A fierce conversation can change everything. By fierce I don't mean menacing or threatening, but a conversation that is robust and honest and occurs when we, to borrow words from author Susan Scott, “come out from behind ourselves and make it real.” The gospels are full of them, and the common denominator is always Jesus. Think of his interactions with the Samaritan woman at the well, Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, and Mary outside the empty tomb. Each encountered Jesus and each, through a fierce conversation, came away more alive than before.

The residential community of Richmond Hill is guided by a twelve-part Rule of Life. First on the list is Conversion of Life, which we define as “living one’s life as if it were a conversation with God, in a commitment to personal spiritual disciplines.” Note the close relationship between the words conversion and conversation. They both have the same root, which means literally, “to turn about with.” The change we seek, or that God offers, comes through engagement, relationship, interaction, and a willingness to converse back and forth. There is an interplay and exchange that leads to growth. It’s one we participate in individually and collectively, with implications for metropolitan Richmond.

We speak of the process often as spiritual formation — to be formed by the Spirit. God engages us and we are shaped into new beings. It’s what Jesus spoke of to Nicodemus when he talked of being born from above. Our willingness to participate in the process is key. We can resist or we can willingly avail ourselves to God. On the availability side, think of it as the willingness to have the conversation. Opening the door to that opens the door to all sorts of possibilities.

Internationally acclaimed poet, David Whyte, says, “There is no self that will survive a real conversation.” What he means is that when we engage courageously with the reality of our lives we can’t help but be changed. Old ways of understanding give way to new ones. In religious terms we might say that we are converted or transformed, or even saved. In this Easter season it’s another way of understanding resurrection. Our lives are renewed through honest conversation. Dying to what was, we are born for new and wider possibilities.

Take Nicodemus for example. Jesus invited him into a wider conversation and a richer life. Nicodemus was stuck. His problem, according to New Testament scholar, Charles Cousar, was that he lived “in a one-dimensional world, a world of ‘flesh’...immune to the renewable power of God. There is room for religion in that world, plenty of it; Nicodemus represents it. What is lacking is the living Spirit.” The Spirit that Jesus introduced Nicodemus to had the power to open him to an entirely different world of fresh breezes, new creation, and the mercy of “the untamed wind of God.”

The conversation continues with us. God invites us into a dynamic back and forth. The give and take necessitates our becoming. Outside the empty tomb, it wasn’t until Jesus called her name, moving the conversation forward, that Mary recognized who Jesus was and rejoiced.

Since we can’t engage with Jesus like Mary and those who met him face to face, we must rely on other means. The quality of the conversations we have with ourselves, our neighbors, and the world around us offer opportunities for divine encounters and fresh revelation. How do we have those conversations today?

We can start by fostering a relationship with silence. St. John of the Cross identified silence as God’s first language. If our conversations are going to be fierce, we’ve got to respect that. To hear what needs to be heard we...
need to regularly quiet the noise that distracts us. It doesn’t take a lot to get us started. Just a minute a day will often do. Practices like Centering Prayer and other forms of Christian meditation can foster longer periods of silence and the inner dialogue needed for healing.

The conversations that take place in trusted community are vital too. We need each other to listen as well as offer insight we can’t see alone. It might be a church small group, your family, or a few close friends. Where do you feel safe to speak the truth in love? Clearness Committees, The Way of Council, AA Groups, and other intentional settings create safe containers for real heartfelt conversation to happen. And, of course, where two or more are gathered Jesus appears (Matthew 18:20).

A regular conversation with a trusted friend, guide, or spiritual director is also of great value. Like two beggars showing one another where to find food, a one-on-one companion can be a lifesaver, providing just the right perspective to find our way. We need trusted others to help us hear the still small voice within and begin to live more fully into the life God intends for each of us.

Nature is another venue for a fierce conversation. We’re so cut off in today’s world from the wonder of God’s creation. Rather than seeing ourselves as above or apart from everything else, reaffirming that we are a part of creation has far-reaching benefits. It’s there, in rightful relationship with the more-than-human-world, that the Apostle Paul says, God’s eternal power and divine mercy have been revealed since the beginning (Romans 1:20). Solitude in nature can calm our souls and awaken a much-needed conversation. As a tea bag reminded me this week, “Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.”

There are other ways to have the conversation, too, like the ancient practice of lectio divina or responsively chanting the psalms. You may have your own way. The point is that we need to have the conversation and it needs to be honest and real. God desires a living, dynamic relationship with us that carries with it the promise of new life.

Conversion happens when we risk the conversation.

Rev. Joel Blunk
Co-Pastoral Director

TENDING THE SPIRIT

REVIVE RICHMOND

Honoring the past while moving forward...

There are times in life when it is appropriate to recognize where we have come from and what has been accomplished in order to determine where we are going and how best to move forward. Micah is at that point in its life cycle. More than 10 years ago, a few people from a few faith communities joined together around the idea of seeing all Richmond Public Elementary Schools provide premium quality education for every student. They envisioned each student adequately prepared for the next level of education, ensuring their success after high school and increasing their opportunities to obtain higher education or productive career choices.

In order to see that vision come to pass, these faithful few decided to offer the City Wide Micah Initiative to every Richmond Public Elementary School that demonstrates need based upon academic and socio-economic criteria, and partner each school with a minimum of two faith community partners. Today we can celebrate that this goal has been met with flying colors. Micah faith partner volunteers from more than 100 faith communities are now in 24 of Richmond’s 26 elementary schools. Cross-cultural relationships have been cultivated. Committed volunteers have been trained to understand the complexities involved in student achievement. More than 1,000 students who have matriculated through Richmond Public Schools have been supported, mentored, tutored, and given the materials needed to achieve in school and beyond.

Kudos to those faith community volunteers who have given valuable time as classroom assistants. Thank you to those of you who chose to spend an hour or so each week eating lunch with a buddy during the school day. We applaud those who organized drives for school supplies, holiday meals, and clothes closets. We can’t say enough about those volunteers whose commitment has extended beyond the school year to arrange and fund day camp and away camp experiences for students. Some Micah faith partner volunteers have followed their students beyond elementary school, choosing to mentor through high school and be a supportive voice from home during their college years.

However, there remains much work to be done. RPS elementary schools still strive to provide world-class education to the children of Richmond. The students, teachers and staff still need the metro Richmond community to support their efforts in building such a school district. How can Micah faith partners continue to be innovative and strategic? How can we use our shared resources in favor of the City’s school children? There are the questions that need to be answered in order to move forward together in faith.
Metro Richmond at Prayer

Pray for the Spirit of the Resurrection in Metropolitan Richmond.

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

April 2, 2017. We pray for the Spirit of the Resurrection in Metropolitan Richmond: For a spirit of love, cooperation, peace, community, and commitment to all people in God’s name.

April 9, 2017. We pray for the Spirit of the Resurrection in Metropolitan Richmond: To remove any spirit of contentiousness, prejudice, greed, jealousy, or enjoyment of others’ troubles; for spiritual renewal, leading to prayer and care for all regardless of race, national origin, religion, income, or neighborhood.

April 16, 2017 (Easter). We pray for the Spirit of the Resurrection in Metropolitan Richmond: For a spirit of hope, of possibility, of eternal life, and of commitment to the redeeming power of God who brings new life out of death to people and communities.

April 23, 2017. We pray for the Spirit of the Resurrection in Metropolitan Richmond: For a spirit of justice, righteousness, equality, and mutual benefit.

April 30, 2017. We pray for the Spirit of the Resurrection in Metropolitan Richmond: For a spirit of humility, respecting and appreciating the gifts and contributions of all.

Community News

Join the Residential Community

Seeking an Administrator. This June, Keesha Sims is completing her term as Administrator of Richmond Hill, and we are actively involved in a search for a person to join the residential community in this position. The Administrator handles the budget, personnel policy, and operations, and staffs the Council, reporting directly to the Co-Pastoral Directors. He or she is a member of the Executive Committee. This is a senior staff position and is an important place for service and ministry in the Community. TO INQUIRE OR APPLY contact Rev. Janie Walker at 804-783-7903, ext. 16, or, jwalker@richmondhillva.org

Armstrong Leadership Program: Education, Motivation & Empowerment

In mid-January, our students participated in the Annual Mini-Retreat. This is a special time when our young men and women are separated for an overnight retreat filled with inspiration, motivation, empowerment and bonding.

The Boys Mini Retreat opened with a presentation from Minister Kelvin Green of Fourth Baptist Church focusing on finding your purpose and believing in “Self.” Rev. Joel Blunk encouraged our young men to be positive and continue working on themselves. Rev. Joel and David Vinson led the group with a few uplifting songs. The ALP Vice-President, Michael Allen, presented on the “Building Blocks of Life”, a discussion on how life provides you everything that you need to become successful. Later in the evening, students along with the volunteers played basketball, video games, pool, ping-pong and much, much more. The retreat ended with a Gratitude Circle that encouraged the young men to appreciate their lives and the support systems around them.

During the Girls Mini Retreat, the conversations were centered on self-love, self-care and image. Kamala and Kiran Bhagat facilitated discussions on impacts of “Negative Female Energy” and ways to better manage your emotions. They taught the girls the importance of a healthy womb and a balanced life. Additionally, the girls experienced guided yoga meditation and dialogue on seeing yourself positively within society.

Overall, the retreats were empowering and left seeds of hope for all of us! We would like to thank Hugh Jones, Kelvin Green, Joel Blunk, Nathan Blunk, Kristen Blunk, Keesha Sims, David Vinson, Toria Howell-Edmonds, Kristin Smith, Kamala Bhagat, Kiran Bhagat, Tiffany Terry and Antwonda Mealey for their assistance, support and LOVE! Peace & Blessing — Ms. Yvette and Mr. Marvin

Like Us on Facebook @ ArmstrongLeadership

Learn more about Armstrong Leadership Program through Yvette Rajput at 804-783-7903, ext. 13, or, alp@richmondhillva.org

Micah Luncheon

Thursday, May 11

Our spring Micah Association luncheon meeting will be held Thursday, May 11 at Emmanuel Episcopal Church, 1214 Wilmer Avenue, 23227. Our special focus will be JEB Stuart Elementary School with remarks by Principal Jennifer Moore. Caterer Kelly Kindle is preparing box lunches with an assortment of sandwiches or a garden salad option for $10, payable at the door. Our Meet & Greet begins at 11:30 am and we will finish by 1:15 pm. Plan to join us, as we celebrate your faithfulness in serving as a Micah volunteer.

Please register your attendance at the meeting by contacting Mary Hetzel, Micah Associate at hetzelmary@comcast.net

Learn more here: micahrva.org
Retreats

CENTERING PRAYER GROUPS

Tuesdays, 4:45 - 5:45 p.m.
David Vinson, Facilitator
Tuesdays, 7:30 - 8:45 p.m.
Jerry Deans, Rev. Valorie King, Facilitators

Centering prayer is an ancient prayer method designed to facilitate the development of contemplative prayer by preparing us to cooperate with this gift. Each group is open to newcomers regardless of experience.

Contact: David Vinson at 783-7903 or hospitality@richmondhillva.org

DROP-IN GRIEF GROUP

Monthly, 4th Fridays, 10 – 11:30 a.m.
Sandy Gramling, Ph.D., Facilitator
Share experiences and obtain support from others who are experiencing a loss in a flexible group format. Discussion and reflection on the impact of loss, coping, meaning-making, etc. follows the brief presentation.

Preregistration is helpful but not required. Contact DeBorah Cannady at 804-783-7903 to register.

Retreats

LISTENING FOR THE SILENCE

Second Tuesday of Each Month | 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Arrive at Richmond Hill at 8:45 to begin this spiritual experience. Lunch and chapel are included. Bring your Bible and your journal but leave the cell phone in the car.

Suggested Donation: $20 (includes Lunch)
Facilitator: Rita Ricks, spiritual director and life coach.
She can be reached at www.speaktoyourspirit.com

Contact DeBorah Cannady at Richmond Hill to register 804-783-7903 or retreats@richmondhillva.org Please register in advance. Space is limited.

First Friday Retreats

First Friday of Each Month | 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

A day for quiet reflection and spiritual renewal. Structure and guidance will be provided for those who want it as well as the option for one-on-one spiritual direction, or you can simply spend the day in silence—your choice.

Suggested Donation: $20 (includes Lunch)
Facilitator: Mimi Weaver, spiritual director and life coach.
She can be reached at www.GraceMoves.com

Contact DeBorah Cannady at Richmond Hill to register 804-783-7903 or retreats@richmondhillva.org Please register in advance. Space is limited.

Koinonia School of Race & Justice: Unitive vs. Punitive Justice

Finding Grace in Race: U

nitive vs. Punitive Justice? The 3rd Koinonia lecture this Spring is a Panel Discussion — What we call justice is often little more than revenge. This expert panel takes on the question: How do we move from punitive justice to a broader position of restoring wholeness and unifying our communities?
RU AH XVI
SCHOOL OF SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE
New Class Begins September 2017

The RU AH School of Spiritual Guidance at Richmond Hill exists to identify and train persons in the ministry of spiritual guidance in the context of contemporary Christian spirituality. The school is a well-developed 2-year program of training which enables lay, professional and clergy persons to serve as spiritual guides within the context of their church, Christian community, or as a part of the Community of Richmond Hill. The first year focuses on the identification of the gift of spiritual guidance and provides opportunity for careful spiritual formation. The second year focuses on skill development and supervision in the context of developing one’s faith and gift in this area of ministry.

Applications are currently being receive for RU AH XVI, which begins September 2017. The program consists of monthly 24-hour retreats in the context of the rhythm of life of the Richmond Hill Community. Prayer and faith-sharing are a part of the discipline of all participants. Topics covered in the curriculum are: Use of scripture in discernment, listening, healing, forms of prayer, history of spirituality, dream work, social transformation, depth psychology, and many other topics. Participants read at least one book a month on the topic of the month.

If you are a person to whom people come for spiritual conversation, and believe you may be called to develop this charism; if you believe Christ wants each person to find God for themselves; and you wish to deepen your own sense of the Spirit’s leading, this program may be for you.

For more information, please contact Rev. Janie Walker, Co-Pastor and Dean of the RU AH School of Spiritual Guidance, at Richmond Hill. (804)783-7903 or jwalker@richmondhillva.org.

Koinonia means sharing in community. This School of Race & Justice provides a safe space and tools to address racism in ourselves and to build justice in our city. Lecture Topics include: History, diversity, shame, grief, lament, privilege, class, poverty, media, and law. Process Groups: These intentional small groups process each lecture personally and its implications for the city. Retreats: The retreats are designed to build community and delve deeper into our issues of race.

The deadline for applications is June 1. Cost: $1200. Some scholarship is available. For further information, please contact Rev. Janie Walker (804-783-7903), email: jwalker@richmondhillva.org

ENROLL NOW!

The Richmond Hill Urban Service Corps provides a rare opportunity to gain understanding of how the Holy Spirit engages with both the people and the social structures of a City as well as how the life of a Christian community can provide a powerful witness for the possibilities of reconciliation and healing in a metropolitan area.

The Richmond Hill Urban Service Corps is a one-to-two year commitment beginning in August of each year. Typically, we will have four servant-leaders in the Community per year.

Applications are due to Richmond Hill by May 1.

To inquire or apply, please contact Rev. Joel Blunk at (804) 783-7903 or jblunk@richmondhillva.org

Holy Week

April 11 - April 13

Join us for silent retreat from 7 a.m. Morning prayer through 6 p.m.

Evening prayer, Tuesday through Thursday of Holy Week, for prayer, study, and meditation. Come for any or all of the time.

A simple lunch will be served each day following mid-day prayer.
DAILY PRAYERS  
Morning 7:00 - 7:30 A.M.  
Noon 12:00 - 12:15 P.M.  
Evening 6:00 - 6:15 P.M.

COMMUNITY WORSHIP  
5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.  
Every Monday  
The community celebrates Holy Communion. Services are led by ministers of various denominations according to their traditions. We invite you to join us afterwards for dinner in the refectory.

PRAYING WITH THE SONGS OF TAIZÉ  
Jim Bennett, Leader  
7:30 p.m. first Monday of each month  
Taizé worship is contemplative and meditative in character, using short songs, repeated again and again in a candlelit chapel. The songs express a basic reality of faith, quickly grasped by the mind. The hope is this reality will gradually penetrate one’s whole being; thus the meditative singing becomes a way of listening to God. Our practice of Taize includes singing, prayer for Metropolitan Richmond, and a period of silence. Jim Bennett, a skilled musician, leads this time of worship with a variety of instruments.

SOAKING PRAYER SERVICE  
DeBorah Cannady, Leader  
1st Thursdays at 10:00 a.m. and 3rd Mondays at 7:30 p.m.  
Those struggling with illness have benefitted from being “soaked in prayer” over periods of time. Prayer ministers are available to pray with those desiring emotional, spiritual, or physical healing. Participants are invited to find a comfortable place, sit, relax, and receive prayer. Participants may also come and go during the service.

GENERATIONAL HEALING SERVICE  
5th Mondays at 7:30 p.m.  
Rev. Dr. Paula O. Parker, Leader  
Once a quarter, Richmond Hill offers a service for Generational Healing. This is an opportunity to invite God’s healing into your family, including generations that have gone before, as well as generations that will come after you. Participants are encouraged to bring the blessings as well as the pains and traumas of their ancestry written on a piece of paper (not to be shared). However, careful preparation of your personal genogram will help you pray more specifically for your family members. 
For those who might find it helpful, 2-hour preparation sessions will be facilitated by Rev. Parker on the following Tuesdays during 2017: Jan 17th, May 16th, July 25th and Oct 17th. For more information, call DeBorah Cannady at 783-7903.

Meditate, Journal, Create...  
Saturday, May 20, 9 am – 4 pm  
This retreat is about spending time in quiet reflection, prayer, or meditation while listening for God in your life. This time of prayer can be guided or on your own, as long as you remain in silence. At a designated time you will be asked to journal about your experience. How would your reflection look as a work of art? Come and enjoy the day in the beauty and sacred space of Richmond Hill.

Brenda Giannini, facilitator.  
Suggested donation $30. includes lunch and art materials.  
Note: bring your own journal.  
Sign-up: Deborah Cannady at 804-783-7903  
or retreats@richmondhillva.org

The Recovery Eucharist is a service devoted to healing and personal transformation found within 12-step spirituality and embodied in the Eucharist. A special invitation is extended to those recovering from any addiction and to those who desire to support people in recovery.  
Each 4th Tuesdays at 7:30 pm in Chapel.  
Leader: Rev. Herbert Jones

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2017 Summer Institute

The Evolving Enneagram
Monday, July 17, 4:00 p.m.
through Friday, July 21, 2:00 p.m.

At the heart of this 5-day retreat, participants will experience stillness, silence, and working from the “ground of our existence up” as we journey together. Symbols and movement will invoke an embodied foundation for reconnection with the infinite wealth of information of innate wholeness within each of us.

The Evolving Enneagram Institute will provide the foundational steps of the conscious journey towards fully embodying, embracing and empowering our lives — living deeply, and becoming fully alive.

Registration is limited to 40 people.
Registration must be confirmed by June 15, 2017. RUAAH Alumni Association members must register by April 15, 2017 to qualify for reduced registration cost. A non-refundable payment of $200 at time of registration is required to consider registration confirmed. The balance must be paid before start of institute. Some scholarships may be available upon request. Register during a visit to Richmond Hill. Ask at reception desk or office. Register online: www.richmondhillva.org

The Mission: The Healing and Transformation of Metro Richmond – So, how’s that going?

You are invited to attend the outdoor dedication of a Marker honoring Richmond Hill’s Building & Grounds as a Historic Landmark of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Tuesday, April 4th at 11:00 a.m.

to be followed by
Midday Prayers and Lunch

RSVP
retreats@richmondhillva.org – or – 804.783.7903

For almost 30 years, Richmond Hill has prayed, studied and worked hard for the healing and transformation of metropolitan Richmond. You may ask, “How’s that going?”

Coming in the May UPDATE newsletter you can find your link to take an online survey. You will find questions designed to gather your thoughts and feelings about Richmond Hill, its activities and its impact on the physical, emotional and spiritual health of the Richmond metropolitan area.

As you think about these questions, try to respond from the perspective of all the ways you may have interacted with Richmond Hill.

Your participation in this assessment process will provide valuable insights as to how Richmond Hill can better allocate its resources in our mission of praying and working for the healing of metropolitan Richmond. We will welcome your response and your insights.
April 2017

Metro Richmond at Prayer

In April:

Pray for the Spirit of the Resurrection in Metropolitan Richmond.

Share your comments, or sign up to receive our monthly UPDATE newsletter by emailing us your contact information: rrumbel@richmondhillva.org

Richmond Hill is an ecumenical Christian fellowship and intentional residential community who serve as stewards of an urban retreat center within the setting of a historic monastery. Our Mission is to seek God’s healing of Metropolitan Richmond through prayer, hospitality, racial reconciliation and spiritual development.