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The Virginia United Methodist

September 2013

Advocate

Re-entering society:



Ministries that help
former inmates who
have paid their debt



FROM THE EDITOR



Neill Caldwell
Editor

What happens once the debt is paid?



The Committee on Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries (CJAMM), part of the conference Board of Church and Society, has over the years been synonymous with ministry to inmates in prisons. But during recent years, CJAMM has developed a growing ministry outside of prisons, and we highlight those ministries in this month's edition of the *Advocate*.

At 2012 Annual Conference in Roanoke, a resolution on the restoration of civil rights for those persons who have been convicted of crimes and have served their punishment was supported and sent to the legislature and the governor. There is a comprehensive document posted on the conference website (under Ministries/Church & Society/Church & Society Documents then "Conversations About Punishment for Nonviolent Crimes") that outlines how we, as faithful United Methodists from Virginia, can respond to that resolution.

This month we also include articles about keeping people out of prison, how churches can become involved in post-prison ministries, and crime victims' rights.

We applaud the work of Gov. Bob McDonnell on this issue. A former prosecutor, McDonnell pledged to do something about restoring the rights of those who have fully "paid their debt to society" and has made it one of the priorities of his administration.

In May of this year, McDonnell announced the automatic restoration of those rights for former nonviolent felony offenders, a program that took effect July 1. It stopped short of what civil rights advocates have been calling for, which is full rights restoration for all former felons, but it is a step forward.

In addition, the state reclassified certain crimes labeled as "violent" felonies – like burglary and breaking and entering – as nonviolent so that more can take advantage of the restoration.

The process is open only to those who have served their entire sentence, including probation or parole, and who have paid all of their court fees, fines and other costs related to their imprisonment. As many as 700 people complete their sentences in Virginia every month, according to the Advancement Project.

Ex-felons who committed violent crimes still must wait five years after their sentence is completed to apply for full rights restoration.

McDonnell has also pushed a constitutional amendment to expand rights restoration, but so far it has failed in the General Assembly.

To learn about the governor's program, you can go online to www.commonwealth.virginia.gov/ror.

I also encourage you to read the document at <http://vaumc.org/NCFilerepository/ChurchSociety/ConversationsAboutPunishmentforNonviolentCrimes.pdf>. It's a long web address, but you can also go through the steps on the website mentioned above. I think you will find the content interesting, especially the part about fostering a conversation in our churches about incarceration, punishment and what happens next. It also gives you – as a church, Sunday school class, men's group, etc. – a way to respond to CJAMM and continue a dialogue about this area of ministry. 📌

Neill Caldwell

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Letters

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

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The theology behind disaster relief, recovery

By Thomas Kemper

“Churches Shelve Theology for Disaster Relief Efforts” ran the headline of a Tennessee newspaper reporting on a devastating flood. The article focused on how churches with different ways of thinking were working together in response to the urgent needs of flood victims.

Yet the headline also suggested that theology was absent from this disaster response. In reality, the opposite is true. As United Methodists and as Christians, we do not “put our theology on the shelf” to respond to disasters. We put our theology to work!

Identifying with and assisting individuals and communities affected by disasters are ways we fol-

low Jesus Christ — whether those disasters are naturally or humanly generated. The mission theology statement of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) makes this point clear: In God’s mission, “Jesus poured himself out in servanthood for all humanity” and “the church experiences and engages in God’s mission as it pours itself out for others.”

This understanding of God’s mission highlights the spirit of disaster relief response necessary for post-disaster restoration. For that reason, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is a natural part of our denomination’s mission agency. We follow and find Christ in disaster situations.

“God’s light shines in every corner of the earth,” proclaims Global Ministries’ mission theology statement. “There are no places where God’s grace has not always been present.”

Concern for those in distress after a calamity is rooted in both the Old and New Testaments. As Rabbi Myrna Matsa observes: “The people of God accept in perpetuity the message of Leviticus 19:2: ‘You shall be holy because I the Lord your God am holy’ and holiness means to nurture the earth, care for humanity and leave the world in a better condition than the way we found it.” (Jewish Theology of Disaster

Response and Recovery)

Jesus was steeped in the Jewish tradition of holiness and instructed in the care of humanity. Matthew 25 spells out the obligation Jesus’ followers have for those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, unclothed or in prison. In the Great Commandment, Jesus tells us to love and care for our neighbors as we care for ourselves — an admonition also from the Old Testament. And in Galatians 5:14, the Apostle Paul uses “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” to sum up the whole of religious law.

Acts 11 tells the story of what may have been the first Christian collection for disaster survivors. When the church in Antioch learned that fellow believers in Judea faced famine, “the disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea” (Acts 11:29). In the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, Jesus broadens the definition of a “neighbor,” cutting across ethnic and religious boundaries for the sake of human service and dignity.

Our Methodist heritage, stemming from John Wesley’s ministry in 18th century England, includes a strong concern for people in jeopardy because of human-caused or natural calamities. Wesley saw some of the results of rapid industrialization as disas-

trous. He railed against factories’ pollution of the air, water and soil, and he started small enterprise programs to rescue at least some women and children from the mills.

Wesley’s ministry extended to those sick from all causes, including industrial contamination. Medicine was not highly developed in his time. Germs and microbes had not been identified, and existing health services were largely limited to the wealthy. Despite the many demands on his time, Wesley compiled the best available medical information, including home remedies, in a book titled *Primitive Physick*. Every Methodist preacher making rounds on horseback in England was expected to carry this handbook in his saddlebag. The book became the best-selling practical manual of 18th century England.

This powerful Wesleyan tradition of concern for the vulnerable was at work in 1940, at the onset of World War II, when U.S. Methodists first set up what is today UMCOR. Its founding was triggered in part by memories of the horrendous effects of World War I on civilian populations.

Another Wesleyan theological theme addresses the attitude of the responders in disaster relief and subsequent rehabilitation. John Wesley built into Methodism the conviction that all people need the grace of God to be redeemed. This has special application for

church members who set out to do “good works.” It is a reminder that the helpers — the funders and the cleanup teams — are not superior in divine favor to those being assisted. To follow Jesus in servanthood to others is to be baptized in humility. We seek to be both confident and modest, asking not how our action makes us look, but how putting our faith into action contributes to human welfare, peace, justice and reconciliation.

As the embodiment of United Methodist disaster response, UMCOR offers services and presence without regard to religion, race, nationality, politics or gender. It responds to small as well as large, well-publicized disasters. John Wesley admonished Methodists to do as much good and as little harm as possible in the world. Those are guiding precepts in our response to disaster.

The church’s disaster response is an expression of our faith, a confirmation of our discipleship and a witness to our love for our neighbors. As United Methodists, we do not distribute food, water, blankets, cleaning buckets and health kits or rebuild shelters and schools with the objective of converting others either to Christianity or to Methodism. Such a goal would miss the point of God’s grace, which is offered in freedom. To us, disasters are opportunities for service, inviting us to our highest levels of

compassion and concern. The theology of presence requires few words.

Working with others, including other religious groups and government entities, serves a theological objective: to recognize the fullness — the wholeness — of God’s created order and to collaborate with others in the restoration and preservation of all creation, including human families and communities. The focus is often on “the least of these” from Matthew 25, because the weakest are hardest hit by natural and human-caused disasters. The poor and elderly characteristically have the least substantial housing and are the most vulnerable regarding immediate post-disaster needs and long-term rehabilitation. Methodists have always been strongly committed to ministry with the poor.

God is at work everywhere, all the time. So in God’s mission, we seek to serve others in humility and confidence. We know that everyone needs — and has access to — God’s grace. In disaster response, we know there is no perfect humanitarian solution. We simply do our best, praying for the Holy Spirit’s guidance as we put our theology to work in action — doing as much good as we can.

-Thomas Kemper is the top executive of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. This story originally appeared in the March-April 2013 New World Outlook magazine, produced by the Board of Global Ministries.

Applying logic to scripture

Since sin exists; And, since everyone has sinned;

And, since the wages of sin is death;

And, since Jesus died in our place so that all can live forever;

And, since this eternal life comes through a new birth;

And, since the new birth happens when we repent of our sin;

And, since to repent means to confess with the intent to sin no more;

And, since one form of sin is sexual immorality;

And, since sexual immorality is having sex outside of marriage between a man and woman;

Then, one must conclude, as the church has done for centuries, that refusal to repent of sexual immorality will result in eternal separation from God.

Because eternal destinies are at stake, don’t pastors and their overseers owe it to “reconciling” congregations to provide 100 percent assurance, using Scripture, that the above logic is flawed, and how?

(Scripture, in sequence – Rom. 3:23; Rom. 6:23; John 3:16; John 3:3; II Cor. 7:10; Matt. 4:17; Luke 13:2-3; Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30; I Cor. 6:18; Gen. 2:18; Gen. 1:28; Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-5; Gal. 5:19-21; and others.)

-Scott Hamel is Lay Leader at Readland UMC in Cross Junction

UMCOR supplies are unloaded at First UMC in Moore, Okla., to boost tornado recovery work. The supplies arrived from the Sager Brown depot in Baldwin, La., and were received by volunteers in Moore, the hardest hit area of the May tornado. (Photo by Randy McGuire)





The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

Overcoming the gender gap

By Justin Allen

I am surrounded by women in leadership positions, and I am so thankful for that. I am in daily contact with the women who serve in Shenandoah University's senior leadership positions – from Dr. Tracy Fitzsimmons, our university president; Rev. Dr. Rhonda VanDyke Colby, our vice president for student life; and Dr. Clarresa Morton, our vice president for enrollment management and student success.

However, in a recent article on CNN.com titled "Teach Girls to be More Like Boys," Rachel Simmons points out that there is a gender gap among many of our younger generation. While boys are upfront and confident, girls are fearful of seeming bossy or opinionated. What is even more shocking is that parents are most often identified as the culprits of supporting these detrimental opinions. The gap

continues into college, as most male students think they are highly qualified to be president of the student government on campus, while most female students shy away from the possibility because they have never been encouraged to think that it is an option.

This university has a plethora of strong, intelligent, charismatic and inspirational female leaders who are bucking the trend in higher education around the world.

I can only imagine that a female student at Shenandoah University might have similar feelings when they arrive on campus their first year, just like any other university across the country or around the world. However, it does not take long for female and male students to realize that this university has a plethora of strong, intelligent, charismatic and inspirational female leaders who are bucking the trend in higher education around the world.

According to a 2012 study by the American Council on Education, only 26 percent of college presidents are female, but the

majority of college graduates are female. In addition, most new college presidents previously served as the chief academic officer. As we say farewell to our current chief academic officer, Dr. Bryon Grigsby, who will assume the presidency at Moravian College, I realize that even more of my daily communication will be directed at gifted women like our incoming vice president for academic affairs, Dr. Adrienne Bloss.

As my nine-year-old daughter grows up, I watch what I say and how I treat her, as well as my son. Surely what I say matters, but what my daughter sees must be incredibly formational as well. After all, her mother, Dr. Alethea Allen, is a local physician and her father's bosses are all women! Thank God that my lack of parenting skills might be positively thwarted by the amazing women that surround me at home and at Shenandoah University. My daughter has a chance to be whatever she wants to be because she sees the possibilities every day! 🍀

-The Rev. Dr. Justin Allen is Dean of Spiritual Life and Director of the Institute for Church Professions at Shenandoah University in Winchester.

A new program being started next year will provide the opportunity for select clergy to complete an 18-month intensive in leadership development.

The Virginia Clergy Leadership Program will help clergy "be radically open to the transformational power of God in their lives and practice of ministry," according to the program description.

"Last fall, Bishop Cho challenged the Board of Ordained Ministry, working with the Cabinet, to design a spiritually based leadership program for clergy with a demonstrated history of effectiveness. The Clergy Effectiveness Committee of the Board has worked for the last nine months to meet this challenge," said the Rev. Doug Forrester, chair of the conference Clergy Effectiveness Team.

The program will target the leadership skills needed for increasing

Nine months in the making, new clergy leadership program ready to be born

each faith community's "missional potential" and disciple making. The three essential elements of the training program will be peer learning groups, reading reflection and spiritual practices. The six three-day sessions will be spread out over 18 months. One theme running through all six sessions will be a focus on cross-cultural ministry. Participants will develop an awareness of cross-cultural issues and learn skills in cross-cultural communication, as is relevant in their local contexts.

The program will begin with a first session on Feb. 11-13, 2014. Twenty-four participants will be selected for the first group.

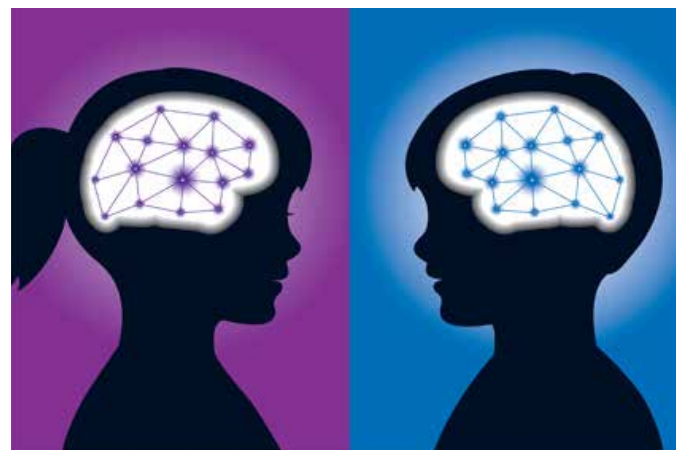
The program is for elders or deacons who have had at least five years under appointment, recommended by their district

superintendent, and with a track record of "fruitful ministry."

Primary leadership will be provided by Russ Moxley, co-creator and co-leader of the Royce and Jane Reynolds Program in Church Leadership of the Western North Carolina Conference. More information on Moxley, including his resume, can be found at <http://moxleyandassociates.com/>.

Applications for this first group of 24 clergy will be received until Oct. 1. The only cost to participants will be their travel.

For more information, contact the Center for Clergy Excellence at **804-521-1127** or **800-768-6040, ext. 127**; or bethdowns@vaumc.org; or Rev. Forrester at doug@crozetumc.org or **(434) 823-4420**. 🍀



Peters is new executive director of the Association of Educational Institutions

The Rev. John Peters has been named the new executive director of the Association of Educational Institutions (AEI).

The AEI interprets the work of our five Virginia Conference United Methodist colleges: Randolph-Macon, Ferrum, Virginia Wesleyan, Shenandoah and Randolph; as well as our prep-school, Randolph-Macon Academy. These historic United Methodist schools receive vital support from our conference education fund apportionment

which provides scholarships for United Methodist students, campus chaplain services, religious programming and outreach ministries. Many of our Virginia Conference clergy and laity have been shaped by their experiences at our United Methodist schools. Others have identified their calling to ministry while being mentored by faculty and staff at our much-loved schools.

For more information, contact Peters at johnpeters@vaumc.org.



The Rev. John Peters

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Floris UMC member to head State Department project

By Elizabeth Tenety

Office of U.S. foreign policy seeks to broaden religious reach

Dr. Shaun Casey, a professor at Wesley Theological Seminary and a member at Floris UMC in Herndon, has been named to head a new project of the U.S. State Department.



The U.S. State Department has announced creation of its first office dedicated to outreach to the global faith community and religious leaders.

The project, born in part of recommendations by its working group on religion and foreign policy, will be headed by Shaun Casey, a United Methodist lay member at Floris UMC in Herndon and professor at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. Casey, an activist and scholar on religion and politics, said he expects the office to focus on three areas: religion and development, international religious freedom, and conflict prevention and resolution.

"I'm not naive," Casey said. "I understand that this territory is fraught. But having said that, I think we ignore the political impact

of religion at our peril."

Secretary of State John Kerry called Casey, who has served for many years as an adviser to the former senator, the "perfect" person for the role.

The State Department said the new office "will focus on engagement with faith-based organizations and religious institutions around the world to strengthen U.S. development and diplomacy and advance America's interests and values."

Melissa Rogers, the new director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, said in a statement: "Shaun's appointment is part of a larger State Department strategy to deepen its engagement with faith and other community leaders. These leaders play key roles in promoting sustainable development, providing humanitarian assistance, advancing pluralism, protecting human rights like the right to religious freedom, and countering violent extremism. Shaun's background and abilities make him a great selection for this post, and I'm looking forward to working with him in the days ahead."

For years, religious activists have called on the State Department to deepen its relationships with and understanding of religious people and leaders around the world. Douglas Johnston, president of the International Center

for Religion & Diplomacy, said that since "85 percent of the world's population derives their reason for being from religion," an increasingly globalized world demands an American foreign policy that includes faith in its toolbox.

"It's all about trying to make religion part of the solution to some of these intractable identity-based conflicts," Johnston said. His organization has been on the front lines of religious engagement, including hosting a program in Pakistani madrassas that worked with Muslim leaders there to enhance their curriculum and rethink their approach to religious tolerance and human rights.

But before the new State Department office deploys a strategy of religious engagement, it will first have to establish guidelines for how it will operate, keeping in mind concerns about the constitutionality of mixing church and state and the potential perception of the government using faith for its own aims.

"I have to be careful, I have to be diligent, I have to be inclusive. We have to do this office right," Casey said.

"One of my mentors once said that 'government engagement with religion is sort of like brain surgery. You have to do it very, very carefully.' So I'm fully aware of the pitfalls, but I'm willing to jump in trying to offer an alternative

model that is inclusive, that is constitutional and that is transparent."

Casey noted that global climate change is "a signature issue for the secretary of state and a longtime passion." He asked, "Are there ways that we can work with international and domestic faith-based NGOs on global climate change to create a case, for instance, for how we should engage international regimes to mitigate global climate changes' impact?"

"There are fruitful ways for us to engage with some of those faith groups to see if we can't have a multiplying effect on persuading other governments, and even perhaps people in our own society, that we need to do more to engage on rolling back global climate change," he said.

Casey said he envisions American clergy members working with religious leaders in other countries and State Department officials talking about religious values with regard to climate change. In addition, he said, "the secretary himself may want to engage with international global faith leaders for whom climate change is a passion."

Casey adds, "If this office has some modest success, I think it's going to help advance some of our most deeply held values."

-Elizabeth Tenety is a reporter for The Washington Post, where this article first appeared.

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

The 2013 Voices of Youth choir concluded its "In Our Own Backyards" tour in July with a final concert at Duncan Memorial UMC in Ashland. This year's participants traveled all around the conference doing local mission projects during the day and presenting concerts in host churches in the evenings. Among the mission activities were volunteering at the conference's Camp Rainbow Connection and participating in a Stop Hunger Now meal-packing event. DeLyn Celec from Shenandoah University directed the group. (Photos by Neill Caldwell)



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Honeycutt excited about opportunities as she begins new position with UMCOR

By Neill Caldwell

The Rev. Dr. Denise Honeycutt and her husband, the Rev. Pat Watkins, are moving from the largest parsonage in their clergy lives to a 400-square-foot apartment in the Harlem section of New York City.

And they are excited to do it.

This month the Virginia Conference pastor is starting her new position as the General Board of Global Ministries deputy General Secretary for United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). Her official start date is Sept. 1 at the agency's offices on Riverside Drive on the west side of Manhattan.

"I am very excited and very humbled," Honeycutt said. "God is faithful, and wherever I have gone has provided people to partner with me."

Watkins will continue his ministry as head of Caretakers of God's Creation.

Leaving St. Matthews UMC in Fairfax was a difficult choice, partly because Honeycutt knows the importance of local church work, especially in support of mission.

"One of the gifts of The United Methodist Church

is understanding that all the work is done because of the local church," Honeycutt said. "It's all an extension of the local church; UMCOR is the local church at work in the world. Through UMCOR the local church can take great pride because they are making a difference in the world, through disaster and tragedy, through help for refugees from war or natural disaster, through making a small microloan to a woman so that she can start a business. People in the local churches are doing all that and more through UMCOR."

Part of that success, Honeycutt says, is because the people in the pews want to feel like they are helping even if they cannot physically go to Haiti or Africa or the New Jersey shore.

"A small child in a Sunday school class knows that raising just \$10 can pay for a mosquito net," she said. "That's pretty amazing, and I am proud to be a part of that. And UMCOR should be proud."

In her time as the Virginia Conference director of Mission, as a missionary in Nigeria and as a pastor, Honeycutt has always stressed the theology of mission. "All of our work in mission begins with our relationship with God. We have to be spiritually grounded as we partner with God at work around the world."


She is grateful for those years of experience as a

conference-level Mission coordinator as she begins this denominational-level position.

"I am so gratified about my partnerships working in the Virginia Conference," Honeycutt said. "In my position I saw the passion of United Methodists all over this conference... people making a difference, supporting One Great Hour of Sharing. I'm glad I had that opportunity."

She is also excited that her husband, Pat, will not only continue his work as a GBGM missionary serving as a Church and Community Worker as executive director of Caretakers of God's Creation, but on a more global scale. "Not only will he resource the Virginia Conference, but other conferences as well," she said.

Now she becomes the face of United Methodist disaster response around the world, visiting with victims of tornadoes, checking the damage after a hurricane, or slogging through flooded areas.

"I can slog with the best of them," she said. "It's important to be that face of UMCOR to those who are immediately suffering, showing 'UMCOR is here for you' ... We are well-known as the first responder to arrive in many cases, but even better known as the last to leave. Because of that, UMCOR has a great deal of respect among world governments and non-governmental organizations." 

St. Matthews member honored for heroism in World War II

by Meredith Somers

The act of military heroism that led to Millard "Lefty" Palmer receiving an award for valor began with an accident.

It was a fatal mistake one night in July 1945 that resulted in the B-29 gunner scrambling around his open bomber bay and unleashing dozens of jammed 500-pound munitions 7,000 feet above Akashi, Japan — saving his plane and his crew.

Sitting in his tidy kitchen in Fairfax, Palmer, 87, is matter-of-fact about his daredevil actions during the final months of World War II.

"If you've got a job to do, you've got a job to do," he said, blue eyes shining. "Just do it, get it done, and then worry about other things."

Sixty-eight years later, he was presented with the Distinguished Flying Cross (with valor) by Rep.



Gerald Connolly at a recent ceremony.

Part of a four-man team — and overall 11-member crew — Palmer's job all those years ago had been to find enemy planes, line up the gun sight and fire. He had enlisted along with his twin brother, Willard, in the Army Air Force Reserve a year earlier at 17 years old with the hope of getting a good-paying job. Both men would become central fire control gunners for B-29 bombers based in Saipan but did not fly together.

Before each mission, the B-29s were loaded with 40 bombs, each weighing 500 pounds, by professional armorers. Palmer — then a staff sergeant — said he and his crew would stand and observe, but the loading was left to the professionals.

Shortly before their mission on July 7, 1945, armorers were loading the explosives when one of the men had his head crushed between a bomb and the bomb rack. After his body was recovered, the armorer crew continued with their work. But something would go wrong.



"We believe that somehow in the process of loading bombs and the anxiety of the accident, the bomb racks were not armed properly," Palmer said.

The B-29 carrying Palmer, his team and 10,000 pounds of explosives flew into the night sky, and the crew prepared to unload the bombs over their targets in Japan. But when the bombardier tried to drop the rear bombs, the mammoth explosives didn't budge. The plane flew on to its backup targets, but once again failed to drop its payload.

Palmer and the crew realized they had limited options remaining. They could bail out over the water, a tactic that had a 5 percent survival rate, or try to bail out on land and let the plane blow up over the ocean.

Landing back at the base was out of the question, since the live bombs were malfunctioning.

"You can never train for it," Palmer said this week of the glitch. "We decided the thing to do was try to get those bombs out of there."

Armed only with a




screwdriver and flashlight, he and the bombardier crawled into the open bomb bay and wedged themselves in among the bombs and racks as they worked to dislodge the 20 heavy explosives by hand.

It took about 30 minutes to get the bombs out of the plane, and then the two men had to maneuver around the open bay door and climb back to their positions.

"There was nowhere to step," he said. "You just couldn't walk."

The men's actions saved the plane — and the other 10 on board.

After the war, Palmer — donned "Lefty" in high school because of his pitching prowess — went on to work in civil service for 42 years, though he was called back in 1951 during the Korean War. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant with the Air Force Reserve.

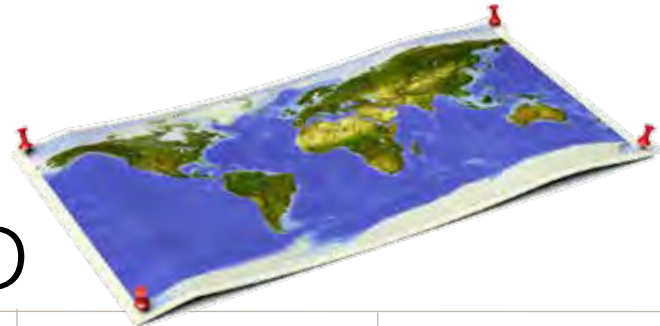
Palmer is still a very active member at St. Matthews UMC in Fairfax. He's been married to his wife, Doris, for 64 years. 

-Meredith Somers is a reporter for The Washington Times, where this article first appeared.

Dr. Denise Honeycutt



Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD



Gordon, Teca Greathouse to be new missionaries in residence at GBGM

Longtime United Methodist missionaries Gordon and Teca Greathouse, who have a long and strong connection to the Virginia Conference, have been selected as the new missionaries in residence at the denomination's mission agency. The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) announced that Gordon started on Aug. 1 and his wife, Teca, will assume her new responsibilities in the spring of 2014.

Missionaries in residence serve as liaisons between Global Ministries and the denomination's missionary community. They ensure that the experience of missionaries is

at the table for planning, training and communicating.

Thomas Kemper, the chief executive of Global Ministries said, "It is particularly exciting for me to have known them during my own missionary years in Brazil where I was blessed to have learned a great deal from them."

Gordon and Teca have served as lay missionaries in Brazil for the last 35 years. Gordon is originally from Oregon, and Teca from Brazil. Their missionary calling, however, pre-dates their work with Global Ministries, when, in the 1960s and early 1970s, Teca helped organize hundreds of impoverished communities of the Northeast and Amazon regions of Brazil to develop rural schools under the vision of Paulo Freire. In the same period, Gordon worked with after-school programs

in the South Bronx before becoming a seminar designer at the Church Center for the United Nations.

During their time as Global Ministries missionaries, Gordon and Teca started Habitat for Humanity in Brazil, taught at the regional Methodist seminary and coordinated Volunteers in Mission in Brazil. Their primary work, however, was building an after-school program called Shade and Fresh Water for more than 3,000 children and teenagers between 6 and 14 years of age.

This network continues to integrate more than 70 local Methodist churches throughout Brazil in a program that focuses on building values and character with a Christian foundation.

According to Kemper, "I have never ceased to admire their ongoing commitment to true ministry with and alongside the poor and marginalized."

Central to the Great-houses' missionary commitment are volunteer training, strategic planning, teamwork and a vision of children's roles as models for the Kingdom. They view this as a very exciting time for innovative ministries that integrate evangelism and social action in holistic ministry. They look forward to getting to know, learn from and support each missionary they work with as missionaries in residence.

Learn more about GBGM at www.umcmmission.org

by Sandra Brands

It's a new thing, but for many, it's impossible to imagine it happening any other way.

Historically, new missionaries have been commissioned and sent forth from the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) headquarters in New York City. But this year, the 10 new missionaries were commissioned at annual conference sessions, strengthening the partnerships between missionaries, annual conferences and local churches.

It was a change that just made sense to the Rev. Dee Ann Heptas. Though a member of the Kansas East Conference, Heptas was commissioned on June 8 during the West Virginia Annual Conference session, where she currently serves as a Church and Community Worker with the United Methodist Coalfields Ministry.

"I really felt like I was being received into the community of the annual conference," she said, "and into the community of The United Methodist Church."

Nancy and Kip Robinson, who were commissioned on June 22 during the Virginia Annual Conference session, learned almost immediately that for many the connection between missionaries and annual conferences had become real.

"The entire experience for the people in the Virginia Annual Conference

Seeing commissioning of missionaries makes the connection more real

and for us was extraordinary," Kip said. "Virginia has put forth a number of missionaries, but the only thing we ever saw were pictures from a ceremony held in New York. This process made it very, very personal and really demonstrates that this is a connectional church."

"It brings missionaries alive and really connects people in the conference to the work being done in other places around the world," said Nancy.

Nancy said that as part of the commissioning service, missionaries are given an anchor cross. During the service, people hear that the cross symbolizes the missionaries' connection not just with the Virginia Conference and The United Methodist Church, but also that they are anchored in Christ.

"That was really special for others to see the spiritual component [of missionary work]," she said. "People commented that it really brought home how the ministry is rooted in Christ and God's love."

Holding the commissioning service at an annual conference session draws attention to the partnership between the missionary and the annual conference, where the missionary's faith journey began. That was especially true for new missionary

Ellyn Dubberly, who was commissioned June 15 during the North Carolina Annual Conference session.

"It was an extra-special privilege to be commissioned by Bishop Hope Morgan Ward in the North Carolina Conference," Dubberly said. "She was a part of my first international missions experience when I was in the fourth grade. We traveled to Puerto Rico with a Volunteers in Mission Team from the North Carolina Conference."

The bishop, who serves the North Carolina Episcopal Area and is president of the GBGM board of directors, agrees. "It was a great joy to commission one of our young adults who we have known to be alive to mission even as a child! We were on a work team together when she was in elementary school, joining the youth work team with her mom and dad who were adult leaders.

"This wonderful and sacred moment of commissioning warmed our hearts and inspired us to join her in the mission of taking Jesus Christ to all the world," she said.

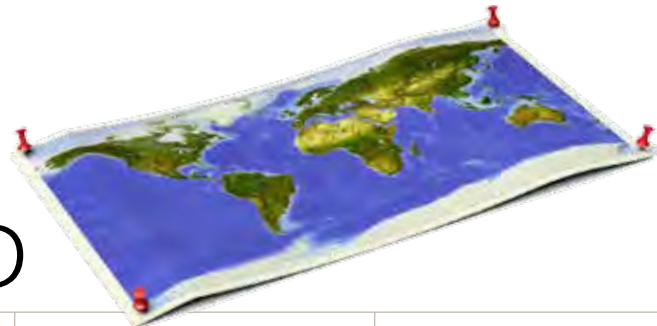
"Missionary commissioning at annual conferences helps local churches get a glimpse of how wide our United Methodist connection spans," she said. "Without this experience, many people in my conference would not know that they now have a Global Ministries missionary serving, on their behalf, in El Salvador."

-Sandra Brands for GBGM

Bishop Young Jin Cho presides over the commissioning of Global Ministries missionaries Clifford "Kip" and Nancy Robinson during the Virginia Annual Conference session. From left, the Rev. Jessie Squires, associate pastor at Warwick Memorial UMC in Newport News and GBGM board member, and the Rev. Glenn Rowley, Virginia Conference director of Justice and Missional Excellence. (Photo by Neill Caldwell)



Religious news from around the
NATION & WORLD



**Bed nets for malaria:
Are they losing their effectiveness?**

By Amy Costello

You can see the grip malaria has over parts of Africa when you visit a village like Chikwawa, in southern Malawi. Look just beyond the brick huts and goats, and you see a big lake. It is filled with fish – a source of food for the residents here – but it is also a breeding ground for mosquitoes that spread disease.

When I visited, some mothers and children gathered in the shade, waiting to speak to me. Among them was a 10-year-old girl lying on a mat, listless.

“This child is suffering from malaria right now,” said the girl’s mother, Dorothy Kalema. “She just

started getting sick yesterday.”

Kalema said she knew her daughter had malaria from her fever, vomiting and lack of energy.

I asked Kalema how long it had been since her daughter had last been sick with malaria. The answer: just one month.

“My child had malaria last month, too,” another woman said.

“I have malaria right now,” commented a third.

Malaria is incredibly common here, despite a multibillion-dollar effort that has drastically reduced the incidence in other parts of Africa. The fight has largely centered on battling the mosquitoes that transmit the illness.

There have been campaigns to kill baby mosquitoes with larvicide. Other campaigns have focused on killing adult mosquitoes

by spraying insecticides on the walls of homes.

Perhaps the best-known campaign has focused on bed nets. These nets, which contain insecticides within their fabric, are meant to protect families when they are sleeping and most prone to being bitten. Governments and charities have distributed hundreds of millions of bed nets across Africa.

About a decade ago, when insecticide-treated nets were first rolled out in a big way, some influential people considered them a game changer. At a gathering of world leaders in 2008, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said bed nets would play a big role in helping to bring down malaria deaths to nearly zero by 2015.

Janet Hemingway, a pre-eminent malaria researcher and director of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine in the UK, was not convinced that things would go so smoothly.

“A number of us were worried that it was too simplistic a story right at the beginning,” she says.

What worried Hemingway from the outset of the bed net campaign was that the hundreds of millions of nets distributed across Africa were all treated with the same class of insecticides, called pyrethroids.

Hemingway says there was no way those nets could ever be a long-term solution, because mosquitoes will become resistant

to whatever pesticide you throw at them; that is, they will evolve so the pesticide no longer works. And resistance is likely to emerge more quickly if you blanket an area with bed nets that all contain the same insecticide.

“People almost didn’t believe that resistance was going to be an issue,” she recalls. “I, for one, had been going around for many years saying, ‘Guys, you’re going to get this problem.’”

It turns out that Hemingway was right.

At Malawi’s Malaria Alert Center, researcher Themba Mzilahowa tests mosquitoes for resistance by collecting them in a tube, exposing them to insecticides, and checking back later to see how the insects fared.

Mzilahowa says as recently as three years ago, nearly every mosquito he tested in this way would be killed by pyrethroids. Today, it is a very different story.

In a recent test, 80 percent of the mosquitoes survived.

“We’re seeing failure of the chemical to knock down the mosquitoes,” he says.

And this problem has turned up well beyond Malawi. According to a recent World Health Organization (WHO) report, mosquitoes are showing widespread resistance to pyrethroids across Africa. The WHO called several nations – including Cameroon, Ethiopia

and Uganda – areas of “critical concern.”

Of course, if the insecticide in a bed net stops working, the net itself should still offer some protection to the person sleeping beneath it. But that is only true if the net

Mzilahowa says as recently as three years ago, nearly every mosquito he tested in this way would be killed by pyrethroids. Today, it is a very different story.

remains intact.

Back in the village of Chikwawa, I asked Dorothy Kalema – whose daughter had malaria twice in one month – to show me the net her family sleeps under.

“This is the big hole where the mosquitoes enter,” she said.

There were three large holes in the net, big enough to put your head through. Many of Kalema’s neighbors showed me their nets, and they, too, were riddled with holes.

In many parts of Africa, bed nets that were supposed to hold up for years have too quickly ended up

in tatters. Perhaps the nets were poorly manufactured, or people who use the nets have not taken proper care of them.

No matter the reasons why so many nets have holes in them, they will obviously need to be replaced. But malaria researcher Janet Hemingway says if you give people the same kind of nets you gave them a couple of years ago, the benefit won’t last long in places with pyrethroid resistance.

“Distributing nets into pyrethroid-resistant areas, where those nets are going to [develop holes] quite quickly, is going to give you very little protection quite quickly,” she says.

Hemingway says it didn’t have to be this way, if only the bed net campaign had been better planned. She contends that those who organized the bed net campaign should have put a greater focus on developing stronger nets – ones that would withstand wear and tear.

And she says that, from the outset, the nets should have contained not one insecticide but two, because that would have prevented the mosquitoes from growing resistant so quickly.

The World Health Organization predicts that if the insecticides on bed nets continue to fail, an additional 120,000 African children will die from malaria each year. 📌

-Amy Costello is a former Africa correspondent and has reported for PBS Frontline.

Volunteers with the Imagine No Malaria campaign set up a bed net in a home near Bo, Sierra Leone.
(File photo by Mike



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

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My chains are gone, I've been set free, My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy rains, unending love, amazing grace. ("My Chains are Gone," by Chris Tomlin)



In a Vermont DNA case that made national news last year, John Gega is reunited with his family following his release from prison in August 2012, after serving 18 years for a crime he has always maintained that he did not commit. (Photo by Len Emery)

HELPING FORMER OFFENDERS RE-ENTER SOCIETY

By Jim Templeton

Today, approximately one out of every 100 adults in the United States is behind bars.

Ninety percent of these men and women who are incarcerated today will be our neighbors tomorrow. What kind of neighbors will they make? A prison warden stated,

“If their hearts aren’t changed, we can’t change their minds.”

What can our church families do to help these “returning citizens” be productive members of our community? Would your church accept ex-offenders and help them become productive members of society?

(Continued on next page)

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In 2010-2011, the Governor's Task Force on Prison Reform recommended more involvement of faith-based groups. In the following year the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) formed a Faith-Based Council. As a result, there are now several groups working to bring Christian-based re-entry programs to our state prisons. This effort is strongly supported by the VADOC. The initial programs in Virginia were started by Prison Fellowship in 2008. These efforts have now been taken over by the Chaplain Services Prison Ministry of Virginia.



Re-entry preparation begins with bringing the love of Jesus Christ into our prisons – which does work. Many prison officials now recognize that faith-based programs have a positive impact on inmate behavior while in prison and in their lives when they return to society. Texas was the first to implement the Prison Fellowship re-entry program. Over a 2-year period the recidivism rate for those who completed the program dropped by 75 percent. In Louisiana the recidivism rate dropped from 41 percent to 14 percent for offenders completing another Christian-based re-entry program. Christian-based programs reduce recidivism, but they do have financial costs and require significant community involvement; however, no study found faith-based programming to have more costs than benefits.

The purpose of re-entry programs is to assist currently incarcerated individuals with a successful transition to their communities after they are released. Some offenders who are released return to a supportive environment, but most do not. The three immediate needs of the released person are housing, food and clothing. Vocational training and/or a job is also a critical need.

A group working in conjunction with Chaplain Services and the VADOC is developing programs where we would start working with the inmates a year before their release date. Christian-based classes would be conducted in the

prison facilities dealing with an array of topics such as Christian Discipleship, overcoming addiction, accountability and responsibility, anger management and corrective thinking. Class leaders are needed.

A second part of the effort would be providing Christian mentors who would meet with the soon-to-be-released inmates in the months before their release. They would continue to work with them after release by facilitating access to drug-free housing, assisting in job placement, finding churches willing to accept them and providing other supportive assistance. Mentors are needed; training will be provided.

In support of this effort, additional volunteers in various communities would be responsible for identifying and coordinating the available resources within the community and to see how these could be best used to help each returning citizen. Many communities already have secular and faith-based groups that help coordinate services. Again, help is needed.

Jesus talks of the field ready for harvest, but where are the workers needed to harvest the crop? There is no greater mission field in the United States than the prison system. In a recent *Book of Resolutions* it was stated that "The prison system of his time was one of John Wesley's primary concerns and has remained a concern of the people called Methodist into this century. The prison system in the U.S. today cries out for a major church-wide emphasis."

Each year at our Virginia Annual Conference, new resolutions are proposed in support of the prison population and ex-offenders. The intentions are good but unless you and I are willing to be Christ's hands and feet, they are soon to be only forgotten words. A helpful resource for exploring how your congregation can help is "Long Road Back: Ex-Offenders Struggle for Acceptance," available as a DVD with a study guide from mennomedia.org.

By assisting those returning from prison to become productive, tax-paying citizens we will not only make our communities safer; we will also save taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration. Each one of us can have an impact, but that impact will be multiplied many times over if we work together. Is God leading you and your church family to participate in this critical Christian-based ministry? The United Methodist involvement is being coordinated by the Virginia Conference CJAMM (Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries) Committee.

For more information, or to volunteer, contact either me at jtemple354@comcast.com, or Louise Jennings at kingswayoutreach@hotmail.com, or Joyce Minor, Faith-Based Re-Entry program director with Chaplain Services, at joyceminor@chaplainservices.org.

-Jim Templeton is chair of the conference committee on Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries.

KEEPING PEOPLE OUT OF PRISON: PREVENTIVE CHALLENGES

By Hunter Mabry

Bill* and Mary are worried. Dan, their teenage son, had been staying out late at night. It had been reported that some of his friends were into drugs. They feared that he and his friends might get into drug trafficking. If caught, they might be sent to prison under a mandatory 10 year sentence. That could ruin Dan's future.

What should they do? How can they best help him grow up as a responsible young man and avoid the 'pipeline to prison'?

Parental discipline and guidance:

Should they impose stricter rules about when Dan should be home? They did not want to create a teen rebellion. Yet they knew that sometimes strict limits can help guide a young person toward making positive choices. At times they have had 'heart to heart' talks with Dan about some of their concerns. Maybe it was time they should do that again.

Keeping youth in school:

Overall, Dan had average grades in his high school studies. But he was in danger of failing math and science. Mary and Bill worried that failure would discourage Dan and cause him to want to drop out of school – as some of his classmates had done. But they also knew that dropping out of school would seriously endanger his chances for employment and limit him to low-paying jobs. Should they look for a tutor to help Dan with his math and science studies? Their budget was already tight and they were not sure that would be affordable.

Alternatives to drugs, guns and violence:

Bill and Mary also knew that in their neighborhood not much is available

to teenagers during after-school hours. Should they canvass the neighborhood for other concerned parents and try to start some supervised programs in one of the area's churches? Could the YMCA or YWCA be persuaded to open a branch in their area? Could the neighborhood persuade the city to renovate an abandoned building down the street into a recreational center? While Mary and Bill pondered such things that parents might do to help their children, they were also somewhat aware of some other things that could help keep many more people out of prison:

Raise the bar for a felony:

Under current Virginia law, persons who commit a crime involving a value of more than \$200 can be convicted for a felony, sent to prison, lose their voting rights and be forever stigmatized as a "felon". But the bar of \$200 for a felony conviction was set in 1980. Today's equivalent would be \$565. While persons should be punished for their crimes, is it right to apply a felony standard under which taking over \$200 today would be equivalent to stealing something of only \$70.80 in value in 1980? A misdemeanor charge, and a fine and restitution or some jail time, would seem more appropriate. Isn't it time to raise the bar for a felony and help prevent young people committing such low-level crimes from being sent to prison and branded for life as "felons?"

De-felonization of certain low-level crimes:

Some crimes involving a value of less than \$200, such as simple drug possession, can also result in a felony conviction, imprisonment and loss of voting rights. According to the latest information from the Virginia Department of Corrections, 1,355 prison

inmates are there because of drug possession. Most of them are young men with less than a high school education. However good their behavior, they will now be forever marked as "felons", have difficulty in getting a job, be unable to vote, and probably influenced for the worst by other prisoners. That seems like a terribly high price to pay for simple drug possession that involved no violence, caused no harm to others and was perhaps no more dangerous than drinking an alcoholic beverage. Isn't it time to decriminalize such behavior, or at least to treat it as a misdemeanor, and create more drug courts to help drug users straighten out their lives? The few drug courts that now exist in Virginia have proven to be a viable alternative and less costly than incarceration.

Mental health courts:

Unfortunately, even today, persons with mental illness are more likely to be arrested than those without mental illness even though their 'crimes' were similar. There are now nearly 5,000 persons in Virginia's prisons who are classified as being "mild, moderate or severely mentally impaired." Many receive no treatment, deteriorate further while in prison, and become homeless upon release. The few mental health courts in Virginia serve as an alternative to incarceration by providing a structured, judicially-approved treatment and rehabilitation program, under strict supervision, to be completed while still on probation. Persons in such programs tend to improve and stay out of trouble, without risking public safety, and have a recidivism rate less than half of that of those who are incarcerated without mental health treatment. Moreover, the cost

(Continued on page 29, "Out of prison")

*Names have been changed to protect privacy.

“America is the land of the second chance. And when the gates of the prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life.” George W. Bush



PROMOTING RECOVERY OF HUMAN DIGNITY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE 'PAID THEIR DEBT TO SOCIETY'

By Hunter Mabry

Maggie* was ecstatic! She had just received a letter from Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell restoring her voting rights! On Sunday she immediately showed it to her pastor, who had assisted her in completing her application months earlier. Both rejoiced at this happy outcome which opened a new chapter in Maggie's life.

As a young woman acting in a moment of desperation and using bad judgment, she had embezzled \$2000. She had 'paid her debt to society' 30 years ago by completing all court-imposed punishment, including

a short prison sentence and paying full restitution. But for three decades she had not been able to vote and felt like she was a second-class citizen. The simple act of restoring her right to vote enhanced her sense of human dignity and made her feel like a first-class citizen again.

As people of faith who believe in a 'second chance,' helping ex-offenders like Maggie obtain restoration of their voting rights is one way we can promote recovery of their human dignity. Such persons also typically need jobs and an end to life-long stigmatization.

Restoration of voting rights: Each year, approximately 13,000 persons are discharged from Virginia's prisons

and return to their communities. But under Virginia's archaic law, anyone convicted for a felony is disenfranchised for life – regardless of what they had been convicted for or what punishment they were given. Under current law, their voting rights can be restored only by the Governor, on a case-by-case basis. Under governors Warner, Kaine and McDonnell, the process for restoring rights to nonviolent ex-offenders has been streamlined. Following up on our Annual Conference resolution on restoring voting rights in 2006, United Methodist volunteers in Alexandria, Norfolk, Petersburg, Richmond and Staunton have helped hundreds obtain restora-

tion of their voting rights. But, even so, the number of disenfranchised Virginians has continued to grow every year. There are now approximately 300,000 Virginians who have completed all court-imposed punishment but cannot vote.

The good news is that in June Gov. McDonnell announced a new policy, which became effective July 15, under which nonviolent ex-offenders who have completed all court-imposed punishment will be eligible for immediate restoration of their voting rights. Such persons will no longer need to submit an application, and the two-year waiting period is being eliminated. But there has been no change in the process which must be followed by those ex-offenders who have already "paid their debt to society" for a violent crime. The five-year waiting period will continue to apply, after which they will need to submit a comprehensive application. Volunteers continue to be needed to assist such persons in getting their rights restored, recovering their human dignity and becoming productive members of society.

Employment:


The biggest hurdle ex-offenders face is the difficulty of getting a job. Without gainful employment, they cannot support their families and become integrated as productive members of society. The inability to get a job leads to lower self-esteem and contributes to a cycle of recidivism

and repeated incarceration involving more victims, more human suffering and higher costs to taxpayers. Most employment applications have a question asking if the applicant has ever been convicted for a felony. Applicants who answer "yes" are seldom given further consideration and find it almost impossible to get a job interview. Persons who have served a lengthy prison sentence return to a much changed world for which they may lack relevant job skills. Most want to turn their lives around and are willing to work hard. But such persons need advocates – persons who will vouch for them, help persuade prospective employers to give them an opportunity to prove themselves, and assist them in gaining acceptance into job skills training programs or on-the-job training available to other applicants.

Ending life-long stigmatization:

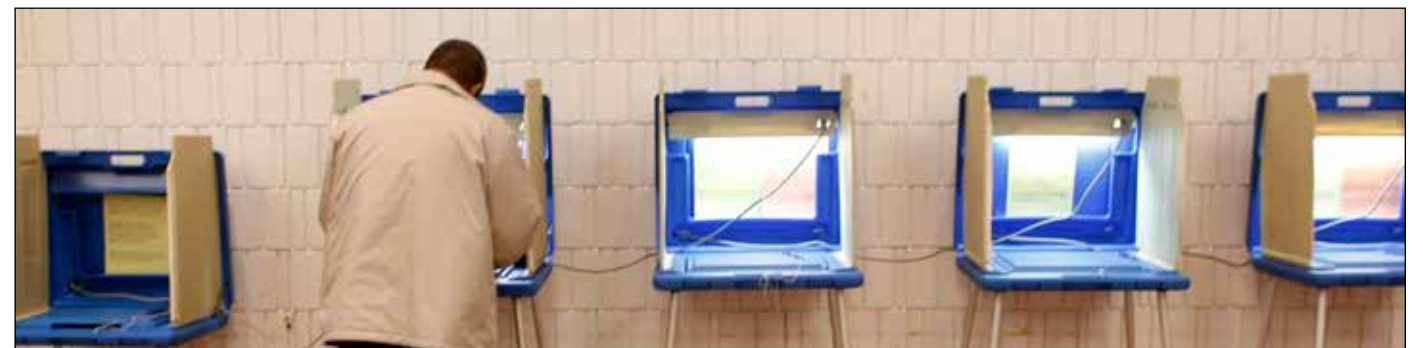
Unfortunately, our culture harbors a bias against ex-offenders. A new term, "returning citizens," is more positive but some still say, "Once a felon, always a felon," implying that people cannot change their behavior and forgetting that "There, but for the grace of God, go I." But this approach not only ignores the returning citizens' needs. It also denies our fundamental Christian conviction that a person may change. Some returning citizens also find that they are no longer accepted by family members and former friends. If it was the family or

friends that got them into trouble, this might be a good thing. But then a new church family and friends are needed. This bias needs to be challenged by reaching out to them, providing acceptance, offering support, and inviting them to our churches. This is especially important during the first 2-3 years after their return to the community, during which new patterns of behavior can most easily be established. Those who come to be regarded as sufficiently rehabilitated to have their voting rights restored should be treated as also sufficiently rehabilitated to be eligible for gainful employment. They also need to be accepted into community groups where they can find support, and no longer labeled as ex-felons but recognized as persons of worth by name ("That's Bob") or relationship ("She's my new friend").

Would you like to engage in some life-changing outreach by helping those who have "paid their debt to society" find new life by getting their voting rights restored, obtaining gainful employment, and helping to end life-long stigmatization? Such work may take you out of your familiar comfort zone – but surprise you with new life as you strive to be Christ to such neighbors. 

-The Rev. Hunter Mabry is Advocacy chair of the conference Commission on Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries.

*Names have been changed to protect privacy.



SUPPORTING THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN HARMED BY MAJOR CRIMES

By Louise Jennings and Hunter Mabry

In our criminal justice system, much attention is given to inflicting punishment on criminals. Once they are in prison, prison chaplains and some faith-based groups give some attention to ministering to them. But comparatively little attention is given to the needs of the victims of major crimes, family members of persons who committed crimes, or communities impacted by crimes.

Consider the case of Ann.* Her husband was murdered six months ago, leaving her to care for their two young children, age 8 and 10. She has only a part-time job, is finding it impossible to meet monthly expenses, and is worried about her family's future.

Or consider Cathy*, whose husband was recently given a 10-year mandatory prison sentence for drug distribution and theft, leaving Cathy, who has no job, to deal with overdue rent and utility bills and find a way to feed her two kids, ages 1 and 3. As might be expected, she is quite depressed.

Then there is Joseph*, who is devastated by the imprisonment of Ken, his only grandson, whom he had practically raised – but now worries that he may have failed, and that 10 years in prison would further harm

the young man.

It would be ideal if local churches had support groups ready to be “first responders” to the needs of such persons – whether these persons be a part of their congregation or others in the community – by extending friendship, offering practical assistance and providing emotional and spiritual support.

But since many of our churches do not yet have support groups trained and ready to respond to such needs, we would like to note several ways concerned members can provide help and support.

Harmed persons are frequently in need of immediate practical assistance such as food, household supplies, financial support and transportation. If your church has a food pantry and some discretionary funds, these could be sources for some temporary assistance. But for longer-term help, such persons will need to be connected with additional resources – such as a Social Services worker, financial counsel, health care resources, and perhaps ways to improve job skills, child care and tutoring, and transportation as needed. If within your church family there are persons who have these skills, it will be a great ministry if they can serve as mentors to harmed persons such as Ann, Cathy and Joseph.

Beyond such practical assistance, harmed persons also need emotional support and spiritual guidance. If not already church members, harmed persons may be encouraged to become part of your congregation and community groups where they can find companionship, support, advice from trusted persons and practical help.

It needs to be recognized that not everyone is comfortable in dealing with emotions such as anger, depression, and loss – nor trained to do so.

But in the absence of formal training, resources such as “Bud Welch’s Story” and “Journey Toward Forgiveness,” which discuss coping with the loss of a family member due to murder, and “Sesame Street: When Families Grieve,” which deals with general bereavement over the loss of a family member, can provide some general guidance and help. Versions of these videos are readily available on YouTube, and some can be found in local libraries. For a particularly moving story about murder, rape and forgiveness, visit www.squidoo.com/murder. Much help for coping with the aftermath of murder is available from Murder Victims’ Families for Reconciliation.

Being a friend and maintaining contact with harmed persons during the stress-filled months following significant loss or harm is especially important. Each person grieves and heals at his or her own pace. Birthdays, holidays and anniversaries can be especially hard to cope with. Being present with those who have suffered loss or harm by writing them a note, making a telephone call, sending cards, sharing memories, being a good listener and offering practical help can provide much needed support and concretely express God’s care and redemptive love.

Unique opportunities to provide much needed support to children who have lost a parent to incarceration are found in the annual All God’s Children’s Camps, which need scholarships, backpacks and mentors willing to enter into a long-term supportive relationship with a child.

Persons who have suffered loss or harm may be encouraged to think about things they can do when intense emotions come in the form of worries, sadness or anger, such as

(Continued on page 29, “Victims of crime”)

What would your congregation and church members be willing to do to help such persons cope with the harm they have suffered and help bring about healing?



EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

UMVIM Team Leader Training

Sept. 14 Trinity UMC, Richmond

Sept. 28 Vision of Hope UMC, Harrisonburg

Oct. 12 Fredericksburg UMC

Virginia Conference United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) Team Leader Training session will be from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with registration beginning at 8:45 a.m. Team Leader Training is required for all first-time team leaders, but all interested persons are welcome to attend whether leading a team or not. There is a \$55 registration fee for each participant. For more information, contact Terri Biggins in the conference Office of Justice and Missional Excellence at TerriBiggins@vaumc.org or **1-800-768-6040, ext. 144** or **(804) 521-1144**.

OCTOBER

5 Talent Academy

Oct. 15 Ebenezer UMC and 5 remote locations

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

Sexual Ethics Training

Oct. 15 and 26

Virginia United Methodist Center, Glen Allen

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

Mid-size Church Leadership Training

Oct. 22 Warwick UMC, Newport News

By invitation to churches with average worship attendance, as recorded by the Cabinet, of between 150 to 349. The goal of this event is to provide training specific to the mid-size church. The dynamic of the mid-size church is often the desire for the warmth of a small church and the program of a large church. You will have an opportunity to interact not only with persons from your own church but also with persons in similar roles from other churches. Even with the great diversity within this group of mid-size churches, the goal is for each church to be challenged, stimulated and equipped with new “best practices” for your context. The Rev. Janice Virtue, senior vice president for Leadership Development, United Methodist Foundation of Western North Carolina, will be the leader. This event is for lead pastors and other appointed clergy, ministry staff and key lay leadership. For more information, contact Beth Downs at BethDowns@vaumc.org or call **1-800-768-6040, ext. 127** or **(804) 521-1127**.

Large Church Lead Pastor Annual Gathering

Oct. 29 Reveille UMC, Richmond

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

NOVEMBER

Middle School Retreat

Nov. 8 Eagle Eyrie, Lynchburg

High School Retreat

Dec. 6 Eagle Eyrie, Lynchburg

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

LOCAL CHURCH NEWS



▲ **Trinity UMC in Orange** recently honored four members who are celebrating their 90th birthdays this year. What makes this especially interesting is that these four women, all active in the life of Trinity, have names that start with J and all were born in a month beginning with J: Joella Bradshaw celebrated her birthday in January; Janie Matthews and Jewell Baker had their days in June; and Jean Grady turned 90 in July. The church celebrated these birthdays by doing what United Methodists do so well – a covered dish luncheon after church – with cards, a cake and balloons. Pictured, from left, are Joella, Jewell, Janie and Jean.



▲ On July 2, **Claremont UMC, James River District**, hosted the Voices of Youth choir for their mission project while in the James River District. The group of 20 youth and four adults made cards, decorated flower

pots, and potted plants to take to the homes of seven shut-ins. Then they divided into three groups and took a meal to each residence that included brownies made by the youth. The Voices of Youth sang hymns and selections from their concert. The group also sang “Happy Birthday” to Lennie Barns (pictured), who just turned 94.



▲ **Wesley UMC, Winchester District**, hosted a Stop Hunger Now meal-packing event in July.



▲ In the **Richmond District, Welborne UMC**’s second annual Southern Food Festival was held on June 8 to provide the funds to send a team in July to assist citizens of Chrisfield, Md., to repair damages incurred when Superstorm Sandy came through last year. Food, fun and games made for significant community outreach while raising almost \$3,000 to underwrite the mission trip.



▲ A fourth- and fifth-grade mission team from **Trinity UMC, Richmond**, Vacation Bible School delivered 120 bags of canned goods to the **Sherbourne United Methodist Church** Food Pantry, an intake and distribution site for the Central Virginia Food Bank. The 1,050 pounds of food donated by children attending Trinity’s VBS helped restock the shelves of the food pantry, which distributes food every Wednesday morning and now serves 1,200 people monthly. Trinity’s team also served cookies and lemonade to both the Sherbourne staff and the guests. In the sanctuary Pastor Pam Culler told the story of her calling to Sherbourne and the hard work being done by a small church with a big heart.



▲ In June **Trinity UMC in Smithfield**’s Navajo Mission spent a week serving the Navajo people in New Mexico. Fifteen from Trinity led Vacation Bible School for about 25 Navajo children on the reservation near Teec Nos Pos, in the northeast corner of New Mexico. The team attended church on Sunday and performed for the Navajo congregation that conducted the service in both English and Navajo. Team members also erected a much-needed chain link fence on the compound that will provide added security for the children.



▲ This summer, six Troop 1 Eagle Scouts, led by Robert Baker and J.B. Powell, traveled from **Main Street UMC** to Sea Base in Florida, the National High Adventure Base for Scouts. We spent five days on Big Munson Island fishing, snorkeling and kayaking, plus toured the Kennedy Space Center, visited Key West and attended a Marlins’ baseball game in Miami. Pictured, from left, are Robert Baker, Haskell Gallotta, Stephen Shaffer, Kirk Ring, Adam Webb, David Forman, J.B. Powell and William Weissner.

In order to raise funds for the church’s walk-in ministry program, **St. Matthew’s UMC, Alexandria District**, sponsored a dunk tank at one of its Wednesdays on the Lawn picnics in July. More than 100 church members turned out and Pastor Denise Honeycutt, Associate Pastor Brian Johnson and other church leaders took turns in the tank to help raise funds for neighbors in need of assistance to cover their housing, transportation, utility, food or other critical daily expenses.

Fifteen members of **Stafford Register Chapel UMC** recently spent a week in Kentucky brightening the lives of residents in an impoverished area. This was the third straight year

the mission team travelled to Henderson Settlement in Frakes, Ky., to perform everything from library services to home repairs. Team members included Janis and Arlen Meline, Steve and Diane Anderson, Dave and Debbie Broadhurst, Lisa Fravel, Pat Moyer, Bob Waugh, Larry Towne, Jim Atkinson, Tally Moore, Bobbye Wardlow and Jack Sprunger. Frakes area is one of the poorest regions in the entire country; average household income is around \$14,000, and unemployment is high. The settlement itself was established 88 years ago with strong ties to the Methodist Church.



“An Evening with Nancy” at **White Stone UMC, Fredericksburg District**, brought in more than 150 people and raised \$1,300. Nancy, the oldest daughter of Pastor Bryan and Stephanie McClain, sang a variety of songs. Her little brother, John, sold cold water and lemonade during the

intermission which netted an additional \$112. The York River District Youth Choir joined Nancy for two songs. The money raised will be used to help the McClain family with the \$1,200 per person expense to go as part of the Fredericksburg District Team to El Salvador in 2014. There, team members will help with food distribution to the poor residents of Ahuachapan.



During Vacation Bible School week, **Kernstown UMC, in Winchester**, collected more than 800 canned goods and other non-perishable items for the local food bank.



Mount Zion UMC in Hamilton and **Willisville Chapel UMC in Upper-ville, Winchester District**, participated in the denomination’s “Change the World” weekend by holding a festival, “Sistas and Brothas Gone African,” with African cuisine, music and attire. The event raised more than \$1,900 for Imagine No Malaria.

Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



The Rev. Kyungsuk Cho is pastor at Victoria United Methodist Church, Farmville District. He earned a bachelor's degree from Yonsei University in Korea, then came to the U.S. in 2009. He earned his Master of Divinity from Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. He was commissioned in the Virginia Conference in 2012. Cho and his wife, Hyesook Lee, have three sons: Joshua, Caleb and John.

Sept. 1, 2013
A lifetime warranty
Psalm 104:5-9, 24-30

For some reasons, I prefer to buy a used car instead of a new one. I have purchased three cars in America, and all of them were used. There are several advantages to buying a used car, especially financially. However, there is a particular issue with buying a used car which has consistently concerned me – a warranty. Because used cars usually come with an expired warranty, I always have to question whether the car is reliable enough (unless I pay extra money for an extended warranty).

I am always thinking that it would be really nice if there were a car manufacturer that offers a lifetime warranty. Manufacturers know the car best; thus, such a warranty would bring me a great peace of mind. But we know this will never happen. All the car manufacturers make cars for profit; therefore, no company offers this sacrificial generosity.

Even if that generosity does not happen in the business field, we know there is the One who provides us with such a gracious care. The psalmist praised the Lord by saying, “In wisdom you have made them all (Psalm 104:24, NRSV).” God not just “made” the world, but “has made” it in wisdom. God has the best knowledge of our lives. Moreover, the Lord is on guard for the entire creation. In our daily lives, we certainly experience the empowering movement of the Holy Spirit and the new creation in Jesus Christ.

Why don't we, then, bring all the issues in our lives to the manufacturer of the earth? Why do we worry, then, even if we have a privilege to claim under the warranty of the Lord? Actually we all know the easiest way for our warranty claim – prayer. From major to minor ones, each concern is to be brought to God in prayer, and God will talk to us as long as we listen to the Lord's guidance.

Truly, the whole earth is full of the creatures in God's wisdom. Let us always remember that we are covered by a lifetime warranty of this awesome Creator of the entire world. You know what? This life-time warranty is even for free!

Sept. 8, 2013
The zero-gap kinship
Genesis 2:18-25

There is an interesting word in Korean that indicates the degrees of kinship between family members – chon. Literally the word means “a joint,” and practically, the terms shows to what degree one is related to another in the family. For instance, parents and children are 1-chon. This means that parents and their children have the closest kinship – only one joint between them. Siblings are 2-chon to each other. They are still close, but not as much as parents and their children. Uncles and aunts are 3-chon, and cousins are 4-chon.

One notable fact is that the relationship between spouses is defined to be 0-chon. This definition means that spouses can be the closest to each other, even more than to their children, just as if there is no gap between them. They are just one being, rather than two separate beings. Their kinship, however, can be nothing, zero, once they decide to turn their backs to each other. They can be all to each other, but they can also be nothing.

I think this illustration exemplifies the relationship between men and women in God's creation. The Bible tells us what God intended, “I will make him a helper as his partner (Genesis 2:18, NRSV),” when the Lord decided to create a woman along with a man. Men and women were made to be “partners.” For that purpose, God took a rib from the side of Adam's body. No one can stand without ribs. Likewise, a rib is useless without a body. These two beings are mutually supportive and absolutely complimentary.

I think this relationship is one of the most awesome features of God's creativity. No one can stand alone in God's creation. By any standard – gender, age, race, whatever – we are made to love and to be supportive to one another. Isn't that fascinating?

Today families are eroding. Why don't we hold the hands of our family this evening? See what you will find. Will it be the zero-gap relationship? Will you find nothing meaningful to each other? Or, are we “one flesh” in a family which makes us whole? Well, of course, I hope it to be the latter.

Sept. 15, 2013
When a child became a dad
Genesis 3:8b-17, 22-23

Sometimes, the story in Genesis 3 frustrates us. God seems to be much too mean; God does not want us to live forever. It sounds as if God considers it to be sinful as well that we know what is good and evil. According to the Bible, God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and what is evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever (Genesis 3:22, NRSV).”

So far, and hopefully at last, I have three boys in my family. All of them make my life surprisingly blessed, but at the same time, they have brought me a lot of duties as a dad. Looking at their lives as children, honestly speaking, I feel somehow jealous. Their lives look much easier than mine, especially that of the youngest one, an eight-month-old baby. He lies on his bed all day long. The only thing that he has to do is to cry. Then, his parents show up immediately. By that point, all his needs will be fulfilled right away.

Actually, Adam and Eve could live such an easy life under the even more powerful and gracious care of the Lord. Nevertheless, they chose to disobey God's commandment. Contrary to their expectation, as soon as they ate the fruit of knowledge, what they saw was their own weak selves. They hid behind a tree to conceal their vulnerability and shame. Then, God came to them and was concerned with the fact that “The humans have become like me.”

For my little ones, who are far more vulnerable and weaker than I, carrying the duties of a parent would rather be a punishment. At this point, they are not at all capable of bearing these duties. Reading this scripture, the same thoughts come to my mind.

God was not at all mean to the first humans. Instead, God knew who they were, but they dared to go beyond their own limits. Children tried to become parents. Aren't we making the same mistake? Do we put our whole trust in God today?

Sept. 22, 2013
The most unfair contract
Genesis 9:8-17

Jürgen Moltmann, one of the prominent theologians of our days, referred to a Jewish notion in his book: “Zimsum means concentration and contraction, and signifies a withdrawing of oneself into oneself ... It is the affirmative force of God's self-negation which becomes the creative force in creation and salvation.”

In Genesis 9, the Lord said to Noah: “I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood (Genesis 9:11, NRSV).” What I find in this short statement is God's amazing grace that voluntarily limits God's own self. The Lord is infinite and absolutely able. Therefore, to make a covenant with people, there is no need for God to restrict God's own self. God could do whatever God wanted to do. Nevertheless, the Lord graciously promised, “I will never do this again.” Why? Why did the Lord impose self limitations?

In fact, I think God's covenants to humanity are the most unfair contracts in the world history. And the unfairness is always on God's side, not on our own. This unfairness repeatedly happened in the Bible. God gave us free will, even though our free will might cause a headache to God. And the possibility came true, as human beings broke their relationship to the Lord. Nevertheless, God did not take control over us but graciously forgave us again. Most importantly, in Christ Jesus, God was clothed in a

human form, “the Word became Flesh (John 1:14, NRSV).” All those things came about solely through God's gracious self-limitation, not by our own contributions. Obviously, the unfairness was on God's side through the entire story in the Bible.

There are still many people, however, who simply complain about the Christian DOs and DONTs. “Why do we have to do good, while that does not bring us any goodness?” “Why do we have to avoid harming others, even if they are malicious?” “Why should I sit on a pew on Sunday, which is my holiday?” Well, sisters and brothers, let us not forget this simple fact: However awesome we are, all is by the grace of God, and this covenant is always an unfair contract on God's side.

Sept. 29, 2013
God turns it around
Genesis 11:1-9

“So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city (Genesis 11:8, NRSV).”

Human beings gathered. They wanted to be like God; therefore, they decided to build a tower as high as to reach heaven. God became upset with the arrogance of the people. As a punishment, the Lord confused their language so that the people would be scattered, leaving the unfinished tower behind them as a sign of their reckless challenge against God's sovereignty.

This interpretation is how we have read this scripture. And I am pretty convinced that this interpretation is what most of the Sunday school lessons taught us about this account, at least until the time when my generation was in childhood. In fact, it is true that the whole story is about people's arrogance and God's response to it. But we can find a more

(Continued on pg 28, “Living the Word”)

CLERGY & DIACONAL



Deaths

Retired Diaconal Minister **Shirley Annette Pomeroy** died Aug. 6, 2013. A native of West Virginia, she graduated from West Virginia University and Duke University Divinity School. She served in the Virginia Conference as a diaconal minister and director of children's education. Most of her time was spent in the Newport News area, but she also served churches in Blackstone, Clarksburg and Charles-town, W.Va.

The Rev. Larry Smith, campus minister and director of the Wesley/ Westminster Foundation at Norfolk State University, died July 24, 2013. He and his sisters made history when, accompanied by police escorts, they were among the earliest groups of African-American children to integrate the Norfolk public schools. A decorated U.S. Army veteran of the Vietnam War, Smith was a graduate of Norfolk State and Virginia Union University, and was ordained in the Baptist faith. He is survived by his wife, Tyronna, two daughters, a son and four step-children.

Howard Lee Belcher, 68, of Meadows of Dan, died July 5, 2013. He was the father-in-law of **the Rev. Terry Martin**, Mountain View UMC, Danville District.

Lois Roberts Foley, 96, of Virginia Beach, died June 25, 2013. She was the widow of **the Rev. Lemley P. Foley**.

Robert Green Gildersleeve, father-in-law of **the Rev. Garey Eakes**, died July 20, 2013. Eakes is associate pastor at Sydenstricker UMC, Alexandria District.

Warren Heckman, father of **the Rev. Linda Monroe** of Buckhall UMC in Manassas, died July 29, 2013.

Alvaretta Pratt Joyce, 88, of Ridgeway, died Aug. 12, 2013. She was the mother of **the Rev. Tom Joyce**, who is appointed as the Assistant to the Bishop in the conference office.

Juliet C. Milk died July 31, 2013, in Austin, Texas. She was mother of **Ann Klotz**, wife of **the Rev. Joe Klotz**, pastor of Northview UMC, Roanoke District.

Emily V. Reynolds, the spouse of **the Rev. William J. Johnson**, of Montpelier, died July 6, 2013.

"Living the Word", continued from page 27)

meaningful fact once we read the story from a little deeper perspective.

God's response to the human pride was to scatter the people into the different places of the world. Bruce Birch, a professor at Wesley Theological Seminary, explains the whole story in this way: The Tower of Babel signifies people's attempt to seek security by isolating themselves at one place. It certainly challenged God's blessing upon human beings to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28, NRSV)." By confusing the languages so that the people could/must be scattered, "God thereby promotes diversity," according to Birch, et al.

Even though people's excessive pride challenged God's divine commandment, God turned this arrogance upside down into a way of accomplishing God's blessing to humanity. Because of that incident, today I can be here introducing a different cultural perspective and sharing the love of the Lord across the countries. God is God, who turns our weakness into a way to bless us in the end. This interpretation is another aspect that the story tells us today. How can we, then, not love this gracious Lord? Well, I cannot but love my God. Don't you think so? ☞

Forest S. "Sid" Talley died Aug. 8, 2013. He was the father of **the Rev. Kathryn Forest Talley**, deputy executive director of Virginia Supportive Housing.

Births

The Rev. Thomas James of Centreville UMC, Arlington District, and his wife, Jen, welcomed twin boys on Aug. 1, 2013: Asher William and Nathan Brian.

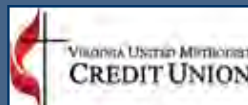
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("Out of prison," continued from page 19)

of mental health courts is more than offset by having fewer persons incarcerated, thereby saving taxpayers' money. More people could be helped, at less expense, by creating more mental health courts as alternatives to incarceration.

Attention to these preventive challenges can help ensure that today's young people will grow up to be responsible young adults and not be caught in the "pipeline to prison." Some of these challenges can be met by parents acting on their own; others will require collective action – through our churches as we make our faith relevant to today's world. ☞

-The Rev. Hunter Mabry is Advocacy chair of the conference Committee on Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries. For more information, or to volunteer, contact hmabry@gmail.com.

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("Victims of crime", continued from page 22)

thinking about how they have coped with difficulties in the past, engaging in favorite activities, hobbies and/or relaxation practices, exercising, focusing on individual goals or seeing a counselor. It will be important to affirm such persons' feelings as they move through the healing process and, at the appropriate time, encourage them to begin to enjoy life again – recognizing that enjoying life is not a betrayal of a significant loss but a sign that they have begun to heal.

Throughout the process of pro-

viding such assistance, pray for, and with, the victims of crime, the perpetrators, other impacted persons and the locality, that all may experience healing and the gift of fullness of life in a restored community.

Are you willing to become part of the solution? If your church is already involved, are you be willing to share what you have learned with others? ☞

-The Rev. Hunter Mabry is on the Committee on Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries. Louise Jennings is director of Kingsway Prison and Family Outreach, based in Harrisonburg.

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FROM THE BISHOP



Covenant for Spiritual Disciplines

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

Now, it is September. The vacation season is over. Children are going back to school, and our life rhythm is returning to a normal season. We are getting busier. The choir members start singing anthems again in worship services, and Sunday school classes begin their new journeys. The churches will start preparing for their Charge Conferences. Lord, have mercy on us!

As I shared in my article last month, the “Covenant for Spiritual Disciplines” has been developed, and this fall we will invite clergy and laity to prayerfully consider this covenant. Last July the team members who prepared the Bishop’s Convocation on Prayer got together and had a time to evaluate and review the last convocation and to share their ideas for the next convocation. These team members are from the Prayer Team of the Bishop’s Steering Team

for All Things New – Equipping Vital Congregations, conference Board of Discipleship and the Kindred Project (association of persons who seek to encourage Wesleyan contemplative practice, living and ministry). In this meeting we also discussed how to keep on fanning the flame of prayer in our conference. We assigned a couple of members to draft a “Covenant for Spiritual Disciplines.”

The Cabinet meeting in July also discussed how to follow up the Annual Conference theme, “Lord, Teach Us to Pray.” We did not want to forget this theme when the Annual Conference was over. The Cabinet reviewed the “Covenant for Spiritual Disciplines” and decided to invite the churches to join this covenant during Charge Conference season this fall.

I deeply appreciate the team members who have prepared this covenant and the cabinet for keeping on working to strengthen the spiritual foundation of our mission and ministries. I did not want the Annual Conference theme, “Lord, Teach us to Pray” to become a one-time emphasis and be forgotten. We talked about prayer during the Annual Conference, and I want all of us to fan this flame of prayer throughout the year. I want every local church to take this precious spiritual discipline seriously and move toward strengthening our prayer life. I prayed that our gathering in Hampton would be a starting point to spread the culture of prayer to the churches in the Virginia Conference.

The “Covenant for Spiritual Disciplines” begins with this introduction:

Prayer is essential to sustain our faith. Jesus modeled a life of prayer that established the DNA for the Christian Wesleyan heritage of prayer. Bishop Cho has envisioned spending his episcopacy in the Virginia Conference creating a culture of prayer. In his episcopal address at Annual Conference, he established a goal for at least 10% of the clergy of the Virginia Conference to engage in spiritual disciplines for one hour each day and for 10% of Virginia Conference churches to become a Prayer Covenant Congregation.

Then, the covenant extends the follow-

ing invitation to clergy and laity:

Virginia Conference clergy and laity are invited to:

Engage “one hour daily” in spiritual disciplines: fasting, intercessory prayer, Lectio Divina (sacred or spiritual reading), centering prayer, breath prayer, contemplative prayer, Tongsung Kido prayer, a service of common prayer, morning midday or evening prayers, etc.

Congregations are invited to become a Prayer Covenant Congregation by:

- 1. Having at least one weekly prayer group that will include weekly prayers for the renewal and revival of their congregation, the Virginia Conference, and The United Methodist Church.*
- 2. Offering at least one class on prayer annually.*
- 3. Participating in conference or district prayer equipping (training) events.*
- 4. Moving toward at least 10% of the laity practicing a “one hour daily” spiritual discipline.*
- 5. Indicating commitment to this covenant through approval by the Church Council.*

After prayerful discernment, our congregation has decided to become a Prayer Covenant Congregation by having at least one weekly prayer group, offer at least one class on prayer annually, participate in Conference prayer equipping events and move toward at least 10% of our members practicing “one hour daily” spiritual disciplines

I think this will be a great beginning for our new future. I am very excited about the great things our God will do when we humbly open ourselves to God. I want all leaders of our churches, clergy and laity together, to pray about this invitation and to respond positively. As I said in our Annual Conference, “If you discern that joining this covenant may be God’s will, please say, ‘Yes.’ If you do not discern that way, please say, ‘No.’” Thank you. 🍀

In our Lord,

New shoes have a big impact for kids who have none

By Virginia Bulger

This summer I made my second mission trip to Costa Rica, and I have been so blessed to see the changes that have been made not only in the church, but also in the growth of the children. Last year I met a little boy named Joshua who did not have shoes. My interactions and relationship that developed with him changed my life.

(Preparing for this year’s trip) I e-mailed Pastor Victor (in Costa Rica), who sent me a list of 12 children who needed new shoes. A few of my friends, my family, and I all went out and bought the new shoes that I packed into my two trunks.

I still have very little knowledge of Spanish, but I was able to communicate with Pastor Victor. He asked me to work at the church in the morning because the families would be stopping by to pick up the shoes. When we got to the church, I was full of excitement but also full of butterflies. The pastor walked over and said that the first family was here, and I jumped up from my task and grabbed the shoes. Two little girls, Naomi and Alison, looked up at me with these huge brown eyes and grins from ear to ear. Finally, the nerves were gone, and all I could feel was joy. I squatted down, took off their old shoes and replaced them with the new ones. They hugged me what seemed like a million times and said “Gracias!” more than I have heard in my life. Not only did these girls transform me with their happiness, but also the gratitude that their grandmother showed with her hug hit me more than anything or anyone on this trip. There were tears in her eyes. At that moment, I realized I did more



than just give them shoes; I changed their lives in a big way.

Throughout the morning, I gave the rest of the shoes away one pair at a time, each time with a different but strong reaction. I have never seen so much joy in someone when putting on a new pair of shoes. During lunch, I leaned over to Jose and said, “Jose, I’m scared. I have no clue what they were saying. Did they like the shoes?” He turned to me and said, “They were so thankful and gracious. They do not care if they are a little too tight or too big because they were a gift, and they are grateful.”

I really hope you have the opportunity to go on a mission trip, foreign or domestic. Your relationship with Christ will grow, and you will find out more about yourself than you ever knew.

Editors’ note: Since 2010, four student mission teams from Floris UMC have travelled to Alajuela, Costa Rica, organizing Vacation Bible School at a local Methodist church. See more at: <http://blog.florisumc.org/costa-rica-student-mission-trip>. 🍀

-Ginny Bulger is a junior at South Lakes High School in Reston.

ONE LAST WORD



Tweets heard ‘round the conference

Eric Vaudt @EVaudt
Found some great encouragement while reading commentary this week: God will prevail. ‘Nuff said.

Hannah Lambert @hannahbanana004
My life every day from 2-3 #foodpantry #internship2013 #pieceofmyheart

Jason C. Stanley @jasoncstanley
It’s #sharkweek join us sun at #peaklandumc 4 #sharknight c what we use this 4



Jason Micheli @JasonMicheli
Rather than sounding like I knew the deceased, I wish more listeners would grade me by saying ‘It sounds like you knew the gospel well...’

Rev. Sarah Wastella @SarahWastella
Maybe fewer Christians would skip worship if they understood all of worship is your offering to God, including your presence.

Martha Stokes @MarthaEStokes
Fellow GBOD bd mbr used a description tonight that I’m stealing - people “allergic to the traditional church.” #GBOD-directorsmtg



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The JustFaith Christian Leadership program is for you if you're:

- Ready for personal transformation
- Open to new ideas and perspectives
- Able to maintain an overall GPA of 3.0 or better
- Committed to justice for the oppressed and to peace in the world
- Ready to serve as a role model on campus and in the community
- Committed to a shared vision and ready to inspire others to follow



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