



Virginia United Methodist

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TEN YEARS GONE

*On the anniversary of 9/11,
where do we stand as a church
and as a nation?*



***"We envision faith communities
where all God's people are
welcomed at table, nurtured
and transformed to be
Christ to others in the world."***

— Virginia Conference Vision Statement


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9/11: Unity, faith has faded



Neill Caldwell
Editor

The rancor over the government debt ceiling had me asking myself, "Wouldn't it have been nice if the spirit of national unity that marked the days and weeks immediately after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, had lasted?"

Wouldn't it have been nice if the feeling that the church could provide meaning and purpose that marked the days and weeks after 9/11 had also hung with us? (Church statistics saw a strong bump in attendance after the attacks, but that lasted only about five weeks.)

No, it did not take long for us to fall back into our natural patterns of dispute, mistrust, apathy and lack of faith. Sure, when a major event happens — like Pearl Harbor, President Kennedy's assassination or the horrors of 9/11 — we bond together in all phases of our lives, including spiritual and religious.

But our human condition is a sinful nature. We've been talking about this in my Sunday school class. In Genesis, we learn that God did not want puppets or zombies, but made humans with sharp minds and the ability to make choices. Some of those choices are bad ones. In the hymn "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" it's that line about "our bent to sinning." Human beings are sinners who "fall short of the glory of God" by not living in the way God intended us to live.

Now murdering a pilot with a box cutter and flying a plane into a skyscraper is sin that's off the chart, but all of us sin, just in far smaller and more subtle ways. That includes failure to be an active part of a community of faith that helps others; it includes harshly judging people of other faiths; it includes harboring feelings of hate and revenge.

Other than the increased time and bother of going through security at the airport, and maybe hearing about the memorial on the World Trade Center site or the proximity of an Islamic Center to Ground Zero, there's not much in the way of tangible response 10 years down the road. (Maybe we treat our military, police and firefighters a little better, which is good.) Important lessons we learned in the aftermath of the attacks in New York City and Arlington have dissipated like the debris clouds.

Ten years after 9/11, many of us remain alarmed by Islam; a recent Gallup survey showed that nearly half of Americans are fearful of Muslims. And yet Christ teaches us to love everyone.

It's time for some real healing, and turning our focus to reconciliation and restoration, and the larger issues of peace, social justice and faith in God. We must seek God's guidance as never before.

Neill Caldwell

ON THE COVER:
This month's cover includes scenes of the terror attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, in New York, Arlington and Shanksville, Pa., along with images of some of the aftermath of the attacks 10 years ago.

Ten Years Later:

How should the church respond to such terror?

This month marks the 10-year anniversary of the Al-Qaeda attacks against the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Arlington. The attackers were religious extremists who believed violence to be an appropriate response to the western culture and ideology they perceived to be threatening them.

by the Rev. Jeff Harlow

The recent tragedy in Norway has sharpened this conversation. The killer in Norway had written of his anger toward Muslims. Their presence threatened him. He had hoped to spark a revolution to stem the tide of immigration in his country. His views were extreme and he felt threatened. His response was violent.

We do not have enough information about the shooter in Norway to know whether his murderous rage was motivated by ideological extremism or mental illness or both. Regardless, the killings in Norway in July were senseless and evil, as were the killings in 2001.

The events 10 years ago in the United States and in July in Norway settle a few questions for me but also stir some lingering questions in my mind. First, evil exists in today's world. Sure, I cling to the hope expressed in our prayer, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Along the way, though, until that day, evil will confront and threaten us.

As well, I do not doubt my own passion – let's call it anger – in reaction to the murders in 2001 and 2011 (with plenty more in between). Sometimes I feel anger when I see evil, especially when it threatens me or my family.

But a few unanswered questions still churn within me, like: How should I respond to people who threaten me? And a bigger question: How should the church respond? We could easily catalogue a few examples from across the centuries, or across recent years. The church has an earned reputation for doing violence when we felt threatened. We justify our violence because we have concluded that evil exists, the evil sometimes threatens us, and someone needs to stop it.

So, let's – for a moment – agree that sometimes the church must endorse a violent response when a real evil threatens us. This by no means is a settled debate, but for the sake of moving us to a more nuanced and helpful conversation, let us agree with (or step over) this premise.

A more pressing concern in my view is this: How does the church decide when someone or something is a real threat? Let's admit, sometimes we are confused about this. The gospels are filled with examples. The well-intentioned disciples considered children to be a threat. Jesus corrected their misperception. The religious elite considered women, Samaritans, lepers and tax collectors to be a threat. Jesus corrected their misperception. Now and then, one or two of the disciples considered the other disciples to be a threat (because there are only two seats next to Jesus).

Jesus corrected their misperception.

Today, the church is mired in a policy debate about whether or not immigrants (documented or otherwise) are a threat to us. How would Jesus correct our perception? While we dare not suggest, as did the Norway shooter, that a violent response to our immigrant neighbors is warranted, we might wonder if the words we choose or the policies we propose are indeed violent in their effect. We are mired in a policy debate about whether or not homosexual persons are a threat to us. How might Jesus correct our perception?

Ten years later, we remain mired in a debate about whether or not our Mus-

lim neighbors are a threat to us. Too many of us – to our shame – have been unable to disentangle in our minds the violent extremist forms of Islam from moderate, nonviolent forms. Our tangled thoughts prevent us from reaching a more carefully nuanced perception, sorely needed in our relationships with our Muslim neighbors. Is this not hypocritical? After all, when one of our "own" representing an extremist form of Christianity publicly burned copies of the Quran (an act of violence in my view), we quickly moved to disentangle ourselves from him. "He is not like us," we resisted, when our detractors suggested that all Christians must be violent extremists like him.

If we have learned nothing else in 10 years since the attacks in New York, we should have learned this: We were attacked by members of a violent, extreme form of Islam. This act of violence brought fear to our nation and shame to most Muslims. The manner in which the church responds today to our Muslim neighbors, and to all of our neighbors who are different from us, is a response that must be formed – and corrected if necessary – by the example set by Jesus of the gospels. We welcome them, we love them, we serve them. □

– The Rev. Jeff Harlow is pastor at Enon UMC, Richmond District. He blogs regularly at <www.unpackingideas.org>.



Some media outlets have branded confessed killer Anders Behring Breivik (left) of Norway a "Christian terrorist." His violent response to his anger toward Muslims was senseless and evil, as were the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

'There can be no future without forgiveness'

by the Rev. Jonathan Barton

Everyone born before 1996 can tell you where they were on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001. It is one of those moments that serves as a benchmark and dates us to significant events. I was on my way to a meeting of May the Month for Children at the Library of Virginia when I heard the initial reports. By the time I got to the library, everyone was glued to the television screen. I arrived in time to see, with almost disbelief, the second plane fly into the twin towers. We all stayed motionless and quiet as we watched events unfold. As I watched the towers collapse I excused myself and called the state's Emergency Operations Center to see if I should report in.

In the days and weeks that followed, all of our lives changed. I was contacted by then Virginia Conference Bishop Joe Pennel and asked if the Virginia Council of Churches would be able to encourage and nurture strong positive relationships with the Islamic faith. Building on dialogues from the previous two decades, we began an intentional effort to bring representatives from these three traditions (Christian, Jewish and Muslim) together, not for the photo op, but for the purpose of building strong personal relationships. This group was strong for several years till energy began to decline. The effort was revived under the leadership of the Rev. Charles Swadley at Lakeside United Methodist Church in Richmond. These dialogues have made a significant contribution to improved relationships, and I have been honored to work with Charles and Virginia's current Bishop Charlene Kammerer.

In March of 2003, the Council was able to bring Dr. Charles Kimball, author of *When Religion Becomes Evil*, to help us understand how each of our religious traditions can be corrupted and the seeds of evil planted in radical extremism.

"Whatever religious people may say about their love of God or the mandates of their religion, when their behavior toward others is violent and destructive, when it causes suffering among their neighbors, you can be sure the religion has been corrupted and reform is desperately needed," Kimball said.

We also struggled with the meaning of forgiveness with Lyndon Harris in 2008. Lyndon was the pastor at St. Paul's Chapel near "Ground Zero."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu declared, "There can be no future without forgiveness." Forgiveness is a powerful tool for personal transformation and healing and is the culmination of the grief process. It is a means through which we create the future — a future free of repaying violence for violence and pursuing any desire for revenge. Gardens of Forgiveness are peaceful places for reflection where we acknowledge the hurts that can befall us as human beings, either as individuals or as communities, and then choose to make the world a better place by refusing to reciprocate violence for violence.

Together we reviewed and reflected on the document "A Common Word Between Us." In spite of all these positive efforts we seem to be drowned out by the voices calling for the burning of the Quran and the denial of permission for a Muslim group to build a community center near the World Trade Center site. We see a rise in violence and hate directed toward anyone that looks different. At times it seems like the evil is winning. Even with the death of Osama bin Laden we have not seen an end to the virulent voices.

Ten years have passed since that



(From left) Phyllis Rodriguez and Aicha el-Wafi have a powerful friendship born of unthinkable loss. Rodriguez' son was killed in the World Trade Center attacks on Sept. 11, 2001; el-Wafi's son was convicted of a role in those attacks and is serving a life sentence. In hoping to find peace and forgiveness, these two moms have come to understand and respect one another.

tragic day. I wonder how much we have learned. Are we a better, safer people today? In the decade, we have added new meanings to our vocabulary... words like "justice," now a synonym for death, "Islamaphobia," "radical Islamists" and more. When did we surrender our humanity and allow persons to be tortured in our name in the name of security?

The venomous dialogue in our country has been frightening. Passions have often overrun our rational and better nature during these debates. Perhaps this has not been all bad. We have shown the world that America is a complicated place, but there are voices willing to stand up and defend our values of freedom of speech, freedom of religion for all persons.

I hope we will now take the opportunity, as people of faith, to ask: "What makes for real security?" How do we, as theologian Paul Tillich challenged us some 59 years ago, face our anxieties and connect to our "ground of being" in spite of our fear, not removing fear, but transcending, displacing it in its place with the "courage to be." □

— The Rev. Jonathan M. Barton is the General Minister for the Virginia Council of Churches.

Despite hate mail and death threats, Aldersgate UMC's hospitality has created reconciliation

by the Rev. Jason Micheli

Sept. 11, 2001, is stamped on our generation's collective memory in the same way President Kennedy's assassination was for my parents' generation. Everyone remembers where they were when they heard the news.

I was in the dining hall of my seminary, watching with others on a muted television screen. With no volume, none of us were quite sure if what we were seeing was real.

Now, 10 years removed, in many ways it seems like we never made it to Sept. 12. The vagaries of two long wars, the number of military casualties and civilian dead, the long deployments suffered by military families, the suspicion provoked in airport security lines, and partisan rancor have all worked to do their best to keep our calendars locked on Sept. 11, 2001.

This is the landscape the church has occupied for the past decade. At times the church has succeeded only in mirroring the fear and fractures of the culture; at other times, it has proved to be a faithful irritant to the dominant mood.

Over this past year, our congregation at Aldersgate UMC in Alexandria has welcomed the members of a neighborhood mosque to observe their Friday Jummah prayers in our building while their own building has undergone renovations. What began as the sharing of space has led to Muslim-Christian small groups, faith-sharing forums, much conversation, and not a little controversy.

Our congregation welcomed our needy neighbors without a second thought. Our hospitality was not remarkable in our congregation or community until the media made it so.

Then, my sermon explaining our hospitality was posted on Scot McKnight's "Jesus Creed" blog, where it was soon picked up (and misquoted) by several other outlets. The media noise built to the point where our hospitality was featured on TV's "The Daily Show" with Jon Stewart. We received hate mail and death threats from Christians around the country.

The struggle to adapt was painful but was accompanied by new life: There is the U.S. soldier who had lost both his legs in Iraq but who, in a roomful of Christians and Muslims at our church, testified that the miracle he's experienced isn't that he survived, but that he did so "with no hate in his heart for his enemy." There is the 20-something Muslim woman who told Christian women that, until eating desserts and making chit-chat with them, she'd been afraid her whole life of Christians. There is the funeral I did this winter for a church family. The caretaker who had nursed the deceased



Members of Aldersgate UMC, Alexandria, welcome members of the nearby Muslim Center during a dialogue event held earlier this year.

in the long months before she died is a Muslim woman. The reading they chose for the funeral? The book of Ruth, the story of a presumed enemy nursing one of God's chosen and, through that friendship, finding her way into the story of salvation.

These individual encounters might not seem like much. But this kind of reconciliation has eternal value and God's blessing. □

— The Rev. Jason Micheli is associate pastor at Aldersgate UMC in Alexandria.

Bishop Kammerer to help lead Sept. 11 interfaith service

Virginia Conference United Methodist Bishop Charlene Kammerer will join other regional faith leaders and Richmond Mayor Dwight Jones for an interfaith service on Sept. 11.

The service on the 10th anniversary of 9/11 will be held at 7 p.m. at Temple Beth El, located at 3330 Grove Ave., in Richmond, and will focus on "Memory and Hope."

Participants also will include Rabbi Martin Beifield of Temple Beth Ahabah, Imam Ammar Amonette of the Islamic Center of Virginia, and other members of the faith communities.

Sept. 11, 2001, became a "defining moment in our nation," organizers said. Just two weeks after the attacks, more than 900 people from the Richmond Metro area gathered to express solidarity as a people of faith. □

Wesley and a multifaith society

by the Rev. Brian D. Siegle

The horrific events of an otherwise beautiful and bright September morning 10 years ago will forever be a defining moment in United States and world history. In that span of a day, much of the way we operate in the world changed. The way we relate to other faiths also changed. Our world is a world of multiple faiths vying for the same space and same souls. When we couple this with the distrust that we hear around us fostered by radical segments of faith, the natural reaction is a backlash against any belief that is significantly different from our own.

In Methodism, there has been much talk in recent years about going back to our roots, of reclaiming our historical core of Wesleyan beliefs. So, in light of the prevalence of multireligious expressions in our world today, maybe we should take a reflection back and see what Wesley might have thought on the subject. Our worlds are different, but not as different as we think. In Wesley's day, there were major disagreements among the various expressions of Christianity, and through colonization, the British Empire was becoming exposed to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others.

So what did Wesley think of these various expressions of faith? How do we reconcile the idea of tolerance with the idea that Christ is the one and only way to salvation?

Wesley spoke to some of this in his sermon "Catholic Spirit," which he based on 2 Kings 10:15 (NRSV), "When [Jehu] left there, he met Jehonadab son of Rechab coming to meet him; he greeted him, and said to him, 'Is your heart as true to mine as mine is to yours?'" Jehonadab answered, "It is." Jehu said, "If it is, give me your hand." So he gave him his hand. Jehu took him up with him into the chariot."

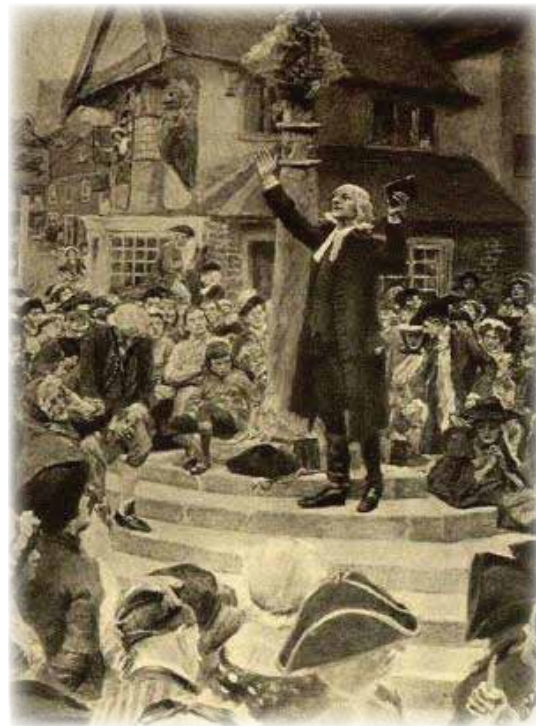
Wesley's focus was twofold. The first, "Is your heart as true to mine as mine is to yours?" This question

was not asking whether or not they agreed, whether or not they had similar opinions, or whether or not they had similar practices. The question is whether or not each had similar conviction of heart regarding his own beliefs, and whether the common conviction allowed room for loving the other.

The question at the heart of ecumenism and multifaith society is, "Does the person next to me have God-given conviction of belief, whether or not his or her expression of Godly conviction is anything like mine?" Out of love, can we view others in the lens of prevenient grace, seeing each person as a child of God? From time to time in history, we humans seem to be great at pointing out differences and fearing that which we do not fully understand. Violence perpetuated in the name of God breeds exactly this kind of fear.

Wesley's second point in this 2 Kings passage was, "If it is, give me your hand." In other words, if the convictions are true and the hearts are right, even if in disagreement over specifics, then there is a common bond that allows mutual respect and support. This is also incredibly important in our contemporary culture. Of course, taking one's hand in mutual support does not mean that one embraces the other's beliefs or blends them together; it simply means that the two can work together in mutual understanding.

In short, Wesley seemed to be in support of working together with all kinds of beliefs, while steadfastly maintaining his own belief. In being able to see adherents of all faiths as fellow children of God, we may open our hearts to strengthen and share our own particular beliefs in a way that might change other hearts. In being faithful to our belief and recognizing the validity of those being faithful



John Wesley, founder of Methodism, preaches to an outdoor crowd. He believed adherents of all faiths were children of God.

to their own beliefs, we strengthen the love of God in our relationships and community.

Is there room for multifaith culture in a Christian understanding? In Wesley's eyes, I believe so. In our increasingly diverse culture, maybe our willingness to work along with those who believe differently is exactly the catalyst needed to fan the spark of Christ's love into something much greater and brighter. If we want to transform the world by making disciples of Jesus Christ, maybe following Wesley's lead of loving more and fearing less is a great place to start. □

— The Rev. Brian Siegel is pastor at New Hope UMC in Saluda.

Sources:

- Wesley, John, "Catholic Spirit," *John Wesley's Sermons, an Anthology*, 1991 Abingdon Press, p. 300-309.
- Runyon, Theodore, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology for Today*, 1998 Abingdon Press, p. 215-221.

A Letter from the Council of Bishops on the Anniversary of Sept. 11 attacks

As we approach another Sept. 11, we are reminded that the world we live in continues to be a fragile place where emotions and tensions run high. There are not many of us who will ever forget where we were on that September morning 10 years ago. We should never forget those whose lives were taken away in the horror of just a few hours.

Sept. 11 should be, for all of us, a day of prayer for peace in this world. It should be a day for quiet remembrance and reflection as we seek to find and live in the ways of peace. We think of Jesus pausing on his way into the holy city of Jerusalem on the day we call Palm Sunday. He wept over the city — not so much for what was about to happen to him, but because the people did not know the things that make for peace (Luke 19:41-42). We suspect he still weeps, looking out over the world we currently inhabit.

Sept. 11 should be a day of prayer for rebuilding and restoring relationships, and for reaching out to find ways to work and live together in this world. It is not a day for burning the holocaust of another faith tradition. Tragically one person has garnered headlines for advocating such a thing. There is nothing of Jesus in such an action. In fact, as we recall, there was a time when the disciples wanted to call down fire from heaven on the perceived enemies for refusing to receive Jesus. No, Jesus said; in fact he “rebuked” those who advocated such a means. (Luke 9:51-55). Such an action is not the way of Jesus, nor the way of peace and love.

There was a meeting in Washington, D.C., of religious leaders of many faith communities. The United Methodist Church and its Council of Bishops was represented by its Executive Secretary, Bishop Neil Irons. The members of the group, in a formal statement, said: “We are committed to building a future in which religious differences no longer lead to hostility or division between communities. Rather, we believe that such diversity can serve to enrich our public discourse about the great moral challenges that face our nation and our planet. On the basis of our shared reflection, we insist that no religion should be judged on the words or actions of those who seek to pervert it through acts of violence; that politicians and members of the media are never justified in exploiting religious differences as a wedge to advance political agendas or ideologies . . . We work together on the basis of deeply held and widely shared values, each supported by the sacred texts of our respective traditions. We acknowledge with gratitude the dialogues between our scholars and religious authorities that have helped us to identify a common understanding of the divine command to love one’s neighbor. Judaism, Christianity and Islam all see an intimate link between faithfulness to God and love of neighbor; a neighbor who in many instances is the stranger in our midst.

“We are convinced that spiritual leaders representing the various faiths in the United States have a moral responsibility to stand together and to denounce categorically derision, misinformation or outright bigotry directed against any religious group in this country. Silence is not an option. Only by taking this stand, can spiritual leaders fulfill the highest calling of our respective faiths, and thereby help to create a safer and stronger America for all of our people.”

We urge all of us to approach the remembrance of Sept. 11 in prayer and hope for peace; and in resolving to do everything we can individually and collectively to live the way of Jesus. It is our prayer that this weekend be filled with prayers and not the fires of hatred and irrational rage. □

Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster, President, Council of Bishops
Bishop Neil L. Irons, Executive Secretary, Council of Bishops



United Methodist Men invite churches to host 'Strength for Service' Sunday

On a Sunday this month, we will mark the 10-year anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. This year also marks the rebirth of "Strength for Service to God and Country." It has been 10 years since the devotional book by the same name was reprinted and began being distributed to U.S. military and service personnel.

The General Commission on United Methodist Men is the champion behind *Strength for Service*, published by United Methodist Publishing House. More than 445,000 copies of this book have so far been distributed overseas, but hundreds of thousands more are needed for those currently serving stateside and abroad.

In the years since Sept. 11, 2001, a new generation of American military personnel has been deployed to war zones around the world. In a time of war, those called into the service of others often turn to spiritual resources for perspective and the strength to persevere. As individuals standing in harm's way by the circumstances of war consider their eternal destiny, published materials that answer life's tough questions are urgently needed and remain in especially high demand.

Strength for Service was brought back to life in 2002 by an Eagle Scout named Evan Hunsberger. After discovering a worn copy of the volume that had belonged to his World War II corpsman grandfather, Hunsberger devoted himself to the republishing of *Strength for Service*. The original book had been published in 1942 by Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, an imprint of the Methodist Publishing House. A popular devotional for armed forces personnel during World War II and the Korean War, one million copies of *Strength for Service* had been distributed before the book fell out of print in the 1950s. Updating its contents only slightly to reflect contemporary language and culture, the newly republished volume remains true to its original spirit

Nearly a half million copies of Strength for Service devotional book have been given to military personnel such as those pictured.



while adding reflections and devotions from contemporary religious leaders. Today, *Strength for Service* is available in three colors and a uniform new typesetting, acknowledging the old while addressing present day concerns. *Strength for Service* has found an audience in military personnel deployed throughout the world in a time of war; more than 300,000 copies have been distributed since Hunsberger's original goal was achieved.

Following the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the General Commission on United Methodist Men has been actively raising awareness and financial support to supply a copy to every man and woman serving in the U.S. armed forces worldwide. As steward of the project, the organization has begun developing plans for subsequent versions of *Strength for Service* that would appeal to public servants and other civilians.

In this anniversary year, churches are invited to consider hosting a Strength for Service Sunday to provide devotional books for military service personnel. This year, because of the anniversary of Sept. 11, participating churches also will receive

books to distribute in their congregations and community to military, police officers, firefighters and other local service personnel.

For more on the Strength for Service program, visit <www.StrengthforService.org>, or call 1-866-297-4312. □

— Rich Peck,
General Commission on United Methodist Men

Discipleship Board offers resources for marking Sept. 11

The General Board of Discipleship has prepared an extensive list of resources for marking the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, which include prayers, litanies, worship service outlines and hymns.

To view a list of nearly 50 resources, visit <www.gbod.org/site/c.nhLRJ2PMKsG/b.7536271/k.8D45/Remembering_911.htm>. The General Board also offers similar resources for dealing with terrorism and violence at <www.gbod.org/site/c.nhLRJ2PMKsG/b.6763167/k.5875/Terrorism_and_Violence.htm>. □

Misconceptions about Islam

Muslims are violent, terrorists and extremists.

This is by far the biggest misconception of Islam, given unfairly by stereotyping and the public image that the media gives. Has anyone else noticed how when a specific group of people attack another group of people it is labeled as a 'hate crime', but when a Muslim opens fire on anybody it is quickly regarded as 'terrorism'? Many political dictators and officials or extremist groups use the name of Islam as a strategy to garner followers and attention when many of their practices go against the true basis of Islam.

In fact, the religion denounces the killing of innocent people over and over again. The Quran says: "If they seek peace, then seek you peace. And trust in God for He is the One that heareth and knoweth all things." War, therefore, is the last resort, and is subject to the rigorous conditions laid down by the sacred law.

The term "jihad" literally means "struggle." Muslims believe that there are two kinds of jihad. The other 'jihad' is the inner struggle of the soul which everyone wages against egotistic desires for the sake of attaining inner peace.

Muslims worship a different God.

Allah is simply the Arabic word for God. Allah for Muslims is the greatest and most inclusive of the names of God. It is an Arabic word of rich meaning, denoting the one and only God and ascribing no partners to Him. It is exactly the same word which the Jews use for God (*eloh*), the word which Jesus Christ used in Aramaic when he prayed to God. In short, Allah is the God of Abraham, the same God worshiped by Muslims, Christians and Jews.

Islam is a religion only for Arabs.

The common image of a Muslim is a turbaned dark Arab man with a long beard. However this image is part of the minority of Muslims. The Muslim population of the world is around 1.2 billion. They are a vast range of races, nationalities, and cultures from around the globe – from the Philippines to Nigeria – they are united by their common Islamic faith. Arabs are only 15 percent of the world's Muslim population. Another common misconception is that all Arabs are Muslims. While the vast majority of Arabs are Muslims (75 percent), there are many other religions that Arabs practice, including Christianity.

Muhammad was the founder of Islam and Muslims worship him.

Muhammad was born in Makkah in the year 570. Since his father died before his birth, and his mother shortly afterwards, he was raised by his uncle from the tribe of Quraysh. As he grew up, he became known for his truthfulness, generosity and sincerity, so that he was sought after for his ability to arbitrate in disputes. Muhammad was of a deeply religious nature, and had long detested the decadence of his society.

It became his habit to meditate from time to time in the Cave of Hira near Makkah. At the age of 40, while engaged in a meditative retreat, Muhammad received his first revelation from God through the angel Gabriel. This revelation, which continued for 23 years, is known as the Quran. From the time he began to recite the words he heard from Gabriel, and to preach the truth which God had revealed to him, he and his small group of followers suffered bitter persecution. This grew so fierce that in the year 622 God gave them the command to emigrate. This event, the Hijra (migration), in which they left Makkah for the city of Medina, marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. After several years, the prophet and his followers were able to return to Makkah, where they forgave their enemies and established Islam.

While Muhammad was chosen to deliver the message, he is not considered the "founder" of Islam, since Muslims consider Islam to be the same divine guidance sent to all peoples before. Muslims believe all the prophets from Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus, etc., were all sent with divine guidance for their peoples. Every prophet was sent to

his own people, but Muhammad was sent to all of mankind.

Islam oppresses women.

The image of a woman wearing a veil from head to toe, a woman who gets unfair justice or a woman who is not allowed to drive is an all too familiar notion when it comes to treatment of women in Islam. And while there are Muslim countries in the world that do implement many harsh rulings against women, this should not be portrayed as Islamic law. Many of these countries have cultural differences that go against the teachings of Islam. It should be noted that during pre-Islam Arabia, women were used for fornication only and had no independence. The birth of a daughter in a family was considered humiliating and the practice of female infanticide was uncontrolled.

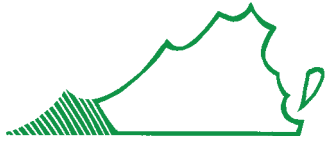
Islam gave back many human rights to the woman. A Muslim woman is allowed to reject and accept any suitor for marriage and has the right to seek divorce. There is nothing in Islam that forbids a Muslim woman from exiting her house and is allowed to drive. Also in regards to education, a woman is obligated to seek knowledge.

Muslims don't believe in Jesus or any other prophets.

Although many lay Muslims and many Western scholars and writers hold the view that Islam began with Muhammad, this contradicts the Quran, which says that Muhammad simply was the last prophet who preached the same faith that Adam preached to his children. Similarly Noah, Abraham and Moses are all prophets of Allah as well. According to Muslim belief, Jesus is one of the greatest messengers of God. One cannot be a Muslim without believing in the virgin birth and the miracles of Jesus Christ. Jesus is also mentioned in verses of the Quran and is often used as an example of good virtue and character. □

– From the www.bridgestv.com blog





Virginia

Immigration issues is hot topic of Bishop's Convocation set for Oct. 1

Bishop Charlene Kammerer has called for a convocation event on immigration issues, to be held Saturday, Oct. 1, at Grace United Methodist Church in Manassas.

The site is not chosen by chance. Manassas is in the heart of Prince William County, where some of the nation's toughest laws against undocumented immigrants were passed four years ago. The county board approved a law allowing police officers to ask people whether they are in the U.S. illegally. If they were found to be non-citizens, the new law also offered authority to request their deportation by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency.

The convocation event, which is being planned by the Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy and its Working Group, will run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., with lunch provided.

Special guest speaker will be Jim Perdue, who is working in the Desert Southwest Conference (Arizona and parts of New Mexico) on immigration issues.

Perdue is a West Virginia native who is an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church, currently a member of the Iowa Conference. In 1994 he was consecrated as a missionary by the General Board of Global Ministries, and in 2001 he was consecrated as a missionary by the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry. He served as a missionary in Argentina from 1994 through 1999 and has served as a National Plan missionary since 2001. He is currently assigned to a partnership between the National Plan and the Desert Southwest Conference as Missionary for Immigration and Border Issues and is living in Phoenix.

"Immigration will continue to be one of the major realities facing our church as we walk through the 21st century," Perdue says. "But more than this, learning how to welcome the immigrant is a ministry into which God clearly calls us and to which the Bible points us at every turn."

For the past two quadrenniums, The United Methodist Church has declared its support for comprehensive reform of U.S. immigration law, and it has called all its agencies, annual conferences and local churches to become actively involved in this ministry.

To see where The United Methodist Church stands on immigration issues, visit http://desertsouthwestconference.org/churchmembers/issues/immigration/the_umc_position.

Grace UMC is located at 9750 Wellington Road in Manassas.



Jim Perdue will speak on immigration at the 2011 Bishop's Convocation. (UMNS photo by Amanda Bachus)

For more information, visit the conference Web site at www.vaumc.org under "Event Calendar" and the Oct. 1 date, or contact Martha Stokes, conference director of Leadership and Inclusivity, at (804) 521-1154, or by e-mail at marthastokes@vaumc.org. □

Five conference churches to lead

The next 5 Talent Academy teaching event is set for Oct. 6 at Oak Grove United Methodist Church in Chesapeake. "Evangelism: Best Practices," will be the focus, but there will not be a well-known expert speaker brought in from outside the conference. The leadership will be drawn from churches within the Virginia Conference that are finding success with their evangelism practices.

"We are drawing from churches within the conference so we can explore what approaches, strategies, ideas work best in the contexts that are nearest and dearest to the heart of the Virginia Conference," said the Rev. Lynne Caldwell, part of the organizing committee. "These five churches are already among participants in 5 Talent Academy, and are among those which are showing the most fruitful results in their ministries."

Organizers are calling this a "taste and see" event, meaning that churches not currently in the 5 Talent Academy can come and see what the program is all about, and discern if they would like to participate.

Registration will start at 9 a.m. The program, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., will include worship, plenary, lunch and time with peer groups.

The cost is \$25 per person, which includes lunch. Pre-registration is encour-

Camp Rainbow participants learn to be 'green'

For the past 22 years the Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center (VUMAC) comes alive with laughter, joy, trust, giving, security, dedication, hope and so much more as campers and volunteers arrive for Camp Rainbow Connection. This year was no exception.

Camp Rainbow Connection is a week-long camp held in July and again in August for individuals with intellectual disabilities. A ministry of the Commission on Disabilities of the Virginia Conference, it has been in operation since 1985. In 1989, the camp began meeting in Blackstone at VUMAC.

"Having the campers and volunteers from Camp Rainbow Connection at Blackstone is truly rewarding," said VUMAC Executive Director Sam McCracken. "Each day while they are here, I look forward to being greeted by the biggest smiles and the warmest hearts."

Campers participate in a variety of activities including Bible class, music, arts and crafts, games, dancing and special activities. Camp Rainbow is a continuation of Christ's ministry where campers and staff of all races and religions experience Christian love.

Throughout the week, campers find at the end of the rainbow unconditional love and a sincere gift of respect. For

(Right): Volunteer Abby Fines assists camper John in making a wreath from recycled church bulletins in Art and Crafts. (Below): The Recycled Drain Pipe Band composed of staff volunteers carried on the theme of "It's Easy Being Green" in a unique way.



many of the campers, this is their only experience yearly being apart from their family or caregiver. The objectives of Camp Rainbow Connection are to demonstrate Christian love with compassion and acceptance; provide opportunities

for campers to experience fun, fellowship and Christian teachings; and experience a week where persons with disabilities can work together as a team.

This year 120 Camp Rainbow Connection campers and 107 volunteers came to Blackstone, with the theme embracing Kermit

the Frog's battle with "It is not easy to be green." Campers believed, instead, that "It is easy being green," when green means taking care of God's creation.

Eight sets of recycling bins and planters for herbs were made by the campers and given to VUMAC.

"We were honored and humbled by their gifts," said McCracken. "Through their generosity, we will become greener!"

"Camp Rainbow Connection is also an example for our churches and communities," said conference Director of Leadership and Inclusivity Martha Stokes, who is the camp coordinator. "Each year, I remind the staff before we leave that their 'job' doesn't end when the campers leave. We are to help our churches and communities see what the world can be like when unconditional love abounds, when differences in appearance, abilities and backgrounds do not matter. If only our world understood and could model the same love and grace, what a different world it would be." □

— Jennifer Wall,
director of Development for VUMAC

next 5 Talent Academy in October

aged. Registration may be completed online at <www.vaumc.org> under "Event Calendar" and the date.

The five churches leading the event (and their pastors) are: Arlington Temple UMC (Cathy Abbott), Culpeper UMC (Randy Orndorff), the Hispanic ministry at Floris UMC (Tom Berlin), Salem UMC in Gloucester (Rita Louise Staul), and Wilderness Community UMC (Keith Boyette).

Each church is preparing a five-minute video, and will make an additional 15-minute presentation. The video presentations will be distributed on a single DVD at the event. The focus of their presentations will cover these topics:

1. How do we define evangelism?
2. How do we equip laity in our church to do evangelism?
3. How does our church reach out to the unchurched persons in our communities?

The 5 Talent Academy is a key part of the conference's "All Things New" core strategy. For more information, contact the Rev. Mark Ogren in the conference office of Congregational Excellence, at (804) 521-1156, or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 156; or by e-mail at <MarkOgren@vaumc.org>.

Oak Grove UMC is located at 472 North Battlefield Blvd. in Chesapeake. □

Conference clergy, spouses to participate in 'Healthy Monday' program

What does Monday mean to you? Are you dragging from the weekend? Determined to get back on that diet? Resolving to start going to the gym? Starting Sept. 12, several hundred active and retired clergy and their spouses will begin working to make Monday "the day all health breaks loose!"

They will be participating in a one-year pilot program called "Healthy Monday," a national movement of

people and organizations

that dedicate the first day of every week to better health. The goal for the next year is to pilot the program among a small group of Virginia organizations, and if successful to make it available to organizations across the country.

The Virginia Conference will be one of four groups taking part. With clergy and spouses spread across most of Virginia in settings ranging from very rural to very urban, working alone or as part of a larger ministry staff, and varying in ages from late 20s to "well-seasoned," makes a very unique target population.

The concept behind "Healthy Monday" is relatively simple. Participants will receive clinical testing in order to compile a biometric baseline (height, weight, blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol and triglycerides), then complete a Health Risk Assessment and submit it, along with their other medical information, to Johns Hopkins. A Johns Hopkins representative works with participants to identify their personal health and wellness goals and objectives. Then, every Monday, each participant receives an e-mail message containing tips tailored to her/his health interests, designed to help them work toward their goals and to begin their week on a healthy note. They also receive access to a Web site that helps them track their progress – while

promoting exercise, good nutrition and other healthful behaviors.

The Rev. Tom Joyce and his wife, Eleanor, are among those enrolled.

"When I first learned about 'Healthy Monday' I was excited," Joyce said, "not only because I believed this program could help me to attain a higher level of wellness, but because it could be of assistance to Eleanor as well."

Why Monday? Simply put, it's the January of the week, the perfect time for a fresh

start. Research conducted by the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future shows that people set their health intentions for the week on Monday, and are more likely to stick with their regimens if they get a healthy start to their week. "Healthy Monday" also encourages small, doable steps – and if you fall off the wagon, there's always another Monday around the corner.

"Current research shows that sending health messages, particularly on the first day of the week, has the potential to change a person's health behavior," said Dr. Lawrence Cheskin, director of the Johns Hopkins Weight Management Center. "We are excited and grateful to the members of the Virginia Conference for taking part in our research project. The results will help provide stronger insight into understanding some of the best ways to encourage people to improve and maintain a healthy lifestyle."

This program is being made available at no cost to Virginia Conference clergy and spouses through collaboration among Virginia Conference Wellness Ministries (VCWM), WellPoint/Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. In a recently released survey of the best hospitals in America, *US News & World Report* rated Johns Hopkins number one for the 21st straight year.



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Healthy Monday Project

Anthem

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Boyd Lucas, spouse of the Rev. Debra Lucas, walks on a treadmill as part of his and Debra's "Healthy Monday" routine. Debra is pastor of St. Peter's UMC in Montpelier (Richmond District).

This is not only a tremendous opportunity for our clergy and spouses, but everybody wins. Johns Hopkins gets to conduct important wellness research, Anthem gets to encourage and facilitate healthy practices, VCWM gets information it needs to deliver the best possible wellness programs to our constituents, and our clergy and spouses reap the benefits of a year-long, personalized relationship with Johns Hopkins.

Don Yesukaitis, chair of the conference Wellness Ministries board, sees significant promise in "Healthy Monday."

"The joining together of our active and retired clergy and their spouses in the 'Healthy Monday' program, with outstanding healthcare providers like Johns Hopkins and Anthem, is a true blessing and represents a tremendous opportunity to improve and maintain good health and overall wellness," Yesukaitis said. □

— The Rev. Charlie Reynolds,
Virginia Conference Wellness Ministries
executive director

Reflections from 'Sojourn to Sacredness: A Theological Ecological Pilgrimage'

During the summer, seven young adult United Methodists set out on a weeklong trip into the woods, a sojourn developed by the Rev. Pat Watkins, executive director of Caretakers of God's Creation, and the Rev. Gary Heaton, senior pastor of Front Royal UMC. The trip was given the name "Sojourn to Sacredness: a Theological Ecological Pilgrimage," to illustrate the contemplative nature of our mission: to create deeper relationship with God, nature and neighbor.

On the first night, we gathered for an informal Communion service on a rocky clearing overlooking the Shenandoah Valley. Our two young adult clergy, Drew Willson and Jessie Squires, led us in the breaking of bread together. It was a beautiful moment of communion not just with God, but also with each other and with nature.

The next day we began with a two-day hike along the Appalachian Trail, followed by a two-day canoe trip down the Shenandoah River. Along the way we were met by various individuals who shared with us their stories, experiences and convictions about ecological as well as faith issues. All those we encountered, whether hikers, homemakers, fishermen, farmers or environmentalists, were fellow sojourners as we sought understanding and peace within the sometimes chaotic context in which we live.

The messages and stories we heard stirred within us a mixture of concern and hope. We were offered a holistic picture of the ecological degradation of the earth, but also caught glimpses of its restoration, in surprising places.

One of those surprising places we visited was an Environmental Protection Agency Superfund site. Formerly the location of one of the world's largest rayon plants (440 acres), the operation was shut down in 1988 after massive pollution

by Nina Voli

to the river and groundwater system.

As we walked around the site, we heard the tragic story of the plant, and the devastating impact it had on the local community — both when it was in operation and after it closed — causing thousands to lose their jobs. At the same time we saw all the projects under way to sustainably reclaim the land where the plant once stood. There were several large fields where buildings used to be, which already had been turned over and replanted with local grasses. As we looked across a field of vibrant green, sprinkled with multitudes of yellow poppies, it was hard to imagine that this used to be the site of such destruction.

We were excited to spot a young deer, prancing through the field in front of us, against the background of the beautiful Shenandoah River. Something about the image spoke deeply to me and gave me a renewed sense of hope. It reminded me that God has the power to restore even the most terrible and horrifying things into something beautiful. That God has not given up on this world, and therefore neither should we.

"She has her home back," I thought to myself. And we too, like that deer, are in the process of getting our home back.

For years now, many people and institutions, secular and religious alike, have come to realize the importance of environmental stewardship and responsibility. Yet, as Christians, we have something unique to offer to the conversation. This is because we believe in a God who called creation good and who entrusted us with its caretaking. And not only that, but we also profess hope in a God of resurrection, who has not left the earth to self-destruct. Just as Christ was brought from death to life, so too will the earth be restored for the glory of its Creator.

If we as the church are to participate in this restoration, there are several steps we must take involving relationship. The truth is that we cannot fully love God and love our neighbor as ourselves until we recognize that our relationship with creation is inextricably connected to both of the other two. This sojourn was just one small step we are able to take towards affirming these and other truths in our own hearts, and seeking to live them out. □

— Nina Voli is a student at Gordon College in Massachusetts. She spent the summer interning with Caretakers of God's Creation while also working at Shalom Farms, a United Methodist project that addresses food security in inner-city Richmond.




(From left): Sean Westrom, Ana Clara, Dylan Cawthorne, Nina Voli, Lisa Jenkins, Drew Willson, Jessie Squires and Sinval Filho are ready for their weeklong journey.



Preserving Methodist history

In recognition of the need for on-site information about William Watters, the first American-born itinerant Methodist minister, the Board of the William Watters Foundation had three bronze plaques installed. One plaque is a duplicate of the fading inscription on the monument. Another supplies brief information about his work. The third lists the names of known persons buried in the Adams, Wren, Watters Cemetery located in McLean. The plaques were dedicated in a ceremony led by the Rev. Kathleene Card (far left) and the Rev. James S. Sprouse (second from left).

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Summer mission to Mozambique is

***Editor's note:** This summer, a team including the Rev. Clarence Brown and others from Annandale UMC, St. Thomas UMC, Lane Memorial UMC and Concord UMC, went to visit United Methodist ministries in Cambine, Mozambique. The team included five college students. Here are one student's impressions:*

Every opportunity in life is a challenge from God. You can take the opportunity, not knowing exactly what to expect, or you can shy away from the unfamiliar. I may never know precisely why God sent me to Mozambique, but I know for a fact that this trip changed my life.

If I could choose one word to describe the people I met in Cambine, it would have to be "resilient." On the ride from the airport to Cambine, it was clear that our presumptions about Africa were incorrect. Yes, there is suffering, but it's amazing to see how suffering is surpassed by truly living.

We drove along the single government-run paved road in Mozambique and then turned onto a dusty road that was extremely bumpy. That's when I knew we were in for the trip of a lifetime. We arrived in Cambine at sunset and we were introduced to Julio who helped translate for us throughout the week. On Sunday, we attended our first church service in Cambine. Our cars were met by a group of people singing in unison and clapping. Their service was so joyful. I never could have imagined what God had in store for me, but that celebration of God's love marked the beginning.

That day, Julio invited Erin and me to his home to play with his children: Telusa, Tanya and Claudia. At first I was hesitant because I've never really been crazy about kids, but we went. That was the best decision because Julio's children taught me more about myself than I've ever learned before. We started out playing UNO [card game] as they practiced their English on us. Every day after we finished sanding and painting we would venture to Julio's house to play. I hadn't played in a very long time, but those girls taught me how to live freely. We played the "country game" which I

had never played before; we tasted sugar cane; we played ridiculous amounts of UNO; but most of all we laughed. It's amazing how people from totally different countries and of different ages can have so much fun together. Our cultures are different, our languages are even different, but our hearts are the same.

Toward the middle of the week, we visited the widows in Massinga. In Mozambique, when a woman's husband dies, people assume she is a witch and she is abused within her community. Massinga serves as a refuge for the widows. When we arrived at the refuge, we were met by singing once more and each of the widows greeted us. We all prayed together, before the team passed out sweaters and wooden crosses to them. The widows immediately put on the sweaters, even though it was an extremely hot day. The best part was when they all put their hoods up and tied the strings in



bows beneath their chins. They were so appreciative of the simplest gesture of kindness. The widows even asked Viktoria to pray for Sue and Rachel, even though they were unable to come on the trip, because the ladies remembered them from the previous

a life-changing experience

year. The most touching part was washing the widow's feet. Each time I looked at their feet, tough from years of hard work, and as I was washing their feet, I would look up, into their eyes. Each of the widows smiled and spoke to me in Xitswa. Even though I was unable to speak to each of them, I believe we understood each other.

When we arrived at the orphanage in Cambine, a bunch of children were chasing a chicken and the rest were working or playing in the yard. We all played "Duck, Duck, Goose," and I

each other like a family, the older ones looking after the younger ones.

At the end of the week, when it was time to part from our new friends, it was 10 times harder than I thought it would be. As we prepared to leave, the whole experience suddenly felt surreal. I never thought I'd go to Africa, and I never expected to fall in love with the country. I couldn't hold in all the emotions, and as we drove away, I told myself this wouldn't be my first and last trip to Mozambique. I decided that I was going back next

year. As incredible as it may seem, I believe that God needs me there, so I'm going to go.

I fully realize how much I take for granted and how much I miss working within my community. I decided to start volunteering at CHAT (Church Hill Activities and Tutoring). Church Hill is an impoverished area of Richmond, and I think God is calling me to start making a difference

here in Richmond and abroad. Our mission in Mozambique opened my eyes to not only the suffering there but also within my own community. The people of Cambine helped me realize the things that truly matter in life. I realize that I don't need television or even the Internet to entertain myself. I don't have to straighten my hair every day, and I can find friends anywhere if I just remain open to new ideas. Now I'm thinking more about my future and where I should be in the next few years. I still see myself as a writer, but I want to work abroad bringing to light the stories of people that often go unnoticed. □

— *Alix Hines is a junior mass communications and political science major at Virginia Commonwealth University. From Altavista, she attends Lane Memorial UMC.*



(Above): Alix Hines offers a hug to a new friend. (Left): Andrew Hudgins plays a game with the children at Cambine orphanage.



started asking them their names. Communication wasn't exactly easy because of the language barrier, but we quickly learned how to ask

the children what their names were. One little girl, Maria, always came up to me and grabbed my hand, leading me off to play. We played group games, jumped rope and played soccer. It was beautiful to see how the children at the orphanage treated

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Blacksburg UMC member among young adults doing social justice summer internship

Fourteen young adults worked in Washington, D.C., this summer in the Ethnic Young Adult (EYA) internship program of the United Methodist General Board of Church & Society (GBCS), including Minoka Gunsekera, 20, a member at Blacksburg UMC.

They worked in nonprofit and nongovernmental social justice organizations in the nation's capital for two months.

Gunsekera is a student at Virginia Tech, studying Public & Urban Affairs, with a concentration in Public Policy and Non-Profit Management. She is an intern with Faith & Politics Institute, which has served hundreds of members of Congress and congressional staff by offering pilgrimages, reflection groups, retreats and public forums.

Her family heritage is Sri Lankan. She's a member of the Wesley Fellowship at Virginia Tech.

Participants must be passionate

about social justice and active in the denomination, according to the Rev. Neal Christie, GBCS assistant general secretary for Education & Leadership Formation. Christie, an EYA intern himself in 1984, said the internship is The United Methodist Church's only leadership development program with a public policy and advocacy focus that reaches out to under-represented racial and ethnic young adults of color.

"This summer we have students from across the United States as well as three who study at Africa University," he said. "This is the first time we have had such significant involvement across the global church."

The interns come from 11 United Methodist annual conferences, and three from the Congo Central Conference. They were housed at George Washington University, attended church together each Sunday, and met for



Minoka Gunsekera in front of the Capitol building in Washington, D.C.

weekly evening devotions and Bible studies.

Money for the program comes from World Service funds, missional giving from local churches. More information can be obtained from Christie at (202) 488-5611 or <nchristie@umc-gbcs.org>. Application details are available at <www.umc-gbcs.org> under the "Leadership Development" tab. □

—Wayne Rhodes, GBCS

UMFS

The Great Depression was a time of intense hardship for many, including families in Virginia. Often, families could not afford to take care of the children. The Virginia Methodist Children's Home, now UMFS, became home to a number of children who had nowhere else to turn.

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Upcoming Events – for all ages!

SEPTEMBER

Kid's Work Camp, Sept. 30–Oct. 2.

Westview on the James, United Methodist camp in Goochland. This weekend camp for 2nd- to 6th-graders focuses on outreach and mission opportunities designed just for kids and their leaders. Some projects occur on-site, but most groups will head out into the Goochland area to assist with home repair, yard work, visits to the elderly and more. Any type of children's group is invited to join in – church groups, Girl or Cub Scouts, or even just a group of friends. Campers will worship together, play together and, of course, work together. Cost: \$67/person. For more information and to register, visit <www.westviewonthejames.org>.

OCTOBER

Middle School Mission Weekend 2, Oct. 14–16.

Westview on the James, United Methodist camp in Goochland. The second of two opportunities for middle school students to be involved in mission and help them understand what it means to be the hands and feet of Christ. Throughout the weekend, middle school youth will put their faith into action as they serve the people of the local community through small home repairs and lawn care. These families do not have the financial and/or physical means to do such maintenance or repairs to their homes, and the work of the middle school youth will help to keep these families safer, warmer and drier. Come and share God's love with others through this mission weekend. Cost: \$115/participant. For more information and to register, visit the "Event Calendar" section at <www.vaumc.org>. **Registration deadline is Oct. 3.**

Westview AfterHours, Oct. 28–30.

Westview on the James, United Methodist camp in Goochland. This event, for 7th- to 10th-graders, is a camp for teens who like to stay up all night and sleep late. Join the Westview staff for

camp activities, worship, Bible study and so much more. Cost: \$95/person. For more information and to register, visit <www.westviewonthejames.org>. **Registration deadline is Oct. 20.**

NOVEMBER

UMMen Spiritual Retreat, Nov. 4–6.

Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center, Blackstone. All men are encouraged to attend this 34th Annual Virginia Conference spiritual retreat. Keynote speaker will be the Rev. Rob Renfro, pastor of Adult Discipleship at The Woodlands UMC, an 8,500-member congregation just north of Houston, Texas. The retreat topic will be "More," because there is more going on in this world than most men know, their mission is more important than they can imagine ... and what God desires to do through them is more powerful than they

would ever dream. To download a registration form with costs and deadlines, visit the "Events Calendar" at <www.vaumc.org>. For more information, contact David Bean, vice president of Spiritual Life, by e-mail at <david_bean@vawp.uscourts.gov>, or by phone at (540) 718-2752 or visit the Web at <www.vacumm.org>.

DECEMBER

Winter Camp, Dec. 9–11. Westview on the James, United Methodist camp in Goochland. This event is for 7- to 15-year-olds. With a variety of activities and a focus on Advent and what it means to wait for Christ's birth, this weekend is the perfect way to connect with the meaning of Christmas. \$109/person. For more information and to register, visit <www.westviewonthejames.org>.

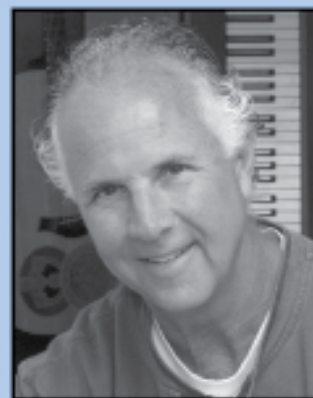
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Nation & World

Virginians participate in World Methodist Conference

by Larry Davies

More than 2,000 representatives, including six of us from the Virginia Conference, entered The World Methodist Conference in Durban, South Africa, during the first week in August. Led by the Africa University Choir, we sang a South African song, "Siyahamba" and clapped as we welcomed the parade of banners symbolizing Methodists from nearly 60 countries and from every continent except Antarctica.

"Siyahamba ekukha nyen' kwen khos. Siyahamba ekukha nyen' kwen khos."

"We are marching in the light of God. We are marching in the light of God."

In addition to singing South African songs, we also were challenged to learn South African words to share with our friends and family as we returned home.

- *Ubuntu*: Integration of life or "we are one."
- *Amandla*: this is energy and power as in the *amandla* of God's Holy Spirit.
- *Ubuntu*: "I am because you are." A promise of fellowship. We will *ubuntu* together.

The Rev. Ivan Abrahams, presiding bishop of the Methodist Church in Southern Africa and newly elected General Secretary of the World Methodist Council, welcomed the delegates and introduced us to South Africa. He said, "South Africa is a place of myths, legends and folklore where nothing, not even the horrors of apartheid, could break the indomitable spirit of a resilient and passionate people who, like Paul and Silas, knew how to sing at midnight. We sing when we are happy and celebrate; we sing when we are sad and face conflicts and challenges. We sing at birth and sing in death. We are deeply spiritual people."



"Here, you will see extreme wealth and grinding poverty exist... side by side. Here, if you look and listen carefully to the beautiful sights, sounds, art and culture, Africa will come alive and you will experience something new. It is my pleasure to welcome you home – to the cradle of humanity," Abrams said.

World Methodist Council President John Barrett spoke of three traditional areas of Methodist mission – evangelism, education and social action – and how they have progressed since they last met, five years ago.

- **Evangelism** – "During these past five years we have seen significant growth in our numbers and it has been encouraging to see the continued work of training ministers and encouraging congregations in mission work."
- **Education** – "The education committee has identified 775 Methodist colleges and seminaries worldwide, and is helping them identify what their distinctive task is as Methodist institutions in the 21st century."
- **Social Action** – "This committee has continued to focus our thoughts on the United Nations Millennium Development

(Left): The choir from Africa University in Zimbabwe sings during opening worship at the World Methodist Conference in Durban, South Africa. (Below, L-R): Virginia Conference district superintendents Brad Phillips and Larry Davies participate in a Stop Hunger Now event during the conference. (Photos by Ken Howle, Lake Junaluska Assembly)



Goals and particularly to encourage concern for the environment."

We met at Central Methodist Church, burrowed in the heart of the downtown sprawl, surrounded by street vendors and small businesses. From the outside, the church looked more like an office building, but as soon as you walked in the door, you knew God was in this holy place.

The conference logo (shown above) uses the baobab tree, often called Africa's "Big Tree." The baobab tree is revered in Africa for its medicinal and healing properties. In ancient times, leaders would gather under the "Big Tree" to make important decisions. Not only did the tree provide shelter, but it also was believed that the spirit of the tree would help them make wise decisions. □

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

12 million caught in food crisis in Horn of Africa

The level of severe malnutrition in the Horn of Africa worries even seasoned aid workers like Maurice Bloem.

Church World Service (CWS), the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), and other members of the faith-based ACT Alliance are coordinating their response to the hunger crisis – deepened by civil strife and the worst drought in decades – that is affecting 11 million to 12 million people in Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti.

A July 22 report by the Global Nutrition Cluster, a United Nations inter-agency standing committee, showed the prevalence of “global acute malnutrition” among the population of Somalia ranged from 23.8 to 55 percent – an estimate that Bloem, deputy director of CWS, said he considered “really alarming.”

Anecdotal stories that CWS staff have heard through their office in Kenya and through the U.S. network of those resettled from Somalia and Kenya paint the same picture.

There are two declared areas of famine in Somalia. “It’s heartbreaking, (these) stories of people walking for 25 days, having lost half of their families, having survived by drinking their own urine,” Bloem said. “That’s the situation we’re talking about.”

Problems with food shortages in the Horn of Africa have been building over the years but came to a “critical mass” in

recent months, said Melissa Crutchfield, UMCOR executive for international emergency response.

“This is not a sudden onset disaster, but it’s one that is finally getting the media attention that it needs to generate awareness and the subsequent support,” she added.

UMCOR is appealing for donations to help the relief agency and its partners address the Horn of Africa crisis. UMCOR’s board of directors approved four grants for \$20,000 each to support:

1) CWS-implemented work in the Mwingi and Kibwezi areas of Kenya, which includes five months of immediate relief measures, such as family food packages and nutritional supplements for young children, and initiatives to improve food security and livelihoods;

2) ACT Alliance members in Ethiopia responding through food distributions and food for work, malaria prevention and capacity building;

3) ACT Alliance members in Somalia providing for a variety of emergency

needs – food, shelter, clothing and water – along with long-term

assistance to promote agricultural, income-generating activities;

4) GlobalMedic, bringing in water purification tablets to Kenya and Somalia to provide 9.6 million liters of clean drinking water as well as purifier sachets for an additional 1.85 million liters of clean water.

Crutchfield said that UMCOR also is discussing cooperative efforts with interfaith partners, such as Muslim Aid, which have better access to some of the communities affected by the crisis.

CWS, which has launched its own appeal for the Horn of Africa, also is supporting the emergency response in Somalia by fellow ACT Alliance members Lutheran World Federation and Norwegian Church Aid. Support in Ethiopia is going to response efforts by the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission, a longtime CWS partner.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, an ACT Alliance member and a full communion partner of The United Methodist Church, has contributed \$400,000 to relief efforts through the Lutheran World Federation and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church’s commission.

In the two regions of southern Somalia where famine has been declared, more than two people per 10,000 die each day, according to the Global Nutrition Cluster report. No improvement is expected before the next harvest at the end of the year.

A huge wave of people, mostly women and children, are fleeing the country. An average of 1,300 Somalis arrive in Ethiopia and 1,700 arrive in Kenya each day seeking assistance, the report said. The long-established Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, originally intended for 90,000 occupants, now has 440,000, Bloem pointed out, and “it’s increasing every day.”

Countries that border Somalia are suffering with their own droughts and are hard-pressed to respond. Districts in northern Kenya have reported rates of global acute malnutrition at 15 to 30 percent. Elevated rates of malnutrition also have been found in Ethiopia. □

– Linda Bloom,
United Methodist News Service



(Right) A malnourished Somali child living in a refugee camp in Kenya. (Photo by the Associated Press)



(Left) A child stands in front of fresh graves dug for victims of the famine in eastern Africa. (Photo by Oxfam International)

'Ministry on wheels' repairs churches

While most people use their recreational vehicles (RVs) for cross-country vacations, trips to Yosemite or other relaxing getaways, several United Methodists in California have found a way to enjoy their recreational pastimes while helping others.

RVers in Mission is a group of 30, mostly retirees, who volunteer to work on California-Pacific Conference churches, campgrounds and facilities in need of repairs. They recently completed their 214th project at Pioneer Memorial UMC in Independence, a town of 669 in the shadow of the Sierra Nevada mountains.

Since the church has no parking lot, the RVers camped for a week in their recreational vehicles on the streets near the church, where they repaired and painted doors and made electrical repairs. They had to chip the paint, patch and prime before painting the exterior of the church. They also painted a Sunday school room, office and windows.

The RVers are not professional building contractors, but they have learned through their various projects to be painters, carpenters and repairers.

This was the second trip to Independence, a six-hour drive for most RVers in Mission members. On the first trip they painted the sanctuary — which had not been painted in nearly 40 years — and helped to fix the bell tower.

"It was such a blessing to our congregation that the RVers in Mission chose to come to our church," said the Rev. Erin Maddox McPhee of Pioneer Memorial. "Being a small, rural congregation with a membership that is primarily older adults, we didn't have the money or volunteers to give the exterior of our church building a much-needed new coat of paint."

Neale Davis is a member of First UMC of Orange and the "Wagon Master" of RVers in Mission. "We are putting about a hundred gallons of paint on the outside of this church," Davis said.

RVers in Mission organized in



Ken Martin, 81, a volunteer with "RVers in Mission" paints the steeple of Pioneer Memorial United Methodist Church in Independence, Calif. To his right is Leroy Plummer from the water and power company.

1986 to help churches and campgrounds unable to handle expansion or upkeep. Davis estimates that the group's volunteer work has saved churches, campgrounds and other church facilities more than \$225,000 in 20 years. He believes they saved Pioneer Memorial UMC at least \$20,000.

The group's normal September-May work year includes eight projects, usually during the last week of the month. The group selects projects for the coming year at its April meeting.

"We try to get to each of the requests that we receive, but we cannot guarantee that we can do it," says Davis. "The choices depend on what work is envisioned by the request and the space available for us to park our RVs at the church site."

The wagon master's job is to help coordinate all the projects during the year. Davis' wife, Ruth, also treasurer of the group, helps with coordinating the food for all the projects.

Project coordinators for each site visit the church or facility before the work occurs to assess the job and what supplies the church or facility will have to provide. Sharon and Gary Mason, members of Mission Viejo UMC and coordinators for the 214th project, visited Independence in January to



RVers park on streets near Pioneer Memorial UMC.

finalize details.

The group arrives at the project site on a Sunday afternoon, sets up the RVs, hooks up electricity and water, has a potluck dinner and reviews the projects ahead. The RVers start each morning at 8 with devotions. Then they begin work.

Sometimes they take the afternoon off to visit a local attraction and go out for a meal. When the owner of Jenny's Café, Jennifer Ivey, heard the RVers were in town painting the church and doing repairs for Pioneer Memorial UMC, she sent food from her restaurant.

Local church members also have potlucks and provide snacks for the RVers. Philip Baxter, known as the "honey man," brought jars of buckwheat honey for all the RVers to take home. Baxter's grandfather helped build the sanctuary. □

— Leah Gallardo Switzer, California-Pacific Conference Media Center director.
(Photos by Leah Switzer)

Vital Congregations Web site empowers churches

A new Web site aims to equip and empower local churches to become vital and healthy congregations. <UMVitalCongregations.org> is designed to help churches move through a process of evaluation and assessment as they begin to set goals, and then find key resources to help them achieve those goals.

"While all congregations have some aspect of vitality, highly vital congregations grow over time, engage more people in ministry, and are more generous in giving to mission," said Bishop John Schol, Vital Congregations Project team leader. "The Vital Congregations Project is designed to equip annual conference leadership, clergy and lay leadership in local congregations to reach their goals and fulfill the vision of becoming more vital and healthy congregations."

Three main components help congregations see their church history, assess their current church health and develop and set goals for their future. Throughout the Web site are descriptions of vital congregations and resources to help congregations become more vital. Churches are encouraged to share their stories of success and achievement on the site.

In October, another component will be added that includes resources to help congregations reach their goals and in November, a best practices

component will be added.

The Vital Congregations Project was authorized by the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table in response to the "Call to Action" report research, which indicated a lack of measures and accountability within The United Methodist Church. The research identified a vital congregation as being one that has:

- Inviting and inspiring worship;
- Engaged disciples in mission and outreach;
- Gifted, equipped and empowered lay leadership;
- Effective, equipped and inspired clergy leadership;
- Small groups and strong children's programs and youth ministry.

Part of the evaluation process involves looking at the history of the congregation, and how the past has affected where it is today. A key feature of the Web site allows every congregation to see its "health history" based upon its past 5-10 years of experience using church profiles research from the General Board of Global Ministries. Congregations would then assess their current health in order to set feasible and attainable goals.

After reviewing its history and

assessing its current health, each congregation is asked to set goals to reach the vision of becoming a more vital and healthy congregation based upon five measurable indicators of vitality: worship attendance, professions of faith, number of small groups, persons in mission, and missional giving.



The Vital Congregations Web site.

Congregations that need help, encouragement and support in moving towards health and vitality will have resources available to assist them in achieving these goals. Resources will be available to address the areas of worship, evangelism, small groups, mission and stewardship.

A report of every congregation's goals will be compiled by district and by conference. Conferences will be invited to set goals based upon the congregational goals, and conference goals will be collected and reported at 2012 General Conference.

The Web site was developed by the Vital Congregations Project Team, that includes United Methodist Communications, the Connectional Table, the General Board of Discipleship, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the General Council on Finance and Administration, and the Council of Bishops.

For more information, visit <UMVitalCongregations.org>. □

— United Methodist Communications



Local Church



▲ **Scott Memorial UMC's** Crafters Group has knitted and crocheted hats for cancer patients at Sentara Virginia Beach General Hospital and Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters. Pictured, from left, Mary Denning, Ginny Gurganus, Jean Schimmel, Dorothy Belile, Johnnie Wright and Dixie Davis.



▲ **Anderson Memorial UMC** and **Zion UMC** in Gretna, Lynchburg District, spent four days at Henry Fork Service Center in June. Zion donated the entrance sign pictured and the mission team installed it. Team members also painted two classrooms, a small kitchen and a meeting room. Some workers repainted the USA map and other designs on the concrete play area. Tables were sanded and refinished, yard work completed, shelves installed and supply areas re-organized. Some of the team led Bible School lessons in the morning classes for the children ages 2-8. The group stayed at Ferrum College, where they worshiped and shared fellowship.



◀ The Mission Work Area of **Beulah UMC**, Chesterfield County, kicked off a fund-raiser to dig wells in Haiti. The project was proposed by member Carole Morris, who has made many United Methodist Volunteers In Mission trips to Haiti. The goal was \$5,000 for the construction of two wells. A display in the narthex provided information about the project, and the goal was reached. Donations included more than \$300 from the church's Upward soccer families, who collected coins in water bottles (pictured), including almost 8,000 pennies. For more information about this mission, go to <www.thehaitimission.org>.



▲ **Concord UMC**, James River District, held a Community Day celebration at the local ball field. More than 60 church members, ages 6 to 82, were on hand to greet and interact with more than 250 guests. Activities included a "moon bounce," cupcake walk, face painting, corn hole toss tournament, live music, fire trucks, old tractors as well as free food. The biggest draw was the yard sale. United Methodist Women sorted donated clothes for two days. A total of 25 tables, some stacked two-feet high with clothes, were first offered to Social Service referred families an hour before the general public. One grandfather said as he left, "I have not smiled so much in a long time."



▲ **Mount Bethel UMC** in Crimora, Harrisonburg District, celebrated Camp Overlook Sunday by holding Sunday school and the worship service outside, with a picnic afterwards. Past participants at Camp Overlook, both youth and adult, shared their camp experiences with the congregation. A total of \$150 was raised for the camp. The church pastor is the Rev. Neil McLaughlin. Pictured are Philip McLaughlin, Emily Humphries, Catherine McLaughlin, Ashley Humphries, Angie Humphries and Ryan McLaughlin leading the congregation in a camp song favorite, "Pharoah, Pharoah."



▲ Twelve members from **Hopewell UMC** participated in the church's annual mission work week in Marion at The Crossroads Project house. The project assigned was the upgrading of a 50-year-old trailer owned by an elderly widow who was hospitalized but could not be returned to her home until some safety features were installed and repair work done. Pictured: Brian Searls, Jared Brumfield and Ned Mulford tear out the old flooring in the kitchen.



▲ The music ministry of **Williamsburg UMC** will take a giant leap forward with the dedication of a new Peragallo pipe organ on Sept. 18, with a special 3 p.m. performance by concert organist Kimberly Marshall of Arizona. Expected to be one of the premier instruments in the state, the new pipe organ replaces the church's original nearly 50-year-old water-damaged Moller and combines old school pipes and modern fiber optics and digital technology. A special financial campaign raised all of the funds needed to pay for the organ. Pictured, WUMC organist Tom Marshall (no relation to Kimberly) sits at the new console.



◀ Calling 21 intern Holly Johnston at **Farmville UMC** shows off two shop-

ping carts full of groceries collected during Vacation Bible School for FACES, the local food pantry. Food and more than \$400 was collected and donated to this local mission.



▲ In Chatham, **Watson Memorial UMC** youth Audrey Trivett and Cody Jones held a carwash to raise money for the church, raising more than \$170.



▲ A prayer shawl ministry was begun at **St. Andrew's Church**, Elizabeth River District, in the spring. Recently Jim Peterson was presented with a red, white, and blue prayer shawl. He is in the U.S. Navy and left Aug. 7 on a 13-month deployment. Pictured along with Jim are his wife, Kelly, their three children, Dustin, Brianna and Teagan, the Rev. Michael Reaves, and Betty Shifferly, a member of the Prayer Shawl Ministry Team.



▲ Fusion, the **Farmville UMC** youth group, recently picked many beans for the local food pantry. Farmville UMC has a community garden each year, led by Dave Culler. The youth also attended the Farmville District Mission Youth Camp, where they gleaned at numerous farms, worked at Glory Rains Ranch, FACES food pantry and the Amelia Thrift Store and made major improvements to the Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center facility in Blackstone.




▲ Members from **Nelson UMC**, **New Faith UMC** and **Rodes UMC**, Charlottesville District, helped supply ground beef for the Nelson County Food Pantry. Members at Nelson decided to supply hamburger when they realized that produce wouldn't keep between the time the "Change the World" project took place and when the food pantry distributed food at the end of the month.



▲ In July, **Reveille UMC**, Richmond District, sent 59 youths from the youth group and youth choir, along with 10 adults, to New York City. The youth worked with numerous agencies that benefit homeless and low-income individuals and families. They stocked food pantries, prepared and served meals and sorted clothing. Additionally, the youth choir performed *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* as part of its annual tour.

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Living the Word



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
The Rev. Sung I. Yoo is pastor of Emmaus UMC at Stratford Hills in the Richmond District. He received his Bachelor of Theology at The Methodist Theological Seminary in Seoul, South Korea, his Master of Divinity at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill., and his Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Virginia. He loves playing drums and table tennis and spending quality time with his wife, Wonsoon, and their son, John, often called "John the Methodist."

September 4, 2011

I surrender all
Proverbs 3:1-12

At one of the churches I served, I got to know a person who was a firefighter. While hearing of his life journey, I was surprised to learn that he was afraid of taking a flight. Here was a courageous man who dared to jump into fire to rescue people, yet was afraid of getting on an airplane. It didn't make much sense to me at first. I began to probe him to see what was going on. Then, I learned that he felt safer on land or on water where he could do something in case of an emergency. In his mind, there would be virtually nothing he could do in the air if things turned bad. That explained his fear. Later I pondered on that conversation, and a thought came to my mind: The deeper reason why he was afraid of flying was because he was afraid of losing control.

This helped me see more clearly why I get anxious about things in my life. When I find myself anxious, I realize that I try to put things under my control, not under God's guidance. I get anxious and frustrated because reality is often beyond my control. Anxiety comes from the unavoidable reality that tomorrow is always beyond our control. No wonder we fear the uncertainty of tomorrow. We are so afraid of losing control over our lives that we become anxious.

Today's passage speaks to us, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil" (Proverbs 3:5-7, NRSV). This passage reveals our deep-rooted tendency to rely on our own insight and be wise in

our own eyes. It feels almost natural and even right that we live our lives according to our own insight, experience, knowledge and desire. What it shows about us is our oft-unfiltered tendency to seek to put things under our control and feel safe and secure about our life. Yet we come to learn again and again that it doesn't work that way, primarily because of the practical limits of our capacity which often lead to anxiety and worry in our lives. The word of God challenges us to learn to trust in the Lord with all our heart, not with part of our heart, and to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, not in some of our ways.

At a deeper level, this issue touches on our continual struggle to let go of our desire to put things under our control and instead to let God lead and guide our lives according to God's holy will. Do I truly desire to surrender all that I am and all that I have to the Lord? On Sunday mornings, we gather together and praise the Lord, singing, "All to Jesus I surrender...I surrender all" (*The United Methodist Hymnal* #354). □

September 11, 2011

Spiritual discipline
Proverbs 4:10-15, 20-27

I still remember how bored I was of sitting through an hour-long revival service as a child. For some reason, my mother forced me to sit right next to her throughout the service. I didn't like it, not to mention that as a pastor's kid I was not interested in another worship service. I remember that the speaker kept preaching on and on even after I took several power naps that evening. Obviously, it was a challenging experience for me, yet, quite interestingly, that is one of many incidents

that pops up in my mind when it comes to services I attended during my childhood. I pondered what made it special or at least memorable. Then I realized that such a torturous memory was somehow transformed and re-inscribed as a sweet moment in my memory bank when I sat with my mother, clapping hands and singing aloud together and even enjoying a sweet sleep with my head placed on her lap. Although I don't remember the message preached on that night, I know that my mother wanted me to be attentive to the word of God.

It appears that the narrative setting for Proverbs 4 is the parental advice for children. I imagine that parents were eager to pass on the wisdom of their tradition, especially the word of God, to their precious children with the hope that their children would take "the paths of uprightness" in their life journey. As said in Proverbs 4:20-22, "My child, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh." While reading this passage, I sense a sincere heart and prayer of parents for their children, and it reminds me of my parents' prayerful efforts to help me grow in faith. Now, as a father, I realize that sometimes I need to compel my son to do certain things he may not like or want. What is at stake is not whether a child likes or dislikes certain spiritual practices, but rather whether such a spiritual discipline is ultimately beneficial for the spiritual growth of the child. We need to practice this with sincere prayers, utmost patience and unconditional love.

The term "instruction" in verse 13 can be read as "discipline." When it comes to discipline, an image of training comes to my mind. One may wonder, "Training with what and for what?" Training with the word of God and for the path of righteousness! The word of God which is living and active provides vital instructions for our life journey. Furthermore, the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ, is "the

resurrection and the life" to those who believe in him. We find continual strength and wisdom and courage in the Holy Bible (the word of God) and ultimately in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior (the Word of God).

Now as a grown-up, I savor the moment when I sat next to my mother at the revival service. I want to pass on that precious experience to my son, imagining that he will have a hard time sitting through an hour-long service, yet eventually he will cherish the experience called "discipline." □

September 18, 2011

The fear of the Lord Proverbs 15:21-33

As said in Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." It appears that this is the foundational profession of Proverbs. The Scripture of Proverbs is all about wisdom which revolves around "the fear of the Lord." This elusive phrase causes a reader for a moment to wonder what it can possibly mean to fear the Lord. What has the fear of the Lord to do with knowledge?

The word "fear" is quite intriguing. In a negative sense, it can indicate terror or dread, whereas, in a positive sense, it can connote awe or reverence. Perhaps people may readily choose the latter as the proper meaning of the word "fear" in the "fear of the Lord," yet I would like to suggest that one needs to keep both meanings in tension without jettisoning the former too quickly. We learn from the Old Testament that encountering God is a terrifying event as well as an awesome moment. Then what would it mean to fear the Lord as the beginning of knowledge? It seems to me that the source of human knowledge or understanding is the Lord our God. Theologically speaking, God is the sheer plentitude from which human knowledge and wisdom and existence flow. As said in Acts 17:28, "in him [God] we live and move and have our being." It first appears that

the fear of the Lord touches only the initial stage of knowledge, yet it covers the whole dimension of knowledge, that is, the entire epistemological realm of human life. It follows that in order to acquire proper knowledge and deep understanding, one needs to start with the Lord, more specifically the fear of the Lord. In a word, to fear the Lord is nothing other than to acknowledge the Lord. In order to acknowledge the Lord, humility is required. Thus, as said in Proverbs 15:33, "The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility goes before honor."

When I studied the Old Testament and the New Testament at seminary, I was so into biblical criticism that I lost sight of approaching the Holy Bible with humility, reverence and prayers. Later I came to realize that I was trying to dissect and analyze the multilayers of biblical meanings only with human conceptual tools, without making room for the divine guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit in interpreting the word of God. From time to time, I still find myself repeating a similar mistake in my everyday life. Instead of seeking God's guidance and wisdom, I too readily tend to perceive and evaluate reality with my thoughts, understanding, knowledge and experiences. I need to kneel down before the Lord with humility, asking for God's guidance and illumination not only for biblical interpretation but also for a deeper understanding of God's creation. Indeed, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. □

September 25, 2011

Humility Proverbs 25:1-10

"I am so proud of my humility," one jokingly says. This mere joke indirectly reveals how deeply our pride is embedded in our human life, even to the point of being dressed in humility. Our secular culture promotes pride in the name of

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

self-accomplishment, self-sufficiency and self-autonomy. Pride appears to be one of the major factors that moves society and drives people in their lives. No wonder it is hard to grasp a proper Christian meaning of humility in the midst of a pride-driven secular culture. Humility is a virtue to be desired and practiced over the period of time. Yet in our contemporary society, it can be viewed as weakness, an excuse for mediocrity, or even failure. This may partly explain why the kingdom of God movement Jesus Christ our Lord inaugurated is counter-secularistic.

Jesus Christ says in the Gospel of Luke 14:11, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." This saying is one of the paradoxes of Christian faith. The secular culture would shout that all who exalt themselves will be exalted, and those who humble themselves will be humbled. But not so in the kingdom of God and not so in the lives of disciples of Jesus Christ. Self-glorification will lead to humiliation, while self-denial will lead to exaltation. Humility is what is required of a follower of Jesus Christ because our Lord himself embodied humility. How far? Even to the extent that he died on the cross. The word of God says in Philippians 2:5-8, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross." Humility is one of the characteristics of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, it was the lifestyle of Jesus Christ which was most powerfully and clearly manifested on the cross. Thus, those who desire to follow Jesus are to deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow Jesus. Humility is an essential part of Christian lifestyle, or cruciformity.

The beauty of humility is that God our Lord exalts those who humble themselves. As said in James 4:10, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." For Christians, humility is not simply something we practice in our relationship with others, but it is further related to our relationship with God. When we humble ourselves, acknowledging and glorifying God in our lives, our God surely exalts us. Yet when we seek to exalt ourselves, celebrating and glorifying ourselves, it leads to the sin of pride, not to mention that it often leads to false pride filled with emptiness and vanity. The word of God says in Psalm 18:27, "For you deliver a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down." □

October 2, 2011

True security

Proverbs 29:16-27

We live in a violent era. Violence, the dark impulse of humanity, appears to dominate the history of the world, hurting and demolishing God's good creation. One nation against another, one religion against another, one ideology against another – a seemingly unstoppable vicious cycle of human violence and destruction goes on and on. In the name of just retaliation, we act and react in quite a violent manner. But we all know that violence only brings more violence, not the genuine security we seek. We long for security and peace at a national level as well as at an individual level.

We Christians have a genuine concern over how to change this violent culture of the world to the nonviolent, peaceful kingdom of God. Today's passage speaks to us, "one who trusts in the Lord is secure" (Proverbs 29:25). A true sense of security comes from trusting in the Lord. No matter what we may try to do, the fragile condition of human life already points to insecurity of human life on earth. It follows that we cannot secure safety for our lives merely by investing our energy in human structures and systems which are ultimately break-

able. We need to turn to the Lord and learn to trust in the Lord who is the Creator of the entire universe and the ultimate Owner of our lives. The presence of God surely generates a deep sense of security and safety in our lives, which, in turn, empowers and inspires us to circulate a nonviolent peaceful culture through our interactions with others in society. We are called to promote the circulation of love which reflects the self-giving, other-serving, and community-building love of Jesus Christ on the cross.

At an individual level, we yearn for a sense of security. In the face of the uncertainty of tomorrow, we become anxious and insecure. Like everyone else in our secular society, we sometimes jump into chasing after things that may look promising to bring security to us, including money, fame, power, etc. When we think we catch it and thus want to enjoy security in our lives, we come to realize that it only provides a fleeting satisfaction and security, like a temporary painkiller. Instead, by placing our trust in the Lord, we come to experience and enjoy a true sense of security. As our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, God alone can provide true security for us. Our task is to learn to trust in the Lord and to learn to obey the Lord. "Trust and obey" – isn't this what faith is about? Thus we sing, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey" (*The United Methodist Hymnal* #467). □

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Letters & Commentary

Should clergy be required to sign social media disclosure statement?

I was shocked when I read how the Kentucky Conference is now requiring pastors and ordination candidates to sign a social media disclosure statement. In a time when mainline denominations are “rethinking” how they grow new churches and recruit new leaders, why legislate rather than nurture?

According to Shane Raynor, managing editor for *Ministry Matters*, the policy was implemented by the Kentucky Annual Conference and applies to “any and all MySpace, Facebook, or other blog and Web site accounts.” By signing the agreement, clergy are agreeing to allow the conference to “examine” the accounts. Clergy are required to add the conference as a friend on each account, and by signing, they demonstrate an understanding that “any information of a questionable nature on these sites that are written and/or posted by me, could affect my status as a Candidate/Resident in the Ordination process with the Kentucky Annual Conference.”

Commentary by Matt Carlisle

The document goes on to say that officials will regularly check their accounts and they will be held accountable for “material that would be deemed questionable in light of the Social Principles and Doctrinal Standards of The United Methodist Church or that would show lack of judgment in understanding the standards and ethics of a United Methodist clergyperson.”

While I am very much opposed to Kentucky’s approach to social media legislation, I do believe the church has an obligation to nurture healthy use of social media. The Virginia Conference has also created a social media policy, but there is a vast difference in the two approaches. In Virginia, the Board of Ordained Ministry has offered guidelines that shouldn’t be considered rules or regulations, but were “created in an effort to inform the Christian community about appropriate behavior online.” In Kentucky, the regulations are cut-and-dry.

It’s my experience organizations will often opt to create strict regulation rather than take the road less traveled. The tools of mobile technology and social media are primary tools for today’s pastor and of those we hope to recruit. An investment of both sweat equity and resources go further than mandated policies.

While The United Methodist Church has its Social Principles, Facebook has an established set of principles as the foundation of the rights and responsibilities of its community. These include the freedom to share and connect, the free flow of information, fundamental equality and ownership and control of information. Facebook outlines that last principle in this way: “People should own their information. They should have the freedom to share it with anyone they want and take it with them anywhere they want, including removing it from the Facebook service. People should have the freedom to decide with

whom they will share their information, and to set privacy controls to protect those choices. Those controls, however, are not capable of limiting how those who have received information may use it, particularly outside the Facebook Service.”

So, is the requirement for clergy of any denomination to sign a social media disclosure statement a violation of Facebook’s principles?

While I believe that clergy should be held to a higher standard, I don’t believe they should be limited in how they share God’s good news or have their online presence “examined.” I believe it’s the role of the church to give voice to the voiceless, not take it away. □

— Matt Carlisle is a former United Methodist Communications staffer who now consults with nonprofits and faith groups to make the necessary changes to fully embrace the Web and social media.

Resolution is incomplete

The Virginia Conference’s *e-advocate* [electronic newsletter] of June 20 correctly notes that the 2011 Annual Conference passed a resolution on “peacemaking efforts between Palestinians and Israelis.” Unfortunately, in making excessive claims and omitting part of the record, this resolution provides an inaccurate and incomplete statement about how the 2008 General Conference acted on petitions dealing with the use of economic pressure to help resolve the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

The 2008 General Conference considered eight petitions about the use of economic pressure to help resolve this conflict. The record — the actual petitions and the legislative action — shows that while all eight petitions dealt with divestment, none of these dealt with the broader categories of economic sanctions and boycotts. And although seven of these petitions supported divestment and were rejected, the resolution omits the fact that another petition opposed to divestment was also rejected. It is therefore quite clear that the 2008 General Conference rejected both petitions supporting divestment and a petition opposing divestment, and took no action regarding use of economic sanctions and boycott. By making excessive claims and omitting part of the record, the resolution wrongly claims that the 2008 General Conference rejected “the use of boycott, divestment or economic sanctions as a just or effective way of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and creating a peaceful two-state solution.”

The Virginia delegation to the 2012 General Conference should note that the record does not support this factually incorrect and misleading portion of the resolution. □

— The Rev. Hunter Mabry (retired), Waynesboro

Harry Potter is not Jesus

With the summer release of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2*, the publishing and cinematic juggernaut that is the Harry Potter franchise reached its final chapter. As the most anticipated event of the summer, the movie saw considerable attention and conversation. As happens with such cultural phenomena, churches will want to get in on this conversation, to use it as an opportunity to share and explore the gospel.

Commentary by Bob Ratcliff

Media articles included analyses of the Harry Potter story in light of Christian faith.

After viewing the movie, many preachers will want to draw comparisons between Harry and Jesus, to suggest that the “Boy Who Lived” is a Christ figure. To which I offer a one-word (two if you add “please”) reply: Don’t.

Wait, wait; put down that pitchfork! I am not among the folks who brand the series anti-Christian because it imagines a world with magic in it. I’ve been recommending the books to classes I teach since 1998, when the first book appeared. I’ve spent many a bleary-eyed midnight with my family at bookstores and theaters when the newest book or movie was being released. Like you, I’m a big fan.

But I’m also a big fan of Christ figures in literature and film, and I know that it doesn’t help the cause to say a book or movie reflects the gospel just because: a) it portrays the conflict between good and evil, and b) a lot of people read or watched it. Not every act of self-sacrifice, not every (seeming) death and resurrection makes a character a Christ figure.

Those who want to turn Harry into Jesus with a wand forget that being a Christ figure is a two-way street. To start with, some quality or action of the fictional character reflects or draws inspiration (intentional or not) from the Jesus story. Things happen in the Potter story that could lead a person to make this claim for Harry. But true Christ figures also reflect back on their inspiration; something about their story helps us understand the story of Jesus just a little bit better. This doesn’t happen in the Harry Potter stories. Squint as you might to see it, no new light shines from them on the gospel.

OK, I see your hand reaching for the pitchfork again. Let me hasten to say that the Potter stories contain excellent lessons, ones that I was pleased for my children to learn. One of the best has to do with destiny, free will, and ethical choice. Harry is what you might call a boy of destiny, someone from whom everyone expects big things. Having lived in obscurity and neglect among the muggles, he arrives in the magical world a celebrity, the child who survived and defeated the Dark Lord Voldemort. Most of the public expects him to become a great leader or protector; most of his enemies expect him to be overwhelmed by the powers of evil. Just about everyone thinks they know what’s in store for Harry ... except Harry himself. While the rest of the world assumes that Harry’s path is predetermined by some great and mysterious destiny, Harry (under



Actor Daniel Radcliffe as Harry Potter in the blockbuster movie hit *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2*.

Dumbledore’s tutelage) discovers that he is creating his life one choice at a time, that the key to his story lies not in his stars, but in himself.

This lesson is one of the story’s central ideas. Its source, of course, is the Enlightenment. Now, I’m not among those who think that Enlightenment concepts and perspectives are of necessity bad or misguided; this one happens to make a lot of sense. It’s just not Christian, by which I mean that it doesn’t tell the whole story. Like the Enlightenment, the gospel rejects the idea that dark and inscrutable fate directs our actions. But, unlike the Enlightenment, we believe that there is a Cross-shaped purpose behind creation and history, and that God works in and with us to bring that purpose to fruition.

Now, if you want to compare and contrast the Potter story’s Enlightenment teachings with the gospel, that would be a great way to capitalize on the teachable moment created by the release of the final film. The ideas and values that animate the world of Harry Potter are winsome, appealing and unerringly right. They’re just not always Christian. Figuring out how those two statements can go together should provide much opportunity to preach, teach and ponder.

And while you do, I’ll just put your pitchfork back in the barn. □

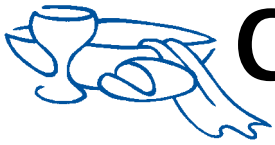
— Bob Ratcliff is an editor and teacher living in Franklin, Tenn. He blogs about theology, the Bible and other curious things at <http://thinkandbelieve.wordpress.com>.

Thanks for ‘Call to Action’ editorial

Thank you for your excellent editorial in the July *Advocate* [‘Call’ and response, pg. 2]. As a longtime Methodist, and the widow of a Virginia Conference minister, I agree with you on the changes that may be coming to our Church. I especially agree with your comments on small churches. I am afraid that the small church congregations will be pushed aside by this [“Call to Action”] report and by the redistricting of our conference. I also agree that the plan lacks the theological and spiritual approach John Wesley himself preached that the Christian is to be oriented around the simple message of “faith working in love,” and not just by statistical information.

Again, thank you for this insight of where the Church may be moving. □

— Mary Durkovich, Mathews



Clergy & Diaconal

Deaths

The Rev. **A. Benjamin Chidester Jr.** 86, retired associate member, died July 21, 2011. He began his ministerial career in 1985 in the Western New York Conference. He transferred to the Virginia Conference in 1988, serving Rockingham Court. He retired in 1990. During his retirement, he served Boone's Mill.

He was preceded in death by his first wife, Joan Bauer Chidester; a daughter, Susan C. Hill; and son, D. Carl Simpson. Survivors include his wife, Dorothy (Dot) Simpson Chidester; daughter, Julia M. Caplick; sons, A.B. (Chip) Chidester III, Philip L. Chidester, Thomas B. Chidester and James B. Chidester; 12 grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren.

Nancy Atherton (Peppard) Buell, mother of the Rev. Janet Salbert, died July 23, 2011. Janet is pastor of Wesley UMC, Alexandria District.

Virginia (Mary) Saxtan, mother of the Rev. Sandra A. McMillen, died July 27, 2011. Sandra is pastor of Fincastle UMC, Roanoke District.

Patricia Alston, mother of the Rev. Lynda Moore, died Aug. 1, 2011. Lynda is pastor of Cheriton and Travis Chapel United Methodist churches, Eastern Shore District.

Stephen Sales Jr., father of Stephen Sales III, died July 22, 2011. Steve III is the lay supply pastor appointed to Bethlehem UMC in the York River District.

John I. Weldon Jr., stepfather of the Rev. Harry Loyd, died July 15, 2011. Harry is pastor of Mathews Chapel UMC in the York River District.



Chidester

Marriages

Kameron Wilds and Samantha Dickerson were married July 16, 2011. Kameron is a part-time local pastor serving his first appointment at Grace Design UMC in Danville.

ARMS retreat set for Oct. 5-6; theme is 'Hope'

It's not too late for retirees to register for the Association of Retired Ministers and Spouses (ARMS) retreat, Oct. 5-6, at Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center in Blackstone. Retirement brings a season of "hope." Brochures are being e-mailed or you can download a copy from the Events calendar at <www.vaumc.org>. **Deadline to register is Sept. 29.**

Office hours set for Labor Day weekend

Conference offices in the Virginia United Methodist Center, located in Glen Allen, will close at 12:30 p.m., Friday, Sept. 1, and remain closed Monday, Sept. 5, in observance of Labor Day. Offices will reopen Tuesday, Sept. 6.

JustFaith Leadership Program graduates five

Five additional students have completed the JustFaith Christian Leadership Program at Shenandoah University, which uniquely bridges the study of faith and religion with practical acts of justice. Jeremy Koontz, Micah Melton and Nikki Wyne received bachelor's degrees during Shenandoah University's commencement. As part of the JustFaith program, each student also achieved a Minor in Religion and received a Certificate in Christian Leadership. Fellow cohort members, Carl Chapman and Chelsea Jackson, also completed the three-year JustFaith program and will finish their bachelor studies in the coming year. Pictured (from top to bottom): Melton, Koontz, Chapman, Wyne and Jackson. (Photo by the Rev. Dan Garrett, adjunct faculty member.)



CORRECTIONS

- On pgs. 6-15, in the **July 2011** issue of the *Virginia Advocate*, churches listed in red represent congregations that have paid 100 percent of all their conference and district apportionments for 2010. James River District Superintendent John Vest reports that the following church also has paid 100 percent of its 2010 apportionments: **Ocran UMC**, James River District (former Petersburg District).

- In the **August** issue: on pg. 5, the end of the photo collage caption incorrectly states "...and prepares to license a group of more than two dozen local pastors." The caption should read "...and prepares to commission a group of provisional members." Also, in the same issue, on pg. 28 in the Letters to the Editor section, the title following the name of the author of the first letter, Hilary "Pete" Costello, should have read "former pastor of Accotink UMC in Warrenton," as his appointment status changed to "retired" during the 2010 appointment year and a new pastor was appointed to Accotink UMC as of July 1, 2011.

Transformation has occurred since 9/11



Charlene Payne Kammerer
Bishop of the
Virginia Conference

This past decade since the terrorist attack on our country has necessitated both a personal and spiritual transformation. Our family reflects the story of many thousands of U.S. military families. Our son, Chris, has been in the U.S. Navy during this whole decade. Therefore, he has experienced multiple deployments, both to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean corridor. The first ship he served on was the first ship to launch cruise missiles into Afghanistan at the beginning of the war. He had returned from deployment just a short time before. Thus, we have known the toll his service has taken on his family, the anxiety of not knowing if your loved one is safe, the separation of a father from his children, and the aching need to stay connected, no matter the distance.

My prayer life has been transformed. Early on in Chris' Navy service, I prayed only for him, his colleagues, and their safety. Then I began to be convicted to pray for other mothers across the world whose children also served in the military, whether they were our allies or our identified enemies. This experience has changed and enlarged my capacity to pray to our God whom I believe embraces all families everywhere.

After the attacks on our homeland, I soon began to understand that my ministry needed to expand. I needed to learn and understand more about our Muslim neighbors and their faith. I needed to intentionally connect with our Jewish neighbors and friends in new ways. This journey has invited me to deep change. I have been called to new experiences of trust, relationship, prayer and transformation that I never envisioned would be needful of me. However, because of this journey, I now have new friends, new respect and new relationship with persons not of the Christian faith. I always have been encouraged by these friends to share my own faith and beliefs about my Christian faith. I have learned anew the power of listening and not being judgmental about my assumptions about someone else who is different from me. This has been an unexpected blessing.

Finally, I have often encouraged United Methodist clergy to be ready to preach in all seasons. I was astounded in September of 2001 that many pastors in the Western North Carolina Conference where I was serving as a bishop, did not know how to preach in response to what had happened. Such a time of national crisis and profound grief and anger deserves the best, most thoughtful, most prayer-soaked preaching that any of us have to offer. As we mark the 10th anniversary of this defining tragedy of our country, I trust that our preachers will dig deep and ask God to help them know how to share the good news of the gospel of Christ. Never has it been more needed. And I know God will be faithful to our pleas as humble servants of the gospel to help us get ready to serve God anew. We are called to be reconcilers and peacemakers in a fractured world. Our people are waiting on us!

Grace and Peace,

Charlene Kammerer

Charlene Kammerer

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Deadlines

The *Virginia Advocate* is published once a month. The deadline to submit news and ad copy for the October 2011 issue is Sept. 2. For more information on future deadlines, contact Peggy Cribbs in the *Advocate* office or visit the Web.

Advertising/Tributes

Rates for advertising and Tributes are available upon request.

Local Church News

Items should be typed (preferably sent via e-mail) or printed legibly, no more than 100 words, and of conference-wide interest. Complete names of individuals, churches, and districts should be included. Because of space limitations, the *Local Church* section prohibits news items related to church members' birthdays (of less than 100 years), wedding anniversaries, receptions for moving and/or retiring pastors, photos of traditional Christmas trees or Easter trees/crosses, and any item over two months old (please no more than one item per issue). Color photos 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* reserves the right to edit all letters.

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