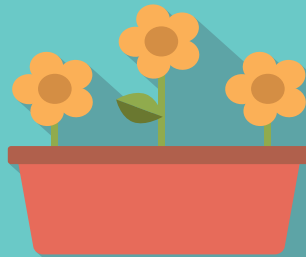
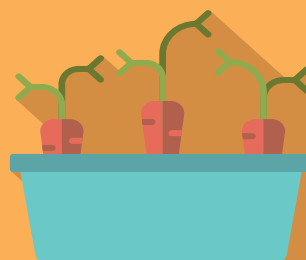
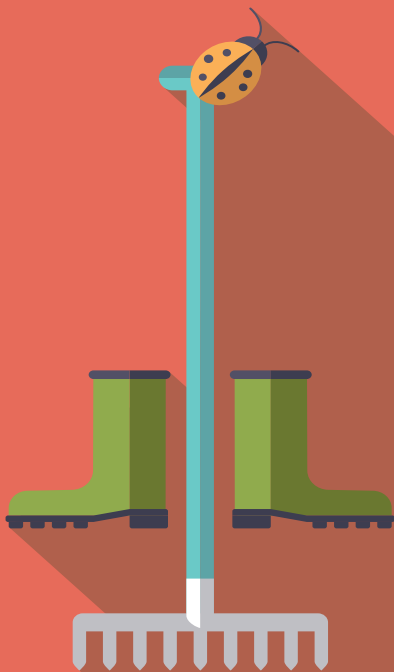


# Advocate



Planting & growing  
new faith  
communities



Plus! The Virginia  
Conference welcomes  
our new bishop.

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Connecting with the



Virginia Advocate

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

# PILLOW TALK



**Madeline Pillow**  
Editor

**Wish you  
were here**

**I wish the entire Virginia Conference could have been at Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference...** specifically

when the Rev. Sharma Lewis was elected on the first ballot, when she was assigned to Virginia and when the Virginia delegation and guests welcomed her to Virginia with an ice cream social.

Her election was a historic one –whether it had been on the first ballot or not. But because it was on the first ballot, it made that experience much more affirming about the state of the Southeastern jurisdiction (SEJ).

Going into the conference, I was fairly sure Bishop Lewis would be elected. I heard her speak at General Conference and had read about her on the SEJ website. She seemed strong, capable and assured in her ministry.

Sitting with my coworkers Linda Rhodes and Nick Ruxton in the press room, there was an initial silence after the announcement (a pronounced change from the usual when you get a bunch of communicators together in a room).

We were definitely not expecting it. I looked around the room for verification. Had I heard right? There was an election?

Bishop Lewis spoke with such eloquence following her election; her quotes quickly filled articles around the denomination with historic words for a historic moment. It says a lot about her character that in that moment she spoke about the women who had come before her and about the men who supported women clergy.

I wish you could have been there when we all waited expectantly to learn who would be assigned to Virginia. At the front of the stage with my other communicators, we all perched back on our heels waiting to swoop in for the perfect shot of the bishop assigned to us.

It was one of those moments where I found it hard to both do my job and be United Methodist.

The Virginia delegation erupted with applause and joy when Bishop Lewis' name was announced. I had to remind myself not to jump in excitement in order to take pictures of our jumping delegation.

I wish you could have heard the screams of happiness when Bishop Lewis entered the room at the ice cream social and seen some of our women clergy dance, and I mean dance, around.

I look forward to seeing more of this joy as our entire conference gets to know Bishop Lewis and envision where this joy can take us. 🍷

*Madeline*



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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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**CORRECTION:** Court Street UMC, Lynchburg District, paid 100 percent in apportionments. This was omitted in the July *Advocate*.

Above: Holy Communion being served at The Gathering. Photo credit: Monica Martin



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# LETTERS

## Being 'square with the Bible' means living our faith

Allan Murphy (*Virginia Advocate*, July 2016) points us in the right direction when he indicates that the *Book of Discipline* should "square with the Bible." But what does it mean to square with the Bible?

If we take some passages in the Bible literally, we could justify slavery, polygamy, child abuse, oppression of women, genocide and the death penalty, to name a few examples. Obviously, we do not interpret all of the Bible literally. It is not helpful simply to say, "The Bible says. . ." and assume the issue is closed. Fortunately, we have Jesus to help us see and hear God's message of love.

In the current discussion of human sexuality, using the unexamined not-interpreted Bible as a test of the *Book of Discipline* is risky if not irresponsible. In view of the crying need of the world for a witness of love and rescue, I urge our church to get its priorities in order. Remember the parable of Jesus about the last judgment. Who were the "blessed of my Father?" Let's stop arguing and start living the faith. This will "square with the Bible" as Allan Murphy urges.

— Marilyn Casey, Williamsburg, Va.

## UMC should offer equality in marriage

I am a faithful and active member of Wesley United Methodist Church in Colonial Heights, Va. My wife (a life-long Methodist) and I have raised two daughters in the church. They also are faithful and active members of Wesley. It is not just their church—it is their church family.

Our daughters are both in their late teens. One is entering college, and the other won't be far behind. Our daughters are spunky, energetic, caring, smart and Christian. They love their church. They love the Lord. Both girls have had plenty of "crushes" and have been on the occasional date, but neither has ever found someone to date seriously. I have a feeling that will change once they go to college. My prayer is that God will bring the right person into their lives and that they will fall in love and one day be as happily married as my wife and I have been for more than 20 years. They have both been raised in the church. I imagine they will both want a church wedding.

Only one of our daughters has the right to one day marry the person of her choosing at our church by our pastor. Our youngest daughter is a gay Chris-

tian. She told us this when she was 14 and explained that she had known for several years. She is not now, nor has ever been, in a relationship with another girl. But she would like to one day fall in love with a gay Christian woman and get married... in our church, by our pastor. Our United Methodist pastor.

Currently, The United Methodist Church and the *Book of Discipline* do not allow same-sex marriage, nor do they allow UMC clergy to officiate weddings of the sort. There are many who will explain that this is in "keeping with God's Word" and going by "what the Scriptures tell us." There are multiple problems with this argument. From translations, to intent, to intended audience there are many fallacies that biblical scholars with greater knowledge than I can point out.

The problem that I have with this argument is that it is already inconsistent with the UMC's rules on marriage. The *Book of Discipline* allows people who were previously married and are now divorced to remarry in The United Methodist Church. It does not state any requirement for the cause of the divorce. This is inconsistent with the words of Jesus. He leaves no ambiguity in His words on divorce. He states in Matthew 5:32, "But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for



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



# COMMENTARY

sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." One cannot use the argument that the UMC ban on same-sex marriage is simply "keeping with God's word" while at the same time our own *Book of Discipline* supports a practice that Jesus himself says is not only committing adultery, but is making someone a victim of adultery. There is no justice in allowing some texts from the Bible to be used to ban the marriage of two loving gay Christians and at the same time ignore such clear statements from Jesus regarding the marriage of previously divorced members of the opposite sex.

I am not suggesting that The United Methodist Church no longer allow divorced members to remarry in our church. I am calling on the UMC to apply the same empathy, mercy and wisdom towards the principle of gay Christians getting married as it does towards divorced Christians getting remarried.

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:12-13)

If the UMC is going to swing that two-edged sword around on the marriage issue, then swing it both ways. For certainly it discerns the "thoughts and intentions of the heart."

I am praying for The United Methodist Church. I am praying for wisdom, mercy and justice on this issue. And I pray that one day our younger daughter will get married to a wonderful gay, Christian woman, and that the ceremony is on a beautiful spring day at Wesley United Methodist Church.

In God's Love,

—Rick Ridpath, Colonial Heights, Va.

## We still have work to do on race relations

by Keary Kincannon

**A**s a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ I am supposed to bring my congregation Good News. But recently I have struggled to do so with all the bad news. Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Dallas "Black Lives Matter" demonstrations and subsequent arrests are taking place in cities all across America.

Lately my heart has been filled with pain, grief and the anger and frustration that come from despair. I have not seen our nation

this divided on so many issues —political and cultural—and unwilling to even try to understand each other since the 1960s.

Most Americans don't get it. We are still dealing with the fallout of one of America's greatest sins —slavery. I am 67 years old. When I was born in 1949, there were older black individuals who had been born into slavery. Most of America doesn't get it. It has not been that long. Changing racial attitudes takes time and real commitment to heal.

Most of America doesn't get it. A significant portion of our nation is in pain because they fear Alton Sterling or Philando Castile could be their son or daughter. The racial rancor in America caused Micah Johnson to snap, shooting 14 people and killing five. He told the police he wanted to kill white people, particularly white officers.

Investigators have discovered that Johnson had emotional and, possibly, mental health problems. We know his actions in no

(Continued on next page.)



# COMMENTARY



*(Continued from previous page.)*

way define black people in America. Just like we know the racist actions of some police officers is only a very small portion of those who serve and protect our community with honor.

But we have got to wake up to the fact that we as a nation still have a lot of work to do around race. When will we engage in the long labor of listening, building trust and insisting on equal treatment under the law?

Saying “Black Lives Matter” doesn’t put black lives above all other lives. It actually means “All lives matter.” Those of us who profess the Christian faith should understand that better than anyone else. After all, Jesus didn’t say “Blessed is everyone,” but “Blessed are the poor.” He did not say “as you do it to everyone you do it me,” but “as you do it to the least.” Jesus did not say “love everyone,” but “love your enemies.”

Jesus encourages us not to love people “in general” but to specifically care for those society discounts or condemns. This is a way he draws us into understanding their lives matter too. “Black Lives Matter” is exactly the kind of thing Jesus would say at the same time condemning the evil in Dallas and calling for us to respect the police and their role in society.

In fact when the police become stereotyped, blamed and condemned for doing their job, I can hear Jesus saying “Blue Lives Matter.”

We need a lot more conversation around race in this country because most of my white brothers and sisters cannot see that “white privilege” is real. Denying white privilege isn’t going to get us anywhere. It is important to understand why so many feel it is easier for whites to get ahead than it is for blacks.

Something is really wrong in America. Something is killing us from the inside – FEAR! The goal of terrorists around the world is to induce fear because fear divides us. Yet the news media, pundits and politicians are fanning the flames of fear just fine without the help of terrorists.


And there is a lot to be afraid of. But it is possible to stand up to our fears and face them with real strength. We succumb to our fears when we throw fear back at others or use violence as a means of control. This is not the time to give into our fears. The “Black Lives Matter” movement is the new civil rights movement. Why are we afraid to acknowledge that racism still exists, especially within our systems of justice? We have nothing to lose (except white privilege!) and everything

to gain if we just begin the process of understanding each other.

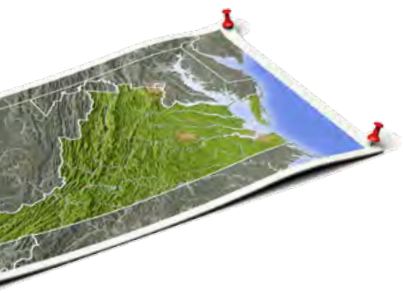
What if, in love, we seek to understand what we fear?

What if, in love, we helped others understand what they fear?

What if, in love, the Black community and the police department engaged in public dialogue around “Black Lives Matter”?

This could be one small step in bringing this world around to be the kind of world God intended. 

*–The Rev. Dr. Kincannon is pastor of Rising Hope United Methodist Mission Church. The church is a racially mixed congregation serving the homeless and the poorest of the poor along the Route One Corridor of Fairfax County, Va.*



# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

## Retired Clergy Housing Corporation, VUMH celebrate Dr. Tom Coffman's ministry



A time of fellowship with the Coffmans was held prior to a lunch and celebration of ministry.

By Madeline Pillow

**T**he ministry of Dr. Tom Coffman and his wife, Nancy, was celebrated Tuesday, July 26, by members of Virginia United Methodist Homes (VUMH), Retired Clergy Housing Corporation and guests.

Coffman is retiring after 22 years of service as president of the Retired Clergy Housing Corporation. He is also a retired clergy member of the conference.

Chris Henderson, president and CEO of VUMH, spoke about the couple's ministry in this capacity and also the future of the corporation.

Those gathered shared

stories about the Coffmans' ministry whether through Retired Clergy Housing Corp. or elsewhere. The couple mentioned how much they had enjoyed serving in this capacity, the people they met and the ministry they were able to serve in.

"You showed so many of us how to be in leadership and how to love with all that we are. We thank you so much for being who you are," said the Rev. Charles Wickham, Trinity UMC, Danville District.

Nancy Coffman also praised her relationship working with her husband through this ministry. "We work as a team, and this is

the best teammate I have ever had," Nancy said, gesturing to her husband.

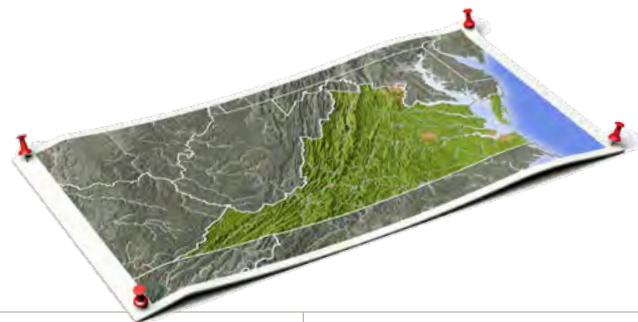
"We have enjoyed working with the people living in our facilities. They have been good people. Excellent people," said Tom. He mentioned that their goals were to provide residents with what they needed as quickly as they could, referring to the wait that some experienced their whole lives living in parsonages. He told those present from the VUMH that they would also enjoy working with these residents.

As of July 1, VUMH and The Housing Corp. have

*(Continued on pg. 9: "Retired".)*



# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



## Cabinet, provisional members help with tornado relief efforts



By Madeline Pillow

The Cabinet and newly-commissioned clergy came together for a work day in Waverly on July 20. Waverly is one of three areas affected by the Feb. 24 tornadoes.

The work day was dreamed up by one of the members of the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM) said the Rev. Lindsey Bayn-

ham, associate director of The Center for Clergy Excellence, as a way to kick start ministry for the newly-commissioned clergy.

"To see them [district superintendents] working alongside people they have mentored and brought to this point in ministry is really exciting," said Baynham. "They are mentoring on the spot while they are drilling, hammering and cleaning roofs, and it's just a really great partnership for our church."

Dividing into different groups, the Cabinet and provisional members worked on five different

homes throughout the day with work ranging from power washing, installing new gutters to sheet rock-ing.

On June 6, efforts moved from recovery to relief in Waverly. Forrest White, Disaster Recovery manager and United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) coordinator for the Virginia Conference, said that teams have now worked on about a half dozen homes in that time.

White was pleased that the Cabinet and provisional members helped with relief efforts so they could not only build relationships

The Rev. David McWilliams, head pastor of Del Ray UMC, Alexandria, and the Rev. Scott Davis, Lynchburg District superintendent, work on the roof of a Waverly home.





# The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA

among themselves but also illustrate that disaster relief can be done by anyone in the church.

"No matter if you're at the largest church in the conference or the smallest church in a charge in the conference, there's a place for you in this disaster recovery," said White.

James River District superintendent the Rev. Rob Colwell appreciated both groups coming together as well including the conference as a whole.

"To see the Cabinet and the conference makes you really appreciate what the connection is all about and just the size and outreach of our church," said Colwell. "It makes me kinda proud to be United Methodist."

Before their work day on July 20, provisional members completed VIM training with White and now are fully trained to go back to their churches and lead short-term missions.

Ryan LaRock, newly-commissioned associate pastor at Christ UMC, Alexandria District, said the experience helped them to see each other in a different way as they worked alongside one another in mission.

"There's sort of a transparency about being able to stop and get out of the buildings and get out of the churches and actually do missions together and to be reminded that we are all in

this together," said LaRock.

Tornado relief efforts are planned for Appomattox and Tappahannock areas.

Relief efforts will expand to the Evergreen area in Appomattox in August, and the Tappahannock area will be up and running in September.

White emphasized that a constant flow of funding is needed to help get supplies as well as to keep teams scheduled one behind the other. He also said that prayers are still needed for survivors and for teams that serve.

Teams are still needed, especially for the upcoming fall months. White said September is typically a slow month in disaster response ministry due to the increase in activities and schools being back in session.

He encouraged volunteers who come to serve to meet survivors, learn about them and be open to the experience.

"Serving is a mutual thing," White said. "Come here and show as disciples that this is what Christ's love looks like."

For more information about relief efforts, putting together a team or the "Walls of Giving, Walls for Living" campaign, contact Forrest White at VirginiaUM-VIM@gmail.com. 📧

*("Retired," continued from page 7.)*

entered into a management agreement. This began when VUMH started doing accounts payable eight months ago for residents and vendors of the Housing Corp.

Henderson said it would be hard to fill the space left by the Coffmans.

"There's so much institutional knowledge bottled up in Nancy and Tom's heads," he said.

But Henderson looked forward to the opportunity to continue to serve through the Retired Clergy Housing Corp. after its 82 years of being founded and said it will be a collaborative effort to fill the Coffmans' shoes which will include contract VUMH employee Larry Wilkinson.

A retired banker, Wilkinson was formerly a board member of one of the VUMH homes in Williamsburg. He has been a contract employee since 2006.

"Clearly what you all have done in your ministry over the last 64 years is remarkable. It is extraordinary. And I want to thank you for leaving me big footsteps in which to follow," Wilkinson told the Coffmans. 📧

## Retired Clergy Housing Corporation

**T**he Retired Clergy Housing Corporation of the Virginia Conference, maintains a program to provide individual retirement homes for eligible United Methodist ministers who need it.

This program has been made possible by gifts of homes or property willed or deeded to the corporation plus gifts of money. Other contributions come through the Covenant of Gratitude whose members contribute \$1 (not to exceed \$35) per year for each person ordained a Commissioned Provisional Member at the annual session of the Virginia Conference.

Those who would like to consider willing their homes, deeding their property, making a special gift of money, becoming a member of the Covenant of Gratitude and share in this ministry for retired ministers or clergy determining either eligibility or availability of housing, should contact Larry Wilkinson at **(804) 474-8700**.

The Retired Clergy Housing Corporation exists through the generous gifts of clergy and laypersons throughout the conference and does not receive any funds from the conference.

# Meet our new

## Bishop Sharma Lewis to lead Virginia Conference for next four years

By Linda S. Rhodes

"I was called by God and I made myself available, not just to a position, but to follow God's will," said Lewis.

Bishop Lewis was consecrated on July 15. Photo credit: Matt Brodie

**B**ishop Sharma D. Lewis, the first African-American woman elected a bishop in the Southeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church, has been assigned to lead the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church for the next four years. She will begin her term of office on Sept. 1.

Bishop Lewis will oversee the 1,169 local churches and faith communities and 327,647 United Methodists in the Virginia

Conference. She follows Bishop Young Jin Cho who is retiring after leading the conference for the last four years.

Lewis, 52, was elected a bishop on the first ballot taken by the 376 delegates at the Southeastern Jurisdictional (SEJ) Conference which met July 13-15 in Lake Junaluska, N.C.

"I was called by God and I made myself available, not just to a position, but to follow God's will," said Lewis. "I am excited, and I am really humbled. At 52 years old, I am excited that my next phase of life will

be as an episcopal leader. I am humbled by the fact that this is historic."

Lewis is the first African-American woman elected as a bishop in the denomination since 2000. The first ever African-American female bishop in The United Methodist Church, Bishop Leontine Kelly, was from the Virginia Conference but was elected in 1984 by the church's Western Jurisdiction.

### Ice cream social welcome

Virginia Jurisdictional Conference delegates and friends welcomed Bishop Lewis as the new leader of the Virginia Conference by holding an ice cream social in Lambuth Inn on the





# bishop



Bishop Sharma D. Lewis

grounds of Lake Junaluska Thursday night, July 14, after the assignments of SEJ bishops were announced. A room packed full of Virginians erupted in cheers when Bishop Lewis entered the room.

"I am excited about coming to Virginia!" the new bishop exclaimed.

## Lifelong United Methodist

Currently serving as district superintendent of the Atlanta-Decatur-Oxford District in the North Georgia Conference, Lewis is a native of Statesboro, Ga., and a life-long United Methodist.

She is a graduate of Mercer University and the University of West Georgia, with bachelor's and master's degrees in biology. After graduating, she worked as a biologist in the academic and corporate sectors. After answering the call to ministry, she entered Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, where

she earned the Master of Divinity with honors.

"I have an evangelistic heart, I just feel that people need Jesus. And I hope that's what I bring to the Council of Bishops," said Lewis.

Before being appointed district superintendent, Lewis served at Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church in McDonough, Ga., Powers Ferry United Methodist Church in Marietta, Ga., and Ben Hill United Methodist Church in Atlanta.

## United Methodist Bishops

A United Methodist bishop in the United States is elected for life. Typically, a bishop will serve a specific episcopal area for eight years, but can serve as long as 12 years in one area.

*The United Methodist Book of Discipline*, the denomination's governing document, directs each bishop to "guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church."

Bishops provide oversight and support to The United Methodist Church's mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. They also are charged to work "for the unity of the church" and "be the shepherd of the whole flock."

## The United Methodist Church

Within the United States, local United Methodist churches are organized into increasingly larger groups: numerous districts, 56 conferences and five jurisdictions. A bishop can be assigned to lead one or more conferences.

Thirteen active bishops lead the 15 conferences in the nine states that form the Southeastern Jurisdiction. States represented in this jurisdiction are:



Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

The Virginia Conference includes 1,169 local churches and faith communities covering the entire state of Virginia – except the section of the state west of Christiansburg, which is part of the Holston Conference. ☞

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

Shirley Cauffman and then-Bishop-elect Sharma Lewis celebrate her assignment to Virginia.

# Bio

A native of Statesboro, Ga., the Rev. Sharma Denise Lewis was a biologist in the academic and corporate sectors prior to her call to ministry. She graduated from Mercer University (1985) where she received her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology, and she received a Master of Science degree (1988) in Biology from the University of West Georgia.

In 1999, she entered ministry at Gammon Seminary at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Ga., and earned a Master of Divinity in Biblical Studies with honors.

She was ordained a Deacon in the North Georgia Annual Conference in 1999 and an Elder in 2002. Lewis is known for her diligent work in reaching the unchurched, professions of faith and new membership growth.

She was appointed as

the first African-American and first female senior pastor of the Powers Ferry UMC, a cross-racial assignment in Marietta, Ga., in 2004.

Lewis has also served as senior pastor of Wesley Chapel UMC, McDonough, Ga., from 2007-2010, where the congregation grew more than 650 members during her tenure. She was senior pastor of Powers Ferry UMC, a cross-racial appointment and associate pastor of Ben Hill UMC in Atlanta.

Prior to her election as Bishop, Rev. Lewis served as district superintendent of the Atlanta-Decatur-Oxford District in the North Georgia Conference since 2010. This district included 60 local churches, ranging in size from 25 to 3,500 members.

The Rev. Lewis is the recipient of the 2010 Harry Denman Evangelism Award and the G. Ross Freeman Leadership Award. She has

served on numerous committees, boards and task forces representing the United Methodist Church.

Her visibility as a strong spiritual and pastoral leader propelled her into numerous leadership roles in the local community, including Hands on Henry County and Many Hearts, Many Hands McDonough.

She was elected the delegation head to the 2012 and 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences and was unanimously endorsed by the North Georgia Conference delegation as their episcopal nominee.

Active in the community, she was a vital part of the Metro State Women's Prison Women of Faith Bible Study and Worship Services, Peachtree Pine Homeless Shelter and has led mission experiences to Jamaica, Kenya and the Philippines. 🇺🇸



Bishop Lewis and her family gather after her consecration at Lake Junaluska.





The bishops of the Southeastern Jurisdiction.  
Photo credit: Matt Brodie

# Bishops in The United Methodist Church

**B**ishops of The United Methodist Church provide spiritual leadership to more than 12.8 million persons in a broad range of settings on four continents, including North America, Europe, Africa and Asia. Historically, bishops preside over Annual and Central Conferences (regional areas of the church). They play an important leadership role in helping to set the direction of the church and its mission throughout the world.

## What are a bishop's responsibilities?

A bishop serves as a general superintendent for the church, assigned to a geographical area. In the United Methodist tradition, bishops are not "ordained" as bishops, but are clergy elected and consecrated to the office of bishop. Bishops give general oversight to the worldly and spiritual interests of the church. Bishops

also have the responsibility to see that the rules and regulations developed by General Conference are carried out. Bishops are responsible for setting all clergy appointments in the annual (regional) conferences they serve. Most bishops also serve on a general agency board, often as the president. The bishop is the presiding officer at the annual conference session and rules on points of law.

## How are bishops selected?

Bishops are elected by the jurisdictional conferences in the United States and by the central conferences outside of the United States. "Any clergy member of an annual conference is eligible to be elected a bishop. Nominations or endorsements of individuals are common, but not necessary for election. The number of votes needed to elect a bishop is determined

by each jurisdictional conference but the church's *Book of Discipline* recommends that at least 60 percent of those present and voting be required to elect. Bishops are consecrated at the jurisdictional conference and are expected to report for work in their new areas September 1."

## How are bishops assigned?

Bishops are assigned by their jurisdiction to serve a geographical area for a 4-year term. There are 46 episcopal areas in the United States and 20 episcopal areas outside of the United States. New bishops may not be assigned to the area where they were a clergy member for at least four years after their election. According to ¶406 of the 2012 *Book of Discipline*, this restriction can be ignored by a two-thirds vote of the Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and a majority

vote of the jurisdictional conference.

## How long can a bishop serve?

In the U.S., bishops normally serve in one area for up to two terms, but they can continue for a third term with special approval of the jurisdictional conference. Bishops are elected for life and serve in their assignment until retirement (required by the *Book of Discipline* to be the jurisdictional conference following their 68th birthday).

In the Central Conferences, bishops are elected for a specific term. If not reelected at the end of the term, the bishop returns to the pastorate and is no longer considered a bishop. Bishops who retire while serving their term are considered bishops for life. In the Africa Central Conference, bishops who are reelected for a second term then become bishops for life. 🍷

\*All information courtesy of [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org).

The Virginia Delegation has the special privilege and task of meeting and getting to know episcopal candidates at the 2016 General Conference as well as at Jurisdictional Conference. Here are a few reactions from members of our delegation on the assignment of Bishop Sharma Lewis to the Virginia Conference.



**C**hristmas morning at my house with small children was always filled with excitement and anticipation waiting to see what gifts would be under the tree for them. You could feel that same sense of anticipation as delegates filed into Stuart Auditorium to cast the first ballot to elect five new bishops.

## Delegates share experience of Bishop Lewis' election and assignment

There was bated breath as we waited for results, and then a jubilation I have never before witnessed at Jurisdictional Conference regarding an election!

The election of Sharma Lewis to the episcopacy on the first ballot is a game changer, because Sharma just became the first African-American woman elected to be a bishop in the Southeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church. As delegates rose to their feet amidst the cacophony of applause and cheering, it was clear that the jurisdiction is ready to make history.

I remember when Bishop Leontine Kelly was not elected in the Southeastern Jurisdiction and how that felt to so many, especially women. It has taken a long time to get to where we are today, and it was both vindicating and emotional to have Sharma elected on the first ballot, when, historically, this rarely happens.

I am so grateful to have been a part of this historic event. The image of everyone around her standing and cheering, while Sharma sat in her seat, head down, crying, will forever be imprinted in my mind.

There was also the

anticipation of waiting to hear where each of the bishops had been assigned for the next four years as the Committee on Episcopacy worked all day to get all the assignments made so they could be read later in the evening.

Then the moment finally arrived. It felt like Christmas morning all over again when the assignments were read and our delegation heard that Bishop Sharma Lewis had been assigned to the Virginia Annual Conference!

Not only did her election as the first African-American woman bishop in the Southeastern Jurisdiction make history, so did her assignment to our annual conference. Sharma becomes the first African-American, and only the second woman ever to serve the Virginia Conference as our bishop.

It has been a privilege for me to know Bishop Lewis for several years as we have both served on the same jurisdictional committee. She is energetic and full of ideas. She is loyal and deeply devoted to her family. She will bring to the Virginia Conference a sense of excitement and anticipation, as together we look to the future and make disciples of Jesus

Christ for the transformation of the world.

Please join me in welcoming Bishop Sharma Lewis to Virginia!

—Shirley Cauffman, lay delegate



**F**or me, the election of Bishop Lewis was a historic movement of the Holy Spirit. This was my fourth Jurisdictional Conference as a delegate, and I had attended many before. The election of a woman of color had been an aspiration of the ethnic community at large for many years, and several despaired of ever seeing it occur. For Bishop Lewis to have been elected was a great time of celebration; for it to happen on the first ballot was a thing of holy significance and an answer to many years of prayers. I am thankful to God to have lived to see this, and am even more thankful that Bishop Lewis is coming to serve among us.



I believe her possessed of a strong and determined spirit, a keen and inquiring mind, and an unquenchable passion for reaching people for Jesus Christ. God has poured out the Spirit upon her work in the church, and the Bishop knows what it takes to turn failing churches into places of glorious transformation. Bishop Lewis brings great energy and excitement into the places that she has served, and I know that she will be greatly beloved by the people of the Virginia Annual Conference.

—Clarence Brown, clergy delegate



If it's not Red Bull, must be the Holy Spirit! After being elected on the first ballot, Sharma Lewis came to the speaker's podium accompanied by her family. It was customary for the newly-elected bishop to speak. Her first words recalled Bishop Leontine T. C. Kelly, a Virginian who was passed over by the Southeast due to race and then elected the first African-

American woman bishop in the denomination by the Western jurisdiction. With thanksgiving, Rev. Lewis then recalled the names of each Southeastern, female bishop – lifting them up as trailblazers who made her election possible. I had tears running down my cheeks. It was an emotional time.

Before her election, I had asked everyone I knew connected with the North Georgia Conference about Sharma Lewis. I met a woman whom Rev. Lewis had married. I met a clergyperson who noted all their friends in Rev. Lewis' district all spoke of their then superintendent as a caring pastor and able administrator.

Looking at the placement of all the episcopal leaders, I'm convinced that Bishop Lewis is the best choice for leading Virginia in the years ahead. She has the experience of a scientist and the ability to speak to the faith of the intellect. She has a pastor's heart and a passion for making disciples of Jesus. She has the experience of being part of the NGA cabinet and knows how to work within that setting. And she is full of enthusiasm. On the night of her assignment, she was as excited as someone who just downed several Red Bulls! Maybe that's what folks would have said of

Peter today!

I'm very grateful for the Southeast electing a woman of color. During the consecration service, my eyes were tearful much of the time because elected were two African-Americans and two women as bishops in the Southeast. It was a historic moment. They are all lovers of God first, skilled pastors and administrators and visionaries who then are women and men, African-American and Caucasian elders.

A good illustration of God's hand in Bishop Lewis' assignment might have been offered by a friend who would place himself at the opposite end of the theological spectrum from me. He said if my personal first choice had come to Virginia, I'd be happy but he would not. However, with Bishop Lewis's appointment to Virginia, we both can be joyful. That's God at work. I have no doubt that God will bless us through the work of our next episcopal leader. 🍀

—Rob Vaughn, clergy delegate

## 2016-2020 Episcopal Assignments

Alabama-West Florida  
Conference

**Bishop David Graves**

Florida Conference

**Bishop Ken Carter**

Holston Conference

**Bishop Mary Virginia  
Taylor**

Kentucky and Red Bird

Missionary Conferences

**Bishop Leonard Fairley**

Mississippi Conference

**Bishop James Swanson**

Tennessee and Memphis  
Conferences

**Bishop Bill McAlilly**

North Alabama Conference

**Bishop Debra**

**Wallace-Padgett**

North Carolina Conference

**Bishop Hope**

**Morgan Ward**

North Georgia Conference

**Bishop Sue**

**Hauptert-Johnson**

South Carolina Conference

**Bishop Jonathan Holston**

South Georgia Conference

**Bishop J. Lawson Bryan**

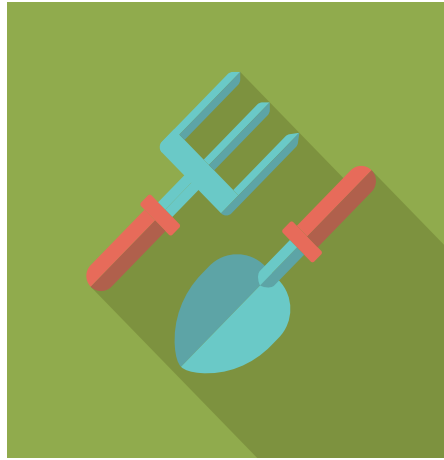
Western North Carolina  
Conference

**Bishop Paul Leeland**

Virginia Conference

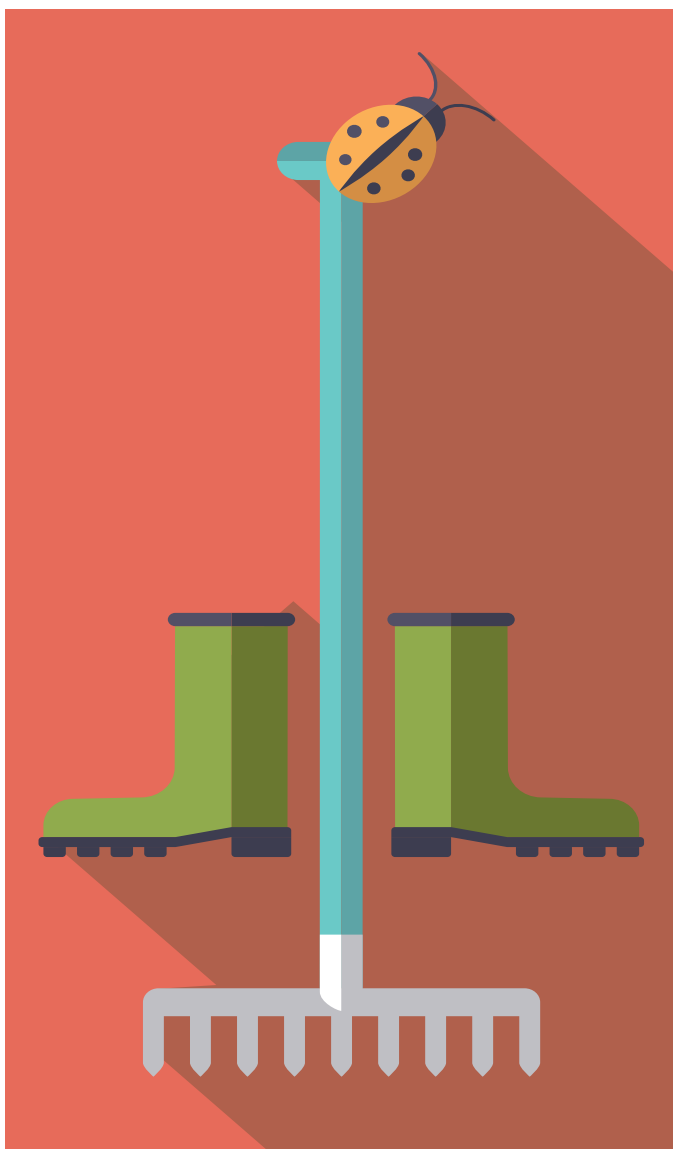
**Bishop Sharma Lewis**

# Virginia Conference's Stra





# Strategy to reach new people



**"It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building."**

*1 Corinthians 3:7-9 NLT*

By Mark Ogren

During the 2008 Virginia Annual Conference, *All Things New* was adopted as the core strategy for reaching more people — more diverse people and more young people. The goal was to shift from a culture of maintenance to multiplication. Creating new and renewed congregations was also one of the four areas of focus of the UMC for the last quadrennium. *All Things New* has two central components: An Invitation to Plant and An Invitation to Harvest.

The Invitation to Plant seeks to establish new faith communities and to resource existing churches that wish to multiply through establishment of new faith communities. Since 2008, we have established 42 new faith communities with 22 Anglo and 20 ethnic minority faith communities. The ethnic churches include African American, Ghanaian, Hispanic, Korean and West African. Combined average worship attendance per Sunday for these faith communities was 2,012 persons for Jan.-June 2015.

The Invitation to Harvest seeks to encourage and provide leadership training and support for existing churches that desire to become renewed faith communities. The Five Talent Academy was established in 2009 to create two conference-wide events per year that would address the five areas of church vitality: average worship attendance, professions of faith, small groups, mission engagement and mission giving. Since 2009, the Five Talent Academy has averaged 400 per event. Between 2011-2016, a workshop called "How to Reach New People" has taught clergy and lay teams how to create a culture of invitation by building relations with unchurched people. Approximately 350 churches have taken part in this workshop.

What follows are stories of four new faith communities within the Virginia Conference. Two are Hispanic churches that have created partnerships with existing churches: Belmont on the Richmond District and Amor Y Pax with Mt. Olive on the Winchester District. The two Anglo churches are The Gathering, which started out of Community Courthouse on the Elizabeth River District, and The Vine, which birthed out of an Elijah Church model on the Arlington District.

*—The Rev. Mark Ogren is Virginia Conference director of Congregational Excellence.*



Becoming a legacy congregation to Vine Church has allowed the Graham Road UMC congregation to reach their community for Christ.

## Vine church experiences new chapter of ministry

By Kris Beckert

**“W**hat’s next?” It’s a common question among churches like Graham Road UMC in Falls Church that face the challenges of declining attendance, aging congregation members and disconnect from their surrounding communities. But it is also the question that Vine Church, a six-year-old United Methodist Church plant in Dunn Loring, was asking as it began dreaming about the next chapter of ministry, specifically the call to start a second campus of Vine Church in the Falls Church region.


One year ago, these two very different churches, one almost 60 years older than the other, not only discovered they were asking the same question, they also dared to take a step of faith to grow God’s Kingdom.

The Vine Church campus in Dunn Loring was started in 2010 after the congregation of Dunn Loring UMC voted to close and Todd Schlechty was appointed by the Virginia Conference to start a new congregation in its location. Six years later, Vine Church is a thriving congregation that has connected with a diversity of unchurched and de-churched people and is known in their community for their summer outdoor movies, October Pumpkinfest, Eggstravaganza and other events. Since the beginning, Todd had a vision of planting 10 new sites of Vine Church in the next 20 years, utilizing a similar method of starting new congregations in churches that had closed or voted to become a legacy (meaning that they would continue to meet but would hand over their facilities for a new church to be started there). The new congregations would be part of the fabric of their communities from day one, meeting people where they are and allowing people to belong before they believe.

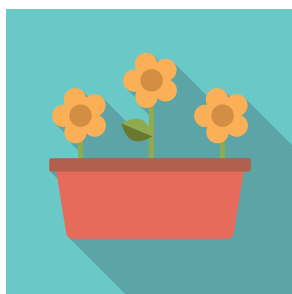
In 2015, Vine Church discerned it was time to begin moving toward planting a second site, and I was brought on as the first trainee in their new Church Planter Development Program. This program was created with the goal of identifying, developing and deploying church planters

who are gifted, called and prepared to lead a launch team in starting a new church site with Vine Church DNA. Under the direction of Arlington DS Cathy Abbott, Vine Church then began consulting with several congregations in the Falls Church region that were praying about next steps for their churches. They were presented with the opportunity to give their building to Vine Church for planting a second Vine Church campus, which would not mean closing but would also allow their congregation to continue to meet and worship together. The last of the congregations with whom Vine Church met was Graham Road UMC, a church that, since chartering in 1952, had taken to heart its core mission of reaching their community for Christ. Reflecting on their history, their present state and their hope for the future, they were convinced that a relationship with Vine Church was the answer to their prayers about the next chapter of ministry. After prayer walking the community and holding further conversation, the Graham Road UMC congregation voted unanimously to become a legacy congregation and to enable Vine Church to plant a new campus at their site.

Throughout the summer, as church planter I held several Launch Team Interest Gatherings with members of the Vine Church – Dunn Loring campus, Graham Road UMC and the community, who share an interest and passion for being part of the team of missionaries who will plant the new congregation. Building renovations, a Graham Road Pumpkinfest, Fire Pit Fridays, and other means of connecting with the Falls Church community will take place in the fall, leading up to preview worship services in December and a Grand Opening worship service on Jan. 8, 2017.

What’s next for Graham Road and Vine Church? Hope. Resurrection. Excitement. And a new chapter of ministry to expand God’s Kingdom. 

—The Rev. Kris Beckert is associate pastor and second church planter at The Vine in Dunn Loring, Va.



The leadership team at The Gathering, including Rev. Rachel Gilmore (second from right.) Photos by Monica Martin.

## Being bold: two congregations merge through prayer

By Rachel Gilmore

**W**e had a problem. As a new church plant, our warehouse space only had two rooms for children's ministry, and we were averaging 60-80 kids in worship each week. We needed a new place to meet but didn't know if we could afford a bigger building, so we started praying for a new church home.

On the other side of town, a United Methodist church that started on a charge in 1846 had fewer than 60 in worship on a Sunday with mainly older adults in attendance. They started praying for ways to grow their church and re-energize as a congregation. God answered our prayers when, on Sept. 17-18, 2015, each church held a church conference with overwhelming votes in favor of joining forces and becoming one unified congregation.

This meant that the older, established congregation had to be incredibly courageous and loving as they opened their doors to hundreds of new members each Sunday along with renovations to the children's wing and the addition of a band and screen in the sanctuary. This meant that the younger, church plant families had to be incredibly open to driving farther each Sunday and being in a more formal, traditional space which was very different from anything they had known before.

We began worshipping together in December 2015 and officially merged committees and finances in January 2016.

We are not two churches sharing one building; we are now one church with one pastor and one vision to continue to make disciples for the transformation of the world! Since our merger in the fall of 2015 we have grown by 20 percent (we now have close to 100 children under 12 on a Sunday) and have received almost 100 percent of our projected annual 2016 giving in the first six months of the year!

Has this process been easy? No, we have had to overcome some obstacles of learning to trust and listen to each other. The church plant has had to learn what it means to be chartered, pay full apportionments and care for a building. The established church has had to learn how to make decisions quickly to meet needs that have arisen due to the rapid growth. There have been bumps along the way, but overall we are grateful to be worshipping together, studying together and serving God together in Virginia Beach.

As you look at the life of your own church and pray for renewal, be bold and courageous, knowing that God can do great things when we surrender to God's will for our lives and churches and are willing to embrace change in a big way.

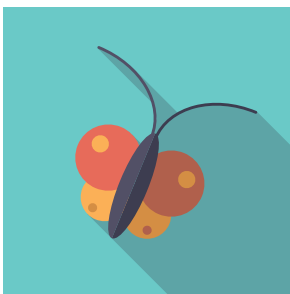
I know that I am grateful to come to worship on a Sunday and hear stories from World War II vets and current active duty officers. I'm grateful to receive hugs from couples that have been married for 65 years and a couple that I married last weekend. There's a beauty in our diverse stories and experiences and with the wisdom we have gleaned from our older members and the energy we receive from our little ones, I have great hope for the future of The Gathering at Scott Memorial UMC! 🍀

*—The Rev. Rachel Gilmore is the pastor of The Gathering at Scott Memorial UMC, Virginia Beach.*

Children gather during a worship service.







## Belmont UMC Hispanic ministry meets growing demographic need



By Larry Cochran

**A**fter a series of vibrant, enthusiastic praise songs in the Hispanic service at Belmont UMC on Sunday afternoons, you will hear worship leader Estrella Serrano say to the people, "Let us give applause to the Lord." What has happened at Belmont over the last two decades is the work of the Lord and the applause given at the Hispanic service represents the feeling of the people as they have witnessed the Lord working in powerful ways in the church.

The Hispanic ministry at Belmont began in 2012 and is an extension of what Belmont represents: a church of the community. Over 15 years ago, Belmont, located in Southside Richmond, made an intentional decision to have its membership be representative of the community where it is located. Church leadership recognized that the demographics of the community had changed dramatically and a prayerful response was needed if the church was to fulfill its mission to reach people for Jesus Christ.

The church developed a mission statement which was set to the tune of "Amazing Grace" and is sung at the beginning of each service: "We are a family of Christ called to be a vital center for community ministry where people of all races can find passion for Christ and compassion for others." The mission statement along with various outreach programs, including reaching out to guests who come to the weekly feeding ministry, has brought in many new people into the church.

The Hispanic ministry began with the decision to hire Pastor Julio Serrano who came to the United States from


Cuba where he served as an elder in the Methodist Church. Along with his wife, Estrella Serrano, the ministry has grown over the past four years.

The ministry began as a new faith community with grant assistance from the conference through the Church Development Team. Mission Insite data suggests that there are over 14,000 Hispanic/Latinos living within a three-mile radius of Belmont. Julio and Estrella have developed a ministry to reach out to these people using a combination of various evangelism efforts along with the development of small groups and leadership to grow the ministry. This includes vibrant worship, house churches, reaching out to the Hispanic community where they live and preaching at the food pantry on Fridays.

Their ministry includes children's activities, dramas and liturgical dancing in worship, picnics, combined services with other United Methodist Hispanic ministries in the area, Tuesday night prayer and worship service, Bible studies, special mother and father days services, shared meals, discipleship classes for new members, Sunday school for all ages, evangelistic campaigns lead by pastors brought in from other locations and joint services with the traditional Belmont membership.

This combined service offers preaching in both Spanish and English. The City of Richmond has offered ESL classes at Belmont, and Cross Over Ministries has offered special health education classes to the Hispanic community at Belmont. These efforts have been successful in helping the Hispanic community become acclimated to life in the United States.

Ministry in the Hispanic community offers many challenges including a transient community and many financial challenges. Many of the Hispanic members work more than one job which makes it difficult to have consistent attendance at worship and other events.

Julio and Estrella have always been open to trying new things to grow the ministry. They are now envisioning a new house church and offering another evangelistic campaign in October. The ministry has helped the traditional membership of Belmont understand and come to see the Hispanic community through new eyes as we come to know and love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. 

—The Rev. Larry Cochran is pastor of Belmont UMC, Richmond District.





Two congregations came together for an event that raised funds for families that lost their homes in a residential fire.

## Congregations create strong partnership in Winchester District

By Víctor Gómez

*"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" – Psalm 133:1 (NIV)*

A few years ago, my district superintendent called me to translate for the Charge Conference of Amor y Paz. Right after the Charge Conference, they had a fellowship meal and invited me to share the meal with them, so I stayed and met wonderful people. That same month I looked for opportunities to assist the ministry of Amor y Paz in partnership with Mount Olive UMC.


We began to partner in ministry and together we invited one another to Vacation Bible School, After School Program, fundraisers such as making tamales and apple butter, sleep overs, prayer walks, harvest festivals and, most recently, a mission experience at Tangier Island. Both congregations began to build relationships and to live together in unity. In fact a Martial Arts instructor from Mount Olive volunteered his time to offer free lessons to both congregations and the community.

Then I was appointed to serve Amor y Paz, and the partnership grew stronger. It is amazing to see God's love in action, and God's people living together in unity for the extension of God's kingdom. On one hand Mount Olive has become very vital as they continue to seek opportunities to serve God in ministry. On the other hand, Amor y Paz

has opened its doors for the community and finds ways to be a missional site.

Recently, there was a residential fire, and sadly two families lost their homes and all their belongings. Both congregations worked together in partnership to raise funds to benefit the two families. Tamales were made. We sold out quickly and the two families were blessed because together we were the hands and feet of Jesus, sharing God's love in unity.

Late in the spring, every Monday evening, parents and children from the community came to church for a special program. The program was created for parents to learn English, while their children were able to take guitar and keyboard lessons and receive assistance with their homework. We had volunteers from the community, Amor y Paz and Mount Olive. What a way to share God's love and to live together in unity. These partnerships enhance the ministry of the church and show the community that we walk together in Christ.

Montague Avenue UMC has also played a very important role in this partnership as they have enabled the use of the building. Together in partnership we must be the hands and feet of Jesus. Together, we must share God's love, we must be living together in unity. 

—Rev. Dr. Víctor Gómez is pastor of Amor y Paz/Mt. Olive UMC in the Winchester District.



# DISCIPLES HELPING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD

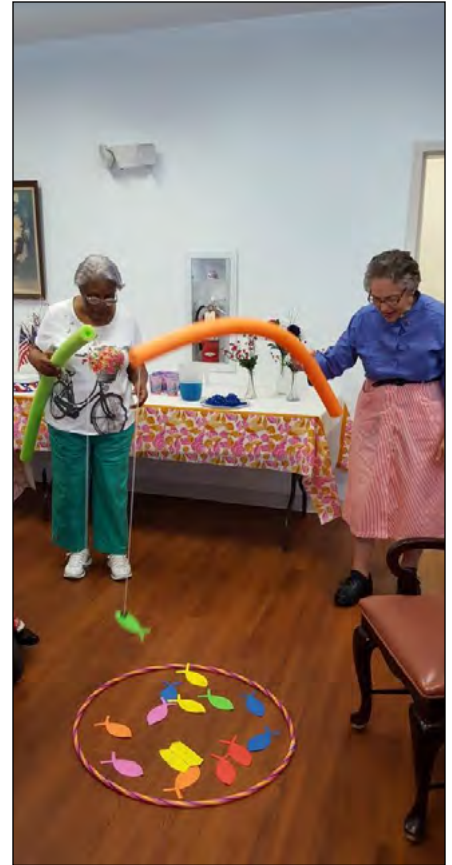


▲ **The HERO Cooperative Parish (Hales Ford, Epworth, Rehobeth, Oilers Chapel)** hosted a three-night revival. On the final night, the Rev. Doug Sasser and the choir of **Burnt Chimney UMC** led the service. The offering that evening went to the Society of St. Andrew.

**Christ UMC, Richmond District,** welcomed a herd of hungry goats in mid-July to clear their property so that the church could be visible to their community. A good portion of the church property was covered with poison and English ivy that hindered visibility. The church was excited to implement an “out of box” and ecologically responsible way to reach out to their neighbors and to enjoy some “goat gazing.” ▶

Back to childhood, **Brookland UMC, Richmond,** conducted an “Adult VBS” at Guardian Place retirement community in Richmond. Twenty residents and two visitors attended the four-day event. For two hours

the participants played games, made crafts and studied about looking at others the way Jesus did. Snacks were exciting with fish food (trail mix), sea water (blue punch), jellyfish squares (blue Jell-O jigglers) and sandy beaches (vanilla pudding topped with graham cracker crumbs and gummy shells.) There was one rule: “When you come to VBS leave your adult self in your apartment and come as a child to have fun.” They did! ▶



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





# EVENTS

## September

### The Old Stone Church Foundation 250th celebration

**Sept. 10, Old Stone Church site,  
Leesburg Station, Leesburg**

The Old Stone Church Foundation of the Virginia Conference Historical Society will host the 250th anniversary celebration of the Old Stone Church site in Leesburg, Va., 2-4 p.m. on Sept. 10. The event will celebrate 250 years since the deeding of the first property to Methodists in America. The Rev. Dr. Clarence Brown, pastor of Annandale UMC, will deliver the keynote address. The Old Stone Church site is located at Wes Cornwall Street and Liberty Street in Leesburg. For more information, visit [www.vaumc.org/oldstonechurch](http://www.vaumc.org/oldstonechurch).

### "Love Heals our Land" Tent Revival

**Sept. 12-17, Park Place Ministry  
Center, Norfolk**

With seating for 400 and room to grow, this five-day event will feature UMC pastors from around the state with prayer and counseling also. If you would like more information, or wish to support the event as a participating church, contact Lay Servant Arthur Devine at **(757) 622-3363**. Register, learn more and volunteer online at [LoveHealsOurLand.eventbrite.com](http://LoveHealsOurLand.eventbrite.com).

### UMVIM Team Leader Training

**Sept. 24, Warwick Memorial UMC,  
Newport News**

Team Leader Training is required for all first-time United Methodist Volunteers In Mission team leaders, but all interested persons are welcome to attend whether leading a team or not. The Virginia Conference offers sessions in different parts of the state. For more information, contact Forrest White,

Virginia Conference UMVIM coordinator, at **(804) 938-1026** or [VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com](mailto:VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com).

### UMVIM Team Leader Recertification Sept. 24, Warwick Memorial UMC, Newport News

Team Leader Recertification is required for all United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM) team leaders who completed basic team leader training five years ago or longer. The focus of this training is to update leaders on Virginia Conference UMVIM policies and guidelines, to share best practices, and to answer any questions you may have. For more information about this event, contact Forrest White, UMVIM Coordinator at [VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com](mailto:VirginiaUMVIM@gmail.com).

### Lay Servant Ministries on-demand course

**Sept. 24, Virginia United Methodist  
Center, Glen Allen**

Lay Servant Ministries is offering a series of six on-demand learning courses in 2016. You may attend the live events 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Virginia United Methodist Center in Glen Allen for free, or pay \$30 to watch online from your own computer during a 90-day period to receive your certification. On Saturday, Sept. 24, "UMC Heritage" will be led by Martha Stokes. For more information, contact Marge Sharp, on-demand learning registrar, at [registrarODL@vaumc.org](mailto:registrarODL@vaumc.org) or **(757) 871-2809**. For more information and to register, go to [www.vaumc.org/LayServantTraining](http://www.vaumc.org/LayServantTraining).

## October

### 5 Talent Academy

**Oct. 4, Ebenezer UMC, Stafford**

The 5 Talent Academy is a group of like-minded pastors and laity across the Virginia Conference who are committed to learning the tools and techniques to have healthy, fruitful congregations. As a member of this community, you will learn new ways to increase worship attendance, professions of faith, faith development, ministry to the poor and stewardship. This event is designed to help participants equip the people of their congregations to be the church in the world. Join the 5 Talent Academy on Tuesday, Oct. 4, for "Equipping People for Ministry Outside the Walls of the Church" featuring Andy Crouch. The event will be live streamed to 10 satellite locations throughout the conference from Ebenezer UMC in Stafford. Go online to see all locations at [www.vaumc.org/5TalentAcademy](http://www.vaumc.org/5TalentAcademy). Early bird rate is \$25 if you register by Aug. 31. Regular rate is \$35.

### Church Leadership Institute (CLI)

**Oct. 10-12, Virginia United  
Methodist Center, Glen Allen**

The Church Leadership Institute (CLI) will help you discern your ministry style by offering greater clarity in the following areas: ministry competencies, core behaviors, spiritual gifts, affinity groups and place on the apostolic/pastoral continuum. Graduates will learn the basics on how to lead renewal in their congregations. Those feeling called to be a new church planter will have the opportunity to more fully discern that call. Register by visiting [www.vaumc.org/cli](http://www.vaumc.org/cli).

(Continued on page 25: "EVENTS.")



# TECHNOLOGY TIPS



## Out-of-the-box ideas for using cellphones in worship

No matter how often we make the announcement about silencing cellphones, people in our congregations are using them during worship. Some use them to read the Bible they like, while others are checking social media updates.

What if we took advantage of that incredible little tool that most people have at their fingertips? There are ways to encourage people to use their cellphones during worship to stay engaged and interact with the service...as long as you think outside the box.

### Selfie-Sundays

A popular cellphone trend is the selfie. You have seen them: People standing with one arm out holding the phone to take a photo of whatever special thing is happening in their lives. One part of the human experience that has largely escaped being shared with friends through the selfie is church.

Other than the occasional undercover selfie taken by the youth in the back row, church is almost never part of the selfie. Few have the opportunity or encouragement to take a selfie during worship. We can remedy. Consider having several Selfie Sundays throughout the year or even Selfie Small Group days! You could celebrate any day of the week and extend the idea to any ministry.

- ❖ First, schedule the selfie celebrations. Give people advance notice and encourage the use of props and costumes.
- ❖ Plan for extra time (about five or 10 minutes) for people to take pic-

tures during your normal greeting time.

- ❖ Provide a few different scenic background options to add color and creativity. Arranging or constructing backgrounds could be a fun activity for the youth group.
- ❖ Give a clear explanation that today the congregation is celebrating Selfie Sunday and you want everyone who can to share this important part of their life with a selfie direct from the service.
- ❖ Enlist a few cellphone-savvy volunteers. Most people can take the pictures themselves, but they may need help from a volunteer to post to Instagram and other social media platforms.
- ❖ Let the fun begin! Feel free to make fun of the church selfie concept. Put on your best duck face, stage a baby selfie and let your church's lighter side shine!
- ❖ Give everyone a specific hashtag to use, something like #FUMC-selfiesunday, to add to the photos so that you can search for them and show them before next Sunday's service.
- ❖ Want to take your selfie to an unselfish level? Take an "un-selfie" to raise awareness about a problem or raise funds for a cause.
- ❖ Highlight a call-to-action by taking a selfie with a sign that lets people know what to do!
- ❖ Hold up a sign in front of your face with a link to a site where people can learn more about a cause.
- ❖ Add a prop to everyone's picture (like a net to raise awareness of the Imagine NO Malaria campaign)





## Poll Everywhere

Though 90 percent of Americans have cellphones, only 58 percent have smart phones. However, this next idea uses a feature that is on every cellphone on the market today: text messaging. Poll Everywhere is a tool that allows you to collect and immediately display responses from a poll via text messaging.

During your service, ask a question, such as "Which of the beatitudes is most challenging to you?" while displaying a screen from the Poll Everywhere site with the options. Everyone in the congregation uses their phones to text their answers to the phone number shown on the screen. As each person texts a response, a bar graph is instantly updated. Wait a minute or two while the graph flexes with each response, then you can move on to the next question or next point in the sermon.

Creating the poll is very simple. After signing up for Poll Everywhere, click "create a poll," type in your question and answers, and you are done. It is that simple. Of course, there are many more features like a presenter app, countdown clock, social sharing, etc. However, the core functionality is insanely simple!



Poll Everywhere is free for up to 40 respondents. After that, you pay a little for each month that you want to use it. You are not locked into a contract. Now, put this engaging tool in your creative toolbox where it will be ready for your next service!

## YouVersion Live

If you are around the church long enough, you will hear the debate about whether you should give sermon notes and whether they should be fill-in-the-blank, whether to put a whole verse on the screen or ask people to turn in their Bible, and on and on. The answer to many of those questions can be YouVersion Live.

You probably know YouVersion as the app on your phone called "Bible." Though you may have only used it to pull up a passage of Scripture or to incorporate a reading plan, there is a lot of power hidden in the little tab that says "live."

You can place everything there that people need to follow along during the sermon (or small group study). There can be full Bible verses in whatever version you will be using, links to videos, discussion questions and even online giving options. All will come nicely formatted in a Bible app on the phone. 📖

—United Methodist Communications

("EVENTS," continued from page 23.)

## Preaching the Advent Season: Sermon Preparation for the Busy Preacher

**Oct. 11, Location TBD**

"Preaching the Advent Season: Sermon Preparation for the Busy Preacher," sponsored by the Goodson Academy for Preaching. Location to be determined. For more information contact David Rash at [davidrash809@gmail.com](mailto:davidrash809@gmail.com).

## ARMS Retreat

**Oct. 12-13, Eagle Eyrie Retreat Center, Lynchburg**

The 2016 Association of Retired Ministers and Spouses (ARMS) Retreat will be held this year at the Eagle Eyrie Conference Center, near Lynchburg. All retired clergy and spouses and widows and widowers of clergy are invited. Cost: \$60 per person; \$30 for first-time attendees. Speakers include Bishop Timothy Whitaker and John Fuller, executive director of Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Inc. Look for more information to be forthcoming. 📖

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# Devotions from General Conference 2016-based scripture

## LIVING THE WORD



*Patrick Pillow is the associate pastor at Chester UMC on the James River District. In 2009, he earned his BA in History with a minor in German World War Two History from the Virginia Military Institute. He recently received his Master of Divinity from Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond. Patrick has been a member of the Virginia Conference since 2013. Patrick loves supporting Manchester United and defending Tom Brady's innocence of all Deflategate charges.*

### September 4, 2016

Isaiah 11: 1-9  
Hand-in-Hand

What a powerful Word to begin this month. In the midst of our nation's division over political candidates, social injustice and fears of terrorism, how fitting it is for us to begin September with a little reminder of how we are supposed to interact with our neighbors.

Whether our world is facing immediate danger or we are reeling from the latest human tragedy, I am always struck by the imagery in this passage: "...the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." (Isaiah 11: 6 NRSV)

Now, my knowledge of animal relations isn't that well versed, but Isaiah was onto something by pairing nature's rivals in union with one another. The idea of the hunter (our wolf) living in harmony with the hunted (the lamb) is quite the revelation for us in 2016. While it is easy for humanity to choose sides and point fingers, which one of us is the hunter and which is the hunted? I believe that the lines are so blurred these days, there is fault to be found on all sides.

But despite our loyalties and fickle judgement, there is hope for you and me in this passage. This excerpt from Isaiah presents one of the core Wesleyan references to the righteousness of Christ. We are called to mirror that righteousness and change ourselves to be in true, authentic relationship with those we love as well as those we wish to avoid.

Perhaps our greatest fear is mirrored in verse 8 when Isaiah says "...the weaned child shall put its hand in the adder's den." (Isaiah 11: 8 NRSV) All of us take a risk when we reach out to the opposing side. Will our heartfelt gesture be received in kind or will we be bitten and forced to retreat back into our shell? While there are no guarantees as to how another brother or sister may react to us, Christ calls us to always be the first to offer the sign of peace.

### September 11, 2016

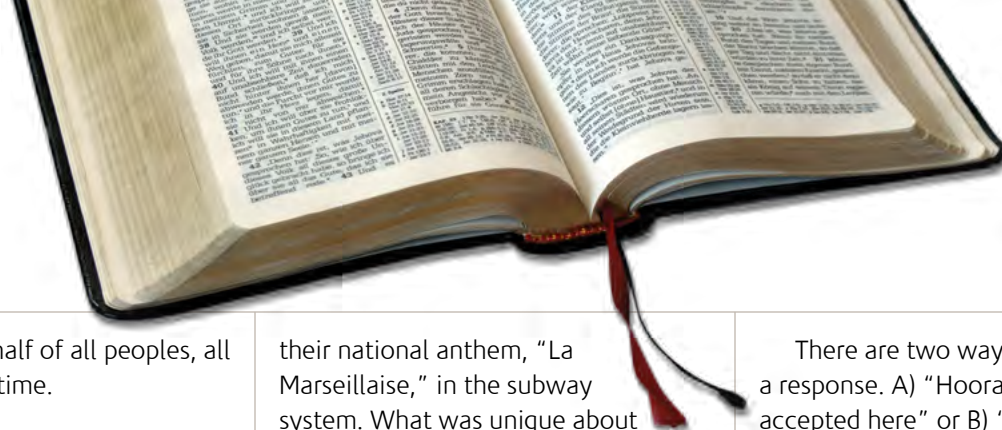
Isaiah 25: 6-10a  
God Knows

If any of you have ever worked in a hospital, then you'll know that no two days are the same. When I served as a chaplain at Chippenham/Johnston-Willis Hospitals in the fall of 2015, the first clinical lesson I learned was "expect the unexpected." This passage reminds me of just such a situation that clearly proved God is in the midst of the world's brokenness and suffered.

One day I was paged to deliver a Bible to a homeless man in the ICU who had been diagnosed with stage 4 brain cancer. While sitting and praying by his bedside, he expressed the need for confession and a desire to be redeemed by the Lord. Unbeknownst to me at the time, this initial visit would span the next month, as he was moved from ICU to palliative care. During our next 12-14 visits with one another, I watched as the cancer ate away his personality, his warm heart and left him a bitter, aggressive and angry man. I struggled immensely trying to provide pastoral care to his ever-changing personality and openly wondered where the hope was for this child of God. As he became more hostile to me and the attending staff, it became very hard for all of us to see what God could possibly conjure from this situation.

Following his death, information came out that he had lived a hard life, one that included hurting many other people. As the other chaplains and I shared our experiences and challenges with the patient, this passage was offered up in remembrance to him and his life. Isaiah tells us that "...then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth." (Isaiah 25: 8 NRSV) This was a timely reminder for me to realize that God is more powerful and forgiving than anything and anyone in our world.

When you and I see a hopeless situation, God sees opportunity. When the world turns its back on a sinful person, Christ takes up the cross and redeems us by his blood. As you and I petition God for salvation from our troubles, let us call



out to God on behalf of all peoples, all situations and all time.

## September 18, 2016

Isaiah 40: 21-31

Power Up Above

As tragedy after tragedy unfolds in our world, it is easy for critics to say: why would God allow this to happen? If God cares, where is that divine presence Christians talk about all the time? Like many of you, I remember watching in horror earlier this year as terror struck the city of Paris. Famous attractions such as the Stade de France, the Bataclan and Le Carillon were the targets of senseless violence and rampage. This was one of those times when social media was especially grueling, as Twitter and Facebook exploded with videos, pictures and terrifying audio clips of people running for their lives. As the death toll continued to rise, we all began to wonder how this could happen in a city that is known the world around for its peaceful nature?

In the hours that followed, many people took to the Internet to share their blogs and views on the tragedy in France. One such blogger made reference to famous children's TV personality and Presbyterian minister Fred Rogers. In one of his episodes of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, Rogers told his viewers, "My mother always told me that if you want to find God in trying times, look for the helpers."

Just like Mister Rogers, the blogger urged his readers to look for the good that was being done in the midst of the horrendous events.

When I surfed the web that night, I remember the BBC sharing a video of Parisians joining hands and singing

their national anthem, "La Marseillaise," in the subway system. What was unique about this video was the diversity of the crowd that joined in: French citizens and tourists, Christians, Muslims, atheist and agnostic believers, people of all races, creeds and cultures. At the same time, French citizens took to social media and posted their addresses so that foreigners could find a safe place to come and stay.

Isaiah tells us that "...it is he who sits above the circle of the earth... inhabitants are like grasshoppers... [he] stretches out the heavens like a curtain..." (Isaiah 40: 22 NRSV) Even when there appears to be no sign of God, sometimes we need to readjust our lenses and see the Lord's imprint on the healing and redemption for our broken world. By taking a moment, we might be amazed to see where God has already been.

## September 25, 2016

Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11

Open Doors

One of my roles at Chester UMC this year has been to interview all of our members and discern what it is about our church that makes them decide that this is the place they wish to worship. At the time of writing, I am slowly making my way through the directory and have gotten a myriad of responses. However, perhaps the number one response I have received to date has been "I just want to feel as if I am accepted for who I am." That doesn't sound like too much to ask does it? If anything, I believe that would be the number one desire for any of our congregants in the Virginia Conference.

There are two ways to take such a response. A) "Hooray! They feel accepted here" or B) "Why have they been judged to begin with?!" Regardless of what time in history you analyze the church, people in all walks of their physical and spiritual journey have reached out to us. For some, the church has always been home. For others, pain caused from within the church has forced them to leave and look for comfort and solace elsewhere. There is also that third category, those who have never heard of Jesus Christ and wander through our doors looking to see what this thing called Christianity is all about.

Whatever the reason might be for people coming or going through our doors, we are called to be the representation of God in the world. Isaiah tells us that the Lord "...loves justice...I will make an everlasting covenant with them...the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations." (Isaiah 61: 8-11 NRSV). We have a responsibility to act the exact same way to all people in the world; within our walls and especially outside of them.

In his book entitled *Becoming a Blessed Church*, author Graham Standish says that the Holy Spirit will not enter unless it is first welcome with open arms. Shouldn't all of our churches be safe havens and places of warm acceptance? My prayer for our congregation, your congregation and our Virginia Conference, is that we will all pray and strive to live each day attempting to "be" Christ for all of the seekers, the hurt, the forgotten and the marginalized. 🍷



# CLERGY & DIACONAL



## DEATHS



### **The Rev. Rachel Mae Downs-Lewis**

40, died July 22, 2016, in Charlottesville, Va. Born November 22, 1975, in Richmond, she was the daughter

of Wilmer Lacy and Evelyn Donner Downs. She was preceded in death by her mother, Evelyn.

Rachel aspired to study the stories of peoples and civilizations at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Va., from an early age. Her devotion to Greek and Roman history, art and architecture and biblical literature earned her induction into Phi Beta Kappa. Upon graduation with honors in 1997, Rachel married Robert Lewis and together they moved to Durham, N.C., where she earned the Master of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees from The Divinity School, Duke University.

Rachel served as pastor of the West Buckingham Charge of the United Methodist Church before she and Robert moved to England, where both were ordained in the Methodist Church of Great Britain in 2005. Together, they served nine years in the Sheffield (Ecclesall) Methodist Circuit. Rachel's infectious joy and boundless enthusiasm inspired and rekindled faith among the elderly, the developmentally disabled, university students and the arts community.

Returning to the United States, Rachel's ministry greatly enriched the congregation of Hinton Avenue UMC in Charlottesville, where Robert came to serve as pastor. Rachel loved teaching, writing and leading many

congregational studies on Scripture, prayer and Christian discipleship. She adored crafting worship and was passionate about nurturing peoples' faith regardless of age, origin, orientation, intellect or disability.

Rachel is survived by her husband, Robert, of Charlottesville, Va.; her father, Wilmer Downs, and his wife, Phyllis, of Chesterfield, Va.; her sister, Rose Sampson, and her husband, Eric, of Highland Springs, Va.; numerous extended family; and many friends who loved her in the US and UK.

A Service of Death and Resurrection was held at Hinton Ave UMC on July 25 with the Rev. Robert Lewis officiating. Ashes will later be interred in the Memorial Courtyard at Duncan Memorial UMC in Ashland, Va.



### **The Rev. Michael S.B. Robbins**

who has been on clergy medical leave since 2013, died July 16, 2016.

He began his ministerial career in

1986 at East Franklin. He went on to serve Mount Pleasant; South Fluvanna; associate pastor at Braddock Street; Cradock in the former Portsmouth District; Warsaw, former Rappahannock District; Shiloh, former Ashland District; Epiphany, Arlington District; Rockingham Court, Roanoke District; and Greenville, James River District.

He was residing in Troutman, N.C., at the time of his death.

**Anne Kimball Davis**, 22, daughter of the **Rev. Bill Davis** and his wife, **Susan**, died in an automobile accident July 13. She was in Idaho with a team from Bike and Build, a non-profit organization. Bike and Build engages

young adults in cycling trips to benefit affordable housing. Anne graduated in May 2016 from the College of William and Mary. The Rev. Bill Davis is pastor of Trinity UMC in Alexandria, Va., appointed in July 2015. Susan stayed in Richmond where Bill previously served as pastor at Bon Air UMC so that their son, Robert, could complete his senior year at Monacan High School in Chesterfield County, graduating in June 2016.

**Mary Ellen Harris**, 105, died at Sentara RMH July 26, 2016. She lived in Keezletown, Va., for 42 years prior to relocating to the Bridgewater Retirement Community 24 years ago. On May 5, 1935, she married Hubert E. (Hugh) Harris who died in 1999. She is survived by two sons, the Rev. Hugh Harris (Sharon) of Richmond, Va. (retired) and the Rev. Jim Harris (Debbie) of Staunton, Va. (retired); 10 grandchildren; 22 great-grandchildren; and 10 great-great-grandchildren.

Mary was "Mother of the Year" in Cincinnati in the late 1940s. In the 1950s she and Hugh helped start the Crippled Children's Center at Main Street School, Harrisonburg. In the

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1960's they founded Community of Hope (CoHope) a boarding and day school for severely physically handicapped but mentally alert adults in Keezletown. She was awarded the "Others" award for 1978 by the Harrisonburg Salvation Army.

Mary was a member of Bridgewater United Methodist Church, and formerly of Keezletown UMC, where she taught Sunday school and was active in the United Methodist Women.

**Mrs. S. Loretta Lynch Miller**, 70, of Forest, died July 9, 2016. She was born April 30, 1946, in Bedford County, daughter of the late Harvey Lynch and Claudine Vaughn Lynch. She was also preceded in death by her husband, the **Rev. Richard Stephen Miller**.

She graduated from Randolph-Macon Women's College and the University of Virginia and was retired from the Charlottesville School System as a teacher and was a member of Main Street United Methodist Church, the American Association of University Women, the Bedford Genealogy Society and was a volunteer with Bedford Hospice.

A Celebration of Life service was held on July 16 at Main Street United Methodist Church with the Rev. Rick Ecklund officiating.

## BIRTHS

**The Revs. John (Salem UMC) and Tammy Franklin (West Patrick Charge)** joyfully announce the birth of their grandchild **Brian Matthew**. Brian was 8 lbs. 4oz., 22" long when he was born July 15 to John and Tammy's oldest son, Matthew, and daughter-in-law, Mary. 🍀

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# ONE LAST WORD



"To me, the part of being 'the first' is that it sets a model of what's possible. I've always tried to do that and bring people along with me, showing other people they can do this — and that they may even do it better. We can't do ministry effectively unless we do it collaboratively."

*—Bishop Sharma D. Lewis*

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