

### Love is in the air: sweet ideas for couples ministry

Whether you have an existing ministry for couples, desire to start one or want to host a stand-alone event, this is the perfect season to focus on activities that strengthen the bonds of marriage.

#### Offer free child care

Quarterly or monthly, give couples and single parents the opportunity to go out. Host child care at your church and offer to arrange carpooling for group outings. You also could host an intimate dinner at your church and take formal pictures. Or keep it low-key with a movie night accompanied by popcorn or appetizers. Mix up the activities to keep these events fun, fresh and inviting.

#### Offer family counseling

If your church has a licensed family therapist on staff, publicize his or her services. Consider offering a seminar or workshop. If your church or community needs a licensed therapist, consider bringing in someone on a temporary or contract basis. Then evaluate whether a permanent position is feasible. You also can provide your congregation with information on where to find counseling in your area. Don't underestimate the importance of premarital counseling to lay the foundation for a healthy marriage.

#### Develop a mentoring program

Do you have young couples or single parents struggling through difficult times? Mentoring ministries can provide excellent guidance and support. You can host events, such as workshops or social outings, for your entire mentoring group. Also encourage the mentors to meet or call each other for support and advice.

#### Host an in-house event

Host your own retreat, and open it to the community or nearby churches. Ask outside experts to speak or present. Ask a United Methodist pastor in a nearby community if he or she would lead a workshop or invite a social worker from your local hospital to lead a discussion. Ask your congregation to suggest topics – and make sure to include those topics in the schedule. Would they like to learn how to communicate more effectively or how to make more time for one another? If you have a technologically savvy audience, you might consider an online retreat, but think through the pros and cons of face-to-face sharing and conversations and those that are electronic.

If you don't have an existing couples ministry, your first task will be to develop a mission statement and place someone in charge and plan programming.

— *United Methodist Communications*

### Annual Conference information, logo now available

Preparation for Annual Conference 2017 is underway. The event will take place June 16-18 2017, at the Hampton Roads Convention Center in Hampton, Va. Visit the webpage at <http://www.vaumc.org/AC2017> to request a banquet, for housing information and to find out more about Kits for Conference. More information will be shared as it becomes available.

### Events planned on one-year mark of 2016 tornadoes

Feb. 24, 2017, will mark one year since the tornadoes that affected three different areas in the Virginia Conference. According to Forrest White, Long-term Recovery Manager and UMVIM coordinator, each community has planned an event to commemorate the day. Waverly UMC will hold a dinner on Feb. 24 at 6 p.m. with worship at 7 p.m. In Tappahannock, there will be speakers at 7 p.m. on Feb. 24 at the fire department including White. In Evergreen on Feb. 26, there will be worship at 11:15 a.m. at Evergreen UMC with the Rev. Bob Parks set to preach.

### Mentors needed for 2017 summer All God's Children camps

All God's Children Camp is in need of mentors for camp this summer. There are three opportunities this year to serve: June 18-23 at Camp Chanco on the James, June 25-30 at Camp Overlook and July 30-Aug. 4 at Occohannock on the Bay. Visit All God's Children page on the conference website for more information including a mentor and camper flyer. Email Lori Smith, camp director, at [lttlelori@gmail.com](mailto:lttlelori@gmail.com) with any questions.

### Bishop's Convocation on Prayer to be held Apr. 1, 2017

Registration is now open for The Bishop's Convocation on Prayer on Apr. 1, 2017. The event will take place at Trinity UMC in Richmond with the Rev. Juanita Rasmus acting as plenary speaker. Fee is \$10 and participants will get to choose two workshops to attend. A workshop in Spanish is also being offered. To learn more about the event, visit [www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org) and click on "conference calendar," then navigate to the corresponding event date.

### Quote of the Week

"When the government says we need the church to be more present in education and in health, we know the church is there. These are good times. These are the times of salvation in Cuba."

— *Bishop Ricardo Pereira, episcopal leader of the Methodist Church in Cuba, shares the reality of the church. The rekindling of the relationship between Methodists in Cuba and United Methodists in the United States has renewed the Cuban church's historic ties with the Florida Conference and also built a network of practical assistance and spiritual exchange.*

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.