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To the Virginia Annual Conference and our *Advocate* magazine subscribers—

Over the last several years, the conference Communications staff, in consultation and partnership with the conference Board of Communications, has reflected on how best our office can meet the communication needs of our members and our conference as technology continues to change and communication needs shift.

We have specifically looked at how we can increase our reach to all of our members and provide better access to information across the Virginia Conference. Our board, in helping us do the work of understanding both the needs of our clergy and laity, recently conducted 19 focus groups in five different locations. We were able to ask in-depth questions about the communication needs of 98 people from 10 districts. Participants included active and retired clergy, church staff, lay members and leaders in local churches, districts, conference boards & agencies and youth. This helped us gather a variety of great ideas on how we can improve conference communications.

In recognizing how the needs of our conference have changed over the years, the staff and the Board have had in-depth conversations concerning the *Advocate* magazine which has been our flagship communication tool for many years.

The board voted unanimously at its February meeting to end production of the *Advocate* magazine with the December 2019 issue. This decision was approved by Common Table.

I, along with my staff and the board, recognize what this magazine has meant to this conference as well as its legacy. It was not a decision made in haste but one we have wrestled with to make sure we are best serving our conference in the area of communication.

In the remaining *Advocate* issues this year, you can expect to see articles that share *Advocate* history and the legacy of this fine publication. Attached to this letter, you will find information related to your subscriptions as well as answers to additional questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to contact me by email ([MadelinePillow@vaumc.org](mailto:MadelinePillow@vaumc.org)) should you have additional questions.

It has been a joy for me to work on this magazine. I am so appreciative of those who shared their stories with us throughout the years and for our *Advocate* representatives around the conference who so passionately supported the magazine and, forgive the pun, advocated for it. To all our readers, I am so grateful for you.

At Annual Conference, we will be sharing a survey we hope everyone will fill out to help my office continue on this journey of providing helpful and accessible information to the Virginia Conference. We will be providing this survey through upcoming issues of the *Advocate*, on our website and in person in the Display space at Annual Conference.

Though the *Advocate* may be ending, the storytelling from the conference Communications office is not ending. We are finding new ways to reach our audience and seeking to create better access for all to important information from and about our United Methodist connection.

Blessings to you on the journey,

Madeline

### Frequently Asked Questions:

- **I get a good deal of my information from the *Advocate* publication. How will I get my news?**

Other avenues to get news include our conference website ([www.vaumc.org](http://www.vaumc.org)); our Sunday *Advocate* bulletin insert; the e-Advocate, a weekly electronic newsletter; and our conference social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Vimeo). On these platforms, we will still be creating the content that you often find in the *Advocate* magazine from Virginia news to timely features. Should you need help identifying where to find any of these other communication avenues, contact the conference Communications office at 804-521-1110 or by emailing [Advocate@vaumc.org](mailto:Advocate@vaumc.org).

As we continue to prioritize how best to communicate to the conference, as stated in the letter, it is so important that all our readers fill out the survey we release at Annual Conference to share their thoughts. Our goal is to reach ALL of our conference members in communication avenues where they receive their news.

You will find this survey in a number of places come June, including in the July issue of the *Advocate* magazine!

- **How did the Board come to the decision to end the *Advocate* publication?**

The conference Communications office, in consultation with the Board of Communications, has been having conversations about the future of the *Advocate* for many years.

For the last decade, we have seen a drastic drop in subscribers each year as needs and preferences have changed how readers want to receive their information. Likewise, our costs to print and mail the magazine have continued to rise over the years as the magazine runs a deficit each month.

Our current membership in the conference is over 300,000 and our magazine reaches less than 1 percent. In this process of ending the *Advocate* magazine, we are interested in reaching more of our audience to provide news and helpful resources.

For questions about this announcement, please contact Madeline Pillow (804-521-1113 or [MadelinePillow@vaumc.org](mailto:MadelinePillow@vaumc.org)).

- **Do you want me to participate in the conference wide survey?**

Yes! We encourage everyone in the conference to participate in the survey. This conference-wide survey will be made available in a number of ways including online and in the print *Advocate* as well as at the Board of Communications booth at Annual Conference.

We want to receive as many responses as possible to make sure we understand the needs of our members and how the conference office can best share information and resources.

Some of these questions will test things we learned from the focus groups. The final results from this survey will help the office prioritize our efforts as we work to continue improving conference communications.

- **My subscription to the *Advocate* continues past 2019. Can I get a reimbursement?**

Yes. If you would like a reimbursement, we will be sharing a postcard to request this in the upcoming May *Advocate* magazine for print subscribers. We will also be sharing in other upcoming issues as well.

If you are an online subscriber, you can email your name, address, best contact information and how long your subscription continues to [Advocate@vaumc.org](mailto:Advocate@vaumc.org).

For questions concerning your *Advocate* subscription, please contact Pam Culler (804-521-1110 or [PamCuller@vaumc.org](mailto:PamCuller@vaumc.org)) or Brenda Capen (804-521-1116 or [BrendaCapen@vaumc.org](mailto:BrendaCapen@vaumc.org)).

- **My *Advocate* subscription ends in 2019. Can I renew my subscription to get the final 2019 issues?**

We will still be accepting one year subscriptions for those whose subscription is ending in 2019; the amount left over can be reimbursed to you after 2019 by following the step above.

For questions concerning your *Advocate* subscription, please contact Pam Culler (804-521-1110 or [PamCuller@vaumc.org](mailto:PamCuller@vaumc.org)) or Brenda Capen (804-521-1116 or [BrendaCapen@vaumc.org](mailto:BrendaCapen@vaumc.org)).

- **For questions not listed here, you can contact Madeline Pillow, Director of Communications and *Advocate* editor, at 804-521-1113 [MadelinePillow@vaumc.org](mailto:MadelinePillow@vaumc.org).**