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Special session slated

UMCSC gearing up for virtual called special session Oct. 18

By Jessica Brodie

South Carolina United Methodists are gearing up for a virtual called special session next month that will vote on recommendations from the conference’s four Jeremiah Teams.

Set for Oct. 18 at 9 a.m., the called special session of Annual Conference will comprise clergy and lay members of the 2025 Annual Conference. They will vote on a slate of to-be-determined recommendations from the

Jeremiah Teams, which are in the finalization process now and should be before the body no later than Sept. 18 for review.

Bishop Leonard Fairley announced at Annual Conference that he was calling the special session to review the teams’ recommendations so far. Created by Fairley in November, the four Jeremiah Teams are tasked to assess and then transform how the conference is structured, how it operates and how it aligns with its stated priorities.

See “Special Session,” Page 12



Blessings for a new school year

Across the state, kids are heading back to school, and churches are doing what they can to support students and teachers with needs big and small. Here, St. Paul UMC, Greenville, does a school supply giveaway with stations throughout the church. See more, Page 18.

Two Hartsville UMCs share one space after church roof caves in

By Jessica Brodie

HARTSVILLE—The Rev. Mary Burnell remembers the feeling of utter shock that washed over her as she stared at the pictures on her cell phone just before Easter last year. Instead of the neat and lovingly tended altar she had preached God’s Word from the previous Sunday, she was aghast to see the sanctuary at Kellybell United Methodist Church in total disarray. Drywall, insulation and other debris rained down from a collapsed ceiling, leaving catastrophe behind.

“Everything was fine,” Burnell recalled, still shaking her head in disbelief. “We saw no sign of anything being wrong. We’d been there that Sunday, the choir did rehearsal ... but when Brother Leo went Saturday morning to open church for choir, that’s when he found the ceil-

See “Two Hartsville UMCs,” Page 24

Holy Grounds serves up coffee with a main course of Christian love

By Jessica Brodie

PELZER—Debbie Welborn didn’t drink coffee. She didn’t even know how to make coffee. So when God started telling her she needed to open a coffee ministry at Augusta Road United Methodist Church, she wasn’t the only one who thought the calling was bizarre.

Yet night after night, God wouldn’t let go. “I couldn’t sleep!” Welborn recalls. “I kept seeing visions of a coffee shop, kept hearing God tell me over and over, loud and clear, you need to do this. I mean, he was pounding on my head: ‘You are going to do this.’”

That was more than four and a half years ago, and today, the church is a thriving testament to one woman’s obedience—and one church’s willingness to take a chance and say yes.

See “Holy Grounds,” Page 13



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The *Advocate* maintains copies of back issues for sale for up to one year, as long as the supply lasts. Postage may apply. To research or review articles published more than one year ago, bound copies of the newspaper are available for review at the *Advocate* office, Wofford College in Spartanburg and the South Caroliniana Library in Columbia.

Deadlines
Deadlines are the 10th of each month for the following month’s paper (except July paper due June 6).

Letters and Op-Eds Policy
We welcome letters to the editor and commentary from guest writers who are members of or connected to United Methodist churches in South Carolina. Letters should not exceed 450 words, and commentary should not exceed 800 words. All submissions are subject to editing as needed to meet standards of grammar and style. We will not publish anonymous letters, letters praising or criticizing businesses by name, endorsements of or letters from political candidates, fundraising language or personal attacks. All submissions will be verified; include your name, phone number and church name with city and hometown. Email oped@advocatesc.org.

Obituaries
The *Advocate* prints death notices of clergy and their immediate families and laypersons who have served on conference boards and agencies or who work for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Photographs
Photographs can be submitted to the newspaper for publication. High-resolution digital color images are preferred. Photographs should be in focus and should have proper exposure. People in photographs should be identified with names and ages, and a contact person with a phone number should be included. Email news@advocatesc.org.

Submissions
The *Advocate* encourages readers to submit items of interest to South Carolina United Methodists. There is no charge for running items involving activities or announcements. Items should be submitted as far as possible in advance of the event’s date or the date of requested publication. They appear in the newspaper on a space-available basis. Email news@advocatesc.org.

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The *Advocate* is delivered via U.S. mail monthly. The cost is \$20/year (print and online) and \$10/year (online-only). Church plans are available for \$1/member (online plan, based on average weekly attendance per current UMCSC Journal) or \$10/member (print plan). To start your subscription, visit https://www.advocatesc.org/subscribe, call 803-726-6743 with credit card, or send a check (payable to *Advocate*) to the address above.

Young LUMC actor in short film addressing domestic violence

LEXINGTON—A young member at Lexington United Methodist Church got the chance to appear in a short film about a day in the life of a fictional woman experiencing intimate partner violence.

Evie Willis plays the daughter of the woman in the film, titled “Just Left of Perfect” and produced by Columbia’s domestic violence support charity Sistercare. The film premiered at the Nickelodeon Theater July 31 with an audience of influential leaders, officials and supporters.

Evie is the daughter of Elle and Billy Willis, longtime Lexington UMC members. Lexington UMC pastor the Rev. Mack McDowell said Evie has already raised more than \$1,000 to help Sistercare through her own efforts.

“Evie is an active child actor with great promise in drama, but also great faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” McDowell said.

The Willis family notes that 42 percent of South Carolina women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime, and our state consistently ranks among the highest in the nation for the rate of women killed by men. Every victim of domestic violence is a prisoner in their



Evie Willis plays the daughter in the film “Just Left of Perfect.”

own life, but they don’t have to walk that path alone.

Sistercare, a dedicated Midlands non-profit, works to reduce the occurrence and impact of domestic violence in the community. Their mission is to provide hope, healing and a sense of belonging to survivors of intimate partner violence and their children.

McDowell said he is currently in conversation with Sistercare about how their church can best support the ministry.

“I think Sistercare is a very worthwhile ministry, especially with its crisis line,” McDowell said. “Innocent people have been protected from danger because of

the mission and ministry that they offer. Praise God!”

Sistercare has been supporting domestic violence survivors and their children since 1981. In 2024, Sistercare served 3,881 domestic violence survivors and children across five counties by providing comprehensive services, including emergency shelter, 24/7 crisis line, legal representation and court advocacy, rural outreach, transitional housing, clinical counseling and health services advocacy.

“People who have never experienced intimate partner violence often don’t understand why victims stay,” says Sistercare CEO Leah Wicevic. “The hard truth is that leaving an abusive relationship is incredibly dangerous, and victims greatly fear being separated from their children. Victims of domestic violence are prisoners in their own lives. Although domestic violence is difficult to talk about, it is important for our community to learn of the everyday horrors that victims endure and how Sistercare is committed to offering non-judgmental help and support so they can live free from fear and violence.”

Learn more about Sistercare at https://www.sistercare.org. Watch the film at https://tinyurl.com/just-left-of-perfect.

Missional Priorities Jeremiah Team releases survey results

By the Rev. Matthew Alexander



More than 180 people responded to a Missional Priorities Survey that was conducted this year by the Missional Priorities Jeremiah Team.

At Annual Conference, the team hosted the survey to hear from laity and clergy in order to inform their work.

The Missional Priorities Jeremiah Team, chaired by the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith, is tasked with evaluating the effectiveness of all current ministries and missions to help determine what things are essential for us to live into Our 4 Priorities, including identifying a stop-do list to free us up to reach new people in new places and in new ways.

Regarding the survey, 182 people responded, offering their voices in the process of aligning the conference with “Our 4 Priorities.” Eighty-four laity and 98 clergy participated by answering ques-

tions about their personal journeys of discipleship, ways they gather information, their impressions of the conference’s greatest need and how conference ministries support disciple-making in their local church.

UMCSC’s greatest need
Considering the greatest needs of the South Carolina Annual Conference, laity and clergy agree that unity, young people and young voices, and communication rank near the top. However, laity were more likely to identify with a concern for finances/membership growth and the full inclusion of all people. Meanwhile, clergy were more likely to identify with a concern for

clarity of mission, evangelism and small/local church support.

Personal discipleship
Among laity and clergy, youth ministry/Salkehatchie, lay servant ministry and campus ministry received the most responses when asked about their own personal discipleship, with youth ministry/Salkehatchie receiving by far the most.

Local church discipleship
Laity identified Salkehatchie/youth ministry and lay servant ministry as the ministries which most benefit disciple-making in their local church.

Clergy call and preparation for ministry
Clergy most often identified youth ministry/Salkehatchie, the local church and campus ministry as ministries that contributed to their call and preparation for minis-

try. A large number of their responses included other clergy, naming pastors, colleagues, mentors and district superintendents as vital to their call.

Communication
Clergy and laity named email and the conference website, https://www.umcsc.org, as the primary means by which they gather information about what’s going on in the conference. Both also included the *Advocate* and social media posts in their top five. Finally, laity said their pastor was their third most common way of keeping up with conference happenings, while clergy named text messages as their third.

Alexander, a member of the Missional Priorities Jeremiah Team, pastors Trinity UMC, Aiken, and also serves as chair of the Board of Congregational Development for the Orangeburg District.

New AU solar power plant boosts self-reliance for students

By Farai Shawn Matiashe

When load shedding, introduced over the past two years, led to frequent electricity blackouts in the eastern part of Zimbabwe, Jose Tenete Domingos Lumboa and fellow students at Africa University had to deal with learning disruptions.

The university responded to these scheduled outages, meant to manage the demand for electricity from the national grid, with backup generators. However, that response brought its own set of challenges for students and university administration alike.

Apart from the noise and air pollution from the diesel-powered generators, the backup system did not run the whole night, and it was expensive.

“It was disruptive,” says Lumboa, a 26-year-old from Angola. “You have an assignment due, and you are still researching online, and if the electricity goes off, you cannot meet the deadline.”

Lumboa is lucky not to have missed the deadline for any of his assignments but says most of his fellow students have been missing deadlines because of rolling power cuts.

Now a new solar minigrid at AU, just outside Zimbabwe’s third-largest city of Mutare, is changing the lives of students like Lumboa. A 250-kilowatt solar power plant, which is the first phase of a larger project, was officially commissioned June 6. It has 590 solar panels, a 250 kilovolts inverter system and a 600-kilowatt-hour battery bank. The lithium batteries have a lifespan of 25 years.

The entire project is being funded by Africa University (Tennessee) Inc., set up in 1992 to enable the founding of Africa University in Zimbabwe and to provide the resources to grow and sustain the university long-term.

“No donor provided funding for this project, and that is the uniqueness of it. That is what I am talking about, sustainability,” says James Salley, president and chief executive officer of Africa University (Tennessee) Inc. and the associate vice chancellor for institutional advancement at Africa University in Zimbabwe.

Although it is currently only 50 percent complete, the solar plant is providing uninterrupted power to AU’s main campus, including student hostels and laboratories.



Conference at 47.8 percent in apportionments as of July 31

By Jessica Brodie

Annual conference financial leaders have released a report with apportionments performance as of July 31.

Of the \$11.7 million budgeted for 2025, South Carolina United Methodist churches have paid \$5.6 million of the total, or 47.8 percent. That amount includes the apportionment rebate from the Conference Council on Finance and Administration because of the separation fees from churches that separated from the denomination in 2024.

Conference Treasurer Beth Westbury said that percentage compares favorably with the percent collected in 2024, which was 47.2 percent.

However, she noted, “While the

percentage collected is favorable, note that the 2025 budget is nearly \$1.5 million lower than the 2024 budget, resulting in lower financial resources available to do mission and ministry across the state.”

Without the rebate, the apportionments paid to date are \$4.8 million, or 40.9 percent.

“We are grateful for the churches that continue to support the mission and ministry that the United Methodist Church performs at the state level,” Westbury said.

Of the 714 churches that pay apportionments in the conference, 12 percent have already paid 100 percent of their apportionments, while 41 percent have paid nothing toward apportion-

ments. Last year at this time, of the 836 churches total, 12 percent had paid 100 percent while 35 percent had paid zero.

“Of course, some of the increase in nonpaying churches is likely to be churches in litigation with the conference,” Westbury noted.

Among the 12 districts, the Walterboro District is in first place as with 58.8 percent as of July 31, followed by Orangeburg and Marion in second and third place with 55.1 percent and 54.7 percent, respectively.

The last day to pay apportionments for 2025 is Thursday, Jan. 15, 2026. The payment must be in the treasurer’s office by 4 p.m.

Westbury said the postmark is not

the deciding factor and the treasurer’s office is not responsible for delivery delays regardless of which carrier is used. They can accept wires if necessary, but remember that wires are expensive to send and receive. If paying by Vanco, the payment needs to be initiated by 3 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 14.

The 2026 apportionments were sent to churches in late July so they can include them in their budgeting process. Because of the rising cost of postage, the treasurer’s office will not do a mass mailing as they have done in the past. If you need a 2026 statement mailed to you, please call the conference at 803-786-9486 to request it.

They will begin accepting payments for 2026 on Jan. 21, 2026.

Leadership convocation to help clergy grow in bold new ways

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—United Methodist pastors across South Carolina will head to Journey United Methodist Church Sept. 8-10 for a multiday leadership convocation designed to help them grow in number, impact and purpose through bold evangelism, digital innovation and culturally aware outreach.

Called “Leadership Convocation: Lights, Camera, Action!”, and drawing from Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:47, the free event will feature a hefty lineup of gifted preachers, teachers and leaders, including South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley.

Organizers said the “lights, camera, action” theme is all about growth.

The “lights” aspect will teach leaders how to shine the gospel clearly and widely, be seen and be present, fully visible in the digital age online and on the ground.

The “camera” aspect will help leaders focus the mission and refine the vision of the church. As organizers note, the church must be the camera, considering where we are pointing our lens and refocusing on discipleship and community impact.

The “action” aspect will help leaders move strategically and boldly with purpose and power, engaging, equipping and expanding.

Scholarships will be available to offset hotel costs.

Fairley will teach on “The Mission

Still Matters.” Other leaders and teachers are as follows:

- Dr. Martin L. Quick, Cumberland UMC, host, “Digital Ministry”
- Rev. Emily Scales Sutton, Bethel UMC, convocation host
- Rev. Dr. George Ashford, Journey UMC, host, “Your Church Can Grow”
- Dr. Teresa Fry-Brown, Candler School of Theology, “Preaching That Connects & Transforms”
- Jason Moore, Midnight Oil Productions “Framing the Future: Technology, Ministry and AI”
- Dr. Meranda Esters, Kr8tively ME, “Technology Assessment”
- Chris Lynch, congregational specialist, “Best Practices”
- Rev. James Friday, congregational development, “Evangelism and Community Impact”
- Rev. Fran Elrod, district superintendent, “Pastoral Care in a Hurting World”
- Rev. LaTonya Dash, disaster response, “Church and Community Impact”
- Rev. Amiri Hooker, congregational specialist, “Church and Community

Impact”

- Rev. Karen Jones, Open Hearts UMC, “Church and Community Impact”
- Dr. Cathy Jamieson, Grace UMC, North Augusta, “Mindfulness Moments”
- Rev. Valerie Mireb, Grace UMC, Pickens, “Mindfulness Moments”
- Rev. Tyler Strange, Carolina Forest UMC, “Best Practices”
- Rev. Mallory Nickerson, Rock Hill Circuit, “Best Practices”
- Ward Smith, disaster recovery, “Best Practices”
- Rev. Deborah Patterson, The Brook UMC, “Best Practices”
- Rev. Matt Alexander, Trinity UMC, Aiken, “Best Practices”

This is a hands-on learning opportunity, and all attendees are asked to bring an electronic device (laptop, tablet or smartphone).

For questions, email gaashford@umcsc.org.

Register by Sept. 1 at https://www.umcsc.org/lights_camera_action_pastors_convocation.

Tri-district discipleship workshops slated for fall

United Methodists across South Carolina will get an opportunity this fall to learn how to more effectively make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Through tri-district workshops called “Follow Me ... Together,” participants will learn practical, effective ways to make and grow disciples in their church and community.

Connecting with and growing disciples is one of the four priorities of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, and as United Methodists, our mission is to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

But as Congregational Specialist Chris Lynch notes, making disciples doesn’t happen randomly. In order to effectively make disciples of Jesus Christ, a congregation needs a plan or a system that is designed for their context that allows disciples on any point in their faith journey to move to the next step in that journey as they grow toward maturity as a disciple.

As Lynch notes, having an intentional discipleship process will help your congregation be able to define what a disciple is; what characteristics of a disciple you want to focus on developing; and create a step by step pathway for disciples to reach spiritual maturity.

The workshops will be held on the following dates:

- Oct. 11: (For Greenville, Anderson, Spartanburg) at Lee Road UMC, Taylors

- Oct. 11: (For Walterboro, Charleston, Orangeburg) at Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville
- Nov. 8: (For Florence, Marion, Hartsville) at Highland Park UMC, Florence
- Nov. 22: (For Columbia, Rock Hill, Greenwood) at Trinity UMC, Blythewood

“Follow Me ... Together” is a follow up to the Conference Connectional Ministries sermon resources titled “Come Follow Me.”

The workshop is designed to be a beginning point for churches to create and ultimately implement a plan for intentional discipleship growth.

Congregations are encouraged to send a small team (four to six persons) from each church to participate in the workshop.

Ample time will be given for this small group to work through the process of laying a foundation that will eventually become the congregation’s Intentional Discipleship Process.

By the end of the retreat, the congregation will have a framework for an Intentional Discipleship System with instructions and resources to help them complete the system and implement it into the life of their congregation post-workshop.

Registration is coming soon and will be available at <https://www.umcsc.org>.

For questions, email clynch@umcsc.org.

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Editorial
by Jessica Brodie

Countering
worldly apathy

In the last few years, certain celebrities—celebrities never before associated with Christianity—began to start making surprising new claims: They now follow Jesus. People like tattoo artist Kat Von D and performer Russell Brand, known for their edgy and sometimes-provocative lifestyles, started getting baptized and using their platforms to tell other people about Jesus. Amid a culture that seems to be becoming decidedly more secular, their conversion stories are making waves. Between that, revivals on college campuses and other big, bold public proclamations of Christ, it’s become clear that, at least among some, Christianity is still moving powerfully and rebelliously despite a culture that often seems in opposition to Christian values.

Yet statistics continue to show our faith is on the decline. Findings from the most recent Religious Landscape Study indicate a 16 point drop in the number of adult Christians since 2007. Currently, only about 63 percent of American adults identify as Christian.

“I’m just not into religion,” I overheard a man say recently, when asked about his faith. “It doesn’t mean anything to me.”

How do we, as United Methodists, counter that sort of apathy in the world today? How do we make people care about Jesus, about Christianity, about faith at all in a world that feels decidedly lukewarm and overly tolerant about a belief in generic spirituality—or in nothing at all?

One thing we might consider is prayerfully embracing the new vision adopted this spring by the United Methodist Council of Bishops.

In May, the bishops adopted a new vision statement: “The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.” The vision is meant to complement the UMC’s longstanding mission statement, inspired by Matthew 28:1-20: “The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

Boldly. Joyfully. Courageously. Those don’t sound like apathetic or lukewarm qualifiers to me. Neither do the words they modify, either. How do you love halfway? Serve partially? Lead only slightly? You don’t.

If you’re loving, serving and leading, you’re all-in. And if you’re loving, serving and leading boldly, joyfully and courageously, well—that sounds like the sort of headline-prompting, wave-making stands these celebrities are making.

Consider your own church, your own ministry passions and your own household for a moment. Are you loving boldly, serving joyfully and leading courageously?

If not, what would it look like to do so? How could you pivot and change to reflect the sort of all-in evangelism our world so desperately needs today to counter the apathy of the masses?

Let’s pray ... and then let’s move together in the Spirit so all can have access to the life-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ.



Bishop’s Column
by Bishop Leonard Fairley

How long, oh Lord?

I write this month’s article on a Sunday morning before getting dressed for church. I will be preaching a celebration of two merging churches using as a text Jesus’ “Farewell Discourse”: “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one” (John 17:20).

I write this article with a heaviness of heart, as I must confess that my soul is weary after watching a week of news cycles filled with violence, war, climate disasters, political upheaval and polarization played out on social media platforms.

In the middle of all this, on a Sunday morning, no doubt, I find it ironic that a bishop of the church would have the lyrics from a rock band playing in his head.

The song, by Supertramp, is called “Lord Is It Mine” (I encourage you to look up the lyrics).

I find myself crying out with the psalmist, “How long, O Lord? Will you forget (us) forever? How long will you hide your face from (us)? How long must (we) bear pain in (our) soul and have sorrow in (our) heart all day long” (Psalm 13:1-2).

Yes, the pain and despair are real for so many people in our world, and yet there is hope that hopes against hope itself as we pray with the hymn writer, “God of grace and God of glory ... grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour. Cure thy

children’s warring madness, bend our pride to thy control.”

Even in our cries of how long, we still join the psalmist in declaring, “But (we) trust in your steadfast love; (our) heart shall rejoice in your salvation.”

I have no idea if any of this article will resonate or make sense to anybody, but it was on my mind on a Sunday morning of all days.

I close with a poem I have written, titled “Heart of Peace.”

Heart of Peace by Leonard E. Fairley

When there is nothing left to fight for, and true healing begins. When all that is left of warring hearts are spirits of peace that are no longer searching for other battles to fight.

When there are no ideologies to defend, no allegiances worth dying or killing for, when the blood lust is cleansed from our souls, this alone will enable holy transformation.

When belief in Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace becomes true to its purpose, when we lay down our theological weapons of self-righteousness that sow the seeds of “Us” versus “Them.”

When extremes are no longer viewed as absolutes, when the only non-negotiable core value becomes unconditional love creating rivers flowing from hearts peace.

Appointment Changes.

Bishop Leonard Fairley has announced the following changes of appointment:

Effective June 25, 2025
Charleston: Hibben – Sara White (RE)
Hartsville: Zion-Zoar – Terri Schell (PL) (1/2)
Orangeburg: Pine Hill – Jim Smyrl (OR 346.2) (1/2)
Orangeburg: St. Paul, New Ellenton – Raymond Camp (OR 346.1)

Effective June 30, 2025
Florence: Mount Zion, Kingstree – Walter Strawther

Effective July 1, 2025
Anderson: North Anderson Charge – John Verburg (SY) (1/2)

Effective Aug. 17, 2025
Rock Hill: Kershaw Charge – Michael Walker (RE)

Corrections.

In the August *Advocate*, the front page should have noted it is issue No. 8, and we misspelled the name of Francis Burns United Methodist Church, Columbia.

Also, in the article “First Same-

Sex Wedding Held in a South Carolina UMC,” we should have stated it is the first officially acknowledged or known wedding in a South Carolina UMC.

And on Page 12, the caption

should have noted the pastor of the new church start in Carolina Forest was the Rev. Tyler Strange.

We apologize for these errors and, as always, strive to set the record straight.

Letters to the Editor.

Salkehatchie 2025
Salkehatchie would like to thank everyone for another successful summer.
There were 1,022 participants, 27 camps and nearly 80 homes repaired. In extremely hot conditions, roofs, bathrooms and floors were repaired.
There were many “God moments,” and Christ touched many lives.
A special thanks to Bishop Fairley for his visit and

blessing to the workers and homeowners.
We encourage the churches to send their youth to Salkehatchie because the need is great.
It is a holy experience.

Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia

See “Letters,” Page 5



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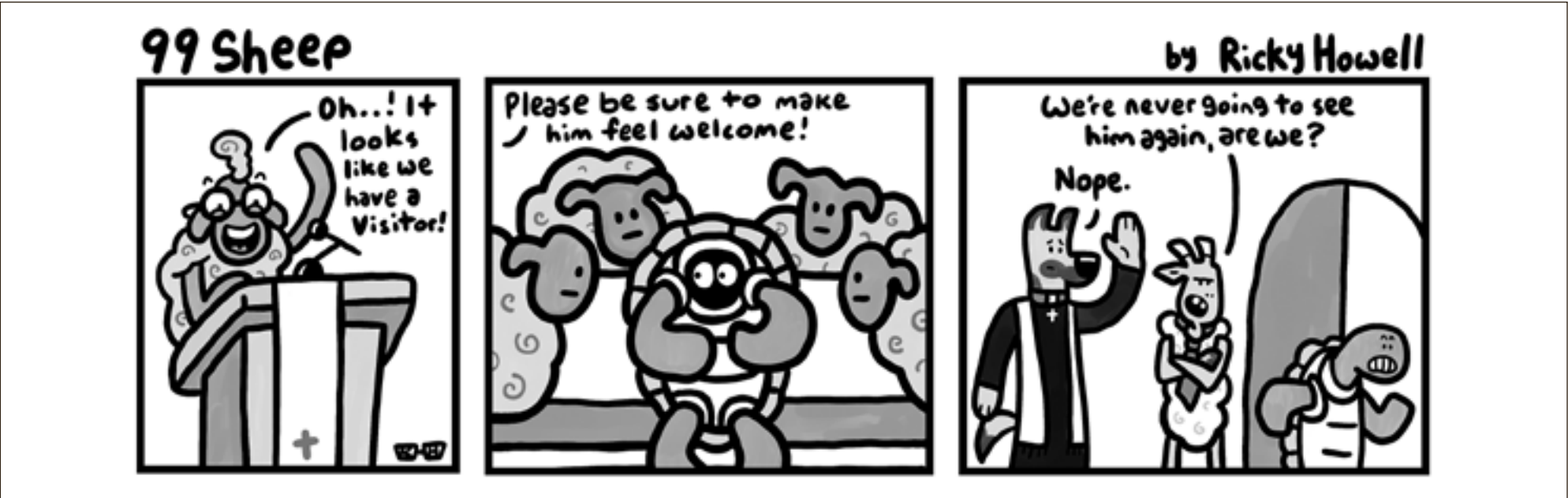
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The South Carolina United Methodist Advocate (ISSN 1078-8166) continues the Southern Christian Advocate, authorized by the General Conference of 1836. Publication began June 24, 1837. The paper is published monthly by the South Carolina United Methodist Advocate Board of Trustees. We cannot be responsible for unsolicited manuscripts. Please direct all inquiries regarding submissions to the editor, 4908 Colonial Drive, Suite 207, Columbia, SC 29203-6070. Periodicals postage paid at Columbia, S.C. Postmaster: Send address changes to: South Carolina United Methodist Advocate, 4908 Colonial Drive, Suite 207, Columbia, SC 29203.

September 2025 • Volume 189 • No. 9



Humanity Behind Bars
by the Rev. Nichole Middleton

Whose responsibility?

There is a rising ache in our time—a quiet tension pulsing through headlines, policies and daily decisions. Too often, the most vulnerable bear the weight of choices made far from their lived realities.

We see it in the dismantling of programs created to support the poor. In policies that punish rather than protect those seeking refuge. In how we disregard people living with mental illness, those struggling to belong or those carrying the burden of past mistakes. These realities are complex, but they raise a deeper question: Who is looking out for those on the margins? Who will stand with them?

Even now—perhaps especially now—some find hope because someone chose not to turn away. Someone paused to notice. To speak kindness into a weary soul. To reach for the hand the world refused—and to believe in the dignity still rising within.

Sometimes it is a teacher, a neighbor, a pastor or a friend. Sometimes it is the quiet grace of someone who loves like Christ—who decides that compassion matters more than comfort.

But what of those whose pasts include real harm? Those who have been incarcerated, who seek a new path, who testify to the slow, painful work of transformation? What happens when they encounter Christ, receive forgiveness and begin again—but the world refuses to believe in their redemption?

Who is responsible for them?

This is not a new question. It echoes in the story of Saul—once a violent persecutor of the church—whose encounter with Christ changed everything. But even after his transformation, the community remained afraid. It took Ananias, a faithful believer, to risk drawing near and call him “brother.” And it took the church to believe that grace could do what fear could not: welcome him in.

Paul’s story reminds us that redemption is possible, but it often requires a community willing to believe in it, support it and help nurture it into wholeness.

Ananias teaches us how to show up when others step back—to lean into discomfort, to draw near when it would be easier to turn away, to affirm when others reject and to trust that grace can make the impossible possible.

The church can still be that place. We are called to stand beside the newly redeemed—bearing witness, praying boldly and staying when others walk away. Not to rescue, but to be present and to remind the world that transformation is not a myth but a mystery of grace—and that even in the hardest places, God is already there.

Many carry their past like a shackle—a chain the world refuses to unlock. But we follow a Savior who breaks chains.

Forgiveness does not ask us to ignore the past. But it does ask us to see beyond it—to believe that no one is only the worst thing they have done. That grace, embodied in community, opens doors the world has closed.

May we be that church. May we trust that when we embrace the uncertain with faith and extend compassion without condition, we join God’s work of making all things new.

Middleton is an elder in the South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, endorsed by the United Methodist Endorsing Agency for prison ministry. She serves as a chaplain in the federal prison system, dedicating her work to providing spiritual care, advocating for justice and supporting the transformation and reintegration of incarcerated individuals.

Reflection topic for October Advocate

How is my church loving boldly, serving joyfully or leading courageously? How could it do so?
Share with the Advocate at oped@advocatesc.org
(include church name/city).

LETTERS

From Page 4

Help needed

On behalf of my son Christopher and other disabled children of aging parent(s) like him, I appeal to this conference to start a new ministry. Given my age of 85 years, and Christopher’s at 48 years, it may be too late to help us personally, but it is a ministry that desperately needs to be done.

You already know our family’s story if we served in your district during our 22 years of parish ministry. The Jennings family, Charles and Patricia, and the five special children we adopted during the first 25 years of our 60 years together. We lost Patricia to God’s great kingdom almost two years ago. She was honored in the Record of Remembrance at Annual Conference 2024. She and I were awarded South Carolina Adopted Parents of the Year 1979. Because of his disabilities, Christopher still lives at home, now with just me. We have a personal care worker who comes each morning and helps us get started with the day. Our need, and one which a new ministry could solve, is provision for a church-sponsored residence with proper care for Christopher when I die.

Christopher sang in UMC choirs with some of the churches I served and was always welcomed and appreciated. From Anderson, Rock Hill, Florence, Charleston and Spartanburg districts, we were blessed by the churches and their members. Christopher has always been socially active in the communities where we lived and would not survive long in an institutional or nursing home setting.

The first question often asked by church friends is why don’t you contact Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry for help. Aldersgate is doing great ministry for many men and women with autism and intellectual disabilities. It provides loving care in seven group homes across our state. But Aldersgate is self limited to serve only intellectually disabled children of aging parents. Christopher was born with cerebral palsy along with intellectual disability. Although he drives himself around in his motorized wheelchair and turns on his own television and music player, he needs more care than Aldersgate is organized to provide.

Which is why I make this appeal. There are many others like Christopher who cannot be served by

Aldersgate. As I always say, “Chris and I are not getting any younger.” We need your help, please.
Rev. Charles T. Jennings, retired
Myrtle Beach

Time to jump in

A great Zen master asked an initiate to sit by a stream until he heard all the water had to teach. After days of bending his mind around the scene, a small monkey happened by and, in one seeming bound of joy, splashed about in the stream. The initiate wept and returned to his teacher, who scolded him lovingly, “The monkey heard. You just listened.”—From “The Book of Awakenings” by Mark Nepo

Nepo described the river as life, which is a perfectly good analogy, and I connect with this. But this story also made me think of my life as a Christian. How many times do we go to church, participate in the hymn singing, listen to the sermon, read the lesson, study the Scripture with our Sunday school, all as if this is what it means to be a Christian, as if this is enough? Do we merely sit by the river and listen? Or do we hear the river’s call and joyfully jump in, fully participating in the fullness of love, service and community in our world? These days, we need more people jumping.

To sit by the river is to be a Christian in name only. There’s a lot of that going around. I am struggling with our world, our country, with people of faith who stand by and allow so much indignity, inhumanity and disregard for life, all in the name of political punditry.

As a country, we have the capacity to feed, educate, house, employ and provide decent health care for everyone in meaningful ways, not just “handouts.” If we wanted to do it, we could. And we don’t. In fact, we regulate it to death or vote it all out. And when a convoy from Mexico comes to help with flood recovery in Texas, ICE shows up and sends them home. When love shows up at our door, we deport it. This is not right and counter to everything Christian.

We’re sitting by the river. I believe that if we don’t jump in, in time this river will rise with the tears of the heartbroken and oppressed and will flood us all, if not in our physical lives, then in our spiritual ones.

Kristen Sojourner, member
Gilbert UMC, Gilbert



Commentary
by the Rev. Amiri Hooker

‘A Poem for the Church that Slept’

When they came for foreign aid,
We looked the other way—
Said, “That’s for Africa, not here,
“Just orphans and dusty prayers far
from our pews.”
We sang our songs,
While they silenced whole continents
with a budget cut.

When they came for education—
For HBCUs, for DEI, for the tired
hands building futures—
We adjusted our tone,
Put on our neutral voice,
Whispered, “We code switch fine,
they won’t come for us.”
But the scholarship pages turned
blank.

When they came for Harvard and
Yale,
We laughed behind closed doors—
“Let the elites feel the fire for once,”
As if endowments could out-pray
injustice,
As if ivy walls were made of more
than vines.

When they came for the stories—
The Smithsonian, the ancestors in
glass,
The Black librarians archiving truth—
We shrugged, “We still got books at
home.”
But then they started banning those,
too.

And now—
My son just tossed his graduation cap
As his classmates ran down the halls,
Tears mixing with dreams and debt.
No notice.
Just locked gates, closed dorms,
A future paused by the same hands

That swore they’d lift it.

When Job Corps fell,
So did the silence.
Too late for mourning.
Too soon for forgiveness.

And still—
The church stood quiet.
Too busy branding revival
To smell the smoke of dismantled
hope.
Too busy planning sermons
To hear God weeping with the unem-
ployed.

But remember—
First, they come for the ones you’re
not.
Then, they come for you.

So now they come for pulpits.
For prophets who won’t comply.
For churches with murals of Jesus
too brown,
For choirs who won’t sing national
pride.

Let’s make it personal—
Before the stained glass shatters,
Before communion turns to silence,
Before they shut down salvation
Like they shut down the centers
Where our children dared to dream.

Let us not be the last to speak.
Let us not wait
To be the final ones they come for.

Amen. Ashay. Wake up.

Hooker is a South Carolina United Methodist elder and a congregational specialist.

Youthful leadership
Manning UMC, Manning,
held their Youth Sunday
Aug. 3. Youth performed
all functions of the wor-
ship service, including
the sermon, which was
provided by Garek Parker
(pictured).

Photo courtesy of Kelly
Gottheiner



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Commentary
by Martha Cooke

Martha’s story

I grew up attending Trinity United Methodist Church in West Columbia. From an early age, I learned that God is love and that I was a child of God. As a teen, I was active in the Methodist Youth Fellowship, served as an acolyte and sang in the choir.

At age 14, I attended a UMC summer camp called Impactivity Week at Spartanburg Methodist College, where I experienced two life-changing revelations. The first happened during one of the nightly chapel services. I felt a powerful inner knowing that God existed and loved me unconditionally. The second revelation was an undeniable attraction I felt to another girl at camp. I hung around her and her group the whole week. We kept in touch for over a year. I never told her or anyone else about my feelings. It was an innocent schoolgirl crush and deeply confusing. In my world, girls grew up, married boys and started families. I was afraid to ask for guidance or support for what I was feeling. A year later, I learned the name for how I felt: “Homosexual.”

As a high school sophomore, I was assigned to write a paper on anything health-related. I chose homosexuality, hoping to understand myself. Everything I found described it as a “mental disorder.” When I asked my mother about the church’s view, she told me, “It is incompatible with Christian teaching.” Her response, combined with the lack of open discussion in my church, left me overwhelmed with fear and a deep sense of inadequacy.

I carried this secret throughout high school. I dated boys while hiding my real feelings. Although I became aware of other homosexual students, I was too afraid to confide in anyone.

Just before my senior year, we moved to North Carolina for my dad’s work. Typical teenage insecurities and the fear of being “found out” made the move more difficult. Most of my new friends went to the local First Baptist Church, and I occasionally joined them.

One night in spring 1982, I attended a movie night at that church. The film depicted the rapture, with graphic scenes of “left behind” people—including homosexuals—being decapitated. I walked out to the church playground and just sobbed. I still believed in God’s love for me, but that night I gained a real fear of “God’s people.”

A couple of months later, I came out to my mother. I was met not with love and encouragement, but warnings. She painted a dismal future of separation from God and the church if I “chose” this path, which she called a “dead-end road.” I was devastated and felt more alone than ever. I had not “chosen” this path, and I couldn’t change it.

In my mid-20s, I was spiritually starving. I found the Metropolitan Community Church of Columbia, a non-denominational LGBTQ-affirming fellowship, and became deeply involved with them.

Over the next two decades I met countless people disowned by their families and churches. The hate we received from politicians, televangelists and “street preachers” at Pride events was relentless.

I cannot describe the pain of being targeted by ignorant people and suffering the condemnation and cruelty for decades. No one deserves to be treated this way.

People in my community face marginalization, violence and discrimination every day. I’ve learned that love and fear are the root of all actions. Those who oppress and legislate our lives act in fear, masked as hate.

Some progress has been made. We’ve won some basic civil rights, the right to marry in many places and protection from discrimination in certain cases. Change has come slowly—but it has come.

In the summer of 2024, I learned that the General Conference of the UMC had overwhelmingly voted (523-161) to redefine marriage and end its official condemnation of homosexuality. I had mixed emotions—hope for the future and pain from the past. One-fourth of UMC churches in South Carolina chose to leave the denomination, most over this issue. Watching that exodus was heartbreaking. It felt like one-fourth of the churches in South Carolina would rather disaffiliate than to extend love to people like me.

I returned to Trinity in hopes of supporting them during this transition. I asked the pastor if they’d gone through a discernment process or vote. The response was, “No, and we’re not going to. That would cause division.” Those words cut right through my soul. It brought back my southern upbringing of not discussing “unpleasant” things. My existence, once again, was treated as being unpleasant.

My faith teaches me to treat people with kindness and respect. Jesus was a revolutionary figure who challenged the religious and social establishment. His Sermon on the Mount directly contradicted the judgmental attitudes of religious leaders and emphasized love and compassion.

The church today remains silent while others are oppressed. Silence is complicity.

I continue to support Trinity, but I will not hide who I am. It took me more than 40 years to fully accept and love myself. Too many in our society still oppress those who don’t conform. Silence and inaction are deadly. As a teen, I was deeply affected by both loud and silent messages of fear. They shaped my life, traumatized me and alienated me from family, friends and the church. My hope is that we do not repeat those mistakes today.

According to the CDC (2022), suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth ages 10 to 14 and third leading cause among those ages 15 to 24. LGBTQ+ young people are more than four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers.

The Trevor Project estimates that more than 1.8 million LGBTQ+ youth (ages 13-24) seriously consider suicide each year in the U.S., and at least one attempts suicide every 45 seconds.

This is not just about doctrines or tradition.

It’s about lives.

Cooke attends Trinity UMC, West Columbia.



Commentary
by Sandy Thrasher

Rest, wonder and the
goodness of God

As the plane lifted off from Anchorage, I looked out the window one last time at the rugged mountains, endless sky and winding rivers below, and I felt something settle deep in my soul. Peace. Not because everything in life was suddenly quiet or perfect, but because I had caught a glimpse of something bigger than myself.

This trip to the Yukon and Alaska wasn't just a vacation. It was an unexpected reminder of God's presence in the vastness of nature, in the joy of connection and in the sacredness of rest, even the kind that comes while you're still on the move.

Everywhere we went, I was overwhelmed by beauty. Purple fireweed growing wild on the side of the highway. Moose wandering near trails. Bald eagles soaring through the sky. Denali, in all its glory, clearly visible, covered in snow. Glaciers that looked like frozen time. There were moments I literally had to stop and say, "How can anyone see this and not believe in God?"

In the Yukon, a quiet stillness lingered in the air that felt holy. Dawson City, with its mix of old-time grit and natural charm, reminded me that you don't need noise or speed to be alive, just a sense of wonder. The people there trust one another, wave at strangers and hitch rides without worry. There was something pure about it, a community rhythm that mirrored the heart of the gospel: simplicity, kindness and shared humanity.

Travel can be exhausting, and truthfully, this trip was packed—planes, buses, trains, time zone shifts, tours and early mornings. But in the middle of the motion, I found deep rest. It's the kind Jesus talks about in Matthew 11:28: "Come to me, all you who are weary ... and I will give you rest." I didn't need a hammock or a weekend with nothing to do (though I wouldn't say no to one). I needed to be reminded that rest is not always about stopping. Sometimes it's about noticing.

Noticing beauty. Noticing laughter. Noticing that the sun doesn't really set in Fairbanks and that somehow, life still finds rhythm there.

I think that's how God moves, too. Sometimes quietly, almost like the midnight sun slipping below the horizon, but never quite leaving.

Being United Methodist, I've always found comfort in the idea of grace showing up in ordinary moments. We believe in prevenient grace, God going ahead of us, preparing the way. I saw that over and over again on this trip—in the people I met. In the peaceful moments I didn't expect. In the protection during long days and travel hiccups. In the laughter of friends and in the quiet when no one was talking but everything still felt full.

This trip renewed me in a way I didn't know I needed. It reminded me of the power of God's creation and the importance of taking time to really see it. Not just to snap a picture, but to let it move me. To feel small in the best possible way. To remember that God is not only present in churches and quiet devotions, but in glaciers, rivers and purple flowers that bloom through gravel.

I went looking for an adventure. I found wonder, peace and rest. I found reminders of the goodness of God in a land I'd never seen before, and it strengthened the faith I've carried for a long time.

If there's anything I took away from this journey, it's that beauty is always trying to get our attention. We just have to be still long enough, or even just aware enough, to notice.

So now that I'm home, I'm asking myself: How do I keep seeing glimmers of that same grace in my day-to-day life? In my classroom, in my family, in the people I serve and love?

I may not be in Alaska anymore, but God's goodness hasn't gone anywhere.

The same God who paints the mountains and stretches out rivers also whispers peace into our busy lives. And for that, I am thankful.

Thrasher is lay leader for the Anderson District of the South Carolina Conference of the UMC.



Commentary
by the Rev. Matt Lacey

Remembering our collective calling

It was a sight that made me proud to be a United Methodist and a clergyperson. Along with other United Methodists and faith leaders around the world, I stood side by side with United States government leaders in Washington, D.C., to celebrate the effectiveness of the Imagine No Malaria campaign (sometimes also referred to as the "Nothing But Nets" campaign) and to ask Congress for more funding to complete the task.

It was 2012, and while the political climate was still tense, this was a rare bipartisan moment in which leaders came together to celebrate the program's impact. There was one organization that played a big part in the campaign but in the end received little credit—USAID, the United States Agency for International Development. Without USAID and its network around the world, all the fundraising and aid would have been in vain because USAID's infrastructure allowed the medication, literature and more to get where it needed to go.

Many of us have heard of USAID, a taxpayer-funded program of the United States Federal Government, but may not know the breadth of its work. The program started under President Kennedy in 1961 to address the staggering inequality that existed outside the United States and to help the United States' image abroad during the Cold War. Over the decades, USAID has helped fund and distribute aid of various kinds throughout the world—health care, medicine, job training, agricultural programs and more. Alongside the aid itself, USAID has served as the infrastructure and transportation network to help distribute aid from other nonprofits, nongovernmental organizations and faith-based volunteer mission teams.

During the 2024 presidential election, President Trump campaigned on the elimination of waste, fraud and corruption in the federal government. And while the closure of USAID was rarely mentioned outright, it didn't take long under the president's tenure for it to be shut down. For the first time in 60 years, the USAID program—including its staff, funding and tangible aid to millions—ended abruptly. The Federal Emergency Management Agency is rumored to undergo a similar transformation and downsizing, even though more than 100 individuals died this summer during flash floods in Texas.

President Trump and many in his cabinet have labeled USAID as a vehicle of waste and fraud. And while USAID is far from perfect or the best example of efficiency, reported incidents of fraud and corruption are few and far between. The loss of the USAID program will not only be felt abroad but will also affect volunteer mission teams traveling from UMC churches in the USA to other countries.

As the executive director for United Methodist Volunteers in Mission in the Southeast Jurisdiction, I have led many mission journeys to countries around the world and trained and equipped other United Methodists to do the same. As a result, I'm not only familiar with USAID

but have seen its work firsthand. When leading a team to Haiti in February 2010, I witnessed USAID workers give lifesaving aid to earthquake victims—necessities such as food, housing and clean water. The aid didn't solve every problem, but in many cases it was the difference between life and death.

During one mission journey, I sat with malnourished children in Mozambique whose lives were saved by "Plumpy-nut," a peanut-based nutritional paste that is made in the United States, bought by USAID and transported overseas to treat hunger and malnourishment. That nutritional paste is now sitting in various warehouses, already paid for by taxpayers, spoiling and rotting. USAID was closed in the name of fiscal conservatism and stewardship but has had the opposite effect: its closure has cost the U.S. taxpayers \$6 billion thus far.

How will this closure impact Christian volunteer mission teams? Transportation networks maintained by USAID to move supplies and medicine have been shut down. As a result, some supplies, including life-saving medicines, will cost more, and health clinics staffed by volunteers may see a massive influx of individuals looking for help elsewhere. In addition, USAID's closure will reduce funding, limit access to certain areas of the world and compromise safety in some places. This has the potential to compromise the effectiveness of both secular and faith-based mission efforts. While mission journeys will continue, the impact and sustainability of volunteer teams will decrease.

Some will ask if the government should have any role whatsoever in charity and let the church and other private organizations step in to fill that role. While going back and forth on the merits of this argument, millions are at risk of losing their lives. USAID has long been a critical cog in worldwide charitable efforts, and developing any new program, government based or not, will take decades.

Though USAID has already shut its doors, your support and advocacy for it will not be in vain. Elected officials are still responsible to voters, and many legislators have expressed skepticism at its closure. Churches with strong histories of mission service can educate their congregations about USAID's closure and raise their voices together.

The church's mission to reach out to those on the margins of society has become significantly more difficult. Many teams will need to step up to fill the void left and come together in one voice to let those in power know the catastrophic effects USAID's closure will have.

This is a moment to work together and recognize that our faith supersedes any political party or opinion. Let us remember our collective calling to exemplify Christian love in action and remember those who are often forgotten.

Lacey is executive director of the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, Southeast Jurisdiction.

Charleston men to gather
Sept. 28 for Men's Day program

Charleston District United Methodist Men will hold their first Men's Day Program this fall. Slated for Sept 28 at 3:30 p.m., the program will be held at Joshua United Methodist Church, Moncks Corner.

Charleston District Superintendent the Rev. Jeffrey Salley will serve as guest speaker preaching on the theme, "Strengthening the Men of the UMC," from 1 Corinthians 16:13.

All are welcome.



‘Men After God’s Heart’

South Carolina men were among the many who attended the National Men’s & Scouting Ministry Gathering held at Epworth-by-the-Sea at St. Simons Island, Georgia, July 31 to Aug. 3. “It was a great gathering of men from across the USA,” said South Carolina Men N Ministry President Dyron Anderson, noting it was the first national event since 2017. South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley was the keynote speaker on Saturday and gave a powerful message on “Men After God’s Heart,” citing scriptural passages from Matthew 22:37-39. Other bishops in attendance were Bishop Julius Trimble, Bishop James Swanson, Bishop L. Jonathan Holston and Bishop Robin Dease, along with many other renowned workshop presenters. Dr. Richard Vance was named as the new general secretary and CEO to lead the General Commission on United Methodist Men. From left are Anderson along with past South Carolina Men N Ministry President Herman Lightsey, Bishop and Mrs. Leonard Fairley, Vice President Bob James and Alvin Glen, Walterboro District UMM president.

Advocate offers Q&A with Willimon on ‘The Church We Carry’

By Jessica Brodie

As Bishop Will Willimon’s newest book, “The Church We Carry: Loss, Leadership, and the Future of Our Church,” continues its successful release, the *Advocate* got the chance to sit down with the retired South Carolina-raised United Methodist bishop



Willimon

to talk about the story behind the book.

Published this month by Abingdon Press, “The Church We Carry” tells

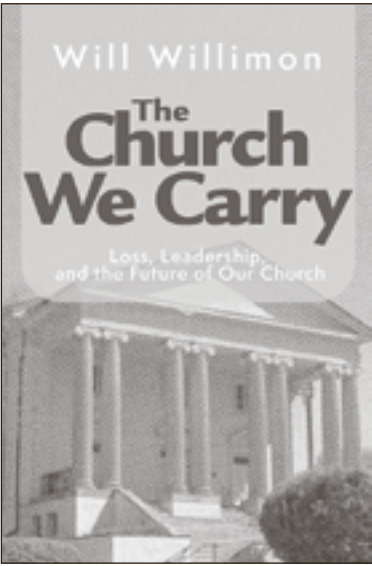
the story of the disaffiliation of South Carolina Methodism’s historic, second-largest congregation, the former Buncombe Street UMC in Greenville—which is also the church where Willimon grew up.

Buncombe Street left the UMC in 2023 during the first of the conference’s two separation votes, when the conference approved allowing churches to leave the denomination using Para. 2549 of The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. (That pathway is no longer a viable option per the UMC’s Judicial Council.)

Here is the Q&A:

Brodie: You describe this as a story about “breaking faith, finding grace.” Can you share what personal moment of broken faith in your own ministry journey prompted you to write this book, and where you’ve found grace in the midst of that brokenness?

Willimon: The shock of learning that the church that introduced me to Christ and played a prominent role in my call to the ministry had a group that repudiated the UMC, was painful. Yet the more I learned of the events at Buncombe Street, those loyal UMC’s who, without help or support from the conference, courageously stood up to the misrepresentation and testified to the fidelity of the denomination was to me a demonstration of Wesleyan grace and graciousness. I wanted to tell their story and give the UMC an opportunity to



learn from the case of Buncombe Street.

Brodie: What did you learn from Buncombe Street Methodist Church that challenged your previous assumptions about church leadership and denominational loyalty?

Willimon: I learned that Wesleyan, connectional, biblical, episcopal Christianity is a challenge to sustain in the present American cultural environment. Disaffiliates at Buncombe Street leveraged the lack of Wesleyan formation among the clergy staff and lay leadership there to sever the church from the UMC. Loyalty to denominational Christianity, affection for those in the ministry of oversight (like us bishops!) is in short supply these days. I therefore, in the last period of my ministry, want to do all I can for speak up for the Wesleyan way of being Christian. Which is a major theme of my book. I hope.

Brodie: You’re remarkably candid about examining “your own role” in the current denominational crisis. As a retired bishop, what specific leadership decisions or approaches do you wish you or other leaders had handled differently?

Willimon: Got a long list! I wish I had more strongly and actively spoken against those who misrepresented our church, its clergy and institutions. The bishops should have found a way to have a firm, faithful, unified response to the disaffiliates. Episcopal indecision and waffling, under the guise of “graciousness,” made the crises of schism much worse. Having preached twice

at Buncombe Street while the disaffiliates were (secretly) planning schism, and thereby finding that my sermons had no effect on the congregation, made me pray to be a better preacher!

Brodie: The subtitle mentions “leading divided churches in divisive times.” For pastors and lay leaders who are facing their own congregational divisions, what’s one practical strategy you’d recommend for immediate implementation?

Willimon: Remember that a divided congregation is nothing new: read the New Testament! Jesus Christ started a 2,000-year argument about his identity and work. But you asked for “practical strategy,” didn’t you? After a deep dive into the troubles at Buncombe Street, I say to pastors: Learn to invite and then curate arguments in your congregation, figure out how to encourage courageous listening and charitable speaking. Protect your congregation from bullies who would take control of the congregation. Above all, keep Jesus Christ at the center of the conversation. Congregational voting, pushing people out of the conversation is just not Jesus’ way of doing things. Keep reminding the congregation: Jesus relates to different people in various ways. You are not free to exclude from the Lord’s Table people whose experience of Jesus is different from yours! Take that, WCA!

Brodie: You write about learning from those labeled as “schismatic.” How has this changed your perspective on what faithful disagreement looks like in the church?

Willimon: My book is not as critical, if that’s the right word, of the disaffiliates as it is of those in the ministry of oversight who failed to intervene and to lead in this crisis in a beloved, historic congregation. I think the UMC failed both the UMC loyalists and the disaffiliates in that way. I admire the disaffiliates for wanting to have an argument about orthodox theology and sound biblical interpretation. Unfortunately, they got their interpretation from questionable sources, though. After all my interviews and watching the meetings and

services at my home church during these momentous years, I am convinced that we church leaders have got to do a better job of helping our folks read the Bible faithfully and pioneer Christian ways of relating to one another in the church. I learned that from the schismatics. Some of those in the small group of laity who led the disaffiliation at my home church dreamed of a more evangelistic, more vital, and mission-oriented congregation. They were right in their desires but wrong in thinking that switching to just another mostly-white, aging, politically right-wing denomination was the cure for any of those needs in their congregation.

Brodie: The book explores “what has become of the church” that shaped your faith. For longtime church members who feel grief over changes in their denomination, how do you suggest they process that loss while remaining hopeful about the church’s future?

Willimon: Tell the truth in the light of Jesus Christ who is not only the way, the life, but also the truth. I was surprised that some on opposing sides of the disaffiliation crisis didn’t want me to write this book because of a time-honored church fantasy: If we just don’t talk about it, maybe our pain will go away. I hope people will get the book and see for themselves the virtue of openly, charitably, telling the truth about a church fight. Above all, the way out of any grief, the sole source of our ultimate hope is Jesus Christ. He will get back what belongs to him. Christ shall have his will done on earth as in heaven.

Therein is our hope. The only question for us is, Will we be part of his great reclamation project otherwise known as the Kingdom of God?

Brodie: Your title suggests we “carry” the church rather than simply attend it. What does it mean practically for ordinary church members to carry the church forward in their daily lives, especially when they feel disappointed by institutional leadership?

Willimon: The church, which has taken on each of us as its burden, can itself be a

heavy burden to bear. I am so grateful that Buncombe Street UMC told me the truth about God (aka Jesus Christ) and put up with me long enough to make me a disciple. And yet, it’s disappointing to see my church ensnared by right wing politics, having secret meetings, making pastors miserable, taking votes that exclude others from the fellowship, and wash in muddled biblical interpretation. Yet through it all I pray never to forget that, for better or worse, Jesus has, from the first, determined to save us as a group. As I preached at Buncombe Street on a number of occasions, the church is God’s big, number one answer for how to bring us into God’s kingdom. From the first (read the letters of Paul) our church (which actually belongs to Jesus, not us) has been a mess. Yet a redemptive God uses the mess we make of church to do whatever it is God wants to do in the world. Of this, I am a witness.

Thanks, editor Brodie and the *Advocate*, for allowing me to talk with you about “The Church We Carry.” Did you know that 61 years ago my work first appeared in the *Advocate*?

As a high school senior I wrote a letter to the *Advocate* defending Wofford’s decision to be the first private college in South Carolina racially to integrate and chiding those Methodist churches that were withdrawing funds from support of the college. Buncombe Street’s pastor at that time, Dr. Robert Dubose, took me aside after the Sunday service and said, “Boy, you shook up a few of the saints around here with your letter.” Then he hugged me and said, “Keep at it. Proud of you.”

See? For good or ill, I owe to the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* my career as a writer!

“The Church We Carry” will be the subject of discussions and presentations this fall at Furman University on Sept. 8 (10:30 a.m.–noon), Wofford College on Sept. 16 (10:30 a.m.–noon) and Washington Street UMC, Columbia, on Nov. 9 (before and after services).



Bishop Fairley gathers with volunteers at Creekfront Salkehatchie.



Catawba Camp volunteers gather after worship.



Camp New Hope volunteers pose with their matching T-shirts.



The Penn Center Camp always has a crowd.



Rock Hill Camp volunteers work on flooring.



Sumter Camp shows some spirit.



Santee Camp volunteers make a cut.

Salkehatchie ‘back on track’ after pandemic

By Jessica Brodie

Salkehatchie Summer Service just completed a successful summer of service projects at homes across South Carolina, from the Upstate to the coast and all the way down to the Lowcountry. Twenty-seven camps and more than 1,000 campers—adults and youth ages 14 and older—worked on roughly 80 homes, repairing roofs, flooring, bathrooms and more. “Summer went very well,

and we are very much back on track, especially since we had fewer camps but more campers,” said Salkehatchie Board Chair Ward Smith. Smith said they plan to add more camps in 2026. Founded in 1978 by the Rev. John Culp, Salkehatchie brings youth, young adult and adult volunteers together to repair and rebuild homes for people in need, many of them living in poverty situations without the ability to fund the work on their own. The weeklong

mission camps offer youth and adults the opportunity to engage in meaningful home-repair ministry across South Carolina. Over the years, hundreds of homes received new roofs, ramps, flooring, ceilings, bathrooms, kitchens and improvements in accessibility through the hands of youth at Salkehatchie. For more information about Salkehatchie Summer Service, visit <https://www.salkehatchie.org>.

Belin Memorial hosts Creekfront Salkehatchie
Creekfront Salkehatchie Summer Service was again hosted at Belin Memorial United Methodist Church. This year, 65 volunteers gave a week of their time to do God’s work in the local community. Creekfront Salkehatchie worked on four home improvement projects. It was a genuine Faith in Action ministry. On July 22, volunteers had the opportunity to work alongside Bishop Leonard Fairley, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. Fairley was able to visit all four work sites and gather with all the volunteers for lunch and fellowship at the Family Life Center at Belin Memorial. Fairley made quality time for this mission to help rebuild houses and restore lives. All said this was a powerful blessing to witness in our community.

Murray UMC marks busy summer with many activities

By Jamelah Youmans

SUMMERVILLE—Murray United Methodist Church has been having a busy past two months filled with much activity, from vacation Bible school, a Pastor’s Appreciation Service, Women’s Day, Family and Friends nights and their 161st anniversary celebration. Murray has not hosted vacation Bible school in more than five years, but the drought was broken with a successful full week that brought all on a “Road Trip” journey. The school was a parish effort in partnership with their sister church, Wesley UMC. Sunday School Superintendent Gladys Lemon led the charge with Gloria Greene, the super-



Bonnell Williams, District Superintendent the Rev. Jeffrey Salley, the Rev. Darlene Richardson and the Rev. Bernie Mazyck gather during the anniversary. intendent from Wesley. They had full classes from elementary to adult—more than 61 the first day and more than 70

in attendance the rest of the week. The teachers did well, as did activity team leaders and the meal team. A few weeks later, they celebrated their pastor, the Rev. Darlene M. Richardson, on her second Pastor Appreciation Day. Their guest speaker was the Rev. Roni Simmons, who was from Richardson’s home church, New Hope United Methodist Church in Huger. They also had a phenomenal Women’s Day service on the second Sunday of July with the theme “Be Still and Know” with guest speaker Glenda Johnson. On July 23-24, Murray had two dynamic Family and Friends nights with guest speakers the Rev. Nathan Smalls

and the Rev. Angela Broughton. This was a wonderful celebration put together by first time co-chairs Faye Jones and Jacqueline Haynes. To top off the week of worship, Murray celebrated their 161st church anniversary with special guest speaker the Rev. Jeffrey Salley, district superintendent, with the sermon “Love Is Key.” The worship service, thanks to worship chair Debra McClellan, was topped off with a fellowship dinner. Murray’s “first gentleman,” Sammie Richardson, provided the dinner while members brought desserts. The church said they give glory to God for allowing them to celebrate so many years of faithfulness.

New Hope UMC celebrates ‘Family and Friends Week’ with revival, outreach

RIDGEVILLE—New Hope United Methodist Church recently celebrated its Family and Friends Week with worship, revival and community outreach. The celebration began Sunday, July 20, with a special worship service and continued Friday, July 25, with a one-night revival led by Pastor Walter Harley of Bethel and Red Bank UMCs. His message, “Know Where Your Help Comes From,” encouraged all in attendance. On Saturday, July 26, the church hosted its first Family and Friends Community Day, featuring local vendors, school supply give-

aways and household items donated by the P. Saxmore Foundation. Dorchester County Fire Department and School Resource Officers Deputy Brandon Jones and Master Deputy Jacob provided safety tips and encouragement to families. In addition, New Hope UMC installed a Blessing Box, offering free food and essential items to support those in need within the community. New Hope UMC thanks all vendors and community partners for helping make the event a success. The Rev. Lisa M. Way serves as pastor.



The church also installed a blessing box.

Photo courtesy of Vickie Chastain



Photo courtesy of Deidre Harley

Celebrate!
Salem UMC, Florence, held a celebration for their pastor, the Rev. Brian Mungo, who was reappointed there for another year. They held a party with cake July 13.

Connectional Ministries director conducts workshop at St. Mark

One church got to hear from the conference Connectional Ministries director recently with wisdom about trust.

The Rev. Millie Nelson-Smith, director of Connectional Ministries for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, delivered what St. Mark United Methodist Church, St. George, members called an “insightful and engaging workshop.”

During this session, Smith introduced the “Eight Pillars of Trust,” a framework designed to strengthen congregations and empower them to fulfill their mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Jackie Jenkins said, “As we embark on this new chapter in our journey, we are excited to emphasize



Smith leads the workshop.

growth in unity and love within our community. We are equally excited about collaborating with individuals in our local communities and across the broader United Methodist connection, as we commit to loving boldly, serving joyfully and leading courageously.”

St. Mark is under the leadership of the Rev. Anthony Rivers.

Recipe Swap.

Grandma Joiner’s Brunswick Stew

From the kitchen of David Bryant, member of Bethesda UMC, Easley.

Ingredients:

1 stick butter (unsalted)
1 onion
Garlic
1 can diced tomatoes (14 ½ oz.)
1 can diced potatoes (drained)
1 can corn kernels (drained)
1 can tomato sauce
¾ cup marinade blend (see below)
2-3 cups chicken broth
1/3 tsp black pepper
1/3 tsp salt
2 cups diced cooked chicken
1-2 lbs. pulled pork

For marinade blend:
Combine 1/3 balsamic

vinegar dressing, 1/3 apple cider vinegar and 1/3 Worcestershire mix (1/2 Bear & Burtons W Sauce, 1/2 Dales Steak Seasoning).

Bring to boil, and add course ground pepper and mesquite liquid smoke.

Cool to room temperature.

Directions:

Melt butter and cook onion and garlic until clear. Add tomatoes and marinate in chicken broth. Simmer for about 15 minutes. Add corn, potatoes, seasonings, chicken and pork. Simmer 5-10 minutes. Enjoy.

Do you have a favorite recipe? Share it with the Advocate! Email news@advocatesc.org.

Tyger River Charge’s Fifth Sunday brings joy

WELLFORD—A sweet, sweet song filled the air of Wellford as members of Immanuel and Duncan United Methodist churches (the Tyger River Charge) came together for a combined Fifth Sunday Gospel Singing Day of Worship.

This special morning drew a full house of worshippers, gospel music lovers and community members eager to celebrate their faith through music, a shared meal and spending time with all kinds of animals.

Special musical guests, The Singing Epps Family, led the congregation in familiar favorites and original gospel songs.

“It’s a beautiful thing when we can come together not just as churches, but as the body in Christ,” said the Rev. Mike Jeter, pastor at Tyger River Charge. “Music has a way of bringing folks together, as we lift our voice as one there is such joy and healing in the room.”

Immanuel UMC member Angie Trammell said, “Our little church villages have gone so much in the last decade after COVID and as families have moved away for work. It was really inspiring to have Immanuel and Duncan UMCs come together for our Fifth Sunday Gospel Singing, and the home-made food afterwards was a



Song and animals made the day fun. sight to behold!”

Following the service of praise and worship, all were invited to enjoy a fellowship meal, offering members of both churches and the community the chance to connect and build relationships outside of regular Sunday worship. While many folks were sitting down for lunch, children of all ages were delighted in the petting zoo Emit’s Farm brought for this event.

Shireen Jackson, Duncan UMC member, said, “The addition of a petting zoo was fantastic! Children, youth and the young at heart were able to spend time with a wide array of animals from Emit’s Farm. They brought baby pigs, a cockerel, Guinea pigs, lizards of all sizes, snakes, a bird and everyone’s favorite—bunnies!”

Several in attendance de-

scribed the experience as uplifting and a true blessing.

Duncan UMC member Earline Powell said, “I really enjoyed the morning, it was a great morning of worship. I especially appreciated how the Singing Epps Family sang some familiar hymns and shared their testimony when singing original songs.”

Ron Lawson, a member of Immanuel UMC and a retired Elvis impersonator who is the organizer behind the Fifth Sunday Gospel Music mornings, said, “The Holy Spirit was surely in our midst. Our hope and prayer is for these Sundays to reach out into our greater community.”

To close worship, The Singing Epps Family invited Lawson to join them on bass guitar, choir director Phyliss Lawson to play piano and Jeter to sit in on the Hammond organ as they led the congregation in a joyful and exuberant rendition of “Victory in Jesus.” As the final melodies echoed through the sanctuary, hands raised and clapping in praise, one thing was clear to all: Gospel Singing Sunday was more than just a musical event—it was an invitation to unity, hope and the power of coming together as the people of God in faith.

Ware Shoals–Harmony bids welcome, farewell

On July 8, with a combined service, the Ware Shoals-Harmony Charge said goodbye to Dr. Bill Rogers and his wife, Bobbie Jean.

Rogers began serving as an interim pastor that ended up being a blessing of 10 years of service. During that time, a food pantry began.

A luncheon and a good-natured roast followed worship service, with the roast containing such comments as, “I had to remind you each Sunday to turn on the microphone and to leave

the microphone,” and “You were afraid of my driving when I took you to visit members at the beginning of your time with us.”

On July 29, also in a combined service, the charge welcomed the Rev. Janice Hughey, their newest pastor, with a luncheon. Her mother, Henrietta Baker, and her fiancé, David Stubbs, joined her. For Hughey, she was coming home, as she lived in Ware Shoals and graduated from Ware Shoals High School.

Retired UMC pastor releases book

Retired United Methodist elder the Rev. Joseph Abram Jr. released his first book July 26.

Abram, who retired in 2015, released the book on the eve of his 83rd birthday. He had been writing for some time for his own pleasure and by request.

The book, “Life’s Maze: Poems of Life,” which features a foreword by Dr. James H. Sally, is about the ups and downs, twists and turns, joys and sadness, and disappointments and excitements on this journey called life. He draws from his many experiences, imaginations and observations.

The book came about after Abram, at the Bishop’s School of Ministry this year, volunteered for the talent sharing time. Unaware of the time allotment, he hastily shared a cross-section of his material before he was told, “Time’s up!” The reactions of those who witnessed were overwhelming, and encouragements to publish were raised.

Pen in hand, Abram walked



Abram signs copies of his book, “Life’s Maze: Poems of Life.”

Bishop H. T. Gainey Jr. and The Good Shepherd Community Ministries provided a venue for Abram’s book release, with the ministry’s chairs leading the various support, saying in essence to the new author and wife, “We’ve got this; you just show up with your books and pens.”

down the red carpet on the way to his seat, which was decorated with a beautiful backdrop.

Soon he was joined by Michael Finkley of The Michael Finkley Morning Show, via Jamal Bates Morning Show. Finkley had been summoned by the author’s son, Elder Joseph Abram III, to do an interview for his national audience and expose the book beyond the region. In the midst of the interview, Abram opened the poetry book and began reading one of his poems as Finkley listened. Shortly the usher came forth with a box of tissues to share with Finkley—for included in the book was a tribute to the author’s best friend, who happened to be Michael’s favorite great aunt to whom he had offered care in her final days. Without their knowledge, God arranged that moment.

Attendance was great and sales were beyond expectation. Book signings are being planned in different locations.

Church celebrates member’s birthday with singing, dance

Pastor Anne Jackson’s brother Waymond Jackson celebrated his 70th birthday with a surprise birthday celebration held at Rosewood Center in Lincoln recently.

Waymond Jackson is a member of Mount Sinai United Methodist Church in Anderson, where his sister is pastor. More than 100 church members and others were in attendance for the celebration, which featured plenty of song and dance.

Jackson is a member of the Upstate’s Shape Note Singers group in South Carolina under the direction of founder Lena Davis. Her step-grandfather, E. S. Simpson, was part of one of Anderson County’s original shape-note singing choirs, the Rock Mills



The Jacksons

Nondenominational Colored Singing Convention, which started off meeting at a plantation on U.S. 29 South in Anderson County, Davis said.

Since 1801, shape notes have been associated with American sacred music, specifically with singing schools, with musical conventions and with all-day gatherings. An offshoot of the Rock Mills choir, the Generostee Baptist Sunday School Singing Convention survived for about 100 years in Anderson County. In 1997, Lena Davis started the Community Workshop Choir. Today, they have about 19 active members.

Jackson is helping keep this tradition alive.



From left are Ramona Williams (Clark Middle School), Karen Gillam, Betty Stone, Pam Coleman and the Rev. Albert Shuler (all from St. Paul’s UMC), gathering with Geneveive Carson Bull and Phillip Mickles, principal (Clark Middle School).

St. Paul’s UMC donates 200 backpacks

ORANGEBURG—In a heartwarming display of community support, St. Paul’s United Methodist Church gifted 200 backpacks filled with essential school supplies to students at William J. Clark Middle School. The generous donation aims to equip learners with the tools they need for a successful academic year.

“We believe in nurturing every child’s potential,” said the Rev. Albert Shuler, pastor of St. Paul’s UMC. “Providing backpacks and school supplies is about more than the physical items. It’s a message of love, support and belief in these young people’s futures.”

Each backpack was thoughtfully stocked with notebooks, folders, pencils, pens and other essentials—items identified by Clark Middle School faculty as most needed. The school’s principal, Phillip Mickles, expressed deep gratitude for the contribution.

“Thanks to St. Paul’s UMC our students can now focus on learning instead of worrying about school supplies,” Mickles said. “These backpacks relieve a real burden for families and help level the playing field for all students.”

St. Paul’s UMC has a longstanding tradition of community service in Orangeburg. Past initiatives include Thanksgiving meals and partnership with local shelters. This backpack drive continues that legacy, reinforcing the church’s commitment to uplifting children and families.

“As these kids head into a new school year, we want them to remember they have a caring community standing behind them,” Shuler said.

Clark Middle School began its first day of classes Aug. 4, and with the support of St. Paul’s UMC, students will enter the year ready to learn with backpacks on their backs and a community behind them

Henry–Crowe teaches at TRUMC

COLUMBIA—Trenholm Road United Methodist Church welcomed Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe on Sunday, July 13, for a day of rich worship, learning and celebration of the United Methodist connection sponsored by TRUMC’s Committee on Church and Society.

Henry-Crowe, who currently serves as president of the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church, preached at the 10 a.m. service and taught a session during the Sunday school hour prior to worship.

Her presence offered not only a deep well of theological reflection but also a living witness to decades of faithful service across the denomination and around the world.

Drawing from Genesis 12:1-9 and Luke 10:25-37, her sermon invited the congregation to consider what it means to journey faithfully and to love boldly. Rooted in the story of Abraham’s call to go and the Good Samaritan’s call to stop and see those in need, her preaching reflected the central values of the Social Principles she has helped shape and defend throughout her ministry. Our love of neighbor is the soil in which our compassion, courage and striving for justice grow.

Prior to worship, Henry-Crowe led an engaging Sunday school session outlining the history and evolution of the United Methodist Social Princi-

ples, pointing to our social advocacy from John Wesley through the early 1900s until today. As the former general secretary of the General Board of Church and Society, she played a pivotal role in guiding the denomination through the process of revising the Social Principles—a nearly decade-long global effort that involved input from United Methodists across all five jurisdictions and seven central conferences. She shared stories from that collaborative journey, reflecting on how the revised principles seek to be more theologically grounded and globally relevant in order to better equip the church for faithful social witness in today’s world.

Her visit was especially meaningful for the Rev. James McCoy-Bruce, whose wife worked alongside Henry-Crowe during her time as dean of the chapel and religious life at Emory University, while completing her M.Div. at Candler School of Theology.

“It was a full-circle moment,” McCoy-Bruce said. “To hear Susan preach in our sanctuary, where her daughter was confirmed years ago, and to witness how her life’s work continues to bless the Church, was a gift to us all. Her leadership reminds us that faithful discipleship is both personal and public: grounded in Scripture, shaped by community and lived out in love.”

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SPECIAL SESSION

From Page 1

The name for the teams comes from Jeremiah 29:11, in which God reveals plans to give us “a future with hope.” Fairley said the decisions the teams make will help position South Carolina United Methodists “to live more meaningfully, more nimbly, more connectionally and more practically into Our 4 Priorities.”

The four teams are Missional Priorities (led by the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith), Strategy for the Black Church

and Ethnic Ministries (led by the Rev. James Friday), District Alignment (led by the Rev. Cathy Mitchell) and Conference Staff Alignment (led by Fairley). Each team comprises a mix of clergy and laity from various regions across the state, and each has been working for nearly a year on research and other collaborative efforts in their area.

“All the teams have been working with a spirit of care,” Fairley said, asking South Carolina United Methodists

to pray for the teams and know they have been working “extremely hard.” While the teams’ recommendations have not been released, many expect one recommendation will be reducing the number of districts in South Carolina, particularly given the departure of 225 churches from the denomination in 2023 and 2024, as well as more recent legal action.

Currently, the conference has 12 districts historically governed by 12 district superintendents. In 2024, the conference shifted to a new model with only 10 district superintendents, and two of the districts—Greenville and Walterboro—now utilize a shared coverage model, with superintendents from surrounding regions offering collaborative leadership. However, all 12 district offices remain in operation, as do the staff in those offices and members of district boards and committees.

Next month’s *Advocate* will include the list of recommendations from the Jeremiah Teams, which will be voted on by the body during the special session.

About the session

The Rev. Mel Arant said GNTV will manage both the webinar and the voting process for the conference, and it will be similar to how Annual Conference was conducted during the pandemic. Arant said online training will be offered in advance of the Oct. 18 session (dates will be announced soon), though the training is not mandatory.

An online registration form is expected to go live by Sept. 1, and all members of Annual Conference—clergy and elected laity—will be verified for voting purposes and get an online identification, as well as a link to the webinar.

Arant noted that even though some laity have already been elected for next year’s 2026 Annual Conference, those participating in the called special session will be the laity elected for the 2025 Annual Conference. If someone elected for 2025 did not attend and was replaced with an alternate, then the alternate would be the lay member expected to attend the called special session.

Tri-district Zoom meetings are also being planned to help answer questions in advance of the session; those dates have not yet been released.

‘New hope’

Fairley said the work of the Jeremiah Teams offers a new hope for the future of United Methodism in South Carolina.

“We are looking forward with anticipation and hope to our called session of the South Carolina Annual Conference on Oct. 18,” Fairley said. “As we prepare for this pivotal moment in the life of our conference, I am grateful for the work of each of our Jeremiah Teams. They have worked diligently over the past year to help reposition our annual conference so that we might live into Our 4 Priorities and The United Methodist Church’s new vision: ‘The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.’”

The teams will meet as a collaborative body Sept. 11 to share their final recommendations. Their proposals will go to the conference secretary to be shared with the annual conference before the Oct. 18 called session, when they will be voted on as whole by the annual conference.

Fairley added, “Please continue to keep these teams and our annual conference in your prayers, remembering the words of Jeremiah 29:11: ‘For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.’”

What are the Jeremiah Teams doing?

The Missional Priorities team is evaluating the effectiveness of all current ministries and missions to help determine what things are essential for the conference to live into its stated priorities.

The Black Church & Ethnic Ministries Strategy team is working to create and resource an effective conference strategy for strengthening the Black church and other ethnic ministries, focusing on new things God is calling for in these areas.

The District Alignment team is reviewing district lines to recommend a reduction in the number of districts to create a more nimble, cost-effective structure that will allow district superintendents to spend more time as missional strategists with the people in their communities.

The Conference Staff Alignment team is examining the best ways to align conference staff with missional priorities and resources, to compensate staff properly for their work and leadership and to create space for staff to be creative and imaginative in their work.

Anyone who has questions about the Jeremiah Teams is asked to email mat@umcsc.org, and their information will be shared with the appropriate team.



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HOLY GROUNDS

From Page 1

Every Tuesday and Thursday morning from roughly 8 to 11 a.m., dozens flock to the church for coffee, a hot breakfast and, best of all, genuine neighborly fellowship.

Welborn calls the ministry Holy Grounds, and everything is free, though they do take donations. Apart from an initial grant from the church for \$750, they have never had to take a dime from the church since; donations cover everything, from food to coffee to the Holy Grounds logo a local theater’s artist hand-painted on the wall, all free.

Most who come each week are senior citizens—the oldest is 96, Welborn says.

“It’s just so nice for people to have someone to talk with, to sit with, to be with,” she says.

“I’ve had grown men cry about how important it is to them.”

‘God would not let it go’

Holy Grounds started in February 2021 when the church was on pause because of the pandemic, Welborn says, with 18 deaths from COVID-19. A friend invited her to have coffee at a Lutheran church in Mauldin that does a coffee ministry. Lonely and bored, Welborn went, even though she doesn’t drink coffee.

Yet when she set foot in the church and saw the people gathered there for fellowship and a warm drink, Welborn marveled at the atmosphere.

“I thought, ‘Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we had this at Augusta Road?’” Welborn says.

Back home, she took the idea to her husband, Joe, who was the head of church trustees—nah, he said.

She took the idea to her pastor—nah.

But God kept pushing her and pushing her.

“Finally I had to battle the board. I was so bold in speaking to them—I’m usually not that way! But God would not let it go.”

The church relented, giving her funds to buy a coffee machine and some basic supplies.

“That first day, sitting here, I thought, ‘Nobody’s going to come.’

But then at 8:15, they started coming,” Welborn recalls.

That was four and a half years ago, and since then, there hasn’t been a day they haven’t had at least a dozen, usually many more. Some come solo, while some bring a friend or a son or daughter. They are open year-round, holidays included. One year, they closed on July 4, and people were so sad Welborn decided closing wasn’t an option.

“Even on Thanksgiving, I’m open!” she says, laughing.

All smiles

What’s ironic is that in addition to not drinking—or knowing how to make—coffee prior to this ministry was that Welborn also didn’t cook. But now she cooks with a helper every week, making grits and sausage on Tuesdays and pancakes on Thursdays, always something hot and always diabetic-friendly.

Volunteers are sporadic—sometimes church members and friends, and sometimes high school kids who need community service hours. Everyone seems to enjoy it, and volunteers stick around long-term.

“This is a happy place—I leave here all smiles,” she says. “As you age, you sometimes feel like people start treating you different. But here, everyone laughs together and cries together.”

They’re like a family, she said.

In addition to the food, drink and fellowship, Holy Grounds now offers other opportunities. On the second Thursday of every month, health partners come, take blood pressures and offer other support.

At Christmas, they all take up a collection to support local children.

They also started a reading program in the summer where kids come, read a book and do a craft with the older people.

“I only thought God wanted me to serve coffee,” Welborn marvels today. “It’s been just wonderful.”

For more on Holy Grounds, call the church at 864-243-2829 or email connections@augustardumc.org.



The coffee ministry is open year-round, even on holidays.



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Rock Hill helps with WNC rebuild post–Helene

By Ken Hudson

Imagine facing flood waters so fast and deep that kayakers had to lift you and your 80-year-old mother to the roof of your home to avoid being swept away and drowning. Imagine being huddled together on that roof and hearing cries for help all around you as you prayed to be rescued.

This was the story of Bill (not his real name). The Swannanoa, North Carolina, area had received 13 inches of rain prior to Hurricane Helene, and when the storm hit, the river overflowed and flooded the area in Bill’s community. The plant where Bill worked closed as water flooded the floor, and he rushed home to find water in his front yard. He rushed in the house and told his mother to leave immediately, but by then his truck was being covered in water.

He and his mother clung to a porch support until kayakers found them.

Bill said, “I don’t know how long we held on; it seemed like hours, but it could have been minutes. We were so afraid.”

Bill told us he still wakes up in the night hearing the shouts for help.

Bill and his mother both visited with us during our time in Western North Carolina, when our Rock Hill United Methodist Volunteers in Mission team visited to help.

Bill told his story because he said it was therapeutic for him to share the ordeal of his experience with others. He showed the porch support with a sign, “Do not destroy by order of the homeowner.” This was the railing they held until help came.

His mother came by and related her experiences of living in the home for many years and told about the enjoyment of sitting on the porch watching hummingbirds during the summer. She related how her other son had searched four days for them before finding them in a shelter.



A volunteer delivers books to the Black Mountain Home for Children.

When our Rock Hill UMVIM team arrived there on May 4, it was almost nine months after Helene and the rebuilding process had started. A friend had been there and recommended contacting the Fuller Center Disaster Rebuilders. As their mission statement notes, “The mission of Fuller Center Disaster Rebuilders, faith-driven and Christ centered is to rebuild the uninsured homes of low income families who have experienced storm damage in major disaster areas using volunteer labor and donated funds. We pursue our mission in an unrelenting quest to insure that these low income homes are not lost because of lack of resources.”

Our connection with Fuller was a great experience for our team. In my 25 years of short term mission service, Fuller is among the best I’ve experienced in organization and support for a team.

At the home, the exterior was almost completed and the interior was in need of Sheetrock. The entire week was spent hanging Sheetrock in all the rooms. Sheetrock is a good project since time spent can focus on work and getting to know each other.

One of the highlights of our trips is the devotion time at breakfast and in the evening after work. As members took turns, we learned more about each other and the life experiences that had brought us together. For team members, these sharing moments are as important as the physical labor at a work site.

Fuller housed us in a cottage that a nearby college used for summer programs, so we had good housing and a kitchen. Some meals were provided by Fuller staff and others by Mercy House that supplied meals for teams. On our grounds we found three bears wandering around the parking lot checking the dumpster. It was similar to the children’s tale with a papa, mama and baby bear.

We also visited the Black Mountain Home for Children where we delivered new and gently used books for the library. This was made possible by Livi’s Library, which was set up by a family at First United Methodist Church, Lancaster, in memory of their daughter Olivia. The children’s home was started in 1904 by the Rev. Robert Perry Smith as a place where “orphaned, abandoned and abused youth are cared for in a loving home-style environment,” per the Black Mountain Home website. Smith earned the nickname “Shepherd of the Hills.”

Bill and his mother will be moving into their rebuilt home soon. Interestingly, there was a hummingbird feeder hanging from the porch when we drove away our last day.

The team consisted of members from First UMC, Lancaster; Bethel UMC, Rock Hill; Pleasant Hill UMC, Indian Land; and members from three non-denominational churches. Members were Holly and Andrew Grasso, Nancy Fish, Paul and Lisa McDaniel, Richard Bickel, Allyson Reid, Elizabeth Smith and Ken Hudson, team leader.

There is still much work to be done in the surrounding areas. Those interested can visit <https://fullercenter.org/disaster-rebuilders>.

Limitless embraces community, Spirit at Mission u

By Samoria Session

This summer’s Mission u was nothing short of inspiring for the youth who attended from across our region.

Held on the campus of Spartanburg Methodist College, the 2025 theme centered around “A Community of the Spirit,” based on Galatians 5:22–23, 25. Through this lens, five young women came together to learn, grow and explore what it means to embody and nurture the fruit of the Spirit in today’s world.

Zaria Spencer, Neveah Williams, Taylor Bracey, Janee Williams and Anaiah Franklin represented our youth with grace, joy and openness. Throughout the weekend, they dove deep into lessons about love, peace, patience, kindness and qualities that define a Spirit-led life. The curriculum invited them to reflect not just on biblical teachings, but also how to live these values in schools, homes and communities.



Young women study Galatians 5.

A key focus of this year’s Mission u was the concept that the “fruit” of the Spirit is singular—a complete package of spiritual characteristics meant to be cultivated together. The youth explored how these traits work collectively to shape a community of faith and support. Ice breakers, group discussions and interactive activities allowed the girls to



Community building was a big part of their time.

connect the Scripture to their own lived experiences, including the pressures they face as young women today.

In addition to spiritual study, the weekend was also filled with meaningful fellowship. One of the highlights was an off-campus trip to Applebee’s, where the youth got to relax and laugh, providing a refreshing break while allowing the youth to build authentic friendships that extended beyond the classroom.


Leadership development was another important element of the weekend. The youth participated in small group roles and were encouraged to share their reflections during group sessions. This helped create a “brave space,” where everyone felt empowered to speak honestly and be heard with respect. Their insights revealed

not only their individual growth but also the potential they hold as future leaders within the church and community.

As we reflect on the experience, one thing is clear: The youth who attended Mission u are returning to their home churches not just with memories, but with a renewed understanding of what it means to live out their faith intentionally and collectively. They are eager to share what they’ve learned, to grow deeper in their walk with God, and to build stronger communities wherever they go.

Mission u may have only lasted a few days, but its impact on these young lives will last for years to come.

Session is the Limitless/Youth Mission u study leader.



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Nifty Knitters ignites Cornerstone

By Maxine Smith

ROCK HILL—Cornerstone United Methodist Church has recently witnessed the explosion of a ministry that started from a spark of one person’s recognition of a need.

For many years, members of Cornerstone UMC have fed the men of Bethel Shelters breakfast on Christmas morning. Last Christmas, Monique Bookout signed up for the first time to serve at this event. Interacting with the homeless men made an unforgettable impression. She saw a need for them and at the same time knew how the need could be fulfilled.

Christine Viets, a friend of Bookout, has been knitting hats on a loom for years and donating them to charity. When Bookout asked, Viets agreed to knit 100 hats and donate them to Cornerstone to be given to the men at their Christmas breakfast.

When Cornerstone heard of Viets’ generous offer, they were amazed. They agreed to furnish yarn for this project and, under the leadership of Debbie Betancourt, a group of more than a dozen ladies learned to knit hats on a loom to help Viets.

The goal of 100 hats was reached by the end of April. The “Nifty Knitters Ministry” was on the move, and other



Debbie Betancourt (left) talks with Linder Tucker, one of the Nifty Knitters.

outlets for hats were soon identified. As of Aug. 1, more than 550 hats have been made, and knitting continues.

At present, hats are being given to nine organizations: Bethel Shelters, Atrium Health Levine Cancer Center, Hospice and Community Care, Open Arms Child Care of Pilgrims Inn, Divine Manor Assisted Living, and Rock Hill Radiation Therapy Center (all of Rock Hill, SC); Atrium Health Levine Cancer Center in Pineville, North Carolina; Atrium Health Levine Children’s Hospital, Charlotte; and Epworth Children’s Home, Columbia.

Smith is president of United Women in Faith, Cornerstone UMC.



Cognitive Connections
by the Rev. Jad Taylor

Carder’s study can help

In the midst of the South Carolina Conference, a beautiful ministry is unfolding—the South Carolina Cognitive Connection.

This ministry seeks to bring comfort and understanding to those affected by dementia, offering a guiding light through a challenging journey. In this spirit, we want to introduce a profound resource that can help empower your church and community to extend this ministry further: Bishop Ken Carder’s book, “Ministry with the Forgotten: Dementia Through a Spiritual Lens.”

The beauty of this resource is its ability to bridge the gap between the medical realities of dementia and a deep theological understanding of personhood. Bishop Carder’s work invites us to move beyond a clinical view and instead embrace a spiritual lens, rooted in the enduring grace of God.

As Bishop Carder writes, “At the heart of the Christian tradition is the incarnation, the Word made flesh. It’s the radical declaration that the Creator of the infinite universe ... has become vulnerable flesh in Jesus of Nazareth and shares in the frailty and dependency of the human condition.”

This powerful statement provides the foundation for a small group study, a space where people can explore what it means to minister to those with cognitive challenges and their families.

The study begins by examining how our faith provides a meaningful framework for responding to dementia, helping us confront our fears and biases. It then moves to the foundational truth that our identity and worth are gifts from God, not defined by cognitive abilities. Participants will learn to practice a ministry of presence, mirroring Christ’s incarnational presence, and will explore how people with dementia remain disciples of Jesus, teaching us about grace while also acknowledging the perpetual grief of caregivers. The journey concludes by considering practical steps to make our congregations more supportive and inclusive for all.

This small group could be more than just a study; it could be a transformative ministry in itself. It’s an opportunity to create a space for honest conversation and prayer, equipped with resources like “Tips for Communicating with a Person with Dementia” to build confidence and understanding. The conversations that arise can lead to new ideas for supporting caregivers, engaging people with dementia in worship or being a compassionate presence in someone’s life.

As United Methodists, we are uniquely positioned to embrace this ministry, given the demographic realities of many of our congregations. We encourage churches and individuals to consider this study to take the first step in creating a more dementia-friendly community where all are seen, valued and loved as children of God. For more information on the ministry of the South Carolina Cognitive Connection, please visit <https://www.umesc.org/cognitive>.

Taylor is campus minister for the Methodist Student Network.



Dr. Ron offers a pediatric checkup.

Three Columbia District UMCs
unite in mission to Ecuador

By the Rev. Tom Wall

The dream of a church and community building for the Evangelical Methodist Church of El Prado in Ecuador is beginning to be realized.

El Prado is a small community in the Andes (altitude 9,000 feet) just north of Quito and the equator. For the last eight years, the church’s ministry program—serving 150 children—has been meeting in semi-converted horse stables on a former hacienda.

The new church/community building will be situated in the nearby community of Florencia with a stunning view of snow-capped 19,000-foot Cayambe volcano. The new building will allow Pastor Maria Fernandez to offer expanded services to more children in a more purpose-fitted center. No doubt it will bring increased growth to the church, and children will be better fed and nurtured and cared for. But the extraordinary quality of the love and compassion will not change.

This is a particularly difficult time for Ecuador. An authoritarian government, high unemployment, high crime and drug cartels in certain areas make for uncertain times. Our Ecuadorian friends told us that hope was in short supply. But the Evangelical Methodist Church in Ecuador is doing marvelous and hope-filled things, especially for the poor and marginalized. And when partnered with teams such ours from South Carolina United Methodism, the burden can be shared and a hope-beam of light can be cast more widely.

Washington Street UMC has been supporting El Prado (and other churches and communities) throughout the five mission trips it has taken to the Otavalo area. And while Washington Street again spearheaded this year’s trip and provided much support, Cayce UMC and Platt Springs UMC also joined the effort.

The major component of the service/mission trip was the providing of health services. Medical, dental and optometry (reading glasses) services brought together a doctor and a dentist from South Carolina along with Ecuadorean doctors and dentists. There was also a well-stocked pharmacy. While there are health services in Ecuador, many people live in places that are underserved or not served. And the poor often cannot afford treatment and services.

When we set up the clinics around Quito at the beginning of our time, we saw many Venezuelan refugees. More than 1,500 people were served in the clinics, and there are Ecuadorian doctors to follow up as needed.

One day we combined our team with



While providing health services was a key part of the trip, the team also helped with construction.

a dermatologist serving on a team from Bethel UMC, Charleston. Another day we mixed concrete and toted cement blocks together with our Ecuadorian worker hosts.

The mission team also conducted vacation Bible school, made home visits with the local pastor and assisted in the construction project at Florencia. Of course, there were times of worship together with our Ecuadorian friends, including an impromptu Pentecost sing-along of Spirit songs in Spanish.

We don’t go on these trips to convert people. But in sharing love and being shown love by our Ecuadorian friends, many of us have found that we have been converted. We don’t go to do service to others, but we serve with others and together, bringing our unique gifts and receiving the gifts of those who come to the clinics. In doing so, we find that we are all being served.

Christian mission is relational. Service in the way of Christ is reciprocal. Our Ecuadorian friends have enriched us. They have shared their beautiful country and rich culture. The buoyant faith they live out in challenging circumstances encourages our often-anemic faith.

The models they have of the church as community are instructional for our North American individualism. Their lives of simplicity convict our consumer mentality.

We are thankful for Sara Flores, the United Methodist missionary from Bolivia working in Ecuador, and her husband, Dakin. She does marvelous work with the young Methodist Church in Ecuador, which continues to grow, and with the teams that come from the U.S. to experience this faithful way of being church. The message that came through loudly and clearly is that despite the differences and distances, we are one in the human and Christian family, and we are better when we are together.



United Women in Faith
by Patricia Armstrong

Living out our faith

It was truly a joy seeing so many United Women in Faith at Mission u. We have made it through half of the year!

I know for me it's the time of year when the energy level is kind of low. Focusing and living with purpose can be challenging. Donnie McClurkin has a song that asks, "What do you do when you've done all you can, and it seems like it's never enough ... after you've done all you can?"

I hear what Mr. McClurkin is saying and I don't disagree, but I have another question. What do you do when you don't know what to do and wonder if you can even make a difference?

That's a question I've pondered off and on over the past few years especially since serving as social action coordinator for South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith. Often, I must reset, free my mind from the distractions, keep it simple and simply ask, "How should I live out my faith?"

The answer isn't always easy, but it's easier when I ask the Spirit to lead me. It's easier when I stand on the basic principles of my faith. It's easier when I come together with other like-minded folks who have a desire to do what the Lord commands even when it's unpopular.

I'm looking forward to seeing you at our annual meeting in October. There will be a table for you to write down something that you've done over the past year in support of social action. This can be something you completed on the Charter for Racial Justice Diamond Unit Award form or something totally different. There will be a few opportunities for you to win a nice door prize. See you in October, and keep up the great work.

Armstrong is the social action coordinator for South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith.



Faithful service

South Carolina Conference United Methodist Men recently treated conference center staff to a luncheon in appreciation for their help and support of their ministry. While there, the men took time to present special recognition to four individuals for service. They awarded Jim Crews, information technology director, with the UMM Lifetime Achievement Award, and they awarded three women with the Susanna Wesley Award of Excellence: Advocate Editor Jessica Brodie, Connectional Ministries Assistant to the Director Tammy Fulmer and Episcopal Office Executive Assistant Lollie Haselden. Pictured from left are Haselden, Brodie, Fulmer and Crews.



The Lee Road men enjoyed meeting the staff of the Bethlehem Center

Lee Road helps Bethlehem Center

On Thursday, Aug. 7, a team of Lee Road United Methodist Church men delivered a truck and large trailer full of early childhood education furniture to the Bethlehem Center in Spartanburg.

Pastor the Rev. Rusty Godfrey, Lay Leader Sandy Davis, Finance Committee Chair Gene Turner and Trustee Rick Stanford loaded up many items (including cribs, feeding table, tables, chairs, cubbies/shelves, etc.) from the church's former child education program, which closed in 2021. They hauled them to Spartanburg to support a fellow UMC mission, the Bethlehem Center in downtown Spartanburg.

Bethlehem Center Executive Director Patrena Mims visited Lee Road UMC back in April to collect a carload of snacks Lee Road collected as a Lenten mission for the center's after-school program; at that

time, she was shown the surplus furniture at the church. Mims expressed interested in having the furniture to augment their classrooms and other Bethlehem Center outreach ministries.

Traci Hilton of the Bethlehem Center said she was delighted at both the amount of the donation and the usefulness of the objects

"It was such a great pleasure to meet everyone today," Hilton said. "I'm definitely looking forward to continuing our relationship and staying in contact. God is good all the time!"

Davis said, "It was good to help a fellow UMC agency and to see this furniture once again serve its purpose."

Godfrey said one moral of this story is: Let not dust collect on your excess; your excess is someone else's need.

Epworth to open new Family Resource Center in Columbia

A new chapter in family support and community wellness begins this fall as Epworth's Family Resource Center opens its doors Sept. 24.

Located in the heart of Richland County, Epworth's Family Resource Center is designed to be a welcoming hub for families seeking guidance, assistance and connection. The FRC focuses on abuse and neglect prevention services, offering families vital support before challenges escalate.

"The Family Resource Center is more than just a place to access services—it's a place to build stronger families and stronger communities," said Beth Williams, president and CEO at Epworth.

The FRC offers a centralized location where families can receive basic needs assistance and links to financial resources; parenting education and support groups; referrals to mental health counseling; educational workshops and wellness events;

and access to concrete goods such as diapers, clothing, food and hygiene items.

In addition to Epworth's dedicated staff, the center also hosts a variety of community partners,

including WIC (the Women's Infants and Children Nutrition Program), SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and other nonprofit organizations that serve families. These partnerships give families streamlined access to a wide range of support services—all under one roof.

"Our goal is to meet families where they are and walk alongside them," said Lauren Tinman, chief strategy officer at Epworth. "By bringing multiple resources together under one roof, we're removing barriers and giving families the tools they need to build resilience and stability."

The grand opening event Sept. 24, from 10:30 a.m. to noon, will feature tours of the facility, meet-and-greets with staff and partner organizations and a showcase of the kind of programming the center will offer families. Community members, families and local leaders are encouraged to attend.

"Families don't have to navigate life's challenges alone," Tinman said. "The FRC is here to connect them to resources, support their growth, and help them thrive."

For more information about the Family Resource Center or to learn how to get involved, email Erodgers@epworthsc.org.

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Golf tournament to raise funds for Africa University

ORANGEBURG—This month, supporters of Africa University will hit the golf course to have some fun while raising money for the decades-old United Methodist-related institution located in Zimbabwe.

Called the Wespath-Bishop Leonard Fairley Golf Invitational, the tournament, scheduled for Sept. 29 at the Orangeburg Country Club, will accommodate 28 four-person teams.

As a kickoff to the tournament weekend, attendees are invited to the Sunday morning service (Sept. 28) and post-worship luncheon at Edisto Fork UMC, a his-

toric United Methodist congregation in Orangeburg and the home church of James H. Salley, president and chief executive officer of Africa University (Tennessee) Inc.

Africa University started with the help of South Carolina and other annual conferences in the denomination. Classes began in 1992, and this year it saw its 31st graduation ceremony, graduating 620 students.

Salley calls Africa University “the school of dreams in the valley of hope.”

As in previous years, golfers, sponsors and friends

enjoy a day of friendly competition and fellowship while investing in student scholarships and evolving needs at Africa University.

There are multiple ways you can support the Bishop Leonard Fairley Golf Invitational Benefiting Africa University. You can enter a four-person team (\$500) or as a single registrant (\$125) or become a sponsor. Register for the tournament or learn more about sponsorship opportunities at <https://golf.africau.org>.

For questions: audevoffice@africau.org or 615-340-7438.

ERT trainings scheduled

As the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Helene approaches, the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church is gearing up with five opportunities for people to get needed disaster response training.

Disaster Response Ministry has scheduled five Early Response Team training sessions:

Aug. 23 at Mount Hebron UMC, West Columbia; Sept. 20 at North Orangeburg UMC, Orangeburg; Oct. 25 at Highland Park UMC, Florence; Oct. 25 at New Beginnings UMC, Boiling Springs; and Nov. 15 at Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville	Space is limited. Register at https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration .
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Wesley Foundations by the Rev. John Sterling Poole

Back to Barracks Bash

On Aug. 24, the Charleston Wesley Foundation and seven local churches welcomed returning upperclassmen at The Citadel. Each battalion (i.e., dorm) had a local church in front serving cold drinks, snow cones, popcorn, fruit, snacks, hot dogs and hamburgers.

The Charleston Wesley Foundation has done the Back to Barracks Bash for several years now, and it is one of the most obvious ways of ministering to college students. The students are excited to get back with their friends, mourning the end of their summer and anxious about classes beginning 48 hours later. To be welcomed back to campus with friendly faces and fresh food is a treat.

This is a great example of the connection in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, particularly in the Charleston District. This year, John Wesley UMC, North Charleston UMC, St Andrews Parish UMC, Cokesbury UMC, New Francis Brown UMC, First UMC in Isle of Palm and Anchor Church (Nazarene) came together to serve students in one of the most basic ways possible.

“Coming back to The Citadel from summer break with unpacking and anxiety, it was an unexpected welcome,” said Kevin Lopez, a senior at The Citadel. “It was a relief and a blessing. Seeing them there and understanding that this was a church that was doing this out of the goodness of their hearts meant a lot to me. In general, given The Citadel’s environment, having this different presence is very heartwarming to see the extent that the Wesley Foundation and local churches are willing to serve students.”

For college students, it is good for them to be reminded that there are churches that love them, are praying for them and want them to have a good and fulfilling education. That is what the Back to Barracks Bash demonstrates in real presence and commitment. It is not cool in August in Charleston; it is not easy for these churches to load up supplies and coolers and drive downtown. However, they do it because they believe college students are worth it. CWF is committed to bringing college students to local churches and local churches to college students, and CWF is grateful for opportunities like the Back to Barracks Bash every year to see the connection work.

Special thanks are extended to SFC Kenneth Greene at The Citadel for assisting us in this event and to William Rhodes (John Wesley UMC), Denise Cutchins (North Charleston UMC), the Rev. Brent Dehlhom (St Andrews Parish UMC), Ken Stovall (Cokesbury UMC), Evelyn Burwell (New Francis Brown UMC), Linda-Marie Hamill (First UMC, Isle of Palms) and Pastor Haydn Miller (Anchor Church) for coordinating their teams to serve the students. Also special thanks to Geri Jones from the Summerall Chapel at The Citadel for lending a golf cart for our team. It takes a village to do campus ministry.

Poole is director of the Charleston Wesley Foundation. To learn more about each Wesley Foundation and how to support, go to <https://linktr.ee/UMCSCWesley>.



Bluff Road celebrates Back to School

Bluff Road UMC, Columbia, celebrated a back-to-school worship service for their students Sunday, Aug. 10. It was a beautiful worship service, ending with all students and parents coming to the pulpit for prayer for all students and teachers for a productive school year. After worship, the students and parents enjoyed food and fellowship. School supplies and bookbags were distributed. All extra school supplies will be donated to a local elementary school. A big thank you goes to the Bluff Road UMC congregation and community partners for making this event a success.

Native American Ministries.

Turtle symbolism in Native American culture

By Zan Tracy Pender

As you observe Native American culture, it is common to see pictures, drawings, fetishes, carvings, beadwork, jewelry, motifs, dance, songs, traditional stories and more where the turtle is depicted or featured.

When exploring the symbolism of the turtle in American Indian culture, remember that each tribe is unique, and there are many different interpretations of what the turtle represents.

There is a difference between a turtle and tortoise. Turtles live in water and have webbed front feet and streamlined legs for swimming. A turtle comes on land to lay its eggs and leaves the offspring to fend for themselves. A turtle has a flat shell. Turtles tend to migrate and move.

The turtle is a powerful symbol among Native peoples and held in high esteem. The turtle can represent Mother Earth, motherhood, longevity, protection and resilience. Its slow, steady movement embraces patience and steadfastness.

The turtle’s long lifespan is associated with wisdom gained over time. The turtle shell is often seen as symbol of protection, perseverance, resilience and the ability to withstand challenges. These are the character traits that Native peoples want to see in themselves.

Among some tribes, the

turtle plays a prominent role in their creation stories. For example, one creation story says the world was created on turtle’s back. This can be the concept of Turtle Island. For the Iroquois, the turtle plays a central role in their creation story.

The turtle’s shell has many uses. The shell represents healing and spirituality. It is used in healing ceremonies where sacred herbs and medicine are placed in the shell. It can be made into rattles. The Muscogee Creek women strap turtle shell rattles to their legs wearing them under their dresses. The women stomp out the beat and rhythm with their legs using the turtle shell rattles during the Green Corn Dance while the men sing. There are no drums used. The Navajo (Dine) use the turtle shell to dispense medications because the turtle’s healing properties are so great that no other container is adequate—“unrivaled.”

Looking at some other specific tribal beliefs, the Lakota associate the turtle, “ke-ya,” with guardian of life, longevity and fortitude. “Ke-ya” teaches humans to walk their path in peace. Lakota mothers make a leather amulet in the shape of “ke-ya” for their newborn babies. The mother places the child’s umbilical cord within and sews them closed for protection. The amulet keeps the child grounded

and connected to Mother Earth.

For the desert dwelling tribes (Navajo, Zuni, Hopi), the turtle symbolizes water, a precious resource, and is linked with self-reliance, longevity and tenacity.

Some tribes view the turtle’s shell (hard not soft shelled) as a calendar with the 13 large scales in the center representing the 13 full moon cycles in the year. If interested, read “Thirteen Moons on the Turtle’s Back,” by Joseph Bruchac and Jonathan London.

For other tribes, family clans are represented by the turtle. A clan is a smaller family unit of a tribe based on common ancestry.

Grandfather God thanked the turtle. Creator made the turtle’s shell special among all creatures. There are 13 large scales in the center of the shell. There are 13 cycles of the moon during a calendar year. Around the turtle shell’s outer edge, there are 28 small scales. There are 28 days in one lunar cycle during the year. The turtle’s shell represents the connection between the land, the water and the lunar cycle.

The next time you see a hard-shelled turtle, stop and look at the shell. Count the 13 large scales and the 28 smaller. Only Creator can accomplish such works.

Note: It is illegal to use turtle shell inlays when derived from shells of endangered sea or land turtles.

Young Methodists.

Conference hosts ‘Called SC’ for UMC youth discerning a call to ministry

WEST COLUMBIA—Youth trying to understand whether they are being called into ministry are invited to Called SC, a day of exploration designed specifically for youth ages 13-18 to explore and discern God’s call on their life.

The retreat will be held Sept. 20 from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Mount Hebron United Methodist Church, West Columbia.

Participants will join pastors and leaders from all over the South Carolina Conference as well as other young people who are also exploring God’s call to ministry.

“As baptized believers in Jesus Christ, we are all called to be in ministry,” said Chris Lynch, who is helping to organize the event. “The question is not whether we are called to ministry, but how we are called to ministry. Even if you are not sure of whether God is calling you to be a vocational minister, you are welcome to come and explore God’s call with us.”

Attendees will discover different types of ministry; learn about the United Methodist ordination process and ministry next steps; share stories with other youth and adults; receive guidance and prayers from adult mentors, both laity and clergy, already living a life of service to our Lord; and have fun and praising God with new friends.

The total cost for the retreat is \$10 per participant and includes lunch.

Register by Sept. 17. Refunds are not available.

To register: <http://scmyp.org/calledsc>.



Photos courtesy of the Rev. Richard Jayroe

Creek baptism for new confirmands

The Union-Elm Charge, Union, recently welcomed nine new members. Lucas, Carla and Colby Brandon joined by transfer of membership. William James Dozier, Cort Jayroe Brandon, Cully James Baxley, Halle Alana Baxley, Lillian Grace Tanner and Brody Lee McConnell completed confirmation class. The six confirmands also participated in a creek baptism in Black Mingo Creek. Will and Cort participated by remembering their baptism, while the other four were baptized by immersion. Their stoles had a Scripture embroidered on them that each had chosen. A worship and meal were also held at Back Woods Quail.

Campus ministries seeks connection with college students

Campus ministers and chaplains of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church are eager to connect with incoming and current college students so they can welcome and support these students as they begin their college journey.

They are inviting United Methodists to share college students’ info through this form: <https://forms.gle/JQNArkHucRjvz1WB9>.

The form can be completed by anyone who knows a student—a pastor, youth minister, family member, friend or the students themselves.

For more information on campus ministry: <https://www.umcsc.org/campus-ministries/>



Pack the Backpack!

St. Paul UMC, located in Greenville’s West End, sponsored their fourth Pack the Backpack Event. St. Paul members collected school supplies and set up stations throughout the church and in the Fellowship Hall with the supplies. Students were able to choose their favorite color binder, composition and marble notebooks along with headphone or earbuds. Traditional school supplies such as crayons, scissors, markers, Expo markers, highlighters and folders were available (pictured at left). Students were also able to choose a pair of Bombas socks. A special table was set up for Pastor Brian Humphries (pictured at right) to talk with families and pray with students about the coming school year. More than 30 church members volunteered to work the stations that served almost 300 students.



Immerse to feature ‘Storyteller’ theme Nov. 14–16

United Methodist youth throughout South Carolina will gather this fall for Immerse, a discipleship retreat from the South Carolina Methodist Youth Program.

Slated for Nov. 14-16 at Asbury Hills Retreat Center, northern Greenville County, the weekend will feature worship, connection and fun.

The theme is “Storyteller,” drawing from Psalm 9:1: “I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of your wonderful deeds.”

The Rev. John Sterling Poole, director of the Charleston Wesley Foundation, is the event speaker. Poole spent three years as the youth leader at a Charleston United Meth-

odist church before going into campus ministry. He has a deep passion for working with young people, and he really enjoys taking faith seriously and having a lot of fun. A student at Duke Divinity School to become an ordained deacon in the UMC, Poole lives in North Charleston with his wife, Hannah, and their son James

Dempsey, born in December.

Philip Gilchrest and his praise team will be leading worship for Immerse. President and CEO of TrueScale Records, his compositions have been recognized by industry giants such as Disney, Paramount Global and Netflix. Gilchrest is the minister of music for two United Method-

ist churches—his home church, St. Matthews UMC and Good Hope Wesley Chapel UMC, Camden.

Registration is now open, and space is limited. Early bird cost of \$180 ends Sept. 15, and the regular cost of \$195 ends Oct. 17. Register at <http://sc-myp.org/mountain-immersed-registration>.

Camps & Retreat Ministries.

Back to school, but the mission continues

As everyone heads back to school, we’ve just wrapped up another amazing summer at Asbury Hills.

This year, campers explored John Wesley’s three simple rules for Christian living: do no harm, do good and stay in love with God. We went deeper, discovering that when we stay in love with God, we are empowered to do no harm, do good and love others fully.

It was a powerful summer. Some campers experienced God’s love for the very first time, while others

were reminded of it for the hundredth. Now as our campers and staff return home, they carry with them the seeds of faith, ready to share with friends, families and communities.

But our mission doesn’t end when summer does. As we move into fall, we’re excited to welcome guests for retreats at Asbury Hills, Camp Providence on Lake Hartwell and Sea Islands on beautiful Johns Island. These sacred spaces are open for the whole body of

Christ to gather, reconnect with God, enjoy creation and deepen relationships.

Whether you seek the mountain trails of Asbury Hills, the calm waters of Camp Providence, or the coastal beauty of Sea Islands, let’s dream together about your next church retreat, small group getaway or personal time of renewal. To learn more, call 864-836-3711.

—Kate Nobles

Columbia College announces academic reorganization

COLUMBIA—Columbia College has announced a strategic academic reorganization that restructures its academic divisions into four new schools, a move designed to strengthen its academic foundation, enhance student success and support the institution’s long-term growth goals, including the aspiration to serve 2,500 students by the end of the decade.

Approved by the Columbia College Board of Trustees and effective Aug. 12, the restructuring streamlines the college’s academic framework while investing in key areas such as health sciences, graduate stud-

ies and online education.

“This reorganization represents much more than a structural change—it’s a reflection of where Columbia College is headed,” said President Dr. John H. Dozier. “We are building a stronger, more focused academic identity that aligns with our mission, responds to workforce needs and positions us to grow in both size and impact.”

The new academic structure includes the following four schools:

- School of Arts and Sciences, which unites the liberal arts, humanities and social sciences to foster inquiry,

- cultural literacy and real-world problem solving
- School of Business and Leadership, focused on innovation, professional readiness and leadership development across sectors
- School of Education, reinforcing the college’s long-standing legacy in teacher preparation while introducing a new Center for Education Innovation
- School of Health Sciences, representing a significant new investment in allied health education, addresses regional health and workforce needs

In addition to the school

realignments, the college will create an Associate Dean of Graduate Studies position to oversee the coordination and support of all graduate programs and transition all evening courses (except social work) to fully online beginning Fall 2025, reflecting changing student preferences and expanding access for adult learners.

“This reorganization strengthens our academic enterprise while honoring the values that have always defined Columbia College,” said Tim Arnold, chair of the Columbia College Board of Trustees. “It allows us to grow with inten-

tion, attract new leadership and remain deeply connected to the needs of our students and community.”

The announcement follows a series of coordinated changes within the Division of Academic Affairs designed to increase operational efficiency, enhance programmatic clarity and expand student opportunities.

Columbia College will host a series of virtual Q&A sessions in the coming weeks to share more about the changes and the vision behind them.

For more information: <https://www.columbiasc.edu/reorganization>.



Grant participants meet at Epworth to get certified in N4.

Children’s grant participants get N4 facilitator certification

By Toni Roberts Taylor

On Aug. 9, more than 50 clergy and laity in from the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church’s Eli Lilly grant initiative gathered at Epworth Children’s Home for a full day of transformative training, made possible through the expertise of partners from Narrative 4.

This event marked a significant milestone as participants became certified N4 facilitators, empowering their churches to deploy the Narrative 4 story exchange practice within their communities.

The story exchange model, central to Narrative 4, offers churches a dynamic tool to foster deeper intergenerational relationships. By guiding participants through a process of sharing and listening to personal stories, the exchange helps bridge generational divides and strengthens communal ties.

There are four key benefits of the N4 Story Exchange:

- Builds Community and Brave Space. Story exchange creates a safe and supportive environment—often called a “brave space”—where participants are invited to share authentically and listen deeply. This process strengthens community bonds and fosters mutual respect.
- Activates Connection. By bearing witness to one another’s stories, connections between individuals

are activated and expanded. This practice deepens empathy and understanding, vital for vibrant and inclusive church communities.

- Opens Doors to Difficult Conversations. When people experience the courage to share and hear life experiences, they become better equipped to engage in meaningful dialogue around challenging topics. The story exchange is an effective catalyst for honest conversations, laying the groundwork for healing and growth.
- Supports Church Leadership. As certified facilitators, clergy and laity alike are equipped to lead their congregations in story exchanges, modeling vulnerability and leadership. This initiative supports their ongoing development and enriches their capacity to guide their communities through change.

Certified N4 facilitators are now prepared to implement story exchanges throughout South Carolina UMCs. This initiative will help build resilient relationships, encourage intergenerational understanding and nurture a culture of belonging—all foundational elements for thriving faith communities.

The partnership between the conference, N4 and the Eli Lilly Endowment Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer initiative signifies a commitment to innovation, healing and hope for the future

New members approved for SMC Board of Trustees

SPARTANBURG— Three new members joined the Board of Trustees at Spartanburg Methodist College following their approval by the United Methodist Church Annual Conference.

New trustees are Margaret Clayton, Elaine Smith and Rob Barrett.

“We are blessed to welcome these new members to the board,” said the Rev. Jerry Gadsden, chair of the board. “Their experience and wisdom will be a great help in driving the vision and mission of SMC. I look forward to working with them to strengthen and bolster the college’s future.”

SMC trustees serve a three-year term beginning July 1. The new members will attend their first meeting in October.

The conference also approved term renewals for Andrew Babb, Pat Barber, Gadsden, Lane Glaze, Marcos Gomez, Catherine Gramling and Clint Settle.



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Advocate.





Historical Society by the Rev. Joseph Kovas

Class meetings

Throughout the church’s history, Christians have searched for ways to help them grow in their discipleship. One ministry that has contributed to Christian formation is the small group.

Many churches today have incorporated small groups as a part of their discipleship ministries. One of the church traditions that uses small group ministries is Methodism. The Methodist denominations come from a long heritage of small groups. The original small groups used by Methodists were the class meetings established by John Wesley in the 1740s. According to the first American bishops, Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke, the class meetings were the “pillars” of the Methodist movement’s ministry.

The class meetings were a defining characteristic of the Methodist movement in Britian and in the American context of Methodism. Albert Outler stated the class meetings were the “distinctive” characteristic of the movement. Not only were they one of the driving factors of the movement, but they also were, according to Wesley himself, the “sinews” of Methodism. As the movement spread, the class meetings followed. This is true in the Methodist movement in America.

One source that documents the spread of the class meetings is “The Rise of Methodism in the West.” In this account, the historian notes as the local preachers moved from North Carolina to Kentucky, they gathered the people together to organize class meetings. The historian illustrates the use of the class meetings in Western expansion as a tool for evangelism. Kevin Watson states the class meetings are a piece of Methodism “DNA” that was transmitted to new communities in the church’s western movement. Although the class meetings in Methodism were cornerstones for evangelism in America and served as a tool to further Christians’ discipleship, they began to decline by the 1850s, and by the turn of the 20th century, they were almost extinct.

The class meeting ministry in The United Methodist Church over the past 40 years has had a resurgence. Both Daivd Lowes Watson and Kevin Watson have contributed to a renewal of the class meeting ministries in their scholarship. In addition, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church passed a resolution reinstating the class meeting and leader in a new paragraph in the *Book of Discipline* in 1984.

In 2015, Joe Lovino published an article with the United Methodist News Service on “Covenant Discipleship: Changing lives, transforming communities.” Covenant Discipleship is styled after the original class meeting to meet the needs of the 21st century of American Methodism.

The Methodist Class Meetings and their spiritual descendants have blessed many throughout the generations and continue to do so today in the in our local congregations.

Kovas serves as the vice president of the Historical Society of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and pastors First UMC, Cheraw.

Immigration stories sought for new book

Many of us have immigration stories that may get lost or forgotten over time. We come from interesting places all over the world.

Arlene Andrews, member of Trinity United Methodist Church, Blythewood, and Advocate Editor Jessica Brodie are collecting stories of South Carolina United Methodists who immigrated to the United States in the past 100 years or so. The stories will be shared through a book slated for publication by the Advocate Press, the newspaper’s book-publishing division.

If you are interested in sharing your story or know someone affiliated with the UMC in South Carolina who would be interested, contact Arlene Andrews at aandr30528@aol.com. Stories should be roughly 1,500 words; due Dec. 1.

Historic Eccles church progresses with much-needed restoration

By Jessica Brodie

HUGER—A historic church in the Francis Marion National Forest is getting some much-needed restoration.

Eccles United Methodist Church, constructed in 1882 and tucked deep within the rural area northwest of Mount Pleasant, has been slowly declining over the years because of extensive rot, heavy wood deterioration, weathering damage and some biogrowth. Churchgoers worship in a modern structure next door, but they wanted to restore the historic original building.

Nancy Platt, Eccles member who is spearheading the restoration, said the church raised the funds needed to restore the old church and found a contractor who would take on the project.

“He’s been busy at work, and the little building is really starting to take shape,” Platt said.

Completing the entrances is in progress, and primer covers the building at this point. The handicap ramp goes in next, and then the church will be painted “Wings of an Angel” white. Platt said the windows will be the final exterior piece as they move into the next phase of the project—the interior plus power.

“The project became restoration not preservation as we wrestled with costs, contractors and code,” Platt said. “We truly want this to be a



Photo courtesy of Nancy Platt

Completing the entrances is in progress.

special place for young and, especially, old (those who have special childhood memories in the church), so the ramp changed our focus a bit.”

The project started in spring 2022, when a historic preservation class at the American College of Building Arts in Charleston spent the semester analyzing the historic building and then producing a master plan with research, condition assessments and remediation suggestions.

Contributions enabled them to replace the roof. Later, carpentry students at the American College of Building Arts in downtown Charleston completed window restorations.



From the Archives by Dr. Phillip Stone

President Greene, educator and leader

Walter K. Greene was, as of this writing, the only Wofford alumnus to serve as president of Wofford College. While serving as Wofford’s fifth president from 1942-1951, he also served for a time as Columbia College’s president as well as the Upper South Carolina Conference lay leader.

Born in 1884 in Greenwood, Walter Kirkland Greene entered the freshman class at Wofford in 1899. He was both a good student and a solid second baseman on the college’s baseball team. In this era, baseball was more prominent than football at the college—indeed, the annual conference insisted for years that the college stop playing intercollegiate football because it was so dangerous. Greene graduated from Wofford in 1903, and in 1905, earned his master’s degree in English from Vanderbilt. No doubt President Henry Nelson Snyder, his English professor at Wofford, helped guide him to Vanderbilt, which was then the Methodist Episcopal Church, South’s central university where Snyder himself had studied.

For the next 15 years, Dr. Greene taught in and led three preparatory schools, and then in the early 1920s, he went to Harvard, where he earned a second M.A. and a Ph.D. in English. He taught English at Wesleyan College in Georgia until 1928; then he went to Duke

as professor of English and dean of undergraduate studies. So, with time spent at Wofford, Vanderbilt, and Duke, he was well steeped in Methodism.

At Duke, he would have worked with several other Wofford graduates, such as President William Preston Few. When in 1941, Dr. Snyder indicated that it was time for him to end his 40-year presidency at Wofford, the trustees found in Greene a scholar and teacher with strong ties to South Carolina Methodism but who had spent nearly 40 years living, working and gaining experience elsewhere.

President Greene quickly engaged with Wofford and with South Carolina Methodism. He became a member of Central Church in Spartanburg, serving on various committees. In 1943, the Upper South Carolina Conference elected him as a lay delegate to the 1944 General Conference. In 1947, he was the lay leader of the Upper South Carolina Conference and was the first elected lay delegate to the 1948 General Conference. He also was elected to General and Jurisdictional conferences in 1952. It is interesting to note that two of his sisters were married to clergy in the conference, which no doubt helped him maintain a connection to the Palmetto State even when he was living elsewhere. Those connections quite likely

helped him become a leading lay member in the conference, though being Wofford’s leader also played a part.

World War II dominated much of Greene’s presidency, and at the end of the war, South Carolina’s Methodist leaders were trying to figure out the future of church-related higher education. Some leaders wanted to merge all the senior colleges on a new campus in Spartanburg. A convoluted series of votes in the two conferences wound up creating a single board of trustees and administration for Wofford and Columbia College, and the new board elected Dr. Greene as president of Wofford and Columbia. Some assumed it was a precursor to a full merger, but that never happened. Three years later, the conference undid the arrangement, which served mostly to divide Greene’s time between Spartanburg and Columbia. By this time, Dr. Greene was 67, and he retired in the summer of 1951.

Greene’s life and presidency at Wofford (and Columbia) show how much the colleges were woven into the life of South Carolina Methodism as late as 70 years ago.

Stone is archivist for the South Carolina Conference and Wofford College. Read his blog at https://blogs.wofford.edu/from_the_archives.

Across the UMC.

Obituaries.

David Cochran

BRANCHVILLE—David Cochran, brother of the Rev. Minnie Dickerson, died July 28, 2025. Rev. Dickerson is the pastor of the Ruffin Parish, Ruffin.

Funeral services were held Aug. 3 at Stephens Funeral Home, Walterboro.

Rev. Carl Duane Evans



Evans

COLUMBIA—Dr. Carl Duane Evans, an affiliate member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Aug. 12, 2025.

Dr. Evans served churches in Kansas and Indiana before beginning his teaching career at the University of South Carolina.

Funeral services were held Aug. 16 at Washington Street UMC.

Dr. Evans is survived by his wife, Cheryl W. Evans, and two sons.

Margaret A. McAlister

WILLIAMSTON, Vt.—Margaret A. McAlister, mother of Mimi Rogers, died Aug. 6, 2025. Mrs. Rogers is the wife of the Rev. Jesse Rogers, pastor of New Hope United Methodist Church, Pomaria.

Funeral services were held Aug. 13 at St. Monica Church, Barre, Vermont, with burial in St. Sylvester Cemetery.

Mrs. McAlister is survived by her five daughters and son.

Barbara Earle Ropp

SPARTANBURG—Barbara Earle Ropp, wife of the Rev. John Wesley Ropp Jr., died July 26, 2025. Rev. Ropp is a retired member of the South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

A memorial service was held Aug. 2 at Central UMC.

Memorials may be made to Mobile Meals of Spartanburg, P.O. Box 461, Spartanburg, SC 29304; or to Central UMC, 233 N. Church St., Spartanburg, SC 29306.

Mrs. Ropp is survived by her husband and two sons.

Louise Worley Sowell

INMAN—Louise Worley Sowell, widow of the Rev. Joseph Huey Sowell, died July 31, 2025.

Funeral services were held Aug. 7 at Gramling Methodist Church with burial in the church cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Epworth Children’s Home, 2900 Millwood Ave., Columbia, SC 29205; to Agape Hospice of South Carolina, 157 N. Church St., Spartanburg, SC 29306; or to Gramling Methodist Church Elevator Fund, P.O. Box 1, Gramling, SC 29348.

Mrs. Sowell is survived by her two daughters.

Advocate survey to help newspaper improve

How can the *Advocate* address your news needs better?

The *Advocate* is working to more broadly understand the wishes and needs of its readers across South Carolina, continuing a full-scale period of market research so it can expand and serve United Methodists better now and in the future.

In addition to listening sessions, focus groups and other methods, the *Advocate* has created a survey it hopes people will take.

“Completing the survey helps us better understand who our readers are, why they read the *Advocate* and how we can improve,” said *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie. “We have a long and thriving history. Established in 1836, we’re the oldest newspaper in Methodism still in existence, and we want to continue to thrive and serve readers long into the future. The answers to this survey will help us do that better.”

To take the confidential survey, scan the QR code here or go to <https://advocatesc.org/survey>.



Photo courtesy of Deborah Calhoun

Fraternity brothers visit Emmanuel

Omega Psi Phi fraternity visited Emmanuel UMC, Sumter, recently. The Rev. Julius McDowell is an Omega and serves as an assistant to Emmanuel pastor the Rev. James Moses Smith as he continues to make tremendous recovery from serious illness. Smith is back in the pulpit, but McDowell is an Emmanuel “homeboy,” member Deborah Calhoun notes. From left are Sen. Kevin Johnson, Mike Davis, TreyShawn Moore, Alphonso Times, the Rev. Julius McDowell, the Rev. James Moses Smith, John Williams, Avery Weaver and Vincent Ferguson.

Worldwide News.

Grants awarded for immigration ministries

WASHINGTON—The United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race has awarded grants, totaling more than \$160,000, to 17 initiatives across the United States that support immigrant communities and equip United Methodist leaders in those communities. Because of the potential risks faced in immigration justice work, the agency has decided not to publish the names or locations of grant recipients.

Advocating for homeless people in Washington

WASHINGTON—The United Methodist Church’s Native American International Caucus has issued a statement offering solidarity with the homeless community in the U.S. capital. “We cannot be silent when we hear that those without shelter may be forcibly removed, pushed far away or jailed simply for surviving in public view,” said the group.

Scouts, UM Men look to the future

ST. SIMONS ISLAND, Ga.—United Methodist Men held its first in-person National Men’s and Scouting Ministry Gathering since 2017 at Epworth-by-the-Sea, a United Methodist retreat center in Georgia. The event included workshops and worship services to build rapport and plan for the future. One main concern was reaching young men, especially at a time when online influencers appear to hold so much sway.

Responding to Trump’s D.C. police takeover

WASHINGTON—Bishop LaTrelle Easterling describes how the church offers “a more excellent way” as the Trump administration federalizes the police and deploys the National Guard troops in the U.S. capital. United Methodist churches in the D.C. area already work to house the homeless, mentor youth and provide health care, writes Easterling, who leads the Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula-Delaware conferences. As a church, “we reject any use of force that treats God’s children as inconvenient eyesores or threats, rather than as beloved siblings,” she writes.

‘Morning Service’ revives community

NYANYADZI, Zimbabwe—From humble beginnings three years ago, a morning church service is meeting struggling people where they are. The service has drawn those facing addiction and other problems. Zimbabwe Area Bishop Gift K. Machinga described the ministry as “a powerful and Christ-centered form of evangelism.”

Book connects Methodist history, present day

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Key moments in Methodist history that could have impact today are detailed in a new book by a United Methodist pastor and the top executive of United Methodist Archives and History. The authors invite readers to travel outside their comfort zones, whether in online spaces, digital communities or outside the church. “Calling on Fire: Reclaiming the Method of Methodism” is written by the Rev. Chris Heckert and Ashley Boggan of Archives and History.

Vonner on voting bill anniversary

NEW YORK—The top executive of United Women in Faith says the Voting Rights Act of 1965 has been steadily undermined since its enactment 60 years ago. “We should not be content to celebrate what was, without ensuring that its strength and vigor remain today and well into the future,” Sally Vonner said in a statement.

Two churches join in building affordable housing

ROANOKE, Va.—Greene Memorial and Trinity United Methodist churches have merged congregations and missions. Working with a local nonprofit, congregants are transforming the historic Trinity building into 15 affordable apartments for retirees, turning sacred space into safe space.

Leadership Gathering to be held in Canada

WASHINGTON—The Council of Bishops has announced that the 2026 COB Leadership Gathering will be held in Calgary, Canada. The Oct. 20-24, 2026, event invites bishops, church leaders, lay and clergy members from around the globe to come together to dream, discern and co-create the church of tomorrow, the council said in a press release. “We are being called to reimagine the Church—not to preserve what is familiar but to fulfill God’s calling and vision for our future,” Bishop Tracy S. Malone, president of the Council of Bishops, said.

Church court denies reconsideration request

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The Judicial Council, The United Methodist Church’s top court, has issued Decision 1519 that denies a request to reconsider its ruling in Decision 1517. In the earlier decision, the church court ruled that the Dakotas Annual Conference improperly used the denomination’s church-closure provision to allow a church to exit with property.

—Courtesy UMNNews



Adult Lessons
by the Rev. Walter E. Strawther

About the
Author

Strawther
pastors Mount
Zion United
Methodist
Church,
Kingstree.

The women of Genesis

Sept. 7
Laugh Out Loud
Lesson Scripture: Genesis 18:1-15
Background Scripture: Genesis 12:1-7; 17:1-19; 21:1-7
Key Verse: Genesis 18:12, “So Sarah laughed to herself, thinking, I’m no longer able to have children and my husband’s old.”

The story of unexpected travelers showing up on Abraham’s and Sarah’s doorstep is usually told from Abraham’s point of view. Yes, Abraham initiates numerous acts of hospitality to the travelers, but Sarah does more than offer a contribution of kneaded dough baked into cakes. The travelers share a message that requires faith from both Abraham and Sarah. From Sarah’s perspective the promise of the birth of a child a year from the time of this visit seems more than a bit far-fetched. Sarah not only laughs to herself, but her statement that “I’m no longer able to have children and my husband’s old,” can be interpreted as both her and Abraham are as good as dead. But her laughter and her statement are not the end of her story.

The readings from Genesis 12, 17 and 21 highlight Sarah faithfulness over and above this momentary expression of doubt. Sarah has faithfully journeyed with Abraham not knowing where God would lead them or how things would turn out. Of course, we can’t overlook the birth of Ishmael through Sarah’s servant Hagar as an example of another act of doubt. However, I imagine Abraham sharing with Sarah the covenant God makes with him to give him offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. As God comes through as only God can, Sarah’s laughter shifts from disbelief to joy. Sarah is not a bit player in this story but the conduit through which God blesses a multitude of nations.

This series of readings from Genesis invites us to consider matters of faith from the perspective of “minor” characters in the Bible. How do we make sense of Sarah’s faithfulness in the context of a patriarchal society? Sarah eventually admits to her laughter. How do we deal with our doubts and acts of disbelief while

remaining available to be used for God’s purposes?

Sept. 14
No Laughing Matter
Lesson Scripture: Genesis 21:8-21
Background Scripture: Genesis 16:1-16
Key Verse: Genesis 21:18, “Get up, pick up the boy, and take him by the hand because I will make of him a great nation.”

The story of Hagar and Ishmael gives us an opportunity to consider the plight of those who are used, abused and discarded. As the story unfolds, Abram is 86 years old and still without a male heir until Sarai offers up Hagar to him, and Ishmael is born. Fast forward to our reading from Genesis 21, and Sarah has given birth to Isaac, making Ishmael obsolete. In fact, Ishmael becomes an unwanted competitor to Isaac. Sarah notices Ishmael laughing and making fun of Isaac during a feast and determines that Hagar and Ishmael can no longer stay. Against his better judgment, Abraham grants Sarah’s wish. Hagar and Ishmael are sent into the wilderness to die, but God shows up to sustain their lives.

Limiting our interpretation to Hagar’s perspective, we are reminded that God is always for the downtrodden and the forgotten. It seems counter to the nature of God to instruct someone to go back to someone who is abusive and harsh, but this is exactly the instruction given to Hagar in Genesis 16:9. However, this instruction comes with a promise: God will make a great nation of the child that Hagar is carrying. Hagar and Ishmael are inseparably connected to Sarah and Isaac. As noted in last week’s lesson, Isaac’s name is derived from God turning Sarah’s derisive, disbelieving laughter into joyful laughter. Likewise, Ishmael’s name, “God hears,” is the result of his derisive laughter of his younger brother Isaac. Ishmael’s laughter leads to him and Hagar being left for dead, but God hears their cries for help. We are reminded that God is faithful, and God will keep every promise.

What do we make of the fact that Hagar, an Egyptian, is the first in the Hebrew

Bible to give name to God? How do we reconcile Sarah’s treatment of Hagar with being the matriarch of our faith tradition?

Sept. 21
Cunningly Courageous
Lesson Scripture: Genesis 24:20-27, 50-56
Background Scripture: Genesis 24-27
Key Verse: Genesis 24:25, “She continued, ‘We have plenty of straw and feed for the camels, and a place to spend the night.’”

The story of Rebekah and Isaac’s marriage gives us an opportunity to explore family dynamics. We are again reminded that although biblical times are marked by a patriarchal system, women play a determining role in the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. While it is true that Rebekah has limited opportunities when compared with Abraham, she does exhibit a similar sense of adventurous faithfulness contributed to Abraham. She doesn’t hesitate to offer water to Abraham’s servant and his camels, fulfilling the servant’s prayer concerning the woman who will serve as Isaac’s wife. She chooses to go with Abraham’s servant without delay. The birth of twin boys, Esau and Jacob, serves as a major turning point in the relationship between Rebekah and Isaac as Isaac favors Esau and Rebekah loves Jacob.

Our key verse for this lesson serves as a foreshadowing of Rebekah’s understanding of her role in the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham and now Isaac. Rebekah while living with her father claims ownership of the family’s resources, noting “we have plenty of straw.” As Esau and Jacob develop their personalities, Rebekah recognizes Esau’s impetuosity and pushes Jacob to deceive Isaac so that Jacob inherits the promise. There is no way around the messiness of how the blessing was secured, and we are again reminded that God works through our failures and foibles. Rebekah uses what limited power she possesses to ensure that God’s promise is fulfilled. She doesn’t let her limitations keep her from embracing her God-given role in this

story. How does the existence of patriarchy help or hinder our understanding of the use of deception by Rebekah and Jacob? Do we continue to put women in a position to manipulate situations instead of simply exercise power? Please explain your response.

Sept. 28
Competing for Acceptance
Lesson Scripture: Genesis 29:31-30:24
Background Scripture: Genesis 29:1-30:24; 35:9-26
Key Verse: Genesis 30:23, “She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, ‘God has taken away my shame.’”

There is sibling rivalry, and then there is Leah and Rachel. We are again reminded how patriarchy pits women against each other—in this case, two sisters married to the same man. To win favor with their husband, Jacob, and the greater community, these two sisters turn childbirth into a competition. Leah shows determination as she struggles with being an afterthought or second choice. According to Genesis 29:31, God made it possible for Leah to have children because of her status in the family, while Rachel is barren. With the birth of each child, except Dinah, we get a sense of the struggle for love and acceptance Leah and Rachel face. In Genesis 30:23 we read that Rachel is finally able to give birth and names her first child Joseph, meaning “God will add.” Unfortunately for Rachel, she dies during the birth of her second child, Benjamin.

Typically, we read this portion of Scripture as the establishment of the 12 tribes and the founding of Israel as a nation. Indeed, according to Genesis 35:10, God changes Jacob’s name to Israel and again commits to making a great nation of the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel. However, from the perspective of Leah and Rachel, we are reminded of the complexity of living as fallen human beings with the propensity to compete against each other instead of unifying for the common good. Leah and Rachel are to be commended for their role in giving birth to the foundational members of the Judeo-Christian tradition even as they struggled to find their place in a society that limited the role and status of women.

How does the struggle between Leah and Rachel inform our understanding of the history of Israel in the Bible? Where do you see God in action in today’s reading?



Children’s
Sermon
by the Rev.
Meg Cook

Lost and found

Date: Sunday, Sept. 14
Scripture: Luke 15:1-10
Time Frame: Three minutes
Supplies: A coin (toy or actual) and a coin to hide. The coin to hide can be an oversized cardboard circle wrapped in tin foil.
Note: This children’s sermon includes an object lesson. You need to be able to hide a coin. This can be somewhere in the sanctuary or—if you do not want to take the time to move around the sanctuary, or if mobility is a concern—you could use a small box or scarf to “hide” the coin in a spot kind of in front of the kids.

Children’s sermon:
Do: Welcome the children warmly, invite them to sit and join them.
Ask: Have you ever lost something? A toy, a shoe or maybe even a coin? (Pause.) How did it feel? (Wait for responses.) You looked and you looked—because you really wanted to find it, right?

Say: In our Bible story today, Jesus tells two short stories, called parables, about things that get lost. One is about a sheep—a shepherd had 100 sheep, and one got lost. The shepherd left the 99 and went looking until they found the one that wandered off. When the shepherd found the lost sheep, he was so happy! Then, Jesus tells another parable about a woman who had 10 silver coins and lost one. She lit a lamp, swept the whole room and searched carefully until she found it. She was so happy she had a party with her friends.

Say: I have hidden a coin here in the sanctuary so we can find it and celebrate. Do you want to pretend with me? Let’s go find it and then we’ll celebrate! (Do it! And don’t be afraid to celebrate big and silly.)

Say: These parables, stories that teach us, tell us about how much God loves each one of us. Just like the shepherd searched for the lost sheep, and the woman cleaned her house to find one coin, God never gives up on us. It doesn’t matter if we make mistakes, wander away or feel lost—God comes running and rejoices when we come back. Heaven is full of joy when someone returns, just like these stories say! Do you know the theological word for this? (Pause.) It’s called grace. These parables focus on God’s relentless grace, not our works, which means what we do. God goes after the one that went missing, rejoicing in being together again, not punishing the wanderer. That’s Wesleyan grace in action. It reminds us that God’s love never gives up. Never.

Ask: Who can help someone feel found this week? Maybe by saying kind words or inviting someone to play? (Pause and affirm.)

Say: That’s wonderful. Let’s pray together.
Prayer: Dear God (echo), we love you (echo). Thank you for searching for us (echo), help us look for others (echo), and celebrate when we’re found (echo). Amen (echo).
Cook pastors Grace UMC, Columbia.

Happenings.

Event Calendar.

August
Aug. 22-24—LSM School (Walterboro District), Zoom and Bethel UMC, Walterboro, 6:30-8:30 p.m. (Fri.); 8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. (Sat.); 1:30-5 p.m. (Sun.), \$25. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Walterboro-District-Lay-School-August-2025-final-rev.pdf>

Aug. 22-24—“Journey to Joy: Lessons from the Letters” Women’s Weekend, Lake Junaluska, N.C. More information: lakejunaluska.com/joy or call 800-222-4930.

Aug. 23—ERT Basic Training Session, Mount Hebron UMC, Columbia, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

Aug. 23—ERT Renewal Training Session, Mount Hebron UMC, Columbia, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

Aug. 26—Advocate Community Listening Session (Hartsville), Lyttleton Street UMC, Camden, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

September
Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)
UWF Killingsworth Special Emphasis Month

Sept. 1—Labor Day (United Methodist Conference Center closed)

Sept. 1—Registration opens for UWF Assembly 2026. <http://uwfaith.org/assembly>

Sept. 2—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 6-7 p.m.

Sept. 6-7—LSM School (Charleston District), Cokesbury UMC, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. (Sat.); 2:30-5 p.m. (Sun.), \$30. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Charleston-District-2025-Fall-1-Session-Registration-Form.pdf>

Sept. 7—LSM School (Greenwood District) Session 1, Broad Street UMC, Clinton, 2-7 p.m., \$35. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Greenwood-District-Registration-Form-for-Fall-2025-classes-PDF.pdf>

Sept. 8—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.

Sept. 8—Bishop Will Willimon, “The Church We Carry: Loss, Leadership and the Future of Our Church,” Furman University, Greenville, 10:30 a.m.-Noon.

Sept. 8-11—“Reclaiming the Mission. Reviving the Church” Leadership Convocation, Journey UMC, Columbia, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. each day. <https://www.umcsc.org/lead/>

Sept. 12—Deadline for Columbia District UWFaith Annual Meeting

Sept. 13—Connectional Ministries, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Sept. 14—Epworth Children’s Home Work Day Offering

Sept. 14—Grandparent’s Day

Sept. 14—LSM School (Greenwood District) Session 2, Broad Street UMC, Clinton, 2-7 p.m., \$35. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Greenwood-District-Registration-Form-for-Fall-2025-classes-PDF.pdf>

Sept. 14—Bishop Will Willimon, “The Church We Carry: Loss, Leadership and the Future of Our Church,” 10:30-noon, Furman University, Greenville.

Sept. 16—Bishop Will Willimon, “The Church We Carry: Loss, Leadership and the Future of Our Church,” Wofford College, Spartanburg, 10:30 a.m.-noon.

Sept. 20—LSM School (Rock Hill District) Session 1, St. John’s UMC, Rock Hill, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., \$30. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Rock-Hill-District-Lay-School-Fall-2025.pdf>

Sept. 20—Called SC, Day of Exploration for Youth, Mount Hebron UMC, Columbia, 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m., \$10. Register: <http://scmyp.org/calledsc/>

Sept. 20—ERT Basic Training Session, North Orangeburg UMC, Orangeburg, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

Sept. 20—ERT Renewal Training Session, North Orangeburg UMC, Orangeburg, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

Sept. 20—Columbia District UWFaith Annual Meeting, Francis Burns UMC, Columbia, 9:30 a.m. To register, call 803-543-9405 or email tiffphillips2014@yahoo.com.

Sept. 20-Oct. 31—Augusta Road UMC, Pelzer, pumpkin sale.

Sept. 21—Youth Service Fund Sunday

Sept. 22—Autumnal Equinox

Sept 22-Oct. 31—Pumpkin Patch, Carteret Street UMC, Beaufort, Noon-6 p.m. (M-F, Sun.); 9 a.m.-6 p.m. (Sat.).

Sept. 24— Grand opening of Epworth’s Family Resource Center, 10:30 a.m. to noon, Columbia.

Sept. 27—LSM School (Rock Hill District) Session 2, St. John’s UMC, Rock Hill, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., \$30. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Rock-Hill-District-Lay-School-Fall-2025.pdf>

Sept. 27—Augusta Road UMC, Pelzer, yard sale

Sept. 29—Wespath-Bishop Leonard Fairley Golf Invitational benefiting Africa University, Orangeburg Country Club.

Sept. 28—Charleston District United Methodist Men’s first Men’s Day Program, 3:30 p.m., Joshua UMC, Moncks Corner. Rev. Jeffrey Salley, guest speaker.

Sept. 30—Advocate Community Listening Session (Marion), First UMC, Conway, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

October
Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)
UWF Bethlehem Center Spartanburg Special Emphasis Month

Oct. 5—World Communion Sunday

Oct. 7—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 6-7 p.m.



Photos courtesy of Enid McClam



Bringing new members up to speed
St. Mark UMC, Taylors, hosted a new members fellowship event under the leadership of Dr. Carlton J. McClam Sr. recently. Juana Slade served as organizer of this fellowship to welcome new members and share information regarding United Methodist ministries. They also highlighted the importance of the *Advocate* in staying informed as they continue to grow in their faith.



Photo courtesy of Kelly Gottheiner

Fun and fellowship
Manning UMC, Manning, held their annual pickleball tournament, a churchwide event that fostered much fellowship. Winners were Cathy, Jessica, Jay, Joanne, Ryleighs and Hunter.

Classifieds.

Jobs

Keyboard/Pianist
El Bethel UMC, 3462 Catawba River Road, Fort Lawn, SC 29714 is seeking a keyboard/pianist. Pianist will play for our service of worshipping God at 9:00 a.m. as well as for some special services.
For more information and to apply, call S/PPRC Chairwoman Nell Ashworth at (803) 287-4227.

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TWO HARTSVILLE UMCs

From Page 1

ing had collapsed.”
He sent her pictures, and when the truth sank in, Burnell could do only one thing: call her district superintendent and ask for help.

Hartsville District Superintendent the Rev. Telley Gadson found the congregation a place to worship on Easter, at nearby Kingsville UMC, then they got to work finding a place Kellybell could worship long-term while they endured the arduous process of discovering the cause and the solution for the collapse.

At Wesley UMC, Hartsville, Gadson struck gold. Immediately, the church offered up its spacious fellowship hall, All Saints Hall, which Kellybell was welcome to use as long as they needed.

For almost a year and a half, first under the leadership of the Rev. Tony Adams and now under the Rev. Fred McDaniel, the two churches have shared a space with relative ease, even though the congregations are quite different.

Wesley is a predominantly White congregation that McDaniel describes as “folksy” and “liturgical,” while Kellybell is a predominantly Black congregation with what McDaniel describes as a jubilant high-praise feel. Yet both share space Sunday after Sunday—Kellybell at 9, Wesley at 10:30, with a crossover Sunday school hour in-between.

“I’ve been so excited about this and pleased with this,” McDaniel said, noting it’s a great way to be a part of

genuine Christian unity. “Jesus prays and desires unity in spirit and in practical unity.”

He said his congregation often stops to listen to the music that is part of Kellybell’s service, impressed with their drums and keyboard and the style of worship.

“Our people are really inspired by it,” he said. “It’s been a good opportunity for people to learn different styles of worship.”

“We’ve had nice interaction,” Burnell agreed. “A couple people have come in to listen, and we have sat in on worship a couple times.”

She added, “Wesley has really been a lifesaver for us. We really appreciate everything, and both Pastor Tony and now Pastor Fred have been so accommodating.”

Hartsville District Superintendent the Rev. Telley Gadson called their partnership an “amazing story of connection and collaboration.”

Unfortunately, Burnell said, their roof issue was not covered by insurance, but thankfully they were able to get a \$75,000 HOPE grant from the South Carolina Conference of the UMC, and repairs are expected to start soon.

Burnell said while she and her congregation are grateful to Wesley for their hospitality, they are eager to get back to Kellybell, which was established in 1854 and turns 171 this year.

“I’m so appreciative of the connection of The United Methodist Church,” Burnell said.



Photos courtesy of the Rev. Mary Burnell

Even though they miss being in their own space, Kellybell members say they are grateful Wesley has welcomed them after their roof collapse. Here they pose for a group picture in Wesley’s fellowship hall.



The Rev. Mary Burnell stands in the sanctuary at Kellybell UMC before the roof collapse just before Easter 2024.



The roof caved in without warning, Burnell said, and they have been meeting at Wesley for a year and a half.



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