



AUGUST CIRCUIT

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Flood Relief Efforts the Church Being Church

By Rev. Deborah Coble

Photo by: Mike DuBose, United Methodist News Service



Photo by: Mike DuBose, United Methodist News Service

The torrential rains, flash flooding and mudslides of June 22-29 left in its wake over 5,000 homes and businesses damaged or destroyed and nearly 3,500 West Virginians without a home. The West Virginia Annual Conference, in partnership with WV VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters) and UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) are actively involved in the ongoing recovery and rebuilding efforts in all of the disaster areas.

In the month since the flooding Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball; Assistant to the Bishop, JF Lacaria and the conference disaster response coordinators; Dan and Sue Lowther, with assistance from UMCOR Executive Secretary for United States disasters, Cathy Earl, and Mike DuBose from United Methodist News Service, have assessed the damage to our communities, churches and parsonages.



Photo by: Rev. Deborah Coble



Photo by: Mike DuBose, United Methodist News Service

Thirteen churches and two parsonages have been identified as having sustained damage. Damage to one of our churches is catastrophic. But numbers don't tell the whole story, for our story is also a story of deep gratitude.



Photo by: Mike DuBose, United Methodist News Service

In her letter to our churches across the conference, Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball writes; "Thank you to everyone who has allowed God to speak through them to give help, hope, service and love. Thank you for stopping in the midst of your busy lives to begin to help West Virginians begin to heal. Thank you for helping to bind our wounds and for giving food, shelter, and funds that will help to continue the recovery and healing that is just beginning!"

God is here and the people called United Methodist are responding to the needs of our neighbors across the state. Whether it's financial donations, dropping off food and supplies or mucking out houses, God is using us to re-build our communities and to bless one another.



Photo by: Mike DuBose, United Methodist News Service



Photo by: Mike DuBose, United Methodist News Service

We give thanks this day for our churches, for our faithful laity and clergy who are responding to the needs of neighbor and friend. We give thanks God's provision in the opening of the New Vision Depot, which is strategically placed as a distribution center. Under the guidance of our conference disaster coordinators and dedicated volunteers, New Vision is a beacon of hope in a time of widespread suffering.



Photo by: Mike DuBose, United Methodist News Service

As we have been reminded many times, the recovery and rebuilding phase will take a long time. As we move into what will be a prolonged season of rebuilding we invite our sister churches and communities to consider how God is calling us to walk alongside those who are still in need.

People with many different skills are needed, from manning distribution centers to helping to rebuilding homes on construction teams. If you'd like to be part of the rebuilding efforts please register as a team or an individual with volunteerwv.org or contact Dan and Sue Lowther at the New Vision Depot. We thank God for the opportunity to live and serve one another out of our abundance and giftedness. To God be the glory!



Photo by: Mike DuBose, United Methodist News Service

**For more information about how the West Virginia Annual Conference
is responding to the flood, visit our Website:
wvumc.org/about/ministries/disaster-response**

Rally on the Mountain group with Bishop Steiner Ball.



Photo by: Jennifer Kniceley Sprouse

Bishop Steiner Ball with the group of Confirmands, who shared an evening meal together.



Guest worship band Render the Hearts led music and worship.

Photo by: Rev. Deborah Coble



Young people pray as they are led by the spirit at Rally on the Mountain.

Photo by: Rev. Deborah Coble

Rally on the Mountain: a Spiritual Breath of Fresh Air of Young People Growing in Faith

By Rev. Shea James

A breath of fresh air was blowing July 14-17 at Snowshoe Mountain resort as youth from across the West Virginia Conference gathered for Rally on the Mountain 2016!

Each day began with a Morning Rally with youth led devotions and wake-up songs led by Render the Hearts band. Gary Shockley, a nationally known sand artist kicked-off each morning by sharing art based around the day's theme.

Morning and afternoon time was devoted to breakout sessions where youth and adults dove deeper into topics such as story-telling, human differences, mental health, social media, confirmation, college experiences, and how to lead healthy lives both physically and spiritually; led by Native-American storytellers boe harris-

nakakakena and Raggatha Rain Calentine, Joe Hill, Christie Hill, guest preacher Dominique A. Robinson, Bev Columbo, campus pastors, and Josh Sowards. Our time together each evening closed with Night Rally worship experience.

The keynote speaker for the weekend was Rev. Dominique A. Robinson an AME Zion itinerant elder from Atlanta, Georgia. The entire group was also treated to worship with Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball Saturday evening where we celebrated her return to West Virginia for another four years. A sending forth service of communion and a charge to "Go, make Disciples of Jesus Christ" wrapped up Rally on the Mountain 2016.

The youth of our annual conference were blessed by the time together and look forward to **On this Rock** this year's Fall Workshop theme, coming November 18-20 at Cedar Lakes Conference Center. For more details about upcoming youth events visit the West Virginia annual conference website at:

www.wvumc.org/about/youth

CALENDAR

Conference Event Highlights - The role of the Conference Calendar is to share the events and business of conference level agencies and ministries.

September

- 8 - 23 Five Day Academy for Spiritual Formation
- 9 - 11 United Methodist Men's Meeting
- 16 - 17 Bishop's Summit on Diversity and Inclusion
- 23 - 25 Minister's Mates Fellowship

October

- 12 - 14 Nurturing Appalachia: Heart & Soul
- 18 - 20 2016 Clergy School
- 21 - 22 United Methodist Women Annual Meeting

View the conference calendar online at wvumc.org/events

AUGUST CIRCUIT

We Remember

Gerald Conrad, father of Rev. Tim Conrad, St. Matthew in Weston, died Sunday, April 3.

Rev. Lehman Aldridge Channell of Vienna, W.Va. died Thursday, April 14.

Freda Klages, wife of Rev. Ray Klages and mother of Peggy Klages, Northern District Administrative Assistant, died Monday, May 2.

Joan Nutter, wife of Rev. Carlos Nutter, pastor of Spruce Grove UMC, Harrsville, died Friday, May 13.

Mary Lee Radford, LLP in the Potomac Highlands District, and member of Aurora UMC, died Friday, May 13.

Rev. Orville W. Davis, retired United Methodist Minister in the Potomac Highland District, died Tuesday, May 17.

Mrs. Lucy G. Wooten, mother of Rev. Dr. Felica Wooten Williams (FE) serving in the Midland South District, and grandmother of Rev. Micah Blanks serving in the MonValley District, died May 19.

Mark Rawlings, spouse of Pastor Sherry Rawlings (LP-Blacksville), died Wednesday, May 25.

Joshua Allen Smearman, son of Rev. Mark Smearman and Rev. Marva Smearman (Greenbrier District), passed away Monday, May 30.

George William "Will" Bequette, son of Rev. Tom & Jennifer Bequette (Nighbert Memorial, Midland South District), died Wednesday, June 1.

The Reverend Doctor Lander Lowell Beal, formerly FM appointed to the Veterans Hospital, died on Monday, June 6.

S.K. McPherson, father of Reva Halloran, and father-in-law of Rev. Tim Halloran, of Suncrest UMC, died Thursday, June 9.

Willis "Bill" Ray Linger, father of Rev. Mike Linger and uncle of Rev. Dan Lowther, died on Saturday, June 11.

Richard Crickard, AM-R, died Thursday, June 16.

William (Bill) Smith, AM-R Volga Charge, died Thursday, June 16.

Rev. Gail Carson, FE-R, Friendly UMC Northern District, died Monday, July 11.

Rev. Nathaniel L. Turner-Lacy, Jr., FE-R, previous Beckley and Western District Superintendent died Wednesday, July 13.

The Monthly Circuit
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Whitney Cherry

A Pastoral Letter From West Virginia's Resident Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball

Dear members of the West Virginia Conference,

First, let me say I am honored and thrilled to be re-assigned to the West Virginia Annual Conference as your episcopal leader for another four years. I look forward to the ongoing and growing ministry and mission in which we are engaged for making disciples of Jesus Christ. Our goal of reaching 2400+ for Christ is not only doable it is what God in Christ has commissioned us to do so that all God's children might come to hear and accept God's invitation to salvation and eternal life.

Having said that, I would request that you not become distracted from this mission by the Western Jurisdiction's election of an openly gay bishop. The decision of the Western Jurisdiction is the decision of that particular Jurisdiction and can only impact the mission and ministry of our local congregations and the West Virginia Conference if we allow that decision to become the primary concern in our churches. I would argue that Christ would not want us to allow this incident to become the primary concern nor would Christ want this to distract us from our compassionate, loving care for all people or from our responsibility to reach all people for Christ. Additionally, let me remind you that the action of the Western Jurisdiction does not change our polity or The Discipline. Jurisdictional Conferences and Annual Conferences do not have the authority to change The Discipline. Only the General Conference has the ability to change disciplinary statements and positions.

In a statement to the United Methodist News Service, Bishop Bruce R. Ough, president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, said, "This election raises significant concerns and questions of church polity and unity." Ough clarified that the Council of Bishops does not have constitutional authority to intervene in the election, but "is monitoring this situation very closely." He acknowledged that some in the church will view this election as a violation of church law and a significant step toward a split, while others will consider it a milestone toward being a more inclusive church. "Our differences are real and cannot be glossed over, but they are also reconcilable," Ough said. "We are confident God is with us, especially in uncharted times and places."

I hope that you will continue to keep our United Methodist Church in prayer.

In the days ahead, the Council of Bishops, as you heard from the General Conference, are pulling together a Commission to discern a way forward for The United Methodist Church in the midst of good church members who have differences in biblical and theological interpretation on matters of human sexuality and marriage. Please pray for the work of this commission.

Above all, remember that each person is God's chosen one, holy and beloved, created in God's image, and because of that we all are called to put on: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3: 12 – 17)

Above all, put on love and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Keep the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as the priority in your personal and congregational life. There are many who still need to be reached for Christ. God is calling us and empowering us for this work. Let us not be distracted from the mission and ministry to which Christ has called us.

Grace and Peace,

Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball

Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference 2016 Recap

By Rev. Deborah Coble

The Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference was held in Lancaster Pennsylvania, July 11-15, 2016. The theme for the time together was Quilted by Connection. Beautiful quilts were displayed throughout the meeting space. The colorful quilts, like the people of the United Methodist Church, are a collection of spiritual and cultural expressions connected to each other to form a tapestry of beauty and functionality.



Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, as Chair of the NEJ Council of Bishops, opened our plenary session with worship, Holy Communion and a statement from the Council of Bishops.

Delegations from New England, Upper New York, New York, Western Pa, Susquehanna, Eastern PA, Greater New Jersey, Peninsula Delaware and Baltimore-Washington were present for the week of worship, prayer, legislation and election of Bishops.

Bottom row (L to R) Connor Kenaston, Erin Sears, Madison Dean, Rev. Joe Kenaston, Allie Sears. Back row (L to R) Rev. Mark Flynn, Rev. Lauren Godwin, Royce Lyden, Rev. Ellis Conley, Rev. Janet Harman, Rev. Dr. JF Lacaria, Judi Kenaston, Rich Shaffer, Rev. Rick DeQuasie, Rev. Mary Ellen Finegan, Gayle Lesure, Fred Kellerman.



Newly elected bishops Rev. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi and Rev. LaTrelle Easterling, with Bishop Steiner Ball in prayer.



In addition to our elected representatives the conference was attended by West Virginia UMC nominee for Bishop, Joe Kenaston; Director of Connectional Ministries, Ken Krimmel youth delegates Madison Dean and Alli Sears and Director of Communications Deborah Coble (not pictured).

Our West Virginia Annual Conference delegation, led by Judi Kenaston (laity) and Rev. Ellis Conley (clergy) were pleased to be able to announce the assignment of Bishop Sandra to another four years in West Virginia.





Jurisdictional Conference and the Council of Bishops' Statement

Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball is joined on stage by the NEJ Council of Bishops July 13, 2016.

The following statement by the Northeastern College of Bishops of the United Methodist Church was shared by our West Virginia area Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball to open the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, Wednesday, July 13, 2016. Bishop Steiner Ball is Chair of the NEJ Council of Bishops.

As we gather for this Jurisdictional Conference many persons have been confronted and consumed with the overwhelming reports of shootings and violence. Life taken! Trust broken! Anger and fear growing.

Frustration and despair looming. We believe that God's heart breaks as our hearts break with these acts of violence - fed and complicated by fear, prejudice, racism, and privilege. We pray for each family and each community affected by profound loss and grief. We pray for the ripple effect of these acts of violence that strip away certainty of safety, sanctuary, value, and trust.

The death of young black males in encounters with white law enforcement officers calls for response. The loss of life within our Hispanic/Latino community and among our brothers and sisters identifying with the LGBTQ community in Orlando, calls for response. The death of police officers protecting the rights of persons to peaceably protest, points to a destructive cycle of violence and retribution, and calls for response.

We, the College of Bishops of the Northeastern Jurisdiction stand together to respond, and our response is not just for the moment. Our response is a commitment to acknowledge our participation in the sin of institutional racism and to have ongoing conversations within the College about racism, privilege, and oppression.

Our response is to give leadership and develop plans to continue these conversations within and among the Jurisdiction and with the leadership of the annual conferences to which we are assigned.

The purpose of these dialogues will be talk about our own racism and prejudices, to heal the wounds that have been caused by racism, privilege, and oppression, to train our leadership and churches in intercultural competency; and lead them to celebrate diversity. We will lead and offer training for leaders in the craft of building bridges across cultures and ethnicity so that all those whom we profess

to acknowledge as created in the image of God and persons of sacred worth, will truly feel welcome and find the safety, sanctuary, value and trust these recent and ongoing acts of violence have robbed from them.

We in the college will hold one another accountable for this action, reporting to our Conferences at their annual sessions and providing a report to the 2020 Jurisdictional conference. At the Jurisdictional level we will partner with both the Multi-ethnic center and the Vision Table in our ongoing response.

Together, we claim the need to listen more deeply and to seek greater understanding for those who cry out for justice. We commit ourselves to seeking justice, supporting faithful law enforcement officers, and empowering the movement of people toward more healthy community engagement within the areas we serve.

Because we believe that all persons are created in God's image, from our United Methodist faith perspective, all people matter, all are valuable. In these particularly violent and life taking incidents and times, however, we need to intentionally lift up that black lives really do matter and the lives of all persons of color really do matter. The lives of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters really do matter.

The NEJ College of Bishops believes that in the midst of the chaos, fear, and violence, there is a rich opportunity for the church to be the church. We seek to be the leaders of this church. We seek justice, repentance and reconciliation. We seek not just to love peace, but to be peacemakers. God's people need us to be bearers of peace.

At the beginning of this Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, we ask you to join us. Join us as we make this response not just for the moment, but affecting the future. Our hope is that, together, Bishops, clergy, and laity, we might be quilted together more strongly in our work of allowing God to transform us, so that we might go out with God's great transforming love – to bring healing, hope, and peace to the world.

As a beginning, we would ask that you think and reflect with us on these questions? How will you be a peacemaker in the midst of the storms of violence and destruction? How can you be a peacemaker and at the same time work for justice? What can you do to help develop a sense of well-being and harmony in your life, in the lives of neighbors, strangers, friends, and communities? What social problems move you to want to make a difference by building bridges, making connections, valuing people?

Blessed are the peacemakers!
Blessed are the peacemakers!
Blessed are the peacemakers!

In the midst of all the storms encountered and perpetuated in this life, please think on these things!

This work begins with each one of us - first individually and then collectively. We your bishops, will not only be thinking on these things, but are moving in response. We seek your prayers and support as we take this action.

"But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the Head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."
(Ephesians 4:15 -16)

Endowment Funds: What, why, when, and how?

By The West Virginia United Methodist Foundation

What is an endowment fund?

An endowment is a fund that holds its principal amount in perpetuity and only pays out a portion, currently 3.5 percent per year, to provide financial resources for particular ministries or programs. The principal is invested with the United Methodist Foundation to grow and to generate expendable income. As we travel around the annual conference meeting with churches' finance committees and boards of trustees, we frequently run into United Methodists who ask, "Why do we need an endowment fund?"

Why do we need an endowment fund?

Often there is concern that an endowment fund will compete with the annual budget for dollars. In fact, a well-planned endowment fund and an environment of creative, planned giving provide an income stream that eases the burden on the budget. Further, the endowment fund should never compete with the budget because they are supported through different funding sources. Church members make their weekly and monthly offerings and pledges out of their income—wages, salaries, social security, retirement, etc. On the other hand, endowment funds are generated and grown through planned gifts such as bequests, beneficiary designations, life insurance, real estate, or appreciated securities. The vehicle for a planned gift varies depending on the needs of the donor.

Churches with a strong endowment program also see an increase in total giving because the endowment is seen as a faithful witness to the church's long-term existence. By establishing the endowment fund, the church is saying "we're going to be here for a while." Because only investment earnings and not the principal are distributed for actual use, each gift will make a lasting contribution through the life of the church. The commitment of the church to use only investment earnings strengthens the trust church members have in the endowment fund, and increases gifts to the fund.

When should we create an endowment fund?

The best time to create an endowment fund is yesterday; the second best time is today. It is never too early. By creating the endowment fund, your church will be prepared when it receives its first planned gifts.

How do we create an endowment fund?

For as little as \$1000, your church or ministry can begin an endowment fund with the United Methodist Foundation. The fund can be the vehicle to receive gifts that will make a lasting difference. Contact **Kim Matthews** or **Jeff Taylor** at **304-342-2113** and let us help you create an environment in your church where planned giving and endowment building is nurtured.

Consider the possibilities!



Pokevangelism and Local Church PokeStops

By Whitney Cherry

Avery UMC, Morgantown, WV, has been selected as a PokeStop in the new reality mobile game Pokemon GO.

According to pokemon.com, one can "travel between the real world and the virtual world of Pokémon with Pokémon GO for iPhone and Android devices. With Pokémon GO, you'll discover Pokémon in a whole new world—your own! Pokémon GO is built on Niantic's Real World Gaming Platform and will use real locations to encourage players to search far and wide in the real world to discover Pokémon. Pokémon GO allows you to find and catch more than a hundred species of Pokémon as you explore your surroundings."

At a PokeStop, players (trainers) collect free items to advance in the game. At a certain level, gamers battle Pokemons with each other at a designated "Gym." There are three teams nationally and players can affiliate with one, as they battle for 'control' of the gym.

Avery UMC dropped lures at a PokeStop event Tuesday, July 19. Folks came out to catch some Pokemon and battle in their gym. Others brought a lawnchair just to sit and visit. Water and lemonade were provided, as well as a charging station for electronics. People coming to the event were invited to bring a non-perishable food item with all donations designated to help feed flooding victims in the Clendenin, WV area.

Pastor of Avery UMC, Rev. Jenny Williams said, "Even the simple things we've done like put up signs that say 'welcome trainers,' and having a water cooler and charging station, are really drawing people to the church with positive attitudes."

Rev. Williams also said a Prayer Request box had been set up and the requests are pouring in from folks who have stopped by.

"This is a great way to become a point of contact for the local church, as a positive and welcoming place to others," Williams said.

That a rare Pokemon might show up at our church so visitors will come also...we pray



Photo credit to theholypeek.com



People have asked Avery United Methodist Church to pray for all sorts of things, including employment, a spouse with a degenerative disease, difficulty conceiving, and more!

As Rev. Darick Biondi of the Riverbend Charge notes, as churches across America have found themselves in a unique predicament – they are seeing a large number of visitors around the church building. Pokémon Go uses real maps of our cities and towns, and it has denoted certain buildings or points of interest as places to visit for Pokémon Trainers (the preferred title of people playing the game). Because of this, many churches are now Pokéstops and Pokémon Gyms which means Pokémon Trainers will be stopping by consistently for some time. So with this influx of visitors, the majority of whom do not have a home church, here are five ways Rev. Biondi created to show how your church can offer hospitality and reach out in love:



1. Post Welcome Signs: Many Pokémon Trainers probably feel uneasy venturing onto church property, especially if they have never been to church before. Why not change your marquee or make a sign that clearly states “Pokémon Trainers Welcome!”

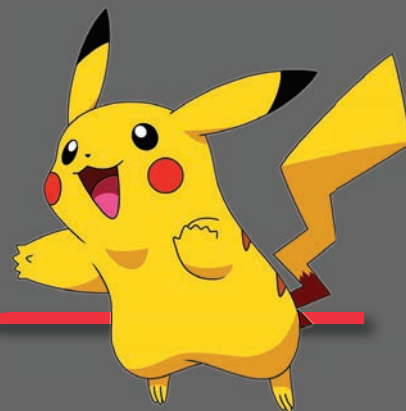
2. Refreshments for Hot Summer Days: While it is impossible to offer refreshments 24/7, Pokémon Trainers are usually the most active in the evenings (after work) and during the afternoon on weekends. The summer weather is brutally hot; why not have someone offer ice cold bottles of water? They will be thankful, and will likely remember your kindness in the future.

3. Have Business Cards and Event Calendars Ready (but Don't be Pushy): Jim Griffith points out that approximately 85% of West Virginians are not in church on Sunday morning. Many have no connections to church whatsoever; however, there are moments in life where most people are drawn to church – particularly weddings and funerals. By offering the church's basic information, you may establish a connection that later grows into a deeper relationship when a spiritual need arises in their life. It is also good to have a schedule of upcoming activities for those that show interest in the church on a deeper level, but be subtle and conscious of their level of interest, giving out unwanted information is usually off-putting and leads to unnecessary trash.

4. Find a Pokémon Expert to Host: If you have a few millennials in your congregation, chances are at least one of them is ecstatic about Pokémon Go, and even if you don't have young adults in your congregation, at least one church member is bound to have a family member that is excited about it. Ask this person to help host trainers during peak times, handing out the refreshments, etc. The great part about excitement is that it is contagious, so a Pokémon fan is the perfect host and will help guests feel even more at home. Also, be sure to have multiple unrelated adults present to host, as we must be conscious of Safe Sanctuaries policies.

5. Lure Modules: This last one may sound strange, but there is a way to make your church's Pokéstop a very exciting place to visit. Usually Pokémon Trainers have to walk all over to find what they are looking for, but a Lure Module is an item in the game that attracts Pokémon to a specific location instead. These Lure Modules cost about a dollar for every thirty minutes. This means that for approximately five dollars, you can host a two and a half hour event where Pokémon Trainers will be intentionally flocking to you because you are offering them exactly what they are looking for: Pokémon!

While these five ideas are far from exhaustible (and some may not fit your context), these provides a starting point to reach new people where they are and offer a small bit of God's grace. While we may want to jump straight sharing the good news with them, it is necessary for us to build relationships and trust first, and Pokémon Go is offering us an unprecedented opportunity to begin forming those relationships. May God bless you in your Pokévangelism endeavors! Rev. Darick Biondi can be reached at darick.biondi@gmail.com.



This writing is a creative piece written for Pastoral Ministry Licensing School (PMLS) Pre-Course work for Intro to Preaching. The West Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM) helps guide people called to ministry on their path to becoming licensed and ordained ministers of the United Methodist Church. Pastor Robby Shorter serves the Meadow Bridge - Danese charge in the Greenbrier District.

A Look into My Backyard

By Robby Shorter

My backyard is a community of its own. It is a joyful place to visit, and differs, depending on the season of the year.

Everyone knows that location location location is the key. My location contains a mountain with a two lane road in front of the house, and behind, an interstate highway between the house and a mountain in the rear. As you attempt to take in the beauty this little community offers in each of its seasons, your ears are immediately greeted as you enter by the zooming sounds of passing cars, loud mufflers of pick-up trucks and motorcycles and the constant rumbling and thundering sounds of the 18 wheelers as they pass by. Sometimes one finds themselves unexpectedly diving for cover at the unforeseen horrendous "BOOM" that occurs when one of the tires of the 18 wheeler explodes as it passes by at 70 mph. It sounds like a cannon firing and you're never ready for it! You are greeted by the sound of one or more sirens passing at different times of the day and night as the police, fire, ems folks hurry along. You can appreciate that there can be some distraction that you must pick your way through to being able to enter and enjoy the pleasant greeting the backyard offers.

As spring approaches, you enter into this gentle space that offers the pungent aromatic smell of the first growing wild onions and the minty smell of some of the yard weeds that live here. The green grass and soft spongy earth reaches up to your feet and squishes out to you as you pass by. Tender sprouts of grass are stretching forth up to the strengthening sunlight that comes with spring and one can feel the anticipation of the dandelions as they creak their way up from the ground to seemingly illuminate their blossoms overnight presenting you an ever-changing tapestry to be viewed each day.

Oscar, my nickname for the mockingbird that lives in my backyard, can be seen as he quickly moves about from one place to the next. He will serenade you with his wonderful imitations of the various local birds that dwell in the sparse brush that grows alongside the highway. He is never in one place for too long and you find yourself listening carefully to his clever ventriloquism. The more sounds he can replicate the more appealing he is to an intended "Miss Mockingbird."



Occasionally, you might be lucky to see a deer slipping by or catch a fleeting glimpse of a rabbit dashing back into the cover of the brush along the back part of the yard that meets the interstate boundary.

Scampering about looking for worms are the robins that have returned from their long migration journey. They find their way back each year and joyfully sing their songs to greet you at daybreak and to announce the coming of evening. Oscar likes to imitate them occasionally, almost sarcastically, during other times throughout the day. Small sparrows and wrens can be observed moving about through the brush along the highway and in the cover of the back yard looking for that ideal location for a nest and also for a bit of dinner during their search. They will also sing a joyous melody that can be enjoyed during the day. Long tailed and short tailed black birds are present, scurrying about in groups looking for that next meal along with potential place of domicile for the season. The short tailed ones always arrive in late February and March with much noise and chaos hustling to and fro while the long tailed ones show up in May and June and seem to arrive silently without commotion.

Looking closer you see mounds of dirt that seemingly appeared from nowhere as the local family of moles tunnel throughout the vastness of the backyard in search of their favorite daily meal, the dreaded and elusive cut worm. A special note! One must be weary and step carefully as they enjoy the beauty and scents of this beautiful oasis as my puppy dog Sam has happily frolicked about and gifted the area with his own special form of fertilization pods here and there and about the area to further enhance the future growth and development of this vibrant community.

As the seasons change you can observe a visible change of this small ecosystem with all of its family as they live out their daily routines. As summer comes the thick green carpet grunts with exertion lifting itself ever higher in response to the warm soaking rays of the sun and the moisture soaking of the spring and summer rains. The pungent smell of the wild onions have subsided and are replaced with the smells of the blooming rhododendrons of May and the tantalizing smell of the freshly cut grass. AAAA---CCCCHHHHOO! *sniff* Excuse me!---also there are the allergies that accompany life in the back yard too!

You will note the blanket of dandelions that seem to appear from out of nowhere when your back is turned and you can pick out the hints of blue and purple of the wild violets that hide themselves until just the right moment for you to be able to see and enjoy their contribution to the beauty of this small area that actually had its beginnings as a vibrant and thriving hay field.

As darkness falls on this little paradise, you can enjoy the crisp damp smell of pending night and see the dew that blankets the small forest of grass. The night holds its own host of



Registration Deadline:
AUGUST 15!

THE FIVE DAY ACADEMY FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

A Program of the WV Annual Conference, The United Methodist
Church in partnership with The Upper Room Ministries

Featuring:

Dr. Kathryn Damiano,
Spiritual Director, Quaker, and Contemplative

Dr. Don Wolpert
Minnesota Institute for Contemplation and Healing

DATE: Sept. 18-23, 2016

PLACE: St. John XXIII Center
100 Hodges Rd.
Charleston, WV 25314

Cost is \$675.00 which includes housing (single room), meals, tuition and program fees.

\$300.00 scholarship available for first time WV
United Methodist Laity.

For more information contact Retreat Leader,
Rev. Janet Harman at 304-343-2115 (church);
More updates on Theme and Faculty to come!

For details and registration, visit www.wvumc.org/events

Registration Open! **Bishop's Summit on Diversity and Inclusion**



September
16-17, 2016

Charleston Conference Center
Holiday Inn & Suites

For details and registration, visit
www.wvumc.org/events



We are so very thankful to have Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball returning to lead the West Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church for another four years!



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