

Advocate



**FROM EVERYWHERE TO EVERYWHERE:
THE SERVICE OF MISSIONARIES**

Connecting with the



Virginia Advocate

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

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

Detailed guidelines for the following
available upon request.

Subscriptions

Print subscriptions are \$20/one year; \$30/two years; \$40/three years. Special bulk rate for five or more copies going to a single address is \$12 each for one year. For both printed copy and online access, subscriptions are \$25/year; \$35/two years; \$45/three years. For online only, cost is \$10/year; \$15/two years; \$20/three years. Subscribe online at www.vaumc.org, under "Resources>Publications."

Deadlines

The Advocate is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the December 2017 issue is October 27. 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.

©2017 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.

PILLOW TALK



Madeline Pillow
Editor

Reflective

I find myself reflective this month. Now whether this will make for a coherent editorial this month, we shall see.

Mark Twain said, "Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect."

In a time when quick information and small snippets of what someone said is the popular mode on which to base one's opinion, we deny ourselves the longer and more meaningful process of reflection.

I see regular people, even our clergy, trying to make heads or tails or both of where we find ourselves as a country today, politically and morally.

Recently, I started watching Ken Burns' new documentary on the Vietnam War. I haven't gotten far into it yet, but my overwhelming sense so far is the number of times information or intel did not reach persons that it needed to, that there wasn't adequate communication between groups, or there was little to no research into persons or different cultures.

It applies still. It's something I'm trying to be mindful of. I find myself waking up in the morning now asking, "What's happened already today?" I find myself wondering, "Can I stand to look at the news or look online for fear of more horrible events?" "Can I stand even looking at social media to see how much further my friends, family and acquaintances attack each other politically or morally?"

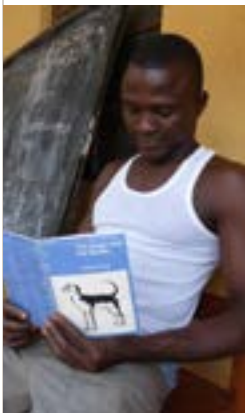
We should be asking ourselves basic questions especially in times of high fear, uncertainty and anger. We should be reflective:

Do I have all the facts? Am I open to hearing other's viewpoints and experiences? Am I loving toward people? Are my biases keeping me from hearing others? Do I understand this situation fully enough to have a strong opinion?

We can do real harm to people and situations when we act from places of little information or an unwillingness to love or learn from other people. In our positions, we have the influence to show others how to be Christian, how to love others. We have the opportunity to learn from past mistakes.

What is happening now wherever you look politically or morally is not working. And it's because people are not willing to say they're wrong, don't have enough information or are unwilling to listen to others. We can work from a place of love to reach the places we need to be.

Are we willing to change ourselves through reflection of our own biases and positions to reach those places? 🍷



Madeline C. Pillow

TABLE OF CONTENTS



SECTIONS

- 4-5** **Commentary**
- 6-13** **Virginia**
- 14** **Local News**
- 15** **Events**
- 25-27** **Living the Word**
- 28-29** **Clergy & Diaconal**
- 30** **From the Bishop**

FEATURE

- 16-24** From everywhere to everywhere: The service of missionaries

STORIES

- 6** Youth Theology Institute seeks to equip young people, strengthen the Church
- 8** Park View Mission food pantry continues to grow
- 11** Lynchburg District office implements restructure focused on mission
- 12** Q&A on Wesleyan Political Theology Project Conference

On the cover: Nancy Robinson, an UMVIM missionary to Sierra Leone, returns from the market.
Above: Kip Robinson shares a laugh with children. Read more in the feature starting on page 16.



Scan this code to go to the
conference website:
www.vaumc.org

The Virginia Advocate Staff

Madeline Pillow | Editor, Director of Communications

Cathryn Huff | Graphic Designer

Pam Culler | Administrative Secretary

Board of Directors of Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc.: Keri Marston, chair. The *Virginia United Methodist Advocate* uses the services of United Methodist Communications and United Methodist News Service. The reporting of news regarding any person or event, or the placement of any advertisement within these pages, does not constitute endorsement by the *Virginia Advocate* or any entity of The United Methodist Church. Opinions of writers are solely those of the authors and not necessarily those of this publication.

COMMENTARY

Circuit riding alive and well at Virginia Wesleyan University

By Terry Lindvall, Greg West & Ashley Kline

In May 2016, Dr. Terry Lindvall was joined by Chaplain Greg West to England and Scotland to lead a class based on the Wesleyan Revival and Scottish Reformation.

On the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, a castle of stone sits among an endless field of emerald green grass and provides a scenic view of the North Sea. One observes sheep as they graze in the meadow and seals sunning off the coast. In this bucolic spot, Dr. Craig Wansink, director of the Center for Religious Freedom and chair of Religious Studies at Virginia Wesleyan University (VWU), conducted a Christian Celtic service for 24 fellow pilgrims from VWU.

Circuit riding is not dead. It lives in a transformed state at the VWU, although with more of a calling to learn than as a ministry to preach. Wansink, Greg West, VWU's United Methodist campus chaplain, and Professor Terry Lindvall, VWU professor, have herded flocks of students over the years on pilgrimages to Corinth,

Philippi, Istanbul, Wittenberg, Geneva, Oxford, Edinburgh, Jerusalem and Valentine, Va. Students received generous scholarships from a donor to make the overseas trips.

Part study-away class, part holiday, part circuit-riding (on a tour bus) and part spiritual journey, a 2016 trip to England was designed to supplement courses taught the previous semester on Methodism and C.S. Lewis. For Ashley Kline, class of 2019, the trip added to her understanding from her readings.

"Learning from history in the actual places where the events happened adds a sense of reality, power and insight to the stories," Kline said.

Following their previous year's trek through Germany to Switzerland to study the German and Swiss Reformations, the 2016 outing primarily explored the Methodist Revival of the 18th century. Standing on the doorsteps of Wesley's Chapel in England and then at Aldersgate sparked a fire in the students as they read the account from John Wesley's journal: "while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my

sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Just a couple hours west of England is the port city of Bristol. One of the great highlights on the "Wesleyan Revival Tour" is the New Room in that city. John Wesley came to Bristol in 1739 after receiving an invitation from George Whitfield who had been field preaching in the area. In Bristol, Charles Wesley also made a happy home with his wife and children, inviting the entourage to sing his hymns, even "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" in the middle of spring.

At that time Bristol was the center of the slave trade in England and the Wesley brothers saw the great opportunity to offer Christ to the multitudes there and to stand against slavery. They constructed the first Methodist building in the world as its headquarters, a place to expound Scriptures and establish Methodist societies.

From Bristol, our tour took us to the city of Oxford which is one of the most visually stunning cities in the world. The famous spires, cathedrals, university and unique architecture make it a favorite of all those who visit. Many today recognize the city and spires from the Harry Potter movies.

At Christ Church College, John and Charles



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

COMMENTARY

Wesley were both undergraduate students; with John serving as a Fellow at Lincoln College. The men gathered in a small group at the college, meeting weekly for spiritual growth, searching their hearts and searching the Scriptures as they were drawn. One of the texts that had a tremendous influence on them was Hebrews 12:14 (KJV) "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." They became known as the Holy Club and pursued "Holiness of heart and life."

At the Eagle and Child pub in Oxford one of the students, Nic Snyder, was pondering his future. Numerous times in the conversation he shared that he was reluctantly heading to law school, though his real passion was to study the Scriptures. When Greg West pointed out that this could be God calling him with that deeper desire, his eyes opened to a particular calling. He immediately applied to Duke Divinity School and was accepted for the 2017 fall term.

The journey then went northward from Oxford up to Epworth to see the rectory and learn about Susanna and Samuel Wesley, the parents of John and Charles. A brief service (and one hymn) was conducted with the pastor of Epworth Wesley Memorial Methodist

Church, whose contagious love for Christ infected the students.

"All of these little sights begin to enrich the reading where you begin to see the connections between real life and fiction," Lindvall said.

West summarized the pilgrimage as a renewing experience.

"This experience helped the students understand the meaning of the Methodist movement, the power of that movement and hoping to spark in them a desire to say, just like the prophet Habakkuk did, we've heard of what you've done back then, do it again in our day," said West.

According to Lindvall, many of the students on the trip had not travelled

overseas before.

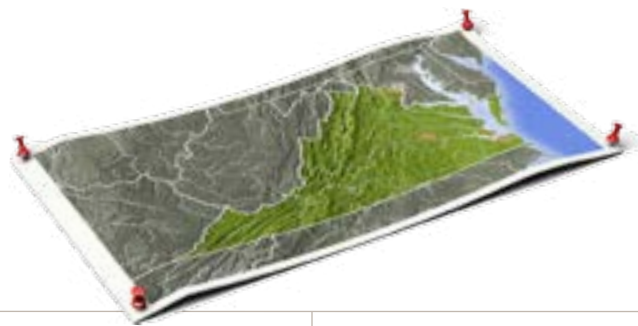
"It was life-changing for many, and I suspect that many will be returning to these same holy places soon, but without professors." ❧

– Professor Terry Lindvall teaches Religious Studies Department in the areas of faith, film and humor at Virginia Wesleyan University. Greg West is chaplain at the university and co-teaches a course in Methodism and leads tours of the Wesleyan Revival in Great Britain. Ashley Kline is a VWU student and is a candidate for graduation for 2019.

VWU pilgrims at the ruins of St. Andrews Cathedral. Built in 1158, it became the centre of the Medieval Catholic Church in Scotland. Photo courtesy of Greg West.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Youth Theology Institute seeks to equip young people, strengthen the church

By Colleen Hallagan Preuninger

Shenandoah University (SU) welcomed their first student cohort of 20 high school students for the first session of the Shenandoah University Youth Theology Institute (SUYTI) in the summer of 2017. Thirteen of these students were nominated and sent from United Methodist congregations in the Virgin-

ia Annual Conference.

SUYTI is a two-week, three college credit bearing experience for high school students exploring the intersections of faith and justice. Seeded with a \$600,000 four-year grant from the Lilly Endowment, SU seeks to come alongside local congregations to offer a formative experience of Christian community for students across the connection. At SUYTI, students are sent by local congregations to be educated and mentored by professors, pastors, college and seminary students in a cultivated Christian community of their peers. In this environment, SU hopes students will fall in

love with theology, gain critical skills in vocational discernment and return to the local church on fire for doing God's work in their communities and world.

SUYTI is founded on the belief that by equipping and empowering young people in local congregations we not only enrich student lives but also strengthen local churches. The program seeks to partner with local congregations to empower and equip young people in two major ways: the nomination procedure and the student justice project.

The institute's leadership invites pastors and youth leaders to nominate youth in their congregations for our program as a means to affirm their gifts for ministry and support them through the journey of the SUYTI and beyond. In addition to this, as a part of the curriculum for SUYTI, each student is asked to propose a justice project to complete in their local church following the institute. Justice projects are developed by students with feedback from their peers, professors and mentors during the institute and completed after they return home. The 2017 justice projects showed a wide range of justice issues including ecological sustainability, immigration, racial reconciliation and poverty.

The 2017 student cohort, staff, and faculty of the Shenandoah University Youth Theology Institute. Photo courtesy of Colleen H. Preuninger.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

The 2017 participants of SUYTI shared that the experience gave them an understanding that they can be more active in their church community, leadership qualities and a better understanding of their specific ministry calling.

As SUYTI's leadership celebrates the ways the 2017 students are serving in their local contexts through their justice projects this fall, they are already looking forward to recruiting a new cohort of students for 2018.

Nominations and applications for 2018 are accepted at www.su.edu/

youththeology. SUYTI will run July 15-28, 2018, offer three college credits and the cost is only \$50. This will be the last year the program will be offered at this grant subsidized cost, so if there is a high school student in your congregation that you think has the gifts for this program, you are strongly encouraged to nominate them for the 2018 session. 🍀

– Colleen Hallagan Preuninger is
the director of the
Youth Theology Institute (SUYTI).



**Be equipped to answer
God's call on your life.**

Wesley Theological Seminary.

**Prepare for or deepen
your ministry at Wesley:**

experience world-class
theological education in the
heart of the nation's capital.



Learn more at WesleySeminary.edu

“I don't want to be another statistic.”

– MARK, FOSTER CARE YOUTH

**The national statistics
for youth in foster
care are grim:**

50%

don't complete
high school by age 18

91%

don't graduate
from college

MARK HAD A ROUGH CHILDHOOD, which included the imprisonment of his father and the death of his mother. He was struggling and behind in school when he entered the UMFS Treatment Foster Care program in 2014. UMFS matched Mark with a loving foster family. With his new support, Mark was able to catch up in school and graduate with honors. This fall, he became the first person in his family to attend college. Help other foster youth like Mark.

Donate online at umfs.org/donate



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Park View Mission food pantry continues to grow

By Madeline Pillow

They're not customers. They're not clients. Neighbors are the names for the people who come to Park View Mission food pantry in Lynchburg, Va.

Park View Community Mission as a whole has 13 ministries within its structure, one of which is the Food for Families food pantry which has been at the site for over 10 years and is the largest ministry.

Over the last several months, the food pantry has experienced growth in a number of ways. This year, the facility installed a ramp which has made

managing donations easier and the pantry has seen almost a 50 percent increase in food distribution.

A consistent problem at the pantry has been for the neighbors to get their food back home. Solutions to the problem involved carpooling or calling a cab.

At the end of August, Amazing Grace Outreach Church in White Rock started using its church van to transport neighbors to and from the pantry, free of charge. In an article with the Lynchburg newspaper *The News & Advance*, pastor Rick Linthicum said the service is worth every bit of the extra expense to his church.

Ray Booth, chair of the board of Food for Families food pantry, shared that in the last seven months, the pantry has seen an additional 100 individuals a month. As well the amount of food has grown over 34 tons, 68,000 pounds of food – a number that grows every month.

Booth said that with the new van ministry, he expects the number of persons to grow as well.

"More people are realizing that Park View is a place where a lot of people come."

As a result of this, the services that Park View can offer their neighbors has grown as well. In October, a group will be coming into the facility to do train-

ing on Medicaid and how to correctly fill out the paperwork. Centra, a regional nonprofit healthcare system based in the city, is increasing their efforts through a free clinic in the facility building.

At the end of August, new signage for the pantry was unveiled at a ceremony that included the vice mayor of Lynchburg, Treney Tweedy.

Tweedy stated at the event that the poverty rate for the city is 24 percent, and of this number 29 percent are children, reiterating the need for Park View Mission and its work in Lynchburg.

About Park View Community Mission

The Food for Families program according to the website "provides supplemental groceries on a monthly basis at no cost to families that are food insecure."

The pantry is a "client choice" facility meaning that the neighbors take an active part in shopping for themselves. Other than food, this ministry also provides clothing and hygiene items.

The food pantry operates on a first come-first serve basis with some individuals standing in line four to five hours ahead of time. Food distribution is on Thursdays from 2 to 4

Ken Huntsman, Park View Community Mission Board chairperson, Treney Tweedy, Vice Mayor of Lynchburg, Scott Davis, Lynchburg District Superintendent, and George Joyner, Market Director at Walmart, help unveil the new Park View signage on Aug. 28. Photo courtesy of John Vest.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

p.m. and Saturdays from 12 to 2 p.m.

For Gordy Harper, director of Food for Families, it's about making sure the facility is clean, full of friendly volunteers and providing a great experience to their neighbors.

"We feel like we're having a pretty dramatic impact on the food insecure, the neighborhood and our community," said Harper. "For me, it's just showing the love of Christ to people."

Harper has been with Food for Families for a little over a year now. He said that in the past he was constantly looking for ways to plug in to ministry. He started with small ministries like cutting a woman's grass, and he now find himself at the food pantry interacting with the neighbors as much as he can.

To make the pantry possible, work takes place around the week from Walmart pick-ups to bread pick-ups from Panera Bread and pizzas from Little Caesar's. Food also comes from Feeding America, and 10-15,000 lbs. of food per week comes from the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank.

"Stuff happens all week. Our main days are Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. We try to find quiet time in between to just get all the business of Food for Families done when we



can," said Harper.

Other work includes restocking the shelves of the pantry, and every Wednesday there is a devotion and a meal which feeds between 125-150 people.

"When the people are here, we're trying to figure out how we can best minister to them and provide services, talk to them and create relationships," said Booth.

Some of these service involve information from financial services to computer classes. Within the building there is a nutritionist who holds cooking classes on Thursdays.

This is integral in sharing knowledge of how to cook food available from the pantry, make it tasty for the neighbors and to emphasize healthy eating.

Breaking down misconceptions

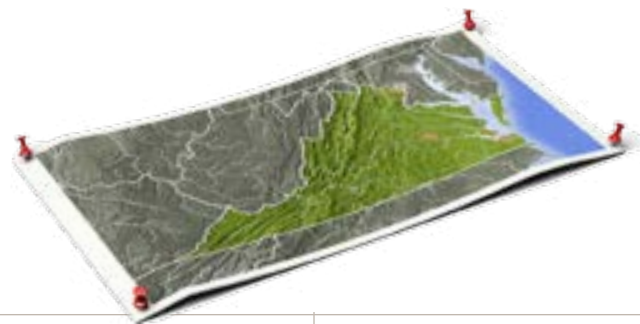
In his work, Harper has found that the outside world has a few misconceptions about neighbors who need a place like Park View.

"The neighbors are completely misunderstood from the world's perspective. People are thinking that some of the people coming here are taking advantage of the system, they are taking too many items and kind of milking the system. The reality is that these are the sweetest, most precious people facing very difficult circumstances," said Harper.

He mentioned that it can often be a barrier just for the neighbors to gather the courage to visit Park View and get the help they need. Harper shared that

(Con't. on next page: "PARK VIEW.")

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



("PARK VIEW," cont. from page 9.)

many of the neighbors are very cognizant of taking only what they need.

"There are up to 24 items available in our USDA room – just that one room – and I've seen people get one thing. The reality is they tell me, 'I don't get what I don't need. Other people need it more than I do,'" said Harper.

"I would like for the world to understand that these are precious people going through difficult circumstances, and this pantry is here for me and you as well. I'm just blessed to not have to need it right now. But if I do I'm coming," said Harper.

Volunteers make it possible

Booth shared that the volunteers at the food pantry make the operation

possible.

"We only have two part-time people; the rest are volunteers," said Booth. "We have almost 400 volunteers a month putting in about 1,300 hours. We can't operate without volunteers. It takes about 30 volunteers for it to run smoothly: to help check the people in, to help them through and to help them get their food to the car."

Harper is thankful for consistent volunteers and especially for the volunteers they have found in local students.

"We've been blessed with many student volunteers, and that has kind of been a highlight to me to reach into the students' lives and to see their transformation and to see their lives turned to service," said Harper. "They already come in with tender hearts for people, and it's been

powerful for me to see the young people embrace this service with servant's hearts."

Looking to the future

"The community looks at Park View as a very safe place. They have been coming here for Wednesday night meals for over 20 years and getting food for over 10 years, and they see it as a safe place where everyone treats them with respect and where they are welcomed and not shunned or turned away. It's a safe place and it's been created by the community appreciating what we do," said Booth.

Booth said he hopes to continue to see the growth of Park View in the future.

"In looking at the future, we want to be seen as an organization that encourages and promotes collaboration and partnering," said Booth.

He also emphasized that through Park View and The United Methodist Church the students provide a great way forward.

"Lynchburg is a growing college town, and I'd say in a few more years we will have as many students here as Blacksburg or Charlottesville. If it wasn't for the students, it would be hard for us to survive," Booth said. "We need to reach out more and more to the students because

the students in today's time really want to serve and help people. This is an opportunity that's hands-on, and they can really create that relationship with people."


Food is the catalyst

Harper emphasized that the service Park View provides is simply a way to enter into a relationship with people by loving them, showing them the love of Christ and then figuring out how to help improve lives for the future.

"By pulling down the walls, we get to embrace their [the neighbors] lives and then we start to understand who they are and what their needs are," said Harper. "The food is a catalyst for this whole thing."

Ultimately, Harper said he is thankful for this chance at relationship-building.

"I just honor them [the neighbors] for being able to come to this place in their life where they're willing to walk through that door and get what they need," said Harper. "I just thank God that we're here to provide it. And I'm thankful for all the people who make us able to provide it."

Visit www.parkviewcommunitymission.org to learn more about the work, make a donation or to volunteer your time. 

– Madeline Pillow is editor of the Advocate.



Lynchburg District office implements restructure focused on mission

By Madeline Pillow

The Lynchburg District has undergone some internal change with the most recent set of appointments prior to Annual Conference 2017.

The Rev. Leigh Anne Taylor is now Revitalization Coordinator for the district, and her duties are administrative in nature for the office but also more fully missional.

Taylor, a deacon in full connection, served as Minister of Music at Blacksburg UMC for 17 years prior to this position.

The Rev. Scott Davis, Lynchburg district superintendent, said the change for the office started in his mind when he started as a district superintendent (D.S.) on July 1, 2016.

"When I first started as a D.S. I asked myself, 'Why do we have a district structure?'" said Davis. "I've known we have always had a district structure, but I wondered how the structure was more than just a mathematical formula to bring churches together to be disciples of Jesus Christ. I wanted to know if there was a missional reason as well."

Davis said he believes that districts often get lost

in the world of committees and lose sight of their greater purpose in disciple-making.

Davis found that when he attended D.S. school the instructors were guiding attendees toward being missional strategists.

"The role of a D.S. has changed and is changing. When I was first asked to be on the Cabinet I thought of the role as largely administrative with paperwork and persons coming into the office," said Davis. "Through D.S. school, it led me to think about my role and realize, yes, there are administrative things, but those are tied into missional things. Everything single thing that we do in this office is tied to mission."

Davis shared that this restructure has been a collaborative process and one that involved discussion with Bishop Sharma D. Lewis. In realizing the emerging vision for the district, Davis and others recognized that a structure would have to support this new vision on putting mission first.

"How can we have a structure that facilitates so that we're not serving the structure, the structure is serving kingdom-building?"

This new structure means that Davis will be in his office, but more often than not, he will be out in the community and with his local churches.

For Taylor, it means a focus on resourcing congregations, training laity and clergy but also being available and equipped to see new things emerging and having conversations that can lead to revitalization in the district.

Made ready by the Holy Spirit

Taylor said that the offer came out of the blue for her, but she had felt that the Holy Spirit was making her ready for something.

"I've always been looking for ways to live out the life of a deacon. In the last three years, I had a feeling of a plowing in the ground of my being to prepare. I don't have better words for it, but I felt a sense to be ready and I trusted it."

In trusting this feeling, Taylor said she and her husband put their house on the market.

She told her husband, "I don't know what we're getting ready for – I just know we're getting ready."

(Con't. on page 15: "LYNCHBURG.")

Project Loans For Churches



**Unsecured & Up To
\$50,000
Rates As Low As
4.25% APR**

**No Fee To Apply
Quick Application Process**



**www.tumcu.org
804-672-0200**

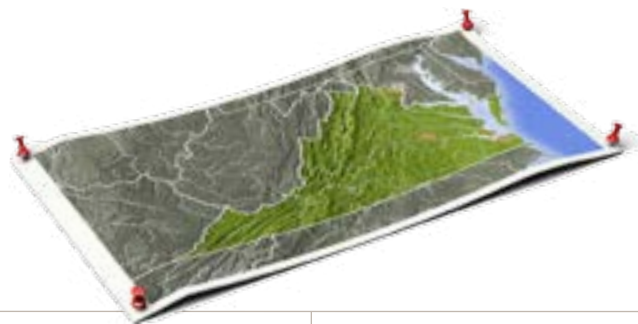
*Credit restrictions apply and rates are
subject to change.*



Federally insured by NCUA



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Q&A on Wesleyan Political Theology Project Conference

By Ryan Danker and
Mike McCurry

What is the Wesleyan Political Theology Project Conference?

The Wesleyan Political Theology Project Conference is a gathering of scholars, students and laypeople from across the country, and from varying perspec-

tives, who will be asking the basic question, "What should a Wesleyan voice sound like in the public square?"

Historians, ethicists, theologians and those who have experience in the political world will bring their insights from the Wesleyan tradition to equip the church for faithful and informed discourse about the political, social and moral issues that are faced by the nation today. What should our voice sound like? How should it be different from what we hear now?

Why now? What is the genesis of this project idea?

As the nation has entered a time when public discourse has been overtaken by sectarianism, soundbites and name-calling, we believe that our Wesleyan/Methodist heritage provides a nuanced and holistic voice that is needed now more than ever.

The idea for the project came from discussions at Wesley and with Methodists involved in the political process who believe that we have a voice, and one that is needed.

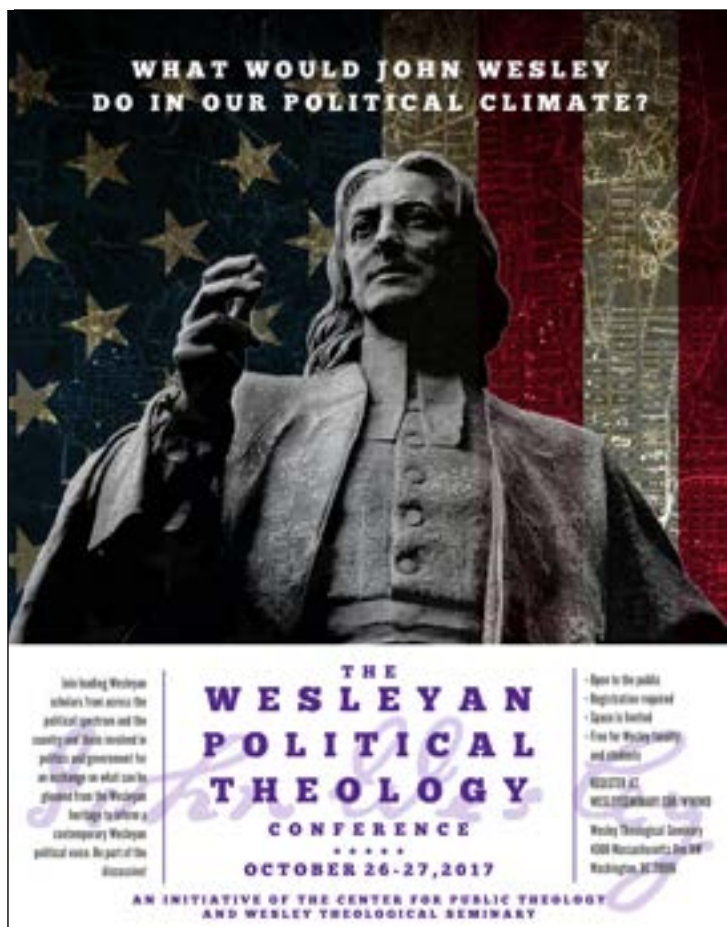
How do you feel John Wesley can inform a public discourse that has become so polarized? Did John Wesley face a similar political reality in England during his years of ministry?

John Wesley lived in a politically-volatile world where concern for rebellion often overshadowed the message of the early Methodists. People thought they were trying to overthrow the Crown. They were right in one respect; the Wesley brothers' message was transformational. They taught that God's grace can transform a person, a community, a nation, at every level. There was no limit to the power of God's grace. The repercussions of this limitless theology of grace are what we want to explore in our context at the Wesleyan Political Theology Project.

Wesley also had a wonderful formula for dealing with conflict: "let thine heart be my heart and my heart thine." That is good advice for how we might deal better with some of the divisive and personal conflicts that infect the body politic today.

Who will be speaking at the conference? What will be happening over the two days?

The conference speakers are all scholars in Wesleyan/Methodist seminaries and colleges who have studied the history and theology of Methodism and have a passion for the church today. We have gathered a wide spectrum of men and



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

women, many United Methodists, but also participants with connections to five different Wesleyan denominations on three continents. Participants include Wesley scholars, ethicists, theologians and historians. And, yes, they are politically diverse: conservatives, moderates, liberals, Republicans, Democrats and those with no party affiliation.

Over the course of two days, these scholars will present on various topics. We have also enlisted three respondents from outside the Wesleyan tradition to engage the speakers and help lead discussion with conference attendees.

Some may wonder why a seminary wants to venture into the mine field that is the political arena these days. What do you think Wesley Theological Seminary and the Center for Public Theology can contribute?

The gospel of Jesus Christ knows no topic that is off-limits. So who else better to discuss this than Christians gathered to think, speak and discern together? We are excited to see the fruits of this discussion because we believe that the church, and in particular the Wesleyan tradition, has a holistic message that is needed today more than ever.

Wesley Theological Seminary recognizes a special obligation to ad-

dress some of the contemporary issues our nation faces because we are an institution located in our nation's capital. We honor the constitutional obligation to keep church and state separate, but we also believe that politics and religion have been deeply intertwined throughout our history— it is in the DNA of America. That connection is what the Center for Public Theology is designed to explore.

Who should attend this event? Is it just for academics?

This event is for anyone who wants to explore the question of Christian engagement in the public square. It will be based on the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition, but we encourage everyone to come who has an interest in the topic. This is a conference for lay people, pastors, academics, and any other interested group.

What outcomes do you hope will come from this conference?

The papers from the conference will be published in about a year by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the UMC. Our hope is that the conference and the book will provide tools for everyday people concerned

about the direction of our public discourse and interested in engaging the Wesleyan tradition.

The Wesleyan Political Theology Project Conference will be held October 26-27, 2017 at Wesley Theological Seminary, 4500 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20016. The event is open to the public but registration is required, as space is limited. To register or for more information, please go to <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/the-wesleyan-political-theology-project/VAUMC>.

— Dr. Ryan Danker and Mike McCurry are the creators of the Wesleyan Political Theology Project Conference.



With a Master's in Christian Leadership, respond to **MINISTRY CALLING** in **WHATEVER FORM IT TAKES.**

MA in CL meets all requirements for those seeking United Methodist Deacon Ordination.



emu.edu/mac1

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ **Main Street UMC, Suffolk**, started a Back to Church campaign in July. During the summer, plans began to join millions of others around the nation to celebrate National Back to Church Sunday on September 17.

The day included one combined service with a covered dish lunch, a ministry fair, blessing of the backpacks for children and a bounce house and Bibles for third graders. In addition, the United Methodist Men used this opportunity to raise funds for their Rise Against Hunger event that will take place in October.

The congregation was challenged to invite someone to attend with them on September 17. Invitations were distributed and promotional videos were used during the service. Missing members were encouraged to “come back to the nest.” Back to Church Sunday gave everyone an opportunity to participate in building up the body of Christ for the transformation of the world.

“Redbird Bound” were the words that echoed from the walls at **Bethany UMC in Rustburg** for more than 12 months.

The congregation had been looking for a mission trip for a team of adults who felt a bit limited in where they might venture because of the advanced age of most of the participants. When

Red Bird Missionary Conference in Beverly, Ky., was mentioned as an option with many different hands-on opportunities for all ages, the team of 11, ranging in age from 45 to 76, jumped at the chance to go.

Seven of the 11-member Bethany team had never been on a mission trip. Prior to leaving, the team members were asked why they would want to venture out this late in life to uncomfortable beds, long days of work in not the most pleasant of working conditions. Almost identical responses came from the multiple 70 year-olds: “A mission trip is something I’ve always wanted to do and I can’t wait to be part of this experience with my church family. I’m hoping it will deepen my faith and that God will be able to use me.”



▲ On August 13, less than 18 hours after the team returned home from their week at Red Bird, the 11-member team led worship and shared how God

was on the move for them during that week.

As an added blessing, the team from Bethany met up with two other Virginia Conference teams, **Warwick Memorial UMC** and **Sterling UMC**, and served the Red Bird Missionary Conference together that week.

Within three weeks of returning from their Red Bird mission trip, the team has already signed up to return to Red Bird in 2018. Already additional hands and hearts from the congregation have shown interest in joining in on the work and fellowship that God will surely send to these “Lifelong Learners” who through their discipleship making work and excitement have “influenced others to serve.”

▼ On June 11, the History and Records Committee of **Grace UMC, Alexandria District**, held an open house for the circa 1830 slave cabin situated on church property and dedicated a historical marker that cites church history. The event marked the beginning of the church’s 150-year celebration.

The cabin conveyed with the property that the Wheatley Johnson family donated to Grace in 1988 for purposes of building a new worship facility. The slave dwelling, recently refurbished and furnished in period detail, will be used for educational purposes, as it was on August 8, when Prince William County history teachers toured the dwelling. 🍷



EVENTS



NOVEMBER

Connecting... to God and Each Other and the Community

Nov. 4, Chestnut UMC, Chestnut Hill UMC, Lynchburg

The Small Congregation Leadership Team invites small church clergy and laity to a day of learning, conversation and discussion with the Rev. David Canada. Event will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. with lunch provided and the course worth 0.5 CEU. Register at www.eiseverywhere.com/ereg/index.php?eventid=254985&. Please be sure to specify your location and date when you register. Contact the Center for Congregational Excellence for more information at 804-521-1100 or email ellenheatwole@vaumc.org or pathickman@vaumc.org.

Heritage Preservation Workshop

Nov. 17-18, Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center, Lake Junaluska, N.C.

The SEJ Commission on Archives and History will present its biannual Heritage Preservation Workshop on November 17-18 at Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center. *Bringing Life to History* will explore the creation of an oral history program, development of a living history presentation and best practices for the creation of a written church history. Registration is limited to 50 persons. For more information contact Nancy Watkins at nwatkins@lakejunaluska.com or (828) 454-6781.

The *Advocate* magazine publishing schedule requires that information be compiled sooner than the month for which it is published. For events you are interested in, please contact those listed for the events as points of contact for the most up-to-date information and for questions.

The Virginia United Methodist
Advocate
EQUIPS
CONNECTS
INFORMS
Subscribe Now!



www.vaumc.org/Advocate

("LYNCHBURG," cont. from page 11.)

When Davis approached Taylor about the position, on the way home from the discussion, she got word that her house has sold.

"I believe the Holy Spirit was telling me to prepare the way to be ready," said Taylor.

Other things had to be prepared, Taylor shared, as the family gathered around Taylor's mother through illness and her death as well as taking care of her father and settling him into a new home in Richmond.

This new position excites Taylor, though at first she wondered about the job title.

"Coordinator for Revitalization – I said what is that? What is that really? I knew that I just had to trust God – that a way was being made and that I would grow in the role," said Taylor.

In her prayer life, Taylor shared

that she had envisioned the kind of partnership she is embarking on with Davis.

"It will be so interesting to have a deacon and an elder yoked together in similar ministry – to see mission that looks like equal parts of contemplation and action," Taylor said.

Moving ahead

While Taylor admits the administrative side of the job will be the part of the job that she will have to learn, she is wholly enthusiastic about the role.


"It's saying yes to a position of influence, and it's saying yes to serving in this job," said Taylor. "I don't feel prepared – I feel completely humbled by it – but I accept the opportunity that's been given me."

For Davis, the district will be ask-

ing itself one question in everything they do.

"How is this tied to our mission work? Or in other words, 'How is this tied to making disciples for Jesus Christ?'" said Davis.

Davis said that he plans to be listening to the clergy and laity in his district and being open to trying new things in the disciple-making process and in fruitful ministries.

"Prevenient grace is out there all the time – somewhere. It's my job to see it and ask others if they see it...to see that something new is emerging at an existing or new church." 

FROM EVERYWHERE.....

THE SERVICE OF



Kip Robinson playing a game with children in Sierra Leone.
Photos courtesy of Kip and Nancy Robinson.

.....TO EVERYWHERE

F MISSIONARIES



According to Global Ministries, missionaries in The United Methodist Church are “from everywhere to everywhere.” Missionaries come from a number of different backgrounds to serve in this way. The roles that missionaries can play include “pastors, educators, congregational and leadership developers, regional coordinators for UMCOR, agriculturalists, health coordinators, and doctors.” (Global Ministries website)

Visit **www.umcmmission.org** to learn more about how you can support missionaries and learn about their work. Keep reading in this feature to hear the personal stories of missionaries who have served in a number of locations and ways.



CALLED TO BE FULLY PRESENT: A MISSIONARY'S MINISTRY

By Nancy and Kip Robinson

Kip's perspective

"Glad you're home, son. You're not going again are you?"

This was a stunning question from my dad, Cliff Robinson, after a United Methodist Volunteer In Mission (UMVIM) trip to Africa. The unexpected reproach stung, considering all the effort required to assure a meaningful mission in Zimbabwe. His concern was surely for my personal safety and the uncertainty that goes along with mission activity, but why couldn't he see what I could see —a valuable venture to participate in God's mission?

Nancy's perspective

Growing up almost entirely in another culture as Nancy did with her parents as lifelong Methodist missionaries in Southern Rhodesia brings a perspective of mission almost completely opposite of Kip's dad. As a missionary child, I experienced the joy of African village life born and bred in the "I am well if you are well" way of life in community. Engagement in mission brings challenge, chaos, skepticism, joy, restraint, freedom, humility, honesty and an enormous willingness to step out of comfort levels into new understanding and wholeness.

Serving in mission

We served together many years as volunteers in all kinds of mission capacities; from multiple UMVIM trips to Africa (Kenya, Mozambique and South Sudan), to Brazil (on a medical boat in the Amazon provided by the Brazilian Methodist Church), most recently to Cambodia and working in Honduras as co-presidents of The Friends of Barnabas Foundation. Each had one common thread; that we were called to be fully present wherever we were. We discovered the power of walking with those in need, listening, responding and growing with a healthy dose of humor. Laughter is a natural universal bond.

The greatest challenge (and accompanying chaos) came in becoming Global Ministries missionaries on assignment requiring a thorough vetting process and very long wait time before serving. Thankfully, there is a definitive process of evaluating one's call to serve as a full-time missionary (after all we are United Methodists!) beginning in our own conference with the conference Committee on Mission Personnel followed by more interviews with Global Ministries, references, written declarations of understanding of God's mission in the world, complete psychological and physical



Kip and Nancy receiving a blessing from their church before their return to the U.S.

exams, family conversations and waiting.

After the vetting for “approval” nothing happens until a need is identified that matches the missionary skill set – a need noted by bishops in other conference in the United States and Central Conferences.

In our case, Bishop John K. Yambasu, Sierra Leone Annual Conference, requested someone to assist with teach-

ing local pastors, training evangelists and working with lay leadership development (primarily United Methodist Women); a skill set Nancy could easily fill with her background in education and discipleship.

An unexpected joy in Nancy’s work also came through workshops with children and women focusing on trauma healing, directly connecting a passion for healing and spirituality gained while serving as a chaplain resident at VCU Medical Center.

Bishop Yambasu also needed someone to coordinate mission teams coming from the United States to serve in various capacities in Sierra Leone. “Nobody can deal with Americans as well as an American,” he would say. This is an area where Kip had extensive experience, and where he also served as the conference engineer overseeing building projects. These slices of the bishop’s organizational pie were missing, and we were invited to respond to these areas of need in the Sierra Leone Annual Conference.

(Con’t. on next page.)



Nancy teaching at church through drama.



Kip checking out the taste of clean water from a newly-installed pump.

Answering the call

The long wait was over—we prayerfully accepted the call and served together in Sierra Leone for three years. Part of what ensued describes “chaos.”

Our belongings were shipped on July 5 and arrived in Sierra Leone on Valentine’s Day the following year. It took two months to find a suitable residence, and then we were robbed within a week of moving in.

We did not know we would need full-time security guards at our home, or that we needed to have a cook; a driver and a vehicle; a home maintenance person; and to learn to live without water or electricity. Thank goodness Kip was an engineer and Nancy is flexible.

Chaos became the opportunity for relationship as we were welcomed warmly, trusted implicitly and challenged to receive in every way. We learned not to be the givers or doers, but to be vulnerable and receive the gift of being in community, learning as we went. We experienced vital worship each day in our living and on Sundays when every service started at 10 a.m. (sort of) and was almost always over by 2 p.m. time rushing by so fast and amazed that four hours had elapsed.

Our greatest challenge was the Ebola crisis with thousands dying, forcing our unexpected return to the United States. Afterward we were asked to speak almost 100 times about the work of the church in Sierra Leone, particularly about the resilience of people in the path of suffering who helped each other.

Though not our plan, this was surely in God’s plan. Looking back now, serving as Global Ministries Mission Advocate Nancy loves to share the stories of these amazing friends. Kip is retired, but is actively engaged in local church ministries.

Serving in the name of Jesus Christ is always mission service, being a part of God’s plan to transform the world. If you want to reach out to others beyond the boundaries of your self-imposed comfort zone, find the pain in your community and see if there is some way to respond to it. Here there is likely no waiting, no vetting, no impatience (but maybe just a touch of chaos)—just missionary service. Missionaries are from everywhere to everywhere. 🇸🇪

— The Rev. Nancy Robinson & C. M. “Kip” Robinson Jr. have served together many years as volunteers in a number of mission capacities around the world. Both are available to speak upon request about their missionary work.



Kip and Nancy's Sierra Leone family: Christopher, Magdaline and Musa, with the dogs, Chief and Scout.



Kip and friends hamming it up (below).



Water for bucket baths, cooking and everything else is stored in any vessel available.



Market day bargaining (above) and Kip discussing an engineering project (below).





Esther and a Cambodian pastor take a moment to smile in the midst of training.



Q&A WITH ESTHER GITOBU: MISSIONARY IN CAMBODIA

Q: How were you called to be a missionary?

Having spent a decade and a half of my life in the corporate world (investment banking), I was clueless about how to be a missionary. Throughout my childhood in Kenya, my parents always taught us what it means to live with the poor, to call them brothers and sisters. I have

been taught from birth that our gifts and blessings do not come without their own burden—the burden of responsibility to our neighbors and their suffering.

Since I was seven, it has been my passion to make a difference—at a magnitude enough to save other lives other than my own. That passion however became a reality after several visits with my parents to rural villages of Kenya and learning how young girls were struggling to stay in school during their menstrual cycle.

Girls would stay home for three to five days since they did not have any means of managing their monthly periods in a hygienic way. This opened my eyes to the enormous needs around us every day that we do not pay attention to. That passion has been channeled to devote my time and lives helping young women attain basic supplies to help them stay in school during their monthly cycle.

After much prayer and discernment, I came to know in my heart that basic human rights, social justice and peace were my calling. God used Global Ministries to fuel the dream and passion that He planted in my heart when



I was only seven years old to become one of the voices of the poor.

In 1999, my family and I packed our bags and moved to Democratic Republic of Congo where we began our missionary journey. In 2002, we were relocated to Cambodia.

It is in these places that Jesus longs to release his compassion, justice, mercy and grace upon lives that have experienced much pain and suffering. When nobody else will, our mission is to tell their story, find them help and bring them hope.

Q: Is your family in the mission field with you?

Yes. When we moved to Cambodia in 2002, my oldest daughter Jeanette was only eight years old, Nicole four years old and Michelle was only 14 months old. Basically they have spent the biggest chunk of their lives in Cambodia.

Q: What is the process for becoming a missionary?

I think we are all called to be missionaries in the places God has placed us but, if one would like to engage full time, you can explore the opportunity to serve through Global Ministries which is the sending agency for The United Methodist Church. There are many opportunities that people can engage including Young Adult programs like the Global Mission Fellows.

Q: Where are you serving and how long?

I am currently serving in Cambodia for the past 16 years. I thank God every day for the incredible honor He has given me, to love on those who are precious to Him and who have now become so dear to me as they have become part of my family.

Q: What do you do?

My work entails coordinating Volunteers in Mission (VIM) teams and mentoring and coaching young people. I feel richly blessed to be a part of what God is doing in Cambodia. It is hard work, and I go to bed tired and sometimes feeling hopeless! But it is a rare privilege to be able to be the hands and feet of Jesus on a daily basis. I pray that the Spirit will fill me and use me so that every person I meet each day will come to know the love of Christ who died for us.

Q: What are some of the most fulfilling moments from your service?

The Susannah Wesley House which serves as a dormitory. As the students live in the dormitory, they learn leadership, responsibility and teamwork.

I have been working with young women and one in particular, Kong Molyta, 18, who lives at one of the dorms that we built really touched me.



Esther sharing about the parables with members of the Virginia team and Cambodian church leaders.



Esther helps demonstrate the parable of the lost sheep in Cambodia.

In the rural villages of Cambodia, many young Cambodians like Molyta have big dreams to help their families and communities. However, difficult conditions make it almost impossible for them to make steps towards their goals. One of the common difficulties is living far away from the nearest school – sometimes as far as 25 kilometers.

When girls like Molyta decide to study far away from family, there are many dangers to consider including being vulnerable to human trafficking, fraud and possible abuse. It is also costlier as one needs to spend for daily living aside from the regular school fees. Consequently, most rural children end up working in the field to help their parents earn money.

Faced with this challenge within the community, I networked with one of my supporting churches, First United Methodist Church in Baton Rouge, to raise support to build a dorm at Kampomg Thom Methodist Church which opened its doors to underprivileged village girls, providing a safe and free accommodation when they study at the Provincial High School.

The project started out with three interested girls who were desperate to find a safe place within the town while they studied in school. The church became a home and the pastor's family acted as guardians to these three girls.

Soon enough, word spread like wildfire, attracting other

girls who were in the same dire situation. From three girls, we now have 69 girls living at the dorm who do daily activities themselves and share responsibilities in the dormitory. It is always a joy for me to visit these girls and see how they are progressing in their education.

Q: What are some of the hardest moments you've had working as a missionary?

Working in a cross-cultural context is certainly one of the most joy-filled yet also stress-filled callings there is. As missionary workers, our vision for impacting lives and shaping communities can easily get bogged down by the overwhelming needs of people, by the challenges of leading others and by the stresses of living (and raising a family) in a different culture.

There are many times I have encountered times of discouragement, feelings of inadequacy and the desire to quit and go home. My children have grown up without spending much time with their grandparents and this has been a big concern for me especially how they will be able to strike that strong family bond with family members whom they have not spent much time with. 📌

– Esther Karimi Gitobu is a missionary with the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church, currently serving in Phnom Penh, Cambodia with the Methodist Mission of Cambodia (MMC).

LIVING THE WORD*



The Rev. Jacob Sahms is serving his second year at Wesley UMC in Hopewell. He and his wife, Joanne, have two sons, Adam and Andrew. He edits ScreenFish.net, a site on faith and film, and contributes interviews and reviews for ChristianCinema.com. In his spare time, he can be found on the soccer pitch or the basketball court, coaching up youth players and trying not to injure himself.

November 5, 2017

John 3-4

Key Verses: John 4:1-15

Asking the right questions

I've always been fascinated by fictional detectives from Sherlock Holmes to Columbo.

Lately, my wife and I have been watching Tony Shaloub's *Monk*. I can relate to his distractions at times, the need to check the doorknob or avoid shaking hands with someone who just sneezed on them! But I also love that *Monk* is willing to ask the questions that no one else is asking because he's observing things other people can't see and thinking about issues on a deeper level than the people around him.

In John 3 and 4, Jesus interacts with two people who are on different ends of the "awareness spectrum." Nicodemus approaches Jesus at night because he knows there are things he can't see but he wants to understand them; the Samaritan woman knows that there are things in her life that aren't right, but she can't untangle them on her own. In both cases, Jesus meets the people where they are, and refuses to leave them where he finds them.

As Jesus arrives in Sychar, the Samaritan woman's hometown, he crosses the social boundary established between the Jews and the Samaritans. (It's no wonder that it would have been shocking to the Jews for the Samaritan to be "good" in the parable Jesus tells in Luke 10 because they were enemies.) But Jesus wants a drink of water, and more than that, he wants to connect with a woman who needs to connect with the Creator who made her. So he plunges ahead, breaking another barrier, speaking as a single man with a single woman in public.

Even as the woman expresses surprise that he'd speak to her, she finds herself drawn in by his observations about her life and the need she feels in her soul. Jesus tells her that there's something deeper available to her, like the magic that's "deeper still" described by C.S. Lewis' Aslan, that there's living water that would do more than fill up her stomach. He knows that she's thirsty physically, but the allegory for her spiritual thirst isn't lost on her. It's not that she

doesn't want to know the answers that Nicodemus sought, but it's that she doesn't know the right questions. But Jesus asks them, and connects them to her real-life situation. It's another reminder that Jesus asks the right questions, that he observes life on a deeper level, and that he opens up his story for other people to share theirs.

The two continue this tender dance, as Jesus shows her that her home life is the element keeping her from embracing God's love and care. He doesn't offer her judgment, but grace, extending the desire kindled in the woman's heart to receive more of what Jesus is offering. He's more than she could have imagined, as he gradually moves from stranger to prophet to Messiah and then finally, the truth teller ("He told me everything I ever did" in verse 39).

And because of the example of Jesus and the time spent to share hope and love with one stranger, across barriers of race, religion and social customs, it says that many Samaritans became believers. This is evangelism at its finest, a reminder that our stories matter to God, and that our stories fit within the context of God's story, in its past, present and future.

In a world where people are too often focused on their own words to hear the stories of others, Jesus reminds us of the need to hear from those around us, to ask questions, and to invite them into the bigger conversation that is God's story with us. It asks us to be aware of the details around us, even the moments that seem unimportant, and acknowledge the beauty in the humanity around us.

As we move forward in our own faith, we are challenged by the example of Jesus to speak truth in grace and love into the lives of others as well. Sometimes, it starts with a question.

November 12, 2017

John 19-21

Key Verses: John 20:1-10, 24-29

Seeing what's really there

In one of my children's most-watched cartoons, *The Penguins of Madagascar*, there's an episode about a poison dart frog who is as



mean-spirited as any of the animals in the zoo. Of course, no one can touch him for fear of getting sick, and he's more and more inclined to wreak havoc out of his growing meanness. Then one of the penguins realizes that the frog wasn't hugged as a kid frog, because of his poisonous skin, so they build a suit that's impervious to the poison, hug the frog and save the day.

Sometimes, when it comes to our perceptions, the limits of what we can see and understand gets in the way of the reality of what actually *is*. In John 20, we meet one of the most misunderstood figures in Scripture, Didymus.

Didymus, or Thomas, gets a bad rap in my book. Ask the average regular Sunday school class student over the age of four, and they'll tell you that it's *Doubting* Thomas. But what if that's not a fair representation of Thomas or his understanding of belief? What if we've slapped a misnomer on poor Didymus that just isn't fair?

Thomas is the one member of the Twelve who was absent from the gathering of the disciples in their secret meeting. The disciples are in hiding, for fear of the repercussions (or crucifixions) that might befall them in the days after Jesus' death. But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

In the opening frame of John 20, it says that first Mary Magdalene, and then Peter and John, arrived at the empty tomb. Jesus was nowhere to be found, or rather, Jesus' *body* was nowhere to be seen. So Mary has discovered the absence of the body of the person who had changed her life and made her whole and dragged the two favorite disciples out to see the evidence.

But it says that when the disciples entered the tomb, both Peter and John saw the absence of the body and the

presence of the other grave cloths. Yet only John gives himself credit for belief. It says "he saw and believed" in the NIV, without categorizing what that belief looked like. If we're to believe John at his word, at face value, he *believed* in the promises of Jesus, that he would rise from the dead.

And yet, the disciples are gathered in hiding for fear of repercussions. Some of them have seen and believed, but aren't called to move. Now, in the secret room, all present will see the risen Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit. Had they really *believed* prior to Jesus showing up?

Enter poor Didymus. We don't know why he missed the meeting but he's told that Jesus showed up, and he says that he will not believe until he sees the nail marks in Jesus' hands, touches those nail marks and puts his hand in the spear hole in his side. Didymus in fact says that he wants to see something to believe...which is no more than what led to the belief of Peter and John.

So Jesus appears, and offers Thomas "proof" by way of challenge, to see and touch. He's rebuked to stop doubting and believe, with the presence of Jesus before him, and his response is uniquely bold:

"My Lord and my God!"

The presence of Jesus is enough for Thomas. Rather than doubting, he's the first to worship the risen Lord, the first to claim him as God. The disciple labeled as doubting is actually the first one to tie belief together with the divine.

What do we fail to understand because it exists outside our own perception? Is it a theological truth, an emotional connection, the presence of a person in our lives who we're called to reach? We have fallen too in

love with labels and categories when there's beauty to be found in the unexpected, the miraculous, the divine.

For Thomas, the beauty is in the beholding, as all of his questions fade away in the presence of the one true answer. May God work good in the midst of our questions as well.

November 19, 2017

Acts 16-17

Key Verses: Acts 16:16-34

The Original Chainbreaker

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas encounter a woman possessed by a spirit that gives her the skills to predict the future. While this might seem like a concept out of an X-Men or Avengers action flick, the reality is that the woman's possession made her a commodity, not a person, to her slave owners. In fact, the Scriptures say that the woman's being held captive by a demon caused her value to be infinitely more impressive for the owners, increasing their anger when Paul cast the demon out.

No possession, no fortune telling.

No fortune telling, no possession, spiritual or otherwise.

In a story that seems to give credit to Paul's annoyance, rather than compassion, for the woman's healing, suddenly, Paul and Silas are persona non grata in a foreign city. They are captured by the slave owners and taken to the marketplace for immediate judgment. Their crime, per the slave owners, isn't the dissolution of their business but the fact that they have the city in an uproar over "advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." While there could be a Roman legal argument for proposing worship of Jesus, that's *not* what Paul did. But in this story about power and privilege, the words used

to accuse Paul and Silas don't matter.

The people in authority believe that their accusations and power are more important than the truth; they believe that their influence will push through the judgment they feel against the disciples, because they're angry and it's their city. They've been "robbed" of a commodity, having lost touch with any belief that the woman freed of possession was actually human to begin with. They think their power will let them "win."

But this story isn't about winning. No, this story is about the liberating power of the grace of Jesus Christ.

Locked in chains, stripped of their clothes and beaten, Paul and Silas are locked in stocks within the jail. They have been robbed of their humanity, much the same way that the demon stole the woman's humanity. Yet, the disciples are not complacent, not filled with hopelessness; they sing and pray to God, who they know to be the Freer of Captives, the Breaker of Chains, the Restorer of Humanity.

And God busts the whole story open, proving that God not only liberates those imprisoned by demons but that God also breaks physical chains. With apologies to *Escape from Alcatraz* and *The Rock*, this is the most excellent prison break in history, the reminder of God's rule on Earth even in the face of the abuse of power by the slave owners.

As if this isn't enough, this story of Paul and Silas frees a third set of people, the jailer and his family, from the prison of unbelief. Having witnessed the praying power of the disciples, the jailer's family repents and believes as a result of God's interwoven story of freedom.

With the push and pull of power in the world we live in today, there are forces of evil that expect to win, that

expect others to be cowered by their bluster and threats. We, the people of faith, are called to speak up and act out against these forces and break the chains that hold us (and others) prisoner. As United Methodists, we do confess Jesus Christ as Savior, but "we also renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of the world, repent of our sin," and "accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression."

(UMH Citation)

These are active approaches to living out our faith, to evangelism in the 21st century. We must take a stand, actively engaging evil and breaking chains, singing hymns and praying, and freeing those who have been held hostage far too long.

November 26, 2017

Romans 8-10

Key Verses: Romans 10:14-15

Beautiful Feet

In *The Princess Bride*, the trickster Sicilian criminal Vizzini says "Inconceivable!" over, and over and over again. He's finally confronted by the Spaniard blade Inigo Montoya, who interjects, "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."

Evangelism is one of the words today that is defined six different ways by six different people. At its core, the word is about the good news and sharing it, but over time, it has been co-opted and twisted from its original meanings.

In Paul's Epistle to the Romans, his exploration of evangelism takes on a practical tone: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the

one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:14-15)

Paul says that people aren't able to believe in someone or something they haven't heard of; that they can't hear the good news if no one preaches it. He's insistent that it's important to share the good news, to proclaim it, even as he's spent a second career sharing the faith as far and wide as he could, by written word and as traveling missionary.

Are we as adamant that the word should be shared? Are we proclaiming the gospel in the ways that we speak and act? Do we show and tell people the good news?

These questions have become prominent in my church lately, as the congregation hungers to share the good news they know with a community that is depressed brand new, introverted and boldly confident, bring a message of hope to those around them?

For our community, we have found that the maxim, "they don't care how much you know until they know how much you care," must inform our evangelism. We've engaged in active adoption of a local elementary school, tackling more projects and opportunities than seemed possible a year ago; we've strengthened our efforts to feed the homeless and care for the impoverished. We've been "in action" based on the words we believe, and we're starting to realize that others want to hear our words, too.

In *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, Bishop Robert Schnase

(Con't. on page 31: "LIVING WORD.")

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS



The Rev. Dr. Frank Joseph ("Joe") Mitchell, 90, died in the company of his family on July 25, 2017.

In 1945, Mitchell enlisted as a U. S. Navy hospital corpsman. After discharge in 1946, he went to the Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University), graduating in history education in 1950. He earned an M.Div. from Duke Divinity School in 1953 and was ordained in the Virginia Methodist Conference. Between 1953-1958, he served as pastor at Chamberlayne Heights Methodist Church in Richmond and Tabernacle Methodist Church in Pungo. He earned his Ph.D. in Religion at Duke in 1962.

He spent most of his career in the teaching ministry as a religion and philosophy professor at Carleton College in Northfield, MN (1961-62); Union College in Barbourville, KY (1962-65); Central Methodist College in Fayette, MO (1965-70); and Troy State University in Troy, AL (1970-1989). In 1989, he retired from Troy and re-entered the pastoral ministry at the Covenant United Methodist Church in Chesapeake, Va. From 1990-92, he pastored the Ensley First United Methodist Church in Birmingham, AL.

He is survived by his wife of almost 58 years, Dr. Norma Anne Taylor Mitchell; daughter, Dr. Anne Virginia Mitchell Whisnant (Dr. David Whisnant); and grandsons, Evan David Whisnant and Derek Taylor Whisnant.

Bob Sufficool, 80, died Sept. 12, 2017, in Virginia Beach. He is survived by his wife, Mary Jane Sufficool; four

children, Keith Sufficool, Julie Brown, **the Rev. Patti Money** and Bart Sufficool; four grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren. The Rev. Money is an ordained elder in the Virginia Annual Conference, serving on loan to the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference.

Billie C. Morris, of Hurt, died Sept. 2, 2017. She is survived by her husband, **the Rev. M. Stephen (Steve) Morris**, pastor of the New Bethel-Motley Charge, Lynchburg District; her sisters and brothers, Sharon Jambard (Roger), Kathy Thompson, Buddy Crawford, Brad Crawford (Dee) and Liz Walker (Rick); her sons, Brandon Morris (Renee), Michael Morris (Becky), Chuck Morris (Laura) and Travis Morris (Kim); grandchildren, Jonathan, Jacob, Makayla, Emma and Lucas Morris and Medora Falls; and a number of nieces and nephews.

She was a member of Zion United Methodist Church in Gretna and was an active participant in ministry with her husband.

Ruth Cadd Walton, 89, widow of **the Rev. C. Reginald Walton**, recently of Harrisonburg, died Sept. 10, 2017. She is survived by her daughters, Diana Hopkins (David), Carol Lunsford (Jeff), Vell Wallinger (Donald); her seven grandchildren, David Lunsford (Colleen), Greg Wallinger (Stephanie), Emilee Hopkins, Jessica Avery (Matt), Chris Wallinger (Bridgette), Natalie Farmer and Clint Hopkins; and five very special great-grandchildren. She also is survived by her siblings, **the Rev. M.L. Cadd** (Sue), Louise Woolfolk, Ella Mae Stirman and Shirley Fortune.

Virginia Troll, widow of **the Rev. Fred Troll**, died Sept. 8, 2017. Troll lived in the Blackstone area for many years.

The visitation and funeral service was at Crenshaw UMC on Sept. 12. She is survived by her daughter, Carol Sartor.

Chap. Lt Col. Phillips King Foote died Aug. 30, 2017. He was predeceased by sister, Susie Monk; and wives, Aileen C. Foote (2010) and Faye S. Foote (2016). He is survived by sisters, Frances Teague and Martha McElhinney; daughters, Carol (Roger) Wetherington, Barbara (Doug) Nolin, Cindy (John) Lawrence; seven grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren.

He served in the Army during WWII and Korea. Graduated from Emory & Henry College and Emory University. He served as a pastor in the Virginia Conference from 1950-1965, an Air Force chaplain from 1966-1981 and post retirement ministered in various roles until 2016.

During military service that spanned five decades, he was awarded the following medals: AF meritorious service (2), AF commendation, Army good conduct (3), National Defense Service (2), WWII Victory, Army of occupation (Germany) and others. He proudly wore the Combat Infantryman's Badge under his Chaplain's Cross. He lived in several Virginia locations prior to moving to Richmond in 1994. He was a member of St. Andrew's United Methodist Church and a resident of Beth Shalom home.

Jo Ann Black died Aug. 28, 2017, after a brief period of illness. A devout and very active member of Central UMC in Staunton, Jo Ann is survived by her husband **Benham Black**, who for more than 50 years served as the attorney for the conference Board of Trustees and in a wide variety of other capacities.

Meredith Heinsohn Austin, mother of **the Rev. Deborah Austin**, retired elder, died Aug. 24 at her home in North Carolina. She was the widow of **the Rev. Harold Austin**, United Methodist pastor in the Western North Carolina Conference, and also the mother-in-law of **the Rev. Jeff Mickle**, Alexandria District superintendent.

She is survived by her children Anne Kolbe, Deborah Austin, Steve Austin; eight grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her daughter, Beth Austin.

Edna Tonkins Renick, widow of **the Rev. Carl Renick Sr.**, died Aug. 22, 2017 in Chicago, Ill. Survivors include her two daughters, Nancy and Angelyn; sister-in-law, Thelma Tonkins; nieces and nephews, Mildred (Donald) Feldman, Robert (Dora Lynn) Tonkins, Ralph (Tina) LeGrande Jr., Doris Dorsey, Alvin (Pamela) Tonkins, Isaac Tonkins, Rex (Vickie) Tonkins, Terecia Jackson, Dr. James (Peggy) Renick and Betty Anne Jefferson.

BIRTHS

Rose Paulina Buxton was born Sept. 12, 2017, at 8 lbs and 20 inches. Parents are **Garrett and Carly (Brown) Buxton** and grandparents are **the Rev. Larry Buxton** and his wife **Bev**.

Advocate The Virginia United Methodist

**EQUIPS
CONNECTS
INFORMS**

www.vaumc.org/Advocate

Erwin & Hitchcock, Inc.
Pipe Organ Builders Since 1915
11561 Edmonston Rd, Beltsville, MD 20705
Phone: 1-800-952-PIPE (7473)
Fax: (301) 931-2378

Pew Upholstering & Refinishing
Reversible Pew Cushions
New Pews • Carpeting
Complete Renovations
<www.churchinteriors.com>
1-800-289-7397
Church Interiors Inc.
The Nation's Leading Church Renovation Specialists.
High Point, North Carolina

For Your Printing Needs

Benj. Franklin Printing Co.

John R. Overberg, President
Ethan A. Overberg

1528 High Street
Roxford, Va. 23226

202-418-6361
Fax: (804) 643-7114

Get a bus and peace of mind.

Choose from our great selection of buses You'll enjoy peace of mind knowing service is available on site at your church.

Sonny Merryman Inc.
VIRGINIA'S BUS COMPANY

sonnymerryman.com
(800) 533-1006

Call for a free demonstration.

SALES AND SERVICE: CENTRAL VIRGINIA • HAMPTON ROADS • NOVA

FROM THE BISHOP



Reflections on my first mission trip to Lucea, Jamaica

*Dear Virginia Annual
Conference.*

The extent of my mission experience at Brannen Chapel United Methodist Church in Statesboro, Ga., was visiting the elderly at Brown's Nursing Home during the Thanksgiving and Christmas season. I had no idea of the joy and excitement I would receive by becoming an active participant of the mission ministry when I joined Ben Hill United Methodist Church.

I remember the senior pastor standing before the congregation and describing an opportunity of a lifetime to participate in the training of the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM). This four-week

training would change my life forever! Sadly, I have to admit that at the time I had never been out of the country and did not have a passport.

My first mission trip was to Lucea, Jamaica, to teach Vacation Bible School to elementary students and to assist in building a fellowship hall for the neighborhood United Methodist church. Our first session consisted of understanding the biblical call upon our lives as missionaries. The trainer shared the scriptural text of Acts 1:8b: "... and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." She enthusiastically taught that as believers our Christian witness was not only for our local communities but as "far as we could reach." I went away that night excited that my "ends of the earth" was Lucea, Jamaica.

Our next sessions consisted of getting acquainted with our team members, learning the culture of Jamaica, assigning our tasks, gathering supplies and learning how to pack. I thought to myself, "How hard would it be to pack clothes for eight days?" Little did I know I had to pack clothes, shoes, insect repellent, first aid kit, snacks, water, supplies and my Bible. During the weeks leading up to our departure, the reality of traveling out of the country became very apparent. For eight days of my young adult life, I would not have the luxuries of my United States comfort. I would travel to a foreign land, teach Vacation Bible Study, sleep in another person's bed and eat food in a new culture. My excitement began to wane. However, I could hear the UMVIM trainer explaining that my feelings were natural; but be open to the Holy Spirit. She would constantly repeat, "you will learn a lot about yourself, about God and you will be blessed." Never did she utter

I would bless my Jamaican brothers and sisters.

The next Sunday, Ben Hill and UM-VIM commissioned our team as "missionaries." I was traveling to Jamaica to teach and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ! How arrogant did I think that I was "not" going to learn from my Jamaican brothers and sisters. As the mission trip revealed, I learned I was very privileged and the goodness of God's grace and mercy.

On October 15, 2017, the Virginia Annual Conference will celebrate UM-VIM Awareness Sunday. Please take the time to recognize those who have served in short-term missions and the work of UMVIM throughout the world. 🇺🇸

Peace and Blessings.

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis

**Need a book? A Bible?
A music CD?**

**Shop Online
At Your
Virginia
Conference
Online Bookstore!**

**Save 20% on most items and
Gain 5% back for Virginia Conference**

Go to the Virginia Conference Web site, <www.vamc.org>
and click, "Resources" >> "Cokesbury Virtual Bookstore."

* 5% return offer does not apply to textbooks, special
order downloads, or official denominational items.



Bishop's Bible Challenge readings for November


November 1	Luke 19-20
November 2	Luke 21-22
November 3	Luke 23-24
November 4	John 1-2
November 5	John 3-4
November 6	John 5-6
November 7	John 7-8
November 8	John 9-10
November 9	John 11-12
November 10	John 13-15
November 11	John 16-18
November 12	John 19-21
November 13	Acts 1-3
November 14	Acts 4-6
November 15	Acts 7-8
November 16	Acts 9-10
November 17	Acts 11-13
November 18	Acts 14-15
November 19	Acts 16-17
November 20	Acts 18-20
November 21	Acts 21-23
November 22	Acts 24-26
November 23	Acts 27-28
November 24	Romans 1-3
November 25	Romans 4-7
November 26	Romans 8-10
November 27	Romans 11-13
November 28	Romans 14-16
November 29	1 Corinthians 1-4
November 30	1 Corinthians 5-8

– See more at: <http://backtothebible.org/reading-guide/15/7#sthash.Cl2yx6KJ.dpuf>

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

shared a story about a couple who hadn't been active in church but began to hear the efforts of a church in the wake of a natural disaster. After several stories appeared in the local newspaper, the couple began to attend the church, and became involved in the relief efforts. Schnase remembered that the couple straightforwardly shared that they wanted to be a part of a church that lived out what it believed and taught in action.

In the case of Paul and the Romans, I find myself focused on the beautiful feet of those who bring the gospel. I wonder what shape my feet are in; are they used to bring the good news with grace, and hope and love? Are they focused on entering situations that challenge me outside of my comfort zone? Are the actions of my feet in sync with the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart? Do I have beautiful feet?

In the pursuit of evangelism, as we bring the good news, let us be challenged to move, to live and love boldly. Let us prove that we love by the actions we take, that the good news may be heard by those who meet us and our beautiful feet. 

*Abingdon Press announced that they are discontinuing the publication of the New International Lesson Series Annual. These passages are in accordance with Bishop Lewis' Bible Reading Challenge calendar. See November calendar at left.

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

Publication Title: Virginia United Methodist Advocate
Publication No. 660-740
Issue Frequency: Monthly
Number of Issues Published Annually: 12
Annual Subscription price: \$20
Mailing Address of Publication:
 Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc.,
 P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058
Contact Person: Madeline Pillow, (804) 521-1113
Mailing Address of Publisher:
 Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church,
 P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058
Name and Address of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor:
 Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc.,
 P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058
Editor: Madeline Pillow, P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058
Owner: Virginia United Methodist Communications, Inc.,
 P.O. Box 5606, Glen Allen, VA 23058
Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: None
Tax Status: The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes has not changed during the preceding 12 months.
Publication Title: Virginia United Methodist Advocate
Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: Sept. 2017
Extent and Nature of Circulation:

15 a) Total Number of Copies (Net press run)	2,948	2,432
15 b) Paid Circulation (by Mail and Outside the Mail)		
1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions	2,351	1,827
2) Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions	116	96
3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS	260	254
4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g. First-Class Mail)	18	18
15 c) Total Paid Distribution (sum of b-1,2,3, & 4)	2,745	2,184
15 d) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (by Mail and Outside the Mail)		
1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies	33	32
2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies	5	7
3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g. First-Class Mail)	18	7
4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (carriers or other means)	241	56
15 e) Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (sum of 15d-1,2,3, & 4)	297	102
15 f) Total Distribution (sum of 15c & 15e)	3,042	2,286
15 g) Copies not Distributed	-226	-16
15 h) Total (sum of 15f & 15g)	3,042	2,286
15 i) Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f x 100)	90%	93%
16 a) Paid Electronic Copies	172	184
16 b) Total Paid Print Copies + Paid Electronic Copies	2,917	2,368
16 c) Total Print Distribution + Paid Electronic Copies	3,214	2,470
16 d) Percent Paid (16b divided by 16c x 100)	91%	96%

Advocate

The Virginia United Methodist

EQUIPS

PRINT & ONLINE
\$25/YEAR
PRINT ONLY
\$20/YEAR
ONLINE ONLY
\$10/YEAR

CONNECTS

INFORMS

The official
monthly
magazine of
the Virginia
Conference

SUBSCRIBE NOW for

- **Timely Issues:** Each issue of the *Advocate* focuses on an important area within the church.
- **Unique Voices:** The *Advocate* features commentary and articles from conference clergy and laity in every issue.
- **Bible Study:** Each month a different pastor or lay person offers personal insight into the Bible lesson.
- **Conference News**
- **Local Church News**
- **Conference Events**
- **Mission Opportunities**
- **Clergy News**
- **The Bishop's Viewpoint**

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

Call the *Advocate* office at:
1-800-768-6040, ext. 110

or online at www.vaumc.org/advocate

