

Advocate



Can the church
bridge the gap to
those with mental
health issues?

Connecting with the



Virginia Advocate

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

FROM THE EDITOR



Neill Caldwell
Editor

On my
mental
health
soapbox

Sorrowing Old Man
(At Eternity's Gate)
by Vincent Van Gogh



This was one sobering Google search! One in four American adults – 43.8 million people – have a diagnosable mental illness, according to the most recent statistics. About 34.5 million (14.6 percent of the U.S. population) received mental health care, and around 10 million have a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Patients often are hesitant to seek care because of the stigma attached to mental disorders. That's a good thing in one way: historically the field is woefully understaffed. Mental health historically has been the red-headed stepchild of the medical field.

Now to type in "what is the church doing to address mental illness..." Not much, apparently.

Mental illness is one of those "under the rug" topics in church. You know, the ones that church folks want to sweep under the rug so nobody sees the problem. Or, sure, we whisper rumors and stories in the shadows, but we don't do much to make a difference.

There are exceptions, of course. Some churches do have ministries that address this great area of need. And there are programs like Stephen Ministries that can deal with a wide range of personal problems including mental ones.


Stephen Ministers helped my mother.

Yes, my mother suffered from mental illness. She was bi-polar and battled that illness and depression for her entire life. When she was manic she was the life of the party, a force of energy. But there were dark days, too. It made for an interesting household.

On the conference level, we've let mental health fall through the cracks as it shifted from one office to another. There used to be a strong support network, but now, not so much. It would be great if the conference Board of Church and Society added this to their "to-do" list, hint, hint ...

On a national level, *U.S. News and World Report* says that the most comprehensive federal mental health legislation in more than half a century is set to be unveiled in the Congress. That's good, because Congress did not pass any bills related to mental illness in 2014. A report from the National Alliance on Mental Illness found that some states increased funding for mental illness after the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, but many decreased it the following year.

Denominationally, the 2012 General Conference approved a resolution stating God's love for people with mental disabilities. There are pilot programs out there, such as Mental Health First Aid (www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org) and Caring Congregations ministry (<http://umc-gbcs.org/resources-websites/how-to-become-a-caring-community>) that your church may want to consider. We do offer a wide range of resources on mental illness; visit www.umc.org/news-and-media/faith-and-mental-health to get started.

But first, I hope you will take a few moments and read Rev. ReNe'e Teague's story about her daughter. She jumped at the chance to tell Sally's story because she is ready to do her part to erase the stigma. It's a powerful and moving story. 

Neill Caldwell

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

Letters

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

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On the cover: Digital illustration by Annika Wooton

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LETTERS

Sam Nesmith: well-deserved recognition

Thank you for recognizing the Rev. Dr. Samuel Nesmith's many years of mission leadership in the Virginia Conference in the February *Advocate*. Always with that infectious smile and full of fun, Sam has worked in often challenging cross-cultural situations, providing new and veteran missionaries opportunities to experience mission first-hand. His sung mantra for his teams is that great biblical mandate "Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up!"

Sam has taught and lived humble, relational ministry throughout his career and, as often as not, has personally provided the funding for his mission engagements. The best part is that God gets the glory, while Sam stays focused for the next opportunity to serve, whether on Tangier Island, some African nation, Russia or Haiti.

Sam has made an indelible impression with whomever he has served, and seems tireless (even in retirement) in seeking to build up God's people in the ways of love and justice.

Thanks, too, for the amazing support and encouragement of Brenda, Sam's wife and soulmate, that helps keep Sam out there on the Lord's work. May they in their own fashion have many more years of fruitful endeavor for their beloved Savior!

*The Rev. Dr. Jack Martin
Charles Town, W.Va.*

Iwould like to congratulate you on the articles submitted in the February issue of the *Advocate* that tell of the Rev. Sam NeSmith's many efforts toward short-term missionaries.

I have had the distinct pleasure of traveling with Sam on 16 of his mission efforts, including Russia, Haiti, Bennett College in Greensboro, N.C., and to Tangier Island. He has been the team leader on each of these missions, and I have gained a great deal of respect for his ability as a leader, both functionally and spiritually.

As you know from traveling with him, he adds a whole new aspect to any mission.

Congratulations for putting this important article together!

*John Morse
New Hope UMC, Harrisonburg
District*

Love is the living H2O of the Bible

On November 22, I attended the live-streaming of the "Holy Conversation" on homo-

sexuality. One sentence really stuck in my mind. It was an unusual sentence for this setting. One speaker said: "This is a chemistry problem."

As I thought about this sentence, some interesting ideas began to form. First, take the chemical combination H₂O. In its most useful and abundant form, in the physical world it is seen as water. But add a little heat and it remains H₂O but the world sees it as steam, also useful in its own right. Take away a little heat and again it is still H₂O, but this time in the form of ice; one chemical compound but seen in three different ways and useful in three different ways by the world.

I started applying this thinking to the LGBT issue facing The United Methodist Church today. Love is our H₂O in the Bible. In the Bible we have a number of rules and laws telling us how we are to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to God. These rules are meaningful in the context of the culture in which they were written. The root of all of these laws is love, God's love for us and our love for God and neighbors. But these laws can be applied in the world in different ways. As the context and the culture change, love remains constant, but the way the love is shown to the world might be different.

In the Old Testament, out of His love, God gave some dietary rules that were particularly applicable



LETTERS

to that culture, especially in terms of health. As we move to the New Testament, the culture began to change when Gentiles were added to the mix, and God's love was shown a bit differently so that this new group could be included. Like adding or taking away heat from H₂O, God's love remained the same, but was applied differently to the existing culture and appeared in a different form to the world.

Next I began to apply this thinking to the LGBT issues of today, ordination of homosexuals and same-sex marriage. The culture at the time the Bible was written was a male-dominated society and had rules in place accordingly. Until the 1950s, women could not be ordained ministers in the Methodist Church, and the Bible was used to justify that position in the *Discipline*. But then some enlightened people saw that the H₂O of the Bible, in this case, was not about the sex of the person but about God's love for a person, regardless of their sex, and calling them into the ministry and giving them the gifts of the Spirit to carry out that ministry. The *Discipline* was changed in the 1950s to recognize the true H₂O of the Bible and let that H₂O be represented in a different way.

The same can be true for LGBT persons. The true H₂O is not about the person's sexual orientation, but about God's love calling them into the ministry and

giving them the gifts of the Spirit to carry out that ministry. The world is judging a person's call to the ministry based on sex and sexual orientation. God is judging the person's call to the ministry based on the true H₂O of the Bible, love. Once we recognize the true H₂O, God's love, we can once again have that H₂O be represented in a different way in the world.

The same idea can be applied to same-sex marriage. The Bible maintains that marriage is to be between a man and a woman. But this is the way that marriage is presented to the world, not the H₂O of the Bible. The H₂O of the Bible is that marriage is to be a love relationship between two people. It is to be a monogamous relationship grounded in fidelity. Once we understand that marriage is to be based on love, the true H₂O of the Bible, we see that marriage can be presented to the world in a different way. I would be comfortable with initially defining marriage as a love relationship between two people, preferably a man and a woman, and at some point in the future, dropping the words beginning with preferably.

The bottom line for me is to move away from the way things are presented to the world, and making judgment calls based on the physical world – what we can see – and move to what may not be seen, the underlying love. It is true that in the case of H₂O,

water is the main way we see H₂O, but we know that there are other ways that, although less prevalent, H₂O can be presented to the world as steam and ice, and each has its own place and use. The Bible sometimes refers to water as living water. The same is true for love, the living H₂O of the Bible, and because it is living, it changes and can be presented to the world in different forms.

Jim Rogers
Warwick Memorial UMC

Agreeing to disagree

I read with great interest about the "Holy Conversation" in the January 2015 *Advocate*. While it is evident that our church is facing a fork in the road and most likely we will go our separate ways like other main line denominations before us, I was encouraged by what I read that just possibly we could take the high road and part peaceably.

I realize that most of the talk is focused on sexuality issues, however, there is an overriding issue that goes even deeper than our different sexual orientation views. We are a denomination that no longer agrees nor abides by the authority of scripture. We would rather have a "Holy Conversation" than submit to a Holy Bible. When what we say and think and feel overrides what God's Word

(Continued on pg. 6)

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

(Continued from pg. 5)

has said for thousands of years as inspired by the Holy Spirit, well, there is not much else to do but agree to disagree and go our separate ways. Because when God's authority is in question, what makes us think we can agree on anything mere humans propose?

What I am hoping and praying is that we will rise above the stone-throwing and name-calling and come together to part ways peaceably and amicably. As the campfire song says, "They will know we are Christians by our love." This is my prayer.

As one who does stand on the infallible authority of scripture, I believe in reaching out to all people, especially those of us, all of us, who are sinners. I have no definition of a sinner other than the one found in Romans 3: We are all born in sin and not one of us is good, no not one. We all fall short of God's glory and we all need a Savior. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. There is no other. Thank God His grace is sufficient for all our needs...from realizing our depravity to receiving our Savior. God even gives us the Holy Spirit to comfort and lead us into truth through the study of the Holy Scriptures and fellowship with other pilgrims. No one is perfect. But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord is forgiven.

Every society has tried

to imprint its world view on God's world. There is nothing new under heaven. No surprises when it comes to human nature. It is my prayer that in the name of Christ and for the love of God and our fellow men and women, we who call ourselves United Methodists will throw down our stones in order to lift up Christ bearing light to the world.

While we will choose different roads due to misunderstanding and unbelief, I pray both sides will take the high road and reveal Christ to a watching and hurting world. Maybe then, the world will get a glimpse of their Savior as they watch His Bride work out her salvation with fear and trembling rather than fights and rumblings.

I read the whole magazine cover to cover. Thank you for keeping us informed.

Sharon Bunting Davis,
Virginia Beach

What the church can learn from the rough and tumble world of politics

By Mac McKenney



As congregations throughout the Virginia Conference thoughtfully reflect on issues associated with human sexuality, believe it or not we might turn to Washington for some guidance as to how to talk to each other.

First, a confession: I am a lobbyist — a tax lobbyist. And while the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances

COMMENTARY

is enshrined in the Bill of Rights, lobbyists may be held in even lower regard than the lawmakers they try to persuade. Jesus was criticized for eating with drunkards and tax collectors, but nowhere is it recorded that he ever broke bread with a tax lobbyist. Even so, I would submit that there are a few things the church could learn from members of this unloved profession.

When I was an undergraduate in the early 1970s, I was a member of the county executive committee of one of the major political parties, the Miami University Senate, and the administrative board of my church. Party politics could be pretty rough-and-tumble, university politics even more so, and church politics were rougher still.

If lobbying Congress can seem more genteel than the average church council meeting, it may be because a few rules of the road have evolved over time. Lobbying has been compared to the practice of law, except that the audience is Congress, rather than a judge or a jury. I would respectfully disagree. Our legal system is an adversarial one, while effective lobbying relies on credibility and good will. Ironically, sometimes people in church, whether they are discussing simple administrative matters or high theology, sound more like litigators than lobbyists do.

Here are a few effective

lobbying practices that would help improve discourse within the church.

Listen. In order to have an impact on the legislative process, lobbyists have to understand the needs of their clients, their adversaries, and the lawmakers they are trying to influence. Time invested in listening pays big dividends. In the church, we need to understand the reasoning of those with whom we disagree, and we can learn a lot more from listening than from talking.

Know your story inside out. A great deal of a lobbyist's value is in providing much-needed information. Lawmakers and their staffs meet with lobbyists to learn more about what a proposal might mean for air quality, education, public health or job growth. There is no shortage of opinions in Washington, but an effective lobbyist can provide credible, factual information. Nor is there a shortage of opinions in the church. But Methodists have a wonderful rubric for theological reflection and discernment—the quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, experience and reason. Taking these factors into account will strengthen an understanding of any of the issues the church is facing.


Tell both sides. It is easy to cherry-pick information to prove just about any point one might want to make, but an effective lobbyist will tell both sides of the story. One of the first

questions I hear in nearly every meeting on the Hill is “Who is opposed to this? And why?” In the church, sometimes we are tempted to cherry-pick scripture. If there is an expectation of fair play in the fiercely competitive world of lobbying, surely we should expect no less within the Body of Christ.

Look for common ground. As advocates, lobbyists try to make the most compelling case they can for their clients' interests and try to develop the most effective strategy. But the legislative process requires give and take, and effective lobbyists try to help lawmakers find common ground and are prepared to compromise. In the first chapter of Isaiah, God discloses the divine plan to restore Israel with the words, “Come let us reason together.” While we may not be able to reach unanimity within the church, we share a unity of purpose and should try to find common ground as much as possible.

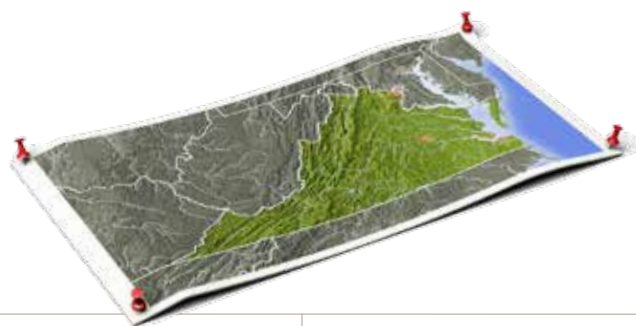
Remember that today's adversary may be tomorrow's ally. A friend of mine once complained about the spectacle of a couple of members of Congress arguing heatedly in a debate and then slapping each other on the back as they walked off the floor. On the face of it, such an encounter might seem to have all the authenticity of televised wrestling, but to me it reflects the reality that friends can disagree,

and that today's adversary may be tomorrow's ally. The public discourse would benefit from more backslapping, not less. In the church, we need to remember that we are all trying to be of the same mind as that which was in Christ Jesus. We need to be humble enough to recognize that the Holy Spirit may be speaking through those with whom we disagree, and we need to affirm their best intentions.

I do not mean to suggest that the world of legislative affairs resembles the Garden of Eden before the fall. Although it usually makes for a short career, some lobbyists don't act in good faith. But as unlikely as it may seem, lobbyists, whose livelihoods depend on credibility and good will, have something to teach us about how to talk to each other. 

-William R. “Mac” McKenney is a principal at Capitol Tax Partners, a certified candidate for ordination, a student at Wesley Theological Seminary and the youth director at Mount Olivet UMC in Arlington. He also worked for various members of the U.S. House of Representatives for 24 years.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Bishop appoints Peter Moon as new Richmond District superintendent

The Rev. Dr. Peter Moon will be the next Richmond District superintendent, Bishop Young Jin Cho announced. The change will become effective July 1 with the start of the new church year following Annual Conference.

Moon is currently the lead pastor at Woodlake United Methodist Church in Chesterfield, in the Richmond District. He will be replacing the Rev. Dr. Steve Jones, who has decided to retire.

This is the only expected change in the Cabinet for this year.

"I have discerned that the Rev. Dr. Peter Moon has the gifts and graces to serve the Richmond District as the chief mis-

sional strategist, which is a new description of the ministry of the district superintendent," Bishop Cho said in a statement. "Pete has demonstrated effective and fruitful ministry in each of his appointments, and his leadership is well-respected by clergy and laity alike.

"It is my great joy to make this announcement," Bishop Cho added.

Moon went to Woodlake in 2003 after serving at Farmville, as an associate at Fairfax UMC, and as pastor of a two-point charge in Richmond, Brookland and Wistar Heights. He was ordained elder in 1993.

Moon was born in Nashville and was raised in Rockville, MD. He graduated from the University of Washington in Seattle with a degree in Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering. Following graduation, he served as a Naval flight officer aboard the aircraft carriers USS Kitty Hawk and USS Ranger, flying A6E Intruder aircraft. In 1988, he left the U.S. Navy to attend Union Theological Seminary (now Union Presbyterian) in Richmond, where he received his Master's Degree. He later earned Doctor of Ministry degree from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. He and his wife, Lynn, have five children, Lauren, Greg, Becca, Kristin and Rachael. He recently ran his first marathon.


Moon has served in conference leadership in multiple ways including 10



years on the Board of Ordained Ministry, including a term as a vice chair of the board. He has served as the chair of the 5 Talent Academy and has represented the Virginia Conference as a Jurisdictional delegate in 2004, and as a delegate to General Conference in 2008 and 2012.

"I pray that this new appointment will be a blessing to the churches of the Richmond District and to the entire Virginia Conference," Bishop Cho said. "Your prayers for a smooth transition for Pete, his family and Woodlake UMC will be deeply appreciated."

Bishop Cho also took the opportunity to thank Jones for his years of service.

"His love for clergy and laity and his thoughtful and wise counsel for the church have been great assets to the churches, Cabinet, our annual conference and the denomination," the Bishop said. "We will miss Steve a lot. May the Lord continue to bless him and his family as they begin a new chapter in their life's journey." 

-Neill Caldwell is editor of the Advocate magazine.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Lynchburg UMFS offers classes intended to break cycle of poverty

To help children in low-income families, United Methodist Family Services (UMFS) in Lynchburg is offering a special program called “Getting Ahead.” The program is designed to help people living in poverty or near the poverty line reach self-sufficiency and “get ahead” of their current situation, according to community liaison Jamesia Harrison.

The class is held once per week for 15 weeks from 5:30 to 8 p.m. at the UMFS Lynchburg Regional Center, 2420 Memorial Ave.

Harrison said modules are applied to participants’

lives and they investigate the “hidden rules of the classes.”

“We look at their current financial situations, their debt to income ratio, and develop a working plan to reach self-sufficiency,” she said.

Harrison said they have reached capacity for this season’s class but are accepting applications for the next round in August. “We already have a waiting list and we are happy the word is getting out,” Harrison said.

A stipend is offered for people who apply and are accepted into the program.

Child care is available for ages 3 years and older, as well as a meal during the class. UMFS also has opportunities for possible volunteers or people who want to donate meals to the group.

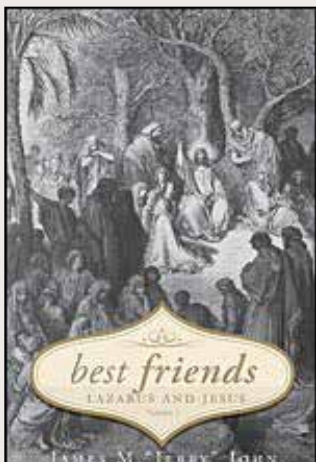
UMFS is a social service nonprofit organization with locations throughout the commonwealth. The service works with high-risk children and families to reach self-sufficiency.

For more information on the “Getting Ahead” program, send an e-mail to Harrison at jaharrison@umfs.org.

—Ashlie Walter, Lynchburg News & Advance



Retired pastor publishes new novel



The Rev. James M. “Jerry” John, a retired Virginia Conference pastor living in Harrisonburg, has published a two-volume novel, *Best Friend: Lazarus and Jesus*.

The book is in two volumes because of its length, John said. Tate Publishing believed that the book was best served by dividing it into two parts.

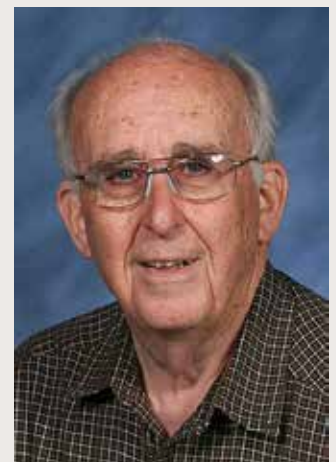
The story features several characters who are familiar from the New Testament including Martha, Mary, Mary the mother of Jesus and all of Jesus’ fam-

ily listed in the Gospel of Mark.

John said he has always wondered about the depth of the friendship between Jesus and Lazarus.

“This is a story of the imagination,” he said. “There is no way to do a scholarly study because there is no information.”

John is pastor emeritus at Asbury UMC in Harrisonburg. He has written five previous books – four for children and a devotional book – but this is his first novel.



Author and retired pastor Rev. James M. “Jerry” John

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Virginia United Methodists have annual day of advocacy before state legislature



Virginia United Methodists visit the state capitol to advocate for social justice.



Bishop Cho talks with Kathy Roberts, chief of staff for House Speaker William Howell, in the General Assembly's office building. Listening in are (from left) Marco Grimaldo, director of Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, and Danville District Superintendent Janine Howard.



Tommy Herbert, legislative assistant to Delegate Tim Hugo, greets the Rev. Janine Howard as Bishop Cho looks on. Herbert is a member at Warsaw UMC, where Howard was his pastor from 2000-2009.

By Neill Caldwell

RICHMOND - United Methodists spilled out of buses and vans and onto Capitol Square Thursday, Feb. 5, intent on being advocates to the Commonwealth of Virginia's lawmakers in the 23rd annual United Methodist Day at the General Assembly.

Bundled against the cold and identified by their bright red tote bags, the crowd fanned out across the connected, multi-story buildings that house the offices of the legislators. Participants later moved to the historic State Capitol for a debriefing session, and some attended the openings of the Senate and House sessions.

This event is sponsored by the Conference Legislative Network, a joint venture of conference United Methodist Women and the Board of Church and Society.

Numbers were down by at least 100 from the usual 300 people who normally come from all over the conference, but organizers said that those who came this year were much more intent on actually talking with their lawmakers rather than just coming for "an outing."

"These are not your average United Methodists," said conference Lay Leader Warren Harper, a first-timer to the event. "This group

realizes how powerful one person can be. ... These people really want to be here."

The main speaker of the day was the Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society. Speaking after lunch at Bon Air UMC, North Chesterfield, Henry-Crowe read parts of the United Methodist Social Creed aloud and said "this is why I wanted this job."

"United Methodists can and do make a significant difference in the world," she said. "Think of what 11 million people can do! Jesus (only) had twelve!"

Henry-Crowe said that it

"It was their opportunity to have their voices heard, and as John Wesley said about social holiness, to live in the world."

-Wayne Rhodes

is our job as United Methodists to live out the denomination's Social Principles, "to live good and principled lives for justice."

The General Secretary also said that it was "a responsibility of United

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Methodists to inspire young people to become public servants” of the kind that participants had met with that morning.

Bishop Young Jin Cho, who has participated in United Methodist Day in each of his years leading the Virginia Conference, called the gathering “a mission in justice, but also a mission in love.”

As he toured legislative offices, the Bishop talked about several key issues:

- ❖ **Resolution passed at 2014 Annual Conference calling for the legislature to raise the minimum wage for Virginia workers;**
- ❖ **One in six children in Virginia come to school hungry, and many churches have had to create feeding programs to help pick up the slack;**
- ❖ **Need for increased law enforcement focus on human trafficking within the bounds of the state;**
- ❖ **Limit access to guns for those persons who have had a protective order placed against them.**

Of those issues, only human trafficking had legislation still pending before the legislature. The others have already been killed in committee.

Bishop Cho and Delegate Buddy Fowler, a Republican from Hanover County, had a

lively back-and-forth discussion about those issues and more.

“In a state with more than eight million population, there are always some who fall through the cracks,” said Fowler. “I think we all agree and want the same things. It’s just how we achieve those results where we differ.”

“Let’s leave it at this,” responded Marco Grimaldo, director of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy and Bishop Cho’s guide in the General Assembly offices, “we believe something should be done and we put the responsibility on our elected officials to figure it out.”

In the de-briefing time led by Grimaldo, participants reported on their talks with their lawmakers about myriad issues, including Medicaid expansion, veterans’ issues, caring for the homeless, global warming and immigration.

“This (event) is a strong example of what United Methodism is all about,” said Wayne Rhodes, director of Communications for the General Board of Church and Society. “It was their opportunity to have their voices heard, and as John Wesley said about social holiness, to live in the world.”

-Neill Caldwell is editor of the Virginia United Methodist Advocate magazine.

Watch a video on United Methodist Day at the General Assembly:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ja0GtomzY0



Danville District Superintendent Janine Howard talks with Marco Grimaldo, the director of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy.

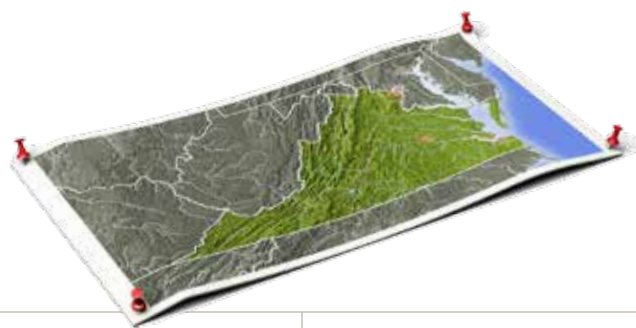


Anne Comfort of St. Stephens UMC, Alexandria District, asks for time with her legislator during United Methodist Day at the General Assembly.



The Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe speaks to the crowd at Bon Air UMC. The General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society was the featured speaker for this year’s event.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Society of St. Andrew offers Lenten devotion, 'Into the Wilderness'



Into the Wilderness

You might consider committing to a daily time of study, reflection, prayer and giving during the season of Lent, the 40 days (plus seven Sundays) leading up to Easter, using devotional materials prepared by Society of St. Andrew (SoSA).

Join with hundreds of congregations and thousands of individuals and families across the country and around the globe. Deepen your faith as you give generously to provide healthy food for hungry brothers and sisters through the work of Society during Lent, through Easter Sunday on April 5.

Traditionally, Lent is a season of penitence, a time of asking God's forgiveness for our sins and seeking a new way of life in Christ as we approach the death of Jesus and look forward to his resurrection.

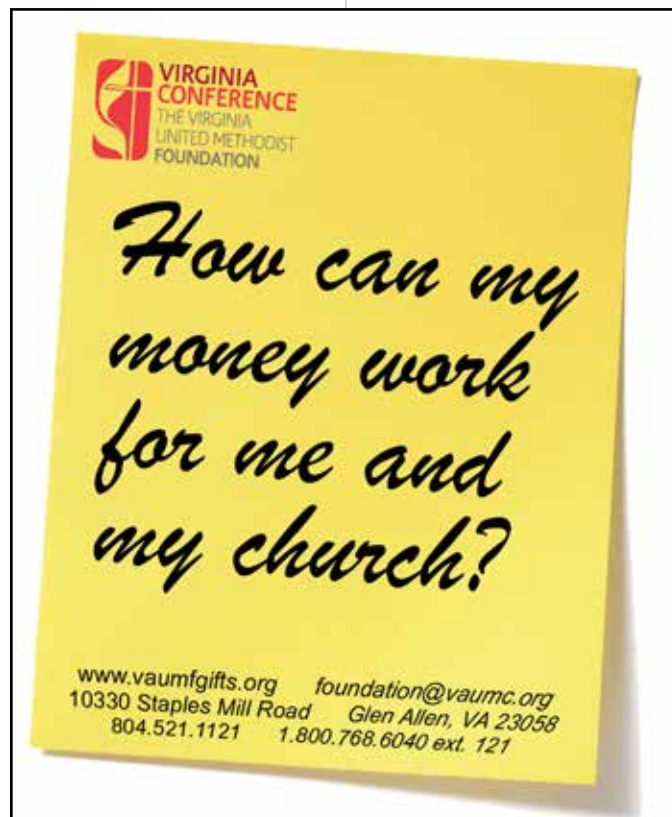
SoSA's 2015 title is "Into the Wilderness", remembering the 40 days Jesus was tempted in the desert, following his baptism. In the devotional booklet, you will find daily meditations and prayers that explore the themes of temptations, challenges and perseverance in faith, written by people of deep and abiding faith: pastors and laypersons from many Christian traditions.

Devotional booklets and coin banks are free and may be ordered in quantity. You may also download a copy of the devotional booklet for your e-reader or sign up to receive each day's devotion by e-mail.

Place your order by calling **1-800-333-4597** or going to **<http://endhunger.org>**.

Also available is the Good Friday Fast guide, "In Remembrance of Me." Join Society of St. Andrew staff and volunteers in fasting on Good Friday. This special time of prayer and fasting uses our physical hunger as a symbol of our spiritual hungers. It also serves as a vivid reminder of our many brothers and sisters who live with real, physical hunger every day. 🍷

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EVENTS

MARCH

Clergy Spouses' Retreat

March 5-7, Blackstone

"Is It Well With Your Soul?" is the theme of this year's retreat, organized by the conference's Clergy Family Enrichment Committee. Speakers will include Dr. Dawn Peck, a member of Trinity UMC in Lexington and certified spiritual director; Dr. Lisa Rochford, a clinical psychologist and clergy spouse; and the Rev. Charlie Reynolds, executive director of Virginia Conference Wellness Ministries. There will be special interest activities, a roundtable discussion of life as a clergy family, and music provided by Josh Wortham. The cost of the entire weekend is \$100, but you can come as a day participant for \$30 a session. For more information, contact the Center for Clergy Excellence at **(804) 521-1126** or **1-800-768-6040, ext. 126**.

United Methodist Men's Spring Training Roundtable

March 7, Centenary UMC, Portsmouth; Crenshaw UMC, Blackstone; Trinity UMC, McLean

This event, offered at three locations, will offer men a chance to recharge their spiritual batteries, hear more about the United Methodist Men's movement, grow in servant leadership, and join the path of spiritual maturity as men of faith in service to God. For more information, call Jim Butts, Virginia Conference United Methodist Men's vice president for Development & Training, at **(757) 421-0161**, or e-mail: charlesdog1@cox.net.

Clergy Continuing Education Seminar

March 16-17, Virginia Wesleyan College, Norfolk

The Rev. Jorge Acevedo, lead pastor at Grace Church, a multi-site United Methodist congregation in Southwest Florida (Cape Coral, Fort Myers Shores and North Fort Myers) with more than 2,600 in attendance each week, will present on the topic "Turbo-Charging the Wesleyan Tradition in the 21st Century" for a two-day continuing education seminar March 16-17 at Virginia Wesleyan College in Norfolk. The seminar will begin at 8:30 a.m. on March 16 and conclude at noon on March 17. Registration may be done online at vwc.edu. For more information, call Jodi Bryant, Church Relations coordinator at Virginia Wesleyan College at **(757) 455-3217** or e-mail jbryant@vwc.edu.

Bishop's Convocation on Prayer

March 21, Trinity UMC, Richmond

The Rev. Sue Nilson-Kibbey, director of Missional Church Initiatives for the West Ohio Conference, will be the plenary speaker for this event. An ordained elder in The United Methodist Church, Nilson-Kibbey was executive pastor at Ginghamburg UMC in Ohio for more than 10 years. She is the author of *Ultimately Responsible: When You're in Charge of Igniting a Ministry*, *Transformation Journal: A One Year Journey through the Bible*, and *Starting a Single Adult Ministry*, and is the creator of the *Ministry by Strengths* program. There will be 13 workshops for participants. Registration information is on the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

MAY

Virginia PAUMCS 'Get Away from it All' Spring Retreat for Church Secretaries

May 3-4, Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center, Toano

Beanie Rankin, retired assistant director of Records and Statistics of the General Council on Finance and Administration, will offer training in the areas of apportionments, record retention, effective cyber communications, church software and membership records. This event is an opportunity for church secretaries and administrators to learn, network and enjoy fellowship. For more information, call Virginia Chapter President, Bev Myers, at **1-800-768-6040 ext. 134**, or **(804) 521-1134**, or e-mail her at BevMyers@vaumc.org.

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ What do you do when you're a small church and don't have enough choir members to do a Christmas cantata? Contact a neighboring United Methodist congregation in the same situation, of course! **Sherbourne** and **Walmsley Boulevard UMCs** in the Richmond District did that in December, presenting "Ten Thousand Joys!" with Victoria Myers directing.



◀ A note from the Rev. Jacob Sahms: "A man named Elwood Rice was driving back from Hilton Head, S.C., in November and Googled 'UMC.' The directions brought him to

Blandford UMC, where he and his wife interacted with people from the church and he heard about our need for coats for kids. A month later, he tracked me down at home and discussed with me his desire to donate stock to our church. (He's a regular participant in church at home in New Jersey and in Hilton Head, where he winters.) We didn't have a way to liquidate the stock, so I ended up talking to the Virginia United Methodist Foundation about their services. On Feb. 1, the Foundation's Bryan Carper came

to deliver checks in the total of \$949 from the sale of the stocks!" Pictured: Carper and Blandford Lay Leader Gus Hulcher.

▼ **St. Paul's UMC** in Staunton hosted a first-ever Chili Cook-off Jan. 25. Members and friends sampled 19 different kinds of chili and then after voting for their favorite, sat down to eat. Participants paid a fee to enter and with donations, the event raised more than \$400 to benefit church mission.



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To have your church or church organization featured in the "Disciples helping to transform the world" section, e-mail your story and photos to NeillCaldwell@vaumc.org by the first of the month. Stories should be approximately 100 words, and photos should be 300 dpi jpgs.

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 \$104,700 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, ext. 134, or (804) 521-1134, or e-mail BevMyers@vaumc.org.

Special Program Grants

ALEXANDRIA DISTRICT

Rising Hope Food Ministries includes a number of food ministries: worship with noon meals; holiday meals; food pantry distribution; home food delivery to shut-ins; holiday food baskets; and others. Contact: Rev. Keary Kincannon, 8220 Russell Rd., Alexandria, VA 22309; (703) 360-1976; kkincannon@rising-hopeumc.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

(below) Scouts help with food distribution at Rising Hope Food Ministries.

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

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

RICHMOND DISTRICT

Armstrong Priorities Freshman Academy - Asbury Church Hill

In partnership with other religious and political leaders, Asbury UMC has created a special program which provides extensive and appropriate instruction in math and English, as well as social and community support, to ninth grade students who enter high school significantly below grade level, in order to bring them



up to grade level by the beginning of 10th grade. Contact: Rev. Marilyn Heckstall, 324 N. 29th St., Richmond, VA 23223; (804) 648-6690, (804) 426-3373; marilynheckstall@vaumc.org

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

ROANOKE DISTRICT

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 24012; (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

Calvary UMC Food Pantry maintains a food pantry at the church, in partnership with several other faith communities. Contact: Rev. Nancy Vaughan, 2179 Stuarts Draft Highway, Stuarts Draft, VA 24477; (540) 337-2980; associate@umc2179.com

YORK RIVER DISTRICT

Beulah/St. Paul Backpack/Backpack Program provides weekend food to elementary students, identified by their schools, who do not have sufficient food. Contact: Mary Lou Sterling, P.O. Box 91, New Point, VA 23125; (804) 725-7418; papa-ba5@VA.metrocast.net

St. James Bread Plus seeks to alleviate hunger in their community by collecting and distributing groceries to the needy. Contact: Harold Richardson, 105 Water Pointe Ln., Smithfield, VA 23430; (757) 357-4066; harold.richardson@charter.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 provid-

ing 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

DANVILLE DISTRICT

Henry Fork Service Center provides pre-school, after-school and all-day summer programs to children, many of whose families fall under Federal Poverty Guidelines. This helps to allow parents to hold a job and ensure that their children receive quality care during their work hours. Contact: Lisa Nichols, P.O. Box 888, 71 Sandridge Rd., Rocky Mount, VA 24151; (540) 483-2819; lisaanichols@cs.com

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



Henry Fork Service Center provides pre-school, after-school and all-day summer programs to children, many of whose families fall under Federal Poverty Guidelines.

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; doug-child35@telpage.net

ELIZABETH RIVER DISTRICT

Club Sandwich serves children from neighboring low-income, at-risk, transient families. These children receive the love and compassion of Christ through the mentoring, tutoring and caring of the director, church members and volunteers. Contact: Debbie Winn or Joann McClung, 288 East Little Creek Rd., Norfolk, VA 23505; (757) 587-2996; church@norwumc.org

Wesley Community Service Center provides Christian-based witness through such programs and services as congregate and home-delivered meals; emergency support services; youth development; representative payee and guardianship services for the mentally challenged; individual and family support services, as well as social action/advocacy on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged in the south side of Portsmouth. Contact: John G. Hatcher Jr., P.O. Box 1396, Portsmouth, VA 23705; (757) 399-0541; wesley@wesley.hrcoxmail.com

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 meals to subsidize the children's nutritional

needs. Contact: Sheila Morris, director, P.O. Box 34, Elkton, VA 22827; (540) 298-5309; Lighthouse4kidzz@aol.com



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

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

RICHMOND DISTRICT

Belmont UMC Youth Outreach and Food & Clothing Ministries 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. The church also offers food and clothing assistance to the community. Contact: Larry Cochran or Barbara McDougald; (804) 275-6336; belmontumcrichmond@gmail.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 or Rev. Tom Sweat, 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; sahnaws@comcast.net

STAUNTON DISTRICT

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; blk@comcast.net

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

Living for hope in a



world of challenges



By ReNe'e Teague

My daughter, Sally, was born the third of four daughters. She's my blue-eyed, left-handed baby that I stayed home with. She screamed on the trip home from the hospital. Sally always preferred me. She knew full well, when we went anywhere, when anyone else held her and she objected loudly. When Sally and I were at home, just the two of us, everything was good.

When she was in the fourth grade her teacher recognized her intelligence, and she was placed in the gifted program. She taught herself to ride a unicycle! She could draw like few others. She could sing, and I believe she has perfect pitch. Her fourth grade year was fabulous, but that didn't continue.

In the fifth grade her teacher assigned books that were too much for her emotionally. On top of that, our nation endured 9/11, followed by anthrax and sniper attacks, one after the other, and Sally was completely fixated on the fear, experiencing more anxiety than she could cope with. The older sisters were in the marching band, and we attended all of the ballgames. Sally would duck when planes flew over. She refused to eat at concession stands, and at this point she began to threaten suicide.

When I look back, it's all so clear, but it wasn't at the time. I really didn't know. I wish I did. But I didn't. I took her to a church-based counselor who said this was attention-seeking and for me to get her a guinea pig. I got two. Kole and Dandy were wonderful, but they didn't fix my child's anxiety disorder and hyper-sensitivity.

It was at this time that Sally began pulling her hair out to cope with the anxiety. By the time she was in high school the top of her head was virtually bald. She fixed her hair in a way that hid the problem. She had friends and marched in the band. She went out. She had a boyfriend and went to proms and dances and ball games. I thought she was artistic, quirky, sensitive...but there are lines in that definition that became a cry for help. I thought she'd learn to cope with herself, she'd find her way. I was wrong.

When Sally turned 18, she went to her doctor and was prescribed her first anti-anxiety, anti-depressant meds. They really made a great difference. I was still encouraging her to go to therapy if she was going to take the meds, but she wouldn't do that.

Sally finished high school, and with a lot of support she went to VCU. She had a job at a fast-food restaurant for a few months and then became a nationally licensed pharmacy tech. She was good at that and she loved it. She loved helping people and earning money. She worked and went to school. But then things got worse.

She was assaulted at a party, and it's as though that was just too much. She went from hair-pulling to cutting,



and her boyfriend of four years broke up with her, which left her sitting and crying every evening, wishing to die. She dragged herself to work, and I began the arduous task of accessing mental health care for my young adult child.

There really aren't words to describe these months in my life or in hers. She was taking her innate strong will and functioning when no one else would have been able to, and I was taking my strong will and calling and calling and begging people to help my child. Day after day I would call until all I could do was cry and then I'd stop. When I was back together I'd call more. There weren't enough providers. The good ones weren't available. So, finally, we took what I could find. She started seeing a psychiatric nurse practitioner and a therapist. She was prescribed so many meds I could barely keep up with what she was supposed to take and when. They were constantly changing. Her poor body just couldn't keep up with it all and, after four months she attempted suicide.

I walked in the bathroom to find my daughter. I scooped her up and took her to the Emergency Room. I consider it one of the worst mistakes of my life.

She was treated terribly. There she was in a fetal position, crying, hugging her phone and the psychiatrist said, "What did you think, this was a luxury resort?" A wonderful hospital security guard took over, de-escalated the situation and Sally went into the psych ward voluntarily.

The next morning her younger sister and I brought her clothes and magazines. The nurse called me aside and told me to get my daughter out of there. She told me Sally didn't belong in the psych ward and then explained what to do to get her out. I did what she said. Sally cooperated. We got her out 48 hours later. I vowed she'd never go back. I'd keep her alive by holding her in my arms if that was what it took. And then we returned to the search for mental health providers.

This is where our story changes from one of loss and loneliness and fear to one of hope. At the end of my resources, way past the end of my rope, I was at a volunteer engagement meeting at United Methodist Family Services (UMFS). Afterwards I talked to Angie Williams.

Angie talked to Greg Peters, the UMFS CEO. They helped me find a psychiatrist. Meds started to make sense. I listened to other stories of young adults like my daughter. It wasn't just Sally and me fighting to survive. We had help. I wasn't alone. We found hope. I'd like to say things were all rainbows and unicorns, but that's not life with mental illness.

With this new support and care things did get better and Sally moved into an apartment with her younger sister. That same week she totaled a Jeep Wrangler. The car wreck sealed in her heart a desire to live! Which was fabulous. She saw love and concern in the eyes of strangers who pulled her from the upside-down Wrangler, and she has never wanted to die again. This mother is eternally grateful.

But her illness has continued to progress and wreak havoc. Sally had to quit working. She couldn't go to classes and had to quit going to VCU. She was raped twice, which has escalated her anxiety and fear. Her cutting stopped, which was good, but then she quit eating. The meds had caused a massive weight gain and when she lost that weight she just kept losing. Now she is severely underweight. So we add anorexia to the list... major depressive syndrome, anxiety disorder, OCD, ADD...

On good days, she gets out of bed, she bathes, she takes her meds, she eats and has enough to drink. On bad days she never leaves her bed, doesn't eat, just lies there in pain. On good days, I celebrate. I enjoy them to the max! On bad days I worry, I cry, I live in sadness and fear. The good days seem to be coming more often, but I'm so optimistic it's hard to say for sure.

My journey has taught me a lot, but the most important lesson is that it is all better with support! I want this pain, this struggle to matter. I want to end the stigma and break the silence surrounding mental illness. I want to be there for others so their stories aren't so unbearably difficult. I do this in a lot of ways. I speak openly to anyone and everyone about living with mental illness, about my daughter and our story. I include references to mental illness in sermons. I use Facebook for all it's worth to spread the word. I even raised funds for NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness).

My connections at UMFS opened another door for sharing the story and supporting parents whose children are living with mental and behavioral health issues. I'm a parent support partner. I work a few hours a week, visiting

families and helping them navigate the systems. I am an integral part of a team of supports who work together to ensure the family is heard and their needs are being met. I helped one mom get her little dog back. I'm the parents' voice when their voice is breaking. I listen. I share my story. I offer hope. And I make absolutely certain these families aren't alone on the journey.

If you are interested in knowing more about the program, contact Rachelle Butler, PSP program manager, at **(804) 353-4461, ext. 1404**.

I'm Sally's mother and relentless advocate. I'm a pastor, and it is a fabulous way to live. I'm also a Parent Support Partner at UMFS. At times it is hard to differentiate the work of one from the other, the skills and calling overlap. One enriches the other in a way only God can provide. And deep inside, I know that I am living out my part in the Kingdom, creating my colorful strand in the tapestry that is life. This purpose, this colorful strand, isn't just true of me, it's true of each and every one; it's true of each and every child and family that struggles. So I work to help each child thrive. I work to help parents access and develop their own systems that can carry them into the future, and through this work their purposes and parts in the tapestry will be fulfilled.

I am called of God to lead a local church. I have no doubt. But I am also called of God to live out my life's purpose: to end the stigma and break the silence around mental illness... to live the hope! 🍏

-The Rev. ReNe'e Teague serves at Enon UMC in Studley.



Resources

National Alliance on Mental Illness: **www.NAMI.org**

NAMI FaithNet: **www.nami.org/namifaithnet**

Mental Health Ministries: **www.MentalHealthMinistries.net**

Pathways to Promise: **www.Pathways2Promise.org**

VICOMIM (Virginia Interfaith Committee on Mental Illness Ministries): **www.vaumc.org/gm/micom.htm**

FACES (Family Advocacy Creating Education and Services) in Chesterfield; Pat Myers of St. Marks UMC in Midlothian is one of the founding directors: **www.facesva.org**

VOCAL (Virginia Organization of Consumers Asserting Leadership), a nonprofit organization of people in mental health recovery; hosting a state conference in Harrisonburg May 18-20; Bonnie Neighbour is the executive director: **www.vocalvirginia.org**

The Caring Clergy Project: **<http://www.caringclergyproject.org>**

American Association of Pastoral Counselors: **www.aapc.org**

Congregational Resources: **www.congregationalresources.org**

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) **www.DBSAlliance.org**

DisAbility Ministries Committee of The United Methodist Church: **www.umdisabilityministries.org**

The United Methodist boards of Church and Society and Global Ministries offer a bulletin insert, "Faith & Mental Health - Creating Caring & Sharing Communities": **<http://umc-gbcs.org/resources-websites/faith-and-mental-health-bulletin-insert>**

Find more information and resources concerning United Methodist ministries in this area at: **www.umc.org/mentalhealth**.

Soothing mental anguish by addressing mental illness

By Sarah R. Wastella

It came time to plan the next worship series. Perhaps we felt liberated by the unorthodox worship style of emergent worship, or perhaps we felt the time was long overdue to address the suffering of mental illness. Either way, my worship leader and I found ourselves willing and ready to confront the issue of mental illness in a dedicated worship service during the prime time of Sunday morning. We decided to lead off this worship series on "Taboo Topics in Church" with mental illness, and we called it "The Weak are Made Strong." Little did we know we were getting ready to open the flood gates, literally.

Emergent worship invites the gathered people to physically respond to the Word, usually getting up and doing something. Traditional and Contemporary Christian worship have emergent elements, such as the invitation to proclaim our faith, and so we come forward to be baptized and the invitation to receive the grace of Holy Communion. We wanted to offer people several means of responding to God's Word with a topic as heavy, personal and uncomfortable as mental illness. We devised three stations: the first was a mirror with the title "Mental Illness" written across the top and "Lord, we pray..." along the bottom, where people were invited to write the name of someone they knew who had or was struggling with mental illness. The second station was a standard ladder with white

We cannot control whether we will come into contact with mental illness or suffer through it ourselves, but we absolutely can control how we will respond. What if we are being called to and offered opportunities to be vessels of God's healing to those who suffer this?

candles of various sizes and styles on every rung. People lit a match off the Christ candle and lit a candle as a sign of our willingness to be present with those who suffer with mental illness, a candlelight vigil in a sense. The last was the incorporation of our standard prayer and offering cards. We have bifold prayer cards where we invite people to anonymously write or draw their prayers, place them in a basket, and the clergy echo the prayers throughout the week. If they have monetary offerings, they are tucked into the cards, too.

There was a mix of teenagers, parents of young children, a few couples and single adults that day. We started by reading the statement of The United Methodist Church in its Social Principles displayed on our multimedia television. I told the gathered Body of Christ that we were getting ready to get real, perhaps uncomfortably real, and that they were in a safe place to express any and all emotions that should arise. I explained that I was going to share not only the official United Methodist stance on mental illness, but that I was going to offer my own reflection, and that they were free to agree, disagree or anything in between. I emphasized that we agree on the most important thing: Christ is our Lord and Savior, and because of that, we can work everything else out.

The Scripture I read came first from Job (7:1-7), and it contained the lament of Job that his suffering felt endless. It is dismal, depressing and resonates the hopelessness than can accompany mental illness.

It was followed by a second reading, the text of Luke 4:18-19, when Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah and declares his purpose, especially "to let the oppressed go free." I wanted to underscore that Christ came to heal,



restore the wholeness we were intended to have as those created in the image of God, and set us free from sin and death, as well as all that leads us towards them. I preached the hard truth that the Church had throughout its entire history often contributed unjustly to the stigma of mental illness and that we needed to focus on how we respond to those who suffer, not judge why they do. As people of hope, we have a duty to be present with those who endure the internal prison of mental illness, as well as their families and friends impacted and held captive along with their loved one. I challenged us all to resist the urge to flee, to turn aside, to ignore and to hide. Instead, would we be willing to consider moving closer, taking up the call to offer grace and exhibit love in a multiplicity of ways? We have an opportunity to repent of our collective sins with regard to mental illness and embrace the liberation to love in tangible and healing means.

There were a lot of downcast eyes. There were quite a few tears shed. I shared my own battles with depression. I introduced the emergent elements, made the invitation and then I waited with bated breath. Slowly, one by one, they started to get up and respond. I watched the mirror fill with names. I watched the dark corner start to be illuminated with candle light. I watched people write on their prayer cards, some needing to turn them over and continue on the back.

By the time we closed our worship with "Christ in Me" by Tim Timmons, I could still see struggle, but also resolution on each face. My congregation has struggled with addiction, depression, suicide, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and a multitude of other names for mental struggle and anguish. Now we were opening doors, even those in our hearts, to responding in a new way. I told them that we cannot control whether we will come into contact with mental illness or suffer through it ourselves, but we absolutely can control how we will respond. What if we are being called to and offered opportunities to be vessels of God's healing to those who suffer this?

We closed worship with a benediction from Romans 8, the same selection of verses often read at funerals, where Paul declares that nothing can separate us from the love of God. "If nothing in heaven or on earth can separate us from the love of God, then how can we allow ourselves to be anything but the manifest love of God for those who are suffering from mental illness?" I offered. The church has work to do in the realm of mental illness. We as individual Christians have stigmas to overcome, to lay aside, and to reject. Our work is before us. Christ is within us. May those that need us find us by their side, faithful and willing.

-The Rev. Sarah Wastella is associate at Larchmont UMC.

10 ways to have better mental health

By Julia Kayser Frisbie

Healthy habits positively influence how a person feels and how his or her body functions. Good health involves not only caring for our bodies, but also our minds. Overall wellness is not possible without mental health. The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is partnering with Mental Health America to raise awareness of the role mental health plays in our lives. Here are 10 tools that you can use to improve your mental health:

- ❖ Stay connected. Nurture relationships with family and friends. A church or volunteer community can be a great way to connect with the people who are most important to you.
- ❖ Stay positive. UMCOR shares stories of hope from around the world with a message: You have the power to make a difference. Remember to extend the same compassion to yourself as you do to the people you serve.
- ❖ Get physically active. Exercise releases endorphins that can make you feel good and help your brain function at its best.
- ❖ Help others. There are underserved people in every community. Who could you reach out to? Do any organizations in your area have a need that your church could fill?
- ❖ Get enough sleep. We may not know why, but research shows that sleep deprivation can cause a mental fog, slower reflexes and emotional instability.
- ❖ Create joy and satisfaction. Laughter can be good medicine. It decreases pain and anxiety by relaxing muscles and, like exercise, it helps to release endorphins.
- ❖ Eat well. Food doesn't just fuel your body; it fuels your brain.
- ❖ Take care of your spirit. Cultivate a prayer life that calms and centers you. Lean on your faith community. Explore spiritual disciplines.
- ❖ Seek help during hard times. Crisis changes us, but it doesn't have to break us. Reach out to your faith community. Try to get even better exercise, sleep and nutrition than normal.
- ❖ Get professional help if you need it. Nobody needs to go it alone. Reaching out to a mental health professional is like hiring a personal trainer at the gym.

United Methodist congregations minister with people affected by mental illness through prayer, support groups and honest dialogue. Support this work with a donation to Disability Ministries, Advance #3021054.

-Julia Kayser Frisbie is a writer and a regular contributor to www.umcor.org

Making children's mental health a priority

By Greg Peters

December 2012 was a wake-up call for America, when a mentally ill young adult entered Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., and took the lives of 26 individuals, including many children. Sadly, these lives could have been saved if the gunman, Adam Lanza, had gotten the mental help he needed as a child.

We follow the headlines when someone with a serious mental health problem guns down children in an elementary school or goes on a shooting rampage at Virginia Tech, but are our eyes open and are we called to advocate as we realize mental illness impacts our neighbor, a co-worker, a friend's child or family member? We are familiar with health epidemics such as polio, HIV-AIDS and tuberculosis, but we must raise our awareness and acknowledge as a country that we are currently faced with mental illness which impacts us personally and in our state and country as much or more than physical epidemics.

In more than 38 years providing clinical services and leading an organization – United Methodist Family Services (UMFS) – that provides a wide array of services throughout Virginia to children, youths and young adults suffering from mental illness, I am encouraged by health care reform which includes insurance coverage for behavioral assessments for children so we can address mental health issues at an early stage.

I am deeply discouraged that Virginia is gridlocked on Medicaid expansion. Many children and adults who do not have access to behavioral health care would be able to receive the care they so desperately need. We have an opportunity to address this epidemic, but what stands in our way?

One in five children and adolescents in the U.S. has a mental disorder that interferes with their daily lives. But, fewer than one in five actually receives the mental health services that they need. Anxiety disorders, mood disorders like depression and disruptive disorders like ADHD are the most common mental health disorders among children. When left untreated, children with these mental health disorders are at risk of failing out of school, increased family conflicts, substance abuse, violence, even suicide.

What is keeping children from getting the mental help that they need? There are three barriers. The stigma of a child with a mental health issue such as depression holds many parents back from talking to someone about their child's problem. Only 15 percent of children who have difficulties have parents that seek help from a health care provider or school counselor.


The second barrier is a lack of access to care. Pediatricians are not trained to recognize and treat psychiatric problems.

Limited time during a check-up does not allow for in-depth analysis of a child's mental state. A year ago I spoke with pediatricians who were frustrated because if they had more community resources such as access to a trained children's therapist from an organization such as UMFS they could address the behavioral issues that often have more chronic impact on children and their families than the physical ailment that brought them to their office. UMFS has just placed our first mental health clinician in a pediatric practice and have a partnership with this health care provider to expand this model to other pediatric and family practices. There is also a shortage of mental health professionals that are trained to work with children in Virginia and across the nation.

The third barrier is a lack of funding and priority for early intervention and prevention services. Early intervention for children is critical to prevent more serious mental health episodes as they move into adolescence and adulthood. We need to have conversations with children about how they are feeling and be open to getting help at the slightest hint of a problem.

We must demand better access to and funding for children's ongoing mental health treatment.

Many of you may have been impacted indirectly or directly by mental illness. It has had a personal impact. My brother-in-law suffered from paranoid schizophrenia. After years of treatment including hospitalizations and periods of extended placements in treatment facilities, he died in his mid-30s. Several suicide attempts did not take his life, but it is believed that years of medication did. I sat with another family member who was voluntarily admitting themselves for psychiatric hospitalization and experienced with them being left for several hours in a bare room with little staff contact as they sat without their shoe strings and belt with empty pockets so they could not harm themselves. This sterile impersonal treatment not only depressed and angered me but it also solidified my conviction that our loved ones, friends and community members deserve better.

In comparison, recently I visited a partnership that UMFS developed with Fairfax County, Leland House, which provides an unlocked crisis stabilization program in a community residence in lieu of secure psychiatric hospitalization. As I sat at the dining room table talking with youths dealing with serious mental health issues, their parents, and staff I was struck by the open supportive environment as well as the dignity and respect that was shown. It gave me hope that we can do better, and through raising our awareness and advocating for a better system of mental health for children we can turn the growing tide of mental illness in our communities and nation. 

-Greg Peters is CEO and President of United Methodist Family Services.



The Joy of the Lord

By Keary Kincannon

Rising Hope United Methodist Mission Church in Alexandria purposefully embraces the most marginalized members of our community. If you were to join us for a Sunday morning worship service it would be obvious to you that we are an incredibly diverse community, not only racially and economically, but with a range of able-bodied and disabled worshippers. Some are very obviously suffering from a mental health condition.

Unfortunately in our society, negative attitudes and beliefs toward people who have a mental health condition are common. The stigma of mental illness is sometimes worse than the illness itself. It can cause families to reject loved ones and bring about extreme self-rejection, doubt and depression.

People with mental illness are robbed of the opportunities that define a quality life: good jobs, safe housing, satisfactory health care and affiliation with a diverse group of people. For this reason they are embraced at Rising Hope.

Joy had many quirks that drew attention to her struggles. Joy was not her real name but the name she chose to be called because it exemplified her stance toward life. Every few minutes during my sermons she would let out a loud squeal of delight whenever she heard something that connected her with the Grace of God. She could not understand why others were so distracted by her gleeful outbursts of joy. Additionally she was very stubborn, and it was obvious that in spite of her joy she had a degree of paranoia. For months she and her teenage daughter hid their homelessness from school officials; homelessness being another stigma that often compounds the stigma of mental illness.

Joy and her daughter found a welcoming home at Rising Hope. With our support and the help of others they eventually found a place to live.

In spite of the hardships her illness caused her, Joy was

emphatic about God's love and grace. Whenever I had a serious spiritual discussion with her I was amazed at the depth of her faith in Christ ... in spite of the sometimes paranoid logic directed towards those who tried to help her.

Joy passed away two years ago from a stroke.

There are many that come to Rising Hope, like Joy, who have serious mental health issues. Joy became a greeter on Sunday mornings. Others with mental health issues volunteer in our outreach ministries. Some serve on our administrative committees. We do our best to embrace everyone at Rising Hope and bring everyone into the healing presence of Christ. For some the healing is welcomed and obvious. For others it is not. But I know our life as a congregation is blessed as a result of our embrace. 🍀

-The Rev. Keary Kincannon is pastor at Rising Hope UMC, Alexandria District

Governor, Republican legislators both plan to help Virginia's mentally ill

Republicans in the Virginia House of Delegates announced in mid-February that their state budget plan will include \$124 million for mental health care — slightly more than the money proposed last fall by Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe.

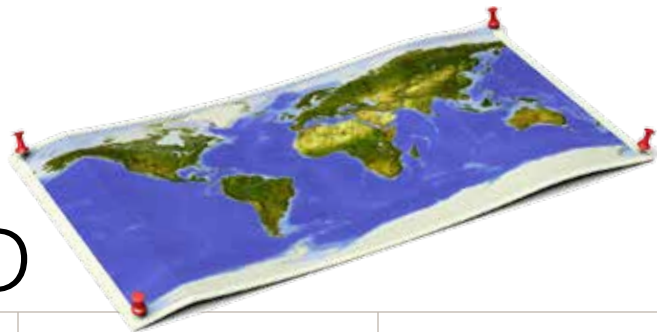
The move reflects a bid to build on mental health reforms begun after a tragedy involving a senator's son. The issue was among the most prominent in last year's legislative session following the 2013 suicide of Austin "Gus" Deeds, the mentally ill son of Sen. Creigh Deeds, D-Millboro.

McAuliffe spokesman Brian Coy said the governor felt that the plan was not too different from his own. "The Governor is happy to see House Republicans recognize the need to expand care for thousands of Virginians with serious mental illness," McAuliffe's office said in a statement.

The Republican plan does have major differences from the governor's. McAuliffe has created the Governor's Access Plan, or GAP, as a way to provide medical and mental-health care for 20,000 of the state's most severely mentally ill individuals. The Republican plan would cover 30,000 mentally ill people, but only provide them with psychiatric care, including psychiatric prescription coverage. It would not provide them with broader health care.

"Let's be clear: We are not expanding Medicaid, not funding the specifics the governor put out," said Del. John O'Bannon, R-Henrico. 🍀

Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD



Slain hostage was following call to offer aid

By Kathy Gilbert

Kayla Mueller died 6,000 miles from her Arizona home, taken hostage and then killed as she followed her call to offer humanitarian aid in Syria.

Friends and family say the 26-year-old was walking the path she believed God set for her.

A close friend and campus minister at the college Mueller attended said the young woman was not the "high-energy, do-gooder saint" she has been portrayed as in some media

reports.

"She was so laid back, so very humble. She saw the suffering before her and tried to respond," said the Rev. Kathleen Day, who was Mueller's campus minister at Northern Arizona University.

Mueller was an active member of the United Christian Ministry, an ecumenical campus ministry that includes The United Methodist Church, at Northern Arizona University.

The Mueller family confirmed their daughter's death Feb. 10. Kayla was captured in August 2013 by the Islamic State group, but the family had kept it a secret because ISIS threaten to kill their daughter if it was made public she was a hostage.

Day is part of a close knit community who knew of Mueller's kidnapping in 2013 and has been in close touch with the family throughout the ordeal.

"The family is focusing on hope and on keeping Kayla's message alive," Day said. "Their faith is strong. They are remarkable people, which is no surprise given their remarkable daughter."

After her death, the Mueller family made public a letter Kayla wrote to them while she was in captivity.

"By God and by your prayers I have felt tenderly cradled in freefall. I have been shown in darkness light and have learned that even in prison, one can be free. I am grateful. I have

come to see that there is good in every situation, sometimes we just have to look for it," she wrote.

Day described the way Kayla lived her life as "Christ-like."

"She poured out her life and she really didn't worry about whether she had enough. She worried about those who did not have enough. Her call was to use her gifts, her knowledge and privilege to fill someone else's cup ... and she called us to do the same."

Day said when she first heard the rumors that Mueller had been kidnapped she immediately called Mueller's parents to offer prayers and support.

"Her parents have not felt the absence of God, they have felt the presence of God through all this."

Marsha Mueller, Kayla's mother, told Day she used to sing, "He Who Began a Work in You," to her daughter when she was a child.

Kayla regularly wrote a blog. In 2011, she wrote: "I find God in suffering. I've known for some time what my life's work is, using my hands as tools to relieve suffering."

Among those offering support is United Methodist Bishop Robert Hoshibata, episcopal leader of the Desert Southwest Conference.

"Horror struck close to home," he said when he heard of her death.

"Loving God, we turn

(Continued on pg. 33: "Mueller")



Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD

General Board of Pension and Health Benefits adopts new investment guidelines

The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of The United Methodist Church (GBPHB), and its investment management division, have announced the implementation of two new investment guidelines.

The board's directors voted to exclude certain investments in coal and avoid investing in companies meeting certain thresholds that operate in countries with "a prolonged and systematic pattern of human rights violations." These changes are just starting to take effect.

The changes come with an eye toward both church values and the long-term financial returns of United Methodist beneficiaries, say board staff.

GBPHB's Chief Investment Officer David Zellner explained, "Climate change and the protection of human rights are two specific issues that can affect company performance and our investment returns. They are also important issues for members of The United Methodist Church, participants in the benefit plans and other stakeholders. The new guidelines are intended to influence our engagement priorities, but they may also lead to the exclusion from our investment funds of securities of

certain high-risk companies until the risk of holding them has been mitigated."

The pension board manages retirement plans for more than 91,000 participants, including United Methodist clergy and lay employees. The board oversees \$21 billion in assets, including the largest church pension fund in the United States.

The Fossil Free UMC movement is urging that coal, petroleum and natural gas be added to the denomination's investment exclusions. The Baltimore-Washington, California-Nevada, Pacific Northwest and Virginia conferences have approved resolutions to study the issue. The movement cites the *Book of Discipline*, which speaks of the dangers greenhouse gases pose to the overall climate and the economically vulnerable. The church's Social Principles urge world governments and United Methodists to work toward the reduction of such emissions.

Details on GBPHB's sustainable investment strategies and the implementation of the guidelines for climate change and Human Rights can be found at <http://gbophb.org/climatechange> and <http://gbophb.org/humanrights>. 

The UMC at a Crossroads: A Conversation

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

Saturday, March 7, 2015, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Woodlake United Methodist Church
15640 Hampton Park Drive, Chesterfield, VA 23832

Featured speakers:




Rev. Tom Berlin
Pastor, Floris UMC



Rev. Rob Renfro
Woodlands UMC, Texas, and
President of Good News

To register or for more information, go to www.efumcva.org.
Cost: \$25 includes lunch (\$30 after February 28)

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EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



11 steps to Creation Care

By Katie Davis

The earth is a gift from God who entrusted us with its care. We practice service to others and the earth by taking care of it. We must understand that most of us constantly consume resources such as food, water, oil, etc. One way to care for our creation is to reduce our consumption of its resources.

However, in our consumption-driven culture, creation care can seem daunting and confusing, and we sometimes do not know where to start. So,

we continue our consumption with reckless abandon. But I also believe that we need to go far beyond turning off the lights when we leave a room. I fully support the age-old mantra “reduce, reuse, recycle, repurpose...”

I began personally addressing my consumption by starting with reduce. If we all simply reduce our consumption, we could seriously reduce our carbon footprint.

Here is a list of 11 ways that I personally try to reduce waste:

1. Reusable bags: If you go to the grocery store, bring reusable bags. I save and reuse the plastic bags used for produce.

2. Household items (plastic baggies, paper towels and cleaning supplies): We wash and reuse the Ziploc plastic bags several times. I try to use cloth kitchen towels instead of paper towels to clean up spills. My housemates and I use easy-to-make cleaning products instead of store bought chemicals. For example, white vinegar diluted with water cleans and disinfects just about anything and it costs much less than other kitchen spray cleaners. Also, I use Castile soap diluted with water and baking soda to mop, clean the bathroom, etc. You can find ideas and recipes through a simple Google search.

3. Laundry soap: My housemates and I make

our own laundry detergent from a recipe found on the Internet. We spend about \$20 for 6 months-worth of detergent that is free of phosphate and other harsh chemicals.

4. Menstrual cup: This one is for ladies to use instead of tampons or pads. I won't provide a ton of details, but women produce way more trash than men simply due to our tampon and pad consumption.

5. Drive less: Cars use a ton of energy and are just not efficient. We will never really address our consumption until we break our addiction to cars. So maybe choose a day or two a week to take the bus instead of driving.

6. Compost: A number of cities now have companies that will pick up your compost. If you do have a yard, you can actually compost directly in the soil. Simply dig a hole, add some water and cover it back up. No grains, meat or dairy.

7. Travel mugs and water bottles: Bring your own mug to the coffee shop. And pack your own water. Tap water is less expensive than bottled water, and many bottled water companies have questionable ethics.

8. AC/Heat: Set the temperature in your house lower in the winter and higher in the summer, especially during the day when you're not home and at night while you are sleeping. Again, this saves



money and energy.

9. Packaging: Try to buy things in bulk with less packaging. Reuse plastic and glass packaging. I started using containers for my lunch instead of using Ziploc bags. We also store our food leftovers in reusable containers.

10. Food: Buy local, organic and seasonal. I know that it can cost more money. But buying seasonal produce will reduce cost, and sometimes farmers markets are cheaper than grocery stores depending on when you go.

11. Advocacy: We need major impact and policy changes to enact real changes. Talk to your church or organization about ways to enact some of these things. (For example, I recently asked my church to stop using Styro-foam cups.) Find out about the policy changes in your area and support them. For example, California recently passed a state-wide tax on plastic bags, but many other cities have similar initiatives. Many organizations, such as Clean Water Action, organize around these issues, so find out what they are and consider getting involved. 🍀

-Katelyn (Katie) Davis, mission intern with the General Board of Global Ministries, who serves with the Workers Defense Project in Dallas, Texas, shares ways we can reduce our carbon footprint by reducing waste. She is originally from Arlington, grew up in Mount Olivet UMC, and is supported by the Virginia Conference.

How to enter the digital age

by Fiona Soltes

Whether you're a pastor wondering how a church Facebook page might affect your congregation or a university leader considering upping the "connectivity" on campus through increased use of mobile devices, take a deep breath; you're already at an advantage. Those who have gone before have already made the fledgling mistakes, and some basic best practices are emerging.

Kathryn Reklis, assistant professor of theology at Fordham University and a research fellow with the New Media Project, has heard the concerns of Christian ministry leaders challenged by the idea of using Twitter, handling a Facebook page and writing a blog in addition to more traditional duties.

Ideally, however, the process is a collaborative one. "It's not meant to be something a pastor does all by himself or herself. A great church Facebook page may be staffed by four or five people." Her advice? "Just start."

Engaging new media, however, can't just be about the technology. Here are some other factors to consider from those who have been thinking about the church in the digital age:

Mission: For leaders of Christian institutions, it's important to ask questions about the ways new technology will enhance and advance mission. Rather than just picking the most recent – or most popular – platform or device, ask first where you want to go, and then ask which one will help you get there. "You have to ask, 'What is all this technology really doing?'" said Mark Hamilton, associate dean of Abilene Christian University's Graduate School of Theology.

Cost: When Abilene Christian University (ACU) decided to create a high-tech learning environment "without boundaries," financial commitments had to be weighed against potential outcomes. "You've got to really wrestle with the cost of technology," said John Weaver, the school's dean of library services and educational technology. "These are sometimes expensive endeavors."

In addition to its own funding, ACU received support from AT&T, and over time, with the help of documented studies and outcomes, has continued to receive grants. In 2011, for example, the school received close to \$250,000 from the Next Generation Learning Challenges program, which is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the William and Flora



Hewlett Foundation. The money will be used in ACU mobile-enhanced learning programs at two schools with low-income students at high risk of failing or dropping out.

Potential partnerships: AT&T has provided support for mobile learning research at ACU as well as the university's Learning Studio. In addition, ACU has partnered with CitySquare, a nonprofit that addresses the root causes of poverty in inner-city Dallas. ACU@CitySquare offers living and learning experiences that help students understand issues such as poverty and justice, but it also will offer access to cutting-edge technology to poor people.

"It's important that you seek partnerships with both for-profit and nonprofit organizations that share your mission," Weaver said. "AT&T and

(Continued on page 31: "Digital")

Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



The Rev. Charlie Baber serves as the Minister to Youth, Families and Missions at Highland UMC in Raleigh, N.C. Baber grew up in Cartersville, attending Oakwood UMC in the Farmville District. He has an M.Div from Duke Divinity School and a B.A. in Religious Studies from Gardner-Webb University. Baber was ordained a Deacon in Full Connection in the Virginia Conference in 2010. He is the author and illustrator of Wesley Bros Comics, a weekly web comic featuring John and Charles Wesley as if they were themselves in today's world. The comic can be found at www.wesleybros.com. Charlie and his wife, Lori, have two children.

March 1 Baptismal identity John 1:29-34

How are your Lenten commitments going this week? It's been about a week and a half since you gave up chocolate, or cussing, or vegetables or homework (as some of the teens I work with are apt to give up for Lent). Have you felt strong? Have you already given in to temptation? One year I gave up all beverages but water, and the coffee headaches were just awful. Even so, I had to ask myself: has giving up coffee profoundly helped me point my life toward the God who became human and emptied himself unto death? Or is it just some sort of personal achievement to say, "Hey, look what I did!"

I do remember that coffee never tasted better than it did that Easter morning.

The season of Lent is a period of 40 days, leading into Easter Sunday, where the Church has traditionally promoted sacrifice and penitence. It is connected to the 40 days of fasting in the wilderness that Jesus underwent before he began his earthly ministry. The early church used the 40 days of Lent for intense teaching and training of confirmands, those people who would be baptized and join the Church on Easter Sunday. We are in a season focused on one thing: Let go of everything but God.

That's what we in youth ministry call baptismal identity. Look at the waters and remember that God has claimed you as God's own child. God has placed the Third Person of the Holy Trinity in your fragile body. Whatever you were before and whatever the world tries to make you, God has claimed you as someone worth dying for. Lent helps us empty ourselves to make room for God. It is a time to join John the Baptist's mantra that Christ must increase and I must decrease.

May this week of your Lenten journey help you remember who you are and so remember God. You are a son or daughter of God and a co-heir with Christ. Let go of everything but God, and you will find the taste of the Spirit in your life is even better than coffee on Easter morning.

March 8 The Comforter John 14: 15-26

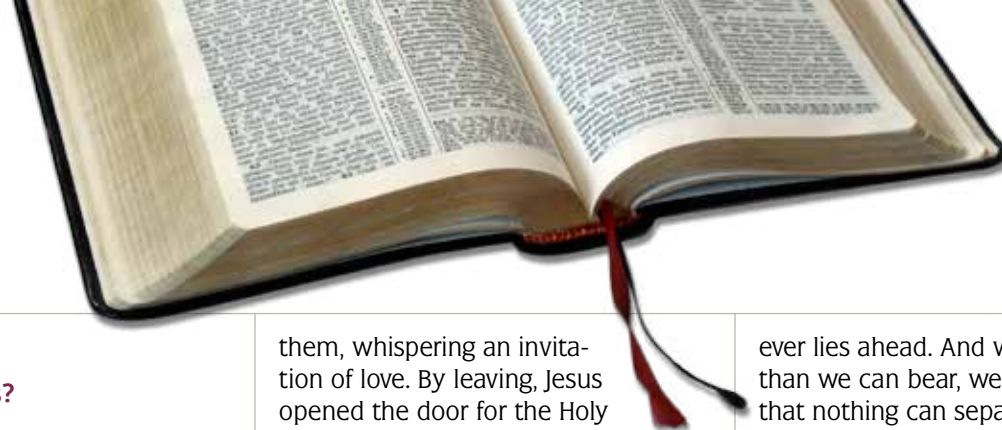
Even when it's hot outside, I like to have a comforter on my bed. There's something about being surrounded by a big, heavy blanket that makes me feel so safe I could just fall asleep. When I was a kid, I could pull the comforter over my head if I got scared in the middle of the night and somehow convince myself that nothing outside that blanket could harm me.

As a parent of small children, I will sometimes find a small lump of kitty hiding under the comforter on the bed, camouflaged from the reckless hugs of our overzealous toddler.

One of the best appeals of the Christian faith is not just that God chose to become one of us in the person of Jesus Christ and save us from death through his resurrection... That's incredible beyond all belief! But God gives us even more: the Holy Spirit is with us. John 14 comes at the end of Jesus' life, and it is a beautiful picture of the mystery of God's nature. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in a way we just cannot comprehend. And when God gives us the Holy Spirit, we are wrapped up into the security of that mysterious community of love.

The Holy Comforter is God alive in us, is with us always. When my faith is on the brink of destruction, when the hurricanes of death and suffering threaten to sink me beneath their waters, I have a Comforter. When I threw my hospital chaplain's badge away in despair over the useless and unfair deaths of the young, I was surrounded by a Comforter. When I recognize my own failures at holy living, I have been carried by a Comforter.

God does not hide us away from troubles, like a child hides under a blanket. God has ultimate victory over those troubles and promises to endure hardships with us. My comfort is not in a false hope that I will be protected from suffering. My comfort is in knowing ... more than that, sensing God's very presence within me through it all.



March 15

Better than Jesus?

John 16:4b-15

I remember the first time I really prayed. I was a teenager and the youth pastor had sat in front of an empty chair. He said that prayer was one of three things: Either you are 1) talking to yourself to make yourself feel better; 2) talking to the ceiling which makes you certifiably crazy; or 3) talking to the God of the Universe who is really right there listening as if he were sitting in the chair looking back at you.

I grew up in Cumberland County, Virginia, where I'm pretty sure there are still no stoplights. You can see the Milky Way on a cloudless night. I remember after that message, looking out of my bedroom window at the splendor of the universe and beginning to pray... I say that was the first time I "really" prayed because it was the first time I realized that the God who made all that out there, the God who was bigger than this universe, was also right there in my bedroom listening to me, caring about what I had to say. It felt like a flood washing through me, beyond my control, like I was hanging on for dear life just to get an audience with this incredibly personal God.

Jesus makes a pretty bold claim in John 16, "I assure you that it is better for you that I go away." What's better than Jesus? What could possibly be better than God putting on a face to share love and truth and sacrifice and resurrection?

By leaving (which we celebrate on Ascension Day), Jesus unleashed the Holy Spirit of God into the world. As Wesleyans, we believe that Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension brought about what we call 'prevenient grace,' or grace that goes before all of us, drawing everyone back to God. We believe that there is no one who does not have the Holy Spirit working in

them, whispering an invitation of love. By leaving, Jesus opened the door for the Holy Spirit to be that presence of God right there, listening to a young boy's prayer as he looks at the stars from his bedroom window.

March 22

The breath of God

John 20:19-23

A good friend gave me some parenting advice once. He said, "When your daughter tells you there's a monster in her closet, a good dad doesn't look in the closet and say, 'There's nothing there.' A good dad goes in the closet, fights the monster, comes back out with his shirt half unbuttoned and his hair all a-mess and says, 'I took care of the monster. He won't be coming back.'"

The first approach doesn't give my daughter any peace, because what if I missed a spot when I was looking? And what if that spot was the very spot the monster chose to hide? But if I can demonstrate to her that I'm stronger than the monster and that I would never let the monster hurt her, I'm working with her imagination to give her a stronger sense of peace that allows her to go to sleep.

When Jesus returned from the dead, he demonstrated to his disciples that he had overcome something far greater than imaginary closet monsters. Jesus overcame sin and death. But more than that, he breathed the Spirit of God into them. Like God breathed life into Adam at the dawn of human history, Jesus breathes new life into disciples when we meet the risen Christ. More than just conquering the monsters, Jesus gives us the Spirit so that we can overcome the monsters when they come our way. The Spirit of peace meets us in our troubles and gives us strength and courage to face what-

ever lies ahead. And when it's more than we can bear, we are promised that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

So maybe my friend was wrong with his parenting technique. The next time my daughter thinks there's a monster in my closet, maybe I'll take her with me to fight it. That way, she knows I am with her, and even when it seems like I'm not, she has been given the power to overcome. 🐉

("Digital," continued from pg. 29)

CitySquare have both been essential in advancing our mission for technology. We could not have done it alone."

Buy-in: If the goal of new technology is reaching new people – and better connecting the ones already around – spend some time figuring out where they're already active. Communities thrive when participation is organic rather than top-down. In addition, when forging plans and moving ahead, don't forget to invite all voices to the table – including the "digital natives."

"Part of the issue is often that the decision makers in the process are not the digital natives," Hamilton said. "It's the boomers. I'm 48, and it's those my age and older who are making all of the decisions. These kids, the digital natives, don't remember a time before email. This just is. Talking about the time before is the same as talking about riding around in chariots." 🐉

-Fiona Soltes is a freelance writer in Nashville.

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS



The Rev. Melvin Ott Davis, 79, died Jan. 28, 2015. Davis was ordained a Deacon in 1961 and an Elder in 1964. He served several churches

in the Virginia Conference: Calvary-Olive Branch Charge, Trinity in Poquoson, Tyler Memorial, Shady Grove, Chuckatuck, Deep Creek, Stratford Hills, Front Royal, Chester, Oaklette, Belmont in Richmond, and Bermuda Hundred. He retired in 1996. Davis is survived by his wife, Betty. A memorial service was held at Chester UMC.



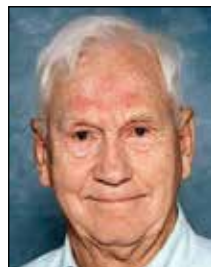
The Rev. Robert J. Day, 88, of Chase City, died Feb. 10, 2015. He served a number of appointments in the Virginia Conference, including

Shiloh, Patrick Springs, Mount Olivet (Danville), St. Mark's (Cloverdale), Grace, McGuire Park, Fairview, Rodes, Providence-Woodland, Tappahannock Memorial, Mathews Chapel. Day retired in 1992 but served Broadnax and Providence in retirement. Among the surviving family is a son, the Rev. Michael G. Day, who serves the Lakeland Charge of the Farmville District. The funeral service was held at Rehoboth UMC in LaCrosse.



The Rev. Dr. Frankie Lee Perdue, 61, of Christiansburg, died Jan. 19, 2015. An Indiana native, he was a United States Army veteran,

serving three years active duty and four years in the United States Army Reserves. He earned several degrees in Christian Ministry and Biblical Theology, with the last being a Doctor of Ministry degree attained in 2000 from Trinity Theological Seminary, Newburg, Ind. Ordained Elder in 1992, he served faithfully within the Virginia Conference for 20 years including West Campbell, Brucetown-Welltown Charge, Front Royal, Calvary in Roanoke, St Matthias, Louisa and Ettrick. Survivors include his wife of 39 years, Edris T. Perdue. He was buried with full military honors at the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Dublin.



The Rev. Garry Shelton, 92, of Roanoke, a retired clergy member of the Virginia Conference, died Feb. 5, 2015. He began his ministerial career in 1950

at Mount Tabor. He went on to serve Madison, Scottsville, Franktown-Johnsons, Ettrick, Peakland and Central in Hampton. He retired in 1987 and then served North Amherst, Wesleyan in the Charlottesville District, Ephesus/Nicopolis in the Lynchburg District, and Otter and Ebenezer in the Roanoke District. Survivors include his wife, Virginia. A memorial service was held at Greene Memorial UMC.

Robert Lee Yancey, 62, died Jan. 14, 2015. He is survived by wife of 39 years, Deborah H. Yancey of Danville. He served as lay supply pastor to Anderson Chapel UMC until his health prevented it. Funeral services were held at Trinity UMC.

Jeanne Griffin Gochenour died Jan. 26, 2015. She was the mother of **the Rev. Bob Gochenour**, serving at Stephens City UMC, Winchester District.

Aileen Mae Hogge, of Richmond, died Feb. 1, 2015. She was the wife of retired pastor **the Rev. W. Ernest Hogge**.

Mark Henry Monge, husband of **the Rev. Kathleen Monge**, pastor at Fairview UMC, Danville District, died Jan. 17, 2015.

Gunthilde Spilman, wife of **Dr. Martin K. Spilman Sr.**, died Feb. 2, 2015.

Margaret Bridgers Winfree, 91, widow of **the Rev. Charles L. Winfree**, died Jan. 14, 2015.

Rosemarie Wooddell, widow of **the Rev. James R. Wooddell**, died on Feb. 1, 2015.

BIRTHS

The Rev. Jason C. Stanley and his wife, **the Rev. Megan J. Saucier**, announce the birth of a daughter, **Jayne Carter Stanley**, born Jan. 5, 2015. Stanley is minister of Youth and Education at Peakland UMC. Saucier is associate pastor of Heritage UMC, both in Lynchburg.

Abigail Jane Webber was born to parents **Robert and Vickie Webber** on Feb. 7. Abigail is the granddaughter of **the Rev. Herb and Judy Brynildsen**; he is the Program Coordinator for the Alexandria and Arlington Districts.

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("Mueller," continued from pg. 26)

to you in prayer in this time of sadness and shock," Hoshibata wrote on a Facebook post. "We recoil at the cruelty that has resulted in the tragic loss of the life of Kayla Mueller. We pray for Kayla's family and all who cherish her."

The bishop said he first learned of Kayla's captivity from Day.

"Since then my fervent prayers have been for Kayla and her family and for those who were then diligently working for her safe return," he said.

Day said Kayla had always participated in projects to help others since grade school and throughout high school. She was involved in high-profile efforts like helping Darfur, and she was also a volunteer in a women's prison.

"She took steps and they weren't giant steps, she just kept walking."

The Islamic State group first claimed Mueller died in a Jordanian airstrike launched as retaliation for the militants' killing of one of its pilots. Jordan denied the claim and U.S. officials have said they do not know how or when she died but are certain it was not in the airstrike. ☞

-Kathy Gilbert is a reporter for United Methodist News Service.

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FROM THE BISHOP



Lent is a time for prayer, reflection

May the grace and peace from our Lord be with you.

March is the month in which we begin hearing the sounds of spring. Soon we will see new signs of life and the beauty of nature around us. God's clock is always right.

March is also the season of Lent. We remember Jesus' suffering and death on the cross and look forward to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the 40 days of Lent, we spend more time in prayer, reading, reflection and the renewal of our faith. Churches provide special programs encouraging prayer, fasting and reflection.

The key question we wrestle with during the Lenten season is "who is Jesus Christ and what is my relationship with Him?" On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus asked his disciples

the question, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Hearing their answers, he went on to ask them a second question: "Who do you say that I am?" This is an important question.

We can answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" by quoting other people's answers. We can quote a well-known theologian's answer or the answer that our pastors have taught us. But what Jesus wants is my answer. This is the reason he asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" I think we need to think about and wrestle with this question very seriously.

John Wesley faced a similar situation while he was in Georgia. When Wesley met Rev. August Spangenberg, one of the pastors of the Germans, Spangenberg asked him these questions: "... Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God?" Wesley was surprised by these questions and did not know how to answer. Observing this, Spangenberg asked, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" Wesley paused and said, "I know he is the Savior of the world." "True," Spangenberg replied; "but do you know that he has saved you?" Wesley answered, "I hope he has died to save me." (From John Wesley's Journal February 1736)

Many people say that Jesus died for us. This is an important confession. But we need to go one step further. Can we also say Jesus died for me? Without truly experiencing God's grace revealed on the cross, we cannot say Jesus died for me. Lent is the season to think about this question seriously and to open ourselves again to the Holy Spirit for a renewal of our faith and a deeper commitment to our Lord.

In this season of Lent, we are going to have the 2015 Bishop's Convocation on Prayer on March 21. This will be our third gathering to learn

more about prayer and also to pray together. Through this convocation, we want to spread the culture of prayer to the churches in the Virginia Conference.

This year we invited the Rev. Sue Nilson Kibbey to be our plenary speaker. She is an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church and currently serves on the West Ohio Conference's executive staff as director of Missional Church Initiatives. She is fully aware of the need for and the importance of prayer for a renewal of our faith and the renewal of our churches. She has many stories to share on how great the power of prayer is and how God changes churches when God's people pray together.

This will be a great time for us to gather together and pray together. We will also learn more about prayer. There will be many workshops to help and to strengthen our prayer life. This will also be a great time for our Prayer Covenant Congregations to get together for sharing what our God has been doing among us.

We, The United Methodist Church, have a proud tradition of strong prayer. John Wesley was a man of prayer. Someone once said of Wesley that he "thought prayer to be more his business than anything else, and I have seen him come out of his closet with a serenity of face next to shining." (From *How to Pray: The Best of John Wesley on Prayer*)

The time has come for us to rediscover our proud tradition of prayer. The time has come for us to kneel down before our Lord. It is the season of Lent. Lord, have mercy on us. 🍷

In our Lord,

Young Jin Cho

ONE LAST WORD



Church team visits UMCOR's Sager Brown Depot

By Joanna Deitz

BALDWIN, La. - We exited the plane, excited to be in mission. Our rental cars took us to a remote area of Louisiana, swallowed by swamps and bayous.

We had safely made it to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Sager Brown Depot. This is a magical place where thousands of kits come to be checked and packed and sent out to foreign countries or places right down the street, giving hope to those whose hope has been buried in the rubble of war, poverty, natural disasters and chaos.

But Sager Brown is not just about sending kits around the world. One of the things I value most about coming to this tiny town in the middle of rural Louisiana is seeing how this community impacts the lives around their town.

Not only does Sager Brown send kits to countries I can't pronounce and flood buckets throughout the United States, Sager Brown is in relationship with the community in which it finds itself. I've done some home improvement projects, fed the hungry, visited a battered women's and children's shel-

Members from St. George's UMC at UMCOR Depot in Sager Brown.

ter, and cleaned homes for the elderly in this community. Everywhere you go, people have a story to share.

Sager Brown has roots as an orphanage, but the school was so good that children from around St. Mary's Parish would send their children there for a better education. Sager Brown prepared these children in a rural, poor area of our country with a strong education for their futures. I have been in the community driving the Sager Brown truck around. People honk, wave or stop and share their stories when you are out in that truck, knowing that you are there to help replace windows, fix dilapidated floors or paint dry wooden house exteriors.

Sager Brown makes a difference in their community. Mission is not just about what can be done far away from home. Mission is living in relationship with your neighbors next door. Mission is knowing the hurts and horrors of the world around you and responding to those cries for help.

This is a lesson to bring back to our homes. Going away for mission opportunities is not bad. Coming home from missions and doing nothing is. Sager Brown teaches that mission opportunities are everywhere. And we are encouraged to find ways to be in relationship with our neighbors. Some of those neighbors are ones we will never meet, being served with a flood bucket or a school kit of learning. But others are right next door, longing for relationships that connect them to something larger than themselves. The question is, how are you sharing your bucket of hope?

You can learn more about UMCOR Sager Brown at www.umcor.org or by calling (337) 923-6238. 🐦

- The Rev. Joanna Dietz is an ordained deacon serving as the Minister of Music at St. George's UMC in Centerville.



Tweets heard 'round the conference

Rethink Church @umrethinkchurch
/Rethinkchurch.org and <http://UMC.org> are down, but here's a cute kitten and pup while you wait.



Megan Harrison @MeganHarrison23
I'm so over this whole getting out of bed every morning thing

Steve Jennings @SteveJennings7
Teens Opposing Poverty ministry in DC, Winchester, Richmond, Berryville, Lynchburg, Roanoke 1st 2 months of 2015!

Andrew Hudgins @andrew_hudgins
"The hard thing about being a bridge is that you get walked on from both ends."

Steven Vornov @Jerseycitysteve
After a day like this one I need some old time Virginia comfort food.

Michael Reaves @revreaves
I love my Wahoos but I am a nervous wreck watching these games.

Lauren Lobenhofer @Chafinhofer
Stuck on Lent Bible Study, asked homebound member what to do. She said "Moses." 4 hours later, study on Moses is planned. #ThanksHolySpirit

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