

Advocate



Lent

Giving up or stepping up?

FROM THE EDITOR



Neill Caldwell
Editor

I've given
up giving up



The season of Lent is a lot more enjoyable these days. That's because I've given up giving something up for Lent. It's not like I don't need to stop eating desserts during these 40 days. Or chocolate. Or sweet tea. Or Starbucks' Caramel Macchiatos. Or cheeseburgers. Or Mountain Dew. Or Doritos. OK, you get the idea... It would be better for my soul and my waistline if I dropped all of these little time bombs out of my life, if even for 40 days.

But I'm thinking about addition rather than subtraction. I'm trying to change my focus about Lent. It's not so much about giving up something you love (which usually involves a cave-in in week three), but about adding something that God loves.

These would be one or more of the spiritual disciplines, or simply ways in which we Christians improve our spiritual formation as we seek a stronger relationship with God.

John Wesley thought a lot about these things, which he called "means of grace" or "channels of conveying God's grace" to us. They included regular daily prayer, Bible study, fasting, writing in his journal, Christian conferencing and celebrating the Lord's Supper. Wesley did these things through the whole year, not just during Lent, and had a daily rhythm of doing them. We're not called "Methodists" for nothing!

Brother Wesley's guidance can help us come up with some practical ideas for ways to improve our spiritual life during this time of preparation for Easter.

Here are some potential additions:

- ❖ Meditate each day or commit to some kind of daily devotion;
- ❖ Read a book about spiritual discipline(s); (Bishop Cho recommended books in a letter to clergy posted on the conference website.)
- ❖ Commit an act of mercy every week;
- ❖ Pray for a person with whom you have conflict;
- ❖ Write thank-you notes;
- ❖ Spend some time in solitude;
- ❖ Do a personal service project;
- ❖ Participate in worship by praying or reading scripture;
- ❖ Pray the Daily Office (fixed-hour prayers; try Phyllis Tickle's "The Divine Hours");
- ❖ "Lectio Divina" (Latin for "divine reading," this is a practice of reading the scripture in a contemplative way of listening for what God has to say to you).

These are but a few of the many kinds of things that you can do. And, of course, these are all things that we might practice at any time during the year. But Lent is a special, holy period when we can focus our thoughts on improving our spiritual walk with God.

As Brother John used to ask, "Is it well with your soul?" ☞

Neill Caldwell

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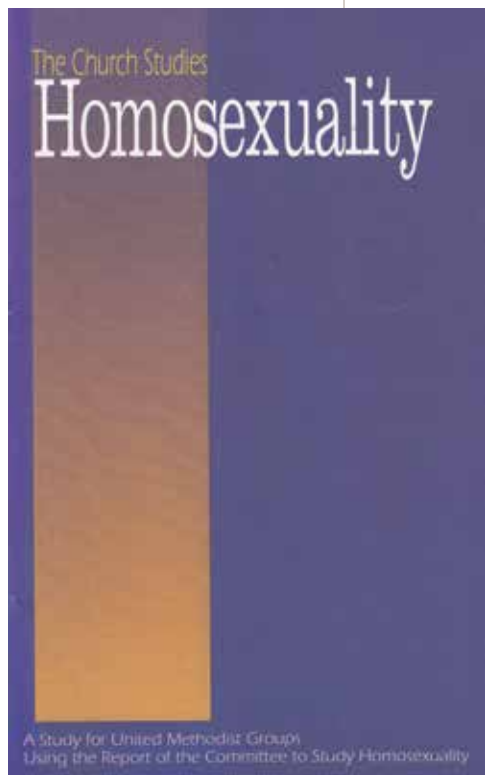
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LETTERS



A copy of the 1994 United Methodist Sunday school study guide on homosexuality.

The most moving books were by men who had been called into the ministry and were also gay.

About the same time, 1988-1992, the Virginia Annual Conference was deep in discussions about homosexuality. I read a letter by Myrl McCotter in the *Advocate* advocating a more inclusive acceptance of homosexuals and their way of life, particularly gay marriage. We developed a friendship by mail but never met. Myrl's great-grandfather, grandfather and great-uncle were all Methodist ministers. The church was the center of her social life and often her place of employment. But when controversy arose about the discussion of homosexuality – which is happening now – she became, as she later

I have a gay cousin who was a Presbyterian pastor and teaching missionary before coming out in the late 1980s. His coming-out letter was a shock to his extended family and caused me to be more focused on homosexuality. With his help, I was exposed to a number of articles on the subject and also books.

wrote, "one of the traditional church's unabashed critics, laying the blame for suffering of untold numbers of homosexuals through the ages at its feet."

She eventually wrote and published a book titled "A Straight Comes Out of the Closet." I have recently tried to contact Myrl by e-mail and phone to see how I can get additional copies, as it is an excellent and moving book. But I have not heard from her to date.

Neither my cousin nor Myrl discuss the sexual activities of homosexuals, which is probably the most controversial aspect of their lifestyle based on what most people think the Bible says about same-gender relations. What they do discuss is Bible texts and their interpretation, general characteristics of gays, scientific studies of homosexuality and anecdotes about gays they have known and know of and what the church's attitude has done and is doing to them.

In 1988, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church passed legislation to establish a Committee to Study Homosexuality, and to have this committee report to the 1992 General Conference. Each member of the committee read many books, specially prepared papers and other materials related to homosexuality. Recognized scholars in the fields of biblical interpretation, theology, psychology, medicine and sociology wrote special reports or testified in

person. The committee held listening posts in each jurisdiction where the members listened to gay and lesbian Christians, family members of gay and lesbian persons and many other individuals and organizations related to the subject. A Sunday school study book called "The Church Studies Homosexuality" was an outgrowth of the committee's findings. The chairperson of the committee testified that her work on the committee was life-changing. Its members made it clear that they felt blessed by their experience and hoped all United Methodists could engage in such a time of listening, studying and learning.

I called Cokesbury about a year ago to see if this Sunday school study was still available. After a long search, they reported that it was out of print but they would try to locate a used copy on Amazon. It is disheartening that more than 20 years later we are still considering what to do about homosexuality and cannot find such an exhaustive and useful study on the subject. I ordered the last copy (I think) of a used lesson plan from Amazon. As best I can determine, there are no plans to reprint this lesson.

In a recent article of the *Advocate*, there was a brief article that appeared to me to be celebrating the second church in the Virginia Conference to declare that they were a Reconciling Church. The next issue of the *Advocate* had a letter from a

pastor in the conference and the chair of the Administrative Board of another church in the conference praising the Reconciling movement.

This was followed by a statement from our Bishop proclaiming that "... a question has arisen regarding the appropriateness of a local church identifying itself as a Reconciling Congregation. I want to remind you that the Judicial Council specifically addressed this issue in its Decision No. 871, given Oct. 29, 1999: 'A local church or any of its organized units may not identify or label itself as an unofficial body or movement. Such identifying or labeling is divisive and makes the local church subject to

the possibility of being in conflict with the *Discipline* and doctrines of The United Methodist Church.' This issue has brought a painful division among us. Trusting that God is the truth of all, let us continue to open ourselves to the guidance of our Lord and pray for one another and that God's will be done in this issue as it is in Heaven."

More recently, there was an essay in the January *Advocate* ("Is United Methodist Church just a majoritarian democracy?," pg. 5) that discussed the pleas of Thomas Frank for bishops not to put pastors who conduct same-sex marriages on trial. Frank wrote that "the continuation of church trials

is a disgrace to our heritage. It is divisive, bringing interference from special interest groups outside the annual conference and introducing the language of 'prosecution,' 'defense team' ..."

What I have not seen recently is any mention of the exhaustive study that was completed and documented in 1992. It is still disheartening that more than 20 years later we are still considering what to do about homosexuality and have not made such a useful study on the subject available to our congregations to learn more about this divisive issue. Why has this not been done?

-Sidney C. Dixon is a member of Bethany UMC in Gloucester Point

LETTERS



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Thank you for getting us out of financially deep waters.

Artwork by Edgar Pichardo, a 4th grader at the HFSC Afterschool program

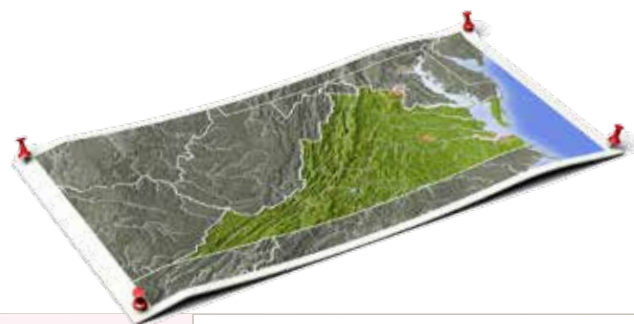
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The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Estelle Pruden retires from the Bishop's office

Four bishops honor her with tributes



Estelle Pruden

Bishop Young Jin Cho's announcement:

“With deep appreciation and mixed feelings I would like to share with you the news that Estelle M. Pruden, Bishop's Administrative Assistant, will retire as of March 1.

As all of us know, Estelle has made tremendous contributions to the ministry of the Episcopal office during the past 31 years. As the fifth bishop with whom she has worked, I cannot thank her enough for her exemplary faithfulness and dedication to this ministry. Not only every bishop she served, but also all clergy and laity in the Virginia Conference will join me in expressing our appreciation to her. This will be a big loss to our conference. May the Lord continue to bless her family and this new chapter of her journey.

To find a person to succeed Estelle,

the ad-hoc search committee and I got together and decided upon the process we would follow to find Estelle's replacement. We discerned that it would be better to find a successor among the staff persons in the Conference Center, and we reached consensus that Terri Biggins would be the right person for this ministry. Terri accepted our offer and agreed to serve. I thank Terri for her willingness to accept this new responsibility. I know she will continue to maintain the excellence of ministry of my office.

I invite you to join me in praying for both Estelle and Terri and for the smooth transition of this ministry.”

Bishop Charlene Kammerer:

Estelle Martin Pruden is a gem! I don't know any other Administrative Assistant for the office of Bishop who has served five consecutive bishops. Estelle has had to exercise remarkable adaptability in adjusting to each new bishop. For, of course, every bishop has a different working style, personality, and approach to living out the ministry of the Episcopal office. Somehow she has been able to make those changes that were also required of her every time a new bishop was assigned to the Virginia Conference. I told her many times that she had already achieved sainthood because she has survived five bishops!

When people come to the bishop's office, often times they are nervous because they are there for a serious reason. Estelle's calm manner and gift of engaging people in conversation has calmed many a person or group before the appointed time with the bishop. Her gracious hospitality was always in evidence. Many cups of coffee or tea were offered, all the while with a listening ear. She helped make people comfortable and provided a place of acceptance.

Estelle has a remarkable grasp of a large Annual Conference in our United Methodist system. She not only knows where the files and history is located, she also knows the oral history, the pastors and lay persons across the many districts. She has been able to assist all the new bishops know quickly what they need to know, things we didn't know to ask, and things which we wish we didn't have to know! Her confidentiality was a requirement, and she kept confidence well.

While cooking is not a requirement of the job description, in Estelle's later years of service, she and her sister and other friends from the Gum Spring UMC, fed the Cabinet so

very well. Gum Spring was involved in an extensive relocation and building campaign for a new sanctuary space. Estelle and crew planned homemade meals, shopped well and made money which was donated to the building campaign. It was a great way to care for needs of the Cabinet as well as give generously to their beloved congregation.

In addition to her work ethic, Estelle takes a personal interest in the family members of the bishops. She does all she can to make every person feel special and checks around the edges to make sure things are going well. She knows the home life of the bishop affects the work life of a bishop. We discovered early on that we both loved cocker spaniels. I was a new grandmother and rejoiced with Estelle when she became a first-time grandmother. We shared stories and pictures of our husbands, children, grandkids and our pets! She became part of our extended family. We love Estelle and Eston and their large family.

My hope and prayers for Estelle in retirement include time to travel, continue to support her mother in her 100th year, stay involved in ministry at Gum Spring, enjoy her family, especially her grandchildren, and let go of the burden of organizing an Episcopal office. She deserves much celebration, rest and play!

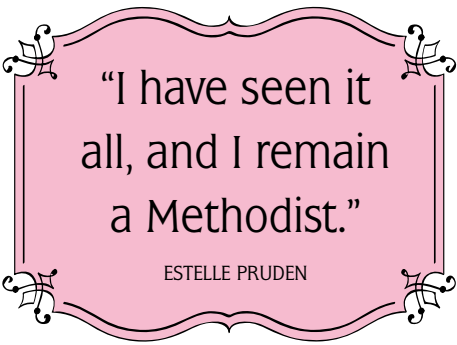
Thank you for this opportunity to reflect on Estelle Pruden and the many gifts she has brought to her ministry. May God bless her richly in this new chapter of life.

-Bishop Charlene Kammerer

Bishop Joe Pennel:

Estelle Pruden sees herself as belonging to three families. First, she belongs to her immediate family. Her love for every member of her family manifests itself in ways that go far beyond the

ordinary. She is interested in and concerned about every happening in each and every one of their lives. One question about any member of her family opens the window for a flood of information and the telling of story after story. She told me that she wanted to purchase a Christmas present for every one of her family members. My memory tells me that she purchased 27 gifts that year. This was but one of the many ways that she expresses love for every person of kin.



Secondly she is the “mother” of her Virginia Conference family. Her love for the pastors and lay people of this family is embodied in her life and work. Her head carried information that could not be found in any file cabinet or in any conference Journal. Having experienced so many clergy and lay people for so many years, she was a great resource for me. She once said, “I have seen it all and I remain a Methodist.”

In the third place, her extended family is the Gum Spring United Methodist Church. She is earnest in her love for this congregation and for each and every congregant. I listened to story after story about her hope and dreams for Gum Spring. Janene and I had an experience at her church that we considered very much out of the ordinary. Estelle invited me to preach at Gum Spring and to stay for a meal following the service. As we passed through the serving line, I did not see

any desserts. Later we were told that the desserts were in another room. As I walked through the door to that space, I saw four tables filled with various desserts. Desserts of every kind flowed over plate after plate.

Estelle has been the main course and the dessert for the Virginia Conference. In the words of John Wesley, she is a “means of Grace” for each of her three families. She is a true servant of the servants of God. I am grateful to have been on her team.

-Bishop Joe Pennel

Bishop Tom Stockton:

What does a newly elected bishop do when he moves to Richmond in 1988 and knows very few people in Virginia? Does he call the former bishop who still lives in Richmond? Does he call Jim Logan, the Lay Leader of the conference who is in Washington? Does he call Doug Dillard, who is in charge of the Parsonage Committee that has just built a new parsonage?

No! He calls out “Estelle, what do I do now?”

Estelle knew most of the clergy in the Virginia Conference but would only divulge the positive characteristics of each. Also, she knew what was going on with all the activities of the churches. Of course official decisions and advice would come from the district superintendents and involved laity and clergy, but important insight would come from Estelle.

Estelle's husband, Eston, was at times a source of discernment, but he usually just took instructions from Estelle so that she could be of extra help to the bishop.

Estelle Pruden was very vital to my ministry in the Virginia Conference from 1988 to 1996, and I am grateful to God for divine assistance through her. 🍀

-Bishop Thomas B. Stockton

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Upper Room's Tom Albin to lead second annual Bishop's Convocation on Prayer

The second annual Bishop's Convocation on Prayer will be held Saturday, March 29, at Trinity UMC in Richmond. Bishop Young Jin Cho will again be the host, and the keynote speaker will be the Rev. Tom Albin, dean of the Upper Room Ministries and Ecumenical Relations.

"Prayer is a universal human desire and experience," Albin says. "Simply stated, prayer is communication with God. It is two-way communication – speaking and listening. Prayer can involve spoken words, inward thoughts or sighs too deep for words. It is an act of love that draws us closer to God."

"Prayer is so simple that even a young child can pray, and so challenging

that the holiest men and women struggle to pray at times," Albin adds. "That is why it is important for us to learn and practice new ways to pray."

Last year's event drew about 275 lay and clergy participants.

The convocation will begin with gathering time at 9 a.m. and a first plenary session at 10. There will be an hour-long time for workshops, then lunch, and a second plenary session with Dr. Albin in the afternoon. The day will end with worship with Holy Communion.

Albin's elementary education was in a one-room schoolhouse on the Kansas prairie. He graduated from Oral Roberts University and Fuller Theological Seminary before traveling to England for doctoral study at Cambridge. He was ordained a deacon in The United Methodist Church in the spring of 1977.

From 1982-1985, Albin returned to pastoral ministry in Oklahoma. He wrote and published adult and youth curriculum for The United Methodist Church. In 1987 Tom joined the faculty of Boston University School of Theology. The following year he accepted the invitation to develop a program in Christian Spiritual Formation at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. In 1999 he moved to his current position in Nashville.

Albin's main interests lie in the areas of spiritual formation, Wesley studies,

historical theology, mission and evangelism.

Workshops and their leaders will be:

Centering Prayer
The Rev. Kiok Cho

Wesleyan Spiritual Disciplines: Means of Grace and Acts of Mercy
The Revs. Sarah Locke and Taylor Mertins

Viviendo para Orar y Orando para Vivir ("Living to Pray and Praying to Live")
The Rev. Lydia Rodriguez (to be taught in Spanish)

Journaling: Best Tool for Spiritual Growth
The Rev. Young Bong Kim

Prayer Covenant Congregations
Bishop Young Jin Cho

Lord, Teach Us to Pray
The Rev. Tom Albin

Body Prayer
The Rev. James Melson

How to Pray With Children and Youth
The Rev. Derrick Parson

Praying With the Scriptures: Lectio Divina
The Rev. Judy Worthington

Introducing Silent Prayer in Worship
The Rev. Janet Salbert

Cost for the day is \$10, which includes lunch. To register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

-Neill Caldwell

Bishop Cho appoints Joyner, Snead new district superintendents

Bishop Young Jin Cho announced Feb. 17 that, effective July 1, the Rev. Alex Joyner, currently serving as pastor of Franktown UMC, Eastern Shore District, will be the new Eastern Shore District superintendent, and the Rev. Wayne Snead, current pastor of Galilee UMC in Sterling, Arlington District, will be the new Elizabeth River District superintendent.

"These pastors have demonstrated effective and faithful ministries for many years," Bishop Cho said, "and I discerned that they have gifts and graces to serve their respective districts as mission strategists. They know the districts and love those areas. My prayer is that these appointments will be a blessing to the churches on those districts, the Virginia Conference and their families."

Bishop Cho also expressed gratitude to the Rev. Tammy Estep, current Eastern Shore District superintendent, and the Rev. Brad Philips, Elizabeth River District superintendent, who will return to local churches this year.

"Their service and ministries have made a great contribution for us," Bishop Cho said, "enabling us to move toward a better future for our conference."

Joyner was ordained a deacon in 1989 and elder in

1993. He has served appointments in Dallas, Texas; York, England; Unionville and Charlottesville. Joyner served as campus minister at the Wesley Foundation at the University of Virginia. He was appointed to Franktown UMC in 2005.

Prior to entering the ordained ministry, Joyner was a radio news director and on-air personality in the Charlottesville area.

Joyner holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Virginia, a Master of Divinity degree from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Texas, and an additional Master in Religious Studies from UVA.

He's the author of several publications including *Where Do I Go Now, God?*, a vocational discernment curriculum and DVD for young adults published by Abingdon Press. He is a regular contributor to the FaithLink adult curriculum from the United Methodist Publishing House, and teaches in the Course of Study program at Perkins.

Joyner is married to the former Suzanne Kee Birdsall of Afton and they have two children, Joel and Rachel.

A native of the small town of Victoria, Snead graduated from Central of Lunenburg before attending Ferrum College for two years and then transferred to Asbury College in Kentucky. He

received his Master of Divinity from Asbury Seminary in Wilmore, Ky.

Snead's first appointment was in the Farmville District at the West Mecklenburg Charge. After four years he was the founding pastor for Messiah UMC, in the Norfolk District, and was there for 10 years. In 1996, Snead moved to the Arlington District where he has served Galilee for the last 17 years.

He was chair of the conference Church Development Team for six years, and has served with the Northern Virginia Bi-District Board of Missions for 16 years.

Snead and his wife, Beth, met at Ferrum. They have three children, Rebekah, J.M. and Ryan.



Rev. Alex Joyner



Rev. Wayne Snead

Meredith McNabb named new director of Center for Clergy Excellence

The Rev. Meredith L. McNabb, who now serves as associate pastor at Grace UMC, Manassas, in the Alexandria District, has been appointed director of the Virginia Conference Center for Clergy Excellence, effective July 1.

"Rev. McNabb is not new to the work of the Center

(Continued on page 15, "McNabb")



Rev. Meredith L. McNabb



Rev. Dr. Tom Albin will be the keynote speaker at the Bishop's Convocation on Prayer.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Bishop Cho's invocation opens House of Delegates on what turns out to be an important day for Korean-Americans in Virginia

United Methodist Day at the General Assembly

By Neill Caldwell

RICHMOND - Bishop Young Jin Cho was already slated to open the Virginia House of Delegates with prayer on United Methodist Day, the annual day when hundreds of United Methodists descend on the General Assembly to talk about key issues. As it turned out, it also happened to be a very important day for Korean-Americans in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The House of Delegates passed a bill that day that would require textbooks in Virginia schools to note that the Sea of Japan is also referred to as the East Sea.

But the change in House Bill 11 means more than the designation on a small label on a map

in textbooks. It is a sign of respect for the state's Koreans, who faced Japanese imperial government occupation from 1910 to the end of World War II in 1945.

"It is personally important to me because of the mistreatment that the Korean people experienced at the hands of the Japanese," said Bishop Cho, who was born in Korea.

The Senate has already passed a similar bill, which the Japan Embassy had tried to squash, and Gov. Terry McAuliffe has said he will sign the bill into law.

The coincidence was a "holy spirit moment" for the Bishop in an otherwise routine day of lobbying Virginia lawmakers. About 250 United Methodists

participated, a number that was a bit down from previous years.

"What is our mission (as United Methodists)?" Bishop Cho asked participants as they ate breakfast at the start of the day. "To make disciples for the transformation of the world. This is an important part of our mission to change the world."

Participants focused on three main topics to discuss with their legislators:

- ❖ predatory lending
- ❖ human trafficking
- ❖ expanding Medicaid coverage to the state's poor.

Marco Grimaldo, president of the Virginia Interfaith Center, led Bishop Cho through the maze of halls and offices in the legislative office building beside the State Capitol in a series of appointment with legislators and their staff members.

Bishop Cho presented a copy of the Predatory Lending resolution passed at 2014 Annual Conference to all the lawmakers and aides that he met with. "Talk about this to your legislators," the Bishop suggested before buses took the crowd from Bon Air UMC to Capitol Square. "This is a good way to follow up on the work done at Annual Conference."

So-called "payday" or "car title" lenders charge up to 300 percent interest to borrowers with little chance of getting a bank

loan because of poor credit. The current call is to reduce that figure to 36 percent, which still seems exorbitant but would be a huge improvement.

Bishop Cho told several legislators that as the chair of the North Korean Refugee Committee of the church, he had heard many horror stories of human trafficking.

"The good news is that awareness of human trafficking has risen," said Delegate Mark Keam, a Korean-American from Vienna. "People understand that human trafficking is right here in Virginia, that it's not just a global issue."

"It's not just a human rights issue, a woman's issue, or an immigration issue," Del. Keam continued. "It's an economic issue, because people – criminals, organized crime, etc., – are simply using other human beings as a way to make money."

In a meeting with Kathy Roberts, chief of staff for House Speaker William Howell of Stafford, she talked about the legislative process in terms that sounded a little like a description of Virginia Annual Conference.

"Virginia does things slowly," Roberts said. "We don't move very quickly. That frustrates people, but it has some benefits as well."

Roberts said that the Speaker and his Republican colleagues are opposed to the Medicaid expansion because while federal dol-

lars would be used in the first two years, it's hard to predict the future beyond that time period.

"We know these are real people with real needs and we don't want to leave them out in the cold," Roberts said. "But we don't want to put taxpayers in the position to have to pay that bill in three years. Virginia is required by law to balance our budget every year. We're not like Washington."

Several speakers during the day invoked the name of Elvira Shaw, the Colonial Heights lay woman who helped establish United Methodist Day at General Assembly more than 20 years ago and passed away last fall. "Elvira made everyone feel as if you were her best friend," said the Rev. Randy Harlow as he lit a memorial candle. "She was the matriarch of United Methodist Day and the Conference Legislative Network and is still with us in spirit. And probably still walking the halls of the General Assembly and nudging those people to do the right thing for those who have no voice."

Afternoon speakers included Erin Steigler, of Virginia Consumer Voices for Healthcare, and Sara Pomeroy, executive director of the Richmond Justice Initiative.

-Neill Caldwell is editor of the Advocate.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



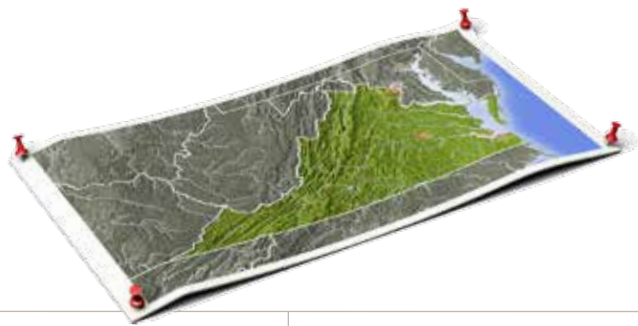
About 250 United Methodists descended on the General Assembly to talk with lawmakers about key issues.



Above, Bishop Cho hands Walter Stosch's legislative aide, Anna Kuta, a copy of the resolution against predatory lending practices passed during last year's Annual Conference. Below, a visit with Del. Mark Keam, who is also Korean-American. Photos by Neill Caldwell.



The United Methodist connection in
VIRGINIA



Candidacy Summit offers answers to those
with questions about a call to ministry

By Heather Johnson

The call to ministry is as individual as the one experiencing it. There are those who have been raised up into it like Samuel, those that have been surprised mid-career like Paul, and even those who were convinced God “had the wrong person” (Moses comes to mind). And yet the emotions are similar: excitement, doubt, eagerness, even fear.

Knowing that the journey into ordained ministry in the Virginia Conference can be daunting, the Center for Clergy Excellence and the Board of Ordained Ministry have introduced a new step in the process: the Candidacy Summit.

In January, 54 current and potential candidates gathered at Blackstone for 24 hours of worship, prayer, discernment and relationship. The purpose of the Candidacy Summit is to provide opportuni-

ties for those considering ordained ministry to learn more about the process, ask some of the technical questions and foster lasting connections with the peers and the leaders that will be journeying with them.

The Rev. Donna Holder, candidacy registrar for the Board of Ordained Ministry, set the tone that “sensing God’s call in life is what we’re here to explore.” When later asked about the initial inspiration for the event, she explained that there was “a need for a place where candidates could meet each other earlier in the process, a place where they could share their stories with others on the same journey. At the same time, (there was) a need for a place where consistent information could be shared with the candidates about the candidacy journey.”

There was structured time for discernment, giving attendees an opportunity to ask: “Is God calling me into a life of ordained or lay ministry? Should I consider elder or deacon? What will my intended ministry path look like?”

Bryan Garra, a potential candidate seeking admission as a licensed local pastor, shared his belief that “whenever (a group) gathers to discuss their call, only great things will occur.”

Even during large group sessions there were opportunities to share callings with one or two others. Mentors from around the conference guided worship and were available throughout the weekend.

Bridging discernment with the logistical steps in the process was an assessment of strengths. Before the summit, attendees were instructed to participate in a “StrengthsFinder” assessment offered by Gallup, identifying five key strengths unique to the individual, and bring the results to the corresponding session. Led by the Rev. Bret Gresham from Wesley Foundation at Virginia Tech, the discussion was informative, fun and enlightening. It was an affirmation that God has created all of us with unique talents and strengths, and that our ministries should reflect them, echoed by Gresham when he said “God made you to be you.”

The second function of the Candidacy Summit was to provide critical information regarding the logistics and requirements of the process. From education requirements to funding seminary to the differences between deacon, elder and licensed local pastor, the organized and consistent delivery of fundamental information clarified all manners of questions. Printed materials gave tangible answers and the Rev. Beth Downs, current

(Continued on page 27: “Calling”)

SEJ bishops,
lay leaders
meet, talk
about goals

Frigid temperatures did not stop people from gathering in Pensacola, Fla., to kick off the new year by strategically planning for the Southeastern Jurisdiction (SEJ). Three groups met Jan. 7-9 to handle various items of SEJ business. During that time conference Lay Leaders and active and retired bishops held their annual meeting together.

Four areas of focus were identified:

- ❖ Fulfilling mission;
- ❖ What is unique in our Jurisdiction, poverty, education and immigration, etc.;



SEJ Conference Lay Leaders gather in Florida.

- ❖ Creating teaching churches/new ministry models, new ways of growing together;
- ❖ Unity and trust.

More in-depth discussion continued with the group about fulfilling the mission. One of the priorities was to change the nature of the

conversation in all of our conferences to focus on the positive of what God is up to in your mission field, mainly the “bright spots”

Lastly everyone agreed that bishops and laity must work together to filter out distractions that will keep God’s people from fulfilling the mission. Lay Leaders and bishops collectively

agreed to look for ways laity and clergy are called to create mission strategies in the annual conferences. ❖

—Warren Harper, Virginia Conference Lay Leader

Retired pastor David Lewis issues print of Blackstone



Watercolor of the Blackstone Conference Center by Rev. David Lewis.

“Ever since I retired and especially since I was diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease a couple of years ago,” says Rev. David Lewis, “I’ve been asked, time and again, ‘Are you doing any painting nowadays?’ My answer has been, ‘Yes, as much as time permits.’”

Lewis, who retired the “first time” in 2005, has enjoyed art as an avocation throughout his life. During vacations and time off from his ministerial activities, Lewis has particularly enjoyed doing detailed watercolors of homes, churches, schools, and an occasional boat or pet. Since 1989 he has issued three sets of note cards and 37 limited edition prints, most of which are of United Methodist churches in Virginia.

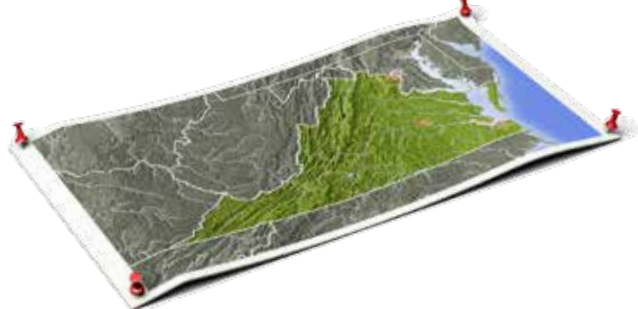
His latest release is of the Blackstone Conference Center. The prints are available in two sizes: 11” X 14” prints sell for \$35, and 20” X 26” prints sell for \$125. Both size prints are for sale in the Acorn Coffee and Gift Shop, on the lower level at Blackstone. A portion of the proceeds helps support the Acorn Shop.

Cindy Lee and Donna Holder lead The Great Thanksgiving during worship at the Candidacy Summit.



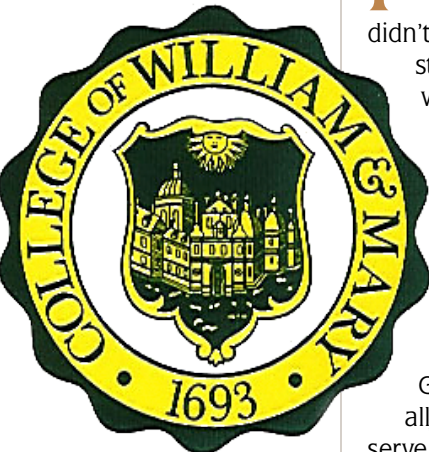
The United Methodist connection in
VIRGINIA

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

William & Mary honors former conference intern



Laura Godwin, a member of St. Mark's UMC in Midlothian, served as an intern in the conference office of Mission and Global Justice in the summers of 2011 and 2012.



It all started with Laura Godwin's 7th birthday. "I decided that I didn't want presents; instead, all of the people who came to my birthday party were supposed to bring presents for the battered women's shelter," said the William & Mary senior. Since then, Godwin has continually looked for ways to serve others, working with homeless and elderly people in her hometown of Richmond, tutoring middle school students in the Williamsburg community and helping the orphaned and hungry abroad. That commitment to service has

earned her the 2014 James Monroe Prize for Civic Leadership, which Godwin received during William & Mary's Charter Day ceremony on Feb. 7. The prize is annually awarded to an undergraduate who has "demonstrated sustained leadership combined with initiative, character and an unfailing commitment to the ethic of service." "Laura is a compassionate individual and demonstrates great commitment to community via her work on campus and the Williamsburg area," said Austin Pryor, coordinator of education programs in the W&M Office of Community Engagement. "The real heart of her leadership is her phenomenal ability to leverage the strengths of those around her and push them to reach their full potential." Growing up, Godwin found ways to serve through the Girl Scouts, school and church. In middle school, she helped feed homeless people in her hometown, participated in "30-hour famines" to fight hunger around the world and worked with Impact Richmond, helping to repair houses for the elderly. "At the beginning of the week, you think that you're going to go and help fix a house up and that you're going to make an impact on them, but then at the end of the week, you realize, yeah, I helped them with their house, but what

I learned about myself and the people that I'm working with and the community I live in is way more important," she said. In high school, she continued to participate in her church's mission trips and interned with Embrace Richmond, helping people who recently transitioned from being homeless to having a place to live. She also helped her teachers tutor other students and worked with kids as part of the Stars of Tomorrow camp for lacrosse and field hockey players. When she began at William & Mary, she knew that service would remain a big part of her life. As a freshman, she was a member of the Sharpe Community Scholars program, an opportunity that she called "eye-opening." "I never really learned about service as a learning tool. ... I was just very interested in learning about what it means to be educated through your service and civic engagement," she said. Her dovetailing interests in education and service led Godwin to get involved with Project Phoenix, which provides tutoring to middle school students in three Williamsburg-area schools. The first student she was paired with was born in China and spoke very little English. The two had to use Google translate to communicate during most of their sessions. "Slowly over the entire year that I worked with her,

it was amazing to not only see her English improve, but her grades improve because she was getting support in the school," said Godwin. Godwin has continued to work with Project Phoenix over the last three years, eventually taking a leadership role in the organization. Throughout her time at William & Mary, the sociology major has also served as a peer advisor and a small group leader for high-school girls at the Williamsburg Community Chapel. During her sophomore year, Godwin also traveled to Nicaragua to work in an orphanage. "It was one of the best weeks of my life, especially since I had been studying in sociology class income inequality and poverty and different aspects that people are going through," she said. "I had seen pretty dire poverty in Richmond, but I had never seen it quite like that in Nicaragua."

Although seeing that level of poverty was tough, it was also humbling, said Godwin, because the people she met were so happy with what they had. "So are the kids I work with here [with Project Phoenix]," she said. "They may not be in the best situations or they may have parents in jail or are in foster care or don't have the experience I had growing up, but they nonetheless are very happy with life." It's a lesson she keeps in mind as she and her fellow students face school-work concerns. "All of that's important, but if you aren't enjoying life, none of that's important," she said. As she begins her last semester at the university, Godwin said that she is happy that her service has allowed her to see more of the Williamsburg community than many students often see. "I think sometimes we feel like we live in the four

blocks that are William & Mary, and we forget that it's much bigger than this and that there's more to it than just graduating in four years," she said. Godwin hopes to continue serving after graduation, with her dream job being a position in a college community engagement office. "I would love to encourage people to get involved in small ways or big ways," she said. "For me, I think that civic engagement can be just as simple as having a conversation with the people that serve you at Starbucks or the lady in the checkout line in the grocery store." Because one of the things that all of her service has taught her is that people matter. "Sometimes it does take getting out of your comfort zone working in a middle school or working in downtown Richmond to realize that you matter and so do the people you're working with." ✎

("McNabb," continued from pg. 9)

for Clergy Excellence," Bishop Young Jin Cho said in making the announcement Feb. 17. "She currently serves as the secretary of the Board of Ordained Ministry, and her leadership has been well recognized by her church and many colleagues. It was with great joy and expectation that the ad-hoc search committee reached consensus in selecting her as the new director of the Center for Clergy Excellence." McNabb will fill the position now held by the Rev. Beth Downs, who will retire at the end of June.

"For the Rev. Beth Downs' 16 years of very effective ministry in this area, we cannot thank her enough," Bishop Cho said. "May the Lord continue to bless this new chapter of her journey." McNabb grew up all over the country but has called Virginia home. She is a graduate of the University of Virginia and the Washington & Lee School of Law. Before entering the ministry she was an attorney, working in a free legal clinic for elder care and domestic violence issues. She earned her Master of Divinity at the Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, and was appointed to Grace UMC in 2007. ✎



LOCAL CHURCH NEWS



EVENTS



▲ More than 50 Hampden-Sydney College and Longwood University Wesley Foundation students enjoyed a meal provided by Sue and Ollie Wright and the Rev. Kyungsuk Cho of **Victoria UMC, Farmville District**. The Wesley Foundation meets at the foundation's facility on High Street in Farmville each Tuesday evening during the academic year for dinner and a short business meeting followed by a time of spiritual study and devotions. All Farmville District churches and church groups are encouraged to assist the Wesley Foundation by providing a meal or some funds to help cover the weekly costs. For more information, contact the Rev. Rich Meiser at (434) 392-8089 or farmvillewesley1@gmail.com.

▼ During the month of December, the members of **Main Street UMC in Suffolk** wrote all of their prayers on strips of paper that were then turned into a very long prayer chain. On Epiphany Sunday, the chain

was brought into the sanctuary by the three wise men and then taken outside and placed on the fence as a witness to the community.



▲ **Staunton District** youths recently enjoyed a Christian Rap concert by hip-hop artist Humble Tip. **Main Street UMC in Waynesboro** hosted the event, where students spent time in small groups composing their own Christian raps. Each group then performed under the direction of Humble Tip. Students were also invited to write prayer concerns and praises on giant posters throughout the gym.



▲ The seventh- through ninth-grade Sunday school class of **St. Stephens UMC, Alexandria District**, adopted

a needy family with two children for Christmas. The youths purchased gifts from their offerings and wrapped them during the Sunday school time.



▲ One of the 2013 goals for members at **Bethel UMC in Front Royal** was to participate in the "Mile of Pennies" program offered by the Society of St. Andrew (SoSA). A very large jug was placed in the church and members brought their pennies each Sunday and placed them in the jug. When the time came for counting and rolling the pennies, it took several hours for 18 volunteers to complete the task. SoSA Director Mike Waldman came to preach and collect the 84,440 pennies that had been collected. Rather than make him return to SoSA's office in Big Island with that many pennies, the church presented him a check for \$900.



▲ At **Main Street UMC in Suffolk**, the Girl Scouts have adopted an outreach project called "If You Can't Eat 'Em, Treat 'Em." Troop 5357 has accepted cookie donations this year for patients at the Walter Reed Medical Center, where they will deliver the cookies to wounded veterans.

MARCH

5 Talent Academy March 8 Florin UMC and nine live-stream sites

The 5 Talent Academy and the Virginia United Methodist Foundation are teaming up to offer stewardship expert Clif Christopher as the speaker of this teaching session. Ideal for clergy looking to reinvigorate their stewardship campaigns and lay persons eager to cultivate ways to help increase church giving in a meaningful way, this event is not one to miss. In addition to the live speaker at Florin UMC in Herndon, the broadcast will be available at these locations: Blacksburg: Blacksburg UMC; Eastern Shore: Franktown UMC; Gloucester County: Susanna Wesley UMC; Lynchburg: Timberlake UMC; Martinsville: First UMC; Northern Virginia: Florin UMC; Richmond: Woodlake UMC; Shenandoah Valley: Bridgewater UMC; Tidewater: Francis Asbury UMC, and Winchester: Front Royal UMC. Cost is \$25. For more information, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

UMMen Spring Training March 8 Annandale UMC; First UMC Charlottesville; St. Luke's UMC Yorktown

Virginia Conference United Methodist Men's Spring Training event will be held at three regional locations around the conference. Cost is \$5, payable at the door. For more information, contact Jim Butts, vice president for Membership and Development, at charlesdog1@cox.net or (757) 421 0161.

Virginia Wesleyan College Clergy Seminar March 17-18 Virginia Wesleyan College

"Sanctified Laughter: A Theology, History and Practice of Humor and Satire" will be presented by Dr. Terrence Lindvall, Professor of Communications and Christian Thought at Virginia Wesleyan, at a two-day Continuing Education Seminar for Clergy at VWC in Norfolk. Cost is \$75 per person, including lunch Monday. The program begins at 8:30 a.m. Monday and ends at noon Tuesday. One CEU credit will be given. The seminar is open to laity as well as clergy. Register at www.vwc.edu/ces or by mail to **Office of Advancement, Virginia Wesleyan College, 1584 Wesleyan Drive, Norfolk, VA 23502.**

Extension Ministers Gathering March 24 Roslyn Conference and Retreat Center in Richmond

Virginia Conference Extension Ministers will gather with Bishop Young Jin Cho from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Roslyn Conference and Retreat Center in Richmond. Extension Ministers (elders, provisional elders and local pastors) and those appointed Beyond the Local Church (deacons and provisional deacons) can connect with clergy colleagues, share stories and have conversation with Bishop Cho. For more information, contact Beth Downs at BethDowns@vaumc.org or call 1-800-768-6040, ext. 127, or (804) 521-1127.

Early Response Team certification training March 29 Galilee UMC, Sterling

United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Early Response Team (ERT) certification training will be 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 45425 Winding Road, Sterling. Registration fee is \$55, which includes training manual, UMCOR ERT badge, T-shirt and background check (forms will be handed out at training). Checks should be made out to the Virginia Conference and brought the day of training. Event coordinator is Rebecca Makowski, (703) 430-2203 or rebecca.makowski@galileeumc.org.

Bishop's Convocation on Prayer March 29 Trinity UMC, Richmond

The second annual event for Bishop Cho to highlight the importance of prayer in all things. The guest speaker will be the Rev. Tom Albin, dean of Upper Room Ministries. Both laity and clergy are invited to attend this important event. Workshops will be offered on topics ranging from Centering Prayer to Contemplative Prayer, from Journaling to Spiritual Disciplines. Learn more at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

APRIL

School for Children's Ministry April 5 Farmville UMC

The School for Children's Ministry is on the road this year. The next training event will be 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on April 5 at Farmville UMC. Registration deadline is the Wednesday before the event. Workshop presenters are children's ministry professionals, representing all sizes of churches. You can register on the conference website, www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

Adding something for Lent

*This season
shouldn't be about
waiting for your
next chocolate fix*

By Jason Stanley

So many people during the Christian season of Lent give up something. It is what we are supposed to do, right? In preparation for celebrating Easter, we give up Starbucks or chocolate, or fast-food, and the list goes on.

And so we ask each other, "What have you given up?" Almost like it's the newest fad – it is "in" to not eat chocolate for 40 days. Or it is "in" to not drink caffeine for 40 days and be a beast of a person because you did not get your morning caffeine. And the countdown to Easter begins, when you can have caffeine or chocolate again.

The tradition of fasting during Lent is an ancient tradition. But is our modern-day fasting in the sense of the ancient practice? The spiritual practice of fasting typically involved not eating while the sun was up (in some cultures, there is a ritual of a feast in the evenings). In place of worrying about our physical needs, we focus on our spiritual needs.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I see people who have given up Starbucks or chocolate for Lent, I see that their lamenting is focused on Starbucks or chocolate. That leaves me wondering, is this what Lent is about?

I wonder, "What would the spiritual life and a relationship with Christ look like if instead of giving up something, we added something?"

There are lots of ways in which we express our faith and our relationship with Christ. John Wesley talked a lot about works of piety and works of mercy. Works of piety include worship, prayer, Bible study, daily devotions and participation in the sacraments. Works of mercy include doing good, helping a neighbor and caring for the poor.

Perhaps, we can start Lent by considering ways we can add a spiritual practice or discipline to our lives: a practice or discipline that is different from our norm. Lent is a powerful time of encountering the Christ who lived, died and rose again for us. Lent forces us to see the wounds, the bruises and the scars that lead us to Easter.

And it is uncomfortable.

(Continued on next page, "Lent")

("Lent," continued from previous page)

Lent is about being uncomfortable. When we step out of our comfort zones, through our piety and mercy, we encounter the Christ of Easter. When we take that risk to step out of our normal routine, we open ourselves to powerful encounters with Christ that transform us.

Consider works of piety you might add to your spiritual life. If you have never attended the Lenten services at your local church, consider participating in the Ash Wednesday and Holy Week services. If your church has a Lenten Bible study or small groups, consider joining one as a way to grow in your discipleship. If you have been slacking in your prayer life, consider finding a friend with whom you can be accountable in your prayer life. If your church offers a Lenten devotional in addition to the *Upper Room*, use them both! Or maybe you just need more quiet time in your life. Carve that time out and maximize your time with God.

Consider works of mercy you might add. What areas of need are there in your community? What areas make you uncomfortable? Are there areas of service within your congregation that you have never served before? Maybe it is volunteering to be a greeter or usher. Maybe it is volunteering to lead children's church or help out with youth group. Maybe it is volunteering at a local soup kitchen or homeless shelter.

Focusing on our spiritual lives and our relationship with Jesus Christ provides us with time to consider how we are living our lives. Do our actions and words reflect our faith? Are we striving towards perfection? Are our hearts warmed and our hands dirty?

Why not consider what you can take on for Lent this year? 🍀

-The Rev. Jason Stanley is associate pastor at Peakland UMC, Lynchburg District.

FAST: FEAST

Fast from emphasis on differences.

Fast from apparent darkness.

Fast from words that pollute.

Fast from discontent.

Fast from anger.

Fast from pessimism.

Fast from worry.

Fast from complaining.

Fast from negatives.

Fast from unrelenting pressures.

Fast from hostility.

Fast from bitterness.

Fast from self-concern.

Fast from personal anxiety.

Fast from discouragement.

Fast from facts that depress.

Fast from lethargy.

Fast from suspicion.

Fast from thoughts that weaken.

Fast from idle gossip.

Fast from judging others.

Feast on the unity of all life.

Feast on the reality of light.

Feast on phrases that purify.

Feast on gratitude.

Feast on patience.

Feast on optimism.

Feast on trust.

Feast on appreciation.

Feast on affirmatives.

Feast on unceasing prayer.

Feast on nonviolence.

Feast on forgiveness.

Feast on compassion for others.

Feast on eternal truth.

Feast on hope.

Feast on truths that uplift.

Feast on enthusiasm.

Feast on truth.

Feast on promises that inspire.

Feast on purposeful silence.

Feast on the Christ dwelling within them.

-William Arthur Ward

What are the "Means of Grace"?

John Wesley called the means of grace "the ordinary channels whereby (God) might convey to (persons) preventing, justifying and sanctifying grace." He believed that without these means of grace our relationship with God cannot grow.

Though Wesley did not believe that any one of the means of grace is essential to salvation, he taught that faithful and consistent use of them provides us with a pathway back to God. These are the means, or ways, that God uses to transform our lives.

There are many practices which can help us grow in our relationship with God but Wesley generally included six primary "means":

Study the Scriptures:

The Scriptures are God's living word of truth, of inspiration, of challenge and of encouragement for our lives. Without reading Scripture regularly, our faith cannot grow. Wesley taught the ideal of setting aside a little time each morning and evening for Bible reading.

Prayer:

Learning to pray is the work of a lifetime. Just as our relationships with other people are nurtured by spending focused time listening to the other person and speaking to the other person, prayer is also a relationship that is about speaking and listening. Wesley believed we can learn to pray by using a prayer book or by using written prayers of others. Modern Christianity has favored extemporaneous prayer – pouring forth the honest emotions and petitions of our hearts.

Fasting:

Among the early Methodists, fasting served two primary purposes: repentance and preparation. Emphasized primarily during Lent, fasting can be used as a spiritual discipline any time we fall into extremes of behavior that keep us from developing our primary relationship with God. It is important not to trivialize the practice of fasting and to realize that when we fast, it does not mean that we deny ourselves all forms of enjoyment. The purpose of fasting is to detach from those things to which we cling obsessively and even addictively. In addition to certain items of food or drink, a person may fast from constant media stimulation, fitness mania, compulsive dieting, judging others or a work-a-holic schedule. Ultimately fasting means one thing – to let go of external attachments until we remember what it feels like to be hungry for God.

The Lord's Supper:

Holy Communion celebrates the grace of God that is present with us as we share in the body and the blood of Christ. We do not believe that the bread and juice actually become the body and blood of Christ, but that through them we experience the presence of the living Christ within us. Each time we come to the Lord's Table we are offered the opportunity to confess our shortcomings and failures and to offer them to God. In the United Methodist tradition, the Lord's Table is open to all who come with faith in Christ, regardless of their membership in

any church. As we receive anew the gift of Christ himself, we are given a new beginning through the power of the Holy Spirit in us.

Public Worship:

God calls people to gather in corporate worship – and to worship God alone. We are called to worship regularly and faithfully because worship restores us and strengthens us for living as disciples in the world. The early 18th century Methodists were mocked and belittled for what was then perceived as obsessive attendance at worship. From the very beginning, participating in corporate worship and sharing the sacrament of Holy Communion has held a central place in Wesleyan discipleship.

Christian Community (which Wesley called 'Christian Conferencing'):

Based on Acts 2: 44-47, joining with others for prayer, sharing meals and small group fellowship and accountability, is a key spiritual practice for growing in Christian discipleship. No one walks the discipleship pathway alone. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. To follow Jesus is to follow Jesus in community with others who are following Jesus. We are only given a portion of faith alone. Together with others, we are strengthened, encouraged, healed and transformed on the path of salvation. 🍀

Conducting an 'Annual Spiritual Checkup'



Each year many of us go through a physical check-up, perhaps do a financial check-up at year's end or at tax time, and perhaps do a performance review at our workplace. But how often do we take time to review our spiritual life?

Those who are saved by grace are called to grow in grace (2 Peter 3.18). As disciples of Jesus, we are to live a life of love – love for God and love for our neighbor, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Too often, in the busyness of our day-to-day lives, we let other priorities crowd out the two highest priorities Jesus gave us.

The following questions are designed to help you examine your spiritual life over the past year and to prayerfully seek God's help in areas where you desire to grow in the New Year.

Loving God with all your heart, soul and mind:

How is my personal relationship with God?

- ❖ Do I have a growing desire to spend more time with God? Am I spending appropriate time praying, reading and meditating on the word?
- ❖ Am I growing in my desire to obey and please God? Do I obey out of gratitude for God's love? Or from guilt or fear?

- ❖ Have I fully surrendered to the Holy Spirit? Do I ask God to fill me each day with the Holy Spirit?
- ❖ Are there areas I am holding back from God? Which ones? Why?
- ❖ Am I more aware of the sins in my life? Do I repent on a daily basis and receive forgiveness and cleansing from God? Have I fully, truthfully repented of all past and current sins?

Am I actively serving God?

- ❖ Volunteering at church?
- ❖ Praying regularly for the pastor, staff, missionaries and volunteers?
- ❖ Am I seeking to make others feel welcome in my church?
- ❖ Doing my job with excellence?
- ❖ Reaching out to those around me?

Am I growing in my desire and actions to give sacrificially to God's work in the church, in caring for the poor, and in other ministries?

Am I teaching my children about sacrificial giving and putting God before materialistic desires?

Am I living in humility before God, my family, friends and co-workers?

Is there evidence of grace growing in my life?

Do I thank God every day for God's love, grace and mercy and saving me from what I deserve? Am I seeing evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in my life (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control)? Am I learning to see others through the mind of Christ? Am I treating others with the same grace God has shown me?

Loving your neighbor:

Am I loving my family as I should?

- ❖ Husbands, are you loving your wives? How, specifically?

- ❖ Wives, are you loving your husbands? How, specifically?
- ❖ Parents – are we teaching our children the Bible, how to pray, and how to please God?
- ❖ Children, are you honoring your parents? How, specifically?
- ❖ Am I managing my time in a way that reflects God's priorities and honors my family relationships? What specific changes are needed?
- ❖ Are there any outside influences that are harming my family relationships? If so, what will I do about them?

Am I forgiving others?

Is there anyone among my family, friends, neighbors or co-workers that I refuse to forgive? Do I fully trust that God has forgiven my sins?

Am I growing in fellowship with other believers?

- ❖ Am I part of a small group? Is it making a difference in the lives of participants?
- ❖ Do I have a godly mentor to help me grow in my walk with Christ?
- ❖ Am I mentoring/discipling a newer believer?

Have I personally witnessed to anyone in the past year?

In my neighborhood? In my workplace? Am I prepared to share my testimony? To share the Gospel?

- ❖ Am I fervently praying for and planning opportunities to witness in this coming year?
- ❖ Am I being salt and light in my neighborhood, workplace and social groups? How, specifically?

Am I focusing part of my time and money to help the poor and disadvantaged?

Am I teaching my children about the importance of helping the poor? How? ☞

-The C.S. Lewis Institute
(<http://www.cslewisinstitute.org>)

To fast or not to fast?

In 1522, followers of Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli publicly rejected Rome's prohibition against eating meat during Lent by eating sausages not long before Easter (and were arrested for their trouble).

Harvard University historian Steven Ozment has said for 16th century church authorities, the Lenten menu was tantamount to burning a flag today. The act of defiance is often cited as the start of the Swiss Reformation.

Dr. Bill Lawrence, dean of Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, said that Zwingli – like his contemporary, Martin Luther, – rebelled against what he saw as the increasingly arbitrary rules of the Roman Catholic Church.

These rules failed to draw people

closer to Christ, Zwingli argued. "In a word, if you will fast, do so; if you do not wish to eat meat, eat it not; but leave Christians a free choice in the matter," he preached.

There is a strong biblical base for fasting, particularly during the 40 days of Lent leading to the celebration of Easter. Jesus, as part of his spiritual preparation, went into the wilderness and fasted 40 days and 40 nights, according to the Gospels.

The Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox churches continue to have fasting rules during Lent. But as a result of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the Catholic Church has shifted its approach toward more personal responses to penitential practices.

Catholics were encouraged to substitute a meaningful act of penance as an alternative to not eating meat on Fridays year-round. The church still asks Catholics not to eat meat on Fridays during Lent and to fast – eating only one full meal – on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

However Christians come down on the question of fasting, Lawrence suggests that the 40-day season involve some spiritual devotion on the mystery of Christ's sacrifice.

"Which is better: to give something up for Lent or do something new for Lent?" Lawrence said. "The answer would be both." ☞

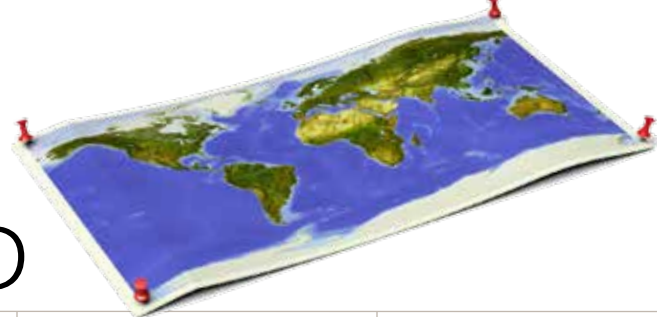
-Heather Hahn for UMNS



Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Psalms 51:10

Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD



I met Jesus in Cambodia



By Nathan Decker

Why go to Cambodia? Can you even find it on a map? It's a Southeast Asian nation that the United States bombed during the Vietnam War; surely they don't like us there. It takes a 17-19-hour flight to get there from Virginia; that is just too far from us! Besides that, aren't there bigger needs closer to home? Couldn't we partner with someone in our own hemisphere? Shouldn't Cambodia be California's or Hawaii's partner?

Why go to Cambodia? Because of Jesus.

I met Jesus in Cambodia. I saw him in Sophany Heng. Sophany is a pastor who leads the women's ministry for the Cambodia Methodist Church. Her grandfather was a professor who was killed by Pol Pot's regime because he was "an intellectual." Her passion for justice impressed me. She speaks against the sex trafficking and sex tourism. She worries about Cambodia's neighbors that threaten to rape her Khmer culture and resources. Thailand has become a place of excess in hedonism to the west while to the east, Vietnam continually exerts political might to exploit Cambodia's rich natural resources. "Please pray for my women," Sophany pleads, "we need education and leadership so that we can be a blessing to others." She is blessed. Her mother instilled in her a passion for learning and helping others through the

story of her grandfather.

I met Jesus in Cambodia. I saw him in Pastor Sokhum Lun. At 35 years old, he's the District Superintendent for the Kompong Thom district. His wife and he have three kids of his own and four teenagers from the minority group Kuy (pronounced koo-ee) people. The teens live with them so that they might receive an education. Sokhum is the only ordained elder on his district. He has to ride his motor-bike past flooded rice fields and down dusty trails to perform baptisms and preside at communion for over 15 growing churches. He hosted the training event while we were there. Most are pastors and farmers. Methodist pastors in Cambodia make \$70 per month. They were so excited to receive training on visioning, preaching and disciplines that they didn't mind sleeping on the floor two nights. "Pray for my church," Sokhum pleads. "We are growing so fast and we don't know how to be church."

I met Jesus at the Methodist Church at Toul Kork, a suburb of Phnom Pehn. Attendance that Sunday was 168. I'm 36 years old, and only four people there were older than I. This congregation meets in a building that, in a former life, was a night club. Now the stage that had strippers has a praise band and a cross. During the week more than 1,000 kids come to this church school. The services are broadcast over the radio and many listen from

home to the good news. I asked the pastor there the question I had been asking everyone, "What do you need?" The answer was always the same and surprised me. "We need training, discipleship; we need Jesus."

Why go to Cambodia? Because of Sophany, Sokhum and Toul Kork Methodist Church. Because this church started in 2001 already has more than 150 congregations. Because in this nation 70 percent of the population is under 35 and 50 percent is under the age of 18.

Because of Sovantara Chea, who desires to see his church send missionaries to neighboring nations. Because of Sopha "Tony" Chen, who dreams about youth ministry and creating a Christian business model for Cambodia. Because of Tim, our driver during the trip, who is not yet a Christian, but reads his Bible every day and hopes for transformation for his nation and an end to political corruption through faith. And because of Rick, a man in Virginia who barely missed the Vietnam War draft. He wrote me a tear-stained letter about hoping to give peace not war and contributed \$1,000 to the team's project. Why go to Cambodia? Because of Jesus. I met Jesus in Cambodia, and I'll never be the same. 📖

-The Rev. Nathan Decker is pastor of Ivey Memorial UMC, James River District. He was part of an UMMVIM team that visited Cambodia in January.

Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD

Professions of faith climb for first time in years

By Heather Hahn

For the first time in 11 years, United Methodist annual conferences in the United States reported an increase in total professions of faith in 2012. Preliminary figures for professions of faith show a gain from 123,986 in 2011 to 124,635 in 2012 — less than 1 percent but still an upward trajectory.

Many church leaders applauded the news as a welcome development after decades of declining U.S. membership and worship attendance.

"Clearly this is the beginning of everything that we've been working toward for the past couple of years as we strengthen congregations to make disciples who engage in the world in justice and mercy ministries," said New Jersey Area Bishop John Schol, who has led the denomination's Vital Congregations Initiative.

"What this really says is we're starting to move in the right direction. Certainly, it's not a trend. ... But it's a hopeful sign for the journey ahead."

For professions of faith, churches count youth completing confirmation and adult new church members who make a profession to follow Christ. The number does not include people who transfer from one church to another.

Twenty-eight of 59 U.S. conferences reported gains in their professions of faith to the General Council on Finance and Administration, the denominational agency that tracks conference statistics. The count includes conferences in each of the five U.S. jurisdictions.

The growth was just one change the

Council of Bishops cheered during a status report on the denomination's efforts to foster more highly vital congregations.

U.S. churches also reported overall increases in small groups, mission engagement and giving to mission.

"We're not seeing (an increase) yet in worship attendance," Schol said. "But that's generally the last one to come."

Leading people to Christ requires a lot of love and does not always lead to immediate results, as the Rev. Leah Hidde-Gregory in the Central Texas Conference attests. Her conference was among those reporting a rise in professions of faith; it also saw 2012 gains in membership and worship attendance.

Hidde-Gregory saw that growth first-hand as pastor for six years, including 2012, of Frost (Texas) United Methodist Church. In that time, the 125-year-old congregation in a town of about 600 people saw 59 professions of faith.

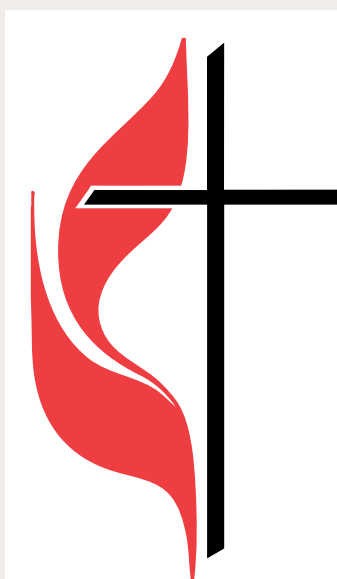
How did the rural church do it? "We invested in people, and we listened, and we didn't judge,"

Hidde-Gregory said. "And we loved, we loved, and we loved some more."

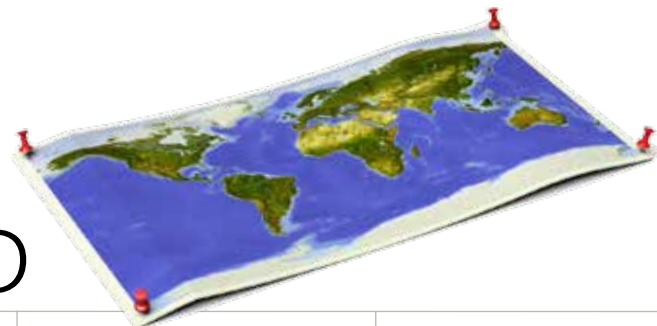
While 14 of the professions of faith at Frost came from confirmands, the vast majority came from adult new Christians. Many were transients attracted by the town's cheap housing, some with histories of substance abuse. They came to the church for its free Wednesday night meals, its food pantry and its help for those seeking work, and they stayed for worship and Christian community.

"I had tremendous laity there who loved until it hurt," the pastor said. "It wasn't being in ministry to. It was being side by side, involved in people's lives. And ministry is messy. That means I got to go experience what it's like to bail someone out of jail for the first time." 📖

-Heather Hahn is a reporter for United Methodist News.



Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD



Leaders in faith, health care to speak at Peace Conference

By Melanie Threlkeld McConnell

An international panel of experts on global health and faith, including Joshua DuBois, former White House spiritual adviser to President Obama, will discuss those issues at the 2014 Lake Junaluska Peace Conference, "Faith, Health, and Peace: Seeking the Basic Right to Good Health for All God's Children," set for March 27-30 at Lake Junaluska, N.C.

The interfaith conference will feature speakers from across the globe who will talk about their work in developing countries, the United States, with mothers' and children's health, and the role faith communities have in combating disease, violence and poverty, often the causes of poor health, said The Rev. Wannie Hardin, a retired United Methodist minister and a co-chair of the design

team. The conference will also feature local speakers, workshops and panels, including a presentation by practitioners of alternative spiritual approaches to health care, moderated by Rabbi Phil Bentley.

"The purpose of the whole conference is to talk about world peace," said Hardin. "Health issues and the lack of good health care around the world can be contributors to the lack of peace. So many of the situations that contribute to poor health are things that stand in the way of peace. Clean water, proper nourishment, proper food, and sanitation, housing and proper shelter. All of those things contribute to poor health and often are found in unstable environments, and that's true around the world."

Dr. Christoph Benn, director of External Relations and Partnerships Cluster for The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in Geneva, Switzerland, is the keynote speaker and will open the session at 7 p.m. on March 27.

President Obama's "Pastor in Chief," Joshua DuBois, will speak at 7 p.m. March 29. DuBois served as leader of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships during President Obama's first term, spearheading the Obama Administration's work on faith-based and community partnerships, fatherhood, religion and other anti-poverty strategies. DuBois left the admin-

istration in 2013 to author "The President's Devotional: The Daily Readings That Inspired President Obama," a book of devotionals.

North Carolina Conference Bishop Hope Morgan Ward will give the closing speech at 9:30 a.m. March 30.

The idea of faith communities working to improve world health is not new, said Bishop Ward, who has served on mission teams in the United States as well as in Central and South America, Africa and the Middle East. "Faith and health are at the heart of the Wesleyan way of life and ministry," she said. "John Wesley [the founder of Methodism] was fascinated by the intersections of faith and health. This was more than an avocation. The profound connections informed and shaped the Methodist movement."

The Lake Junaluska Peace Conference is an ongoing response to God's call to peacemaking and reconciliation. Affirming the community of Abrahamic faiths, the Peace Conference seeks to work in partnership with Christians, Jews, Muslims and members of other religious traditions to advance the work of reconciliation and peace.

Partial scholarships are available for full-time college and seminary students. Register by calling 1-800-222-4930 or visit www.lakejunaluska.com/peace.

-Melanie Threlkeld McConnell is a freelance writer based in Waynesville, N.C.

United Methodist Women will show the world how Faith, Hope and Love in action can bring about change



Assembly 2014: Louisville

Women from around the country and mission partners from across the globe are called to the 19th quadrennial Assembly of United Methodist Women April 25-27, at the Kentucky International Convention Center in Louisville, Ky.

"Make It Happen" is the theme for the faith-filled, spirit-lifting gathering of thousands of women of every ethnicity, background and region.

The biblical foundation for the 2014 Assembly is Mark 6:30-44, the feeding of the 5,000 – a miracle most fitting for a "Make It Happen!" Assembly. Inspired by Jesus who fed 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish, United Methodist Women members face seemingly unbeatable challenges, but together find ways to advocate for those deemed "the least," Christ's kin. United Methodist Women members

are equipped with faith, hope and love in action to turn the impossible into life-affirming realities every day.

"Join us in Louisville as we strive to turn Faith, Hope and Love into action on behalf of women, children and youths," said Yvette Richards, president of the United Methodist Women (See a video invitation at: www.Assembly2014.org).

-Anissa Walker for United Methodist Women

("Calling," continued from page 12)

director of the Center for Clergy Excellence, provided a more in-depth look into the many different options for ministry. A panel gave the attendees a chance to hear personal experiences about acting on the call to ministry and attending

seminary.

A common theme tying the many different aspects of the Summit together was the importance of self-care. "We are beginning early in the process to set the expectation that candidates and clergy must be attentive to issues of self-care and ongoing spiri-

tual development," Holder said, and it was reflective of the belief that the call to ministry is not one of solitude and fear. "Don't be afraid," she encouraged. "We are all here to help."

-Heather Johnson is a member of the conference Board of Communications.

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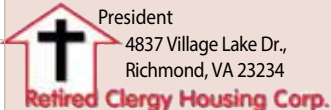
The Retired Clergy Housing Corporation of the Virginia Conference maintains a program to provide retirement homes for eligible United Methodist pastors who need them.

This program has been made possible by the gift of homes and funds willed to the Corporation for this purpose. Other contributions come through the Covenant of Gratitude whose members contribute \$1.00 a year for each person ordained a commissioned probationer at the Virginia Annual Conference.

If you would like to consider willing your home to the Retired Clergy Housing Corporation of the Virginia Conference or if you would like to share through the Covenant of Gratitude, please mail in the coupon below with your name and address.

c/o Thomas L. Coffman, President

4837 Village Lake Dr., Richmond, VA 23234



Phone: (804) 271-7219; Fax: (804) 271-4558
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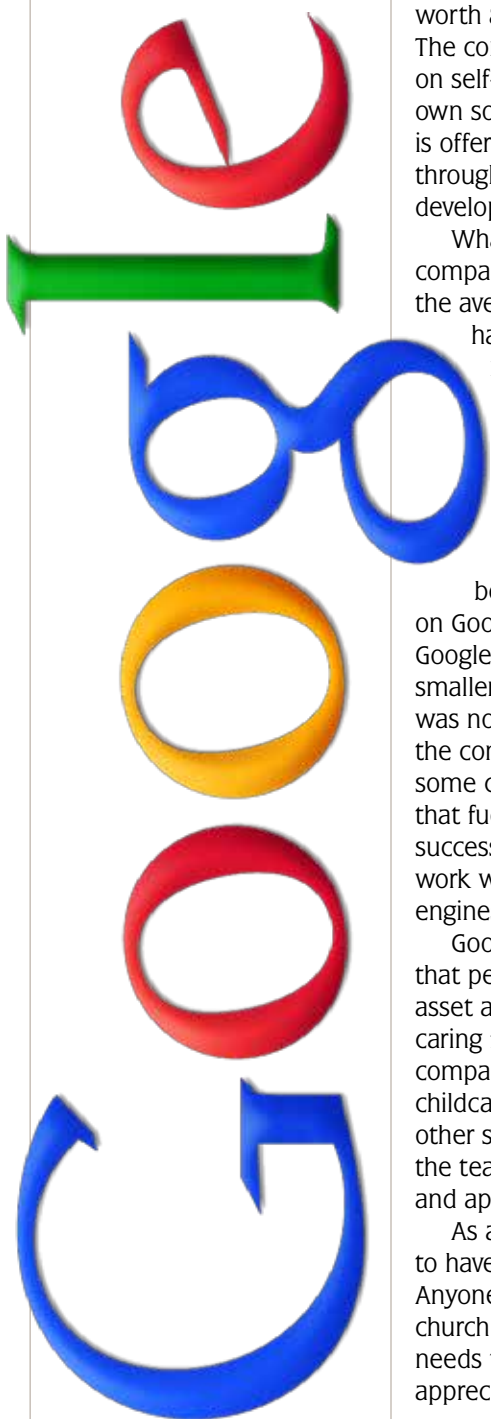
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EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



What churches can learn from



By Jeremy Steele

Google is one of the most successful and innovative companies in history. Currently, Google has 53,000 employees and is worth around \$330 billion. The company is working on self-driving cars and its own social network and is offering free Internet through blimps over developing countries.

What insights could a company like that offer the average church that has one to three staff members, a budget definitely not in the billions and a focus on reconciling people with God? A whole lot. It turns out that before people relied on Google maps, when the Google team was much smaller and when Google was not close to profitable, the company established some cultural priorities that fueled innovation and success – fuel that would work well in most church engines.

Google understands that people are its No. 1 asset and goes over the top caring for its people. The company provides food, childcare and a host of other services to make sure the team feels supported and appreciated.

As a church, we need to have the same priority. Anyone who serves in the church is on the team and needs to be cared for and appreciated. This does not

have to cost a lot of money. Simple, heartfelt actions can express appreciation. Here are some ideas:

If a leader is ill, ask everyone who serves with him or her to write a note on colored paper and ask a local florist to donate floral cardholders to make a "note bouquet."

During your next leader meeting, recruit a couple of neighborhood kids or youths from your church to wash all the cars in the parking lot that evening.

Ask Sunday school classes to prepare a casserole for the leaders returning from a youth retreat.

Select a group to be your "people team" and find creative ways to say "thanks" and help your leaders when things get tough.

Google believes the best way to make a great product is to release a good one and improve it. Rather than trying to get every detail of every piece perfect, Google releases a beta version that is far from its ideal, knowing Google can continually improve it. Google employees have discovered that they cannot know how the final version should look until they see how people use it. As soon as they release the unfinished version, they begin evaluating and iterating.

Our churches are the same. We do not need to wait until something is perfect to try it. We can launch

beta versions, especially if we get in the habit of iterating quickly and continually.

There is definitely a place for big, yearly evaluations, but just as important is the weekly, "What was good/bad? How can we improve next week?" questioning. How do you start?

Find a couple of people who are good at spotting ways you can improve and ask them if you can chat for about 10 minutes after your service, group time or study.

Ask them what went well or poorly and try to get an actionable item for improvement next week.

Keep the meeting short. If big issues crop up, schedule a follow-up meeting. If you keep the meeting short, you will be more likely to get actual feedback.


Try to make the follow-up meeting longer (about an hour) every month or two to think about bigger ideas and ways to improve.

Google may be most famous for its 20-percent-time rule. The idea is that anyone on the team gets 20 percent of his or her time at work to use on a personal-choice project as long as Google can own it. Many of the services you use every day like Gmail and Docs resulted from this policy.

This represents Google's commitment to trying new things and creating

new ideas. The best way to grow and maintain relevance in your community is to encourage everyone to try new things and reach out with new ideas. It means asking your leaders to brainstorm new outreach, worship ideas and so forth and then giving them permission to do it.

The reality is that the best ideas in your church are most likely half-baked in a leader's head, and if you release that leader to innovate and iterate, you will discover it.

One of John Wesley's most effective discipleship tools (the class meeting) was a result of just this. In 1742 a group of Methodists were trying to devise a method for paying off some building debt in a town called Bristol. One of the leaders (Captain Foy) suggested that everyone be divided into groups of 12 to collect a weekly penny donation to go towards debt reduction. They appointed one leader to go around and collect the weekly donations, and to their surprise this small-group division ended up being a profound ministry innovation. Wesley took the concept, tweaked it, replicated it and soon it became the driving force of discipleship in the Methodist Church. 

-The Rev. Jeremy Steele is the Next Generation pastor at Christ UMC in Mobile, Ala.

Holiness and the Renewal of Ministry

A Gathering for Laity & Clergy
(Presented by the Evangelical Fellowship of Virginia)

Saturday, May 3, 2014, 9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

River Road United Methodist Church
8800 River Road, Richmond, Va. 23233



Featured speaker:

Rev. Dr. Jason E. Vickers

Professor of Theology and Wesleyan Studies at United Theological Seminary and author of "Minding the Good Ground: A Theology for Church Renewal" and nine other books.

**Cost: \$25 includes lunch (\$35 after April 3)
.5 CEU available**

"I thank God that we, the United Methodist Church, have such a theologian like Dr. Jason Vickers. His book, *Minding the Good Ground*, is one of the best books on the renewal of the church, and I highly recommend this book. I have heard him a couple of times, and was deeply moved by his presentations. I welcome his coming to our conference again."

--Bishop Young Jin Cho

To register or for more information, go to www.efumcva.org.

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Because the mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, the Virginia Conference has long seen the need to assist churches which are reaching out into their communities. The Common Table, Committee on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy, and United Methodist Women have combined their resources, including a designated portion of the Church Extension Apportionment, to assist in this work. A total of \$179,500 will be distributed to the mission projects listed on these pages. For more information about a specific project, or how you can assist, contact the appropriate persons listed below; or call Bev Myers in the conference office of Connectional Ministries at 1-800-768-6040 or (804) 521-1100, ext. 134, or e-mail BevMyers@vaumc.org.

Special Program Grants

ARLINGTON DISTRICT

Grace Ministries Sterling gathers resources to address the varied needs of the low-income immigrants in Northern Virginia, currently concentrating on food distribution. Contact: Phil Mohr, 304 East Church Rd., Sterling, VA 20164; (703) 430-6455; ministries@sterlingumc.org

DANVILLE DISTRICT

Grace Design UMC provides weekend food once a month to 450-500 area children. Contact: Rev. Kameron Wilds, 1064 Franklin Tpk., Danville, VA 24540; (434) 836-4545; kameron.wilds@duke.edu

ELIZABETH RIVER DISTRICT

Zion Grace Be Blessed Food & Table Ministry provides a Wednesday evening meal for children who attend their Wednesday Tutoring Program and their families, and is followed by Bible study classes. Contact: Deborah Jones, 1440 W. Little Creek Rd., Norfolk, VA 23505; (757) 423-2118; djones@ziongraceumc.org

FARMVILLE DISTRICT

Jane Jones Food Pantry (Main St. UMC) is a monthly food distribution program which serves the

South Boston/Halifax county community, providing fresh and non-perishable foods to all who have need. Contact: Rev. Edward Rigg, P.O. Box 119 South Boston, VA 24592; (434) 572-3290; mainstreetumc@embarqmail.com

HARRISONBURG DISTRICT

Shiloh UMC Enrich Program serves at-risk children by providing a half-day summer enrichment program which includes two meals and a snack daily. Contact: Lucinda Erbach, 392 Thompson St., Strasburg, VA 22657; (540) 465-3382; luellie392@hotmail.com

LYNCHBURG DISTRICT

Amherst Cares (Emmanuel UMC) provides food for middle school children who have little or no food on the weekends. Teachers have recognized improvements in academic performance, behavior and attendance since the implementation of this program. Contact: Beth Gamble, 297 Ridge Drive, Amherst, VA 24521; (434-946-7657; bethgamble3@comcast.net

Weekend Meals (Anderson Memorial UMC) is a weekend meal program that provides food for the families of hungry children, along with notes of encouragement and tips for providing nutritious meals. The program also invites parents of the children to participate in activities such as menu planning, reading labels, grocery comparison shop-

ping, etc. Contact: Joan Yeatts, P.O. Box 773, Gretna, VA 24557; (434) 656-2604; joanyeatts@comcast.net

RICHMOND DISTRICT

Belmont UMC Arts Program is designed to help engage middle and high school youths in Christian community by working in different disciplines within the creative arts. They will interact with professionals in the arts and be mentored in professional artistic development; receive Christian education; and serve their community. Contact: Marie Coone, 3510 Broad Rock Blvd., Richmond, VA 23224; (804) 275-6336; belmontumcrichmond.org

Belmont UMC Youth Outreach Program reaches into the nearby Broad Rock community to mentor youths, providing leadership training, social skills, Christian character education, life skills, academic assistance, and opportunity for community service projects, college tours and other relevant experiences. Contact: Larry Cochran, Barbara McDougald or Marie Coone; (804) 275-6336; belmontumcrichmond@gmail.com

Beulah UMC hosts a program for multi-ethnic community children which is three-fold: soccer, tutoring and spiritual development. Featuring multiple partnerships, this program also engages students' parents. Contact: Rev. Will Waller, 6930 Hopkins Rd, Richmond, VA

23234; (804) 275-2325; will@beulahumc.org

Bon Air UMC - Change the World RVA is a program for homeless high school students which provides after-school tutoring, and a College Prep course; field trips and college visits; emergency transportation; mentoring and support for the transition from high school to college; and support during their college years. Contact: Natalie May, 1645 Buford Rd., Richmond, VA 23235; (804) 272-2042; nbmay@verizon.net

New Song UMC - Celebrate Recovery is a Twelve-Step/Eight Biblical Principles program which is intended to reach the hurts, habits and hang-ups for people (and their families) in the community. Contact: Heather Shaheen, 7450 Colt's Neck Rd., Mechanicsville, VA 23111; (804) 559-6064; hshaheen96@gmail.com

Central UMC Teen Group, an extension of the Kids Club program at Central, provides a safe, fun environment for the youths in the community to get to know each other, fellowship and learn about our Lord. Contact: Stacy Phibbs, 1211 Porter St., Richmond, VA 23224; (804) 397-3345; stacy.phibbs@yahoo.com

ROANOKE DISTRICT

Newport Cares Backpack Ministry provides weekend meals for Eastern Elementary and Middle School students who are identified by the school. Contact: Morris Fleischer, P.O. Box 133, Newport, VA 24128; (540) 544-7183; nmoumc@pemt.net

The Well at Huntington Court is a ministry which seeks to involve un-churched young adults in the

surrounding community through worship, fellowship and missions. Contact: Rev. Jeff Wilson, 3333 Williamson Rd., Roanoke, VA; (540) 366-3465; hcumc1@gmail.com

STAUNTON DISTRICT

Basic UMC Feeding Program is an ecumenical feeding ministry which provides Saturday morning breakfast and Wednesday evening meals to the hungry in the Waynesboro community. Contact: Rev. Don Gibson, P.O. Box 2447, Waynesboro, VA 22980; (540) 949-8947; pastor-don8@gmail.com

Casa de Amistad Computer Access Program provides access to computers to community members to conduct job searches, seek affordable housing and reconnect with estranged family members. Contact: Jennifer Strother, P.O. Box 2447, Waynesboro, VA 22908; (540) 946-7958; cdajenn@comcast.net

Helping Hands Food Pantry (Mint Springs UMC) offers food-insecure families access to a pantry which allows them to make choices which fit their needs, with bilingual assistance as needed. Contact: Anne Perdue, P.O. Box 34, Mint Spring, VA 24463; (540) 337-4855; adperdue1@gmail.com

South Covington Care Pantry is a food pantry which serves the hungry of the Covington City and Allegheny County area. Contact: Linda Black, 5015 Castile Rd., Covington, VA 24426; (540) 747-5261; llblack47@aol.com

YORK RIVER DISTRICT

Singleton UMC Weekend Meals Program is a program which provides food to middle school students from low-income house-

holds. Contact: Brownie Bartley, 5750 Ware Neck Rd., Gloucester, VA 23061; (804) 693-5564; bebe-bartley@cox.net

Sustaining Program Grants

ARLINGTON DISTRICT

Grace Ministries seeks to engage and empower the low-income immigrant community in northern Virginia through the distribution of food, clothing, school supplies and over-the-counter medications; by providing families with emergency funding for utility bills, rent assistance, medical and pharmacy bills; and providing vocational training in high-demand occupations. Contact: Martha Real, 13600 Frying Pan Rd., Herndon, VA 20171; (703) 793-0026, x112; mreal@florismc.org

EASTERN SHORE DISTRICT

Agape Christian Children's Community Center provides a healthy nurturing environment for the at-risk children of the small rural ethnic minority community of Horntown through a preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds that is open 11 hours daily, Monday through Friday; after-school program for kindergarten through second grade; and Vacation Bible School during the summer months. Contact: Brenda M. Child, 12021 Robinson Ferry Rd., Broadnax, VA 23920; (434) 848-3329; doughchild35@telpage.net

HARRISONBURG DISTRICT

Lighthouse Center for Children and Youth provides before- and after-school care and a preschool program for the economically depressed community, including hot

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

meals to subsidize the children's nutritional needs. Contact: Sheila Morris, director, P.O. Box 34, Elkton, VA 22827; (540) 298-5309; Light-house4kidzz@aol.com

RICHMOND DISTRICT

Belmont UMC Food & Clothing Ministry, supported by volunteers from the church and the community, embraces the changing neighborhood by offering food and clothing assistance to the community. Contact: Larry Cochran (804) 275-6336; belmontumcrichmond@gmail.com or lcochran6@verizon.net

Black Methodists for Church Renewal strengthens the ethnic local churches by training its youth in order to realize the inclusivity of the general church. Contact: Willard H. Douglas, P.O. Box 26941, Richmond, VA 23261; (804) 321-4222; Douglas546@aol.com

Kids' Club of Central UMC provides a safe place for children to learn about Jesus with their friends and neighbors, and serves as a springboard for other outreaches in the neighborhood, such as an Easter egg hunt, Super Bowl party, camping opportunities and Vacation Bible School. Families of participating children desire to be a part of what is happening at Central UMC because of the positive experiences their children are having at Kids' Club. Contact: Sandy Harmon, 1211 Porter St., Richmond, VA 23224; (804) 232-0334; (804) 288-3063; sandy@wrightdunn.com

Sherbourne Food Pantry provides food and spiritually nurtures needy residents and neighbors in the community where the need for food is very apparent. Contact: Sandy Sahnaw, 2619 Sherbourne

Rd., North Chesterfield, VA 23237; (804) 559-0705 or (804) 921-2187; sahnnows@comcast.net

ROANOKE DISTRICT

Shalom Zone: Grace Ministries is a ministry to the disenfranchised of downtown Roanoke with an emphasis on the recovering community, the immigrant community and marginalized people. It offers help with immigration and Fair Housing law, jail ministries and worship opportunities, and education and nutrition opportunities. Contact: Don Edwards, 4819 Golfview Dr., Roanoke, VA 24019; (540) 266-7262; donedwards.esq@gmail.com

UMC Community Outreach Program of Roanoke provides a safe and nurturing environment for children and families in inner-city Roanoke who are in need of resources not available to them through other channels, exposing them to Christian values and teaching. Tutoring, Christian education, enrichment activities and guidance; as well as a clothes closet, school supplies and evening meals are provided. Contact: Rebecca Parsons, 305 Mountain Ave. SW, Roanoke, VA 24016; (540) 342-3103; umcopr@roacoxmail.com



Shalom Zone in Roanoke's 'Bridges of Poverty' graduation class from 2012.

STAUNTON DISTRICT

Casa de Amistad is the outreach ministry of Basic UMC, serving the primarily Hispanic population in the community through programs of educational and material assistance. Contact: Jennifer Strother, P.O. Box 2447, Waynesboro, VA 2280; (540) 946-7958; cdajenn@comcast.net

Greenville UMC offers an after-school program which supplements the one offered by the local elementary school. The program serves neighborhood students who are struggling with the Standards of Learning tests by offering this free program, which includes free transportation. Contact: Rev. Kevin Haynes, 66 Almo Chapel Rd., Greenville, VA 24440; (540) 337-6220; gumcoffice1@verizon.net

Greenville United Methodist Women (UMW), through its "Food on Fridays" program, provides food for needy children on weekends and holidays, and connects children and their parents to much needed community resources. Contact: Beth Haynes, 66 Almo Chapel Rd., Greenville, VA 24440; (540) 377-6220; gumcoffice1@verizon.net

The next 5 Talent Academy teaching session will focus on stewardship.

Organizers invite participants to learn how to convince potential givers about the real significance and impact of their gifts. The Saturday, March 8, program will be ideal for clergy looking to reinvigorate their stewardship campaigns and lay persons eager to cultivate ways to help increase church giving in a meaningful way. Local church finance committees, stewardship committees, and all those with true passion for giving should plan to attend this important event together as a team.

The keynote speaker will be the Rev. Dr. Clif Christopher, CEO of the Horizons Stewardship Company and a Certified Fund Raising Executive. In 1995 he was given the National Circuit Rider Award by The United Methodist Church for outstanding leadership in developing vital congregations.

In his 20 years as a pastor, he led numerous major building and capital campaigns. Since founding Horizons, he has led consultations in more than 400 churches, conferences, synods and diocese in all phases of building, finance and church growth. Christopher is the author of several books including *Not Your Parents' Offering Plate*, *Whose Offering Plate Is It?*, and *Rich Church-Poor Church*, published by Abingdon Press.

"No one knows more

about local church stewardship than Clif Christopher," says Dr. Bill Easum, church consultant and author. United Methodist pastor the Rev. Adam Hamilton said, "When I have a stewardship question, I call Clif Christopher."

Among Christopher's beliefs are:

- ❖ Churches are losing out on donations that used to come their way and now go to other religious institutions and secular groups.
- ❖ The church must learn to "compete" (his word) for charitable dollars.
- ❖ Pastors should have access to personal giving records because the spiritual oversight of souls demands they know about such things.
- ❖ Personally thanking major donors is critical.
- ❖ The church must earn the gifts of God's people – "You should give because the Bible says so" or "God expects it" or "We need it" is no longer reason enough.
- ❖ Telling the stories of life-changing ministries is crucial.
- ❖ Teaching people how to give from all three "pockets of giving" is necessary.
- ❖ And, please, stop putting weekly offering totals in the bulletin!

The 5 Talent Academy is a program of the conference Center for Congregational



event on March 8 features expert on stewardship

Excellence. It offers tools and techniques to develop fruitful congregations in five areas: worship, discipleship, evangelism, ministry with the poor and stewardship.

The event will be hosted live from Floris UMC in Northern Virginia and will broadcast to Blacksburg (Blacksburg UMC); Eastern Shore (at Franktown UMC); Gloucester County (Susanna Wesley UMC); Lynchburg (Timberlake UMC); Martinsville (First UMC); Richmond (Woodlake UMC); the Shenandoah Valley (Bridgewater UMC); Tidewater (Francis Asbury UMC) and Winchester (Front Royal UMC).

Registration is open to all Virginia Conference churches regardless of previous membership or affiliation with the 5 Talent Academy. Visit www.vaumc.org/5Talent for more information or to register. Individual registration costs \$25 per person and includes lunch. Clergy attending can receive one-half unit of CEU.

The event will run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., with registration opening at each site at 8:30 a.m. The program will begin promptly at 9.

-Neill Caldwell



Rev. Dr. Clif Christopher, CEO of the Horizons Stewardship Company and a Certified Fund Raising Executive

Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



The Rev. Beth Shafer Glass is associate pastor of Serve Ministries at Ebenezer UMC in Stafford. She is an elder in the Susquehanna Conference, serving on loan, and is in her 22nd year of ministry. She received her undergraduate degree from Dickinson College and MDiv from Wesley Theological Seminary. Her husband, Mike, is an active duty officer in the United States Marine Corps with 28 years of service.

March 2
It would have been enough
2 Samuel 7:4-16

The Jewish Passover celebration includes a song called “Dayenu,” which roughly translates “It would have been enough.” The song recounts the story of the Exodus from Egypt and reminds the singers of the many things that God did for the Israelites as they made their way from slavery to freedom. With each gift recounted, the singers affirm that if God had only done one thing for them, even that would have been enough. But God gave more than they could ever have imagined.

In this story from 2 Samuel, we read of King David’s desire to build a temple for God. David himself has established Jerusalem as his capital and lives in a palace. He desires for the ark of God also to be housed in luxury. But God responds to David’s desire by saying “Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle.” (2 Samuel 7:6, NRSV) God then, through the prophet Nathan, reminds David of all that God has done for David and all that God continues to do for him: taking David from his place as a shepherd boy and making him king, remaining with him and protecting him from his enemies, granting him fame and fortune.

If God had only done those things for David, it would have been enough. But God now goes even further. Instead of allowing David to build a house for him, God promises to build a house for David. But this house will not be a physical home, instead it is a dynasty that will have no end, one that will continue to and culminate with the birth of Jesus. David is overwhelmed at the generosity and blessing of God.

God is generous with us as well. If God had only given us the gift of creation, it would have been enough. If God had only invited us to be part of a covenant, it would have been enough. But God has given us the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Perhaps we should join David in proclaiming, “You are great, O Lord God; for there is no one like you and there is no God besides you!” (2 Samuel 7:22, NRSV)

March 9
Promises, promises
Psalms 89:35-37; Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 1:18-21

When our youngest son, Joseph, was a preschooler, one of his favorite books was titled “I Promise I’ll Find You.” The short story told how a mother would use any means available to find her son. From rowboat, to airplane, to train or to horse or rocket ship, the mother assures her son that she will always find him if they are ever apart.

Part of the reason my own son loved the story was that the son in the story appeared in each illustration, but his image was very small and hard to find. Joseph loved scanning the pages to find the picture of the little boy that was hidden in it. Finding it was like discovering a surprise! I think the other reason Joseph loved that story, though, was that he found the promise in the book very comforting. It reassured him to hear over and over again, “I promise I’ll find you.”

In Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus, we are told that Mary, the mother of Jesus, became pregnant before she and her husband, Joseph, had marital relations. Because he assumed that Mary had been unfaithful, Joseph was prepared to end their relationship quietly. Then an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told Joseph that this child would be the fulfillment of the promises that God had provided throughout the ages. This child would continue the line of David, which God had promised would last forever. This child would be both human and divine, bearing the names “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6b, NRSV). And this child would “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21b, NRSV).

At the time of the birth of Jesus, there was a general sense of expectancy as the people of Israel awaited the promised Messiah. But it is unlikely that they looked for God to fulfill the promise of a savior through the birth of a baby in humble circumstances. And yet, that is exactly what God did. God is always faithful, and God’s promises are always fulfilled. But sometimes, they are filled in surprising ways. May we trust in God’s promises, and may we look for them as diligently as a young child searching for a hidden figure in a storybook, knowing that when we find the promise, what is really hap-

pening is that God is reassuring us, saying “I promise I’ll find you.”

March 16
Back to the future
Psalms 110:1-4; Acts 2:22-24, 29-32

I recently became interested in genealogy and have spent some time on the Internet researching my family history and my family tree. I find it fascinating to piece together stories and trace family ties and family relations back in time. But I also find it incredibly interesting to find connections between distant ancestors and my family now. For instance, I have always known that I had ancestors who lived in Virginia. But I recently learned that they were from Spotsylvania County, not far from where I live now.

In the account from Acts, Peter is also making a connection from the past to the future. He points out that God had promised to David an unending dynasty. David embraced this promise and placed his trust in it. And David also claimed that promise for future generations. In his sermon, Peter points out that, according to the promise of God, one of David’s descendants would not die. Indeed, David said of this promised descendant “He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption” (Acts 2:31b, NRSV). Proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus, Peter draws the ancestry line from David to Jesus and from Jesus to resurrection and back to the promise of God.

Scripture reminds us that God’s promises are true from generation to generation. God promised an unending dynasty to David and delivered on that promise. God promised that one of David’s descendants would not die, and God delivered on that promise. And God promises that through the Son, we too can have the gift of eternal life. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that

everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life” (John 3:16). And guess what? God delivers on that promise as well!

March 23, 2014
What’s it worth?
Revelation 5:6-13

There are several television shows now that are based on discovering the value of a rare or unusual object. Series like “Antique Road Show,” “Pawn Stars,” “American Pickers” and others explore the possibility of finding an item of great value amid a sea of inconsequential things. Sometimes it is clear which items will be valuable, and sometimes, the treasure is harder to find.

The Book of the Revelation reminds us that the sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross is of inestimable value. What is that sacrifice worth to all creation? The author of this book recounts his vision, saying that thousands and thousands of voices were praising what Jesus did singing with full voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:12).

The contrast between that scene and that of the crucifixion of Jesus is startling. At his death, Jesus was surrounded by crowds who cursed him and mocked him saying “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” (Luke 23:35, NRSV). Even one of the criminals who was executed with him derided him.

Most of those who were present for the crucifixion of Jesus would have had a hard time understanding the value of his sacrifice. They saw him executed as a common criminal, dying on a cross under the oppressive authority of the Roman Empire. Truly, the death of this carpenter’s son

would have seemed insignificant to most. But, like a hidden treasure in a field, or like something that has been buried in an attic or tucked away in a closet, the sacrifice Christ made on the cross can – and does – reveal to us that it is more valuable than anything we can imagine.

March 30
The Christ-bearer
Zechariah 9:9-10; Matthew 21:1-11

The lesson from Matthew shares the story of Jesus’ Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem. He does not enter as a conquering hero, but riding on a donkey. In fulfillment of prophecy, he enters as the One who will save his people through his own death.

There is an old story about a donkey named Christopher, the donkey who carried Jesus that first Palm Sunday. It was an exciting day. Every time he took a step, someone threw a palm branch in front of him or spread out a coat for him to step on. People sang, clapped and shouted, “Hosanna” as Christopher walked by. Christopher was very impressed: impressed with the way people treated him and impressed with himself.

Monday morning, Christopher was strutting around the yard, “I’m the donkey. I’m the donkey.” The other donkeys just laughed at Christopher. So Christopher left and went to visit some of the people who had placed their coats on the road before him. As he walked up to them, he began his mantra, “I’m the donkey.” They, too, laughed at him, threw stones at him and told him to go away. Now, Christopher was depressed. So he went to his mother. “Mother,” he said, “Yesterday, everybody thought I was the world’s greatest donkey. They spread palm branches, lay down their coats and cheered as I walked by. Today,

(Continued on pg. 37, “Living Word”)

CLERGY & DIACONAL



Deaths



The Rev. David C. Cook, 66, died Jan. 16, 2014. Cook retired from Aldersgate UMC in Hampton, York River District, in 2012. He also served as executive director of the Peninsula Crime Victims Council of Newport News. Cook was a member of the North Alabama Conference and came to Virginia in 2007. He was ordained deacon in 1972 and elder in 1975. He was also a U.S. Army Chaplain for 25 years, rising to the rank of Major. A service was held at Aldersgate and he was buried in Tuscumbia, Ala. He is survived by his wife of 45 years, Barbara, and three adult children.



The Rev. Henry Stith Moody Jr., 87, died Jan. 13, 2014. A native of Richmond, he served during WWII as a ball-turret gunner on a B-17, flying 35 combat missions over Germany. He graduated from the University of Richmond and Union Theological Seminary and was ordained a deacon in 1960 and ordained elder in 1962. He served six churches in the Virginia Conference including Central Chapel, St. Matthews, Mount Pleasant in Roanoke, Elkton, Sledd Memorial and Central UMC in Salem, before retiring in 1991. His surviving family includes his wife of 64 years, Marion MacMillan Moody, and an adult daughter.



The Rev. Ralph A. Stalter, 92, died Jan. 16, 2014. An associate member of the Virginia Conference since 1969, he began his ministerial career in 1953 at Bath. He also served Philadelphia, East Dinwiddie, Little Fork, Montross, Northumberland, Craddockville-Belle Haven, Powhatan and Benns. He was ordained deacon in 1956, elder in 1958 and retired in 1985.

J.N. Ely Jr., 94, died Jan. 17, 2014. He was the father of **the Rev. Sue Ann Salmon**, pastor of the Gordonsville Charge, Charlottesville District.

Daisie Pearl Garner, mother of **the Rev. Steve Garner**, who serves the Mount Bethel UMC, Danville District, died Jan. 9, 2014.

Carol Sue Oguich, 70, of Midlothian, died Jan. 12, 2014. She was the mother-in-law of **the Rev. Judy Oguich**, a deacon serving Trinity UMC.

Jo Palmer died Feb. 5, 2014. She was the wife of retired minister **the Rev. David J. Palmer** and the mother of **the Rev. David R. Palmer**, pastor at Louisa UMC, Charlottesville District.

Maxine Watkins, widow of **Rev. R. Beverly Watkins**, died Jan. 28, 2014, in California. Rev. Watkins was a former Portsmouth District Superintendent.

BIRTHS

The Rev. Erich and Candice Bennett welcomed a daughter, **Charlotte Ann**, on Dec. 5, 2013. She has a sister, Berkley, and brothers Jeremiah and Elijah. Bennett is pastor at Luray UMC, Harrisonburg District. ☞

Clarification

Some content in the article "Deaconesses and Home Missioners" by Olma Garibay in the December 2013 issue of the *Advocate* originally appeared in "Cutting-edge Ministry" by Myka Kennedy Stephens in the February 2013 issue of *Response* magazine.

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("Living Word" continued from pg. 35)

everyone is laughing at me and telling me to go away. I don't understand." Christopher's mother said, "Ah, my foolish child. When you carry the humble Christ to others, you are the world's greatest donkey. But, when you think it's all about you, you are just another dumb jackass."

The question is, what about us. Will we carry the humble Christ to others, or will we just seek our own status? ☞

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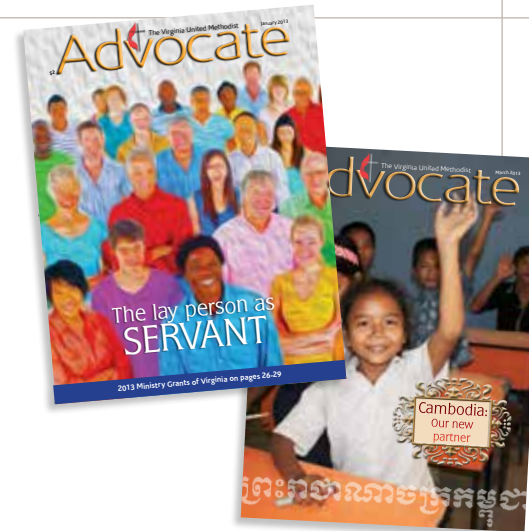
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FROM THE BISHOP



The new Virginia Clergy Leadership Program begins

The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

It is March, and spring is at hand. The Lenten season will begin on March 5, Ash Wednesday. All of us will be called to remember Jesus' suffering and death for us and to reflect again upon our faith and life before the Lord.

During this Lenten season, we will have the second Bishop's Convocation on Prayer on March 29. I invite all of you to join this gathering. Especially, for the prayer covenant congregations this convocation will be a great opportunity to get together and learn more about the spiritual disciplines. Please pray for this convocation. Without prayer, nothing great will happen.

On Feb. 11 we launched the Virginia Clergy Leadership Program with great joy, hope and expectation. The first cohort

of 20 clergy gathered at Roslyn Retreat Center in Richmond and started their 18-month journey under the leadership of Russ Moxley. I was present at their first session and was touched and moved by this great group of clergy.

I deeply appreciate the members of the Clergy Effectiveness Team (chaired by the Rev. Doug Forrester) of the Board of Ordained Ministry, and the Rev. Beth Downs, for their dedication in creating this program. They worked very hard with a dream for a new future for our conference. The description of this program says:

"This program is rooted in the understanding and practice of leadership in Christ, so that clergy will be radically open to the transforming power of God in their lives and practice of ministry. Believing that fruitful clergy leadership is grounded in deep spiritual maturity, participants will be able to:

- ❖ Develop the interpersonal and leadership perspectives and skills to actualize missional potential in their faith community.
- ❖ Sharpen vocational competencies in evangelism and disciple making, worship leadership and preaching, and mission."

This group of clergy will get together for six three-day sessions spread out over 18 months. The topics of the six sessions will be: The What and Who of Leadership; Moving from Maintenance to Mission; Building and Maintaining Effective Interpersonal Relationships; Worship Leadership and Preaching; Forming Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World; Learning to Be a Lifelong Learner.

As we know, The United Methodist Church has been declining in numbers for the past 40 years. We are in an urgent need of turnaround. Many programs and training opportunities have been offered. But my conviction is that if the clergy are changed, the church will be changed. The importance of clergy leadership for vital congregations was confirmed in the "Call

to Action" report and cannot be emphasized too much. The Bible also says that God's great works always started when the leader was prepared and secured in faith. First of all, we need transformed clergy leadership.

Today we are facing many challenges. The world is rapidly changing, and many researchers say that the United States is no longer a Christian country. This land is now a mission field. That means today we need missionary pastors. But most of our clergy have not been trained that way. We are more used to managing and maintaining the church and lack passion and zeal in reaching out to people and our community.

These are the reasons and the background for creating this program. One of the challenges for the future of this program will be securing an endowment fund (about \$1 million) to perpetually continue this program. When the Clergy Effectiveness Team discussed this issue, everyone agreed that God would provide for our need if the Lord is pleased with this plan. If someone donates this endowment fund, the team agreed to name this program after the donor. If we cannot find this one person, we will try to find a different way of raising this endowment fund.

I believe this program will contribute significantly to changing the culture of our conference. If the clergy who participate in this program help the churches to move forward, our future will be different. If they are equipped and prepared for the new future of our churches, transformation of our present and future will begin.

I am very, very excited about this Virginia Clergy Leadership Program and ask for your prayers and support. The most important investment we can make is to invest in people, especially to invest in developing leadership.

In our Lord,

Gene Robinson

ONE LAST WORD



Tweets heard 'round the conference

- Morgan Guyton @MAGuyton**
Jesus makes us dance again like we did when we were children before we became fearful performers burdened with being our own gods.
- Pastor Jason Elmore @PastorJasonE**
Wondering how long the kids will be going to school this summer? #polar-vortex
- Hannah Lambert @hannahbana004**
How did I get to be 21 years old and having never made a baked potato before tonight??
- Lindsey Baynham @LMBaynham**
As the only Methodist in the room, had to give a brief breakdown of our structure/polity. #geekedout #lovedit
- Beth Givens @bethgivens5**
Home in a warm house, grateful for safe travels, those who clear the roads, hard work and so much more. #gratitude #heat
- Jason C. Stanley @jasoncstanley**
1963 #MLK : "Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust."
- Andy Braswell @andybraswell**
Dear People All Over the World, please stop shooting each other. Thanks. #enoughalready



Got ashes? A new take on Ash Wednesday

The Gathering UMC, a new church plant in the Elizabeth River District, is always looking for new ways to reach out to the community. Last year on Ash Wednesday, the Rev. Rachel Gilmore and members from her congregation met at a coffee shop during breakfast and lunch hours to offer ashes,

a lenten devotional and explanation of Ash Wednesday in Virginia Beach's Town Center. That evening they had a worship service in the coffee shop and went out on the streets in teams to share ashes with others. Over the course of the day, more than 100 people received ashes. Members were excited to share their faith with others in a real and relevant way.





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