

October 2015

Advocate

GOD DOES NOTHING
APART FROM *Prayer.*

JOHN WESLEY

Connecting with the



Virginia Advocate

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

FROM THE EDITOR



Madeline Pillow
Editor

Be
still.

Prayer is something that has been important to Bishop Cho since he started his ministry in the Virginia Conference.

In this issue, you will get a look at prayer in our conference, in our churches and in individuals' lives. You may also learn more about the many forms of prayer, all of which are the formation of a relationship with God.

Our lives in the 21st century are busy, hectic and full of motion. Many times I have to remind myself that being "busy" doesn't always equate to diligence or productivity. We don't always have to be in motion. Personally, when I have taken time for extra prayer and silence in God, I have felt that change, the kind of change that creates an "a-ha" moment.

What has worked for me for many years is Bible study combined with my daily devotional and a time in prayer spent reflecting over both texts. It allows me to quiet my mind and really focus in the moment.

John Wesley said, "God does nothing except in response to believing prayer."

To me, once you feel the difference between just praying for your needs or praying during a time of stress and panic and altering prayer, prayer that takes its time in God, you can never go back.

If you haven't found what works for you, our feature articles can give you a place to start by showing individuals in our conference who find this kind of prayer through prayer walks or through lectio divina.

When I was younger, I knew prayer was important, but I was guilty of just using it when it seemed convenient or when I was going through something. Even now, when I hear and see Bishop Cho's passion for prayer, I am reminded that prayer isn't just a "have-to-do" because it's what they taught you in Sunday school. It's a "want-to-do" and an "I-do-it-without-being-told" every day because it is nestled in the heart of our relationship with God.

For me, that reminder by Bishop Cho and his belief in prayer caused a spark to go off in my head telling me I've been seeing it all wrong. And when you get those sparks in your life, whether from a person or the everyday events in your life, you have to take a step back and start seeing the significant with new eyes.

Psalm 46:10 tells us, "He says, "Be still, and know that I am God." (NIV)

I hope through this issue you will see prayer through new eyes ready to see the significant and stop placing prayer within the mundane. I hope you will be still and find God in your prayer. 🌸

Until our next issue,

Madeline

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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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Correction (September issue): Lauren Lobenhofer is pastor of Gum Spring UMC, Richmond District.

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LETTERS

Who is your God?

In a radio interview, Rev. Amanda Garber explained why she performed a same-sex ceremony in violation of the UM Book of Discipline: "I made a choice, a choice rooted in who I believe God is and who Jesus is." Amanda believes that the God of Jesus disapproves of our repeatedly reaffirmed Discipline statement about homosexuality and the Universal Church's 2000 year-old conviction about what constitutes faithfulness in sex, marriage and ministry. Apparently the Church has mistaken the nature, word and actions of God and Jesus in these important matters. Until now.

Amanda and I agree that the choices we make as disciples and leaders are rooted in the larger questions of the identity and character of God and the person and actions of Jesus. We agree that the issues that threaten to divide the UMC are grounded in fundamental theological convictions. And yet, we disagree over the issues themselves and over the desired future for our church.

To all who out of conviction want to change the Discipline and the course of the UMC, I suggest that the following theological questions must be addressed: 1) Why would God withhold from the Church crucial knowledge about how we are to order our

sexual lives and conduct our most intimate relationships? 2) Did Jesus really leave his disciples in the dark about the proper and improper ordering of human sexuality? 3) How could a loving God allow God's people to remain so blind as to perpetuate (allegedly) continuing harm to gay and lesbian people? 4) If God failed to tell us what we need to know about sex and marriage, what else has God failed to tell us? 5) And what other harm are we still causing in our ignorance? Indeed, who is this God anyway? And who is this Jesus?

Following John Wesley, The United Methodist Church has lived in the confidence that while we do not know everything we wish to know, we do know "all things necessary for life and salvation." Why? Because God's character and purposes have been self-revealed in acts of creation, of covenant loyalty to Israel, and definitively in Jesus the Messiah—the Incarnate, Crucified and Risen Son of God "full of grace and truth," and in the Church that bears his name. We believe, as Jesus promised, that the Holy Spirit continues to confirm, convey and extend the character and purposes of God for our salvation and for the good of all creation. We believe also that what we need to know was recorded reliably and authoritatively in the Bible. John Wesley called this "Scriptural Christianity."

Our essential beliefs and our shared life that flows from them are gifts of the self-revealing Triune God. And because God has given us all things necessary for life and salvation, surely God has not withheld from the Church—until now—what we must know about sex and marriage to live faithfully.

So if the questions above puzzle or shock some reading this, you are in good company; they would have been unimaginable to Christians through the ages. But to those among us who would radically change the church's course, Discipline, and—by implication—its doctrine and practice now, these questions are unavoidable: Who is your God? Who is your Jesus? And what have they to do with the Church's revealed faith and life?

—The Rev. R. Bruce Johnson, pastor of Manor Memorial UMC, Harrisonburg District.

More than pumpkins

Since the late 1990s, Trinity UMC in Chesterfield County has sponsored a pumpkin patch fundraiser. We work with Pumpkin Patch Fundraisers who supply a diverse selection of large and small pumpkins and gourds. Except for a 10% tithe to the church to offset costs such as utilities, proceeds are divided equally between United Methodist Men and United Methodist Women who dedicate the money re-



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

LETTERS

ceived to mission projects. Projects we have supported over the years include the Chesterfield-Colonial Heights Alliance for Social Ministry (CCHASM), Boy Scouts, United Methodist Family Services, Christmas Mother, the Wounded Warrior Project and Chesterfield County school children. To date, we have raised about \$60,000 for charities and missions. The portion of proceeds retained by Pumpkin Patch Fundraisers is used to pay overhead costs, including employing Navajo, Pueblo, Zuni and Hopi Indians to manage, farm and harvest the pumpkin crop. In addition to the pumpkin fare, we sell mums from a local producer.

We've designed our pumpkin patch to be an EVENT. We try to schedule other events on weekends during pumpkin patch so that these activities support one another. One Sunday school class prepares and sells apple butter, the UMM prepares and sells Brunswick stew, the children's ministry hosts a Fall Festival and our Boy Scout Troop and Cub Scout Pack showcase their activities to pumpkin patch visitors. We also offer small groups, primarily pre-school classes, the opportunity to visit the pumpkin patch as a local field-trip destination. To support their educational objectives, volunteers meet the children and teach them how pumpkins grow and what they're used for; in 2014 we started grow-

ing our own small pumpkin patch for teaching and as a backdrop for photos.

Our pumpkin patch isn't just about selling though. Through our pumpkin patch, we have the opportunity to talk with people in our community that we would not otherwise meet, to spread the good news and to help make disciples for Christ. It also provides our church member volunteers fellowship with one another.

We have many repeat customers who prefer our pumpkins not just for their quality, but because they know and understand that their money is helping us help others in need. Through the pumpkin patch, they become engaged in the mission work of our church. Without our customers, we could not provide the assistance that we've been able to provide and we greatly appreciate their support.

-Edward Sismour, coordinator of the yearly pumpkin patch at Trinity UMC, James River District.



COMMENTARY

Wesley Foundation campus facilities help plant seeds



In early September 2014, I took a dangerous phone call from Herb Brynildsen, president of the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries (BHECM). He was looking for a volunteer to assist with the property management of the Wesley Foundation campus facilities through the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries. If I accepted the position, I would be serving on the board, but also chairing a council of property managers from each facility who have the responsibility for maintaining their buildings and grounds.

This group meets once a year to determine what projects can be funded for the upcoming year. The Wesley Foundation has facilities at Mary Washington, Old Dominion, William & Mary, Longwood, Virginia Tech, University of Virginia, James Madison and Virginia Commonwealth. I listened to the responsibilities for the volunteer and told him I'd ponder the opportunity.

I didn't give a quick affirmation because, occasionally, my wife tells me I'm too easily reeled into projects. My plate is full at Trinity UMC in managing the day-to-day operation of our church while handling the challenges of the unexpected failure of HVAC equipment or the unwanted intrusion of honey bees. But Mr. Brynildsen's request kept tugging at me, and a few days later I accepted.

I attended my first board meeting on Sept. 23,

quickly assessing that I had quite a bit to learn. One of my first assignments was to schedule a time to meet with the property managers from each facility.

At the same time, the Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) was reviewing a proposal from G3, a company who has expertise analyzing the critical needs for non-profits. From the BHECM and the Wesley Foundation perspective, it was now critical for an assessment of the physical condition of each campus facility. By conducting comprehensive inspections, our response to urgent physical needs and insights related to the funding level for making improvements could be better met.

By mid-November, these inspections were completed. G3 personnel pinpointed the critical needs and, based upon their reports, funding was provided to a few campus facilities to address these concerns.

During this past spring and summer, follow-up visits are and have been made at the campus sites to assess progress made from the original findings from G3.

It has been a privilege to be a part of this research and assessment work. While I still have more to learn, one thing is clear: the campus leaders at each facility are "seed planters." Quality research surveys during the last couple of years have clearly documented the attendance

decline in our mainline denominations.

For me, that is why the work by these campus leaders and their teams is so important. Connecting with college students and giving them opportunities to grow their faith might just be the right planting that helps to rejuvenate a church in the near future.

As important as this "seed planting" is for the campus communities and churches, the work to be done by the BHECM, the Wesley Foundation and CFA related to maintaining these facilities will be just as critical.

Difficult questions will need to be asked: Can the conference adequately fund the on-going proper maintenance of these facilities so that they are safely and efficiently operated? Based upon the age and improvement needs of a facility, are the stakeholders willing to explore all reasonable options including the possible sale of the property?

I don't think the answers will be easy, but I have a healthy respect for the people serving on these boards and the campus leaders. My hunch is that with the good Lord's guidance, the future plans for each campus site will be figured out. And I believe these challenges can be met in such a manner that the "seed planting" continues. 🌱

-Bill Pike, director of Operations at Trinity UMC, Richmond District.

COMMENTARY

Leave a trace

The church is changing. So are scouting programs. We both are changing in significant ways, but the core values of The United Methodist Church and scouting programs will continue if we embrace them within the context of this day and age.

Most everyone feels that we are in a revolution about our morals, our compass, our values and our core. The conversations in our church, in scouting and in our government are entrenched in the rights of the individual, their personal sexuality and their preferences. Even one generation ago, this was not the case.

The contextual background is important in regards to the future of our church and our scouting programs.

Recently, the Boy Scouts of America changed their policy on allowing openly gay adults into leadership, and there has been a good bit of debate about it. The BSA also has new mandates which include running background checks on all adults wishing to be leaders; requiring three references; featuring a checkbox on its application asking about sexual identity/preference; and the addition of a "Guide to Safe Scouting" program (similar to the UMC's Safe Sanctuaries program for its volunteer leaders) required upfront



<https://www.lds.org/media-library/images/scout-leader-young-men-1164229?lang=eng>

before any adult serves as a leader. The strength of these new mandates from scouting enables our local church to decide who can be their leaders.

Bringing the church and scouting into a closer association is beneficial for both organizations. The relationship between the church and the Boy Scouts is that of a parent and child. All other youth programs available through The United Methodist Church (Girl Scouts USA, 4H, Campfire and Big Brother/Big Sister) have loose affiliations with the church. But the Boy Scout unit (pack, troop or crew) is owned by the church. The church has to annually sign the charter agreement before the unit is re-chartered. If the Boy Scout unit ceases to function as a viable unit, the equipment and supplies revert to ownership of the church.

This I say in order to

illustrate that the Boy Scout unit in your church is owned by you. You decide who the leaders are. You **SHOULD** be actively involved in their programs. Offer to be a leader, a supporter or a donor to the youth program in your church.

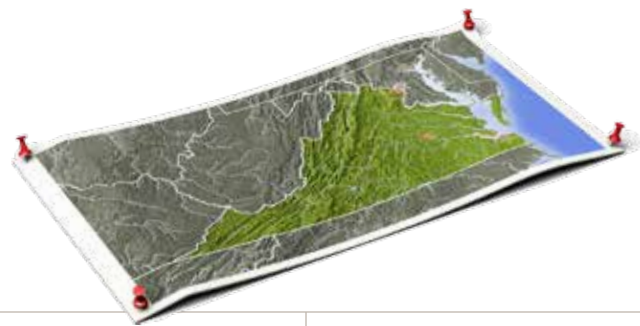
I have visited many churches, spoken to many leaders and each speak beyond issues of today or changes in front of us. Name a church that does not want more families, particularly young families. Is there a more attractive church than one with many children? The answer is obvious and the solution is as well. Even if your church is in a neighborhood where there are few, if any, youths, you can still bring young boys and young girls and their families into your church. Contact your local scouting council and invite them into your house of worship. These local

scouting professionals will show you what it will take to open those doors to these opportunities and to the boys and girls who will follow. Don't think that the work is done when you invite scouts in. **YOU** have to participate. There are many ways for you to help.

The outdoor code is "Leave No Trace." That says to leave God's creation as you found it, or better, when you leave it. We scouters, your Virginia Conference Scouting Coordinators, say "Leave a Trace!" Leave a trace of you, so that your church and community know who you are. Let them see you. Let them know what you are about and that you participate actively with the scouting programs. If you don't have youth ministries, build scouting programs. Build them and they will come. 🍀

-Bill Chaffin, Virginia Conference
Scouting Coordinator.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Health insurance coverage will change for VAUMC retirees

By John Fuller

The Virginia Conference-sponsored health insurance program for Medicare-eligible retirees will change on Jan. 1, 2016. This change was recommended by the Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Inc. (VUMPI) Board of Directors and was approved at the 2015 Annual Conference.

The change will shift the program from a one-size-fits-all approach, in which only a single plan option is offered to eligible clergy. VUMPI, partnering with United Healthcare, will feature multiple options for the new program:

- ❖ A new group plan, which closely matches the current group plan, will include several new, valuable benefits such as coverage for podiatry services, a hearing aid benefit and United Healthcare's "Silver Sneakers" wellness program. Retired clergy with at least 10 years of ministry in the Virginia Conference will be eligible to enroll in the group plan.

- ❖ The Connector program will allow retirees to select from multiple plan options in order to more closely align health care coverage with individual needs and preferences.

Retirees who enroll in the group plan will be asked to pay a monthly contribution toward the cost of their health plan coverage, which is currently the case. With the new structure of this plan, monthly contributions required in 2016 will be lower than those contributions currently required.

Retirees who elect coverage through the Connector program can select from multiple United Healthcare Medicare Supplement and Part D prescription drug plans. All retirees can designate coverage under the Connector program regardless of years of ministry. Virginia Conference retirees with at least 20 years of full-time ministry in the conference will be eligible for funding to partially or completely offset the cost of their plan selections through the Connector. For 2016, funding ranges from \$1,800 per year to \$3,000 per year, and eligible spouses of retirees can receive the same amount of funding.

Retired Virginia Confer-

ence clergy can select their 2016 health plans during the program's open enrollment period, Oct. 1 through Nov. 6, 2015. United Healthcare is providing all retirees with access to benefit advisors who can guide the plan selection process. All retirees who are currently eligible for the conference-sponsored retiree health plan will remain eligible for the new group plan. In addition, participants who choose coverage through the Connector option in 2016 will be able to move back to the group plan in a future year, if desired.

VUMPI's retiree health insurance program strategy was designed to meet multiple goals. The primary goal is to provide a better health insurance program for Virginia Conference retirees at a lower cost. Improvements to the plan include added benefits in the group plan, along with enhanced flexibility and choice. In addition, the program is expected to drive more sustainable cost growth in the future. Providing a health benefits program to retirees of the Virginia Conference will remain a vital component of VUMPI's overall mission, and more sustainable costs will help VUMPI to maintain this program. 📌

-John Fuller is executive director of the Virginia Conference Pensions and Benefits office.



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The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

New grants available from Virginia United Methodist Foundation

By Katey McCarney

Starting in 2013, The Virginia United Methodist Foundation offered grants to districts, churches and agencies across the Virginia Conference to fund strategic initiatives that met immediate needs and expanded ministries.

This year, two new grants have been established: the "Dr. William J. and Frances Hanna Memorial Grant" and the "Micah 6:8/No Harm Do Good Endowment Grant."

The Hanna Grant is designed with a special focus on creating a new

strategic ministry initiative that could potentially have a wide impact across the Virginia Conference. Funds may be used in any variety of directions for clergy or laity, for local church planting and for revitalization. The Micah 6:8 Grant's purpose is for outreach and ministry to persons or groups of persons outside The United Methodist Church in hope of changing lives and transforming the world. This fund is not to replace or establish the giving of funds to church members or persons coming to a local church

for assistance. Nor is it to be used for evangelism. Depending on your project and goals, you can apply to one or all of the grants available.

In the fall of 2014, five grants were awarded from the general grant fund. One of last year's Foundation Grant recipients, Hope House in Charlottesville, was able to use the grant to provide life essentials for families entering the program. Hope House is a family stabilization program for the homeless or imminently homeless families. Through the pro-

gram they receive rent-free apartment residency while addressing their economic, education or family issues to help the family remain together, become stable and self-reliant.

Applications to apply for these grants are due by Sunday, Nov. 1. To review grant requirements or apply, go to **www.vaumf-gifts.org/grants**.

To learn more about Hope House in Charlottesville, go to **www.macaa.org**.

-Katey McCarney is the Marketing and Communications coordinator for the Virginia United Methodist Foundation.



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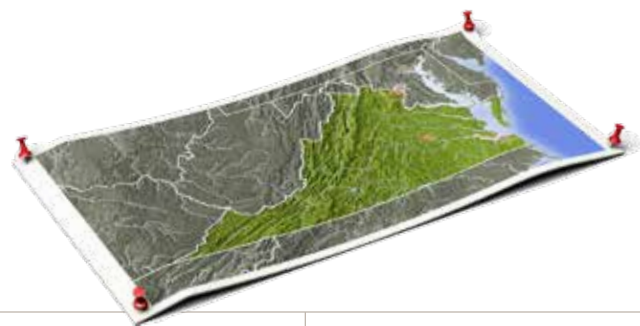


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The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Water issues resolved at VUMAC

By Linda S. Rhodes

The Virginia Conference Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) approved an \$11,500 loan to the Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center (VUMAC) in Blackstone to cover costs of needed repairs to VUMAC's water system. By the beginning of September, all repairs had been completed and the facility's water was, once again, of high quality.

"Repairs have been done," said Sam McCracken, VUMAC executive director. "We are clean and ready to go. The water's perfect. CFA came to our rescue, and we really appreciate it."

Problems with the water quality were first noticed in mid-summer.

"About two months ago we noticed a smell at

some of our water fixtures," McCracken wrote in a letter dated Sept. 2. "It was not always the same fixture, in fact the smell seemed to move around the building. Sometimes it was really strong, and sometimes it was not present at all. We looked for the obvious causes and could not find any so we turned to a bacteriological water testing facility (this is the group that does water tests for most of the central Virginia water authority) to define the problem, determine the source of the problem and then to develop a plan to eliminate the problem. After several weeks they did determine which group of bacteria and yeast were causing the problem and came up with a solution to correct it."

McCracken said they drained all water from the building, replaced underground hot and cold

water pipes to the building, refilled the system with 30 gallons of chlorine and water for 24 hours and then flushed the lines until the chlorine smell was gone.

"Sure enough there is no smell, no taste and no color to our water," McCracken said.

This summer's second session of Camp Rainbow Connection, scheduled for Aug. 9-14, was cancelled due to concerns about VUMAC's water quality.

Stacy Roberts, camp coordinator, said an odor in the water was first noticed by camp leaders during the July 12-17 camp session. "We were informed that the water had an odor but were told it had been tested and was safe to drink," she said.

When volunteer staffers arrived at VUMAC on Saturday, Aug. 8, to prepare for the second camp session of this summer, they discovered that the water's odor was much stronger than it had been in July.

"Unlike during our stay in July, the smell did not dissipate," Roberts said, "and at times the water was brown. We were not able to see any documentation to prove that the water was safe to bathe in or drink. Ultimately, the risk of liability was a great concern. Due to the unknown cause of the issue and without verification that it was not harmful, we were not able to carry on with our plans for camp."

At the time, McCracken admitted that the water



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

had “a terrible odor” and didn’t taste very good either. And he said he understood why the Camp Rainbow staff was concerned. But he was able to report that “even with the bad smell, all water tests confirmed that there was never any danger with drinking or bathing in our water with all tests showing that we were well within state standards.”

Roberts said the Executive Committee of the Camp Rainbow Connection Core Leadership Team is working to come up with an alternative event for campers before next year.

“Because the Thursday night dance is one of the highlights of each camp week, we are exploring the possibility of holding a dance in Richmond in September or October to provide an opportunity for campers and staff to fellowship together,” Roberts said.

She said the 58 campers originally scheduled to attend the August session of Camp Rainbow will be invited along with the 56 campers that attended the July session of the camp and the 100 volunteer Camp Rainbow staff members.

Camp Rainbow Connection is a week-long respite camp held once in July and once in August for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Campers range in age from 16 into their 80s. 🍷

— Linda S. Rhodes is Virginia Conference director of Communications.

The results are in... 98,854 lives saved!

The Virginia Conference concluded the promotion of its Imagine No Malaria initiative on Aug. 31. As of Sept. 8, conference churches had raised \$988,548.83 and saved more than 98,854 lives from the deadly disease of malaria.

Churches can still send in funds and have them counted towards the conference goal. Only \$11,451.17 (which would save 1,145 lives) is needed in order to meet the goal of raising \$1 million to save 100,000 lives from this preventable and treatable disease.

You can make online

contributions with a credit card at www.vaumc.org/DonateINM. Contributions may also be sent to the Virginia Conference Treasurer’s office, P.O. Box 5605, Glen Allen, VA 23058. Make check payable to “Virginia Conference” and designate “Imagine No Malaria, Advance Special #6450,” on your check or at the bottom of your apportionment statement. If the check is from a church, be sure to indicate the church GCFA number on the check. 🍷



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



Are you singing?

By Madeline Pillow

The blog, *Renewing Worship*, recently posted the article, “Nine Reasons People Aren’t Singing in Worship.”

Writer Kenny Lamm identifies the reason as the fact that around the world, worship leaders have changed their church’s worship into that of a spectator event. He notes that the rise of new technologies, including the projector, first caused more congregational singing, but now has led the way towards “re-professionalization of church music.”

Lamm also lists nine reasons why he believes

people aren’t singing anymore. A few examples are provided below:

- ❖ We are singing songs not suitable for congregational singing. There are lots of great, new worship songs today, but in the vast pool of new songs, many are not suitable for congregational singing by virtue of their rhythms (too difficult for the average singer) or too wide a range (consider the average singer—not the vocal superstar on stage).
- ❖ We are singing in keys too high for the average singer. The people we are leading in worship generally have a limited range and do not have

a high range. When we pitch songs in keys that are too high, the congregation will stop singing, tire out and eventually quit, becoming spectators. Remember that our responsibility is to enable the congregation to sing their praises, not to showcase our great platform voices by pitching songs in our power ranges. The basic range of the average singer is an octave and a fourth from A to D.

To read more from this article, go to <http://blog.ncbaptist.org/renewing-worship/2014/06/11/nine-reasons-people-arent-singing-in-worship/>.



EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

From the perspective of a Director of Music:

My church music professor once said that “worship is not a spectator sport.” Instead, we are all characters on a stage, performing worship with God as our audience.

My basic philosophy of worship is that it is primarily a practice and responsibility of a believer, one already knowingly in the midst of a developing relationship with God. We come together to acknowledge that God is worthy of worship, to acknowledge what God has done and is doing and to discern what God is calling us to do.

Before introducing a new song, I filter that song through a screening process. Is the text theologically sound, rooted in scripture and worth singing? Does the melody support its words with proper emphasis? The next level of the filter is how “singable” is the song? Are the rhythms natural and easily learnable or will the syncopation be an overwhelming distraction? Does the range lend itself toward the common singer? Or would this song be better suited as a solo?


For example, in “Revelation Song” by Kari Jobe there is an interesting melody, a number of scriptural allusions, but the two do not meld together effectively. The melody emphasizes lesser words in the phrases like “worthy is the Lamb who was slain....”

sing a new **song** to Him who sits **on....**” Though this song is widely popular in many churches and on Christian radio, I can’t bring myself to use it in worship.

Many of the tunes in our hymnal come from a time when worshippers sang with a different kind of gusto and willingness to reach to the extremes of their ranges. The overall range of the common singer is still generally narrow, the same range as Amazing Grace, for reference. In order to keep our congregations singing, we must prayerfully discern a balance between congregational songs and what many churches call “special music” – those solos, or duets, or band or choral numbers that prevent the full church from actively participating. We must include these songs with caution and intention and, first and foremost, glorify God and engage the listener to God’s voice.

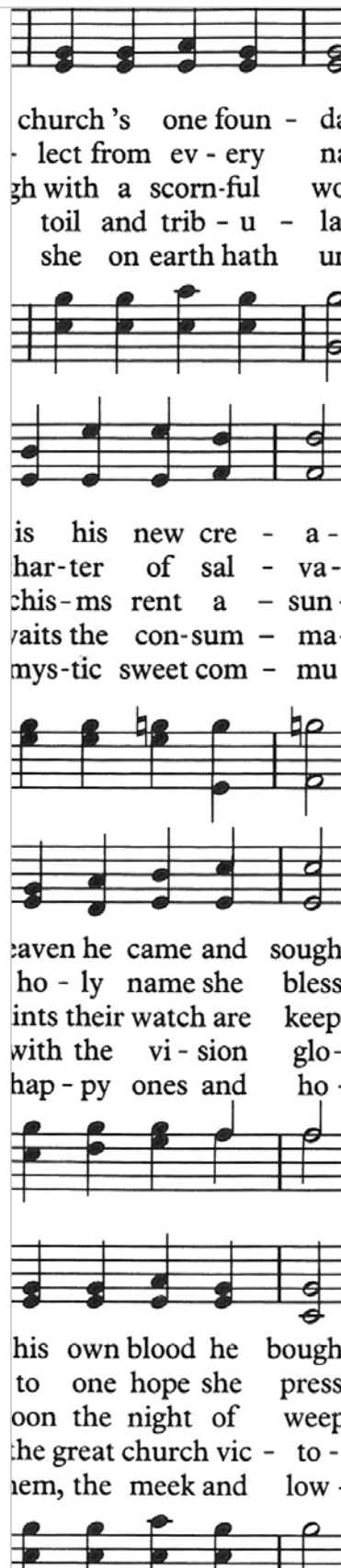
In recent years, we have noticed that our congregations are not always singing “lustily and with a good courage,” per John Wesley’s instructions printed in the front of our hymnals. While there are many factors, I believe one of the primary reasons is because of the societal pressure that empowers our insecurities. No longer content with “joyful noise,” if we don’t feel we are the best at singing, we cower in fear of being heard and judged.

Lack of familiarity can also influence the congregational voice. New songs are written every day and gaining play on the radio and in our services. The hymnal offers a variety of songs that has often been passed through several generations, thus breeding a somewhat common ground of familiarity. In our contemporary services, we must consider a sort of repetition that offers a similar common ground. Utilize familiar songs so that singers can engage without fear of the unknown. Has a new song been chosen simply because it is new, or supports the theme of the service? What value has that song for worship if few to none can participate? New songs must be introduced in moderation and carefully balanced among a repertoire of familiar music.

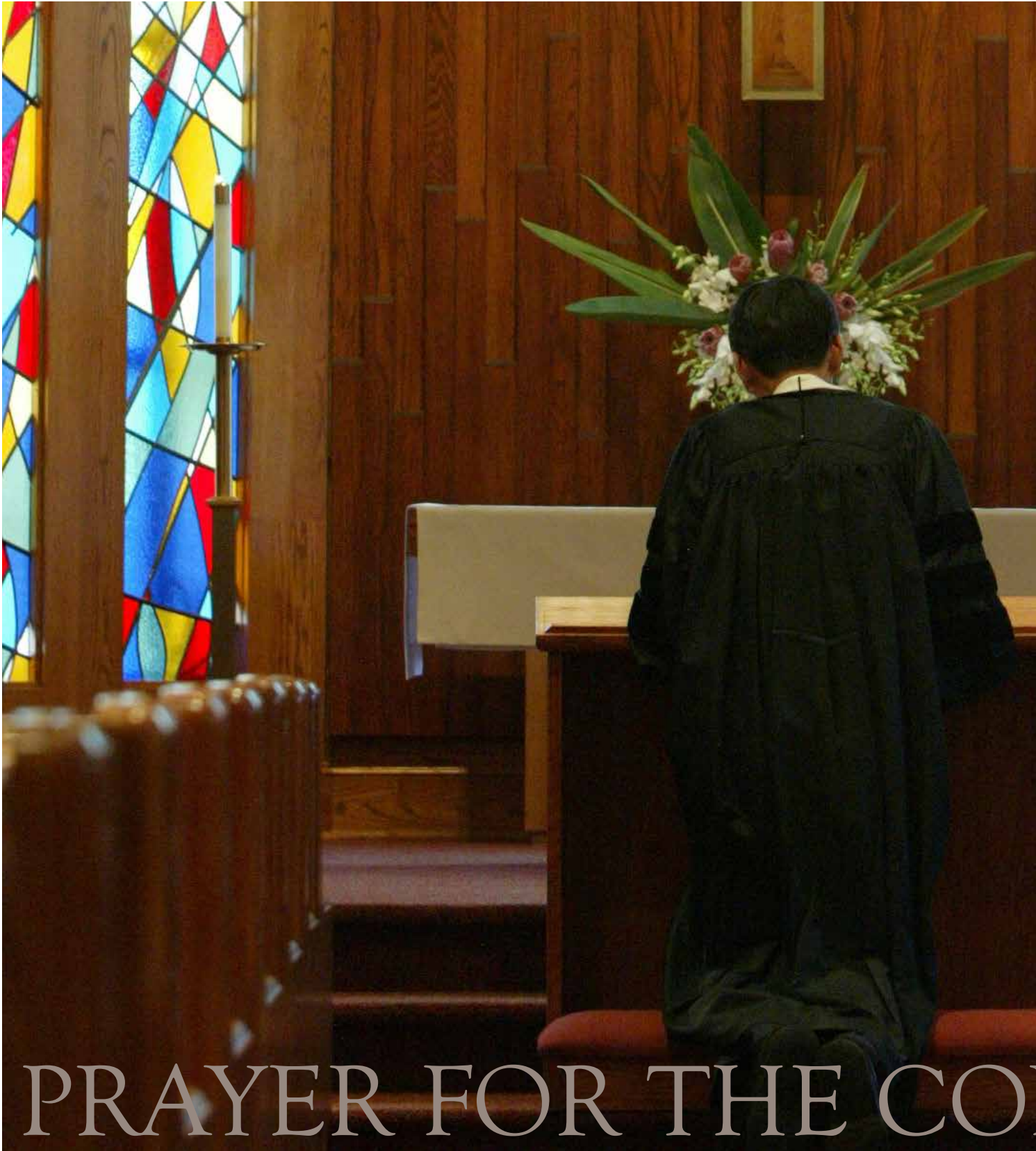
Worship leaders must, in the midst of guiding the music, be sensitive to both the Spirit and the congregation. While leading songs, we can engage or re-engage the worshippers whose focus has trailed off in a moment or see how many people are actively singing a song. 

– Joshua Wortham is the director of Music and organist at Chester UMC, James River District. He is also director of the Richmond Men’s Chorus and founding director of the Chester Community Chorus

– Madeline Pillow is editor of the Virginia Advocate.



NOTHING APART FROM



PRAYER FOR THE CO

Prayer



By Madeline Pillow

Bishop Young Jin Cho, you could say, is all about prayer. Since he started as bishop, he has seen the development of the “Covenant for Spiritual Disciplines,” held Convocations on Prayer and encouraged formation of congregations into Prayer Covenant Congregations.

And this might have a little something to do with the fact that Bishop Cho sees prayer as something essential to sustaining the Christian faith because “Jesus modeled a life of prayer that established the DNA for the Christian Wesleyan heritage of prayer.”

The bishop has found significance in the fact that Jesus did pray. “If there was one person who did not need to pray, it would have been Jesus Christ,” Bishop Cho said. “He said, ‘My father is in me, and I am in Him.’ What Jesus said were the words that God had given Him. Even so, Jesus prayed regularly and fervently. How can we do our ministries without praying also?”

The bishop’s emphasis on prayer continues this fall when he will visit the Roanoke, Staunton, James River, Farmville, Alexandria and Danville districts to meet with members of these Prayer Covenant Congregation Conferences.

Planning for the March 5, 2016, Bishop’s Convocation on Prayer is currently in the works. The theme will be “Deepening Discipleship: Piety and Mercy through Prayer.” Speaker will be Dr. Frederick Schmidt, Rueben P. Job Associate Professor of Spiritual Formation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. A change from previous years will allow attendees to participate in two workshops at the event rather than just one.

See in the rest of this month’s feature how prayer is working in the Virginia Conference, in its leaders, churches and in individuals’ lives.

CONFERENCE

CHANGING THE *culture* OF PRAYER

By Bob Parks

*P*rayer is essential to sustain our faith. Jesus modeled a life of prayer that established the DNA for the Christian Wesleyan heritage of prayer. Bishop Young Jin Cho envisioned spending his episcopacy in the Virginia Conference creating a culture of prayer. In his first episcopal address at Annual Conference, he established a goal for at least 10% of the clergy and laity of the Virginia Conference to engage in spiritual disciplines for one hour each day. The progress may not have taken off as fast as I would like; nonetheless, the culture of prayer happens not by the mass but by one individual at a time.

I can attest to the change of culture of prayer in my life. Prior to the bishop's challenge, my prayer life consisted mostly of intercessory prayer which involves asking or telling God to do something for oneself or someone else. But a good reminder is that prayer is more than communicating with God but also making a relationship with God.

In July 2012, I covenanted to change my culture of prayer. I committed to engage in spiritual disciplines for at least one hour each day. I can attest that my spiritual life has been transformed. Each morning this hour includes intercessory prayer, Scripture reading, spiritual readings and journaling. This daily spiritual practice began my spiritual transformation.

Before Bishop Charlene Kammerer retired, she told members of the cabinet to choose an Equipping Vital Congregations work team to serve on. When the list came to me, I saw that Young Jin Cho (Arlington DS) had signed up for the Prayer Team. I wanted to sign up for this team because I knew I could learn so much about prayer from him. Well, God had other plans when he became our bishop. I was excited for him, but the appointment meant he would not be on the Equipping Vital Congregations Prayer Team.

KINDS OF PRAYER

PRAYER WALKING: A method of intercessory prayer that involves praying on location.

With the formation of the Equipping Vital Congregations work teams under Bishop Cho's leadership, I was asked to serve as the Prayer Team chairperson. Boy, did I feel inadequate. But God was in control.

You may not have heard much about the Vital Congregations Prayer Team even though more than three years have passed since this initiative was implemented. This is because we have been in the background, praying. Our team consists of a small group of people who are committed to praying for this Equipping Vital Congregations initiative. We prayed for all the Equipping Vital Congregations work teams so they could complete the task that was assigned to them. Today, there are three teams still co-existing: Bishop's Steering Team, Discipleship Circle Implementation Team and the Prayer Team.

When the prayer team began, we made a commitment to travel to the United Methodist Center in Glen Allen to hold our prayer meetings. We met monthly for two years reading Scripture; meditating; practicing Tongsung Kido, contemplative prayers and silence; and concluding with Holy Communion. Today, we meet at the conference center on the fourth Thursday of the odd months. Our agenda consists of meeting in the chapel for Scripture reading and contemplation. This is followed by a prayer walk through the conference center. All the conference staff are visited by a prayer team member, invited to share prayer requests and then we pray for them. If the staff member is not present, the prayer team member offers a prayer of thanksgiving for the staff person and leaves a note stating that they have been prayed for by a prayer team member. We challenge everyone who goes to the conference center to stop by any office to pray and to pray daily for our conference staff. Our prayers are greatly appreciated by them. One staff member has worked in the conference center for 17 years and said in those years no one had stopped to pray for him. With tears in his eyes, he said he was going to tell his wife and all others who would listen what had happened.

Prayer blesses people! When we have completed our prayer walk, we return to our chapel to feast at the Lord's Table. This is just one practice of how we are creating a culture of prayer in the Virginia Conference.

What if Christians when entering our church, district or conference offices would pray for the staff, pastor, district superintendent and bishop? I have committed when I go to the United Methodist Center, for whatever purpose, I take the time to pray and give thanks to God for the ministry of that person. I have committed whenever someone comes to or calls my office to pray for that person before ending our communications. We are creating a different culture of prayer in the Virginia Conference. ☞

— The Rev. Bob Parks is Farmville District superintendent and serves as the Equipping Vital Congregations Prayer Team chairperson.

KINDS OF PRAYER

TONGSUNG KIDO PRAYER: In Korean congregations, among others, Tongsung Kido is popular and an important part of prayer life. Usually the congregation is given a specific time period, with a common theme of petition or supplication. All pray aloud at the same time as individuals concentrate on their own earnest prayers, longing for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

FEEDING A *Life* OF PRAYER

In March 21 at the Bishop's Convocation on Prayer, the Rev. Sue Nilson Kibbey spoke about the importance of "Breakthrough Prayer." As director of the Missional Church Consultation Initiative (MCCI) of the West Ohio Conference, Kibbey offers coaching and training to congregations that want to revitalize their ministries. One of the ways she does this is through prayer.

Kibbey believes that prayer can revitalize churches, and said it has proven so in Christian history. "As I look at the history of Christianity, every great wave of renewal and growth has always been preceded by a pronounced effort and focus on prayer," Kibbey said. "Jesus himself made it clear that prayer was the source of unleashing God's potential and miraculous work, and it was the one practice that Jesus' own disciples (after observing his ministry for some length of time) asked him to teach them."

Prayer is underutilized, says Kibbey, either because it is relegated to use as a tool when someone is sick or in crisis or because of various misconceptions about the technique of prayer. "Churches do not always make a practice of also praying for new God possibilities and potential—only for concerns, tragedies and protection," she said.

Kibbey emphasizes that there are no "right" words for prayer. "Thank goodness the New Testament describes powerful prayer in the book of Romans also as 'groanings

too deep for words' in and through us by the Holy Spirit," Kibbey said. "God hears equally our prayers with or without words."

In her work, Kibbey also talks about Breakthrough Prayer which is when we as individuals ask God to "break through our current circumstances, our lives with miraculous possibilities and direction."

Breakthrough Prayer can take many forms and can be incorporated into regular practices of church life. The first step that Kibbey recommends is that at any gathering whether church service, church dinner or small group study, that the group open and close with prayer that includes not only prayer concerns but also a request that God break through individual lives and the church with new possibilities.

Prayer Walking is a part of Breakthrough Prayer. Often without words, this type of prayer is easy for large groups of people to unite as a congregation while asking God to break through at all levels. "When I think about prayer walking," Kibbey said, "I am reminded of the story from the gospels of two individuals on a walk to Emmaus, and how Jesus appeared to them and opened their eyes and their understanding. So it also is when church members simply walk prayerfully through their church buildings, classrooms, surrounding neighborhoods, etc., and ask Christ to break through with new understanding, God possibilities and perspective."

Prayer needs to start with the lead pastor of a church, says Kibbey, otherwise it becomes and is seen as just another church activity rather than a priority.

Just as the great Scottish devotional writer Oswald Chambers found that physical food nourishes the physical body and without it bodies become malnourished and waste away, Kibbey finds that prayer is food for the body of Christ, the church. "Is it any wonder, then," she said, "that many churches are malnourished and wasting away? When churches feast on prayer, rather than just snack on it, renewal and healthy fruitfulness blossoms." 🌿

—Sue Nilson Kibbey is director of the Missional Church Consultation Initiative (MCCI) of the West Ohio Conference. Her upcoming new book, Flood Gates: Holy Momentum for a Fearless Church discusses more about Breakthrough Prayer.

KINDS OF PRAYER

BREATH PRAYER: Another way to become more aware of God's presence. A common way is to silently repeat a single-line prayer with each breath. With each inhale, address God. On the exhale, express a request to God.

PRAYER AT

Work

DISTRICT DS CALLS FOR DELIBERATE PRAYER

By Pete Moon

Sixteen years ago, as a part of graduate research work at Wesley Seminary, I had the opportunity to travel to Cuba. I had a simple question: Why, when so many churches were struggling, is the Cuban Methodist Church thriving? At that time, Cuban Methodist churches were growing in a phenomenal way. Much of that growth continues today.

I interviewed many people, laity and clergy, throughout the island. Of particular note were the responses of four senior, mostly retired, clergy. Independently, they all told the same story. In the mid-seventies, things were particularly bad. Pastors were imprisoned or had fled the island. Salaries were reduced to 25 cents a day. There were only seven pastors left, including these four.

And yet, these seven still met for Annual Conference. Their business became prayer. In what proved to be a spiritually pivotal moment, they all gathered around the altar and prayed for the revival of the Methodist Church in Cuba. Each described the new spiritual life enjoyed by tens of thousands of Cuban Methodists today and beyond: beginning with a prayer around an altar.

Fast forward to an old and semi-rural Virginia United Methodist Church. They were also thriving, people moving in and out on a Wednesday night when I arrived. But it wasn't always that way. There was a time when they had 18 people on a Sunday morning. I asked them what happened and they told me a story. Several years prior, a few of the remaining seniors were gathered for Sunday school. A young mother approached these senior saints, asking where the children's Sunday school was held. They replied sadly that they didn't have one and watched the single mother and her children walk away to the parking lot. But then they prayed. They, too, gathered around the altar and prayed that God would revive their church. And now, 15 years later, on a Wednesday night, the parking lot and the classrooms are full.

John Wesley said, "God does nothing except in response to prayer." Clergy and laity alike have struggled for centuries with the theology and intensity within that statement. And yet, the words have proven true in the experience of many Methodists throughout the years.

For that reason, the Richmond District is endeavoring to do something different in charge conferences this year. In keeping with the bishop's emphasis upon prayer and our recent convocation, I am asking each congregation in Richmond to spend the bulk of the charge conference time in a deliberate time of prayer. Instead of simply naming the vision and priorities for the coming year, we will take the time to pray for that vision in creative ways.

Some may turn our charge conference into a prayer walk through the neighborhoods. Some may make it a bus ride through places where the church needs to serve. Other congregations may spend the time walking through the sanctuary, praying that empty seats may be filled. I am praying that the list may go on and on.

If Wesley is right, and I believe he is, our congregations, as in Cuba and semi-rural Virginia, always have hope. There are lots of folks who are predicting doom and gloom for United Methodists and, to be sure, the problems in our midst are challenging. But then again, as Wesley preached and as history has proven, every time we pray, we are reminded that God did not get the memo, and in Christ, there is no place where there is no hope. ☞

— The Rev. Pete Moon is the newly-appointed Richmond District superintendent.

KINDS OF PRAYER

LECTIO DIVINA: Meaning "divine reading," this is reading Scriptures in a way that will open you up to God. The steps of this prayer are *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (reflection), *oratio* (response) and *contemplatio* (rest).

To start, choose a text of the Bible you wish to pray. Allowing yourself to become silent, focus either on your breathing or a prayer word or phrase.

Read your chosen text slowly. In *lectio divina*, God teaches us to listen to God and to seek God in silence. Next, focus more on this text by trying to memorize it. Allow a dialogue between yourself and God through inner ruminations.

Lectio divina has no goal other than being in God's presence by praying the Scriptures. You may find yourself hearing God through a phrase or just a word of the text. Whatever seems more helpful, use words or relax in silence.

THE PERPETUAL JOURNEY OF PRAYER

By Justin Allen

Honestly, prayer has always been a struggle for me. However, the reason it has always been a struggle is because I have always thought that I had to pray like every other person I met. I thought I had to wake up at 5 a.m. and kneel and pray for a great amount of time. When I tried that, I fell asleep. I am an active person. I often run across campus. I interact with students through intramural sports, and I was always chastised by teachers because I could not sit still. The reality is that my relationship with Christ is different from everyone else's, and I am different from everyone else, so my prayer life should be different too.

There is no question that I feel closest to God while I am surrounded by nature. I have worked at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks with A Christian Ministry in the National Parks, and I have traveled to numerous other national parks from A-Z (Arches to Zion). When I am immersed in nature, I speak with God constantly, and God speaks with me. So, my perpetual journey to explore my prayer life has been to try and recreate the constant prayer that occurs for me when I am active in the created world.



I cannot always be on the Shenandoah River or hiking in God's great creation. Therefore, what has been most meaningful to me in the last few years is the benefit of a smartphone. I cannot regularly travel to Denali, so I have turned to what travels with me regularly. The Pray As You Go app follows the Ignatian Spirituality movement and provides a daily prayer prompted by a 10- to 12-minute recording that includes music from contemporary to chant, a Scripture lesson and a reflection that prompts the listener to pray. I use it while I exercise, while traveling to Shenandoah University and when I am walking from one part of campus to another in the morning.

However, the best part of the Pray As You Go app is the

nightly Examen. The Examen helps the listener review the day, reflect on how God was present, be thankful for God's presence, review how we might not have lived up to God's call on our life and ask for forgiveness. At night, after I am spent from the day, I am able to be still and be with God as I review my journey throughout the day. I have become more centered, more prayerful throughout the day thanking God and seeing God's presence in the conversations with students and staff, and I have become more self-aware because of my reflections at night. I am constantly thinking about previous days and trying to make each moment a God-centered event that I will review that night during the Examen.

My perpetual journey for a more consistent prayer life continues, and it may change again next month as I continue to explore ways of prayer that are meaningful to me, a unique creation made in the image of God. So, while I wish I could pray all day among the great trees or as I paddle down the Shenandoah River, I have at least learned that I cannot sit and pray in the morning. I must be active during my prayer life in the morning and peaceful and reflective at night through the Examen. My prayer life might not be for everyone, but right now it works for me.

-Justin Allen is dean of Spiritual Life and director of the Institute for Church Professions at Shenandoah University.

KINDS OF PRAYER

CENTERING PRAYER: A method of silent prayer that prepares participants to receive contemplative prayer, a prayer in which you experience God's presence within you. This kind of prayer is a relationship with God and a discipline to foster the relationship. This prayer can add a depth of meaning to all prayer and facilitate a receptive prayer of resting in God.

KINDRED PROJECT OFFERS PRAYER *opportunities*

By Janet Salbert

*O*n the doorway, a sign says, "Welcome Kindred Project." Chatter, laughter and smiles are exchanged as the group gathers in a circle of chairs. A bell signals time for attending to God's presence. There is a reading and then silence. Fifteen minutes go by without a spoken word. A candle burns, objects on an altar extend the text and a sense of unity builds amongst the group with each silent minute. The movement of the Holy Spirit is invited through holy conversation, shared reflections and often by celebrating the Lord's Supper together. This is the experience of prayer that Kindred Project seeks to offer across the Virginia Conference.

In a world where conflict continues to interrupt each day, Kindred Project (KP) offers a place to come and experience the unity that arises when contemplative forms of prayer are practiced together. Among participants in KP, there is a firm belief that the practice of attending to God's presence with a community is the answer to every difficulty the world endures. When we learn to attend to God's presence together in prayer, we learn God's grace is available as we invite the use of silence as a tool for discernment in our families, churches and communities. The

"I think that people are excited about praying in our neighborhoods and extending the way they can share their faith through prayer. Prayer is being seen as an important aspect of our discernment. However, it is too early to say exactly what God is revealing through our new intention and experience of prayer."

— The Rev. Janet Salbert, pastor at Grace UMC, Alexandria District, reflects on the church's prayer walks that started as a result of the March 21 Bishop's Convocation on Prayer.

movement of the Holy Spirit is revealed as we grow deeper in relationship with God and one another.

Kindred Project began in 2012 with a small group who hoped for a way to facilitate the spiritual lives of church leaders. The Rev. David Canada, Dawn Peck, the Rev. Alexis Faithbrucker, the Rev. Bert Cloud, the Rev. Scott Hopkins, Joy Crawford and the Rev. Sylvia Meadows were among the first to seek increasing spiritual formation opportunities for both clergy and laity around the state. Kindred Project does not have denominational boundaries; all are welcome to come together for prayer. We now have regional gatherings in several districts across the state with two in Northern Virginia. Each gathering selects its own style which may include centering prayer, lectio divina, the Lord's Supper or other forms of practicing God's presence.

In Northern Virginia, KP began meeting in August 2013. We met monthly for a year with a growing number of participants which enabled us to form a second group in our second year. Since January, a daytime group meets at St. Matthew's UMC in Annandale, and another meets in the evenings at Grace UMC in Manassas. Dr. Janie Mitchell and the Rev. Janet Salbert facilitate the gatherings arranging for shared leadership within each group. John Richards, the Rev. Scott Hopkins and the Rev. Joe Shoop, all regular KP participants, are offering contemplative prayer groups within their home churches.

Kindred Project offers a way for us to grow in our awareness of God's presence; to strengthen our faith; and grow in our discernment, all to benefit our churches and the communities we serve.

You can visit www.kindredproject.org for details about gatherings in each region. 🕊

— The Rev. Janet Salbert is pastor of Grace United Methodist church in Manassas.



KINDS OF PRAYER

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER: Resting in the presence of God without any prayers or thanksgiving.

PRAYER WITHOUT *Boundaries*

By Mike Thornton

Small group prayer, the first of three prayer initiatives at Aldersgate UMC, began two years ago as a response to Bishop Cho's 2013 Annual Conference Episcopal address and his appeal for churches to become "Prayer Covenant Congregations."

Our prayer group began meeting every Wednesday for one hour of prayer and, included in that hour, prayer for the renewal and revival of the congregation, the conference, The United Methodist Church and the universal church. We have prayed consistently for the Holy Spirit to come and reignite the church and our congregation. We have used a number of formats including: Korean Style Prayer (we all prayed Psalms simultaneously out loud); Lectio Divina (praying a Scripture with silence and asking specific questions of discussion); conversational prayer; and contemplative/centering prayers.

We consistently open with a short prayer, music, Scripture, silence intermixed, prayer requests and closing thoughts and prayers.

Prayer walking began September 2014. Aldersgate is moving from an inward focus to an outward and invitation-al focus. As part of this change we decided to intentionally and specifically pray for our neighbors. An even more exact target was to pray for those who lived within a one-mile radius of the church. So we decided to walk the neighborhoods, the retail areas including a mall, and the small office sections surrounding the church.

We begin with prayer and walk for a while and then stop and pray as we enter and leave areas. We pray for both the spiritual and physical needs of our neighbors. Our motto is "to be on the scene without making a scene." We also try to greet and talk to anyone we come across as we are walking, allowing the conversation to be guided by those we meet. It is important that, even though we generally decide on a path to walk beforehand, we allow the Holy Spirit to work during our walk. We began walking weekly and now we walk the first Thursday of each month.

Prayer is a spiritual discipline that knows no boundaries. With this fact in mind, we created the "prayer wall" in October 2014 as we began to redesign our website. We often pray for missionaries and friends all over the world, so it made sense that people should be able to request prayer from anywhere in the world 24/7. The prayer wall allows us to have a connection between prayer and the community both inside and outside the church. There is a button to click when someone prays for a request, which allows a connection between the person requesting prayer and those praying for the request.

All the revivals and renewals in the history of the church have begun with prayer. The emphasis on prayer through these prayer ministries, prayer in worship, prayer at the beginning and ending of all church meetings has increased an awareness of prayer. And, hopefully, increased individual prayer lives. It is my belief that the Holy Spirit is being welcomed at Aldersgate and asked continuously through prayer to open our eyes, minds and hearts to God's power and direction. 🙏

— Mike Thornton is Spiritual Growth leader at Aldersgate UMC, Charlottesville District.

KINDS OF PRAYER

INTERCESSORY PRAYER: A kind of prayer that pleads with God on the behalf of others or for yourself.

DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD



▲ Bovard Studios of Fairfield, Iowa, is in the process of restoring the beautiful stained glass windows at **Main Street UMC, Suffolk**. The project was begun in early June. The windows are being cleaned inside and repaired where necessary. Outside, the old Plexiglas coverings are being removed and the windows re-cemented, frames restored and repainted and new plate glass coverings installed. This is a major part of a comprehensive restoration of the 100-year-old building which is due to be completed by June 2016 when Main Street will have a Centennial Celebration for this building. This is the third building that has been used since 1801.



▲ **Asbury UMC, Park UMC** and **St. Paul UMC**, all in Christianburg, held a combined Vacation Bible School at St. Paul on July 20-23. Adults, youths and children from each church participated in the event with the theme "Treasures Forever." The churches are pastored by the Rev. Bob Berghuis, the Rev. Pat Jones and the Rev. Moonsup "Paul" Song.

▲ Sometimes dreams come true. Kenneth Burch, member of the Quicksburg congregation of the **Mount Jackson UMC Charge**, dreamed about holding a baptismal event at his farm along the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. After a couple of months of discussion and planning led by the Rev. Michael Dettmer, the event was held Saturday, Aug. 15, which also included members of Quicksburg's sister church, **Mount Jackson UMC**. Nineteen people, including several who have no prior connection to the Mount Jackson Charge and ranging in age from two months to more than 70, were baptized. Several chose to be immersed in the river, recalling the method used by John the Baptist. Another 50 people renewed their baptismal vows.

Beulah UMC, Richmond District, decided to join Chesterfield County's SummerTime Access to Reading (STAR) program and host neighborhood elementary school students and their families for three evenings of books, snacks, games and crafts. The idea was to keep children reading over the summer in preparation for the next school year. Three Tuesday evenings were scheduled—one each in June,



▲ July and August. Following the success of the June event — about 30 children and their families came — the church created Breakfast & Books @ Beulah, or B&B@B. Beginning Thursday, July 9, volunteers welcomed local families from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. The families ate breakfast, chose books, played games with volunteers and participated in crafts. The final STAR event was combined with Chesterfield County National Night Out on Aug. 4. Law enforcement officers stopped by to chat with the kids and their families, and towards the end of the evening, Officer McGruff, crime-fighting dog, came in to meet them.

▼ **Providence UMC** on Stratford Hall Road in Montross is one the most architecturally unique and beautiful churches in the Northern Neck area. The entire interior of the church is done in natural stained wainscoting. Seeing the craftsmanship and appreciating the efforts of those who built



Providence UMC provides current members of the church with a strong sense of identity. Often you can find members of Providence actively involved in the community they love. Recently, the "Providence Crew" set up at one of the local markets to collect donations for Westmoreland County school children. They raised over \$350 toward the purchase of backpacks and supplies in three short hours. The "Providence Crew" was headed by Joy Bishop who has headed up several local missions, including collecting funds for Imagine No Malaria. Living in a county where so many of our neighbors have a difficult time preparing for the new school year, Providence was glad to help.

▼ The **Danville District** tithes proceeds from the sale of former United Methodist church buildings and district properties. The district recently sold the district parsonage and gave the tithe to the Henry Fork Service Center. Pictured, the Rev. Janine Howard (left), Danville District superintendent, presents a check to Lisa Nichols, director of the Henry Fork Center.



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

EVENTS



October

Mid-Size Church Training Day

Oct. 3, Providence UMC, Richmond

Teams of clergy and laity from mid-size congregations with an average worship attendance between 150-349 are invited to a training event Saturday, Oct. 3, at Providence UMC in Richmond. Keynote speaker will be Phil Maynard, author of *Shift: Helping Congregations Back Into the Game of Effective Ministry*. The event will also be live-streamed to five other locations across the conference. Cost is \$25, and .5 CEU will be offered. Group discounts are available. More information and registration can be found online at www.vaumc.org/mid-size-training.

Mary & Paul II: Nurturing God's Call

Oct. 3, United Methodist Center, Glen Allen

Studies show that many persons who are called into ordained ministry receive the call at 10 years of age, but the adults in their lives are not well equipped to nurture the call. This seminar is designed to help adults become better equipped to help young people understand and respond to God's call. Mary & Paul II: Nurturing God's Call will be 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 3, at the United Methodist Center in Glen Allen. Registration is required 48 hours prior to the event. Registration fee is \$10. If you have questions, contact the Rev. Ted Smith at (804) 448-8326 or Fredericksburgds@vaumc.org. For more information and to register online, go to the conference website, www.vaumc.org, click on "Conference Calendar" and the date.

Annual ARMS Retreat

Oct. 7-8, Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center, Blackstone

"Journey of a Lifetime" will be the theme of the Association of Retired Ministers and Spouses (ARMS) annual retreat Oct. 7-8 at Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center in Blackstone. Dr. Joseph Eldridge, chaplain at American University, will speak on "Looking Back/Looking Forward: Viewing Justice Inter-Generationally." Dr. Kenneth Patrick, chaplain at Blue Ridge Hospice, will speak on "Journeying through the Winter of Life with the Lord." Fee is \$50 per person (\$25 if this is your first ARMS retreat.) For more information, e-mail Harry Kennon at RevHarry@aol.com.

School for Children's Ministries

Oct. 17, Thalia UMC, Virginia Beach

The School for Children's Ministries is on the road again offering the same school at four different locations on four different dates. The next event this year will be 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 17, at Thalia UMC, Virginia Beach.

Learn "Extraordinary Lessons from Ordinary Objects" plus three more workshops. A .5 CEU offered. Only \$20 per person. For more information and to register online, go to the conference website, www.vaumc.org, click on "Conference Calendar" and the date.

PAUMCS fall training event

Oct. 21, United Methodist Center, Glen Allen

Virginia chapter of the Professional Association of United Methodist Church Secretaries (PAUMCS) will hold its fall training event, "Experience Your Conference Connection 2015" 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 21, at the Virginia United Methodist Conference Center in Glen Allen. Wayne Rhodes, director of Communications for the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, will talk about the United Methodist Social Principles. Linda Rhodes, Virginia Conference director of Communications, will lead "I Love to Tell the Story," a session on church communications for today. This event is open to all church administrative staff (full-time, part-time, paid and volunteer), including but not limited to administrative assistants, financial secretaries, office managers and newsletter editors. Pastors and Communication chairs are invited to attend. For more information and to register online, go to the conference website, www.vaumc.org, click on "Conference Calendar" and the date. Or call Sandra Fulcher, chapter president, in the Danville District office at (276) 638-2688.

United Methodist Women annual meeting

Oct. 23-25, Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center, Blackstone

Virginia Conference United Methodist Women (UMW) will celebrate the 40th anniversary of "Dimes and Dollars for Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center" (VUMAC) at VUMAC in Blackstone during the UMW annual meeting Oct. 23-25. The Wicker Room (beside the Dining Room) is being renovated to become the official UMW room and will be dedicated during the annual meeting.

Tearing Down the Walls: Ways of Doing Justice

Oct. 24, First UMC, Salem

The Roanoke, Danville, Lynchburg and Staunton districts are co-sponsoring "Tearing Down the Walls: Ways of Doing Justice" 9 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 24, at First UMC, 125 W. Main St., Salem. Leader will be Shane Clariborne, nationally-known speaker and founder of The Simple Way Christian community in Philadelphia that has helped birth and connect radical faith communities around the world. This event will focus on the meaning of Christian social justice; how we can break down contemporary walls of injustice such as economic inequalities, educational disparities and racial divisions; and how we can build hope and

EVENTS

empower persons to overcome walls of separation and engage others on social justice issues. Youths, young adults and older adults are invited to attend this intergenerational event. Adult registration is \$30. Student registration is \$10. Registration deadline is Oct. 17. Approved for 0.5 CEU. For more information and to register, go to the conference website, www.vaumc.org, click on "Conference Calendar" and the date.

UMFS golf tournament

Oct. 26, Stonehenge Country Club, Richmond

Registration is now open for the annual United Methodist Family Services (UMFS) Fore the Kids Golf Tournament to be held Monday, Oct. 26, at Stonehenge Country Club, 1000 Farnham Dr., Richmond. Cost is \$400 per team or \$100 per individual and includes a light breakfast, lunch and BBQ dinner as well as prizes and golf. Four-man Captain's Choice format will tee off at 10 a.m. Register at www.umfs.org/golf. A pre-tournament party 6-8 p.m. Monday, Oct. 19, at Golfsmith in Short Pump will offer free food, contests, giveaways and a 15% discount to Golfsmith for in-store purchases. UMFS is seeking sponsors for the golf tournament. An organization providing a \$1,000 sponsorship will be able to enter a team in the tournament and will receive signage and visibility throughout the tournament. If interested in being a sponsor, go to www.umfs.org/golf. For more information, contact Joe Torrence at jtorrence@umfs.org or (804) 239-1042, ext. 1941.

Small Congregation Training Day

Oct. 31, Belmont UMC, Richmond

This is an event designed for teams of clergy and laity with an average worship attendance between 1-149 with a desire to learn and grow. Rev. Dr. Lewis Parks will keynote this event focused on the practical tools needed for bringing new vitality to small churches. Belmont UMC in Richmond will host the event. It will also be live-streamed to other locations around the conference. The cost is \$25 and .5 CEU will be offered. Group discounts are available. More information and registration can be found online: www.vaumc.org/small-church-training.

November

United Methodist Men Spiritual Advance

Nov. 6-8, Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center, Blackstone

The Virginia Conference United Methodist Men 2015 Spiritual Advance will be Friday-Sunday, Nov. 6-8, at Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center in Blackstone. The annual event will feature the Rev. Dr. Clarence R. Brown,

senior pastor of Annandale UMC (Alexandria District), who will preach a series of four messages on Men Making a Difference. For more information and to register, go to the conference website, www.vaumc.org, click on "Conference Calendar" and the date.

5 Talent Academy: 'Stir Up the Fire: Wesley's Way of Making Disciples'

Nov. 10, Ebenezer UMC, Stafford

This faith development event is focused on small group ministry and will be keynoted by the Rev. Dr. Jim Harnish. "Stir Up the Fire" will be hosted live at Ebenezer UMC in Stafford and will be live-streamed to nine other conference locations. Cost is \$25 and .5 CEU will be offered. Group discounts are available. More information and registration can be found online at www.vaumc.org/5Talent.

Clergy Ethics II Training - Fredericksburg District

Nov. 18, Wrights Chapel UMC, Ruther Glen

All clergy and church professionals are required to attend an Ethics II Training event in the current quadrennium (2012-2016). Registration is required 48 hours prior to the event in order to ensure sufficient materials are available for all participants. Fee is \$12 to include lunch or \$5 without lunch. Refunds will not be processed once registration closes 48 hours prior to the event. For more information and to register, go to the conference website, www.vaumc.org, click on "Conference Calendar" and the date. If you do not have a credit card to register online or if you have questions, contact Kristen Seibert in the Center for Clergy Excellence at kristenseibert@vaumc.org, (804) 521-1126 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 126.

Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



The Rev. C. Douglas Pillow is a retired elder in the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church. During his more than 55 years of active ministry, Rev. Pillow served a number of churches including Centenary, Court Street and Amelon in the Lynchburg District. He graduated from Lynchburg College with a B.A. in religion and completed his theological studies through the conference course of studies. He and his wife, Eleanor, have two children, Rick Pillow and Donna Forehand, as well as four grandchildren and two great grandchildren. Patrick Pillow, a grandson, is a local pastor serving at Chester United Methodist Church as an associate. Madeline Pillow, a granddaughter, is editor of the Virginia United Methodist Advocate. Rev. Pillow and his wife live in Lynchburg and attend Court Street United Methodist Church.

Oct. 4, 2015 What Money Can't Buy Acts 8: 9-25

Have you ever been rebuked for something you said or did? Did it make you feel hurt, angry, defensive or repentant?

Phillip, the disciple, went to a city in Samaria to proclaim the message of Christ. Though the Samaritans and the Jews were hostile toward each other, Phillip still went into the city and preached Christ. When they saw the power he proclaimed, many believed his message as he healed the crippled and paralyzed. When the people saw this, they were overjoyed and accepted the gospel message that Philip preached and were baptized.

Living in the city was a magician named Simon. He also did miracles by his magic (sorcery) and had convinced the people that he had a special power. Oddly enough, when Simon saw the power of Christ that Phillip preached, he converted, was baptized and became a supporter of Phillip.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard what was happening in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to minister to them. When they arrived, they prayed for the Samaritans and laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit, because previously they had only been baptized "in the name of Jesus."

Paul found 12 men at Ephesus and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have never heard of the Holy Spirit." "What baptism did you receive?" asked Paul, and they answered, "John's baptism." "That baptism was for repentance," replied Paul. Then he laid his hand on them and baptized them in the name of Jesus. The Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied just as the Jews had done in Jerusalem at Pentecost. (Acts 19: 1-7, NIV) How many people today join the church but fail to receive the Holy Spirit?

Simon offered money to purchase this same power after seeing the people receive the Holy Spirit. But God's power is never for sale. Here is where we find the key to our lesson. Peter rebuked Simon saying, "You thought you could buy the gift of God with money. You have no part in this ministry because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and

pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." (Acts 8: 20-23)

Now we are much too polite to say such a thing to a new convert, especially those with money. However, God is no respecter of persons, and God denounces sin regardless of who commits it. Rather than getting hostile and angry, Simon repented and followed the advice of Peter and John to pray that nothing bad he had said would happen to him.

Now how do we react when we are rebuked by God, our minister, a teacher or a friend?

Too many of us become angry and defensive when someone points out our sins or shortcomings rather than repent as Simon did. After all, repentance is the key to our salvation.

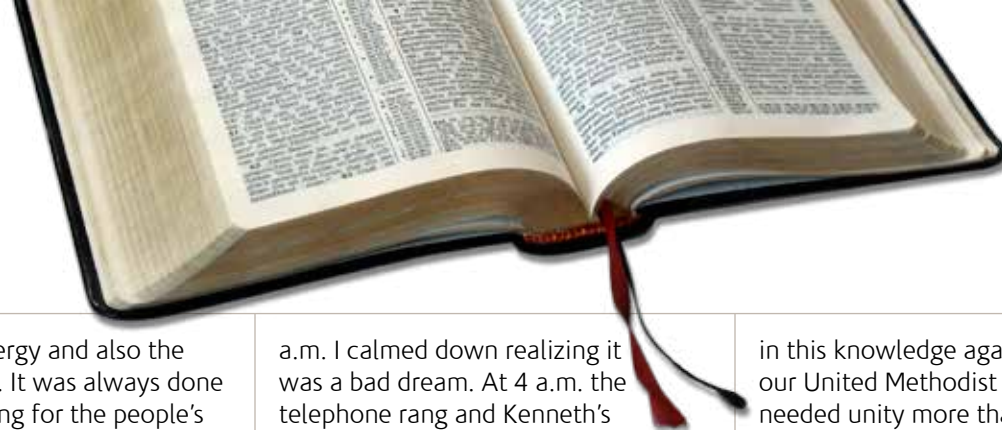
Oct. 11, 2015 How Difficult and Dangerous is Preaching? Acts 9: 19b-31

In this passage, we examine Paul's first sermon at Damascus just after his conversion. He had intended to go to Damascus to persecute Christians and arrest them. Now he was preaching Christ. The message was so touching that people remembered his topic, "He is God's Son." (Acts 9: 20)

After a few days in Damascus, the hostile Jews wanted to kill Paul for his preaching. To escape, Paul's friends put him in a basket and lowered him down the wall of the city. (Preachers need friends when they are in trouble!) From there, Paul went to Jerusalem, and when he arrived the people were afraid of him. A friend, Barnabas, successfully convinced the people that Paul had met Christ on the road to Damascus and there had boldly and fearlessly preached Christ. (Acts 9: 27b)

Now what is bold preaching? It is telling people that they are wrong. They are sinners. They are lost without Christ. They need to denounce sin and repent. But bold preaching is not popular preaching. Consider the Old Testament prophets. They preached boldly against the wrongdoings of Israel and Judah, and though always offered the opportunity to repent, they were despised by many.

Luther, Calvin and Wesley all were bold preachers denouncing the corruption of the



church and the clergy and also the sins of the people. It was always done in love and pleading for the people's repentance.

The early Methodist circuit riders in America were bold preachers, but the church grew by leaps and bounds and became the largest Protestant denomination in America. They all died young, having worked themselves out preaching the gospel. Again, it was done out of love for God and God's people.

A modern-day bold preacher was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In the 1960s, he called the nation to repent of the sin of racism. It was never with hate or violence but with love. His bold preaching cost him his life; however, his preaching changed the face of America forever.

Even today, bold preaching is more dangerous every day. But, especially in this time of violence, Christians need to speak boldly against hate toward any people. Have we counted what it may cost to follow Christ? Consider this: All of the disciples, with the exception of John, were killed because of their bold preaching that "Jesus was God's Son." How bold are you in presenting Christ's message?

Oct. 18, 2015

Dreams, Dreams and More Dreams

Acts 10: 1-44

In 1956, my nephew, Kenneth, swelled up from too much fluid. The doctor assured us he would be okay, but that night I had a terrible dream. My niece, Kenneth's sister, was running back and forth across an upstairs balcony screaming and crying. Flames were shooting up all around her. The house was on fire and there was nothing we could do. (It was like little John Wesley in the burning parsonage.)

Suddenly awake, my heart pounding, I breathed shallow and fast. Looking at the clock, I saw that it was 2:10

a.m. I calmed down realizing it was a bad dream. At 4 a.m. the telephone rang and Kenneth's father said that my nephew had just died. Later, I learned that he had died exactly at 2:10 a.m. In less than two hours, the dream had become a startling reality.

With the recent events that have happened in America, we have been jolted out of our slumber. How should the church react? Are we frightened, alarmed, sick or just having a bad dream? Should we just go back to sleep? There are false prophets today as there were in the Old Testament time who tell us as the doctor told us—that everything is okay. Get a good night's sleep, and in the morning you'll be fine. But the nation collapses soon from its illness. Now there are good dreams and bad dreams. I had the bad dream.

Our lesson today deals with two dreams—one by Peter, a Jew, and the other by Cornelius, a gentile. In Peter's dream, he saw a sheet let down with animals reptiles and birds. A voice said, "Arise and eat." Peter answered, "No, Lord. I've never eaten anything unclean." The Lord said, "Don't call anything I have cleansed unclean." That dream was puzzling to Peter (Acts 10:17) just as my dream has always been puzzling to me.

In Cornelius' dream, he was told to have Peter come to his house. When Peter arrived, Cornelius told him about his dream and why he sent for him. Peter reminded him that it was against Jewish law for him to be in a gentile's house.

Peter's dream now became clear to him so he began, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." (Acts 10: 34-35)

It was through these dreams that God showed Peter and Cornelius that all people are God's people. Wouldn't it be marvelous if we could be united

in this knowledge again? Never in our United Methodist history have we needed unity more than we need it now. God sees no difference between one Christian and another Christian. Each is a Christian in God's eyes.

Paul puts it so well: "For there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10: 12-13)

The United Methodist Church has a dream for the world that is recorded in our mission statement, "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." How well are we fulfilling that mission?

Oct. 25, 2015

Standards for Church Membership Acts 11: 1-18

It has been suggested that the fifth book of the New Testament should be called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," rather than "The Acts of the Apostles." After all, Acts is all about the workings of the Holy Spirit through the apostles not the apostles working through the Holy Spirit.

My daddy told me a childhood story that I have long cherished. He was nine, and his sister was 11. One day they decided to "play church." They took the family Bible and hymnal down to the creek where they lived. They began the service by singing a hymn, and my dad read Scripture. The service took a turn as the pair decided to baptize the family cat who had followed them to the creek. Taking the cat in his arms, my dad said in a loud voice, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and in the holy-he-goes," and dumped the cat in the water. I don't know whether the cat received the Holy Ghost, but dad did think the cat was more loving after being baptized. Why not? If it works

(Continued on pg. 28: "Living Word.")

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS



The Rev. Dr. Carl H. Douglass Jr., 86, of Smith Mountain Lake, died Aug. 22, 2015, surrounded by his family. He is survived by

his wife, Brenda Mosier Douglass, and 10 children. A celebration of his life was held at Main Street UMC, Lynchburg District, on Aug. 26 with the Rev. Dr. Riley R. Smith Jr., the Rev. Larry E. Davies and the Rev. Richard H. Ecklund officiating.



John A. Miller, a full-time local pastor in the Virginia Conference, died Aug. 12, 2015. He began his ministerial service in 1985 at Wachapreague.

He also served the Bedford County Circuit, Mount Zion, Kelly Circuit, Horntown and Pleasant View in the Staunton District. The funeral was held at Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church in Richmond, where he worshipped and served after retirement.

Lester E. Hall, husband of **the Rev. Gay Brown Hall**, died at home under hospice care on Aug. 10, 2015. He was 81. He is survived by his wife; sister, Alice Faye Lebow of Roanoke; and brother, Howard Carlton Hall of Roanoke. His wife is currently serving as senior pastor at St. Mark's UMC York River District. A celebration of Lester's life was held Aug. 22, 2015, at St. Mark's UMC officiated by the Rev. Dr. R. Franklin Gillis.

Virginia Charles Jones, wife of **the Rev. C. Bailey Jones** of Petersburg, died Sept. 2, 2015, at the age of 91. She graduated from Crozer Theological Seminary with a master's degree in Theology. She is survived by her husband; son, Dr. Robert V. Jones; and daughter, Cynthia D. Jones.

(*Living Word*, continued from pg. 27.)

in this way in people, why not to a cat? When bishops commission ministers to preach, they place their hands on the recipients' heads and say, "Take thou authority to preach the Word." It is never said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." It is not theirs to offer.

The Holy Spirit is a gift from God; we are really receiving the third person in the Godhead. So the spiritual power of that third person is not something for which we should take credit. Too many times we give people who do something helpful for the church all praise and honor, never realizing that it was the Holy Spirit working through that person. The preachers of the early church gave honor and praise to the Holy Spirit rather than seeking honor for themselves.

Some followers of those preachers wanted to worship them as gods. It happened to Peter when he went to Cornelius' home, and Cornelius fell at the feet of Peter who said, "Get up. I'm a man just like you." (Acts 10: 26) Those preachers took it as an insult to be praised and honored because

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("Living Word," continued from pg. 28.)

the people were overlooking the real source of power which was the Holy Spirit. Those preachers in no way felt superior to any other person.

The discussion here was that some circumcised Jews did not feel the unclean, uncircumcised gentiles should be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. Yet they had no defense when Peter claimed that God had given them the same right to the Holy Spirit as he or they had.

It was not that Peter did not set high standards for church membership — it was just that he had no right to refuse those whom God had accepted. Just because our churches are dwindling in membership today, we have no right to refuse the high moral and spiritual standards that have always been a hallmark of the Christian church. Furthermore, we dare not become another social club that only does good deeds in the community. We are in the redemption business offering Christ's forgiveness, mercy and everlasting life. That sets us apart from any other group or organization in the world. ☞

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FROM THE BISHOP



Why prayer?

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

It is now October! The beautiful season of fall is with us. The sky is clear and blue, and trees are beginning to change their clothes. Soon we will see colorful autumn leaves. The churches are in the season of Charge Conferences and preparing for the next year. I hope this season will be a time to discern anew the vision of our Lord for the church and recommit ourselves to God and our mission.

This month I will lead the Pilgrimage for Spiritual Renewal one more time. Thirty-four clergy from our conference will visit South Korea from October 19 to 26 and take part in this continuing education program. This journey has a very busy schedule beginning with an early morning prayer service at 5 a.m. We will visit various churches and learn about ministry based on strong prayer. Your prayer

for our safe and meaningful trip will be deeply appreciated.

Starting this month, I will write for the next couple of months about why prayer is important with the title of "Why prayer?" I hope and pray that my article will help the churches and the people called United Methodists rediscover our praying knees. Now is truly a time to pray for ourselves and for the churches.

Why prayer? First of all, prayer is the essence and foundation of our faith. Being a Christian is more than becoming a better person. Being a Christian is more than doing some good works. Being a Christian is more than a culture and more than having knowledge about God. Having knowledge about God is important, but this is not enough.

We believe in a living God revealed in Scripture, especially in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The God in whom we believe is still alive. Being a Christian means having a relationship with this living God. If our faith remains as only information or knowledge about God, our relationship with God will be "I and it." But, if we have a fellowship with this living God, our relationship with God will be "I and Thou (You)." Prayer is about this relationship with our living God.

The essence of our faith is about the restoration of our relationship with God. Because of our sinfulness, our relationship with God had been broken, and we had been separated from God. Jesus Christ came to us and did a ministry of reconciliation with God and with each other. By dying on the cross and rising from the dead, Jesus opened the door for us to go to our God. Our relationship with God was restored, and now we can pray to God as children of God and call God, "Abba," which means father.

In prayer, our true self will be restored. Being created in the image of God has various meanings. One of

the interpretations understands the image of God in terms of our relationship with God. So, restoration of our relationship with God means restoration of our true self which was created to live in relationship with God. Prayer is not an additional thing we need to do. Prayer is an expression of our true self and a very natural thing for God's children. This is the reason that prayer is more than asking some favors from God. This is the reason that our prayer should be more than just saying "hello" to God a couple of times at our dinner table.

In prayer, we know our God better and deeper. In the Bible, especially to the Hebrew people, to "know" meant more than having knowledge about a person. To "know" means having experiential knowledge which comes from an intimate relationship. So, to "know" God means having a relationship with God, and this is all about prayer. Without prayer, we cannot know our God better and deeper.

Prayer will change our lives. In prayer, we will know God deeper and be more sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In prayer, we will grow to be more obedient to God. In prayer, we will get strength to live a life as children of God. In prayer, we will truly experience the joy and grace which come from our Lord. In prayer, we will find a way to respond to the challenges we face today as Christians. So, why not prayer? 🌹

In our Lord,

Young Jin Cho

ONE LAST WORD

Tragedy at Smith Mountain Lake

By Larry Davies

Smith Mountain Lake, near the Blue Ridge Mountains, is on the southwest corner of the Lynchburg District of The United Methodist Church, my district. At least 10 churches, large and small, from our district are part of the Smith Mountain Lake community. Danville and Roanoke Districts also have churches located in this scenic resort and retirement area.

Aug. 26 was a beautiful summer morning at Bridgewater Plaza shopping center overlooking Smith Mountain Lake. Alison Parker and Adam Ward were on assignment for WDBJ-TV out of Roanoke to do an early morning interview with Vicki Gardner, executive director of the Chamber of Commerce for Smith Mountain Lake.

What started as a routine interview ended in horror as both journalists were shot and killed and Vicki Gardner severely wounded by a disgruntled, former employee of the television station. Within a few hours, the shooter was spotted on an interstate near Northern Virginia but before being apprehended he shot himself and, within hours, died.

Alison Parker, who grew up in Martinsville, was described by many as "a bright, shining light" with a vivacious personality and promising future in the media. Adam Ward, who was from nearby Salem, played on the high school football team and attended Virginia Tech. Adam was engaged to a morning show producer. They were days away from moving to Charlotte, N.C. Two young professionals with everything to live for were cruelly murdered on live TV.

Vicki Gardner is described as a "bright light" in the Smith Mountain Lake community. She served as Executive Director for the Chamber for over 10 years. Vicki was rushed to surgery, came through successfully and is ex-

pected to have a full recovery.

Jack Philips, a resident of Smith Mountain Lake and a friend of Vicki, summed up on his Facebook page what many were feeling: "I'm emotionally exhausted. Today's shootings within five miles of our home have caused alternating periods in me of great anger and deep sorrow. Thankfully our friend, Vicki Gardner, appears to be out of danger, but she lost a kidney and her spleen. The two news people from WDBJ lost their lives. And why? Because some worthless person couldn't hold a job and blamed his shortcomings on everyone around him. Today was a beautiful day here at Smith Mountain Lake. As each of these people got ready to go to work this morning, they had no idea that their lives were about to be changed (or ended) shortly. Live each day as you would want to be remembered."

Visiting another television station in Lynchburg that day to check on friends, I saw professionals working hard to do their job and "get the story right" out of dedication to their craft and love for their co-workers. But afterward those same professionals could be seen crying, grieving, offering each other support and hugs and, at times, with questioning looks, asking each other: "Why?"

Paul wrote in a letter to the Corinthians, "We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed." (2 Cor 4:8)

Could this be the ultimate lesson

from the tragedy at Smith Mountain Lake? No matter what you may be going through:

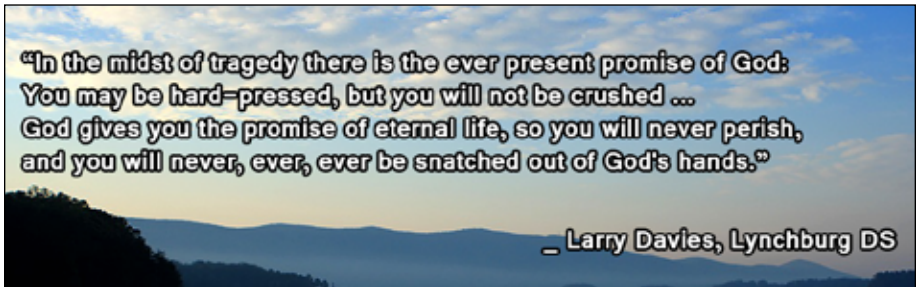
- We are hard pressed to understand what happened and why, but we are not crushed.
- Whatever problems you may be facing, we are perplexed but not in despair.
- No matter what personalities you may be dealing with, we are persecuted but not abandoned.
- Whatever tragedy you may be facing, we are struck down but not destroyed.

The gospel of John puts it another way: "I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hands." (10:28)

The tragedy at Smith Mountain Lake vividly reminds us that life is short and occasionally unpredictable. Human beings are vulnerable to tragedy, crisis, illness and the consequences of mistakes, mishaps and the evil intentions of others or even self-inflicted wounds.

Yet, in the midst of tragedy there is the ever present promise of God: You may be hard-pressed, but you will not be crushed. You may feel perplexed, but there is no need to despair. You may even feel persecuted, but you will not be abandoned. You could be struck down, but you will never be destroyed. God gives you the promise of eternal life so you will never perish and you will never, ever, ever be snatched out of God's hands.

— The Rev Larry Davies is Lynchburg District superintendent.



**"In the midst of tragedy there is the ever present promise of God:
You may be hard-pressed, but you will not be crushed ...
God gives you the promise of eternal life, so you will never perish,
and you will never, ever, ever be snatched out of God's hands."**

— Larry Davies, Lynchburg DS



OUR PRAYERS

lay the track down

ON WHICH GOD'S POWER CAN COME.

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*his power is IRRESISTIBLE,
but it cannot reach us*

WITHOUT RAILS.



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