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Special session to consider reducing districts, eliminating Cabinet position

By Jessica Brodie and Dan O'Mara

Annual Conference will consider reducing the number of districts from 12 to 10 in South Carolina and eliminating a Cabinet-level position when they gather this month for a special called session.

The online special session, called by South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard E. Fairley, is scheduled for 9 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 18.

All Annual Conference 2025 members—clergy and elected lay members—will have the opportunity to vote on the changes, which were recommended by the

bishop's Jeremiah Teams related to redistricting, reorganization of conference staff and missional priorities. The Annual Conference approved holding this called session virtually during the 2025 regular session in June.

If a lay member was replaced by an alternate at

the June session, that alternate is now considered to be the official lay member.

If the recommendations are approved, they will take effect July 1, 2026.

Created last fall, the teams are called Jeremiah Teams because they were

See "Special," Page 12



Photo by Jessica Brodie

Ashiya Myers of Journey UMC's Women of Destiny uses interpretive dance to help the body worship.

Pastors leadership event empowers, equips

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—Clergy from across South Carolina headed to the Midlands for a multiday leadership convocation designed to help them reach people with relevance and power.

With an emphasis on preaching the Gospel and evolving evangelism, participants were encouraged to leap from their comfort zones and from tradition for tradition's sake, embracing digital outreach with a new lens

and understanding about why it's so crucial given our increasingly online culture today.

Held Sept. 8-10 at Journey United Methodist Church, the event featured a host of leaders from throughout South Carolina and beyond who taught on various aspects of authentic evangelism, bold and inspired preaching, cultural relevance, digital ministry and more. The fourth day, Sept. 11, served as an "action day," and participants were encouraged to go

back home and begin to put what they learned into practice.

The Revs. Emily Sutton, Matthew Alexander and Martin Quick served as convocation hosts along with Journey's pastor Dr. George Ashford. Social media ambassadors were the Revs. Meg Cook, Ellis White and Bryan Pigford as well as Jerald McKie.

Other key presenters included Dr. Teresa Fry-Brown of Candler School

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One judge to handle all separation litigation

By Jessica Brodie

Litigation between the South Carolina Conference and local congregations seeking to leave The United Methodist Church will now be handled by one circuit court judge—and not the South Carolina Supreme Court.

The Methodist Church of Simpsonville and other United Methodist churches in the state filed lawsuits seeking to break away from the denomination yet keep their church property. On April 14, these churches filed a petition in the state Supreme Court asking the case be brought under the court's original jurisdiction.

Meanwhile, the South Carolina Conference of the UMC filed a motion March 5 asking the South Carolina Supreme

Court to assign all cases regarding the conference and separating churches to a single trial judge. The conference noted in the motion that it "is likely that up to 42 individual lawsuits will be pending around the state that all center on the key legal issues of church corporate identity and ownership of the local church property at issue."

On Aug. 13, the Supreme Court of South Carolina issued two orders, one denying The Methodist Church of Simpsonville et al.'s petition for original jurisdiction per appellate court Rule 245(a), noting the Supreme Court will not entertain matters when they can be determined in a lower

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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.

Advocate raises rates because of rising costs

Because of drastically rising costs, the *Advocate* is increasing the cost for its subscriptions.

Starting in January, a one-year print subscription will cost \$30/year, while a digital subscription will cost \$20/year.

The *Advocate* is also eliminating its Church Leadership Plan and replacing it with streamlined group rates. Churches now have two different options to subscribe with a group rate:

- 1) The Print Plan, which enables 10 or more people in a church to subscribe for \$15 per person for the year; or
- 2) The Digital Plan, which enables

everyone in a church to receive a digital subscription to the *Advocate*; this costs only \$1.50 per person for the year and is priced based on a church’s average weekly attendance.

The *Advocate* was founded in 1836 as the *Southern Christian Advocate* and is the oldest newspaper in Methodism. It has won more than 150 journalism, marketing and advertising awards and strives to foster discipleship within South Carolina United Methodism by providing relevant news in various formats to unite followers in Christ.

“Several exciting new changes are

coming for our readers, including a user-friendly new website, an app, e-newsletters, video content and even a podcast, all rolling out within the next few months. These rate changes will help make it all happen,” said *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie. “The rates are still intentionally low, and far lower than other religious publications. We wish we didn’t have to charge for what we do, but we pledge to do what we can to make our products affordable and excellent.”

Email questions to subs@advocatesc.org. To sign up for a church plan: https://advocatesc.org/church-subscription-plans.

Conference at 53 percent in apportionments as of Aug. 31

By Jessica Brodie

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

Of the \$11.7 million budgeted for 2025, South Carolina United Methodist churches have paid \$6.2 million of the total, or 53.01 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.

Compared to last year at this time, collection percentage through August 2024 was 61.05 percent.

Conference Treasurer Beth Westbury said that collection rate was higher than what is typical because it included apportionment payments for churches separating in both 2023 and 2024.

Without the rebate, the apportionments paid to date for 2025 are \$5.4 million, or 46.18 percent.

“We are grateful for our local churches for the work they do in their communities and the resources they provide to the conference for mission

and ministry beyond their localities,” Westbury said.

Of the 714 churches that pay apportionments in the conference, 15 percent (105 churches) have already paid 100 percent of their apportionments, while 36 percent (257 churches) have paid nothing toward apportionments.

Last year at this time, of the 836 churches total, 27 percent had paid 100 percent while 24 percent had paid zero.

Westbury noted in the September *Advocate* that some of the increase in nonpaying churches is likely to be

UMCSC offers social activism guidelines

The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church is providing guidance to clergy who attend a protest rally or march or engage publicly in any form of social activism.

“Social Activism Procedures for Clergy” are designed to help clergy better prepare for participation in such activities, and to help them know what to do if they get caught up in any disruption or unexpected events as a result of their participation.

While prepared by a group of UMC chancellors, the procedures do not offer specific legal advice. Rather, they strive to ensure both the safety and security of those who participate in social activism events.

“The conference is not attempting to stop you from legal protest or activism,” the procedures state. “However, we do need to be informed of your plans so we can respond to media inquiries, respond to inquiries or complaints from your community or potentially church members, and assist you in the event you need assistance with an emergency medical, legal or travel need.”

The procedures were shared with district superintendents, who in turn shared them with clergy at their discretion.

- Examples of guidance included in the procedures:
- Notify your district superintendent and the Office of Clergy Services of the date and location of the event, as well as who you will be attending with.
 - If attending with a group, fully inform yourself and those in attendance of any intention to be charged with an infraction or crime, and let the conference know, as well.

The procedures also provide guidance for those who might have any type of outstanding legal infraction, including consulting with a criminal attorney who has experience representing clients in social activism matters. Similar guidance advises those in the United States on any type of visa or green card or other temporarily protected or status to consult with an attorney who specializes in immigration law.

See the full guidelines at https://tinyurl.com/social-activism-umcsc.

New disaster plan released

By Jessica Brodie

Disaster response leaders have developed an updated conference disaster response plan that they hope will help them be as prepared as possible in a disaster.

The Rev. LaTonya Dash, disaster response coordinator for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, said the plan was released in August.

“This plan provides resources and equips United Methodist churches and districts as we assist our communities,” she said. “The disaster response plan provides immediate guidance as we work together as a collective body to provide relief for human need and to respond to the suffering of persons within our communities whose lives have been affected by disasters. With the implementation of this disaster response plan, we begin to coordinate our efforts to deal with a disaster.”

Speaking at the leadership convocation, Dash said the disaster response team works to be rela-

tional and intentional.

“We’re to see our communities as God sees our communities, with dignity and worth and love,” Dash said.

Ward Smith, disaster recovery director and construction manager, said more than 451,000 South Carolinians applied for relief from the Federal Emergency Management Agency after Hurricane Helene last year—far more than all the floods the state experienced put together. He said Helene was our fourth major disaster in 10 years.

“And we all know there’s more coming,” Smith said, noting the disaster response plan will help prepare and equip us for that.

“The damage is real and the damage is in our state,” he added. “All these numbers represent families that were affected, families that live just down the street with that small little roof leak and now they have mold in house. Today, tomorrow and every day, we are called to action, and we have to respond.”

Read the plan: https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/UMCSC-Disaster-Response-Plan.pdf.

Advocate holds listening sessions across S.C.

The *Advocate* continues community listening sessions this month, which are being held in every district in South Carolina this year to gauge the needs and interests of its readers.

The community listening sessions will enable *Advocate* staff and board members to better understand the news needs of South Carolina United Methodists.

Remaining dates are as follows: Sept. 30: First UMC, Marion; Oct. 28: Trinity UMC, Orangeburg; Nov. 17: Stallsville UMC, Summerville; and Dec. 1: New Life UMC, Walterboro.

All are welcome to the sessions, which run from 6:30-8:30 p.m. with a free pizza dinner, plus salad and dessert. RSVP to krenfroe@advocatesc.org.



Lay Servant ‘Train the Trainer’ event draws large crowd

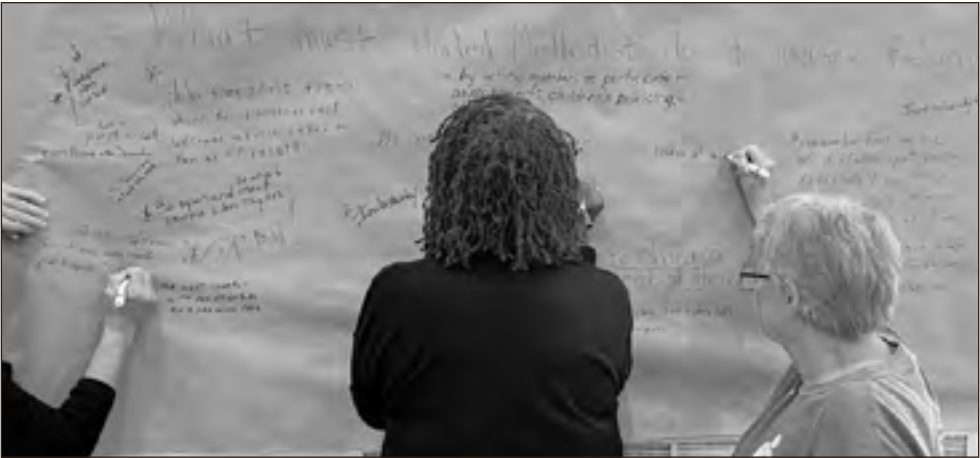
South Carolina Conference Lay Servant Ministries held the annual Lay Servant Academy (Train the Trainer) event Saturday, Aug. 2, at Washington Street United Methodist Church in Columbia. More than 80 people, many of whom were first-time attendees, were trained as instructors in the various district lay servant schools throughout the conference. This year’s academy had the highest registration numbers since COVID-19.

As participants arrived at the church, they found a delightful array of breakfast items, fruit, coffee and juices, which were generously sponsored by St. Luke United Methodist Church, Ridgeland. Committee member Cynthia Green-Thompson, wife of St. Luke’s pastor the Rev. Christopher Thompson, coordinated the breakfast.

David Salter, co-director of Conference Lay Servant Ministries, welcomed everyone, and Rosa Kennerly-Dance provided the morning devotion.

After the devotional, the morning session of Train the Trainer welcomed Toni Taylor, Lilly grant administrator, ICF professional coach and lay speaker, as the facilitator of a session that emphasized such topics as recognizing the value of every generation, increasing engagement in adult learners and leading and facilitating lay servant classes. Taylor’s presentation exemplified teaching techniques that engage learners of all ages. There was great discussion, activities and sharing both at individual group tables and throughout the entire room.

The academy continued with Becky



Academy participants had the opportunity to participate in several group activities during the morning session, above. Below left, Bishop Kenneth Carder and Sandy Shaffer facilitate a breakout session on Ministry with the Forgotten. Below right, Toni Taylor leads a session.



Green, co-director of Conference Lay Servant Ministries, offering a blessing for lunch catered by Tim Scott and sponsored by Southern Mutual Church Insurance Company. Jim Ellis of SMCI presented a check to Lay Servant Ministries in generous support of the meal. During lunch, the attendees got to know one another better and continue discussions that began during the morning training session.

The afternoon breakout sessions



showcased the various courses available for teaching, of which there are more than 30 courses approved through Discipleship Ministries.

Academy breakout sessions consisted of Basic/Youth Basic (facilitated by Pamela Goodwine-Glover, secretary of Conference Lay Servant Ministries), Polity (the Rev. David McManus Jr. and the Rev. Sharome Henry), Leading Worship (the Rev. Kenneth Nelson), Leading in Pastoral Care (the Rev. Michael

Walker), and Ministry with the Forgotten: Dementia through a Spiritual Lens (Sandy Shaffer and Bishop Kenneth Carder). Carder is the author of both the student text and leaders guide for this course. Carder is also the author of “The United Methodist Way: Living Our Beliefs, Second Edition.” He is presently working on the third edition of this text at the request of Discipleship Ministries.

As attendees were leaving after a full day of collaboration and learning, many made a special effort to seek out those of us who had planned the day to express their gratitude for both morning and afternoon sessions. Everyone who came by said they learned new and exciting insights into offering lay servant classes.

One said, “I walked into the training with a lot of questions, and I walked out with answers and a new sense of purpose and seeing things from a new perspective. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity.”

Organizers said this statement hopefully represents how the majority of the attendees felt as they traveled back to their districts and churches, energized and ready to see things in a new perspective.

In addition to those mentioned above, the planning team thanks Sylvia Harris-Greene and Chuck Sovick, co-directors of the Columbia District Lay Servant Ministries, for their work with registration and handling all of the local details, and Tammy Fulmer, administrative assistant in the conference offices, for her faithful service and help.



149 years of God’s ministry
With joy and thanksgiving, Shepherd UMC, Sumter, celebrated 149 years of ministry on August 24. With the theme “Moving Forward in This New Season,” the Rev. Telley Lynnette Gadson, superintendent for the Hartsville District, served as the preacher for the worship service. Members gather above, At right, Shepherd’s pastor the Rev. Gwendolyn T. White shares a smile with Gadson.



Finney statue under way

Committee members stand with a statue of the late Chief Justice Ernest Finney Jr., which will become a bronze statue when complete. The project is spearheaded by the Good Fellows of Sumter, including Sandy Grove UMC, Lamar, pastor the Rev. J. Elbert Williams as chairperson. The statue will be placed in front of the new judicial courthouse in Sumter on the judge’s birthday, March 20. Committee members stand with a clay rendition of the statue in Camden: Dickey Brunson, attorney Dwight Moore, solicitor Ernest Finney Jr. and Williams, along with sculptor Maria Kirby.



New book by two UMCSC pastors helps people breathe amid life’s complexities

A new book by husband-and-wife United Methodist pastors aims to help people take new steps toward peace.

Titled “A Moment to Breathe: Sermonic Reflections,” the book by Dr. Amenti Sujai and Dr. Daniel Hembree

welcomes readers on a journey of spiritual growth and introspection while drawing from biblical narratives and personal reflections.

The book is available at <https://advocatepress.org>.

Advocate.

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Editorial
by Jessica Brodie

Reducing districts
is a good move

In a few weeks, voting members of Annual Conference will decide whether to approve recommendations from the bishop’s Jeremiah teams—one of them to reduce the number of districts from 12 to 10.

We think the idea of reducing districts is an excellent one.

Since June 2023, we have lost almost 25 percent of our churches to separation. It seems only logical that we should reduce the number of districts accordingly. Going from 12 to 10 is not a 25 percent cut, but that’s OK. It doesn’t have to be. It’s a step in the right direction and a wise and sound attempt to save money. The team’s plan to move some of the district offices so that they are more centralized—and to move some of the churches and certain districts to different districts because of proximity—also sounds like a smart idea.

The *Advocate* supports this recommendation, and if things change and we lose more churches or money is too tight to accommodate 10 districts, we should consider downsizing even further.

Tightening of belts is necessary when financial circumstances change, and most entities in our conference have had to make frugal and sometimes difficult choices in the aftermath of the schism. At the *Advocate*, we’re currently drawing 42 percent of our operating budget this year from our trust fund because money is that tight. Thank God our board had the foresight to establish a trust fund many years ago and that we have one we can draw from at this time in order to pivot, embrace new marketing and fundraising efforts and live into a new future. And thank God the conference has some reserves with which they can do the same.

We’re going to be OK, my friends. God’s church will always prevail. What will help is keeping our focus on Lord and our passion on making disciples priority.

“But as for me
and my house,
we will serve
the Lord.”

—Joshua 24:15 (ESV)

Reflection topic
for November *Advocate*

How is your church embracing
hospitality as a means of discipleship?

Share with the *Advocate* at
oped@advocatesc.org
(include church name/city).



Bishop’s Column
by Bishop Leonard E. Fairley

An unsettling season

“If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and light around me become night,’ even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is light to you.”—Psalm 139:11-12

As a child I grew up with a bad case of “night terrors.” When they occurred, I kept my siblings awake with screams of fear. I still occasionally have them where my wife, Dawn, must wake me from some terror I am fighting.

My Grandma Gladys had another way of explaining what was happening. She would tell my mom that it was a battle for my soul, and if she wanted me to sleep through the night, she needed to open the Bible and place it on the dresser. One of the passages to which she opened was Psalm 139.

I have gone back to this passage repeatedly as of late, finding comfort and hope in the presence of God, knowing there is no place I can go away from God’s spirit and no place I can flee from God’s presence.

Even in this unsettling season we are reminded, “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:13-14).

It should not take too much convincing for us to agree that we are traveling through an unsettling season of uncivil discourse, violence and threats. It feels

as if all creation is groaning under the weight of the darkness that has us in its grip.

It feels as if we are collectively traveling through a dark night of the soul, which has caused a profound disorientation and loss of our spiritual center rooted in the compassion, love and justice as lived out in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We must refuse to allow this unsettling season to drive us into hopeless despair, because our hope is rooted in something that is far greater than any political party, leader, agenda or labels we place on each other.

Ours is a hope that is not passive, but leads us to a place where, when necessary, we hope against hope itself, holding to hope even when everything seems hopeless—when reason would have us give up. Ours is a light of hope that pushes back against the darkness. Ours is a hope that inspires perseverance and courage to face the darkness and stand up in the storm.

I pray that we face this current darkness with an active hope and courage that sings in the words of the hymn writer, Kathleen Thomerson: “I want to walk as a child of the light, I want to follow Jesus. ... In him there is no darkness at all. The night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God. Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.”

Letters to the Editor.

Grace

I just read Dr. Will Willimon’s book, “The Church We Carry: Loss, Leadership and the Future of Our Church.” This book was sad but truthful about his childhood memories and the call to ministry while growing up at Buncombe Street United Methodist Church, Greenville. He describes the secret meetings and the deceptions and apathy of the leadership of the conference.

I can identify because I grew up with the wonderful childhood memories of Grace United Methodist, Union. I had great church teachers, inspiring music, a beautiful sanctuary with priceless stained glass windows revealing Christ and so much love. Grace UMC had tremendous ministers such as Dr. Tom Shuler and Dr. McKay Brabham. This church helped produce several ministers. There were saints who touched my life in Grace. All of my family for three generations are buried there. I plan to be buried there.

It pains me that the members of the present Grace UMC want to leave The United Methodist Church. My great-grandfather gave the granite to build Grace in 1872 and named the church “Grace” and said, “I hope that it will never fall from Grace.”

There are several lawsuits against the South Carolina United Methodist Church to separate but the Supreme Court of South Carolina declined to hear the case and it is back in lower court. This case may take years.

My prayer is that Grace United Methodist will remain Grace United Methodist and not fall from grace.

A child of Grace,
Rev. John Wesley Culp, retired
West Columbia

Great edition

Thank you for the *Advocate* August issue. Thank you for publishing the Rev. John Culp’s letter, “Protesting Evil.” He mentioned great United Methodist notables, including Dr. McKay Brabham and Bishop Paul Hardin Jr. The latter once spoke at an Erskine College convocation, back when it was truly a liberal arts institution. He made a comment that, at the time, I thought to be heretical, but now I fully understand his point. He said that if Jesus himself appeared in his office that afternoon, announced that he was back and would like to pastor a South Carolina United Methodist Church, Bishop Hardin said that he did not know of a single UMC church in our conference that would accept

him as their pastor. Wow! Having now been a United Methodist member since 1976, joining the small, rural Centenary UMC in Marion County—where, incidentally, my great-grandparents are interred—I have come to believe what Bishop Hardin claimed.

It was a blessing to represent that church at several Annual Conferences in Spartanburg and to lunch with my work mentor, one J. Mitchell Reames. He and others, including the Rev. Eben Taylor, the Rev. Fred Reese, Rhett Jackson, and other progressive United Methodists would hold an annual luncheon during conference, which they dubbed “the Clay Foot’s Luncheon.” I wish I could remember all the men, primarily ministers, sitting around that table.

And, as a veteran of a good many Salkehatchie Summer Service camps in Aiken, Marion, and now Fairfield counties, I am among those who would nominate the Rev. John Culp for sainthood.

And, while thanking *Advocate* writers one and all, my spouse and I appreciate everything Jessica Brodie pens. Her “Building Up the House” editorial in the August issue was especially appealing. Ms. Brodie captured the “soul” of

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99 Sheep



by Ricky Howell



Commentary
by the Rev. Nichole
Middleton

When church hesitates

As followers of Christ, we are called to love, to welcome and to extend grace. Yet too often, we draw lines where God draws none—shunning people because of their past associations, their mistakes or the labels society assigns. Fear tempts us to step back when God calls us to step closer.

I have seen this in the lives of those I serve as chaplain. Their pasts are heavy—sometimes marked by choices they regret, by harm they cannot undo, by consequences that stretch decades into the future. And still, they long for connection, for understanding, for the chance to be seen as more than a number or a sentence.

Just recently, while helping a young man apply to a faith-based prison program, I heard this longing in his voice. Shaped by childhood abuse, poverty and a fractured education, he wrestles with deep doubts. The world has told him in countless ways that he is not worthy. Even the church once turned him away, and with it, he walked from the Christian faith. His story is not rare. Too often, when faced with what we fear or what society warns us to avoid, the church hesitates.

But when we hold people at arm’s length, we forget our own need for grace. Scripture reminds us that before pointing to the speck in another’s eye, we must first see the plank in our own. Everyone has faltered. Perhaps our sins are quieter, less visible—but they are real. And yet, God calls us new creations, not by merit, but by mercy.

If God has named us redeemed, then we must have the courage to see others through that same lens. To embrace the formerly incarcerated is not to ignore the past but to believe in the future. It is to trust that grace can work where fear cannot.

There is life-changing power in presence. To sit with someone in their becoming, to listen with dignity, to extend kindness instead of suspicion—these are acts that breathe hope back into weary hearts. Sometimes that presence comes from a teacher, a neighbor, a pastor or a friend. Sometimes it is the steady witness of one who refuses to turn away, who chooses compassion over comfort.

If we know Christ, if we have tasted redemption, then we cannot deny it to others. To withhold welcome is to question the very grace we depend on ourselves. To extend it is to participate in God’s work of making all things new.

May we be that church—gentle with the wounded, patient with the becoming and bold in our hope. May we remember that no one is only the worst thing they have done. And may we trust that when we cross the boundaries fear has drawn, we will discover God was already there, waiting to meet us on the other side.

Middleton is an elder in the South Carolina 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.

LETTERS

From Page 4

Salkehatchie service, in my opinion. She dropped a name or two, too, including the Rev. Joe Long who pastored First UMC, Marion, when my family were members there.

But please, no more articles on new books. My study “runneth over,” and I have no room for new, interesting tomes. Now I must order a copy of Dr. Willimon’s work on his home church and weed a beloved book from my collection and add another book to those stacked on the floor as the bookcases “overfloweth” as well.

We look forward to every full edition of the *Advocate* and extend heartfelt appreciation to all who contribute to its informative columns, articles and letters.

Paul Dove
First UMC, Winnsboro

Something we can do

What can we, as citizens of this once great land steeped in the constant search for more freedom and liberty for all, what can we do now that even our long present freedoms are being taken away?

As a faithful God-centered servant people dedicated to lifting up the downtrodden, quenching the thirst and hunger of those who are suffering and giving shelter to the homeless, what can we do as Christ’s disciples in this hour, in this darkest time we find ourselves in?

We find that our elected representatives in Congress are either unable or unwilling to help us in this, our latest and perhaps our final dark hour. Our news media seem to have lost their ability to affect any change, maybe because there are so many untruthful competing voices clamoring to follow the source of this evil destruction.

Our lower courts have won some skirmishes and minor battles, but the court we call supreme erases some of those hard-fought efforts apparently in subservience to the present leader. In fact, it was this same court that more than a year ago gave him not just the idea but indeed the means to dismantle and destroy anything he wants and chooses to.

We all are praying for deliverance. There is no doubting that. But what else can we do?

I recently wrote a letter to the chief justice and all associate justices of the people’s court (is it not our court?) asking them to revisit their decision of July 1, 2024. As you probably know, that decision told this president and any future ones that he had broad criminal immunity under presidential authority, even if acts committed by him would be otherwise illegal under United States statutes.

I believe the Supreme Court’s decision on that fateful day effectively normalized any past, present and future criminal and unconstitutional acts against the people of the United States of America by any sitting U.S. president.

Please join with me with a nationwide letter-writing (not email) campaign to the chief justice and associate justices of our nation’s final court, prayerfully demanding that they revisit their July 1, 2024, decision for the purpose of rescinding that decision for this and any future president: Chief Justice John G. Roberts and Associate Members of the United States Supreme Court, United States Supreme Court, 1 First St. N.E., Washington, DC 20543.

Rev. Charles T. Jennings, retired
Myrtle Beach

An Upper Room group

As a long-time United Methodist, I have real love and appreciation for “The Upper Room,” our wonderful devotional book. We used the book for our family devotions, and somewhere along the way I began to notice the section titled, “An Easy Plan to Use The Upper Room in Small Groups,” thinking that sounded like an inviting activity.

When I retired from teaching, I found myself still interested in the idea of an Upper Room group, so I approached my Grace UMC pastor for his thoughts on this; he was on board immediately. My husband, a retired minister, advised me to find four or five people who would commit to meeting each week. I quickly found them, and we started meeting in our living room. Because we met in our home, I was also comfortable inviting neighbors (at least seven gave our group a try over a period of time; two of them are regu-

lars and one of them joined our church). I had coffee and water to offer folks—and sometimes goodies, too, or someone else brought them—as they arrived for a greeting time before we started. Our group grew to eight, 10, 12 and keeps growing.

When COVID hit, we had FaceTime and Duo meetings, and I served somewhat as facilitator for both groups. We held our first in-person meeting again with our lawn chairs in the church’s portico, but too much traffic noise resulted in our continuing our meetings down by the Savannah River on a nice expanse of grass, spreading our chairs in a big circle. When the weather got chilly, we moved into our church youth lounge, spacing our chairs out until the “mostly clear” for COVID came and we moved to a classroom in the church office building.

Our meetings occur from 10-11:15 a.m. on Wednesdays since that is the day for which questions are given, and our season runs from the week of Labor Day to the first or second week of June. We somewhat use the guide given in the book; questions are answered voluntarily, and the things shared in our group are held in confidence.

Soon we added Scripture background/context each week and gave ourselves a purpose and a new name to go with it: The Upper Room Encouragers. We encourage others with calls, visits, food, prayer and other opportunities that present themselves. We share prayer requests at the end of each meeting and pray together. I have divided our group into three text conversations, and we also share prayer requests through those year-round.

Our times together and our fellowship are so special that we celebrate them with a shared meal in one of our homes or at a restaurant at Christmastime and at the end of the season. This is our 17th year. My husband started a men’s Upper Room group, and they have begun season three; they, too, started meeting in our home but have since moved to a classroom at church.

Upper Room groups draw people closer to God and to each other. This 90th year of The Upper Room would be a great time to start one!

Laura D. Lusk
Grace UMC, North Augusta



Commentary
by Dr. Anthony Hodge

What quarter is it?

Are you ready for some football? This is my time of the year! I couldn't wait to see the kickoff for the first football game I saw this year. Anyone who knows me knows I try to carve out time on the weekend, Monday or Thursday to watch a football game.

Even if my schedule will not allow me to watch football games on those days, I will watch a previously broadcast football game whenever possible. Sometimes, because of my schedule, I may tune into a game later than I really wanted to, and the first thing I ask is, "What quarter is it?"

Why do I ask what quarter is it? I ask because, depending on the quarter, I can gauge how much time is left in the game and what length of time a team or both teams have left to try to execute the plays they have in their playbook with hopes of being the winner of the game when the clock runs out in the fourth quarter.

I am well aware that some people may not like to watch football. Still, quarters matter to all of us even if you don't like or care for football. Think of your life through the lens of quarters. From a personal standpoint, I am 60 years old. That puts me in the fourth quarter of life.

How did I come to that declaration? Well, if 60 years has me in the fourth quarter of life, the three earlier quarters are as follows: First quarter: ages 1-18; second quarter: 19-39; third quarter: 40-59; and fourth quarter: 60 and older.

It is impossible for me to go back to the first, second and third quarters of my life because those quarters are over for me. I am no longer 18, 39 or even 59 for that matter. I am 60 and am in the fourth quarter of my life, similar to football teams playing in the fourth quarter of a football game.

More than half of my life is over, like the teams who have played two quarters of a football game. Persons like me who are 60 years or older have had a chance to spend some time reflecting on how we have lived our lives during the first and second phases of our lives.

We've even been able to be surrounded by others who served as coaches and assistant coaches for us from the time we were born to the present moment in our lives.

I don't have to tell anyone this because it is a given—every game I have watched did not end the way I wanted it to end. I am certain others can say the same thing. We all have favorite teams, and if we had the ability to determine the outcome of every game we watch, listen to or attend, our favorite team would always be victorious. That's not realistic, is it? Obviously, our favorite teams win sometimes and unfortunately lose sometimes.

The good thing about winning and losing is this: There will always be another game to be played.

We have from September through January to cheer our favorite football teams to victory. Better yet, if God grants us the opportunity, we may have longer than that time period to enjoy life with family and friends.

It is my hope that, as we enjoy watching or listening to our favorite football teams or simply life engaging in general with family or friends, we realize every game has a stopping point and all lives eventually come to an end. So whether we are in the first, second, third or fourth quarter of our lives, we still have time to positively impact the lives of others and make the necessary adjustments in our lives. I am thankful that God has blessed me to reach the fourth quarter of my life but am keenly aware that there is still room for improvement for me and for others.

What quarter is it for you? How do you plan to make the changes and adjustments needed to reflect Christ's impact or influence on your life? During your halftime period, what has the coach or coaches shared with you that are helpful for you to grow into a better representative for the kingdom?

Prayerfully, all of us will be able to say to our God that we took full advantage of everything we have been exposed to grow into a winner for God and others. Remember, in team sports, while some team members may shine more in some games, it still requires all team members contributing to help the team win a championship.

Let's try to work together to win others to Christ by giving the best of ourselves for God and others.

Hodge is the superintendent of the Rock Hill District of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.



Commentary
by Anna Stevens Bright

From the heart

When most people think of giving, the focus is usually on money. Giving can constitute a number of things: time, talent, love, prayer, hugs, smiles, words of encouragement and the list goes on. Each one of these can be broken into smaller entities involving giving.

You do not have to be wealthy to give to others because it is the simple ways of helping others and giving back to the Lord that sometimes reap the most benefits for the giver and the receiver. Think about this: You can be a wealthy giver and not have to spend a dime! However, you must not give because you have been asked to do it or for a show, for as 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, "God loves a cheerful giver." Therefore, whatever and whenever you give, always do it from the heart.

As long as we live, we are going to be asked to give. The Word asks us to give. It is not what you give but how you give. If you give and do it with a grudge in your heart, because you felt compelled to do it against your will, or for a show or competition to broadcast all over the place, this is not of God, and he most definitely will not be pleased with your so-called gift. Further, he will not reward you, for the Word firmly states in Mark 12:41-44 (ESV): "And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'"

There are four life lessons that can be learned from this: 1) The Lord watches our every move; 2) he knows our motives and intentions; 3) he frowns upon those who want recognition for their giving; and 4) he recognizes and uplifts those who sacrifice and give purely from the heart. If you want man's recognition for what you do for the Lord and others, then it is not from the heart. It is self-serving only.

When you give of your resources, time, talent or whatever it may be, it should have a profound effect on you. It should make you feel good inside if it is done from the heart. There are so many ways to give, and what you give may be the only "Jesus" some may see. Two ways I love to give are to post encouraging words daily on Facebook and to write a weekly column on the "Faith Link" page of my local newspaper to inspire and motivate the world. People are hurting all over the globe, such as from several plane crashes and the recent tragedy in Texas, so offering an encouraging word can lift someone's spirits or save that individual from destruction. If you do it from the heart, there will be no need for bragging, boasting or seeking recognition.

I'll share three brief heart-touching stories about giving and generosity, written by Angel Chernoff, which appeared in "75 Day-Brightening Stories of Generosity" (2012):

"Today, at the local convenience store where I work, an elderly man with a guide dog came in, went to the aisle with the greetings cards, picked up a card, held it up extremely close to his face, and struggled to read it. Just as I was about to walk over to help him, a big truck driver asked him if he needed assistance reading, and then proceeded to read him almost every single greeting card out loud until the elderly man smiled and said, 'That's perfect! My wife will love that one!'"

"Today, my mom is donating the kidney that my dad desperately needs in order to live. They have been divorced for 16 years."

"Today, a young man three seats away from me on the airplane purchased a meal. When his debit card wouldn't work, the woman next to him gave her debit card to the flight attendant. As she did this, the young man said, 'Thank you,' and asked the flight attendant if they offered military discounts, as he's active duty. The flight attendant handed the woman her card and told them both that it was on the house."

Always abound in the faith, and never leave home without him.

Bright is a member of Isaiah United Methodist Church in Walterboro.



Commentary
by the Rev.
Joseph
Abram Jr.

Loving her still

My children and the family usually send individual texts for holidays. My wife's side of the family usually sends group texts, which I delete after a few days. (I fear I'll inadvertently send personal notes to my wife to the group—I bet the Department of Government Efficiency is having fun.)

This year's fourth of July group text was generated in Virginia by my two brothers-in-law. They are both former military persons with the rank of sergeant major, have served in war zones and are preachers and elders in The Church of God in Christ, serving as pastor and associate pastor in the same church.

The text had a slightly different effect on me this time. I have been wrestling with the obvious decline of our country and the demise of a system that was not perfect but seemed to have been trending in the right direction. For I have noticed a callous disregard for some among the elected and citizenry at-large. If asked to go to war to protect these charlatans, I would be hard pressed.

Some would argue the country has not changed. The picturesque mountains still stand tall as if pointing toward heaven. The lowly valleys are covered with nature's velvety green carpet, as if a luxurious floor with tall oaks and pine walls surrounding them, and gorgeous crystal basins like a mirror wait quietly and patiently for joyful, playful bathers to freely enjoy themselves together. Above it there is still the faithful, beautiful blue sky with what looks like a sheet with cotton balls of various shapes and colors floating effortlessly across it. Within and above it, there are the lights for all the moods below, the sun for day and the moon and stars for night. It's a theater where all its actors and actresses are free to do their best performance, strutting their stuff in civility.

"That's America, the beautiful, the pilgrims' pride! God shed his grace on you!" someone yelled.

Then in a low and tearful voice from outside the theater came a whisper, "The land where our fathers also fought and died."

I am saddened to announce to America that the America freedom show has been cancelled. During the night while we were sleeping, the enemies crept in, kidnapped and took the willing and able participants abroad to make other countries great again. There are only spectators left with their booties. They are hiring, but only felons and criminals need apply.

There are flies in your ointment, America, but if my brothers-in-law can salute, hope, love and trust in your conversion, maybe I should. May God bless and never damn you, America. Happy belated birthday. I love you still.

Abram is a retired elder in the South Carolina Conference of the UMC.

Two churches merge to become Triune UMC

ST. MATTHEWS—It has been a long time coming, but now a circuit of three has become a charge of two.

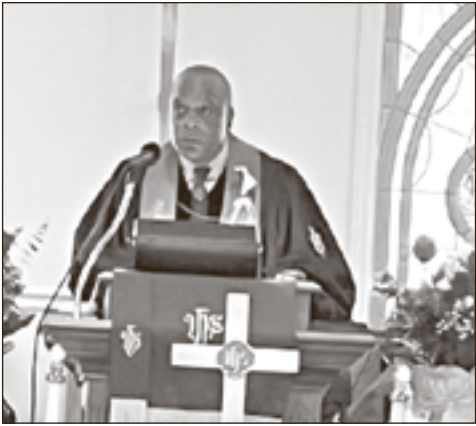
After years of serious conversations about a merger with the help of the Rev. James Arant, Bethlehem and Mount Nebo United Methodist churches became Triune United Methodist Church.

On June 11, the last day of annual conference, Triune became the newest African-American United Methodist congregation established in St. Matthews. Triune made the decision to become one while others have made the decision to leave the conference and the denomination. The merger decision was voted in agreement by the members from Bethlehem and Mount Nebo congregations in July 2024. Although sister church St. John declined to merge with them, they still continue to support each other, now on a two-point charge.

In order to celebrate such an auspicious occasion, Triune created a merger celebration worship team. Beginning May 29, Triune started meeting to plan an impressive worship service on Aug. 10. For two months, members met consistently to plan this amazing service. The worship service was designed from “A Service for Organizing a New Congregation” on Page 630 of the Book of Worship. This was one of two services suggested by District Superintendent the Rev. Ken Nelson, who assisted Triune’s team during this process.

They filled the team with worship chairpersons Dannie Mays and the Rev. Annie H. Sistrunk, finance team S. Elaine Leonard and Evelyn Pauling, trustee chair Alvin Passmore, legal paperwork Curtis Murph Jr., and children/youth Courtney Keller and Brigid Reed.

“Our design for this service would not begin with what happens inside the sanctuary but what takes place in our hearts as well, as what is seen when



Above left, Bishop Fairley preaches. Above right, guest musician Dr. Wash A. Jones plays. Below, the church receives a proclamation from Rep. Jerry Govan on behalf of Rep. Russell Ott.



individuals arrive,” Sistrunk explained. “Everyone will see our cornerstone now showing Triune on it, also will see our landscape decked with feather signs saying, ‘Welcome Triune Worship.’ Trustees helping with parking, greeters on our porch as well as a red and white balloon stand surrounding a placard standing welcome sign. As you enter the vestibule, you see a sign with our theme, ‘Stronger Together: One Faith, One Family, One Future.’”

Triune’s service continued with ushers leading guests and members to their seats and taking tithes and a special seed offering. Special guests included Mrs. Dawn Fairley along with her daughter and son-in-law with their two children; the Rev. Frank James

and his wife and daughter (one of our former pastors); Rep. Jerry Govan; and James Salley. There were others who were invited but were unable to attend in person.

Rep. Russell Ott delivered a proclamation that morning to be presented in his absence because of illness. Triune also was blessed to have one of its home-grown members return to be the guest musician for this celebration, Dr. Wash A. Jones of Cypress, Texas. The choirs sang with uplifted voices during the service beginning with the hymn “How Firm A Foundation,” signifying that Triune was built on the foundation of Bethlehem and Mount Nebo. The youth choir reminded us that there is “None Like You”—believe in Jesus as

your one and only savior. As Triune continued with the service, all were charged to remember “I Can Depend on God” and invited to walk into a new relationship with our savior through the song “It’s Your Season.”

Dr. Jones sang the last song as a Carolina call to the congregation to remind all to “Trust in God.” Scriptures read during the service were Isaiah 2:1-4, Psalm 100, and Matthew 16:13-18; each of them speaks to a connection to God with adoration and thanksgiving.

The guest speaker for the day was South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley, who preached a powerful message from John 17:20-26 titled “That They Might be One.” His preaching for this service culminated the end of his first year as South Carolina’s bishop.

Within his sermon, all were reminded that Jesus prayed for his followers in his final speech and discourse. Through his prayers, Jesus became our way-maker and burden-bearer. If we do not believe, then we are charged to change our name.

Triune refuses to change its name because they do believe Jesus prays and makes a way for all to be one. This prayer is not only for Triune but for every congregation within the denomination, for Jesus prays all might be one.

“We are not a product of individualism but a collection of dedicated members who made a request in the lonesome valley still believing that Jesus has the audacity to do what we can’t do,” Sistrunk said. “We might be one when we are anchored by the solid rock named Jesus because we are going higher. We are charged to remember that God is not done with us by a long shot. Merger was not a survival strategy, for we shall not die but live to do the works of the Lord. God is doing a new thing, knowing that we are better together.”

Memorial voted ‘Best Place to Worship’ by the community

GREER—Memorial United Methodist Church has been voted the “Best Place to Worship” in the Greenville News 2025 Community Choice Awards, decided by the votes of people in the community.

The Rev. David Smith, pastor of Memorial UMC, said this recognition reflects the faith, service and love that define the Memorial UMC family—not only within the walls of the church, but in the wider community they serve.

“We are deeply humbled by this honor,” Smith said. “Our mission has always been to be a place where people can experience the love of God, grow in their faith and serve alongside one another. Knowing that our community members chose us for this award makes it especially meaningful.”

Over the past several years, Memorial UMC has strengthened its ties within the congregation and the community through vibrant worship, active ministries and outreach programs. From children’s and youth ministries to younger and older adult discipleship, music ministries and mission opportunities, the church



Memorial sees the win as reminder to continue living out their faith.

seeks to welcome everyone into a traditional Christ-centered community rooted in generations of loving God and one another since 1882.

While the award is an exciting moment for the congregation, members see it as more than a title—it is a reminder to continue living out their faith with love, hospitality and service.

“We are proud of our church family, but our true joy comes from knowing that God is using Memorial UMC to make a difference,” Smith said. “We invite anyone seeking a church home to join us and see for themselves what makes this place so special.”



Providing for the children

Buford Street UMC, Gaffney, donated to a Back-to-School Supply Drive sponsored by the Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office in Gaffney. Pencils, notebook paper, composition notebooks, wire notebooks, pens, crayons, glue, erasers and more were delivered by Jade Allison to the event this year. These items will help make sure every child starts this school year off right with needed supplies to help them succeed in the classroom. As Allison noted, “Children are our future.”

Photo courtesy of Angela P. Peeler

Free concert at St. John’s features internationally acclaimed American organist Jonathan Dimmock

An Anderson church will present a free concert featuring internationally acclaimed American organist Jonathan Dimmock this month as a gift to the congregation and community. All are welcome to the



Dimmock

concert, set for Sunday, Oct. 5, at 3 p.m. at St. John’s United Methodist Church, 515 S. McDuffie St., Anderson.

Dimmock, organist for the San Francisco Symphony, has a personal passion for the healing quality of beauty. Recognized internationally as a consummate

artist, his musicianship is enjoyed by at least 100,000 people each year. An innovative programmer, he designs and performs weekly programs for the Legion of Honor Museum, where he serves as principal organist, illustrating the correlation between art and music.

For more on his work and music, visit <https://jonathandimmock.com>.

Trinity steps into revitalized future after challenging year

By the Rev. Matthew Alexander

AIKEN—The last year has been challenging for Trinity United Methodist Church, as it has been for many United Methodist churches. However, it has also been a year of revitalization, clarity and renewed missional spirit.

Recently, Trinity UMC had the honor of celebrating the 100th birthday of Henrietta Eckert. Visiting her ahead of her special day, I asked Henrietta about her birthday wish. She said she wished she could “worship with her church again.” But there was one big obstacle. Life has brought Eckert to a moment in which travel to 2724 Whiskey Road is not realistic for her anymore.

Yet that didn’t keep Trinity UMC from finding a way. “If Henrietta can’t come to church, we will bring church to her,” members decided.

A group of Trinity members gathered for a worship on what became a second church campus on Aug. 24 at Anchor Heath in Aiken. Thanks to Diane Bailer, Diane Kingery, Russell Lemonds and Tommy and Mandy Thompson who attended onsite with Eckert, along with four family members and 18 Anchor friends. Lemonds coordinated the streaming of the worship time on campus to the fellowship space at Anchor, so those gathered with Eckert could participate in worship. Worship began with an acknowledgment of



Members celebrate Henrietta Eckert’s 100th birthday.

Eckert’s 100 years and included a rendition of “Happy Birthday.”

At Anchor, Eckert was showered with 100 gifts and cards, all prepared by Trinity UMC children, youth and adults, as well as Trinity Preschool students and staff. Gifts included her favorite Crunchy Cheetos and a stuffed Chester the Cheetah, the Cheetos mascot. Following worship, Eckert’s family hosted a birthday party for her including cake. Dozens of friends, church

members and family gathered with Eckert to celebrate her special day.

In another opportunity, on Aug. 26 at 8 a.m., 20 churches and organizations from around the Aiken community gathered at Cedar Creek Church to receive a truck from the Convoy of Hope. Dozens of volunteers unloaded a semi filled with food, drinks and paper goods. They organized, separated and loaded goods into pickup trucks, trailers and SUVs. These resources were be distributed to people in need throughout the Aiken community. Trinity UMC was honored to be a part of this work, allowing them to support local families through the church’s Blessing Box, Trinty UMC Preschool, Golden Harvest Food Bank and ACTS (Area Churches Together Serving), Community Ministry of North Augusta and Lost Sheep Ministry of SC.

Thank you to the following people for participating in this significant missional work: Karen Brand, Beverly Campbell-Pullen, Erica Huyler, Duncan Huyler, Daniel Kingery, David Kingery, Diane Kingery Chris Shupe, Keeley Taylor, David Wenderoth and Dan Wood.

We are doing things differently at Trinity UMC. We are living into the belief that “church” is an action word. We don’t just come to church; we do church. As a pastor, I’m beyond grateful I get to do church with such wonderful people as those of Trinity UMC in Aiken.

Grace rises from the ashes: 40th anniversary of sanctuary rebuild

By Amber S. Forrest

NORTH AUGUSTA—Monday, Sept. 22, marked the 40th anniversary of the inaugural worship service in Grace United Methodist Church’s rebuilt sanctuary after a devastating fire in 1983.

The congregation celebrated this anniversary in worship on Sunday, Sept. 21, with special music and testimonials from church members during the 11 a.m. traditional service.

Dr. John Younginer, pastor emeritus and Grace’s pastor at the time of the fire and rebuild, participated in the service. Mayor Briton Williams offered remarks, and the church recalled the support of city officials and firefighters. Grace’s History Committee also put on a showcase; the History Room (located in Grace’s Wesley Center) housed an exhibit about the 1983 fire, the aftermath and the rebuilding of the sanctuary.

The congregation was also invited to view a recorded interview between Younginer and the Rev. Jerry Henry as they reminisced about the horror of the



Today, the church is thriving.

fire and the beauty of the community’s pulling together after. A celebration was held after the service.

Members said Younginer’s reminder, “The love of God is what builds the church. We only provide the building,” is just as poignant today as it was all those years ago.

A summer thunderstorm struck the steeple of the Grace UMC sanctuary late in the afternoon Sunday, July 17, 1983. The fire began in the attic of the building and quickly spread, causing the roof to collapse. For almost three



Fire destroyed the sanctuary.

hours, the North Augusta and Augusta fire departments worked together to battle the blaze, narrowly preventing the fire from spreading to the nearby Asbury and Family Life Center buildings. In the end, the entire sanctuary and the fellowship hall underneath it were destroyed.

Despite the shock, the leadership and congregation of Grace were not deterred; Sunday worship services continued in the Family Life Center for more than two years. With the generosity of the congregation and sister churches

throughout the Central Savannah River Area and the Greenwood District, money was raised to build a new sanctuary. A groundbreaking ceremony was held at the location of the future altar in June 1984, with the steeple being installed in May 1985.

Today, Grace’s sanctuary continues to be the location of beautiful acts of worship and community engagement. In addition to two Sunday morning worship services (at 8:30 and 11 a.m.), this space hosts prayer services, weddings, funerals and the first Community Lenten Worship service of each Lent season. The sanctuary is also the “waiting room” for Return to Bethlehem, Grace’s interactive nativity production, which is scheduled for Dec. 10-13. Grace’s Student Ministry and several small groups gather for times of learning and fellowship. Free concerts and musical learning opportunities are regularly hosted within the walls of the sanctuary as well, making this space not only a place for members of Grace, but also a place for the entire community.

Augusta Road men learn from veteran about PTSD service dogs

PELZER—Every year on the Sunday closest to Sept. 11, the United Methodist Men’s group at Augusta Road United Methodist Church invites the firefighters from South Greenville Fire Station

to join them for breakfast. This year, they also invited Javey Derr to come speak. Derr served in the Marine Corps from November 1989 to December

1997. He shared with the men’s group how he was a radio operator in the infantry working on forward observer teams that called in supporting fire and ground units. He served in combat for Desert Storm and did humanitarian relief and security in Somalia.

After he left the Marine Corps and came home, he had a difficult time connecting with people. His home became his safe place. He tended to stay home so he didn’t have to interact with people. He felt civilians and family members didn’t understand the things he had gone through or witnessed. It was 15 years before Derr was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Along came Axel. Axel was a three-month-old puppy when Derr found him abandoned at his apartment complex. Now, Axel is Derr’s service dog. On Aug. 6, they completed an eight-month training program with Service Dogs for Veterans. The first three months is



Derr speaks about Axel’s help.

obedience training. The last five months involve task performance, helping with anxiety and guarding personal space. Derr will tell you he didn’t train Axel—Axel trained him.

Since 2014, 188 dogs have been trained by Service Dogs for Veterans. It costs \$8,500 for the program, but there is little or no cost to the veterans. Donations pay for most of the training. Visit <https://www.sd4v.org> for more.

"let us not grow weary in doing good..."

— Galatians 6:9





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New Webster equipment upgrades enable enhanced worship

A Charleston District church has been able to obtain and install new media equipment, and it is quickly transforming their worship and community engagement.

The upgrades at New Webster United Methodist Church, Wadmalaw Island, include state-of-the-art sound and video equipment, including dual 85-inch worship monitors, a reverse 85-inch monitor, a 40-inch monitor in the foyer and a 75-inch monitor in the fellowship hall for overflow and flexible uses for various ministries and programs.

“This investment reflects our shared commitment to enhancing the worship experience for all members and visitors,” John Taylor Jr., Johns Island Parish media ministry chair.

Taylor said the upgraded technology will improve the quality of audio and visual presentations during



New Webster’s state-of-the-art sound and video equipment.

services, expand opportunities for livestreaming and virtual participation and support more dynamic and engaging worship, teaching and community out-

reach.

“These upgrades have encouraged expansion of our media team, and we look forward to additional training and opportunities to grow,” Taylor added, noting they are grateful to the leadership of the South Carolina Annual Conference, the Charleston District and their pastor, the Rev. Pattie Gordon.

The church said the effort strengthens their ability to connect with one another in worship, both within the sanctuary and beyond as it strengthens their mission of glorifying God by making disciples of Christ through genuine love and outward ministry for all God’s children.

“We look forward to the many ways this new media capability will enrich our spiritual life and broaden our mission across the Johns Island Parish,” Taylor said.

Bethany’s summer Christianity course unites

SUMMERVILLE—Bethany United Methodist Church spent 11 weeks of the 2025 summer reaching out to church members and others in our community with a weekly dinner and a basic Christianity course called ALPHA.

There was no cost to attend, and childcare was provided.

Months before, there was much prayer about the timing and how to do this. Bethany members then stepped out in faith as God led us in planning and organizing.

Looking back, members said they were reminded of the saying that if you are obedient doing God’s work God’s way, God will provide. There has been unity and renewal of Christian values for church members as well as an opportunity to disciple to church and un-churched attendees.

More than 50 volunteers either donated money or food, participated as a table leader,



Free dinner helped draw many. served meals, decorated or publicized the class. This does not include another 55 guests, and all those who prayed. Members said there are so many incidences where God showed that he was in control.

ALPHA DVDs and course materials from Nickey Gumbel were chosen for the basic Christianity course. The ALPHA teachings center on aspects of Christian faith about which all denominations are

in general agreement. Gumbel had once been quoted saying, “What unites us is infinitely greater than what divides us.”

Bethany’s Fellowship Hall was used for tables for dinner and to show the DVDs because of its large screens. Tables were set up that consisted of a leader and six guests at each table. Each table became a small group, with attendees getting to know each other well.

The night began with dinner at 6 p.m., and then the DVD and table discussion. Each night ended promptly at 8 p.m.

The 2025 summer brought much love and unity as Bethany answered God’s calling to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19).

Members are now praying about where God is leading Bethany next. But they know that wherever it is, love and unity will be the center.

District News.

- Columbia District**

Platt Springs UMC, Columbia, will hold its annual Blessing of the Animals Oct. 11 at 2 p.m. All friendly, well-behaved animals are welcome.
- Florence District**

Congratulations to the Rev. Grayson and McKenzie Fallaw on the birth of their son. Edward Garrith Fallaw was born July 26. Rev. Fallaw is the pastor of Bethlehem-Johnsonville Charge, Johnsonville.

The “first mother” of **Salem UMC, Florence**, Susana Hines, celebrated her 100th birthday and was featured in The Community Times as “A Beloved Florence Centenarian.”
- Orangeburg District**

St. Stephen UMC, Orangeburg, will host a Fall Festival Oct. 18 from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. The church will host Out of the Box Game Truck, bounce houses, the Brown Steppers, special musical artists and games for children and youth. Food trucks and vendors will be available.
- Rock Hill**

New Hope and Mount Olive UMCs, Rock Hill, came together for the second year in supporting the kids and community during summer break, with natural and spiritual food and activities. They offered fun, games and reading. Food Lion, Costco, a private sponsor and the South Carolina Conference offered generous support, for which they are grateful.

Former pastor, Anderson DS preaches at Lyttleton Street’s fifth Sunday

CAMDEN—The fifth Sunday at Lyttleton Street United Methodist Church is set aside for a combined worship service that sees the traditional and contemporary services come together for a time of worship and fellowship.

On Aug. 31, Anderson District Superintendent the Rev. Steve Patterson, past senior pastor of LSUMC, preached at LSUMC’s homecoming service.

“Steve and Debra served LSUMC for seven

years. It was a joy to see them again,” the Rev. Gary Rivas said.

Patterson preached from Luke 15:11-32, the Prodigal Son, with a sermon title, “When He Came to Himself.” After the service, everyone joined in a time of food and fellowship.

The fifth Sunday services, which focus on unity in the church, alternate between the gym and the sanctuary. This service was held in the newly renovated gym.



Patterson brings a word on the prodigal son.

St. Mark praise band records set for addiction treatment center

GREENWOOD—The praise band at St. Mark United Methodist Church’s Rivers Street Campus stepped up to use their musical gifts to help a local addiction treatment center.

In September, the band was invited by Cornerstone: South Carolina’s Addiction Treatment Center to record a contemporary worship set for the center’s recent Community Change Benefit Breakfast.

A professional videography crew came in to record their set, which was played during the event.

“What makes this special is the story behind it,” said the Rev. Robby Lybrand, associate pastor at St. Mark. “This same band was struggling coming out of COVID to even have enough musicians to lead worship on Sundays.”

Now, under the leadership of Fred Engler, Lybrand said they have become recognized for their talent and heart for ministry.

“The fact that their music is now being used to support Cornerstone’s work in addiction recovery makes it an especially powerful story,” Lybrand said.

Bishops Dease, Carter to keynote SABTS racism lecture Oct. 18

HILTON HEAD—The community will gather this month for a chance to hear two United Methodist bishops, Bishop Robin Dease and Bishop Ken Carter, discuss the ongoing challenges of racism in our culture, including the church’s responsibility.

On Saturday, Oct. 18, at 10 a.m., the Bridge Builders Committee of St. Andrew By-The-Sea United Methodist Church, along with partnering churches, will host the free in-person presentation, part of the Dr. Julius S. Scott Jr. Lecture Series.

The event will be held at the church, 20 Pope Avenue on Hilton Head Island.

Dease is the resident bishop of the Georgia Episcopal Area of the UMC, including the

North Georgia and South Georgia conferences. She is also the former senior pastor of SABTS. Carter is the resident bishop of the Western North Carolina Conference.

Organizers of this event invite people from all backgrounds and perspectives.

The purpose of this ecumenical group is to raise awareness of the issues and challenges of racism and inequity through educational events, involvement in community programs and respectful dialogue. The series is named after the late Dr. Julius S. Scott Jr., a lifelong civil rights advocate.

No reservations required. For more information, email standrewbythesea@gmail.com or call 843-785-4711.

PASTOR LEADERSHIP

From Page 1

of Theology, Jason Moore of Midnight Oil Productions, the Rev. James Friday of the Office of Congregational Development, plus a panel featuring pastors sharing practices that are bearing significant fruit in their communities.

Bishop Leonard Fairley lifted up the “brilliant epiphanies” we often receive as we discern how to lead our congregations and neighborhoods in new and fruitful ways.

“You’re not just appointed to a local church but to a community,” Fairley told the packed sanctuary, drawing from Mark 8:23-25 as he shared the story of a blind man who was suddenly able to see after encountering Jesus.

Perception yields behavior, which yield destiny, Fairley shared.

“What and how you see will determine your actions,” he reminded them.

Framing the future

Jason Moore of Midnight Oil Produc-

tions led a lengthy session Monday on technology, ministry and artificial intelligence, talking about how COVID-19 forced many churches to get online and do ministry differently. Now online worship is a necessity—every aspect of life has an online component today, and for us to think church shouldn’t or doesn’t is a mistake.

“Don’t stop online worship because you think it will force people in church,” Moore told the body. “If my favorite restaurant stops offering Door Dash, I’m not going to go to the restaurant—I’m going to find another restaurant that has Door Dash.”

Moore taught that engagement is key with online worship.

“People don’t want to be spectators; they want to worship online, not just watch,” Moore said.

He offered a number of thoughts about why online worship matters. For instance, some who have left church have come back because of it. Some of those who felt shunned have returned. Shut-ins have experienced the most incredible several years of worship, and vacationers, travelers and busy families can now worship anywhere at any time. Special needs families can worship without fear of judgment or on especially difficult days, and introverts and those with major social anxiety can take a respite from in-person church. And those with hearing and visual impairments can have an enhanced worship experience.

He closed with a few tips for better online worship:

- Create an intimate experience for everybody. Get the camera closer (waist to head close-up view, not from balcony).
- Look at the camera sometimes. If you use notes, remind yourself there are people online.
- Assign an online advocate who will answer questions and assess the experience.

Your church can grow
On Tuesday, Dr. George Ashford led a lengthy session on church growth, noting it demands courageous leadership, innovative thinking and a heart for the lost.

“Tradition is a foundation and not a lid,” Ashford said, drawing from what Fairley said on day one. “It’s not meant to limit or stifle but be a stable base that supports growth and evolution.”

Today, our communities operate in

Save the date: Laity leadership event

On the heels of the clergy event, the South Carolina Conference will offer “Lights, Camera, Action: Leading and Learning for Laity” Jan. 10, 2026. The event will cover topics like making the shift, all generations matter, ministry and technology, reaching your zip code and more. More information will be announced in a future *Advocate*.



Dr. Teresa Fry Brown says preaching the Word—not commentary or self—is essential.

new and often different ways from how some of us grew up or learned to lead church, and now we all must reevaluate how we do ministry in this present age. He said the apostle Paul knew everybody would not accept Christ, but he was determined to remove every barrier, to remove himself, so others could get to Christ through him.

Ashford said he’s determined to do the same.

“Church growth starts with you,” Ashford said, noting that if we doubt our church’s potential for growth, others will, too. “Your belief is the spark that ignites the possibility.”

He lifted up Thom Ranier’s teaching on four kinds of church leaders who will not lead in revitalization: fearful leaders who avoid risk, leaders in denial who ignore decline, comfortable leaders who resist change and coasting leaders who have lost their drive. Recognizing these patterns is the first step, Ashford said.

He said growth isn’t magic but is a mindset, and we need to abandon the “yeah, but,” mentality, meaning saying things like, “We would grow, but we don’t have any land, any money, limited staff, wrong location, wrong denomination.”

“Jesus is greater than our yeah buts,” Ashford said. “The problem isn’t the barrier; it’s our belief.”

He noted that hospitality is huge when it comes to church growth. At his church they don’t have “visitors” but “guests.”

“Your church cannot grow without guests, and your church cannot grow if your guests don’t come back.”

He said we also have to get over the idea that churches can’t market and make things exciting; they can and do.

Church with a screen door
The Rev. Matthew Alexander echoed Ashford’s wisdom on guests with a ses-



The Rev. Karen Jones (center, flanked by the Revs. Ellis White and Mallory Forte) discusses her church’s “break bread together” events.

sion on Christian hospitality and evangelism, noting that before, Christianity was the dominant culture in this nation, but today it’s no longer the dominant driving force in the world anymore. In the 1990s, 50 percent of adults attended church, while in 2022 it was 25 percent. In the 1990s, 8 percent were “nones,” professing no religious affiliation or belief; today it’s 29 percent.

“We can’t assume people see the world through a Christian lens,” Alexander said, and many people have a negative view of religion.

That’s why it’s critical we understand our “new church front door” includes things like social media, our church website, Google Street View and our general reputation in the community.

“A screen door church is welcoming, inviting, friendly, comforting, nourishing and healing,” Alexander said.

Many of us feel like we’re all these things, but we’re desensitized to our own flaws. So we need to do intentional, strategic things to be as welcoming and inviting as possible, such as intentionally inviting people to church, using church signs, doing social media posts and videos, keeping our website updated, considering accessibility and parking for those who are first-timers and making sure those who stand at the door are hosts rather than merely greeters—truly invested in and caring about guests who come through the doors.

What do the numbers say?
The Rev. James Friday offered helpful statistics that show needed information not only about United Methodist churches in South Carolina but areas of rapid growth and population density. “Remember, these numbers represent people that we want to share the love of God and Jesus Christ with,” Friday said.

Friday noted South Carolina is in the top three states in nation that are growing (following Texas and Florida). He said key areas of growth are in Myrtle

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Beach, Fort Mill, Charleston/Summerville, Bluffton, northeast Columbia, Blythewood, Lexington, Anderson, Greenville and Spartanburg. The population grew 11 percent between 2010 and 2020 and is expected to grow another 8.3 percent by 2030. He also noted there are 3.4 million European Americans, 1.3 million African Americans, 386,000 Latinos and 96,000 Asians in South Carolina.

Of the nearly 700 churches in the state, Friday said 70 percent have 50 or fewer people in attendance on a Sunday morning. As the population continues to rise, Friday said, “We need to make preparations to meet the needs.”

Best practices

Next, the Revs. Mallory Forte, Karen Jones, Reggie Lee, Deborah Patterson, Tyler Strange and Ellis White shared best practices from what they are doing in their churches so people can get practical ideas about ways to make those preparations Friday said are so needed.

Jones, who pastors Open Hearts UMC, Greenville, underscored the importance of having a vision and values and actually utilize them, lifting up their recent “break bread together” events that help people have clarity about this.

Strange shared how telling the story is critical. As pastor of a new church start in the growing Carolina Forest community, he realized almost immediately that crystallizing why church matters and why Jesus matters is key.

“You’ve got to know your story and your why and then to be ruthless in sharing that with your community,” Strange said.

Forte shared about her fresh expression ministry, The Circuit, which focuses on growing very slowly—one person at a time, mainly through “third spaces” like coffee shops and breweries.

“We’re trying to help people find their people,” she said.

White shared about how using their space at Edisto Fork, Orangeburg, for a medical ministry has been critical in connecting them deeply with their neighbors.

“It costs nothing but time and space,” he said, noting the need for medical care is at a premium in rural areas, and having this ministry enables them to have an opportunity to build real relationships with people.

Lee talked about his work with the Hartsville Cooperative Parish, including ways they are boldly preaching the Gospel and social issues as well as directly helping with real needs, like a health fair or a fitness ministry.

“You’ve got to be a disrupter to move things forward—can’t be afraid for people to be upset sometimes,” Lee said.

And Patterson, of The Brook in Myrtle Beach, talked about the need to be enthusiastic and intentional about kindness. The passion we bring to our work is essential.

“Don’t complain. A sad saint can



Photos by Jessica Brodie

Above, hundreds attended in person and online. Below left, the Advent UMC, Simpsonville, Praise Band leads worship. Below right, Men of Valor’s Meltony Billie, of Journey UMC, offers a mime-style praise dance during a worship interlude.



never convince a happy sinner,” she said.

One pastor who attended the convocation, the Rev. Ed Stallworth, said those words from Patterson have stayed with him since the event.

“In a world filled with despair, heartache and cruelty, we are called to offer joy—joy in acknowledging those who join us online. Joy in sermons that are well-prepared, intentional and clear. Joy in welcoming visitors warmly. Joy in fellowship, in serving those in need, in seeking justice and in reminding everyone they are loved by God,” he said.

Preaching that connects, transforms

Dr. Teresa Fry Brown, associate dean of academic affairs and Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology, spent most of Wednesday sharing about the importance of preaching that truly connects with the people in bold, fresh ways.

People are bored to tears by the predictability of our sermons, she said.

“We get enamored by the lights and we forget that preaching is not all about us,” she said, noting we need to remember that attention spans are decreasing.

From shorter sermons to preaching that is multisensory and fully centered on the Word, Fry Brown shared that we need to go beyond superficial preaching geared toward the first two rows and not the whole room.

She offered tips on how to reconnect with the people:

- Stay connected to culture. Read books, listen to music and watch movies that aren’t about faith to be in touch with your congregation.
- Active listening is helpful. Stop talk-

ing so much. Be quiet and listen to the sounds of life.

- Preach out of the overflow. Cultivate an empathetic imagination.
- Nurture empathetic understanding; it’s one thing to say “the joy of the Lord is my strength,” but imagine you have to say it to someone whose house just burned down.
- Preach from the Word, not from commentary.
- Don’t just deliver monologues. Dialogue. Read faces while you preach.
- Personalize your topic.

“Anyone who does not think they cannot improve is a sad preacher. You can always improve,” Fry Brown said.

Mindfulness moments and worship

The event was filled not only with intellectual and emotional sustenance but soul and self care, too. A massage therapist was onsite, providing 15-minute sessions to those in attendance, and several led “mindfulness moments” to help participants embrace needed



Bishop Fairley brings a word, above. Below, Dr. George Ashford shares how church growth starts with our mindset.



practices and understandings.

The Rev. Valerie Mireb led a mindfulness moment drawing from Matthew 6:21—our hearts are focused on what we prioritize in our lives, while the Rev. Cathy Jamieson led the room in some stretching and breathing exercises. Kendra Miller also led.

Journey UMC’s Women of Destiny—Ashiya Myers and Alycia Jones—used interpretive dance and song to help the body worship Wednesday morning, while Meltony Billie of Journey’s Men of Valor did the same that afternoon with a mime dance performance.

The Advent UMC Praise Team, Simpsonville, led worship Monday morning, while the Clergy-Laity Praise Team did so Tuesday morning.

“Self-care is not selfish,” Jamieson said. “It is great stewardship of the only gift God has given us to give away.”

To see videos of the event: <https://www.youtube.com/JourneyChurch-COLUMBIASC> (under “live” or “past livestreams”).

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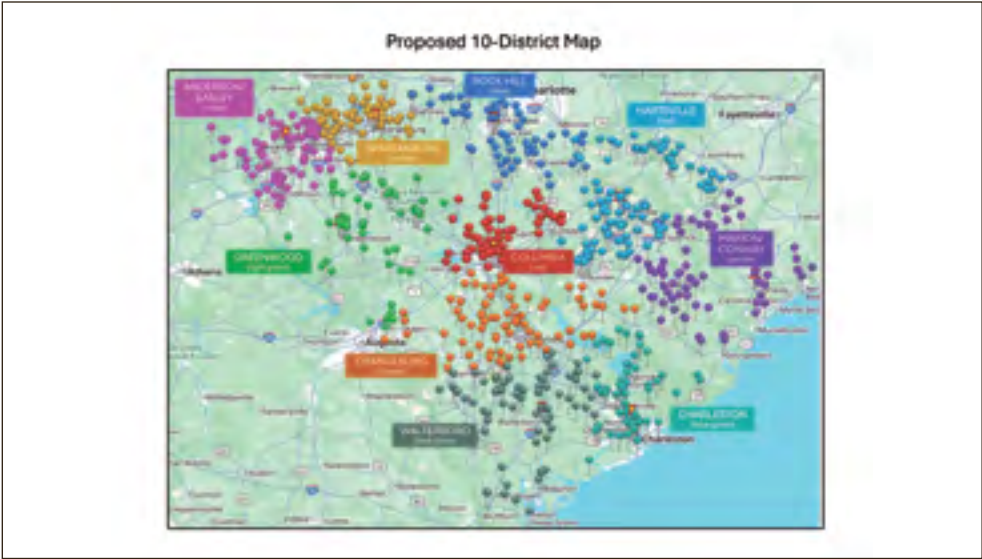
SPECIAL

From Page 1

inspired by Jeremiah 29:11, in which God reveals plans to give us “a future with hope.” Fairley made it clear to conference leaders that simple survival after a time of separation from the denomination is not the goal of this effort. The teams are Missional Priorities, Strategy for the Black Church and Ethnic Ministries, District Alignment and Conference Staff Alignment; they comprise laity and clergy from across the state.

Only two of the four teams—the District Alignment Team and the Conference Staff Alignment Team—offered recommendations for conference vote.

Fairley thanked the members of the Jeremiah Teams for their “faithful and diligent work within a challenging



timetable” and asked all South Carolina United Methodists to pray for the lay and clergy voting members of Annual Conference as they prepare to make “momentous decisions.”

“God has provided the people called United Methodist in South Carolina ample resources to further God’s kingdom on earth,” Fairley said. “Together, we will move forward; we will lean in to God’s promised hope; we will fix our eyes with determination on God’s promised future.”

What are we voting on?

Annual Conference members will consider two motions:

1) Reduction of districts: The District Alignment Team moves that the South Carolina Annual Conference begins a gradual process of downsizing its number of districts. Phase 1 would reduce the Annual Conference to 10 districts and 10 district superintendents, to be implemented by July 1, 2026, with continuous planning for further reduction as indicated.

2) Reorganizing conference staff: The Conference Staff Alignment Team moves that the South Carolina Annual Conference restructures the Office of Congregational Development by combining the current responsibilities of this office with the continuing work of Connectional Ministries, creating the new Office of Congregational Excellence. The current full-time Extended Cabinet position director of Congregational Development will become a part-time clergy appointment with the title director of Innovation and Strategy, supervised by the director of Congregational Excellence (formerly the director of Connectional Ministries).

About the districts motion

If approved, the Greenville and Flor-

ence districts would see their churches merged into other districts.

The Greenville District would be merged into the nearby Anderson and Spartanburg districts. Churches would be realigned to those districts based on their GPS distances to the district offices. As well, several churches in the eastern Spartanburg District would be realigned to the Rock Hill District.

The change would also relocate the Anderson District Office to Easley, which is a more central location for the newly aligned district office.

The Florence District would be merged into nearby Hartsville, Marion and Orangeburg districts.

Florence District churches west of I-95 and within the city of Florence would be realigned to the Hartsville District. Florence District churches east of I-95 would be realigned to the Marion District. And Florence District churches south of U.S. 521 would be realigned to the Orangeburg District.

As well, Marion District churches west of I-95 would be realigned to the Hartsville District. Hartsville District churches in the Camden-Lugoff area would be realigned to the Columbia District, and several churches in the northwest Hartsville District would be realigned to the Rock Hill District.

The change would also relocate the Marion District Office to Conway, which is a more central location for the newly aligned district office.

The team said shifting to 10 districts, with 10 district superintendents and 10 district administrative assistants, would save the conference an estimated \$467,428 per year in operating costs over the annual cost of operating 12 districts.

The difference in estimated apportionment values between operating 10 districts instead of 12 districts would mean a savings of \$490,428.

Before coming up with the 10-district plan, the team also reported that it considered shifting to eight or nine districts, but they felt the 10 district plan would be best. As they noted in their recommendation, “Moving to fewer than 10 districts immediately might sacrifice mission, ministry and the wellbeing and retention of district superintendents.”

The 10-district option would reduce to 42 (from 54) the number of churches located 50 or more GPS miles from their district office. The 14 Florence District churches that were 50 or more miles from the Florence District Office would be closer to their new district offices. The proposed Anderson and Spartanburg districts would remain balanced based on the number of churches. The proposed Hartsville District would continue to have the highest number of churches, at 94.

DISTRICT	CURRENT NUMBER OF CHURCHES	10-DISTRICT NUMBER OF CHURCHES
Anderson/Easley	57	78
Charleston	62	62
Columbia	47	68
Florence	64	
Greenville	51	
Greenwood	55	57
Hartsville	75	94
Marion/Conway	48	66
Orangeburg	72	81
Rock Hill	53	86
Spartanburg	55	74
Walterboro	72	72
TOTALS	718	718



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For details, visit EpworthSC.org



Continued, next page

Other Jeremiah Teams offer updates, no action

By Dan O'Mara

The two other Jeremiah Teams—Missional Priorities and The Black Church and Ethnic Ministries Strategy—also shared their work with the Annual Conference, but they did not ask members to take any action at this time.

The Missional Priorities team identified key areas of ministry as:

- Prioritizing children, youth and young adults
- Equipping churches to reach new people
- Fostering intentional inclusion and diversity
- Increasing clergy effectiveness for lasting impact
- Improving and expanding communication

The team continues to study how resources and staff align with these priorities in such areas as financial wellness, ongoing evaluation and improving

coordination with existing structures.

The Black Church and Ethnic Ministries Strategy is charged with creating and resourcing an effective conference strategy for strengthening the Black church and other ethnic churches and ministries, while staying attentive and looking for the new thing God is calling for in this area. The team's research has so far revealed that more than one third of churches in the South Carolina Conference are home to Black congregations, with only one active Korean congregation, and wide swaths of the state are not being served by a Black or ethnic United Methodist presence.

They are asking the bishop and Cabinet to consider creating an appointment partnership between Trinity UMC, Orangeburg, and the Orangeburg Wes-

ley Foundation, through which the Wesley Foundation director could serve as an associate pastor at Trinity. Beyond that, they are working to develop a plan to support leadership, resourcing and discipleship within thriving Black and ethnic ministries across South Carolina; evaluating current realities and missional possibilities; beginning to tell the story of these churches through a 10-year narrative project; creating intentional discipleship frameworks and processes to nurture and develop leaders; examining current charge and church configurations to determine their effectiveness and sustainability in disciple-making; fostering conversations within these churches to promote revitalization; and identifying best practices for growing and thriving ethnic ministries and sharing them with all churches.

CONT'D

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The team divided themselves into a map team and a workload team and analyzed a host of data in making their decisions. The map team identified all current churches and charges; reviewed district demographics, size, history, pastoral leadership, etc.; mapped out mileage between district offices and parsonages; and worked to ensure equitable districts (diversity, church size and financial strength).

The workload team reviewed the operational structure of the current 12 districts to identify a more cost-effective structure with the possibility of sharing job responsibilities without sacrificing the mission, ministry and connectionalism of the conference, including reviewing job responsibilities of district superintendents and administrative assistants and evaluating other SEJ conferences post-realignment.

The full team noted there is enough money in the Conference Contingency Fund to financially sustain 10 districts for approximately two years.

The District Alignment Team has made these preliminary recommendations for district lines after consultation with the Appointive Cabinet, but the final redrawing of district lines is an Appointive Cabinet decision, per the *Book of Discipline*. If approved, the conference would establish transition teams, as well as research and consider further district reductions, if needed.

About the conference staff motion

The staff changes mean the offices of Congregational Development and Connectional Ministries will become one new Office of Congregational Excellence. The current director of Connectional Ministries becomes the new director of Congregational Excellence. The director of Congregational Development position will shift from a full-time Extended Cabinet position to a part-time clergy appointment with the title "director of innovation and strategy," supervised by the director of Congregational Excellence.

The combined office will enable development of resources and strategies for ministry, faith formation, spiritual growth, outreach and the overall health of congregations in the South Carolina Conference.

Additionally, two currently open full-time congregational specialist positions and one currently open half-time congregational specialist position will not be filled.

Altogether, the team noted the staff changes will save an estimated \$400,000 annually.

About the special session

Voting lay and clergy members need to register for the special session of Annual Conference at <https://ac2025.umcsc.org>. A unique voter ID will be sent via email for those eligible to vote. A virtual webinar link for the special session will be sent with the voter IDs. This will be the same format used in 2020-2023 during the virtual sessions. Clergy who are unable to vote may register for attendance purposes. Alternates and others will be able to watch without registering.

Two webinar voting training sessions will be held Thursday, Oct. 16, at 12 and 6 p.m. Details will be sent to those who have registered for the special session.

Informational sessions

The Jeremiah District Realignment Team will hold four tri-district Zoom informational sessions, but only voting members are permitted to attend.

The dates and times for the sessions are Sept. 24, Sept. 25, Sept. 28 and Oct. 5.

To register to attend a Zoom informational session, visit <https://www.cognitofirms.com/ClergyServices1/Jeremiah-TriDistrict-Registration>.

Read the Jeremiah Teams' full report to be considered at the Oct. 18 special session at <https://ac2025.umcsc.org>.



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Grace UMC mission team helps in Bolivia tropics

From July 18-28, a mission team of 11 from Grace United Methodist Church, North Augusta, traveled to Bolivia, continuing a partnership that spans more than 30 years.

While Grace has sent many medical teams to the mountains of Bolivia, this trip was unique—only the second in Grace’s history (the first in 1997) to the tropics of Bolivia. The different climate, along with new medical concerns specific to the region, meant extra preparation for the team.

Over the course of the week, the team cared for what is estimated to be more than 600 patients at a clinic in Sapecho, Bolivia. Each patient not only received care but also the love and compassion of Christ through the hands of the team. Thanks to the generosity of Grace UMC and partners, team members were able to dispense more than \$100,000 worth of much-needed medicines and eyeglasses, more than 2,000 toothbrushes and sunglasses and a Spanish-language Bible to each family.

The team was welcomed warmly by Bolivian partners. In La Paz, they were received by the Metodisto Hospital with the bishop in attendance. In Sapecho, both the Good Samaritan Metodisto Church and the local clinic opened their doors for ministry and partnership.

Team members said the hospitality and fellowship with Bolivian brothers and sisters in Christ were a reminder of the deep connections formed over three decades of mission.

Perhaps one of the most meaningful aspects of this trip was the visible passing of the torch in leadership. For decades, Janis Collins has been at the forefront of Grace’s Bolivia missions, faithfully leading teams with passion and perseverance. On this journey,



The team gathers with Samaritan church members.

however, she embraced a new role—not as leader, but as mentor in supporting Ryan Hendrick as he stepped forward to guide the team for the first time. Watching Collins encourage and Hendrick lead was a powerful reminder that God’s mission is always bigger than one person, and that the future of the Bolivia partnership is bright.

The team itself was also inspiring, because of the 11 members, four were younger than 30, representing a new generation stepping into Grace’s mission legacy. Eight of the team members had a parent or grandparent who had previously served in Bolivia, showing how faith and service ripple across generations; four were first-time missionaries, eager to experience God’s work in a new place.

“Grace UMC gives thanks for the faithful service of this team, the wonderful leadership of Ryan Hendrick, the mentorship of Janis Collins and the continued opportunity to serve alongside our partners in Bolivia,” said the Rev. Ashley Buchanan. “We celebrate the lives touched, the seeds of faith planted, and the ongoing story God is writing through this mission.”



Commentary
by the Rev. Shay Long

Caring for the vulnerable—our animals

Welcome to fall! As we move into October, I have to think of St. Francis of Assisi. Many will be celebrating the Blessing of the Animals during this month. St. Francis, born Francesco, was a kind and gentle friar in the small Italian town of Assisi. The village people said he could communicate with the animals, and they seemed to understand him.

Francesco grew up surrounded by the songs of birds and the whispers of the forest animals. He found more joy in the creature-filled streets than in any of the merchant-filled stalls.

While he was in the marketplace, he heard a peddler bragging about power and wealth, all the while a cat was curled up under his cart, licking some juice from the merchant’s fruit. Francesco reached down to the cat, and it pressed its head against his hand. He received a quiet understanding that creatures have a place in this world—and so do we, when we choose gentleness over boastfulness.

As Francesco’s heart began to soften, he began to notice the world through their ears and eyes. He spent days in the fields speaking to sparrows, rescuing a stray dog. He learned to listen to rivers, to the rustle of leaves, the tremble of a scared hare and to the small, almost invisible voices of the fields.

The people of the village noticed that he spoke to the animals in the same way as he did people, with a patient, honest kindness that did not ask anything in return. There is much more to the story of St. Francis, and you can find books about him. What a better world we would live in if all lived and loved like St. Francis.

For now, I strive to live the life of St. Francis by caring for the most vulnerable among us. In Genesis 1:26, it refers to humanity’s God-given authority to govern the earth and its creatures. This is not because humans are more intelligent than animals. Given the chance to observe animals at work, they are brilliant. We are to show compassion, care and management of the animal kingdom. In other words, we should provide responsible guardianship to the animals.

As a wildlife rehabber, I try to do just that. I take in injured and/or orphaned wildlife to provide the necessary care.

I provide medical care for those who are injured. For the orphaned ones, I give the very best nourishment and care for them until we can return them to the wild to live out their life as God intended. If, after the care given, they are deemed nonreleasable, we will make a decision. Can this animal have a good quality of life if kept in captivity? Animals that are injured and that we cannot save upon intake, and those that are saved but will have no quality of life, will be humanely euthanized. But if they can, one of our many rehabbers will take the animal and care for it for the remainder of its life.

That is why you will see me at different events throughout the South Carolina Conference with a raccoon. I currently have three non-releasable raccoons: Remington (4 years old), Gabe (1 year old) and Sugar Foot (6 months old). All of my raccoons get vaccinated, just like any cat or dog. They receive canine and feline distemper vaccines, Parvo, and a 3-year rabies vaccine. They see a vet every year, just like your pets. My raccoons are always secured when out in public for their safety and protection.

When you see us out, come over and talk to us. We aim to educate the public to eliminate fear and misunderstanding. I will never force you to interact with my raccoons; that would upset them. They sense fear. If you have any issues or concerns about me or my raccoons, please don’t hesitate to talk to me. I’m happy to share information about wildlife.

I am cofounder and treasurer of Palmetto Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation of South Carolina. We are a group passionate about wildlife. We don’t make money off animals; we take them out to educate people. Do we fund-raise? Yes; it is expensive to raise these babies, and we don’t get a discount at the vet. We don’t get government money, either. We spend our own money on their care, housing and feeding.

If you would like to learn more about rehabbing or how you can help, please reach out to me at koalapastor2011@gmail.com or 803-309-3842.

Long, AKA “the Raccoon Lady,” is pastor of Mill Creek United Methodist Church, Columbia, and serves as the conference disaster recovery volunteer coordinator.



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Fifth Sundays now represent congregational partnerships and impactful worship that leads to meaningful mission work.



Hartsville Cooperative Parish: When worship leads to missions

By Paulette Lunn

Fifth Sundays have turned into special occasions for the “Heartwarming” Hartsville District Cooperative Parish, comprising St. John, Wesley Chapel and New Providence United Methodist Churches.

Passionate about creating reverent experiences that resonate throughout surrounding areas, the worship mission was held at Wesley Chapel to help replenish Hartsville Interfaith Ministry’s pantry with needed food bank supplies for needy families that depend on their efforts. Congregants brought canned goods, sanitary items, pasta, oral health items, milk, cereal and more. After service and the Eucharist, dressed-down members of the parish packed boxes to be transported to Interfaith.

Hartsville Interfaith Ministries was created to act as a coordinated extension for local churches by establishing relationships with the Department of Social Services, utilities, pharmacies and landlords to assure accurate information is obtained, as well as housing an emergency food bank onsite. The provisions provided will help to strengthen community ties, as well as provide a pathway to families that need uplift and care.

Worship services that lead to mis-

sion work is one of the most satisfying experiences a parish can have. Three churches collaborating to extend their reach to include more communities in need is a powerful weapon that solidifies the joint congregations. This outreach project allowed for cooperation through faith and love, embracing the values and beliefs that drive our adoration for God’s kingdom.

Doing charitable work is doing *missio Dei*, a Latin term meaning “the mission of God.” This concept allows members to be active participants and partners with God, as this service originates from God to help bridge the gap between church and community.

Our desire is to no longer neglect our surrounding neighborhoods, but to engage with them at their point of need.

This Fifth Sunday is a continuation of our work as a parish to be inclusive, progressive, inspiring and fulfilling as we reach towards more meaningful missions. Many pastors have contacted the Rev. Lyndon Alexander II, our associate pastor, to praise the work being done at the Hartsville District Cooperative Parish.

Engagement leads to connections that can make a positive impact that will help us to make disciples of those that are outside our walls.

A Tribute of Appreciation to Rev. Darlene L. Kelley The Embodiment of Love, Faith and Service

The people of Trinity UMC, West Columbia, are blessed to have a loving and caring pastor in Rev. Darlene L. Kelley. Her life is a testament to the power of faith in action. For years, she has drawn people together through her unwavering commitment to service and her outgoing spirit. In every sermon delivered, in every hand extended in love, she has lived the message of love and acceptance. Her ministry has touched countless lives, offering comfort in times of sorrow and celebration in times of joy. We love you, Darlene.



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United Women in Faith by Kathy Roys

Annual meeting coming soon

The women of the Spartanburg District United Women in Faith have been very busy planning to host this year’s conference-wide annual meeting.

The event will take place at St. Paul United Methodist Church, Spartanburg, Oct. 24-25. The keynote speaker is from the Spartanburg area; Chip Walters will share about her citywide project known as Sidewalk Hope.

Sidewalk Hope is a mobile children’s church that makes weekly visits year-round to housing developments in areas concentrated by poverty. Sidewalk Hope serves roughly 700 children and youth living in Spartanburg. Their tour truck will be on display in the church parking lot during the event. Those attending will have an opportunity to give monetary donations to be used toward Sidewalk Hope’s annual Christmas gifts project.

This year’s theme is the “Good Shepherd Cares” and is based on Ezekiel 34. Spartanburg District Superintendent the Rev. Cathy Mitchell will present the message during our worship service. Bishop Leonard Fairley will be in attendance and will officiate our communion service.

Representatives from our four state mission projects will give updates on their organizations: Wallace Family Life Center, Killingsworth, Bethlehem Center Spartanburg and Columbia Bethlehem Community Center. Participants are encouraged to bring specific gifts cards for these mission projects.

Registration is required by Sept. 30 to attend the annual meeting. For more information go to <https://www.umcsc.org/uwfnnewsletters/> or check with your district UWFaith president. All women are invited to come.

Roys is South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith vice president/program coordinator.



Photos courtesy of Dr. Luke Rhyee

Sight restored

At Healing Guatemala’s Hospital Bethesda Cataract Camp held last month, the ministry successfully performed 58 cataract surgeries on 42 individuals. Prior to the camp, ophthalmologists and nurses worked to recruit candidates for cataract surgery, especially those who have limited access to eye care. Many patients came from across Guatemala. Some travelled from Zacapa, an eight-hour drive away, while others came from Guatemala City, Huehuetenango, Mazatenango, Retalhuleu and Quiche. Their next Cataract Camp is scheduled for Oct. 12 with a goal of performing 100 surgeries. Healing Guatemala’s Hospital Bethesda is a medical ministry founded in Guatemala by physician and South Carolina United Methodist elder Dr. Luke Rhyee and is supported by the UMCSC. To learn how to help, email rhyeemt@gmail.com, or write Healing Guatemala, P.O. Box 1835, Duluth, GA 30096.



Shiloh United Methodist Church was blessed to have the Rev. W. A. DuBose join them June 29, 2025. Even though it has only been a short period of time, we wanted to show how much we appreciate and love you Rev. DuBose! Happy Pastor’s Appreciation Month!

Rev. DuBose is a passionate servant of God, devoted to preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ with clarity, conviction and compassion. Called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit, he has committed his life to the mission of advancing the kingdom of God through preaching, teaching and service rooted in love. A graduate of S.C. State and current student of Duke Course of Study, Rev. DuBose is known for his dynamic, Spirit-led preaching that blends theological depth with heartfelt application. His sermons reflect a rich heritage of the Black church tradition, infused with rhythmic delivery, biblical truth, and a call to radical discipleship.

At the heart of Rev. DuBose’s ministry is a relentless love for God and an unshakable commitment to loving people. His pastoral leadership reflects this calling—where senior citizens, families and youth alike are nurtured in the love of Christ. Whether in the pulpit, in the streets or through community outreach, Rev. DuBose embodies the words of Jesus: “I was hungry and you fed me, I was a stranger and you invited me in.” His ministry efforts are hands-on and people-focused, guided by the belief that faith without works is dead.

Rev. DuBose is supported in life and ministry by his beloved wife, Cheryl, who shares his passion for loving people and serving God’s kingdom. Together, they are committed to building a church that reflects the heart of God: one rooted in worship, driven by mission, and defined by love. They share two children Darvia’ and Madison and they have a daughter-in-law, Alexis and two grandchildren, Talen and Greyson. In his free time, Rev DuBose loves to ride his motorcycle, race RC cars and started fishing for relaxation.

Ministries.

St. Andrew By-The-Sea, Hudson’s Seafood to host annual Community Thanksgiving

HILTON HEAD—The 26th annual Community Thanksgiving Dinner will be celebrated on Thursday, Nov. 27, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Hudson’s Seafood House on the Docks on Squire Pope Road.

The event is a partnership between St. Andrew By-The-Sea United Methodist Church and Hudson’s Seafood House on the Docks.

The free traditional family-style meal is served to more than 1,500 Lowcountry residents and visitors annually. Founded in 1998, Community Thanksgiving Dinner was conceived from an Island Packet article featuring locals with nowhere to go. Brian Carmines, co-owner of Hudson’s, as well as Allan LaCoe and Betsy Doughtie, the former executive director of the Deep Well Project, soon met to discuss and begin organizing a community-wide event. St. Andrew By-The-Sea became a co-founder by leading the volunteer and planning efforts, and Hudson’s offered to host the first dinner.

Five hundred meals were served that Thanksgiving Day in 1999. The dinner celebrated its 25th anniversary last year.

Taking the reins this year from Gloria and Allan LaCoe, who retired after years of leading the charge, is Lesley Kyle. Kyle has been part of the leadership team for the past two years.

“The LaCoes have done a wonderful job all these years and I’m honored to step into the role,” Kyle said. “I attended the Community Thanksgiving

Dinner three years ago after moving to the island and loved it. My professional background, moving to this beautiful island and the fact that the church I joined co-founded this event made it seem like it was meant to be. Add the fact that the LaCoes were talking about retiring from the event, it was perfect timing for me to become involved.”

As many as half of the volunteers who serve in different roles—from parking assistance and welcoming guests to serving meals—come from outside the local Hilton Head area.

At least 50 percent are repeat volunteers, and the volunteer roster is usually full by mid-October with a waitlist.

Guests can expect the same tradition of memorably delicious food, warm Southern hospitality, fellowship and entertainment.

“The Thanksgiving dinner is such a tremendous community endeavor every year and we are excited to host and serve again at this year’s event,” said Andrew Carmines, co-owner of Hudson’s Seafood House.

Donations benefit local nonprofit organizations: Bluffton Self Help, Deep Well Project and Second Helpings. Contributions are gratefully accepted via the Community Thanksgiving website and during the dinner.

Complete information is available at <https://communitythanksgiving.com>.

Wesley food ministries help church, community

Food ministries at Wesley United Methodist Church, Hollywood, are helping not only the local Yonges Island community but also the church itself.

Wesley UMC has a soup kitchen, preparing and delivering meals to elderly and disabled community residents.

Sept. 17 was the opening day of the fall and winter season soup kitchen. Outreach Coordinator Della Butler and faithful servants of Wesley and from the community prepared, packaged and delivered 60 hot meals to elderly and disabled people.

The soup kitchen happens every Wednesday from 8 a.m. to noon,

The Rev. Fadetra Boyd said the ministry is a time of great fellowship and service for all.

Wesley also has a food pantry available daily, and they partner with other churches and agencies in the area to serve at a drive-through grocery box pickup every third Saturday of the month beginning at 7 a.m. at what’s locally known as Hollywood Square.

That ministry supplies more than 175 families with a variety of fresh foods each month.



Outreach Coordinator Della Butler helps on opening day.

Faith-Based Symposium to focus on public health improvements

United Methodists across South Carolina are encouraged to attend an upcoming public health faith symposium.

Hosted by the South Carolina Department on Aging, the seventh annual Faith-Based Symposium is set for Thursday, Oct. 9, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

This year’s theme is “Improving Public Health in the Faith-Based Community.”

This is a free program that provides faith-based communities in South Carolina with education and tools to help their congregations and communities.

The program will be held at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 8301 Parkland Road, Columbia SC 29223. For more information, email scaldwell@aging.sc.gov.

To register, visit <https://aging.sc.gov/2025-faith-based-symposium>.



Lake Junaluska

Winter Youth Retreats



Chris Singleton, inspirational speaker and former pro athlete, shares a moving story of resilience and faith after the loss of his mother in the Emanuel AME Church shooting. His message of forgiveness, unity and unshakable faith is unforgettable.

Jan. 16-19, 2026, MLK Weekend
\$273 p/p, includes 3 nights & 7 meals

Join Andrew Mochrie of The Ministry Leadership Center for a weekend designed to equip and empower youth. He brings a dynamic approach to faith development, fostering youth in leadership and solidify their Unshakable Faith in practical ways.



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See all of our powerful winter youth retreats at Lake Junaluska online: www.lakejunaluska.com



Camden to host ‘Colors for the Cause’ health fair and fall festival this month

Members of New Haven United Methodist Church, Bishopville, are participating in a community health fair and fall festival this month, and all are encouraged to attend and enjoy a day of awareness and fun.

Presented by the Bertha F. Mills Foundation, “Colors for the Cause Health Fair and Fall Fest” will be held Saturday, Oct. 25, beginning at 11 a.m. at The Price House, 724 Broad St, Camden.

There will be face painting, singing, speakers, food trucks and fall-themed activities for all ages.

Attendees are encourage to wear any color for a cause they represent or support, such as kidney disease, heart disease, breast cancer, leukemia, dementia, HIV/AIDS, lupus, Crohn’s disease, epilepsy or diabetes.

Participants will also be able to walk or run for a cause. For more information, contact the Bertha F. Mills Foundation at 803-420-9457 or berthafmillsfoundation@gmail.com.



Advocate Community Listening Sessions

6:30pm-8:30pm





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Lowcountry – 4th Quarter
October 28th – Orangeburg: Trinity UMC, Orangeburg
November 17th – Charleston: Stallville UMC
December 1st - Walterboro: New Life UMC

RSVP for head count for food to krenfree@advocatesc.org!



Young Methodists.

12 churches selected for Lilly Endowment children’s initiative

By Toni Taylor

The South Carolina United Methodist Conference has selected 12 churches for Cohort 2 of the transformative Lilly Endowment grant initiative, “Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer,” set to begin in 2026.

The diverse group of congregations represents seven districts across South Carolina, bringing together urban and rural communities in this vital mission:

- Bamberg Cluster (Franklin, Orange Grove and Mount Carmel UMCs), the Rev. Sheera Yates, Orangeburg District
- Trinity UMC, Bennettsville, the Rev. Judith A. Knox, Marion District
- Cannon’s Camp Ground UMC, Spartanburg, the Rev. Miriam Mick, Spartanburg District
- Stallsville UMC, Summerville, the Rev. Robert L. Rabenstein II, Charleston District
- Belin Memorial UMC, Murrells Inlet, the Rev. Sandra Stevens-Poirel, Marion District
- St. Stephen UMC, Orangeburg, the Rev. Kenneth Middleton, Orange-

- burg District
- St. Mark UMC, Seneca, the Rev. Alex Stevenson, Anderson District
- New Hope UMC, Pomaria, the Rev. Jesse Rogers, Greenwood District
- St. Paul UMC, Greenville, the Rev. Brian Humphries, Greenville District
- Advent UMC, Simpsonville, the Rev. Russell Freeman, Greenville District
- Wesley and Murray UMCs, Summerville, the Rev. Darlene Moore-Richardson, Charleston District
- Washington Street UMC, Columbia, the Rev. Becky Shirley, Columbia District

This initiative directly responds to a steady decline in children’s worship attendance, a challenge facing congregations across denominations. The grant aligns perfectly with the conference’s mission and priorities, focusing on creating meaningful connections between children and their faith communities through worship and prayer.

The program leverages strategic partnerships with proven organiza-

tions Narrative 4, bringing empathy-building practices to congregational life; Messy Church, USA, providing innovative, family-friendly worship resources; and West Virginia United Methodist Conference (Portico), sharing successful intergenerational ministry models.

Each participating church will send a team of four to five leaders (both clergy and laity) to join the leadership cohort, creating a powerful multiplier effect: 60 trained leaders across the 12 churches, more than 500 children directly impacted throughout the initiative and cultural transformation in how congregations experience worship together.

What will the initiative accomplish?

The initiative centers on fundamental questions that reshape how we think about worship: What is intergenerational worship? What generations worship with you? What generations have a voice? What generations are missing? Why is this important? How can we make this intentional?

The grant’s ultimate goal extends

beyond increasing attendance numbers. By implementing intergenerational worship practices, promoting empathy across generations and creating a culture of belonging, these churches will model a new way of being community that other congregations can replicate.

This cohort represents the second wave of churches participating in this groundbreaking initiative, building on lessons learned and successes achieved by the first group. Their journey will contribute valuable insights to the broader conversation about engaging children in meaningful worship experiences.

The South Carolina United Methodist Conference celebrates these congregations and their pastoral leadership as they embark on this important work of transformation, ensuring that our youngest members find their place at the center of our worship life rather than on its margins.

Taylor is grant administrator for the Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer initiative.

Spartanburg Methodist College tops its student enrollment record

SPARTANBURG—Spartanburg Methodist College once again topped its enrollment record with 1,220 students for the fall 2025 semester.

“We are blessed to be celebrating a record student body at SMC again this fall,” said President Scott Cochran. “The landscape in higher education is challenging right now, so to continue experiencing growth means we are doing something right and students and their parents are recognizing that.”

The fall enrollment broke the record set just last year and exceeded 1,200 students for the first time in college history. Total enrollment increased by 8.1 percent over 2024. The 2025

enrollment total includes 951 students attending on campus and 269 online, which is also a record. More than 550 first-year students enrolled this fall.

SMC continues to grow its academic program, adding another new bachelor’s degree this fall with a Bachelor of Arts in humanities. The college will add its first Bachelor of Science degree in exercise science next fall.

“We continue to add new degrees, responding to the demand we are hearing for particular degree programs,” said Dr. Curt Laird, provost and executive vice president for academic affairs. “We are continuing to study the market and consider other programs that

would fill a need in the Upstate.”

In addition to new degrees, SMC is also attracting students for its Camak Core professional development program. The mandatory set of classes is named for the college’s founder, Dr.

David English Camak, and it teaches students the specific workplace skills employers say they want graduates to have. Courses include skills like professional communication, teamwork, problem-solving and leadership.

Columbia College sees its largest-ever incoming class with 1,800 students

COLUMBIA—Columbia College welcomed the largest incoming class in its history this fall, with more than 1,800 students enrolling across day, online and graduate programs.

This milestone reflects the college’s continued growth and momentum as it prepares for an extraordinary academic year.

- The 2025–2026 year marks several exciting firsts for Columbia College:
- Lacrosse debut: The college is launching its inaugural men’s and women’s lacrosse seasons, adding to its vibrant athletics tradition.
 - New academic space: College Place will host its first classes for the School of Education, providing an expanded home for teacher preparation programs.
 - Enhanced campus dining: The dining hall has undergone extensive renovations, including all new furnishings, a refreshed layout and expanded food offerings designed to meet the needs of today’s students.

“We are thrilled to welcome our largest class ever to Columbia College,” said President John H. Dozier. “This incredible milestone reflects the confidence students have in our academic programs, vibrant campus life and supportive community. With new athletic programs, expanded academic spaces and upgraded facilities, this promises to be an unforgettable year.”



Rev. Allen Nesmith
St. James United Methodist Church
Sumter, South Carolina

Happy Pastor Appreciation Month!



Young Methodists.

More than 100 youth gather for empowerment conference

RIDGEVILLE—Canaan and Sand Hill United Methodist churches hosted a Youth Empowerment Conference Aug. 1-2.

With the theme “Lace Up Your Boots; It’s Time to Rise,” the event drew from Isaiah 60:1, which proclaims, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”

Youth ages 10-17 were invited to come and learn how to grow mentally, physically and spiritually—to become well-rounded leaders who make disciples for Christ and impact the world through meaningful connections.

Sessions focused on mental health, physical health, spiritual awareness and financial awareness.

The inaugural conference was hosted by the charge under the leadership of Dr. James P. Smith, pastor, along with a youth empowerment design team.

Pamela Goodwine-Glover said it was an opportunity for youth across South Carolina to connect with each other for a time of learning and relationship building. The youth had the opportunity to share from

their hearts about things that cause them to worry and experience anxiety in a world where gun violence in communities and schools is such a common occurrence.

“If we want to see a change, we have to be the change that we want to see,” Goodwine-Glover said. “This conference is what we hope is the beginning of a shift in the culture that will help young people be empowered to make a difference.”

Through worship, workshops, learning activity and intentional times to have serious dialogue about what is going on in their lives, the young people demonstrated that they are aware of the issues, disturbed by the issues and want to see a change.

Caring adults addressed the issues of mental health, physical health and spiritual wellbeing to which we all need to be paying attention.

More than 100 were in attendance each of the two days together. Leaders from the churches in attendance were invited to be a part of a design team that will plan next year’s event.



Youth ages 10-17 were invited to come and learn how to grow mentally, physically and spiritually as leaders.

Photo courtesy of Pamela Goodwine-Glover

Youth talents wanted for Advocate

Are you a child, youth or young adult United Methodist with writing or artistic talent? We would love to feature your contributions in the *Advocate*.

Whether it’s a church- or faith-related photograph, drawing, painting, essay, poem or story, share your efforts with the *Advocate*, along with your name, age and church name and city. Email to jbrodie@advocatesc.org or mail to Editor Jessica Brodie, *Advocate*, 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203.

If you’re mailing it and would like your submission returned to you when we’re finished, let us know and we can do so.



Wesley Foundations by the Rev. John Sterling Poole

Another Monday night miracle

On Monday nights, the Charleston Wesley Foundation gathers for our weekly Monday Night Worship, and this is a particularly fun event we offer for our students. That’s because while it is at The Citadel, every student can come. We gather students from more than three campuses, sometimes five, for food, fellowship, worship and reflection.

I made the decision two years ago that we would celebrate communion on the first Monday Night Worship of the school year. Many of my colleagues cautioned against this, afraid that the new students would be made uncomfortable and therefore never show up again for the rest of the school year. However, I decided we should celebrate communion because I want students to know what we are about. I want students’ experience with the Charleston Wesley Foundation to always point to deeper relationship with God, and I want that to start from the very first day.

We began this semester by celebrating communion. We had approximately 25 returning students from the College of Charleston and The Citadel, and we had more than 40 new students attend.

Many folks know that The Citadel is a uniquely challenging college campus for freshmen, called Knobs, who before their first week of class matriculate and begin their Citadel career. That week is labeled as Challenge Week (formerly known as Hell Week). Some would say this week is designed to refine Cadets to be more accustomed to their new college campus, while others would say this week also refines the incoming class by prompting several students to withdraw. The week is difficult on a physical, emotional and spiritual level. And of the 40 new students at the Charleston Wesley Foundation on Aug. 25, almost all of them were Knobs.

Prayer is also something many students do not receive during their college experience, and so when we celebrate communion, I stand to the side to offer prayer while two student leaders serve.



St. Andrew’s Parish UMC members feed hungry Cadets.

The miracle of this Monday night was the prayer line. The line stretched across the entire front of the room; so long was this line that it actually slowed the serving of the Lord’s Supper. Students, many of whom I had never met, waited 10 to 15 minutes to ask for prayer. This line was so full and so long that Ava Hussey, our worship intern who is a lifelong United Methodist and senior at College of Charleston, had to keep playing and singing for about 25 minutes (and she did so flawlessly).

I was so humbled by the students making such a vulnerable sign of faith on the first night of the semester. It was holy and moving. But what touched my heart the most was Colton Crawford, a young man I had never spoken to, who waited patiently in line for prayer. When it was his turn, I asked him how I could pray for him. He stood thinking, and then he said, “Could I get a hug?”

After Challenge Week, sometimes students need a simple reminder of unconditional love and family. What a holy and beautiful connection we share in the body of Christ. My favorite prayer that night was that hug, for it was an outward sign of an inward connection.

God is so good, and God moves wonderfully through college students.

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

Goose Creek shifts to school year VBS

Vacation Bible school is a time of learning, making fun memories with friends and exploring the wonders of the Bible for both young people and church leaders. Sessions are usually held during the summer months when schools are not in session.

But at Goose Creek United Methodist Church, Goose Creek, the 2025 VBS program proved to be challenging. Many families had pre-planned travel arrangements and medical treatments. Others were involved in continuing education and work demands and last-minute emergencies.

A quick family survey was conducted with the conclusion that instead of being held in summer, a VBS program would be held during the regular Sunday school schedule, starting at the commencement of the new school year.

Our VBS staff quickly modified the curriculum. Learning sessions were shortened, crafts were made sim-

pler, online videos were selected and Sunday brunch replaced the evening meals.

The program theme remained the same: “On the Road, with Skyler.” Skyler the Flying Squirrel, a VBS puppet from 2007, is known for being adventurous and sometimes going off the beaten track. He led our travelers into yesteryear for a six-week study of the life of Moses. From birth, floating down the River Nile, burning his tail on the burning bush, flying into a pyramid, getting blown offtrack during the plagues and crossing the Red Sea, Skyler guided the travelers into the desert to learn the Ten Commandments.

Of course, he was present for the conclusion of the life of Moses—and the ice cream party.

Parents agreed the modified VBS program was easier for their schedules and kept the young people engaged.

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Commentary
by Linda Powers Bilanchone

Mary Belle Winn: Striking balance
between China and South Carolina

The missionary Mary Belle Winn was a woman who was comfortable in her own skin. She was a working woman carrying out her teaching responsibilities halfway around the world from the home she loved and thought about every day. She was in China, but she was constantly thinking about her home in Columbia, South Carolina—especially about the house, the roof, the utilities, care of the property and repairs and their cost.

She shared these concerns with her mother in her letters—and the cost of homeownership was on her mind often. She outlined the actions she was taking in terms of income and budgeting in order to be able to send money back to Columbia as her contribution to paying the bills.

But that is not say she was not comfortable and even enjoying her life and teaching in China. She liked the women she lived with and taught with. She vacationed; she traveled—to Korea, Japan and other cities in China. She loved Shanghai.

She paid great attention to her clothing, especially enjoying the beautiful silks and other fabrics that were available in the Chinese markets. She designed her own clothes and had them made or took upon herself to redesign clothes she had and remake them herself, dying skirts and tops a different color and taking some dresses apart and putting them back together again in a different way.

Hats were important to her, too—the right one in the right color for the right occasion. For instance, on March 30, 1934, she wrote, “Today I wore my spring hat to church for the first time. I am going to have the tailor make me a hat this week to wear until mid-summer; at least then, maybe I can get a hat at a reasonable price in Shanghai. The one the tailor is to make is very much like that brown taffeta one Dick had last summer. I am having the crown made of black silk and the brim is white-brocaded silk. To finish it off, I think I will have him put a white cord ending in a tassel around the crown.”

Winn led an active social life with her missionary community, and she concerned herself with the configuration and well-being of the campus on which the mission buildings were located. She wanted to see reasonable access and good appropriate use of open areas. She put a lot of thought into her advice, sometimes drawing crude sketches to express her ideas of how and where particular activities could take place.

Of course, a serious challenge in another country is the language, and it is common knowledge that Chinese is dramatically different from English, both in its written and spoken forms. She accepted the challenge graciously and with determination; she apparently succeeded quite well. She even reached the point where she could deliver a simple speech. She was nervous; she didn’t know how well she communicated or how well she would be understood, but she did it.

Frankly, though, she gave a lot of

thought to her family’s house and its needs in Columbia and the financial impact of those needs, although she still seemed quite at home in Soochow, China. She calmly contemplated five years or more of living in China and even the possibility of spending a lifetime living in China as a missionary.

I think that South Carolina Methodists can be proud of Winn. I have absolutely no doubt that she represented us well. Her ability to keep both homeplaces (Columbia and Soochow) alive in her mind at the same time is amazing—oceans apart, both homes were her concern and her passion. Weeks and months passed between the arrival of letters describing the projects that she cared about at her home in Columbia, but her interest never waned.

As for her teaching, she was conscientious, and she seemed to be charmed by the little girls who were her students. Her fear was that their education would end too soon, and they would find themselves very young wives and mothers.

Winn had a positive, even-minded attitude—she sought, accepted, enjoyed, found, engaged, listened and lived fully in her vastly different circumstances as a missionary in the exotic confines of a different world. She and other teachers in the mission schools taught English, promoted intercultural understanding and built bridges between people of different beliefs and experiences. Their role may be underappreciated; their lives and commitment made a difference.

The good news, I think, is Winn understood that, and it kept her grounded even as she lived and carried out a mission far from the home she loved and thought about and wrote letters about often. She seems to have taken it all in stride, strongly and graciously with a sense of both adventure and responsibility.

Of course, during the quarter century of her letter writing, there was war and more war in China. When bombs were dropping from 23 Japanese planes flying over their school and home in 1937, she described the air raid and said, “To be saying we weren’t scared stiff would be telling a plain lie.”

And, after several dreary, gray, rainy days during the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1927, Winn wrote home, “How lovely it would be to be in Dixieland beneath the soft southern skies and hear the mockingbirds and hunt the yellow jasmine and wild violets in the pine woods. You’ll have to go a long way to beat old Dixieland. How quiet it would be and so far removed from a Chinese revolution.”

Yes, indeed, Winn’s heart was in both places—her home and her calling. She balanced them both with grace and faith.

Powers Bilanchone is a member of Central UMC, Spartanburg. Taken from the letters of Mary Belle Winn, South Carolina United Methodist Collection, Sandor Teszler Library, Wofford College. Location: Archives, Sandor Teszler Library, Wofford College, Spartanburg, SC 29303.



Sandy Grove marks 160 years

Sandy Grove UMC, Lamar, celebrated their homecoming and 160-year anniversary Aug. 10. The Rev. Dwight Nelson Sr. served as guest speaker, while the Rev. J. Elbert Williams was host pastor. Dinner was served immediately after, and a number of celebratory activities helped the church celebrate the special occasion. Above, the youth of the church praise-danced for Jesus during homecoming. Below, the event included a number of visiting clergy, including speaker Nelson, host pastor Williams and the Revs. Jacob McLeod and Blondell Miller.



Photo courtesy of Preservation South Carolina

People stand in front of Speedwell Methodist, a historic building now part of Swallow Savannah UMC but whose supporters work to keep the church preserved.

Ellis gets award for preserving
historic Speedwell Methodist

One man who has been instrumental in leading ongoing stewardship of a historical Methodist church building has received a Stewardship Award from Preservation South Carolina, the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and the Office of the Governor.

Vincent Ellis was honored with the award June 18 in a program at the South Carolina Statehouse.

The award recognizes exceptional accomplishments in the preservation, rehabilitation and interpretation of architectural and cultural heritage. For 15 years, Ellis has served as a steward of Speedwell Methodist Church, located in the Millett community near Allendale in the Walterboro District,

overseeing painting, window repair, termite treatment and grounds maintenance, as well as installing an historic marker and the raising of funds to do all this work.

Speedwell Methodist Church was organized in 1885. The congregation started work on the current historic structure in 1922, but because of bank and agricultural economic failures of the Depression, the building was not finished until 1941. By 1970, because of falling attendance, the congregation was merged with Swallow Savannah United Methodist Church, Allendale.

Almost immediately, however, former members organized to keep the building and grounds under repair and to host annual homecomings.



Historical Society
by the Rev. Meredith
Dark

St. Andrews’ story

In the Charleston District, churches are divided into groups in which we do ministry together. One of the churches in the North Hope Cooperative Ministries is St. Andrews Parish United Methodist Church, located in what locals call “West Ashley,” meaning west of the Charleston peninsula across the Ashley River.

The North Hope Cooperative Ministries is a unique group of churches including St. Andrews, New Francis Brown, Enoch Chapel, Cokesbury, Grace, Midland Park, St. Mark, Charleston Wesley Foundation and North Charleston UMCs.

Today, St. Andrews UMC is pastored by Rev. Brent Delbohm. Delbohm, and his lay representative to the North Hope meetings, Hope Treadway, shared with me the following history of St. Andrews that I find fascinating, and I hope you do, too:

In 1921, a group of Methodists living in West Ashley decided there was a need for a Methodist church in their community, as the closest Methodist congregation was in the city of Charleston. The church began as the Charleston Mission and met in a one-room school building located on Savannah Highway.

In 1923, members began soliciting donations for the construction of a church building. On June 14, 1926, the Methodist Conference purchased a tract of land on Savannah Highway for \$900. The mission became known as St. Andrews Parish Methodist Episcopal Church South. The congregation was very small, but it was the only active Methodist church in the area at that time.

On Nov. 9, 1935, a new lot was purchased near Pierpont (2543 Ashley River Road). Pierpont was the most populated area west of the Ashley and an ideal location for a growing church. Frances Murray sold the lot for \$100. Ollie Flood (one of the mission’s founders), J. O. M. Murray and C. A. Knight formed a building committee, and construction was funded with donations and chicken dinner fundraisers. During construction, members met in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Murray.

St. Andrews Parish UMC officially opened its doors in 1936, and the Rev. J. E. James was the first minister. The congregation had 50 members. The church members built several additions in 1939, 1955 and the early 1960s.

The church had no room to grow by the late 1970s, and the conference already owned land near Shadowmoss. Congregation members requested the land for the purpose of a larger building. Their request was granted, and a new building committee was formed in 1986. The old property was sold in 1990, and church members rented four classrooms in the cafeteria at what was then Drayton Hall Middle School for Sunday morning worship.

On Dec. 22, 1991, the congregation journeyed to the new property (3225 Ashley River Road) for “Ground-breaking Day.” The building was completed the following year, and the first worship service was held on Aug. 16, 1992. The church was consecrated by Bishop Bethae on Oct. 25, 1992.

The Ashley River Road Bike Path opened in 2007, connecting Bees Ferry Road to Village Green and everything in between, including St. Andrews Parish United Methodist Church. Delbohm and Treadway express that the church has embraced their identity as the “church on the path.” This is, of course, a reference to the physical location, but it also speaks to the congregation’s spiritual journey.

I hope that you have enjoyed learning more about St. Andrews Parish and the wonderful history that they have compiled. We encourage you to compile a history of your church! Follow the instructions at this link: <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/how-to-record-the-history-of-your-church>.

Dark serves as the president of the Historical Society of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and pastors North Charleston UMC, North Charleston.



140 years strong
Barnwell UMC, Barnwell, celebrated its 140th anniversary Aug. 24. The celebration began with a worship service at 11 a.m. followed by a delicious meal in the social hall. The church was packed with about 150 in attendance, many of whom were former members. A full choir, directed by longtime organist David Brandyberry, sang several beautiful selections. The Revs. Joel Jones and Fred Buchanan spoke briefly about their time in Barnwell, followed by a message from the Rev. Judson Barnes, the current pastor. The present church was organized in Barnwell in 1885. The Rev. J. L. Tillman, a Methodist, came to Barnwell and started the Methodist church after realizing there had been no Methodist organization in Barnwell for the past 30 years. He encouraged the members to build a church, and it was completed in 1887. It was built in the shape of a “T” to honor Rev. J. L. Tillman.



From the Archives
by Dr. Phillip Stone

A peek back to 1850

What were Methodists in South Carolina reading about in the pages of the *Advocate* in October 1850, 175 years ago this month?

The issue dividing the nation in 1850, which had already caused a schism in the Methodist Church, was featured on the front page of the Oct. 4 issue. The *Advocate* carried a long essay by Bishop Joshua Soule about slavery, acknowledging the Methodist Church’s anti-slavery position from its earliest days, but also noting that the call for individual Methodists to manumit their enslaved people had been suspended in states where it was impossible.

Indeed, Bishop Soule noted, most of the Disciplinary language regarding slavery had gone unenforced for decades. Soule believed the language about slavery needed to be removed completely from the *Discipline*. Soule’s position drew applause in later issues, with one clergyman calling for an end to this “ridiculous interference with civil affairs.” Indeed, the position that the church should not teach on what some considered a political question was generally popular in that era.

The editorial that week also noted the desire of the southern conferences for a Sunday school publication society. However, the editor complained that the existing publishing house, which had been created to support all of Methodism, was in the hands of the north after the schism.

The Oct. 11 issue featured several religious topics on the front page, including an article on baptism and another, a review of a Presbyterian sermon on election. The author concluded, “We think Calvinism absurd, contradictory, unscriptural, bad,” and a few other things to boot.

The Oct. 18 issue began with a story that could easily be repeated today: a plea for a supply of ministers to fill the shortage. The writer noted “what difficulty our bishops have in filling stations and circuits—even tolerably” and how many were left

Smyrna UMC celebrates
180 years as a beacon

BENNETTSVILLE—Smyrna has been a beacon of light in the Lester community for nearly two centuries, beginning with a brush harbor in 1845.

The members of Smyrna now say they are elated to celebrate this legacy of love left by those Christians who came before and saw a need for a place to worship in the community.



Smyrna UMC.

Smyrna has gone through many transitions over the past 180 years, beginning with a brush harbor in 1885 to its present day edifice, which was resurrected in 1985 after being almost completely destroyed by a mammoth funnel tornado that ripped through Marlboro County on March 28, 1984. The Smyrna church family said they are grateful to their ancestors who were wise enough to leave a written history of their humble beginning.

Smyrna will celebrate this milestone on the second Sunday in October beginning with a worship service at 10 a.m. The theme is “The Legacy of Love.” The sermon will be delivered by Bishop Otis Bernard Robinson. Following the morning service, members, family and friends will gather in the fellowship hall to reminisce and enjoy fellowship while enjoying a delicious dinner.

All are invited to attend.

The Rev. Maurice McZeke is the pastor of Smyrna.

paper carried a lengthy biography of the former king. It reported on events around the conference and in Georgia and Florida, changes in the cotton market and news received by ship from Europe. The growth of railroads seemed to be a popular topic.

Later in October, the paper reported on the arrivals of immigrants in New York, listing almost 21,000 that arrived in September 1850, almost half from Ireland. The paper also noted the laying of an underwater telegraph line in the British Isles and the fascination with the Swedish vocalist Jenny Lind.

And so, South Carolina’s Methodists could learn about church controversies, argue with their Presbyterian friends and be able to talk about regional and world events if they were reading the *Advocate* 175 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.

Worldwide News.

Congress of the Deaf meets
ELKRIDGE, Md.—Presentations on Deaf liberation theology and an introduction to DeafBlind ministries were heard by the United Methodist Congress of the Deaf during its conference Sept. 12-13 at Magothy Deaf Church. Other highlights were the presentations by members of the Association of Ministers with Disabilities, the Disability Ministries Committee and Love Your Neighbor Coalition.

Pushing back in Florida
ST. PETERSBURG, Fla.—United Methodists are among those

striving to alert the public that marginalized communities are struggling in Florida. The Revs. Andy Oliver and Roy Terry, both United Methodists, are organizing protests to try and keep pressure on lawmakers, including leading weekly demonstrations at detention centers in the state that are housing suspected undocumented immigrants.

Bakery ministry empowers women in Zimbabwe
CHITUNGWIZA, Zimbabwe—Women in Chitungwiza Marondera are rising in their communities through a new baking

initiative funded by United Women in Faith. Each day they meet, the women of Divine Grace Bakery make hundreds of sweet buns that they sell in their communities.

Survey offers insights on clergy health
GLENVIEW, Ill.—United Methodist clergy are still struggling, but there has been “stabilization in key areas,” says Kelly Wittich, director of health and well-being at Wespeth Benefits and Investments. The agency released the results of its eighth biennial Clergy Well-Being Survey on Sept. 17. Rates

of depression and functional difficulties due to depressive symptoms have stabilized, though they remain higher than national averages.

Reigniting campaign for children in poverty
BIRMINGHAM, Ala.—Under the inspiration of Bishop L. Jonathan Holston, North Alabama Conference leaders have reignited a campaign to lift up the needs of children and their families in poverty. The campaign’s first goal is to invite all congregations to recognize the National Observance of Children’s Sabbath on Oct. 19.

HIV research cuts at Meharry
NASHVILLE—The Trump administration has eliminated \$2 million in HIV research facility funding for Meharry Medical College after the U.S. Supreme Court cleared the way for the National Institutes of Health to cancel hundreds of millions of dollars in DEI-linked funding for biomedical research. Meharry, one of 11 United Methodist-related historically Black colleges and universities, intended to use the funding for a “cutting-edge and modern HIV research space.”

Courtesy UMNews

Obituaries

Rev. William Alvin Anderson
IRMO—The Rev. William “Father Bill” Alvin Anderson, brother of the Rev. David Anderson, died Aug. 26, 2025. Rev. David Anderson is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Sept. 5 at the Episcopal Church of St. Simon and St. Jude.

Rev. Anderson is survived by his son.

Lisa Marie Camp
GRANITEVILLE—Lisa Marie Camp, daughter of the Rev. Ray and Debbie Camp, died Aug. 28, 2025. Rev. Camp is the pastor of St. Paul United Methodist Church, New Ellenton.

A private funeral will be held.

Memorials may be made to the Susan G. Komen Foundation for breast cancer research, <https://www.komen.org>.

Ms. Camp is survived by her parents and brother.

Calvin Cohen
MOORE—Calvin Cohen, a certified lay minister of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died March 25, 2025.

Funeral services were held March 29 at Allen View UMC with burial in the church cemetery.

Mr. Cohen is survived by his wife, Rachel H. Cohen, two sons and two daughters.

Posey W. Copeland Jr.
CLINTON—Posey W. Copeland Jr., father of Dr. Jennifer Copeland, died Sept. 5, 2025. Dr. Copeland is an elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church currently serving as executive director of the North Carolina Council of Churches.

Funeral services were held Sept. 11 at Broad Street UMC with burial in Rosemont Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Project Warm Ministry of Broad Street UMC, 310 N. Broad St., Clinton, SC 29325.

Mr. Copeland is survived by his wife, Sarah Bradshaw Copeland, two daughters and son.

Thomas Grant Hooper
SPARTANBURG—Thomas Grant Hooper, brother of Donna Campsen, died Aug. 24, 2025. Ms. Campsen is the

Spartanburg District lay leader.

Mr. Hooper is survived by his wife, Judy, and daughter.

Joyce Faye Leach Kirven
EFFINGHAM—Joyce Faye Leach Kirven, mother of the Rev. Renee Garrison, died Sept. 6, 2025. Rev. Garrison is the pastor of Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Rock Hill.

Funeral services were held Sept. 15 at Tabernacle Church of Pamplico with burial in the church cemetery.

Mrs. Kirven is survived by her husband, Charles Allen Kirven Sr., two daughters and son.

Ann Marie Knox
BISHOPVILLE—Ann Marie Knox, mother of the Rev. Judith Knox, died Sept. 11, 2025. Rev. Knox is the pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church, Bennettsville.

Funeral services were held Sept. 15 at Wesley UMC, Hartsville, with burial in Hough Cemetery.

Rev. Michael Steven Leonhardt



Leonhardt

ROCK HILL—The Rev. Michael Steven Leonhardt, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Sept. 1, 2025.

Prior to his retirement in 2022, Rev. Leonhardt served the Marlboro Circuit, Pine-wood, Adnah, Herbert Memorial, St. Goerge, St. John’s Lugoff and Woodland charges.

Funeral details were unknown at the time of printing.

Rev. Leonhardt is survived by his wife, Linda Kay Leonhardt.

Rev. Janice Lee Mabey
BEAUMONT, Calif.—The Rev. Janice Lee Mabey, a retired local pastor of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Aug. 4, 2025.

Prior to her retirement in 2019, Rev. Mabey served the Lebanon

Charge (Ridgeville, Boone Hill Associate, Ebenezer-Hood’s Chapel and Ebenezer (Moncks Corner) charges.

Funeral details were unknown at the time of printing.

Rev. Mabey is survived by her husband, Dan Mabey.

Jean Barr McKnight
LAKE CITY—Jean Barr McKnight, mother of the Rev. Edward McKnight, died Sept. 2, 2025. Rev. McKnight is the pastor of Faith United Methodist Church, Cades.

Funeral services were held Sept. 6 at Bethesda UMC with burial in the Florence National Cemetery, Florence.

Mrs. McKnight is survived by her sister and son.

Roger Allen O’Mara
FAYETTEVILLE, Ark.—Roger Allen O’Mara, brother of Dan O’Mara, died Sept. 14, 2025. Mr. Dan O’Mara is the director of Communications of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Sept. 19 at Westfield Chapel Funeral Home, Springdale, Arkansas.

Memorials may be made to support children’s programming at Mount Sequoyah, 150 N. Skyline Drive, Fayetteville, AR 72701.

Mr. O’Mara is survived by his son.

Helen Valerie Ryde
LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C.—Helen Valerie

Ryde, an organizer and director of mission impact of Reconciling Ministries Network, died Sept. 2, 2025.

Funeral services were held Sept. 9 at First United Methodist Church, Waynesville, North Carolina.

Memorials may be made to the Helen Ryde Memorial Fund, United Community Bank, P.O. Box 162, Waynesville, NC 28786.

Ms. Ryde is survived by their wife, Kate Schiappa, and their mother.

Rev. Cheryl Martin Bass Rhodes



Rhodes

COLUMBIA—The Rev. Cheryl Martin Bass Rhodes, a retired elder of the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Aug. 29, 2025.

Rev. Rhodes served as the associate pastor at Trinity UMC, Blythewood in her retirement.

Funeral services were held Sept. 3 at Shandon UMC.

Memorials may be made to Peace Church United Methodist Church in Munich, Germany, https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=K49L7HP3CPQSG; or to Columbia UMC, 1830 Main St., Columbia, SC 29201-2410.

Rev. Rhodes is survived by her husband, Robert Rhodes, three sons and daughter.



Trenholm Road United Methodist Church

We give thanks and celebrate the ministry of our Clergy.



from left to right

Rev. James McCoy-Bruce, Pastor
Rev. Mollie Reddic, Associate Pastor
Rev. Sarah Fletcher, Director of Music Ministries
Rev. John Holler, Congregational Care Pastor

We appreciate and honor your ministry to our congregation.

3401 Trenholm Rd. Columbia, SC 29204



Adult Lessons
by the Rev. Nona Woodle

About the
Author

Woodle is congregational specialist for the Rock Hill and Spartanburg districts.

Urgent messages from God

Oct. 5
Out of the mouths of babes
Background Scripture: Jeremiah 1:1-19
Key Verse: Jeremiah 1:7, “The Lord responded, “Don’t say, ‘I’m only a child!’ Where I send you, you must go; what I tell you, you must say” (CEB).

Prior to entering ministry, I was the director of a child-care program.

Over the many years, there were so many times I wished I had a camera rolling and could have captured those wonderful moments when children delivered the most profound truths in ways only a child can. So often, children have a way of seeing and speaking straight to the heart of the matter. Yet their words are often ignored because they are “only a child.”

In today’s Scripture, Jeremiah is trying to get out of God’s calling on his life to be a prophet to the nations by claiming that he is only a child, seemingly much too young for such an important task.

As if God didn’t know Jeremiah’s age!

“No,” God tells him. “Where I send you, you must go; what I tell you, you must say.”

Notice God has a purpose for Jeremiah, even at his young age. What a reminder to all of us that no matter our age, God has a purpose for us! Children and youth are not the church of tomorrow—they are a part of the church today.

How often do we lament the lack of young people in our churches?

But we need to ask ourselves whether we make room for them.

Is our church welcoming to children, youth and young adults? When they are present, do we see them and their contributions? Do we make space for them to be seen, heard and appreciated? Do they have a voice in the ministries of the church? Are they included in the worship design process?

Spend time this week in conversation with a young person. You just may hear the word of God. Are we ready to listen?

Oct. 12
Measuring success
Background Scripture: Jeremiah 12:1-13
Key Verse: Jeremiah 12:1, “If I took you to court, Lord, you would win. But I still have questions about your justice. Why do guilty persons enjoy success? Why are evildoers so happy?”

We’ve all been there—in the valley of the shadow of doubt, where we find fault with God for the way things are. Why God? Why? Why do those bad people prosper when here I am? I’ve been faithful to you for so long, and it seems nothing goes right for me! Why do the wicked succeed and the evil revel in merriment?

We wonder why bad things happen to good people while good things happen to bad people. We, like Jeremiah, remind God of our love and ask that God hurry up and put an end the bad people’s happiness and success.

If, while claiming to be followers of Jesus, we measure success by the world’s standard, then we will most likely always feel disappointment and ready to take God to court for the seeming injustice of it all. But we have to remind ourselves that God uses a different measuring system altogether. God’s idea of success and happiness varies greatly from our society’s individualized concept of success measured by wealth and good times.

The Bible reminds us often that we are to be in the world, but not of the world, that we are not to conform to the patterns of this world, that we have been chosen and do not belong to this world. Therefore, our success as Christians cannot be measured by the standards of the world. Instead, let us set our hearts and minds of the things of God and continue to do all the good we can to grow the kingdom of God.

How do you measure success? Does it align more with worldly standards or God’s standards?

Do you need to adjust your measurement standard?

Oct. 19
Stumbling around in the dark
Background Scripture: Jeremiah 13
Key Verse: Jeremiah 13:16, “Honor the Lord your God, before it’s too late, before you stumble on the mountain paths in the evening shadows.”

I love a good road trip, but I do not like driving unfamiliar roads at night. During one road trip, I was driving toward an inn in the mountains, and as day turned into night, I found myself gripping the steering wheel hard as the roads seemed to get narrower and curvier the higher we climbed, and the sheer drop-off on the other side of that guard rail got scarier and scarier! I don’t think it would have been so bad if the sun had been out. I eventually made it, but today’s passage reminded me of that trip, stumbling around mountain paths in the dark, hoping for light.

This passage speaks to the negative consequences brought about by forsaking God in our arrogance and pride. Building on last week’s passage, when it seems the wicked prosper, we can often convince ourselves that we can both follow Christ and chase after worldly success. In arrogance and pride, we promise ourselves we won’t be led astray into the pitfalls that have swallowed those who went before us and attempted the same. So we set out, scaling the steep climb up the mountain of worldly success, chasing its allure.

But Jesus reminds us we can’t serve two masters. And somewhere along the way, we justify what we are doing and we forget God. We make idols of fame and fortune and turn our life’s altars to them, until we find ourselves stumbling around steep paths in the dark, still trying to climb that mountain of worldly success and wishing for God’s light instead.

In Jeremiah’s vision, the Lord says there are consequences for forgetting God and trusting in lies—our sin and shame will be exposed. Are pride and arrogance causing you to chase after things that are not of God?

How and with whom will you create accountability so you do not stray into darkness? What is one step you can take to better honor God?

Oct. 26
God loves us anyway
Devotional Reading:
Background Scripture: Jeremiah 30-33
Key Verse: Jeremiah 31:33, “No, this is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my Instructions within them and engrave them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Finally, amid all the doom and gloom of the Book of Jeremiah, after stumbling around in the dark (though that was a bad situation of our own design, forsaking God to chase success in our pride and arrogance) there is finally a ray of hope breaking through!

Even though we created the problem, God loves us anyway. Even though we humans never seem to learn from our mistakes, God loves us anyway. Even when we forsake God, God makes a way for reconciliation. All because God loves us! God promises to not only make a new covenant, but that it will be written not on tablets, but on our hearts, so we will know God as our God and know we are God’s people.

Notice God does not do away with the punishment for their sins. There will always be consequences to sinful choices. But God does promise to forgive and forget. That’s hard for us to grasp. We often anthropomorphize God, and when we try to make God in our image because we have a hard time forgiving and forgetting, it is hard to believe God does that. We hold on to guilt and shame, allowing it to create a vicious cycle in our minds, convincing us we are not worthy and that God couldn’t love us because of all the ways we have forsaken God. Oh, what a wonderful thing that God is God and not bound by our human limitations. God promises full forgiveness! God delivers new mercies every day!

We have received this new covenant. God has written it on our hearts. How do you honor God’s covenant? Do residual guilt and shame hold you back from living into God’s promise and forgiveness?

What reminders can you set up to help you live as a redeemed child of God, forgiven and free to live into God’s promises?



Children’s
Sermon
by the Rev.
Meg Cook

God’s long
chain of love

Date: World Communion Sunday, Oct. 5
Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:1-14 (specifically verse 5)
Time Frame: Three minutes
Do: Welcome the children and help them get settled. Hold up the paper chain.

Ask: Has anyone ever made one of these before? (Listen to answers.) We make them at home to count down to Christmas or vacation. Today, instead of counting down days, we are using these loops to show all the ways we are connected.

Say: Today is a special day in the life of our church. It is World Communion Sunday! That means all around the whole world, Christians will have communion today. We will receive bread and drink juice—and so will people everywhere. This means we are all connected! Connected to God’s grace and love, and to one another as fellow believers. Whoa.

Long ago, there was a woman named Lois and her mother, Eunice. They taught their grandson Timothy about God. They prayed for him and told him stories about Jesus. Did you know I put their names in here? Let’s find them!

(Find Lois and Eunice’s paper.) See, they are each one link in this big chain. Each person who loves God, teaches someone, prays for someone, or helps someone—that’s another link. Look at all these links! (Hold up the chain so kids can see how long it is. Exclaim about how long it is!)

Say: Did you know that this chain isn’t finished? Someday there will be loops on here for your partners, your children, and your grandchildren. Whoa, that is amazing. It’s a connection that keeps on going and going and going.

So when we pray, when we love, when we gather at God’s table, we are part of this huge, huge chain of love—connecting us to people here, people in other countries, and even people who lived long ago. We’re never alone because God connects us all.

Say: Today, as we celebrate World Communion Sunday, we remember that every time we pray or share communion, we are connecting with people all around the world—a chain of God’s love stretching far and wide. I think that is pretty inspiring and cool.

I’m going to leave this chain up front so when we take communion later you can be reminded, we are connected to all of God’s people!

Prayer (echo style): Dear God (echo), we love you (echo). We are connected to you (echo) and all the believers around the world (echo). Thank you, God! (echo) Amen.

Cook pastors Grace UMC, Columbia.

Are you interested in serving as a writer for the *Advocate’s* Bible lessons?
Email jbrodie@advocatesc.org.

Happenings.

Event Calendar.

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

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. 28—Wespath-Bishop Leonard Fairley Golf Invitation benefiting Africa University, Orangeburg Country Club.

Sept. 30—Advocate Community Listening Session (Marion), First UMC, Marion, 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.

Oct. 9—Seventh Annual Faith-Based Symposium, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Contact: Sherri Caldwell, slcaldwell@aging.sc.gov; Register: <https://aging.sc.gov/2025-faith-based-symposium>

Oct. 10—Emmanuel UMC Second Annual Golf Tournament, Beech Creek Golf Course, Sumter, 8:30 a.m. For more information, contact Yoland D. Wilson at 803-840-3973.

Oct. 11—Follow Me Together Discipleship Workshop (Anderson, Greenville, Spartanburg districts), Lee Road UMC, Taylors. Information: clynch@umcsc.org

Oct. 11—Follow Me Together Discipleship Workshop (Charleston, Orangeburg, Walterboro districts), Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville. Information: clynch@umcsc.org

Oct. 11—Blessing of the Animals, Platt Springs UMC, Columbia, 2 p.m.

Oct. 12—Jubilee Homecoming, Jordan UMC, Manning, 10:30 a.m.

Oct. 12—65th Anniversary Celebration, Aldersgate UMC, Greenville, 10:46 a.m.

Oct. 13—Indigenous Peoples Day

Oct. 17-19—Choir Music Weekend, Lake Junaluska, N.C. Info: <https://lakejunaluska.com/spiritual-renewal/adult-ministry/choir-music-weekend/>

Oct. 18—Dr. Julius S. Scott Jr. Lecture Series Event featuring Bishops Robin Dease and Ken Carter, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head. For more information, email standrewbythesea@gmail.com or call 843-785-4711.

Oct. 18—Fall Festival, St. Stephen UMC, Orangeburg, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

Oct. 18—Fall Festival, Asbury Hills, Cleveland, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Oct. 19—Laity Sunday and Children's Sabbath

Oct. 24-25—SCCUWF 53rd Annual Meeting, St. Paul UMC, Spartanburg. For more information, <https://www.umcsc.org/uwfnewsletters/>

Oct. 25—ERT Basic Training Session, Highland Park UMC, Florence, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

Oct. 25—ERT Renewal Training Session, Highland Park UMC, Florence, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

Oct. 25—ERT Basic Training Session, New Beginnings UMC, Boiling Springs, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

Oct. 25—ERT Renewal Training Session, New Beginnings UMC, Boiling Springs, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

Oct. 25—Colors for the Cause Health Fair and Fall Fest presented by the Bertha F. Mills Foundation, The Price House, Camden, 11 a.m. For more information: berthafmillsfoundation@gmail.com or 803-420-9457.

Oct. 26—Reformation Sunday

Oct. 28—Advocate Community Listening Session (Orangeburg), 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Oct. 31—Halloween

November
Native American Heritage Month

Nov. 1—All Saints' Day

Nov. 2—All Saints' Sunday

Nov. 2—Conference Advance Specials Sunday

Nov. 2—Daylight Saving Time Ends

Nov. 4—Election Day

Nov. 8—UWF District Officers Training, Zoom, 9 a.m.

Nov. 8—Follow Me Together Discipleship Workshop (Florence, Hartsville, Marion districts), Highland Park UMC, Florence. Information: clynch@umcsc.org

Nov. 9—Organ and Tissue Donor Sunday

Nov. 9—Bishop Will Willimon, "The Church We Carry: Loss, Leadership and the Future of Our Church," Washington Street UMC, Columbia, before and after services.

Nov. 10—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.

Nov. 11—Veterans Day

Nov. 13—Killingsworth Home Gala, Seawell's Restaurant, Columbia, \$70. <https://www.killingsworth.org/events>



Pastor reads her books at local school
The Rev. Meg Cook got the chance to read her popular Herbert the Hippo children's books at Oak Pointe Elementary in Irmo Sept. 10 as part of the school's reading program. Here, Cook shares a smile with Principal English, a member at Trenholm Road UMC, Columbia. Authored by Cook, the Herbert books—"Herbert the Hippo" and "Herbert the Hippo In the Moment"—are published by the Advocate's publishing arm, the Advocate Press. Find them at <https://advocatepress.org>.

Classifieds.

Jobs

Part Time Business Office Specialist at Epworth Children's Home

Under the direction and supervision of the controller and according to the ECH policies and procedures, the position is responsible for coordinating record keeping in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles, which includes guiding the financial requisition process and any other functions related to the operations of the Business Office.

Primary Performance Objectives:

- Oversee all financial requisitions that are processed through the Business Office
- Reconcile departmental purchase card transactions
- Perform petty cash and gift card processing and reconciliations
- Agency wide post office contact

Qualifications for the Position:

- Experience in all business office operations
- Proficient in software programs necessary to administration and communication such as MS Office and Windows, Blackbaud, Excel
- Must be able to pass standard background checks, including: drug screen, employment physical, SLED, DSS Central Registry and Sex Offenders Registry
- Has a belief system and engages in faith practices that are compatible with those of the United Methodist Church

Email a copy of your resume and cover letter, clearly stating the position you are applying for, to jobs@epworthsc.org

Golf tourney to help Emmanuel fix HVAC

SUMTER—Emmanuel United Methodist Church will host their second annual golf tournament, a special event dedicated to supporting the church's ongoing programs and community outreach.

Emmanuel has long been a pillar in the local community, offering spiritual guidance, support and charitable services to neighbors in need.

The congregation, led by Rev.

James Moses Smith, continues to serve Sumter through outreach, compassion and action.

However, the church is facing significant expenses because of damaged HVAC units, which have forced the congregation to worship in their soup kitchen area until the sanctuary can be renovated.

The golf tournament not only helps cover these critical costs but also expands the church's

food pantry, youth efforts and outreach initiatives.

The golf tournament will be held Friday, Oct. 10, at Beech Creek Golf Course, 1800 Sam Gillespie Blvd., Sumter.

Check-in is at 8:30 a.m., with a shotgun start at 9:30 a.m.

All are welcome to participate in the event.

To register or sponsor the tournament, contact Yolanda D. Wilson at 803-840-3973.

ERT training sessions set for this fall

The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church will offer three opportunities this fall for people to get needed disaster response training.

Disaster Response Ministry training sessions are scheduled for the following dates:

- 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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LITIGATION

From Page 1

court in the first instance.

Also Aug. 13, S.C. Chief Justice John Kittredge ordered that all litigation of this nature be handled by the Hon. Brian M. Gibbons, circuit court judge for South Carolina's Sixth Judicial Circuit, based in Chester.

"Assigning a single trial judge to administer and prepare for trial all such cases will promote the effective and expeditious disposition of this litigation through uniform rulings and will conserve the resources of the parties, their counsel and the judiciary," Kittredge wrote in the order.

Gibbons, he wrote, will handle "all pretrial motions, as well as trials, in any case that may arise statewide pertaining to the aforementioned disputes."

"The conference appreciates the Supreme Court's orders and looks forward to the expeditious resolution of these matters," said Dan O'Mara, director of communications for the South Carolina Conference. "We believe the actions of these local church leaders violated *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*—the collection of rules by which United Methodists have agreed to govern themselves dat-

ing back to the 18th century.

"Connectionalism is an integral part of The United Methodist Church, and that commitment is protected by a denominational trust clause providing that all property and assets of any local United Methodist church are held 'in trust' for the benefit of the entire denomination."

David Gibbs, one of the attorneys with National Center for Life and Liberty, which represents the churches seeking separation, said the church properties in question "were paid for, maintained and stewarded by the local congregations, not the denomination."

"Our clients entered the separation process promised by the South Carolina Annual Conference during the 2024 Annual Conference. When the conference breached that commitment and refused to allow the churches to separate, the churches were left with no choice but to pursue other options," Gibbs told the *Advocate*.

The UMC Judicial Council ruled Oct. 26, 2024, that Para. 2549 of the *Book of Discipline*, which South Carolina had been using, cannot be used to permit the exit of local churches. Another provision in the *Discipline*, Para. 2553, allowed congregations to disaffiliate from the UMC and take property, but that paragraph expired Dec. 31, 2023, and the 2024 General Conference further removed it from the *Discipline*.

About the lawsuits

The issue stems from some churches wishing to leave the UMC over theological differences surrounding human sexuality. In 2024, the UMC General Conference voted to change its stance on homosexuality, removing language from the *Discipline* that previously stated "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." It also voted to lift longstanding bans on the ordination of LGBTQ+ clergy and the celebration of same-sex marriages.

In advance of this, in 2023, 113 local South Carolina congregations disaffiliated from the UMC under Para. 2549. In 2024, another 112 did so. Then the Judicial Council said disaffiliation through Para. 2549 was no longer permissible.

The Methodist Church of Simpsonville did not participate in the Para. 2549 process, instead announcing in June 2024 the church had disaffiliated from the UMC and amending its corporate filings, changing the name of the

church from Simpsonville UMC to The Methodist Church of Simpsonville.

The South Carolina Conference then sued The Methodist Church of Simpsonville et al. in a lawsuit filed Nov. 5, 2024, in Greenville County Common Pleas Courts, alleging fraudulent deed filing and unlawful occupation of the church parsonage and property owned by the UMC, among other things.

On March 5, the conference asked the South Carolina Supreme Court to assign all cases regarding the conference and separating churches to a single trial judge, noting it had received Notices of Separation from roughly 40 local UMCs since November and that additional lawsuits were "imminent." A single trial judge, the conference said, would conserve and streamline the responses of the parties and counsel.

Not long after, on April 14, attorneys for the churches seeking to leave filed a petition in the state Supreme Court asking the case be brought under the court's original jurisdiction. Titled *The Methodist Church of Simpsonville, et al. v. The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, et al.*, the other churches in the lawsuit are Jackson Grove Methodist Church, Calhoun Falls Methodist Church, Good Shepherd Methodist Church, Trinity Methodist Church of Lancaster, Aldersgate Methodist Church, Boiling Springs Methodist Church, Fort Lawn Methodist Church, Panola Methodist Church and Dickson Methodist Church (all have removed "United" from their name).

Churches named by the conference in their March 5 motion as having filed Notices of Separation are as follows: Aldersgate UMC, Greenwood (Greenwood County); Andrews Chapel UMC (Clarendon County); Bellinger Chapel UMC (Allendale County); Bethel UMC, Bethune (Kershaw County); Beulah UMC (Calhoun County); Bogansville UMC (Union County); Boiling Springs UMC (Lexington County); Brunson UMC (Hampton County); Calhoun Falls UMC (Abbeville County); Camp Swamp UMC (Horry County); Canaan UMC (Cherokee County); Ebenezer UMC (Abbeville County); Emma Gray Memorial UMC (Spartanburg County); Eutawville UMC (Orangeburg County); Folly Beach UMC (Charleston County); Fort Lawn UMC (Chester County); Good Shepherd UMC, Lancaster (Lancaster County); Gordon Memorial UMC (Fairfield County); Grace UMC, Pickens (Pickens County); Hardeeville UMC (Jasper County); Jackson Grove UMC (Greenville County); Jefferson UMC (Chesterfield County); Livingston UMC (Orangeburg County); Lupo Memorial UMC (Greenwood County); Montgomery Memorial UMC (Spartanburg County); Monticello UMC (Fairfield County); Panola UMC (Greenwood County); Pleasant Hill UMC (Bamberg County); Providence UMC, Holly Hill (Orangeburg County); Rehoboth UMC, Greenwood (Greenwood County); Republican UMC, McCormick (McCormick County); St. James UMC, Laurens (Laurens County); St. Paul UMC, Florence (Florence County); Swallow Savannah UMC (Allendale County); Trinity UMC, Bamberg (Bamberg County); Trinity UMC, Lancaster (Lancaster County); Trinity UMC, Laurens (Laurens County); Union UMC, Cope (Orangeburg County); Wesley Memorial UMC (Charleston County); Zion UMC, Dorchester (Dorchester County); and Zion UMC, Lancaster (Lancaster County).

The *Advocate* will run updates as soon as more information is available.



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