

Keeping Pace

The latest news from The Pace Center, VCU's Methodist Campus Ministry



Director's Letter

Dear Pace Supporters,

The past year has been a challenge for our campus, nation, and world. The pandemic has left a path of food and housing insecurities in its wake, racial inequities and political tensions threaten the fabric of our community, and feelings of anxiety and depression are on the rise. VCU's campus mirrors our society in so many ways: isolation is rampant on campus, divisiveness is all around, and food-insecurity touches over a third of all students. At Pace, we equip student leaders to take on these pervasive issues. For the past several years, Pace has worked with students to build a community where they feel their unique stories and gifts are valued. Pace embodies a place of abundance, a place of sharing and deep community where differences aren't something that tear us apart, but bring us together.

Last summer, during the protests following George Floyd's death, our building was severely damaged. Our broken windows and graffitied walls stood as a testament that Pace's healing work is needed now more than ever. During our time of struggle, Pace's supporters stepped up and gave new hope to our ministry. United Methodist Churches, their members, members of the Richmond community, and others drawn to our mission devoted their time, money, and energy, declaring hope in the future of Pace's ministry. Thank you. Because of your generosity, Pace endured. We became more clear in our mission, and our hope led us forward.

With your support, Pace was able to repair our building and welcome students in the fall as they arrived for an unprecedented school year. Throughout the pandemic, our student leaders worked tirelessly to offer safe but impactful ministries. I hope you enjoy reading about them in the pages that follow. I'm especially excited to tell you about the launch of our new Mentorship Program, and hope you will consider taking part.

Thank you again for your unrelenting trust in God's hope for Pace's ministry. Hundreds of students engaged with Pace this year as a vital place of community and hope. Thank you for your prayers and support as we continue this exciting work.

Rev. Katie B. Gooch
Director

A Welcoming Space on Campus



Pace leaders welcome students into a refurbished building.

VCU's campus was almost unrecognizable this school year. Courtyards, greenspaces and crosswalks, usually flooded with undergrads, were empty. Cabell Library was at one-third of its capacity. All indoor dining areas were shuttered, and students were not allowed to visit each other's dorms. When the rest of VCU closed its doors, the Pace Center opened theirs. Pace's interns worked to create a physically distanced study hall program, a place where students could safely leave their crowded dorms and apartments. Pace's famous Community Café - a \$1 meal prepared by students for students - was creatively redesigned. Students were able to reflect on what was happening in their lives with Pace's daily Pause and Reflect mindfulness events, and give back to the community by donating blood.

Community Café

Students from all backgrounds, cultures, and faiths came together to restart Pace's famous Community Café, an event where every Thursday, a different student cooks from their culture and shares a story of why the meal is meaningful to them.

Our determined student leaders got creative with Community Café's format and decided to host in-person, to-go, and remote components of the Café so that all students could still feel welcomed and engaged.

Students Katie C. and Samantha reached out to student orgs and other interested groups to secure each week's head chef. Ossan made sure that every meal had a cultural component that focused on the head chef's story and what the prepared dish personally meant to them. Sara, a fully remote student living in Northern VA, organized communications for each event. And Vicky, a student who found her love of cooking through the Community Café program, fostered each chef, making sure they could find their way around Pace's kitchen. Together, these students developed incredible leadership skills and made this new, hybrid Community Café a place where students could still gather, share a meal, and celebrate different cultures.



Students break from studying to attend Pace's Pause and Reflect

“Pace has given me the opportunity to make friends and connect with others, especially during covid.”

- Katie C., VCU sophomore and Engineering Major



Pace hosts nearly two dozen Red Cross Blood Drives this school year.

Pause and Reflect

Pace further addressed isolation on VCU's campus, by hosting dually in-person and remote Pause and Reflect sessions each day. During these 15 to 30 minute sessions, students were given a chance to pause for a moment from focusing on all the stresses of their online lives and to instead focus on all the things that bring them joy, peace, and gratitude.

This processing space became all too important as students gathered to reflect on the death of two fellow classmates this spring: a freshman who died during fraternity hazing and a junior, who was a beloved Teaching Assistant, killed by a random act of gun violence. Pace was one of the only campus organizations to host a reflection event and over 60 students, faculty, and staff gathered safely in our building and online to process these shared tragedies in community. Pace collaborated with VCU Presbyterian and Episcopal campus ministers as well as our own VCU Pace Social Work intern to provide care during this time.

Blood Drives

Pace's doors were open when we received a call from The American Red Cross. Pace worked tirelessly with the Virginia United Methodist Conference to be one of the first Methodist buildings to open its doors to The Red Cross, during a time when blood donations were at an all-time low. Pace's students partnered with other VCU student organizations to host almost two dozen blood drives throughout the school year. Two student leaders, Evan and Jordan, developed a program training students to be welcoming hosts and spark conversations amongst people waiting to donate, in a small but significant effort to combat isolation.

Open Doors

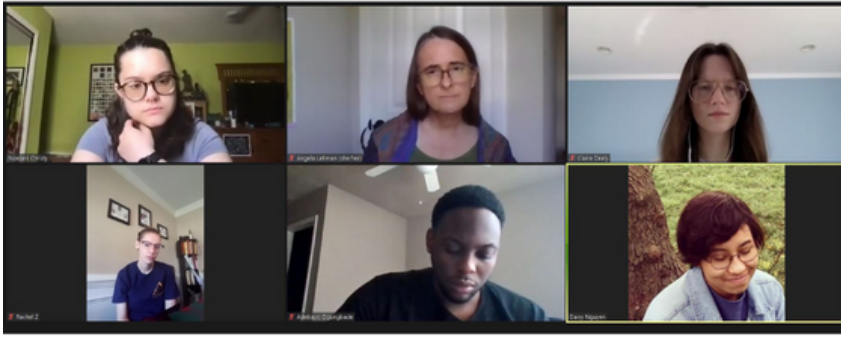
Pace was one of the only places on campus this year where VCU students were able to physically be with other students. Staff heard dozens of awe-struck realizations from students stating they hadn't physically seen anyone besides their roommates all week until they came to Pace. To quote one student, "Pace has been the biggest support system I've had this semester, and is the reason why I made it so far."

Thanks to generous donations, Pace's building was able to undergo renovations over the summer and fall, including the replacement of broken windows, installation of a new HVAC unit, and the encapsulation of broken asbestos floor tiles. Thanks to the support of donors and volunteers, Pace was able to provide a vital place of community on VCU's campus this year.



Student volunteers prepare for Community Café.

Nurturing Leaders



Students gather online for Community Conversation

During a time of divisions and turmoil, Pace fostered leaders who listen deeply to one another and respond lovingly to the way they are being called to use their gifts to serve their community.

Community Conversations

Pace's Community Conversations series provides space for students to share their diverse experiences. Each student is encouraged to learn about the experiences of others as they reflect on prompts crafted by student leaders.

This school year, students navigated themes such as violence against the Asian American community, the emotional and social effects of online classes, Covid fatigue, political advocacy, and student housing. Students are encouraged to share their impactful personal stories rather than argue their beliefs or political leanings. Through listening and reflecting on the stories of others in the conversation, students can engage with complex issues from another's perspective. As a result, these students' stories have the power to influence future beliefs and behaviors. Student leaders, Bayo, Noelani, and Claire, all stepped up to moderate these challenging conversations and guide students to a place of understanding. Leaders crafted topics, organized communications, and moderated discussions.

Fellowship Program

This year, Pace will launch its Fellowship Program. Created through a marriage of Pace's work-study internship program and volunteer student leaders, this program will instill servant leadership techniques, teach job skills, and help students expand their professional resumes. Students will be required to devote a minimum amount of time each semester to leading a Pace program. Fellows will come to future job interviews prepared to share real examples of impactful leadership and growth metrics.

Bible Reflection

Students gathered Friday mornings, online and at Pace, to read Scripture. Student leader Justin welcomed students from various Christian traditions to reflect on God's redeeming story and share how it impacts the way they are being called to live and serve in their communities.



Senior Bayo Ogungbade speaks at graduation. Pace students lead throughout campus. Bayo will attend Union Presbyterian Seminary in the fall and is in the process of becoming an ordained United Methodist elder.

“Pace has become something I look forward to every week. I was really considering not returning to campus [for the spring 2021] semester, but I didn’t want to miss out on the things we do at Pace.”

- Sam, VCU junior, undeclared

Community Connections

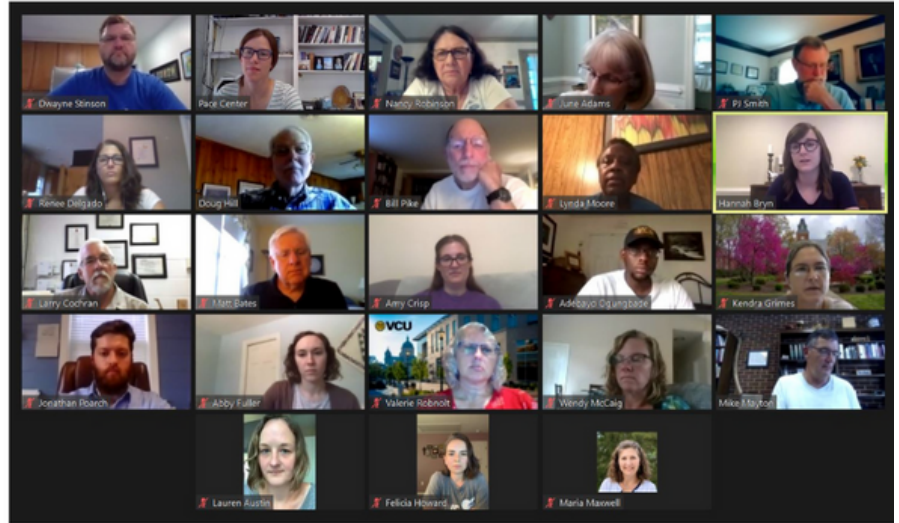
Pace is empowering students to become servant leaders both on campus and out in the greater Richmond community. Over the last year, the partnerships we have developed with church and community organizations have proven to be fruitful for all involved.

UMC Richmond District COVID Mission Task Force

During the summer of 2020, when COVID's devastating impact on local communities became clear, a United Methodist VCU student active at Pace asked, "What can we do to help Richmond's 66 Methodist churches help their communities?" One week later, over 100 UMC members working in the fields of health, education, and community development had responded to a Pace survey and attended a zoom meeting alongside UMC clergy to discuss ways Methodist churches could address the impact of COVID.



Students create cards of hope in English, Spanish, and Arabic to share with UMC food pantry guests and volunteers throughout Richmond.



United Methodist members and clergy gather to discuss ways to respond to the impact of COVID in their communities

Pace went on to develop the Richmond District Covid Mission Task Force in conjunction with the Richmond District Missions Board. The goal of the Task Force was to assess the missional needs of the greater-Richmond community, provide support for current missions, and be the catalyst for new initiatives throughout the district. Pace's two VCU Social Work interns lead twice-monthly meetings with Methodists who were passionate about missions.

The Task Force enabled food pantry leaders to share best practices, helped eager volunteers connect with ministries that were exhausted by overwhelming needs, produced a video compilation of the ways Richmond-area UMCs connected with their communities, and began a mapping project tracking the mission work of over 50 churches. This Task Force enabled Pace to connect over 3 dozen eager VCU students with the important work UMCs were doing in their communities. After a successful start, the Task Force plans to expand beyond Covid to continue uniting the Richmond District.

UM Day at the General Assembly and College Day of Action

In partnership with the Virginia Interfaith Center on Public Policy, Pace connected students all over the state with their elected officials. Students learned the impact people of faith can have on their communities by making their voices heard.

“Pace has given me a place to come and be myself. I love the environment that Pace brings and how at home I feel.”

- Arya, VCU senior and Information Technology Major

Mentorship Program

In spring 2021, Pace launched its highly successful pilot Mentorship Program. This program is designed to connect students who lack professional networks to adults in the Richmond community (especially Richmond-area United Methodist Church congregants). Mentors help guide the students' civic and professional aspirations and help them build their professional network, while also gaining the perspective of someone in a younger generation whose cultural background may differ from their own.

During the pilot, six students were paired with mentors based on the students' professional aspirations. After completing the program, student mentees largely reported feeling more prepared to join the workforce. They felt they had gained clarity on which courses and certifications to pursue and had enjoyed connecting with a professional who provided experiential knowledge of the mentee's desired field. Additionally, many were connected to internships or shadow opportunities.



Cherie, a VCU student and aspiring Radiologist was paired with Dr. Bob Downs, Professor Emeritus of Medicine at VCU and Reville UMC member.

Mentors benefited from the program as well. Some enjoyed the opportunity to share their professional and life advice with a young person in a way that they were never able to with their own children. Others noted it was nice to offer advice to an eager student who would genuinely value the information and opinions they offered. Mentors were especially appreciative that after rigorous training, their mentees were prepared to lead the meetings and ask specific questions pertaining to their goals.

Pace plans to offer a more robust version of the program in the fall. The more mentors in the pool, the better matches can be made. Pace encourages any member of the Richmond professional community to sign up. The program will require about 6 hours of input over the course of a semester. For more information and to sign up, visit thepacecenter.com

“Pace has allowed me to find and strengthen my gifts. It has also taught me how to find gifts in others and to embrace them as they help us grow close to one another. Pace has shown and defined what community means to me.”

- Maikah, VCU freshman and Nursing Major

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?



DONATE

by mail or online



BECOME A MENTOR

by online form



REFER A VCU STUDENT

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Visit www.thepacecenter.com to learn more

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