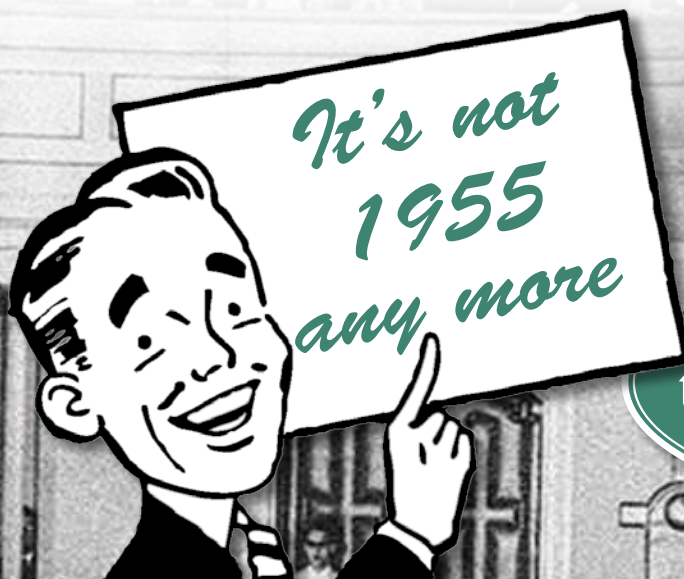


Advocate



Attracting new people
today means getting out
of the church



Connecting with the



Virginia Advocate

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

FROM THE EDITOR



Neill Caldwell
Editor

It's all about
relationship

Meeting new people... that can be a challenge.

Meeting new people and getting them to come to your church? Very tough indeed.

I was thinking about the new people who've arrived at my little church in the past year and how they got there. One family came because their son was dating the daughter who, along with her family, was a church member. One wonderful woman wandered in when we had a spaghetti supper, came to worship the next day and has kept coming back, often with her three young adult children! But several have come because they are neighbors of our members who invited them.

It's this ability to invite people to church that is a hallmark of thriving churches. Unfortunately, only about 20 percent of churches are thriving right now. The rest are somewhere between dying and hanging on.

A lot of churches show great hospitality to people who wander into church off the street. (Jim Griffith calls these "bib churches," as in a baby wearing a bib waiting to be fed.) The problem is that people don't wander into churches much anymore, or if they do they have a lot of problems. These churches, and the ones that don't show great hospitality to people who wander into church off the street, are in the 80 percent.

The "How to Reach New People" workshop that has been circulating around the conference over the past year – and will continue to be offered over the next year – stresses the idea of getting out into the community and meeting people where they live or work. It talks about getting the pastor(s) out of the building and into the community, along with the laity, and organizing ways to care for some of those jobs that are currently keeping the pastor in the office. It talks about networking with people you may know from group meetings or seeing them at the football game on Friday night. The workshop outlines ways to have small group gatherings around a particular hobby or interest as a way of inviting new people into one of your circles of friends and maybe a church invitation along the way.

Bishop Robert Schnase wrote about "Radical Hospitality" in his book, "Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations." In fact, he called that element the key to a church's identity. Schnase says "Churches that practice [radical hospitality] are constantly examining every one of their ministries and saying, 'How do we become more attuned to the call of God to reach out to other people?'"

But here's the thing to remember... inviting folks to church is not about putting people in the pews, or money in the plate, or additional bodies to serve on committees, or even because you fear your church is dying. Hospitality/inviting/outreach – whatever you want to call it – is about helping people establish a relationship with Jesus Christ when they don't already have one. It's just that simple.

Jesus said, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matthew 25:35b) That's what it's all about. 🍌

Neill Caldwell



P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058

Phone: 1-800-768-6040 or
804-521-1100

Fax: 804-521-1174

E-mail: advocate@vaumc.orgWebsite: www.vaumc.org

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Deadlines

The Advocate is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the January 2015 issue is December 1. For more information on future deadlines, contact the Advocate office or visit the website.

Advertising/Tributes

Rates for advertising and tributes are available upon request.

Local Church News

Items should be typed (preferably sent via e-mail) or printed legibly, no more than 100 words, and of conference-wide interest. Complete names of individuals, churches and districts should be included. Because of space limitations, the Local Church section prohibits news items related to church members' birthdays (of less than 100 years), wedding anniversaries, receptions for moving and/or retiring pastors, photos of traditional 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.

©2014 Virginia Advocate

USPS 660-740

ISSN 0891-5598

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

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

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(Above) Mark Ogren, director of the Center for Congregational Excellence, leads a workshop on "Reaching New People" in Farmville.

The *Virginia Advocate* Staff

Linda S. Rhodes | Virginia Conference Director of Communications
Neill M. Caldwell | Editor
Cathryn Huff | Graphic Designer
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COMMENTARY

Four churches: That ‘something’ special and next steps

By Larry Davies

It's no secret that most churches in America are declining, yet some churches thrive. Why? What are they doing that others could learn from? I visited four churches defying the statistics and thriving in the midst of decline.

In all four churches, I experienced generous hospitality from parking lot greeters to coffee bars; a casual, informal atmosphere; stimulating worship services with engaging music and challenging messages; numerous service opportunities either within the community or worldwide.

But there was “something” else... Each church possessed “something” that had nothing to do with size but everything to do with attitude. Thinking back, I regularly witness this “something” in many vital churches. This “something” was emphasized during announcements and even during the message. One pastor devoted the entire worship service to this “something.” How the church was spiritually deepened and his family strengthened.

I saw this “something” in action as I drove into a church parking lot. Attendants were standing in a circle praying. One saw my headlights on and came over to inquire. Then he walked with me to the

entrance, sharing how much his church meant, especially the men's group he belonged to.

In Atlanta, a couple sitting beside us talked of a daughter moving to our area. They attended both churches we were visiting and loved the pastors, but it was a Bible study group that really strengthened their faith.

A woman in the “welcome” area was friendly and knowledgeable about church activities. She shared how her life changed through a divorce care group. That group became her family when she needed them. She described her church as “a home for the hurt and hurting.”

A video at one worship service interviewed a police officer and his family becoming part of a neighborhood group. Later that year on a routine traffic stop, he was shot seven times. Members of their group were at the hospital and their house within minutes. For over a year, they provided meals, child-care, chores and loads of prayer and encouragement.

What is the “something” that vital churches seem to have in abundance?

The “something” is a passionate realization and belief that everyone from deeply committed members to brand new attendees need to pursue a “next step” in their faith

journey with God. And... these churches have a carefully designed and repeatedly emphasized process that only begins with worship and leads to various “next steps” such as a Bible study, a small group experience or a mission outreach.

This “next step” in our spiritual development is needed whether we're new to the faith or been connected to the church all our lives. Thriving churches recognize the need for “next steps,” plan for “next step” opportunities and consistently include “next step” possibilities in worship and in announcements so that everyone believes in “next steps,” talks about “next steps” and faithfully pursues “next steps” in their faith journey.

For one church “next steps” means: “Connect: Being a part of community is an essential part of following Jesus.” Another proclaims: “Circles are better than rows: Sustained life change happens best in the context of community.” What mattered was for everyone to passionately believe that taking the “next step” is crucial.

“Next step” opportunities were offered in four general areas:

- ❖ Teaching - Bible studies, curriculum studies, new member or new Christian
- ❖ Neighborhood or community - often meeting

“Part 1” of Larry Davies’ commentary on “Four Churches” appeared in the October 2014 issue of the Advocate.

(Top to bottom at right): Worship band at Blue Ridge Community Church in Lynchburg; worship at Tree of Life Ministries in Lynchburg; youth worship at Roswell United Methodist Church in Roswell, Ga; after-church gameday celebration at North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, Ga.

COMMENTARY

in homes, using materials provided by the church

- ❖ Need based - cancer, divorce, grief, new mothers, addictions, exercise, job transition
- ❖ Missional - literacy, food, clothing, construction or maintenance, car repair, local and worldwide

The mission statement for the United Methodist Church is: Making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Making disciples starts with first learning to be a disciple yourself. Learning how to be a disciple is taking the "next step." Becoming more involved in the transformation of the world is about disciples taking the next step toward service.

A church should provide an atmosphere of encouragement and love for you to improve your relationship with God as you strive to become a disciple for Jesus Christ. Researcher and author Lovett Weems writes: "The church is to connect people with God." Jesus said in response to a question: What is the greatest commandment? "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being and with all your mind."

Learning to love the Lord with all your heart, with all your being and with all your mind is about "next steps."

A church should help you discover your unique gifts and talents and use them toward a ministry of

serving and transforming the world. Lovett Weems calls this: "To connect the church with the community." Jesus said, "And the second is like it; You must love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Working to be involved in the transformation of the world is about "next steps."

What is the "next step" in your faith journey? Is your church providing help? What potential "next step" opportunities are there for others within your church, new to your church or live in your community?

Jesus said: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being and with all your mind. And you must love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Visiting four churches taught me the value of being aware of and continually providing opportunities for "next steps."

Do you have questions about the Christian faith? Are you a new Christian? Have you been attending church for years and asking: "What's next?" Are you looking to deepen your faith? Do you feel called to be involved in meaningful community service and outreach? Are you in career transition? Are you going through a separation or divorce?

Thriving churches provide "next step" opportunities to help you find answers and deepen your faith journey.

-The Rev. Larry Davies is superintendent of the Lynchburg District.



COMMENTARY

Leaders must believe things can happen

By Tom Berlin

One of the most important contributions a leader can make is to believe that things can happen. When we do not, they will not. It is that simple.

I learned this lesson when my congregation needed to raise \$3 to \$5 million to buy a plot of land for a larger facility. I found this financial challenge intimidating. When I had to talk to the congregation, I would mumble the amount of money in a low tone.

After one such lackluster performance at a church-wide meeting, the chair of the Building Committee pulled me aside and said, "It doesn't matter how good the plans look or how much work we do; if you can't say \$3 to \$5 million plainly and with enthusiasm, it's just not going to happen."

I will never forget what he asked next: "Do you believe this can happen? Because if you don't believe it can happen, then it simply can't." I had to learn not only to pronounce the words "three to five million dollars," but also to say them as though we faced a mild challenge, a shallow stream to cross, a low hurdle to jump. And before I could say the words, I had to believe them myself.



In the years since that conversation, I have been amazed at what can happen when you believe things are possible. Believing that it could happen, and celebrating when it did, led to other opportunities to exercise our faith. We have undertaken mission projects that seemed impossible, entered into community partnerships that seemed unlikely, started a nonprofit center that felt implausible, and embarked on many other adventures that started with a simple belief that they could happen.

It is not all bad when you struggle with your own lack of confidence. It will push you to assemble a solid team and ask others to share their time, expertise and money. If you can get the right people together, you will figure it out, even if the issues are complex.

It is also essential that you believe God can make things happen. There is a fine line for Christian leaders between marching people to certain failure saying, "All things are possible with God," and playing it so safe that it is evident

to everyone that God need not bother to get involved. Leaders live in and with that tension.

If you do not lie awake every so often wondering how you got into this mess, much less how you got other people to follow you, then you probably have not entered the deepest zone of trust in God's ability to bless your efforts. It may be that the Bible's regular admonition not to worry is a response to the consistent apprehension that the people experienced while pursuing God's call. There are few, if any, biblical characters who did not fear their circumstances before they learned to stand in awe of God's power.

I have learned a great deal about trusting God from my friend Bishop John Yambasu, who leads The United Methodist Church in Sierra Leone, Africa. Although Sierra Leone is a country where human and financial resources are scarce, he always takes things in stride. He reminds me, "God is good, all the time." He speaks of God's ability to bring good out of bad and the ways that grace often is running ahead, preparing blessings we cannot yet see but will experience soon. These are not clichés to Bishop Yambasu. They arise out of a deep trust that God is able to make things happen, even when it appears that all may be lost. His faith and confidence inspire those he leads.

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



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Sometimes it is easier to believe that things can happen because they simply must happen. Judy, the principal of a local school near Floris, challenged us to start a four-week summer school program to replace one lost to funding cuts. The school's test scores were low. Kids lost ground in reading and math over the summer. They often did not eat as regularly without school breakfast and lunch. Worst of all, gangs recruited kids unsupervised in the summer because their parents were working multiple lower-income jobs to make ends meet.

Key leaders met to discuss the proposal. Everyone had many questions. Where would we find enough certified teachers or the money to pay for the buses and necessary school personnel? Could we generate enough volunteers? It would have been easy simply to reject the proposal based on these concerns. But the fact remained that summer school was something that the principal felt the kids needed. It was a need too great to ignore, and so Camp Hutchinson was born.

Once you believe God is able, the people around you can do great things if they do them together. And when a need is crying out for attention, you start to understand that anything is possible. 🍷

-The Rev. Tom Berlin is Senior Pastor of Floris UMC in Herndon.

Fairfax UMC pays tribute to 20 WWII veterans

On Sept. 11, Fairfax UMC held an evening of tribute to its 20 current World War II veterans.

Lead pastor the Rev. Tim Gerde spoke of how amazed he was to identify 20 veterans within the congregation when, based on the proportion of surviving World War II veterans in the general population, FUMC should have just three or four.

With background music provided by Men of Message, the veterans enjoyed spending time catching up and reminiscing amidst fellow veterans, family and friends. After dinner, those assembled moved to the sanctuary, where more than 200 people settled in for the program consisting of service-related music, a reading from Tom Brokaw's book, *The Greatest Generation*, a poem written by a member of the congregation and maps of the European and Pacific theaters pinpointing locations where the veterans served.

A book paying tribute to Fairfax UMC's World War II veterans was compiled after an extensive interview with each veteran and family members telling their story of their war experiences and post-military contributions. The books were presented at the event.

Highlights of each veteran's story were featured. As members of the Army, Army Air Corps, Navy and Marines, these men

and one woman served on the front lines on Normandy, in the Battle of the Bulge, in the Atlantic and Pacific supporting island landings, in sea battles and ship escort duties, in the bombings of the Axis Powers in Europe, and in the Pacific "island hopping" on Tinian, Iwo Jima and Saipan.

Equally important were those who performed vital support roles in transportation, front line hospitals and triage/surgery units, special and secret missions, occupation duty in Germany and Japan and other support functions without which any mission would likely fail. For their dedication and valor, these WWII veterans received numerous awards such as Purple Hearts, Bronze Stars, Air Medals, Combat Infantry Badges, Presidential Unit Citations, the WWII Victory Medal and many others.

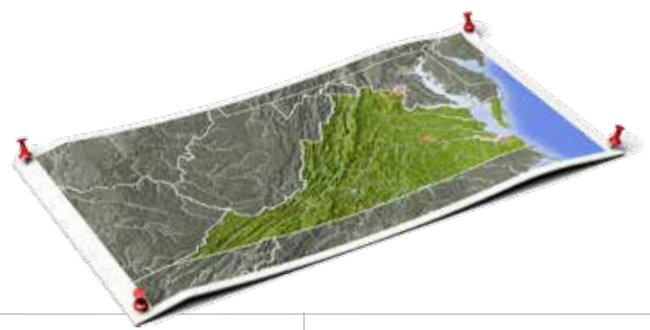
A vet who was unable to attend the event, Bob Lear, passed away on Sept. 13, and a memorial page dedicated to him was written and added as an addendum to the tribute book.

After the event, the church learned of a 21st World War II veteran from Fairfax UMC, Bernie Jennings. His story is being compiled and it will be added to the book as part of an addendum. 🍷

(Below) Pastor Tim Gerde commends the Fairfax UMC World War II veterans for their service.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



By Linda Rhodes

In response to Bishop Young Jin Cho's request that the Virginia Conference Common Table for Church Vitality facilitate conversation around the conference on the subject of human sexuality, the Common Table announced that it will hold "A Day of Holy Conversation on Sexuality and The United Methodist Church" on Saturday, Nov. 22, at Woodlake UMC in Chesterfield.

The day of conversation will also be live streamed to 12 regional sites across the conference. All Virginia Conference clergy and laity are invited to participate at one of the sites: Burke UMC (Alexandria District), Korean UMC of Greater Washington (Arlington District), Fairview UMC (Danville District), Blacksburg UMC (Roanoke District), Braddock Street UMC (Winchester District), Ebenezer UMC (Fredericksburg District), Franktown UMC (Eastern Shore Dis-

trict), St. Luke's UMC (York River District), St. Paul's UMC (Staunton District), Thalia UMC (Elizabeth River District), Timberlake UMC (Lynchburg District) and High Street UMC (James River District). In addition, live streaming of the event will be available through the Virginia Conference website.

The Day of Holy Conversation will include a message from Bishop Cho, remarks by a convener, morning and afternoon presentations and designated times for conversations among participants that will be guided by the convener or a selected facilitator.



Dr. David Anderson Hooker will be the convener for the day.

Convener for the Day of Holy Conversation will be Dr. David Anderson Hooker, Senior Fellow for Community Engagement Strategies at the J. W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development at the University of Georgia. As a mediator and facilitator for the past 30 years, Hooker has helped individuals, congregations, organizations, communities and local and national governments conduct important conversations on difficult subjects.

The guiding question for the Day of Holy Conversation will be: "In light of concerns being expressed in different areas of the connection of The United Methodist Church and in society as a whole regarding human sexuality, how can we move forward in mission and ministry together?" Follow-up questions will be given to the presenters by the convener as prepared by the Presenter Committee and culled from written questions submitted by event participants.

The morning presentation will focus on the first part of this question: "In light of concerns being expressed in different areas of the connection of The United Methodist Church and in society as a whole regarding human sexuality." Morning presenters will include a representative from the Virginia Conference chapter of Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) and the Virginia Conference Evangelical Fellowship as well as a presenter to be chosen by Bishop Cho in consultation with the Common Table who will represent a "centrist position" regarding human sexuality.

The afternoon presentation will focus on the second part of this question: "How can we move forward in mission and ministry together?" Afternoon presenters will include representatives from MFSA, Evangelical Fellowship, conference Young Adult Council, and a person who will represent a "centrist position" regarding

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

human sexuality.

All presenters will be selected from within the Virginia Conference and will covenant to:

1. Speak personally, i.e., articulate a particular point of view and the heart of the position they represent;
2. Remain open to consider something new in the exchange with other presenters and through follow-up questions and conversations;
3. Be mindful to acknowledge, within the limits of the format, a range of positions not represented by the selected presenters;

4. Be mindful to recognize points of agreement as well as points of disagreement; and
5. Seek to model a spirit of Christian dialogue for the small group conversations to follow.

Prior to the Nov. 22 event, advance information will be posted on the conference website. This information will be prepared from a variety of sources by members of the Presenter Committee and will include:

1. A historical timeline of The United Methodist Church's history of disciplinary statements/changes on the question of homosexuality and


related issues;

2. A historical timeline of selected disputed issues from our shared history and the manner in which they were resolved with a view toward identifying precedent for the present disagreements and challenges of The United Methodist Church;
3. How petitions are processed at General Conference; and
4. How to write a good petition for General Conference.

The Day of Holy Conversation will be recorded, and DVDs of the event will be distributed to be used

for additional conversations in the districts and local churches. The recording of the Day of Holy Conversation will be available on the conference website.

A guidebook will be developed for use by districts, congregations, and other groups following the Nov. 22 Day of Holy Conversation, and facilitators will be trained to lead district conversations using information that is prepared for the Nov. 22 conference Day of Holy Conversation.

Registration for the various locations can be made through the conference website. 

-Linda Rhodes is the Virginia Conference director of Communications

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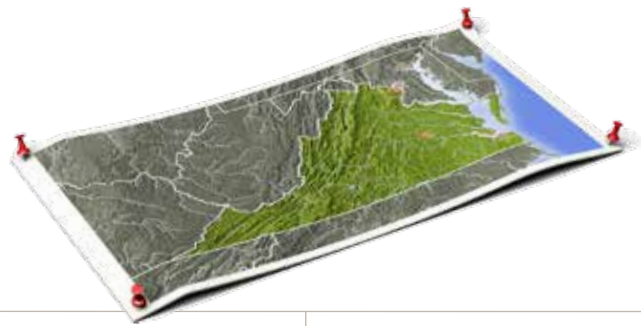
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The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Park View Community Mission brings ministries together in Lynchburg

By Larry Davies

It started as a typical weekly church covered-dish supper. During the meal, two strangers, just off work, asked if they could come in and eat. Church members welcomed them and shared their meal. The next week the same two workers showed up again with another and asked to join in again. The following week there were five. As the number of people coming to eat the covered dish meal grew, the mission of the church changed from feeding and socializing with members to caring for those in need. Park View United Methodist Church eventually became Park

“If you wait
for perfect
conditions, you
will never get
anything done.”

Ecclesiastes 11:4

View Community Mission.

The conditions were never perfect over the years, but somehow God kept working miracles through the hard work and dedication of many volunteers who always seemed to show up when needed.

Situated in one of the poorer areas of Lynchburg, Park View Community Mission quietly goes about the business of providing a hot meal and worship every Wednesday evening. Every Thursday and Saturday, the mission also assists more than 700 families per month with a shopping cart full of eggs, meat, vegetables and canned goods from food banks, churches and area grocery stores and restaurants. Park View is a vital part of the 89 United Methodist churches within the Lynchburg District and has transformed into a community ministry including other churches, civic organizations and colleges.

The statistics are staggering, but there are real people with every one of those numbers.

There was a young couple, with four children and another on the way, who lost their home and everything they owned because both parents lost jobs. All of them were living in a Salvation Army shelter when they first came to Park View. They received help with baby items, clothes, toys, groceries and a meal. The parents later joined a local church, and all five children were

baptized. With employment and continued help, the family was able to rent a home and even provide shelter for others.

There is the grandmother raising her teenage granddaughter alone from infancy due to a domestic violence incident that sent the girl's father to prison for life. There are countless others who have temporarily lost their jobs or have minimum wage jobs that don't pay enough to get them through the month. Park View provides each of them a temporary helping hand.

But in the midst of helping so many, there were problems. Maintenance costs were staggering. Providing tons of food each week required hundreds of volunteers. Park View needed a transfusion of resources, volunteers and organizational expertise to continue their vitally needed ministry.

Many times, I wondered if we should quit. But there were the stories. People who lost jobs receiving food to get them through the rest of the month. Families receiving help no one else could provide. Hundreds of people with needs were coming into that old church building week after week looking for a miracle.

As Rev. Floyd Archie, a minister involved with the mission, often proclaimed: “We needed to offer more than a hand-out to those in need. We needed to offer a hand-up.”



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

The first miracle came when United Methodist Family Services (UMFS), based in Richmond, received a large bequest with the stipulation that the money be used in Lynchburg. So, they opened a branch office on the third floor of Park View Community Mission. UMFS brought valuable family counseling and an adoption service to the community. In our time of need they also provided a partner for Park View to share in the cost of maintaining a large church building.

Two worthwhile organizations agreed to work together in ministry and share costs.

Next, our Lynchburg District made up of 89 United Methodist churches became a third partner, moving our district offices and training facilities in order to manage the building and bring needed help to the mission. This provides an opportunity for all 89 churches to work together on a project that will benefit thousands.

Centra Health offered to provide a Mobile Medical Unit, a clinic on wheels. Every Thursday, Centra offers this free medical help through Park View.

Rev. Archie began leading Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups. He wrote: "Church services were no longer happening within the walls of one of the most beautiful sanctuaries. During one of my prayers, while sitting on the steps of Park View, I

asked God, 'why don't we have a church where we could be of service to Him?' There are a lot of broken people within this community who are in need of God's unconditional love."

Two of the members of Archie's new church felt the nudge by God to begin a communications company in order to provide low-cost Wi-Fi throughout the area. Now students can continue their schoolwork at home in an area where very few homes can afford an Internet connection. Special equipment for this project is being set up at the Park View Community Mission.

Our two land-grant universities provided a nutritionist to teach people in the area how to cook and eat foods in a way that promotes better health. More than an employee, she lives in the area, learned from the program and lost 45 pounds in the process.

A local bank is interested in teaching financial management classes. A community college and a job training center are interested in working together to provide basic job training. A counselor and therapist will soon be opening an office.


While all these ministries are helpful, a critical ingredient is missing. When people come to Park View, who is going to answer questions, guide them to the right ministry, listen to concerns and pray with them? The critical ingredi-

ent of Park View will be a Pastoral Care Welcome Center. Imagine calling or entering Park View to seek help. There will be a volunteer there to greet you. He or she will listen to your story and provide possible resources whether the need is counseling, job training or to learn new skills. The volunteer will provide resources and offer to pray with you before you leave.

The Pastoral Care Welcome Center will provide more than a hand-out but rather a hand-up to enable someone to break the cycle of poverty and offer the most important help of all, a connection with God.

Another benefit will be training for pastors and church leaders who have little experience talking to people in need. Pastoral care volunteers will receive classes to help them relate without become either judgmental or enabling. There will be role-playing situations set up by coun-

selors who work regularly with people trapped in poverty.

The conditions surrounding Park View are not perfect, but we have an opportunity to do something vital for the Lynchburg community and for the Kingdom of God. 

-The Rev. Larry Davies is the Lynchburg District Superintendent.

Here are ways you can be involved with Park View Community Mission:

- ❖ **Pray for the mission.**
We value and depend upon your prayers.
- ❖ **Visit, either in person or through our website, www.ParkView-CommunityMission.org.**
- ❖ **Consider volunteering – volunteers are needed, individually and in groups.**
- ❖ **Become a financial donor.**
- ❖ **Encourage your church to become involved.**

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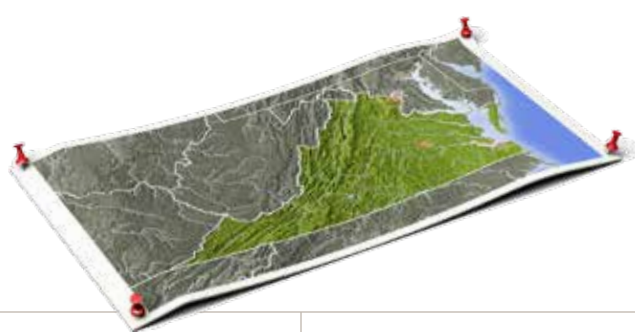
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The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Foundation starts new investment and loan program

By Stephen Clark

Every child goes through periods of rapid growth. Shoes that once fit become too small.

Many businesses move from start-up mode to a more aggressive operation.

a seasoned church. Older church structures may require enhancements and modifications to meet updated building codes or require re-purposing space to meet new ministry demands. Some ministries have already expanded and created a loan at a certain interest rate, but are now looking to re-finance for better rates. Other churches may be expanding through new community

purpose facility whose target is a younger, more mobile constituent.

Looking for new ways to serve local churches

In that changing ministry environment, The United Methodist Foundation of the Virginia Conference, Inc., began looking at other investment options that could assist local churches and related ministry entities to address these challenges and create strategies to extend for future ministry opportunities.

Dave Thompson, past president of The Foundation, said, "My primary motivation was to find a way to diversify the Foundation's income stream away from the almost 100 percent dependency on asset values by creating new investment options for churches and donors that could be truly 'connectional' in supporting other United Methodist Church ministry. Creating a church loan program was a way to enhance our ability to be a financial center for the churches throughout the conference. The thought was that by gathering funds through the offering of attractive investments and then lending that money back at attractive rates, we could help the churches and individuals. This could be 'Methodists helping Methodists', and at the same time, with the revenue flowing to the Foundation, we could greatly enhance our ser-



VIRGINIA UNITED METHODIST DEVELOPMENT COMPANY, LLC

United Methodists Investing to Impact Virginia

They may run out of space and need to expand. An infusion of capital investment is required to help the business transition to the next level of meeting the growing demand for the products and services.

A church plant can also experience growing pains as membership and attendance swell and expand the ministry. Such growth often requires building improvements and may even necessitate relocation. Normal funding avenues through local banks are generally not an open door to fledgling church ministries, since they lack the stability of

outreach opportunities to fulfill their mission – and now face challenges with existing structures and property in a rapidly developing area of the state.

One church in the Virginia Conference was built in the 1950s when the community was expanding into that neighborhood. But, over time, the area's demographics changed. New ministries were created to meet the challenges of a changing population – like a day care program – but the building requires renovation to handle the re-focus. In another community, a major ministry expansion led to a multi-

vices to all in the conference.”

The Foundation Board explored various options in how to structure this new investment and loan program to limit risks to investors and enhance the ability to minister to local churches. The approach was fairly basic. It is a business model that has been used by credit unions and ‘building and loan associations’ for many years. As churches or related church entities and individuals make deposits, the Development Fund is able to turn around and loan those funds to local churches for capital projects – either land acquisition, new church construction or building modification and improvements.

While this is a new reality in the Virginia Conference, other annual conference foundations throughout The United Methodist Church have been providing a similar investment and loan program for more than 40 years.

Church loan considerations

Many church finance teams are looking for ways to be effective stewards of their local church’s financial resources. Comparing lending options is a prudent practice. No one can see the future in the mortgage markets. The current 30-year mortgage interest rate is hovering around 3.87% – which remains unusually low. While it has climbed

some in the past year, it is very low when compared to the 1970 mortgage rate of more than 8.5%. Some analysts predict that mortgage rates could increase in the coming year. As the economy improves, rates tend to climb. Church loans are generally priced from the Current Prime Rate, which is the loan rate charged by banks to credit-worthy customers.

How will this impact United Methodist churches that are coping with growing pains?

Now is the prime time to review your church’s financial picture and create fresh strategies for future ministry. Set up a meeting with the Foundation team to assist your church through that process.

Investment options

When you purchase interest-bearing certificates from the Virginia United Methodist Development Co., LLC, everyone wins. Investors earn competitive interest rates, prudently grow their investments and experience the joy of Christian stewardship by providing a source of capital for Virginia United Methodist churches and agencies through the Development Fund. And deposits in the Development Fund will help make an eternal impact on people’s lives and local ministries, enabling them to meet the needs of a growing ministry.

What investment opportunities does the Development Fund offer?

- ❖ Investors may purchase either Savings Certificates or Loan Certificates.
- ❖ Terms may range from 30 days to 60 months.
- ❖ For more information, call (804) 521-1150 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 150, to speak with a Development Company representative regarding the Virginia United Methodist Development Co., LLC.

-Stephen Clark is president of the Virginia United Methodist Foundation.

Dr. Raymond Wrenn (below) of Winchester has served as a pastor in the Virginia Conference for more than 70 years, making him the longest serving ordained elder in the conference. Wrenn became the first individual investor in the Development Fund, signing his paperwork here with Stephen Clark. “Through many years of ministry, I still believe strongly in extending the United Methodist Church all across Virginia to impact people for God,” Wrenn said.



DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ The Rev. Burt Brooks, pastor of **The Brandermill Church**, led a group of kayakers and boaters on the annual "Vesper's on the Lake" service in August. The Swift Creek Reservoir became the "Sea of Galilee" and scriptures of Jesus' early ministry were read at various stops around the lake.



▲ David Patterson and Josh Humphrey joined York River District superintendent Seonyoung Kim at the Jim Griffith Coaching Network event at **Zion UMC** in Seaford. The two-day event, "How to Reach New People," shared strategies for pastor networking, dealing with growth and conflict, building a culture of invitation and better reaching the community, among others, and provides opportunities for further mission work by forming cluster groups. Eight churches from the York River District participated.



▲ **Chester UMC in Chesterfield County** held "Praise in the Park" on Sept. 7. Following the usual three morning worship services at church, the congregation and community guests proceeded to nearby Pocahontas State Park for an afternoon of food and praise music. About 350 people enjoyed fried chicken, watermelon and more. Selected members gave their testimonies. Those assembled enjoyed the praise music of the Chester UMC Chancel Choir, the Fresh Start Band, the Bridge Band, men's ensemble All for ONE, women's ensemble Dawn of Grace, and the new children and youth choir Faith on Fire. The Rev. Sylvia Meadows dismissed the crowd to go into the world Spirit-filled and energized for Christ's service.



▲ Members of **Burnt Chimney UMC** and **Red Valley UMC** in the Danville District participated in a work camp at the Red Bird Mission in Kentucky in September.



▲ Celebrating God's grace, Vale UMC members "wrapped" the church in a chain made of individual blessings, recorded over the past month.



▲ Last spring, under the guidance of the Children's Director Deborah Schieber, the children of **St. Andrew's UMC** planted potatoes with the help of Gary Biggs. Their goal was to raise some potatoes to send to others in need as their mission project for the month. There was much excitement when Gary arrived on Sept. 10 to help the children harvest their potato crop. Everyone was pleasantly

surprised to find that they had grown 45 potatoes. They decided to send potatoes to **Welborne UMC** to help in their project of feeding the hungry.



▲ In the Harrisonburg District, the **Asbury UMC** Arts and Mission Camp incorporated The Society of St. Andrew's "Abundance Orchard" curriculum. The camp included 21 children from Asbury, other churches, the community and several whose families are participating in the Refugee Resettlement ESL classes at the church. On Friday the children, their families and leaders shared art, music, games and biblical lessons from the week's activities, along with a Potato Bar lunch. Several families brought native dishes from Iraq, Sudan and Eritrea to share. The children and their families "gleaned" almost \$200 for The Society of St. Andrew.



◀ **Calvary and Warsaw UMCs** sponsored a musical fundraiser for the Northern Neck Food Bank and the Warsaw Community Food Pantry. A total of \$400 was raised to fight hunger on the Northern Neck.

▼ **Front Royal United Methodist Women** recently held a retreat at Blessings Lodge, Camp Overlook, with the Rev. Denise Bates leading the women in "Heart Whispers."





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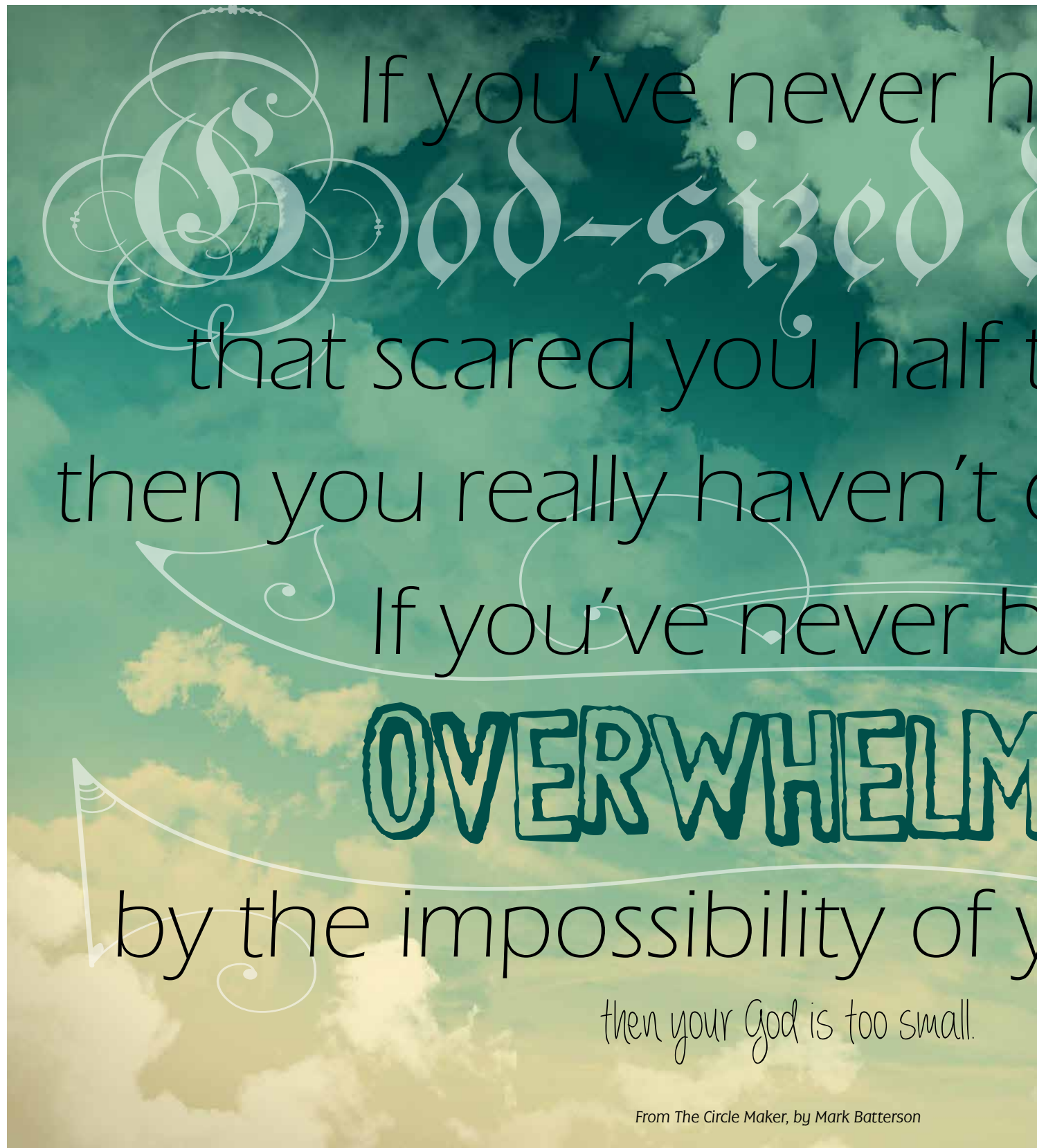
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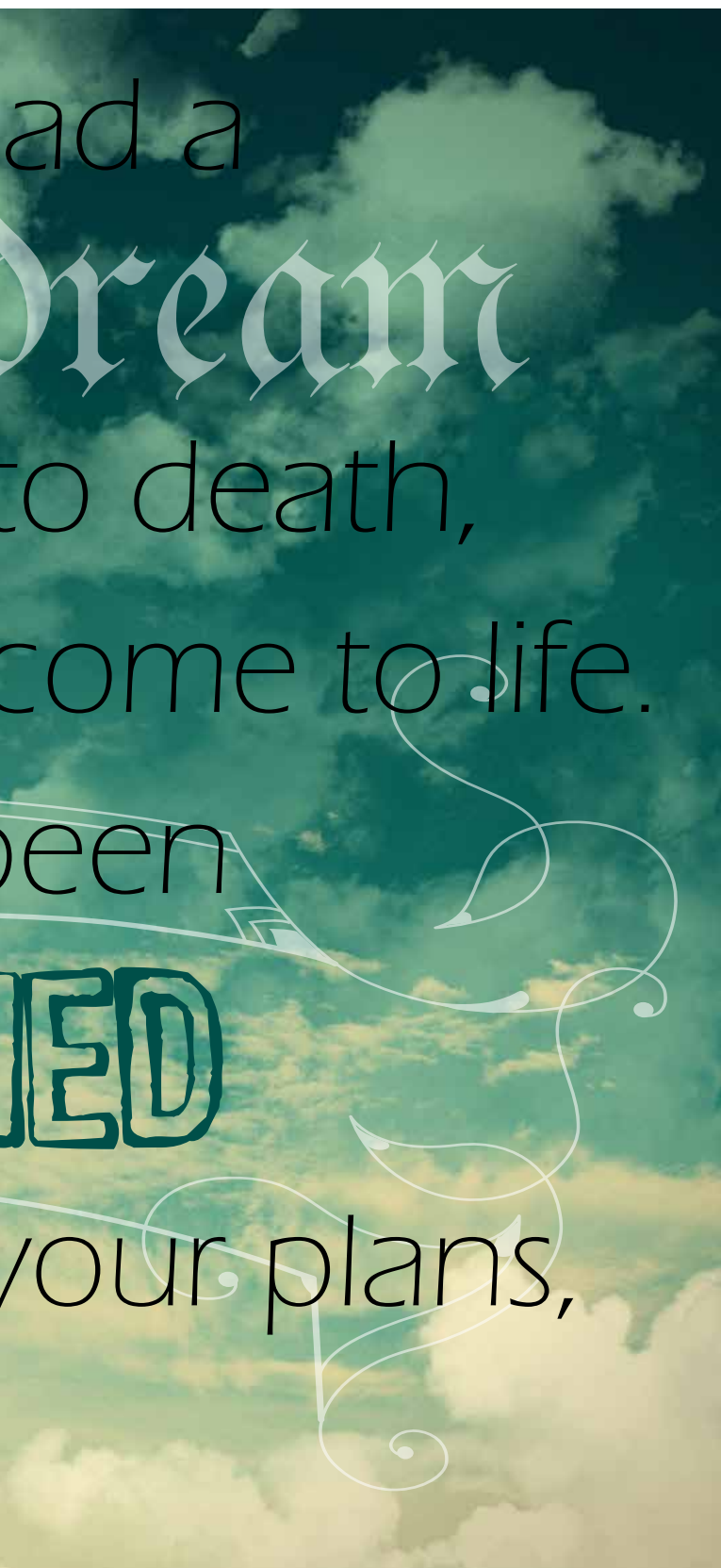
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Reaching New



People

Workshop helps people see that the old model no longer works



Last fall districts around the conference began hosting the Rev. Jim Griffith, a noted church planting and congregational development expert, and a two-day workshop on “Reaching New People.” The schedule of workshops is continuing this fall and into 2015.

“This really lays the current realities on (participants),” says the Rev. Mark Ogren, director of the Virginia Conference’s Center for Congregational Excellence, “as to why less than 20 percent of our churches are thriving.”

So far there have been 10 workshops, with 115 churches participating. About half of those have signed up for the year-long coaching that is offered.

The following material is taken from Griffith’s workshop.

(Continued on next page)



The world as we knew it in 1955

To do business in a town, the business person would need to join your church and probably be a leader, and the church and the culture are the same.

The bad news is it is no longer 1955

1. **According to Lifeway Research, 19% of the population in the U.S. will attend church this Sunday.**
2. **In Virginia, 20.2% will attend church.**
3. **The fastest-growing segment of Americans is the group claiming no religion. As of 2012, this group now comprises 20% of Americans.**
4. **32% under age 30 claim no religion.**
5. **80% of people between ages 18-22 drop out of church.**
6. **125,000 churches closed between 1990 and 2010.**
7. **80% of current churches are experiencing numerical decline.**

Church growth consultant Win Arn interviewed 5,000 Christians in America and asked them what they thought the church existed for... 88% said, "The church exists to serve my needs and the needs of my family."

This is called a "bib" church member because they are sitting around waiting to be fed.

Most congregations have remained in the 1955 model, waiting for people to walk into the church. This model no longer works; very few people simply wander into a church.

Churches have shifted into survival mode, where they become inward and self-focused. Those churches continue to decline numerically.

"Jim shows a great video of a church and a grocery

store that are side by side," said Ogren. "The church never changes while the grocery store undergoes many changes in an attempt to attract new customers. Finally there is a change for the church: a for sale sign appears out front."

No church starts out this way. Most of our churches have a long history of fruitful service: many baptisms and professions of faith, strong education, discipleship and spiritual formation across all age levels, and great generosity with their gifts and finances. But at some point, the vast majority of our churches in the U.S. become isolated from what's happening around them and do little to address that problem. It leads to more reduction and grief.

The Five Stages of Grief

1. **Denial**
2. **Anger**
3. **Depression**
4. **Bargaining**
5. **Acceptance**

The work of pastors and leaders is to do an intervention in this slow decline. Jim Griffith believes that churches across the country have discovered that the best way to implement "Reaching New People" is to join a coaching cluster facilitated by a coach. A coaching cluster provides ongoing support, accountability, resources and encouragement.

The goal of this year of coaching is to help each church bear "fruit" in their setting; to reach new people and make a difference.

Coaching

In the coaching cluster the following topics are covered:

- ❖ Strategies to re-distribute 20% of the pastor's work week;
- ❖ Continued support for pastor's networking;
- ❖ Strategies to build allies and momentum in the congregation;
- ❖ Implementing member/guest activities and building a culture of invitation;
- ❖ Helping the congregation gain clarity on its mission field;
- ❖ Dealing with growth and conflict;
- ❖ Instruction on how to build relationships and invite others;
- ❖ Instruction on how to take advantage of various seasons and holidays in the church year.

In the coaching process, there are:

- ❖ Monthly coaching calls (one month the pastors have a call, the next month the teams have a call)
- ❖ Unlimited e-mail contact with the coach
- ❖ At the six-month mark, a re-gathering of all teams for a face-to-face day of training and coaching

The cost of one year of cluster coaching is \$1,500 per church, but the conference and most of our districts are willing to help pay a lot of that cost through grants.

Strategies growing churches use to free up 20% of the pastor's current schedule:

- ❖ Rethink how the pastor(s) provides congregation care;
- ❖ Set up a congregational care system;
- ❖ Examine time spent with committees;
- ❖ Examine time spent in the office;
- ❖ Re-write the pastor's job description reflecting time to be spent networking in the community;
- ❖ Lay leaders must protect the pastor's networking time.



Rethinking the role of the pastor

How can your church break down the “walls of the castle” and begin to see the community? One way is to begin to schedule church meetings off-site, like at a local restaurant.

For example, the Rev. Barbara Jacobs, pastor at Zion UMC in the Fredericksburg District, has started having Bible study in the nearby McDonalds. She's found that it's become a witness to the community, as people react to the group and even want to join in.

In order to reach new people, the pastor (assuming a 40-hour work week) needs to be in the community at least eight hours per week.

For three generations congregations have expected their pastor to sit in his/her office during office hours. Growing congregations expect their pastor to be out of the office and in the mission field, leading the congregation back into the community. But given their current busy schedule, how is this possible?

They must “have their pastor's back” when there is push-back, and people complain that they “don't see the preacher's car in the parking lot at church.”

Networking

Networking is the primary means by which the pastor spends significant time in the mission field to build relationships and gather new people into the church.

To network effectively, the pastor must: interact with people where they are; break your community down into separate circles; have a set routine in the same places; allow relationships to develop naturally; understand that trust takes time; and understand that reaching new people is a contact sport.

“Basically we're talking about freeing up the pastor to do the things they went into ministry for, which is talking to people about their faith,” said Ogren. “There are so many more important things than sitting in the office.”

Here's a list of places for the pastor (and lay members) to begin to network:

Rotary Club, Lion's Club, etc.

YMCA exercise class

Local book store

Police/Fire/Rescue volunteer chaplain

Hospital or funeral home volunteer chaplain

Walking the dog at a park

Local recreation leagues

Golf course

The old model doesn't work

Those old 1955 churches reached new people by following the "attract" model. (Numerically declining churches still attempt to use this model.)

1955 Growth Strategies:

1. **Denominational loyalty**
2. **Attracting new members through advertising**
3. **Tracking down "inactive" members**
4. **Use of church by outside groups**
5. **Community-wide events (bazaar, dinner, etc.)**
6. **Outreach projects (food pantry, clothes closet, etc.)**

Growing churches no longer follow this model. They promote a culture of invitation. Nearly 90% of people who come to church and stay do so because someone invited them. Two-thirds of un-churched people would visit if someone invited them. And three-fourths have never been

invited to any church.

A recent study of United Methodist churches by the Rev. Bob Farr found that only three percent of church members had ever invited someone to church! And the average United Methodist invites a person to church every 38 years!

Creating "Elbow" activities

"Elbow" activities are member-guest opportunities where a church member extends their arm to someone who is not a member. They are not large events inside the church building, but small social gatherings away from the church campus based on affinities such as hobbies or interests. They are simply a non-intimidating way for people to interact with your church members. These activities build on the fact that people already have circles in which they've networked quite naturally.

List a couple of things you like to do, and think of a couple of others in the congregation who like to do this activity. Then think about where and when this gathering might take place.

Questions to ask:

Is it normal?

Is it doable?

What will the "hand-off" be?

To invite others, say, "Some people in my church are having an outing and I'd like to invite you as my guest."



Conclusions

Start by making some changes:

- ❖ Identify and invite church leaders to be a part of a task force for reaching new people.
- ❖ What committees and groups can we ask to meet outside the church building? What activities can we relocate to places outside the church?
- ❖ Think of ways members can start networking with people outside the church and develop a culture of invitation.
- ❖ Are there programs that can be used as “hand-off” events to our elbow activities?
- ❖ Look for events that the congregation can become a part of as you begin to reintroduce the church to the community.
- ❖ Schedule prayer walks. Ask members to pray specifically for this process.
- ❖ Ask the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee to discuss strategies for getting the pastor out into the community.

Griffith concludes: “There is no magic wand. Networking and invitation are about building relationships. This work takes time and effort and lots of prayer.”

For more information, visit the conference Center for Congregational Excellence at <http://www.vaumc.org/CforCE>, or www.griffithcoaching.com.

“How to Reach New People” Workshop

2014-2015

Nov. 8-9, 2014	Open
Nov. 22-23, 2014	Open
Jan. 24-25, 2015	Open
Feb. 7-8, 2015	Richmond and James River
Feb. 21-22, 2015	Winchester
March 14-15, 2015	Elizabeth River
April 11-12, 2015	Open
April 18-19, 2015	Arlington
April 25-26, 2015	Open
May 16-17, 2015	Open

Testimonials

I had the opportunity to attend the “How to Reach New People” workshop at Regester Chapel UMC. Attending the workshop with me were four laity from Hillcrest UMC. The workshop was excellent, and the workshop leaders, Jim Griffith and Paul Nickerson, did an excellent job in showing that it is possible for established churches to reach new people. At the end of the workshop one of my laity said to me, ‘This is the best workshop I have ever attended. We were given concrete steps on how to move forward.’ The bi-monthly Skype coaching cluster sessions for pastors have been very beneficial. Each time we meet our coach continues to encourage us as pastors to make, not add, eight hours a week a priority in reaching out to new people.

-The Rev. Justin Williams, Hillcrest UMC, Fredericksburg District

It happened often enough for me to notice. Leaving a meeting where faithful church folks had just lamented their dwindling numbers and an uncertain future, I would see several folks walk or drive by without so much as a glance at the church. Very few people outside church will ever just come in. So, people inside church MUST go make connections in new, even unusual places and ways. The ‘Reach More People’ seminar does just that. If you find something in church worth sharing, here are some new ideas on how to do it. You can pick a future for your church. As resurrection people, we believe death is optional. But you have to make the choice to stop doing what is not bringing new life to your church.

-The Rev. Joe Carson, Blacksburg UMC, Roanoke District

I can’t say enough good things about the new ideas presented to our team by Jim and Kim Griffith. Our team is in agreement that we believe this is a step Warsaw should take and would like to sign up for the coaching phase.

-Carol Blackley, Warsaw UMC

I want to thank you for making possible the Rev. Jim Griffith workshop. They gave the group an excellent step-by-step strategy of inviting new people to our churches and making them feel welcome and wanted. Their advice sounded very practical and doable.

-Carolyn Nelson, Worship Chair, Dahlgren UMC

“How to Reach New People” was a sense of overwhelming recognition that certain traditional methods were no longer working and then a sense of excitement that we had the freedom to create and explore new ways to meet, invite and include folks in our surrounding neighborhoods.

-The Rev. Ellen Heatwole, Bethel UMC

EVENTS



NOVEMBER

Middle School Retreat

Nov. 14-15, Eagle Eyrie, Lynchburg

The theme will be "Identity." The speaker will be Dugan Sherbondy, and music will be led by Keith Elgin. For more information, go to www.vaumc.org/youth or contact Becky Tate in the office of Ministries with Young People, BeckyTate@vaumc.org, or call 1-800-768-6040, ext. 139, or (804) 521-1139.

Ethics II training

Nov. 13, Fairfax UMC

All clergy and church professionals are required to attend an Ethics II training during this quadrennium (2012-2016). Trainings are held four times a year throughout the conference to provide convenient opportunities for participation. To register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

New Church Leadership Institute

Nov. 17-19, United Methodist Center, Glen Allen

The New Church Leadership Institute is for both pastors discerning a call to be a church planter and/or seeking ways to offer revitalization for existing congregations. It can help the participants discern their ministry style by offering clarity in ministry competencies, core behaviors and spiritual gifts. For more information, contact the Rev. Mark Ogren at MarkOgren@vaumc.org or call 1-800-768-6040, ext. 156.

Day of Holy Conversation

Nov. 22, Woodlake UMC

In response to Bishop Cho's request that the Common Table facilitate discussions around the conference on the subject of human sexuality, the conference will hold "A Day of Holy Conversation on Sexuality and The United Methodist Church." This event will also be live streamed to 12 regional sites across the conference.

DECEMBER

High School Retreat

Dec. 5-7, Eagle Eyrie, Lynchburg

The theme will be "Identity." The speaker will be Dugan Sherbondy, and music will be led by Keith Elgin. For more information, go to www.vaumc.org/youth or contact Becky Tate in the office of Ministries with Young People, BeckyTate@vaumc.org, or call 1-800-768-6040, ext. 139, or (804) 521-1139.

'Wounded Hearts, Healing Love' Retreat

Dec. 5-7, Camp Overlook, Keezletown

"Wounded Hearts, Healing Love" retreat is for those who have found themselves single again due to separation, divorce or death of a spouse. Participants will explore the trials, hurts, loneliness of being single again, and search for the road leading to healing and wholeness. Register at www.campoverlook.org.

'Walk to the Manger'

Dec. 19-20, Camp Overlook, Keezletown

"Walk to the Manger" is a free, live, interactive nativity experience. Meet the shepherds, hear the angels announce the good news, visit a young couple and their holy child, and help point a few kings toward the treasure they seek. Tours will begin continuously from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The experience will last about 30 minutes. Dress warmly, wear sturdy shoes, and keep children with a responsible adult at all times. Children and youths (grades 4-10) can extend their "Walk to the Manger" experience and attend Winter Camp. Register at www.campoverlook.org.

JANUARY

Ministers' Convocation

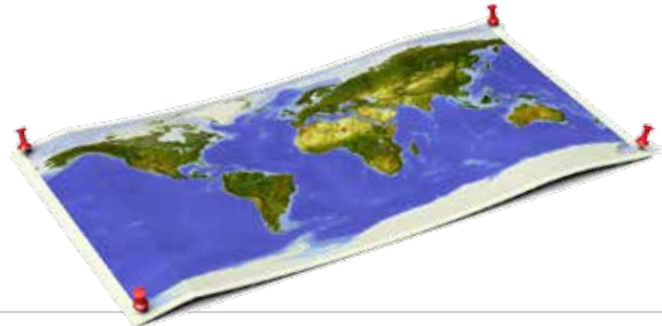
Jan. 13-15, Blacksburg

The theme for the 2015 convocation will be "The Future of Christianity in America" with presenters Dr. Asa Lee of Wesley Theological Seminary and Dr. David Evans of Eastern Mennonite University. The preacher will be the Rev. D.J. del Rosario, senior pastor of Bothell UMC in Washington State. Bishop Cho will preach for the opening service and lead Holy Communion. Details and registration at www.vaumc.org/MinistersConvocation.

Convocation of Association of Conference Directors of Lay Servant Ministries

Jan. 22-25, Williamsburg

Annual gathering of the Association of Conference Directors of Lay Servant Ministries, composed of conference and district directors of Lay Servant Ministries from across the connection. For more information, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.



Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD

UMCOR prepares long-term response to Ebola

Since June, the General Board of Global Ministries' (GBGM) United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and Global Health unit have been working in collaboration on a global scale to coordinate an integrated approach in response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa.

Community education about the disease, health worker protection and psychosocial counseling for affected people and their families are the strategy's three prongs, said Dr. Olusimbo Ige, of Global Health.

To date, UMCOR and Global Health have worked together to ensure that grants totaling \$400,000 for educational programs, protective equipment and other Ebola-related supplies have been provided primarily to United Methodist health boards in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.

"Our approach is to work closely with United Methodist health boards in affected countries, listening closely to them as they identify needs and strategies we can support," said the Rev. Jack Amick, UMCOR executive who heads the organization's International Disaster Response unit.

Amick is in charge of disbursing UMCOR emergency funds, while Ige advises that distribution in the case of the Ebola response. Together, they hold a weekly conversation by telephone with the United Methodist health boards in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

It has become apparent to the international humanitarian community and the governments involved with this crisis that the epidemic will likely have a long-term negative impact on the health systems, economies and social practices of these countries.

Last week the Reuters News Agency reported that hunger is an equally deadly danger as Ebola ravages West Africa's food-producing regions, preventing planting and harvesting and disrupting supply routes and markets.

"The country will starve," warned Mary Hawa John-Sao, vice president of Sierra Leone's National Farmers' Federation and an award-winning grower. Her own fields were lying unattended and spoiling in quarantined Kailahun district in the country's traditional food-growing area.


The U.N.'s World Food Program and Food and Agriculture Organization say border and market closures, quarantines and movement restrictions, and widespread fear of Ebola have led to food scarcity, panic buying and price increases, especially in Sierra Leone.

GBGM is partnering with local health boards, bishops, missionaries, UMCOR technical offices and others to enable a long-term approach that not only responds to the current Ebola crisis, but also helps strengthen healthcare capacity in the region to make it better prepared to meet any possible future crisis.

This long-term, integrated approach reflects the established standard for response to health crises and issues of sustainable development. To financially support these immediate and long-term goals, please write "Ebola response" in the memo section of your check. This will ensure that funds go where intended.

To help, you can give to one or more of the following Advance projects:

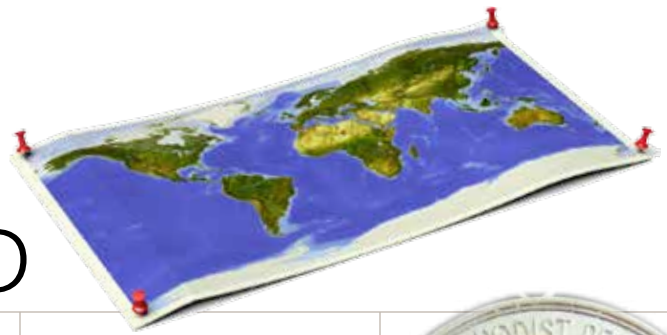
- ❖ 982450 International Disaster Response
- ❖ 3021951 UMCOR Sustainable Recovery and Development
- ❖ 3021770 UMCOR Global Health
- ❖ 15124A Pastors and District Superintendent Salary Support – Liberia
- ❖ 14552A Salary Support and Training for Pastoral Leaders – Sierra Leone

Visit www.umcor.org/umcor/donate/ebolare-sponse to get the latest updates about the crisis. 

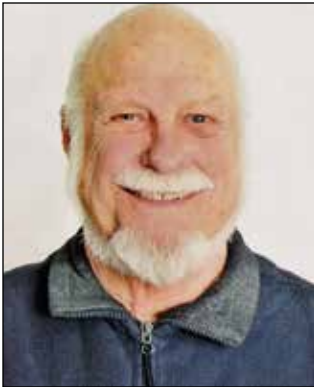
Health workers spray chlorine around a house that was occupied by a person who died of Ebola in Sierra Leone. Photo by Amy Hamer/The Guardian



Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD



Virginian wins 2014 World Methodist Peace Award



Dr. Hugh G. Johnson



Shirliann Johnson

Former Virginia Conference member Dr. Hugh G. Johnson, a retired missionary, pastor and former superintendent of the North African District of The United Methodist Church, and his wife, Shirliann “Fritzi” Johnson, have been named co-recipients of the 2014 World Methodist Peace Award.

Dr. Johnson was born in Kentucky but moved to Richmond when he was about 1 year old.

“I believe that Hugh was a member of the Virginia Conference when he was first commissioned as a missionary in 1962,” said Lynette Johnson, director of Church Relations for the Society of St. Andrew and Dr. Johnson’s niece. “He raised most of his missionary support from churches within the Virginia Conference throughout his years of service, and Arlington was his home base whenever he was in the U.S. on furlough. I think he retained his membership in the Virginia Conference for most of his time in Algeria,” she said.

Johnson graduated from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington and received a doctorate in international relations from United Methodist-related American University.

For more than 40 years (1962 – 2005), the Johnsons operated under a simple

motto: “The church has to be where the needs are the greatest.” This philosophy carried their ministry. As missionaries in North Africa, the Johnsons served during times of great unrest. From their beginnings with the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) in Algeria, the couple served throughout the nation during the country’s war of independence and the following turbulences.

Serving first in Laarba Nath Irathen in the Kabyila Mountains and later in Algiers, the couple’s tirelessness and drive to connect the gospel with the lives of the people of the Maghreb region led them to become fluent in Arabic as well as in Kabylian (a Berber language) as well as preaching in French. Dr. Johnson wanted there to be no barriers between the Word and the people.

In 1972, the Algerian government closed orphanages, hospitals and other diaconal institutions of the church. In response Dr. Johnson helped establish an English-language library, which served as a meeting place for people in the region and an unofficial place for Christian fellowship.

Dr. Johnson also regularly appeared on Algerian Radio, often in dialogue with a Muslim representative. He was a mediator who crossed the lines for the cause of reconciliation and mutual understanding.

Fritzi Johnson often visited refugee camps in the desert, coordinat-



ing humanitarian aid and teaching young women to lead kindergarten classes in the camp in order to help children and families who were affected by the war.

As the region dealt with a rising tide of religious extremism, the couple’s home and church were often attacked and targeted by militant groups. Serving a local church (The Protestant Church in Algeria) that was largely comprised of converted Muslims, Dr. Johnson faced restrictions limiting the church’s ability to worship and evangelize. To combat these laws he held meetings in his home between various Christian denominations and worked together in the spirit of ecumenism. His outspokenness and clashes with local authorities over the import of Bibles in Arabic and the Berber languages displayed the courage and willingness to stand up for his faith and church family, often at great risk to himself. Dr. Johnson was stabbed in an attack in January 2005, but his faith and commitment to his ministry never wavered.

Through numerous disputes with the government

Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD

and even expulsions from the country, Dr. Johnson always returned to Algeria to help the small Christian community that had formed there. His voice was one that served as a calming influence within the small community of believers in the country as well as an open ear and voice to Muslims in the area. Upon retirement Dr. and Mrs. Johnson left the nation, but their hearts and spirits are still with the people in North Africa.

First awarded in 1977, the World Methodist Peace Award is given semi-annually to a person or persons who have displayed courage, creativity and consistency in pursuing peace and equal rights for individuals throughout the world. Nominations may be made by leaders of the World Methodist Council's member churches by submitting a letter highlighting the reason for the nomination and giving evidence of the fruit of the nominee's efforts toward peace, etc. Prior recipients of the award include former South African President Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter.

The World Methodist Council is composed of between 250 to 528 delegates elected from its member churches. In 1956, the World Methodist Council established a permanent headquarters in the United States at Lake Junaluska, N.C. 🇺🇸

Operation Christmas Child can be a year-round project



For Palm Harbor UMC in Palm Harbor, Fla., Operation Christmas Child is a year-round, multi-generational project. Children, youths, adults and older members all pitch in to pack shoeboxes that will be sent to children around the world.

One special needs class, The Shining Lights, sells lawn ornaments and gourmet dog biscuits so they can provide the shipping costs for the boxes they pack. During the week, residents at a local assisted-living facility also prepare boxes with the materials Palm Harbor UMC supplies, since they are no longer able to get out and shop for them on their own.

Elementary students get involved in the summer, too, with Operation Christmas Child their mission emphasis at Vacation Bible School. This summer all 504 VBS attendees learned about Operation Christmas Child from Mission Pastor Ron Evers. Through age-appropriate videos and stories, the children discovered how a simple shoebox

filled with gifts communicates the love of Christ to a needy child.

Palm Harbor UMC keeps funds in their Operation Christmas Child account all year so they can take advantage of shopping deals when they happen. "We buy thousands when Wal-Mart has crayons for a quarter or notebooks for 17 cents," Evers explains. Then they are prepared to host shoebox packing parties for the various groups in their church.

To focus their year-round shopping, the church has a formula. They fill each box with a total of 12 items: four school supplies, four hygiene items, two gender-related toys, a stuffed animal and a Ziploc bag of hard candy. 🇺🇸

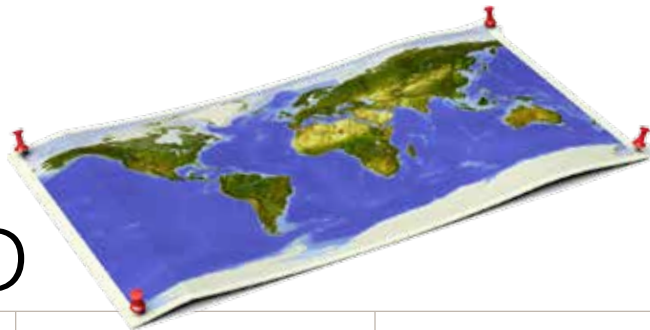
-Samaritan's Purse

Did you know?

- ❖ Since 1993, Samaritan's Purse has delivered gift-filled shoeboxes to more than 113 million children in more than 150 countries through Operation Christmas Child.
- ❖ Operation Christmas Child anticipates 2.75 million children participating in the follow-up discipleship program "The Greatest Journey" during the next year.
- ❖ You can learn how to pack a shoebox at <http://samaritans-purse.org/occ>.
- ❖ National Collection Week is Nov. 17-24.



Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD



Mission agency to move headquarters to Atlanta

Within two years, the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries will permanently vacate its longtime headquarters at the Interchurch Center in New York and move south to Atlanta.

That decision was approved in a closed session Oct. 3 by the mission agency's board of directors, but was not made public until its 160 employees in New York were officially informed Oct. 6.

The Interchurch Center, just south of Riverside Church in New York, has been home to the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries for more than 50 years. In 2016, the mission agency will move its headquarters to Atlanta.



In a new configuration for the agency, staff will be assigned to three new regional offices in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The departure from the offices at 475 Riverside Drive on Nov. 1, 2016, will coincide with the end of the board's current lease.

The Board of Global Ministries expects to purchase and renovate the large Grace United Methodist Church complex on Ponce de Leon Avenue for its Atlanta headquarters, with the congregation continuing to worship there.

"It's a unique chance to bring the global church and the local church together," said Thomas Kemper, the board's top executive, in an interview with United Methodist News Service prior to the announcement.

Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, board president, called the plan for relocation "a vision for ministry that is truly global... and grace-filled for those who give and those who receive."

"The theology of this is definitely rooted in 'The world is my parish,'" she said, referring to the well-known John Wesley phrase.

The mission agency will seek any needed approvals by the denomination's General Council on Finance and Administration and the Connectional Table for the purchase of the Atlanta headquarters site.

"New York has been a wonderful home for many years and there is sadness

in leaving," Ward said.

Earlier attempts by the general church to move the agency's headquarters from New York — home to mission organizations since the founding of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1819 — have failed.

This time, the push for relocation came from board leadership, based on the desire to create an international network and the need to lower costs to finance the plan. "Nobody is forcing us out of New York," Kemper said. "It's a totally different decision."

A member of The United Methodist Church in Germany, Kemper said he had a mandate to expand the board's international connections, which "needs to be expressed and lived in the way we have our staffing and our presence around the world."

Hong Kong "may be a possibility" for the office connecting the denomination's work in China, the Philippines and Southeast Asia, he noted. Earlier this year, the agency hired its first Chinese staff member, Liu Ruhong, who works in Nanjing.

The Africa office will be in a French-speaking country, either Côte d'Ivoire or Democratic Republic of Congo. In Latin America, office space would be shared with The Upper Room, a global ministry that supports spiritual formation. "We are in conversations on what this could look like," Kemper said.

Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD

In Europe, the Board of Global Ministries will not establish a separate office but work cooperatively with the European Commission on Mission of the European Methodist Council. Ulias Tankler, a current staff member, is based in Estonia.

As at the U.S. headquarters, regional office staff will have some international representation. "We want to keep the same diversity in the office," Kemper explained. "There could well be an American in Hong Kong or a Filipino in Africa."

Factors favoring the mission agency's relocation to Atlanta, Kemper said, included the availability of international travel through Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, a lower cost of living that would attract individuals and families not willing to move to New York and the ability to partner with organizations ranging from Emory University to the Carter Center.

But the real advantage to Atlanta, said Jan Love, dean of Emory's Candler School of Theology, is the local denominational connection, beginning with Mayor Kasim Reed, a member of Cascade United Methodist Church.

"The church is a player on a different level here in Atlanta," she explained. "In almost any arena in which one works or partners, there are prominent United Methodists in that arena. That gives you access to

partnerships much faster."

Before taking her current position at Candler, Love was top executive of the Women's Division of the Board of Global Ministries from 2004-2006 and served as a board director as a young adult in the 1970s.

So when the exploration of Atlanta as a possible new headquarters began, Love helped board officials get acquainted with the city "and the extraordinary resources that are here."

A couple of decades ago, the Board of Global Ministries, which then had more than 500 employees, opposed an effort to move it out of New York. At the time, the Lutherans, Presbyterians and United Church of Christ had all moved denominational offices from New York to other cities.

The 1988 United Methodist General Conference, the denomination's top legislative body, approved a 15-member task force to do a feasibility study. The cost of remaining in New York was a key consideration, but the task force also recognized that some church members questioned whether being in New York kept staff "out of touch with the grass roots."

Supporters of the New York location pointed to church's historic mission presence in the city, to the opportunities for ecumenical cooperation there and to a multicultural and social diversity that

existed in few other places. The task force's \$9 million relocation estimate was disputed, with the board's treasurer fixing the cost at \$16.6 million.

A site selection task force established by the 1992 General Conference proposed building a five-story headquarters for the mission agency at the Reston Town Center in Reston, Virginia, at a cost of up to \$72 million, including interest. A legislative committee of the 1996 General Conference rejected that recommendation, effectively putting an end to the process.

The debate over the move "became very, very politicized from my point of view," explained Love, who grew up in an Alabama family committed to achieving racial justice and remembered being both amused and saddened by false characterizations painting everyone in the Deep South as rigidly conservative.

Ward believes the mission agency's expanded global presence will open up new opportunities for mission. "The regional offices will help us grow in the mutuality that we seek in mission," the bishop explained. "We deeply believe that this configuration will be fruitful for the vision of our church." 

-Linda Bloom for United Methodist News Service.

Our mission footprint in New York

New York has served as a headquarters for Methodist mission work since the early 19th century.

After three branches of Methodism joined together in 1939, the newly formed Methodist Board of Missions opened its offices in 1940 at 150 Fifth Avenue, in what was then the Methodist Publishing House building.

In 1961, the mission board became one of the original tenants of the Interchurch Center. When the Methodists merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1968, the EUB mission staff came to New York from Dayton, Ohio.

While the Board of Global Ministries has reduced its office space from four floors to three in the last decade, it remains one of the center's largest tenants. Other United Methodist occupants are United Methodist Women and staff of the Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships, United Methodist Council of Bishops.



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



Church Communications faux pas

By Darby Jones

Effective church communication is more than preaching a sermon that inspires. It requires careful planning and consideration of your audience.

Here are eight common church communications blunders to avoid:

1. "I don't need a marketing plan."

"If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there." –The Cheshire Cat, *Alice in Wonderland*. United Methodist Communications offers a step-by-step guide to developing or updating your church's marketing plan.

2. "Ready. Fire! Aim."

Getting your marketing steps out of order can be extremely costly. Just remember the three "M's:" Message, Movement and Method. More importantly, remember the order to execute them.

Step 1: Message

What is the purpose and point of each of your communication efforts? Create a strong and compelling call to action in each.

Step 2: Movement

What do you want to happen because of your message? Be specific in terms of attendance, actions and feelings.

Step 3: Method

How will you connect the message with the movement? If method comes first, you may wind up with something that looks amazing but does nothing for the cause. If the movement comes first, you get a bunch of people milling around with no sense of purpose or direction.

3. "The church down the street is doing it and it is working great."

However, every congregation is unique, so a "one-size-fits-all" approach is not the best. Many people go to other churches because they are looking for something different. So

don't copy other communications and ministries outright. Customize. It's ok to repurpose another church's ideas or ministries, but add an original component that makes you stand out. Start by finding out the differing interests of your congregation and the other people you are trying to reach. Based on your findings, figure out the best communication methods to use.

4. "Everyone gets my message."

Often the message gets lost because it's either unclear or buried. Think of your call to action like the title to a classic song. Many times the title is conversational, prominently placed and repeated. Some people get away with breaking these rules. For instance, Bob Dylan can write a song nobody understands, yet people still think it is cool. Why? Because "cool" overshadows esoteric or "artsy" writing. It's hard to pull off, though, so as a rule, assume nobody "gets" your message. Next, rethink your content and test it on people who aren't familiar with it.

5. "I went to seminary and want everyone to know it."

People shouldn't need a seminary degree to understand you – whether you are preaching, teaching or writing an article for the website. Unless your content comes with a translator, do not speak "churchy" language.



6. "People are dying to hear my opinion."

Communication is a privilege, not a right. Many pastors get so used to their congregation listening to them every Sunday that they forget that the unchurched aren't so eager to listen. People care about their own interests. Don't assume people know, like or care about your message. Think about who is listening, and tailor your message accordingly. Make the message as clear and compelling as possible.

7. "My message is always interesting."

I see a lot of church communication that is both good and original. However, the good parts aren't original, and the original parts aren't good. Content that isn't compelling or interesting isn't likely to be read or heard.

8. "It's too expensive to do it right."

If your marketing material looks cheap, it will most likely repel people and do the opposite of what you intended. As much as we like to provide inexpensive marketing methods, we also like to promote wise decisions. Know when you can skimp and when you need to make the investment in especially important communications efforts. 📌

-Darby Jones, United Methodist Communications.

Avoid these common church website issues

By Steven Gliebe

A church website needs to provide the information visitors are looking for. It also needs to create a positive impression.

Here is a list of things I often see done poorly. If you find something in this list that sounds familiar, now is the time to improve it.

Design is outdated or unprofessional. It's time for a redesign.

Design is not mobile-friendly. Make sure your new design is responsive (this is huge today).

Making updates is difficult. Switch to a better content management system, train staff and volunteers.

Location is missing or hard to find. Put it on the homepage and header or footer.

Service times are missing or hard to find. Put them on the homepage or header.

Few details about the church. You need to cover location, service details, what to expect, beliefs, staff and ministries.

Contact information is missing. Make an easy-to-find page with all means of contact.

Navigation is poorly thought out. Rethink your menus; test by asking people to find things.

Information is not current. Keep time-sensitive information on your radar at all times.

Events are not posted online. Bulletins are not read as much as they were 10 years ago.

Sermons are not available. Help potential visitors, sick people and travelers listen online.

Photography is low quality. Find someone with this skill or help someone learn.

Photography is not representative of the church. Don't overdo "stock" photos.

People aren't visiting the website. Use Google Analytics, learn how to promote your site.

Social media is not prominent. Put icons in your header/footer, social share buttons on content.

Child care information is missing. Last but not least, don't lose young families.

There is no way to tell how many people never step through a church's doors because the website they visited was lacking information or gave a bad impression. The good news is that church website problems can be solved. Take some time this week to address a couple of issues and schedule more time for other improvements. 📌

-Steven Gliebe develops WordPress themes for churches at churchthemes.com.

Your house...



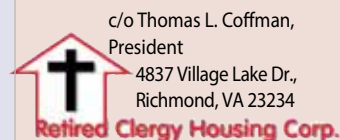
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Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



Dr. Dawn H. Peck, M.D., is a member at Trinity UMC in Lexington, where she leads an adult Sunday school class focused on the intersection of United Methodist theology with contemporary life. She is certified through the Shalem Institute's Leading Contemplative Prayer Groups and Retreats program, and has served as adjunct faculty there, co-leading its Personal Spiritual Deepening Program. Peck also leads a local contemplative prayer group as part of the Kindred Project, co-leads the Clergy Spirit Care Program and is a popular retreat leader. She serves on the conference Board of Ordained Ministry. Dr. Peck has practiced medicine for 24 years in Developmental Pediatrics.

Nov. 2, 2014

Ezekiel 43:1-12

In this place

One of our greatest strengths as United Methodists is our diversity; one of our greatest weaknesses as United Methodists is our diversity. I have come to appreciate this within my current home church, and I am certainly aware of vast regional differences, as I grew up in a United Methodist church “in the north.” Who knew that the South could be so different?

One way in which we come together as a community is for worship. Yet, anyone who has ever served on a Worship Committee knows that even (or perhaps especially) planning a worship service can be controversial.

God calls each and every one of us. Each of us is a precious child of God. We are the same, and we are different. We are all created. God created, “and it was good.” We have different life experiences and different sets of strengths and weaknesses.

Somehow, in spite of all our differences, many of us show up on Sunday for worship. God invites us and welcomes us, even if our reasons for being present on a particular Sunday are not noble.

I have come to see attending worship services as a kind of spiritual discipline. I attend seeking awareness and reassurance of the presence of God. I come to worship God and to listen for God. I also attend services to support the local church, to be present to the variety of people with whom I cross paths, to hear the Word as spoken through the lips of others, and to hear interpretation of God's Word from the perspective of another. I love sinking into music that invites contemplation. I need silence within a worship service, or my prayer life in God seems to get pushed out by too many words. Others find silence uncomfortable. Worship services are not designed just for me. The Spirit moves in and through worship services to meet each of us in some way.

In spite of our differences, we join together in worship because we know and experience that “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” We know and sing and believe: “Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place ...”

Sometimes, but not always, we can even feel it.

Nov. 9, 2014

Ezekiel 43:13-21

I will accept you

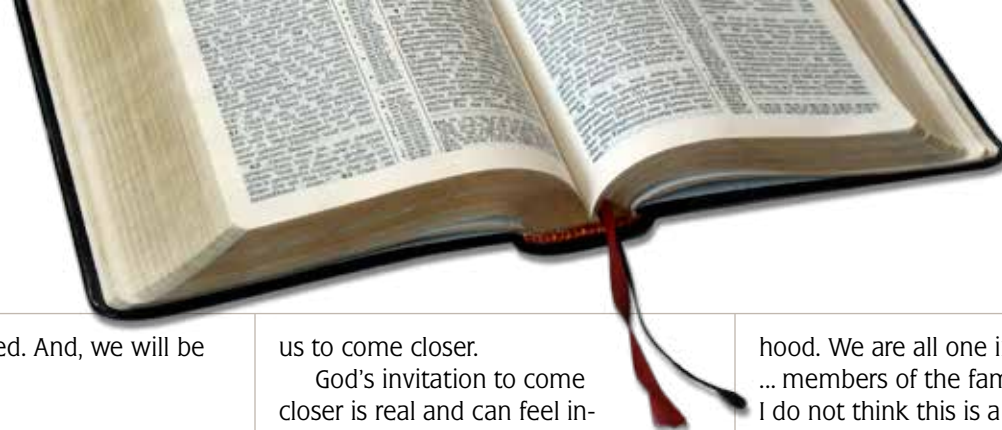
There is a cry deep within the heart of every man, woman and child. This is the cry, the yearning, to be accepted and loved. Many of us struggle to live authentically, for we fear if we let out our deepest, truest self, we might not be accepted. Worse yet, we might be overtly rejected. Rejection hurts.

God invites us to open our hearts fully to God. We are assured that as we approach God authentically (with our offering of ourselves and on holy ground), we will be accepted. What constitutes holy ground, sacred space, is the encounter with God. Certainly this encounter can happen in church and during a worship service. Many speak of an encounter with God during Holy Communion – a converting and transforming sacrament. John Wesley spoke of the power of Holy Communion; we should partake as often as possible. Yet, sacred and holy ground is not found only inside church walls.

I sense the close presence of God nearly anywhere that I take a moment to breathe and “open myself” to this presence. It isn't actually “me” that does the opening. It is God, answering a deep, perhaps wordless prayer of desire – desire to come closer, desire to “see,” perceive, become aware of God's awesome presence radiating through and in everything. God is certainly always present, but my ability to perceive this presence varies. Dry spells happen, sometimes for a long time.

What makes an altar for me is the encounter with God, the awareness of the Spirit of Christ present now. The physical place can be anywhere – even in the midst of swirling chaos, although that would not be my choice. I would prefer to hike, to walk in a deep forest, to sit or stand before crashing waves, to enter into deep and meaningful conversation with another ... to seek God's presence in these ways. God, however, comes as God will. Thanks be to God that, even in the midst of what can sometimes be the terrible cruelty of this world, God makes God's self known. Sometimes this even happens when we don't recognize the need enough to consciously seek.

God is seeking us. Our deeply authentic response puts us solidly on holy ground, and



we will be accepted. And, we will be changed.

Nov. 16, 2014

Ezekiel 47:3-12

Living water

Sometimes, not always, I perceive a stream of living water continuing throughout time, bringing forward all good that has gone before. It is similar to the river of Ezekiel's vision – everything this river touches becomes fresh and everything within its reach lives in the fullest sense. At times, I sense the ways in which God has reached out to me through people and experiences across my lifetime. I might not have chosen all of these experiences, but I am now able to recognize the living water that has flowed through them. These experiences continue to help me recognize, in the present, when I am living in consort with this life-giving stream and when I am “out of sync” with it.

This stream of God's goodness, of Spirit, of love, of all that is within Christ, is ever present. Our very lives are intertwined with this stream and depend on it – whether or not we recognize it. Once this stream of goodness, of God's grace, is tasted, however, it is hard (impossible?) to resist. As in Psalm 42, we too may find ourselves thirsting for more of the living God. Like our earth's surface water that sometimes disappears (but is really running underground for a time), we may think it “gone.”

More often than not, we recognize this stream retrospectively, as we become aware of the ways in which God has been moving in our lives and in the lives of others. Sometimes in the middle of a hard place, we can only trust, but not see that God is with us. Sometimes, when we are overwhelmed and almost without hope, we are carried by the prayers and presence of others. God is ever-present and reaching out towards us, inviting

us to come closer.

God's invitation to come closer is real and can feel intimidating. To paraphrase Annie Dillard, in *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, we should consider wearing hard hats to church and perhaps strapping ourselves in our seats. For, when God enters one's life, things change.

Are we brave enough to continually respond affirmatively to God's invitation to come closer? Do we trust God enough to do so? In this way, our lives and our world are transformed. We may find ourselves joining in the refrain, “Since love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?”

Nov. 23, 2014

Ezekiel 47:13-23

Orienting and re-orienting

With electronic-guidance systems, “re-calculating route” is becoming a familiar sound when we make a wrong turn. This has parallels in life. How many times, as an individual, a parent, a congregation, or an institutional church, have we had to step back and re-evaluate where we are headed and how we are getting “there”? Even defining “there” is a major task.

We have in the texts today a common theme of new beginnings, new beginnings in God and new beginnings in relationship with one another, a re-directing of sorts. Some of us remember our baptisms; some do not. I was baptized at age two months; I do not remember. I have one photo from that day.

I wonder about the expressions on my parents' faces. What are they thinking? Did they really understand the theological significance of baptism? Did they (do we) have any idea of what a particular life as a Christian will look like over time? “Through baptism [we] are incorporated by the Holy Spirit into God's new creation and made to share in Christ's royal priest-

hood. We are all one in Christ Jesus ... members of the family of Christ.” I do not think this is a statement to be fully understood intellectually, although we certainly can and do approach it intellectually. I think we live into the understanding of it as we are grown and shaped by God, through community in Christ.

We cannot predict exactly how this shaping of us will take place, as we cannot even predict our own responses to the situations of life in which we find ourselves. What we can predict is that, with our baptism, we step into the waters of a tried and true flowing stream of God's love and grace, as lived for us through and in Jesus. I need to consciously connect with this stream in the midst of daily life; otherwise my responses to any situation are not grounded in God. There are times that I need to “remember my baptism” and re-calculate my direction. As I step into this life-giving stream ever deeper, it carries me and empowers me to respond to the needs of the moment in a loving way.

Even the church itself needs to re-calculate its route at times, to deepen its own grounding in the triune God whose arms of love reach out to all.

Nov. 30, 2014

Isaiah 52:1-2, 7-12

The inklings of the reality of God

Like the people of ancient Israel, perhaps we too are strangers in a strange land. In a life full of the busy-ness of contemporary culture, there are intimations and inklings of another world that at times may seem more Real than the one in which we are all immersed.

For me, these inklings began at an early age. Sitting in the side-chapel of the United Methodist church in which I grew up, I was aware of a palpable presence so close as to be overwhelming. Consistently. No one, however,

(Continued on page 33, “Living Word”)

CLERGY & DIACONAL

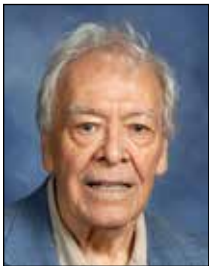


DEATHS



The Rev. Harold M. Fuss, 89, of Chatham, died Sept. 17, 2014. A West Virginia native, he began his ministry in 1944 in the Baltimore

Conference and transferred to the Virginia Conference in 1946. He retired in 1990 having served 46 years throughout the conference. He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Jacqueline; two sons, including the Rev. Christopher Fuss, and a daughter.



The Rev. Dr. Homer Alexander Hall, 90, of Richmond, died on Sept. 16, 2014. Hall was 44 when he began his career as a pastor for The

United Methodist Church. He served churches in Loudoun County from 1968-1982. He was also a chaplain at Fairfax Hospital and a counselor at Pastoral Counseling Service of Northern Virginia. He is survived by his wife of 69 years, Ethel Hall; a son and a daughter.

Linda Lavender Duston, of Columbus, Miss., died Oct. 2, 2014. She was the sister of the **Rev. Dr. Jim Lavender**, pastor of Discovery UMC, Richmond District.

Peggy Ann Hardesty Jones, 81, of Berryville, died Sept. 20, 2014. She was the mother of the **Rev. Bill Jones**, senior pastor at Williamsburg UMC, York River District.

Nancy W. Markham, 77, of Hampton, died Sept. 14, 2014. She is survived by **the Rev. Tommy Markham**,

retired clergy in the Virginia Conference.

Kenneth C. Seaman died Sept. 28, 2014. He was the father of **Bettie Ann Felumlee** and father-in-law of **the Rev. Alan Felumlee**, pastor of Centreville UMC, Arlington District.

Elizabeth "Betty" Tongue, 92, died Oct. 1, 2014. She was the mother of **the Rev. Jim Tongue**, who is serving Bridgewater UMC, Harrisonburg District.

James Walker died Sept. 17, 2014, in Ohio. He was the brother of **the Rev. Jan Prentace Commander**, pastor of Roberts Memorial UMC in Alexandria.

BIRTHS

James Faulkner Box, the first child of **Rev. Oliver and Kate Box**, was born Oct. 10. Oliver Box is pastor of Camerton UMC, Alexandria District.

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TRIBUTE

Angaleene Lee, a life-long member of The United Methodist Church, faithfully served her local church, Mount Horeb in Bristersburg, as well as at the district and conference levels. At the age of 14, she began a long term of service as pianist/organist at weekly worship which continued until recently. Using her gifts and talents for music, she also led the church choir, as well as mentoring others in sharing their talents. Lee served as a teacher for the adult Sunday school and as UMW president for many years. In the Alexandria District, she was active in the UMW and served as a delegate to the district. For numerous years Angaleene and her husband, Fitzhugh, were delegates to Annual Conference. A shepherd of the heart, Angaleene continued in her commitment to the church until she claimed the promise of the resurrection this July at age 87.

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Cokesbury

("Living Word," continued from page 31)


spoke of this to me. I can remember clearly other times when this presence seemed to lure me into thinking about God. Only later did I come to understand this presence as God's own Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. God calls each and every one into relationship with God and with each other. Over and over again – we are invited. The invitation comes in many different forms, as we are a diverse lot of people. God has great respect for our independence and freedom of choice. And, yet, I wonder still, is God's Grace irresistible once experienced?

Isaiah talks in this passage of "how beautiful ... the messenger who proclaims peace, who brings good news." Advent ushers in a thin place in our liturgical calendar – a time of expectant waiting, a time when we may let down our guard and begin to hope and trust and expect God to really show up. We hope and yearn and pray. And, our prayers are answered.

Inklings begin to surface, and hope bubbles up. Sometimes I sense a little nudge. As I respond (cautiously), I sense a peace of being. This peace of being becomes a kind of signpost indicating a direction or a way perhaps. God's call is not a one-time thing. Each moment brings a new opportunity to respond from our center in God (or not). As we respond positively to these gentle promptings of the Spirit, we are transformed into being more of who it is God calls us to be. As we are transformed, so is our world. Our hope truly is in the Lord.

This Advent season, may we once again dare to hope, yearn and pray deeply – trusting in God, who always comes to meet us. ☺

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FROM THE BISHOP



A plea for prayerful discernment

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

It is already November! I am writing this article before I leave for Korea for the Pilgrimage for Spiritual Renewal. By the time you receive this November issue of the *Advocate*, I will be back from that trip.

As you know, on Nov. 22 we are going to have a conference-wide conversation on human sexuality. I am deeply grateful to Rev. Marc Brown and the members of the Common Table and the work group members who have been preparing for this conversation. Though the team members have different opinions on this difficult issue, they have been respecting each other and working together in prayer. I appreciate their dedication to this conference-wide conversation.

The issues relating to human sexuality have been very difficult for The

United Methodist Church for many years. Though we think that this is not a primary thing in our church, this issue has been dividing our churches, and we have been experiencing pain. Now, we reach the point that some people start saying that the time of amicable separation has come. In this situation I think it will be very important to have a time to sit together, to share with one another, and to try to find a way to be one in mission in our conference.

My expectation for this conversation is to seek and find a way to deal with this issue in a different way. Is there any way for us to move from political battle to prayerful discernment? Is it impossible for people with different understandings to respect each other and move forward in God's mission? Is there any room in each of us to listen and reflect upon the other side's stories? How can we restore a respect for the discerning process of the church even though the decision of the church is different from my opinion?

One of the reasons this issue is more serious and difficult is a different understanding and interpretation of the Scripture. Both sides argue on the basis of Scripture. So, this issue is more than a different understanding on human sexuality. This is related to a different understanding of the authority and interpretation of Scripture.

Though we have differences in our understanding on this issue, I believe that all of us are seeking the truth, God's truth, on this matter. And I believe that truth will prevail in the end. In Jesus' death and resurrection we confirmed that God's truth would prevail in the end. For the time being, truth may seem to lose, but God's truth will prevail in God's time. All of us are on the journey of seeking and following God's truth.

I still remember what I heard from my Old Testament professor in my first year at Methodist Theological

Seminary in Seoul, Korea. He told us that conviction was important, but if our conviction was not open to truth, our conviction would easily lead us to self-righteousness.

Can we not open our conviction to the truth, our Lord Jesus Christ who is still alive and leads our churches through the Holy Spirit? Can we not stop labeling the other side and pray for each other that we may be more humble in discerning the guidance of our Lord? Can we truly apply our faith, hope and love in this matter?

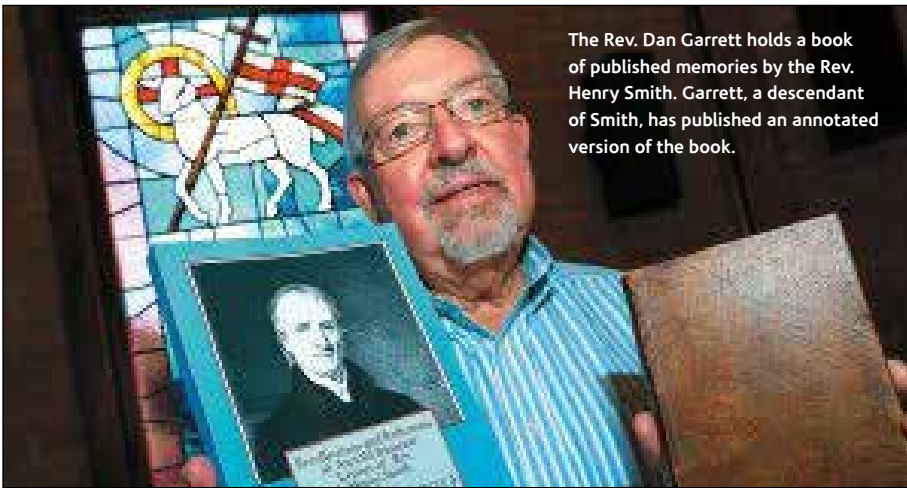
Many times we have used this kind of conversation to advertise one side's agenda. That was the reason we lost trust in our discerning process. This time we tried to do our best to be fair in preparing for this conversation. Now, I appeal to you to pray for this conference-wide conversation. This issue is too sensitive, too complicated and too divisive. And we, The United Methodist Church, are a global church. The decision we make here will impact the mission of fellow United Methodist churches on the other side of the earth. I think without God's help, we human beings cannot handle this complicated issue properly and wisely. Please, please pray for this conversation.

My prayer is that with God's help and intervention our gathering may be a blessing to all of us.

One more time I appeal to you: Please pray for this conversation.

In our Lord,

ONE LAST WORD



The Rev. Dan Garrett holds a book of published memories by the Rev. Henry Smith. Garrett, a descendant of Smith, has published an annotated version of the book.

Garrett ends up where his family began

The Rev. Daniel Garrett often notes that the 14 years he spent as pastor at Duncan Memorial UMC in Berryville marks the longest time he has ever lived in any community. He's the son of a Methodist minister, who moved to various appointments as his children were growing up.

"I put down deep roots in Berryville," says Garrett, who along with his wife, Susan, raised two sons in the town and decided to retire here in 1996. But, until he went to a family reunion in Zanesville, Ohio, in 2003, he didn't know how deep his family roots were in Clarke County.

It was a gathering of his mother's family, the Smiths, who descended from Bartholomew Smith, "my maternal grandfather, seven generations back," Garrett said.

He learned that Bartholomew Smith and his three brothers came to America from Stuttgart, Germany, in 1765. Then, in 1772, he and one of his brothers moved to a 450-acre farm called Big Spring Plantation. It was just three miles north of Berryville.

How strange, Garrett said, that after all the traveling he'd done in his life, he ended up where his mother's family began in America. But, there was an even stranger coincidence.

Bartholomew's oldest son, Henry Smith, became a Methodist minister, ordained by America's first Methodist Bishop, Francis Asbury. He was an early circuit-riding preacher, cultivating new congregations on the American frontier.

Later in his life, Smith, who died at age 94 in 1862, wrote a series of articles about his life as an "itinerant" preacher for a Methodist publication, *The Western Advocate*. He collected and published them in 1848 as a book called *Recollections and Reflections of an Old Itinerant*.

Smith described his journeys on the frontier, the hardships he encountered and his joy at the conversions he saw.

Smith describes riding through Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Kentucky, Ohio and present-day West Virginia. Some of his comments bring a smile to Garrett's face, perhaps because he is a pastor.

Circuit-riding preachers suffered for their calling in a time when getting from one place to another meant long days on horseback, or on foot.

When Garrett found a copy of Smith's book at the Duke Divinity School, he decided to republish it. It is now available on Amazon. 📖

-Val Van Meter, *The Winchester Star*



Tweets heard 'round the conference

Zach Roberts @zachsayssthis

Seriously naming my daughter some manly name. Ralph or Clarence or Paul. Nobody wants to date a girl named Richard

Justin Hicks @JUST_livINg_it

STOPTOBER!!! Look it up. #stophungernow <http://riseharrisonburg.com/stop>

Sonja Flye Oliver @SoFlye59

Life is filled with swift transitions... But guess what? #ItsAllPlannedOut #RethinkChurch #UMC

Chad Herndon @buildingnewsong

"The Lord is my Shepherd... he restores my soul." (Psalm 23: 1, 3) Breathing this in very deeply today!

Lindsey Baynham @LMBaynham

Dentist at 7:30 am is well worth it bc as the black eyed peas are singing "I got a feeling" I'm singing "I got a filling" #gotjokes

Andrew Hudgins @andrew_hudgins

Looks like tomorrow is shaping up to be the first #flannelfriday of the school year! #reasonsilovefall...

Tom Berlin @RevTomBerlin

To my pastor friends who have yet to address homosexuality, I believe it's time to preach that sermon.

Keith Elgin @keithelgin

Well, at least i have a little money that I saved to use on World Series tickets. #Nationals

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