

## Give up the spiritual lint during Lent

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, Mar. 1, and will conclude April 15 — the day before Easter. We often associate Lent with self-reflection, repentance, prayer, fasting and self-denial. A spiritual cleaning, of sorts. Perhaps you've heard or asked, "What did you give up for Lent?"

When we choose willingly to give up something — a habit, an indulgence or a behavior — we do so intentionally to avail ourselves to God's grace. This self-denial leads to a dying of self as we anticipate and expect that we will experience, through our Easter faith, a rising with Christ and a rebirth of life.

Consider these ideas to engage your congregation during Lent:

-Ask children and youth to rewrite the Scripture lessons for the day in their own words and include this paraphrase as a part of worship each week. This may be a great sermon starter for the preacher.

-Encourage people to decide how they will strengthen their walk with Christ to the cross. This may mean giving up something in order to add something more meaningful.

-Highlight, in children's sermons, various symbols of the season. Add these symbols to a barren tree to create a Lenten tree.

-Invite dramatists to portray Judas, Pilate, Simon Peter, Simon of Cyrene and others who engaged Jesus in a meaningful way as he journeyed to the cross.

-Make a reverse Advent wreath. In Advent, the light grows stronger each week. In Lent, the light grows darker each week as we anticipate the death of Jesus Christ. If you have a Good Friday service, begin with seven fully lit candles (six if you have no Good Friday service). Each week as the Scriptures are read, extinguish a candle. Extinguish the last candle on Palm-Passion Sunday or Good Friday.

-Purchase a butterfly kit. Watch caterpillars transform from larvae into beautiful butterflies. Release the butterflies on Easter morning.

-Using the workshop rotation model of Sunday school with children, establish a different room for the various events of Jesus' last week. These may include the Upper Room, Golgotha, the road into Jerusalem and Pilate's court. In each room, the children look in depth at the characters, emotions and decisions the people faced. Center conversations on the decisions we must make every day.

Lent is a season of preparation and anticipation. Let us prepare and anticipate the sadness and grief that we feel when Christ is laid in the tomb and then look with new eyes toward Easter.

— *United Methodist Communications*

## February 2017 Bible challenge readings on website

The readings for the 2017 Bible reading challenge can be found on the conference website. For more information about the challenge from Bishop Lewis or to register your participation visit her page at <http://www.vaumc.org/pages/bishop-lewis/biblechallenge>.

To see the readings for the whole year, visit <http://backtothebible.org/reading-guide/15/1>.

## Faithful Aging Conference set for March

Faithful Aging on Mar. 14, 2017, will be the first statewide, faith-based conference on aging addressing opportunities related to an aging congregation and meeting the needs of older members. Presented by the Beard Center on Aging at Lynchburg College and Virginia United Methodist Homes, Inc. (VUMH), this conference developed following listening sessions across the Virginia Conference to hear directly from clergy and laity about the needs of older adults in their congregations and communities. The Virginia Conference Older Adult Council is a Gold Sponsor for the event. A .5 CEU has been approved for Virginia Conference clergy and certified professionals as well as five hours of credit toward recertification for Lay Servants. Contact Martha Stokes directly by phone at (804) 474-8718 or email her at [MStokes@vumh.org](mailto:MStokes@vumh.org) for more information. There is a registration form on the event under the conference calendar or you may register online at [www.lynchburg.edu/beard](http://www.lynchburg.edu/beard).

## Appointment and Itinerary Process video published

A newly-created video now offers for local church Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC), and all clergy and laity, information about the appointment process of the Virginia Annual Conference. If you have additional questions about the appointment process, please feel free to contact your district superintendent. To view the video, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLR07jZ3F4A&feature=youtu.be>

## 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.

You may register for the Academy at <http://www.vaumc.org/LayServantTraining>. Direct registration questions to Sandy Kelley at [sandkelle@yahoo.com](mailto:sandkelle@yahoo.com) and other questions to Beth Christian at [bethchristian@vaumc.org](mailto: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](mailto:Advocate@vaumc.org). Unless indicated, all news compiled courtesy of the *Virginia Advocate*, the weekly *e-Advocate* or United Methodist News Service.