

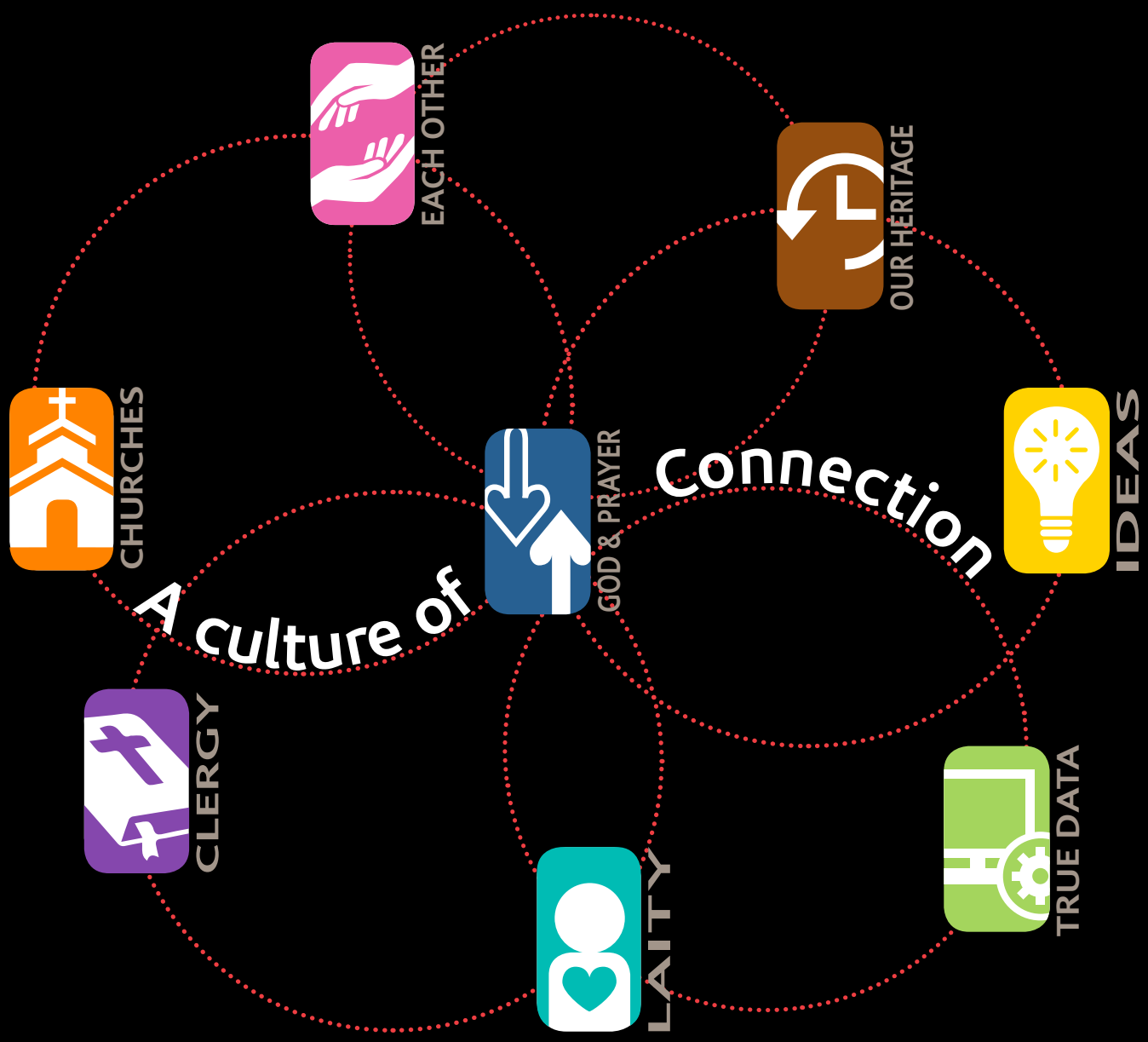
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The Virginia United Methodist

October 2013

# Advocate



## EQUIPPING



## VITAL CONGREGATIONS

# FROM THE EDITOR



Neill Caldwell  
Editor

Circles  
and  
numbers



**A few Fridays ago my wife and I walked into a classroom** at Randolph-Macon College for instruction on the new data entry system being developed for local churches in the Virginia Conference.

Lynne was there in training as the pastor of one of our congregations and an official data-enterer. I was there wearing my journalist/researcher/photographer hats for a chance to see what this new “one stop shopping” way to input our data was all about.

David Bailey and Karen Albro were there to help walk us through the new input system, which seems remarkably simple. I know our conference IT czar Bryan Compton has spent hours, weeks and months developing this system, but luckily you don’t have to be a computer geek to use it.

The idea is to greatly simplify the process of reporting statistics and information. Congregations have already been inputting charge conference information into the system. The idea is that we’ll start using all of its features by Jan. 1 when churches can enter their year-end statistical data.

This is just one more cog in the effort to build more vital congregations and make disciples for the transformation of the world. The hope is that having this information more accessible – with a few key strokes as opposed to finding last year’s Journal – will help our churches be more connectional.

If you didn’t make one of the training sessions, there is a self-guided PowerPoint about Equipping Vital Congregations posted on the conference website.

You can also watch a 12-minute video on YouTube where the Rev. Larry Davies walks viewers through a quick history of how Equipping Vital Congregations is a tool for accountability and greater connection.

“The ultimate goal, of course, is to equip our churches so they can be more vital,” Davies says in the video. You can read Davies’ update on Equipping Vital Congregations inside this magazine.

There has been steady work by the bishop’s steering team throughout this year. Another major element ready for roll out is the new plan for “Discipleship Circles,” which will be modeled after John Wesley’s Holy Club at Oxford. These small groups will be for clergy and laity who want to collaborate with people from other churches, hopefully, for spiritual growth, learning and developing a closer relationship with God. It’s a leadership development strategy that brings people and churches into a closer connection so we can collaborate on making disciples and making disciples better.

All of this effort has been performed in an atmosphere and attitude of prayer, and the notion that people are still the most important part of any ministry.

“Numbers are about people and people have particular needs,” the Rev. Lydia Rodriguez of Arlington UMC concluded in the Equipping Vital Congregations video on YouTube. “The sense that we need to take more care about numbers makes us aware that we really need to give better pastoral care, and better congregational care, to the people we serve.”

*Neill Caldwell*

Connecting with the

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## 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

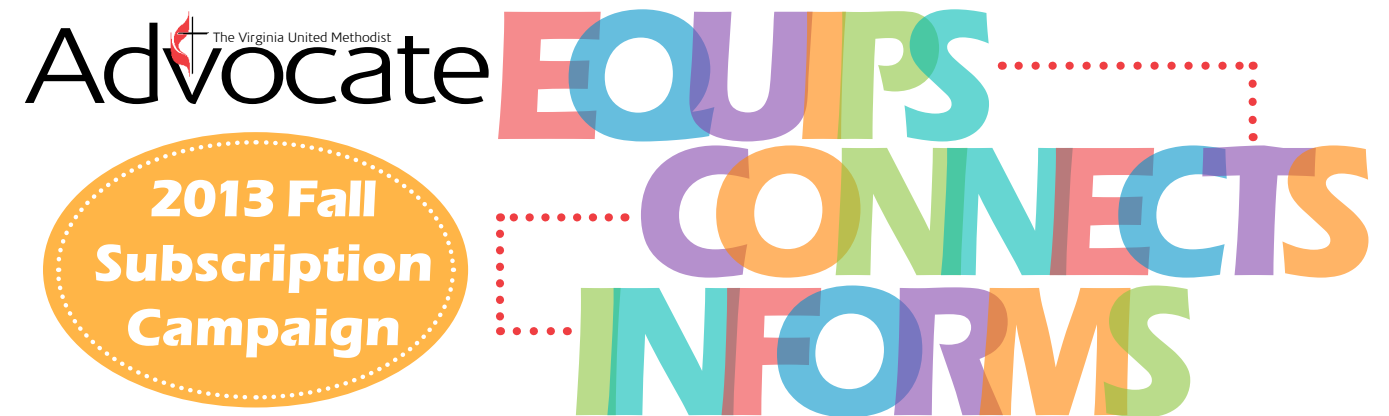
Letters to the Editor are printed on a space-available basis. Letters should be limited to 150 words for space reasons. The Advocate will not print letters addressing a topic beyond two months of the publication of that issue. The Advocate editor reserves the right to edit all letters.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## SECTIONS

- 4 Commentary and Letters
- 9-11 Virginia
- 12-15 Nation & World
- 23 Events
- 24 Local Church
- 26-27 Living the Word
- 28 Clergy & Diaconal
- 30 From the Bishop
- 31 One Last Word



## FEATURES

- 16-22 Equipping Vital Congregations update

## NEWS

- 6 Special report: How Obamacare will impact local churches
- 9 Conference staff, Bishop go to adaptive leadership training
- 10 Bishop gets tour, updates at UMFS
- 12 Scams target United Methodists
- 13 Church responds to Syrian refugees
- 14 Warning! Young adults have authenticity sensors
- 15 ‘Dream Team’ hopes grants will attract young clergy

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Rev. Ward Campbell



Rev. Larry Smith

## To live nobly: what does it mean?

By Derrick Parson

As we reflect on both the lives of our dear friends, Larry Smith and Ward Campbell, they leave us with a legacy of goodness, graciousness, dignity and decency lived out right. Those who are able to live this life gallantly, splendidly and faithfully teach us what it means to live nobly.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, then be the best street sweeper the world will ever know." Larry and Ward must have heard those words from the lips of Dr. King as they put forth their best effort in the way they lived. These men walked with a special bounce and cadence that solidified that they knew who they were in Christ. Humble, but determined, as they put every ounce of energy into whatever they were doing for the Kingdom.

These men would not have thought of themselves as living nobly but intentionally. Living their best life with joy on their faces, love in their hearts and grace in their hands at the dawn of each new day is the blessing that we must not miss as a gift. These men were not complainers but chose to serve others in spite of their own personal

hardships. Therefore, Higher Education and Campus Ministry and the Virginia Conference will forever be indebted to these men who served so faithfully amongst us. May God continue to surround their families and each and every one of us with God's amazing, all-sufficient grace.

In saying goodbye, we can only attempt to emulate Larry and Ward as we celebrate their lives, their witness, and strong reassuring relationship to and with God. We must never forget their strong work ethic, talent and skill set that seemed to match the needs around them. These men can never be replaced because their imprint on each of us is genuine, fixed and infectious. They actually leave us with an incredible portrait of authentic leadership as they were just as comfortable leading from the rear as they led out front.

These two appeared to breathe in God and exhale any negativity that would stand in their way of progress. These loyal servants will be missed because they were truly lovers and doers of God's Holy Word.

In living their best lives they lived nobly right in front of us, teaching us the secret to having balance in an unbalanced world is in living a life of gratitude. We salute these two men for their altruistic nature and their tremendous personification of living a noble life. Dear friends, you will be missed but never forgotten.

*-The Rev. Derrick Parson is the conference director of Ministries with Young People.*

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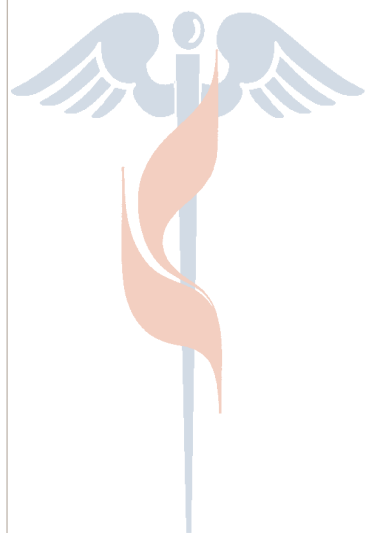






# The impact of Obamacare

New federal healthcare law could impact United Methodist churches for years to come



By Neill Caldwell

**A**s the Affordable Care Act becomes the law of the land, annual conferences are grappling with how to best make use of the reforms.

Many uncertainties loom as the federal law that has drawn so much gnashing of teeth goes into effect Oct. 1. There's also a pending Internal Revenue Service decision that will have a direct impact on United Methodist clergy.

In the midst of all the rancor accompanying the Affordable Care Act – the ACA, but more commonly called “Obamacare,” now even by the president – Congress overlooked employees of churches.

For many years, church-affiliated organizations have provided retirement and health benefits to clergy and lay employees. Nationwide, more than a million people receive

their health care coverage through church organizations. But the new federal law does not extend the same premium tax credits to low- and modest-income clergy or lay employees of churches receiving coverage through a church health plan. Under the ACA, more than 50 percent of United Methodist clergy would qualify for these tax credits to purchase insurance. But because of the way the law was written, those tax credits cannot be used toward insurance plans churches can offer through government-run exchanges.

## The Church Health Plan Act of 2013

A bill introduced in the U.S. Senate – the Church Health Plan Act of 2013 – would fix the problem. The bill would extend the same tax benefits available to the general public to clergy and church employees receiving coverage from church health plans.

Since many churches are small – with one pastor and perhaps no lay employees – they will not be required under the Obamacare plan to provide coverage. If a church drops coverage, that would free (or force) employees to seek the lower-cost insurance with the government exchange. Small churches that fall outside the large-employer mandate may conclude

that they should drop health coverage and guide employees to purchase insurance on their own through government-run exchanges, where subsidies would apply, according to Colette Nies, spokesperson for the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits.

“We cannot estimate how widespread this would be, but given the income demographics of the UMC workforce, it could be substantial,” said Nies.

The bad news for the “fix-it” legislation? It has zero chance of passage.

“We’re not expecting to (even) get a vote,” said Ian Koski, spokesperson for Delaware Senator Chris Coons, co-sponsor of the legislation. “The dedication of Senate and House members to repeal it entirely instead of fixing it has disincentivized Republicans from working with us.”

“The hypocrisy of The United Methodist Church’s leadership on this issue is breathtaking,” wrote the Rev. Donald Sensing, a Tennessee pastor, in a recent blog post. “The UMC supported and lobbied for passage of Obamacare hammer and tongs, so much that then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi specifically thanked the UMC for its work in getting the legislation through Congress.”

## No legislative solution in sight

John Fuller, the Virginia Conference’s Pension and Health Benefits director, has been wrangling with the implications of the ACA all summer. He’s not at all optimistic about any legislative solution for the problem.

“The Church Health Plan Act of 2013 is intended to correct what many consider to be an unintentional oversight in the drafting of the Affordable Care Act,” said Fuller. “While the law would be ‘budget neutral,’ and most impartial observers seem to agree that the proposed legislation represents a common sense fix to the original law, most also appear to agree that the law has little or no chance of passage. This is a reflection of the political dynamic that has been an evident factor in all legislative and regulatory activity related to Obamacare.”

Fuller explained that the proposed Church Health Plan Act would make clergy and lay employees of churches eligible to benefit from premium tax credits when purchasing coverage under their qualified plan. Without passage of the law, clergy would only be able to capitalize on the premium tax credits to which they are otherwise entitled if they purchase coverage through one of the new health care “exchanges” being created.

While the proposed legislation may have more

immediate relevance to other conferences in the denomination, there is no similar impact in the Virginia Conference, Fuller said.

“We are maintaining our conference-sponsored

“The Church Health Plan Act of 2013 is intended to correct what many consider to be an unintentional oversight in the drafting of the Affordable Care Act” -John Fuller

health plans in 2014, and all full-time appointed clergy in the Virginia Conference are required to be enrolled in a VUMPI-administered plan. Our plans are funded primarily through apportionments, but also through contributions from clergy themselves. Those contributions are based only on the specific health plan selected and whether individual or family tier coverage is chosen; factors such as clergy compensation or health status have no impact on the contribution paid by the covered clergy.”

Under the new law, premium tax credits are

unavailable to those who have access to affordable employer-sponsored coverage. Accordingly, full-time clergy in the Virginia Conference will not be eligible for premium tax credits. Part-time clergy who may, based on household income, qualify for premium tax credits would be able to capitalize on those credits by purchasing coverage through a qualified exchange-based plan.

Similarly, lay church employees who may not have access to the conference-sponsored plans will gain access to exchange-based coverage, and potentially to premium tax credit subsidies, when the exchanges become operational in 2014.

“Our intent is to continue monitoring all aspects of Obamacare as its various provisions are implemented,” Fuller added, “and we will continue to develop strategies to seek optimal health care coverage for the conference’s clergy and lay employees, while minimizing the cost of that coverage. It is possible that, in the future, exchange-based coverage may prove to be a viable consideration for inclusion in our strategy. However, we will not take that step until we are confident that incorporating exchange coverage into the Virginia Conference health coverage strategy would not be disruptive to clergy in the conference.”

## Other conference pension and health benefits coordinators are also struggling to interpret the new law.

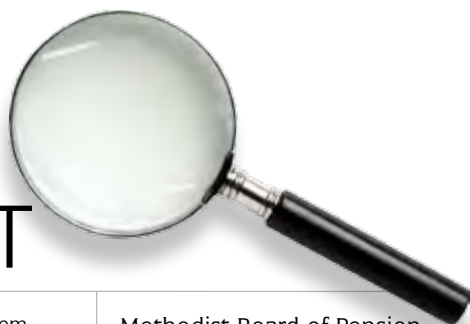
“Obamacare was intended to bring health insurance to those who do not yet have it, and to encourage existing coverage to remain in place,” said the Rev. Dr. Jackson Day, chair of the Baltimore-Washington Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits and a consultant on Health Care Advocacy for the General Board of Church and Society. “For clergy to remain in the plans they currently have is therefore consistent with the intent of Obamacare.”

Health insurance marketplaces are being subsidized for any household with income under 400 percent of the poverty line – about \$90,000 for a family of four. Since clergy in conference plans do not get this subsidy, nor do their churches, it could be attractive to get insurance from these marketplaces instead.

“In the Baltimore-Washington Conference, we have structured our health insurance plan so that the congregations pay the same premium for each pastor’s insurance regardless of any of these variables, so that appointment decisions can be made based on congregational needs and clergy skills,” Day said. “If we set our clergy free to obtain

(Continued on next page: “Obamacare”)





# SPECIAL REPORT



## The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



### Learn more about the health care reform

- ✚ **Healthcare.gov**, the website on the law by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- ✚ Kaiser Family Foundation, which examines health care policy <http://kff.org/>
- ✚ Overview of the new law by Consumer Reports [www.consumerreports.org/cro/2012/06/update-on-health-care-reform/index.htm](http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/2012/06/update-on-health-care-reform/index.htm)
- ✚ Download "UMC Clergy, Conferences and Health Reform," a PowerPoint by Jackson Day, chair of the Baltimore-Washington Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits. <http://umc-gbcs.org/faitn-in-action/health-care-reform-and-churches>
- ✚ Overview of health care reform rules from the United Methodist Board of Pension and Health Benefits [www.gbophb.org/health\\_welfare/health-carereform/](http://www.gbophb.org/health_welfare/health-carereform/)

("Obamacare" continued from previous page)

insurance in the marketplaces, we would lose this important aspect of the appointment process."

"The restrictions which apply to clergy because of their appointed status do not apply to lay employees," he added. "Lay employees have voluntary participation in the conference health plan, and while our insurance coverage is excellent, often lay employees must pay 100 percent of the cost, and it is likely many would pay less in the marketplaces. It would thus seem quite likely that many lay employees will find it to their advantage to obtain their insurance from the marketplaces."

In addition, conferences sponsor wellness programs intended to improve clergy health and fitness, and these create savings in health expenditures because of healthier participants.

Much will depend on the extent that conferences can use the online insurance marketplaces, which are to open for enrollment by Oct. 1. Options are just starting to become public.

"Some conferences are seriously considering allowing covered lay workers and some covered clergy to opt out of the conference plan, essentially by allowing their local churches to opt out, ... to seek coverage on the exchanges," said Andrew Hendren, associate general counsel at the United

Methodist Board of Pension and Health Benefits. He is the agency's expert on the Affordable Care Act.

### A distinctly United Methodist question of clergy employer

But, to take advantage of the marketplaces, church benefits officers face a number of questions, including one that is distinctly United Methodist and that awaits an Internal Revenue Service ruling: In the connectional system of Methodism, who is clergy's employer? Is it the church or ministry where a clergy member is appointed, or is it the clergy member's conference?

If the answer is the local church or extension ministry, then many clergy can shop in the insurance marketplaces and potentially qualify for federal subsidies. If the conference is the employer, then the conference likely must provide insurance for clergy under the Affordable Care Act's large-employer rules.

The ACA requires all 50 states and the District of Columbia to have health insurance marketplaces – also called exchanges – where people without insurance through their employer or some other program, like Medicare, can buy coverage from an array of private plans. The federal government will establish the marketplace in states that do not set up their own.

All insurance plans – whether in the market-

places or not – must meet certain standards, such as selling coverage to everyone regardless of pre-existing conditions. New insurance policies will be mandated to cover preventive health measures without any cost-sharing from the patient.

Because these new marketplaces can pool large groups of people, the expectation is that the insurance options will be more affordable than what individuals can purchase now.

The outcomes of all these questions are important because of the huge chunk of apportionment dollars that are now going to health care and pensions. More than half (52.6 percent) of the 2014 Virginia Conference budget, for example, is devoted to clergy benefits.

Some United Methodist benefits officers are optimistic that the ACA could eventually help those numbers change.

"(Pension and Benefits) is a fascinating place to be working because it's so complex," said Lonnie Chafin, Northern Illinois Conference treasurer.

The United Methodist Church has about 14,800 retired clergy, and 31,760 active clergy in the United States. Most conferences, like Virginia, require that full-time clergy be covered by the conference health plan.

But identifying the employer of United Methodist clergy remains tricky.

*The Book of Disci-*

*pline* asserts that clergy are not employees of a local church, district or conference. Their ministry is derived from Christ.

Church law also recognizes that for purposes of taxation, insurance and other benefits, governmental agencies may classify clergy as employees. The paragraph just does not specify what church entity is the employer, and the employer can vary depending on the circumstances. For example, clergy are self-employed for employment tax purposes.

The IRS applies a "common-law test of employment" to determine who the employer is under the health care law, Hendren said. The common law test examines numerous factors, including who provides a place of work, pays the salary, provides benefits, pays for work supplies and has the ability to terminate employment.

"Though many factors point to the local church or the charge conference being the employer for this purpose, the appointment and removal powers of the annual conference leave some ambiguity for elders and local pastors," Hendren said. "The local church is arguably more clearly the employer of deacons under the rule."

Hendren said United Methodist leaders are working with the IRS to resolve the issue. ☞

*-Neill Caldwell is the Advocate editor. With additional reporting from Heather Hahn of United Methodist News Service.*

## Connectional Ministries staff, bishop go together to Adaptive Leadership training

By Neill Caldwell

This summer the entire Virginia Conference Connectional Ministries staff and their bishop took a road trip together, but it had nothing to do with vacation. Eleven members of the conference staff – along with Bishop Young Jin Cho – went together to a training session on "Leading Adaptive Change" offered by the Alban Institute.

The training was offered at the United Methodist Simpsonwood Retreat Center near Atlanta.

Director of Connectional Ministries the Rev. Marc Brown was the only participant from the Virginia Conference who has had experience studying about adaptive leadership, and thought the entire staff would benefit from attending this training event together.

"I have previously participated, individually, in two other training events on adaptive change, but I found this session to be of benefit as our conference staff engaged in beginning adaptive conversations about how we can best fulfill our conference mission of equipping local churches for ministry and providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church," Brown said.

"It was beneficial to be in conversation with persons from various faith perspectives from around the country who are encountering similar adaptive challenges related to their ministry settings," he added. "Part of adaptive challenge is helping organizations to have different conversations and it was good to engage in different conversations with these persons. One of the benefits was the opportunity to learn more about organizational culture and to reflect on the complexity of the organizational culture of the Virginia Conference."

Adaptive change and adaptive change leadership comes out of the research done by Dr. Ron Heifetz of Harvard University, who asserts that leaders are confronted with two kinds of problems: "technical" problems, which are tackled through simple problem solving, and "adaptive" problems, which are more systemic and require a change in behaviors.

Say the church's air conditioning goes out. The "technical" fix would be to simply call someone to come and repair it. An "adaptive" solution might be to get used to being without air conditioning for a while. Maybe it's time to consider a new "green" energy system. Or maybe it's time

*(Continued on pg. 11: Leadership Training)*





By Neill Caldwell

Virginia Bishop Young Jin Cho visited the Richmond campus of United Methodist Family Services (UMFS), lunching with residential students, getting a tour and listening to staff and board members.

Bishop Cho heard firsthand the stories of Brandon and April, two teenage student leaders at UMFS's Charterhouse School who have already had difficult lives despite their young ages. Cho told the two that, while growing up in Korea, he had to drop out of high school in the 10th grade because his family was too poor to continue to pay for his education. He later passed the GED and went to college and seminary.

"I am here by the grace of God," Bishop Cho said. "I always say that wherever I go. My advice is that you

need to learn to rely on God. ... Your best friend should be Jesus Christ. He will never disappoint you."

"Listening to your stories, I have kind of a pain in my heart," the bishop told the young people.

"When you do hear their stories you're reminded how brave our young people are," said the Rev. Joe Torrence, a United Methodist pastor who serves as Minister to Youth and Church Relations at UMFS. "This truly is a place of redemption."

UMFS has 12 locations around the Commonwealth, providing treatment, adoption help, residential and school-based services. Bishop Cho also learned that the agency is about to open a second Charterhouse School in Edinburg to serve the northern Shenandoah Valley.

"We work with young people who fall through the cracks," said Greg Peters, the president and CEO of UMFS. "Otherwise these 15- to 25-year-olds would be lost to society. We believe that we can turn these young people around."

Both staff and board members stressed to the bishop the importance of faith-based involvement in the work of UMFS, and in particular the support of the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church.


“There is a place for mission work right here within the conference,” said Peters. “Joe Torrence

and Angie Williams (a former conference staffer who is now coordinator of volunteers at UMFS) have done some great things in bringing more churches in to do ministry and mission in their communities through the 'Partnership Churches' program."

"We're able to serve, through our programs, to be the hands and feet of Christ," Williams said. "A good example is what happened in Farmville. We had an emergency foster home placement and needed a wheelchair ramp built right away. I sent an e-mail to Farmville UMC, and within 24 hours they had gotten their people and the supplies together and built a ramp!"

"We try to have a more relational approach with these kids at risk," said Torrence. "For some there are justice issues... What does it mean to be in relationship with the church?"

“One of the remarkable things to remember about this agency is that it’s not the first stop for many of these kids,” said the Rev. John Brenneke, pastor at Crewe UMC and current UMFS board chairperson. “They have to develop a level of trust.”

“Brandon, for one, was beat up by the church,” Torrence added. “Now he sees a different side of what God looks like. It speaks to the power of the gospel.” 

-Neill Caldwell is editor of the Advocate.

("Leadership Training," continued from pg. 9)

to think about replacing the entire building. Or whether the congregation even needs a building...

“We need to reframe our thinking,” said the Rev. Susan Beaumont, a senior consultant for Alban Institute who led the training. “We’re not looking for easy answers.”

In helping people to define adaptive challenges, Beaumont asked participants to avoid the phrasing, “How do we...?” and instead look more broadly, stating the challenge as “what does it mean to do \_\_\_\_ in the face of \_\_\_\_?”

Adaptive leadership, as defined by Heifetz in his book, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, is a set of strategies and practices that can help organizations and the people in them break through gridlocks, accomplish deep change and develop the adaptability to thrive in complex, competitive and challenging environments.

There are no set policies and procedures for dealing with adaptive change problems. These problems call for leadership where the leader does not have the answers. We see adaptive challenges every day at every level of the workplace – when companies restructure or reengineer, develop or implement strategy, or merge businesses.



Participants were assigned to small groups of four or five to talk about their own adaptive change situations. Each attendee from Virginia was assigned to a different group so that they could openly talk about their work setting.

Brown said it was not unusual for the Connectional Ministries staff to go to a training together.

“The staff who participated in this training has an annual local off-site retreat and off-site half-day learning time together,” Brown said. “What was unusual was the three-day format instead of our usual retreat format and having Bishop Cho participate in the training with us. His presence in this training and his interaction with our staff is a true blessing.”

-Neill Caldwell is editor of the Advocate.

**Greg Peters (right) gives Bishop Cho (left) a tour of the UMFS campus, including the Charterhouse School. At center is the Rev. John Brenneke, the current UMFS board chair. Photo by Neill Caldwell**



## Go Nuts! Join us for the Nutzy's Rotary Funn Run



## Benefits UMFS

## Registration is open!

Go nuts with Nutzy at the 2nd Annual Nutzy's Rotary FUNN Run 5k to benefit United Methodist Family Services and the YMCA on December 7. Children eight and older can run without mom and dad. Strollers and walkers are welcome! And new this year, the race will be timed. Runners will be in the first flights and strollers in the last flight. Registration is \$30 for individuals and strollers and \$12 for those 17 and younger. Visit [www.nutzyrotaryfunnrun.com](http://www.nutzyrotaryfunnrun.com) to register today!

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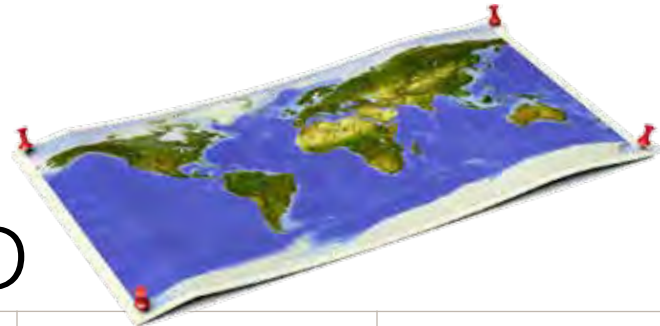


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Religious news from around the

# NATION & WORLD



## Scams target United Methodists

Unfortunately, scam phone calls and e-mails are not unusual, but several scams lately are specifically targeting United Methodists.

One scam has been reported by United Methodist pastors across the denomination. A person claiming to be a United Methodist bishop (Bishop Bledsoe, Bishop King and Bishop Holston's names have been used) calls to say that his daughter, niece, or friend has broken down in your town. He needs your help getting them a prepaid credit card to get back on the road. At least one North Georgia pastor has gotten

this call. Please note that no Conference or bishop will ever call your church in an emergency and ask you to send a prepaid credit card. Please alert your local authorities and report the call to the Conference Bishop's office as well.

Another scam is local to North Georgia and has been reported in at least two districts. A person calls a church and asks to speak to the pastor about an AIDS patient who has fallen on hard times or has been evicted. He mentions foundations and organizations that are not real. He asks for money and offers to come to the church

to pick up the check.

A third scam we're aware of comes from a false World Methodist Council e-mail address and asks for your bank card number. The World Methodist Council does not request money by phone or e-mail. You will always receive a letter on official letterhead when it comes to matters of money. Any e-mail correspondence from the Council headquarters will arrive from an "@worldmethodistcouncil.org" e-mail address.

Not all scams are as easy to see through as the "Prince of a foreign land needs to wire money" or "You just won the European Lottery" but are, instead, very convincing.

United Methodist pastor Rev. Adam Hamilton was impersonated on Facebook earlier this year by someone who recreated his page almost exactly, but asked for money for non-existent mission projects.

It is important to be thorough in your research, to make donations on your terms through reputable methods and to be wary of all solicitations.

CharityNavigator.org posts this advice on avoiding becoming the victim of an online scam: [www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&cpid=313](http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&cpid=313).

-Sybil Davidson, North Georgia Conference Communications Office

## Faith groups step up to help Syrian refugees fleeing civil war

By Linda Bloom

Every day, an estimated 5,000 Syrians flee their homes and the civil war that engulfs their country.

That's the startling new figure released Sept. 3 by the United Nations as the global debate on how to respond to chemical weapon attacks against Syrian civilians intensified. The total number of Syrians seeking safety in neighboring countries now exceeds 2 million.

In a statement, António Guterres, the U.N.'s High Commissioner for Refugees, called Syria "the great tragedy of this century," noting the suffering and high level of displacement. "The only solace is the humanity shown by the neighboring countries in welcoming and saving the lives of so many refugees," he said.

But those countries cannot shoulder the entire burden. Humanitarian organizations, including the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and Church World Service, have been working through partner agencies for months to address critical needs.

Church World Service will be among those assisting some of the more than 100,000 Syrian refugees living in Cairo, Egypt. Funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, the Church World Service program will

provide basic services, education and protection in partnership with St. Andrew's Refugee Services.

The Rev. John McCullough, a United Methodist pastor and the humanitarian agency's president, acknowledged the crucial needs under volatile conditions. "We are hopeful for a nonviolent solution in Syria and for a calming of tensions in Egypt," he said in a statement. "Recognizing the incredible needs in the region right now, we must respond."

Erol Kekic, who heads the Church World Service immigration and refugee program, noted that while the standard model for assistance is housing large groups in one place, "it's now a well-known fact that 50 percent of world refugees don't live in refugee camps."

The international community has struggled with how to offer assistance to this population for the past decade. "When refugees find themselves in urban situations, they're flying under the radar," Kekic said. "It's very difficult to reach them."

As with any disaster, natural or man-made, UMCOR is cooperating with partners on the ground to assist affected communities, bringing hope to those in need.

UMCOR mobilized its relief-supply network, including UMCOR Sager Brown in Louisiana and UMCOR West Office and Depot in Utah, to



provide items such as health kits, school kits, layette kits, and birthing kits for uprooted families.

A container full of those supplies arrived this summer in Amman, Jordan, to assist refugees gathered at Jordan's border with Syria. The agency also is starting to assist Syrian refugee children in Turkey and Armenia.

Within Syria, UMCOR is providing hygiene kits and school kits for distribution by International Orthodox Christian Charities and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch through November.

"We hope and pray for the day in the future when these refugees will be able to return home," said the Rev. Jack Amick, UMCOR executive for international disaster response. "In the meantime, we are working through a variety of partners to provide hope in the present."

-Bloom is a United Methodist News Service reporter.

Children inside a classroom at Za'atari refugee camp, host to tens of thousands of Syrians displaced by conflict, near Mafraq, Jordan. Photo by Mark Garten

## Give A Child A Chance



### Kaylin's Story

Meet Kaylin. Kaylin is a first grader at a local elementary school. She is a participant in our therapeutic treatment in the public schools program. Kaylin likes hearts, music and playing with her friends. She has worked really hard to overcome many challenges and is now making better grades, listening and paying attention in class and learning is fun. Kaylin wants to be a teacher when she gets older. Can you help Kaylin achieve her dreams?

**Donate to the Pop Smith Scholarship Fund at UMFS.**

**Pop Smith Scholarship Fund, UMFS**  
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or online at [www.umfs.org](http://www.umfs.org)  
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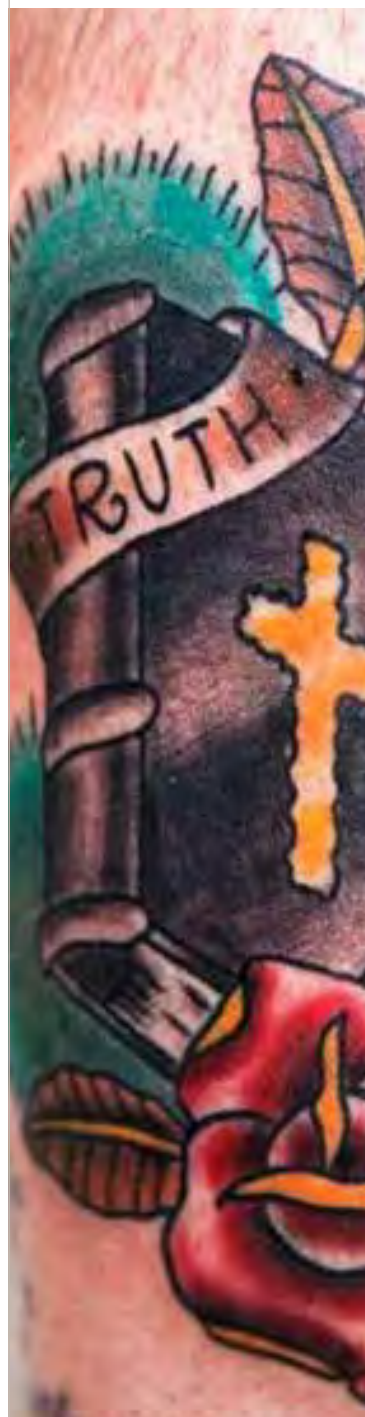


# EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



## GET REAL!

Young adults have authenticity radar



**H**oping to attract young adults to your church? The solution is less about devising new programs or loud worship services to attract the elusive demographic, and more about authenticity.

According to Beth Ludlum, director of Student Faith and Leadership Formation at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, authenticity is the key. She suggests churches start by asking why they want this group to attend their church. If the primary reason is to make the congregation viable for the long term, that is not enough. "Young adults have authenticity radar," Ludlum says.

Churches need genuinely to desire the energy, hope, insight and passion this group brings. They must also be ready to embrace the change that will result as young people become a part of the community of believers. Or, as the Rev. Jorge Acevedo, pastor of Grace Church, a multi-site United Methodist congregation in Florida, points out, "It can be never about saving a church. It is always about reaching people for Jesus. We need to let God break our heart for the next generation."

### Authentic conversation

You feel the call and

have the passion to reach young people with Christ's message. Where do you start? Ludlum advises starting by listening to those you want to attract. "Listen to their joys and pain, where they find meaning, where they find hope and despair." For more ideas, check out "Stop talking and start listening to your community," an article on the UMC website at: <http://www.umcom.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=mrLZJ9PFKMG&b=6084863&ct=12703029>

### Authentic diversity

Armed with relational knowledge, churches need to begin to let the values of young people shape their community and leadership. Acevedo says you have to "look at the platform." Part of valuing the next generation includes giving them a voice and visible presence in your community. We need generational diversity in our leadership, just as we need racial diversity.

### Authentic hospitality

Churches that do not radiate authenticity may make young adults feel as if they have walked onto a used-car lot. The constant greeting, prodding and questioning can sound like "What do I need to do to get you in a car today?"

While young adults yearn for others to know them, they want to be able to check out a church with a level of anonymity. In addition, Ludlum points out,

if a church is starting in the right place, the openness and hospitality that flow from the heart naturally will allow young adults to feel welcome without feeling pressured.

### Authentic relationships

Acevedo says that the longing to be known shows up in young adults who want to hang out with "a blue jean-wearing, 53-year-old pastor." They don't want to go through a book or talk through a list of questions each week; rather, they want to come over, grill out and talk about life. This relational approach to mentoring reaches the heart of some of the deepest longings in this generation. The congregation that is willing to open lives and homes has the potential to produce incredible ministry and radical discipleship.

### Authentic topics

Bringing authenticity into the sermon or a study begins while selecting the topic. When considering a topic or focus, ask, "Does this have any real-world significance?" Whether you are looking at difficult questions, dealing with relationship issues or considering a current issue or topic from the lectionary readings, that question should inform your choice from the selected readings and your focus.

### Authentic teaching

This goes far beyond burning your Christian joke

book and leaving behind tired clichés. When you interact with difficult issues, your response has to be as nuanced as the debate is messy. If a clear-cut, universally accepted response does not exist, authentic teachers acknowledge that up front and do not demean other legitimate positions.

"Many church leaders refrain from tackling complex moral issues because they have the potential to divide the congregation," says the Rev. Adam Hamilton of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Kansas. "However, we are called to be fearless disciples. Many visitors and especially younger generations are looking for acceptance, not a one-minded mentality that is blind to important issues. Controversial teachings can actually draw people into your church. For this to happen, you must teach both sides, dialogue with others and let people reach their own conclusions. Encourage them to use Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience when making ethical conclusions."

These values echo Jesus' authentic, complex, openhearted life that God calls us to embody in the world. As we seek to open our hearts, minds and doors to the next generation, we can work to become a more authentic expression of the body of Christ. ☞

-United Methodist Communications



Young Clergy Initiative 'Dream Team' drafts plans for use of fund approved by the 2012 General Conference for increasing the number of young clergy in the UMC. From left, front row: Trip Lowery, Beth Ludlum, Sam Kim, Shonda Jones, Brad Farrington; back row: Beth Downs, Sophia Agtarap, Melissa Wiginton, Qunicy Brown, Casey Langley, and Robin Minthorn. Not shown, Kenda Dean and Drew Dyson. Photo by Vicki Brown

## 'Dream Team' hopes grants will attract more young clergy

By Vicki Brown

**F**unds from the \$7 million Young Clergy Initiative will be used to support innovative projects of all sizes that could create "seismic change" by attracting young people to ministry in The United Methodist Church. And prayer will be a big part of the process for anyone who gets the funds.

The Dream Team, a group of 12 young clergy, campus ministers, pastors, youth ministers, annual conference and seminary staff with expertise in various areas relating to discernment and young clergy issues, met in Nashville Sept. 5-6. They mapped out a timeline, priorities for the grants, and funding cat-

egory recommendations.

The Rev. Beth Downs, director of the Virginia Conference's Center for Clergy Excellence, is one of the team members.

The goal of the Young Clergy Initiative is to increase the number of young clergy in the UMC.

The Rev. Brad Farrington, campus minister at Appalachian State University, said the projects need to show young adults that ordained ministry is "worth your life."

"They are rejecting a career path of creating good company people for The United Methodist Church. We have to really think big," Farrington said.

To learn more about the Young Clergy Initiative, visit [www.explorecalling.org/yci](http://www.explorecalling.org/yci) ☞

## Your house...



Celebrating 80 years of service

...can become a very special home for retired United Methodist pastors and their spouses in the years to come.

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

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

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

c/o Thomas L. Coffman,  
President  
4837 Village Lake Dr.,  
Richmond, VA 23234  
**Retired Clergy Housing Corp.**

Phone: (804) 271-7219; Fax: (804) 271-4558  
E-mail: [nlctlc@comcast.net](mailto:nlctlc@comcast.net)

Please send me information on:

- ☐ The Covenant of Gratitude.  
☐ Including the Retired Clergy Housing Corporation in my will.

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City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_



# EQUIPPING VITAL CONGREGATIONS

## An update

By Larry Davies

## A culture of connection



After creating 84 modules, typing over 27,000 lines of code, inserting more than 50 data tables and expending countless hours of work, the Equipping Vital Congregations charge conference reporting system is up and ready for churches for use!

Beginning in January, Virginia Conference churches will enter their weekly "Vital Signs" on this website. By then, virtually every administrative task for churches and pastors will be in one convenient, readily accessible location.

For charge conferences, churches will be able to enter the information once, then only update as needed, saving many hours of administrative work. Reports will be readily available at the click of a mouse. Information can be freely shared and utilized within your church.

The website, [www.evc.vaumc.org](http://www.evc.vaumc.org), is designed to be intuitive and easy to navigate. But, for those who would prefer an overview and hands-on training, sessions have been and will continue to be scheduled. For help, just look for "Equipping Vital Congregations" at our conference website, [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org).

The new reporting system is only part of the story of Equipping Vital Congregations.

When you connect to [www.evc.vaumc.org](http://www.evc.vaumc.org), look closely at the home page. At the top you will notice just under our logo, our United Methodist guiding purpose: "Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." More than data, Equipping Vital Congregations is about helping you and your church better accomplish your purpose: "Making disciples" and "transforming the world."

One Equipping Vital Congregations team has provided an excellent reporting system while another team is working to enable church leaders, both clergy and lay, to come together on a regular basis to grow together spiritually, support each other and share information in a way that will establish an atmosphere of continuous learning and a culture of improvement.

How can we utilize the information provided by the Equipping Vital Congregations website to accomplish the mission of our churches to make more disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world? One answer would be to share the information through "Discipleship Circles." (See *related article*)

The objective of "Discipleship Circles" is to provide a systemic approach for church-to-church collaboration and church leadership development based on spiritual vitality, strong relationships and data. A Disciple Circle is for church leaders (clergy and lay) who want to collaborate with peers for spiritual growth, relationship and learning so they can grow as disciples and become better equipped to lead the church in making disciples.

Models for Discipleship Circles are in the process of be-

ing created, and information on the formation of Discipleship Circle will be available early next year.

The Prayer Team for Equipping Vital Congregations meets monthly to pray for all of the work teams. In addition, whenever the other work teams meet, the Prayer Team offers prayer for those meetings. Prayer partners have been established between the members of the Prayer Team and the chairs of other work teams. Two important guides were created: "A guide for 30 minutes of prayer and devotion to start every meeting" and "31 Day Devotional." Both are available on [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org) under "Equipping Vital Congregations."

The Communications Team has been developing materials to inform various audiences about "Equipping Vital Congregations" including articles and special editions of the Advocate, updates on our [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org) website including a self-guided "Equipping Vital Congregations" power point that can be downloaded and shown at any local church. "Connection Cards" designed to help us connect with another church were introduced at Annual Conference are still available. Comprehensive materials are being designed and placed on the website for use by each of our districts at leadership training events.

On the home page of [www.evc.vaumc.org](http://www.evc.vaumc.org) you will find: "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all of the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those were being saved." Acts 2:46-47

The real story of our United Methodist churches is only partially told by the data. Day by day, throughout the Virginia Conference people are faithfully attending the temple through worship. They are breaking bread and sharing their faith in their homes. We are praising God and doing ministry throughout our community and world.

"The story of the Church's beginning witnesses to the two realities that have been part of the Church's ministry since its founding: 1) the importance of shared ministry in Christ, and 2) recording ways that God is blessing the Church's ministry." (From [www.evc.vaumc.org](http://www.evc.vaumc.org) website)

This website [www.evc.vaumc.org](http://www.evc.vaumc.org) is intended to witness to both of the realities. In the Wesleyan heritage of ministry, it serves as a point in connection so the churches throughout the Virginia Conference may share the stories of their ministry together in Christ. It also records tangible ways that God continues to bless the ministry of the church.

As you enter information for your church, please pray for the ministry of your church and for all of the churches of our conference as we praise God together. ☞

-The Rev. Larry Davies is superintendent of the Lynchburg District and the chair of Equipping Vital Congregations effort.



# Discipleship Circles

Connections to offer outlet for those attentive to personal spiritual life



By Rachel May

I want to be the pastor who admits she needs others to lead her congregation in the way of life. I want not to endure, but to pursue holy accountability. I want the tradition that has made a way for me to be set free from the impulse to apologize for its connectionalism.

Maybe these are the desires that landed me on the Discipleship Circle Design Team. I cannot say. But what I do know is that the people with whom I have gathered since October

of last year, have experienced something – a something that the buzz, at least the portion to which I have been privy, has yet to lend voice.

So here it is: Not a defense of Discipleship Circles, but our story in brief.

We were asked to create space where churches could collaborate, that more might come from the Vital Congregations initiative than a directive perceived by some as a reprimand. This, as we found ourselves embracing a bishop who said that if newness in Virginia was still the prize, it would come only on the heels of spiritual renewal.

That was the first time we realized we needed to “take five,” so to speak, and start again. We were not going to be designing an event for churches to come together or a small group for pastors to compare notes. We were birthing an opportunity that needed to have, at its heart, a hunger for God and a focus on leadership – clergy and lay.

Clarity came around certain aspects, even as new questions emerged and old ones represented themselves. No, this was not a program. And no, it was not a requirement. Yes, there are people who may already have an avenue by which they contribute to a culture of collaboration, trust and continuous growth and yes, that was OK.

We began to see a circle comprised of those attentive to their personal spiritual life. It would be relationship, first; task and outcome second, and the relationship part would not be a tool for coercion.

In the several months that followed, consensus emerged around the notion of discipleship circles bringing the numbers to the table. We asked: When a circle reached the place where doing so was an authentic next step in helping one another to bring their best before God through their respective roles in Christ’s church, why would they not?

So, hold the kinds of questions that, in effect, shoot us down simply because we do not appear armed with all the answers to every question. This is my plea. (The full implementation, not to mention the outcome, has never been ours for the wrangling.) And if a plea can be two-fold, hear this also: As the design team works to form the first circles – betas, we are calling them – we are making no sales pitch to the people of God. All we are saying is that there will exist a place at the table for those who long for what we envision the Spirit might serve.

If you are unafraid to look at data as if God speaks through it, certainly not exclusively, but substantively; and if you are fairly sure that more vital Christians and a greater number of vital congregations will not come from isolated churches trying to make it happen for themselves, then this is for you. If integrating the number of disciples who are worshiping, making new disciples, growing in faith, engaging and giving to mission into your personal discipleship turns your stomach, fair enough. Nobody on the design team has the role of taking roll!

I will be looking, however – looking within for God, and to the others around the circle to which I intend to commit. When the time comes, I will participate because the desires with which I began, still burn.

For God to be the almighty scatterer, do not some among us have to offer ourselves as seed? Sure, there is the possibility that the work in which any one of us is invested could fall on rocky ground. But if God is the God revealed to me in and through The United Methodist Church, then that God will scoop us up and toss us again until we are where the fertile things are.

It is wild, I know. But grace always is. ☞

—The Rev. Rachel May is pastor at Boulevard UMC, Richmond District.

## EVC Data entry training sessions in progress



David Bailey (above and below) leads one of the Equipping Vital Congregations data entry training sessions being offered this fall. The system will be used for Charge Conference information as well as end-of-year statistical figures. (Photos by Neill Caldwell)





# What happened to the Equipping Vital Congregations “Connection Cards?”

“My wife and I started feeling under each seat which resulted in our acquiring five cards. I sent an e-mail to each pastor and published their information in this Sunday’s bulletin. The churches and pastors will also be on our Joys and Concerns prayer list weekly. It causes me great joy to think that somewhere out there the Body of Christ is praying for Mount Bethel and me. Not sure whose idea it was, but this was surely Holy Spirit inspired.” - Steve Garner

By Larry Davies

At 2013 Annual Conference, as part of the Equipping Vital Congregations report, attendees were instructed to reach under their seat and pull out a card which contained the name and address of a United Methodist church, along with the district and the name of the pastor.

“I was sitting in an area with lots of empty seats. I picked four cards and have kept them as prayer reminders. I also intend to send a note to the pastors.” - Loretta Benninghove

The card then read: “As United Methodists, we are part of a wonderful connection...”

...A connection that helps us accomplish more together than any one of us or any one of our churches can do alone.

...A connection that offers an opportunity for us to support each other, pray for each other, build each other up as brothers and sisters in Christ.

...A connection that enables us to work together, with God’s help, to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Let’s start now. Reach out and connect with the leaders of the congregation listed above. Pray for

them. Let them know you’re praying for them. See what, with God’s help, we can do together.

The response to receiving the connection cards was immediate and heartfelt.

“We e-mailed the pastors to tell them we personally will be praying for them and for their congregations throughout the coming year, and we have added the names of those churches to our daily prayer list,” said Betty Whitehurst. “We asked the pastors to share with their congregations that we are praying for them, and to send us any special prayer requests they may have.”

“I was sitting in the chair of one of the two churches I am just beginning to serve. I guess God really wants me to be in prayer about them!” - Lori Beach

My connection card was McDon-ald’s Mill UMC on the Roanoke District near Blacksburg. The pastor is the Rev. Melanie Duncan Franklin. After arriving home from Annual Conference, I sent her an e-mail promis-

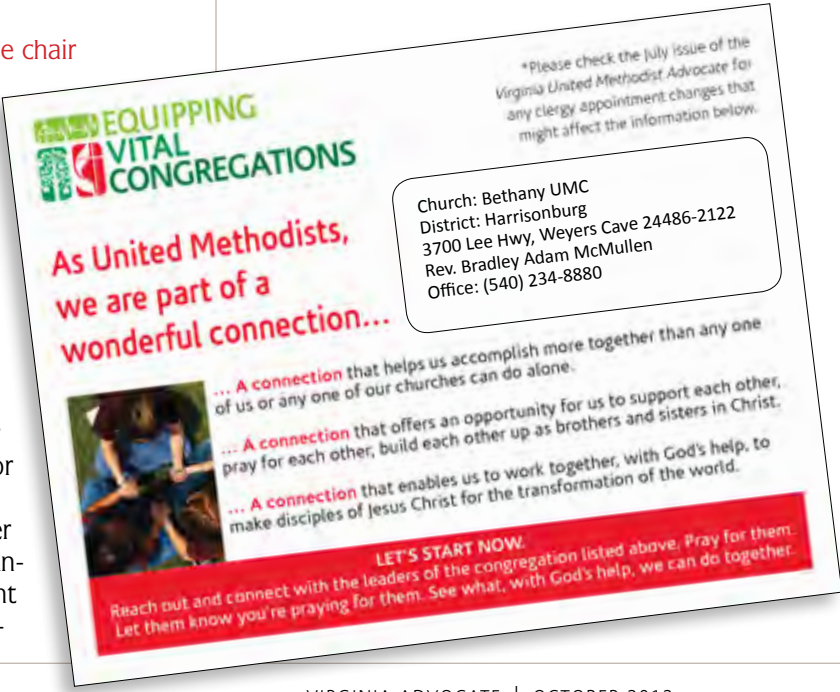
ing to pray for her and for the church regularly.

Franklin quickly replied: “McDonalds Mill is a small, one room church tucked in the Catawba Valley. We are part of a three-point charge. Our congregation is comprised of mostly seniors who love God and each other. They work well together and jump at the chance to come together for ministry to their neighbors. Usually preceded by a meeting that includes lots of good food so they can think clearly to plan how, when and what they will do next. This group fully understands the power of prayer and the awesomeness of God. Thanks for your prayers. If you have a prayer need please let us know. Peace, Melanie”

As United Methodists, we really are a part of a wonderful connection. If you did not receive a connection card, call or e-mail us at the information provided below and we will be happy to send one.

Contact Pam Culler in VAUMC Communications at [PamCuller@vaumc.org](mailto:PamCuller@vaumc.org) or (804) 521-1110.

-The Rev. Larry Davies is superintendent of the Lynchburg District and the chair of Equipping Vital Congregations effort.



Vital Congregations – a small example

By Larry Davies

What does it mean to be a “Vital Congregation?” Does a vital congregation imply lots of people or programs? Can smaller churches be vital too?

Recently, I attended a dedication service for a new education wing at Calvary United Methodist Church in Gladys. Calvary is not one of our larger congregations. Over the years however, thanks to the leadership of their pastor and a dedicated group of church members, Calvary UMC has become one of our “Vital Congregations.”

Capt. Mike Miller works part-time as Calvary’s pastor and works full-time as second in command for the Sheriff’s Department in nearby Bedford County.

In his message, Rev. Miller asked: “Why are you here today? I hope you are here because this house that the Lord built, also built you. Calvary is the perfect example of a family. Our

sanctuary represents the hopes and dreams of our older generation. The Fellowship Hall, built later represents our middle-aged generation. Our Education building is designed for the youngest generation. Each area has its strength and weakness. Each is unique in its own way.”

Recently Miller was asked to describe his church and what they are doing to be a more Vital Congregation. “Calvary is located in a community both aging and rural, filled with farmers as well as other workers. Our community suffered due to the economic downturn. There are needs for basic supplies such as food. Elderly neighbors need basic housing supplies such as air conditioning. There is a growing homeless and substance abuse population. Job loss and higher gas prices are impacting everyone. Basic staples such as food, medication and utility expenses are becoming more expensive and out of the reach of many, especially the elderly and poor.

“Our congregation is attentive to individual acts of piety and acts of mercy. Acts of piety for us involve regularly attending worship, studying the scriptures, prayer, participating in the taking of sacraments, and sharing our faith with others. Acts of mercy are visiting the sick, feeding the hungry and collecting basic necessities for community needs. We

try to find ways to love anyone who seeks our assistance.

“If Calvary UMC no longer existed, our community would suffer by not receiving food, financial assistance and spiritual growth opportunities. This is not provided by other sources. We promise to continue to grow in faith and then share that faith with others by feeding the hungry, helping the needy and providing spiritual growth opportunities to our church and the community.”

Miller said in his message: “No one is perfect and that’s the wonderful way Jesus wants us. Jesus went to the streets to find the sick, the lame and the sinners. Jesus was there and is there for the ones who come up short, who make mistakes, who are not perfect.”

“A beautiful example of that is right in front of you.”

Standing at the Prayer and Altar rail, Miller added: “Did you know that three of the many posts that supported this rail are actually upside down. Somehow the person who put the altar rail together made a mistake... or did he? I like to think that he deliberately placed these posts upside down as a reminder to all of us that we come to Jesus as imperfect, flawed people. When we come to this altar rail we find healing, forgiveness and grace. We discover the true meaning of family, God’s family.”

What does it mean to be a vital congregation?

It’s not about size or programming. Jesus said: “You will know them by their fruit.” (Mat. 7:16) Rev. Mike Miller and the family at Calvary UMC certainly understand what it means to produce fruit for Jesus.





# Accurate data leads to better decisions

By Melissa Dunlap

“Everyday I’m Pastoring,” a blog on Tumblr, has an image that perfectly captures the sentiments of our clergy when it comes to reporting information. *The Daily Show’s* Jon Stewart is angrily crumpling up the paper in front of him and tossing it away. The caption reads, “United Methodist Charge Conference Paperwork; after I’ve answered the same question five times on four different forms.” (<http://everydayimpastoring.tumblr.com/post/35868696891/united-methodist-charge-conference-paperwork-after>)

Filling in the name of the church, the pastor’s name and the church address multiple times is ridiculous and a waste of time and does nothing to glorify God or make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We’ve always known that. Now we can do something about it.

Automating data collection – charge conference, vital signs and statistical tables – provides several benefits to the local church. The first benefit most churches will experience is an end to repetitive questions. The data base knows your church name, pastor’s name and church address. Questions are answered once and then automatically filled in on the necessary forms as many times as they are called for. This equals time for clergy and lay leadership to focus their efforts on ministry rather than administration.

The accessibility of information and the ability to view it in different forms is the benefit that the data team finds the most inspiring. With a few clicks, graphs of your average worship attendance will appear. A few more clicks and you can compare your worship attendance to that of similar sized churches in your district or the conference. With the Equipping Vital Congregations database you can identify the church with the

fastest growing worship attendance and up pops their contact information. Churches will be able to mine this kind of information in a variety of ministry areas – small groups, children’s ministry, youth ministry, mission and stewardship. We can, of course, do this now, but it would take combing through the small print of statistical tables and loads of time.

Our local churches may recognize the impact of this accessibility more slowly than the other benefits of automated data. However, the availability of ministry information is what will most greatly impact our ministries. In a recent blog post, Ed Stetzer, a nationally recognized church planter, had this to say about data and assessment: “I believe that churches must have the right information to make the right decisions. When we speak of the need for an assessment culture, we want churches and Christians to avoid making claims that are unsubstantiated. We, above all others, need to be trustworthy, and we can do that with accurate assessment of where we are as individuals and a church. Churches need honesty as much as they need to have hope. Assessments are a great way to examine the truth about today and provide a direction for tomorrow. And an assessment culture within a church provides a way forward in thinking about where we are and how to go forward in making disciples.” (Ed Stetzer’s “Creating an Assessment Culture”)

Accurate data leads to informed decisions. When we know the truth, we can then make faithful choices about the future. These decisions and choices affect our ministry which is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Why would we desire anything less than the most accurate information and faithful decisions? 📌

-The Rev. Melissa Dunlap is Church Development coordinator for the Arlington and Alexandria districts.

## OCTOBER

### 5 Talent Academy

Oct. 15

**Ebenezer UMC, Stafford, and 5 remote locations**

Ideal for those involved with planning and designing worship, musicians, key lay leadership, and clergy; this event will provide you with immediate, practical, and useful ideas to help your church design a worship experience with both the member and visitor in mind. The speaker will be the Rev. Dr. Constance Cherry, the author of *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* who currently serves as professor of Worship and Pastoral Ministry at Indiana Wesleyan University, where she directs the major in Christian Worship. This event will be live-streamed to five locations from the Stafford site. Visit [www.vaumc.org/5talent](http://www.vaumc.org/5talent) to register.

### Sexual Ethics Training

Oct. 15 and 26

**Virginia United Methodist Center, Glen Allen**

This training is designed for new clergy (first-time appointments) and other church professionals. An introductory workshop on the unique needs of clergy and religious professionals engaged in United Methodist ministry exploring concepts of how to maintain healthy boundaries along with issues of access, power and control, vulnerability, and transference. An orientation to our conference policy on sexual ethics and the process utilized for seeking reconciliation and resolution upon the occasion of boundary violations is also explored. Registration is required 48 hours prior to the event in order to ensure sufficient materials are available for all participants. For more information, contact Beth Downs at [BethDowns@vaumc.org](mailto:BethDowns@vaumc.org) or call 1-800-768-6040, ext. 127, or (804) 521-1127.

### Mid-size Church Leadership Training

Oct. 22 **Warwick UMC, Newport News**

Oct. 23 **Old Bridge UMC, Woodbridge**

Oct. 24 **St. Paul’s UMC, Staunton**

By invitation to churches with average worship attendance, as recorded by the Cabinet, of between 150 to 349. The goal of this event, which will be offered three times in three locations, is to provide training specific to the mid-size church. The dynamic of the mid-size church is often the desire for the warmth of a small church and the program of a large church. You will have an opportunity to interact not only with persons from your own church but also with persons in similar roles from other churches. Even with the great diversity within this group of mid-size churches, the goal is for each church to be challenged, stimulated, and equipped with new “best practices” for your context. The Rev. Janice Virtue, senior

vice president for Leadership Development, United Methodist Foundation of Western North Carolina, will be the leader. This event is for lead pastors and other appointed clergy, ministry staff and key lay leadership. For more information, contact Beth Downs at [BethDowns@vaumc.org](mailto:BethDowns@vaumc.org) or call 1-800-768-6040, ext. 127, or (804) 521-1127.

### Large Church Lead Pastor Annual Gathering

Oct. 29

**Reveille UMC, Richmond**

A time of networking and learning for the large church lead pastors in the Virginia Conference. You may register for this event only if your average worship attendance for 2012, as recorded by the Cabinet, is over 349. The Rev. James Howell of Myers Park UMC in Charlotte, N.C. will be leading. The topic for this year is “Preaching in the Large Church.” For more information contact Beth Downs at [BethDowns@vaumc.org](mailto:BethDowns@vaumc.org) or call 1-800-768-6040, ext. 127, or (804) 521-1127.

## NOVEMBER

### United Methodist Men’s Spiritual Retreat

Nov. 1-3

**Blackstone Retreat and Conference Center**

Virginia Conference United Methodist Men will hold their 36th Annual Spiritual Retreat Nov. 1-3 at Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center. The Rev. Tom Berlin, senior pastor of Floris UMC in Herndon, will speak on “Profiles In Courage.” For more information, contact David Bean, vice president of Spiritual Life, at [david\\_bean@vawp.uscourts.gov](mailto:david_bean@vawp.uscourts.gov), or call (540) 718-2752.

### Middle School Retreat

Nov. 8 **Eagle Eyrie, Lynchburg**

**High School Retreat**

Dec. 6 **Eagle Eyrie, Lynchburg**

In these weekend retreats, youths are challenged to grow as disciples of Christ through powerful worship, Bible study, and small groups while building friendships with youths from all over Virginia. You can e-mail the names, ages, and gender of participants to Becky Tate at [BeckyTate@vaumc.org](mailto:BeckyTate@vaumc.org).

### Early Response Team Training

Nov. 9

**Galilee UMC, Sterling**

Early Response Teams respond during the first phase of disaster relief, providing Christian presence. Train to be ready to respond and know the first steps to help. Registration fee is \$55, which includes training manual, UMCOR ERT badge, T-shirt and background check fee (forms will be handed out at training). Checks should be made out to the Virginia Conference and brought the day of training.



# LOCAL CHURCH NEWS



▲ United Methodist Women at **Andrew Chapel UMC in Montross, Fredericksburg District**, served lunch to 52 Harvest of Hope volunteers from church groups from North Carolina, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Virginia. This group of young people spent a week in the Northern Neck gleaning fields for the Northern Neck Food Bank. Harvest of Hope is a program of the Society of St. Andrew.



▲ **Norfolk UMC** celebrated its first success in helping a former inmate obtain restoration of his voting rights. Pictured (center) is Donald Williams, showing a letter he received from Gov. McDonnell, restoring his voting rights, which he had lost as a result of being convicted for a nonviolent felony. With him are Althea Miller (left) and Lois Simons, members of the restoration of voting rights team at Norfolk UMC who assisted Williams in preparing his application after Williams had completed all court-imposed punishment and the two-year waiting period that was in effect.

On Sunday, Aug. 25, members and friends of **Floris UMC** in Herndon packaged 1,200 weekend meals for students at Hutchison Elementary School. The two-hour event for the

Help Hungry Kids program was for all ages, and more than 100 volunteers participated in assembling the bags. In addition to this annual event, Help Hungry Kids is sustained by individual volunteers and families that assemble and deliver packages to the church on the first Sunday of each month. Last year, approximately 80 children received these bags weekly throughout the school year. Floris UMC provided over 5,000 bags to Hutchison as well as other schools and organizations. Meal bags contain 10 child-friendly items, such as single serving entrees, snack bars, fruit cups and juice.



▲ **New Hope UMC, Chamblissburg, and Halesford UMC, Moneta, making up the Kelly Charge, Lynchburg District**, recently sponsored a food drive to collect cases of canned food in obedience to Christ's command to feed the hungry. The drive netted 134 cases of green beans, peas and corn, or about 1,600 cans, which were distributed to food ministries at Mount Zion A.M.E. Church and Still Standing Ministries in Roanoke and Parrish Chapel UMC in Chamblissburg.

**Fairfields UMC in Burgess** held its annual Student Awards Service in June. The Covington/Hurst Educational Fund (CHEF) committee gave awards to 15 high school students, five college students and three continuing-education students. Robert Lumsden, committee chair, presented the awards to the students who were congratulated by Pastor Seonyoung Kim and Frances Hurst, honorary committee member and namesake of the educational fund. The students are: front row, from left: Asa Smith, Nyasia Brown, Gabriel Smith, Michelle Carroll, Tekeya Baker; back row: Theresa French, Max Massaro, Maegan Lewis, Summer Newsome, Nicole Massaro, Julie King and Weldon Dobyns. Not pictured, Jessica Rew and Quinn Ellis. ▼



**The Bethany UMC Youth Group from Purcellville** traveled to New York this summer to partner with the YouthWorks mission team. These youths blessed a community in much need of love and outreach. The jobs included such things as Salvation Army Kids Club, home repairs, Meals on Wheels, serving in a local food bank, Sustainable Sandals, visits to elderly homes, and more. ▼



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Devotions from International Lesson Series

# LIVING THE WORD



*The Rev. Joanna Marcy Paysour is associate pastor at Cave Spring UMC in Roanoke. She is a Provisional Elder, in her second year of ministry. She attended the University of South Carolina, graduating in 2008, and Wesley Theological Seminary, graduating in 2011. Fall is one of her favorite times of the year: leaves, college football, pumpkin spice lattes and her birthday! Her husband, Jake, recently graduated from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., and is working on his PhD in Public Policy and Administration at Virginia Tech.*

**Oct. 6, 2013**  
**Six-Word Memoirs**  
**Genesis 15:7-21**

Smith magazine has been collecting six-word memoirs on various subjects for years. The goal is for famous or not-so-famous writers and people to sum up themselves in six words. Could you do that? Only use six words to express your story, maybe not in complete whole, but in part, to others.

I often wonder what mine would say. I think if I were to write my grandfather's six-word memoir it would say, "Never met people who weren't friends." But when I come to my own, I often struggle with what to include. Maybe "Her life could not be louder." Or I also like "She loved and lived as synonyms."

It is hard to try to sum up what you would want your legacy to be. What would you want people to remember?

We learn of the story in Genesis about Abram and the covenant God makes with him. The promise shared is that God will make it so that there will be so many descendants of Abram that the number will be one that could never be counted, and they will live in the land of Canaan. Abram's part of the covenant is to have enough faith to believe in the promise of the many and of the gift of land. The covenant is essentially a promise of relationship that God and Abram share.

It is indeed a promise of an inheritance, to generation after generation. The gift that God will restore all lives is the covenant God gives to Abram, and to us as well.

A key to this text is that it tells us not of what Abram did, but rather reminds us again that God is always the first initiator. God makes the promise to Abram, and to us, to always restore life.

So maybe the question would not be what would be our own six-word memoir (though that would be good to ask of yourself and those around you). But might we ask ourselves what is God's legacy and be reminded of God's promises to us? I might try at God's six-word memoir, and there are certainly many to try. It could be found in Genesis 18:14 (paraphrased) "Is anything too wonderful for God?" Sarah's response to her belief in God's promise might remind us, here and now, that the story of our God is one that there is nothing too wonderful for God to do.

**Oct. 13, 2013**  
**What's So Funny?**  
**Genesis 17:15-17, 18:9-15, 21:1-17**

You have probably heard the saying that floats around that if you want to make God laugh, tell God your plans. I am not totally sure that is completely correct, but sometimes it does seem like an appropriate response to laugh at the way life has worked out or God's hand in it.

Certainly as we read the texts from Genesis about Abraham and Sarah, the theme of laughter seems to overcome the text. It is Abraham's response, and Sarah's response. Both partners in this story laugh at what God has to say. God talks to them about their laughter, asking them questions as to just why they might be laughing. We read later of their naming of Isaac, which means laughter. We see them ultimately proclaim that others will share in laughter of joy with them over this child.

There are times in life where it seems hard to laugh. There are events that have happened or circumstances that just seem to pervade our world that seem irreconcilable with a gracious and loving God. There is too much hurt or pain. Violence or evil brought against innocents or the attempt to explain undue hardship seems like more than we can bear.

But the story of Sarah, as she lives into God's promise as her part of the covenant as well, teaches us that God walks with us through the struggle. This story even reminds us that God does that in surprising ways. Abraham believed God's promise that there would be generations so numerous they would be innumerable. He just did not believe it would come through Sarah. But God reminds both of them again and again, that indeed God will bless them, even in the midst of this hard road.

May our laughter not be one that mocks God, like Abraham. But may we allow God to use us, or others, in ways and times that might even surprise us to our own joyful laughter. May we be stunned to giggles by just how gracious God can be, even in unexpected places. May our laughter fill our hearts with gratitude for God's steadfast presence. May our faith be one that allows us to respond with the faith of Abraham and Isaac, so that one day someone might ask us "What's so funny?" Let our response be "God carries out what God promises."

**Oct. 20, 2013**  
**He is on My Side!**  
**Genesis 21:12b-14, 17-21**  
**Genesis 26:2-5, 12-13**

When my family would travel on vacations my brother and I shared the backseat. I am certain my parents knew this made the trip a bit more treacherous. This was because the bickering was rarely short. It was a fight over the radio station, over the air temperature, and especially over the seat. We would draw a line down the middle, and we were not to cross over that line. Often I would have packed more toys than I could ever have possibly needed, and would cram them all well and safe on my side. I could not intrude over to his side. Not only that, but anytime he got close to my side, I would announce this invasion by yelling to my parents, 18 inches away, that "HE IS ON MY SIDE!" The offense was always egregious, and worthy, I thought, of serious reprimand. I think my parents were just trying to survive the time it took to get there.

I may have spent many hours coveting space in a backseat, but sadly in life we spend a lot of time coveting space, money, relationships, advantages, and others lives. We spend far too much time invested in this task and lose much of the joy of the journey of life.

We see this is a struggle as we look at the story of Isaac and Ishmael. All parties involved, especially the mothers Sarah and Hagar, struggled to understand that there is enough. They are jealous that one or the other might have some kind of advantage, more of anything, over the other.

But God does indeed know there is enough. Enough blessing, enough promise of further generations, and even enough love from God.

There is always enough for all. But sometimes it is our jealousy over space or time, the things we covet that become the biggest obstacle to receive and to give that love to God and to our

neighbor.

We spend a lot of our life yelling and screaming, upset in a tight closed-in space that someone has more space or advantage. We also miss the beauty of the journey going on around us, the joy of life. We should stop shouting that others have more, stop being upset over jealousies, and instead we should know there is enough space. Even in the car.

**Oct. 27, 2013**  
**Thin Spaces**  
**Genesis 28:1, 20-22**

Many people describe the actual place of holy encounters as "thin spaces." These are locations, buildings, settings that the presence of God is very real and near. It is as if the barrier between earth and heaven is truly thinner as if only a veil, so that one might be able to be here and see there.

Sometimes those thin spaces are rarely visited places of retreats or mighty towering cathedrals. They might be seminary chapels or campgrounds of our youth. They are often places that feel holier than our normal life.

It is our utmost hope that our worship spaces, the places we gather in regularly, are thin spaces as well. We hope that whether it is a small white church, benches outside on a campground, a brick church built in the 1950s, in the basement on a college campus, or a refurbished storefront, that God is felt there in powerful and new ways every time that the Body of Christ gathers.

Jacob certainly encountered a thin space as we read in Genesis 28. Even there, placing his head on a rock, he was assured that he was not alone. He encounters God, and God makes a promise to him in verse 15 saying "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not

leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Jacob establishes a place of worship there at Bethel, meaning house of God, a place where God's presence was felt and known. A place of worship to return to, to gather at again, and to come with expectant hearts for God to be at work is what Jacob designates in anointing that rock. It is a thin space to regularly return as a place for worship.

But God makes a promise even bigger than Jacob's act. God promises that although this one place holds that sense of distinct blessing, God proclaims that Jacob will not go anywhere that God will not be with him. We may encounter thin spaces only on retreats or in beautiful far off cathedrals most powerfully, but we should be always aware that a thin space could happen in a coffee shop, walking path, meeting space, or roadside just as easily. For we know God goes with us, to keep us wherever we go. ☞

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# CLERGY & DIACONAL



### Deaths



**The Rev. Dr. Robert J. Bull** of Madison, N.J., 92, who was renowned world-wide for his work as an archaeologist in the Middle East, died Aug.

31, 2013. He was a clergy member of the Virginia Conference. Bull held a Ph.D. and S.T.M. from Yale University, a D.Litt. and B.A. from Randolph-Macon College and a B.D. from Duke Divinity School.

Bull was professor of church history for 37 years in Drew University's Theological School. He also was the director of the Drew Institute for Archaeological Research, emeritus, and the author of several books based on his archaeological research.

His widow, Vivian A. Bull, a former professor of economics at Drew for more than three decades, is the president of Drew University, appointed by the university's trustees in May 2012.

Bull directed 25 seasons of field work by the Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima, a city in Israel built by King Herod more than 2,000 years ago, beginning in 1971.

**Rachel Ashman Bowlin**, 101, of Amelia, died Sept. 7, 2013. She was the mother of Nancy Coffman and mother-in-law of the **Rev. Tom Coffman**, a retired clergy member of the Virginia Conference.

**Anne Finley Gagliano**, daughter of the **Revs. Bill and Jeanne Finley**, retired pastors of the Virginia Conference, died Sept. 10, 2013, in Rockville, Md.

**Edna Cralle Johnston** of White Stone, 102, widow of the late **Rev. Dr. Joseph Johnston**, a former district superintendent and founding president of Virginia Wesleyan College, died Aug. 26, 2013.

**The Rev. Harold Lloyd McKinnish**, 80, of East Flat Rock, N.C., died Aug. 21, 2013. He was the father of the **Rev. Dr. Linda Bridges** and father-in-law of the **Rev. Dr. Tilden Bridges**, who is pastor of St. Luke's UMC, Danville District. McKinnish served nine Baptist churches in western North Carolina and two in upstate South Carolina and was called "the Baptist Bishop of Henderson County."

**Charles Wesley Parks Jr.**, 82, of Tangier Island, died Sept. 9, 2013. He was the father of the **Rev. Charles (Chuck) W. Parks III**, pastor of Onley UMC, Eastern Shore District.

### BIRTHS

**The Rev. Chenda Lee**, associate pastor at Mount Olivet UMC, Arlington District, and her husband, Asa, welcomed a baby girl, Cydah Abigail Lee, born Aug. 20, 2013.



The **Calling 21** interns from this summer were: Bryce Miller, Emily Clark, Michelle Hettman, Alexis Ward, Hannah Lambert, Minoka Gunesekera, Lianna Campos and Brett Stadlander. "Calling 21" is a conference ministry where college students from across Virginia are placed in church internships. Visit [www.Calling21.org](http://www.Calling21.org) for details.

Shenandoah University Vice President for Student Life the **Rev. Dr. Rhonda VanDyke Colby** (second from left) and former Director of Church Relations and Co-Director of the Institute for Church Professions the **Rev. Don VanDyke Colby** (left) were presented with the 2013 Francis Asbury Distinguished Education Award for their extraordinary service to higher education and campus ministries of the Virginia Conference. The award was presented by conference representatives the **Rev. Jean McDonald-Walker** (second from right) and the **Rev. Derrick Parson** (right). "Rhonda and Don have been instrumental in refocusing Shenandoah University's mission and creating a solid partnership between the university and the church," said Parson. "We salute their work and leadership groups such as JustFaith, Calling 21 and making the culture of call and young people the vital aspect of their ministries for which we all have been major recipients." Photo by Lee Graff



A large group from the Virginia Conference attended the recent School for Congregational Development, held in Denver.

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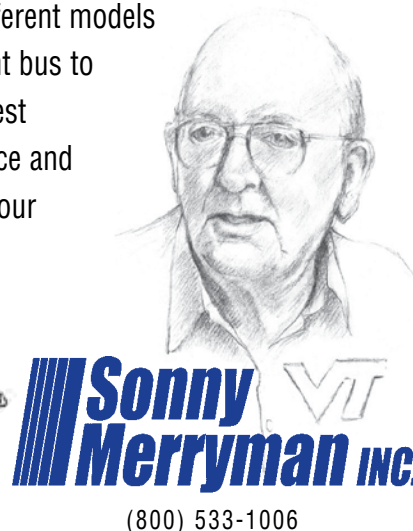
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# FROM THE BISHOP



## Do we have another option?

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. It is now October. We are at the gate of the beautiful season of fall. Soon the trees will change their colors, and we will see the beauty of autumn leaves again. Having four seasons is a real blessing to us.

This month the *Advocate* is introducing a progress report on "All Things New-Equipping Vital Congregations (EVC)." In my article for the February issue of the *Advocate*, I shared my thoughts on the Vital Congregations Initiative. Since then, the Bishop's Steering Team for Equipping Vital Congregations has continued to get together and has worked hard to implement this initiative in a systemic way. All the other teams, like the Data Team, Prayer Team, Communications Team and Discipleship Circles Team, have also been working hard envisioning a new future for our conference.

One of the critical teams for systemic implementation of Vital

Congregations is the Discipleship Circles Team. They have discussed and prayed for many months and wrestled with the need and identity of the Discipleship Circles. They seriously raised many questions: why do we need Discipleship Circles? Many clergy are already taking part in various kinds of small groups like covenant groups, lectionary groups, peer learning groups and fellowship groups. Why do we need another group? What is the purpose and uniqueness of Discipleship Circles?

Will it be truly effective for clergy and laity to sit down together and share vital signs? Will these circles really help the churches to move forward?

It has been a long journey for the members of the Discipleship Circles team. Now, we have a clearer picture about Discipleship Circles and are preparing for pilot groups. I am deeply grateful to the members of the Discipleship Circles Team for their dedication to the journey.

Discipleship Circles will help clergy and laity to grow spiritually in the first stage of their journey. During this stage they will work to build up their trust for one another and prepare themselves for dealing with difficult questions. When the Discipleship Circle members are ready, they will move to the next stage and begin dealing with their reality based on vital signs. They will pray and work together to move toward more faithfulness and a more fruitful future. This will not be an easy task, but it will be worthwhile to try. It will be far better than sitting and doing nothing.

As I say wherever I go, ministry as usual is no longer an option. We cannot just sit and wait for another glorious day. Our reality is far more serious than before. Most of all, we need to ask ourselves whether United Methodist churches today are truly biblical, authentic and vital churches. If not, what plan or vision do we have

for the renewal and revival of our churches? What other alternative do we have for a more faithful and fruitful future? If you do not have any other alternative for our future, why not prayerfully consider Discipleship Circles?

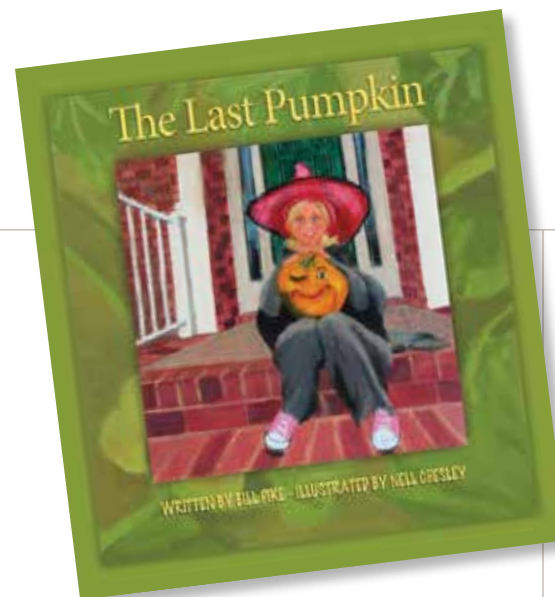
In Discipleship Circles we hope to grow together spiritually and to tackle our declining reality seriously. We United Methodists are not strangers to this practice. The class meetings and covenant groups were the essence of the Methodist movement. The Discipleship Circles will rediscover this legacy. I invite you to pray seriously about these circles and to take part in one of the pilot groups. There may be frustrations and challenges, but if we tackle and overcome these challenges, I believe that we will be blessed by Discipleship Circles.

I have another prayer request this month: From Oct. 16-24, about 40 Virginia clergy will visit South Korea for a pilgrimage for spiritual renewal. This is a continuing education program aiming at learning the importance of mission and ministry being based on strong prayer. While we stay in Korea, our daily schedule will begin with attending early-morning prayer service, which begins at 5 a.m. every day. We will also visit universities founded by American missionaries and many vital churches. In this pilgrimage we will learn the importance of mission and get a global perspective on our faith and churches. Your prayer support for this pilgrimage will be deeply appreciated.

Every day I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to serve the Virginia Conference. May the Lord continue to bless and lead our churches in this beautiful season. 🍂

*Young H. Cho*

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## Children's book was product of teamwork

Last March, work by first-time author Bill Pike, Richmond landscape artist Nell Chesley and publisher Wayne Dementi came to fruition when their book *The Last Pumpkin* arrived from the printer. Suddenly, the collaborators were scrunching boxes into a basement, a garage and a small storage shed at their homes for storage.

*The Last Pumpkin* is the story of an unusually-shaped pumpkin named Keeper, a little girl, a farmer and a teacher. The story focuses on five elements: the busy life of the girl's family on Halloween, a look into the preparations made by the farmer for planting, the growth and harvesting of Keeper, Keeper's journey to market, and the link between the girl, her teacher, and the farmer.

In the end, it is Keeper's unusual shape that catches the farmer's attention. This attention is used to help readers understand our different shapes, sizes, and colors, while learning to value our uniqueness.

Pike and Chesley are members of Trinity United Methodist Church, Richmond District. The

project started when Bill gave the accomplished artist a draft of the manuscript to read with this note: "If you agree to illustrate the book, I have no funds to pay you."

Chesley said "yes," explaining she had always wanted to illustrate a book for children, and besides, one of her daughters was almost born on Halloween. So the new teammates started to work.

During the spring of 2011, Chesley was asked to develop a show of artwork from Trinity members. This turned out to be a very successful event for the church, but also for Bill and Nell. They displayed a storyboard featuring the manuscript and corresponding illustrations for *The Last Pumpkin*. Trinity member George Gill suggested that Pike and Chesley contact local publisher Dementi.

Through spring and into the summer, the team edited pages, reworked illustrations and gave a draft to layout designer, Jayne Hushen. When the book was printed in early 2012, the focus shifted to marketing and selling. Wayne had published successful books in the Richmond area, so his established contacts were a start. Soon, September and October were filled with book-signings and presentations in schools, churches, community meetings and bookstores.

In January, the teammates met to access their first season of selling. Overall, the results were positive. Their optimism merited a second printing order and the beginning of work on a second book for children.

For more information about *The Last Pumpkin*, contact Dementi Milestone Publishing: [www.dementibooks.com](http://www.dementibooks.com) or the website for the book: [www.thelastpumpkin.com](http://www.thelastpumpkin.com). 🍂



# ONE LAST WORD



## Tweets heard 'round the conference

**Fieldstone UMC @FieldstoneUMC**

We picked up 35 backpacks at the Christiansburg Kroger this morning for \$5 each!! They were marked down from \$10.

**Tim Hares@TheTimHares**

Today is National Chocolate Milkshake Day!

**Emma J@ejhnstn**

My town is so small that Chic-fil-a posted about the death of a church member. #Danville

**Brandon Robbins@B\_Rob8308**

Just got down to Key West to perform a wedding. Oh, the hardships of being a pastor!

**Alexandra Woody@AlexWoody10**

I hate when someone tells you they have something to tell you but wont tell you until tomorrow. #nowiwontsleep

**Rev. Sarah Wastella@SarahWastella**

As my three year old pointed out, Time Out has Purgatory overtones, and feels like Hell. 2 minutes is better than 2 eons. Be thankful, son.

**Lindsey Baynham@LMBaynham**

I photobombed at least 5 preschool pictures on the way into the church. Happy Tuesday. #yourewelcome

**Michelle Hayes@MichelleLeigh27**

It's official. I'm just gonna remove my gallbladder myself.

**Patti Money@pattimoney**

You all totally need to follow @PissedP-  
strsWife! She is hysterical!



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