

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS: DISASTER RECOVERY





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**Virginia Advocate**

The official magazine of  
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The Advocate is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the July 2019 issue is May 24. For more information on future deadlines, contact the Advocate office or visit the website.

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### ©2019 Virginia Advocate

USPS 660-740 ISSN 0891-5598

Published monthly by Virginia United Methodist Communications, an agency of the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. Periodical postage paid at Glen Allen, Va., and at additional mailing offices. The Virginia United Methodist Advocate is owned by Virginia United Methodist Communications.

POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to Virginia United Methodist Advocate, P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058. Editorial and business offices are located at 10330 Staples Mill Rd., Glen Allen, Va. Office hours are 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

# PILLOW TALK



**Madeline Pillow**  
Editor

Small  
things  
done with  
love

**"Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love."**

-Mother Teresa

Sebastião Salgado is a well-known Brazilian photographer. In 1994, he returned from an assignment to his family land in the state of Minas Gerais. He was heartbroken to discover a barren waste, sorely changed from the tropical paradise it had once been. He shared in a 2015 climate change meeting in Paris that only about 0.5 percent of the over 2,000-acres remained covered in trees.

His wife Lélia wondered if they could replant the once-lush forest.

They did just that. Little by little, the pair, along with volunteers and a local forestry engineer, replanted trees, slowly coaxing insects and birds back home and encouraging the soil back to prosperity. In total, they have planted more than 2 million trees.

The journey was not easy. With their first batch of seedlings in 1999, they lost about 60 percent because the holes for the trees were made too tightly.

Over the years they kept at it, figuring out what worked best. Their property is now a federally-recognized nature preserve used to educate people about the environment as the site of Instituto Terra, a nonprofit organization founded by the couple, to train young ecologists and raise millions of tree seedlings in its nursery.

I find their story extremely soul warming. It makes me think of the Mother Teresa quote above. While this dream was a large undertaking, in reality, it started with a few seeds, Small progress over time to recreate a forest.

Are you under-  
cutting the power  
that your small  
acts can do?

Until our next  
issue,

*Madeline*



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# COMMENTARY

## Remembrances of moving days past

By Barbara Lewis

*This will be the first in a series of remembrances of past moving days as we look toward the Appointment List for pastors in the July ADVOCATE issue.*

I AM A PREACHER, a preacher's kid, a preacher's grand-kid, and a preacher daughter-in-law. I grew up hearing all kinds of stories about parsonages and moving time. My earliest memories are in parsonages and churches. Life has changed a lot in just my lifetime in the parsonage — some for the good — but we have lost some things as well. While we now get to meet some of the members weeks in advance, get to see the parsonage, or choose where we live with a housing allowance, we have lost some of the sense of anticipation, surprise and community. In the days when the appointments were read at conference (every church name, every minister's name liter-

ally read aloud) to find out who was moving or staying, congregations approached welcoming the new pastor and their family differently. They realized it was a traumatic time and one that required much work in a short time.

### The way things were

In years past, our church was our community and our family. If the pastor and their family needed something, the congregation knew it and responded accordingly. Moving companies were rare and expensive. Most of the furniture along with sheets, towels, curtains, dishes and silverware were furnished with the parsonage, meaning the family had only their personal items, clothing, and the preacher's books to move. When moving day arrived, the church members would show up with their pickups. The men would start loading, and the women would help with the last-minute packing and the cleaning. The sheets came off the beds, were washed, and ironed, and put back on the beds for the new family. The church members took the pastor and family to

the new appointment, unloaded their trucks and returned home to greet their new pastor and their family.

### First appointment

One of the stories, my father told was about arriving to his first appointment. In those days, the parsonages were mostly furnished and were ready for the family to move in and live. The basic furniture was there, with beds made, and china and silverware ready to use in the kitchen. My parents had only been married about a week, were just off their honeymoon, and my father was about to start seminary. They had only been in the house a few minutes, and Dad went to get a drink of water in the kitchen. He opened a cupboard and found not only the drinking glasses, but a left-behind set of teeth stored in one! They belonged to the previous pastor's wife!

### First impressions

One memorable moving day, the staff parish relations committee took our family out to breakfast at a local pancake house as we were heading



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# COMMENTARY

to the new parish. The family cat sat in the car meowing the whole time, looking terrified. It was a hot day, and the cat did not like car rides. Unfortunately, the whole family got sick from something we ate. The cat also decided to get sick — all over my father's shirt. Talk about making a good impression. We arrived at the new parsonage looking bedraggled, feeling sick, and the new pastor had cat vomit all over him!

## Momentous move

I remember sitting on a stack of boxes when I was 4 years old while Mom and Dad were interviewed by a *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reporter about our upcoming move. The church that Dad was going to serve had been fire-bombed in the 1960s, and he was sent to be their pastor as the church decided to rebuild on the edge of the VCU campus. The church had been completed and dedicated a few months before we moved to the western side of the conference. It was the first move I could recall, and it seemed momentous. My picture on the stack of boxes was in the paper.

## Remember "poundings"?

When my Mom was a little girl, her father, Jim, was a Methodist minister. In those days, the Virginia Conference crossed multiple state lines. Many churches were in rural areas. Churches often struggled to pay their pastors and knew they often paid less than was needed to care for the pastor's family. They practiced "poundings." On a given day or week, the members of the church would "pound" the pastor. Mom, her mother and her siblings told us about how people would show up with a pound of sugar, a sack of flour, a pound of coffee, a slab of bacon or a brace of birds. They might bring a basket of eggs or a bushel of apples. It depended on what the family raised, had access to or could spare. In one parsonage, they were "pounded" with a milk cow.

## Waiting on a call

Grandma used to tell the story about waiting by the community phone on the last day of annual conference. When the phone rang, the store proprietor would answer and then

pass her the phone. She would wait for her husband to tell her if they were staying or if she needed to pack. She shared how stressful that call could be. In those days, there were few phones, and even parsonages didn't have them. My grandfather would have to line up with all the other clergy at the nearest pay phone to where conference was being held (in those days, a large church held the Virginia Annual Conference session) to wait his turn to call home. Seven days later was moving day. In those days, moving day was also the meet the pastor meeting!

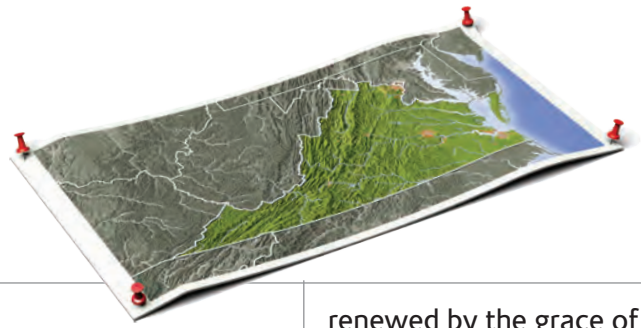
MOVING DAY can be filled with surprises and also be very stressful for all concerned. It can be a hilarious and joyful experience as well. Help from friends and family can be mixed blessings. But it is the love

and caring that are shown that help to make it the beginning of a wonderful adventure. The warmth and welcome from church members is something that parsonage families remember and appreciate. The way members welcome their pastor and their family, whether in a parsonage or with a housing allowance home, can set the tone for a great beginning and life-long friendship. My mother still talks about how one congregant showed up eight Junes ago to welcome me on behalf of his congregation, and he was smart enough to bring hot Krispy Kreme donuts! 🍩

— The Rev. Barbara Lewis is pastor of Greenwood-Laurel Park Charge in Richmond.



# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



## Event allows young women to reflect on next steps, provides spiritual formation

By Chelsea Morse

**T**heologian Frederick Buechner once said, “The place God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” When we sense we are in a season of deep discovery and transition, these words can be used as a guidepost to help us reflect on where God

may be leading us next. It is important when we are navigating through the fog of uncertainty and change that we find time to gather in community and listen to how the Holy Spirit may be guiding us in this moment. Through fellowship and storytelling, we are reminded that we are not alone. Hearing stories of resilience empowers us to move forward and be

renewed by the grace of God, remembering that we will not be in this season of uncertainty forever.

On March 16, the Center for Clergy Excellence of the Virginia Conference co-sponsored a young women’s retreat entitled, “Cross-Roads: A Future Trail-Blazer’s Discernment and Empowerment Retreat.” Chelsea Morse, the seminary intern for the Center, created and coordinated the pilot event. This event stemmed from the recognition that there was a gap in providing spiritual formation spaces for young women

Cross-Roads was a pilot event  
for young women.  
Photo courtesy of Chelsea Morse.



# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

between the ages of 18-30 who are discerning how their faith, gifts and vocational work can be integrated in ways that would serve the world and bring glory to God.

During the day together, women gathered for contemplative worship where they learned contemplative prayer practices including centering prayer, Lectio Divina and shared Holy Communion with one another, led by the Rev. Lindsey Baynham, who presided as the acting director of the Center for Clergy Excellence. The attendees came from multiple denominations and had diverse backgrounds of where they were and where they felt God was leading them next. This made for engaging storytelling and reflections through activities, break-out sessions and lunch.

Speakers at the event included the Rev. Caitlyn Bailey, ordained elder on extension as the ACPE-certified instructor at VCU Medical Hospital; the Rev. Joanna Dietz, ordained deacon at Braddock Street UMC in Winchester, Va., and Director of WINCHESTER TOGETHER, a nonprofit working to provide tran-

sitional services to people in the community; and Maria Maxwell, a lay person who is the program coordinator for Next Level Innovations (NLI) in the Richmond District as well as the former coordinator for the "Imagine No Malaria" campaign.

Each facilitator was chosen because they were living out their faith and using their gifts in their vocations while not being in traditional pulpit ministry settings. Each woman brought a wealth of knowledge and expertise to their sessions and weaved their personal story into their presentation. The common theme was "God's call on our lives is not static." God is forever shaping us and moving us forward.

Dietz advised the women to continue to pursue the "rabbit-hole" because you never know where the twists and turns will lead you, but you cannot stop being curious and searching for where God is taking you next. The destination may be beyond your wildest dreams and it is worth pursuing, even if you have to take a couple of wrong turns along the way.

If you are inter-

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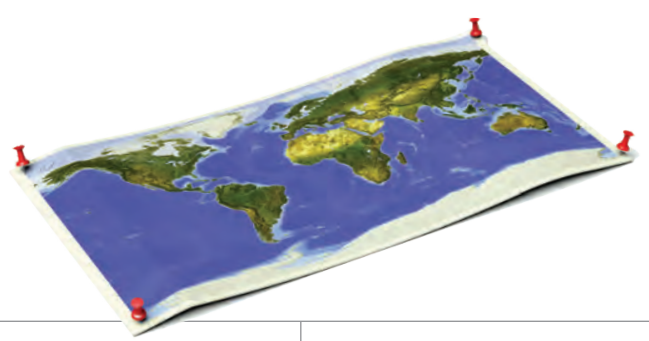
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ested in coordinating a "Cross-Roads" discernment retreat for lay people at your setting for young women or a broader audience in your congregation, you may reach out to Chelsea Morse at [CA.Morse109@gmail.com](mailto:CA.Morse109@gmail.com) for more information on hosting and facilitating. 📧

*– Chelsea Morse is a Virginia Conference certified candidate for ministry and served as a seminary intern for the Center for Clergy Excellence for the 2018-2019 school year. She recently completed her second year of her seminary studies at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Va.*



# The United Methodist connection in THE WORLD



## Leaders pursue plan for new U.S. structure

By Heather Hahn

*Quotes added from  
Michelle Hettmann with  
Virginia Conference focus  
by Forrest White*

Judi Kenaston, Northeastern Jurisdiction, talks with Michelle Hettmann, Southeastern Jurisdiction, during the meeting of the Connectional Table held at United Methodist Discipleship Ministries in Nashville, Tenn., April 2.  
Photo by Kathleen Barry, UMNS

**U**NITED METHODIST LEADERS are pressing ahead with an

effort to create a new decision-making body for United States matters — despite concerns that it will become another battlefield in the homosexuality debate.

The Connectional Table in an April 3 vote gave the go-ahead to submit legislation to the 2020 General Conference that, if the legislative assembly approves, would offer two steps toward creating such a structure. The 64-member church

leadership body acts as sort of a denominational church council coordinating the work of ministry and money.

The goal is not to skirt General Conference's votes on same-sex weddings and gay ordination, said Judi Kenaston, who leads the Connectional Table subcommittee working on the proposal.

Instead, the Connectional Table's goal is to have a place for United Methodists to vote on clergy pen-





# The United Methodist connection in THE WORLD

sions, retirement plans, property matters, resolutions and other initiatives that solely affect the United States — and take some of the burden off General Conference to deal with these matters. Ordination standards, clergy conduct rules and marriage policies would remain up to General Conference, Kenaston said.

“Streamlining the process, and eventually creating the U.S. as a separate body entirely, would allow for more time at General Conference to be spent on the true work of the kin-dom of God,” said former Virginia Conference intern Michelle Hettmann, now a student at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology and a member of the Connectional Table. “People have expressed a desire to build deeper relationships with folks from across the connection at these General Conference meetings and this could possibly be one step in making that a reality.”

At the April meeting in Nashville, the Connectional Table voted to put much of its work aside “because of the uncertainty of what our denomination will look like moving for-

“Streamlining the process, and eventually creating the U.S. as a separate body entirely, would allow for more time at General Conference to be spent on the true work of the kingdom of God.”

— Michelle Hettmann

ward,” Hettmann said.

Not so with potential legislation to create the new U.S. body, though some outside the Connectional Table have expressed a fear that it is really just an effort to skirt church polity or re-create the failed One Church plan.

“While everyone’s opinions are valid, it seems to me like we are unable to have any structural conversations right now without returning to the polarizing conversation around LGBTQ inclusion and

rights,” Hettmann said.

The first step in the Connectional Table’s legislation would create a General Conference legislative committee to deal with petitions pertaining exclusively to the U.S. church.

The committee, which would not convene until the 2024 General Conference, would consist of all U.S. delegates to General Conference. It also would include two delegates from each Central Conference — church regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines. The Connectional Table proposes that General Conference’s Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters name these delegates, who will have voice but not vote.

“There is a perspective here that is needed,” the Mississippi Conference’s Bishop James Swanson Sr. explained. “Sometimes something may look like it’s only dealing with the U.S. but may have an effect on other local churches.”

He noted that the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters also includes U.S. members.

The Committee on

(Con’t. on next page: “PLAN.”)

(“PLAN,” cont. from page 9.)

U.S. Matters, unlike its central matters counterpart, would not be a permanent committee that meets between General Conference sessions. However, as with the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, any legislation approved by the U.S. committee also would need the support of the General Conference’s full multinational plenary to go forward.

### Next step toward a new Central Conference

Connectional Table members see the committee approach as only an interim step towards creating a U.S. Central Conference where delegates from across the U.S. could make decisions without going to the full General Conference.

At present, that is how some decisions work in the current seven Central Conferences. Central Conferences have authority under the denomination’s constitution to make “such changes and adaptations” to the *Book of Discipline*, the denomination’s policy book, as missional needs and differing legal contexts

require.

In practice, that means Central Conferences make decisions related to administering their own clergy pensions, their own clergy compensation and in some cases, their own clergy’s educational requirements.

Creating a new legislative committee on U.S. matters would only require a simple majority vote at the 2020 General Conference. However, creating a new Central Conference requires multiple constitutional amendments — a high hurdle.

For ratification, amendments must receive at least a two-thirds vote at General Conference and at least two-thirds of the total votes at annual conferences.

If a U.S. Central Conference was approved by General Conference and ratified, the legislative committee on U.S. matters would sunset.

Since the creation of Central Conferences in the 1920s, Methodists have talked about creating a church structure to deal with solely U.S. concerns. Still, such proposals often have faced tough opposition.

As recently as 2016, petitions to create a

Since the creation of central conferences in the 1920s, Methodists have talked about creating a church structure to deal with solely U.S. concerns. Still, such proposals often have faced tough opposition.

U.S. Central Conference and other proposed new regional structures didn’t make it out of committee at General Conference. Earlier, constitutional amendments to create uniform regional conferences around the globe gained approval at the 2008 General Conference,



only to go down to defeat before annual conference voters.

However, Kenaston and other church leaders believe the development of a new *General Book of Discipline* gives the effort new urgency.

Since 2012, the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters has been working to determine which parts of the current *Book of Discipline*'s Part VI are essential for all United Methodists and which can be adapted. Part VI, the largest section in the *Discipline*, deals with organizational and administrative matters.

The committee will recommend that any parts it deems adaptable be moved to a new Part VII in the *Discipline*. The standing committee is collaborating with three other leadership bodies, including the Connectional Table, in developing its recommendations.

As it stands, the new Part VII will only be adaptable outside the United States — unless the U.S. has its own Central Conference.

In 2018 — before the special General Conference — standing committee members were encouraging of the Connectional Table's plans to create a place

for U.S. decision-making.

However, when Kenaston spoke to the standing committee again last month, the mood was decidedly different.

Because of the General Conference 2019 fallout, the standing committee already had agreed to delay bringing its *General Book of Discipline* recommendations for a vote until the 2024 General Conference. Instead, the group plans to ask the 2020 General Conference delegates to give feedback on the work done so far.

"I appreciate all the impulses, but I think we are in a different day," said the Rev. Amy Lippoldt, a standing committee member from the Great Plains Conference. "I would want to put my energy toward something that goes a lot farther in creating space than this does."

Other committee members remained unsure about what a new U.S. Central Conference would do to the denomination's power dynamics — particularly since the plan keeps the five U.S. jurisdictions for bishop elections.

"Why doesn't America become some-

thing like five Central Conferences, simply changing the five jurisdictions into Central Conferences?" asked Simon Mafunda, a standing committee member from the East Zimbabwe Conference. "If they are only going to have one Central Conference and they still want to hold onto jurisdictions, big questions remain."

Kenaston said the goal is to have the least complicated legislation. Also, she told United Methodist News Service that the legal contexts for pensions and property are pretty much the same across the United States.

After the Connectional Table vote to move forward, those backing the U.S. structure were still hopeful but worried it will face strong headwinds.

"From my point of view, it's a need," said Benedita Penicela-Nhambiu, a veteran General Conference delegate from the Mozambique South Conference. "I'm feeling this need from quadrennia and quadrennia ago." 🍷

— Heather Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News Service. Forrest White is a news associate with the conference Communications office. This article was originally posted on [UMNS.org](https://umns.org) on Apr. 10.

# WHEN





# DISASTER STRIKES



Shenandoah University students help with disaster recovery in North Carolina.

**H**OW PREPARED is your local church should a natural disaster like a tornado or flooding affect your local church community?

In recent years, Virginia has had more than its share of natural disasters – the tornado outbreak in February 2016, Hurricane Matthew in October 2017 and flooding in the Danville area in the fall of 2018.

Your church can be ready for natural disasters and ready to help your neighbors through proper preparation.

United Methodist Insurance created a free e-book “Emergency Preparedness for Natural Disaster and Extreme Weather” to help churches prepare. Access here: [www.umnews.org/en/news/help-for-churches-in-preparing-for-disaster](http://www.umnews.org/en/news/help-for-churches-in-preparing-for-disaster).

Learn more about how local churches can respond to natural disasters and have responded in the feature to follow.

# LEANING INTO THE CALL OF DISASTER RECOVERY

By Forrest White

**I**N EARLY 2013, Stephanie Hunt served in Haiti for the second time with a short-term mission team, her heart broken again by the overwhelming poverty, her soul haunted by the faces of children in need.

She returned home to Salem, Va., back to work as a hairstylist and yoga instructor, but she couldn't shake the feeling that God was calling her.



Stephanie Hunt is the construction manager for the NC Conference Disaster Relief Team.

But where? For what? When? How? She was restless.

She sought clarity, focusing on the Old Testament story of Isaiah's calling.

"Life had to have more meaning, a purpose," Hunt said. "'Here am I. Send me' became my mantra."

She signed up for another short-term mission, joining a Virginia Conference team in May 2013 to serve with Bahamas Methodist Habitat, a home repair and disaster recovery ministry based in Eleuthera. Connections made there led to another opportunity — she would spend two weeks in the fall of 2013 serving in Galena, Alaska, a tiny fishing village devastated by flood waters from the Yukon River. There, she would make more connections that led to more times of serving in disaster recovery and, eventually, to full-time ministry helping storm survivors.

"God's web," she likes to say.

## 2016 VIRGINIA TORNADO OUTBREAK

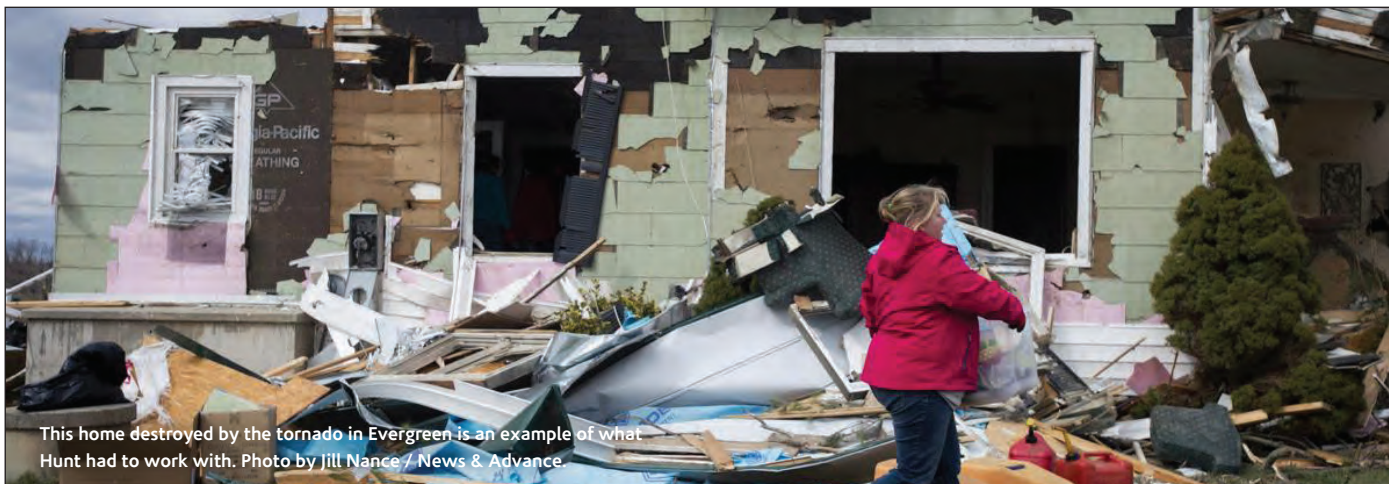
For many around the Virginia Conference, Hunt is best known for overseeing disaster recovery in Evergreen, a small community in Appomattox County devastated by a tornado outbreak in February 2016.

Over 15 months beginning in early September 2016, Hunt supervised repairs of damaged homes and construction of seven new houses from the ground up in Evergreen, a feat unheard of in disaster recovery ministry which relies upon volunteer teams of varying skills to do the work.

"I have so many good memories of that community. So many friends I still keep in touch with," said Hunt, now serving for the second time with the North Carolina Conference Disaster Recovery Ministry. "The church — Olive Branch UMC — let me stay in the parsonage which was so peaceful. A lot of great work was done there by so many volunteers from all over the United States. The push to finish stressed me out. But my biggest joy was all the families we helped that otherwise would not have been able to recover."

Now that the hazy calling from early 2013 has become clear through her disaster recovery ministry, Hunt sometimes laughs at the thought of God's





sense of humor.

"God has a huge sense of humor," she said, "to make me a construction manager."

The NC Conference first hired Hunt in 2014 and she soon found herself as an apprentice to Tommy Gilbert, who has been repairing storm-damaged homes and building new ones in Eastern North Carolina since the late 1990s.

It was like showing up with Construction 101 skills for master's-level classes with Gilbert, but she kept up, her mind racing at times.

Over time, Gilbert trusted her with more and more, to the point where she was ready for the role in Evergreen even though the Virginia Conference hired her initially for an administrative position.

"I surprise myself sometimes by what I know in construction," she said.

Hunt barely had time to rest after wrapping up in Evergreen, returning to North Carolina in January 2018 as construction manager in the Fayetteville area, helping survivors of flooding from Hurricane Matthew.

Twenty-eight mission teams that had served with her in Evergreen joined her to serve in Fayetteville in 2018.

## EVERYONE CAN SERVE IN DISASTER RECOVERY


Earlier this year, Hunt moved up the NC coast to Swansboro, where she oversees operations in Onslow and Jones counties, areas pummeled by Hurricane Florence.

With another hurricane season upon us and the ever-present threat of tornadoes amid the sweltering heat of summer, Hunt offers this advice: "Keep your eyes to the skies. Be prepared. Evacuate if told. All material things can be replaced. Get ERT (Early Response Team) trained and be ready to deploy if needed."

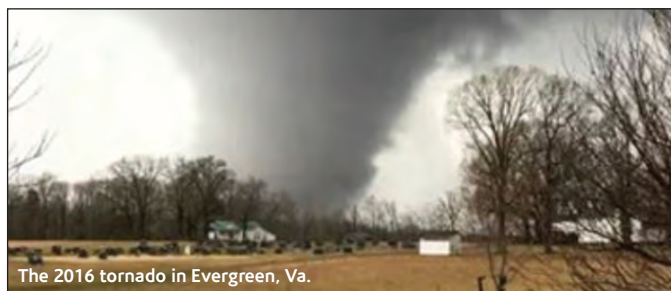
Who knows what call God might place on your life if you go out to serve?

"There is something for everyone willing to serve in disaster recovery," Hunt said. "Prayer warriors, shawl or quilt makers, construction workers, cooks, a listening ear to survivors, just being with those who are hurting, raising money, providing snacks or desserts for mission team members. It takes a village."

You might even find yourself, like Hunt, discerning a call that leads to giving your life away to serve survivors.

"Disaster recovery is vital to so many who would otherwise be left behind," she said. "When survivors go home or have recovered, it's a good day." 

— Forrest White is a news associate with the conference Communications Office.





# THE STRENGTH AND COMPASSION IN UNITED METHODIST CONNECTION



Survivors of Cyclone Idai staying at an evacuation shelter at the IFAPA training center in Beira, Mozambique, listen as aid workers describe plans for returning them to their homes in Buzi, many of which were destroyed by the storm. Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.

By Glenn Rowley

**A** COMMENT I HEAR OFTEN as I promote mission in churches and districts in our conference is, “Why should we spend our limited resources on international mission when there are plenty of people in need here in our community?” That’s right. There are always those in need close by, and there are always those in need in distant lands.


In the past year those in need have a face we can see as close as flood-damaged homes in Danville, Va., from Hurricane Florence and Tropical Storm Michael, and as far away as Mozambique, Africa where lives were lost and whole communities destroyed by Tropical Cyclone Idai.

There have also been other disasters that have occurred across the United States and around the world. For United Methodists there is one thing that brings all of those who have suffered together: we are present in every one of those disasters because of our connection through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

In both Danville and Mozambique, we in Virginia have shared and continue to share because of that connection. Early Response Teams were present in Danville immediately after the flooding, and Volunteers in Mission teams continue to share our connection in mission and ministry.

In Mozambique — through our conference Initiatives of Hope mission partnership with Mozambique — we were able to send \$10,000 to assist their disaster response team in meeting immediate needs of water, food and shelter for many thousands of those affected by the cyclone.

A case can be made that both the strength and compassionate outreach of our United Methodist connection is most evident in our disaster response and volunteers in mission recovery ministry.

As we struggle for a way forward as United Methodists, we remain connected to each other near and far as we live out our call of missional discipleship. That call has no boundaries. The church of Jesus Christ has a mission, but the mission of Jesus Christ also still has a church! 

— The Rev. Glenn Rowley is the conference director of Justice and Missional Excellence.



# DEALING WITH A DISASTER AT THE LOCAL CHURCH LEVEL



Shenandoah University students help with relief efforts in North Carolina.

By Bob Pihlcrantz

**H**OW DOES A LOCAL CHURCH deal with and respond to disasters? The first thing to realize is that all disasters are local disasters, and secondly, that there are many phases to a disaster. Those phases are: readiness, rescue, response, relief and recovery. The church is involved in all but rescue.

One of the early visions of the church was that there would be a church at all the crossroads. That vision causes the church to be, in many cases, the center of the community and in a pivotal place to respond to a disaster. This requires the local church to first take care of itself.

## MAKE A DISASTER PLAN

Preparation for a disaster starts with making a disaster plan. This begins with identifying those things within the church that need protecting for administrative purposes and historical reasons. In

a digital world that is best done by taking pictures of those things and scanning documents and then uploading to a portable hard drive or a Cloud-based server. This also helps in the event that the church is damaged and an insurance claim is filed.

Next, make plans on how best to safeguard the physical church property, including the parsonage.

Third — and this should probably be first — look after the at-risk members of your congregation.

These basic things should be a central part of any disaster plan. Make sure that you also identify the “what needs to be done” and the responsible party (who is going to do it) to accomplish the goals of the plan. The very first thing to do following any disaster that has impacted the church or the community is to worship.

## AFTER A LOCAL DISASTER

Following a local disaster, we enter into the relief phase. Pastors have responsibilities to immediately report all damage to church properties and an over-

view of community damage to the district superintendent and district disaster coordinator as soon as it is safe to do so. This is when the local church can really shine.

As the center of any community, the local church can simply be the “church.” This can be accomplished by becoming a safe haven for survivors, providing food and water and a place for rest, both physically and spiritually for those dealing with loss — it should be a listening presence.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) provides a training resource titled *Volunteer Navigators Outreach* within the Connecting Neighbors course which lays out the do’s and don’ts of local church efforts within the community. A great video about this program can be seen at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEv9G5XUN9M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEv9G5XUN9M).

## MAKING UMCOR KITS

Local congregations should be encouraged to participate in making UMCOR supply kits as well. At every Annual Conference we collect “Kits for Conference” with a focus on the immediate and emergent need UMCOR has. These kits can be Cleaning Buckets, Health Kits or School Kits. The list

of items for each of these kits is located at: [www.vaumc.org/AC2019](http://www.vaumc.org/AC2019). I also encourage churches and districts to make and keep some of each of these kits for themselves in the event of a local disaster.

Following a disaster, most people want to help by doing “something.” It’s important to remember that many relief organizations are doing things post event that may not be visible to everyone.

Coordination is vitally important. Each district coordinator as well as any local church disaster coordinator is encouraged to become part of their regional Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) group. Information about VOAD is available at [NVOAD.org](http://NVOAD.org) or by reaching out to the Virginia conference disaster response coordinator (DRC). Local churches may be called upon by the district or conference disaster response coordinator to be host churches for disaster volunteers (VRC) or possibly to be a disaster resource center (DRC) where survivors can get information and support for relief and recovery.

The flow of disaster response within the conference begins and ends with the local church. For example, disaster X takes place and impacts local church Z. If it is beyond the local church’s ability to





support itself and the community in relief and recovery then the district disaster coordinator responds with district resources. If it is beyond the district's abilities or exceeds capacity, the conference DRC is notified and conference disaster resources are brought into play. This may include requests for UMCOR grant assistance or training. If a very large disaster occurs, then the Virginia Department of Emergency Management provides support in coordination with VOAD as well as FEMA. A disaster de-escalates in the same manner back down to the local church.

During the relief phase, VAUMC-trained and credentialed Early Response Teams (ERTs) are deployed to help families begin recovery. These teams are trained to make homes *safe, sanitary and secure* using tarps on roofs, dewatering flooded spaces, instigating mold abatement and debris removal. ERTs can be requested by other conferences. That request is made through the conference disaster coordinators. For an ERT to deploy outside the Virginia Conference, an invitation must be received by the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, and only then will ERTs be requested and deployed. ERTs will never self-deploy to any disaster. If you or your church would like to be trained as an ERT member or perhaps put together your own team please reach out to the VAUMC ERT coordinator, the Rev. Kirk Culpepper at (757) 434-0078 or [DisasterInfo@VAUMC.org](mailto:DisasterInfo@VAUMC.org).

Please remember the best way to help in any disaster is to donate money. You can donate to the Virginia Conference Advance Special #5037 which is our Conference Disaster Response Fund or to UMCOR via the conference Treasurer's Office.

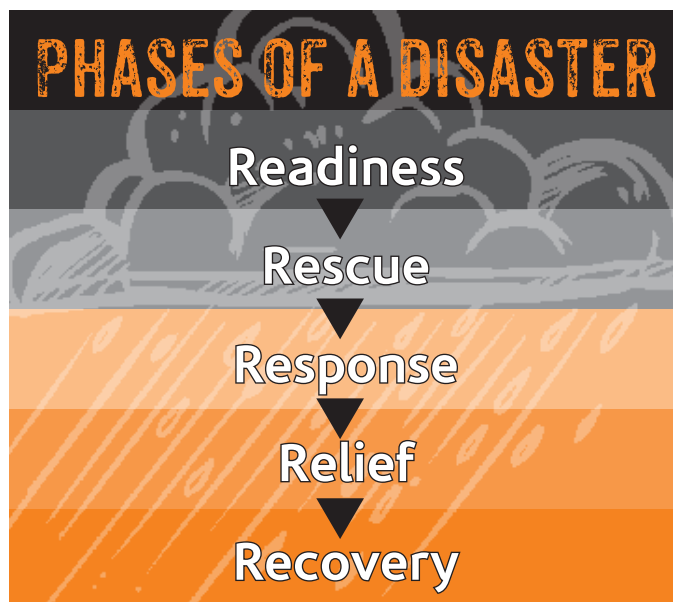
There are agencies that specialize in physical item donations, such as the Salvation Army, who have the resources to process those donations. People who want to donate things should be referred to those agencies. Under no circumstance should churches accept clothing unless you are prepared to be a transfer point to another collection point. Clothing donations at the site of a disaster are known as the *second disaster*. It takes many

vital volunteers away from much-needed relief and recovery efforts, and in most cases, clothes that are not taken end up in either landfills or cut up as rags. [www.nvoad.org/howtohelp/donate/](http://www.nvoad.org/howtohelp/donate/).

Once a disaster enters into the **recovery** phase, teams of dedicated volunteers set forth to help those with unmet needs, such as those with no insurance or those who did not qualify for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or Small Business Administration (SBA) assistance. Long-term recovery can take many months, if not years, to accomplish. During this time, many volunteers are needed to help rebuild and repair homes. All skill sets are needed.

Over the last five years, we have experienced many natural disasters (earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes) within the Virginia Conference boundaries. It is only because of the efforts of our church congregations in meeting our disaster financial needs and in volunteering time and talents that we have been successful in helping to rebuild the many communities that have been affected by these events. We truly have been the first in and last out of these disasters. You make relief and recovery for the survivors of these events possible by being the hands and feet of Christ. You are UMCOR. 🏡

—The Rev. Bob Pihlcrantz is the Virginia Conference disaster response coordinator.



# IN THE PATH OF HURRICANE HUGO



By Forrest White

**I**N THE WEE HOURS OF SEPT. 21, 1989, I sat on the floor of the den at my apartment in Little River, S.C., glued to *The Weather Channel* watching satellite images and radar loops and forecast paths for a storm named Hugo.

The hurricane was 12 days old by then. It was born off the west coast of Africa, grew into a monster over the warm waters of the tropical Atlantic, and unleashed its blustery fury in places like St. Croix and Puerto Rico before setting its sights on a visit to the South Carolina coast.

I listened intently to the ominous forecast — Hugo would make a direct hit somewhere along the Grand Strand, the stretch of S.C. coast from Georgetown to Little River.

There was only one other sound in the apartment, the sound coming from the loft bedroom, the sound made by my wife of 68 days.

Desda was *snubbing*.

In case you don't already know, the dictionary

defines snubbing as “sobbing with convulsions.”

That's what she was doing for sure — snubbing.

I wanted to stay and ride out the storm.

I was only 24. I didn't know any better.

She wanted to evacuate and run from the storm.

Setting the tone for the rest of our married life — 30 years in July — we did what she wanted to do.

I'd like to think I got in my right mind and decided to use the good sense God gave me to determine evacuating was for the best.

But it was the snubbing — definitely the snubbing — that caused me to pack up a few belongings and leave the coast.

Back then, I was a newspaper reporter between jobs, so I was working as a correspondent for the *New York Times* regional newspapers.

Before we evacuated, there was a story to be done. On that we could agree.

I still remember going to one of the area's most popular beaches, driving past the tourist traps to an empty parking lot and walking out onto the sand.

The sun was shining late that afternoon. It was breezy, but there was nothing to foreshadow the angry menace lurking out in the sea.

I looked to my left. There was no one in sight. I looked to my right and saw a family of four from the Midwest. They were trying to squeeze every ounce out of their vacation, opting to walk on the beach instead of sit in their car on some strange highway amid the massive traffic jams created by those fleeing.

By the time the winds started picking up, we were in a motel room in Bennettsville, S.C., roughly 90 miles from Myrtle Beach and far enough removed from Hugo's forecast path to ride out the storm safely.

Or so we thought.

Shortly after 1:30 a.m. on Sept. 22, Desda nudged me out of a sound sleep.

“It's getting really bad out there,” she said.

“What do you want me to do about it?” I said.

I was only 24. But I knew better. I quickly realized the gravity ... of what I'd just said.

So I jumped up and into action, turning on the



battery-powered radio and tuning to an AM station, only to hear frantic voices sharing news of tornado warnings for our area and damage reports coming into the station.

Hugo's forecast turn to the north, toward landfall at the Grand Strand, never happened.

Instead, the hurricane barreled ashore in Charleston, with its deadly "right side" (sometimes called the northeast quadrant) sending massive storm surge through Seewee Bay near the tiny fishing village of McClellanville, about 40 miles up the coast.

The storm raced to the northwest.

We were caught up in the chaos, on the bad side of Hugo, and Desda went back to sleep once I was awake to keep watch.

The roof of the motel across the street was gone, according to the voice on the other end of the radio.

Outside, if you dared peek through the curtain, there was nothing to see — only total darkness and the constant sound of howling winds and the occasional sound of crashing debris.

Long before daybreak, the worst was over for us.

Morning's first light revealed damage all around and soon came the sound familiar to all in the aftermath of such a storm — the sound of chainsaws cutting a path to freedom for those blocked by fallen trees.

The Grand Strand wasn't spared. It just wasn't ground zero as had been predicted.

We made our way back to our apartment to find a few small limbs on the ground and a power outage that lasted only a couple of days.

We would have been better off staying, I thought.

I didn't dare share those words with my newly-wed wife.

I was 24. I knew better.

We are Hurricane Hugo survivors.

The greatest lesson we learned?

Evacuate. Period. Nothing left behind is worth the risk of losing your life, and, when you do leave, make sure you go far enough inland to avoid any possibility of being caught up in the hurricane itself or hit by the tornadoes it inevitably spawns.

Yes, evacuate. Use the good sense God gave you. Don't wait for the snubbing. 🍷

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



Storm survivor Ann, second from left, is surrounded by UMWIM workers who helped repair her home after Hurricane Matthew.



The Cabinet and provisional clergy help with tornado relief in 2016.



United Methodists are known for their aid during natural disasters.

# EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



## The Fresh Expressions movement takes root in conference

**I**N THE VIRGINIA CONFERENCE, under the direction of the conference Center of Congregational Excellence, the Fresh Expressions initiative is taking root. The office announced at the beginning of this year that it would partner with Fresh Expressions U.S. in 2019. The overall goal of this initiative is for 20 Fresh Expressions to be launched in the Virginia Conference by April 2020.

Since 2010, Fresh Expressions U.S. has been cultivating a modern-day mission movement all across America. Fresh Expressions is a movement that serves

to equip, train and send people to start new, different and innovative forms of church in our changing culture primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.

Different examples of fresh expressions of church include: Messy Church for parents and preschoolers, Dinner Church, and bar and café churches.

From February through May, Fresh Expressions has been introduced through day-long training events scheduled in different regions of the Commonwealth.

The initiative by the Virginia Conference has three components:

- ❖ Vision Days
- ❖ Roundtables
- ❖ Pioneer learning communities

Currently, **Vision Days** for Fresh Expressions are happening around the conference, with the last one happening in the Eastern Shore. According to the Rev. Mark Ogren, conference director, these Vision Days are one-day events where Fresh Expressions trainers will introduce the biblical framework, stories and methodologies of the

movement and cast a vision for what it could look like for a congregation or district to embrace this movement in the denomination and context.

**Cost: \$25/per person**

**Who: Clergy and laypersons**

**When: May 18 Eastern Shore**

**Roundtables** are half-day events where a trainer will explore how the Fresh Expressions approach could work within a team, church or district. These are scheduled six to eight weeks after the Vision Day as a follow-up. Participation in a prior Vision Day is not required.

**Cost: No fee for individuals; \$750 cost for event to be shared between districts represented and conference Center for Congregational Excellence**

**Who: local church teams**

**When: June 8 Richmond**

**June 14 Shenandoah Valley**

**Additional dates TBA**

**A Pioneer Learning Community** is a six-month, part-time learning cohort designed to:





Skate Church is a Fresh Expression in Hampton, Va.



- ❖ assist teams who want to launch fresh expressions of church
- ❖ help pastors and lay leaders create fresh expression strategies for their communities and neighborhoods
- ❖ surround pioneers with a network of fellow sojourners and practitioners of missional ministry

Cohorts meet for two weekend retreats and monthly connection and support through coaching in between the two retreats.

**Cost: TBD per person**

To learn more about Fresh Expressions, visit [www.vaumc.org/FreshX](http://www.vaumc.org/FreshX) or check out the book resources:

*Fresh Expressions of Church*

by Travis Collins

*Welcome to Dinner, Church*

by Verlon Fosner

*Deep Roots, Wild Branches*

by Michael Beck

*From the Steeple to the Street*

by Travis Collins

*Fresh Expressions*

by Kenneth Carter and Audrey Warren

For questions about Fresh Expressions or these scheduled events, contact MaryKaye Cochran in the Center for Congregational Excellence, [marykaye.cochran@vaumc.org](mailto:marykaye.cochran@vaumc.org), 804.521.1155. 📞

# DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ While their peers were enjoying some downtime or visiting colleges, 16 **Randolph-Macon Academy** (R-MA) students, along with six adult chaperones, spent most of their spring break at the Washington United Methodist Church Disaster Recovery Center in eastern North Carolina.

The recovery center had been in operation since Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and was in need of a few repairs itself. The students stained decks and walled in a pavilion for supply storage. They also worked on a mobile home in Belhaven, N.C., which had been devastated by Hurricane Florence in September 2018.

They worked on skirting the outside of the mobile home and put in flood vents. They also built two 8x8 decks so the groups that would follow them later could get inside the trailer to work on

flooring, insulation, and other repairs.

On the last day they were there, the neighbors approached the group and asked for their help. The railing on their house stairs was damaged, resulting in a dangerous fall for an older gentleman. The R-MA group sent a crew over and repaired the railing on the stairs and around the porch.

On the last evening, the group gathered around the fire for the final time for a simple yet meaningful ceremony. They wrote their burdens on paper (some opted to share them aloud as well), then put them in the fire and symbolically let go of them.

For the full story with student quotes, visit <https://rma.edu/blog/mission-trip-opens-eyes-and-hearts>. 🍷



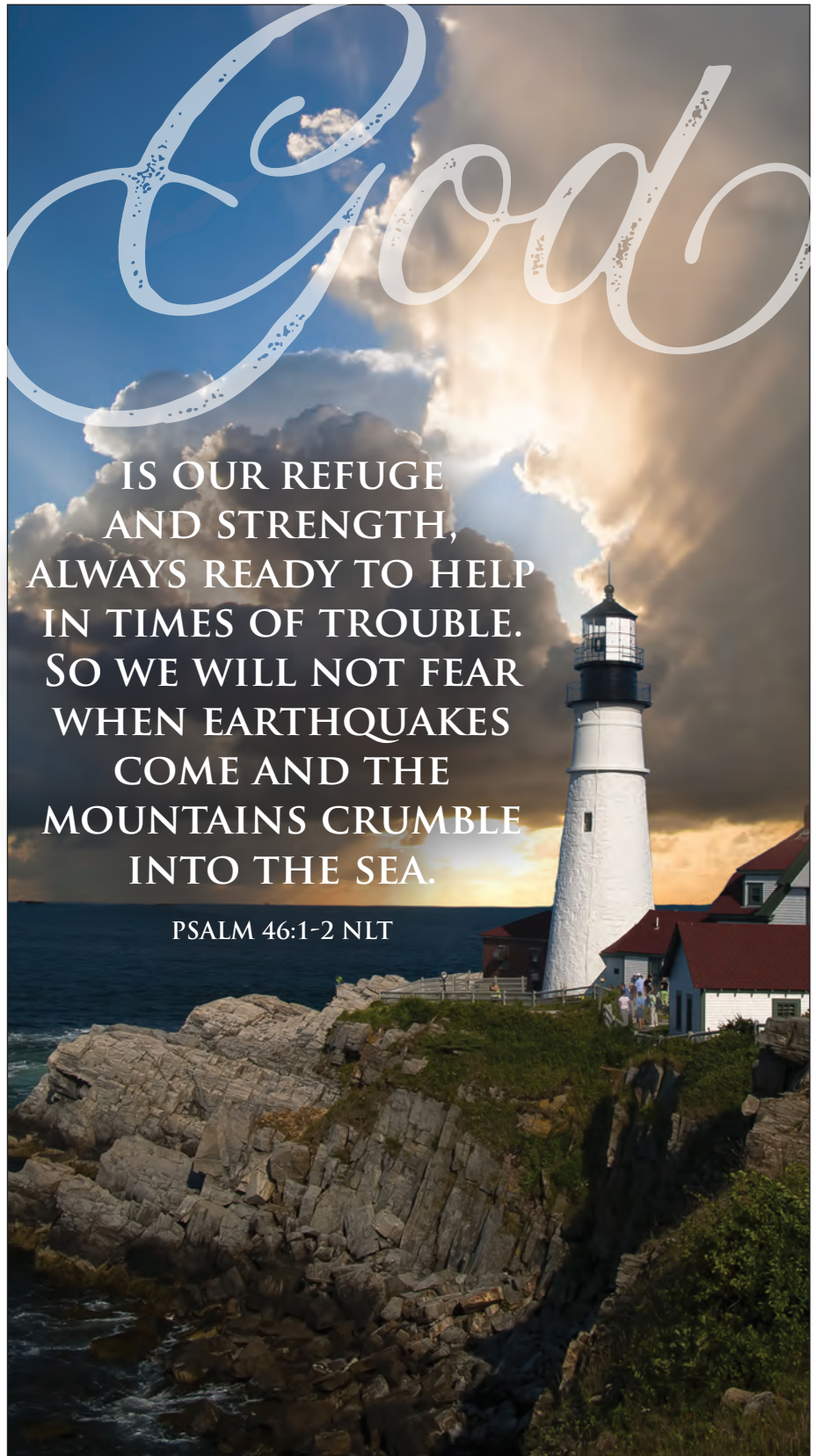




# ONE LAST WORD

## Bishop's Bible Challenge readings for June

|         |                              |
|---------|------------------------------|
| June 1  | Hosea 1-4; Matt. 18:1-20     |
| June 2  | Hosea 5-8; Matt. 18:21-35    |
| June 3  | Hosea 9-11; Matt. 19         |
| June 4  | Hosea 12-14; Matt. 20:1-16   |
| June 5  | Jeremiah 1-2; Matt. 20:17-34 |
| June 6  | Jer. 3-5; Matt. 21:1-22      |
| June 7  | Jer. 6-8; Matt. 21:23-46     |
| June 8  | Jer. 9-11; Matt. 22:1-22     |
| June 9  | Jer. 12-14; Matt. 22:23-46   |
| June 10 | Jer. 15-17; Matt. 23:1-22    |
| June 11 | Jer. 18-19; Matt. 23:23-39   |
| June 12 | Jer. 20-21; Matt. 24:1-28    |
| June 13 | Jer. 22-23; Matt. 24:29-51   |
| June 14 | Jer. 24-26; Matt. 25:1-30    |
| June 15 | Jer. 27-29; Matt. 25:31-46   |
| June 16 | Jer. 30-31; Matt. 26:1-25    |
| June 17 | Jer. 32-33; Matt. 26:26-50   |
| June 18 | Jer. 34-36; Matt. 26:51-75   |
| June 19 | Jer. 37-39; Matt. 27:1-26    |
| June 20 | Jer. 40-42; Matt. 27:27-50   |
| June 21 | Jer. 43-45; Matt. 27:51-66   |
| June 22 | Jer. 46-47; Matt. 28         |
| June 23 | Jer. 48-49; Phil. 1          |
| June 24 | Jer. 50; Phil. 2             |
| June 25 | Jer. 51-52; Phil. 3          |
| June 26 | Joel 1-3; Phil. 4            |
| June 27 | Deut. 1-3; Acts 1            |
| June 28 | Deut. 4-6; Acts 2:1-21       |
| June 29 | Deut. 7-9; Acts 2:22-47      |
| June 30 | Deut. 10-12; Acts 3          |



# LIVING THE WORD



*The Rev. Joanna Dietz is a deacon in The United Methodist Church, serving at Braddock Street UMC in Winchester. Dietz was hired to find the gaps that were not being addressed in Winchester and connect both the churches and agencies together to begin to fill those concerns.*

*In 2018, Joanna formed a non-profit called Winchester Together, which empowers working families as they transition to self-sustainability through mentorship, housing and a unified community network. She spends a lot of time out in the community looking for ways to bridge these gaps, while leading the church into these challenging locations.*

*She is married to Norm Dietz, who is her biggest supporter and soulmate. She has two adult children, Andrew and Jacob, and a wonderful daughter-in-law, Danielle. She loves to spend time with her family hiking and playing board games.*

**June 2, 2019**

**Acts 1:1-11**

**"I looked up there, too, but I didn't see anything..."**

**W**hen my boys were little, we read a lot of *Junie B. Jones*. One of her catch phrases came as adults, frustrated by her 5-year-old antics, would look up at the ceiling in exasperation. Junie B. would say, "I looked up there, too, but I didn't see anything."

Jesus' ascension always reminds me of Junie B. How often do we get caught "looking up there," wondering where Jesus is, when the chaos of this world threatens to overwhelm us?

In the midst of this wondering is also amazement. Just 40 days prior, Jesus conquered death and walked the earth once again; teaching, explaining the Scriptures, and preparing the disciples for his departure from this earth.

Just as the disciples continued to look up, it is easy to get caught up in what has taken us by surprise instead of seeing what is actually happening in the world around us. We watched in shocked horror as Notre Dame Cathedral's spire burned and fell into the roof. Money came pouring in to rebuild this beautiful and powerful landmark.

But at the same time, the Yellow Vest protests continue to decry the injustice toward the poor while the country attempts to align with green energy. Too often, attempts at costly change fall on the backs of people ill-equipped to take on the financial burden.

Most ideal concepts have intricate complexities that need to be considered. As we search the skies, we sometimes ignore the pain and anguish of those caught in the aftershocks.

Are we caught looking up there, too? Are our hearts caught up in an emotional tie that keeps us from seeing the needs of our neighbors attempting to survive daily

right beside us?

*Resurrected God, in the midst of the excitements that catch up our spirits, open our eyes to see the needs that surround us. Call us out of our stupor to act as you taught us to in love, compassion and justice for our neighbors. Amen.*

**June 9, 2019**

**Acts 2:1-12**

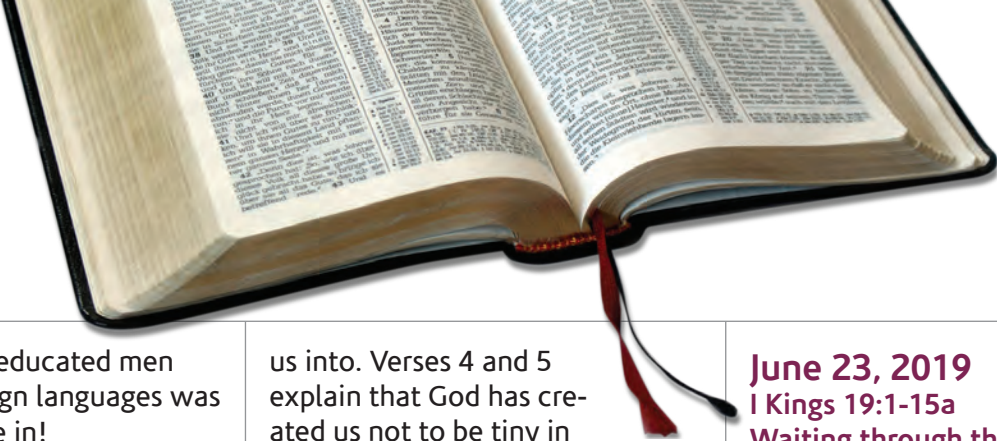
**Expanding the search**

**A** couple of years ago I went on a mission trip to Haiti. For several weeks before we left, I began attempting to learn Haitian. My limited high school French made some parts of the language easier, but some harder. Languages can be inclusive or incredibly alienating.

Although there were people from all over the world celebrating the 200th anniversary of Methodism in Haiti, translators were extremely limited. I made friends with a woman from Canada who spoke French, which is one of the languages spoken in Haiti. During the gala celebration, she began to translate the speeches for our table. Our ears were opened to the amazing works that had been done for the country and we, too, could celebrate the goodness of God's love offered through countless strangers.

Last week we left the disciples looking up into heaven, wondering where Jesus had been taken, shaken by his abrupt ascension. This week we find the disciples filled with the Holy Spirit and able to speak in multiple languages so all people can understand. This shocked those who knew the history of the disciples. These fishermen were suddenly speaking in many different languages, able to communicate incredible claims about Jesus and not only his resurrection from the dead, but his ascension into Heaven! It has been noted that Galileans were not known for their abilities in languages.<sup>1</sup> This unbelievable news





coupled with uneducated men speaking in foreign languages was too much to take in!

Where are places in your community where barriers may isolate groups of people from one another? Are there ways that you can become a translator and shift these boundaries to open up space for God to bring communities together? When barriers are removed, the Holy Spirit freely flows into the conversation to allow God's grace to eradicate the borders that separate us from one another.

*Incredible, breathing Spirit, we invite you into our lives. Flow freely through our communities and eradicate the barriers that keep us in isolation from our sisters and brothers. Amen.*

<sup>1</sup> Keck, Leander E., editor, *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Volume IX*, (Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN), page 58.

## June 16, 2019

### Psalm 8

#### A beautiful partnership

When my children were little, I loved to do projects with them. We would explore "dinosaur bones" and "volcanoes" with science kits. We would decorate and color eggs for Easter lunch, watching the invisible crayon markings come to life on the eggs when the color leached into the shells.

Psalm 8 reveals the majesty of God and the seemingly insignificance of humanity. But it also describes the importance of a partnership that God invites

us into. Verses 4 and 5 explain that God has created us not to be tiny in this universe, but as a little lower than either God (NRSV) or the heavenly beings (NIV). God invites us into partnership to oversee creation in verses 6-8.

God could rule over all the earth alone, but chooses to invite us into the care of creation.

I believe one of the gifts that children give us is the wonder of creation. By taking the time to allow my boys to explore the earth, I relearned the wonder of sliding down a snow-covered hill. I watched the ants in fascination as they busily marched along the ground. I felt the wriggle of earthworms in my hands as I taught the boys about the good they do to the soil. And I was blessed because I didn't ignore them or push them away when I could have done a job faster.

I believe God experiences the same joy when we enter into partnership to care for our earth and all of creation. There is wonder in watching seeds that we've planted and God has watered and nurtured grow tall. There is child-like delight in enjoying a harvest moon blooming over the horizon. And I believe that when we take time to enjoy these spectacular views, God shares in our delight in the beauty of creation and so much majesty for the earth.

*Creating God, thank you for the beauty of creation. May we never be too busy to care for all that you have placed in our hands. May we never be so caught up in our own world that we miss out on the splendor of your incredible works. Amen.*

## June 23, 2019

### I Kings 19:1-15a

#### Waiting through the long night

Another day dawned bright and clear. I got out of bed and started the routine of getting my family out the door for work and school. As soon as they had left, I curled up on the couch, drifting in and out of consciousness as the depression took hold of my spirit and threatened to pull me into the murky depths.

Throughout this season of depression, there were a couple of constants. The greatest was a huge sense of God's presence, not fixing it, but holding me as I moved through it.

Elijah has just had one of the greatest prophetic moments in history. Up against a multitude of sorcerers, God's vast power is proven in test after test. But after this triumph, Queen Jezebel threatens to kill Elijah and he runs to the space where he feels held by God — Mt. Horeb.

This same mountain is where Moses received his call into ministry, and where Moses also shared the heavy burden of leading the Israelites through the desert in Numbers 11:14-15. This mountain holds God's people through trials, challenges and tribulations and sees them through to the other side.

The Scriptures are full of God's leaders going through anxiety, depression and burnout.

(Con't on page 28: "LIVING WORD".)

The 2019 Living the Word devotions are from the *Standard Lesson Commentary* from Cokesbury. Note: you can follow the June readings for the 2019 Bible Challenge from Bishop Lewis on pg. 25.

# CLERGY & DIACONAL



## DEATHS



**The Rev. C. Eugene Meek**, 70, retired clergy from the Elizabeth River District, died on April 1. Meek served Gog-

ginsville UMC and Rehoboth UMC in Franklin County; First Church Martinsville; Bethel UMC and St. Matthew UMC in Mathews; Sudley UMC, Manassas; Francis Asbury UMC, Virginia Beach; Oaklette UMC, Chesapeake; and Trinity UMC, Poquoson.

**H. Dwight Gwaltney**, 72, of Smithfield, Va., died April 17, 2019. He was the husband of the **Rev. Becky Gwaltney** of Uzzell United Methodist Church in the York River District.

**Lucille G. McAllister**, 94, died April 9, 2019. She was the mother of **the Rev. Ruth Burgess**, pastor at Bruen Chapel UMC on the Arlington District; and mother-in-law to **the Rev. Mark Burgess**, pastor at Walker Chapel UMC on the Arlington District.

**William "Bill" E. Hepler**, 79, died April 3, 2019, in Culpeper. He served as a local pastor in Rockbridge County, Orange County and Louisa County.

**John Edwards**, 64, of Midlothian, long-time director of Westview on the James, died March 30,

2019. He worked at Westview for over 30 years.

**William Michael Lynn**, 95, died March 29, 2019 in New Jersey. He was the stepfather of **the Rev. Barbara L. Parker** of the Greenbackville Charge, Eastern Shore District.

**Dr. Maurice S. Luker Jr.**, 84, died March 27, 2019, in Sarasota, Fla. Luker taught Old and New Testament, Biblical Archaeology, and numerous other courses at Emory & Henry College from 1965 until his retirement in 2004. 🌹



("LIVING WORD" con't from page 27.)

Sometimes we hear people say that these things only happen if you don't rely on God enough.

But if some of the greatest men and women of faith — even Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane — have experienced these same things, why would we be immune or seen as weak for experiencing anxiety, depression or burnout?

And if these are feelings that are biblical, shouldn't we look upon our brothers and sisters who suffer through the long, dark nights as moments to sit with them in solitude rather than ridicule them for a lack of faith? I have learned that God provides spiritual nourishment when we

don't have the energy. God sits with us in the darkness and asks us where our pain is. And God continues to call us through the weakness and into the next step of our journey.

*Present God in the Silence, thank you for walking with us in the darkness. Provide the nourishment we need to heal and continue on the journey you have for us this day. Amen.*

**June 30, 2019**

**2 Kings 2:1-14**

**Moving forward**

**T**he moving of a clergy person from one church to another can be extremely challenging for the congregation left behind. There are so many memories built, so much future work that could have been done together, so much love and fellowship developed. Saying goodbye can be extremely challenging.

But saying hello has incredible potential. Maybe there is a legacy that has been left to follow, and maybe that legacy needs another to guide and love the vision into the future. Change brings great potential for amazing things to happen.

Elisha has just been talking to Elijah when suddenly the two are separated by a chariot of fire and horses. Elijah has promised more wisdom if Elisha watches his ascension, and so — like the disciples from the beginning of the month's reading — Elisha watches until there is absolutely no sign of the chariot. As he journeys back the same road, I imagine in some ways it was incredibly lonely. His




master and friend was gone and he is left to carry all the responsibility on his own shoulders.

As Elisha returns to the people, the leaders beg to go look for Elijah. Elisha knows he isn't coming back — knows that he is gone. But sometimes, we just have to see that empty tomb for ourselves. As some of our churches transition, remember that your new clergy is a different person. They will experience your church and community in unique ways. And they may push you to stop looking behind on how things have always been done and into new ways of focus.

Be open to one another. Share how things have worked, but be honest about how things can be better.

And if your clergy is staying, realize that they have taken an oath during Annual Conference to pledge themselves once again to do what is right and good with you. Continue to dream with one another, unafraid of risks that have potential for growth. And in those risks remember: failure is only failure if you don't learn something new that improves you along the journey.

*Dear Lord of All Things New, we celebrate stories like Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and the disciples. All these stories remind us that change comes and, in the newness, your Holy Spirit enlivens us with dreams and possibilities greater than we can imagine. Bless our congregation. Bless our denomination. Bless the church. May we follow wherever you lead. Amen.* 

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# FROM THE BISHOP

On April 27, interim Bishop Pete Weaver shared a letter following the Judicial Council ruling on items from General Conference 2019 that was shared Friday, April 26. Find out more about his District Days events at [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org). Learn more below.



**Peter D. Weaver**  
INTERIM RESIDENT BISHOP

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April 27, 2019

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the Virginia Conference,

Greetings in the name and spirit of the Risen Christ who promises to journey with us always!

Another step along the journey of our United Methodist Church was taken on Friday. The Church's Judicial Council (Supreme Court) reviewed, in the light of our Church Constitution, the church laws that were passed by our Special General Conference (global legislative body) in late February. The actions of that General Conference centered on our Church's positions related to the practice of homosexuality.

Many faithful United Methodists and churches have been significantly impacted by these decisions. Some have agreed, some have disagreed. Regardless of people's perspectives, many questions have been raised, hurt inflicted, unity tested, prayers raised and significant conversations started about our future. Let us always remember that this is about people's lives, for whom Christ died and rose again.

At the conclusion of this letter, I will share links to resources in which you can find detailed explanations of each decision that the Judicial Council made. Here, in simple language, I want to summarize the basics of our Church position and changes that were found to be constitutional. **Most of the changes will take effect starting January 1, 2020 except for the "gracious exit" provisions which are effective from now until December 31, 2023.**

1. **NOTHING CHANGED ABOUT** the Church position that "all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God," and that "we will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us." "We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons." The Church also believes that "sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage." and it does not allow same-sex marriages in our churches and by our pastors. The church does not ordain or appoint "self-avowed practicing homosexuals".
2. **MAJOR CHANGES FOUND CONSTITUTIONAL**
  - a. The definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual" now includes people living in same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or civil union, or who publicly state it. These persons are not considered qualified for United Methodist ministry.
  - b. Boards or District Committees on Ministry must make a full examination and shall not approve anyone who does not meet the qualifications for ministry and the bishop shall rule unqualified persons, if recommended, "out of order." Bishops may not consecrate a "self-avowed practicing homosexual" as a bishop.
  - c. A pastor who has conducted a same-sex marriage shall be given a minimum penalty, after due, fair process, of one-year suspension without pay for a first offense and termination for a second.
  - d. If allegations are brought against a pastor, any resolution of the offense must include agreement from the person bringing the allegation. The resolution must identify the harm caused and how that will be addressed by the pastor.



3. **SEVEN PROPOSED CHANGES WERE FOUND UNCONSTITUTIONAL.** Some of these sought to provide a way in which to certify that only persons who would “uphold, enforce, and maintain” the *Book of Discipline* (our book of order) could serve in certain committees. Other proposals suggested an additional process for removing bishops from active office. The Judicial Council found these unconstitutional because of lack of balanced and fair processes.
4. **"GRACIOUS EXIT PROPOSAL"** was found to be constitutional for churches thinking of leaving the United Methodist denomination concerning homosexuality for a limited time from now until December 31, 2023. They would have a "limited right" to disaffiliate for reasons related to the Church's law concerning homosexuality for a limited time. Approval for such a move would require:
  - a. A two-thirds vote of the members of the local church
  - b. Terms related to financial and legal matters, apportionments and clergy pensions
  - c. Approval by a majority vote of the Annual Conference

When I was growing up, I had a Sunday School teacher who was fond of saying, “God has brought us this far...and God isn’t finished with us yet!” While the decisions by the 2019 General Conference and the rulings of the Judicial Council are important, they are, by no means, the final word in the journey of The United Methodist Church.

Take some time to read the detailed material and reports that are linked to this letter. Talk to those of different perspectives in your local church and community. In less than two weeks, I will begin to visit all of our districts for further conversation and worship with you ([see the link to your invitation](#)). Then the Virginia Annual Conference will gather in Roanoke June 20-22. Visitors are welcome.

In just about one year, May, 2020, the General Conference will convene again to further pray, discern, further refine, and redefine who we are as United Methodists, as we have for over 250 years. This is not a time for “waiting” but for working with one another, building relationships with all of God’s people and seeking God’s will for our next steps on the journey. Please feel free to contact your District or our conference office with questions or concerns. As Wesley reminded us: “Best of all, God is with us!”

Grace and Peace,



Peter D. Weaver  
Interim Bishop, Virginia Conference

View the Judicial Council ruling: <http://www.umc.org/decisions/79922>;  
<http://www.umc.org/decisions/79923>  
Learn more about the Judicial Council ruling: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/court-oks-part-of-traditional-plan-exit-plan>  
Council of Bishops statement on ruling:  
[https://vaumc.org/pages/news/2019vanews/2019vanews\\_cobresponseapril26\\_2019](https://vaumc.org/pages/news/2019vanews/2019vanews_cobresponseapril26_2019)



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