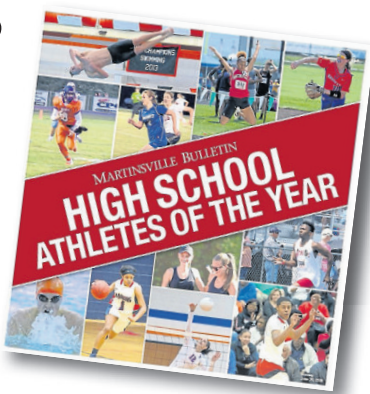


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Fireworks show will explode at Speedway

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# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

THE VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY FOR 130 YEARS

Sunday, June 30, 2019 • MARTINSVILLEBULLETIN.COM • Martinsville, Virginia \$2

## Churches fighting for their salvation



HOLLY KOZELSKY/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Ruby Stultz (from left), the Rev. Gene Anderson, Bob Weatherall and Avenell Jordan look over church records. Once a thriving church, St. Paul's Episcopal was down to four active members in December, but now it's on the rebound.

ONE IS REBOUNDED, ONE IS CLOSING, AND TWO HAVE FOUND MERGER AS THE AISLE TO SUCCESS.

By Holly Kozelsky • holly.kozelsky@martinsvillebulletin.com

Avenell Jordan cried when the congregation talked about possibly closing St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

That was in the winter, when just four people were keeping it together, but now they are up to 14 – and improvements are being made on their building.

“We were in a shaky situ-

ation with our backs to the wall,” fellow St. Paul member Bob Weatherall said. “We came storming back.”

The way St. Paul's handled the society-wide decline in church membership is just one of different approaches being carried out in the area.

Villa Heights Baptist Church

had closed by the spring after 58 years, and the 125-year-old Bassett Memorial United Methodist Church is closing this month.

Meanwhile, Stanleytown Amazing Grace Baptist Church is in its 10th year of being two churches merged into one and on a path of continued growth.

## A revival at St. Paul's

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, on Fayette Street in Martinsville, got its start in 1940, when the dentist Dr. L.A. Vickers presented a petition to the area Episcopal diocese to organize an Episcopal Church for black people in Martinsville.

Services started in the home of Mary E. McDanielson on East Church Street, where Patrick Henry Mall is now, from 1941-48, according to a church history written by Jean Wilson. In 1948 the basement of the present church building was completed, and the congregation met there until the sanctuary was opened in 1955.

For decades it was a strong church with heavy professional membership and community outreach. When the factories closed, the younger generations moved out of town for work, and as original members passed away, church membership dwindled. “Not unusual” for this area, Bob Weatherall said.



HOLLY KOZELSKY/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Ruby Stultz (left), who has been part of St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Fayette Street for 65 years, and Avenell Jordan, who joined a few years ago, have remained strong in the church even when it got down to just four active members. Now about 14 people go every Sunday, a baptism was held there recently and a wedding is planned for October.

SEE REVIVAL | A9

## New CEO named for Sovah in Martinsville

Dale Alward of LifePoint Health Care moving from Galax is just one change

By Amie Knowles  
Special to the Bulletin

Some key changes are coming to Sovah-Martinsville, and they start at the very top.

The hospital system has named Dale F. Alward as its new chief executive officer, replacing Michael Ehrat, who last month moved to pursue an out-of-state opportunity.

Stepping into the position ahead of his to-be-determined start date,



Alward

Alward, the CEO of Twin County Regional Healthcare in Galax, came to Martinsville a couple of times last week to meet with administrators and staff. Sovah-Martinsville and Twin County are both

*“I look forward to collaborating with the hospital's staff, physicians, board and partners to enhance the care and services we provide and examine how we can improve the health of the region”*

– Dale F. Alward, incoming CEO of Sovah-Martinsville

owned by LifePoint Health, a national system.

According to Elizabeth Harris, marketing director at Sovah, Alward made a great first impression.

“He spent a good portion of Tuesday and Wednesday meeting with our hospital leaders,” Harris said. “So when he officially starts, he's not starting from square one.”

The meetings confirmed rumors hospital staff had heard about Alward's dedication to health care.

“We're very excited. It's a nice opportunity we have here because Dale is coming from another LifePoint hospital. In our system, the buzz gets around,” Harris said. “He comes so highly recommended from a local and corporate level.”

Said Jamie Carter, Eastern Division president of LifePoint: “Dale is a seasoned leader with a strong passion and commitment to high quality, patient-centered care. We are thrilled to welcome Dale to Martinsville to explore new ways that Sovah Health-Martinsville – and the entire Sovah Health network – can enhance the ways they work together to achieve our mission of making communities healthier.”

It could be a few weeks – or longer – until Alward makes the move from Galax. “He's so good that they won't relocate him until they find a replacement,” Harris said.

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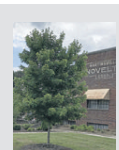


### WEATHER

Today will have a thunderstorm in spots. Tonight will be clear and humid.

91 HIGH | 60 LOW

For detailed weather information, see Page A2



Company says the issues at Lofts are 'a top priority'

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Stanleytown Amazing Grace Baptist Church formed with the 20 remaining members of the once-strong Stanleytown Baptist Church merged with the growing Amazing Grace. About a decade after the merger, the church's membership keeps growing.

## Merging helps 2 churches thrive

When Greg Hodges was a boy, Stanleytown Baptist Church on Fairystone Park Highway was a thriving church, he said. At its height, the church, founded in 1927 as Sunday school classes, had 400 members.

Hodges, the vice president of academic and student success services at Patrick Henry Community College, in 2001 started Amazing Grace Baptist Church in Collinsville (in the neighborhood behind the old Dutch Boy drive-in restaurant), with 55 members, he said.

That church building was big enough for 200 people, but in less than 10 years the membership outgrew even that. There wasn't room to add on, so members had to look for a new building.

Meanwhile, around the same time, Stanleytown Baptist Church, once the biggest independent Baptist church in the area, had gone down to about 20 people who had been three years without a pastor. "They were really, really

struggling," Hodges said. "They were facing some difficult decisions" and approached him about the possibility of merging.

Hodges invited the Stanleytown congregation to worship with Amazing Grace for three months of Sunday evening and Wednesday services, to see how they felt about it.

The two churches' doctrines were the same, he said, but they had slightly different worship styles: Stanleytown was more solemn, while Amazing Grace was more participatory, such as saying "amen" more during the service and singing the same hymns in a livelier manner.

However, overall it was a good fit, so after the three months the results of a vote they took was to merge. Amazing Grace moved into Stanleytown's building, and it leased its former building to The Church on the Hill, which now is 10 years into a 15-year rent-to-own arrangement.

The hardest thing was merging the two 501c3 organizations' paperwork

to satisfy IRS requirements, which took about 6 months, Hodges said.

The two churches combined their name to Stanleytown Amazing Grace Baptist Church.

Being together "has been incredible," he said. The church has "experienced significant growth since then. We couldn't be more pleased with the way things have gone. It's much, much better than we had originally anticipated."

There are many reasons the church is thriving, he said. Much of it is because of "programming for all ages to keep them engaged with the church, all the way from nursery to our 'Senior Saints' program," he wrote by text.

It has Sunday school, Awana, teen programming, children's church, junior church, summer teen conferences, youth camps and more ministries that are "designed to engage the children and teens in church," he wrote. Church leaders make sure to set aside "significant funds" for those programs at the

creation of each annual budget.

They group classes "to address the issues and challenges that each age group faces" to follow Biblical teaching.

Additionally, although Hodges said he fully supports the standard model followed by churches of that size to have full-time ministry staff, Stanleytown Amazing Grace mostly has part-time staff who also have other jobs, he wrote. "This model allows for money that is often times directed to salary to be directed to other areas of engagement."

Of the staff of 15, the only two full-timers work in the church's child-care center.

After about a decade of the two churches together as one, they rarely think back to the times they were separate entities, Hodges said.

"The only time it comes up is when someone asks why the name is so long," he said.

Holly Kozelsky is a writer for the Martinsville Bulletin; contact her at 276-638-8801 ext. 243.

## Churches vote to close doors

Bassett Memorial United Methodist Church is closing this month.

The pastor and Danville District United Methodist Church district superintendent did not respond to recent requests for interviews. A district staff member said no one from the district would be available to talk until this week. However, some details about the church's situation has been shared on social media and in its newsletter.

Its final monthly community meal was May 23, when the church "shared the news of our discontinuance," the Rev. Timonty Joseph Barth shared on the church's Facebook page.

The church newsletter sent out on May 30 stated that items and memorabilia in the church were available to the congregation. An inventory was in the church office, and people were to sign their names beside things they would like to have.

On a May 16 post, Barth wrote a Facebook post about the process of "discontinuing as a local congregation of the United Methodist Church in June."

For the two prior months, he wrote, the members "entered into a time of discernment," which included conversation and prayer. The congregation consulted the district superintendent and "talked about financial concerns, energy, and the possibility of another church utilizing our building."

The district superintendent, the Rev. D. Janine Howard, held a church conference at which 15 people voted to discontinue, and 12 voted to stay open.

"The reality is this: Every person voted they [sic] way that they did out of their

love for the church. As a whole the majority felt it would be better to discontinue. It is our hope that another church will have the possibility of buying our building and continuing the legacy of missions, evangelism and love that has defined Bassett Memorial UMC over the last 125 years," he wrote.

In Martinsville, Villa Heights Baptist Church's final pastor was Keith Spangenberg. The March/April edition of "The Caller," Henry County Baptist Association's newsletter, has a message titled "The Legacy of Villa Heights Baptist Church" signed by "Former Trustees & Pastor."

It states, "We reached the point that many of our sister churches may be familiar with: we weren't the church we used to be in size, ministries, and capabilities; we're an aging congregation that was having to cut back services because we didn't drive at night, cook like we used to, and becoming less physically able to get out into the community; each year the budget had to be reduced; the future looked bleaker."

The members "did not want the building to become a funeral home or 'used car lot,'" it states.

The message said that the church agreed to let Agape Bible Christian Fellowship use its property and to let Amanacer of Collinsville, a church with services in Spanish, to use the fellowship hall. Remaining assets were divided among Agape, Amanacer, Grace Network, the Gideons, Pregnancy Care Center, Good News Jail Ministry and the Home Home's residents, according to a survey and vote, it added.

Holly Kozelsky is a writer for the Martinsville Bulletin; contact her at 276-638-8801 ext. 243.

## Revival

From Page A1

St. Paul's still kept up its yearly picnic for the neighborhood, attended by about 100 people; monthly movie nights; and a free clothes closet open from 10 a.m. to noon the first and fourth Saturdays of the month. During election season some members help people register to vote.

Membership was at 13 or 14 for the past several years, but because of deaths it had fallen to four in December — one of the remaining five wasn't going much in the winter.

Ruby Stultz, a 69-year-old retired registered nurse and physician assistant, started attending when she was 4, and Wilson, the coordinator for Patrick Henry Community College's Alliance for Excellence, also is a long-time member.

Avenell Jordan and her adult son Tom Salyer and Weatherall have joined more recently.

They say the church means a lot to them because of its welcoming nature and respect for all people.

"We're not one of those churches that says you can't come here because" of this or that, Weatherall said.

"I grew up in this church and always loved this church," Stultz said. "Everybody was really nice and encouraging to me when I was pursuing my career" and also supported her son on his path. "There was a closeness here. I just could not turn my back on that."

"That's what really helped me in staying. These people care about everybody," Jordan said.

Throughout the lean times, their pastor, Gene Anderson,

"never got discouraged, and a lot of times he's not getting a paycheck," Weatherall said.

Anderson, who has been the supply pastor for 12 years, said he has a house in Roanoke and an apartment in Martinsville. Service is held at 11 a.m. Sundays, and he comes the first and third Sunday while members who are lay ministers take turns on the other Sundays.

The diocese pays Anderson for one Sunday a month, and he donates most of that back to the church, Jordan said.

The church's expenses are low because the members do all the work, including cleaning and maintenance, that they can.

"The biggest bill is utilities. We stretch our money," Jordan said.

Weatherall said the first time he attended, he stayed afterward for the vestry meeting. The church's balance was \$990. Even with that low balance, the church made plans to get clothes for victims of an apartment-complex fire.

"That's one of the things that attracted me to the church," he said.

At a December meeting, the four present talked about closing the church because there were so few people. However, they still had enough money to keep going for a while, so they decided to keep it open until it just wasn't possible.

"We were in the early stages" of closing, Weatherall said. "Ruby just flat-out said, 'I'm going to get new members. We're not going to close this church down.'"

At the end of January, Stultz attended an inspiring revival in Roanoke with Presiding Bishop and Primate Michael Curry (who received worldwide attention when he delivered the sermon at the wedding of Meghan Markle and Prince Harry) and Bishop



HOLLY KOZELSKY/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Even when it was down to a congregation of just four, St. Paul's Episcopal Church still kept its free clothes closet open twice a month. Now the church is up to 14 member and its future is looking bright.

Neff Powell of the Episcopal Diocese of Southwestern Virginia.

She talked to them about St. Paul's situation "and they gave me a lot of encouragement. I came back to Martinsville and got busy," Stultz said.

"Something just hit me. I made a few phone calls and invited some people out," she said. Some of them were former neighbors she had befriended. "We cannot say no to you in no way," she said they told her.

"Ruby, she's a closer," Weatherall said.

Now 14 people — black, white and Hispanic — are regularly attending St. Paul's. There has been a baptism. A wedding will be held there in October, and a teenager is talking about being confirmed there.

The diocese is helping the church with the costs of installing

an air conditioning system and building a ramp.

"It's not a huge amount" in terms of the diocese, which "is not a wealthy" organization, but it's helpful to the church, said the Rev. Canon Melissa Hays-Smith of the diocese.

"We don't want to close churches. It's not our goal," Hays-Smith said. "Churches often close because people stop thinking about the ministry they are called to do. The keep doing the same thing over and over" and don't look at how to keep current with what people's needs are.

"Being relevant does not mean giving up the powerful message" of Jesus, Hays-Smith said. "Church doesn't have to remain the same as the past 100 years. We think of the mid-20th century" type of church as the model, but throughout history ways of

worship have changed.

The bishop is assigning diocese staff to help the people of St. Paul's "being in the process to be open to what God's calling them to do," she said.

The key to that is "prayer, study and not snap decisions," Hays-Smith said. "When in transition, people are anxious. Our bishop is very supportive of people being in that place, wondering, 'What is God calling us to do at this moment?'"

St. Paul's recent turn around gives her "a sigh of relief," Jordan said, "and I personally thank God every day."

"It's a good feeling to know," Stultz said. "It was very sad to me thinking this. I just did not want this place to close."

Holly Kozelsky is a writer for the Martinsville Bulletin; contact her at 276-638-8801 ext. 243.

MARTINSVILLE  
MAN CHARGED  
WITH KILLING  
HIS WIFE

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Martinsville Speedway  
hosts a different kind  
of racing event

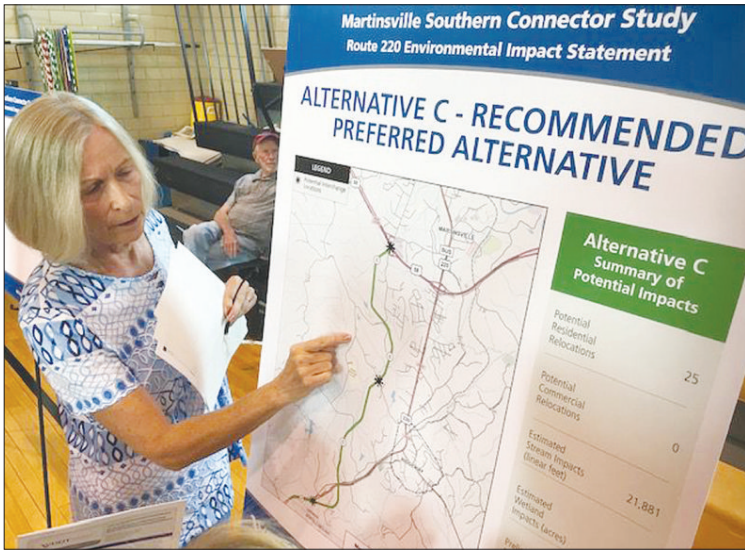
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MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

THE VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY FOR 130 YEARS

Sunday, August 18, 2019 • MARTINSVILLEBULLETIN.COM • Martinsville, Virginia \$2

What to do about ‘the old pig-path road’?



Beth Robertson looks at a display about Alternative C.

Nearly 300 people attend public hearing on connector for U.S. 220

By Paul Collins  
paul.collins@martinsvillebulletin.com

Nearly 300 people attended the Virginia Department of Transportation’s public hearing Thursday about the proposed path for a U.S. 220 connector from the North Carolina state line to the U.S. 220/U.S. 58 bypass north of Ridgeway.

VDOT officials were on hand for two hours at Drewry Mason Elementary School to answer questions about their preferred path (Alternative C) and two other alternatives for what VDOT calls the Route 220 Martinsville Southern Connector Study.

There were maps, displays, handouts and a video presentation.

Several VDOT officials and members of the Henry County Board of Supervisors who attended the hearing said in interviews that members of the public were asking how the various routes would affect their properties, when the road would be built (it’s in the conceptual phase) and how it would affect the county and the community. There were diverse opinions about various aspects of Alternatives A, B and C.

None of the officials interviewed seemed to think there was a clear

front-runner among Alternatives A, B and C based on comments at the public hearing.

“It’s like I’ve always said about a landfill: Everybody knows we’ve got to have a landfill, but nobody wants it in their back yard,” Henry County Supervisor Tommy Slaughter said. “The road is kind of the same way. If you’re going to put one in, you’ve got to put it somewhere. With everything like it is, trying to get the permits and stuff, that’s the problem — putting it where it’s going to be the least impact.”

SEE ROAD | A7

WOMEN OF THE CLOTH

A lot of women man pulpits in the Southside of Virginia.  
But not every denomination embraces that concept.



Martinsville-area female ministers include (from left) the Rev. Libby Grammer, Elder Naomi Hodge-Muse, the Rev. Ashley Harrington and the Rev. Susan Spangenberg. These women have talked about experiencing different levels of welcome or restrictions regarding women in ministry.

By Holly Kozelsky  
hkozelsky@martinsvillebulletin.com

It’s commonly accepted that the minister standing in the pulpit may be wearing a robe.

But — symbolically — whether or not there can be a dress instead of pants under that robe

can be divinely complicated.

There are many female pastors in Southside, but there remain restrictions against women in roles of leadership in churches, with some not allowing women to serve at all.

The Pew Research Center shows that 73% of adults in Virginia align themselves with a Protes-

tant (non-Catholic Christian) religion, and there are 12% Catholic, 1% Jewish and 1% Muslim. Although both the Jewish and Muslim religions allow women religious leaders, Protestant religions with the larger memberships as well as Catholics don’t.

*“Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”*

SEE WOMEN | A9

— 1 Timothy 2:11-12

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WEATHER

Today will be partly sunny and hot, and tonight will be partly cloudy and humid. For detailed weather information, see Page A2

93 HIGH | 67 LOW



Hurricane Camille turned brothers’ lives ‘upside down.’  
Page A5



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*“The gospel of Jesus is freeing. It’s not an oppressive thing. It frees us to be who God has made us and created us to be. I was called to be a pastor, and on the other hand, I happen to be a woman, too.”*

— The Rev. Ashley Harrington, co-pastor of Starling Avenue Baptist Church with her husband

## Women

From Page A1

Of the 73% who are Protestant, by far the greatest numbers are “Baptist Family” in the “Evangelical Christian” category, 15% and “Baptist Family” under “Historically Black Protestant” at 9%. Other denominations have percentages of adherents of less than 5%, with most at 1% or less.

In Virginia 2% are Mormons, which have some divisions that allow female leadership and others that do not.

Much of the basis for those who ban women from ministerial and other leadership positions are founded on the Scriptures written by the Apostle Paul in the New Testament.

But not everyone sees those words and limitations as being as black and white as the words appear on the pages of the Bible.

### ‘Oddly really progressive’

When it comes to Baptist churches, some welcome women pastors, but most don’t allow them. Libby Grammer, the pastor of First Baptist Church in Martinsville, grew up in a Baptist tradition that still does not recognize her as a pastor.

“It a free-church tradition,” said Grammer, who is finishing a doctoral degree at McAfee School of Theology. Baptists “don’t have that corporate kind of structures above us, no bishops or so forth.”

Although Baptist churches operate independently, most tend to align themselves with a convention, in large part to be effective in missions, she said. While “in theory they can’t tell the church exactly what to do,” there can be pressure to conform.

Traditionally, most traditionally white Baptist churches have been Southern Baptists – Pew says about 10% of adults in Virginia are Southern Baptists – and about 30 years ago, as “women were starting to be ordained, the convention was taken over” by people who did not think women should be in ministry, Grammer said. They “slowly took control of the convention and seminaries,” and churches that had supported women in ministerial roles were “forced out – ‘disfellowshipping’ churches, and still doing that to this day.”

In 1984, the Southern Baptist Convention passed the “Resolution on Ordination And The Role Of Women In Ministry,” which ends with the line, “we encourage the service of women in all aspects of church life and work other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination.”

That would encompass serving as deacons or elders. Some Southern Baptist churches have either or both leadership roles among their members.

The Rev. Susan Spangenberg, the pastor of Pocahontas Bassett Baptist Church, said “the division really started to happen between moderates and conservatives at the end of the ‘80s, start of the ‘90s. It came to a head in the seminaries with a plan to get all of the moderate people out, and they were taken over by fundamentalists.”

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was formed in 1991, largely as a place for churches that were pushed out of the Southern Baptist Convention. It has about 1,900 member churches, whereas the Southern Baptist Convention has 46,125 member churches.

Another Baptist association with a significant local presence is the Virginia Baptist State Convention, which has almost 30 traditionally black Baptist churches in the Henry County area. It does have some women pastors, said Valeria Edwards, who is in-



BY HOLLY KOZELSKY/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN  
**Amanda Harris started out as a Baptist but became a minister in Methodist churches, one of the reasons being that the Methodist religion offers more opportunities to women, she said.**

volved in many capacities with the VBSC through the local Smith River Missionary Baptist Association, one of the VBSC’s 12 regional associations.

There are four Cooperative Baptist Fellowship churches in the local area: First, Starling Avenue, Pocahontas Bassett and Chatham Heights Baptist churches. In contrast, about four dozen Southern Baptist Convention churches are in the Henry and Patrick Counties region.

Three of the four Cooperative Baptist Fellowship churches have women pastors, so “when I came here I thought, ... ‘Martinsville and Henry County are oddly really progressive about women in ministry, minus a handful. Even those that don’t’ support it ‘aren’t overtly negative’ about it, Grammer said.

### Changing denominations

The Rev. Ashley Harrington is a co-pastor, with her husband, Brian, of Starling Avenue Baptist Church. She said she received “a call to ministry at a really young age, and I was in a church tradition that was very, very limiting of what women could do, so it was very confusing for me.”

It was only when she was in college, taking some religion and theology classes, that she became aware of women ministers.

“I’ve heard so many times: You can’t become what you don’t see. I’d never seen women as ministers until I was 19 or 20,” she said. “I found a denominational home in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. It was affirming of women in ministry – not a topic of debate.”

Her own home church, on the other hand, would not recognize her as a pastor.

“Hopefully, at the end of the day, when people need the church, especially in a time of crisis, they don’t care who shows up ... they need the presence of God,” she said.

The Rev. Amanda Harris is the pastor for the Axton

Charge United Methodist Church, which is comprised of Irisburg, Carroll Memorial and Beckham United Methodist Churches.

She grew up Baptist, she said, and ended up surprised to see the limits on women in ministry.

As a girl, Harris attended First Baptist Church, where Nancy Stanton McDaniel was the minister of education. “She was a big influence on my life,” Harris said. “I didn’t know anyone had any problem with women in ministry” until she was in college, when another woman spilled the beans about the situation.

Harris was ordained by First Baptist and has been in ministry for 21 years. She ended up transferring to the Methodist church, in part because the sacramental aspect of the religion appealed to her, but also because it is “much more accepting of females in ministry.”

During the past decades, she has “seen some huge strides in leadership roles” for women in the Baptist church, she said. For one, McDaniel became the first ordained woman to serve as president of the Baptist General Association of Virginia. Also, “for a woman to be a head pastor at a First Baptist church is a big thing, and I see it more and more.”

However, Harris added, the “Methodist church has always seen women as head pastors.”

### No limits

Elder Naomi Hodge-Muse is an associate pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church, where the Rev. Kelvin Perry is the pastor – following the Rev. Jane Johnson, who left that role when she moved to her home state of Pennsylvania about a year ago.

Hodge-Muse said she never has seen any prohibitions or discouragement against women in leadership in any of the three denominations with which she has been involved, African Methodist Episcopal, Episcopal and Presbyterian.

She was raised African Methodist Episcopal, “and women in the A.M.E. have always been welcome” in positions of leadership, she said. Her sister is an A.M.E. minister in the fifth-largest A.M.E. church in Virginia.

When Hodge-Muse married an Episcopalian, she moved over to his church, where she stayed for 22 years. “The Episcopal Church has had women a lot earlier than most churches,” she said.

“The Rev. [Ellen] Hinkle and Christ Church made me a Eucharistic minister,” she said, a process that involved taking ministry classes. That sanctioned her to take “Communion to the sick and dying for years.”

Hinkle also groomed her toward becoming a deacon, she said.

However, eventually Hodge-Muse headed in a different direction. Nine years ago, she began attending Grace Presbyterian. To become a minister, “they accepted the four-year program from the Episcopal Church,” she said.

To her 2013 degree in theology from the University of the South, she only had to add Reformed Theology and Polity classes, she said.

There was just that one time, when she was a girl, when a minister who was not of her denomination came to the church “and started talking junk about women in pants. I just looked at him like, ‘Really?’ ... That’s as close to foolishness as I have ever experienced.”

### The resistance

The Rev. Mable Finney, pastor of New Bethel Christian Church in Fieldale, said she most definitely has experienced resistance to women in ministry.

“First of all, you hear people say, ‘I don’t believe in women ministers or women pastors,’” she said. She has encountered “men who will not visit my church or allow me to come and minister at their church.”

A woman who ministers to women only would “probably be more accepted in that role,” Finney said, adding that she even has heard women say that women shouldn’t lead men religiously, “so you get it either way.”

People are taught those restrictions in childhood, Finney said, and having that belief system “keeps us in bondage rather than setting us free, as it should.”

In the Oneness (Apostolic) Pentecostal Church, said Bishop J.C. Richardson Jr., pastor of Mount Sinai Apostle Church, some groups support women in the ministry, and some do not.

### Imams and rabbis

There are female imams (religious leaders) in the Muslim religion, and absolutely nothing in the Qu’ran (Muslim holy book) to limit women’s roles, said Khalil Shadeed of the Martinsville Center for Al-Islam.

Even so, the topic of women in Muslim leadership “is a very tough question,” mostly culturally, Shadeed said. “In fact, we are probably, in my lifetime, addressing the formal position of leading prayer in our congregational services, and we are just now establishing women as imams that are leading prayers.”

Amina Wadud, who became the first female imam in the United States 25 years ago, wrote in “The First American Woman Imam Explains the Rise of Islamic Feminism” (Vice, March 27), “In the past 20 years, Muslim women reached a critical mass in reclaiming their agency and responsibilities. In every country, at every economic and educational level, in the arenas of politics, law, art, civic society and of course, in sacred public ritual, we have

tackled the biased assumption of authority belonging exclusively to Muslim men.”

In Martinsville, it is a woman who is the religious leader of Ohev Zion Synagogue, Rabbi Beth Socol.

### What the Bible says

“The gospel of Jesus is freeing. It’s not an oppressive thing,” Harrington said. “It frees us to be who God has made us and created us to be. I was called to be a pastor, and on the other hand, I happen to be a woman, too.”

To people who disapprove of women in ministry, Spangenberg says, “Take it up with the Lord, because never once did I set up to do this. The Lord led me to do all of it.”

There are a few Bible verses that some people say command that women cannot be pastors.

1 Timothy 2:11-12 says, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”

Finney said that her understanding of that verse always has been in response simply to one problem a church was going through: Some women in the congregation were talking to each other during service, which “was making a lot of noise and distractions.”

Paul, the author of the letter to his protégé Timothy, was just offering the suggestion that if those women had questions, they should just ask their husbands about the matter when they got home, because “he couldn’t teach with everybody talking.”

1 Timothy 3:2 says that a pastor must be “the husband of one wife.” Some say it means only men can be preachers; others say it’s a target of the practice of polygamy, ruling out polygamous people from taking the lead in religion.

“There’s a lot of theology that cherry-picks verses to control women, that keeps them from doing what they’re called to do,” Grammer said. “Instead of reading the whole story through Scripture through the lens of the ministry of Jesus, we are too often finding that one ‘cllobber verse’ just so women can’t do what they’re called to do. It’s interesting how many other verses are ignored.”

Another basic reason for the belief in superiority of man, Finney said, is simply grammatical: The “traditional masculine language of the Bible.” The traditional grammar rule has been to use “he” to stand for “he or she,” and only in the past few years are some people using “they” to be a gender-equal way to say “he or she.”

The first people to announce the Resurrection were women, Grammer said. In the New Testament, there’s “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17 KJV).

“Despite being written in a time of subjugation of women, the Bible says all that,” she said. “The Bible does support women in ministry, and we just have to read it more carefully, and read it for an eye for what Jesus wanted us to see.”

“People who believe that women cannot be in ministry often will use particular scriptures, especially those of the apostle Paul, to be almost blanket statements for all women instead of his context of writing to a particular church at a particular time, with particular needs in a particular discussion,” Harrington said. “Hopefully people will interpret the Bible through the lens of Jesus who, in his ministry, welcomed women. Women were the very first people” who witnessed the Resurrection, “so in many ways they were the first evangelists.”

Holly Kozelsky is a writer for the Martinsville Bulletin; contact her at 276-638-8801 ext. 243.

# BETTER

Fresh ideas to make the most of the season

» SPECIAL SECTION

# MARTINSVILLE SPEEDWAY

» Gilliland earns first trucks victory. B2  
» Hamlin wins qualifying Saturday. B6

# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

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# Race start should weather rain

Rain expected to clear area early afternoon; First Data 500 should start close to on time

By Cara Cooper  
cara.cooper@martinsvillebulletin.com

Weather that had threatened the race schedule for Sunday at the Martinsville Speedway should not be too much of a factor.

The green flag for the NASCAR Monster Energy Cup Series First Data 500 is scheduled to wave at 3 p.m. Sunday, and according to Weather.com, rain is expected to hit the area around 9 p.m. Sat-

### INSIDE

» Former fire chief now is chief at Martinsville Speedway. **A5**  
» Martinsville High School band performs anthem at speedway. **A6**

urday and go through the night, turning to thunderstorms early Sunday morning before clearing out around 10. Up to an inch of rain is forecast.

Predictions show mostly cloudy to sunny skies the rest

### MARTINSVILLE SPEEDWAY

of the morning and into the afternoon right up until race time. But as recently as Friday morning, both races at the speedway had appeared under the threat of rain.

Martinsville Speedway President Clay Campbell told the Bulletin Saturday that even though rain is expected fall in Ridgeway into the morning Sunday, the track has contingency plans, and there's no set cutoff time for when the race can or cannot start.



MIKE PARIS/SPECIAL TO THE BULLETIN

SEE WEATHER | A6 The finish line at Martinsville Speedway.

# COMPASSION EMERGES IN BASSETT

Bassett Memorial United Methodist Church closed this summer, but its campus, materials are finding new life



BULLETIN FILE PHOTO

A section of the sanctuary at Bassett Memorial United Methodist Church is shown.

By Holly Kozelsky  
holly.kozelsky@martinsvillebulletin.com

Communities are mourning and celebrating a church that had been a staple of Bassett for 125 years but closed this past summer.

The last service at Bassett Memorial United Methodist Church was in June. Compassion Church in Axton, with an estimated congregation of 1,000, is buying the property to use as an additional site, to the Compassion in Axton, with plans to be heavily involved in ministry and charity in the Bassett area.

Meanwhile, churches around the region have received gifts of furniture, educational and choir materials and sundries from Bassett UMC. Woolwine UMC even held an appreciation service for the congregation of Bassett UMC.

"I am pleased that another church is going to take it over," former Bassett UMC member Marge Bumstead said. "We're very, very pleased they're going to keep the stained-glass windows and pipe organ."

Seth Robertson, lead pastor of Compassion Church in Axton, said closing on the property should happen within a week or so. The former Bassett UMC will be an additional location for Compassion, which has a congregation of 950 to 1,000.

"We're just running out of space" in the former Irisburg Elementary School where his church moved 2 1/2 years ago, said Robertson, son of former Mount Calvary pastor Gary Robertson. "We're running three services already:" at 8:30 a.m., 10:10 a.m. and 11:55 a.m.

SEE CHURCH | A9

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### WEATHER

Today will have a morning thunderstorm. Tonight will be mainly clear and cooler. For detailed weather information, see Page A2

80 HIGH 45 LOW



Company projects 700 jobs for the Danville area. Page A8



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# Church

From Page A1

Compassion started five years ago in Robertson's living room in Laurel Park with 14 people, then moved to a location outside Danville before it moved to the old Irisburg school with a congregation of 50. It still has a location in Danville. Adam Touchstone of Axton is the executive pastor.

It's part of a network of 31 churches from the East to West Coast that originated in Tennessee seven years ago. About eight months ago, it moved its "central hub," where videos and promotions are generated, to Axton. It has a church in Wales and is about to open one in the U.K., Robertson said.

Compassion plans to "update the whole building [in Bassett]," he said, with modernizing the bathrooms and replacing the heating and air conditioning systems and the roof. It will also "change the feel of the sanctuary" — updating it while still keeping and appreciating its stained glass windows and other fine elements.

"We want to honor the past," he said. "We will preserve the past. The greatest way to honor" those who built and kept life in the church would be "to be a light to the community."

## Community compassion

Compassion is active in the community in many ways.

Its members run a backpack feeding program for children at Axton Elementary School; a home-less feeding program and "Sidewalk Sunday School," both in Danville; and they served 500 families with a Christmas dinner and gifts.

On football-game nights, church members take dinner to the cheerleaders and football players at Magna Vista and Martinsville high schools. Soon, Compassion will be able to start doing the same for Bassett High School.

On the whole, they plan to get involved with existing ministries in Bassett rather than compete with them, Robertson said. For example, a team from Compassion already is planning to volunteer with the food bank run by EMI, the security company run out of the former J.D. Bassett High School.

Compassion will start a "launch group" at the old Bassett UMC building on the third week of January. A "big launch" will be done once 120 adults have attended for four Sundays in a row.

Leaders plan to reach deep into the community of Bassett where, Robertson said, 80 to 82% of the people are "unchurched." "To know that the folks at Compassion have this level of passion, energy and excitement, seeing what



Barbara White of Bassett Memorial United Methodist Church (in pink) talks with Stephanie Martin of Woolwine UMC. In the background at right are John and Nancy Philpott of Bassett UMC. They were at a service hosted by Woolwine UMC to commemorate Bassett Memorial UMC.

they do ... that was part of our end game, in my mind, where I hope everything was headed," said Len Dillon, a former Bassett UMC member and trustee.

"Everything has its evolutionary process. What they do with the church there, or not do, is out of my hands. They will do well with it, and I have no doubt," Dillon added.

Said Robertson: "We're coming to the Bassett community to be a light and change that community with the love of Jesus Christ."

## Saying goodbye

The final service at Bassett UMC — a discontinuation service on June 23 — "was very good," said Joyce Craig, who had been a member for more than 60 years. "It was a sad time [overall], but it really wasn't that morning."

A "good group" attended, including many who were brought up in the church but no longer attended regularly.

Len and Mary Kate Dillon's granddaughter attended the service. "She was the sixth generation of our family in that church, and that's pretty significant. It's something you can be proud of," Len Dillon said — and part of the tragedy of losing the church.

Dillon said Craig had been asked by Pastor Tim Barth to speak a few words about the history of the church during that service.

When she was raising her children in the 1950s and 1960s, Craig said, "That church was packed with young people and whole families. Bassett was booming at that time. A lot of activities kept a lot of people busy."

After local industry shut down, "many of our children did not come back here, and that was one of our main problems. We

only had old people toward the end. We could not keep the church going on the money we could give," Craig said.

The annual budget was about \$100,000, said Bumstead, who served as the church's treasurer, among other roles. About \$60,000 of that went to the pastor's salary and benefits as well as apportionments, which means to the larger denominational bodies.

It was an old facility, "facing some expensive work," she said, such as a new boiler, air conditioning and roof, which was "what made us make the final decision. We were managing to limp along."

Talks of closing the church began about a year ago, Craig said, although "for quite a number of years we had known we were on the downward spiral." For some, for whom it had not sunk in, the closing was quite a shock, she added.

"For me it was a very difficult process," Bumstead said. "Part of you wants to keep it open and keep going, and part of you knows it can't go on."

Meetings were held weekly for three or four months for people to talk it over, Dillon said. "There was a lot of information available for those that wanted to know what was going on."

The final decision to close was made by a margin of only a few votes, Bumstead said. The experience of closing the church "hurts. It's like a divorce."

As treasurer, Bumstead had to "finalize the books," which was quite a job, she said.

The experience also gave

her perspective. "I wish the churches were structured better. We're sending missionaries to start churches" in distant lands, while churches back home need help they aren't getting.

"We as a denomination tend not to discuss finances as openly as we need to," Dillon said. "Everybody's got to know the numbers, and you have to treat the church like a business. It has bills to pay. It has responsibilities, and you have to meet them, and everybody has to know expectations of that and know what happens when you don't."

"It's all religions," Bumstead said. "The rules and the regulations and the expense of running an organization that big gets in the way of what you want to do."

## Appreciation from Woolwine

The real estate belongs to the United Methodist Church. Church "trustees had to sign off on it and give it to the Board of Missions," Bumstead said.

Bassett UMC invited its members to take some of its items. Craig said she took a crosscut saw on which her husband had engaged Kitty Horsley to paint a portrait of the church and also a plaque that had his name on it.

Other items were gifted to other churches. Many things went to Woolwine United Methodist Church.

Recently, Woolwine United Methodist Church and its pastor, Mary Sue Terry, held a service of appreciation for the former Bassett UMC congregation.

The service was "a way to honor our Bassett friends

in a ceremony that would mark receiving their gifts and also dedicating those gifts to Woolwine United Methodist Church," Terry said.

"That service was just excellent. The pastor out there put it together so well," Bumstead said.

Said Dillon: "It was such a nice service. The folks there were so humble. They were very thankful for the gifts we had given them."

Instead of having a sermon that day, Len Dillon and other Bassett members "talked about what it had been like and was like for them, the grieving process, what they learned," she said.

One of the first things she did, Terry said, was ask Woolwine members who did not have large-print Bibles in their pews to come forward. "We asked our Bassett friends to come around so that each person from Bassett was able to give a Bible to each person from our church."

The women who worked with children at Bassett UMC gave children's Bibles to Nancy Peters, who works with children at Woolwine, and the director of Christian education from Bassett gave educational materials to the two people at Woolwine with that role.

Then dedication prayers were given, and litanies were read, indicating that "these items constituted a legacy from their church," Terry said. The Woolwine choir sang songs out of books from Bassett.

After the service, the guests from Bassett toured the rest of the church to see where and how other

gifts, such as a rug, were in use — and appreciated. They had a lunch and dessert together, and saw on a movie screen given by Bassett scenes from the life of the Woolwine church.

Woolwine UMC members gave each guest from Bassett a jar of the apple butter they had made just two weeks before.

"It was a very moving service," Terry said, especially during a part when each person from Bassett stood up and "told the story of how long they'd been at Bassett, what they did, and their grief experience."

"It was emotional to me," Dillon said. "It gave me a little bit of personal closure to see the whole situation not come to an end, but parts of the church will live on in other churches and the legacy is continuing, and that's a good thing."

## On the rebound

Since the church's closing, most of the former Bassett UMC congregation gets together once a month, on the same night they used to hold free community meals. This month's gathering was Thursday at Papa's Pizza.

"They became family. They became friends," Bumstead said.

On Sunday mornings, however, Bassett UMC members "are scattered here and you, I guess," Craig said.

"A lot of them are still out there floundering," Bumstead said.

Dillon said he and his wife meant to take a break from church for a couple of months, but that's spread to four months, and it's getting time to find a new church.

"Mentally I was tired, and physically as well, from what we went through," he said.

"I miss going to church, and I miss the folks I attended church with at Bassett a lot. That's a kind of a void. You're never going to replace that. ... It's an experience I really hope to not ever have to go through again. That weighed on us. ... there was a lot of trauma for everybody."

Craig now is attending Stanleytown United Methodist Church, where she says she feels right at home.

But Bumstead is taking her time visiting other churches.

"I'm looking around. I've found a couple." She's even heard Bassett UMC's most recent pastor at his new church in Danville, which had received several of Bassett UMC's items.

However, finding a new church is a big deal, she said, and "I'm not ready to jump in."

Holly Kozelsky is a writer for the Martinsville Bulletin; contact her at 276-638-8801 ext. 243.

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