



A Newsletter of The Richmond District • Virginia Conference • The United Methodist Church
June 2020

May 29, 2020

A Call to Action on Systemic Racism

Dear Virginia Annual Conference:

On Memorial Day, when the world was honoring and remembering all military men and women for their sacrifice to this country, Mr. George Floyd, another African-American man, while handcuffed and in police custody, was pleading for his life. His dying statement, "I can't breathe," rings again in my ears just as it did in 2014 when Eric Garner used those same words as he was dying from being held in a chokehold by a New York Police Department officer.

As I have reflected since Monday, I find my emotions range from sadness to anger to disbelief. I ask myself the simple questions – "How long, Lord? How long, Lord?"

Isn't it enough that we are fighting a pandemic and at the same time fighting life's other challenges? Isn't it enough that we witnessed the senseless death of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, the disturbing exchange between Christian Cooper and Amy Cooper in Central Park, and the barely-mentioned Breonna Taylor, who was killed by Louisville Metro Police Department officers executing a warrant at the wrong house in March?

When do we as children of God decide that God is calling us into action? When do we decide that mere words or social media interactions for a few days are just not enough?

When do we as children of God decide that the systemic racism in our society, whether manifested overtly or covertly, is a sin that hinders our relationship with Jesus Christ and is antithetical to the gospel?

When do we as children of God in the second largest annual conference in The United Methodist connection decide to have the crucial conversations and examine our own experiential and inherited stories of race and racism? I believe that everything in life begins and ends with the story you have accepted as truth about yourself and others. These stories shape our thinking, actions and assumptions about different races.

The lesson from these senseless deaths is that the fight to eradicate racism is not another person's problem but humanity's problem, and I believe that I'm not the only voice in the Virginia Annual Conference that wants to see real change and work toward the complete eradication of racism.

As the Resident Bishop of the Virginia Annual Conference of The United

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Service of Lament

Please join Woodlake UMC, Wednesday, June 3 at 7 p.m. (approximately 30 minutes) in a Service of Lament. We will express our deep sorrow for the wounds of our nation and we will ask God for His blessing and intervention. Our prayers will lament the lives lost from COVID-19 and our grief of the death of George Floyd and the violence on our streets.

Please use this link for Wednesday evening livestream: <https://www.woodlakeumc.org/livestream>. ♦

Clergy Facebook Group

District clergy people are invited to join us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/625932661327796/>.

This group is dedicated to our Richmond District Clergy. We want to help keep our clergy resourced and encouraged! Please use this page to share valuable resources that help you in your ministry so that others can also benefit! If you have any specific questions for our Richmond DS, please email him directly at <RichmondDS@vaumc.org>. ♦

UM Center Closing

The VAUMC Conference Center and the Richmond District Office will be closed until at least June 10 due to the Coronavirus outbreak. We are working from home, answering emails, and returning phone calls. ♦

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Richmond District

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June 2020

Friends,

As I write this, the City of Richmond and even more, the nation in general is coming off of a weekend of deep racial tension, illustrated by three conversations I have had this weekend.

The first is with a former church member whom I have known for many years. She has an African American teenage son. She and I were discussing the events around us and she told me of the reaction of her son when they were recently traveling to North Carolina. Some of you may have noticed that at one of the border crossings, the first thing you see is a large Confederate flag. On seeing that flag as they crossed the border, his question was simply, "Mom am I safe here?"

The second was a prayer request that I received from another person on the District. He sent me a picture of his son, a police officer, in the midst of the protests. He simply asked me to pray for his son in all the danger.

The third discussion was with Katie Gooch, Director of the Pace Center downtown at VCU. During the unrest on Saturday night, several windows at the Pace Center were broken.

What is the church to do with this? How can we respond to this second punch of viral news? And how can we deal with what is certainly going to become worse when we are already down and out?

Racism is simply ugly, evil, and rooted deep within us and our culture. Most of us know that racism is something that is learned, it is passed down and carried on generationally, but it is not just learned.

Racism is also ugly sin. Sin is that which misses God's mark, that stains us as humans and requires God's intervening atonement, sacrifice, and redeeming justice.

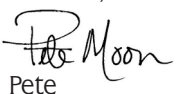
But racism is not just sin. Racism is also evil that rises up from the pits of hell. It is the Evil One's most potent brew for causing hatred and discontent in our world. It is an evil force that tempts and takes hold of almost every single one if not all of us.

And so we as a church fight it. We make proclamations, we go to conferences and we march in solidarity. We work for legislation and all of that is needed and right. And yet, after a weekend like this one, as another one of God's children, George Floyd, is killed by a man who was there to defend us, we weep. The Scripture that comes to mind is the story from Matthew, as a boy with a demon is brought before Jesus. We are told that the disciples tried to rid the boy of the demon but just couldn't do it. In the face of racism, I feel like those disciples: inept, embarrassed, and frustrated that all of our attempts to rid the world and nation of this demon just seem to come back at our face with mockery.

Jesus told the disciples that they couldn't cast out the demon because they didn't have enough faith. He said that if they had the faith of a mustard seed they could move a mountain. Could that be my issue in being so powerless in the face of racism? I could be offended by that possibility or I can take it at face value. Faith comes with time. Faith comes with experience. Faith comes with some successes but mostly by failures that gets up and tries again. Maybe that means I and all of us keep working at it, keeping pushing on that mountain. Wesley said that we are to preach faith until we have it.

We may not be able to move that mountain of racism right now. But as for me and my house, I am going to get up and keep pushing. I hope that you will join me.

In Christ,


Pete

Help Needed at All God's Children Camp?

Children, ages 7 to 12, with an incarcerated mother or father, spend a week at camp, participating in activities such as boating, swimming, hiking, archery, music, crafts, Bible study, and conflict resolution. Partnering with Virginia United Methodist camps, All God's Children Camp (AGCC) provides a week of sanctuary for children who face so many challenges in their lives: economic poverty; temporary living conditions; loneliness; low self-esteem; violence; and drugs.

The leadership of AGCC made the decision to cancel the camp for the week of June 14-19. However, the other two weeks of July 26-31 at Occohannock on the Bay and August 9-14 at Camp Chanco will remain on the schedule. Please consider mentoring with the organization this summer. This summer more than ever, our kids need camp to help bring back some normalcy in their lives!

◆ July 26-31 @ Occohannock on the Bay (Eastern Shore)

◆ August 9-14 @ Camp Chanco on the James (Richmond area)

All God's Children Camp will be here before you know it and we are in need of mentors next summer. We will need 60 mentors total, 30 for each camp, both male and female. Please consider giving a week of your time and mentor a camper whose mother or father is incarcerated. You will get a chance to just pour out some love on your camper, engage with them during bible, arts and crafts and worship. You can also encourage them through the week as they learn new activities the camp has to offer. For more information, please contact Lori Smith at lttlelori@gmail.com or 571-245-9591. ◆

Prayers for...

◆ Rev. Florence Brooks, Cederfield, and family on the death of her father, Claude K. Fisackerly, Jr., on May 8.

◆ The family of Rev. Dr. Gerald M. Miller, Sr., retired, former pastor of Huguenot UMC, who died May 2.

◆ Madeline Pillow White, Conference director of Communications, on the death May 7 of her grandmother, Eleanor Pillow, widow of the late Rev. Douglas Pillow.

◆ Rev. Tom Brown who fell April 30 and is recovering from surgery to repair a broken hip. ◆



2020 VAUMC ANNUAL CONFERENCE | ROMANS 15:7

COVID-19 Date Changes

- ◆ The VAUMC Conference Center is closed indefinitely.
- ◆ General Conference scheduled to begin May 5, has been rescheduled for August 29-September 7, 2021.
- ◆ VA PAUMCS Spring Event planned for May 27 at the VAUMC Center will be rescheduled.
- ◆ Annual Conference scheduled for June 18-20 in Roanoke is being moved to September 18-19.
- ◆ The Lay Servant Academy scheduled July 17-19 at Randolph-Macon College has been canceled.
- ◆ Mission Encounter scheduled for July 24-26 at Smith Mountain Lake has been canceled.
- ◆ Jurisdictional Conference scheduled for July has been postponed until November 10-12, 2021. ◆

Connectional Resources during COVID-19 Survey

The Richmond District is home to a number of amazing mission ministries that reach out to our local community and help those who are most vulnerable. Unfortunately, many of these ministries are staffed by older members who are no longer able to volunteer. In addition, there are many churches whose local missions do not fit with social distancing requirements (ex. ESOL tutoring) and have put their mission on pause, but have resources to share with those who need it.

We are a connectional church! Let's connect our needs with our gifts so we can be the church throughout the Richmond District.

Please see RichmondDistrictUMC.org for a survey to indicate your church's community ministries, the needs of those ministries, and resources your church may have to offer to assist in others' ministries.

If you have questions please contact Rev. Katie Gooch, 405/301-6215. ◆

Richmond District COVID-19 Resources

There are an abundance of resources available to local churches pursuing ministry during this time of Coronavirus. Here are but a few:

- ◆ VAUMC New Website has great resources for you and your church. Check them out here: <https://vaumc.org/coronavirusresources/>. Check out the Webinars called Crucial Crisis Conversations at the end of the page link
- ◆ Online Worship Attendance Guidelines: http://doc.vaumc.org/Cabinet/OnlineWorshipAttendanceGuidelines.pdf?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=e-advocate-april-7-2020_9
- ◆ The Spark Mill (Free Strategy Sessions, Webinars and Blogs): <https://www.thesparkmill.com/covid19>
- ◆ UNSTUCK GROUP (weekly Blogs, Podcasts and Webinars): <https://theunstuckgroup.com/coronavirus/> and <https://tonymorganlive.com/author/tony/> (7 shifts churches need to make because of COVID-19)
- ◆ Barna Church Pulse Weekly with David Kinnaman and Carey Nieuwhof (Webinars, Podcasts and Blogs): <http://churchpulseweekly.org/> and <https://stateofthechurch.com/churchpulse-weekly> (Free Church tool kit to help during COVID-19)
- ◆ Excellence in Ministry Coaching (emc3): <https://emc3coaching.com/blog/>
- ◆ Fresh Expressions US (Webinars, Audio/Videos, Blogs): <https://freshexpressions.org/> ◆

Lay Servant Schedule

Bessie Owens,
director,
Lay Servant
Ministries:
<obessie10@yahoo.com>, 745-

5372. Richmond
District Certified Lay Servants lead
worship regularly at the following
care centers:

Our usual preaching sites--
Beth Shalom, University Park and
Elmcroft--are closed to outside
visitors for the COVID-19 Crisis.
We look forward to resuming our
visits soon. ◆



VCU Pace Center Update

On the evening of Saturday, May 30 most of our windows in our fellowship hall and kitchen were broken during the protests that took place around Monroe Park. There was also graffiti on our back alley. As Bill Pike noted, "in some respects we were lucky, the VCU dorm right beside Pace had its loading dock and a fair amount of equipment torched, melted to the ground."

It was disheartening to walk into our building filled with shattered glass. However, Sunday morning was filled with God's glory. Nearly two dozen students and volunteers rallied with two hours notice to clean up the glass, post wooden boards on all of our first floor windows, and paint signs of hope. Two students who were walking by asked if they could join in, recounting how meaningful our Community Cafe had been to them during the school year.

We are working with the conference office and insurance to see the next steps. We will cover the windows with more weatherproofing before the mid-week rains. Soon we hope to take stock to determine further damage.

We used the boards covering our stained glass windows to write a message to our students "We are here 4 you." We would like to rally others, including local United Methodist Churches to help us do just that. We intend to do that by providing a space for our students to share - using our "Community Conversations" format. In addition, we are aware that VCU's food pantry is completely barren and we would like to see if folks could help stock it. We are working on other immediate and longer-term ways to be there for our community. We will make sure to keep you in the loop.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Pace. I ask you to pray. Pray for those who are angry, scared, frightened, sad, grieving, numb by all of this. Pace prides itself on being a diverse community and with that comes a diverse array of emotions about everything that is going on in our country right now. Pace Mission is to equip and empower students to listen deeply and respond lovingly to their community and God's calling on their lives. We pray that we can continue to do just that during these times.

Rev. Katie B. Gooch
Director, The Pace Center for Campus
and Community Ministries
United Methodist Ministry at VCU

New Conference Website Unveiled

You may have noticed a new conference website was quietly launched late last week. The Conference Communications staff is thrilled to release this new resource and the new possibilities it allows for future communications and resources.

Look around the website at www.vaumc.org to familiarize yourself with the new features and the new layout. You will notice the magnifying glass icon at the top right of the website which will allow you to search the website for anything you might need.

Unfortunately, all the internal and external links had to be changed with the move to a new platform and host. Please be aware of this if you have shared documents from the conference website. You will need to redo links you have shared in the past.

If you have questions, please email communications@vaumc.org.

Please know that we are working speedily and diligently on any questions or concerns you may have. Please be patient with us during this process as we are continuing to update content and to process the technical aspects of the website. For questions call 521-1116. ♦

A Call to Action on Systemic Racism

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Methodist Church, I am requesting that leaders of the Virginia faith community join in a conversation about policing with Governor Ralph Northam. The requested conversation will focus on statewide community relationships and policing training and practices.

In addition, I would like to invite the people of the Virginia Annual Conference to join me in these call to action steps:

1. We need informed clergy and laity to have authentic conversations about race and reconciliation in houses of worship, communities, and workplaces in which we acknowledge racism as a sin and actively pursue whatever is necessary to dismantle the injustices. One resource for starting that conversation is the Racial Justice Conversations Guide produced by the General Commission on Religion and Race;
2. Community policing emphasizes working with neighborhood residents as partners in creating public safety. We can offer our support and involvement with law enforcement agencies that want to work with community residents to identify problems and collaborate on implementing solutions that produce meaningful results for the community; and
3. We can encourage civilian participation in oversight of law enforcement in order to strengthen trust with the community. Every community should define the appropriate form and structure of civilian oversight to meet the needs of that community.

Continue to pray for the families of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. Let us hold close the words of the Apostle Paul, who reminds us in Romans 12:21; "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (NKJV)

Peace and Blessings,
Bishop Sharma D. Lewis



DISTRICT DISPATCH

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Bessie Owens Director, Lay Servant Ministries

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

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

District Opportunities

All Richmond District events have been canceled until further notice

- ♦ June 3--Service of Lament, Woodlake UMC, <https://www.woodlakeumc.org/livestream>, 739-4535.
- ♦ June 14-19--All God's Children Camp, 245-9591.
- ♦ June 18-20--Annual Conference, Roanoke, 521-1124.
- ♦ July 17-19--Lay Servant Academy, Randolph-Macon College, 521-1155.
- ♦ July 24-26--Mission Encounter, Smith Mountain Lake, 521-1155.
- ♦ July 26-31--All God's Children Camp, 245-9591.
- ♦ August 9-14--All God's Children Camp, 245-9591.
- ♦ September 18-19--VAUMC Annual Conference, Roanoke, 521-1124.
- ♦ August 29-September 7,

2021--General Conference, Minneapolis, MN, 521-1134.

- ♦ November 10-12, 2021--Jurisdictional Conference, Lake Junaluska NC, 521-1134. ♦



**All of them were
filled with
the Holy Spirit!**
Acts 2.4