

Bishop receives Virginia Council of Churches' highest honor



Virginia United Methodist

Advocate

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June 2012



General Conference 2012

.....
Little accomplished
amidst lots of
frustration

**"We envision faith communities
where all God's people are
welcomed at table, nurtured
and transformed to be
Christ to others in the world."**

— Virginia Conference Vision Statement

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How to fix General Conference



Neill Caldwell
Editor

One of my college roommates frequently uses that old axiom about not liking sausage "after you see how sausage is made." I've returned from two weeks at General Conference, the place where a thousand indecisions were launched, and there was plenty of sausage-making on display. Yuck.

Marc Brown said that the 2012 General Conference was like a novel: "It had a plot, lots of sub-plots and a surprise ending." It was certainly a surreal experience for most of us. So I offer five ways to fix General Conference:

- 1. Make it shorter:** Two weeks is too long. The exhaustion and ill will builds daily, meaning everyone is tired and crabby in week two. Legislative committees need to find a way to use modern technologies like Skype to meet in the months leading up to General Conference to work through their legislation. Then shorten the big session to a week.
- 2. Make it younger:** Shortening the gathering will also allow more young adults and youths, who have jobs and school, to participate. Ten of our 13 Virginia Conference lay delegates are retired, and while I love each of those people dearly as individuals, that's not a happy statistic for a church that needs to be looking toward the future. The way General Conference is set up now, retirees are the only people who can go. Still, annual conferences need to be more purposeful in electing young people in the future.
- 3. More discernment, less Robert's Rules of Order:** OK, I know Henry Martyn Robert created his rules after a frustrating church meeting (true story), but it's still not a great way to run a gathering of nearly 1,000 church people. Savvy delegates use and manipulate *Robert's Rules* to block and delay progress. What really burns my buns is that someone in the committee's work will make an amendment to something, they'll spend two hours debating it, it will get voted down, and then the same person will make the exact same amendment on the plenary floor (with the same result)!
- 4. Change a flawed system:** It's great to be a global church and to have delegates from around the world, but it's no way to legislate. The level of understanding of what was going on was very low among Central Conference delegates (well, among U.S. delegates too, for the most part). The solution – make the USA its own central conference and allow each central conference to meet separately and enact its own rules – was actually approved at the 2008 General Conference, but failed to get the two-thirds support needed in annual conference voting to change the church constitution.
- 5. We need some new faces:** Sometimes people joke that their congregation will not make progress until there are "a couple of key deaths." At General Conference there are a handful of delegates – I won't name names – who have had control of the church in their grip for 20 years or more. Not to wish ill health on anyone, but...



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Neill Caldwell

General Conference 2012 is much ado about very little

The Rev. Marc Brown, Virginia Conference director of Connectional Ministries, said on the last day of General Conference that he was “hopeful in my discouragement.” Brown, a member of the Virginia delegation, emphasized, “I am hopeful because I have faith in God.”

No doubt, Brown spoke for many other delegates and observers in Tampa. The quadrennial meeting was filled with scratch-your-head, “say-what?” moments.

For example, eliminating guaranteed appointment for clergy was approved, while establishing term limits on bishops was not – barely. The petition to set term limits for bishops came out of committee with a 28 in favor, 25 against and 9 not voting. The motion on the plenary floor was rejected 463 to 462.

Despite what could hardly be called a vote of confidence, the Council of Bishops nonetheless aggressively pursued establishing a “set-aside” bishop who would serve as its full-time president in addition to other duties established by at least one restructure plan. The motion to have a full-time set-aside bishop was defeated 490-399.

Speaking of restructure, three plans were put forth. All were defeated in committee. A fourth, developed by proponents of two of them, somehow made it to the plenary floor for consideration. The 88-member General Administration legislative committee could not in three days come up with an acceptable restructure plan to present to the plenary for consideration (see committee member Marc Brown’s related story, pg. 4). But the negotiated proposal, known as “Plan UMC,” sailed through the full plenary – nearly 1,000 delegates – in just two hours.

Ultimately, the nine-member Judicial Council unanimously declared “Plan UMC” “constitutionally unsalvageable.” In its decision, the council pointed out that “the adoption of ‘Plan UMC’ by the General Conference came through a tortured course and outside of the established legislative processes. At the request of the General Conference, the Judicial Council reviewed the plan to determine whether any part, portion or all of ‘Plan UMC’ can be saved.” The council concluded that “it cannot.”

Proponents of restructure disregarded this assessment and asked the plenary as General Conference began its final session to refer “Plan UMC” to the Connectional Table and Council of Bishops to perfect. They also suggested calling a special General Conference before 2016 to consider whatever the bishops and Connectional Table perfected.



Virginia delegates huddle to discuss possible restructuring options on the final day of General Conference. UMNS photo/Mike DuBose

Why to refer the dead proposal escaped many delegates’ understanding. And the prospect of spending in the vicinity of \$3-5 million to hold a special General Conference appalled almost everyone.

The proponents of restructure fought off tabling their motion, which would likely have put it aside indefinitely. But in yet another head-scratching moment, they themselves agreed to table their motion so the plenary could consider a series of petitions from the denomination’s general agencies that offered to reduce the number of members on their boards of directors. These were approved, and the presiding bishop called for adjournment.

A delegate jumped to his feet to point out that the motion to refer “Plan UMC” was still on the table. It needed to be removed so it could be referred. The plenary voted to leave it on the table and adjourned.

The seeds of this farcical end to General Conference were perhaps planted earlier in two incidents.

The Rev. Adam Hamilton, a delegate from Kansas and pastor of the Church of the Resurrection, was an outspoken advocate of restructure. He was a member of the Interim Operating Team of the Connectional Table that had proposed one of the restructure plans.

In a meeting with young adults to discuss restructure, he reportedly avoided answering questions about details of restructuring by responding that he was more attuned to the vision than to the details of restructure. It was the details that doomed restructure, though.

Most disconcerting – and probably the defining moment for the 2012 General Conference – was a vote on including the words “God’s grace is available to all” in the preamble to the church’s *Social Principles*. Adding the words was approved 532 to 414 (56% to 44%). Does that mean 44 percent of delegates to General Conference do not believe God’s grace is available to all?

-Wayne Rhodes is director of Communications for the General Board of Church & Society



General Conference fails to come away with new restructure plan for the church

The 32nd chapter of Genesis tells the story of Jacob wrestling with God throughout the night by the Jabbok River. In this story of calling, Jacob becomes Israel as God refuses to let go of Jacob as morning dawns. The story concludes with Jacob crossing the Jabbok into a new day with a new identity.



**by the Rev.
Marc Brown**

I had the privilege of sitting, along with Ron Hardman, on the General Administration Legislative Committee at the 2012 General Conference. This committee had the responsibility for considering disciplinary concerns related to the structure of General Church boards and agencies. Advance preparation for this legislative committee was printed in the *Advance Daily Christian Advocate*. Included in these pages were 97 petitions related to the *Book of Discipline*, eight non-disciplinary petitions, and two plans for restructuring the functioning ministry of The United Methodist Church. In addition, another proposed restructuring plan was presented to the committee. All three plans were concerned with aligning the resources of our global denomination so we might fulfill our stated mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Each had a different area of emphasis for the fulfillment of this mission.

Over the course of 21 hours, the committee dealt with these various pieces of legislation by dividing into three subcommittees. Ron and I were on the subcommittee that dealt with the restructuring requests of boards and agencies. The last two and a half hours of the total committee’s time was spent in review of a compromise restructure plan that was the result of nine persons representing the three proposal

plans – six Central Conference delegates and three racial/ethnic members from the United States. As a group, the General Administration committee members could not agree by majority vote on any of the plans that were presented.

An alternate “Plan UMC” was presented by a secondary group to the plenary of the General Conference. With amendments, this plan was approved along with a request for a Judicial Council ruling on whether the restructuring plan was in accordance with the constitutional provisions of the *Book of Discipline*. In the late afternoon of the final day of General Conference, the Judicial Council announced that “Plan UMC” was in conflict with the *Book of Discipline*. In response, the plenary approved the downsizing of boards and agencies as recommended by General Administration committee. Delegates shrank agency boards by 266 members, cutting the number of board members for the 13 agencies nearly in half.

As I sat through the final session and thought about the struggle between the various restructuring plans, I reflected on Jacob by the Jabbok River and came to two conclusions:

- 1) God is refusing to let go of The United Methodist Church in spite of our differences of opinion on restructuring and other matters of faith and witness.**
- 2) God is calling The United Methodist Church into a new identity as a global denomination as we struggle to understand how we shall fulfill the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-18.**

I am not sure how our story will conclude, but I am certain of this: God is with us as we travel into the dawning of a new day.

-The Rev. Marc Brown is the Virginia Conference director of Connectional Ministries



Guaranteed appointments go out with a whimper

Many delegates were surprised and even shocked by how quickly a far-reaching proposal that takes away the security of guaranteed appointments for ordained elders breezed by General Conference.

The item was approved as part of a large number of proposals in the assembly's consent calendar, a tool used by General Conference to expedite legislation wherein recommendations from legislative committees with no more than 10 negative votes are grouped and approved together. There was a motion to reconsider the item but that motion failed by a vote of 564 to 373.

Under this new legislation, bishops and cabinets will be allowed to give elders less than fulltime appointment. The legislation also would permit bishops and their cabinets, with the approval of their boards of ordained ministry and annual conference's executive session, to put elders on unpaid transitional leave for up to 24 months. Clergy on transitional leave would be able to participate in their conference health program through their own contributions.

Under the legislation, each annual conference is asked to name a task force to develop a list of criteria to guide the cabinets and bishops as they make missional appointments.

The cabinets shall report to the executive committees of Board of Ordained Ministry the number of clergy without fulltime appointments and their age, gender and ethnicity. Cabinets also will be asked to report their learnings as appointment-making is conducted in a new way.

Earlier the assembly voted down a proposal that would have allowed elders and deacons to be eligible for ordination as soon as they complete their educational requirements and after serving a minimum of two years as a provisional elder or deacon.

The commission stated security of appointments for elders has been a major stumbling block for missional appointments.

"Although I knew it was coming, I'm shocked at how fast it just passed right by in front of us," said the Rev. Gloria Kim, pastor of Marysville (Wash.) UMC and delegate of the Pacific Northwest Conference. She said she is "grieving" the loss of United Methodist heritage this petition brings.

"I am a true disciple of Jesus Christ, I am United Methodist and I am an effective clergy," she said. However, as a woman from an ethnic minority, she has experienced discrimination.

The Rev. Vance Ross, pastor of Gordon Memorial UMC, Nashville, Tenn., said guaranteed appointments have been critical to discouraging cultural bigotry. "We have put something in place that allows an awful amount of opportunity to move in ways that are not part of the diverse and inclusive values that we get from Jesus of Nazareth."

Security of appointment was established in 1956 to protect women clergy and, later, clergy of color.

In the United States, one in three churches has fewer than 40 in worship on Sunday, said the Rev. Ken Carter, chair of the Western North Carolina delegation and co-author of the ministry study report. "What we have done is to displace local pastors often in poor and marginalized areas or created charges that are sometimes artificial and not helpful to the local churches to try to provide employment for elders," he said. "They have continued despite ineffectiveness and this has done harm to local churches."

-Kathy Gilbert, United Methodist News Service

"Although I knew it was coming, I'm shocked at how fast it just passed right by in front of us."



Leaders canceled votes on homosexuality issues

United Methodists concluded General Conference May 4 without voting on gay clergy or same-sex marriage, a surprising end to a disappointing week for gay activists.

On Thursday, the nearly 1,000 delegates soundly rejected two motions that would have amended The United Methodist Church's *Book of Discipline*, which calls the practice of homosexuality "incompatible with Christian teaching." After those votes, protesters flooded the convention floor, briefly shutting down the conference.

Conference planners, evangelical leaders and gay and lesbian advocates met later and determined that there was little use in holding additional contentious debates on homosexuality, according to several sources. Proposals to ordain gay clergy and bless same-sex unions held little chance of passing, the parties agreed, so they would not be debated.

"Leaders of the demonstration were told that the legislation was postponed to avoid more harm to LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgendered) people and their supporters," the Love Your Neighbor Coalition. "The United Methodist Church had an opportunity to offer love, grace, and hope," the coalition said. "Sadly, we did not take that opportunity."

The UMC's policy remains that ministers cannot marry same-sex couples and churches cannot host same-sex weddings. Clergy in same-sex relationships are likewise banned.

Leading up to General Conference, gay advocates had argued that momentum favored their cause. About 1,200 United Methodists clergy have agreed to break church rules and marry same-sex couples, surveys show young Christians favor expanding gay rights and other mainline Protestant denominations have adopted gay-friendly policies in recent years. But the UMC, which is the largest mainline Protestant denomination in the country, is shrinking in the U.S. while growing in Africa and Asia, where very conservative views on homosexuality predominate.

The conservative Institute on Religion & Democracy credited African delegates for upholding UMC's "incompatible" stance on homosexuality. "Delegates from Africa, comprising about 30 percent of the total, were decisive in votes ... on wording that sought to soften the church's position."

-Daniel Burke, *Religion News Service*

Church cannot even

The United Methodist Church cannot agree that it disagrees over the issue of homosexuality. After more than an hour of passionate debate and clear disagreement, two items stating Christians have different opinions about homosexuality were not approved by the 2012 General Conference, leaving the original language in the *Book of Discipline* intact.

Paragraph 161F states: "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching."

The Rev. Adam Hamilton, pastor of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan., and the Rev. Mike Slaughter, pastor of Ginghamburg Church, Tipp City, Ohio, proposed a substitution to 161F that sought to clarify that United Methodists disagree on whether homosexual practice is contrary to the will of God and urged unity over division and respect for co-existence. Their substitution replaced the last paragraph of a petition submitted by the Global Convocation of Young People after its 2010 conference.

*"Though we cannot think alike,
may we not love alike? May we not
be of one heart, though we are not
of one opinion? Without all doubt,
we may."*

JOHN WESLEY

Hamilton reminded delegates to the 2012 United Methodist General Conference that John Wesley once said, "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may."

As discussion on the petition began, many who support including lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender people quietly stood outside the bar of the plenary floor praying, holding hands and signs. Throughout the days leading up to the legislation, members of coalitions seeking equality and inclusion for all had been protesting and praying for change. After the vote to keep the original wording in the *Discipline*, they moved to the altar singing "Let us Break Bread Together."

"Many feel we need to take a strong stand against homosexuality," said the Rev. James Howell, of the Western North Carolina Conference "What matters is God's will. We have said for a long time we do not condone homosexuality, but they are here, they are in our delegations, they are serving our churches. They keep coming back ... there is a

agree to disagree

kind of miracle in that.”

The Rev. Maxie Dunham of the Kentucky Conference spoke against the substitution saying, “It leaves out good teaching.” There is no reason at all to state we disagree, because we disagree about almost everything, he said.

Slaughter said agreeing to disagree was necessary because there are people within his church and others that do disagree. “At Ginghamburg, we have Christ-centered, Bible-believing Christians who are against this and for this and somehow it is working when we agree to disagree. ... It’s making one heaven of a difference in Dayton, Ohio, and in places as far as Darfur, Sudan.”

Ralph Williams, a lay delegate from the Baltimore-Washington Conference, said some of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Christians attending this conference “have been told they should be stoned, that this is what the Bible prescribes for our sin.”

When asked the intention behind the substitution, Hamilton replied it would not change the church’s stance on same-sex marriage or ordination of gay clergy.

The discussion around the petition also included debate about whether homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.

Kashal Kabung, South-West Katanga Conference, said he did not believe homosexuality was created by God. “The grace of God does not allow us to sin,” he said.

*-Kathy Gilbert and Tita Parham,
United Methodist News Service*



Adam Hamilton (left) and Mike Slaughter make their appeal.



Love and hate on full display in Tampa

The notorious Westboro Baptist Church came to The United Methodist Church’s worldwide assembly on the last day of their two-week meeting with a message: “God Hates the Methodist Church.”

The Rev. Troy Plummer and other pastors and lay members of The United Methodist Church formed a human shield in front of the Westboro demonstrators. Westboro positioned themselves outside a white tent where the Love Your Neighbor Common Witness Coalition held daily lunches in support of full inclusion of everyone in the church.

Inside the tent they were signing “Draw the Circle Wide,” while outside the visitors sang their own words to “God is Going to Watch You Burn” to Rhiana’s song “Love the Way You Love.”

Plummer, director of Reconciling Ministries, was constantly being taunting by one man hurling hateful words like “Methodists are fag enablers.” In the hot Florida sun, Plummer keep his cool.

Audrey Krumbach, a member of MOSAIC (Methodist Students [Young People] for an All Inclusive Church), was holding rainbow-decorated stoles which are a symbol of solidarity with lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people. “This is the first time I feel like I am protecting The United Methodist Church with these stoles instead of standing outside looking in,” she said.

-Kathy Gilbert, United Methodist News Service



Delegates reject divestment in companies supporting Israeli occupation of Palestine

Delegates to General Conference approved petitions dealing with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but they did not approve a measure to divest from specific companies.

Delegates instead approved a report calling on the United Methodist Board of Pension and Health Benefits to explore “serious peace-making strategies in Israel and Palestine, including positive economic and financial investment in Palestine.”

The Israeli-Palestinian issue dominated the May 2 afternoon session. The petition originally called for divestment from Motorola Solutions, Hewlett-Packard and Caterpillar, which provide products that are used by the Israeli military in the occupation of Palestinian lands. The Finance and Administration Committee instead substituted language urging “positive, rather than punitive options,” according to Jessica Vargo, East Ohio delegate and committee chairperson.

The petition also asked United Methodist general agencies and boards to ask companies to adopt United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and to consider economic sanctions with companies that refuse.

Vargo noted this petition did not mean that divestment from companies would not be considered. Rather, the petition placed the decision to divest into the hands of the Board of Pension and Health Benefits, as has been historically done, not General Conference.

A minority report urging divestment and calling on United Methodist boards, agencies, annual conferences and local



Volunteers hold up a banner asking delegates to approve a plan of divestment from Caterpillar, Motorola and Hewlett-Packard. UMNS photo/Paul Jeffrey

churches to take into consideration a company's involvement in Israeli occupation when making investment decisions was rejected.

Those opposed to the committee's recommendation said it did not go far enough in helping end the struggles of the Palestinian people and that past efforts encouraging companies to change their behavior had not worked.

Robert Lee, 19, a student at Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C., and a delegate from Western North Carolina, said he was moved by stories about those who were injured or killed when Palestinian homes were bulldozed to make way for settlement building. "If we're trying to show this is a conference of change, it's time to put our money where our mouth is," he said.

-Tita Parham, United Methodist News Service

Students get an up-close look at General Conference



Students and the Rev. Dr. Justin Allen, dean of Spiritual Life and director of the Institute for Church Professions, joined with the Rev. Dr. Rhonda VanDyke Colby, a delegate from Virginia and vice president for Student Life at Shenandoah University, for a group photo at General Conference.

A group of students from Shenandoah University and the *Calling21* internship program had the opportunity to study United Methodist Church polity taught by the Rev. Dr. Rhonda VanDyke Colby, Dr. Justin Allen, and Amy Howard. These 11 students journeyed to Tampa, Fla. to observe the global gathering of The United Methodist Church at General Conference.

"In addition to learning the process of General Conference, our goal is to help students learn complex decision-making, critical thinking and writing skills. They don't necessarily have those skills when they enter," said Van Dyke Colby, who leads the class *Global Nature and Ministry of The United Methodist Church*.

Students were from many different faith backgrounds and had many different opinions about issues being discussed. Each student was asked to choose a different leg-

(continued on next page)

("Students" continued from previous page)

islative committee following the selection process used by the Virginia Conference delegates and to also follow a lobbying group. Some students followed groups that aligned with their convictions, while others stepped outside of their comfort zones and followed groups that challenged their beliefs.

As a group, we enjoyed the diversity within the body of Christ as we listened to more than seven languages spoken. We also noticed that there was a larger population of young people at GC2012 than we expected to encounter, and we really enjoyed talking with these young leaders. Sadly, many were attending to observe, just as we were, and not as delegates. This raises the question, how is the young adult voice of today and tomorrow supposed to be heard when it is not more widely represented in the voting delegation at General Conference? In order for young people to have an opinion and help strengthen our church, we have to be elected and supported by our conferences!

We do want to recognize the Virginia Conference for its steps toward a resolution on this issue as we work together to become more fully equipped to lead our body forward by empowering the young people around us. "Students asked questions of our delegates during breaks and were encouraged by the fact that every Virginia Conference delegate took time to talk with them and explain what was happening on the surface and what was happening behind the scenes to enact change," said Allen.

Having attended General Conference, we now have experiences that give us a unique eye as we critically and joyfully participate in and observe the workings of United Methodist polity. We found great strength in the partnerships we made with other observers. We worked together with brothers and sisters in Christ so all of us could fully understand what was going on during sessions. In the future, it is our hope to partner with others regardless of age, sex, race, gender or sexual orientation to ensure that all are properly represented and respected during gather-

ings of the church.

Even though there is a great divide in The United Methodist Church about rights of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered (LGBT) community, our group participated in several holy conversations, and as a whole, we all agree that no matter where we stand on this question, we need to stand in unity with those who have been oppressed and hurt. During conference, our group stood with our sisters and brothers during a vigil that yearned to mend the body of Christ.

During the vigil, a person from a Central Conference approached some students, embraced them and proclaimed, "Those who are oppressed and hurt stand with you and love you." This showed us the hope that is present for the reconciliation of the church.

During the week, our group made a covenant to live in holy community with one another. We became one and learned to respect

the viewpoints of others while expressing our own. Even though there were moments of strife between us, we quickly realized our faults and corrected the mistakes that were made. We pray that in the future the Church can do the same on a worldwide level.

"There is a risk in bringing them to General Conference," said VanDyke Colby. "The risk is that some or all of them might be so turned off by the issues or the process that they no longer want to be part of the church. I'm pleased that it has not been the case. They don't all agree on the issues, but they all agree that what they have seen and learned is relevant and interesting."

Two members of the group are *Calling 21* students from Virginia Tech and Blue Ridge Community College. The rest of the students are from Shenandoah. The students were: Virginia Greer, Emily Howdyshehl, Matt Knonenborg, Brooke Layne, Joshua McCauley, Mary Claire Miller, Sara Miller, Nicholas Ruxton, Michelle Viljoen, Michelle West and Alex Woody.

-By Nicholas Ruxton, Virginia Greer and Emily Howdyshehl.

The Rev. Judy Worthington also contributed to this article.

How is the young adult voice of today and tomorrow supposed to be heard when it is not more widely represented in the voting delegation at General Conference?



A chalice, a paten and a vow of poverty

The Rev. Lorenza Andrade Smith talks about her ministry.



The Rev. Lorenza Andrade Smith arrived at General Conference with nothing more than a small backpack and a bedroll. She took up residence outside on the ground near the Common Witness Tabernacle. She is an ordained elder in the Southwest Texas Conference who has taken a vow of poverty and sold her house, her car and most of her possessions in order to be in ministry with those living on the streets in her community.

When she tried to enter the Tampa Convention Center she was asked to leave because she had no shoes. She says, “I walk with no shoes because I want to be intentional about my movement, to slow down, to feel the earth under my feet. It is a spiritual discipline and a way that I can be an advocate for the very poor who have no shoes, and a way that I am in community with them.”

“Poverty is a symptom of even larger issues going on around our world,” she said. “The biggest concern for me is the criminalization of the poor and it is happening here. It is happening all over the world.”

Andrade Smith has arrest warrants against her for sleeping on public property. On one occasion when she tried to enter the courthouse, an officer got a mop and hit her with it. She left and went outside and put on her clerical collar and went back inside where she walked up to the officer who hit her. She says, “I didn’t say anything. I didn’t shout or demean him. I just stood before him. His jaw dropped. He said, ‘Are you a nun?’ I said ‘Not quite.’”



She carries a chalice and a paten with her wherever she goes. She was banned from entering a homeless shelter because they said the chalice she carries could be used as a weapon. So she slept on a park bench where she was arrested for sleeping on public property and thrown in jail. When she appeared before the judge he ordered her to do community service – and sent her to the very shelter she had been thrown out of.

For her the chalice is a tangible way that she brings Christ with her into the community of the poor. When people ask her about her chalice she tells them about the presence of Christ. One man crossing the border between Mexico and the U.S. said, “Now I know I am no longer alone.”

Andrade Smith is concerned about the criminalization of immigration. She says, “The Arizona law SB1050 that criminalizes immigration is a precedent. What is happening in Arizona is being recognized around the world and will have a global effect if it goes forward. We have to be forward-thinking and prophetically stand in the pulpits, in our local churches and in our schools. We need to work alongside all peoples in our areas.”

She tirelessly campaigned on behalf of the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act that allows illegal immigrants who entered the U.S. as children to apply for conditional legal status after attending college or serving in the military for two years. She believes the DREAM Act will change the landscape of this country – allowing young people, who would otherwise not qualify for work permits because of their immigration status, to work legally.

When asked what was the hardest thing for her regarding her vow of poverty she answered, “The hardest thing is survival on the streets. I work on advocacy. I go to churches and build community. The church has been good to me. People on the streets have been a loving, hospitable community who care for me. Here in Tampa a man stopped me and said it was going to be cool outside at night and he gave me his blanket.”

—The Rev. Judy Worthington serves Belle Haven and Bethel churches, Eastern Shore District

“There is a warrant for my arrest because I was sleeping outside on a park bench. That type of criminalization of people of poverty needs to come to an end.”

Imagine No Malaria takes Nothing But Nets to a whole new level

On World Malaria Day, General Conference was abuzz with activity. A flash mob of youth invaded the conference worship service dressed in blood-red t-shirts with the logo: *Imagine No Malaria*. A 6-foot tall, black mosquito buzzed in their midst, bringing to our attention the real threat that malaria holds for much of our world.

Infants, children under five years of age and pregnant women are at risk of dying from malaria. Those older than five years are often able to survive the disease but are at risk of loss of income and productivity due the chronic and debilitating nature of the disease.



Since the launch of *Nothing But Nets* in 2008 The United Methodist Church has learned a great deal about the needs of communities subjected to this deadly disease. As a result, the initiative, which started as an effort to supply bed nets, has expanded and become more comprehensive. The goal of the new campaign, *Imagine No Malaria*, is to eliminate malaria deaths by 2015.

Imagine a world in which no infant or child ever dies because of malaria. Imagine a world where no pregnant woman dies from the disease. Imagine a world where no one ever dies from this disease. We, The United Methodist Church, in partnership with the United Nations Foundation, the Red Cross, the Red Crescent and regional governments, are helping to make it happen. By partnering with local governments the campaign hopes to distribute treated bed nets, educate the public to know where to go when children get sick and provide effective treatment.

Imagine No Malaria has three distinct initiatives aimed at eliminating malaria deaths:

- ❖ **Train Community Health Workers:** Community Health Workers will take the lead in educating their communities about the disease; the importance of using bed nets; and where to go to receive treatment. The Community Health Workers will also be part of a door-to-door campaign to educate and inform their communities.
- ❖ **Establish Community Health Clinics for treatment of those who have malaria:** This second tier of the No Malaria campaign will provide affordable and effective treatment through community health clinics to those who are infected.

- ❖ **Establish 12 health boards of trained and equipped indigenous leaders to oversee the malaria program in Africa.**

To be successful, each country's malaria program relies on the ability to effectively plan, organize and implement its program at the community level so that it is a community-led, community-driven initiative.

According to Bishop Thomas Bickerton of West Pennsylvania, "The United Methodist Church's malaria clinics have become the most trusted delivery system across the continent of Africa. New churches are forming across Africa because of the awareness of the malaria mission by The United Methodist Church."

Bishop John Yambasu, episcopal leader of the Sierra Leone Conference, takes very seriously the responsibility of the church in Sierra Leone to help in the campaign. Earlier this year the Sierra Leone Conference took a special offering for *Imagine No Malaria*. Bishop Yambasu said, "Truly, we all have an important role in this fight against the killer disease, malaria. *Imagine No Malaria* is changing lives in many ways in Sierra Leone."

Since the start of the *Imagine No Malaria* campaign, \$20.2 million has been raised, 850,000 bed nets have been distributed and 5,000 health workers have been trained.

When the campaign was started, the statistics showed that a person died every 30 seconds from malaria. Today that rate has been reduced by half to every 60 seconds.

A goal of raising \$75-100 million has been set. "Our goal of ending malaria deaths is bold and ambitious," Bickerton said. "But, when we stand together as United Methodists, God can do far more than we can possibly imagine."

To learn more, go to www.imagenomalaria.org.

-The Rev. Judy Worthington



Beatrice Gbanga of Sierra Leone holds an insecticide-treated mosquito net during a celebration of the work of the *Imagine No Malaria* campaign during General Conference. UMNS photo/Mike DuBose.

Reflections on GC2012



"Everyone said to me, 'Go, make a difference.' But, I don't feel like there is any way to make a difference. I think it is easier for those outside the bar to make a difference. There is just so much fear here. We are making our decisions based on fear."

– *The Rev. Amanda Garber, first-time Virginia Conference delegate*

"This whole morning has been very frustrating. I can't imagine how our non-English speaking delegates had any idea what they were voting on. 'Plan UMC' was never even published in any other language. I had a hard time knowing what I was voting on and I stayed up late last night trying to read through the 79 pages. I'm not even sure anyone knew what they were voting on."

– *Dot Ivey, lay Virginia delegate*

"I will never complain about Annual Conference again."

– *Lay reserve delegate Rachel Hundley*

"It is amazing to be here. It is clear that it is a global church. But it is also painfully clear that we are very U.S.-centric. The Global Young People's Convocation in Johannesburg that I attended last year was much more intentional about the global nature of the church. There was much more focus on spending time together and getting to know each other [across the boundaries of nationality]."

– *The Rev. Kristen Holbrook*



"We have huge trust issues. Some of the things we've done here were helpful . . . like the conversations around the tables. As you get to know people, look them in the eyes and hear their story – that helps a lot. I think it's going to take more years of that. It's going to take trust building between Central Conferences and U.S. I think we need to build more trust between the bishops and the laity . . . bishops and clergy. Clearly we have the trust issues between the left and the right. . . . I think sitting down with people and giving people the benefit of the doubt is important. Building trust is going to be sitting down, talking to people and hearing their stories."

– *The Rev. Adam Hamilton, Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, Kan.*

"We made many false steps leading up to and during this past General Conference, to be sure. We need to learn from those. I believe we can. I am committed to doing what I can to reflect that learning in my work. But the Spirit has opened up for us many new possibilities through and despite what we did there. We can and, I trust, will build on those, as the Spirit continues to lead."

– *The Rev. Taylor Burton Edwards*

"The 2012 General Conference had a difficult time passing a new way of being the church. A church with declining membership, worship attendance, new disciples and money should be ready to take bold steps. Instead we opted for small changes or no change. I believe that in part this is due to a lack of trust. We have a hard time trusting leadership, trusting people with different theological beliefs, and trusting people promoting change. We will need to take bold risks to become a vital church. Our faith is not in humanity or human leadership but in God at work in and through the church including our leaders. Trust builds as we humble ourselves before God, as leaders lead in the midst of the people rather than over the people and as the community of believers pray daily for their lay and clergy leaders."

– Bishop John Schol,
Baltimore-Washington Conference



"Let's just say I didn't think it would be pretty from the beginning."

– The Rev. Tom Berlin

"To be in full communion is to be related to one of the great churches of American society and the world."

– Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
Senior Bishop Thomas Hoyt Jr.,
commenting on the passage of full
communion relationships with other
pan-Methodist denominations



"General Conference revealed the ugly side of our connectional processes, the unholy realities of strict procedures and self-preserving structures. The Judicial Council decision that undid days (even years, depending on your perspective) of work and deliberation by ruling Plan UMC unconstitutional offered The United Methodist Church a candid view of our denomination's systems. Despite support from approximately 60 percent of General Conference delegates, Plan UMC died on May 4th. ... General Conference unveiled harsh procedural obstacles to change, and those realities highlight the necessity of institutional introspection. The gasps of delegates after the Judicial Council statement signaled the need for a level of self-examination that extends beyond hackneyed theological sound bites and Twitter wisdom. The hope is that, in the aftermath of General Conference 2012, we may have the clarity of vision to accept a fundamental truth: Our system will not change unless United Methodists believe with intentionality and enthusiasm that our structures and processes require transformation."

– Ben Boruff, a young adult member of
the Connectional Table

"As I watched my church rip itself and its members into shreds over the issue of homosexuality, I could do nothing but weep. I wept for the words of my brothers from Africa who equated being gay with bestiality. I wept for Adam Hamilton and Mike Slaughter's loving act of seeking compromise between the diverse opinions of the Church. I wept as I saw many moderates, some who are truly seeking to be inclusive but struggling with old frameworks, be pulled by the mantras of 'it's a sin' of the right and the human desire to acknowledge the beauty of difference."

– Dr. Maria Dixon

"I stand here broken-hearted, knowing the church has done harm to my friends. As a straight, married woman, I have privilege, but I am also expecting a child in September. I want my church to love my child no matter who they grow up to love."

– Laurie Rossbert, Tennessee Conference



"Everybody take a deep breath. It's going to be okay. As the mushroom cloud surrounding the end of General Conference slowly dissipates, United Methodist leaders are in a frenzy of frustration. The delegates are frustrated that, after the failure to adopt a valid restructuring plan, their work seems for naught. Non-delegates are angry that our representatives are coming home with little to show except the removal of guaranteed appointment, which hardly enjoys universal popularity. And everyone is upset at the prospect of another quadrennium of wondering what we should do next. ... If we are going to thrive as Wesleyan Christians, our first and most important task is not to formulate an efficient church. It's to develop and live out a passionate love for both God and neighbor."

– The Rev. Eric Van Meter, Wesley
Foundation at Arkansas State University

"In the closing hours of General Conference, as the Judicial Council announcement came through that 'Plan UMC' was 'constitutionally unsalvageable,' on the large video screen that broadcast the session, a delegate held up a sign: 'John 11:35' – 'Jesus wept.'"

– Melissa Lauber, Baltimore-Washington
Conference





Tyler Sit of the Candler School of Theology (center) led a 'flash mob' dance during a break of the 2012 United Methodist General Conference. UMNS photo/Kathleen Barry.

Young adults come away hurt, feeling excluded

The Rev. Stephanie Gottschalk, 31, a first-time delegate from Western Pennsylvania, said she came to General Conference to "be in holy conferencing and grow together." Instead, she said the gathering "opened my eyes to a painful reality – the pain of coming to the table with a heart open to listening and finding closed-door meetings, manipulation of the process and systematic prejudice against those of color and those of gender and those of different ages, whether young or old."

Throughout the 11-day assembly, young adult delegates urged greater inclusion of young people in the decision-making of the church. Many felt their voices were ignored.

Delegates rejected a motion to increase the number of youth and young adults represented on the denomination's general agencies and boards.

-Tita Parham, *United Methodist News Service*

Full communion approved with Pan-Methodist cousins

After several hundred years of separation, members of six Pan-Methodist denominations have committed to ministry together.

The United Methodist Church is the last of the denominations to adopt the full communion agreement, which was celebrated May 1 during the 2012 General Conference.

The affirmation establishes a new relationship among the African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion, African Union Methodist Protestant, Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), Union American Methodist Episcopal and United Methodist denominations.

Bishop Sharon Rader, ecumenical officer for the United Methodist Council of Bishops, noted that acknowledging past difficulties is part of the process. "We believe this is a significant moment in all of our histories," she said during a news conference preceding the celebration.

For the CME church, an outgrowth of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, this moment is one of lasting significance, said Bishop Thomas Hoyt Jr., who has a long history of involvement with United Methodists through the Pan-Methodist Commission and ecumenical organizations.

"I believe the best for Methodism is yet before us," added AME Bishop John White. "This full communion gives us an opportunity to make our witness around the world."

There is a temptation to look at the new relationship of The United Methodist Church and smaller black Methodist denominations as a situation of the big fish swallowing the smaller fish, said United Methodist Bishop Alfred Norris, but that is not so. "In this case," he explained, "the big fish and the little fish will be swimming together."

-Linda Bloom, *United Methodist News Service*

Mix of languages, cultures is both frustrating and a blessing

By Ileana Rosario

Singing, dancing, greeting, arguing... it seems that everything at General Conference happened in multiple languages at the same time.

As a member of the Commission on the General Conference, I know that most of our planning was centered in the idea of creating a holy space for the encounter of many cultures where the delegates around the world could experience God together in a new and amazing way. From the circular tables to the mixing of the delegations and the use of many languages during worship, everything was planned to allow the delegates to encounter each other and appreci-

ate their own diversity.

At times it was overwhelming, as we navigated this sea of people speaking so many different languages. Other times were simply frustrating as we waited for interpreters and translations. But most times it was just powerful to hear the stories, the ideas, the dreams of others who come from so far away and somehow share the same goals and dreams that we do.

At the end we all want a united church, a church with a vision of hope, a church that will serve the world, a church that will make disciples of Christ from all around the world.

-The Rev. Ileana Rosario Rosario is pastor at Wesley Chapel UMC in Suffolk and was a reserve delegate.

Rigid parliamentary process is not keeping pace with our modern ministry needs

By Alex Joyner

I've found it hard to explain General Conference to curious friends and neighbors. Which part of General Conference? The spontaneous moment when African delegates began a midmorning break with smiles, singing and dancing in the aisles? That was thrilling. The dedication and



seriousness with which delegates took their work? Inspiring. The grueling day-long sessions in which people spoke past each other? Not so much.

What was abundantly clear to me is that our denomination no longer has a structure adequate to the challenges we face.

That's true of our board and agencies and of the General Conference itself. The global character of our church is both our greatest blessing

and a holy headache as we try to deal with radically different environments for ministry. The rigid structure of our parliamentary deliberations stifles meaningful interactions. And the energy that accompanies issues with very narrow constituencies is not matched by an energy for embracing the great common purpose of The United Methodist Church.

If that sounds like a negative assessment, it should also be heard with this caveat: The kind of church that is needed for this new age has never existed before. To take a movement that has functioned well in previous times into this new period is going to involve a lot of pinching and pain.

We didn't take a radical step forward into the future at this General Conference. There's more discomfort on the way. I just hope that we can be honest about what we experienced while we were together and be open to where God is calling us to go.

-The Rev. Alex Joyner is pastor at Franktown UMC, Eastern Shore District

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Virginia

Virginia Council of Churches presents its highest honor to Bishop Kammerer



Bishop Kammerer gives the Rev. Tom Joyce a kiss after his introduction of her award on May 15.

Virginia Conference Bishop Charlene P. Kammerer received the Lifetime Ecumenist Award from the Virginia Council of Churches at a luncheon on May 15.

Cooperative efforts with other denominations and faiths have been a cornerstone of Bishop Kammerer's ministry since the very beginning.

The bishop will retire this summer. Beginning in January 2013 she will begin a teaching position at Candler Theological Seminary in Atlanta and be a bishop-in-residence there.

The Brandermill Church, a joint United Methodist-Presbyterian Church congregation, was the host church and was also honored with a Faith in Action award. The Richmond Hill retreat center and the Rev. Dr. Joseph M. Vought, who served as senior pastor of Muhlenberg Lutheran Church

in Harrisonburg from 1997 until 2008, also received Faith in Action awards.

On the denominational level, Bishop Kammerer serves as president of the General Board of Discipleship, is a member of the Connectional Table and a member of the In Defense of Creation Task Force within the Council of Bishops.

She is a native of Winter Garden, Fla., where her home church was First United Methodist. She graduated from Wesleyan College in Macon, Ga., with an A.B. degree in Religion and Philosophy. (Wesleyan is the first college in the world chartered for the granting of degrees to women.) She obtained a Master of Christian Education degree and a Master of Divinity degree from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston,

Ill. She was ordained deacon in 1975 and elder in 1977 in the Florida Conference. She received a Doctor of Ministry degree in 1991 from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

Bishop Kammerer's service in the church has included equal years in parish ministries and connectional ministries, including service as a campus minister at Duke University and as a district superintendent of the Tallahassee District, Florida Conference. Her longtime interests in ministry include higher education, mission and the spirituality of administration. She has served as a director of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women and as a director of the General Board of Global Ministries, including chairperson of the United Methodist Committee on Relief from 1992-1996. She has been honored with Doctor of Divinity degrees from Bethune-Cookman College (Fla.), Pfeiffer University (N.C.) and Wesleyan College (Ga.).

She and her husband, Leigh, a substance abuse and addictions counselor for VCU Health Systems in Richmond, have one son, Chris, who just completed more than 10 years service with the United State Navy, and three grandchildren, Christopher, Noelle and Elton.

"It is an honor for our conference as well as for Bishop Kammerer personally for her to receive the Virginia Council of Churches' Lifetime Ecumenist Award," said the Rev. Tom Joyce, assistant to Bishop Kammerer and former president of the Virginia Council of Churches. "This is the most prestigious award and honors those who have made extraordinary contributions to strengthening relationships among the various Christian faith communities over the span of their entire career or lifetime. Bishop Kammerer is, indeed, a most worthy recipient."

The Brandermill Church was organized in 1977, and the vision of

an ecumenical church for the new community of Brandermill originated in the Virginia Council of Churches.

"It was proposed that such a church be established by many denominations pooling their resources together," writes the Rev. D. Clyde Bartges, founding minister of the church. "And although other denominations did participate in the initial conversations, only two agreed to cooperate in this unique venture. These continue to be the Presbyterian Church (USA) and The United Methodist Church.

"The first meeting of those who would later form the church was held at the home of Bill and Sue Akin in Poplar Grove on Jan. 16, 1977. About 25 people attended that Sunday night meeting, and some of these are still active members today." The present church facility was begun in 1980.

Richmond Hill is an ecumenical Christian community with a vocation of hospitality, healing, prayer and racial reconciliation for the city of metropolitan Richmond. It was founded by members and leaders of 14 denominations to seek to establish a continuity of prayer in the historic monastery of the Sisters of the Visitation of Monte Maria on Church Hill in Richmond. Richmond Hill will celebrate its 25th anniversary this year on Dec. 4.

The residential community of Richmond Hill lives by a modified Benedictine Rule. The community maintains a 45-bed retreat center, offering individual and group retreats, the RUAH School of Spiritual Guidance, a school of Pastoral Care and Counseling, the SOZO School of Christian Healing Prayer, and classes in centering prayer, Christian Social Transformation and the Unhealed History of Richmond. The center also staffs the Micah Initiative, which involves 125 faith communities in support of 25 highly impacted elementary schools in the city of Richmond.

-Neill Caldwell

Foundation director retiring for health reasons

The Virginia United Methodist Foundation has announced the retirement of E. Deal Tomkins, the agency's president and executive director, effective April 30.

The retirement comes as sudden news, because he has been in the position less than a year. Tomkins encountered health issues "such that he felt it was necessary to retire to be able to focus on his long-term health needs," said Lori Roberts, chair of the Board of Directors for the Foundation. "The Foundation appreciates the leadership Deal has provided as he facilitated implementation of several improvements to allow the Foundation to better serve the Virginia Conference," she said.

One such improvement was the launch of a new website, www.vaumfgifts.org, which includes information related to planned giving and estate planning.

Tomkins reorganized office operations so depositors are receiving new and enhanced statements, and he worked with several Virginia Conference-affiliated organizations to provide planned giving support.



Tompkins

"Deal was very passionate about planned giving and the need for churches and organizations to incorporate large gifts into their financial plans," Roberts added.

"He also began implementing capital campaign support to local churches."

Tomkins was named president last June after the retirement of Jim Bergdoll, who served the Foundation for 12 years.

The Foundation's Board of Directors is developing a search process to name a new president and executive director. In the meantime, David L. Thompson will become the interim president. Thompson retired from a 45-year banking career focused on investments, institutional funds and endowments and has served on planned giving committees for several non-profit organizations in the Richmond area. He is a member of Brandermill UMC.



Changes made inside UM Center

Visitors to the United Methodist Center on Staples Mill Road in Glen Allen will notice a bit of a change in the layout of offices. The Cabinet room is being moved to the old Media Center space. A new conference table is on order and should arrive this month. Webmaster Brenda Capen's office has been consolidated into the Communications Department space to allow more area for the Cabinet Room. The Treasurer's office is expanding into the former Cabinet room, while the Richmond District office is reconfiguring its space upstairs, as is the Center for Congressional Excellence downstairs. Additional meeting space is being added downstairs in the space behind the main staircase.

Board of Discipleship to recruit Vital Congregations coaches, specialists during Annual Conference

Do you need help with your “Vital Congregation” goals? Would you like to assess your church’s current reality?

If your answer is “yes,” visit the conference Board of Discipleship’s display at 2012 Annual Conference. There you can discover who the Regional Team Leader is in your area. That person can help you get the answers you are looking for.

**“The Harvest is Plenty, but the volunteers are Few.”
Please come and join our team.**

The Board of Discipleship is currently seeking volunteers to help local churches assess their current reality and reach their Vital Congregation goals. We need “Assessment Coaches” who will partner with local churches that contact the board for assistance. They, in turn, will use our assessment tool to advise if the church needs an expert in a certain area to help them achieve their goals.

Our second volunteer need is for experts in various areas of church work. If you could be an “Assessment Coach” or a “Specialist,” please fill out a leaf and hang it on our



“Harvest of Volunteers” tree at the Board of Discipleship display.

Have you done something that really worked for your church?

We would like to know about success stories related to evangelism, worship, spiritual formation, Christian education or age-level ministries. We will have cards at Annual Conference for you to use to share your “Best Practices” with us. You can hang these cards on the “Harvest of Best Practices” tree at the display.

We can help your church once we know what your needs are.

Visit the Board of Discipleship’s display to see how your church can begin to receive the help you need.

-Virginia Conference Board of Discipleship

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- This fascinating tour to England and Germany is limited to 20 participants and the tour fee is \$3,250. The cost may be tax-deductible!



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September 6-13, 2012

School of Christian Mission has new name: 'Mission Encounter'

The annual summer training event, previously known as the School of Christian Mission, has a new name for 2012: "Mission Encounter."

The teaching sessions will be offered July 27-29 and July 30-August 2 at Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center.

The theme of this year's Mission Encounter event is "That They Might Have Life."

Classes include "Immigration in the Bible" (Spiritual Growth) led by the Revs. Lynne Alley-Grant, Michael Hoefer and J.P. Hong; "Haiti" (Geographic Study) led by the Rev. Sam NeSmith and Darlene Rundal due; "Poverty Simulation" (Issue Study) led by Brenda Connelly, the Rev. Don Edwards and the Rev. Nancy Robinson.

In addition, there will be a youth section of the Haiti study taught by Tim Craft and a children's section of the Poverty study led by Tracey Hall.

This teaching experience is sponsored by the Virginia Conference United Methodist Women and the conference Board of Global Ministries.

There will also be United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) training at the weekend session.

Workshops on various related topics will be offered for weekend and week sessions. The Poverty Simulation Experience will be offered at both sessions.

For registration form, visit the conference website, www.vaumc.org, or the conference UMW website, www.vaumw.org.



Registrar is Jo An Liskey. You can call her at (540) 434-2997. Scholarships are available. For more information, contact Mary Jane Rawley at (540) 828-2436.



Showers of blessing: Trailer to be refurbished

The 50-foot Virginia Conference shower trailer has returned to the conference for much needed rehabilitation.

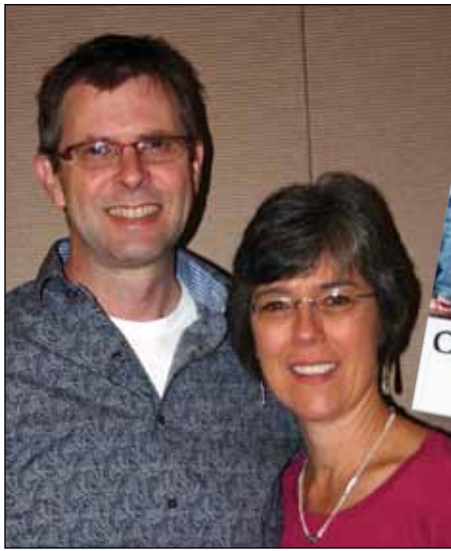
Built in 1986 by volunteers from the Petersburg District, the trailer has been deployed outside of the conference, through the connectional system, to various disasters in six different conferences. It has been an effective and much needed and loved ministry to both those impacted by disasters and also by volunteers who responded to assist with recovery efforts.

Being on the road for so long has taken a toll on the installed facilities as well as the container itself. Rehabilitation efforts have already begun with a goal of it being returned to its mission by Annual Conference in June. It will be painted, cleaned and upgraded with new washer and dryers. Air-conditioning and the chassis will be inspected and repaired as needed.

If you would like to participate in this project, consider a financial gift to the Advance #5037, Virginia Conference Disaster Response and Recovery.

-The Rev. Robert Pihlcrantz is coordinator of conference Disaster Response efforts

Ministry couple writes book about their breakup



By Beverly
Amsler

To an outsider, it seemed the Rev. Joe Cobb had it all. In the late 1990s he was the pastor of a large United Methodist Church in Kansas and had a wife and two young children. But Joe was carrying a deep, dark secret – one he shared with his wife, the Rev. Leigh Anne Taylor, in the basement of their home one Monday night.

“I had had an encounter with a man a year earlier at a conference that I had attended; that I didn’t know whether I was gay or straight,” he recalls.

What Cobb had said didn’t sink in until the next morning when Taylor was getting ready for work as Minister of Music at the church when, she says, “the reality of his words cut like a knife.”

She found herself at the mall. “I purchased a pair of black velour pants and these two long, chenille sweaters with cow necks and long sleeves and blue and purple. And in retrospect I thought how interesting that I dressed myself in the color of bruises. But it was a way for me to care for myself and it really didn’t have anything to do with shopping; it had to do with caring for myself.”

The couple decided to divorce about a year later. Taylor moved to Blacksburg, where she’s now the Minister of Music at Blacksburg UMC. After giving up his credentials as a United Methodist pastor, Cobb moved to nearby Roanoke, where he’s pastor of Metropolitan Community Church.

Taylor had asked God to give her a way to explain to the children about what their mom and dad were dealing with concerning homosexuality. She fell asleep and when she awoke, she had been given a beautiful letter/story she read to the children that reassured them and encouraged them to ask questions and verbalize their feelings.

Cobb and Taylor say their book, “Our Family Outing:

A Memoir of Coming Out and Coming Through,” is one of just a handful of books written by both spouses detailing the struggles they faced as individuals and as a family.

Taylor decided to write the book after hearing a sermon, where the speaker said, “What has God done for you and why are you keeping it a secret?”

“I have to write the story of how our family has been able to come out on the other side of this incredible challenge with a spirit of reconciliation, without judgment, and with this deep sense of peace,” she said. “And so many families struggle when a family member comes out, particularly if they are Christian and the only Christian perspective they’ve ever heard is one of judgment and rejection. And I wanted the story to go out so that there could be a voice in this public dialogue that says there is another way of being Christian.”

She says for her and her family, acceptance and reconciliation was a faithful Christian response to her spouse’s coming out. She and Cobb have made themselves extremely vulnerable about their private struggle, hoping to help other families going through the same thing and as example to other Christians.

Members of the Kansas church were never fully told the real story, and some feel betrayed. Cobb says what they feel as betrayal was for him and his family, a way of protecting themselves. The pair recently returned to Kansas to read from their book, and they found love and acceptance from some of their former church family who were grateful to finally learn the truth.

Since 2000 the advertising slogan of The United Methodist Church is “Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.” But is the church practicing what it preaches when the *Book of Discipline* requires those who come out as practicing homosexuals to leave the ministry?

“I think it’s trying to,” says Cobb. “I think it’s a brilliant vision for the church and I think each individual church is trying to figure out what that means for them, as are the people within those churches. I think that there will come a time when The United Methodist Church will live into that.”

He wants to add “open hands” to the list, “because that opens the possibility to receiving the gifts that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people have and are offering the church today.”

When everything is said and done, “Love is the bottom line,” Taylor says. “We can talk all day; we can talk social issue, political issue, theological issue, but if we’ll just keep love as the bottom line, that’s enough to guide us.”

“For me, there was a moment of decision, where I asked myself, at the end of my life, I’m going to be held accountable,” she said. “Did I teach my children to love, or did I teach them to hate?”

—Beverly Amsler is a freelance journalist in Roanoke

Shenandoah nursing students work on medical mission boat in Brazil



Mission is about relationship. As we seek to build relationships with our sisters and brothers around the world, we try to listen authentically and adequately help them meet their needs. We acknowledge that with every person we meet, we are meeting the risen Christ.

The Shenandoah University Spiritual Life office worked with the Division of Nursing to provide a unique mission trip catered to the talents and academic needs of students. Nine nursing students and faculty and a Spiritual Life leader, who was also a pediatrician and student at Wesley Theological Seminary, boarded a boat in Brazil and headed to isolated villages to provide health care. More than 700 children and adults received care, and 1,000 toothbrushes were distributed with a lesson on oral hygiene.

The Virginia Conference Initiatives of Hope provided the connections and support that were needed to make this trip possible, along with the Methodist Church of Brazil.

The team learned of the injustices facing the Brazilian people, but witnessed a great hope for the future. While the team provided medical care, they received so much more from the relationships they built with their Brazilian sisters and brothers.

Also, a team of Shenandoah University Conservatory students and faculty traveled to Guatemala, through the Highland Support Project, and used their artistic talents to teach the arts in local schools. They learned that because the Guatemalan school system was previously so regimented, the children were not taught the arts, and now they are trying to introduce the children to this important field.

This was the second year for each trip and it was quite obvious by the enthusiasm and passion of the students that they all hope to return. In both cases, the teams truly witnessed the risen Christ among their sisters and brothers across the world.

-Amy Howard

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Nation & World

UMC in Nigeria showing explosive growth

The United Methodist Church in Nigeria is growing — so much, in fact, there aren't enough pastors to serve all its members, leaders say.

Within the past two to three years, 15 to 30 new churches have launched — each with 200 to 300 members. And since 2006, the total number of members in the Nigeria Area has doubled from an estimated 600,000 people to 1.8 million, according to John Wesley, administrative assistant to Bishop Arthur Kulah, interim bishop of Nigeria and a member of the 30-person Nigerian delegation attending the 2012 General Conference.

Two of the area's three annual conferences have been renamed from cities to regional areas to better reflect the expanding reach of the church. Gwateng Conference is now the Central Annual Conference; Pero is the Northern Annual Conference. Those join the area's Southern Conference.

Bishop John Yambasu of the Sierra Leone Area says that growth comes after years of struggle and conflict.

Yambasu is secretary of the Council of Bishops of the West Africa Central Conference and coordinator of the program for Nigeria. He was appointed to serve on a special task force on Nigeria, he says, to pave the way for a smooth transition to elect a new bishop this year.

When missionaries first founded the church in the early 1980s, its headquarters were located in a remote area of the country, Yambasu said. As time passed and the country expanded, the location became even more isolated, he said, and church leaders decided they needed a place that was more centrally located, "where communication and everything else was easy." The headquarters is now in Jalingo in the northern part of the country.

Early church leaders "felt deprived of their heritage," Yambasu said, which caused tension. Tribal influences have also played a role. Where the church was founded, a small tribal group was welcomed and included, but with a focus on evangelizing the country's other tribes, the church grew and new leadership began to dominate decision-making in the church, Yambasu said.

"It was difficult for the original group that founded it to accept the leadership of this new people who came into the church," he said.



Delegates from the Nigeria Conference gather on the steps of the Tampa Convention Center, site of the 2012 United Methodist General Conference. UMNS photo/Mike DuBose

The catalyst for growth was the realization among leaders that the church couldn't continue amidst the turmoil.

"Instead of pushing them forward, all of that conflict had just taken the church backward," Yambasu said, adding they realized they were "all just the same people in Jesus Christ."

"All of the leaders in the area came together to say, 'No more of this. We are brothers and sisters. We need to go ahead with the church,'" Yambasu said.

A national peace and reconciliation conference several years ago, that was replicated in each district, was the start. And a team was formed to develop a plan for the conference that included a major evangelism emphasis.

Now, Yambasu says, there are too few pastors to meet the church's needs, prompting increased efforts at intentional theological education and training of pastors.

New ministries, such as water and sanitation projects that are providing wells for hospitals and schools, and a reorganization of the conference's men's, women's and youth groups, are other signs of the church's growth, Yambasu said.

Those efforts, as well as a number of retreats and revivals for all ages, are "bringing many, many people to the church," Kulah said.

"Even non-Methodists are coming back to the church," Wesley added, "because they feel The United Methodist Church has a positive bearing on people's lives."

-Tita Parham, United Methodist News Service

The 2012 United Methodist General Conference paused on May 1 to remember those killed in a wave of violence in Nigeria and to pray for peace in that country. The uncle of a Nigerian seminary student present in Tampa was killed in a bomb blast in the city of Jalingo on April 30. The student is enrolled in a seminary in the U.S.

Delegates to the conference from The United Methodist Church in Nigeria were deeply concerned about family and friends in both Jalingo and Kano. The church is headquartered in Jalingo, in the northeastern part of the country. A suicide bomber attacked a police convoy there on April 30, killing at least 20 and wounding others. The day before, a gunman invaded a church service on the campus of Bayero University in Kano. At least 20 persons were killed there as well.

"This is a very serious situation," said Bishop Arthur Kulah, the current episcopal leader in Nigeria. He said information he received indicated that twice as many people were killed in Jalingo than the 10 originally estimated by news media. He also said that some of the other victims are United Methodist.

The seminarian whose uncle was killed was in Tampa with a student contingent observing the General Conference.

Bishop Charlene Kammerer of Virginia was in the chair when a delegate announced the death of the student's relative. She asked the nearly 1,000 delegates to pray for peace in Nigeria and to ask God to comfort the families of those killed: "Hold them in your hands in this time of impenetrable horror."

-Elliott Wright, General Board of Global Ministries

Society of St. Andrew again offers Vacation Bible School mission program

The Society of St. Andrew (SoSA) introduces "It's A Miracle!" as its Vacation Bible School (VBS) mission program for 2012.

Each day of VBS, students will be introduced to one of Jesus' miracles, from feeding the multitudes to cleansing the lepers. Included in the VBS packet are student sheets containing a short scripture story, facts about hunger and the SoSA ministry, "Go Green" statistics, mission adventure opportunities and a pencil activity. SoSA also includes song suggestions, craft ideas and yummy snack choices for each day of VBS that compliment the "Miracle of the day!" All of the pages are reproducible, so you can make as many copies as you have students.

This year, make the SoSA Potato Project your VBS mission. This program is designed to use along



with your regular VBS program this summer – or as a stand-alone VBS program.

You can order your packet by e-mailing the Rev. Jennifer Vestal Moore at Church@EndHunger.org, or call 1-800-333-4597. You can also order or download online at www.endhunger.org/vbs.

SoSA produce drop at General Conference nets 40,000 pounds of cucumbers

During the 2012 General Conference, the Society of St. Andrew hosted a produce drop, delivering about 40,000 pounds of cucumbers to the steps of the Tampa Convention Center. Volunteers

bagged the food for distribution to food banks throughout Tampa.

It was just one of the ways The United Methodist Church used its gathering to raise awareness of hunger and poverty issues.

A May 1 event, "Break Bread with Tampa," featured singing groups from Tampa and Africa and exhibitors from various ministries working with the poor.

Florida Bishop Tim Whitaker, a native of Virginia, said it was a way to "lift up the Church's vision of how anti-poverty ministries look and act in the 21st Century." The food was prepared by an entrepreneurial initiative where proceeds are reinvested in providing meals to homeless and other hungry people in the Tampa Bay area.



Bishop Hope Morgan Ward helps bag cucumbers for the Society of St. Andrew. UMNS photo/Mike DuBose



Local Church



▲ **Great Bridge UMC** in Chesapeake recently put on a church-wide variety show entitled "Twisted Wicked Good – The Land of GBUMC." The sold-out event began with a meal served by church youth. The show that followed kept the audience in stitches as Dorothy, the Tin Man, the Scarecrow and the Cowardly Lion encountered a variety of characters from other classic movies on their journey to find their path to God. In addition to being a major tool for fellowship and evangelism, the event also raised more than \$2,000 for a newly-established fund called "GBUMC Cares for Chesapeake," aimed at providing financial support to areas of concern within the city.

Burnt Chimney UMC in Wirtz celebrated its 50th anniversary on April 21 with a "Songfest" and dinner, then a special Sunday morning service on April 22 honoring former members and pastors.



▲ The Rev. William Thompson, author of "Bad Friday," was the guest speaker for the **Farmville UMC's** Senior Adult program recently. Pictured, from left: Melissa Ward, Jane Crute, Dr. William Dorrell, Thompson and Gary Pridgen.



▲ The Confirmation Class at **Luray UMC**, Harrisonburg District, led by the Rev. Erich Bennett, took their studies to Camp Overlook in March. The young people began their spiritual journey by studying Christianity and how it differs from other faiths, plus how Methodism differs from other denominations. They took time on the Massanutten Mountain feeling closer to God. Pictured, from left: Jordan Nealis, Berkley Bennett, Jeremiah Bennett, Carolyn Vickers, Megan Osborne and Joel Osborne; and at top, Ben Vickers and Danielle Martin.



▲ Children of **Main Street UMC**, Suffolk, were honored on April 29 at a Children's Festival. Since April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, blue ribbons became the symbol of the day. Everyone wore ribbons and the church was decorated with them as well as handprint banners that were made by the children. The Rev. Myrtle Frances Hatcher joined in the fun and had her face painted (pictured). There was also a kid-friendly lunch, pony rides, crafts and games.

In March, 19 people left **Salem UMC** in Evington for Aurora, N.C. There are more than 140 families in Aurora still living in FEMA trailers as a result of Hurricane Irene. Those trailers are scheduled to be picked up over the next couple of months, yet many homes are still far from inhabitable. While in Aurora the team from Salem managed to work on three homes. Work included installing insulation, sheet rock, wiring, plumbing, painting trim and framing a wall. We were visited by FEMA, state, and local representatives, all expressing their thanks. The local TV station did a special report on our team, and we were featured in the local newspaper. Every member of the team received a blessing from the people of Aurora for the work that was accomplished. All came home looking forward to March 2013. While this year's team was the largest to date, it is almost certain next year's team will be even larger. Church youth are gearing up for a mission trip of their own this summer. Last year they worked on a home in Pulaski, this year they will be in Aurora or, possibly, Liberty, Ky.

Effective July 1, two Annandale churches will become one congregation.

Annandale UMC on Columbia Pike and **Immanuel UMC** on Heritage Drive will become one congregation. Worship services at the Annandale location will continue to be held at 8:30 and 11 a.m. on Sundays; worship services at the Immanuel location will continue to be held at 10:30 a.m. on Sundays. The Revs. Clarence Brown, Eduardo Carrillo and Cynthia Johnson-Oliver will lead worship services and provide pastoral care for the newly merged congregation. Leaders from both congregations have worked for nearly a year to bring this merger to fruition. The merger proposal was approved separately at church conferences held by each church's congregation in February.

Upcoming Events

JULY

Camp Rainbow Connection **July 8-13 and Aug. 12-17, Blackstone** **Conference and Retreat Center**

Campers must be at least 16 years of age, have an intellectual disability as their primary disability, and be able to independently complete activities of daily living. For more information, contact Martha Stokes in the Center for Lay Leadership Excellence by calling 1-800-768-6040 or (804) 521-1100, ext. 153; or by e-mail at <marthastokes@vaumc.org>.

Finding Your Own Way **July 12-15 at Eagle Eyrie**

The Virginia Conference is creating a new retreat for youth pastors and youth workers called "Finding Your Own Way." Robert Davis, of Joplin, Mo., will be the leader. The retreat is limited to 40 persons. Cost is \$300, which will cover food and lodging for four days and materials. Visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the dates, or for more information, contact the Rev. Derrick Parson at <derrickparson@vaumc.org>, or Becky Tate at <beckytate@vaumc.org>.

Camp Loud and Clear

July 13-15, Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center in Appomattox County

This is the second year for the camp specifically designed to meet the needs of children who are deaf and hard of hearing. Counselors have experience working with children with hearing loss. There will be nationally certified interpreters present for the children who are deaf. Camp Loud and Clear is being supported by the Virginia Conference Commission on Disabilities, Longwood University, Radford University and the Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center in Appomattox County. Contact Dr. Lissa Power-deFur at <powerdefurea@longwood.edu> or (434) 395-2972; Jennifer Kingsley at <jkingsley@hotmail.com> or (434) 391-3679; or visit the conference website, www.vaumc.org/loudandclear.

LEAD

July 27-August 5, Salvation Army, Roanoke

LEAD is a leadership training event offered by the Conference Council for Youth Ministry. This experience will be a 10-day leadership immersion. District and local church youth councils are invited to select 3-5 youths who are willing to commit to this 10-day intensive experience and a covenant

action plan to enact newly developed leadership skills in their districts and local communities upon return. Cost is \$300. For more information, you can e-mail <alisonmalloy@gmail.com>.

AUGUST

All God's Children Camp

Aug. 5-10, Camp Highroad in Middleburg; Aug. 5-10, Occohannock on the Bay in Belle Haven, Eastern Shore; and Aug. 12-17 at Westview on the James in Goochland

Children ages 7-12 who have an incarcerated mother or father spend a week at camp participating in activities such as boating, swimming, hiking, archery, music, crafts, Bible study and conflict resolution. Contact Casey Torrence at <caseytorrence@vaumc.org>.

SERVE

Aug. 5-7 at Randolph-Macon College

Do you know of a high school student who may be interested in or has the potential for ministry? SERVE will have a work camp focus and include small groups, Bible study, recreation and worship services. For more information, visit www.vaumc.org, under "Events" and date; call Margie Turbyfill at (804) 368-7276, or e-mail <margieturbyfill@rmc.edu>. The program is co-sponsored by the Bailey Pre-ministerial Program at Randolph-Macon College and the Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry.

The Enduring Magic of Eugenia Price

A Masterful Storyteller and an Award Winning New York Times Best-Selling Author
Epworth By The Sea
St. Simons Island, Georgia
October 29 – November 1, 2012



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Enjoy and appreciate the expansive view of the historic Marshes of Glynn from the front yard of Eugenia's home on her beloved island. (no interior entry)



For more information, please visit epworthbythesea.org or call 912-638-8688.

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Living the Word



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
The Rev. "Tizzy" von Trapp Walker currently serves the Richmond Charge (Calvary, Oakland and Hopewell), Fredericksburg District. She also serves on the conference Commission on Disabilities, the District Committee on Ordained Ministry and the United Methodist National Task Force on Disability Ministries. She earned her Master of Divinity from Eastern Mennonite Seminary. She is married to Vern H. Walker, and is stepmother to Karen and Matthew and proud nana of Jessica Lynn (10) and Kacie Bryce (3) Walker. She is the daughter of Dr. Rupert von Trapp, the oldest child of the renowned von Trapp family whose story is portrayed in Rogers and Hammerstein's musical and movie "The Sound of Music." Severely hard of hearing since birth, Tizzy received a cochlear implant in December. "It has changed my whole life!" she now says.

June 3, 2012

"What Does the Lord Require?"

Exodus 23: 1-9

The *Anschluss* had arrived in Austria March 12, 1938. My grandfather had been called to serve the Nazi Third Reich, and my physician Papa was called to serve as a hospital director. These were not invitations one refused. The family had already seen friends disappear into the night never to return.

After six months of living under Nazi rule, Grandfather called the family together and said: "Now we have to find out the will of God. Do we want to keep our material goods – our house, our estate, our friends – or do we want to keep our spiritual goods – our faith and honor? We cannot keep both any longer. Listen, you can have money today and lose it tomorrow. The very same day you can start all over again, and that can happen more than once in your lifetime. But once you have lost your honor or your faith, then you are truly lost."

There was really no question in their collective mind what God wanted. As a family it was decided they wanted to keep God, and they knew they had to leave their beloved Austria (from the book *Maria*, by Maria Kutschera von Trapp).

Exodus 23:2 says: "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd." (NIV) Yet almost exactly two months after my Grandfather and his family became exiles from Salzburg, *Kristallnacht* (The Night of Broken Glass) occurred in Nazi Germany. State-sanctioned, anti-Jewish riots were held against the Jewish community where untold numbers of windows in synagogues, Jewish-owned stores, community centers and homes

were shattered. Encouraged by the Nazi regime, the rioters burned or destroyed 267 synagogues, vandalized or looted 7,500 Jewish businesses, and killed at least 91 Jewish people. They also damaged many Jewish cemeteries, hospitals, schools and homes as police stood aside.

Have you ever turned your head in the face of injustice? Perhaps when "persons of color" move in to the neighborhood or, God forbid, our churches? Even children are not immune. They are afraid to stand up to bullying, refuse to share their lunch tables with the new kid in school, and too often take part in ridiculing physically and mentally challenged classmates just to be part of the "in crowd." Have we, as the church, failed to teach our children that every created person is a child of God? Let us all chew on the words of the Prophet Micah 6:8: "And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" (NRSV)

June 10, 2012

"Strangers in a Strange Land"

Leviticus 19:9-18, 33-37

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

*Emma Lazarus,
carved on the base of the Statue of Liberty*

It was October 1938. The strangers in the strange land of America had no idea the path that God would open before them. During the six months since the *Anschluss* in Austria, their homeland no longer felt like home. The 11 family members along with their musical director stood in the immigration line at Ellis Island. There

is a family anecdote that tells the following story: “When questioned by the Immigration officers how long she planned to remain in America, Mutter boldly announced, ‘Forever!’” She had a six-month concert visa. Rupert, my Papa, had retained his Italian visa; the others had surrendered theirs prior to leaving Austria. But because of his dual citizenship, Papa was allowed to leave Ellis Island. He became the advocate for his family and they were released from detainment. What if he had not been able to function as their emissary? Fortunately, the family also had the church on their side, which begs the question in 2012: Where is the church today as the “illegal alien” question swirls around us?

Leviticus 19:34 makes a bold statement: “The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself.” How quickly we forget. Like the Israelites held in captivity in Babylon, Americans forget that their ancestors came to their “new land” as aliens. Just ask any Native American. They have a long and painful history with the aliens who landed on the shores of their nation.

How are we, as the church, living out these words from Leviticus? Too often, we seem to circle the wagons determined to protect what we see as belonging to us: whether the church, community or country. Not only do these ancient words from Leviticus 19:34 make it quite clear that we are to welcome all; the words of Jesus continue to call us to first and foremost love God, then love your neighbor. As you ask the question, “Who is my neighbor?”, think carefully. Put on the eyes, heart and mind of God before the words spring forth from your mouth!

June 17, 2012

“A 21st Century Jubilee”

Leviticus 25:8-12, 25, 35-36, 39-44, 47-48, 55

It was a glorious autumn afternoon in Branau Am Inn, Austria, notoriously known as the birthplace of

Adolf Hitler. Every little village surrounding the city was celebrating the harvest. Dirndls and lederhosen were the dress of the day, from the youngest to the oldest. Nearby, Ranshofen was lining up the townspeople for the traditional procession into the church.

It was unlike any harvest Sunday I experienced in the United States. Overflowing bushels of fruits and vegetables required strong men to carry them: Grandmothers carried enormous loaves of bread; acolytes bearing candles and a crucifer led the ensemble into the church. Laughing children, village “oompah” bands and the fire brigade brought up the rear. It was a joyous celebration forever emblazoned in my heart!

Leviticus 25:10 commands the people of Israel to celebrate Jubilee: “Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you.” When I think of a Jubilee celebration I think wedding anniversary. A biblical Jubilee was a time of celebration of a different sort, for it offered the opportunity to restore what had been taken wrongly, to re-evaluate lifetime priorities rejoicing in God’s grace. It was a time of giving back instead of hoarding possessions, particularly in light of the biblical mandate that it is impossible to “own,” or even to call one’s own, that which belongs to God. What a marvelous tradition. How could we celebrate a true Jubilee in the church today? Cancel a financial debt? Let go of a grudge? Return to others that which was never ours to begin with?

During that Oktoberfest in Austria, I was serving as a goodwill ambassador for my family. I was there to receive an award for the years of humanitarian efforts on the part of the post-World War II Austrian Relief Fund established by my family. For Branau Am Inn it was a true Jubilee culminating in years of re-claiming the reputation of their city.

June 24, 2012

“Leftovers”

Deuteronomy 10:12-22; 16:18-20

It was the summer of 1979 when I found myself surrounded by heavenly *a cappella* music during training to work with a campus-based ministry. As the voices swelled, so did my heart and I can remember thinking, “For this, I was born.”

It was an echo song based on the familiar words of Deuteronomy 6:4-5: “Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is One! Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all of thy heart (echo)! Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all of thy soul (echo)! Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all of thy mind (echo). Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all of thy strength (echo).”

“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one!” In the Jewish faith these words of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 are known as the *Shema*, which is the central prayer of the Jewish prayer book and is often the first prayer a Jewish child learns. It is the first prayer said upon waking every day, and often the last prayer uttered by the faithful at bedtime.

Thirty-three years later, these words remain the very core of my being. God comes first in life, and everything else is just gravy.

The passage for this devotion from Deuteronomy fleshes out the words of the *Shema* by instructing that we are both to love the Lord our God with our entire being, and to live our daily lives in the light and understanding of these words. We are to walk in all the ways of God. We are to love and serve God with all our heart and soul and, lastly, we are to keep God’s commandments.

What this looks like varies in individual lives, but in keeping with the theme of the week’s lessons, Christians are called to do acts of justice, love with kindness and walk humbly with our God. (Micah 6:1-8). Historically, however, the church has been judgmental, loving only those who fit certain criteria. We measure our service with the almighty dollar sign, and we extend hospitality locally but struggle with global ministry. Instead of giving God our all, we give God our leftovers.



Letters & Commentary

Called to be co-creators with God

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, concern for social justice is ancient, dating back to the 8th century prophets and before. How Israel treated the alien, the orphan, and the widow (i.e., “the poor”) was the measure of its faithfulness to God (e.g. Deut. 24). Jesus stood in that tradition when he opened his ministry in Nazareth by claiming, in the words of Isaiah, that he had been anointed to preach good news to the poor, release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty the oppressed (Luke 4). Of course, the town folk were not pleased to hear it, and they tried to kill him (vv. 28-29).

It is all the more startling, therefore, to read the proverb embedded in the parable(s) of the talents (Matt. 25) and pounds (Luke 19) that “to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away” (Luke 19:26; cf. Mark 4:13-25 pars.).

Although many interpretations have been given to these words, one thing is certain: they are descriptive, not prescriptive. They describe what is the case, not what should be. The saying encapsulates a phenomenon that occurs throughout nature: the small and weak lose out to the big and strong. Whether one is talking about the interaction of diverse molecules, or cancer cells in the body, or pythons in the Everglades, or towns and cities, or small businesses and chain stores, or small galaxies and black holes verses their larger counterparts, the phenomenon remains the same: “to the one who has, more is given; but from those who have not, even what they have is taken away.” “Nothing succeeds like success,” we say. “Money makes money.” Sadly, in many arenas of nature, those who “have not” begin to self-destruct – the poor engage in deleterious behaviors: the abuse of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, gambling and so forth – all of which lead to greater poverty, disease and an earlier death.

It is little wonder, therefore, that over the past four decades in this nation and around the world the rich have gotten richer and the poor have gotten poorer. It is a perfectly natural phenomenon, especially given the fact that money is power and that, as the saying goes, “power corrupts.” Our nation’s wealth is held in fewer and fewer hands; and these few in turn, through well-paid lobbyists,

achieve greater and greater political power in order to gain greater wealth. This accounts for the move to eliminate estate taxes (counterfeited as the so-called “death tax”), as well as taxes on capital gains and dividends. Here, too, is the origin of the signed pledge never to raise taxes of any kind; and, arguably, it is the origin of the idea that money is speech and corporations are persons. All of which, intentionally or not, are designed to assure that to the one who has, more will be given.

There are, however, many things that are “natural” that are not beneficial to the welfare of society. Tornadoes, floods and tsunamis are all natural processes whose effects civilized societies do all in their power to mitigate. The transfer of wealth from the many to the few is also a natural phenomenon, but it is not desirable. The individual and societal dysfunction to which gross inequality leads cannot be accepted as just and good any more than the ravages of tornadoes and floods. Even the Roman biographer Plutarch, a younger contemporary of the apostle Paul, called inequality between the rich and the poor “the oldest and most fatal ailment of all republics.” Plutarch’s judgment is even truer of democracies. Systemic economic inequality calls for a wise and systemic response, including a progressive tax structure, equality of opportunity, affordable education, etc.

Jesus quoted the proverb, but he did not accept it. In all that he said and did, he sought to right the wrongs of nature, both physical (blindness, lameness, leprosy, etc.) and spiritual (greed for money and power, hatred of the different other, self-righteousness, etc.). He did so because, as Son of God, he saw himself called by God to become the instrument of God’s Spirit (Matt. 12:28) to overcome the faults of nature and human nature. The followers of Christ are likewise called to be instruments of God’s Spirit, to be co-creators of creation with God – or, as Paul put it, ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17-20).

-Dr. Soulen is author of Sacred Scripture: A Short History of Interpretation (Westminster John Knox, 2009) and Handbook of Biblical Criticism, 4th Edition (WJK, 2011), co-authored with his son, R. Kendall Soulen of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.

Non-anxious evangelism in a time of numerical decline in our churches

At Christ in the Desert Monastery in New Mexico, when the sun goes down, so do you. With limited electricity and a schedule that begins at 4 a.m., there is no holding back the darkness. Sunset is not to be fought, but embraced as a time of reflection and rest.

**Commentary by
Sarah Howell**

In the 16th century, St. John of the Cross meditated upon what he called “the dark night of the soul.” Elaine Heath appropriated that image in her book *The Mystic Way of Evangelism* to describe the state of the church today. Many denominations, including my own United Methodist Church, are seeking to reverse decades of decline. With falling numbers in terms of membership and giving, ineffective leadership and uncertainty about our mission, the church is indeed in a dark night of the soul.

However, Heath believes – as St. John of the Cross did – that the dark night of the soul is not something to be avoided or escaped. In fact, it is a necessary time of stillness, reflection, and drawing closer to God. The monks of Christ in the Desert quietly yield themselves to literal night and welcome its coming without anxiety or fear. The church, on the other hand, has seen the oncoming spiritual night and rushed out to buy floodlights and generators. We are calling for more effective leadership, more programs and more styles of worship. None of these is bad, and in fact many of these efforts represent needed changes and long-overdue reform. But they do not get at the heart of the problem. What we need is not a call to action. What we need is a call to holiness.

When people resist change in worship, worship expert Marcia McFee says, they are actually expressing fear. Fear around changes in worship reflects a fear of losing God. If someone has always connected with God through hymns accompanied by an organ, it is no wonder that they worry about not finding that connection through praise choruses sung to a guitar. The world is changing and the church along with it, and we are afraid that those changes will cause us to lose God.

Anytime we allow fear to dictate how we react to change, of course, we find ourselves responding out of anxiety and not out of faith. We need leaders who can calm those fears and remind us that even as everything around us changes, God never does. It says something about spiritual leadership in America that we have manufactured Christian heroes from professional athletes.

However, this does not mean that the church needs to produce leaders who will triumph an aggressive march out of the darkness. We do not need better performance and outputs. What we need is faithful leadership, not by those who are effective, but by those who are holy. Elaine Heath’s approach – and, I would argue, the biblical witness to the life of Christ in which we are called to participate – has nothing to do with metrics or effectiveness and everything to do with holiness and kenotic love.

The church should not be about building herself up but about giving herself away. The church can only show this self-giving love as embodied by Christ when she is more concerned about faithful witness in the world than with her own survival. Holiness is not about self-aggrandizement or even self-preservation, but about being the body of Christ, who “emptied himself” (Phil. 2:7).

The church’s task is not to increase its own membership but to imitate and participate in the life of Christ. The church does this by giving itself to the world in love in a gesture as wasteful and beautiful as when Mary of Bethany spilled her precious nard at Jesus’ feet (John 12:1-8).

Efforts at reform cannot be about institutional preservation. The realities of membership and stewardship in a denomination facing decline cannot be ignored, but a fundamental shift in posture is needed if the church is to remain faithful to God’s call.

For, in the end, this is not about the survival of a denomination or congregation; it is about a God who does not need rescuing and to whom we must yield for rescue instead of trying to be our own savior. The church’s dark night of the soul need not be a threat but an opportunity for us as a body to seek humility, to recover our prophetic voice, to ask to be taught by the God who is love how to live into that self-giving love.

-Sarah Howell from Charlotte, N.C., is a third-year student at Duke Divinity School.

May Advocate’s focus on Scouting was another outstanding issue

Our family has had someone involved in Scouting in every generation since the programs began. We had one long-term Tenderfoot and one Eagle among eight family members.

During part of our grandson’s journey he needed a Den Mother, and his father stepped forward and filled the vacancy. Our neighbor needed a little more work to achieve his Eagle rank and became a Troop of one with a leader willing to take just one member.

The church cannot ignore this valuable resource.

-Alouise Ritter, Lower UMC, Hartfield



Clergy & Diaconal

Deaths

The Rev. Cecil Eugene McFarland, 81, died on April 19, 2012, in Richmond. He was born on Aug. 7, 1930, in McClure and grew up in Grundy. He was a United Methodist minister, a Navy chaplain, Goodwill Industries director and president of Chaplain Service Prison Ministry of Virginia, Inc. He was a graduate of Tennessee Wesleyan College in Athens, Tenn., Emory and Henry College in Emory, and the Candler School of Theology, Atlanta, and had one year of post-graduate study at Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass. He is survived by his wife of 58 years, Mary Riddle; two children, Bob McFarland of Richmond and Ann Collins and her husband, Mark, of Spartanburg, S.C. A memorial service was held at Chamberlayne Heights UMC in Richmond, with a grave side service and interment at Emory & Henry College.



McFarland

Shirley Fines Amidon, 92, of Fredericksburg, died April 30, 2012. She was the widow of the Rev. Henry S. Amidon.

Lucille Armstrong, mother of retired pastor, the Rev. "Skeeter" Kenneth T. Armstrong, died May 8, 2012, in Nassawadox. Rev. Armstrong lives in Machipongo, Eastern Shore District.

Tennie Marie Chandler Brandon, of Bracey, died April 13, 2012, at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C. She was the widow of the Rev. John Z. Brandon.

Shelton Jennings, co-founder of Kingsway Prison and Family Outreach, died April 24, 2012. He is survived by his wife, Louise.

Charlotte Elizabeth Scott Myers, of Roanoke, died May 1, 2012. She was the widow of the Rev. John W. Myers.



The conference Clergywomen's Collective recently honored Bishop Kammerer at a luncheon at the United Methodist Center in Glenn Allen and presented a 'memory book' to her.

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Differences make for a different kind of General Conference



Charlene Payne Kammerer
Bishop of the
Virginia Conference

I have been to General Conference since the 1984 gathering in Baltimore. At first, I served in a monitoring function, then as an alternate delegate and a delegate many times from the Florida Conference. Now I have gone four times in the capacity of bishop. Thus, I have some perspective on the quadrennial gathering of United Methodists! There were some distinctions about this General Conference.

Since 41 percent of the delegates came from outside the U.S., it was truly a representation of a global church. Seven languages were offered in translation to assist the delegates in legislative committees, plenaries and worship. While we looked different, we have not yet learned how to be a global body. There are regional, continental, tribal and cultural differences that are difficult to navigate. We have a long way to

go to model a unified Church as a global family.

These issues gained the most attention:

1) Restructure of the denomination – When a compromise plan was adopted by the delegates, our Judicial Council ruled it unconstitutional, so much so that their word was “unsalvageable.” It was clear to me that the General Conference was not yet ready to make such sweeping changes when no consensus emerged. Therefore, we keep the same structure with boards and agencies and a Connectional Table. Legislation did pass that reduced the membership on almost all boards and agencies, right-sizing them for future work.

2) Loss of Security of Appointment (“guaranteed” appointment) – So much thorough work was done in the committee considering this, with amendments protecting the rights of clergy, that the matter actually passed on a consent calendar, with no plenary debate. Now bishops, cabinets and boards of ministry will work together to establish criteria for missional appointments.

3) Human Sexuality – An attempt to simply add a statement to the *Book of Discipline* which would acknowledge that faithful Christians disagree about homosexuality and we live together in covenant. The offered statement was not attempting to change any of the other language in the *Discipline* regarding the denomination’s stance on homosexuality. The statement, after much discussion, did not prevail.

4) Vital Congregations – I had the privilege of presenting our Virginia Conference quadrennial goals in a service of worship. We are committed to growing more of our churches to being fruitful and disciple-makers. This did not require legislation and bishops will continue to lead this effort.

5) Set-aside bishop – Over time, the idea became tainted with the possibility of a bishop who also had major programming responsibilities and leadership to adjust the quadrennial budget. The petition did not pass. It was clear that the General Conference takes seriously the separation of powers in our denomination between the Council of Bishops, the Judicial Council and the General Conference/boards and agencies structure.

I am still reflecting on the actions we took and the actions we did not take. We shall see how God works among us to raise up new leaders, grow our churches and make us a blessing to our neighbors, near and far away.

Grace and Peace,

Charlene Kammerer

Connecting with the *Virginia Advocate*

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Deadlines

The *Virginia Advocate* is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the July 2012 issue is June 4. For more information on future deadlines, contact Peggy Cribbs in the *Advocate* office or visit the Web.

Advertising/Tributes

Rates for advertising and Tributes are available upon request.

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 Chrism trees or Easter trees/crosses, and any item over two months old (please no more than one item per issue). Color photos 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* reserves the right to edit all letters.

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