



# CONFERENCE CIRCUIT

The West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church

Issue #4 • Sunday, June 10, 2018

## Young people bringing innovative ideas, programs to the Mountain State

By Chris Scott

Not long ago I stumbled upon a meme on Facebook that hit a little too close to home: “Nobody talks about Jesus’ miracle of having 12 close friends in His 30’s.”

The joke is a revealing one, as it shows how isolated many people feel, particularly millennials. As young adults begin their professional lives, get married, have children, and manage their work/family life balance, it becomes more difficult to foster meaningful relationships with peers.

This struggle is even more pronounced as many young West Virginians have settled in other parts of the country. As a young pastor myself, I have discovered my own passion and calling for connecting young West Virginia



Two of our young clergy, David Johnston and Chris Scott, at the United Methodist building in Washington, DC.

clergy (ordained, licensed, and commissioned) for community, fellowship, and support.

At times, being young and in ministry can feel isolating. Having a strong group of friends and

colleagues in ministry that supports, encourages, and prays for one another has made a world of difference in my life and in the lives of other young clergy.

Luckily, there is a growing movement of young people in West Virginia, both native born and transplants, who are committed to putting down roots in the Mountain State.

Young adults all across West Virginia are bringing innovative ideas and new life to West Virginia. Young United Methodist clergy are part of this movement.

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### Circuit Highlights

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### Sunday Schedule

- 8:15am Sunday School/Discipleship Classes
  - International Bible Study
  - Opioid Crisis
  - Discipling Systems
- 9:30am Worship Service of Commissioning and Ordination

You can always find more news on our website! Just visit us at [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org)



## Young clergy invited to August retreat at Blackwater Falls State Park

The West Virginia Annual Conference has 50 clergy (ordained, commissioned, or licensed) who are 40 years of age and under. We are blessed with conference leadership that uplifts the gifts and callings of young adults in ministry.

If you are a pastor under 40 (ordained, commissioned, or licensed), YOU are invited to a Young Clergy Retreat that's happening at Blackwater Falls State Park on August 23-25.

This will be a time of spiritual formation, Sabbath, and spending time getting to know one another.

The total cost is \$175 per person (+\$75 for spouse, \$25 per child), and includes lodging for two nights and several of your meals. Scholarships are available and you will receive continuing education units (CEUs) for participating.

For more information or to receive registration information, e-mail [wyoungclergy@gmail.com](mailto:wyoungclergy@gmail.com) All this is made possible through the generous support of the United Methodist Foundation of West Virginia, Inc.

# Profiles of 2018 Ordinands

## Chip Bennett

I feel like the luckiest guy in the world! My wife Karyn has been my biggest supporter through a career change, seminary, and



balancing life and ministry. In fact, it was Karyn's influence that led me to ministry in the United Methodist Church. Her grandfather was a UM pastor, her father just retired as a UM pastor, her uncle was a UM pastor, and her cousin married a UM pastor! It was only a matter of time!

This March we celebrated 10 years of marriage. We have three incredible children. Gabby, Evelyn, and Ira keep us on our toes and bring us loads of joy.

I currently serve at Bellemead UMC in Point Pleasant. Bellemead has been an incredible place for me to learn and grow as a pastor and a leader. The congregation has been receptive to both me and my family.

In 2011 I quit my job in resource management to attend Asbury Theological Seminary. It was a big move for a family with a one-year-old! My time in seminary was transformational. The education and training I received at Asbury were exactly what I needed to prepare me for ministry. When I graduated in 2015 I went on a final run through Wilmore and came across a field filled with fireflies. I took it to be a sign from God representing all the possibilities God had before me.

In ministry I have felt drawn to places and people who need to hear some Good News! I have been involved in ministry to people in the recovery community for the past several years.

It started when I began offering a Bible Study at the local Day Report center. Those relationships led to the creation of a non-profit called The Meeting House that creates community for people in recovery and seeking recovery from substance abuse. The lessons I have learned rival my formal education in seminary! The relationships I have formed have led to friendships I hope last a lifetime.

I also have the privilege of serving as a Chaplain for the West Virginia National Guard, where I have served for over 18 years. Currently I am the Chaplain for the 1092nd Engineering Battalion. My ministry with soldiers and their families is both challenging and rewarding. Whether it's rappelling out of a helicopter, leading a service, or counseling a soldier, there is never a dull moment!

Like I said, I feel like the luckiest guy in the world!

## Jonathan Dierdorf

I began to sense a call to ministry during my junior year of high school, and it was during my senior year that I surrendered my life to full-time vocational ministry. Growing up in another tradition, I didn't have a clear trajectory for how to follow through with my calling, so I enrolled in Bible College.

After I earned my B.A. in Bible and Theology, I felt unsettled in the tradition I had been raised, and began looking for a new theological home.

A few months after graduation I married my wife, Alisha, and wanted to serve in full-time ministry. Although



I considered several options, Forrest Burdette Memorial UMC was looking for a youth pastor, and I was intrigued.

I applied for the position, and when I went for the interview, I explained that my wife had two years left in college, and I planned to go to seminary once she was finished. I was also clear that I might end up in some other denomination, but I had no long-term plans in the UMC. Nevertheless, I was offered the position.

Two years stretched into three and a half, and needless to say, I found my new theological home. During my time at Forrest Burdette, Rev. Dan Hogan gave me several opportunities to preach and serve in various ministries. Throughout our conversations he encouraged me to consider ordained ministry in the UMC, and so I began the process.

While I was in seminary, I was invited to serve part-time at Forrest Burdette as an associate pastor. In addition to serving for six and a half years with Dan Hogan, I had the privilege of serving for one year with Rev. Ellis Conley. Like Dan, Ellis also encouraged me on the journey to ordination, in addition to my wonderful mentor, Rev. Amy Shanholtzer.

As a Provisional Elder, I have been privileged to serve in the Greenbrier District. Exactly one year after we arrived, our community was struck by a 1,000-year flood. It's hard to express how much the flood has defined my role in ministry here. I believe I am living evidence of how God uses the most unlikely candidate in order to ensure that God's glory shines through.

I am honored to serve as a pastor in the West Virginia Annual Conference, and I look forward to what God has in store for the future.

## Charles May

I am a transplanted West Virginian, having spent the majority of my early life moving from place to place as a child



of a member of the United States Air Force. Our family was not particularly religious and my exposure to Church was very limited. When I met my wife-to-be in 1990 that all changed. Barbra was very devoted to her faith and encouraged me to become a member of a church.

I had always felt God's calling to a more devoted religious life but was always hesitant to be part of something that I did not understand. A desire to serve God and the Church eventually led to my involvement in the Church and a calling to ministry as most people are preparing to retire.

I have a Bachelor's degree from West Virginia University in Business Administration with an emphasis on Accounting and have served in the private, public and governmental arenas for twenty-five years. My Masters of Divinity comes from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

I am currently in my second appointment as I serve First-Otterbein Charge in Preston County. It is through this appointment that I have been blessed with a growing number of youth who continue to challenge and inspire me in my ministry. I remember my youth and my uncertainty about God and the Church. I now have been given this opportunity to love and educate these youth on what I missed when I was their age.

I have been blessed to be able to live in my home in Arthurdale where Barbra and I have raised three children: Christopher, age 23; Caitlin, age 21 and

Matthew, age 19. We are excited as we look forward to our family addition of a future son-in-law, Kale Newton, on December 14, 2019.

I continue to be blessed by this journey and this opportunity that God has given me. I eagerly and anxiously await the ministry that He has in store for me. I am deeply thankful to members of the West Virginia Annual Conference for their love, support and continued guidance through this process.

## Raymond Stonestreet

I grew up attending Baber Agee United Methodist Church, where I eventually answered my call to serve in pastoral ministry. I served as an



assigned supply at Van UMC for two years while attending United Theological Seminary, before being appointed to the Fisher Valley Charge as a part-time local pastor. I served the Fisher Valley Charge for one year, until I graduated seminary with a Master of Divinity in 2013. That same year I was appointed as a full-time local pastor at Kee Street UMC, which subsequently became the Kee-Stinson Charge, where I served for four years. I am currently appointed to Lavalette UMC.

I have been married to Elaine Harrison-Stonestreet for 28 years. We have two adult children and one grandchild.

## Karen Tate

Born and raised in Clarksburg, WV, I have been a baptized



Christian most of my life and a United Methodist for over three decades. While a member of Suncrest United Methodist Church, I experienced a persistent sense that God wanted me to be in some form of specialized ministry. It took quite some time for me to discern the general direction in which I was being led, but in 2007 I entered The Methodist Theological School in Ohio. As part of my seminary's field education requirement, I agreed to serve one year as an assigned supply pastor in the Grantsville, MD, charge. Before my first two weeks there were completed, I became aware of a strong sense of fit with pastoral ministry. I stayed on two more years as the pastor of State Line, Jennings, and Saint Paul's in the Grantville area. By the time I completed my seminary education, I was a provisional elder in our West Virginia Conference.

Besides my years in Western Maryland, I spent a year at the Brookhaven-Tyrone Charge, followed by three years pasturing churches in southwestern Webster and eastern Nicholas counties. Every placement has presented new experiences, new challenges and new blessings, as well as fresh opportunities for personal and professional growth. Soon, I am to be appointed to another church, so the blessed adventure continues.

One of my many joys as a pastor is helping members of my congregations discover, develop, and make use of their own God-given gifts for ministry. It has been a delight to see new ministries develop under lay leadership in some of the churches I have served, especially in my current charge. It is my hope and prayer that the Lord will continue to work through me, in equipping the laity to answer God's call and claim on their own lives.



# Health insurance plan changes aim to close funding shortfall

By George Hohman

Conference health insurance plan premiums will increase 20 percent in 2019.

The increase was approved by the Annual Conference during the Saturday morning business session.

The approval came after the Conference on Friday decided to alter the prescription co-pay to 30 percent of the cost of a prescription, with a maximum cost of \$100 or \$35, whichever is greater.

At first the Board of Pensions, which oversees the health insurance plan, did not recommend an increase in premiums. It sought the increase after the conference on Friday rejected its original recommendation that the co-pay increase from \$35 per prescription to 30 percent of the cost of the drug or \$35, whichever is greater.

The increase in premiums, which will be effective on Jan. 1, 2019, is expected to generate \$640,000 in revenue, said

James Berner, conference treasurer. Berner also serves as conference benefits officer and executive secretary of the Board of Pensions.

The finances of churches who have pastors in the plan will be impacted by the premium increase.

Churches with pastors in the plan are required to pay a minimum of 70 percent of the premium. The increase approved Saturday means churches with pastors in the plan will pay a total of \$448,000 more next year.

Pastors in the plan could have to pay up to 30 percent of the premium increase (a total of \$192,000), depending on how much of the premium the church pays.

The plan incurred a \$2 million shortfall in 2017 due to an increase in claims. Berner said Saturday that so far this year, claims are coming in at approximately the same volume as 2017. All of the Board of Pensions' original

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## Innovative partnership brings new position to WVWC

By Erin Sears

Lauren Weaver will serve as the United Methodist Church Liaison and Spiritual Life Coordinator at West Virginia Wesleyan College (WVWC) starting July 1.

The position was developed in a partnership between the West Virginia Conference and WVWC with a vision for the future sustainability of the connection.

Weaver is a lifetime United Methodist from Macon, Ga. She discerned her call to ministry after a short-term mission trip to Peru.

After receiving her undergraduate degree from the University of Georgia in education, focused on recreation management, she went on to Asbury Theological Seminary to pursue her Master in Divinity.

While at Asbury, Weaver met her husband Nathan, who is a provisional elder in our conference.

Weaver brings energy, passion and gifts to the new position.

She previously worked at the University of Georgia Wesleyan Foundation. Centered in the call to love God with all her heart, mind, soul, and strength, she is passionate about holistic health — health of body, mind, soul, and spirit.



*Lauren Weaver chats with Okey Harless at the Community BBQ Friday.*

Weaver said that as she looks towards beginning this new ministry, her hopes for Wesleyan are twofold:

- To connect all ministries across the campus in campus-wide worship and prayer to give a united heartbeat of worship and prayer for all Christian ministries; and
- To bring into focus our Wesleyan theology and spiritual practices.

As part of her hopes to bring our Wesleyan heritage into focus, she hopes to utilize John Wesley's band and class principles of studying Scripture and holding one another accountable on their spiritual growth and life together.

The hope is to provide space for students to learn about Jesus, grow in their spiritual life, and become a community confident in whose they are.

Weaver's position as a liaison to the West Virginia Conference gives her the opportunity to build community and connection with the campus, students, and churches in the spirit of the connectionalism of the United Methodist Church.

With a vision for the future, Bishop Steiner Ball, in connection with the West Virginia United Methodist Foundation, has started the process of creating an endowment to sustain the position Weaver will occupy.

The West Virginia Conference is invited to join this partnership by making a donation to the endowment at the West Virginia United Methodist Foundation.

For more information contact the foundation at 304 342-2113 or [info@umfwv.org](mailto:info@umfwv.org)

# 'I'll leave my first conference with a renewed sense of hope'

By Rachel Brosky

Growing up, I knew about Annual Conference. My father and Grandmother are both ministers in the Mon Valley District. Once every year, they would pack their suitcases and head to Buckhannon for conference.

When I was little, it sounded boring (but anything with the word "conference" can sound boring to a child or adolescent.) However, as I grew in my faith and became more involved with the church, my curiosity grew about this great gathering and its importance for each church, our state, and the United Methodist Church as a whole.

When I was invited to attend this year to assist the Communications team, I couldn't say no.

I arrived Thursday night after a long day working in what many these days find an unholy field of work: television news. There, I work behind the scenes on the digital side of things, which in part means being on Facebook constantly posting stories, responding to messages and monitoring the comments on the stories we post.

Doing this I've seen first-hand the division, anger, and hate in the world right now. Differences of opinion on politics, religion, and sexuality are expressed in the worst ways when people are behind the protection of a computer or phone screen. However, I feel the work I do is important. I help to inform people about things that will affect their life.

Being behind a computer screen all day has done nothing to help the syndrome inflicted onto many children of the "digital age" — the inability to comfortably communicate face to face.

This made going to conference a bit overwhelming. Sitting in the chapel for worship with many strangers who were hugging and shaking hands around me made me want to retreat into my little digital bubble.

However, I must say that there is something amazing about being in a chapel with so many people that you can not hear any individual voice when singing. Together, we make up a strong congregation of faithful believers, loving one another as we decide the directions in which our church will go.

When there are disagreements, arguments are made with respect and the majority vote is accepted without cursing, name-calling, or throwing digital or real unfavorable gestures at one another.

The environment here is the environment I wish the world would be more like.



Rachel Brosky

Thursday evening, retiring pastors passed on their words of wisdom. I feel many things said (being patient, listening, accepting what we cannot change) can be applied not only to ministers but to all in the church.

In his teaching Friday morning, Reverend Dotson spoke about reaching out to make disciples of others. This helped me to realize how I have been in my little bubble, living my life seeing the negativity but not reaching out to the world to help some of it diminish.

Through our Circle of Grace Friday afternoon, I got to meet lovely individuals. The topic of conversation was something that's trying the church right now. Through our conversation, I was able to see new points of view regarding the three models brought forth by the Commission on a Way Forward.

No matter the opinion, everyone was kind and respectful of one another and I got to know complete strangers. I was surprisingly comfortable speaking during the conversation.

A favorite hymn of mine says, "They will know we are Christians by our love." I saw

that love first-hand Friday evening when we gave back to the community at our BBQ.

Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball wants us to focus on being innovative. The community BBQ was a great example of how to do that. Being in the beautiful weather, eating good food, listening to a wonderful message and just having fun as a giant group of people helps instill peace in me.

Needless to say, I would recommend the conference experience to others. I am proud to be serving my church, and I finally understand what my family was talking about when they raved about worship and spoke of the business sessions to members of the congregation.

I think what I will take away from conference is a renewed sense of hope — hope that the issues our denomination is facing can be solved as long as we continue to pray, worship, and love together.

I have hope that even I am capable of helping make new disciples in the world, and that the world will get better if Christians lead the way with God's love.

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*Together, we make up a strong congregation of faithful believers, loving one another as we decide the directions in which our church will go.*

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**Celebrating Innovation!** We thanked our host city of Buckhannon Friday night with a community barbecue and block party as an innovative means of reaching out. To find out how you can host a similar event in your church, see the back page of our Saturday morning Conference Circuit or page 37 of your conference worship booklet.



# In·no·va·tive

#WVAC18

## Saturday business recap

- One Matters Award: Dallas UMC, pastor Lisa Fox. Presented by Rev. Vance Ross from Discipleship Ministries and Rev. Amy Shanholtzer
- Lay Denman Award: Ross Thornton, Assigned Supply at 4th Avenue UMC, Huntington. Attendance at the church has more than doubled while he's been there.
- Clergy Denman Award: Rev. Dr. Ken Ramsey, Senior Pastor of Bridgeport UMC. BUMC has received more than 200 members through profession of faith in the last few years.
- Youth Denman Award: Max McGinnis, Johnson Memorial UMC, Huntington. He has been the leader of the Youth Service Fund on CCYM and his Eagle Scout project was renovating the interior of Ebenezer Community Outreach.
- PENSIONS: Because of the action of the Conference yesterday, the Board of Pensions amended its report to increase health care premiums in 2019 by 20%. After vigorous debate of numerous amendments this increase was approved.
- EQUITABLE COMPENSATION: Equitable Compensation recommended no increases. A motion to recommend that conference clergy staff and superintendents receive no increase and that the Conference recommend that churches give no salary increases for 2019 received considerable discussion but was eventually tabled.
- Celebration of Missions Event has raised \$98,900.67
- Friday night's collection for YSF exceeded \$3,700
- Bishop Steiner Ball delivered the State of the Church address, highlighting the Ministries in the Conference that bring hope.
- A budget of \$12,436,162 was adopted for 2019. This is an increase of \$72,917 or .59% from the 2018 budget.
- The resolution titled "United Methodist Teaching Regarding Human Sexuality" was referred to the Special Session General Conference delegation.
- The following resolutions were adopted: "De-List Pitcher UMC as a Historic Site" and "Advocating for the Rights of Children Living Under Israeli Occupation (amended)"
- We adopted revised Sexual Ethics and Safe Sanctuaries Policies.
- Girl Scout Troop 32353 from Trinity UMC, Cowen, in the Greenbrier District received the Bishop's Award for Scouting.

### SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS:

- Ken Krimmel, transitioning from the Director of Connectional Ministries to pastor of Oak Hill UMC.
- Gayle Lesure, as she retires after more than 40 years as a Church and Community Worker.
- Rev. Lawrence Sherwood received the "Ministry of Memory" award at the Retired Clergy Lunch.

### CABINET TRANSITIONS:

- Bishop Steiner Ball recognized and thanked Rev. Mike Estep and his wife Sara, as Mike transitions off the cabinet after serving for 5 years. Mike will be pastor of Suncrest UMC in Morgantown.
- The bishop recognized and welcomed Scott Ferguson, who will be the new Superintendent in the Potomac Highlands District. Scott's is married to Becky and they have two children, Conner and Caitlin; and Rev. Amy Shanholtzer, who will be the new superintendent in the MonValley District. Amy is married to Craig and they have two daughters, Claire and Lauren.



*Young clergy people Lauren Godwin (left) and Jarrod Caltrider (right) work with Hannah Lamb (center) to prepare the altar for worship.*

## Young clergy

*(Continued from page 1)*

Time and time again, I find myself amazed at how the Holy Spirit is working through the ministries of my peers in unique and dynamic ways.

Concord United Methodist Church is active in the campus community through Vine & Branches student ministry. Vine & Branches offers a pop-up coffee bar for students and employees of Concord University. It has created opportunities for meaningful fellowship and witness with people from all walks of life.

Reynolds Memorial United Methodist Church in Marmet hosts a weekly community meal with donations and volunteers from the local area, including a nearby tattoo shop.

Some young clergy are hosting "office hours" outside of the walls of their church in places such as coffee shops and fast food restaurants, reaching people who may not otherwise come to a Sunday service.

Other churches led by young pastors are challenging their congregations to deepen their connections with their communities again.

These are but a few of the ways that God is working through young clergy and the congregations they serve. Our young pastors are being led by the Holy Spirit in new and creative ways. While some of our quirky, out-of-the-box ideas for ministry might be different than how we've done Church in the past, they are the kind of "new wineskins" that are absolutely essential in a changing world.

We live in a time when many young adults have become disaffected from organized religion. A great many are more likely to be found at yoga classes, a little league game with their kids, or a local bar on a Wednesday evening than at a mid-week Bible Study.

If you have a young pastor, humor their quirky ideas and walk alongside them as they invite you to try new things. It might just be the Holy Spirit at work!





## Health insurance plan

*Continued from page 4*

recommendations were designed to make up the shortfall by shifting costs from the conference to the participants.

Other proposals, which were approved Friday:

- Increase the deductible to \$2,000 for an individual and \$4,000 for families. Currently there is a sliding deductible. The lowest tier is \$400 for an individual and \$800 for families. The highest tier is \$1,000 for an individual and \$2,000 for families. The approved change will raise an estimated \$300,000 to \$400,000 in annual revenue.
- Establish a policy that prohibits working spouses whose employer offers health insurance to be enrolled in the conference's plan. Spouses are currently eligible to enroll in the plan even if their employer offers health insurance. The approved change will improve annual revenue by an estimated \$400,000 to \$500,000.
- Require participants to work at least 30 hours a week to be eligible to participate in the plan. The current requirement is 20 hours a week. The approved change will improve plan revenue by an estimated \$200,000 to \$300,000.

The conference's plan covers 560 individuals and families.

Also at the Saturday morning session, the conference agreed with the Equitable Compensation Team's recommendation that minimum clergy salaries remain at current levels in 2019.

Several amendments were proposed but, after extended debate, were tabled.

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