A Conversation on Racial Reconciliation

What happens when the topic of race intersects with the church? It’s an area some would rather avoid. Yet, Belmont UMC, 3510 Broad Rock Boulevard, Richmond, charged directly to the heart of the matter during its inaugural Church and Community Conversation on Race and Reconciliation.

Belmont UMC cast a wide net for invitees to the February 25 event. In all, 84 people took part representing 29 churches and several organizations including the Virginia Department of Corrections, Embrace Richmond, Richmond Hill, Richmond Police Department, Samuel Proctor School of Theology and Virginia State University.

“This conference offered an opportunity for people to dialogue in small groups on the topic of racial reconciliation,” said Belmont UMC pastor Rev. Larry Cochran. “Our hope is that the conference will be the beginning of future conversations and serve as a springboard for action to address this important topic.”

The small groups allowed individuals to examine their own attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs linked to concerns about safety, crimes, and punishments, which divide and unite our communities and city. The groups later reported on practical ideas and actions that individuals, churches and community groups could take to address the issues.

In addition to the conversation, the group watched clips of the documentary 13th which explores the historical elements of mass incarceration in the United States and its impact on African Americans.

Special guests included Joel Miller, a Reentry Specialist with the Virginia Department of Corrections. A former inmate, Miller now works to help prisoners prepare for life on the outside. He also works with outside groups to provide services to men and women returning home from prison.

The event concluded with a message from Rev. Earl Bledsoe who explained that in order to achieve the goals set forth in this initiative, and to have more respect and concern for one another, it’s vital that we seriously examine what it really means to, as stated in Matthew 22:37, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

Rev. Dr. Joseph Crockett with the National Council of Churches was instrumental in the development and launching of the conference. Belmont UMC lay leader Marie Coone served as facilitator for the conference.

Article written by Gregory Carter, friend of Belmont UMC. For more information about Belmont and their racial reconciliation program contact Rev. Larry Cochran at <larrycochran@vaumc.org>.

District AC Orientation

An orientation session for the Richmond District members of the 2017 Virginia Annual Conference will be held on Tuesday, June 6 at 7 p.m. at Good Shepherd UMC, 9155 Hungary Road, Richmond. It is important that clergy, church lay members, and district lay members be present to be briefed on issues coming before the Conference. Notices will be mailed to delegates in the near future.

AC 2017 Offering

Bishop Lewis has announced the annual conference mission offering goal of $200,000 to focus on the following missional priority projects:

◆ $50,000 for the Methodist Mission in Cambodia;
◆ $25,000 for the Shade and Fresh Water ministry in Brazil;
◆ $25,000 for the United Methodist Church of Mozambique;
◆ $50,000 for Virginia Long Term Disaster Recovery;
◆ $25,000 for Ethnic Minority Missional Ministries and
◆ $25,000 for Virginia Volunteers in Mission.

See <www.vaumc.org/AC2017> for details on these mission efforts and other Annual Conference details.

UM Center Closings

The District Office and the VAUMC Conference Center will close at 1 p.m. May 26 and remain closed May 29 in observance of Memorial Day.

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- Rev. Lee Sheaffer, retired, who continues rehab for a stroke suffered in January.

Friends,

This weekend, I have been thinking about Easter Saturday.

You know Easter Saturday. It is the in-between times. It is the day after Good Friday and the day before Easter Sunday. Easter Saturday represents the waiting times in our lives, those seasons where things are not resolved, those periods in our journey when we don’t know where we are going, but just know that things have happened, and that clear resolution we seek is beyond the horizon. To put it in children’s sermon language, we are swimming in Jello, praying for a banana to climb on.

On a less significant level, this past weekend feels like that within the cloudy nature of the recent Judicial Council decision. As most of you have heard by now, the Judicial Council ruled that the consecration of a gay bishop violates church law. The ruling goes on to say,

“Under the long-standing principle of legality, no individual member or entity may violate, ignore or negate church law”… It is not lawful for the college of bishops of any jurisdictional or central conference to consecrate a self-avowed practicing homosexual bishop.”

The ruling continued saying that the bishop “remains in good standing,” until an administrative or judicial process is completed.

And so as on Easter Saturday, the church waits. We continue to live in this cloudy season. Unfortunately, clarity may yet be far away. The placement of Bishop Oliveto is now in the hands of the Western Jurisdiction. Though possible, it seems unlikely that the Western Jurisdiction will take action to remove Bishop Oliveto, despite the ruling of the Judicial Council.

And yet a few things are still very clear. Jesus has made many promises to his Church. He said the gates of hell will not prevail. He said that where two or more are gathered he would be there. He told us to make disciples of all nations and to baptize because he promised that he would be with us. He promised that he would rise again, and he did.

So it is true that Easter Saturday can just be a squirrely place. It is natural to seek clarity in the fog. I think it fair to say that in our season of the United Methodist Church, we simply will not have the clarity we seek, and we probably will not have it for a while. But in the meantime, I am going for the promises of Jesus. On squirrely Saturdays the power lies in the promises. It held those scared and confused disciples as they hid in the darkness. It can hold us too. So let’s hold to the promises, and stay with this kingdom work to which Christ has called us. It may be long coming, but Sunday is still coming.

In Christ,

Pete

Get Away from it All!

The VA PAUMCS (Professional Association of United Methodist Church Secretaries) spring retreat will be held Wednesday, May 24 at Fredericksburg UMC, Fredericksburg.

Pastoral Transitions can create a most difficult time for United Methodist churches. As Administrative Church Professionals we find ourselves filled with both anticipation and sorrow as established relationships are broken in preparation for new beginnings. In order for healthy transitions to take place, we all have to work together making certain that lots of details are covered.

What are the many things we must do to ensure a smooth transition? Come join us for informative conversation, great fellowship and active learning. Our speakers for the day are Rev. Larry Davies and Rev. Dr. Ted Smith.

Registration details can be found at <vaumc.org/paumcs>.

UMFS invites You to Tea

The Richmond chapter of artist P. Buckley Moss’ foundation is hosting a tea party fundraiser to benefit UMFS. The tea will be held Saturday, May 6 from 1–3:30 at UMFS’ Charterhouse School at 3900 W. Broad Street, Richmond. Tickets are $35 per person and all proceeds benefit UMFS. The tea includes a light lunch catered by the UMFS culinary arts students. There will also be a silent auction, including artwork created by UMFS art students and planters created by UMFS horticulture students. Contact Jill Gaynor to purchase tickets to the event at <jgaynor@umfs.org> or 254-9463.

Prayers for...

- Rev. Michael Southall-Vess, medical leave, continues his recovery from liver and kidney transplant surgery in February.
- Rev. Lee Sheaffer, retired, who continues rehab for a stroke suffered in January.
Helping Hands

Join us for Helping Hands, an exciting two day Virginia Conference Children’s Mission Experience (rising 4th through 6th Graders) offered to all member churches of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The Richmond area event will be held July 27-28 at Woodlake UMC, 15640 Hampton Park Drive, Chesterfield. Contact MaryKay Cochrans at <MCochran@woodlakeumc.org>.

Come and learn about mission opportunities and the importance of being a caring Christian. The cost is only $36 per person. This includes a t-shirt, meals, snacks, and an overnight stay. We will be sleeping on the floor and do not have shower facilities.

Possible Hands-On and Workshop Experiences include painting, planting, window washing, visiting a veterans hospital, loving animals, feeding people, yard work, playing games with the elderly, washing wheelchairs, delivering needed supplies, making a meal for first responders, singing, sorting at a thrift store, playing with kids, worship and making new friends!

Registration for church groups and information about other dates/locations is at <http://www.vaumc.org/Children>. Get your team together and learn what it is to be a United Methodist Kid in Mission! ◆

The Ministry of Monitoring

A few years ago, I was settling into my seat, looking forward to the beginning of Annual Conference. As the Bishop recognized a representative of the Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW), I thought, “Why isn’t COSROW’s report with the other reports later in the conference?” At the beginning of each annual conference session, The Commission on the Status and Role of Women Report calls us to do what the Lord requires of us: “to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God” and each other as we gather for Conference. (Micah 6:8) One of the ways that we do this is through the ministry of monitoring. Monitoring is done by a few individuals around the room collecting statistics including: clergy or laity status, gender, ethnicity, and age range of each person who presents or speaks. This information is shared with Conference leadership for the purpose of raising our awareness of the people – and types of persons – who have and have not spoken. We know that until people are reminded to be inclusive, we are not as likely to remember to prioritize inclusion and diversity as part of God’s call. A young woman sees someone like herself, and can imagine herself speaking up even to this huge crowd. Likewise, persons of different ethnicities and different abilities see someone like themselves welcome to the table.

Our desire is not to discourage those who speak regularly or to say because of your gender, ethnicity, age, or ability you are not welcome at God's table. Rather, it is holding up a mirror to ourselves and saying “Are we reflecting the great goodness, the diversity, God has created?” And, if we are not, inviting the Conference to take part in becoming better together.

We are going onward to perfection, and that calls us to ask who else might have a voice not yet fully represented at our table? You can see how far we have come, but we’ve got a long way to go. Let’s keep inviting all God’s children to the table, so that we can “do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.” (Micah 6:8)

Mary Dadisman, COSROW clergy Co-Chair, marydadisman@vaumc.org

UMMen Spiritual Advance

The United Methodist Men’s 39th Annual Spiritual Advance will be held at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, on June 9-11. Rev. Max Blalock, Campus Minister from the College of William and Mary will be the guest speaker. All men are invited for a special weekend packed with programs, sharing groups, missions, recreation, music, fellowship, food, worship, and spiritual growth! Information may be found on the following link <http://www.vacumm.org/Retreat> ◆

El Camino de Santiago

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones, a former pastor of Reveille UMC and a retired Richmond District Superintendent, will present his Pilgrimage in Spain to the Leisure Club of Reveille UMC, 4200 Cary Street Road, Richmond. Prior to his retirement, Steve walked 325 miles of El Camino as a part of his spiritual renewal leave. During the presentation he will share pictures and experiences as a pilgrim on the Camino de Santiago, an 1100 year old path, and what meaning it holds today. The program begins at 11 a.m., Tuesday, May 16, in the fellowship hall. Bring your favorite side dish or dessert to share at the luncheon following the program. The main dish and beverages are provided. For more information visit <www.reveilleumc.org/leisure-club> ◆

Mission Benefit Concert

The 24th Annual Mission Benefit Concert, sponsored by Reveille’s adult music ministries, will take place on Sunday, May 21, at 7 p.m. in the sanctuary of Reveille UMC, 4200 Cary Street Road, Richmond. The featured masterwork will be selections from Joseph Haydn’s “The Creation.” Reveille’s Chancel Choir will be joined by members of Trinity UMC’s Chancel Choir and community singers. The concert will be conducted by Dr. Charles Staples, and will be accompanied by the chamber orchestra. The Reveille Ringers will begin the concert with several pieces, including one based on a popular movie. A catered reception will follow the concert in the fellowship hall. Concert admission is free and donations benefit Reveille’s UMFS Ministry which empowers high-risk children, their families, and communities throughout Virginia. For more information visit <www.reveilleumc.org/music-events> ◆
**District Opportunities**

- **May 6**–Tippers to Thhers, Welborne UMC, 521-1124.
- **May 6**–UMFS Tea, UMFS Charterhouse School, 254-9463.
- **May 8**–Ministers’ Convocation, Wyndham Hotel and Conference Center, Glen Allen, 521-1126.
- **May 8–10**–Mission Encounter, Roslyn Retreat Center, 703/254-9463.
- **May 15**–A Day with Bishop Lewis for Associate Members and Local Pastors, 521-1126.
- **May 16**–El Camino de Santiago, Reveille UMC, 359-6041.
- **May 21**–Mission Benefit Concert, Reveille UMC, 359-6041.
- **May 24**–VA PAUMCS Spring Event, Fredericksburg UMC, 521-1124.
- **June 2-3**–UMW Day at Ferrum College, 218-0627.
- **June 6**–Mission Benefit Concert, Reveille UMC, 359-6041.
- **June 7**–8–Candidacy summit, Roslyn Retreat Center, 521-1126.
- **June 16–18**–Annual Conference, Hampton, 521-1124.
- **July 9–14**–Counselor in Training Camp, Westview on the James, 457-4210.
- **July 27–28**–Helping Hands, Woodlake UMC, 739-4535.
- **February 16–March 7, 2018**–Holy Land Tour with Bishop Lewis, 521-1103.

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**Holy Land Tour**

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis invites you to join her on a 10 day Holy Lane tour, February 26-March 7, 2018, that will expand your knowledge of the Bible and this sacred land. A journey following in the footsteps of Jesus will change the way you read the Bible, and you will learn why scholars refer to it as the “Fifth Gospel.” The all inclusive cost from Richmond is $3,398. Contact <tomjoyce@vaumc.org> for an information brochure.

Please consider this a personal invitation to be a part of this adventure in faith and join Bishop Lewis in experiencing a once in a lifetime journey as you walk where Jesus walked!◆

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**District Dispatch**

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We’re on the web at: www.richmonddistrictumc.org

The DEADLINE for the NEXT ISSUE is the 15th of the month.