



CONFERENCE CIRCUIT

The West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church

Issue # 1 • Thursday, June 8, 2017

Conference focus: What does it mean to be Hopeful?

By Rev. Bonnie Glass MacDonald

Hopeful. Who is this word meant to describe? Can it possibly be about me? About my congregation? I wonder if the disciples had any of these reactions as the realization of their situation sunk in—that Jesus had left them in charge and that the sharing of the good news would be on their shoulders.

At Pentecost we watch these followers of Jesus begin to leave behind their fear and uncertainty. They are

transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into hope-filled leaders who will carry forward the gospel message to the world.

They release their doubt and struggles in prayer within the community and count on God for all they will need.

I participate in a group that shares “hope encounters”—examples we have

witnessed of God’s action in the world. A leader recently challenged us to remember that *hope* is more than something we passively experience and *encounters* is a verb. He asked, “How

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Today's Schedule

- 1:30 Call to Order
Worship with Holy Communion
Celebration of Flood Recovery
Rev. Scott Ferguson and
Rev. Jonathan Dierdorff preaching
- 4:00 Laity Gathering, Wesley Chapel
Clergy Executive Session, Chapel Hill UMC
- 5:30 Dinner
- 7:30 Evening Worship service
Historic Questions and
Retirement Service

Today's 1:30 p.m. service celebrates flood recovery

Worship at the annual

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conference begins today with Holy Communion and a celebration of recovery from the 2016 West Virginia floods.

A highlight of the service will be the gathering of water from the rivers that roared through 18 of the state’s 55 counties a year ago this month, killing 23 people and altering many lives.

The thousand-year flood destroyed or damaged more than 4,900 homes and businesses, 25 public schools and 16 United Methodist churches.

The West Virginia Conference is responding with prayers, work teams, an ongoing commitment to flood relief and financial gifts and grants totaling \$2.4 million thus far.

Today’s gathering of water is based on Psalm 46:



Discussing flood recovery at Clendenin UMC are (from left) Jack Lipphardt, Jeff Taylor, JF Lacaria, and Scott Ferguson.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

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Circles of Grace: Courageous conversations

By Rev. Cheryl George

The West Virginia Annual Conference made an intentional effort to engage the community of people who gathered at the 2016 conference in courageous conversations.

How did that happen? People of all opinions, lay and clergy, older and younger, rural and metropolitan, joined together in honest facilitator-led conversations. The conversations were opportunities for listening and deepening the understanding of each other as well as the marginalized in our communities and world.

Rev. Janet Harman, Deacon Associate at St. Marks UMC, trained over 100 Circle of Grace facilitators last year. This training prepared the facilitators to ‘really listen’ and focus on the topic at hand.

Each session had its own set of questions, a reporting component and a talking piece, which was an olive wood cross.

Our Covenant focused on speaking with respect that invited conversation. We used “I” language—speaking for yourself—and focused on the question at hand. We were invited to listen with

respect: for understanding, being open to God’s leading; listen with curiosity and compassion; and to be gentle with yourself and others; being mindful of your wellbeing and emotions.

The questions last year focused on key decisions considered by the 2016 General Conference, specifically human sexuality and, secondly, about the church’s mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

At this year’s annual conference, the questions will again focus on human sexuality and making disciples, as well as racial diversity and inclusion.

The randomness of the groups added to last year’s conversations. Everyone at conference was given a number on their name tag and was asked to join the group of that number. The goal was to have about 10 people per group, meeting all over conference. The facilitator had a talking piece, a lovely wooden cross. It was passed from person to person to keep the conversation moving as well as to give everyone the opportunity to speak as they wished.

Rev. Paul Rebelo was one of the trained facilitators. He was pleasantly surprised at how well everything went. “It was gracious; if that is all we achieved, it was a success,” he said. The ability for everyone to share in a safe, respectful atmosphere



made hard conversations manageable and focused. The total experience, said Rebelo, was positive and good. It was a wonderful way to deal with touchy subjects. He liked the way that it allowed people to speak freely and how open-minded the group was to hear others’ opinions and to share.

Rowena Mersing, a lay speaker in the Potomac Highlands District, also has been a practicing counselor and social worker during her career. She was at conference for the first time as a delegate. Mersing walked away from the Circles of Grace conversations with pride.

“This is what United Methodists do!” Mersing said after the experience. Her group was diverse and she loved the process.

Because of her gifts, when Mersing’s facilitator could not join the group for the second day, she accepted the task. The conversations were so interesting and good for the group that they went to lunch together and continued the discussion. The opportunity to hear different thoughts and to consider their differences created an openness and willingness of the group to listen in a unique way.

One of the interesting things, in speaking to people about the Circles of Grace, is that the memories were of the way the conversations and listening played out, how people reacted and listened to each other and created honest conversation; the conversation could have dwelt on our differences, instead it was on how we joined together to have the discussions. Some of the Circles continued the conversation after Annual Conference was over; others expressed hope that we would continue to have these types of conversations in the future.

If you missed out on the Circles of Grace last year, or if this is your first time at conference, look toward the Circles of Grace time as an opportunity to join in the courageous conversations of listening, sharing and working toward unity in spirit, even when our opinions are diverse, and to truly be a Christ-led, spiritual breath of fresh air that changes the world.

Rev. Cheryl George is the pastor of The Aurora Charge and chair of the Conference Communications Committee.



Flood recovery service...

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though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city, it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. (Psalm 46:1-5)

Representatives of churches in the flooded areas have gathered water from the watersheds of the Cherry, Cranberry, Elk, Gauley, Greenbrier, Kanawha, Meadow, New, Ohio and Williams rivers.

The rivers will be named in the liturgy. Water in small containers will be combined into three larger vessels, to be carried to one large vessel at the front, just as small streams become mighty courses that flow into oceans.

“The ritual will symbolize our shared faith coming from many sources and becoming a mighty force, reflecting that in life, all things are gathered together by the spirit of God,” said Rev. JF Lacaria, who, with Catherine Earl, will be among the liturgists.

Lacaria is assistant to the Bishop. Earl is director of U.S. operations and partner relations of the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

The altar will be decorated to look like a progressively healing stream, changing during the service and revealing the elements of communion.

“The service will end with a call for persons to ‘flood’ forward for a prayer of healing from the Bishop,” Lacaria said. “Like the water, the one will become the many, will become the mass, over which one prayer will be given for all.

“All motion moving forward, growing larger and larger as

it flows.”

The Revs. Shari and David Stilgenbauer will present the children’s sermon.

Shari Stilgenbauer is pastor of the New Creation Charge in White Sulphur Springs and David Stilgenbauer is pastor of the Ronceverte Charge. Both communities were hit hard by last June’s floods. David Stilgenbauer also is conference Volunteers in Mission coordinator.

Revs. Scott Ferguson and Jonathan Dierdorff will share the pulpit. Ferguson is pastor of the Clendenin Charge, which includes Brawley Chapel, which had to be demolished after the flood, and the Clendenin United Methodist Church, which sustained major damage to electrical, heating and air conditioning systems.

Many repairs have been made to the Clendenin church, including the replacement of some load-bearing walls with new steel structures. The Clendenin parsonage has made a complete recovery.

Dierdorff is pastor of the Meadow River Charge, which consists of the Bascom United Methodist Church in Rupert and the Rainelle United Methodist Church in Rainelle.

Following the flood, Bascom functioned as a lay-led rescue shelter and distributor of building materials and household supplies.

Within a few days after the flood the Rainelle church, which suffered some flood damage, opened as the first distribution center in that area.

The Rainelle church also partnered with the annual conference and the United Methodist Committee on Relief to house volunteers and work teams engaged in early response and long-term recovery.

Pastor recalls flood recovery service of 1986

Some who will attend this year’s service celebrating recovery from the June 2016 floods recall the 1986 annual conference, when a similar service marked efforts to recover from the Great Flood of 1985.

Rev. Dr. Ken Krimmel, who now serves as the conference’s director of connectional ministries, was a young pastor serving the Riverton Charge in Pendleton County when the 1985 flood struck.

“I lost everything in the flood that was in the basement and first floor of the parsonage,” Krimmel recalled. “The garage was washed away, and my brand new motorcycle was later found buried under the road.

“Water was five feet deep in the parsonage first floor,” he said. “I managed to save a few items before being evacuated. I remember leaving the parsonage when water was thigh deep, and going across the road to take my neighbors with me who didn’t want to leave.

“We stayed awake all night singing hymns in an attempt to drown out the sound of raging waters and of trees cracking and snapping. The next day, the morning light revealed the damage that had devastated our community. The church and parsonage were flooded. Many homes were gone. Rocks and mud were

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God creates us in his image (or...Creativity: A gift from God)



Rich Shaffer draws inspiration from WV heritage to symbolize 2400+ in stained glass piece

By Rich Shaffer, Stained Glass Artist

After God created the Earth and everything on the Earth and in the sky above, God created humanity in His own image. —Genesis 1 and 2.

As creations in God's image we also have the ability to create. I enjoy the process of creating and the opportunities to use my talents for the glory of God.

I try creativeness in my laity addresses and offer ideas that are not quickly forgotten. Do you remember "Where's Larry?" or "Get off your Donkey"? One year for conference I wrote lyrics for a song, "Do You Want to Make Disciples," to the tune of, "Do You Want to Build a Snowman" from Disney's Frozen. The Laity Advent and Lenten Devotionals have also satisfied some of my desire to create.

The stained glass piece I have created to symbolize the 2400+ new professions of faith, has rekindled my interest

in making stained glass. At one point in my life stained glass not only provided an outlet for my creativity, it also provided part of my livelihood, but life's priorities have crowded out and many times squelched the creative spirit.

My inspiration for this symbol came from the state where I have grown up and where I have seen the beauty of God's handiwork. It had to represent West Virginia in as many ways as possible.

All of the glass was manufactured in our state and the walnut tree that provided me wood for the frame was grown in West Virginia. The scene depicts a feeling of Canaan Valley with its mountains, fields and streams.

In my position as conference Lay Leader one of my challenges is to motivate laity to be disciples (if a few clergy types are motivated, that too is fine). Through the creative outlets the conference has provided me, I pray that Jesus has touched hearts along the way.

Go and make disciples. Be creative in your efforts.

Rich Shaffer is West Virginia Conference Lay Leader.

Kathleen Henry brings Conference themes to life on silk

My name is Kathleen Henry. I have painted all of my life. My paintings on silk are an expression of my joy in God's Creation. I am inspired by the mountains and valleys of West Virginia.

Silk is an ancient cloth and glows with light and life. I use intense colors to remind us of God's power in the universe. I use 100% silk, silk dyes (that must be steam set), distilled water, sea salt, vinegar, gutta resists (to draw designs), watercolor brushes and handmade frames. Each of my pieces is unique, even if I try to make them the same they turn out differently, even when I use the same mixture of colors.

Your church conference pieces were a challenge for me, especially because of the sizes involved 4 feet wide and 9 feet long. My intention is to honor God. The words/themes of your conference spoke to me in widely different images.



1. The Hopeful Banner has a youthful, bright splash of many colors and words that are synonyms of "Hopeful." The words were written across and around the edges of the banner and the colors I used were very intense.

2. The Invitational Banner is the banner with the scene of mountains, Mostly Earth... 3 rocks at the base—we are rooted to the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). The road invites us through life to the sun—Glory and Grace.

3. The Inspirational Banner is my banner painted to represent the northern lights. Mostly Sky... We are to look to God for our life's direction and purpose.

Awesome is our God who created the Heavens and the Earth.

4. The Generative Banner represents growth. The dogwood tree legend and symbolism are fitting examples to remind us of Christ—the center of our growth as Christians. The smallest blossom is still a bud, ready for the next generation to take us forward.

As you study these banners may they all speak to you! To God be the Glory! Blessings on you and your mission in God's World ...

With gratitude, Kathleen



Sprinkling on sea salt after painting with silk dyes



My sister and me: Two banners painted and two to go!

Small town charm, foodie haven

By Whitney Cherry

Buckhannon is traditionally known for its exceptional small-town charm and for exemplifying the well-known West Virginia hospitality. But the city is quickly gaining a reputation as one of the state's premier dining destinations.

As host to the West Virginia Strawberry Festival, residents of Buckhannon appreciate the native, fresh ingredients that come from the very soil of Appalachia.

Whether this is your first Annual Conference or 49th, this town has local eateries to satisfy any appetite while visiting for the week!

The Daily Grind Coffeehouse & Restaurant

More than just a local coffee shop, The Daily Grind offers a full breakfast and lunch menu as well as a wide variety of specialty coffee drinks. You will also find homemade soups and desserts, and daily specials such as meatball hoagies, steak salad, and chicken avocado salad. This place is truly a classic hangout for college students and local residents in the middle of downtown Buckhannon.



A recent 5-star review on Facebook exclaims, "Excellent sandwiches, coffee, and shakes! Couldn't have asked for a better lunch!"

5 E. Main Street

Buckhannon, W.Va. 26201

Hours: Monday-Saturday 6:30 a.m. – 9 p.m.

[facebook.com/pages/the-daily-grind/131390260267991](https://www.facebook.com/pages/the-daily-grind/131390260267991)

Fish Hawk Acres

According to the restaurant's website, Fish Hawk is a farm, a market, a restaurant in the evening, and a wildly popular custom catering service.

Fish Hawk Acres provides fresh food sourced locally and regionally. This restaurant faithfully exemplifies what it means to eat local.

Their bakery selection is unmatched with sumptuous scones, oversized cookies, meringue pies, layered cakes, fluffy cupcakes, decadent tarts and famous pepperoni



rolls, just to name a few. This rustic farmhouse spot offers an amazing menu for lunch and dinner, along with daily specials created by hospitable co-owners Dale Hawkins and Teresa Lipps. My personal favorite is the chicken salad BLT, served on a fresh-made ciabatta roll. Seriously, divine!

5 W. Main Street

Buckhannon, W.Va. 26201

Hours: Monday-Saturday 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.

fishhawkacreswv.com

C.J. Maggie's

With flavors from around the world or close to home, C.J. Maggie's is an all-American classic. Right in the heart of Main Street, "Maggie's" -- as locals call it -- offers a sizable menu with dishes for even the pickiest eaters. Choose from fresh salads, wood-fired pizzas, sizzling steaks, loaded pasta dishes, Tex-Mex offerings, and good old-fashioned burgers.



From personal experience, the Alfredo Pie is completely something to behold – mounds of pasta and alfredo sauce lightly breaded and flash fried, served with provolone and marinara on top. You could share that one... or not.

16 E. Main Street

Buckhannon, W.Va. 26201

Hours: Monday-Thursday 11 a.m. – 10 p.m.

Friday & Saturday 11 a.m. – 11 p.m

cj-maggies.com

Audrey's Downtown Restaurant

If you're craving comfort food like your mama used to make, Audrey's is the place to be!

Audrey's features home-cooked meals like brown beans and cornbread, baked steak and mashed potatoes, friend potatoes and biscuits, and a scrumptious selection of pies and desserts. A wrap-around porch with rocking chairs creates an inviting atmosphere to dine with friends and family alike.



38 N. Kanawha Street

Buckhannon, W.Va. 26201

Hours: Monday-Saturday 6:30 a.m. – 9 p.m.

Sunday 6:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.

[facebook.com/audreysdowntownrestaurant](https://www.facebook.com/audreysdowntownrestaurant)



Tweeting your Conference experience?
Hashtag your post using #WVAC17

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Foodie haven...

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The Donut Shop

A Buckhannon favorite for fresh doughnuts and amazing pepperoni rolls (a West Virginia staple)! This is the spot where you will find friendly locals having a cup of coffee and shooting the breeze.

Since 1977 customers have stopped by The Donut Shop day or night for doughnuts, hot pepperoni rolls, sandwiches, bagels and more! Open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, breakfast is served until Noon and other freshly baked goodies are made all throughout the day.

With almost 60 varieties of doughnuts ranging from glazed to jelly-filled, you'll definitely want to stop by The Donut Shop on your way through Buckhannon.

19 North Locust Street

Buckhannon, W.Va. 26201

Hours: Monday-Sunday 24 hours

[facebook.com/pages/the-donut-shop/148731015153241](https://www.facebook.com/pages/the-donut-shop/148731015153241)



Upshur Cooperative Parish House

The Upshur Parish House, one of West Virginia's United Methodist mission sites, offers a smorgasbord of homemade comfort foods ranging from salads to barbeque during Annual Conference.

Located directly across College Avenue from campus, the Parish House is a quick option to grab a meal and catch up with friends, while supporting one of our own mission sites. The Parish House is busy year-round serving families in the surrounding area with housing and utility assistance, meals, a clothing closet, community engagement and many more critical programs.

Stop by and say "Hello!" to Rev. Alicia Rapking, Executive Director, and her wonderful staff.

68 College Ave.

Buckhannon, W.Va. 26201

Meals: Thursday, Friday & Saturday Noon – 2 p.m.

[facebook.com/upshurparishhouse](https://www.facebook.com/upshurparishhouse)



French A. See Dining Center

Located on campus (number 8 on your campus map), the See Dining Center offers a vast variety of options to please everyone. The Dining Center's program is designed to provide meals of quality and variety to students and visitors. An expansive selection is offered that includes traditional entrees, grill items, deli sandwiches, pizzas, pasta, soup and salad bar, fresh fruit, pastries and desserts, hand-dipped ice cream, and a variety of specialty bars. A quick and delicious option for dining during Annual Conference!

Food service times: 7 a.m.-9 a.m.; 11:30 a.m.-1:25 p.m.; 4:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m.

Last meal: Sunday lunch

www.wvc.edu/life-at-wvwc/dining-center

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Tag us on Instagram! @wvumc

Hopeful...

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does hope encounter? What are you doing to be hopeful in your life and bring hope to the lives of those whom you encounter?"

What a great question for us 21st century followers of Jesus! God's guidance for the people of Israel was clear as recorded in Deuteronomy 6: Love God with all your heart, soul & might. Jesus later added, "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (John 13:34). Because God has always loved us -- from the beginning -- we are people of hope. We are created in, redeemed by, and sustained within the power of that love. Love that never fails. *We are people of hope.*

Rather than being something we grab for or work hard to achieve, hope is cultivated and sustained by God as we stay close to God, watching for how God might use us to

bring hope to others. The steadfastness of hope shows up as compassion in the face of addiction, as quiet presence in grief, as joy in celebration and as gratitude for daily sufficiency.

So yes, hope. We're talking about you. And me.

How is your hopefulness? What help do you need? What might need to change for the Holy Spirit to more fully be at work in you, bringing you closer to the hopeful, spiritual leader which you have been called to be?

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in faith so that we overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13 CEB

Rev. Bonnie Glass MacDonald, the West Virginia Annual Conference's Director of Leadership Formation and Ministry Support, can be reached at bmacdonald@wvumc.org.

1986 Recovery Service...

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everywhere. It looked like a war zone. Helicopters hovered just over the trees. The windows of the parsonage had been blown out, the door was blown off the house, and there was a moat around the parsonage. The mud inside was three feet deep in places. The mucking out began, and I was out of the parsonage for six months.

"Gratefully, our connectional church came to our aid," Kimmel said. "Johnson Memorial in Huntington and Walnut Grove in Fairmont adopted us and helped us rebuild. The various denominations in the community came together, organized, and helped people rebuild their lives.

"I became the elected leader of the flood recovery council. By the time of Annual Conference in June, much recovery and healing had taken place in our lives and in our community.

"I was invited to bring a container of water from the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac," he recalled. "The very waters from the river that ravaged our little town and robbed us of our possessions, stole our memories that had been preserved in pictures, and took all normalcy from us for years to come! I had an allergic reaction to a tetanus shot which inflicted physical illness on top of the emotional punch.

"The service at Annual Conference provided healing in many ways. Turning killing waters into blessed water was a powerful ritual. Flood survivors were given evergreen branches, and we used them to sprinkle water from the various rivers and streams over the gathered worshippers.

We were invited to remember our baptism. That was a healing act. As our baptismal liturgy proclaims that we die and rise in Christ, transforming the killing waters into healing waters powerfully symbolized that our faith in Christ transforms death into new life.

"I was a very young pastor in 1986, but the memory of the Great Flood of 1985 and of the subsequent Annual Conference are forever part of me — forcing me to acknowledge the dual realities of loss and gain, fear and courage, sickness and health, destruction and recovery.

"The service allowed hurting people to proclaim life in the midst of death. It allowed us to proclaim the love of God, and the grace of the community of believers we call the church, in the midst of troubled waters. I'm grateful that the conference leaders at that time invited me and other survivors to participate in that service.

"I pray that today's opening service will provide the same healing power for the survivors of the flood of June 23, 2016. May we all hear the voice of God over the waters."

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