

Three simple ways to show love this Valentine's Day

Wesley scholar Ken Collins said that Wesley's theological vision could be summarized in two words: Holy Love. As the people of this "holy love" tradition, it seems only right that we should take hold of the love holiday, Valentine's Day, as a tool to express the love of God to a hurting world.

1. Celebrate and renew vows of love.

On the Sunday before Valentine's Day, the Rev. Brian Kent, senior pastor of Hope UMC in San Diego, officiates at a special service that seeks to celebrate love and a renewal of marriage vows. This special celebration happens between worship services with enough of a gap so that those who prefer not to participate may excuse themselves.

Following a modified version of the Service of Christian Marriage in the hymnal, Kent leads all couples present in renewing their vows as a group. After the service, each couple is given a "Marriage Vow Renewal" certificate. This short service, lasting about 15 minutes, is a great experience that, when done carefully, is a blessing for everyone involved.

2. Send love letters from home.

The people of Hemingford UMC in Nebraska reach out to the youth group alumnae. In the weeks leading up to Valentine's Day, they collect things that the youth away at college will need. "Each year the contents vary from washcloths, toothbrushes, popcorn, candy, bouncy balls, books, to any other small item that will fit in our package," said youth leader Kim Haas.

Though the supplies are appreciated, what the college students talk about the most is the "love letters." Along with trinkets and daily necessities, the packages are filled with personal notes of encouragement and Scripture from every person who has contributed. Some come from people the students know and some from strangers who want them to feel loved nonetheless.

3. Serve a multigeneration Valentine's Day meal.

When the Rev. Jim Hart was appointed to the Altamont/Jonas Ridge Charge in North Carolina, he began seeking a way to bring the youth together with the older generation. After a bit of deliberation, the congregation decided to revive an old tradition: the Valentine's Day meal. Hart invited the youth to take the lead in planning. Energy and enthusiasm spread throughout the church as they planned the meal and recruited help.

Youth dressed up, set tables and served food as the older generations enjoyed a fun evening out. After dinner, some musicians in the church came to perform. Though the food and music were good, Hart said the love connecting generations was the real win. "The relationships built between our youth and our older members are amazing," he noted.

— Jeremy Steele, *United Methodist Communications*

Urgent need for UVMIM work teams

The Virginia Conference Disaster Recovery ministry currently has ongoing operations in Evergreen (Farmville District), Tappahannock (Fredericksburg District), Virginia Beach (Elizabeth River District) and Waverly (James River District). There are open dates available from now until April that need to be filled as well as summer slots. Email Forrest White for any questions and to schedule at virginiaumvim@gmail.com.

Register your participation in 2017 Bible reading challenge

You can now register if you are joining Bishop Lewis in her challenge to the Virginia Conference to read the Bible in entirety in 2017. The short poll allows you to add your name as well as district and your home church at www.vaumc.org/pages/ministries/communications/biblechallengesurvey

Applications due for Calling 21 on Feb. 1

"Calling 21" is a conference-wide, grass roots, congregation-based, youth-focused approach to the Virginia Conference's emerging culture of call. During the summer, college students are placed in church internships and are immersed in the life of a local church discerning God's call into church leadership. Trained on the Shenandoah University campus, these students experience a valuable program. The summer time commitment is from orientation beginning on June 4 to a reflection event concluding Aug. 8. Applications are due Feb. 1. Applications are found at this link: www.calling21.org. If you have any questions, please contact the Rev. Allie Rosner Bass, allierosnerbass@vaumc.org or the Rev. Lindsey M. Baynham, lindseybaynham@vaumc.org.

Lay Servant Academy to be held March 31- April 2, 2017

The Lay Servant Academy is about equipping laity to carry out the mission of the church of making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. All courses are open to everyone. Each course is designed to help those serving the local church to learn more about leadership, personal faith development and a deeper understanding of the UMC. Many courses offered this year will support those seeking to become Certified Lay Servants and Lay Speakers.

You may register for the Academy at <http://www.vaumc.org/LayServantTraining>. Direct registration questions to Sandy Kelley at sandkelle@yahoo.com and other questions to Beth Christian at bethchristian@vaumc.org.

Published weekly, the electronic *Sunday Advocate* summarizes news events affecting Virginia United Methodists and serves as a link to the in-depth reporting of the *Virginia United Methodist Advocate*, the official magazine of the Virginia Conference. To subscribe to the monthly *Virginia Advocate* magazine, call (804) 521-1110 or 1-800-768-6040, ext. 110; or e-mail Advocate@vaumc.org. Unless indicated, all news compiled courtesy of the *Virginia Advocate*, the weekly *e-Advocate* or United Methodist News Service.