

May 2016

Advocate

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Virginia Advocate

The official magazine of
the Virginia Conference of
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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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PILLOW TALK



Madeline Pillow
Editor

Our society is very driven by fame, success and the beautiful people.

Our celebrities, who contain all of these qualities, are more accessible than ever. Hop onto Instagram and you can catch what the "hottest" celeb is doing on his vacation. Check out her latest spread in *OK! Magazine* or tune into *E! News* tonight to learn a celebrity's secret on how she got her pre-baby body back in two weeks.

Now I won't lie. I've got my list of "celebrities" who I think are interesting or wonderful actors and stop to read articles about them when I see them (RIP Alan Rickman).

But in this celebrity-focused world, I have yet to find one that makes me stop whatever I am doing and follow his or her every movement. I have yet to find one that makes me say I would "die" to meet them. I might really, really enjoy meeting them but not pass away over it.

I have yet to find one that makes me base my worth up against theirs. And that's one problem I have with our created culture. Celebrities are dangerous illusions. A line from a good movie sums it up, "Illusions are dangerous people. They have no flaws." ("Sabrina", 1995)

And they don't. They are perfection. They are beautiful, successful, charismatic, caring, good people. And in our culture, when we lift people onto pedestals, we forget that we are all the same fundamentally.

We are all made of the same stuff. We will all return to dust. And there's where I find the challenge and the beauty of humans.

While some of us start richer, or more attractive or more charismatic, that holds no flame to the dreams we can have, the goals we can achieve or the impact we can have on people and the world around us.

It's all about worth. What do you think you are worth?

I believe in the cost that Christ paid for me, the worth he placed in freeing me of the burden of sin, of his promises for my life. When you stop bettering yourself or taking that leap of faith because you are comparing yourself to others, you are telling yourself that you aren't worth it.

When we surround ourselves with a culture so focused on looks and material wealth, we set ourselves up to doubt our own worth, especially if it doesn't match what we see in society.

It can be a daily struggle when we compare ourselves to others, celebrities included. But in the end, we are all the same. All the same cracked, flawed beings trying to figure it out.

Something that can be a good refresher is a break from social media or entertainment news (guilty pleasure). When you stop finding and defining your worth within society, you remember where you should really be looking for it.

Here's to celebrating your worth. 🍀

Madeline

Worth



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Photo credit (above): College Creek, Hampton Roads, by Andy Glascott

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LETTERS

Bring life, abundance to older adults

The Older Adult Council of the Virginia Conference provides resources and training for ministry to, by, for and with the older adults of our congregations and in the community at large. As we celebrate May as Older Adult Recognition Month, we are called to consider the roles older adults play in the family of God, how we encourage seniors in their service to God and how we serve them as Jesus calls us to do.

How do seniors respond to Jesus' call on their lives in this season of their lives and how does the church respond to their changing needs, both for ministry and discipleship? How do we reach out to those in their older years, who have never heard the Gospel message? How do we teach those who have incorrectly believed all their lives that it's how they live their lives, not by grace, they are saved?

A clergy member of the Older Adult Council, the Rev. Carol Bookwalter, has shared her experience with elderly church members who face the dying process with fear and the question, "Have I been good enough to get into heaven?"

There are many wonderful, loving, faithful members who have graced our pews every Sunday, been active

participants in the church, but never understood what Jesus means when he says in John 10:10, "I come to bring life and life abundant." They made a profession of faith in a younger season, have promised to follow Jesus and be his disciple, but have never quite understood how to apply it in their day-to-day lives.

Have we made disciples, but failed to grow disciples? Do our churches concentrate on membership, not discipleship; on Jesus as Savior, but not as Lord of our lives? Do we ignore the need for discipleship in our older adults, because we have the mindset expressed in one of our larger churches by the youth leader: "Why should we spend money on our older adults? The future of the church is in the children and youth."

Are we guilty of ageism? Jesus tells us he is the light of the world, and none of us need to walk in darkness, and as his disciples, we are to now be the light of the world. How do we equip the church at every age and season to be the light to this dark and hurting world?

The Council wants to serve you in empowering and equipping the local church for intentional service of older adults and in recognizing the great resource they provide right here in our midst. One of the more exciting programs we offer is called Legacy.

Seniors often think of the legacy they will pass on in material terms, but what is the rich spiritual legacy they can give?

Annie Pierce, Shenandoah UMC, has developed a fun and interesting half-day program, challenging participants to share their own walk with the Lord with their family and neighbors. In partnership with the Virginia United Methodist Homes, Inc., the Council is excited to hear from geriatrician Gary H. Oberlander, M.D. about "Building a Circle of Support: The Role of the Church in Supporting Individuals with Dementia and Their Care Partners."

The Council offers a class on "Experiencing God, Spiritual Disciplines for Seniors," a class on liturgical dance titled "Sacred Circle Dance and Liturgical Dance," and provides resources for assessing buildings for safety and accessibility for those with disabilities.

The Council also sponsors "Olde Time Revivals" regionally, fond remembrance of the revivals where many seniors first made a commitment to follow Jesus. In 2016 the revival will be offered on Oct. 1 at Centreville UMC. The message will feature the Rev. Clarence Brown as well as worship and music led by Michael Berkley of Woodlake UMC.

If you would like to



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

LETTERS

schedule a program or request a list of resources, please contact Council Chair, Suzanne Spencer at schmidley711@gmail.com.

— Suzanne Spencer,
Older Adult Council chair.

Are clergywomen not prepared to assume episcopal candidate role?

I read with great interest the letter from Tammy Estep printed in the March *Advocate*, "It's time to end bigotry in church." The Rev. Estep makes reference to the bigotry against clergywomen in terms of appoint-

ments. I want to address another area of bigotry against clergywomen — endorsement for the episcopacy.

I have been a member of the clergy in the Virginia Conference since 1974 — one of the first women to be ordained in our conference. I was a reserve delegate to Jurisdictional Conference in 1984 when the Rev. Leontine Kelly was elected a bishop in the Western Jurisdiction. In fact, I assumed her delegate chair in the SEJ conference when she left Lake Junaluska to travel to the west coast. Like the Rev. Ted Smith, she was nominated by a

caucus, not the Virginia delegation. She was the first African-American woman to be elected a bishop in any major denomination in the world. It was an opportunity for Virginia to make history. Did we learn from this failure of nerve? No, in all these many years, Virginia has never endorsed a clergywoman for the episcopacy. Why?

While both the Rev. Tom Berlin and the Rev. Ted Smith will make good bishops and provide vital leadership to our church, I wonder why the Virginia

(Continued on page 13:
"CLERGYWOMEN.")

Helping FOSTER and ADOPTIVE families soar

Social workers and other professionals rely on UMFS as a resource. They readily refer their clients to us for placement with a foster family. We are distinguished from other agencies by our passionate staff, our accessibility, and our unwavering support for our families. Since May is National Foster Care Month, we invite you to learn more about our Treatment Foster Care and other foster care programs.

Visit us online at www.umfs.org



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center to close May 7

The Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center (VUMAC) located in Blackstone will close its doors permanently on May 7.

The decision was made by the VUMAC board of directors at a meeting on March 11, according to Sam McCracken, VUMAC executive director.

On March 24, McCracken announced the decision by posting it on Facebook and on the VUMAC website.

"It is with heavy hearts that we have to inform you and your groups/events that the Board of Directors of VUMAC has made the

painful decision to cease operations of VUMAC on May 7, 2016," McCracken wrote. "The Board reached the decision after much prayer. This decision was not an easy one, however in attempting to be good stewards of the facility entrusted to our care, this action had to be taken."

The reason for the closure, McCracken said, is primarily due to the decline of attendance at events held at the center over the last decade.

McCracken acknowledged employees who will be affected by the decision as well as residents of the

community of Blackstone.

"We ask that you remember the employees, past and present, who have served the facility faithfully for many years," McCracken said in his statement. "We will always be indebted to them for their commitment to VUMAC."

Activities scheduled at VUMAC prior to May 7 will still be held at the facility, McCracken said, including a United Methodist Women's (UMW) Spiritual Life retreat, Board of Ministry provisional meeting and the Not-taway High School Junior/Senior prom.

McCracken said plans are in place for a celebration service to officially close the center on April 30 at about 3 p.m. This will coincide with the presence of the UMW and alumni as well as Virginia's Historic Garden Week.

"The decision was a slow-coming process but now that it's been made, a lot is happening quickly," McCracken said.

He also said that VUMAC and the board will release more information as decisions are made and more information is available.

The facility was established in 1892 as The Blackstone Female Institute, a private, religious school for young women. The first year the school operated, it employed six teachers, housed 29 boarders and had 42 day students en-



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rolled. At peak enrollment in 1920, the student body numbered approximately 500 pupils. The school operated under the auspices of the Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South between 1894 and 1950.

In 1920 and 1922, two fires devastated the campus. Leaders of the college rebuilt the school on a smaller scale and reopened. In 1943, the college suspended operations for the duration of World War II, and school buildings were used as apartments by servicemen and their families. Classes resumed in 1945, but dwindling enrollment and the Korean War forced the college to close in 1950. The facility was then purchased by the Virginia Conference and converted into a retreat and conference center, which was opened in 1955.

Notable alumna of Blackstone include actress Bea Arthur and Violeta Chamorro, former president of Nicaragua.

In October 2011, in an effort to reach out to groups outside of The United Methodist Church, The Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center (VUMAC) changed the name under which it marketed itself to Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center. 🌸

Calling 21 helps young adults discern call to ordained ministry

By Emma Johnston

Calling 21, an initiative between the Institute for Church Professions at Shenandoah University, the Virginia Conference, Wesley Theological Seminary and the Fund for Theological Education, has been calling, forming and sending young adults from the conference and across the nation for the past 10 years.

During the summer, college students are placed in churches around Virginia for an eight-week immersion. These students spend a summer deep in the life of a local church, discerning God's call into church leadership. In 10 years, 66 percent of Calling 21 interns have gone on to pursue ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church. While the focus of Calling 21 is to enable students to explore a call to ministry, it also serves to affirm and equip those who are called to lay ministry through music, education, politics and countless other fields in our communities.

Nationwide, there are a number of programs that are following this pattern from Southern Appalachia to Minnesota and to Texas. In the Western Ohio Conference, the Next Generations Leadership Ministry Intern-



ship Program has seen the same trends as the Calling 21 program. As a result of this program in the Western Ohio Conference, at least 60 percent of eligible interns have pursued ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church.

What is it about these programs that appeals to college students? As a former Calling 21 intern, I realized it provided something that I had not been able to find with prior church internships. During orientation at Shenandoah University, I was able to explore my gifts, spend time learning from peers who were also on this journey of exploration and to learn from a half dozen elders and deacons in The United Methodist Church.

There is a reason why grassroots initiatives are making waves denominationally. There are young people crying out for experiences and chances to be in ministry and to do it

in a space where it is okay to take risks. Calling 21 provides that failure-friendly environment. Young adults are discovering where their call is leading by learning and failing and finding those places where their love for God grows.

For Bishop Young Jin Cho, the program has been an effective one in inviting young people to experience the ministry setting and to think about their call.

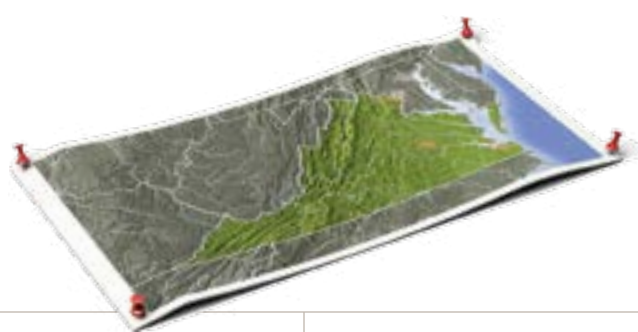
"It has given a positive impact on recruiting young clergy whom we need today. This is a very important investment for today and the future of our church," Bishop Cho said.

The young clergy that come through Calling 21 are well-equipped for what their first appointments may bring them and they are leaders in their communities.

There are many common threads throughout

(Cont. on page 11: "CALLING 21")

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Recovery plans at work for survivors of Virginia Feb. 24 tornadoes

By Madeline Pillow

On Wednesday, Feb. 24, a deadly storm system produced multiple tornadoes that swept from southern Virginia across the state and into the Northern Neck.

Now more than a month later, disaster response efforts for the hardest-hit communities are entering into long-term recovery.

As the immediate horror from the storms has faded a bit behind recovery ef-

forts, it has created a time of reflection on how these communities are banding together.

Communities coming together

The Rev. Bob Parks, Farmville District superintendent, reflected on the morning after the storms in Appomattox where more than 50 structures were destroyed and over 100, including Evergreen UMC, were damaged.

"I was up here [Evergreen UMC] the next morning, as soon as I could get in here, and it just amazed me. There were 25-30 church members that had come. They had everything cleaned in a short period of time. They were working through the damage and

the death of their beloved church member," Parks said.

Keith Harris, a faithful member of Evergreen UMC in Appomattox, was killed by the storms.

When the Rev. Herndon Jeffreys, pastor of Evergreen UMC, made it up that morning, he was struck by the scene.

"I was so struck, not so much this church because it was still standing, but the nature of the damage. It was a very different kind of damage than you would see with a hurricane. It was so targeted. You would see a home and you wouldn't even know there was a home there once."

But the damage led to community building. Jeffreys said the nearby Baptist church which was undamaged immediately set up a place to receive water and food, showing a hospitality to its community.

"One of the first things I heard which made my heart feel so good was one of the members came up and said, 'We have to worship here on Sunday,'" said Jeffreys.

Church members created a work team to clean out the fellowship hall because the sanctuary was unusable.

That first Sunday after the storms, Evergreen held a healing service to emphasize Jesus' healing ministry. Afterwards they held an

Below: The belongings from a family home are divided into piles for recovery efforts.



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anointing service for two purposes according to Jefferys.

"Not just to anoint for purposes of healing, but also in the Bible you were anointed to be a king or for a special purpose. So we anointed everyone also so that they could be agents for healing in the community."

'A time for extreme patience'

The Rev. Bob Pihlcrantz, Virginia Conference Disaster Response coordinator, calls this time before long-term recovery efforts can begin "a time of extreme patience" because of the number of steps that need to happen first within the community and at the local and state government levels.

Right now, staff positions need to be funded for hires as well as planning and resource allocation and getting grant monies from United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and local Virginia congregations.

Forrest White, one of the first necessary hires, began work on April 11 as Virginia Conference Disaster Recovery manager to handle the long-term recovery effort. White has served as United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) coordinator for the conference since June 1, 2013.

Pihlcrantz emphasized that this process will be a

marathon and not a sprint as the process will take up to two to three years. He references Hurricane Katrina as recovery work is still being done by United Methodists in the Gulf Coast.

Once the transition to long-term recovery is complete, United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) will take the lead. But this recovery will include local congregational help, conference aid and resources as well as resources from other conferences.

Parks encouraged people to keep up with the Farmville District's electronic newsletter to keep up-to-date as well as a way for church groups to get in touch about the recovery process.


Funds, prayers needed now

On April 4, it was announced that FEMA denied the Commonwealth's request for Federal Assistance. Though State Coordinator Dr. Jeff Stern said the state would submit an appeal, for the survivors of the Feb. 24 storms, it emphasizes the importance of raising funds within the conference to help with immediate needs.

"There's a saying in The United Methodist Church: we are the last ones out, we turn the lights out. And we are going to live up to that expectation, I hope

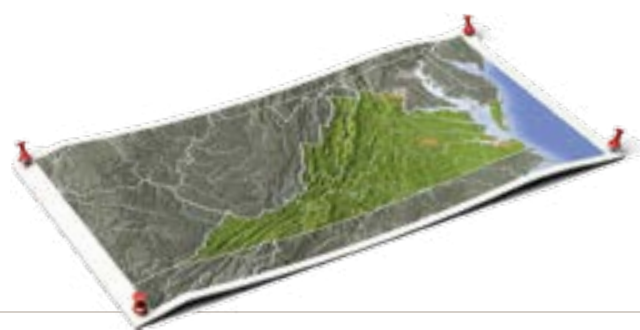


and pray. But it is going to take the annual conference churches and congregations to help us step out in faith to do this job," Pihlcrantz said.

To contribute to Virginia Conference disaster response and recovery efforts, you can make a gift through your local church. Or, make your check payable to "Virginia United Methodist Conference" and send it to the Virginia Conference Treasurer, P.O. Box 5605, Glen Allen, VA 23058. Designate "Conference Advance #5037 – Disaster Response" on your check or apportionment statement. Or donate online using a credit card by visiting <https://vaumc.org/DisasterResponseDonation>. 

Above: A look at the path of the tornado in Appomattox.

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Randolph-Macon College hosts Standing Together event



By Kendra Grimes

On Sunday, March 6, Randolph-Macon College (R-MC) in Ashland was the third site for a Standing Together Event led by the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities. Amid the Islamophobia appearing in national headlines, many in the Richmond area are choosing to reach out to their neighbors rather than turn away.

Following a press conference in December at the Islamic Center of Virginia (attended by Bishop Young Jin Cho and other UMC leaders), the first Standing Together event was held in January at Congregation Beth Ahabah. The event then went to the Hampton Roads area before coming to Randolph-Macon. As several of the college's faculty attended the initial event, they were eager to continue that sort of interfaith

conversation on campus and open the conversation to the broader community. Approaching the Center, the college asked if they would be able to provide a similar program together with the uniqueness of a college campus.

Panelists at the R-MC gathering included Dr. Imad Damaj, founder and president of the Virginia Muslim Coalition for Public Affairs and faculty member at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU); the Rev. Melanie Mullen, downtown missionary, St. Paul's Episcopal Church; Dr. Archana Pathak, faculty member at VCU and member of the local Hindu community; and Professor Shosanna Schechter-Shaffin, faculty member at R-MC and executive director at Alliance for Jewish Renewal (ALEPH).

The event was well-received by the college community with volunteers for small group leaders forming from students, faculty and staff.

This event is just one of the many ways Randolph-Macon College seeks to be

(Above) Panel discussion centered around topics such as how individuals can make the region more inclusive. Photos courtesy of Randolph-Macon College.



The event brought together R-MC students and members of the community to discuss inclusivity.

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a welcoming community. Currently, the campus ministry council is an interfaith body with both Christian and Jewish student groups. The chaplain's office continues to offer "Interfaith Experiences" several times a semester, giving the community an opportunity to either hear a speaker or participate in a holy-day or other experiential learning. Last fall, was the first interfaith Thanksgiving service on campus with more than 100 in attendance. A new program called Student Leaders in Spiritual Life allows students to help create opportunities for leadership, service and spiritual growth on campus. The first Student Leader is from a non-Christian tradition and offers outstanding leadership in interfaith conversation.

The next opportunity to hear the interfaith panel discussion through the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities and to participate in small group sharing was April 19 at Salisbury Presbyterian Church in Midlothian. For more information or to sign the Standing Together Pledge online, visit www.inclusiveva.org/standing-together-rva/. 

— Kendra Grimes is the chaplain and director of Church Relations at Randolph-Macon College.

("CALLING 21," Cont. from page 7)

these national programs: the summer begins with an orientation where students explore their call through different discernment tools, engage with their peers and learn what the church has to offer. As the summer continues, students reconnect at Annual Conference and conclude the summer with a debriefing in which they reflect on their experiences. Host pastors and lay leaders meet at the conference office in the early spring to discuss the ins and outs of the summer experience and have the chance to meet with former interns to hear meaningful and challenging moments in ministry. The churches create an intern support team that meets with the interns throughout the summer to learn from one another and to help guide the intern through some of their experiences.

Emily Howdysshell, a 2011 Calling 21 alumna and the director of Emergent Ministries at St. Luke's UMC in Yorktown, describes the program as a network of support and training that was crucial to exploring her call.

"I believe Calling 21 offers our local, and maybe overlooked, churches a chance to connect with the conference on a larger scale and provide safe spaces for ministry exploration," said Howdysshell.


Now in its 10th year, Calling 21 is gaining speed as one of the most important tools in helping young adults discern their calls to ministry. As the program has evolved, it now has a second-year program, "Connections 21," in which former Calling 21 interns work in the conference office, allowing interns to see how the conference functions on a larger scale while still being connected with a local church. This provides another failure-friendly environment where they can learn from those who have been experts in their fields for years. Interns experience what ministry looks like at Camp Rainbow Connection, a week-long respite camp held once in July and once in August for individuals with intellectual disabilities; with children through Helping Hands, a two-day mission experience for children in grades 4-6; and attending the Candidacy Summit.

Michelle Hettmann, a senior at Virginia Tech and an alumna member of both Calling 21 and Connections 21, said that the combination of working at the conference office and at a local church helped her learn about the way the conference functions and granted her a passion for ministry, specifically church planting and revitalization.

As a conference, Virginia is invested in the long-term discernment of our young

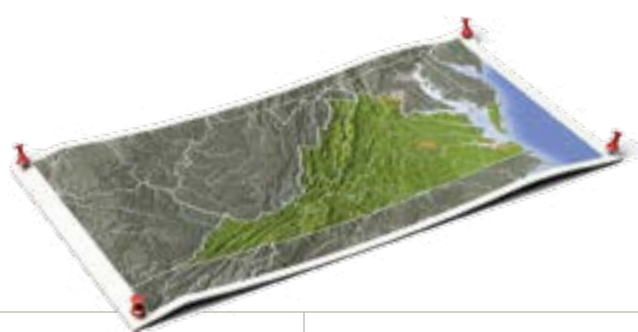
adults. This past November, Shenandoah University, once again in partnership with Wesley Theological Seminary and the Virginia Conference, received a \$600,000 grant from the Lilly Endowment to establish a Youth Theology Institute. This program encourages high school students in the Virginia Conference to explore what it means to be a Christian in their context before they even begin to declare their major in college. This gives our youths a chance to deeply explore Christian vocation before they even get their driver's license.

Together, these programs help to plant seeds of vocational discernment and strength in youths and young adults that we hope will stay with them throughout their lives.

For more information on Calling 21 or the Shenandoah University Youth Theology Institute, contact Meredith McNabb in the Virginia Conference office of Clergy Excellence at MeredithMcNabb@vaumc.org or Justin Allen at Shenandoah University's Institute for Church Professions at jallen3@su.edu. 

— Emma Johnston attends Wesley Theological Seminary. She is a certified candidate for graduation in May 2016 and is on the deacon track. She is also a staff member at the office of Spiritual Life at Shenandoah University.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Virginians attend March 2016 BMCR General Meeting in Baltimore

Rev. Dr. Theodore Smith (right) is congratulated on his recent episcopal candidate nomination by former General Secretary for Religion and Race, Rev. Chester Jones.

Nine United Methodists from the Virginia Conference were among more than 330 people who gathered March 10-12 in Baltimore, Md., for the 49th general meeting of Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR). Theme was "It's Harvest Time" based on Galatians 6:9-10.

Attending from the Virginia Conference were the Rev. Dr. Theodore Smith, Debra Straughter, the Rev. Dr. Sherry Daniels, the Rev. Lorenzo Hill, the Rev. Clarence Brown, the Rev. Jan Prentace Commander, the Rev. Clyde Nelson, Daniel Shelby and Wyley Neal.

BMCR is one of The United Methodist Church's five U.S.-based ethnic caucuses. It represents more than 2,400 predominantly African-American congregations, with about 500,000 African-American

members across the United States.

The group's work includes advocating for the interests and inclusion of black United Methodists in the general church structures, serving as a spiritual agitating conscience for the denomination and raising prophetic and spiritual leaders.

As the denomination approaches General Conference 2016 in Portland, the caucus will again be an active participant with the Love Your Neighbor Coalition in pushing for passage of specific legislation. General Conference, the United Methodist Church's top legislative body, meets at the Oregon Convention Center on May 10-20, 2016.

United States Representative for Maryland's 7th Congressional District, Elijah Cummings, was the advocacy keynote speaker. Congressman Cummings, who now represents downtown Baltimore, told those gathered he could not come to downtown Baltimore as a child because of segregation. "The thought today that I represent every square inch of these blocks and help to make policy for this city, and this nation...only God could make my life," he said.


BMCR General Meeting Actions

Five retiring Ebony bishops were honored during

the Spirit Awards: Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr., Bishop Robert E. Hayes, Bishop Jonathan D. Keaton, Bishop James R. King Jr. and Bishop Marcus Matthews.

Caucus officers for the next three years were elected: Deborah Dangerfield, Northern Illinois Conference, chair; the Rev. Antoine Love, Baltimore-Washington Conference, vice-chair; Audrey Pankey, Western North Carolina Conference, secretary; and Diane Johnson, Missouri Conference, treasurer.

BMCR History

Since its 1967 inception in Detroit, BMCR has consistently been the voice of black United Methodists and an advocate for the growth and development of black churches. When The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968, the caucus effectively lobbied for the creation of the General Commission on Religion and Race and desegregation of The United Methodist Publishing House. BMCR also helped the denomination launch numerous other landmark mission initiatives, including the Black College Fund in 1970. 

— Based on an article by Dr. Larry R. Hygh Jr., director of Communications for the California-Nevada Conference. He also serves on BMCR's communications team.





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Virginia holds Day of Prayer for General Conference

On Sunday, April 10, the Virginia Conference held a 24-hour prayer vigil for General Conference with congregations and individuals in each district taking specific times to pray so that someone in the conference was praying continuously from 12 a.m. to 12 p.m.

The day of prayer was held in response to the United Methodist Council of Bishops' request that each annual conference designate one day to hold a 24-hour prayer vigil for General Conference sometime between Jan. 1 and May 10, the opening day of General Conference.

Virginia Conference churches used a variety of methods to conduct their prayer vigils. For example:

Kilmarnock UMC, Fredericksburg District, focused on prayer with the sermon, "Praying in the Wesleyan Spirit" and the Scripture lesson from Hebrews 4:14-16. They also focused on the quote, "Good prayers shake heaven and good prayers shape community." (Paul Chilcote, Praying in the Wesleyan Spirit: 52 Prayers for Today)

The Rev. Penny Cory led a prayer for all General Conference delegates and for God's perfect will to be done throughout General

Conference proceedings. She placed her hand on a globe with her finger pointing to Portland, and the people of the congregation held their hands toward the globe as they joined in prayer.

The Oak Level UMC, Harrisonburg District, congregation focused on General Conference and the Virginia Annual Conference. Members gathered around the altar for special prayer for General Conference and dedication of 182 totes handmade by Ruby Swart to be used for United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) school kits to be brought to this year's Annual Conference.

At Oakton UMC, Arlington District, planning for the Day of Prayer began a few months ago with formation of a Prayer Vigil team. The team of two staff and three lay people brainstormed how to make the prayer vigil meaningful as well as informative. They decided to hold prayer time from 9 a.m. to noon Sunday, and every worship bulletin included a specific issue that will be discussed at General Conference.

The Rev. Dawn-Marie Singleton discussed the need for prayer and explained how delegates were elected and countries

that will be represented.

During the time for prayer, various stations were set up, each dealing with different issues from General Conference. Members were asked to pray for that issue and write prayers for General Conference on Post-It notes that were placed on the sanctuary wall.

Members were invited to touch water in a baptismal station and to pray

that all decisions at General Conference be made in love and with the mindset that Christ is the foundation of it all.

Another station was a toolbox with various tools to remind members of their own spiritual gifts. A card at the station asked, "Is there a tool in this toolbox that best represents one of your talents?" The

(Continued on page 25: "PRAYER")


("CLERGYWOMEN," continued from page 5.)

delegates did not choose to endorse a woman. Could it be there is not a clergywoman prepared to assume this role?

It has been said many times, that leaders are born not made. However, it seems to me, leadership is a combination of innate ability, mentoring and opportunity. We have many clergywomen in the Virginia Conference with the gift of leadership, but we have not, as a conference, provided the necessary mentoring and opportunities. It appears the most common practice we provide for clergywomen to lead in Virginia is one of serving on the Cabinet. Beyond that we do very little.

I would encourage our conference to consider nominations of women for

conference, jurisdictional and general church boards and agencies; to note how many clergywomen have "platform time" at our annual conferences and to intentionally provide for the transition from the Cabinet to a large church, providing mentoring, coaching and experiences that equip the female pastor to serve with competency and confidence the complexities of a large church. This is not about selecting one woman but providing opportunities for many to see who rises to leadership for the episcopacy.

It is time to take note and ask the questions that hold us as a conference accountable to be wise stewards of the incredible human potential God has given us in Virginia. 

— Margaret Kutz, retired elder

EVENTS



May

General Conference

May 10-20, Oregon Convention Center, Portland, OR

UMVIM Team Leader Recertification

May 6, St. Mark's UMC, Richmond District

Team Leader Recertification is required for all United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) team leaders who completed basic team leader training five years ago or longer. The focus of this training is to update leaders on Virginia Conference UMVIM policies and guidelines, to share best practices and to answer questions. Five participants are needed to offer this training. There is a \$25 registration fee for each participant, payable when you register. This fee does not cover an optional team leader handbook, which will be available for purchase (\$20) at the training, or the new *A Mission Journey* book, which is available through Cokesbury. A meal will NOT be provided. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. For more information, contact Forrest White, Virginia Conference UMVIM coordinator, at (804) 938-1026 or VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com. To register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

UMVIM Team Leader Training

May 7, St. Mark's UMC, Richmond District

Virginia Conference United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) Team Leader Training will be held Saturday, May 7, at St. Mark's UMC, 11551 Lucks Ln., Midlothian. Training will begin promptly at 9:30 a.m. and end at 3 p.m. Doors open at 9 a.m. Team Leader Training is required for all first-time team leaders, but all interested persons are welcome to attend whether leading a team

or not. All participants must pre-register by noon Monday before the training event. There is a \$55 registration fee for each participant. For more information, contact Forrest White, conference UMVIM coordinator, at (804) 938-1026 or VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com.

Virginia PAUMCS Retreat

May 15-16, Camp Overlook, Keezletown

Dr. Sandy Gramling, associate professor in Clinical Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University where she teaches "Stress and Its Management," will help PAUMCS retreat participants learn how they can stay centered in Christ while meeting the needs of congregations and community members. Held at Camp Overlook in Keezletown, this event is an opportunity for church secretaries and administrators to learn, network, fellowship and relax. Breakfast and lunch on Monday are included in the cost of registration. The fee for this event is \$88 for PAUMCS members; \$98 for non-members. Register online at www.vaumc.org/PAUMCS by May 2.

Historical Society-sponsored Tangier Island trip

May 21, Reedville

The Virginia Conference Historical Society is sponsoring a spring travel experience to Tangier Island Saturday, May 21, to celebrate the ministry of the Rev. Joshua Thomas. Known as the "Parson to the Islands," Thomas was born in 1776, converted to Methodism in 1807 and became a licensed exhorter, organizing the first of many Methodist camp meetings in the islands of the Chesapeake. This day trip includes embarkation from Reedville at 9:45 a.m., one-and-a-half-hour cruise to the island, historical portrayal of Thomas and a walk to Swain Memorial UMC where a recently-erected marker honors Thomas.

Tour of significant sites will be guided by the Rev. Kirk Mariner. Return at 4:15 p.m. Cost for the cruise, based on a group rate, is \$27 for adults, \$15 for ages 4-15 and free for children under 4. Lunch may be purchased at the Hilda Crocket Chesapeake House (all-you-can-eat seafood buffet for \$20.70), Waterfront Restaurant (sandwiches), Fisherman's Corner Restaurant (sandwiches) or bring your own lunch basket and drinks. Registration deadline is April 30. To register, send check payable to Catherine Morgan, to Morgan at **14016 Redhills Rd., Beaverdam, VA 23015**. On check memo line, indicate "Tangier Cruise" along with your phone number. Cancellation refunds cannot be made after May 10. For those traveling a long distance, overnight accommodations can be found in Warsaw and other surrounding communities. Contact Catherine Morgan at ddcomm97@aol.com for registration questions.

Five-Day Academy for Spiritual Formation

May 22-27, Roslyn Retreat Center, Richmond

The rescheduled Virginia Five-Day Academy for Spiritual Formation will be held at the Roslyn Retreat Center, Richmond, May 22-27. Registration is currently full, but to be placed on a waiting list, contact Dot Ivey, Registrar, at dotcivey@gmail.com.

June

UMVIM Team Leader Training

June 4, Franktown UMC, Franktown

Virginia Conference United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) Team Leader Training will be held on Saturday, June 4, at Franktown UMC, 7551 Bayside Rd., Franktown. Training will begin promptly at 9:30 a.m. and end at 3:30 p.m. Doors open at 9 a.m. Team Leader

EVENTS

Training is required for all first-time team leaders, but all interested persons are welcome to attend whether leading a team or not. All participants must pre-register by noon Monday before the training event. There is a \$55 registration fee for each participant. For more information, contact Forrest White, conference UMVIM coordinator, at (804) 938-1026 or VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com.

Annual Conference

June 17-19, Berglund Center, Roanoke

Helping Hands for Children

June 22-23, Saint Paul's UMC, Staunton

This two-day mission experience for children is offered to all member churches of the Virginia Conference. Rising 4th through 6th graders, parents and adult leaders can come and learn about mission opportunities and the importance of being a caring Christian. Cost is \$36 per person. This includes t-shirt, meals, snacks and overnight stay. Complete registration form by May 30 on the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. For more information, contact Beth Christian at BethChristian@vaumc.org.

Harambee!

June 24-28, Rust College, Holly Springs, Mississippi

For rising 7th graders through 2015 high school graduates (ages 12-18) and adult workers with youth, this is a youth conference planned by the HARAMBEE planning committee under the guidance of the executive board of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Black Methodists for Church Renewal, Inc. The conference is held annually to help youths develop spiritual, leadership and interpersonal skills. Come to work, pray, sing and build meaningful relationships with God and each other.

Speaker will be the Rev. Jerome Scales Jr., pastor of Spirit Of Truth UMC in Mason, Tenn. Registration ends June 2. All necessary paperwork is on the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Refer any questions to the Rev. Constance Nelson Barnes, RegistrarHarambee@yahoo.com.

July

Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference

July 13-15, Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center, Lake Junaluska

The 2016 Conference theme is "Hope and Unity in Christ" based on Hebrews 6:18-19a. The conference opens at 9 a.m. on July 13 and concludes on July 15 with the Service of Consecration for newly-elected episcopal leaders.

Helping Hands for Children

July 21-22, Woodlake UMC, Chesterfield

This two-day mission experience for children is offered to all member churches of the Virginia Conference. Rising 4th through 6th graders, parents and adult leaders can come and learn about mission opportunities and the importance of being a caring Christian. Cost is \$36 per person. This includes t-shirt, meals, snacks and overnight stay. Complete registration form by June 24 on the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. For more information, contact Beth Christian at BethChristian@vaumc.org.

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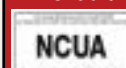
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Greening our Faith



Photo of Tangier Island by Anita Mays.

with Creation Care



is integral to creation care.

Caretakers of God's Creation is a United Methodist Church and community ministry focused on the care and healing of God's creation. This grassroots group finds an integral connection between creation care and being a Christian and a United Methodist.

Ministries like this one connect people with the biblical theology and the responsibility rooted in a relationship with the creation of God.

Charged with growing Caretakers of God's Creation into a national ministry at the General Board of Global Ministries and integrating it within the overall global church ministry, the Rev. Pat Watkins has talked about this relationship.

"Many of us are stuck at a grade school level of theological competence and Bible understanding," Watkins explained. "If we looked deeper into the Bible, we'd be surprised. Relationship with God and relationship with the Earth are very prevalent in the Bible, but we focus primarily on our relationship with God and not the Earth."

"It's more than recycling and Styrofoam," Watkins said. "It's about relationships with God, each other and God's creation. It's about how we live with each other. It is a covenant."

The key to this emphasis on creation care is placing it within the mission of The United Methodist Church. Mount Olivet UMC in Arlington has woven creation care into international mission work in Haiti. Partnering with IMEC School in Arcahaie, they are providing infrastructure and training to upgrade the school. So far they have provided a portable power unit, solar street light, water purification system and 10 laptop computers which the solar power unit can power. Their next plans include a community garden project and a rain catchment system.

Read on to learn how other churches and individuals are living out this mission.

Church answering call to be caretakers



By Anita Mays and Phil Burks

Mt. Pisgah UMC, Richmond District, formed a Creation Care team in 2014, after the associate pastor noticed an interest and passion among church members to care for God's creation. We are a small, but active and passionate group, inspired by the work of Caretakers of God's Creation, the Rev. Pat Watkins — our UMC missionary to the earth — and, of course, the love and power of our Creator God and the beauty of God's creation. We have appreciated learning from sister congregations with similar ministries, and we draw much inspiration from *The Green Bible*, as well as other resources such as the "Social Principles," and the bishops' letter: "God's Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action."

For the last four years our church has designed a "Creation Sunday," and our associate pastor has preached on themes such as stewardship of the Earth (Psalm 148 and John 3:1-17), God's Garden (Genesis 2:4b-10 and Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-2), A New Creation (Romans 8:19-23), and The River of Life (Psalm 104:1-15 and Revelation 22:1-5). All of these services included a celebration of and thanksgiving for God's gift of creation, an acknowledgment of the important and interconnected relationships among God, human beings and all of creation, a call to confession for damaging those relationships and a message of hope that the God who created all things good continues to work toward the renewal of all of creation.

Our Creation Care team has also partnered with the Richmond Region Energy Alliance to offer workshops on energy efficiency and solar power, and to offer home energy audits. We offered the study "EarthBound: Created

and Called to Care for Creation," and hope to offer a study on the United Methodist Women's new mission book, *Climate Justice: A Call to Hope and Action*. Our children and youths have also led the way by participating in events such as cleaning up the James River. We are excited about future possibilities, and especially enthusiastic about a new community garden that we are beginning to construct this spring, designed to supply food for the hungry. With all of these ministry and mission opportunities, we are trying to faithfully answer God's call to be caretakers of God's creation. 🍀

— The Rev. Anita Mays is associate pastor at Mt. Pisgah UMC. Phil Burks is chair of Mt. Pisgah's Creation Care Team.

Duncan Memorial UMC installs solar panels

As a result of long-range planning and an expansion renovation, Duncan UMC in Ashland is installing solar panels on top of the sanctuary roof.

Currently, more than 200 solar panels are being installed in partnership with Dominion Power. These solar panels will produce approximately 220 kilowatts of energy per day.

This project is given through Dominion Power as an incentive to non-profits, and it will help the company further research the effect of solar energy.

But the project, which is not only beneficial for the church, also meets the congregation's goal of becoming better caretakers.



Photo by Morris Fleischer.



For Ray Martin, an engineer and lay leader at the church, it's something they should do.

"We should be doing it, and it connects with us being good stewards," Martin said.

Martin has become a key player in helping the church set out its next steps in becoming greener and specific steps in becoming more sustainable, especially though this part of the project.

Ultimately, this is just one of the many ways that Duncan Memorial is now a green church with plans to optimize its energy performance as well as rainwater capture for irrigation. In 2014, the church began a Creation Care team beginning with a small group study based on the Council of Bishops document, "God's Renewed Creation."

Using the Green Church Initiative through the Virginia Conference, the church got started and has since created a much larger and personalized plan and was certified 'green' through the Board of Church & Society last year.

Brian Moores is a member of the Long-Range Planning Team and chair of the Creation Care team, a team whose vision is finding congregational involvement to make church operations more sustainable and to evangelize through this commitment to being more sustainable.

The reason for doing so, Moores said, is based on the Bible.

"There are many passages in Scripture that deal with this, care for the world: the rocks, the trees, the skies, the seas. All of creation — living and non-living," Moores said.

For Moores, relating this information to the congregation has been like preaching to the choir.

"A lot of our members are ahead of the curve in being environmentally aware. They get it. They are very aware of the situation and are willing to help." 🌱



I DON'T HEAR THE FROGS ANYMORE

By Patsy Wheeler Gochenour

**My garden of Eden is where the Shawnee walked,
where the great elk roamed and Washington
rode.**

**The rains still come and the winds still blow,
but I don't hear the frogs anymore.**

**Oh, my Wonderful Creator, All-Powerful, Great Spirit,
do you hear the cries of Mother Earth?**

**She is seeking stewards and counsel
to help her return to prior glory and worth.**

**My garden of Eden is where in the spring
the daylight lingers and robins sing,
Where butterflies dance and tulips nod,
but I don't hear the frogs anymore.**

**A springtime chorus is singing off key
the frog section I no longer see,
The choir loft pond has disappeared,
because untuned man didn't listen or hear.**

**Some men are attempting to erode God's laws
as they build their empires of stone.
But no matter how foolish or thoughtless this seems
goodness and right stand not alone.**

**For east of the garden of Eden, He places the
Cherubim
a flaming sword turns to guard the way
to the tree of life again.
The winds will blow the dust of time into the Hands
of God,
and all will hear, "I must begin anew".
as He kneels upon the sod.**

— Patsy W. Gochenour served on the conference board of Church and Society as chair of Caretakers of God's Creation in 1995. That year the committee submitted its annual report for proposed projects focused on water. They emphasized that just as Christ is water for people's spiritual lives, pure water is also needed for people's physical lives. The result of the report was the first colored cover of The Advocate magazine in Nov. 1995. She wrote this poem for Earth Day 1995.



Church recreates the 'garden'

By Walt Westbrook

When we think of the human place in creation, many of us think of our original job as gardeners. Gardening is the place where God's creativity and human creativity meet and entwine around each other, resulting in plots of land that produce food or flowers. People feel truly at home in their gardens, watching God's work and their work blossom.

In 2015, **Remington UMC, Fredericksburg District**, started its Community Garden. Under the direction of John Waldeck, all of the many aspects merged and produced a wonderful garden. Thirty-eight gardeners tended 20 different plots. Master Gardeners were around to help the less experienced gardeners. Two local homes for the developmentally disabled each had a plot which the Master Gardeners oversaw until it was time to harvest, which the home residents and staffs did.

Gardeners contributed extra produce to people who

needed fresh vegetables for their families. Everyone ate better, and many of the newer gardeners learned skills that will benefit themselves, their families and their neighbors.

On June 13, 2015, we sponsored a Garden Party which was attended by 150 people from the Remington community. It was a wonderful evening with food prepared by the United Methodist Men and games and crafts and music. We connected with our community as we never had before. The Community Garden is growing more than produce; it is growing relationships. 2016 promises to be an even bigger year for the Remington Community Garden.

On a smaller scale, our church has been observing a Blessing of the Pets each fall for the past few years. We've blessed a number of dogs, a couple of rats, a cat and a horse.

A couple of years back, we decided to try using dogs as part of our Greeters Team. Most people enjoyed being greeted on the porch by happy dogs. So, at one point, we said to ourselves, "Why limit it to greeter dogs? Why not just invite people to bring their own well-behaved dogs to any and all worship services?"

So, we now welcome dogs to our three services each weekend. When we tell people they may bring their well-behaved dogs to any worship service they decide to attend, those people are always surprised. But, for us at Remington UMC, it's all just part of a regular worship service.

We also include dogs on our monthly Prayer Walks. They come along and help us go through the community, praying for each house, business, school and church we pass. Dogs as a symbol of loyalty are represented occasionally in Christian art, and people appreciate not having to abandon their pets in order to come to church. When Capt. Robert E. Lee was stationed in Brooklyn, NY (1841-46), the family dog used to accompany the family to worship. His children were chastised for paying more attention to Spec than to the sermon, but when the family tried to leave Spec at home, he jumped out the window and met them just as the family was entering the church.

The human place in creation can be in any number of situations. But, we at Remington UMC find that recreating our place in the Garden, and honoring the animals we have domesticated are two of our favorite ways to pay attention to God and to our fellow creatures. May we continue to honor the Creator by being an active and productive part of creation. 🐾

— The Rev. Walt Westbrook is a pastor at Remington UMC in Remington.



The Ongoing Commitment of RRUMC to Creation Care

By Michael J. Wriston

River Road United Methodist Church, Richmond District, has long been committed to Creation Care, inspired by our understanding of what God intends for us to do which is to care for “every living and moving thing,” “every winged bird” and “seed-bearing plants and trees” (Genesis 1).

In pursuit of what we see as God’s clear wish for the care of creation, we not only established an Earth & Spirit Bible study but also an ongoing Earth Advocacy Committee.

Among a host of creation care initiatives, we certified our church property as a National Wildlife Habitat and launched a Creation Care Family program.

In our building, we conscientiously recycle, installed a compost box, have a ‘rain garden’ (with a second one on the way), a ‘bee-and-butterfly’ garden (sustained by a rain barrel), switched to fluorescent lighting (which automatically shuts off when rooms are vacant), replaced our external spotlight with an LED light, banished Styrofoam, upgraded our HVAC system to ‘greener’ technology and even installed ‘waterless’ urinals.

Recently recognized as the ‘greenest’ (large) United-Methodist Church in the Commonwealth, we have also partnered with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to help create three separate creation care conferences in the last several years (one of which we hosted) and are playing the lead role in organizing and hosting a fourth in collaboration with the Interfaith Climate Justice Team.

In the most recent permutation of our strategic vision, we identified creation as one of the five gifts that God has given us, to be forever loved and treasured. 🍀

– Dr. Michael J. Wriston is the chair of the Earth Advocacy Committee at River Road UMC.



Barbara McPhail and her rescue Dog

Rescue dog shows connection to God

By Barbara McPhail

God gave us dominion over the animals — the responsibility to care for God’s creations. God went to great lengths to make sure every kind of animal would survive on the ark. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of the great care God has for animal life, including each bird that flies in the sky.

As a child I never gave much thought to the connection between God and my pets — mostly cats and the horses I rode as a child, but I always felt they were a gift of sorts. They gave me love, companionship and a sense of security.

As an adult, my animal companions over the years were rescued from The Humane Society, the animal assistance league, sometimes just came to my door from off the street and a “throw-a-way.” My cats don’t go outside often, but my rescue dog has matured from a wild, untrained crazy girl to a calm, loving, ball-addicted, sweet lady who gets along well with cats, dogs, small children and adults of all ages. She has a small dark imprint on her forehead that I have always called God’s thumbprint — where God blessed her and said “you’re done” when she was created. She has truly been a gift to me and kept me focused, sane and thankful for life and memories when my husband passed away.

She is a certified therapy dog and visits with me in nursing homes, memory care units, assisted living facilities, public and private schools, and the BARKS (Books & Reading for Kids in Suffolk) program where she brings joy and memories to many. We spend many hours outside walking, playing ball, walking in the woods and visiting with neighbors — many of whom keep dog treats handy just in case we pass by. I thank God for my animals that have become part of my family and for the joy they give to me and others. 🍀

– Barbara McPhail is the Congregational Care Coordinator at Main Street UMC in Suffolk.

How can I be a better steward of God's magnificent creation?

"Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! ...On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work." Genesis 1:31a,2:2

By Susan Keeney

In this life, we do not know nor can we understand the concept of "God time" because God's thoughts are above our thoughts. God's ways above ours. As the Book of Genesis teaches us, God took six days to make the heavens and earth and all things in it, and then rested. When we think of "six days" to create everything, we put it into a human 24-hour period and stand in awe of it — as we should. Scientists tell us that it took millions or even billions of years to have everything evolve as we know it, and that it continues to do so. We still stand in awe of it — as we should. One day we hope to know the true story.

Whether it took "one day" or millions of years, humans seem to bring damage and destruction in much less than a day — during OUR 24-hour day. God took the time, because of great love for us, to create and give it all to humans as a gift, a loan to manage and enjoy, to honor and praise God. It doesn't matter what the time span of a "God Day" is... God loves us so much that God made this for US. Then we tear it down, pollute it or replace pieces of it with what we feel is "better." As if we know what is best!

God's handiwork cannot be re-created once we have obliterated it. And the global challenge is overwhelming to individuals. How do we save the physical world from our destruction of it? A daunting task at the very least. But why not start with our own little corner? If each person regularly cleaned up the litter on his or her property, along the roadside, hanging from bushes and small trees, isn't that a two-fold act? We are modeling how to care for this gift from God AND able to enjoy the beauty by removing the blemishes of this throw-away society. It will also serve to honor and thank God by being better caretakers of God's Gift On Loan.

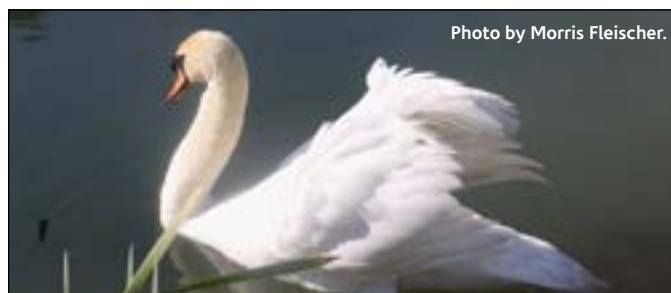


Photo by Morris Fleischer.

Consider making today the first, and not the only, day to spend a few minutes picking up litter around you, or when walking through a park, down your street, in a mall or any public place. Help a neighbor. Friend. Family. Hospital or care center. A favorite store. With just a little effort each day to improve the earth God provided for us, we can make our awesome God smile!

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. For he laid the earth's foundation on the seas and built it on the ocean depths." Psalm 24:1-2

Prayer: Creator of all, forgive us for not always being good caretakers of your gift, given because of your everlasting love for us. Help us to do a better job of maintaining and preserving what you created. Let us always be mindful that every creature, every blade of grass, every towering tree, every lily of the field, majestic mountain and green valley, every thing was created by you and given with love to us. With praise and thanksgiving, we lift our grateful hearts and will try to do better to maintain your beauty. In the name of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, Amen. 📖

– Susan Keeney is a member and chairperson of the Board of Trustees at Ivy Creek UMC in Charlottesville.



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

Making a 'greener' footprint

What is your church's carbon footprint? More importantly, do you know how to use your carbon footprint to improve both the environment and your church's environmental communications?

What is a carbon footprint?

A carbon footprint sums up how much greenhouse gas (carbon dioxide) an organization, event or product emits. In lay terms, a carbon footprint is the environmental impact these things can leave behind.

Knowing your church's carbon footprint could be important for several reasons, including:

- ❖ It promotes your church's efforts to become more environmentally sustainable.
- ❖ It demonstrates fiscal responsibility because, generally, long-term costs decline when your carbon footprint declines.
- ❖ It enhances your church's reputation in the community as a responsible and caring organization.
- ❖ It inspires your church members and others in the community to reduce their carbon footprints.

Just because your church isn't actually releasing gases from a smokestack, it does consume energy that generates unhealthy emissions. So reducing energy consumption is the best way to shrink your church's carbon footprint.

Switching to low-energy light bulbs and replacing the old church van with a hybrid model will reduce emissions, but your building's heating and cooling systems are by far the largest consumers of energy and the place you should

focus your energy.

How do you find out how much energy your church building is consuming and translate that into your carbon footprint?

Options to calculate carbon footprint

Calculate it yourself using information from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, <http://www.eia.gov/> to calculate electricity consumption and expenditures for non-mall commercial buildings (such as churches).

Collect details on square footage, building age, type of roofing and wall materials and type of heating and cooling systems to calculate energy consumption.

The resulting sum is described in kilowatt-hours (kWh). Then use the State-level Greenhouse Gas Emission Coefficients for Electricity Generation conversion at <http://www.eia.gov/> for your state to determine pounds of carbon dioxide emitted.

You now have your church's carbon footprint based on building energy consumption. Having the base number enables you to share what your carbon footprint is and to identify how upgrades could not only save money in the long term, but also reduce that footprint.

Use energy-use-calculation software. This software can calculate energy use based on the systems in your building and provide projections and suggestions for reducing energy use.

They are designed for building-maintenance professionals, so if you go this route, collaborate with your church facilities team. A couple of these programs include Building Energy Analyzer and Building Advice.

Hire a company to conduct a building energy audit. Search your local Google directory for "building energy audits." This is the most expensive method and shouldn't be undertaken unless church leaders are making a serious commitment to energy reduction via building upgrades.

The benefits of hiring a company to conduct the audit is that they also act as consultants during the retrofit process, are required to be pre-certified on the state level and can provide the most comprehensive information available on energy consumption now and after upgrades are made. They also can calculate how long it will take to recover a church's investment in new systems through energy savings, a crucial piece of information when seeking capital-improvement funds.

Benefits to knowing carbon footprint

Knowing your church's carbon footprint and ways to reduce it enables your church to determine whether to spend money to reduce energy consumption. If the church is undertaking a capital campaign, for example, this information can be valuable in demonstrating why the church needs money and how the congregation is a good steward of money and the environment.

Share the church's carbon-footprint process and energy-reduction steps with church members and the community — let them know how they can act in their own home or commercial building.

Being able to communicate in specific and accurate terms about energy usage and energy reduction will prepare you to talk with authority about your church's commitment to environmental protection. 🍀

— United Methodist Communications

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ As one of their yearly projects, the **Afton & Fairfield's United Methodist Women** held a drive for Heart Havens Rappahannock House during the month of February. The congregations of both churches donated toiletries, cleaning products and fun items for the residents. Their monetary donations will be used where needed most within the Heart Havens network.



▲ Easter was celebrated at **Bethany United Methodist Church in Forest** by about 15 excited children. In addition to the traditional egg hunt, there were games and refreshments. The children also celebrated the collection of \$2700, which will be used to purchase 54 goats for Rwandan Hugs, a mission headed by Nancy Strachan in Bedford. Nancy makes an annual trip to Rwanda, an African country ravaged by genocide in the 1990's, where she has been a friend and has made

many friends. Since 2011, the children at Bethany have raised over \$16,000 to buy 164 goats, 65 pigs, 267 chickens and 208 rabbits for the families in Rwanda. The livestock produce milk, food and fertilizer for crops there. Bethany is proud to be a sponsor of Rwandan Hugs. Pictured with the children is Nancy Strachan, founder of Rwandan Hugs, and Rev. Tom Thomas, pastor of Bethany and Oakland United Methodist Churches.



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

The Afton & Fairfield's United Methodist Church Relay for Life Team "Christians for the Cure" hosted a Soup and Sandwich Fundraiser on Feb. 27. During the process of making soup, Chef Lenny Gaskins suggested making extra to carry to Mt. Zion Baptist Church to help feed the workers and those who lost their homes in the devastating tornado. The food, as well as monetary donations collected during the fundraiser, were delivered to a very appreciative group at Mt. Zion. This church has been instrumental in organizing and accepting donations from those in the surrounding areas. A spokesperson for the church said they have been taking in donations every day; some from as far as Mechanicsville, VA.

Pictured below: Lenny Gaskins, Judy Jett, Linda Gallihugh and Kim Brown. ▼

Byrd Chapel celebrates 200 years of "Grace and Glory"



Bishop Young Jin Cho, the Rev. Neil W. McLaughlin (current pastor) and the Rev. Danny Kesner, Charlottesville District superintendent

Byrd Chapel United Methodist Church, Charlottesville District, celebrated its 200th anniversary March 20 with Bishop Young Jin Cho delivering the message.

Byrd Chapel UMC was organized in 1816 Kent's Store following a series of Camp Meetings previously held by Methodist leaders in surrounding areas. It was formerly known as Hughes Meeting House. The original pulpit used in Hughes Meeting House was donated to the church and restored in time for this event.

In 1853 the congregation of Hughes Meeting House moved to another location on Little Byrd Creek and built a new frame sanctuary. Shortly thereafter, the name of the

church was changed to Byrd Chapel and was put on a seven-church charge known as the Fluvanna Circuit. However, due to bad roads and need for a more central location, the church building itself was moved — with only one plank broken during the move. The church was put in its present location on State Highway No. 601.

Byrd Chapel continued to grow and after much hard work and planning, the Formal Opening and Consecration Service for the new brick building was held on May 22, 1955.

The church holds its annual Homecoming Day on the second Sunday in August every year. On that day, in 1983, the church had a groundbreaking service for the parsonage that was

built on Route 604. The land was a gift from a great grandson of one of the founders of the church.

In 1994 an educational wing was added to the church to accommodate the needs of the church.

Just east of the church, many loved ones who served the church faithfully over the years lie resting in the church's perpetual care cemetery.

Byrd Chapel UMC is part of the U.S. Route 250 bike route that runs from Sandusky, Ohio, to Richmond, Va. The church is always open for those needing a rest or place to stay while biking the route.

Mission-minded and continuing to serve each other and the community, the current congregation consists of members from the age of 90 years old down to one year old with new babies due this year. The church has two services every Sunday, with Sunday school in between. The nursery is available for those under four years old and with six Sunday school classes available, there is something for any age child or adult. With so many children in the church its future looks bright! 🍀



("PRAYER," continued from page 13.)

toolbox contained some unexpected tools, showing that God's work requires a wide diversity of talents and gifts. (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

Important decisions will be made for the denomination at General Conference 2016 in Portland. To hear from some of the Virginia Conference delegates to General Conference and learn how they are preparing, view a video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noGtePY4YQQ&feature=youtu.be>. 🍀

Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



Delano Douglas is the director for United Campus Ministries FLOW (Faith, Love, Outreach, & Worship) at Virginia State University, and the associate pastor at Ettrick United Methodist Church. In May 2014, he officially joined the Virginia Conference as a licensed local pastor. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies from Lynchburg College (2000), a Master of Divinity (2004) and a Master of Theology (2011) from Union Presbyterian Seminary. Delano has been involved in ministry for 20 years in a number of capacities. His hobbies include basketball, fitness activities, cooking, reading and volunteering.

May 1, 2016 "Mustard Seed Faith" Luke 17:1-10 (NIV)

This passage contains a familiar phrase of the New Testament in an unfamiliar context. In contrast to Matthew 17:20, Jesus' oft repeated words of verse 6, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed..." are not applied to an attempt at the exorcism of a demon possessed boy by well meaning disciples lacking the faith to do so. Here, "mustard seed" faith addresses the disciples' wrangling with the inner demon that manifests itself as a result of sin within the faith community.

The lesson opens with a "woe" to the person who serves as a catalyst for sin. That person would be better off trying to swim to shore with a large millstone tied around his or her neck. We know that it would be impossible for someone with the aquatic prowess of Michael Phelps to make it to shore with a large stone attached to his or her body. Figuratively speaking, one who causes others to sin creates a burden that does not easily go away and renders it extremely difficult to navigate through troubled waters. When things that cause people to sin take place, an immobilizing weight is attached, creating a spiritually stagnant situation.

Having created such a vivid analogy for Galileans all too knowledgeable with the ways that water works, Jesus offers a liberating lifeline. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

The remedy for offense within Christian community is the process of rebuke, repentance and forgiveness. Communication is key, as the expression of transgression in a Christ-like way is permissible. If the offender's response is repentance (remorse for the offense along with commitment toward correction), then forgiveness (a release from the burden of the injury) is to be granted. It is important to note that the word "repent" precedes the word "forgive" in two instances (vv. 3-4). The apostles' response of "Increase our faith!" acknowledges what is

necessary for reconciliation... great faith "the size of a mustard seed." This faith can uproot a mulberry tree – known for its extremely deep roots in the ground and lack of compatibility with water – from the earth and cause it to flourish in the depth of the sea.

Oh, to have mustard seed faith to rebuke, repent and forgive!

May 8, 2016 "The Thankful Samaritan" Luke 17:11-19

Just a few chapters removed from Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), once again we find true faith being embodied in an unlikely vessel. Jesus is on his way to the holy city by way of a route that would have certainly been considered less than holy.

Samaria and Galilee were both heavily populated with "outsiders," "foreigners," Gentiles and other people on the fringes of society. I'm sure Jesus anticipated opportunities to heal and bless those in need on the way to the "City of Peace" and wasn't surprised by the desperation and despondency along the way. Undoubtedly, the word about Jesus had spread rapidly, and people in the vicinity were longing for a life-altering encounter with Christ.

The 10 men with leprosy who stood at a distance had probably positioned themselves as close as the law would allow to a place where they could give a "shout out" to the Savior. Upon noticing the entourage, the men whose physical condition and accompanying social conditioning had influenced them to feel distant from God cried out to Jesus like enslaved Israelites in Egypt. "Master, have pity on us!"

With words of grace and restoration instructing them to show themselves to the priests, Jesus cured the lepers' physical and social ailments. These "unholy" men, living in an "unholy" place had been made whole(y)! Their newfound cleanliness would have yielded a priestly endorsement of wellness, affording them fellowship with the community. They had been delivered and given a new lease on life. Their lives were totally transformed. They had become new creatures in every



imaginable way.

Though 10 had been cleansed, only one acknowledged by gratitude what had taken place. As a foreigner with leprosy, he was undoubtedly an outcast amongst outcasts. I can imagine that his compatriots with leprosy looked down on him because of his Samaritan status. "We may be lepers, but at least we aren't Samaritan lepers." The double portion of discrimination the foreign one experienced compelled him to appreciate the grace given and go the extra mile in offering thanks, similar to his spirit-filled predecessor's extra-mile efforts in offering compassionate care to a man attacked by robbers. Thank God for this Samaritan who teaches us that "it is right to give our thanks and praise!" As sinners saved by grace, may we go forth and do the same!

May 15, 2016

"No Contest"

Luke 18:9-14

The parable contains yet another example of spiritual paradox illustrated by the presence of true faith found in an unlikely vessel. If we take the liberty to interpret this passage via an analogy of an athletic contest pitting two contestants versus one another for the "spiritual heavyweight championship of the world," on paper this bout would appear to be a no contest.

In one corner stands the self-professed number one contender in possession of a resume that would stand to intimidate most opponents. The Pharisee entered the ring representing the spiritual elite. The name he bore literally meant that he was part of a group that "set apart" themselves from any person, Jew or Gentile, who would have been

deemed as "unholy." As such, he had an impressive record of strict obedience to the laws, rites and rituals of their faith. As the Pharisee took his "corner" of the temple, he addressed God, the proverbial referee and panel of judges to decide the contest, reminding the Holy One of his credentials.

"God, you know that there is really no need for this contest to take place. You know my case and my cause. I thank you for my superiority! I thank you that I am in no way a sinner by my own righteousness. Check my record. I do not rob, maim or cheat. I fast and I tithe! I, on my own volition and righteousness, make the world a better place. You should thank me for being your champion."

In the other corner stood the underdog who was blessed to have an opportunity to even set foot in the temple. He approached God with no righteous credentials to speak of. His resume would have been the exact opposite of his counterpart. His occupation would have classified him in the eyes of society as a robber, evildoer and (spiritual if not an actual) adulterer. Instead of fasting, he most likely indulged. Instead of tithing, he likely extorted at least 10 percent of what he collected. He was a sinner and knew it. He had no business in the temple. He presented himself before God in desperate need of mercy.

The bout was an ironic no contest. By unanimous decision, the tax collector left justified. His acknowledgment was step one toward transformation. Only God is good. Any of our goodness is a gift from God by grace alone.

May 22, 2016

"Jesus Loves All God's Children"

Luke 18:15-17; Mark 10:16

As many contemporary Christian churches literally covet the presence of children in their congregations, it bewilders us to read about Jesus' disciples rebuking him for blessing those babies brought to him in this passage. A number of our faith communities would love to deal with the "problem" of parents going out of their way to bring their little ones to Jesus! It comes as a surprise to us today that children were held in such little esteem during the period that Christ walked the earth.

During the days of the New Testament, it was a common occurrence in the Roman Empire to abort, orphan and abandon children. This is due to the fact that a number of people viewed children to be social liabilities and cultural burdens. But by this point of our survey of Luke's gospel, we understand that Jesus' ministry is one of "open hearts, open minds and open doors" for all who open their hearts, minds and doors to his love. And due to their vulnerability, malleability and dependence, children were open in each of these areas and then some. The Master viewed their impressionable status as an asset essential for entrance into the kingdom of God and a prerequisite for discipleship.

Ironically, the mere presence of children with their humble and teachable disposition offers a subtle counter rebuke of the disciples. We often lift up and reiterate the need for adults to set the example of discipleship for youngsters to follow. Yet this passage's conclusion echoes the message of the episode in the gospel that precedes it. "For everyone who exalts

(Continued on pg. 28: "LIVING WORD.")



CLERGY & DIACONAL

DEATHS



The Rev. William S. Ferguson, retired, died March 19, 2016. A Service of Remembrance was held March 26 at Discovery

UMC, Richmond District.

He began his ministerial career in 1949 as a student at Emory. He went on to serve Middle Bedford, Boykins, Monumental in Emporia, Bethany in Hampton, Rocky Mount, Culpeper, Westhampton, Lakeside and Westover Hills. He retired in 1989.

Skip Earl died March 12, 2016, after a four-year battle with Alzheimer's disease. He is survived by his companion and soulmate of the last 20 years, Ruth Fox of Norfolk; sister, Rachel Earl of Australia; brother, Sam Earl and wife, Joan, of Smithfield, Va; ex-wife Ann Morris; and their children, Jim (Tammy) from Temple, TX; Steve (Lynne) from Salt Lake City, UT; and David (Wendy) from Virginia Beach. He is also survived by 12 grandchildren, six nieces and nephews, 18 great grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

Graduating Randolph-Macon College in 1955, Skip then studied at seminary and became a Methodist minister, serving as pastor at Tappahannock, Reveille, Park Place and Great Bridge Methodist churches. In 1968, he left the ministry and became a student councilor at Old Dominion University. He continued his education there, obtaining Masters and PhD degrees in Psychology. He worked as Director of Academic Advising at ODU until his retirement in 1995.

Traveling extensively, Skip had a thirst for new adventures and experiences and went on Earthwatch archaeological studies to Easter Island, Hawaii, Australia, Israel, Jordan, Italy, Wyoming and Nairobi. He was also dedicated to equal rights for all. He worked actively in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's and 1970's, leading the Colonial Place Civic League in Norfolk.

After retirement, Skip became a docent at the Norfolk Zoo, where he spent many years as a volunteer and became known as the "Zoo Grandad." He was also active in the Unitarian Church of Norfolk.

Joanne DeHaven, of Danville, died March 18, 2016. She was the widow of the **Rev. Meredith N. DeHaven**. A funeral service was held March 21 at Mt. Hermon Chapel with the Rev. Jason Cook officiating.

Mildred Taylor, wife of the **Rev. Edward J. "Ed" Taylor Jr.**, died March 8, 2016. A celebration of her life was held March 12 at Fairlington United Methodist Church, Alexandria.

("LIVING WORD," continued from page 27.)

himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

One may interpret the disciples' efforts to rebuke Jesus in his dealings with children as an attempt to exalt themselves above the youngsters as well as the Savior himself. Yet Jesus' first words in response to their reprimand is to call the children to him. When he called, they came. They came ready to receive any and every blessing that he desired to give to them.

The moral of the story is that we are all God's children regardless of our age, gender, ethnicity, sins or any other level of social classification. If we are Jesus' disciples, we are to welcome others as we have been welcomed. Failure to do so runs the risk of aborting our own entry.

May 29, 2016

"The Walls Came Tumbling Down"
Luke 19:1-10

The Old Testament Book of Joshua contains the phenomenal story of the Battle of Jericho.

I was first introduced to this tale in Sunday school during my elementary days and was fascinated by the details. I even remember participating in a class skit performed as a summary of the account. We reenacted Joshua and the Israelites' marches around the walls of the city throughout the week. On the final day of the battle, the band marched around the city seven times, the priests played their trumpets and the people bellowed a loud shout, ultimately causing the walls to come tumbling down leading to God's army completing their conquest. This awesome story contains all of the elements of a biblical classic!

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Later in life I discovered that the name Joshua, means “the Lord is my salvation” or “the Lord is generous.” In light of this, one may interpret the Battle of Jericho as evidence of this reality. By the time we reach Joshua in the Bible, the Lord had provided salvation to the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt and had generously given them the land sworn to their forefathers (Joshua 21:43). I also discovered that the name Jesus is a Latin rendering of the Greek transliteration of Joshua.

When I read this passage I hear the music of Joshua playing in the background. Jesus’ stint in Jericho resulted in the tumbling down of spiritual walls. As a wealthy chief tax collector, Zacchaeus was a professional “sinner” whose fortunes were probably the result of cheating folks notoriously. Though small in stature, he was rather big in the business of hustling others. His lifestyle had certainly erected a large barrier between him and the members of the community and his relationship with God. That barrier was reflectively illustrated by the fact the he could not see Jesus when he came to town because of the wall of the crowd. The only way that Zacchaeus, whose name means “clean” or “pure,” could get a clean look at Jesus was to climb a sycamore-fig tree symbolic of regeneration. Jesus noticed Zacchaeus, bid him to come down, and arranged a visit.

Just then, the walls came tumbling down. The sinner repented, offered amends to destroy the walls and began to take up residence in the promised land of his salvation. Indeed, the Lord is our salvation! The Lord is generous! Praise the Lord! Amen! 🍀

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FROM THE BISHOP



This church is
not mine, but
yours

*May the grace and peace from our
risen Christ be with you.*

We are still in the “Great 50 Days” after Easter and looking forward to Pentecost. It is really a beautiful season, and I cannot but sing to God “How Great Thou Art” when I observe the changes in nature. Starting this month our conference will be getting busier, preparing for the upcoming General Conference and our Annual Conference in June.

I want to express my deep appreciation to all of you who took part in the Virginia Conference Day of Prayer. On April 10 we had a 24-hour Prayer Vigil. Each district developed a plan, and many churches joined in this prayer movement. I want you to continue to pray for the General Conference which will be held in Portland, Oregon, May 10-20. The Council of Bishops will meet before (May 5-10)

and after the General Conference (May 21). Please keep on praying for the delegates and for only God’s will to be done in this gathering.

Today we, the UMC, are in desperate need of renewal and revival. I think the essence of our renewal is to rediscover the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our life, in our churches and in today’s world. This is the reason I have been saying, “Let Jesus Christ be the Lord in our mission and ministries” for our new future. It is our calling as disciples to live out our faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our daily lives. If we do this, the church can grow to be a biblical and authentic church in discerning and obeying the Lord’s will in our mission and ministries.

I still remember one of the most important awakening experiences in my ministry, one that affirmed this faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It was about 15 years ago. As a follow-up to the third phase of a Five-Year Long-Range Plan at the church I served, Korean UMC of Greater Washington, we started a process of renewing our small group ministries. This plan was adopted by the Church Conference, and we prepared for this renewal plan for more than a year. First, we trained small group leaders and as a pilot project tried five small groups with a new format for a year. After a year we received positive responses from all our pilot groups and decided to expand this new format to the entire congregation. The renewal plan was aimed at transforming our small groups from fellowship groups to disciple-making groups. Although we prepared this process thoughtfully and cautiously, much criticism and opposition began to spread among church members. Why is Pastor Cho asking us to meet twice a month in today’s busy world? Isn’t it enough to

meet once a month? Pastor Cho was influenced by a small group seminar and tried to implement it without considering our situation.

One of our long-time members came to me and said, “Rev. Cho, this plan is splitting the congregation. I decided not to join a new small group. Please honor my choice.” I was deeply disappointed and full of frustration.

On Sunday when the congregation was scheduled to choose their small groups and commit to this renewal process, I went to church early in the morning and knelt down before the Lord. My heart was full of worries, anxieties and frustrations. There was no peace in my heart. I prayed and waited in silence.

After a while I heard soft and comforting words in my heart: “This church is not yours, but mine.” At the moment I heard this voice, I was relieved from all my anxieties and worries. “Yes, Lord. This church is yours, not mine. I will leave the future of this church into your hands. If you allow us to move on, we will proceed. But if you have a different plan, we will gladly obey your guidance.” On that Sunday, I shared this experience in my sermon and asked the congregation to forgive me if I had pushed too much. More than 60 percent of the congregation committed themselves to the new format of small groups. The renewal plan was successfully launched that year.

Yes, the churches are not ours, but yours, Lord. Amen. 📌

In our Lord,

Young Jin Cho

ONE LAST WORD

The earth is the Lord's,
and everything in it,
the world, and all
who live in it. Psalm 24:1



Photo of Assateague Island by Jon Woodburn.



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