

Advocate



Revitalizing Children's Ministry

Connecting with the



Virginia Advocate

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

FROM THE EDITOR



Neill Caldwell
Editor

Creative
ministry:
The next
generation

At Annual Conference this year our graphic designer, Cathryn Huff, was asked about when the *Advocate* might do a feature on children's ministries. It sounded like a good idea, and Cathryn suggested we put the call out on our conference Communications "Nets" – ClergyNet and LaityNet – to ask congregations to submit their good ideas for this important area of church life. You'll see the results starting on page 18.

A lot of church leaders, especially those who deal with Christian education, youth and children, scratch their heads about what to do that's new and different, things that will attract and retain the children. Sure, it's easy to purchase the latest Vacation Bible School offering from Cokesbury, and those programs have become fun and creative. But what do you do beyond VBS? What can you do during the school year?

A few years ago my little church – which is comprised of a lot of grey-haired folks (or no-haired folks like me) – decided to give up a classroom to create a nursery. This was notable because at the time we didn't have any children. But we wondered if we didn't have any children because we didn't have nursery space. We wanted to be prepared when children did come, in the spirit of offering hospitality to all. Plus some of us were thinking of the "Field of Dreams" idea: "if you build it, they will come."

Well, we haven't been overrun with children, but there have been a few who have made use of our nursery space. And we do have a new infant in the congregation, and we imagine that she will be in that space very soon. (Although it is nice to have her with us in worship so we can all enjoy those baby sounds in the sanctuary!)

Baby sounds... The sound of children playing... The sound of youth running through the halls. A church just doesn't seem like a church without these sounds present. Unfortunately they're becoming more rare. Churches are struggling with a reduced number of young adults who have children, so they are searching for innovative ideas to attract those families.

The Woodlands United Methodist Church is a huge church near Houston, Texas, but I love their vision statement for children's ministry: "Our vision is to create the most innovative and imaginative children's ministry that will bring God's love to a new generation. Our mission is to partner with families to reach and teach children in such a way that they have the greatest opportunity to become fully-developed followers of Jesus Christ."

We need to do more, at the conference and district level, to provide guidance for our church leaders who struggle to come up with new ideas. There are a lot of great United Methodist resources listed at <http://ministrywithchildren.com> and at www.gbod.org/leadership-resources/children.

We'll specifically look at ideas for reviving Sunday school in an issue coming up in 2015. But we hope you will enjoy these great contributions this month. And maybe pick one or two to try at your church. 🐾



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Advertising/Tributes

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Local Church News

Items should be typed (preferably sent via e-mail) or printed legibly, no more than 100 words, and of conference-wide interest. Complete names of individuals, churches and districts should be included. Because of space limitations, the Local Church section prohibits news items related to church members' birthdays (of less than 100 years), wedding anniversaries, receptions for moving and/or retiring pastors, photos of traditional Christmas trees or Easter trees/crosses, and any item over two months old. Color photos are encouraged. Photos returned *only* if submitted with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Photos included on a space available basis. The editor reserves the right to edit all copy or refuse publication.

Letters

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

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(Cover): Shady Grove UMC Short Pump goes deep to come up with innovative VBS ideas

(Above) James (center, orange shirt) leads a tour of the Feeding America warehouse for kids in the First UMC Salem Vacation Bible School.



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LETTERS & COMMENTARY



When will we stop talking back to God?

Every year at the Clergy Executive Session at Annual Conference we are asked to reaffirm our call to ministry. In that affirmation, we affirm that we believe in a Triune God. We affirm that the Old and New Testaments contain all things necessary for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and are the unique and authoritative standard for the faith and life of the church. We affirm that we will be loyal to The United Methodist Church, accepting its order, liturgy, doctrine and *Discipline*, etc.

When I was a child, my favorite question was "Why?" My father must have told me a thousand

times, "Because I said so." That is what authority is – someone who doesn't have to explain themselves to an underling. We say that we are under the authority of our church doctrine and the Holy Scriptures, and we go right out and argue against both. That is not only disrespectful and arrogant, it is a lie.

I have mixed emotions about tabling Resolution 1: "Change *Book of Discipline* in Reference to Homosexuality," which would ask General Conference to change language in the *Book of Discipline* relating to homosexuals. I am certainly pleased that this did not pass, but I also feel that this matter should not be considered for any further discussion. Why? Because the Father has

said so! When? In Leviticus chapter 20, Romans chapter 1, 1 Corinthians chapter 6, and Revelation chapter 21.

The Bible, God's Holy Word, clearly states what the Father commands of us, yet we are determined to talk back and disrespect Him. That is what this whole issue is about to me. It is not about what I think about homosexuals at all; it is about what I think about God. Is my faith blind and unemotional? No, it is informed by scripture, tradition, experience and reason, with scripture taking the lead.

When will we stop talking back to God?

Allan Murphy

Pastor, Southall Memorial and New Hope UMCs, Farmville District

An epistle to the unqualified

By Hannah Shanks

As a part of my job, it's my great opportunity to work alongside congregations of all stripes on their outreach ministries and volunteer service. In more than three years in this work, I've watched great ministry ideas – and great, high-capacity leaders and clergy – shut themselves down with the same simple sentence: "We'd love to do something about [ministry area/community problem], but we don't even know where to start."

Because God is constantly calling us into the margins, it's not surprising

that we feel unqualified. I've never been there.

I don't know anything about affordable housing. We want to do more than a food pantry, but don't know how to connect with our food pantry guests.

We can teach ourselves how to create the perfect crème brulee via *Pinterest*, or how to strip decking via *YouTube*, or google a curriculum vitae template – but when faced with nebulous, deeply-interconnected web of ministry to people who are different than us, there's no walk-through wizard. Without a perfect blueprint, without 5+ years of experience, we

feel unqualified...and then we freeze.

We freeze into molds of doing the same ministry activities year after year, whether those activities transform us and the world or not.

In light of this, I'd like to submit a proposal:

1. Let's all agree that we're not qualified to do what we're doing. (This applies to you, too, clergy.)

2. Let's all agree that we can't get qualified to do what we're doing.

3. Let's get humble, listen to the wisdom around us, and do something.

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

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Even if we're clueless.

The body of Christ, and the work of that body, is far too great for any one of us to have a corner on – whether that's children's ministry, social entrepreneurship, teaching or pastoral care. Claiming that we can't – or shouldn't – participate in kingdom work because it isn't our area perpetuates our silos and allows us to disengage from our hurting brothers and sisters around the world with a comfortable excuse.

At what point did we decide we were international public health experts, United Methodist Church? And yet look at the amazing work that has been accomplished through Imagine No Malaria.

In my first ministry position as a General Board of Global Ministries summer social justice intern, I couldn't have been more unqualified. A corn-fed rural girl with zero experience in urban ministry, I was matched with Rising Hope United Methodist mission church in Alexandria, ministering to folks experiencing homelessness, serious mental illness, addiction recovery and deep poverty in Alexandria. I had no marketable skills. I had no background to make me "comfortable" or "effective" in urban ministry.

My work experience was working in a popcorn stand and snow cone shack in rural Illinois. My ministry experience was doing improv

in a church camp basement with 5th-12th graders and teaching preschoolers to sign the lyrics of praise songs while they sang.

My first weekend in Alexandria, Rising Hope needed someone to run a popcorn machine for their family fun fair. A 4-year-old and her mother approached – she seemed desperately shy and reserved, never attempting to interact with the other 300 children at the fun fair. As they moved up through my line, I finally



Hannah Shanks at the time she served with Rising Hope.

understood why. They were signing back and forth to one another. She couldn't communicate with any of the other children, only her mother.

I crouched down and signed to her, using 20 percent of my total sign language vocabulary: "Would you like popcorn?"

The girl beamed and signed back rapidly, way beyond my level. "Sorry," I replied. "That's all I know." She laughed and held up two fingers. I scooped, buttered and salted away. She signed "Thank you"

and skipped away to the nearest bench. Her mother thanked me profusely. "I feel so bad that she can't talk to anybody but me when we're out and around. Thank you so much for talking to her."

I tell this story because I had no idea what I was doing, and yet I was following. I had longed for classes on urban ministry and affordable housing and leadership in the days leading up to my departure for Alexandria. But they didn't need another expert, especially not for my term. They needed a girl who could work a popcorn machine and tie water balloons and carry donations. They needed me to be transformed as they strove to transform the Route 1 corridor.

In the eight years since, this scene comes shining back when the path gets dim.

We don't have to know what we're doing. All we have to know is that we're being faithful and striving to honor the people in front of us.

We don't have to know how we're going to fix it. All we have to know is that God is calling us to partner with our brothers and sisters who are hurting, no matter where they are.

We don't need classes on neighboring or innovation or leadership –


though they are incredibly helpful and I highly recommend them. But no amount of them can qualify us to do what God asks.

God asks for us to care for orphans and widows, even if we don't know how. To visit those in prison, even if we've never trafficked drugs, committed fraud, assaulted others, or lived with addiction. God asks us to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly, even on roads we don't know and with folks we can't fathom.

Next time we're considering a ministry opportunity or a problem in the community – let's skip the part of the conversation where we say "We don't even know where to begin." We either die on that sentence or quickly move past it anyway. We don't need it.

Instead, let's ask "Who will help us begin, and when is he available to speak with us?" Let's ask "What would transform us, even a little bit?"

Let's walk out there, even when we don't know what we're doing. And when all else fails, let's ask...

"Would you like some popcorn?" It's always worked for me. 

-Hanna Shanks served as an intern at Rising Hope UMC in Alexandria and is now a called layperson at Centenary UMC in St. Louis.



COMMENTARY

Committed to liberation

I am a product of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement ... guided, molded and shaped into my “whoness,” first by my parents, whose professional responsibilities and volunteer activity in the fight for Civil Rights increased my awareness of the injustices in our society and importance of speaking against those injustices.

My own experiences as a graduate of Maggie L. Walker High School, a segregated high school in Richmond, and a student at Morgan State University in Baltimore, enhanced my worldview and commitment to the liberation of people of African descent.

My father, the Rev. Gloster B. Current, director of branches and field operations for the NAACP, was a major strategist in coordinating the 1963 March on Washington. He was also a political analyst with the NAACP Washington bureau chief, Clarence Mitchell Sr., in lobbying for passage of the Civil Rights Act, and, as Medgar Evers’ supervisor, witnessed the assassination of Evers by white supremacist Byron De La Beckwith on June 12, 1963.

Dad was also one of the founding members of The United Methodist Church’s Commission on Religion and Race. Mom, Leontine T.C. Kelly, then a history and economics teacher at segregated Armstrong High School in Richmond,



By
Angela Current-Felder

agreed to be one of two African-American teachers to integrate the faculty of John Marshall High School and ensure that the first African-American students integrating that school would have teachers of color to support them. She later entered the ministry and was eventually elected bishop of The United Methodist Church.

In 1963, I was at Morgan. I was a member of the debate team; was a student participant in the Maryland Freedom Rides; picketed the movie theater near the campus at Northwood Shopping Center; was arrested with 343 Morganites, including classmate Ernie Lyght (elected bishop in The UMC in 1984), along with students from John Hopkins University and Goucher College. Each of us was charged \$600 bail and jailed for six days in Baltimore’s Pine Street Jail. With NAACP support and

funds raised by residents, the charges were dropped, we were freed, the theater was desegregated and buses returned us to campus.

Thousands of high school and college students throughout the South and North replicated my student experiences – actively engaged in civil disobedience activities, protesting the 60 years of Jim Crow laws and segregated public facilities and demanding the right to vote.

Stokely Carmichael, John L. Lewis, United Methodist minister the Rev. James Lawson and others founded the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee which became largely responsible for organizing student activism in the Movement. To this day, many of us believe that the student movement and the students’ willingness to risk their lives for freedom played a major role in ensuring the passage of the Civil Rights Act in July 1964.

As we celebrate the eradication of legal segregation, the election of Barack Obama, the first black president of the United States, and strides made in this multicultural, diverse, highly technological society, we are simultaneously witnessing a frightening emergence of racial hatred. We see growing numbers of white supremacy groups in the United States, well-organized efforts to prohibit racial ethnics from voting, mass

A view from the Lincoln Memorial toward the Washington Monument during the March on Washington, Aug. 28, 1963. (Wikipedia)



COMMENTARY

incarceration of thousands of poor black and brown people in the name of the “war on drugs” and a growing use of “Stand Your Ground” laws to justify killing young black males – the new form of lynching!

We have celebrated 60 years of the Supreme Court’s landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington and the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act. Next year will be the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act. We have witnessed the passing of our heroes and “sheroes,” recently, Nelson Mandela, Maya Angelou, Vincent Harding and Ruby

Dee. They have joined Malcom, Medgar, Martin, Bobby, Roy, Whitney, Dorothy, Coretta and others who fought for our freedom and are among that mighty cloud of witnesses.

Every generation inherits the world that the preceding generation helped to dream and create for them – both the good and the bad. As my generation passes the baton, are there people we can rely upon who will remain steadfast, unmovable, always abiding in the Word of the Lord? Who within this great denomination of United Methodists will remember these words of Amos?

“Take away from me
the noise of your
songs; I will not listen
to the melody of your
harps. But let justice
roll down like waters,
and righteousness
like an everflowing
stream.

Amos 5:23-24, NRSV

-Angella Current-Felder is the former executive director of the Office of Loans and Scholarships, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Her books include *Breaking Barriers: An African American Family and the Methodist Story*, Abingdon, 2001, and *School of Dreams in the Valley of Hope: The Africa University Story*, AU Press, 2012.

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The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



United Methodists offer aid after tornado hits Eastern Shore

Campers at the Cherrystone Family Camping and RV Resort on the Eastern Shore had barely a moment of warning on the morning of July 24 before a tornado ripped through the area, resulting in three deaths, three dozen injuries and the loss of multiple campers, cabins, homes and boats.

A number of United Methodist churches responded to an urgent appeal by providing water or monetary donations. Two pastors in the area, the Rev. Janet Allen, serving the Cheriton Charge, and the Rev. Elizabeth Lutz of the Cape Charles-Capeville Charge, were active throughout the day checking on members and neighbors.

A couple from Jersey City, N.J., Lord Balatbat and Lolibeth Ortega, died when a tree fell onto their tent. Their son, Lheandrew Balatbat, 13, died Aug. 9 at Children's Hospital in Norfolk

from injuries sustained when a separate tent he was sleeping in was also crushed. He had been in a coma since the day the tornado hit the campground.

Two daughters, ages 12 and 7, were also injured, but have returned to New Jersey and are recovering with relatives. A niece of the deceased couple, Jelyn Ortega-Fallarme, 21, also suffered injuries and is hospitalized.

Balatbat and Ortega were natives of the Philippines and were called key figures in the Filipino community in Jersey City. Balatbat worked as a manager of a Walgreen's. The family made an annual summer trip to the same Eastern Shore campground to celebrate Ortega's birthday.

The tornado came out of the southwest, actually forming as a water spout over the Chesapeake Bay. The campground was packed with summer vacationers. Weekends typically draw 2,000 people to the campground.

"In the summertime, it's the biggest town on the shore," said Larry LeMond, chairman of the Northampton County Board of Supervisors.

Rev. Allen was closest to the campground and was quickly on the scene, providing comfort to the victims.

"(District Administrative Assistant) Connie Owens and I went out and just talked to people," she said. "The Salvation Army was there,


organizing. I went to the firehouse right across from my house to see what they needed and of course they were focused on supporting the first responders. Our church members collected bottled water and other supplies. We really pulled together. It's been amazing how all the churches have offered things so graciously."

PNC Bank has organized a fundraising drive for the family from New Jersey. Mary Ann Cox in the Travis Chapel UMC congregation designed a t-shirt emblazoned with the words "Shorely Blessed" to be sold to help raise money for the family.

Cherrystone Campground reopened Aug. 1.

"We drove down to the campground and there were campers everywhere and kids having fun," Allen said. "Life has kind of gotten back to normal. But for some it's been hard to move on. There are people in my churches who are still getting their homes repaired."

"The way the Shore came together helped folks know a little light on a dark, dark day," said the Rev. Alex Joyner, the Eastern Shore District superintendent.

"And, as always, the prayers of the United Methodist people of the Virginia Conference are a mighty thing, and we solicit those for the families and communities affected." 

-Neill Caldwell and Linda Rhodes

A tornado hit the Eastern Shore on the morning of July 24.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

United Methodist churches in northern Virginia step up to help Afghan translator

By Neill Caldwell

After seven years translating for the highest echelons of the United States military mission in his homeland of Afghanistan, Hameed realized he was in grave danger. The Taliban had left a warning tacked to the door of a family business threatening him and his family with assassination.

Given just hours to prepare to leave the country, he and his wife and two small children arrived in Washington, D.C., in February with little in the way of belongings, money or future plans. The U.S. government did arrange for three month's housing with Lutheran Family Services, expecting him to be self-sufficient by the end of that time.

The Northern Virginia Military Ministry Outreach, a coalition of 10 churches in northern Virginia – eight of them United Methodist – learned about Hameed's family's situation and jumped in to help. The churches provided furniture, food, clothing, toys, a television and money. Since then, additional support has been provided in resume preparation, job search assistance, driving lessons, financial help to pay the rent and other expenses.

Coming to America "was

the only choice that we had," Hameed recently told CBS Evening News reporter Jim Alexrod. "We were the eyes and ears of coalition and American forces. We are left in a lurch and do not know where we're going to go or what might happen to us tomorrow. ... There were times when I felt like I would not survive this situation. I'm a proud man and I want to work. I want to support my family. But there was no way to find a job."

The eight United Methodist churches participating in the program are Centreville, Messiah and Sydenstricker in Springfield, Grace and Buckhall in Manassas, Pender and St. George's in Fairfax and Christ in Fairfax Station.

"Representatives from several of those churches went to a seminar on working with returning veterans and found we were doing a similar military ministry independently," says Bill Shugarts of Christ UMC, one of the coordinators.

In the span of just over a year, the combined organization has done several projects, including holding a dinner that raised \$8,000 for the Wounded Warrior project at Fort Belvoir, and hosting veterans from Fort Bragg in North Carolina and their families who were part of a "Healing Tour" to

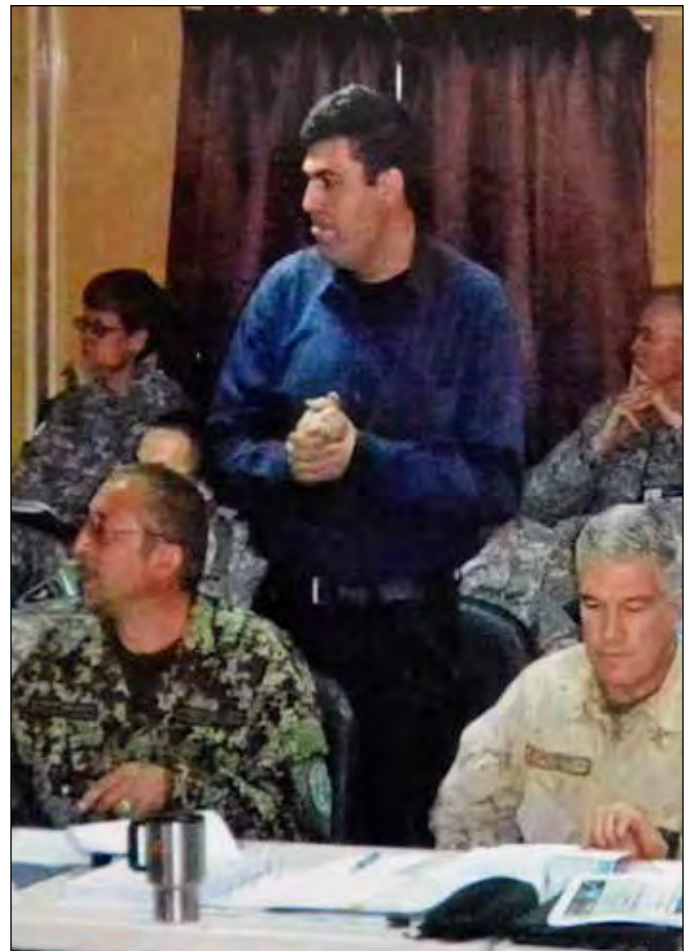
the Washington area.

But reaching out to help Hameed's family has been especially meaningful to all those involved, Shugarts said.

"I got an e-mail from another church member that said 'we gotta help this guy.' That's how it started. Basically they had dropped him into low-income housing in a high-risk area, a combat zone of

(Continued on next page)

Hameed, an Afghan translator for the U.S. military, and his family moved to the Washington, D.C., area in February to escape threats from the Taliban.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



another sort. So we've continued to work and work. Basically they'd be out on the street now if it weren't for these churches."

Recently Christ UMC associate pastor the Rev. Monica Reynolds asked Shugarts and Hameed to stand up as examples of how people of different faiths can work together for a sermon she was preaching on the Book of Galatians. It happened to be a Sunday when Virginia Bishop Young Jin Cho was visiting worship there. "It sure got the Bishop's attention," Shugarts said with a chuckle. "He gave Hameed a big hug at the end of the service. It was great!"

"It's by the grace of God that we're doing this," Shugarts added. "There's something really special going on here... with Christians and Muslims helping one another."

Promises unfilled

As well as translating, interpreters play a key role in educating foreign troops about the local



Rawof celebrating his 6th birthday at Christ Church.

culture. They are also key sources of intelligence, not just for information about the Taliban, but also the Afghan army and police, who sometimes pose as much of a threat as the insurgents they're supposed to be fighting. The interpreters do this for years on end, going out on every patrol with coalition forces, while U.S. troops never do more than six- or 12-month tours. Translators also have the extra burden of putting their families at risk, because the Taliban often target interpreters' relatives.

And they didn't take the job for the money. Afghan interpreters were lucky if they got paid more than \$1,000 a month. Some interpreters took the job because they were explicitly promised a U.S. visa after at least 12 months' service. But most took the job because they believed the Taliban would be defeated and their country would be rebuilt.

In late May, President Obama announced that the U.S. will withdraw all but about 10,000 troops from Afghanistan by the end of this year, and by the end of 2016, only a small force will be left at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

But as Americans move out, there are plenty of loose ends remaining. For those Afghans whose work for the U.S. government puts them in danger with the resurgent Taliban, it's a situation that is eerily reminiscent of the end of the Vietnam War.

The Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program was established in 2009. The program, modeled after one for Iraqis, was designed to identify people who faced genuine threats and to speed their entry to this country. But the program was an initial failure. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry admitted as much in an op-ed written for the *Los Angeles Times* in June.

"The effort got off to a

Afghan translator Hameed (far right) with Rennie Chan, Bill Shugarts and Pastor Monika Reynolds at Christ UMC in July 2014.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

slow start," Kerry wrote. "Delays in processing applications and lack of transparency in making decisions created problems. Bluntly stated, the process wasn't keeping up with the demand. ... Some deserving people were simply falling through the cracks."

The State Department and other federal agencies have worked to make the SIV process more efficient, and the results have been dramatic. Nearly 5,000 Afghans, mainly interpreters and family members, have received visas under the program since Oct. 1, 2013, compared with roughly 1,600 in the previous 12 months.

But the government had already reached the current fiscal year cap of 3,000 new visas. On Aug. 1, the U.S. Senate passed legislation to grant an additional 1,000 visas to Afghan interpreters. The U.S. House of Representatives had passed similar legislation earlier.

The new legislation expands the number of visas available to 4,000 for fiscal year 2014. As of July, the *Washington Post* reported that there were around 6,000 applicants still in the pipeline, with about 300 whose cases were close to completion.

"The State Department is working hard to catch up," said U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), who is among the lawmakers leading an effort to extend and expand the SIV program. "While it has

made real progress, it is still behind after years of treating the issue as a low priority."

"The well of SIVs has dried up," Blumenauer said. "So any interpreters looking for relief, looking for the U.S. to honor our promise, are going to be left alone and without protection, often with a price on their head."

This is personal

For former Army Capt. Matt Zeller, the debt owed is personal. Zeller literally owes his life to his Afghani interpreter.

"Janis shot and killed two Taliban fighters who were about to kill me in a fire fight," said Zeller. "I look at every one of these



Army Capt. Matt Zeller and his interpreter, Janis

men and women as fellow veterans, as a fellow soldier who served our country in war. They literally wore our uniforms."

Zeller told his story in the July issue of *Guideposts* magazine. He's also gotten involved with the Northern Virginia Military Ministry Outreach and their help with Hameed.

"(Hameed) is a prime example of how the system that was put in place

to help has failed," said Zeller, the president of *No One Left Behind*, an organization created in 2013 to help translators who have struggled to find footing in the U.S.

"Matt is trying to help several hundred Afghan translators," said Shugarts, "not just one or two guys. He's really been able to shine a light on this situation, which is a huge major issue militarily, politically... and not just around the Washington area."

Zeller describes *No One Left Behind* as an organization of "last resort."

"We come in when the other organizations have stopped taking care of them, have stopped paying for their housing, when they've provided them with horrible furniture and done nothing to get them a job. These people are not being taken care of the way that we promised them. ... We're bringing them here and dropping them into slum housing and not doing anything whatsoever to help them find jobs. How could we not want to do more than give these people a slum and a 'good luck' and that's it?"


Zeller worries about the next time American soldiers might need locals to help them out.

"This is the credibility of our word on the line," he added. "We told them if you gave us a year of honorable and faithful service, and that if they found themselves in duress because of that service,

so long as they could pass a national security background screening, we would get them here and take care of them and their family. What that means is that they are holding us up to the standards that we held them up to in their country – and they were the greatest friends and hosts that we could have asked for. We're simply not returning the favor, and we need to do better."

Hameed is happy that Americans have stepped up to help his family. "I will never, ever forget a call from a man named Keith Saddler, who I never met in my life, telling me, 'Don't worry, Hameed, we're going to help you,'" he recalled.

Saddler, a member at St. George's UMC, described the first time he met the family. "We walked in the door of this apartment and there was nothing in there. There was a mattress, not in the best shape, in one of the bedrooms, and that was all they had."

For Shugarts, a Vietnam veteran who retired in 2006, it's a chance to help atone for past mistakes. "I lived through this before with the draw-down from Vietnam," he said. "We have good intentions to do the right thing, but we still manage to use other people as disposable." 

-Neill Caldwell is editor of the *Advocate*

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Better together: Interfaith engagement on a university campus

By DeLyn Celec

The Rev. Dr. Rhonda VanDyke Colby metaphorically describes the celebration of diversity as a stew, as opposed to a soup. As the vice president for Student Life at Shenandoah University and a United Methodist elder, she encourages individuals to proudly and distinctly be who they are alongside the other “chunks” that make our community delicious. Religious diversity is no different. In interfaith engagement, we do not try to blend all faiths and philosophies together into one broth that suits all people. Rather, we savor the chunks that taste different from one another but “work” together.

Shenandoah University has accepted President Obama’s challenge through the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC). The motto of IFYC is a simple and powerful summary of its vision:

“Better Together.” According to the President’s Challenge website, involved schools work to mobilize their campuses to serve. This service to our schools’ communities unites students and others across lines commonly drawn between diverse backgrounds of faith and philosophy.

IFYC offers a useful quiz on interfaith literacy. This information is a great start in learning about some important historical quotes, facts and figures: www.ifyc.org/quiz.

The Shenandoah University Office of Spiritual Life staff has learned many lessons over the past few years while focusing on interfaith concerns. Foremost, we start from common ground. All of the earth’s major religions value extending generosity and hospitality to others – especially to those in need – so why not serve together?

Prayer and ritual are certainly important in the devotional lives of most religious people. However, engaging in truly inclusive interfaith worship services must be done with great care and consideration. While engaged in service to our communities, we have the opportunity to build relationships across religious lines. By embracing our colleagues, we learn the vocabularies and finer points of their faith backgrounds, which lay the

foundation for relationships and deeper discussion.

The “stew” metaphor is useful when we talk about worshiping and praying together in a religiously diverse setting. For example, Shenandoah offers two weekly worship celebrations throughout the academic year; both are unapologetically Christian. All students are invited to attend, and on occasion we feature a person or element of another faith. Occasional services are created as intentionally interfaith, focusing on Jewish or Muslim traditions, for instance. In these cases, we seek to learn from one another as we find commonalities and embrace differences.

Many events during the 2013-2014 school year included participants of diverse faith and philosophical backgrounds. Two in particular stand out: Night in a Box and a Stop Hunger Now meal-packaging event.

The multi-faith elements of the *Night in a Box* event were a pleasant and welcome surprise. The purpose of the fall semester fundraiser was to raise money for the Winchester Area Temporary Thermal Shelter (WATTS). WATTS partners with faith communities, businesses and service organizations to provide temporary shelter for people in the area who are experiencing homelessness during the harshest

An interfaith group of Shenandoah University students participate in “Night in a Box.”



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

winter months. Locations change each week, but are usually in church buildings. Christian congregations and Beth El Synagogue supply volunteers, as does Shenandoah University. The vision cast by a few local Christian churches has grown into a far-reaching network of faith-based and secular organizations.

The vision cast by a few Christians in Spiritual Life grew into a far-reaching community of people of diverse faith and philosophical backgrounds. By stepping up to sleep in cardboard boxes set in the campus quad for one cold November night, students, faculty, staff, administrators, presidents, trustees and a few of their children formed a multi-faith community.

IFYC's founder, Eboo Patel, points to Habitat for Humanity as an inspiring example. Because of their commitment to Christian service, Millard and Linda Fuller began Habitat for Humanity to gather materials and volunteers to build affordable housing. Today, interfaith builds are common in the U.S. and even more so around the world. While they were "living in a box," members of the Shenandoah community who identify as Christian, Muslim and "non-religious" raised several thousand dollars for WATTS. (Each participant raised funds in exchange for the use of luxury items such as blankets, sleeping bags, food and flashlights.) Both the fundraiser and



Shenandoah University students participate in a Stop Hunger Now event.

the organization expand to serve more, and more efficiently, together with those of diverse faiths. One *Night in a Box* participant said, "I learned that you can make anything happen when you join a community together."

During Shenandoah University's annual Partnership With Community Day – when classes are canceled and students and employees go out into the community to serve – the Office of Spiritual Life sponsored the Interfaith Stop Hunger Now. The Stop Hunger Now organization delivers the supplies and know-how, instructs the volunteers, and then sets everyone to work packaging thousands of nutritious meals in only a couple of hours. Stop Hunger Now then transports the meals to places around the world where people are hungry and distributes them at schools as incentive to attend and get an education.

At a Stop Hunger Now event, no one asks the

faith or philosophical backgrounds of those who will ultimately receive the meals. However, participants frequently do discuss their reasons for serving. One volunteer said, "My Islamic faith teaches me that it is my responsibility to help those in need. That's why I do these things." Representatives of Shenandoah's Catholic Students Association, Muslim Students Association, Jewish Students Association, Freethinkers (based on principles of secularism) and other student groups joined the Office of Spiritual Life and packaged 20,000 meals in two hours. "I'm inspired to do more to end hunger," one student said. "I wish there were more of these events."

On Sept. 11 last year, the Office of Spiritual Life hosted an interfaith dinner discussion. Reza Aslan, a New Testament scholar who happens to be a Muslim, had recently been scrutinized for writing a book about the histori-

cal Jesus. We gathered to discuss the treatment of Dr. Aslan and its representation of intolerance toward Muslims in the U.S. Students, staff and faculty of diverse faiths and no faith gathered in safe space for moderated discussion. The goal was not to reach agreement, but understanding.

The Muslim persons in the room spoke briefly about discrimination they have experienced. A Jewish person referenced the long history of the oppression of Jews. The Atheist and Buddhist persons also spoke about discrimination they have faced, which many attendees had not previously considered. The evaluations afterward indicate that those present thought we made progress, but still have a long way to go. 🍀

—DeLyn Celec is campus minister and Worship Arts coordinator at Shenandoah University in Winchester.

First steps

Are you inspired to reach out to the synagogue or mosque in your community to unite and serve? The Interfaith Youth Core's action-focused model outlines step-by-step instructions for campuses that easily adapt to fit other types of communities. Indeed, when each of us heeds the call to serve God and neighbor, we are "better together." Visit [www.ifyc.org/sites/default/files/Making it Interfaith.pdf](http://www.ifyc.org/sites/default/files/Making%20it%20Interfaith.pdf).

LOCAL CHURCH NEWS



▲ **The Kelly Charge, New Hope UMC in Chamblissburg and Halesford UMC in Moneta**, under the leadership of Rev. Kelvin Edwards Sr., held a concert to raise awareness of the need for food in the Rocky Mount, Roanoke and Chamblissburg areas. Admission was a donation of canned green beans, corn or peas, all in demand at area food pantries. The concert was held at **Burnt Chimney UMC in Wirtz** and featured the Halesford Gospel Singers, Burnt Chimney Chorus, Melody Chimes, the Disciples of Faith and Offerings. The event received 150 cases of food for area food banks. Pictured: Carlton Robinson, James Jordan, Valerie Jordan and Melodi Huston sort donations at Halesford.

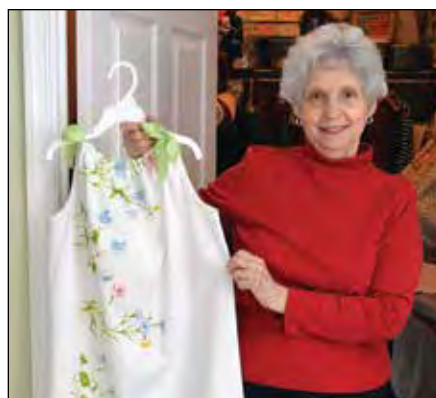


▲ **First, Aldersgate, Hinton Avenue and Wesley Memorial United Methodist churches** collaborated for Vacation Bible School this summer at Aldersgate. About 90 children and 50 volunteers came together to make it all happen. One highlight of the week was the various animal groups that came to share: Animals Unlimited, Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary and Caring

for Creatures each came to talk about how they care for God's creation. One First UMC member also shared her pet snake. The children learned that Jesus loves us all, no matter how different or weird we may feel. Not only did the children grow in their faith, but they also learned the value of helping others. Together they raised \$177 for the Heifer Project, which is more than enough to buy a goat! They also collected donations for the Fluvanna SPCA.



▲ The Credo (confirmation) class from **New Hope UMC, Harrisonburg District**, recently traveled to Glenn Allen to visit the Virginia Conference Office and meet with Bishop Young Jin Cho. They also toured and visited at United Methodist Family Services while in Richmond. The class was accompanied by mentors and Pastor Doug Gunsalus.



▲ Gretchen Parrott, a member of **St. Andrew's UMC in Richmond**, earlier this year learned a new twist to her

craft of sewing. "It all started with a simple question asked by my daughter-in-law, who had just been selected to go on a medical mission trip to Haiti. She asked 'Do you know how to make a pillowcase dress?' Forty-eight dresses later, I can answer 'yes!'" With help from Jan Ragland's sister, Nancy Mader, and her granddaughter, Kasie, who collected pillowcases at Pocahontas Middle School, the pillowcases were cut, trimmed, and sewn and on their way to Haiti.

The Day Care Ministry at **Main Street UMC** has been going on for 26 years. The two young women pictured, Sarah Smith and Brenna Ginn, came to Main Street as infants and now are back as teachers. Both are pursuing college degrees. They formed a friendship that began when they were babies at Main Street. This summer the Main Street summer camp is exploring different themes for each month. The theme for June was "God's World," for July it was "God's Gifts" and for August, "God's Praises." ▼





▲ Members of the cluster of United Methodist churches in **Franklin City/Southampton County** met for their 14th year of worship for "Christmas in July," which includes each congregation bringing gifts to support the feeding ministry of the community. About 50 United Methodists met to sing carols. More than 1,000 food and paper products were donated for the food bags that are distributed almost daily by the Franklin Cooperative Ministries to the needy citizens of the community. A love offering of \$515 was also collected.



▲ Forty-five **Main Street Suffolk** Scouts and leaders went to Minnesota in July, 29 of them attended Many Point Scout Camp near Ponsford while 16 Scouts attended Northern Tier High Adventure Base near Ely. The

troop traveled approximately 3,300 miles. Scouts that attended Many Point spent their mornings working on merit badges or other skills and their afternoons in patrol activities. The Northern Tier crews had a physically demanding trip as they went out into the wilderness. They canoed lake to lake, portaging canoes between lakes. They were blessed with places to spend the nights including United Methodist churches in Ohio and Minnesota.



▲ **Main Street UMC** youths made a summer mission trip to Roanoke to work with the REACH (Real Experiences Affecting Change) program. The team assisted with food preparation at the Roanoke Mission, help prepare nearly 500 meals, waded through the waters of the Roanoke River to pick up trash and debris for about six hours, worked in the mission thrift store rearranging the 10,000-square-foot receiving area, sorted and arranged food at the Christian Soldiers Food Bank and cleaned out planting beds in the community garden. The highlight of the week was working at the home of Anne Chilton. While there was a lot of work going on, there was much fellowship with the Chilton family. The youths cleaned, scraped and painted her large detached garage. While there was much work done, each night was capped off with a worship service. The team also made new friends from **Burnt Factory UMC in Winchester** and **Mount Pisgah UMC in Midlothian**.

During the summer, youths at **Courthouse Community UMC in Virginia Beach** sold "virtual hoagies" to raise money to help feed the homeless. These "cyber-sandwiches" were sold for \$5, and the money raised was used to buy supplies to make real sandwiches to take to areas where homeless people congregate.

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EVENTS



SEPTEMBER

Edward Droomgoole House

Sept. 13, Valentines

In celebration of its 10th anniversary, The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation will hold an open house tour of the Edward Droomgoole House, the only remaining Virginia Conference circuit rider home (built circa 1790), 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 13. The home is located at 2722 Christanna Highway in Valentines. The Rev. Dr. Michael Browder will speak on "The Cradle of Methodism." The Rev. Gary Ziegler will portray Rev. Droomgoole. A fellowship lunch at noon costs \$10. Send checks and **RSVP by Sept. 6** to: Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation, P.O. Box 385, Lawrenceville, VA 23868. For more information, e-mail stammany@bitbroadband.com or call **(434) 636-5604**.

UMVIM Team Leader Training

Sept. 13, Brosville UMC, Danville

This conference-sponsored United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) team leader training event will meet the requirements for all first-time leaders. Others interested are welcome to attend whether scheduled to lead a team or not. **Deadline to register is Sept. 8.** Visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. To learn more, contact the Center for Justice and Missional Excellence at **1-800-768-6040, ext. 144; (804) 521-1144**; or contact Forrest White, conference UMVIM coordinator, at VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com or **(804) 938-1026**.

UMVIM Team Leader Recertification Training

Sept. 19, Culpeper UMC

Team Leader recertification is required for all UMVIM team leaders who completed basic team leader training five years ago or more. The focus of this training is to update leaders on the Virginia Conference UMVIM policies and guidelines, to share best practices, and to answer any questions. There is a \$25 registration fee. **The deadline to register is Sept. 15.** For more information, contact the Center for Justice and Missional Excellence at **1-800-768-6040, ext. 144; (804) 521-1144**; or contact Forrest White, conference UMVIM coordinator, at VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com or **(804) 938-1026**. Visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date to register.

School for Children's Ministry

Sept. 20, Greenville UMC

Nov. 8, Grace UMC, Manassas

The School for Children's Ministries is an annual training event for local church leaders. Come alone or bring a team to share ideas, experience creative workshops and make

new connections. Contact Beth Christian for more information at bethchristian@vaumc.org or **(540) 932-1055**. To register, visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date. Greenville is located on Highway 11 between Staunton and Lexington.

OCTOBER

5 Talent Academy

Oct. 4, Floris UMC, Herndon (and live streamed throughout the conference)

Registration is open for the 5 Talent Academy "Evangelism, Communication and Church Growth" event on Saturday, Oct. 4, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Floris UMC in Herndon, and broadcast to nine additional locations across the conference. Maria Dixon Hall, associate professor of Organizational Communication at Southern Methodist University, will explore evangelism through the lens of solid and fruitful communication practices. Registration is open to all Virginia Conference churches regardless of affiliation with the 5 Talent Academy. Visit www.vaumc.org/5Talent to register; **registration deadline is Sept. 19**. Registration is \$25 per person and includes lunch. Live stream sites are: **Blacksburg UMC, Franktown UMC, Timberlake UMC in Lynchburg, Fairview UMC in Danville, Woodlake UMC in Chesterfield, Bridgewater UMC, Francis Asbury UMC in Virginia Beach, Macedonia UMC in White Post and St. Luke's UMC in Yorktown.**

Mid-Size Church Lead Pastor event

Oct. 16, Good Shepherd UMC, Richmond

This event, with the theme "Leading Your Congregation to New Life," will be a time for the mid-size church lead pastors (average worship attendance between 150-349) in the Virginia Conference to gather for networking and learning. The Rev. Jim Harnish, a United Methodist minister from Florida and author of "You Only Have to Die," will be the speaker. The cost is \$25, which includes lunch. For more information, contact Pat Hickman at PatHickman@vaumc.org.

'Lord, Teach Me to Pray'

Oct. 25, St. Thomas UMC, Manassas

"Lord, Teach Me to Pray – Practical Applications for Prayer" will be offered again in October. The main speaker will be Dr. Wendy Miller, professor emeritus of Spiritual Formation at Eastern Mennonite Seminary and adjunct faculty at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill., and Perkins School of Theology in Dallas. Visit the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

Large Church Lead Pastor gathering

Oct. 28, Roslyn Retreat Center, Richmond

This annual event offers clergy a time of networking and learning for the large church lead pastors in the conference. Registration for this event will be open to pastors only if your average weekly worship attendance for 2013, as recorded by the Cabinet, is more than 350. The Rev. Dr. Lovett Weems, director of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary, will lead the event. The cost is \$25, which includes lunch. Questions may be directed to Pat Hickman at PatHickman@vaumc.org.

Virginia Chapter PAUMCS event

Oct. 29, Virginia United Methodist Center, Glen Allen

Experience your conference connection as speakers from the conference Board of Communications address the need to communicate in a technology-infused world, including social media, website design, web hosting and blogging. For more information, contact Bev Myers, the Professional Association of United Methodist Church Secretaries (PAUMCS) Virginia Chapter president, at BevMyers@vaumc.org or call **1-800-768-6040, ext. 134** or **(804) 521-1134**. You can register on the conference website at www.vaumc.org under "Events" and the date.

NOVEMBER

Middle School Retreat

Dec. 5-7, Eagle Eyrie, Lynchburg

For more information, contact Becky Tate in the Office for Ministries with Young People at BeckyTate@vaumc.org or call **1-800-768-6040, ext. 139** or **(804) 521-1139**.

New Church Leadership Institute

Nov. 17-19, United Methodist Center, Glen Allen

The New Church Leadership Institute is for pastors discerning a call to be a church planter and/or seeking ways to offer revitalization for existing congregations. It can help the participant discern his or her ministry style by offering clarity in ministry competencies, core behaviors and spiritual gifts. For more information contact the Rev. Mark Ogren at MarkOgren@vaumc.org or call **1-800-768-6040, ext. 156**.

DECEMBER

High School Retreat

Dec. 5-7, Eagle Eyrie, Lynchburg

For more information, contact Becky Tate in the Office for Ministries with Young People at BeckyTate@vaumc.org, or call **1-800-768-6040, ext. 139** or **(804) 521-1139**.

Common Table begins planning holy conferencing on human sexuality

The Virginia Conference Common Table met in July to discern the best way to respond to Bishop Young Jin Cho's request that the Common Table organize times of holy conferencing related to human sexuality during the 2014-2015 conference year.

Bishop Cho's stated goal for times of holy conferencing is consideration of how we may be in ministry together even though we may have differing opinions on sensitive issues. Disagreement over same-sex marriage has been dividing the entire denomination this year, with some calling for schism.

The bishop announced his plan in his Episcopal Address during the opening session of 2014 Annual Conference. The following day, during discussion on a resolution urging the 2016 General Conference to change the *Book of Discipline*, members approved a motion to postpone that resolution. Maker of the motion the Rev. Tom Berlin asked that discussion be put off until 2015 to allow time for the bishop's proposed holy conferencing on the issue.

In a recap of the meeting for the Cabinet and conference staff, Director of Connectional Ministries the Rev. Marc Brown wrote that the Common Table's time of discernment resulted in the following understanding of holy conferencing:

1) Guiding question for holy conferencing conversations: "In light of concerns being expressed in different areas of the connection of The United Methodist Church and in society as a whole regarding human sexuality, can we move forward in mission and ministry together?"

2) Guiding values of holy conferencing: Opportunity to be open to the Holy Spirit; Educate and articulate authentically; Develop the capacity to hear other person's thoughts as well as my own; Understand it's an ongoing process; Involve the fullness of connection and engage the local church.

These action steps were also agreed on:

1) Conference-wide holy conferencing will occur on one day via live streaming in different parts of the conference, with a video being made of the live stream. An individual or organization from outside the Virginia Conference will be contracted to present information that seeks to educate and articulate authentically the concerns of persons who

(Continued on page 37: "Common Table")

Jesus said, "Let the little children
them, for the kingdom of heaven



come to me, and do not hinder
belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:14



When you ask our conference to share its passion for youth ministry, you'd better be prepared for a flood of terrific ideas and stories! As Sunday school classes start filling up again and kids get back in the groove, we know you will find some inspiration in these pages for your youth ministries. From out-of-the-box worship venues, to unique annual events, to reaching out to kids without a church home, to teaching kids to serve their neighbors...we hope you dog-ear these pages all the way up through next summer's VBS!

CENTRAL SALEM UMC

On Sunday mornings at 9:15, the Fellowship Hall of Central UMC in Salem is filled with a unique and joyful gift: a worship experience called *The Table*. *The Table* is a dynamic worship service that is designed with children in mind. It is the root of our children's ministry and the catalyst of renewal in our church.

Everything about the Table is intentionally designed to disciple children. The chairs in the worship space are set up "in-the-round," encircling a wooden table with a fish carved in the middle of it. One section of circle, designated by a big rug and small stools set against the wall, is called "The Kids' Space." Children are invited to be in this area during the worship service, though they are also free to go give their mom a hug, put a prayer post-up on the board, or sit with their grandma until they feel comfortable.

At no time during worship are the children sent to another room; they are present and a vital part of the entire worship experience. During the singing, the children are invited to sing, to dance, and sometimes to play instruments. They participate in every aspect of worship, from singing to praying to serving communion.

(Continued on next page)

Rev. Kristen Holbrook leads children in worship around "The Table" at Central UMC

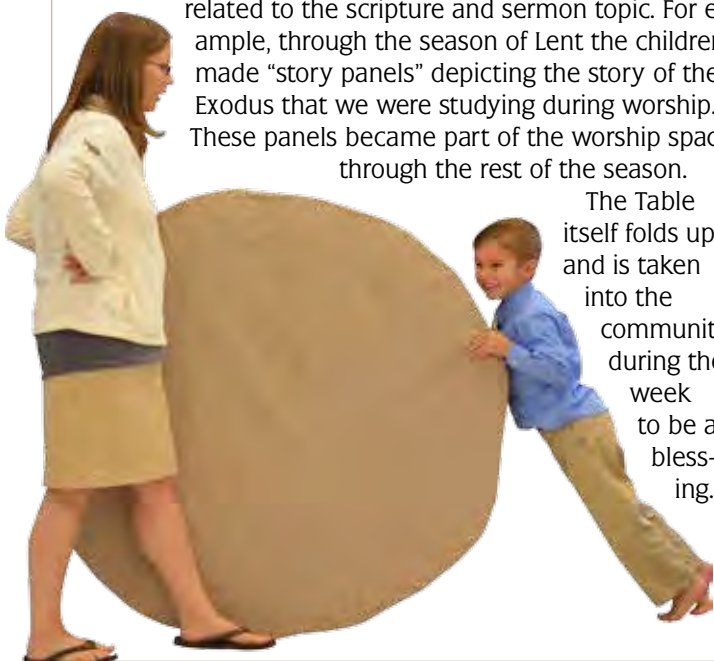


("Central Salem," continued from previous page)

Every week, the children make an offering to give. This is an intentional way of teaching that giving an offering is an act of worship and a joyful, important one at that! The children make goody bags for children at the Food Pantry, blessing cards for guests at the Church Yard Sale, get-well cards for sick church friends, and a host of other things that are given away to be a blessing to others. In a world where they are normally entitled to keep the things that they make, we have seen tremendous growth in the children as they learn to give freely of the good things that they have.

During the sermon time, after presenting the scripture in some kind of concrete way and speaking about the topic with the children, they have various projects that are related to the scripture and sermon topic. For example, through the season of Lent the children made "story panels" depicting the story of the Exodus that we were studying during worship. These panels became part of the worship space through the rest of the season.

The Table itself folds up and is taken into the community during the week to be a blessing.



We go to the dog park and hand out treats and bottled water, to the food pantry to give bagged lunches to the clients, to collect canned soup and crackers at the local Kroger, to the park to give away freezie pops...the possibilities for blessing the community are endless. We believe that mission and worship are inseparable, and the Table is seen as both the center of worship and the center of God's grace in the community. During testimony time, children and adults are encouraged to tell a story if they were present for a Table Outreach event. Every Sunday we celebrate Communion, and children help to serve the elements.

Another vital piece of The Table is the "Take Home" activity. We have found that many adults have no idea how to practice their faith at home with their family: how to pray with their children, read the Bible with them or have spiritual conversation. We intentionally provide tools to parents to help them disciple their children and practice faith at home with their family. Every week, the children are given a "Take Home" activity that connects with the scripture theme. This activity has basic instructions that a parent can read and follow. It always involves reading the scripture passage from worship, discussing it (with suggested questions), and then doing something concrete. These take home activities have included a cube with different prayers to say at meal time; a blessing to say before leaving for school every day; memory cards to learn the Lord's Prayer; a "Decision Tree" with practical questions to help make a decision.

God has done incredible things that we never expected, and it is absolutely the case at Central UMC that children are not the church of the future, they are the church of the present.

-The Rev. Kristin Holbrook, pastor of Central UMC

CENTENARY UMC

At Centenary UMC in Lynchburg, the need to think "outside of the sandbox" started with the fact the kids we minister to don't even have a sandbox. CUMC lies in a low-income neighborhood and the children have a mile walk to the nearest park. For almost 20 years we've hosted a program for the neighborhood children, grades K-8, on Thursday nights. Jesus set the example to go where people are and invite them in, so on any Thursday night (when school is in session) you'll hear the bells ring at 5:30 and dozens of children come to CUMC for "JIFF" ... not the peanut butter - this JIFF stands for "Juniors In Fun Fellowship."

The excited children rotate through four stations for 20 minutes each: Game Room/Bible study/Life Skills/Anything



Goes. The last category changes from week to week but could include a visit from our parish nurses or the neighborhood firefighters, or the children might learn how to ring hand bells or tune up their bicycles. Whatever gift a church or community member wants to share with the kids becomes “4thstation” – Anything Goes! After going through all stations, the children have pizza and lemonade.

One of the more successful recent additions is the “Chip Shop” reward program. The children earn “chips” for successfully participating in each area and bank those chips each week. The list of ways to earn chips is far too long but it’s amazing to see them help one another, raise hands to answer questions, use their manners, etc. – all to earn a chip. Every six weeks we have “Chip Shop” and they spend their chips on anything from books to food to games. They learn to budget their chips so that they can save and buy big ticket items like a meal out or a movie night. And when they have chips at the end of the school year, the amount that they save earns interest over the summer.

Through the years God has blessed us with glimpses of the harvest from the seeds that we sow. We have seen some of the young men and women blossom, go on to excel in school, the workplace and even college. It’s always great to run into a former JIFF’er and get a big hug! But even without those encounters, the dedicated volunteers will keep on sowing the seeds of God’s love in our neighborhood.

One last secret? Shhh ... don’t tell the JIFF kids ... the volunteers have as much fun as they do!

-Denise Bryson, Chris Howell, Paula Howell from Centenary UMC



The Purim Festival at
Bonsack UMC

BONSACK UMC

This year we did a Purim Festival at Bonsack UMC in Roanoke. Purim is the time when the Jewish Faith observes and celebrates Queen Esther’s brave decision to save her people. The children dressed as either Queen Esther or her cousin Mordecai. We had a costume contest, ate Hamann cookies, played games and retold the story with noise makers drowning out Hamann’s name each time it was mentioned.

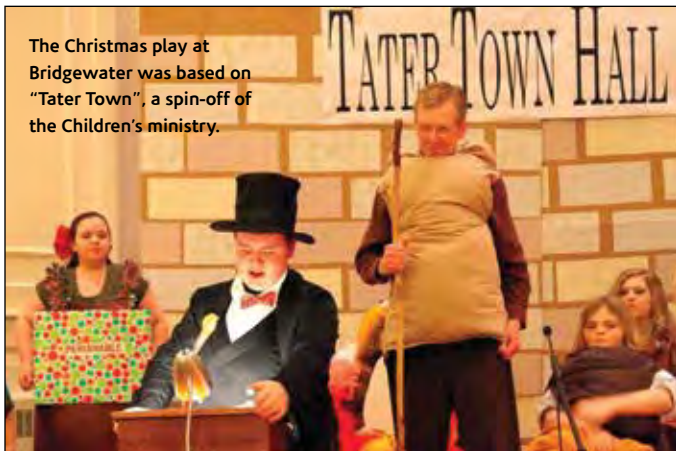
-Susan Wagner



Centenary UMC’s “Juniors in Fun Fellowship” (JIFF)

BRIDGEWATER UMC

At Bridgewater UMC, children play a vital role in the creation of the message offered to them during the Sunday worship service. A few years ago I introduced them to the "Taters." They are not original with me and have been used as teaching tools in public education since at least the 1950s. Words that end with "tater" are used encourage good behavior, for instance a teacher might encourage participation in this way: "Some people never seem motivated to participate but are content to watch while others do the work, they are called 'Speck Taters.'" Over the years, I have used the basic education taters – Speck Tater, Dick Tater, Emma Tater, Aggi Tater, Comment Taters, Hezza Tater and Sweet Tater – for the children's time in worship. In a previous appointment, I created Tater Trading Cards with an ink drawing of a Tater on one side of a card, and a lesson about that Tater on the other side.



The Christmas play at Bridgewater was based on "Tater Town", a spin-off of the Children's ministry.

When I introduced the Taters to the children of BUMC, I upgraded the cards to full color, creating a small original painting of each Tater for use on the cards, and I added other Taters to the original seven, including "Irri Tater" and "Tater Tots." I was asked to create a "Tater Chip" for Youth Sunday, and after that a child brought me a drawing she had created of mashed potatoes on a plate with a suggestion for a "Mashed Tater" card. I had never had a child suggest a Tater, and I eagerly created it, with the lesson being about how Mashed Tater depended on other Taters to carry him to church. Another child gave me a Tater drawing and suggestion, "Couch Tater," and since then it has never stopped!

I have created more than 100 Taters thus far, most of them the ideas of the children, who often provide a suggested text for the card as well as a drawing. I currently

have a dozen Taters created from the children's suggestions, which will be used this year, as well as a box with at least two dozen other suggestions from the children.

Our children, or "Tater Tots" as we call them, have ownership of the Tater Ministry, which is a wonderful thing to behold. Through their drawings and words I have come to see that they have a wonderful, vibrant faith which they want to share in creative ways. They eagerly participate in what was once known as the Children's Story and is now called Tater Time. And last year the children's Christmas play was based on Tater Town, home of the Taters, with children, teens and adults dressed as Taters.

Tater Time is just a small part of a much larger and energetic Children's Ministry at our church. We are blessed to have Liz McCammon as director of Children's and Youth Ministries, who along with the Children's Ministry Team, ensure that our young people are well cared for and provided with solid Christian teaching and ministry opportunities. The children collected toiletries and made goodie bags with handmade cards for Open Doors, the Harrisonburg area ministry to the homeless. They hosted a dinner for veterans, and made cards, favors and sang for them. They took a hayride to the Bridgewater Home and visited the residents there, singing for them and giving them pumpkins and candy. Our children's ministry is planned so one month is a mission project, and the next month a recreational activity. The One Crop program of our church invites children, and anyone who wants to participate, to grow crops specifically to be shared with the local food pantry. VBS provided an opportunity to include children of the community.

Of course, volunteers play a vital role in each of these activities, and are our greatest blessing.

-The Rev. Jim Harris, associate at Bridgewater UMC





AMP'D Summer Camp at Staunton UMC

CENTRAL STAUNTON UMC

In June, Central UMC in Staunton showcased the talented performances of the 43 children who attended "AMP'D" summer camp. The arts, music, performance and dance camp was an inspiring success, and children's laughter filled the halls of Central while they started the summer off with creativity at center stage.

The camp aimed to welcome the local community into the expansive facilities of the church and succeeded. Parents and caregivers remarked on the healthful and nutritious snacks provided, the amount of instruction provided in just a week, and the safe and warm environment.

"It was a great opportunity for the kids, and they really enjoyed it!" said Heather Walden, who had two children attend the camp. "The teachers were superb."

Artist Lili Un led the art camp into an exploration of sketching, watercolors, clay and paint. They went outdoors to explore and be inspired by what children love most – nature. Their artwork was displayed in the Fellowship Hall.

Murine Lusakweno, the Greater Voices of Praise & Worship director, brought the music camp attendees to a grander appreciation of musical awareness through a study of the history of music and a discovery of their natural aptitudes. A recital brought a melodic mixture of piano, drums and singing to life – with self-confident smiles all around.

An education artist and archivist for the American Shakespeare Center, Lia Razak started the performance camp off with an imaginative study of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Children memorized lines, learned an Elizabethan dance and put on an incredible performance for their peers, friends and family in Central's sanctuary. The children's confidence and skill in their production spoke volumes about how well their experience went.

The dance camp had Kimberly Field, the owner of Valley Dance Theatre, teach a collection of promising dancers. The children's varied experiences with different dance techniques led Fields to create a spectacular series of dances to showcase his or her diverse talents. The camp allowed each child to shine in their own unique way.

-The Rev. Won Un is pastor at Central UMC.

CHRIST CROSSMAN UMC

For two weeks this summer, our elementary (K-6) Sunday school students have been building model volcanoes. Every week this summer as part of our study of Genesis 1 we are learning and doing real science.

What do volcanoes have to do with a Bible study, you ask?

In his 2011 book, *You Lost Me*, David Kinnaman discusses how issues of science are one of the significant points of disconnection between today's young adults and Christianity. At Christ Crossman, we intentionally foster "side-by-side" experiences between science and faith as our children grow. For example, we had fun doing water science experiments as part of learning the story about Jesus' baptism. We learned about the water cycle when we explored "Day 2" of Genesis 1. Our hope is that by the time we send them off to college, they can embrace both the Truth of the Bible and the truths of science with ease and confidence. We are equipping them to be followers of Jesus for an age of science.

There are plenty of Sunday school curricula on the market that claim to incorporate science activities. Unfortunately, most of them fall short of doing the kind of inquiry-based science that children experience in the typical public school classroom. At Christ Crossman, we are developing our own faith-and-science units that incorporate real science. So, what do model volcanoes and earth science have to do with a Bible lesson? For young people in the 21st century, everything!

-Jennifer Secki Shields, director of Christian Education,
Christ Crossman UMC, Arlington District



Making volcanoes at
Christ Crossman UMC



Vacation Bible School participants at Emmaus UMC.

EMMAUS UMC

Like many other churches at the time, in 2010 the Emmaus UMC Children's Ministry Committee was looking for a way to tailor our Vacation Bible School to better meet the needs of a small church. Our average VBS attendance was 35-45 children ages pre-school through 8th grade. After much discussion and encouragement from our pastor, we decided to create our own VBS curriculum. At first, we wondered whether this was even possible. Would we be able to create a curriculum from scratch that included all components of VBS while engaging enough to attract children during summer vacation?

Despite these doubts, our Children's Ministry Committee decided to move forward. We first needed to decide on a theme and schedule, then plan daily lessons, crafts and so forth. We decided on the theme "All Things New." Keeping in mind our church needs and resources, we decided a three-night Bible school, with an additional night scheduled for commencement and a potluck dinner, would best suit our church. Once our theme and schedule were planned, the nightly lessons fell into place. Crafts, recreation, music and science lab were also included, to complement the nightly Bible lessons.

Our 2010 VBS was a huge success! Children experienced a curriculum which could be found nowhere else. Before the end of the week, we were already planning for the next year's VBS.

We discovered creating our own curriculum was lots of work, but it was also fun and unique.

We have now completed our fifth year of designing our own curriculum. Our theme for 2014 was "Mighty and Powerful in God," using a carnival theme. It was our most successful Bible school yet. We have refined certain points, but still operate with the same basic design we began with. Many of the children who attended our VBS in 2010 are now old enough that they assisted with planning, decorating, even writing and acting out skits.

So, to those churches searching for a different approach to VBS, doubt not. We were able to design a curriculum which was engaging, targeted our children and youths, and fit the needs of our church. You can too!

-Cindy Perdue, director of Children's Ministry, Emmaus UMC, Moneta

MACEDONIA UMC

United Methodist Women at Macedonia UMC lead a thriving "book bag" food ministry, which provides food year round to families in need and is a natural for partnership with Macedonia's Children's Ministry. Children love to help other children, and there is nothing so compelling as a hungry child to inspire mission projects.

We use Sunday school, Children's Church and Vacation Bible School as points of collection for the always needed staples of peanut butter and breakfast bars. To inspire giving, we have been known to offer such incentives as "Funky Hair Color Day" (temporary, of course) on a Sunday for all children when a specific goal has been met. During VBS this past summer, kids collected 46 jars of peanut butter and 33 breakfast bars.



Macedonia UMC youths fill book bags from their food pantry for other children in their community.

Also, parents have used social media to invite friends to meet at a local grocery store to shop together for the ministry and to have their children pass out flyers encouraging others to support the ministry. Kids are a big help back at church when it is time to organize the food on the pantry shelves.

During the first home delivery of the summer, we invite our book bag families to VBS and offer a meal and transportation to any who will come. This year, eight children attended and two invited friends! Our church surrounded them with such love that they have continued to come to church. Through conversations with those parents, we became even more aware of how much the food is both needed and appreciated. Hearing first-hand how a family



became homeless due to an injured parent opened eyes and deepened compassion for the families we serve.

Our book bag food ministries are about more than just food. They are an opportunity to unify a church with a common goal to provide both physical and spiritual nourishment to families in need. Children make the best disciples because they do not see obstacles. They are happy with whatever they can pro-

vide and don't worry that it won't be enough. They pray for families in need and believe that God will take care of them. Their enthusiasm is contagious. We can learn a lot from our kids as we serve alongside them.

If you are interested in finding out how to begin a book bag food ministry, ask your local school counselor. They can identify students in most need and can help you develop a plan to send food home.

Hunger is closer than you think.

-Nanette Fox, Children's Ministry leader, Macedonia UMC in White Post

CULPEPER UMC

Our program called "Children's Ministry Exploration" grew out of a desire to help people consider serving in children's ministry. After several conversations that ended with the words, "I just can't commit to working with children. I'm not sure I could do it," we realized there had to be a way to "try out" children's ministry.

We offer "Children's Ministry Exploration" as an opportunity for a person to do just that. It starts with an invitation to participate in the program. Sandy Carpenter heard Pastor Randy Orndorff mention children's ministry at "Coffee with the Pastors," and then heard Pastor Jessie Colwell ask the congregation to "check the Children's Ministries box" on their attendance form if interested. She did, so I called her. Several others responded to the invitation.

During an initial interview, a schedule of participation is set up. This may include helping in Children's Church, Sunday school or Wednesday night "J-Team." Some people explore by doing administrative support as well. Often people think they know exactly what they want to do. We suggest they try something different, too. If they want to work with kindergarteners on Sunday, we suggest they also try third graders on Wednesday. They generally have up to three opportunities to serve as a "Children's Ministry Exploration" participant.

"Exploration" participants do not complete the paperwork required in order to work alone with children and are not background checked. A survey of the National Sex Offender registry is made with their name, just to be safe. Volunteer staff are made aware that there is someone exploring children's ministry on the children's wing and they ensure the person is not left alone with children or "in charge" of a class. They are strictly helpers. Once a person is ready to commit to serving in a regular children's ministry position, then those administrative requirements are completed.

Sandy Carpenter started by servicing all the First Aid kits on the children's wing. After she completed the task of First Aid kits, Sandy suggested she would like to experience Wednesday night "J-Team." After helping, she knew that was where she fit.

Drew Wynham experienced different ages of children in Children's Church. "I knew I was good with my god-son, but I didn't know how I would be with a group of children, or teaching them," he said. After experiencing Children's Church, Drew stepped in to help with a mission event with the children one Sunday morning. After that, he was sure he wanted to serve in Children's Ministry. Wynham found that the greatest need was Wednesday night, so he decided to serve as a teacher with J-Team and stepped in to teach the fourth and fifth graders.

Several people chose to serve, but there were others who did not feel led to serve in such a capacity. One person thought they wanted to serve directly with children, but found administrative support more suited to her gifts and skills. Sometimes those who don't think they can take on a specific role find out they have gifts for it. Carpenter will be substituting this year on occasion in J-Team, teaching the children she has come to care about. About the program, she says, "It has been good for me."

It has been good for the children, too. We have new teachers and helpers who care about them and feel called to serve specifically in children's ministry. Our volunteers who complete "Children's Ministry Exploration" stay because they know it is where they belong.

-Mary Ann Buscher, director of Children's Ministry, Culpeper UMC



St Peter's UMC presents an "End of Summer Celebration" at their Music and Drama Camp.

MAIN STREET UMC, SUFFOLK

More than 300 children served by the Friends of Barnabas will have sturdy shoes given to them when they have medical procedures in the future. The shoes are a gift from their friends at Main Street UMC in Suffolk.

This outreach project began when a returning mission team reported that children who are treated at the medical facility in Honduras are given shoes to wear when they are sent home as a preventative measure against infections. This aids in the healing process.

Previously the shoe appeal was centered around flip-flops, but due to the lack of paved roads and walkways, it has been determined that a more substantial shoe is needed, so the request was for tennis shoes.

Our Vacation Bible School (VBS) used the Friends of Barnabas' appeal for shoes as their mission offering, and 178 pairs of tennis shoes were collected. For the blessing of the shoes, they were placed along the altar rail. It was impressive to see the altar rail covered with all the shoes that stood for the goodwill of the VBS participants. The week after VBS the appeal was made to the whole church, and an additional 123 pairs of children's tennis shoes were added.

The generosity expressed through these tennis shoes is an indication of the genuine love of the members and friends of Main Street UMC for "all God's children."

-Barbara N. McPhail, Main Street UMC Congregational Care coordinator



Main Street UMC children collected shoes for children in Honduras.

ST. PETER'S UMC

Summer is not just for Vacation Bible School anymore.

At St. Peter's UMC in Montpelier, Richmond District, we offer community children a variety of summer camp options which are designed to share the love of Jesus with children through creativity, daily Bible stories and group discussions.

Art Camp, offered twice a summer, is the perfect opportunity for young creative minds to be set free into a world of varying mediums and projects. From printmaking to three-dimensional design, every day features a new method and medium. There is a gallery showing of all completed art work following each camp week.

Music and Drama Camp is the perfect opportunity for all creative kids. There are lyrics and music to write, scripts to create and props to build as the participants prepare to perform at the "End of Summer Celebration."

Puppet Camp introduces campers to the world of puppetry. Campers design and build puppets of various styles, learn how to operate them, create skits and practice performing with their puppet creations. We cap off the week with an open puppet show, featuring our creations.

-The Rev. Deborah Lucas, St. Peter's UMC

WELLSPRING UMC

Like many churches, Wellspring UMC was often searching for new and exciting Vacation Bible School curriculum to educate and enlighten children to fall in love with God's stories and God's Word. We found "Jerusalem Marketplace" about six years ago and were so inspired by its format, lessons and interactive design, we knew we needed to share our find with our neighbors. Thus began the start of our annual community event to bring Jesus and His life to Williamsburg.

Wellspring UMC transforms its back field into the bustling city of Jerusalem, 33 A.D. As visitors approach the city gates, they have a sense they are about to step back in time. Our marketplace is set during the final week of

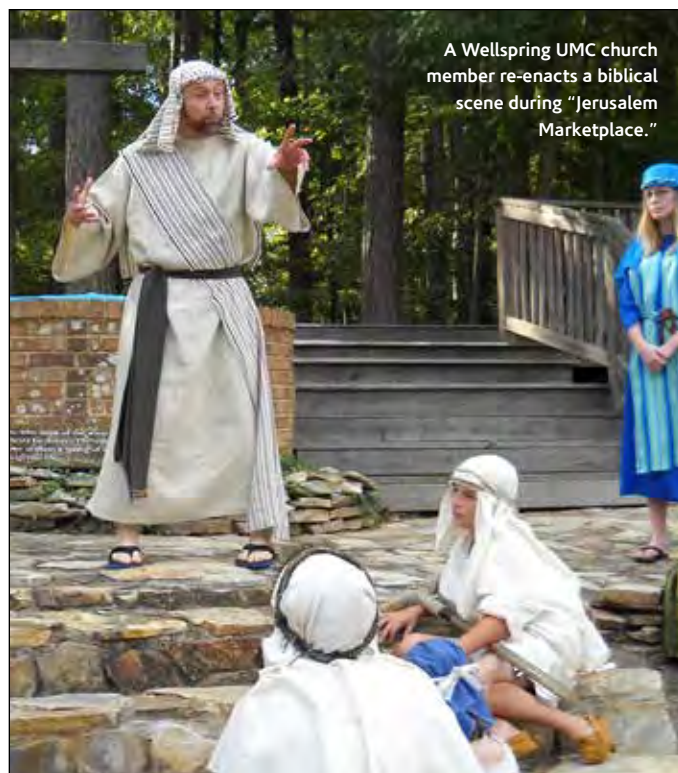


Jesus' days in Jerusalem, during the traditional celebration of Passover. Just like Jerusalem in biblical times, our town is filled with tents which house market shops where visitors can become apprentices and learn a new skill or trade. With shops such as carpentry, bakery, music, crafts, jewelry, herbs and spices, pottery and more, visitors are immersed in the sights and sounds of a vibrant and active town.

Locals are dressed in biblical attire, and there are Roman guards keeping a close eye on the activity (watch out, or you may end up in jail!) The town is filled with music that may inspire you to learn a few steps of a traditional dance. Visitors are given a passport to stamp at the various market shops and a few gold coins to spend during their visit. One can join a class at the synagogue school to hear the scholars teach about the traditions of the time or learn how to make matzo bread at the bakery. The potter teaches to make a pinch pot. There are live animals in the barnyard.

But Jerusalem really comes to life in conversations with shop owners on who Jesus is. Some believe he is the Messiah; some think he is just another prophet. Some have seen his miracles and still others believe he is just bringing trouble into town. There's even an opportunity to see Jesus and hear him teach.

-Cindi Eicher, director of Christian Education at Wellspring



A Wellspring UMC church member re-enacts a biblical scene during "Jerusalem Marketplace."



SANDBRIDGE COMMUNITY CHAPEL UMC

When the fence around the playground at Sandbridge Community Chapel UMC needed to be replaced, the children and staff as well as parents and friends went into action.

They decided to use the old fence rails for the Sandbridge Day School Art Show (to raise money for the Day School Scholarship Fund). Enlisting the children to help take down the old fence, they sanded the old boards, painted them and displayed them as new art. The children learned to respect the earth, conserve materials, and have fun while creating art for a great cause!

-Dr. Clyde DeLoach, pastor at Sandbridge Community Chapel UMC, Virginia Beach

WEST LOUISA CHARGE

I created a back-to-school blessing service called "The Apple of God's Eye" a few years back. It seems to me that with all the negative news in this world of school shootings, financial cutbacks and teens making hard decisions long before they are developmentally ready, we needed to be intentional about prayerfully beginning the school year.

So on "Back to School Blessing" Sunday, our two churches meet together to celebrate our children, school employees and Sunday school teachers. We decorate the sanctuary with apples (which are given out), we will bless their backpacks and the school year. Each child receives a prayer angel to fill in with their name and school. Congregation members receive one to be the prayer partner for that child for this school year.

And at the same time we blessed the Sacred Heart Boys School in Kenya, as we have formed a relationship there.

- Rev. Judy Janelle DeBres, West Louisa Charge





TRINITY UMC, SMITHFIELD

The Children's Program at Trinity UMC keeps fun in mind while leading kids to Christ. Prayer is the most important part of our program. We ask God to lead us and work through us to accomplish God's goals. Showing God's love to the children and their families shapes our program.

Our Children's Mission group meets monthly to learn about and participate in missions. To make the meetings developmentally appropriate and exciting, we plan games that relate to the mission being studied. When learning about the *Heifer Project*, an organization that donates livestock to families in need, we played a game of Heifer Charades, acting out the animals that could be purchased for donation. The children were so excited after this meeting that they decided to make fun loom band bracelets on their own to sell to raise money. In two Sundays, they raised enough money to donate a llama and a goat.

During our *Operation Christmas Child* meeting, kids had to travel around the room and "visit" with puppets from different countries. The puppets each had a problem, and the children had to explore tables full of supplies to find an item that the child might want or need. Before long all were engaged, excited, and understood why the boxes were important.

We even took the kids on the road to visit a Heart Havens facility for adults with developmental delays. The children sang a song and led a craft for the residents. It was a meaningful outing that generated many requests for

more missions on the road. Whatever the mission, we try to be hands-on and active in our learning.

When planning large seasonal events, we choose fun activities that can bring the message to the kids at their developmental level. Always remembering that play is a child's work makes this much easier. At our fall event, we offered an activity station where the kids could leave a prayer request and take a cross necklace. This is an introductory way to have kids (and parents) learn that the church is interested in their lives. The kids are told that all prayer requests are important no matter how big or small.

At our "Birthday Party for Jesus" (designed for preschoolers) some activities included a "Pin the Tail on the Donkey that carried Mary" game, a station to make the star that led the wise men to Jesus out of play dough, and a center of blocks to build the stable where Jesus was born.

At our Family Christmas Eve service, our pastor wrote a sermon from the point of view of the animals and had the children dress as animals for part of the service. We then had live animals for another part of the service. You can bet those kids remember that story! Getting involved in a hands-on fashion is always a popular part of all of our events.

Throughout the year, we plan special activities for Sunday School and Children's Church. Bringing a stuffed animal friend or doll to church helped the kids practice hosting friends at church. If they introduced their friend to the director, they were given a small treat. We have many really funny kids in our congregation, so "Joke Sunday" was used to help the kids see that everything about them was designed by God, even their sense of humor. "Show and Tell" was used to explain to the kids that God knows all about them, but people in their life may not. We talked about ways to share their faith with others.

Communication with families has strengthened our program. A Children's Ministry newsletter in hard copy and via e-mail is produced each month to keep families informed of upcoming events. E-mail is used after events to pass along pictures.

It's never a dull moment at Trinity! Staff and volunteers work closely together to meet the needs of the children while keeping it fun.

-Kim Orrock, Children's Ministry director,
Trinity UMC, Smithfield





FIRST SALEM UMC

Our Vacation Bible School students go into the community all week to learn and serve. Children collect needed items and deliver them to the various places of need, then they stay and help. We have been doing this for more than eight years. We take our third, fourth and fifth graders and travel all week. They love it and it has become very popular. We have a large VBS, but have found the older children really need to be putting what they have learned about sharing God's love into action.

Another approach we implement at First UMC for VBS is that we place the children in classes with a teacher for the appropriate grades. They use this classroom as home-room throughout the day. Their teacher is someone who they will develop a relationship with through the week. I feel young elementary age children do well when they can develop a relationship with an adult teacher. Each teacher has a youth helper, who takes the children to recreation, music, and the video or skit. The snacks and arts and crafts are brought to each room at a scheduled time. Teachers decorate their rooms in amazing ways. The teachers are in charge of teaching the Bible lesson, helping children with the lesson sheets, and Bible verses as creatively as they can.

We do not even advertise for VBS anymore. We put up a sign and take it down. Our VBS is full every year because our energetic staff does such an outstanding job. I also think the effort we make to establish a relationship with the children while they are here makes a huge difference. They know their teacher and the staff before they go. We also make music important. We use a piano and accompanist, so I can take the songs and shorten them and make them easier for the kids to learn. We also like to add songs that we have found successful during the past years. Recreation and arts and crafts are always a huge hit.

Beyond VBS, we offer "Story Time" during the summer. It is in our church library and usually on Wednesdays. We share secular books which are highly recommended. We also share Bible stories. With each session there may be a craft, music or a "make your snack" activity. All activities coincide with the theme of the day. We have had Fourth of July parades and read about our country. We have had Christmas in July and read a Christmas story and made an ornament. We have had a Hat day, a Pet Day, a Bug Day, a Scavenger Hunt day, all as we read books that go those themes.

An idea for fall festival, which we have been doing for years, is all our games coincide with a Bible story. For example, we have a Goliath and you toss the ball and try




Young participants in VBS at First UMC in Salem visit local agencies and non-profits, like this visit to the Rescue Mission in Roanoke.

to knock him down. With each game there is a Bible lesson sheet and coloring sheet for the children to take home. At the Spring Festival, we have an egg hunt and many eggs have scriptures in them. Both these festivals are well attended. Many people from the community attend, which again gives us the opportunity to reach out to new families and their children.

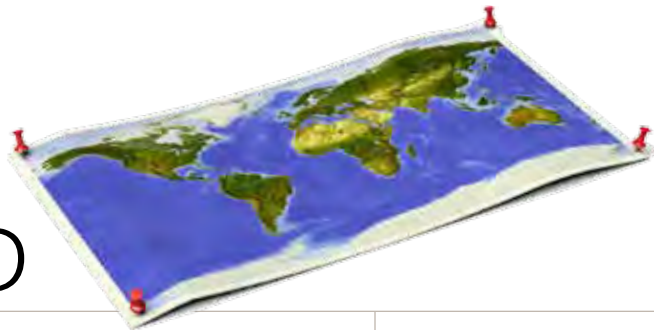
I've found parents today are so busy and of course you need their help as volunteers for any program to work. So, all Sunday school teachers work in teams in a rotation. Teachers seem to like the feeling that they are teaching two Sundays a month. This is not a new idea, but I've just found today's parents are so stressed that I have to make their volunteer time as easy as possible with lots of flexibility.

We try to offer a parent class each semester. We've offered classes on children's anxiety issues, bullying, discipline, how to raise children who respect, how to raise compassionate children and how to help grow your child's faith.

We have a Sunday school open house two Sundays in the fall. The teachers have handouts for the parents which outline the milestones the children will be working on. Parents stay and observe the class. We want them to see the importance of Sunday school and to be a part of nurturing the faith of their child. 

-Tricia Givens is Children-Family Ministry director and Children's Choir director at First UMC in Salem.

Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD



Typhoon adds additional excitement to Global Young People's Convocation



Rachel Miller gets the full Filipino experience during her trip to the Global Young People's Convocation.

By Rachel Miller

In July I was privileged to represent the Virginia Conference and Southeastern Jurisdiction as a voting delegate to the Global Young People's Convocation and Legislative Assembly in the Philippines.

It became a very memorable adventure early on, as we arrived at retreat center in Tagaytay City the same time as Typhoon Glenda. We were able to shelter in place and later change locations to a safer building at the retreat center during the eye of the storm.

Everyone was very patient and flexible, which is much-appreciated by all when, at times, you have one semi-working bathroom with hundreds of folks trying to, literally, weather a storm together in one building. During the worst parts of the storm many of us prayed and


sang together, even if we were exhausted from over 24 hours of travel with less than two hours of sleep.

We were not able to stay at the retreat center due to the damage it sustained during the category three typhoon, but the planning committee spent hours making contacts and working through the situation until they found a place for us to reconvene closer to Manila. Before we left, an offering was taken up and money was donated from representatives from around the world – more than \$1,500 was collected to help as the staff there begin to repair their facility.

Once things began to calm down and the convention actually began, we enjoyed meals, worship, fellowship, Communion and awesome music together. Our wonderful Filipino brothers and sisters blessed us with amazing hospitality!

During the convocation, there was time to help fill food bags to help those devastated by the typhoon, a time of worship to celebrate the Young Adult Mission Fellows from around the world who will be going out shortly to serve and a time to discuss legislation. All items that passed will be sent to General Conference 2016.

The most amazing work to come from our short, hot, busy, emotional time together was a statement of unity which can be found at www.gbod.org/resources/united-meth-odist-young-people-urge-denomination.

We are all thankful for the prayers sent up for us during the Global Young People's Convocation, and I encourage all to continue to support the young people in the church around the world as they work towards unity and work to fulfill the mission of The United Methodist Church. 

-Rachel Miller is director of Ministries with Young People at Aldersgate UMC, Charlottesville.



Religious news from around the NATION & WORLD

General Conference 2016 logo unveiled

By Dwight Davis

LEXINGTON, N.C. - Like the unique



The Commission on the General Conference has chosen a logo for the 2016 General Conference.

United Methodist Communications developed the logo to complement the theme of the 2016 General Conference, "Therefore go," which the Commission chose in 2013. Stephanie Henry of the Upper New York Conference chairs the Logo and Theme Committee.

The theme is based on the Great Commission set forth in Matthew 28:19-20: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (NIV)

"The theme of the 2016 General Conference serves as graphic support for our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," said the Rev. Larry Hollon, chief executive of the global communications agency. "We wanted to provide an action-themed logo that ties to the roots of The United Methodist Church, a denomination striving to fulfill the Great Commission."


The logo's font is constructed of strong letter shapes and curves, which gives the words an approachable and friendly feel, while also hinting at the boldness of the denomination's mission. The word "go" is set inside a triangle, which adds movement and direction, while the backdrop of Mount Hood is reflective

The Portland Convention Center in Oregon is the site for General Conference 2016.



of the location of the 2016 event in Portland, Ore.

"We believe this logo provides cohesive imagery for the event, yet affords a lot of flexibility for the various needs of the conference," said Sara Hotchkiss, business manager of the General Conference. "It gives us a strong foundation on which to build."

The simple design of this logo allows for easy integration with conference-related materials and coordinates well with the Cross and Flame symbol already featured on United Methodist media, avoiding redundancy. The logo is rendered in black-and-white in order to use it over vibrantly colored backgrounds. Future creative executions may include the use of the logo itself in color as new resources are created. 

-United Methodist Communications

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EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY



40 ways to engage your local schools

From the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary.



Learn and listen:

1. Learn about schools in your area. Study basic demographics and statistics. Drive or walk around the neighborhood.
2. Introduce yourself to the principal, head of school or chief administrator. Because they have tremendous influence within a school, it is critical that they know who you are, what you are doing and that you want to help.
3. Make an appointment for a group from your church to visit your local school to observe and learn what is happening.
4. Hold conversations with teachers, social workers, guidance counselors, athletic directors, and the school nurse to get a sense of the most pressing needs within the school and among students and their families.
5. Go in without an agenda or preset ideas about what is needed. Ask simply, "How can we help?" Be willing to listen.

Start smart:

6. Determine if programs to support schools already exist in your community, school district or interfaith networks. Don't reinvent the wheel if you can partner with another group or work through

an existing channel.

7. Put child safety first. Learn and comply with your school's volunteer guidelines and security protocols as well as congregational or denominational policies regarding child safety.
8. Prepare volunteers with adequate training. Help them understand why they are doing what they are doing and process what they experience. Cultivate an attitude of servanthood.
9. Be sensitive regarding church/state boundaries. While you do not want to hide that you are from the church, it is never appropriate to pray or proselytize in a public school setting. Witness through actions not words.
10. Start small. You might begin by focusing on just one classroom, grade or subject area, rather than a whole school.

Build relationships and trust:

11. Show up at school activities and events – big games, performances, fundraisers, etc. Make a point of talking to students and teachers.
12. Get plugged into the room parents' network, if one exists, as school and classroom needs are often communicated through this channel.
13. Attend PTA meetings to stay abreast of school

issues and demonstrate to the principal and parents that you care.

14. Drop by the principal's office on the first day of the school year to wish them well and offer help. Strive to maintain an on-going, face-to-face relationship with the principal, especially if he or she is new.
15. Partner with other churches or non-profits, and invite others in your community to support what your church is doing. This increases the efficacy of your work and demonstrates that you are not in it for yourself.
16. Under promise and over deliver. Neither school nor church is well-served if you launch an overly ambitious plan but cannot deliver. Consistency and follow through build credibility.
17. Stay the course. Long-term commitment is essential to successful institutional partnerships and in one-on-one tutoring and mentoring relationships with individual students.

Cultivate congregational support and awareness:

18. Preach and teach about the value of education. Pray for the administrators, teachers, staff, students and families in your local school and for educational policy makers.
19. Hold a Children's Sabbath.



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

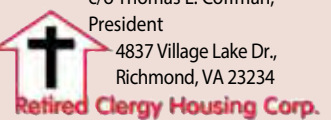
The Retired Clergy Housing Corporation of the Virginia Conference maintains a program to provide retirement homes for eligible United Methodist pastors who need them.

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

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20. Stay abreast of local education issues and needs. Hold information sessions. Invite the principal or a panel of other school leaders to speak at your church.

21. Announce major school events – such as graduation, big games or performances – and ask church members to show up and show their support.

22. Be a cheerleader for schools and kids. Share success stories about teachers and students who are trying to do well.

Supply student needs:

23. Collect books to be used in classroom reading programs or to be given to children at the end of the school year. Ask teachers or the librarian for appropriate selections.

24. Develop a program to outfit kids with needed school uniforms, shoes or athletic gear. Some churches use an “angel tree” system. Others set up a giveaway or exchange.

25. Fill backpacks with school supplies to be given away at the beginning of the school year.

26. Collect coats, hats and mittens. Donate socks and underwear for the school nurse or other staff person to give away when younger children need a change

of clothing.

27. Fill “snack packs” or backpacks with food to be taken home over the weekend by children who rely on school breakfasts and lunches for basic nutrition.

28. Start a summer lunch program in your church or another suitable location.

29. Conduct giveaways with dignity and discretion to avoid stigmatizing recipients. Seek the school’s guidance on where needs exist and the best way to distribute items.

Help students succeed:

30. Involve volunteers from your church in tutoring, mentoring or after-school programs. If your school does not have programs to plug into, spend time investigating models and best practices.

31. Create and support a computer lab either in your church or your school.

32. Organize and resource a summer academic enrichment program in your school or church to counter summer learning losses.

33. Start a “graduation ministry” to assure that children are making academic progress, graduating from high school and preparing for college.

34. Offer college-bound students SAT prep-sessions, guidance on college selections and help in completing financial aid forms and applications.

Offer spaces and places

35. Organize a volunteer workday to spruce up school facilities, helping with cleaning, painting, landscaping, facilities repair, play ground upgrades, etc.

36. Make church facilities available for team banquets, parties after school dramas, offsite meetings or other school-related activities.

37. Host a community celebration at the beginning of the school year. This might be an occasion for a school supply giveaway, an immunization clinic or a school uniform exchange.

Support and affirm the work of teachers:

38. Host an event to celebrate and recognize teachers in your congregation and community.

39. Start a teachers’ group within your church for educators to resource, support and affirm one another in their vocational calling.

40. Encourage a culture of speaking positively about teachers to counteract the messages of disrespect and blame so rampant in some rhetoric about public education. 🍀

Devotions from International Lesson Series

LIVING THE WORD



Martha Stokes just left her conference staff position to become director of Church and Community Relations with Virginia United Methodist Homes, Inc. Established by the Virginia Annual Conference in 1945, the mission of the communities of Virginia United Methodist Homes is to provide quality care for the aging. Martha will be working to strengthen the relationship between the VUMH, our conference, districts and the local churches. Stokes will also be visiting churches to promote the mission and services of the VUMH communities. She and her husband, Steve, live in Richmond.

Sept. 7, 2014

**Lost or certain about the future?
Jeremiah 30:1-3, 18-22**

This time of the year always reminds me of returning to school. I find myself reminiscing about going back to class, new things to learn and new adventures to undertake. Various scholars tell us that Jeremiah was a very young man at the time of his call. Some think he may not even have been 20 years old when God instructed Jeremiah to “write in a book” all the words God had spoken to him. I wonder if he might have been more interested in going back to school than announcing God’s judgment on the nations.

I was feeling lost back in the fall of 1979 when I left the comfort of Henry County and headed to North Carolina to college. I didn’t know a single person who was attending the same school, but something about the campus the first time I set foot on the property made me feel it was where I was supposed to be.

My mother did not seem to feel the same way when we moved into the dorm. She kept noting that I didn’t have the same type of clothing or jewelry that the other young women had. I don’t think I had ever heard the description of “preppy” until then. I knew about overalls and steel-toed safety shoes, not espadrilles, madras plaid or ribbon belts. On her first visit back to campus, my mom handed me a few things she thought I needed: a pink Izod shirt and a gold add-a-bead necklace. At times, I really didn’t feel that I fit in, and the shirt didn’t help.

What felt safe when I was missing the security of my home community, what reminded me most that I would move beyond the loss of friendships to new relationships – from feeling desperate for a return to the life I had known to a new way of being – came from a ministry intern at the Wesley Foundation. While on a retreat that first fall of college, we celebrated Holy Communion on the beach. That was the first time I ever remember being called by name as I received the bread and juice. Oh how powerful that was! I had been lost in a world that was changing dramatically. I was young, but God called my name in a new way. Sounds a little like Jeremiah, doesn’t it? I was reminded in that moment – in a way I will never

forget – that I was a child of God and covered in grace because Jesus had died for me. I wasn’t called to write the words God spoke that day in a book, but they have been written on my heart ever since. I was no longer lost, but certain of God’s promises.

Sept. 14, 2014

**Equipped for the present and the future
Jeremiah 31:31-37**

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette composed the words of a hymn, sung to the tune of “Jesus Loves Me,” where the verses tell the story of God’s covenant with Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Jeremiah. The fourth verse of “Long Ago, God Reached in Love,” reads:

*“Jeremiah came to know:
God would help us change and grow;
so God’s law would fill each heart,
giving us a fresh new start.”*

The final verse of her hymn shares that Jesus came to fulfill God’s loving plan for us. This new life through Christ is what transforms us and the world. With all that is wrong with the world, our faith in God guides us toward hope and joy. As Jeremiah told his people, the present may be filled with despair and weeping, but God promises a different future – a fresh start, a new covenant.

Several years ago I helped with a New Consecration Sunday stewardship program at a church in the Richmond area. As I was preparing to meet with church leaders, there were many things happening in the world which brought devastation to communities and fear to hearts. I researched a little history of 1972, the year I was confirmed into membership in The United Methodist Church. Some of the things I read seemed strangely similar to events around our world then and even today...

- ❖ Back in 1972, the world was concerned about an outbreak of smallpox in Yugoslavia. Now, the death toll is rising from the Ebola virus.
- ❖ A 7.0 earthquake killed one-fifth of the population of the Iranian province of Fars in 1972. The news stories of the past weeks have focused on recovery in China following a 6.1 magnitude quake, typhoons in the Philippines and hurricanes headed toward Hawaii.



❖ In 1972, the last U.S. ground troops were withdrawn from Vietnam. Our family now awaits the return of a soldier from Afghanistan.

Today, as my faith journey enters the second half of a century, I realize more and more clearly how each of us has the power to shape and change the lives of others – those in our families, those sitting next to us in the pews on Sunday morning, and people around the world – by the example of our discipleship as followers of Jesus. God's promises don't change our circumstances. The world situation or our personal crisis may not suddenly be transformed. Yet we are called to remember that we're living under God's new covenant, one that equips us for the present and the future. So the question for each of us is this: "What is God calling me to do to extend Christ's transforming, restorative love to others?"

Sept. 21, 2014

A little gardening therapy

Jeremiah 32:2-9, 14-15

War is raging. Jerusalem is under siege. Jeremiah sits in jail for his prophesying. And what does he decide to do? Buy a piece of land from his cousin. Everything is going badly, yet, in the midst of it, Jeremiah decides to make a commitment that shows those around him how God has promised that the future will be different. Jeremiah demonstrates the kind of hope, the commitment to action, that prepares the ground for the future. It's the kind of hope that can prepare the church for a new day, a new reality, a new way of being in community.

There is a quote from *Praying in the Wesleyan Spirit* by Paul Chilcote that reads "...inner healing requires a long process of divine therapy." There are days when I realize that in addition to lots of divine therapy, I

need dirt therapy. I just need to play in the soil – to plant and trim and create. I need to turn the soil with a shovel and push the wheelbarrow. There are times when I need to dig up dead rose bushes and replace them with new ones. And get the scratches to prove I did it. I need to pull weeds, and haul all the dead stuff to the dump. There are just times when I need to get dirty and sweat while playing in God's creation. Dirt therapy: as a professionally trained social worker, I recommend it highly.

As a Christian who knows that no matter what happens God's final word is always renewal, there's nothing better to remind me of who is ultimately in charge of all life than playing in the dirt. When healing and wholeness for whatever struggles we face are needed, there is no better therapy. The tulips will bloom again, the herbs will grow, the seasons will change. God is always making an investment in the future. My job is to prepare the soil, care for the seeds and prepare for the growth and changes. As Christians and as a church, do our lives, choices and priorities show that we are making an investment in the future, or are we too preoccupied with life's trials and woes? Are you willing today to go out and buy a piece of property? Or even commit to cutting the dead limbs off the rose bush?

Sept. 28, 2014

Bring thank offerings

Jeremiah 33:2-11

As I write this final devotion, I am close the end of my 14 years of service as part of the Connectional Ministries staff of the Virginia Conference. The question that caught my attention in the preparation materials for this week's lesson was: "How do you mourn your losses?" Let's see, for the last

few weeks, I've cried every time I've been asked to pray at the start or close of a meeting or phone call, while offering the blessing before a meal, and during the entire time that I was assisting Bishop Cho with serving Communion as the Bishop's Cabinet and Connectional Ministries staff gathered together. Yesterday, the tears came as I read cards from my fellow staff members. Tonight it was while writing an e-mail message for a gift I was honored to receive.

So, how do I mourn my losses while at the same time being excited about new possibilities? I am eagerly looking forward to new things to learn, new adventures to undertake and new relationships to form. Wait a minute! Didn't I start these devotions saying the same thing?

Jeremiah is still imprisoned when God reminds him once again that those who seek God and call upon God's name will be joyful once again. The voices of the faithful will be heard singing, laughing and rejoicing. They will bring their thank offerings to the Lord. Just like the inhabitants of Judah who had turned away from God, I'm giving thanks that God forgives:

- ❖ all my mistakes when I didn't make the best choices over these 14 years – no, let me be honest and say over the last 53 years;
- ❖ my pride that doesn't always let me admit I'm not perfect;
- ❖ procrastination when I've had lots of time to prepare;
- ❖ my weakness when I've thrown up my hands and yelled, "I can't do this," while knowing that God is the one who equips;
- ❖ and my complaining and whining which is certainly not reflective of who God wants me to be.

(Continued on page 37, "Living Word")

CLERGY & DIACONAL



DEATHS



The Rev. Clifford Lyle East Jr., 91, of Harrisonburg, died July 9, 2014. A World War II Army veteran, he graduated from Randolph-Macon College and Duke

Divinity School. He served the East Nottoway Charge of the Farmville District, Wesley in Alexandria, Cave Spring in Roanoke, Moseley Memorial in Danville, Lane Memorial in Altavista, Leesburg UMC, Tabernacle UMC in Poquoson, Ramsey Memorial in Richmond, Great Falls UMC and Charles Wesley UMC in McLean, where he retired in 1988. East was an artist and was influential in introducing the tradition of the Chrismon tree into Methodist churches. A memorial service was held at Otterbein UMC.



The Rev. Sandra H. Stamey, 70, of Richardson, Texas, died June 19, 2014. A native of Alabama, she attended Wesley Theological Seminary in

Washington, D.C., and began her ministerial career in 1996 as the associate pastor at Herndon UMC. She went on to serve New Kent, Marvin and Crums. She retired in 2006. In retirement she continued to serve as Associate Pastor at First UMC in McKinney, Texas, and later at First UMC of Richardson. Her husband of 50 years, David O. Stamey, died in 2013.

The Rev. Austin Ray Burroughs, 87, of Shinnston, W.Va., died Aug. 5, 2014. He was the father of the **Rev. William Franklin Burroughs**, who is retired in Lancaster.

Danna Richardson Cook, 94, died June 26, 2014, in Tennessee. She was the widow of the **Rev. Marvin C. Cook**, former pastor at Culpeper UMC.

Father Alfred Lee Durrance died July 13, 2014. He was ordained to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church in 1958 and was North American Warden of the Order of Saint Luke the Physician. "Father Al" was the father of the **Rev. Tom Durrance**, who serves at Fieldale UMC, Danville District.

Martha Barksdale Carter Franklin died July 17, 2014. She was wife of retired pastor the **Rev. A Howell Franklin** of Lynchburg.

Oscar Haynes, 98, died in Herndon on July 31, 2014. He was the husband of the **Rev. Joan Bell-Haynes**, pastor of United Christian Parish, Arlington District.

Freda Hedge, 97, of Ohio, died July 29, 2014. She was the mother of **Nancy West**, a member of St. Paul UMC in Woodbridge and president of the Alexandria District United Methodist Women.

Eloise Orndorff Friel James, 97, died July 6, 2014 in Greensboro, N.C. She was the wife of **Kenneth James**, who is retired after serving several small Virginia United Methodist churches.

Mary Weeks Johnson, 88, of Ashland, died July 9, 2014. She was the mother of **Beverly Bray**, wife of the **Rev. Steve Bray**, senior pastor of First UMC in Salem, Roanoke District.

Evella D. Spencer, 88, of Maryland, died July 7, 2014. She was the widow of the **Rev. Hori W. Spencer**, who served churches in the Virginia Conference.

Wava Hale Teilmann, 91, died July 8, 2014. A native of Virginia, she became a citizen of the world, serving alongside her husband, **Gunnar**, as a Methodist missionary to Malaysia and Singapore for more than 30 years. She retired to Blacksburg in 1980, and continued her missionary service as a member of Blacksburg UMC.

Phyllis Jean Wendler Vestal, 83, of Florida, died July 31, 2014. She was the mother of the **Rev. Jennifer Vestal Moore**, who serves Rock and Olive Branch UMCs, South Brunswick Charge, Farmville District.

BIRTHS

Hannah Marie Colby was born on July 12, 2014, to **Allison and the Rev. Drew VanDyke Colby**, associate pastor for Youth and Outreach at St. Stephen's UMC in Burke. Among those celebrating the arrival of Hannah are her grandparents, the **Revs. Rhonda and Don VanDyke Colby**.

Summer Melody Tanner was born July 2, 2014. She is the first child of **Jonathan and the Rev. Melody Tanner**, pastor of West Point UMC.

Correction

No, **the Rev. Sandra Stanley** is not dead, but your editor is mortified at making a very careless mistake by inserting Stanley's photo with the obit for **the Rev. Sandra Stamey** in the August issue. This month we are re-running Stamey's obituary with the correct photo, as we also celebrate the life and ministry of Rev. Stanley, who lives in Ashland.

("Living Word," continued from pg 37)

And I remember that God offers the healing:

- ❖ as I need to forgive myself for things left undone;
- ❖ when I harbor grudges or have a hard time forgiving the hurts;
- ❖ in times when I've had to accept God at work in ways that I didn't plan for or want.

And I bring my thank offerings, realizing that difficult times are followed by recovery, that tears often come before laughter, that it takes chaos to bring about calm, and after Good Friday comes Easter. 🌸

("Common Table," continued from pg 17)

would want to delete current wording from the *Discipline* related to human sexuality, maintain current wording in the *Discipline* related to human sexuality, or amend current wording in the *Discipline* related to human sexuality. Included as part of the live streaming will be regional conversation groups. In addition, provision will be made for additional conversations on district and local levels using the video. All conversation groups will use the same discussion guides with facilitators being provided in regional and district levels.

2) A guiding team will be formed of representatives from the Common Table, a representative from Virginia Reconciling United Methodists, one from the Evangelical Fellowship, and a signer of "A Way Forward" to design the process outlined above. This guiding team will make a report at the regularly scheduled Sept. 18 Common Table meeting. 🌸

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Kim installed as conference's first Korean-American woman superintendent

An upbeat processional to “We Are Marching in the Light of God” set the tone for the August 10 installation service for the Rev. Seonyoung Kim as superintendent of the York River District. She is the first Korean-American woman to serve as district superintendent in the Virginia Conference.

The Rev. Kim was received with the traditional gifts of service and leadership for a superintendent – including a globe representing global mission and a towel and basin representing service to others – from clergy and lay members of the district.

Kim preached and celebrated Holy Communion for the service,

held at St. Luke's UMC in Yorktown. Bishop Young Jin Cho introduced her. Special music was provided by the Rev. Hyung Il Moon and the District Youth Choir.


In her sermon, Kim shared a moving testimony. She was raised with a combination of Buddhism, ancestor worship, and shamanism. Her family named her “Good Pearl,” sharing their goal of raising a well-rounded individual. She said she matched all their expectations, but felt something lacking. As she entered college, the unrest her country faced added weight and furthered her own dis-ease.

Finally, she responded to a college friend's request to join her for a church service. At the service she felt herself in the presence of the Holy Spirit and was convicted of her sinfulness. She repented, feeling the weight on her shoulders lifted and a peace that passes understanding fall upon her. She joined a small group at the church and was led to understand what it means to be a true follower of Christ.

Kim said she had rejected the friend's requests to join her at church events for two and a half years, and later learned the friend had prayed for her for those two and a half years. The power of prayer in changing lives

has not been lost on Rev. Kim. Upon learning of her appointment to the York River District as Superintendent, she said has prayed fervently for God to guide her.

Kim – the first Korean-American woman ordained in the Virginia Conference – came onto the Cabinet this summer from the Northumberland Charge (Aston UMC in Ophelia and Fairfields UMC in Burgess), Fredericksburg District. She is a native of South Korea and graduated from Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul, where she received a Bachelor of Science in Physics. She came to the United States in 1987 to study Computer Science at the University of Iowa. During her study toward a Ph.D., she was called into Christian ministry and moved to Washington, D.C., for seminary education at Wesley Theological Seminary, where she received a Master of Divinity. She was ordained Deacon in 1999 and Elder in 2003.

Prior to serving Fairfields and Afton UMCs, Kim was appointed to the Buchanan Charge (Andrew Chapel UMC, Lithia UMC, Trinity UMC), Roanoke District; Zion Grace UMC, Norfolk District; and Lawrenceville UMC, Farmville District. 

-Shan Sixby

York River Superintendent Rev. Seonyoung Kim preaches at her installation service. Photo by Tim Scullion



Bishop Cho is on sabbatical. His column will return next month.

ONE LAST WORD



Cristen Mitchell (right) directs the Voices of Youth choir during the 2014 group's final performance at Chester UMC.

Voices of Youth members see other side of Bahamas, tour conference

The *Voices of Youth* choir, composed of students representing congregations from around the Virginia Conference, wrapped up its concert tour over the summer. The annual mission/concert tour is in its 28th year.

Numbers were down somewhat this year, but the youths still made a huge impact in their mission work week, held in the Bahamas with the Bahamas Methodist Habitat organization. Choir members did home repair work in very poor areas amid difficult conditions.

Student Michelle Hayes said she grew tired of friends teasing her before the trip that she "had to" spend a week in the Bahamas. "The vast majority of people (in the Bahamas) do not live in the luxury of the resorts that the islands are known for," she said. "In fact they are very poor."

Hayes said that a few times on the first work day she had to step away and gather herself because the conditions the people are living in are so bad.

Jacklyn Crabtree, another young *Voices* participant, said that like any mission work, the workers probably benefitted more than the recipients of the work.

"We think we are the ones doing the good work, but it's God," Crabtree said. "We're just the vessels."

Following the work week with the Habitat project, the group spent several weeks touring around the conference, combining singing and testimony about their mission work.

Jennifer Dixon is the conference coordinator for *Voices of Youth*. Cristen Mitchell was the music director this season.

Dixon said that *Voices of Youth* is considering heading to Brooklyn, N.Y., next summer to continue the conference's work with Hurricane Sandy rebuilding efforts, and then hopes to visit Taizé, France, in 2016 to celebrate the choir's 30th birthday. 🍷

-Neill Caldwell



Tweets heard 'round the conference

Alan Combs @thricemantis

Feeling a deep sense of loss, as I have changed my twitter avatar for the first time since I got on twitter.

Zach Roberts @zachsayssthis

When my seniors graduate from youth group I'm taking them skydiving.

#coolestideaever #maybethedumb-estideatoo

Andrew Hudgins @andrew_hudgins

That moment when "Let it Go" plays over the speakers in Walmart...all the little girls scream the lyrics & all the boys cover their ears

Rethink Church @umrethinkchurch

Friends, remember and remind others: Nothing – including suicide – can separate us from the love of God.

#UMC #rethinkchurch

Jon Woodburn @JonWoodburn

#thunderstorm means no sleep for awhile! Listening 2 the thunder echo off the mountain, rain pelting the ground, & wind thru trees = #prayers

Bert Cloud @bertcloud

The smell of sage on the south rim trail of the Grand Canyon is a foretaste of heaven.

Megan Harrison @MeganHarrison23

Is it just me or is shark week slacking this year?

Patti Money @pattimoney

Either I'm in the best appointment of my career, or I'm dreaming. So very, very thankful.

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