

January 2019

Advocate

*Renewing
your spirit
yourself*

Connecting with the



Virginia Advocate

The official magazine of
the Virginia Conference of
The United Methodist Church

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Local Church News

Items should be typed (preferably sent via e-mail) or printed legibly, no more than 100 words, and of conference-wide interest. Complete names of individuals, churches and districts should be included. Because of space limitations, the Local Church section prohibits news items related to church members' birthdays (of less than 100 years), wedding anniversaries, receptions for moving and/or retiring pastors, photos of traditional Christmas trees or Easter trees/crosses, and any item over two months old. Color photos are encouraged. Photos returned only if submitted with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Photos included on a space available basis. The editor reserves the right to edit all copy or refuse publication.

Letters

Letters to the Editor are printed on a space-available basis. Letters should be limited to 150 words for space reasons. The Advocate will not print letters addressing a topic beyond two months of the publication of that issue. The Advocate editor reserves the right to edit all letters.

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PILLOW TALK



Madeline Pillow
Editor

Fading Battle- fields

There was an article earlier this year in *The Atlantic* that showed pictures of how the landscape torn apart by World War I is finally healing itself a full century after the "War to End All Wars."

Some of this land is still toxic; some farmland, some cemeteries.

The trenches that were so iconic to the war look like sewn up scars from an aerial perspective. In another picture, the trunk of a tree has overtaken graves of German soldiers in Belgium. While I have no memory of this war or the many that followed after, the pictures with their peacefulness are eerie.

We humans can do great harm to each other and, in the process, those around us and the world in which we live.

We also tend to do harm to ourselves. I heard recently from one of my colleagues that humans have about 60,000 thoughts a day and 40,000 of those are negative.

We are hard on ourselves when we judge ourselves up against other people's money or clothing or popularity. We judge too harshly when we shame our bodies for not looking or working like they did when we were younger.

Our issue this month offers some ways to find renewal in yourself and your spirit. Any time is a good time to make a change in your life, but the new year provides such a good opportunity for a new start.

My wish for our readers and this conference is to grant yourself grace this year. Go easy on yourself. Let old wounds and hurts fade into the background just as the battlefields of World War I are finding their way back to healing.

Until our next issue,

Madeline C. Pillow

You can view the article referenced here at www.theatlantic.com/photo/2018/05/the-fading-battlefields-of-world-war-i/561353/.



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Photo courtesy of Neil McLaughlin

Being accepted

By Neil McLaughlin



Letters to the Editor are printed on a space-available basis. Letters may be emailed to MadelinePillow@vaumc.org by the first of the month.

June 16, 1991, was one of the best days of my life. At around 11:15 p.m. my first son, Philip Wade, was born. Even though he was six weeks premature, Phil was born on Father's Day. What a wonderful first Father's Day present! There were a series of issues happening with the pregnancy. I was told that the baby would not be alive because the

doctors thought he was going to be about eight weeks premature and there were other matters happening as well. I remember the nurse coming to me as I was in the waiting room and announcing that I had beautiful baby boy and everything was going to be OK. There was a lot of praying happening in that 15 minutes of waiting.

The next day I was told that the doctor suspected that Phil was born with Downs

Syndrome. At that time in my life, I really didn't know exactly what Downs Syndrome was, but after the doctor and nurse explained more to me about it, I decided that I still had a beautiful boy and was going to do everything I could to show him love and acceptance in life. I still had a baby boy but realized that I would be taking a different road through life when it came to raising Philip. Without the support of the church I was serv-

COMMENTARY


ing at that time, I don't know how I could've made it through with this new experience in life.

It has always been my goal to make sure that Phil lived a life just like any other child would live. Even though I accepted Phil for who he was, not everyone else has done the same. As a parent, one of the most heartbreaking times would be when people at your church would not look at him the same way as I did. One instance that stands out to me was at a church I was serving when Phil was about 10. At times, Phil would have behaviors that were similar to a 3-4 year-old child. After service one Sunday, a few members of the congregation approached me and said that they would prefer that I let Phil stay in the nursery during worship because he was too disruptive. Phil has always liked being a part of a group his own age. Phil was upset with this request because he didn't see himself as a boy who should have to stay in the nursery just because he did not act "normal" in the eyes of other people.

Phil's communication is mainly used through

sign language and even today, at age 27, Phil still strives to be accepted for who he is even though it may seem that he is a little different than other people. In 2010 Phil wanted to be baptized in church as he had witnessed others being baptized through the years. I was honored, as his Dad, to be the one that God used to make this possible for him. Philip loves being a part of society and at times shows more unconditional love than other people do.

I believe it is very important to make sure that everyone feels accepted no matter who they are when it comes to life. Even though Phil is labeled as a person with a disability, he is the same as anyone else through the eyes of Jesus.

That one experience at this particular church has been the only issue that has come before me about Philip not truly being accepted. Everyone strives to be accepted in society. Phil is no exception. 

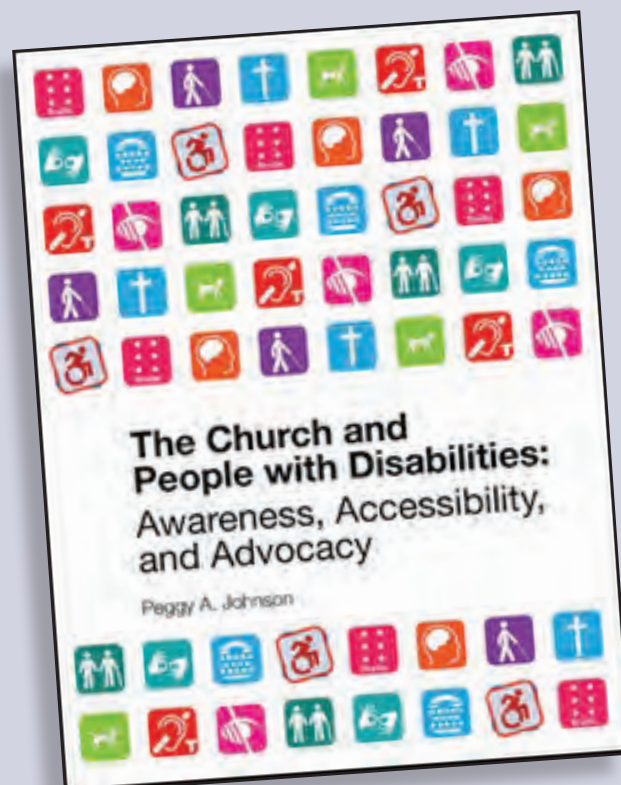
– The Rev. Neil W. McLaughlin is the chair of the Commission on Disabilities (COD) for the Virginia Conference.

Resources for Disability Awareness Sunday

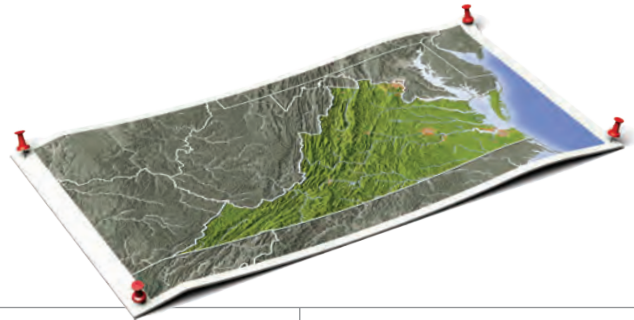
The United Methodist Church for many decades has called on its members and congregations to “celebrate the gifts and graces of persons with disabilities and calls the church and society to full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community” (The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* ¶265.4). The church’s legislating General Conference

has mandated an annual Disabilities Sunday (In 2019, it is Feb. 3), the time to be determined by each annual conference, with permission to receive an offering to promote “architectural and attitudinal accessibility” in local churches (Ibid.).

Learn more at www.umcmmission.org/find-resources/conference-events/124resources-for-disability-awareness-sunday or [https://www.unitedmethodist-women.org/disabilities](http://www.unitedmethodist-women.org/disabilities)



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Ride-sharing drivers take their ministry on the road

Seungsoo (R.J.) Jun and Robert Stutes, elders in our conference, serve as drivers of a ride-sharing service. Both drivers for Uber and share in the article below how they are living out their call in a different way.

Tell us about yourselves.

RJ: My name is Seungsoo Jun, serving Raleigh Court UMC in the Roanoke District. People know me as R.J. I'm honored to serve Raleigh Court where our church is focused on becoming a blessing to the community. I only drive once or twice a month, but I enjoy the time meeting people outside the four walls of the church.

ROBERT: I am Robert Stutes, and I am in my sixth year serving at Mount Pleasant UMC in Roanoke. I am a retired member of the Texas Conference, but we chose to make Roanoke

our place to retire and have been able to serve "on loan" since 2013. Now in retirement, I am serving Mount Pleasant part-time (¾). As a part-time pastor, I am able to mix in Uber driving as a way to interact with the community.

Why did you start driving for Uber?

ROBERT: Somewhere years ago I heard about pastors who would spend a few hours a week tending bar and finding that they had some amazing meaningful encounters that never would have happened in the church building. While I admired those "edgy" pastors, I knew this would never happen for me. I would feel like a fish out of water at a bar and just could in no way envision myself in that role.

When I heard about Uber coming to Roanoke and Blacksburg back in 2009, I very tentatively decided to experiment with it and quickly learned that spending a few hours giving rides through Uber was helping me see my community through an entirely new light. I was also surprised to learn that meaningful conversations sometimes happened in the short



Photo courtesy of R.J. Jun

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

amount of time I spent with a passenger. Like R.J., I shared this with the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) at the very beginning.

RJ: One of our members came to me asking for help finding a part-time job. I immediately thought of introducing Uber to that member. I asked Robert if he could meet up with us and share his experience driving for Uber. The three of us got together for a meeting, where Robert shared information on how to become an Uber driver, and how he loved his experience. After the meeting, I came out thinking it might be awesome to try this. It seemed like a good opportunity to reach out to the community. I needed some kind of motivation to get out of the four walls of the church. I shared my thoughts with our SPRC, and they were supportive of my idea. Then I made sure that I got the blessing from our district superintendent, and she gave me her blessings. I signed up as a driver and waited for the right moment to start my Uber experience.

How was your first experience driving?

RJ: I was nervous. I cleaned up my car, filled up with gas and waited. When that first chime rang, my heart started to pound. I drove to the pick-up spot and met this couple who were about to meet with their friends. I told them how it was my first time driving. They were supportive! They were excited for me. And I was able to drop them off at their destination. Right after I dropped them off, there was another call and a group of college girls called me. I drive a Honda Fit, and when they saw my car they said, "Will we all fit?" Surprisingly they all fit comfortably, and I was able to safely drive them back to their dorm. That is when I learned that driving Uber is to provide a safe and comfortable ride to the customer's destination.

ROBERT: Honestly I was a little bit scared, but I quickly learned that nearly all of the customers were friendly — even the ones that were a bit tipsy! One of the things I learned early on is that drivers must quickly learn to be socially

perceptive, as there are customers who want to chat, and there are other customers who want me to be invisible. This is actually a valuable skill transferable to other settings for pastors — as we increase our sensitivity to paying attention to where others are.

Share a funny moment you've experienced as an Uber driver.

RJ: I was called by a young customer, who was fairly drunk. The GPS was acting weird and I couldn't find the pickup point. It took me about 10 minutes to get to him. As we were driving to his destination, the GPS fell from the windshield, and every hard turn I made he was crying out "Jesus!" In my mind, there were two thoughts flying around — that is not the right way of using Jesus' name, and I might not get a five-star rating. My driving was not that horrible, but when he blurted out Jesus' name again, I had to say something. So I said, "Maybe we started off on the wrong foot." He agreed and we started to talk, and I dropped him off at his destination. A couple of weeks later, I got an-

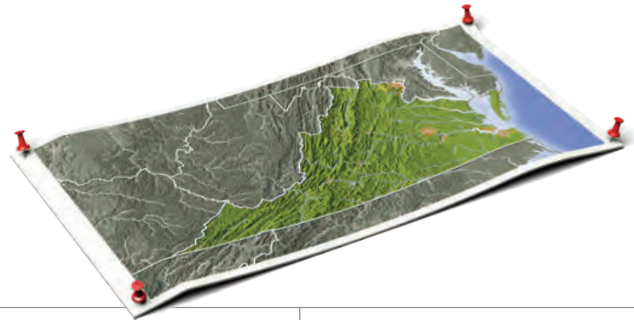
other call and got to pick up this young person again. He saw me and shouted to his friends, "Yo! This is my favorite Uber driver!"

ROBERT: I picked up a very affable couple at a bar at closing time and (as often happens) she asked what my other job was. When she found out I was a UMC pastor, she said, "Oh my, I love United Methodists. I used to attend a UM church in Orlando, Florida. United Methodists are so humble. I just love them; they are so humble." And then she really cut loose and said "United Methodists, #### yeah (expletive deleted)!" I had to wonder if that might be an even better slogan than "Open hearts, open minds, open doors!"

Well one more — I was driving one night in the Washington, D.C. area. It's definitely more intimidating to drive in D.C., and I picked up three young men who all sat in the back seat. I did not think about the fact that I had bluegrass music on the radio, and it only took a few minutes before one of the young men said, "Excuse me, can we do something about that music?" I

(Con't. on next page: "DRIVERS.")

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



("DRIVERS," cont. from page 7.)

quickly allowed them to plug into my aux cord, and the volume raised quite a bit and the music style went through a radical transformation!

Any downsides to the ride-sharing service?

RJ: I have to keep my car extra clean all the time. Or when it comes to a time I need to drive, I need to make sure I take my car through a car wash. I'm not really good at cleaning my car or keeping it clean. However, you need to make sure your car is clean for that five-star rating.

ROBERT: You aren't really an Uber veteran until your back seat has been baptized by... (vomit). However, the customer does get dinged for the cost of a cleanup!

What has been the joy of driving for Uber?

ROBERT: I only discuss my day job when folks ask, but it actually happens a lot. I have learned a lot about my community and I have been surprised how many times a relatively

brief conversation has turned to deeper things. More than once I have ended a ride by having a prayer time, and I even had a young man visit our congregation twice. He later ended up at our local megachurch, but he was very appreciative of our congregation helping him re-enter the faith community after having spent a very, very rocky semester at a local college and after having to leave school, along with losing his driver's license.


RJ: I get to meet people outside the walls of the church. On my Uber driver profile, I wrote, "I believe people are good." My belief is proven right every day. Almost every person I met proves that people are good. Some are Christians and some are not. However, when you have a face-to-face interaction, most of my customers are very nice! Most of the time, I share that I am a pastor. Many are intrigued to hear why I am driving.

After driving Uber, I found another reason why I needed to drive, besides meeting people outside the walls of the church. In the area where I serve, the public transportation ends at

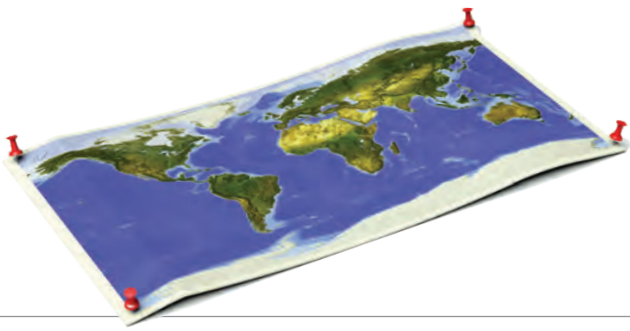
10 p.m. and doesn't run on Sundays. Many of the hourly wage workers who rely on public transportation call an Uber to get back home. I wanted to help them out. So I started reimbursing their Uber fare by giving out electronic gift cards. Some of our members heard what I did and started to hand me piles of gift cards. At the end of the trip, I give them the gift card and say that our church wanted to encourage them after their hard day of work.

Final thoughts?

ROBERT: Not every experience is positive. I have conversations that leave me rather sad. And even eavesdropping often proves to be a great eye-opener. You hear the good, the bad and the ugly. Sometimes I just have to keep my mouth shut and say a little silent prayer for a wandering child of God.

RJ: I think every pastor should try this out. You get to be a community driver, counselor and sometimes a pastor. It is a great way to survey your community. It is a great way to see the life of people. It is a great way to serve. It is a great way to pray and live out your faith. 





The United Methodist connection in THE WORLD

Chinese martyr inspires 50 years after execution

By Jim Patterson
Nov. 20, 2018

For decades after her execution on April 29, 1968, it appeared that the Chinese Communist Party had silenced Lin Zhao, a slight but iron-willed Christian poet and essayist who dared speak truth to power in the face of imprisonment and torture.

Miraculously, it hasn't worked out that way.

Written by Duke Divinity School Professor Lian Xi, "Blood Letters: The Untold Story of Lin Zhao, a Martyr in Mao's China," tells the story of the Methodist-educated martyr. The tale is a thriller, with Lin Zhao the near-unbelievably courageous hero, writing criticisms of the government with her own blood on clothing and bedsheets when prison guards deprived her of pen and paper.

"Blood Letters," published by Basic Books, has received strong reviews in such publications as the *Atlantic*, the *New York Review of Books*, *Christianity Today* and *Christian*

Century.

Kirkus Reviews called it "a moving account of astonishing human courage in the leering face of human cruelty."

Nearly 40 years after Lin Zhao was declared innocent of the crimes that led to her murder, the Chinese government is again trying to intimidate those inspired by her story. Every April, on the anniversary of her death, admirers travel to her tomb in the Lingyanshan Cemetery near Suzhou in the Jiangsu Province.

In recent years, the government has put up a locked fence, intimidated and sometimes arrested the visitors.

"Her voice still speaks to the people's aspiration for freedom and human dignity, and that's why they started to clamp down," said Lian Xi, professor of world Christianity at Duke.

Lin Zhao's journey was not a straight line. Born to educated, upper middle-class parents, she embraced the Communist revolution despite the trouble it

caused her family. And she did her part for the Communists as they demonized and sometimes murdered landholders during the land reform era. But Lin Zhao's stubborn nature and idealism led her away from her initial idealization of Mao Tse-Tung.

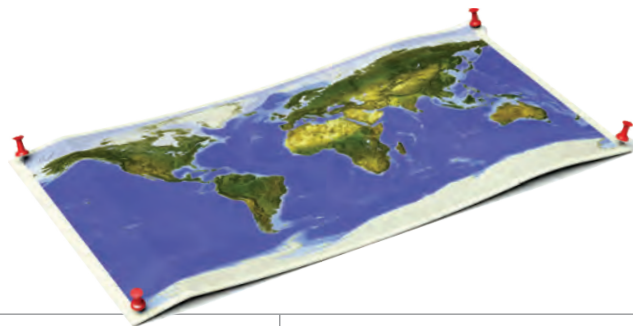
Speaking up cost her freedom, and ultimately

(Con't. on next page: "MARTYR.")



Photo courtesy of Lian Xi

The United Methodist connection in THE WORLD



("MARTYR," cont. from page 9.)

her life.

In a final insult, Lin Zhao's family was billed half a yuan (roughly 7 cents) for the bullet used to kill the 36-year-old activist.

"There certainly will be those who refuse to change until they die," Mao wrote about the harassment and murder of political dissenters. "They are willing to go see God carrying their granite heads on their shoulders. That will be of little consequence."

Why were party leaders so threatened by Lin Zhao speaking her mind on politics in the late 1950s and 1960s? And why are their successors threatened today?

"She inspires people in search of a better society. She also challenges the legitimacy of the Communist government, and they care deeply about their political legitimacy," Lian Xi said.

As a teenager, Lin Zhao was heavily influenced by Christian values she learned at the Laura Haygood Memorial School for Girls, which she attended for two years.

The school was founded in honor of Haygood (1845-1900), an early Methodist Episcopal Church South missionary to Asia.

"It was a transformative period," Lian Xi said of Lin Zhao's time at the school. "It shaped her in profound ways." Two decades after she had completed her studies, she held on to the biblical verses, hymns and stories she learned there, even as she was imprisoned and tortured.

"She sank religious roots much deeper than she realized at the time," Lian Xi said. "One of the hallmarks of the Methodist work — both Southern and Northern Methodists — was to preach a holistic gospel. It was not just about the saving of individual souls. It was also about transforming Chinese society, about liberating people from the bondage of semi-slavery and the things that had held people back."

Lin Zhao drifted from organized religion as a young woman, although there is no evidence she ever lost her Christian faith. She joined the Communist Party for a short while before being expelled for disobeying orders. Still, she participated in the land reform

program under Mao. Her work didn't include the torture and killing of landlords, but she was part of the system that resulted in executions.

"Even though I do not have blood on my hands, I must have been splashed with blood," Lin Zhao wrote, as quoted in "Blood Letters."

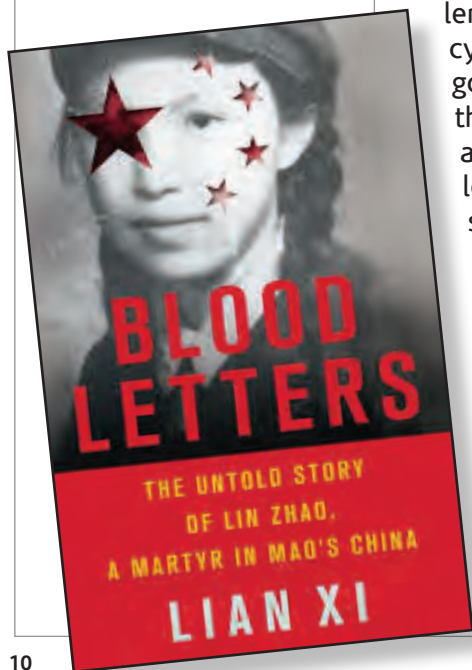
Lin Zhao grew disenchanted with communism's failure to match its rhetoric. She was crestfallen by the corruption of the local Communist officials she dealt with.

To learn more about Lin Zhao

"Blood Letters: The Untold Story of Lin Zhao, a Martyr in Mao's China," was published by Basic Books this year. The documentary "Searching for Lin Zhao's Soul" was released in 2004, and is sporadically available on the Internet.

"She had a fiery temperament," Lian Xi said. "Throughout her life you find a streak — a very strong one — of independence in her."

Lin Zhao was one of many activists caught in a Mao trap called the Hundred Flowers Movement. The movement invited criticism of the Communist Party



The United Methodist connection in THE WORLD

to “help improve the party’s work.”

Lin Zhao, a student at Peking University at the time, spoke her mind. But Mao’s request for criticism wasn’t sincere.

“Let all these ox devils and snake demons ... curse us for a few months,” Mao said, as reported in “Blood Letters.” “One day punishment will come down on their heads.”

Many who spoke out ended up in jail or dead. Lin Zhao was first arrested in 1960.

In prison, she was manhandled and beaten by guards. There were suicide attempts and hunger strikes. In her writings, Lin Zhao said she had “lost track of how much hair (one guard) pulled off my head.”

Such treatment did not deter Lin Zhao. She developed an ingenious technique to continue writing. She would prick one of her fingers with a bamboo pick, hair clip or the plastic tip of her toothbrush after she had sharpened it on the concrete floor. She collected the resulting blood in a plastic spoon and would dip her makeshift pen — either a thin bamboo stick or a straw stem — and write in blood on shirts or torn bedsheets.



Lin Zhao's gravesite in Suzhou, China

Lin Zhao would then copy the blood writings with pen and paper when authorities allowed her access to them again.

“As a Christian, my life belongs to my God,” Lin Zhao wrote in a letter intended for the Communist newspaper *People’s Daily*. “I have come to see more clearly and deeply the many terrifying and shocking evils committed by your demon political party! ... I cried for your blood-smeared words, which are unable to rid themselves of evil and are dragged by its terrifying weight ever deeper into the swamp of death.”

Prison authorities confiscated her poems and essays, but she believed her work would eventually be seen by others. She was right.

Prison authorities kept the writings in case they were needed as evidence against Lin Zhao. When the government absolved her in the early 1980s, some writings were released to her family. Others remain under lock and key by the government.

“Portions of her writings have been published on the Internet since the early 2000s,” Lian Xi said. “It’s really become a Promethean fire to contemporary Chinese dissent.”

Filmmaker Hu Jie made the 2004 documentary “Searching for Lin Zhao’s Soul” —sporadically viewable on YouTube. Lian Xi saw the film in 2011, and the next year traveled to the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, where some

of Lin Zhao’s papers are collected. In 2013, he was gifted with a printed copy of some of Lin Zhao’s work. All this led to the writing and publication of “Blood Letters.”

With the release of the book this year, Lin Zhao’s story continues to spread. Asked if there is any interest from Hollywood to Lin Zhao’s story, Lian Xi demurs.

“I’d better not comment on this right now,” he said.

In an unsettling parallel, activist Zhu Chengzhi was arrested in April of 2018, as he tried to reach Lin Zhao’s tomb to observe the 50th anniversary of her death.

He has not been heard from since. 🇺🇸

— Patterson is a United Methodist News Service reporter in Nashville, Tennessee.



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

Give your church bulletin a facelift

By Melissa Carro

Amid the changes in United Methodist churches through the years, one constant has been the weekly bulletin. Perhaps in the new year it is time to evaluate your bulletin and look for ways to do it better or differently. Here are some ideas for increasing the effectiveness of your worship bulletin.

Ideas for improving your bulletin

Consider including a monthly “rolling calendar.” In this approach, you print all information and events for four consecutive weeks, starting on the current Sunday. This will give congregants more of a heads up, especially at the end of the month, when a normal calendar would only show a few events.

Include a welcome message. This should be the first thing a reader sees. It should reflect your church’s personality. If

your church is casual and contemporary, make the welcoming language reflect that atmosphere.

Order of worship. Use a bold typeface to delineate the different parts of the worship service. Make sure to indicate when the congregation is to stand, speak or follow any other special direction. Give those who may have difficulty standing permission to remain seated. “Stand as you are able” is a good instruction to mention up front. Remember that many people, especially youth, young adults or people who have difficulty standing repeatedly, aren’t fond of playing “Simon Says” in worship. Many like to stand or sit as the Spirit moves.

Church news. Make sure any news you list answers the 5Ws: who, what, when, where and why. Give enough information for people to know if they want more. Hold the details that they can find out later. If you have the ability, always include an abbreviated “vanity URL” to your website for details. A vanity URL is a simpli-

fied and shorter web address (i.e. yourchurch.com/youth). Vanity URLs are easier to remember and save room in print media.

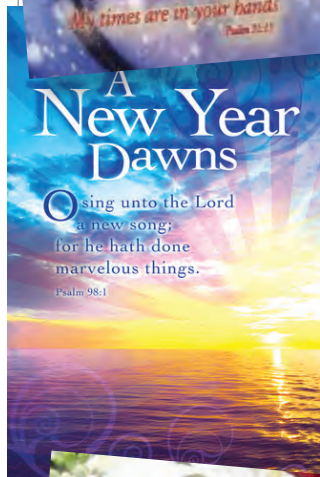
Have at least two people proofread. This may be difficult for smaller churches, but every church probably has people with the gifts to do this. English teachers may consider this a great ministry opportunity. Unless you want to show up in church-bulletin bloopers, be sure to look at every letter and especially at names.

Be consistent in your template. Once your bulletin design is the way you want it in terms of fonts, layout and margins, keep it consistent. This includes having the same information in the same spot in each issue. People find comfort in consistency because it is easier to find things.

What to avoid

Abbreviations and Christian jargon. Your congregation may know that CFH is the Cummins Fellowship Hall, but visitors may be confused.

(Con’t. on page 24: “BULLETIN.”)



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EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

Advice to Christians: Learn a little Hebrew

By Sam Hodges

The Rev. Matthew Richard Schlimm, author of *70 Hebrew Words Every Christian Should Know*, uses a light board to write two Hebrew words. At top is the word that transliterates to “shalom,” meaning “peace” or “well-being.” The bottom word is “khesed,” meaning “love” or “loyalty.”

Schlimm is a United Methodist elder and professor of Old Testament at the University

of Dubuque Theological Seminary. If seminary students and others want to dive into studying Hebrew, that’s wonderful, said Schlimm.

But he said he believes that just getting into the wading pool with that language leads to deeper understanding of the Old Testament.

Even understanding that fraction of the Old Testament’s original language can make a big difference, Schlimm maintains. In his book, he sweetens the deal by providing lots of historical and cultural background, as well as theological commentary.

“My hope is that I’m giving students of the Bible a new tool so that they spot new things in the biblical texts,” Schlimm, 41, said by phone from Iowa. “Being

able to access the depth that Hebrew brings is a huge gift.”

The book came out in August from Abingdon Press and already is in its second printing. The Rev. Joel B. Green, a United Methodist elder and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, touted it in *Catalyst*, an online journal for United Methodist seminarians.

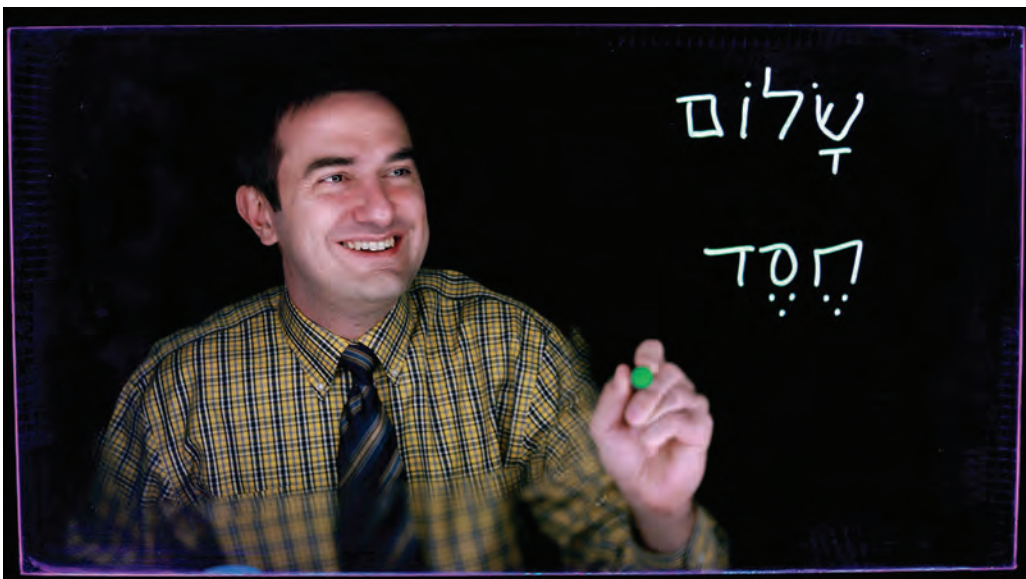
“From start to finish, Schlimm offers a veritable feast of theological reflection and exegetical insight,” Green wrote. “His readers are bound to have frequent ‘Aha!’ moments.”

The book is aimed at three audiences — Christians who never took Hebrew, but want to go farther in Bible study; seminary students who need to be convinced of the “why” of undertaking a language with a very different alphabet and grammar; and pastors who once took Hebrew but need a refresher and perhaps an introduction to using the language in teaching and preaching.

In the book, Schlimm gives full explanations of the few Hebrew words that have entered the English language in transliterated form.

“Amen,” for example, doesn’t in its Hebrew understanding just mean the prayer is over. It comes

The Rev. Matthew Richard Schlimm uses a lightboard to write Hebrew words. Photo by Nick Story, the University of Dubuque.



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

from a cluster of Hebrew words meaning what's true, trustworthy, reliable, faithful.

"When we say this word at the end of prayers, we're signaling not only that we agree with the prayer but also that we'll do what's needed on our part for the prayer to come true," Schlimm writes.

Many people in the pews and choir loft sing "hallelujah" without knowing what it means. Schlimm notes that the word appears 25 times in the Bible, exclusively in the book of Psalms, and simply means "praise the Lord."

The book's backcover reminds that "English isn't God's first language," and Schlimm shares various Hebrew words and concepts that are, to one degree or another, lost in English translation.

The consequences can be major

For example, English translations of Genesis have focused on the sound of its key Hebrew words and given us "Adam" and "Eve" and "Eden." But a focus on the meaning of the Hebrew words in question would instead have the words translated as "humankind" and "life" and "delight."

So, as Schlimm shares, a meaning-first English account would have Humankind and Life in the Garden of Delight, not Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

"The English translation sounds like an account of ancestors the farthest removed from us," he says in the book's first chapter. "The Hebrew sounds more like an account of human nature: what we're like. The names' meanings suggest we may have less a historical account and more a parable about God, humanity, our world and the loss of innocence."

Schlimm writes that some of his seminary students, who feel a tension between science (particularly Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection) and faith, are angry that no one told them this earlier.

As an undergraduate at Asbury University, Schlimm first encountered Hebrew. He was enthralled when Bible professors translated a word or phrase to put light on an Old Testament text.

Schlimm went on to study at United Methodist-related Duke University, earning a Ph.D. in Hebrew/Old Testament. As a graduate assistant, he was asked to take over teaching a Hebrew

course when the professor became too ill to continue.

Suddenly, Schlimm was an understudy thrust onto the stage and struggling to engage his students. He decided to try beginning each session with a brief, dual-purpose devotional.

"I'd pick a different (Hebrew) vocabulary word they'd studied that week, and make connections, showing why it's relevant to ministry and the life of the church," he said. "They loved it, and I loved doing it. Those theological reflections were sort of the genesis of the book, though that was at least 15 years ago."

Schlimm would eventually join the faculty of the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, a Presbyterian Church (USA) school approved for training United Methodist clergy. His wife is the Rev. Stephanie Schlimm, pastor of Epworth United Methodist Church, in Epworth, Iowa.

Schlimm starts with the book of Ruth

At Dubuque, Schlimm gets his Hebrew students into translating as soon as possible, using the book of Ruth because it's only


four chapters yet offers lots for discussion.

The innovative approach to teaching continues in *70 Hebrew Words Every Christian Should Know*, with Schlimm adding an appendix about the Hebrew alphabet that uses *Star Wars* words to demonstrate the sounds. His website has his own recorded pronunciation of Hebrew words discussed in his book.

Schlimm knows that many church folks find the Old Testament baffling and even off-putting, given its level of violence. He recalls from his pastor days hearing a parishioner say she loved the God of the New Testament more than the one in the Old Testament.

Throughout his writings, including many scholarly articles and the earlier book *This Strange and Sacred Scripture*, Schlimm has championed the Old Testament. He sees it as a work of teaching more than law, offering abundant insight and wisdom.

"It's a very important friend in our faith," he said.

And knowing a little Hebrew can make it a better one. 

— Sam Hodges is a Dallas-based writer for United Methodist News Service.

Renewing your



spirit yourself



The new year is the perfect time to make a change in your life or reevaluate. But New Year's resolutions don't often stick if you don't really want to make a change or if your heart is not in it.

But as Christians, our faith and our selves need constant maintenance. Our experiences change us and as we grow in our faith we should be changing.

Read more of this feature to think about how you can renew your spirit and yourself in 2019.



Opening ourselves more deeply to God

By Dawn Peck

In these first days of the New Year, Christmas is still lingering in the air for many of us. But also with us is the realization that Christmas is never exactly as we anticipated. There are always surprises, some welcome and some not. We wake up the first week of January tempted to wonder, has Christmas really made a difference? Is the world not the same? Are there still not so many worries, so many fears and so many problems? And yet, just as we teeter on this precipice of real doubt, something (or someone) deep within us calls us back.



*"In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into
being.*

*What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it."*¹

How is it that within the course of a few days, weeks or even minutes, we can go from total assurance of God's intimate presence with us to wondering if any of it is real at all?

How do we put this awareness of something deep within us, this perception of God's presence, into words? If we try to define it, we risk confining God within our limited visions and understanding; we don't allow God to be God. If we try to stay away from words, we find it difficult to share God with others. This problem persists within every faith tradition and is certainly present in interfaith dialogue.

There is so much fear in our world. We are told, both in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the New Testament to "fear not," "be not afraid," "...perfect love casts out fear..."² No matter our circumstances this day, we need God. We need this Love. And, as we risk reaching, yet again, toward our loving God, we find that, indeed, God is even in our seeking.

So, let us seek anew this New Year to deepen our relationship with God. Let us open our yearning hearts to movement of the Holy Spirit within our lives. Let us "pray without ceasing,"³ for all of our life can be prayer if we intentionally offer it to God. For, God is indeed present.

We will need help in this seeking journey. We need each other to be prayerfully present in our seeking and in our struggles. Many have gone before us to pave the way and show us how; many all over

1 John 1:1-5, NRSV


2 John 4:18

3 1 Thessalonians 5:17



the world are currently yearning to respond to the call of God upon their lives just as we are.

We will be looking together over this next year for ways in which we can intentionally open ourselves more deeply to God, to the action of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in our world and in our lives. We are seeking nothing less than spiritual formation, our ongoing transformation in the way of love. And, for this, we need to deepen our prayer lives.

There are so many resources to help. Perhaps we could start by simply offering each day to God before we even get out of bed? Perhaps we could simply say the Lord's Prayer to ourselves before our feet hit the ground. The two minutes it takes to do this, in reality, just may alter the flow of the entire day. For, in these two minutes, we indeed have invited God in! 

— Dawn Peck is certified through Shalem Institute of Spiritual Formation and a member of Kindred Project in the Virginia Conference.



The Lord's Prayer

Our Father,
 who art in heaven, hallowed
 be thy name, thy kingdom come,
 thy will be done,
 on Earth as it is in heaven,
 give us this day our daily bread,
 and forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those who
 trespass against us.
 And lead us not into temptation
 but deliver us from evil,
 for thine is the kingdom and the power,
 and the
 glory forever
 and ever.
 Amen

Taking time for prayer



By Kindred Project

And so a new year begins. Happy New Year! Before we start to run the race and tackle our to-do lists, let us pause and reflect on the gifts of Christmas 2018 before the memories fade.

What gifts did you receive for Christmas? Allow yourself a few moments to pause and give thanks for them and the givers.

Much of the spiritual side of Christmas emphasizes the gifts of love, hope, joy and peace. How can we unpack and live into these gifts in 2019?

Did you receive some spiritual gifts and insights during this Advent/Christmas season? Were there memories of the cherubic smiles of children to warm your heart? Was there a gift of the God's peace in that final verse of Silent Night as you carried your candle out into the darkness on Christmas Eve? Is there a conversation with a friend or family member lingering in your spirit? Was there a devotion or a sermon that brought God alive in you? Did you hear the angels' refrain – "Do not be afraid!" – in a new way?

How can we keep and deepen these special spiritual gifts in this New Year and beyond? We invite you to take some time and write these spiritual gifts in the margins right now. And if your spiritual gifts were few you might reflect on those you have received in the past or would like to receive in the year ahead.



A new year means a new start; for many it means there are resolutions to write. That is all well and good but before we get caught up in lists let us remember these words of Scripture:

"That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or pos-

essed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

"In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed." (Mark: 1:32-35)

Mark demonstrates the intertwining of prayer and action to which we are called by God. Jesus needed a time of silence and prayer to renew his energy and then go back into his "doing" ministry, refreshed and renewed.

How do we hold onto the spiritual gifts of Christmas and find balance in our doing and being? Let us resolve to recharge our spirits by spending time with the Holy One, knowing that even the resolve to do this is a gift of God, who is always seeking us.

When we focus too much on the doing, we lose our center, our groundedness in God.

The spiritual gifts of Christmas can quickly slip away, leaving an empty space for fear, anger and other "demons" to enter. Our American culture may take us to these dark places, but those of us who know God and celebrate the true meaning of Christmas can return to our spiritual gifts, which help us fearlessly face the negativity and divisiveness of our culture.

Finding balance

It is important to find the balance between doing and being. Instead of making New Year's resolutions – perhaps we can begin this year with a Rule of Life. We know that word "rule" can be scary, conjuring images of monks in coarse robes who pray seven times a day. If a Rule of Life is calling to your spirit and you wish to dive deep there are many resources we can suggest to help you begin very simply. If we can take a minute or two to recenter ourselves and encounter God anew, it will make our day and our relationship with God that much deeper.

A Rule of Life is simply allowing space to be built into our day that calls us "back to God". As we create this sacred space we will be renewed by the Holy One. This helps us follow in the footsteps of Jesus and set aside some time to pray in quiet place of our choosing throughout our day.

Perhaps even before you hop out of bed to make that first cup of coffee, simply pause and greet God or remember Scripture:

"This is the day the Lord has made, let me rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118:24).

Perhaps you can take a moment to rest and take a breath, thanking God for the food at each meal. At noon, in silence, you can pray the Lord's Prayer. And maybe you want to take up General Conference delegation head Martha Stokes' invitation to pray each day from 2:23 to 2:26 p.m. for the General Conference Feb. 23-26, 2019, in St. Louis. As your day comes to a close, as you brush your teeth, simply pray: "Please fix the things I didn't do so well and spread the love I shared and bless me as I sleep." Giving things to God in prayer always makes the world a better place.

These are just a few examples of what you can do. We invite you to spend some time in quiet listening to God to see how God is calling you to spend time together. Prayer is simply our conversation with God. It doesn't have to be hard, but it is very real and necessary for our spiritual growth. 🍀

– Written by members of Kindred Project participants including Dawn Peck, Joy Celeste Crawford, the Rev. Bruce Lugin and the Rev. Kimberly Barker-Brugman.

What is the Kindred Project?

Do you long to join others who wish to deepen their life with God? Let us introduce you to the Kindred Project (KP):

Kindred Project is an organic gathering of people who share a passion for the practice of spiritual disciplines. Though not affiliated with The United Methodist Church, most of our participants are clergy and laity from the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. Much of our activity centers in monthly contemplative prayer gatherings. We currently have six of these regional contemplative prayer groups meeting across Virginia.

Each gathering is formed and shaped by the leaders but generally there is a time of gathering, a prayer, time for silence, some sharing and communion. We are involved in much more than our prayer groups. A couple of us have homes that serve as retreat centers and places for rest and spiritual nurture. Some of us are also involved in the creation and implementation of retreats and workshops. These are times to learn new ways to pray and form our spiritual lives.

In KP gatherings we try to practice this connectedness as Jesus and the disciples model this practice of our faith.

You can find us on our Facebook page or website:

www.facebook.com/kindredproject/?fref=pb&hc_location=profile_browser

www.kindredprojectva.com

Other resources:

Paths to Prayer: Finding Your Own Way to the Presence of God by Patricia Brown
(an ordained UMC elder);

The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom and Silence by Henri Nouwen

Contemplative Outreach website:

www.contemplativeoutreach.org/

Writing a Letter

By Forrest White

There's a voicemail message saved in my cell-phone from March 14, 2017. It's from the Rev. Dr. Talmage Skinner, who served as chaplain at Wofford College in South Carolina during my time there.

I recognized that booming voice as soon as the message began playing, as soon as he called my name.

"You sent such a wonderful letter," Chaplain Skinner said. "It meant so much to me to get it."

During the Lenten season of 2017, I set out each day to write a letter to someone from my past or my present.

Chaplain Skinner was the second person I wrote. His was a four-page letter. We had lost touch over time. I wanted to share with him details about my





life, but more importantly I wanted to make sure he knew just how much he meant to me as a mentor and a friend. He baptized my son, Austin, inside Wofford's Leonard Auditorium in the fall of 1995.

I returned the call a few days later. We talked for close to an hour.

I'm glad I saved the voicemail. Talmage Skinner's body died May 31, 2018.

Because of my letter, Chaplain Skinner left us knowing how I felt about him and his impact on my life.

I wrote other mentors that Lenten season. I wrote players I coached years before in Little League. I wrote former youth from my student ministry days. I wrote friends, old and new. I wrote colleagues and former colleagues. I wrote my mom. I wrote someone I didn't even know.

I got a couple of handwritten letters in return, a phone call or two and some text messages. I didn't hear back from most of the people I wrote, though none of the letters was returned because of a bad address.

But I wrote those letters expecting nothing in return.

So, why did I choose to write, when typing an email or sending a text message is so much easier and more efficient? (Plus my handwriting isn't the best.)

Simply put, there's nothing quite like receiving a handwritten letter in the mail.

I remember the years between college and marriage, when I rushed to the mailbox every day in hopes of finding a letter. I wrote lots of letters in those days. I got lots of letters back then, too.

Maybe all the electronic messaging is just too easy these days? And there's no doubting this ... It's just plain impersonal.

At this point, I should confess ... I completed Dr. Gary Chapman's 5 Love Languages assessment,

which identified words of affirmation as my primary love language.

That helps to explain why, when I open the mailbox and see a hand-addressed envelope from a friend or loved one, I feel like a child on Christmas morning.

It is a gift, and I can't wait to rip it open.

I can't even wait to go inside. I stand at the mailbox to read my letters – maybe even twice.

It explains why I've kept countless letters through the years, even carrying some with me for days when I need to remember I'm loved.

The love language thing explains, too, why I've been crushed by a handful of letters in my life, most especially the "Honest Abe" letter from my first love, but that's a story for another time.

I should confess something else ... I was an English major at Wofford. I was a newspaper reporter in college and for 10 years after college.

I love to write!

I know some people hate to write.

But for me this is about more than love languages or love of writing.


When you take the time to write an actual letter, I believe it shows that you have something heartfelt to say.

And it shows that the letter recipient matters to you, that you care enough to spend your precious time on them because writing good letters, especially legible ones, takes a chunk of time.

In a world always pushing you to speed up, get things done more quickly and move on to whatever comes next, why not put down the cellphone, pick up a pen, and write a letter to someone who has shared a portion of your life's journey?

Start slowly. Identify one person to write each week and see where you go from there.

Write a mentor. Write a long-lost friend. Write someone you don't even know who has done something to make the world a better place.

As life gets more hectic and the effort to communicate cheaper, there is much value to be gained in writing letters to those who share our journey, value not just for the recipient but for the writer as well. 

– Forrest White is a news associate with the conference Communications office.



Forging a new way forward

By Ted Smith

In 1996, I hit the proverbial “brick wall” and thought about turning in my elder orders. I began exploring a different vocation. I came to the point of realizing that I simply couldn’t keep going as I had when ordained a deacon in 1986.

A year of deep prayer, discernment, exploring options, soul searching and consultation with trusted friends revealed that the problem was the way I was living my call, not the call itself. I came to the understanding that my call was solid and still a driving force in my life. I came to clarity regarding the changes I needed to make in order to sustain my call and continue in ordained ministry.

In 1996:

- ❄ I started taking a Sabbath day without exception or excuse.
- ❄ I started taking my vacation days and stopped the poor practice of returning home for emergencies.
- ❄ I decided that every few years I should try a new hobby.
- ❄ I began taking a quarterly prayer and study retreat, meaning I go away every quarter for 48-72 hours to engage in more intentional and extended prayer, exercise, sleep, ministry visioning and program planning. This is not vacation, so the family doesn’t come along. When I go, I create an agenda, I plan my food menu and I usually do a full year of worship and preaching planning.

This is how I keep my call sustained and remain renewed in ministry. ❄

– The Rev. Dr. Ted Smith is the Rappahannock River district superintendent.

Listen to yourself

By Bill James

One should never be reluctant to seek counseling when dealing with stress that causes a noticeable change in life.

In my life I have learned that stress can cause severe physical distress. I tend to internalize stress and, therefore, trouble follows. It has taken decades to learn that I must act immediately when facing a stressful situation or suffer consequences. Since life is rife with stressful situations, I, like many others, get much practice.

To deal with stress I stop and take stock. If I feel the effects of stress, I try to place a value on it, i.e. is the outcome worth the effort? If a relationship is at stake, I will try to move forward. If I’m stressing over some material thing, I try to let it go.

Of course, the perfect method is to talk it over with God and perhaps a trusted partner, friend or counselor. I know from experience that an honest conversation with God always brings a clearer view of the situation/problem. In said conversation I am usually reminded of God’s claim on my life and God’s promise to always be near. It’s a simple process, but one that yields positive results for me.

If I were going to offer advice, it would be to always listen to yourself, always heed signals from your body. To put off acting on the signals is to risk illness and the worsening of your stressful situation. ❄

– The Rev. Bill James is a retired elder in the Richmond District.



DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



► While Minneapolis and the greater United Methodist Church gear up for General Conference 2020, the **United Methodist Rural Advocates (UMRA)** have already started the ball rolling.

Meeting in Minneapolis October 2-5, 2018, UMRA got busy with legislation to bring before the General Conference. From Oregon to Oklahoma and North Dakota to North Carolina, more than 35 people who are passionate about small membership churches and rural church ministries gathered to begin the work.

From the UMRA Statement of Values: "The health, vitality, and sustainability of each local congregation should be held as the primary value of the denominational structure. Healthy local churches make new disciples for Christ and the transformation of the world. Legislative changes should: first, do no harm, and second, do all the good possible for the local church."

For more information about UMRA, please check out the website: www.umruraladvocates.org.

At **Crossroads UMC, Elizabeth River District**, members who are homebound can still be a part of the worship service via telephone. Many of the members don't have computer access and the church does not livestream services so having worship by telephone seems natural. Members call in via a conference call number in the afternoon and they are able to be a part of worship. Because one member can't make long distance calls, the Rev. Lynda Moore will call her on her cell phone while speaking to the others on the land line. The pastor's aunt calls in from New York and the group has become a church family. 📞

("BULLETIN," cont. from page 12.)

And where is the narthex? Is that in the attic?

Too little white space. Avoid the tendency to reduce margins to squeeze in more content. Readers' eyes need to breathe. White space allows this. Set ample margins and live with them.

Too many fonts. Too many fonts can overwhelm the eye. Never use more than three fonts. Two are ideal: one for the headlines or subheads and one for the body text. Serif fonts (such as Garamond or Times New Roman) are more readable because each letter is distinctive. Designers generally recommend using serif fonts for the body copy and sans serif fonts for headlines, which are shorter, larger and, therefore, easier to read.

Too much information. It is not necessary to list every staff member along with his or her title, phone and email information. Select the staff members who people are most likely to contact and save the rest for your website. Take time at a staff retreat or meeting to review your bulletin, how helpful it is to visitors and its welcoming message. Don't fall into the trap of saying, "but we've always done it that way." Your bulletin, like your church, must evolve. 📞

– This article was originally published on United Methodist Communications' website (www.umcom.org).



EVENTS

JANUARY

Conference center closed for New Year's Day observance

Jan. 1, 2019, Glen Allen

The conference center of the Virginia Conference will be closed at on Tuesday, Jan. 1, 2019 in observance of New Year's Day.

Conference center closed for MLK Day observance

Jan. 21, 2019, Glen Allen

The conference center of the Virginia Conference will be closed at on Monday, Jan. 21, 2019 in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

United Methodist Day at General Assembly

Jan. 31, 2019, Richmond

Ever wanted to know how to create real change in our state government? Want to know more about real issues facing our legislature? United Methodist Day at the General Assembly is the place for you!

This is your opportunity to help faith communities become empowered to serve as missionaries of justice, as well as the more traditional missionaries of mercy. A briefing for

the event will be held on Wednesday, Jan. 30 at 7:30 p.m. Learn more at <https://vaumc.org/Events>.

FEBRUARY

Special Session of General Conference

Feb. 23-26, 2019, St. Louis, MO

The Council of Bishops has called a Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church to be held February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri. The purpose will be to receive and act on a report from the Commission on a Way Forward based on the recommendations of the Council of Bishops. The 32-member commission was authorized by General Conference 2016 and appointed by the Council of Bishops to examine paragraphs in *The Book of Discipline* concerning human sexuality and exploring options to strengthen the unity of the church. You can learn more at <http://www.umc.org/topics/general-conference-2019-special-session> and get Virginia resources at <https://www.vaumc.org/GC2019>.

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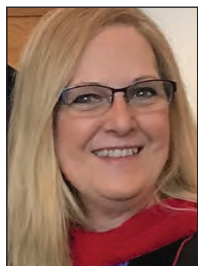
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LIVING THE WORD



The Rev. Dr. Jan C. Nicholson Angle is serving into her fifth year at Ferrum College as the Dean of the Chapel and Religious Life. An elder in the North Carolina Conference with affiliate membership in the Virginia Conference, Jan is a native of Radford, Va., where she and her husband, Jay, reside. Jan is a coach for Passion and Partnership and also an Ecclesiastically Approved Trained Intentional Interim Specialist through the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. She is passionate about the connection between spirituality and story as well as creating spaces for people to experience and discover God.

January 6, 2019

John 15:12-17

Go! Love! Bear Fruit

It seems odd to speak of bearing fruit as we look out our winter windows and see barren trees and dormant flowering shrubs.

One blessing I receive as the Dean of the Chapel at Ferrum College is my daily rural mountain drive to work. I always marvel at God's creation in nature as I embrace this gift of extended reading time and prayer. (Let me assure you I listen to audio books and pray with my eyes wide open.)

Recently, I listened to Charles Stanley's book *Life in the Spirit*. Stanley reflects on the passages from John 15 of the vine and the branches and writes: "Branches were not created to produce fruit, they were created to have fruit produced through them."

Reflecting on the words I thought, "I am not created to be a fruit producer. I am created to be a conduit through which the Spirit of God produces divine fruit."

Looking at the seemingly dying trees on my drive, I thought, "You really aren't dead are you? You are resting, returning to your rootedness through which your branches will produce fruit in the coming season."

How many times do we find ourselves struggling to "bear fruit" for God? I wonder, is there a difference between being a "doer" for God and a "being" through which God's mighty works of love produces "fruit that will last?"

John 15:12-17 cannot be cut off from the first 11 verses where God is identified as the vine grower and Jesus as the divine embodiment of God. John 15 also cannot be pruned from the greater discourse found in John. Chapter 15 lives within the farewell discourse of Jesus. Simply put, Jesus is preparing his followers for his departure. These followers are getting ready to enter into the winter months where it

appears Jesus has died and they are cut off from God. In John 15:16 Jesus speaks these words of assurance. Jesus Christ has "appointed" those who are connected to and through him to allow his love to flow through us as we "go and bear fruit — fruit that will last."

What divine fruit is being prepared to be born through you? Will you stay rooted in God during this season drawing your strength from the sap of the Spirit knowing that the day is nigh in which we will "go, bear fruit" in the love of our Savior Jesus Christ?

January 13, 2019

Proverbs 3:27-35

Letting Go

Proverbs are wisdom texts intended to be "educational or reflective in tone." By observing and interpreting life in the world, a person shapes their actions and thus their character. (*The New Interpreters Study Bible*, p. 893.)

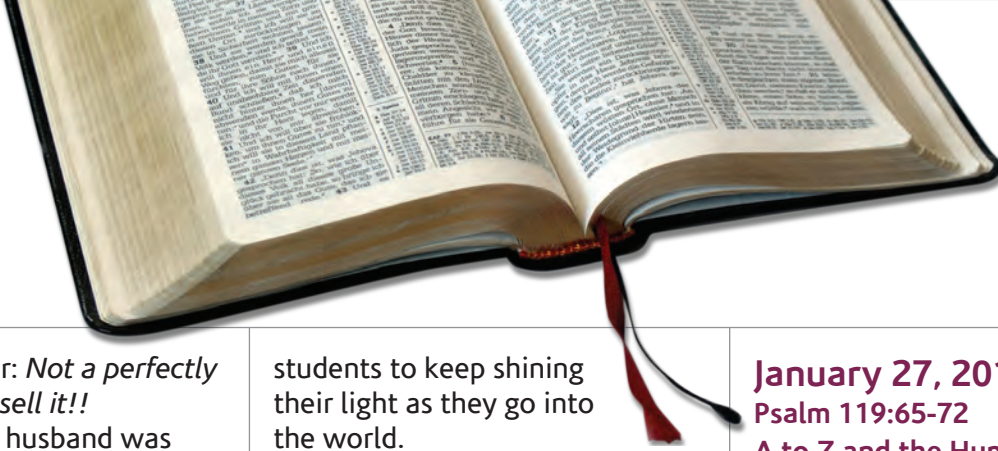
By now most of us have packed away the Christmas tinsel and the New Year's noisemakers, but just for a moment go back to the busy holiday season.

My husband and I were in the midst of Christmas hustle and bustle when our 25+ year-old washer decided to take its own holiday and permanently retire. As the laundry piles grew to the size of Santa's satchel, we knew we had to drop our holiday prep and address the crisis.

Off to the appliance store we flew like a flash, threw open the doors and counted our stash. When what to our wondering eyes did appear, the price of today's appliances, "Oh dear!" We agreed on a washer and dryer, handed over our money and headed home to deal with our deceased washer and well-used dryer.

Dilemma: What do you do with a perfectly good dryer?

Husband's Answer: *Like the washer, take it to the dump!*



Wife's Answer: *Not a perfectly good dryer!! I'll sell it!!*

Of course my husband was wrong. You DON'T throw away a perfectly good working dryer when someone might need it. I, too, was wrong. With the holidays breathing down our necks, who was I to try and make a few dollars off a neighbor?

I pondered my greed, then thought about the need. A few texts and a couple of phone calls later, I found a young mother who had recently broken her leg, was waiting for surgery, and truly needed a free dryer. How often do we find ourselves in situations where we have enough and enough to freely share?

May God grant us wisdom to let go of what is in our hands to meet the needs of our neighbor.

January 20, 2019

I Peter 4:12-19

This Little Light of Mine

One of the first songs I remember singing as a child went something like this:

*This little light of mine I'm
gonna let it shine (repeat 3x)*

Let it shine (repeat 3x)

*Won't let Satan blow it out, I'm
gonna let it shine (repeat 3x)*

Let it shine (repeat 3x)

I taught this song to my children and now they are teaching it to theirs.

Interestingly one of our Ferrum College traditions following baccalaureate is a candlelight service. Most years we collectively sing this simple children's song, and leaders then encourage

students to keep shining their light as they go into the world.

In a playful way this song reminds us that evil exists and seeks to snuff out the Christ light within us. Our job, in good times and in times of hardship and suffering, is to keep the Christ light burning.

The author of I Peter witnessed the persecution of early Christian believers. In chapter 2 believers are encouraged to "be built into a spiritual house" with Christ as the cornerstone. By chapter 4 the author connects the sufferings endured for faith in Christ with the joy embraced in eternal life.

"Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed." I Peter 4:13

The author of I Peter thought the end of the world was imminent but, by the time of the writing of 2 Peter, the author begins to reason Christ's delay as being for our sakes, in order that others may come to believe (2 Peter 3:9.)

So what are we to do as Christians of the 21st century? Let your light shine. In our Wesleyan tradition, we live to embrace the sanctifying grace of God which draws us toward Christian perfection so that our heart is "habitually filled with the love of God and neighbor" and as "having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked." (*The Book of Discipline, 2016, Paragraph 102*)

January 27, 2019

Psalms 119:65-72

A to Z and the Humble Highway

Years ago I was blessed to serve the British Methodist Church. Prior to departure, one of my hosts sent a post alerting me to be prepared for the "windy roads." I thought he meant wind. Upon arrival, I realized he was addressing the sharp turns and winding paths. Thank God for the church steward who gave me an A to "Zed" (A-Z) — an atlas of all the roads in England. A to "Zed" was my lifesaver. I didn't leave home without it!

The atlas certainly made life easier, but one thing the book could not do was help with what I truly needed — an immersion into the British way of life. For that I needed my church members and community. The more time I spent with my British brothers and sisters the more "at home" I felt. After a few months I phoned home and found myself using phrases such as "I'll ring you up in a fortnight" and words like boot, bin and jolly. My family members were left clueless.

Psalms 119, the longest of the psalms, is an acrostic (A-Z). In essence Psalm 119 is its own A to "Zed" and should be read as a meditative reflection on life lived in God's presence and under God's direction. (*Harpers Bible Commentary, p.487*)

In verses 65-72 each line

(Con't on page 29: "LIVING WORD".)

The 2019 Living the Word devotions are from the *Standard Lesson Commentary* from Cokesbury. Note: you can follow the January readings for the 2019 Bible Challenge from Bishop Lewis on pg. 30.

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS



The Rev. Malcolm Lee Yapple, 89, died Nov. 14, 2018. A pastor in the Virginia Annual Conference of The United

Methodist Church, he was a resident of the Tidewater area since 1965, serving churches of the Norfolk and Portsmouth districts until retirement in 1993. Following retirement, he continued as an interim pastor, serving several area churches.



The Rev. James W. Reynolds Jr., 93, died Oct. 30, 2018, in Roanoke. He served churches in Essex and King & Queen

counties, Knotts Island, Princess Anne County, Richmond and was the founding pastor of Peakland UMC in Lynchburg. He went on to pastor Rocky Mount, Cave Spring and Raleigh Court churches in the Roanoke area, as well as Friendship, Mt. Vernon, St. Mark's and Arlington Forest in Northern Virginia in addition to Baylake in Virginia Beach and Chestnut Memorial in Newport News, before retiring in 1990.

The Rev. Edward "Ned" Van Dyck, 71, died Nov. 3, 2018, in Harrisonburg, Va. Van Dyck began



his ministerial service in 1979 at Wesleyan Acres. He went on to serve as associate pastor at Chester and senior

pastor at: Salem in the Danville District; Dinwiddie; Memorial in Charles City; First Broadway; Wachapreague-Quinby; Hallwood-Sanford-Saxis; Grace in Roanoke; Mount Crawford, Harrisonburg District; Amissville, Charlottesville District; and Linden-Markham; Winchester District. He retired in 2010. He is survived by his wife Carolyn and daughter Katie.

Annie Bell Bryant, 84, of New Bern, N.C., died Nov. 17, 2018. She is the mother of **the Rev. Lorenzo Hill Sr.**, pastor of Cranford UMC, Alexandria District.

Mary Helen Gee, 84, of Lady-smith, died Nov. 9, 2018. She was the widow of **the Rev. Gene Gee** and mother-in-law of **the Rev. Charles Tillapaugh**.

Betty Ann Wadsworth, 84, of Winchester died Nov. 4, 2018. She is survived by her husband

the Rev. Anthony A. "Pete" Wadsworth.

Philip Gene Godwin, 83, a retired licensed local pastor, died Oct. 31, 2018. He was with the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church as a pastor while attending and graduating from Wesley Theological Seminary. He served three United Methodist churches and three Baptist churches.

Edith Dollins, 97, died Oct. 23, 2018, in Waynesboro. She is the mother of **the Rev. Janet Hawkins**, Minister of Music and Congregational Care at Fort Hill UMC, Lynchburg District.

Carole D. Hindman, 81, died Oct. 8, 2018, in Mathews, Va. She was the widow of **the Rev. William E. Hindman**.

Doris Chambliss Epps, 91, of Trip-let, Virginia, died Sept. 11, 2018. She was the widow of **the Rev. William Braxton Epps**.

BIRTHS

Congratulations to **the Rev. Carl Chapman** and his wife, **Katie Chapman**, (Old Bethel-Welltown Charge on the Winchester District) on the birth of their daughter, **Alexandra Susanna**, on Nov. 10. 🍷



Notice: The *Advocate*, due to the increasing number of entries for this section each month, will only publish death notices for individuals rather than full obituaries. To have additional information published, please contact the *Advocate* office at advocate@vaumc.org or mail to c/o Communications Office, P.O. Box 5606 Glen Allen, VA 23058-5606. The Communications Office receives obituaries from a number of sources, but to ensure we receive a particular notice, please contact us with copy.

("LIVING WORD" con't from previous page.)

begins with the word "good," (in Hebrew tôb) indicating the goodness of God's Law. The psalmist can rely on God's help to live a good life open to God's instruction through God's Law. (*New Interpreters Bible*, Vol IV, p. 1170)

The psalmist was missing the same thing I missed when first in England. I had a road map. What I needed and longed for was the personal relationship which required my willingness to humble myself and walk with those in my church and community. Soon my life began to reflect the good of those I came to serve.

For us, the Bible is our A to Z roadmap. Being conformed into the likeness of God in Jesus Christ, however, requires a trip down "Humble Highway." As January 2019 comes to a close, are you where you need to be in your relationship with God? Take a moment, reflect on God's goodness in Jesus Christ, then ask the Holy Spirit to empower and direct your life in such a way that you are transformed into God's image with increasing glory (2 Cor 3:18). As you do so, may God bless your God-directed, God-reflective life, and may you know it is good. ☞

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FROM THE BISHOP



Join Bishop Lewis for the 2019 Bible Challenge!

Since 2017, Bishop Lewis has been encouraging the Virginia Conference to read the Bible in a year. Each year has featured a different way of reading.

2017:

Read the Bible straight through

2018:

Read the Bible chronologically

For 2019, the Bible Challenge will be a blended style of reading; a mixture of Old Testament readings and New Testament each day.

In this new year, challenge yourself to study the Bible and strengthen your faith in the

process. To see all the readings for each month and the year, visit the conference website.

Each month's readings will be printed in each *Advocate* issue.

Tips on reading the Bible daily:

- ❖ Start reading the Bible today.
- ❖ Set aside a specific time and place each day. Set your schedule and then stick to it. Mornings are great; but feel free to use any time that works consistently with your schedule.
- ❖ Get a good study Bible to help to illuminate the meaning of the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek text.
- ❖ Choose a translation to use during your reading.
- ❖ Say a short prayer to God before you begin, asking the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom and understanding.
- ❖ Dive in and enjoy the richness of God's Word! Apply God's Word to your life. Bible study should be practical and applicable. I assure you that these seven steps will help you begin a journey in becoming a "life-long learner" of God's Word. 📖



Bishop's Bible Challenge readings for JANUARY

January 1	Genesis 1-3; Romans 1
January 2	Genesis 4-6; Romans 2
January 3	Genesis 7-9; Romans 3
January 4	Genesis 10-12; Romans 4
January 5	Genesis 13-15; Romans 5
January 6	Genesis 16-17; Romans 6
January 7	Genesis 18-19; Romans 7
January 8	Gen. 20-22; Rom. 8:1-21
January 9	Gen. 23-24; Rom. 8:22-39
January 10	Gen. 25-26; Rom. 9:1-15
January 11	Gen. 27-28; Rom. 9:16-33
January 12	Gen. 29-30; Rom. 10
January 13	Gen. 31-32; Rom. 11:1-18
January 14	Gen. 33-35; Rom. 11:19-36
January 15	Gen. 36-38; Rom. 12
January 16	Gen. 39-40; Rom. 13
January 17	Gen. 41-42; Rom. 14
January 18	Gen. 43-45; Rom. 15:1-13
January 19	Gen. 46-48; Rom. 15:14-33
January 20	Gen. 49-50; Rom. 16
January 21	Isaiah 1-2; Mark 1:1-22
January 22	Isaiah 3-4; Mark 1:23-45
January 23	Isaiah 5-6; Mark 2
January 24	Isaiah 7-8; Mark 3:1-19
January 25	Isa. 9-10; Mark 3:20-35
January 26	Isa. 11-13; Mark 4:1-20
January 27	Isa. 14-16; Mark 4:21-41
January 28	Isa. 17-19; Mark 5:1-20
January 29	Isa. 20-22; Mark 5:21-43
January 30	Isa. 23-25; Mark 6:1-29
January 31	Isa. 26-27; Mark 6:30-56

ONE LAST WORD

A RESOLVE
for every morning of the new year

I WILL THIS DAY TRY TO LIVE A
SIMPLE SINCERE AND SERENE
LIFE REPELLING PROMPTLY EVERY
THOUGHT OF DISCONTENT, ANXIETY,
DISCOURAGEMENT, IMPURITY & SELF-
SEEKING CULTIVATING CHEERFULNESS,
MAGNANIMITY, CHARITY, AND THE
HABIT OF HOLY SILENCE EXERCISING
ECONOMY IN EXPENDITURE, CAREFUL-
NESS IN CONVERSATION, DILIGENCE
IN APPOINTED SERVICE, FIDELITY TO
EVERY TRUST AND A CHILD-LIKE
TRUST IN GOD.

*from a calendar by Bishop John
H. Vincent (early 20th century
New Year's resolution postcard)*

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