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Charleston Men hold first of what they plan to be an annual gathering. Page 8.



Grace UMC gears up for its popular Return to Bethlehem event. Page 10.

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Screenshot by Jessica Brodie

Bishop Leonard Fairley, flanked by Conference Secretary Mel Arant (left) and Conference Parliamentarian Kay Crowe (right), answers a question during the online special session of Annual Conference, which approved two Jeremiah Team recommendations.

Special Session reduces districts, staff

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—South Carolina United Methodists have approved two changes that impact how the denomination is structured in this state.

During an online called special session of Annual Conference Oct. 18, more than 700 lay and clergy delegates approved reducing the number of districts from 12 to 10 in South Carolina. They also approved eliminating a Cabinet-level position in creating the new Office of Congregational Excellence, which will oversee the work of the Office of Congregational Development and the continuing work of the Office of Connectional Ministries.

Both changes were submitted

by the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church's Jeremiah Teams, created by Bishop Leonard Fairley last year to assess and transform how the conference is structured, how it operates and how it aligns with its priorities.

Two of the four Jeremiah Teams submitted recommendations for a vote at the called special session.

The District Alignment Team moved that the conference reduce the number of districts from 12 to 10 by July 1, 2026, with further assessment to be overseen by the bishop.

Lay and clergy delegates voted 582-39 in favor of the motion.

The Conference Staff Alignment Team moved that the responsibilities

of the Office of Congregational Development (currently a Cabinet-level position) be merged with the continuing work of Connectional Ministries, creating the new Office of Congregational Excellence, and that the current full-time Extended Cabinet position of Director of Congregational Development become a non-Extended Cabinet, part-time clergy appointment with the title of Director of Innovation and Strategy supervised by the Director of Congregational Excellence, which is formerly known as the Director of Connectional Ministries.

Lay and clergy delegates voted 563-39 in favor of the motion.

See "Special Session," Page 12

Legal team: 70 churches intend to leave UMC

By Jessica Brodie

More than 70 churches have indicated in writing their intent to separate from The United Methodist Church.

That's the word from James Becker, partner with

Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd in Columbia, who gave a brief update during the special called session of Annual Conference Oct. 18 about the lawsuits facing the South Carolina Conference of the UMC.

Haynsworth Sinkler

Boyd is representing the conference in litigation.

Becker shared that the conference has so far filed lawsuits against 38 of the 70 local United Methodist churches who had notified the conference of their intent to separate, and they

will be filing more complaints or otherwise resolving the issues soon against the rest, he said. He said the primary claim in the lawsuits is one for declaratory relief surrounding property.

See "Legal," Page 24

Repair issues creating struggle for Killingsworth

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—For 78 years, Killingsworth Home has been quietly nurturing women, helping them grow in faith and love so they can one day transform the world around them. While initially a boarding house for Christian women seeking higher education, today Killingsworth houses women who are emerging from crisis situations, whether addiction, incarceration, abuse or trauma, helping them learn needed skills in a safe, Christian environment before fully entering the community.

But now, their safe haven is being threatened with a host of repair issues.

See "Killingsworth Repairs," Page 14

One year in, church thrives through dementia ministry

By Jessica Brodie

ROCK HILL—In just a year, one Rock Hill church has experienced an explosion of ministry, and it's all thanks to a dementia connection program they started last fall.

Last October, Woodland United Methodist Church launched The Memory Connection, a respite care ministry offered two days a week for people living with dementia, not only within their congregation but throughout the community.

Woodland's pastor, the Rev. Robin Griffeth, had attended the South Carolina Conference's Cognitive Connection Ministry workshop earlier that year and

See "Dementia," Page 11



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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.

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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.

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Youth pray about their call.



Small groups discuss various topics.



Plenty of fun rounded out the day.

Called SC helps teenagers take next step in discerning ministry call

By the Rev. Bryan Pigford

On a warm September Saturday when many in South Carolina were preparing for college football game day, something special was happening at Mount Hebron United Methodist Church in West Columbia. In their fellowship hall gathered a group of teenagers, laity and clergy from across the state to participate in Called SC, a day of worship, fellowship and discernment.

Called SC was a day set aside for teenagers to explore how God might be calling them to serve, all under the guidance of clergy and laity who have all said yes to God’s call on their lives.

A lot happened in the space of a few hours. South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley shared an inspiring word borrowing from John the Baptizer the



Bishop Fairley brings an inspiring word. idea that it was time for his generation to start to decrease so that the generation gathered there could increase in their church leadership. Small group sessions were held to deepen relationships and explore various scenarios of what it looks like to answer God’s call on our lives. A panel of clergy and laity shared what life looked like as a deacon, elder, local pastor or layperson serving God

and God’s church. Attendees provided testimony as to how they have been answering God’s call on their lives so far, as well as what it meant to have this time and space to explore together. There was also time for fun activities, and Bentley the dog repeatedly tried to steal the show. Called SC ended with a laying on of hands for those discerning, while praying a prayer of discernment with them, and the Rev. Fran Elrod prayed a blessing over them. What adventures await these teenagers who are figuring out how to say yes to God’s call on their lives? God knows, and God knows we are all called to continue to walk alongside them in their journey as we work together in God’s kingdom transforming the world.

Deep need prompts restart of Haiti School Lunch Program

A longtime United Methodist-sponsored lunch support program in Haiti is being reinstated because of the severe hunger needs of youth there.

The Haiti School Lunch Program is an effort coordinated by the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission-South Carolina. The program had been on pause, but now is restarting at the request of the Methodist Church of Haiti, as an increased number of students there are now much in need of the free lunch provided through the program.

South Carolina’s Dr. Hal Crosswell—a member of Shandon United Methodist Church, Columbia, who started the decades-old UMVIM eye clinic in Haiti—said more students are being sent to Jeremie, Haiti, to do their schooling because of violent gang activity in Port-au-Prince and elsewhere. At John Wesley Methodist School in Jeremie, for instance, they now have 900 students—double what they had two years ago.

“Worried parents are trying to keep them safe and to continue their education since most of the schools in the Port-au-Prince area are closed,” Crosswell said.

Crosswell said the Haiti School Lunch Program provides one simple meal a day (such as a nutrient-dense soup with bread) to the students. He said that for some of the students, it’s their only meal in a day.

“It’s a very necessary program. A hungry child is not going to learn, and the way we help these people is through education,” Crosswell said.

Churches and men’s or women’s groups often pitch in to



Photo courtesy of Hal Crosswell

Children at John Wesley Methodist School in Jeremie, pictured here, are among those who will benefit from the Haiti School Lunch Program.

make donations. In the past, children have taken up collections at church as a way of helping their counterparts in the Caribbean.

“If you have helped in the past we ask that you prayerfully consider doing so again,” Crosswell said. “We want to help as many kids as we can feed.”

Donations can be made out to UMVIM-SC and mailed to UMVIM treasurer Jennifer Parker at 143 Glenbrooke Circle, Columbia, SC, 29204 (indicate the Haiti School Lunch Program on the memo line). Call Crosswell with any questions at 803-609-3285.

‘Follow Me Together’ registration going on now

South Carolina United Methodists are invited to tri-district workshops designed to help their church begin creating a discipleship path to help people follow Christ together along their discipleship journey.

Called “Follow Me Together,” the workshop is designed to focus on one of the South Carolina Conference’s Our 4 Priorities: connecting with and growing disciples.

As a follow up to the Conference Connectional Ministries sermon resources “Come, Follow Me,” this workshop is designed to be a beginning point for churches to create and ultimately implement a plan for intentional discipleship growth.

While the October event for the Lowcountry has passed (Oct. 11 at Sand Hill United Methodist Church, Ridgeville), three other events are slated for this fall:

- Nov. 8 at Highland Park UMC, Florence (Florence, Hartsville, Marion)
- Nov. 22 at Trinity UMC, Blythewood (Columbia, Greenwood, Rock Hill)
- Nov. 22 at Lee Road UMC, Taylors (Anderson, Greenville and Spartanburg)

To register, go to https://www.umcsc.org/follow.

UMCSC deacon reflects on time at European annual conference

By Rev. Elizabeth Murray

I haven’t been to a United Methodist annual conference since June 2019. Certainly, this is bizarre for an elder or deacon serving in the local church. The Methonerd in me loved annual conference—from friends, to polity, to the bookstore—and I left happy and exhausted.

The pandemic stole my last two annual conferences from me, and it is hard to think that those first five Junes of my ministry were more sacred than I knew. As I count on my fingers, I have attended as many annual conferences as years I have missed over my 11 years in ministry.

It seems easy to romanticize my time at South Carolina’s Annual Conference, I realize that. However, as I write this, I stand here in Langenthal, Switzerland, for the France/Switzerland/North Africa Annual Conference in June 2025, and I feel at home. Thankfully, last year after Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference, Bishop Stefan Zürcher learned of my appointment serving as one of the associate pastors at the American Church in Paris and invited me to attend this year’s annual conference for this region. The invitation was 10 months in advance, but it was a resounding “Oui!” from me.

Certainly, there are a lot of similarities from annual conference to annual conference—a mélange of clergy and lay delegates from each church, singing lustily and with courage just as Wesley desired, and services of retirement and ordination. Opening worship began with the German version of “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” which felt like a balm in Gilead to my Wesleyan soul.

While I have learned a lot about ecumenism and interdenominational ministry in the last three and a half years of pastoring at the American Church in Paris, I remain Methodist to my core. Meeting other United Methodists from France, Switzerland and North Africa these past few days has been a blessing and a continued opportunity to expand my understanding of worldwide Methodism.

Now, don’t be fooled to think that it felt entirely “home” for me, as I want to highlight some noteworthy observations during my time here. The first is that, because of the geographical boundaries of this annual conference, everything is conducted in Swiss German with headset translation into French (or, at times, vice versa). If you thought annual conference was tiring, do it in another language. What a great reminder for our friends in South Carolina who are not native English speakers—or during General Conference—when many delegates have two weeks of listening and speaking, and maybe even potential misunderstandings, and



Above, Murray talks with other delegates. Other photos show scenes from the event.



making crucial decisions in a language not their own. While I will admit that I have not understood everything said these few days, it is evident that German is the dominant language.

One Swiss delegate noted that the conference has had worship songs solely in German, with one CeCe Winans exception, and that “we” Francophones could not fully participate. Expanding the worship experience, including from our own Anglophone ways, ushers in glimmers of the fullness of the kingdom of God.

Like many others, the France/Switzerland/North Africa Annual Conference discussed and voted on Petition 20332, Para. 5. Article V. Racial Justice. The discussion moved similarly as many places in the U.S. I would assume, including conflating White supremacy as a social construction with an individual, personal attack. However, what I have continually heard in Europe is that racism is an American problem. While this is objectively untrue, how might the church combat the idea to the world that racism is uniquely an American problem?

Finally, one matter stopped me in my tracks. There was one report given orally, and livestream stopped, and phones put away, because of the sensitivity and safety of the ministry in particular parts of the world.



Over three years I have learned the existent persecution of Christians and the church universal around the world. Before I could not imagine, as a White American in the south, that Christians still experience persecution today. I now know the real risks and fear that many face for their faith. In our connectional denomination, I am proud that The United Methodist Church continues to be a haven, a missionary backing, a point of connection in very lonely work. When you tithe, you give to those pastoring vulnerable churches, thanks to the work of Global Ministries.

Our denomination is bigger than us. If you’ve ever been to General Conference, you know this. The United Methodist Church is working around the world, making disciples and transforming the world. Don’t take our connection for granted. As United Methodists, let us continue to pray for each other all over the globe, let us notice and humble ourselves in moments of privilege and let us thank God for our continued, shared work.

Murray, a member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, is the associate pastor for youth, young adults and missions at The American Church in Paris.

UMC again assembling Christmas stockings for children in Haiti

South Carolina United Methodists will have the chance to help children in Haiti get Christmas stockings through a South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission project.

The stockings will be filled with hygiene items and a small toy and delivered directly to the children courtesy of UMVIM’s Dr. Hal Crosswell, who has a way to get the stockings to the children through the Methodist Church of Haiti.

The project hopes to share hope and the love of Christ with the children.

The project is open to all, from churches, men’s and women’s groups, Sunday school classes, small/life groups and individuals. The stockings will be distributed by the Methodist Church of Haiti in the Jeremie region to the needy children at Christmas, who otherwise would not have a gift.

Stockings should include the following items, all placed in a one- or two-gallon size Ziplock bag:

- 4.6 oz. or larger tube of toothpaste
- One medium-sized toothbrush
- One washcloth
- One large-tooth comb

- One bath-size bar of antibacterial soap (ex. Dial)
 - One toy (small, like a stuffed animal)
 - Mints or hard candy
- They should also include \$2 for each Christmas stocking to help cover shipping expenses. Make checks out to UMVIM-SC/Christmas Stockings. The check can accompany the stockings or be mailed to Jennifer Parker, treasurer UMVIM-SC, 143 Glenbrooke Circle, Columbia, SC 29204.
- “The Christmas stocking program began after 2021 with the shutdown of Haiti because of chaos and violence caused by the gang activity,” Crosswell said. “These Christmas stockings not only provide something for children who otherwise would get nothing at Christmastime but also are a help to the Methodist church in getting young children interested in the church.”
- The deadline for assembled kits is Nov. 5. When assembled, kits should be delivered to the UMVIM warehouse in Leesville: 117 West Church St. Batesburg, SC 29006. For questions: 803-609-3285.

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Editorial
by Jessica Brodie

Trimming is
necessary for
true health

As a long-haired woman, I am no stranger to regular haircuts. Trims get rid of the dead, split ends and keep my locks healthy and growing. If I didn't trim them, my hair would break off at the ends and eventually be a mess of split and dead hair strands. It takes regular trimming and care to keep everything as it should be.

This is the metaphor that comes to mind after the special session and the excellent message our bishop and other conference leaders brought on the need for pruning in this denomination in order for it to be healthy, vibrant and alive (see article, Page 1).

Drawing from John 15:1-11 and Jesus' teaching on how we are branches of the great heavenly vine that is God's kingdom, Bishop Leonard Fairley shared that pruning is necessary in order to keep the vine healthy. As he shared, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful" (NIV).

The original Greek here for "pruned" is *kathairō*, meaning to prune, clear unproductive wood or cleanse.

Dead, overgrown branches must be pruned, cut away, trimmed back to ensure health. Gardeners know this. Hairdressers know this.

And we as God's church must know this, too.

The changes our annual conference passed in reducing districts and downsizing staff are definitely a step in the right direction, and more change will probably be required. Instead of fear and grumbling, let's do our best to embrace it. Instead of holding onto past "branches," let us keep our eyes trained on the future and the health we need in order to thrive and do God's work the best way possible.

If we can keep our sights on Jesus Christ and do his will as his church, God will bless our work.

Appointment
Changes.

Bishop Leonard Fairley has announced the following changes of appointment:

Effective July 31, 2025
Hartsville District: Bethlehem, Bishopville – TBS

Effective Sept. 1, 2025
Anderson District: Marshall Memorial-Ebenezer – Dave Simpson (SY)



Bishop's Column
by Bishop Leonard Fairley

Shaped for fruitfulness

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."—John 15:1-2

They had become our pride and joy, the twin pink crape myrtles just outside our front door. We had no idea that the landscapers we hired would prune them. It was all we could do to pay him after looking at crape myrtles that now looked anything but beautiful.

We were certain there was no way they were going to survive this. We were in no mood to listen to him trying to explain to us how beautiful they would be once they started blooming again. We were devastated at what looked like a hatchet job of destruction.

However, true to his word, the crape myrtles came back more beautiful than before.

Siblings in Christ, there is a seed of change in every beautiful thing that must be cultivated if true transformation and renewal is to take place. Caterpillars must enter the cocoon stage before becoming butterflies.

Every seed must be planted in the cold dark earth before it can germinate and grow into what it was meant to grow into something that nourishes and beautifies the world.

Jesus had to journey through agonizing betrayal and desertion by his closest friends on his way to the brutality of crucifixion on a Roman cross. Listen to him praying, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want" (Matthew 26:39).

Jesus' life, death and resurrection became God's atoning work of reconciliation that redeemed our lives and heals the world.

We as followers of Jesus know that our "hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; we dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name. When darkness veils his lovely face, we rest on his unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale, our anchor holds within the veil" ("My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less," Edward Mote).

We trust that our best days are not behind us but in front of us. The changes approved during the special called session of Annual Conference are about doing everything the Lord calls us to do to stay connected to the true vine.

When we as followers of Jesus Christ set our eyes toward a future with hope, we find the courage to move forward by letting go in total surrender so that the bright future can shine through the darkness. We do this in the strong words of the apostle Paul to the church at Philippi: "Not that I have already obtained this or have already

reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own. ... Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

Contrary to what others might say or what might look like slow death, the South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church will not die but will live to declare the works of the Lord. We will not die but live to do what the Lord requires of us: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

We will not die but live to grow and show the love of God to the last, the lost and the least. We will live and not die because "we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our bodies" (2 Corinthians 4:7-10).

We will not die, but while the blood is still running warm in our veins, we will press forward because the blessing is in the pressing. We will always position ourselves, both in our current reality and in whatever is yet to come, in a spiritual posture to grow in the love of God, to know the love of God and share the love of God—to share the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, if it means that something must be pruned, let it be so. If pruning means we grow more fruitful and effective in "forming disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections," then prune us Lord, from the top of our heads to the crowns of our feet.

If pruning means these things, Lord let the pruning begin so that we might stay connected to the true vine. Let the pruning begin in our hearts as we pray with Richard Foster these words: "Spirit of the Living God, be the Gardener of my (our) souls. For so long I (we) have been waiting, silent and still experiencing a winter of the soul. But now, in the strong name of Jesus Christ, I (we) dare to ask: Clear away the dead growth of the past. Break up the hard clods of custom and routine. Stir in the rich compost of vision and challenge. Bury deep in my (our) soul the implanted Word. Cultivate and water and tend my heart. Until new life buds and opens and flowers. Amen."

Christian morals

On my mind right now are two issues. First, I visited my U.S. House of Representative office and I said I was disturbed to hear the stories of the women survivors of Epstein, a convicted sex offender who died in prison in 2019 while waiting trail on federal sex-trafficking. I wanted to

know what my congressman was doing about this, and I believe the release of the files is important.

This is more than a political headache. These are stories of crude and dark behavior against young, innocent girls by wealthy and powerful men. In Christian

See "Letters," Page 5

Letters to the Editor.

A poem: 'Let Us Go'

Why do you want to worship with a group of people who do not believe as you do?


Let us go.
What will you do with churches standing empty?

Let us go.
Why do you want to add attitudes to the Bible that are not there?

Let us go.
If you close churches, how can you make as many disciples for Christ?

Let us go.
Just because something may be legal because of the trust clause, does that mean it is moral?

Let us go.
Jane G. Conrath, member
Trinity UMC, Laurens



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Commentary
by Glenn Williams

Two trees: A fable

Editor's note: This was written in the aftermath of a storm that caused a giant oak to crash near the author's church.

A young boy walking through Greenwood on a sweltering summer day rested under a mighty oak tree across the street from a church. The sidewalk was buckled by the roots the the mighty tree. Leaning against the trunk he drifted into sleep and dreamed that he had a conversation with the tree. A sad face appeared in the trunk with tear drops in his eyes.

"Why are you crying, mighty oak?" said the boy.
"I am so tired!" The oak tree replied.
"Why?" said the boy.

"For the last 25 years, I have been struggling to keep from falling on that steeple across the street. I have grown so big that my shallow roots are not going to keep me standing for much longer. You see, God designed me to grow in the forest beside other trees that I could lean on when the storms came. Now, I have no one to help me when the wind blows, and one day I will fall. What makes me even sadder, is that when I fall, I may damage the beautiful church steeple. They will cut me up into little pieces and take me to the landfill. I had so dreamed of becoming a floor in a house or a dining table or a child's desk.

The boy woke up and walked into town. He again fell asleep on a bench by the city fountain and had another dream. He heard some giggling and looked around. The Ginkgo trees were smiling and laughing.

"Hey, what's so funny?" said the boy.
"We are just so happy to be here in Greenwood. God designed us to make people smile. Our only purpose is to be beautiful, with the prettiest fan-shaped leaves that turn "golden" in the fall. We are sturdy and long-lived and even surround the Capital Building in Columbia. We wish that we could be planted all around Greenwood. We grow well here."

The boy awoke with a start.
"I know what I'll do. I'll go back and ask the owner if they could turn the sad oak tree into lumber for a child's school desk, and I will plant a Ginkgo in the place where the oak tree stood."

Years later, another little boy laid his head on a beautiful oak desk and fell asleep. He heard a faint giggle and a small cheerful voice.

"Hey little boy. You might not believe this, but I used to be a mighty oak tree."

Moral: Trees never die; they just change form.

Williams is a member of Main Street UMC, Greenwood.

Reflection topic for December Advocate

What can you prune for health, whether in your church or in yourself? Share with the Advocate at oped@advocatesc.org (include church name/city).

LETTERS

From Page 4

terms, this is evil and sinful.
Where are the morals and consciences of our leaders? We all have a moral duty and obligation to protect the innocent. A Christian life has moral values and lives as Christ taught us.

Christ said, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:5-6).

In addition, as a child and as an adult I have no respect for the Klan. I have seen KKK walk the streets of communities and create fear in years past. At this time in our nation there are masked, armed soldiers with United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement walking the streets in the neighborhoods of our communities arresting and threatening citizens, including children and women. This is barbaric. Our democracy will be destroyed with these acts of injustices. In history, barbaric action destroyed civilizations. Think of your children and grandchildren.

They wear masks just as the KKK. Why do they cover their faces? Isn't this evil? Lewis Edwards said, "Your face doth testify what be inwardly."

When we look into someone's face, we are seeing the image of God. Wearing a mask covers the face God created.

"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Peter 3:12).

Pray for your neighbor, or these masked soldiers will be in your neighborhood. Democracy is being challenged by barbarians.

Read Numbers 6:24-26 and show the face of Christ.

Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia

For those who feel left out
Thank you for running the Q&A with Bishop Willimon on his new book (September Advocate).

I am one of those UMC lay members who has been trying to find footing for the past several years.

I tried to find who wanted to

stay in the UMC in my county. No one would tell me. I was not with those who wanted to leave, so I didn't hear of meetings until they were "tonight" or had already been. The congregation shunned me. I had been a member for about 20 years and served as Sunday school teacher and superintendent and lay delegate to Annual Conference. I participated regularly in church and in the UMW. No one would talk to me at church. After everyone had made up their minds, they held an open prayer meeting with guided prayer.

Then they planned a discussion on Topic A. I planned to give some points on Topic A from a different point of view. The morning of the meeting I checked my e-mail and found Topic A had been changed to Topic B. I brought my grandson, age 20, to the discussion. No one spoke to us. The pastor came over and was all buddy-buddy. My grandson told me he was never going back to that place, where he had been baptized and confirmed and served as an acolyte. When they were planning on who was leaving, they sent out a list of people they needed information about; my grandson's name was on it!

During all of this, I was asking clergy friends of mine for help. There was no advice except wait and see how it comes out.

I may be the only UMC member left in Abbeville County. My membership now is in Toxaway UMC, Anderson, a very small but Christian church. I talked my grandson into going with me one Sunday. When we left, he said, "I've never been in a church like that." He felt the Spirit. We go together now most Sundays. We have great conversations going to and coming home again. He studies Scripture because he wants to understand. We are both learning, worshiping and serving.

I wrote this to share the misery of some of us who stayed. Most who left, left to stay with their friends.

Connectionism meant nothing to them, but money did.

For those who feel left out, there are Toxaways out there who will welcome you and not brag about their building, how big they are or how much money they have, but show what God's love is, how real it is and how you can have it to share it.

Mary Lou Edens
Toxaway UMC, Anderson

Love points to Jesus
Not too long ago, I listened as my son Sean and our pastor, Kurt Stutler, sang "The Jesus Way." The words grabbed my attention. It's more than a song; it's a roadmap. Every line reminds us how we're called to live in love, even when it feels impossible. The lyrics made me think of the shirt we received at our annual conference that simply says, "By our love." It's a bold statement that ties directly to the message of "The Jesus Way." The world will know us by our love, not our arguments, positions, possessions or even good intentions. Love is the marker. Love is the evidence.

If I'm honest, lately living this out is proving to be one of the more difficult struggles of my faith. Loving like Jesus means forgiving when we've been wronged, extending grace when it's undeserved, showing kindness to those who see things differently and offering compassion to those we don't understand. When disagreements run deep and words cut sharp, it can feel impossible.

But here's what I'm learning: At South Main, I catch glimpses of love winning. We welcome people without judgment. We see each other as children of God first, not as categories or labels, not as us and them. In those moments, my hope is renewed.

Our world is overflowing with hate, division and bitterness. It's easy to join in, throw stones and write people off. But the song echoes in my mind, and I know this is not the Jesus way. If we want change, we must be the change. We can't wait for someone else to fix it. We can't wait for everything to be better. We must love through it, in spite of it. It's so important to model Jesus' love for everyone, even the hardest to love. So I share this reminder:

Lead with love.
Lead with kindness.
Lead with compassion.
Lead with empathy.
And when all else fails, return to the greatest command: to love one another as Jesus loves us.

It won't always be easy. It may always be a struggle. But it's worth it. Because in a world starving for hope, love is the light we have to give. And when people see that light in us, they'll see Jesus, too. After all, we'll never look into the eyes of someone Jesus doesn't love.

Sandy Thrasher, lay leader
Anderson District



Humanity
Behind Bars
by the Rev. Nichole
Middleton

The humbling we need

“If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played?”—1 Corinthians 14:7

A joy I have come to know is that words do not fade when the conversation ends—they echo in the soul, reshaping how we listen for God. There are moments in ministry that linger—words that stay with you long after they are spoken.

Recently, I was with someone enduring a particularly hard day in prison. Another man had spoken harshly to him for no apparent reason, and moments later he realized a cherished possession was gone—removed from where he had placed it. For many of us, such moments can be walked off or privately soothed, but for people behind the fence, there is no such space.

I entered in the midst of this moment for BJ. Our encounter began with a simple question: “What did you learn from the last two hours?” He paused, and a tear rolled down his cheek as he looked at his hands and said, “This is the humbling I needed, but not the humbling I was expecting—or wanted.”

His honesty landed deeply. There was no bitterness in his tone, only a weary acceptance—a recognition that grace had found him even in a painful place. His words made me reflect on how God often works in ways we would never choose. Humbling rarely feels like a gift, yet sometimes it is the only doorway through which transformation enters.

Paul’s words to the Corinthians remind us that even sound without clarity loses its purpose. So it is with our lives before grace tunes us anew. When our hearts fall out of rhythm with the Spirit, we can become noise—busy, distracted, speaking but not saying, moving but not becoming. Yet God’s sanctifying grace continually shapes and perfects us, retuning our lives until mercy rings clearly once more.

For some, that retuning happens in quiet prayer or through the embrace of community. For others, it comes in the still, unchosen classroom of grace—behind prison walls, in the shadowed corners society often avoids. Yet even there, grace is present. In that silence, I have seen hearts change, dignity restored and songs reborn.

Later that afternoon, BJ told me he is burdened by being defined by his past.

“Chaplain,” he said, “Why do people judge? You don’t know who he is—and you don’t know who he was either.”

He was speaking of his younger self—angry, lost and hurting from childhood trauma beyond his control. Now he carries wisdom born of surrendering to God’s love, yet he fears the world will never see beyond his criminal record. His words stopped me in their honesty. They were both reflection and revelation—a reminder that none of us are only who we have been, and that grace is always at work in the in-between.

The church, if it is to be faithful to its mission, must not only welcome the transformed but stand with those still being reshaped by grace. To be the Body of Christ is to listen for redemption’s faint notes in unlikely places and trust that the Spirit is already weaving beauty from brokenness.

Sometimes the humbling we need is realizing we do not get to decide when someone’s story is finished. God does. BJ understood that truth. His words were not resignation—they were revelation. In his confinement, he had found clarity.

His life was beginning to sound again—one honest note at a time—as he journeys through spiritual transformation.

May we, too, be retuned by grace, each note clear and distinct, so that all may hear the mercy that humbles, heals and restores.

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.



Commentary
by the Rev. Mark E.
Thompson

Help after combat

In 2003, returning from my first combat deployment with the 101st Airborne Division, 502 Brigade combat team, I was in a very dark place. I knew something was wrong, but I was not sure how to handle it.

I was the chaplain responsible for providing for the spiritual needs of more than 5,000 soldiers in combat, but I did not take care of myself. Some wounds don’t bleed. That is when I was invited to attend a weeklong retreat (they call them Evolutions) with Warfighter Advance.

Warfighter Advance is seven-day Evolution designed and developed to help all service members from all branches of service, as well as first responders, who are struggling. Having been deployed is not required to participate in the program.

I am honored to now be part of the team that leads Warfighter Advance.

I have served in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait. All our instructors at the Advance 7-Day Evolution are post-deployment veterans themselves. We have all had the experience of reintegration, and some have also endured the medicalized process and survived.

All of us are heartbroken when we see our brothers and sisters deceived and drugged, believing that they have an illness and that drugs will treat and perhaps ultimately cure them. The team is heartbroken by the day-in and day-out veteran suicides. Leading the way, we are driven to change this scenario so that every warfighter has the information, tools and support they need to successfully reintegrate.

We are committed to giving warfighters the confidence and dignity required to be force multipliers leading other warfighters in their communities to successful reintegration.

We invite and welcome warfighters who are struggling with what is typically known as post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, with or without a formal diagnosis, and other post-deployment “mental illness” labels or problems, such as anxiety, depression, adjustment disorder, anger and traumatic brain injury. All referrals are self-referrals. No paperwork documenting “a mental illness” is required or accepted.

Warfighters who have been treated by traditional psychiatric methods, as well as warfighters who have been struggling on their own to reintegrate or deal with their operational traumas, are welcomed.

Warfighter Advance 7-Day Training Ops are held at Elks Camp Barrett, Annapolis, Maryland. With the help of churches and organizations, Warfighter Advance raises 100 percent of participant costs so warfighters can attend free of charge.

They also offer programs, workshops and lectures. To learn more, visit admin@warfighteradvance.org, call 202-239-7395 or call me for more information: 706-825-1958.

Warfighter Advance changes the path of the warfighter’s post-deployment life, so that rather than an existence, characterized by an endless cycle of mental illness diagnoses, medications, medical appointments and disappointments, the warfighter has a life characterized by pride, productivity, healthy relationships, continued service and advocacy for the same outcomes for their fellow service members.

Thompson is a retired U.S. Army Chaplain colonel and pastor of Gilbert UMC, Gilbert.



Warfighter Advance helps many who struggle.



Commentary
by Anna
Stevens Bright

The little things

This month, we pause to celebrate another Thanksgiving, a special day of giving thanks with family and friends.

However, giving thanks is something Christians should do on a daily basis. Many of us worship God, who bestows grace, mercy and favor on us every day, and we do not always deserve it. As we celebrate this special holiday enjoying our scrumptious meals, conversations and time together, think about those who will not and cannot partake of such. Remember to thank God for the little things, but do that daily, because he deserves our thanks and praise, no matter how many times a day that we do it. As Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (ESV). Further, Psalm 100:4 says, “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!”

I read a brief illustration on Facebook, “10 Signs You’re Doin’ Well in Life,” and I share it with you, along with Scripture to support each one:

1. You have a roof over your head. Isaiah 25:4. There are people in this country living in tents, battling the elements as a result of recent floods and homelessness. Entire communities lost their homes in the California wildfires.

2. You ate today. Genesis 9:3. Right here in this nation of plenty, there are people who eat out of garbage cans. They won’t get the chance to sit with family to eat dinner on this holiday and many other days.

3. You have a good heart. Proverbs 4:23. If you do have a good heart, show it in the deeds that you do for others and say something daily to encourage somebody.

4. You wish good for others. Hebrews 13:6. As you wish good for others, do good for them as well. It is sad to say, but when some people are going through some challenging times, there are those who judge them and do nothing to lift their or their families’ spirits. It would be wise to be careful of the stones that you throw.

5. You have clean water. Isaiah 44:3. Every time you drink clean water, think about the people in our nation and abroad, who live with unsanitary water conditions.

6. Someone cares for you. John 15:13. When you are there for others and show them that you care, this pleases God.

7. You forgive others. Mark 11:25. If you refuse to forgive others, then don’t expect forgiveness for the wrongs you have done.

8. You have clothes to wear. Genesis 3:21. There are so many children who go to school each day with a couple of outfits, and they have to be washed over and over again, just so they will have something to wear. If you have a week’s worth of clothes to wear, be thankful; you surpass many.

9. You stay in faith. Galatians 5:16. Remaining faithful to God will get you through tough times. It is through these times that God sees if you love and trust him.

10. You’re breathing. Psalm 27:13. As you breathe, many families are grieving. Because you are still here, you have a chance to get right with God!

Have a blessed Thanksgiving and week, and never leave home without Jesus!

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



Commentary
by David Bryant

The cycle of sanctification

We often hear and think of our salvation in terms of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

But have you ever read on? Verse 10 continues: “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Works, then, are required; they simply can’t earn us grace. But can we internalize and grow our faith, thus preparing us for greater—or more—grace?

It really depends on how you define grace and the kingdom of God (Jesus Christ). If your primary focus is on the repentance of behaviors and an eternal afterlife, then grace is grace—it can’t be “earned,” and therefore it can’t be grown. This definition leans heavily into the concept of grace and salvation being synonymous, which Paul’s passage clearly refutes.

If, however, you look at grace as our entering into the kingdom of Heaven/God/Christ on Earth, then practice can indeed lead to a personal increase in grace, as one associates and consecrates oneself to the realization of the kingdom on Earth. Wesley would say that salvation occurs at justification, but sanctification moves us past that transactional relationship and toward perfection—not simply that every mouth will proclaim, but that every mouth shall proclaim and every knee shall bow.

It’s the knee bending that takes us into action: Bending to lift the lame. Bending to feed the poor. Bending to nurture the child. Bending in supplication and obedience to serve the outcasts, misfits and marginalized whom he so dearly loved.

Paul actually said there are six ways to grace. In Romans, he outlines them as:

- Hearing the gospel
- Believing in Christ
- Repenting of sin
- Confessing Jesus Christ
- Being baptized into Jesus’ death
- Presenting your body as a living sacrifice

With that last one—which Paul describes as “your reasonable service”—he comes within the thickness of a moth’s wing of contradicting himself on excluding works by emphasizing “walking” into salvation. However, one must remember that Romans was written about 25 years before Ephesians, to a vastly different audience and for different purposes.

Presenting one’s body as a living sacrifice can more easily be understood as a prerequisite to faith. Three

main components of this consecration can be seen as trust, acceptance and obedience:

- Trust: The willingness to step forward without all the information
- Acceptance: Think of the Serenity Prayer
- Obedience: What were the actual instructions given by Jesus?

Once we can say we either have—or wish to have—these three things, as well as the aforementioned five, we are well established in faith, even though we may yet doubt (Mark 9:24). Once we have that faith, however small or minute, Paul tells us we receive grace. He goes on to state that grace is not to be taken for granted, not hoarded or squandered. Thus, grace—according to Paul—is intended by God to be put into action (works).

Wesley tells us that through the process of sanctification, we use the grace we’ve received to further the kingdom and to ready ourselves for more grace. We haven’t earned it by good deeds, but by living into our faith, we prepare ourselves to receive all the faith we need, when we need it. Think of spiritual gifts. We may be most comfortable within the gifts we own at the time we take a spiritual gifts inventory, but if God calls us to something outside those specific gifts, he will give us the gifts necessary for that call.

This, then, becomes the cycle of sanctification—not so much a perpetual circle as a spiral, ever seeking the center of perfection.

If we possess great faith (not to be confused with hubris or conceit), we may do great things. But if all we possess is faith the size of a mustard seed, we can yet make a difference, and that difference may grow and multiply in greatness (Luke 12:48).

The following quote is attributed to Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson, a self-proclaimed agnostic, who offers startling relevance to Christians today: “When people talk about traveling to the past, they worry about radically changing the present by doing something small, but barely anyone in the present really thinks that they can radically change the future by doing something small.”

But let’s be clear. Standing back in silence, immune from injustice, bigotry, prejudice; avoiding conflict; or protectively perpetuating systems of doing the same old things the same old way—all of that does nothing but increase our irrelevance. And, more importantly, it squanders the very voice of Jesus we so reverently claim in opposition to all evidence to the contrary.

Bryant is a member of Bethesda United Methodist Church, Easley.

Resource Center.

Christmas musicals available

Church musicians, we still have musicals available for your Christmas programs. Please check the website for all titles with descriptions.

Christmas ... Sing The Joyful Song!

(SBK503=) Composer/Arranger: Frazier, Michael/Mathews, Dale.

This musical keeps the Simple Series format of Unison/2-Part arrangements. It has been adapted by Michael Frazier from the original soprano, alto, tenor, bass. Arranged to sound larger-than-life while remaining easy-to-learn and easy-to-sing and hand-selected to celebrate the joyful song of Jesus’ birth, your choir will love these selections. Adult/29 min./Easy/Unison/2-part.

Hope in a Manger

(SBK505=) Composer/Arranger: Hamby, Marty.

This musical features songs by Chris Tomlin, Mark Shultz, David and Nicole Binion and three new original songs by Dale Mathews, including the title song, “Hope in a Manger.” Your Christmas program will bring everyone together to celebrate the wonder and hope we have in Jesus this Christmas season. Adult/36 min/Moderate/SATB.

Hope was Born This Night

(SBK507=) Composer/Arranger: Allen, Dennis & Nan/Crumpton, Johnathan.

This Christmas resource is a ready-to-learn and easy-to-sing SATB Christmas musical, perfect for the small-to-medium size choir. Adult/35 min./Easy/SATB.

The Mystery of the Missing Manger

(SBK506=) Composer/Arranger: Boe, Gina/Mathews, Dale.

It’s almost Christmastime, and the children are set to decorate the church for Christmas. But the manger is missing and they’ve got to find it now! Solving the mystery to find the manger becomes their obsession, but in the process, they are reminded what the story of Christmas is really all about: the fulfillment of God’s promise to send a savior, who came to us as a baby born in a manger—Jesus! Children/26 min/Easy/Unison/2-Part.

The South Carolina Conference Resource Center is your connection to DVDs and seasonal musicals. We are here to serve your church family. To reserve resources, call 803-735-8798 or visit <http://www.umcsc.org/resourcecenter>.



Go, team!
Anthony Harris, a member of Sandy Grove UMC, Jefferson, and his softball team, Cookies, were invited to Panama City Beach, Florida, for the Summer Worlds 2025 Tournament. They placed 17th out of 45 teams there that weekend. Their next tournament was Oct. 18 in Rock Hill.

Photo courtesy of Ernestine McCaskill

Two Christian novels by
Advocate Editor Jessica Brodie

THE DARLIA SERIES BOOK ONE

The MEMORY GARDEN

JESSICA BRODIE

AMAZON #1 BESTSELLER

THE DARLIA SERIES BOOK TWO

Tangled ROOTS

JESSICA BRODIE

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Advocate

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Rep your team, rep your school
On the fifth Sunday of August there was a friendly competition between Centenary and Kingsville UMCs, Hartsville, during a combined service held at Kingsville UMC. Each member was asked to wear something representing their favorite school or team. Many schools and professional teams were represented, but it was unanimous: Team Trinity was the winner. Members were also asked to invite family and friends to join them for service. A prize was awarded to Deborah Edwards (pictured at top) for inviting the most guests—14 family members who attended service with her. She won a tailgate bag filled with goodies. A highlight of the service was the Rev. Willie Mae Cannon's message, drawing from Joshua 24:14-15. As she preached (pictured at bottom), Team Trinity's executive team includes the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. With that type of team, there is no way you cannot win.

Photos courtesy of Beth Johnson



Photos by Rev. Arthur Holt

Walkway education
As a way to help the local community learn more about United Methodism, Central UMC, Spartanburg, has placed signs along the walkway through their park. Here are a few.



Courtesy of UWF President Peggy Hood

Becoming more aware
The United Women in Faith at Sandy Grove UMC, Jefferson, celebrated breast cancer awareness month Oct. 12 with a balloon release in remembrance of all loved ones who had breast cancer. This was observed by the women and men of the church, since men can have breast cancer also.

Charleston District United Methodist Men hold first Men's Day Program

MONCKS CORNER—The Charleston District United Methodist Men held the first of what they hope will be an annual Men's Day Program at Joshua United Methodist Church.

It was an event filled with worship, fellowship and inspiration.

The gathering was organized by District United Methodist Men President George Jenkins, whose leadership, along with the work of many dedicated volunteers, made the day a success. The volunteers of Joshua UMC, in the spirit of Christian hospitality, provided a meal afterward.

The music was a highlight, with the men's choirs from Wesley UMC, Ladson, and Wesley UMC, Pinopolis, each bringing powerful songs of praise.

Charleston District Superintendent the Rev. Jeffery Salley delivered a spirit-filled sermon that both challenged and encouraged those present.

The enthusiasm of the day was summed up by Conference UMM President Dyron Anderson, who remarked, "I will report that the Charleston District



The gathering was organized by District United Methodist Men President George Jenkins.

is on fire for the Lord!"

The event not only celebrated the faith and compassion of the men of the Charleston District but also set the tone for future gatherings, strengthening bonds of fellowship and mission across the district.

Church homecoming celebrates 124 years rooted in faith and growing in love

SUMTER—St. James United Methodist Church held its annual Homecoming Sept. 19-21.

The celebration began Friday night with a "Sing Out," followed by a Saturday morning picnic for the community, followed by Sunday morning worship.

Dr. James Salley, president and chief executive officer of Africa University Inc. and associate vice chancellor for institutional advancement, Africa University, served as guest speaker.

Salley spoke on the theme "Rooted in Faith, Growing in Love" and began by sharing some history on St. James UMC, which was established in 1901 as a city church, as well as what it means to be a city church when most Black churches back then were in rural areas.

His presence was a highlight for the church, as many were not aware of the connection between Africa University and the UMC. Salley praised the work and history of the United Methodist churches and the South Carolina Conference for having the highest dollar amount in donations to Africa University. Salley is a member of Edisto Fork



Photos courtesy of Tonya Mack

The church choir sings, above, while below, Dr. James Salley brings a word.



UMC, Orangeburg and continues to serve in various capacities of The United Methodist Church.

St. James' Homecoming Choir sang with uplifting voices during the morning worship services. A brief history was shared to educate many about where the church started and where it is today. They

recalled their longest serving pastor, the Rev. Willie George Wright, from 1967-1977, followed by the Rev. Willie F. Dicks, the Rev. Kay Adams Best, the Rev. Willie H. Shaw (who established our first homecoming celebration as a fundraiser for the finance team), interim pastor the Rev. Nathan McLendon, the Rev. Cathy Mitchell, the Rev. Mary Johnson, the Rev. Cheryl Johnson and St. James' current pastor, the Rev. Allen Nesmith.

Members praise God for the glory of all the great things he has done.

Augusta Road pumpkin patch becomes exciting learning experience, fundraising tool

PELZER—Augusta Road United Methodist Church partnered with Pumpkin Patch Fundraisers for the first time this fall.

They are discovering selling pumpkins is a unique way to raise money for church programs as well as support the people of the Navajo Reservation in Farmington, New Mexico, who grow the pumpkins.

Members said it's been a learning experience, and an exciting one. A group of dedicated Pumpkin Patch planners met twice a week through most of August and September to discuss issues and work out all the logistics for selling 1,500 pumpkins.

The pumpkins were delivered Saturday, Sept. 20.



Photo courtesy of Ann Hastings

All are welcome to the patch, which will be open through Oct. 31.

an annual event!"

The congregation, local firefighters and students from the nearby high school helped unload the truck.

So far, they have had some slow shifts, but some especially bright moments, too.

"It's such a delight to see children walk every inch of the patch with a wagon in search of the perfect pumpkin," member Ann Hastings said.

They also have a scavenger hunt, games and photo opportunities for families to enjoy while at the patch.

"We all agree that the best part of the pumpkin patch is showing hospitality and God's love to all in our community," Hastings added. "This may just become



Sharing God’s love

Lawrence Chapel UMC, Central, recently shared God’s love through service and a blessing. On Sept. 27, members joined at the South Carolina Botanical Gardens to participate in a walk supporting the Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation, raising awareness and funds for ongoing research. The following day, Sept. 28, Pastor Justin Ritter led a special Blessing of the Animals service at the church. Members brought their pets—or photos of them—to receive a blessing, and Pastor Justin provided water and treats for the furry friends. Both events were filled with fellowship, compassion and joy, reflecting the caring spirit of the LCUMC family.



Photos courtesy of Donna Glenn



Photo courtesy of Dominique Moore



Fun new program

Aaron Temple UMC, Bennettsville, has been doing Meet and Greet events at their door every Sunday. Members take pictures and answer questions.



Photo courtesy of the Rev. Dick Waldrep

Dinner & Devotions

In September 2020, a new ministry was born at Piedmont UMC, Piedmont. This year, as the church celebrates its fifth year of outreach in the community, the Dinner & Devotions ministry is alive and well. Once a month, the church provides a free meal to anyone who makes a request. Along with the meal a devotion, prepared by the pastor, is given to those receiving meals. The hope is that the devotion will be shared with family as they enjoy their meal. A drive-through method of distribution, including “walk-ups,” allows time to visit and pray with neighbors. Some months the number of people served is low (less than 100); this past month 151 meals were served. The highest quantity to date is 250 meals. God continues to bless this ministry through dedicated volunteers and the support of the congregation.



The church family of Port Royal UMC wishes to honor

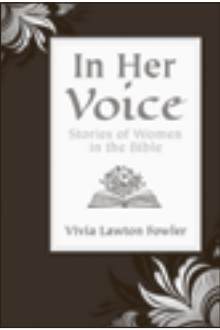
Music Minister Peggy Barry Bartz
Our praise band, Rock Solid

*Their timeless dedication provides inspiration
through music as we come together to worship our great God.*



Fowler pens book containing stories on women in the Bible

Paulist Press recently released a book authored by Dr. Vivia Lawton Fowler, pastor of Epworth United Methodist Church, Charleston. Titled “In Her Voice: Stories of Women in the Bible,” Fowler started writing these stories and presenting them in character more than 20 years ago when she taught in the Department of Religion at Columbia College. She has continued to add a few each year, and since coming to serve Epworth in the Charleston District, has written a monologue for each of the last three

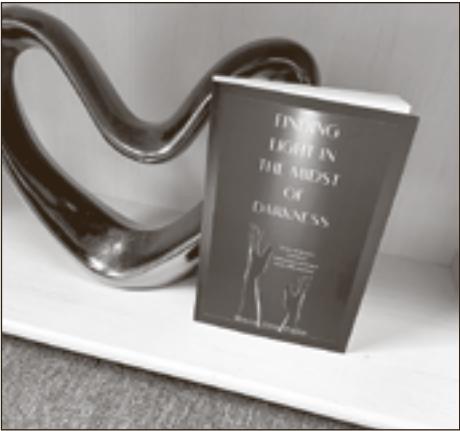


Christmas Eve services. The book is a collection of 24 stories from the Old and New Testaments. While Fowler said some of them are not appropriate for children because they contain some of the more troubling adult themes in the Bible, she noted they would work well for personal or group Bible study. Fowler is also available to visit churches for a presentation, though not on a Sunday morning. The book can be found through Paulist Press or Amazon.

Old-time game book by UMCSC author now back in print



GREENVILLE—Greenville author and United Methodist J. J. Ferrer’s fun book from Charlesbridge Publishing offers history, how-to and “who knew?” facts about games beloved for generations. Ferrer is a member of Bethesda United Methodist Church, Easley. Originally published in 2013, “The Art of Stone Skipping and Other Fun Old-Time Games” has just been reprinted in a new edition. The book features games that have entertained multiple generations. Ferrer says the book was a lot of fun to write. “Charlesbridge asked me to write ‘Stone Skipping’ because they knew I love research,” Ferrer said. “Wading through the history of these games was fascinating! Who knew Blindman’s Buff was one of Henry VIII’s favorite games, or that bingo’s been around since the 1500s? Electronic games have their place, but traditional games like Red Rover and hopscotch deserve to be preserved. Besides providing exercise and fresh air, they teach us to how to strategize, solve problems, build self-esteem and improve motor skills.” Black-and-white illustrations add to the book’s old-timey feel, and simple instructions explain how many people can play, the object of the game and basic rules. Fun facts are sprinkled throughout about the history of the games. The book is available in both paperback and Kindle versions.



Finding the light

Sharon Fuller, a member of St. Mark UMC, Taylors, has authored a book titled “Finding Light in the Midst of Darkness.” Intended for those seeking hope and a deeper relationship with God, the book is a 365-day journey that includes daily Scripture, a daily word of encouragement and a daily affirmation. It also includes a morning and night prayer. It is available on Amazon.

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

Advocate

November 2025 | 9



This year’s event will take place Dec. 10-13 at the church.

Grace presents ‘Return to Bethlehem,’ a living nativity experience

NORTH AUGUSTA—For 26 years, Return to Bethlehem has been a cherished holiday tradition in the Central Savannah River Area.

Presented every other year by Grace United Methodist Church, this immersive live nativity experience invites the community to step back in time and witness the story of Jesus’ birth as if they were truly there.

The church grounds are transformed into a bustling first-century Bethlehem, complete with more than 100 costumed characters, live animals and the sights and sounds of the marketplace. Visitors stroll through the village with a knowledgeable “Bethlehem host,” encountering merchants, street musicians and scenes from the nativity story, from the angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary to the birth of Jesus in a humble manger beneath a



shining star visible for miles.

This year’s event will take place Dec. 10-13 from 6:30–8:30 p.m. behind Grace UMC at 639 Georgia Ave., North Augusta. Admission is free, and donations are welcomed to support this ongoing community tradition.

A 6 p.m. drive-thru experience will be offered for guests who may find walking the tour difficult. Attendants help manage traffic to ensure the drive-thru runs safely and smoothly.

Return to Bethlehem is the church’s way of sharing the true spirit of Christmas with the community. They invite families, friends and visitors of all ages to join for this moving, inspirational journey.

For more information, visit <https://www.gotgraceumc.org/bethlehem> or call 803-279-7525.

District News.

Orangeburg District

The United Women in Faith at **Trinity UMC, Orangeburg**, came together to assemble baskets containing personal hygiene and care items for the women served by Paths To Wholeness’ Beatrice Davis Transitional Home for Women. This dedicated group, led by President Wanda Glover Harmon Smoak, has formed a partnership with Paths To Wholeness, consistently expressing God’s love through their compassionate actions. As they noted, often even a simple gesture can have a profound and lasting effect.

Rock Hill District

Bethel UMC, Edgemoor, will hold a special Family and Friends Day Nov. 23 beginning at 2 p.m. Everyone is welcome and can expect uplifting worship, an inspiring message and delicious food. The theme is “A family that prays together, stays together.”

Sand Hill fall fest set for Nov. 8

All are invited to join in the fun at Sand Hill United Methodist Church Nov. 8 for a Fall Festival.

Held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., the event will feature food, music, games

and more.

Sand Hill is located at 1961 Summers Drive, Ridgeville.

For more information, call the church at 854-269-8192.

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GET A QUOTE

Trinity baptisms show God at work

By the Rev. Matthew Alexander

Baptism is a sign of the new world breaking in. Baptism is a sign of Christ’s mark on our lives. When we go down into the waters, we die with Christ. But when we rise from those waters, we are given new life in Christ. We are given a new future, a new family and a new purpose.

Six people at Trinity United Methodist Church, Aiken, rose from the waters of baptism Sept. 28. They have been received into the Body of Christ, and God has claimed them for God’s kin-dom!

Baptism is becoming a common occurrence at Trinity UMC. Baptism is administered only once in the life of a follower of Christ and marks the beginning of that person’s Christian journey. Seeing baptisms regularly is not only a sign of church health, but a sign that God is on the move. Trinity said goodbye to 146 people during two exodus events relating to our discernment process. For many congregations, losing such a large number of people could be paralyzing. However, time has brought clarity and unity around who God has called Trinity UMC to be, which seems to be the difference maker in these days. We continually welcome new people who are looking for a church like Trinity—a church with open hearts, open minds and open doors. We are living by the mantra, “We’d rather be excluded for who we include than included for who we exclude.” God seems to be honoring this spirit in the people of Trinity by bringing to us people who have felt excluded elsewhere.

When a person joins Trinity UMC in membership, they are saying,

Six were baptized Sept. 28.

“Trinity is my church.” They commit to share in the life of the church with their prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. Membership doesn’t mean we are perfect or that we have everything together. It means we recognize our need for one another.

We welcomed 10 new members in September. Five people joined as professing members. We celebrate with them. We pray with them. We need them.

We have celebrated nine baptisms this year. This represents the greatest number of baptisms in a given year at Trinity since 1993, when Trinity was preparing to build its new sanctuary.

In the last year, we have officially received 21 adults and 15 children. God is doing a new thing in and through the people of Trinity UMC.

Alexander is pastor of Trinity UMC.

Lybrand releases three books

One United Methodist pastor has recently authored and released three books, which are achieving success.

The Rev. Robby Lybrand, associate pastor at St. Mark United Methodist Church, Greenwood, has released “Radical Hospitality: Creating a Culture of Welcome in the Church,” “If God Said Yes” and “Sacred Chaos: Finding Grace and Purpose in the Messy Middle of Parenting”

“Radical Hospitality” brings together his unique blend of ministry experience and a former career in the hospitality industry to offer a practical and deeply spiritual look at how churches can embrace hospitality as a core ministry. This isn’t about greeters at the door or coffee in the lobby; it’s about creating a culture where every person, visitor or long-time member,

feels seen, valued and wanted.

“If God Said Yes” explores what we would do if we heard God say yes to everything we prayed for last week, and it ultimately invites readers to step beyond cautious, vague prayers and into bold, faith-filled conversations with the God who still moves mountains.

“Sacred Chaos” is designed for the parent who’s doing their best to love Jesus and their kids in the middle of laundry piles, school projects, work deadlines and one more meltdown before bedtime. Each chapter includes biblical insight, practical encouragement and a closing prayer to help you breathe deeply and keep showing up with love, with faith and with the assurance that the chaos you’re in is anything but wasted.

Appreciation to Christopher McCroskey and the Choir

The people of Trinity United Methodist Church, West Columbia, express their sincere appreciation to our Director of Music, Christopher McCroskey, and the choir for their talent, preparation and dedication.

Week after week, they bless our congregation with music that uplifts the soul and brings us closer to God.

Thank you for being vessels of grace and beauty—your music is truly a blessing to us all.

10 | November 2025

Advocate



Dancing is a popular activity during what Griffeth calls “a four-hour party.”



Woodland has now become known as a dementia-friendly church in the community. Here, dementia care participants play with a beach ball during exercise time.

Photos courtesy of Juliette Phillpot

DEMENTIA

From Page 1

felt God speak into her heart, urging her that her congregation could do this.

When she approached her church, she said the excitement was contagious, and the church’s director of Christian education, Juliette Phillpot, immediately asked to have her job description updated to include serving as the program director.

Since then, Woodland serves 12 people with dementia on Mondays and Fridays—about the maximum number they can serve currently—and there are seven people on a waiting list. The participants, along with a host of volunteers, get to enjoy four hours of cognitive, social and spiritual connection in a safe and loving space, while their caregivers get a break to go to doctor appointments or have other needed time to themselves.

Griffeth calls it “basically a four-hour party.”

“It’s amazing to me that God has done so much in just a year, taking this from just an idea to serving as many people as we are with so many more waiting to get in and be part of things,” Griffeth said.

“I don’t know how to put into words about how it makes me feel—it’s overwhelming. I’m just amazed at how successful the ministry has been,” Phillpot said.

Griffeth said Woodland has now become known as a dementia-friendly church in the community, and that has truly impacted the congregation. Now, when they invite people to come worship at Woodland, they have a thriving ministry to share about.

She said it has been equally as exciting to witness what The Memory Connection means to those in the congregation who volunteer. Many thought they might only volunteer occasionally, but now they come every time. Currently there are about 24 active volunteers.

“It’s extremely exciting as a pastor to watch people light up and find their place for ministry, to see them form real relationships with our friends who have dementia,” Griffeth said. “That’s what the draw is for everybody—the experience of real connection that



Singing (above) is always a fun choice.



Participants and volunteers play together.



Volunteers and participants also do service projects during their time at The Memory Connection.

comes.”

Phillpot said the volunteers have such a great time they keep coming back.

“They come and they get hooked,” Phillpot said, laughing.

It’s just as beautiful to see the participants thrive and experience true joy during the respite sessions. At first, Phillpot said, newcomers are quiet, but soon they relax and now are dancing, laughing, singing and just making friendships with each other.

“I have one man who says every single day, ‘You don’t know what this means to me; this is tremendous,’” Phillpot said. “Another lady drives an hour to get her husband there, and it is

worth it because it makes that much of a difference for him.”

Their work is also attracting attention in other ways. Recently, Woodland received a \$100,000 grant from the South Carolina Department of Social Services that Griffeth said was a total surprise.

Griffeth said the grant was offered to them without them having to apply for it; one of the volunteers was so enthusiastic about the ministry that her excitement inspired a DSS employee to share about the program with coworkers. When they realized they had DSS grant funds available, they immediately thought of The Memory Connection.

“That’s God working—they came to us with this incredible gift,” Griffeth said.

They will be using some of those grant funds to try to hold a third respite session each week, working with a marketing company to recruit volunteers. Grant funds are also being used to train volunteers and caregivers to provide care for people with dementia; nine of Woodland’s volunteers have attended special training and are now Certified Dementia Volunteers. The grant is also funding half of Phillpot’s salary, as she now spends about half her time serving as The Memory Connection’s program director. The rest of the funds are helping with improved technology for their dementia-friendly exercise programs, as well as with supplies and meals.

Woodland held a special service Sunday, Oct. 12, to celebrate the one-year anniversary of The Memory Connection, and almost all the participants, caregivers and volunteers attended.

Their theme was reclaiming joy, and Griffeth shared about the ways God enables us to see joy despite all the hard stuff that comes with a dementia diagnosis.

Griffeth used the transfiguration in Scripture to emphasize how—just as before all the awfulness of holy week, Jesus allowed the disciples to see God’s glory to shine through—God continues to transfigure our suffering so we see God’s radiance.

“I’ve been in ministry for over 20 years now, and this is really the most fun thing I have ever done in ministry because it gives me so much joy to see everyone connecting and these real relationships that have sprung up between volunteers and participants,” Griffeth said.

“This is one of the most rewarding things I’ve been involved with.”

To learn more about how to start a similar ministry in your church, email the conference’s Cognitive Connections Ministry leaders at cognitive@umcsc.org.

SPECIAL SESSION

From Page 1

‘Prune us, Lord’

The online session had many technical difficulties. Voting delegates initially reported trouble hearing, and poor internet connection at the conference center prevented the session from being livestreamed. The conference has since released a full recording of the proceedings found at <https://www.youtube.com/@TheUMCSC>. Flanked by Conference Secretary Mel Arant and Conference Parliamen-

tarian Kay Crowe, Bishop Fairley began around 9 a.m. with a word from John 15:1-2, noting that pruning is an essential part of helping God’s ministry be fruitful. “Friends, we will not die, but we will live,” Fairley said. “If it means that something must be pruned, let it be so. If pruning means we grow more fruitful and effective in forming disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully,

lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections. If this is what pruning does, prune us Lord, from the top of our heads to the crown of our feet.” Before voting began, attendees first got an update on current litigation the conference is involved in against local churches wishing to leave the denomination with their property. James Becker, of the conference-engaged law firm Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd in Columbia, shared that approximately 70 South Carolina United Methodist churches have indicated in writing their intent to separate from the UMC. These 70 churches are in addition to the 225 churches that separated from the conference in 2023 and 2024. (See article, Page 1.) Fairley thanked the legal team for sharing, while noting, “We cannot allow the litigation to slow us down in offering the good news of the gospel to all the people we can, in all the places we can and with the resources God has provides us with.” Fairley also thanked members of the Jeremiah Teams, who he said made a commitment to do some work that is not easy and not always popular. “We are grateful for them for stepping up to the plate and being able to lead in this manner.”

Districts reduced from 12 to 10

Next, representatives from all four Jeremiah Teams presented their reports before the body, with those requiring votes on recommendations doing so during their time. First, the Rev. Cathy Mitchell, chair of the District Alignment Jeremiah Team, introduced that team’s members and explained that they have spent the past eight months researching and reviewing a realignment of the districts in the conference, “prioritizing mission and ministry and maintaining connectionalism with the least disruption to the churches as a whole.” They also discovered that conferences that downsized their districts gradually rather than radically had fewer drawbacks. The team recommended that the conference reduce the number of districts to 10 by July 1, 2026. Mitchell noted that this was the first phase in

such restructuring. Once the conference makes a decision about the number of districts, Mitchell said, the bishop, in consultation with the appointive cabinet, would be responsible for redrawing district lines. The body approved the team’s recommendation. This means the Greenville and Florence districts will see their churches merged into other districts. The Greenville District will be merged into the nearby Anderson and Spartanburg districts, and several churches in the eastern Spartanburg District will be realigned to the Rock Hill District. The Florence District will be merged into nearby Hartsville, Marion and Orangeburg districts, with some churches in those districts shifted into a closer district. The Anderson District Office will relocate to Easley and the Marion District Office will relocate to Conway, which are both a more central location for the newly aligned district offices. 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.

Updates from Missional Priorities and Black/Ethnic Church teams

While neither the Missional Priorities and Black/Ethnic Church Jeremiah teams had recommendations requiring a vote, leaders of each team presented their work to the body. The Rev. Millie Nelson Smith of the Missional Priorities Team shared that her team reviewed the conference’s current programs and ministries across all budgeted areas, paying close attention for any duplication and identifying what might be missing or that needs pruning. Smith noted that five focal areas have emerged:

- Prioritizing children, youth and young adults
- Equipping churches to reach new people
- Fostering intentional inclusion and diversity

Continued, next page



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CONT'D

From Page 12

- Increasing clergy effectiveness for lasting impact
 - Improving and expanding communication
- “Based upon the actions today, our next steps are to align funding and ministry staffing support to strengthen the local church and disciple-making so dollars, roles and resources match the five focal areas to create an ongoing evaluation process for how we allocate funds to ministries, programs, events, and partner entities across our United Methodist connection,” Smith said.

The Rev. James Friday of the Black/Ethnic Church Team shared current numbers, noting that 246 churches—about one-third—are predominantly Black, with only one active Korean congregation and one with substantial multiethnic identity. There are no active Hispanic or Native American churches, through there are active ministries among the tribes of Native Americans.

Friday said next steps include developing 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.

“Our implementation strategy includes fostering relevant conversations with local church clergy and lay



Screenshot by Jessica Brodie

Bishop Fairley began with a word from John 15:1-2, noting that pruning is an essential part of helping God’s ministry be fruitful.

leaders about how we can be more missionally relevant in the communities of service, identifying and learning from ethnic churches that are growing and making significant kingdom impact in their communities.”

Congregational Excellence to combine two offices

Finally, the Rev. Brian Gilmer presented the report of the Conference Staff Alignment Team, thanking team members and noting that the team has prayerfully been working on ways to help the South Carolina Annual Conference move into the future that God has planned for us.

Gilmer said the team is focused on how to organize conference staff in order to better support local churches and ministries, use resources wisely and create space for creativity and innovation in ministry.

He said their recommendation comes “after much study and prayer, and in an effort to help streamline the conference staff and the extended cabinet.”

The team recommended that the

responsibilities of the Office of Congregational Development be merged with the continuing work of Connectional Ministries, creating the new office of Congregational Excellence. The current full-time Extended Cabinet position of Director of Congregational Development would become a non-Extended Cabinet, part-time clergy appointment, with the title of Director of Innovation and Strategy supervised by the Director of Congregational Excellence, which is formerly known as the Director of Connectional Ministries.

Gilmer noted that the elected convener of the Conference Connectional Ministries team would continue to help lead this ministry area, and it would also be supported by the three remaining congregational specialists and the existing conference staff.

“Now, the big question that we continually get asked is about stewardship and savings,” Gilmer said. “This

plan that we’re presenting today would eliminate one full-time Extended Cabinet position. It would eliminate three currently open congregational specialist positions—two are full-time, and one is halftime. And so together, these changes would save the annual conference about \$400,000 each year if approved.”

He said the Office of Congregation Excellence would begin its work July 1, 2026.

The body approved the team’s recommendation.

Now what?

Fairley said that a transition team will be named soon around the decisions made at the special session, including issues such as if there’s to be renaming of a district; property and finance considerations; and preserving connectionalism for navigating change.

Fairley noted the possibility of tri-district administrative offices being created, as well as district offices with remote work or centralization of district administration.

He also said a research plan will be developed for further district reduction as needed.

Fairley offered a closing word for United Methodists across the state, urging people to step up around evangelism and stewardship as they live into the denomination’s new future.

“We serve a risen Savior who (after) three days got up out of the grave from a horrible crucifixion, so don’t you tell me what God can’t do,” Fairley said.

He closed with a prayer, asking, “Prune us, Lord, so that we might bear much fruit in our lives and in the ministry and mission as the South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, always reflecting your love and your grace to the world.”



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KILLINGSWORTH REPAIRS

From Page 1

“Built in 1902, it’s an older home, and many repairs are needed,” said Azilee Dickey, chair of the Killingsworth board of directors.

Susan Sirmons, Killingsworth executive director, said the house initially had issues with missing grout, which caused leaking in their two upstairs bathrooms that is now flowing down to the first floor. In the guest bathroom on the lower level, they have had to cut out portions of the ceiling to identify where the leaks are coming from. That, teamed with ongoing plumbing issues, meant that for some time only one bathroom was operational for all 17 of their residents. Now they have two working bathrooms, but between leaks in ceilings, a leaking air conditioner and a lot of structural damage, they will not only need to permanently stop the leaks but also repair the ceilings, redo the drywall and make sure mold doesn’t become a problem.

There are also painting and gutter fixes needed beyond all that. And all of this is occurring during a season when donations to support the ministry are way down, a trend that started during COVID-19.

“Our finances are a challenge,” Sirmons said, noting that finding the funds to make repairs as well as keep the home operational has been tough. Killingsworth is supported by the National Office of United Women in Faith as well as by The United Methodist Church, but those funds only amount to \$60,000/year at most, and it costs about \$25,000/month to operate the home, Sirmons said.

The women do pay rent, \$140/week, but only those who are currently working are able to do so, and some of the



The women work together on goal-setting during a lesson at Killingsworth Home. The house was built in 1902 and has 17 residents.

women are new residents who have not yet found employment. Even if all the women paid their rent in full each month, there is still a shortfall. “It’s extremely stressful,” Sirmons said, noting they rely on donations to stay afloat.

Killingsworth leaders are hoping and praying that communicating their needs will help people become more aware of the home and how important it is to the women who live there. After all, Sirmons said, what happens inside Killingsworth ultimately affects the community as well.

“The women who come in to us are women who are going to go out and be leaders in the community, so we’re providing a service not only to the women we serve but to the community as a whole,” she noted.

Over the years, they have had many success stories—women who

once struggled are now thriving and equipped to provide for themselves. One recent Killingsworth resident was able to complete her degree at Midlands Technical College while at the home and now has moved on, obtaining a job making \$35/hour as a welder. Another resident transitioned into a role as support staff there at the home. One former resident, Jackie, said Killingsworth provided her with a second chance when she felt as though life was over.

“Killingsworth has provided me a space where I could feel safe, nurtured and loved,” she said. “I realized that I am also being restored, loved and healed. God has allowed Killingsworth to offer me and so many other broken women over the years ... a place called home.”



The women are required to get a job or be in school during their time at Killingsworth.

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and a National Mission Institution of United Women in Faith, Killingsworth currently needs monetary donations to help with repairs and home operations, as well as a few other items that will specifically help their residents, such as gift cards to Walmart, Sam’s Club and Food Lion; toilet paper and trash bags; twin-sized bedspreads or comforters; and a computer printer/fax machine. Currently they are stocked on clothing and toiletry items. To help: Killingsworth, 1831 Pendleton St., Columbia, SC 29201, or visit their website, <https://www.killingsworth.org>. Their upcoming gala, set for Nov. 13 at Seawell’s in Columbia, is also a fundraiser, and tickets and sponsorships can still be purchased on the website.



Killingsworth leaders are hoping and praying that communicating their needs will help people become more aware of the home and how important it is to the women (pictured above) who live there.

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Advocate.

Columbia District UWFaith hosts 53rd annual meeting

By Carrie R. Murray

United Women in Faith from across the Columbia District gathered at Francis Burns United Methodist Church, Saturday, Sept. 20, for our 53rd Annual Meeting. As members and guests arrived, they were invited to the fellowship hall for a delicious breakfast, complements of Francis Burns United Women in Faith.

The event was designed to create an inviting and comfortable atmosphere where everyone would feel included and appreciated. Ladies were asked to wear shades of purple to symbolize unity and togetherness. And that, they did!

We were delighted to have 88 persons in attendance, to include two ladies younger than 40 and an 89-year-old-first-timer.

During our time of spiritual formation, Vice President Becky Travis began with a Call to Worship followed with recognition of guests and past district presidents and announcements. Carrie Murray, president of Columbia District and Francis Burns UWFaith, followed with a welcome and greeting, as did the Rev. Geneva Stafford, pastor of Francis Burns. Spiritual Growth Coordinator Vilma Cobb led the ladies into a spirit-filled devotional followed by a Celebration of Life service as we gave thanks and gratitude to 38 ladies who have answered their call to duty and faithfulness. Special features included a liturgical dance, “Come Jesus Come,” by guest performer Elizabeth Young and a heart-wrenching solo by Ava Doby, “The Goodness of God.”

Keynote speaker the Rev. Fadetra H. Boyd, pastor at Wesley UMC, Hollywood, addressed the theme “Living Out Our Faithfulness,” drawing from Matthew 15:21: “His Lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’”

Boyd gave a profound testament of how we should live our lives as followers of Jesus Christ and act as servants of God by being faithful with all that God has given to us, to include his grace, mercy, kindness and goodness. We were all encouraged to share God’s faithfulness with everyone, especially women, children and youth.

We were grateful for the \$1,200 love offering that was donated to Killingsworth, Inc., one of our national mission sites located in downtown Columbia.

During the business session, reports were given by the district president, Secretary Diann Selph, Treasurer Tiffany Phillips and Nominations Chair Marlene Sipes.

Debra Schooler, president of SCCUWFaith, installed the officers for 2026, and Beth Sawyer, president of Union UWFaith, extended an invitation to join



Pictured are the Rev. Geneva Stafford, pastor of Francis Burns UMC; Carrie R. Murray, president of Columbia District and Francis Burns UWFaith; the Rev. Fran Elrod, Columbia District superintendent; and the Rev. Fadetra Boyd, keynote speaker.

the ladies at Union UMC for the Columbia District UWFaith 54th Annual Meeting and to help them celebrate Union’s 125th anniversary.

One of the highlights of the event was the individual and unit recognition for outstanding service to UWFaith.

Membership, Nurture and Outreach Coordinator Heidi Ankeny introduced 13 ladies who were selected by their local unit as Woman of Year. Each was congratulated for dedicated service to her church, her unit and her community and received a certificate of outstanding service along with a beautiful multi-colored corsage, presented on behalf of Columbia District UWFaith.

Education and Interpretation Coordinator Rhonda Washington proudly presented eight units with Mission Today Awards for meeting their pledge to mission and for completing the requirements to be recognized as a Mission Today Unit. They included UWFaith units at Bethel in Columbia, Brookland, Francis Burns, Gilbert, Grace, Mount Hebron, Northeast and Trenholm Road.

Program Resource Manager Stella Chisholm recognized eight churches that participated in the Reading Program: Bethel (eight); Francis Burns (20); Gilbert (four); Grace (14); Mount Hebron (three); Trenholm Road (four); Union (13); and Wesley Church (two). A total of 68 ladies completed the 2025 Reading Program. Hats off to five individuals who completed Plan 4 by reading 20 books: Karen Stewart, Bethel; Stella Chisholm, Doris McNair and Carrie Murray,

Francis Burns; and Suzanne Wise, Trenholm Road.

Ten units received the Charter for Racial Justice Diamond Unit Award for striving to establish color-blindness through Jesus Christ. Social Action Coordinator Lexie Chatham recognized the following units: Bethel (Columbia), Brookland, Francis Burns, Gilbert, Grace, Mount Hebron, Northeast, Trenholm Road, Wesley and Windsor.

Eleven units were recognized as Supporters of the Campaign for Children by acting boldly to transform injustices in the lives of women, children and youth by logging in more than 2,000 volunteer hours in schools and community outreach organizations. Chatham presented certificates of appreciation to Bethel (Columbia), Brookland, Francis Burns, Gilbert, Grace, Mount Hebron, Northeast, Shandon, Trenholm Road, Wesley and Windsor.

Lastly, Columbia District is proud of the 13 churches for mission giving through the five channels of giving. Phillips recognized units that achieved the Five Star and Gold Seal Unit Award: Bethel (Columbia), Brookland, Francis Burns, Gilbert, Grace, I. DeQuincey Newman, Mount Hebron, Northeast, Rehoboth Methodist, Salem, Trenholm Road, Union and Wesley Church.

Two units achieved the status of being a Four Mission Unit: Ashland and Bluff Road.

The total pledge to mission exceeded \$27,455. Additional giving to mission sites, designated and undesignated totaling in excess of \$23,000.

Sipes, chair of Committee on Nominations, provided gifts for the three retiring officers: Phillips; Ankeny; and Linda Kennedy, Cluster Leader 6. She extended a word of thanks for their service to the Columbia District.

After, she presented the slate of officers for 2026 who were installed by Schooler.

Stafford sent us forth with Holy Communion, the benediction and the blessing of the food.

Lastly, ladies assembled in the fellowship hall for lunch. Everyone was encouraged to visit display tables. Thanks are extended to the following sponsors: Marcella Forrest, Program Advisory Board and the Legacy Fund; Susan Sirmons, executive director, Killingsworth, Inc.; Flo Johnson and Betty Void, Killingsworth Gala; Pat Hoesly, Columbia District historian; and Stella Chisholm, Columbia District program resource manager.

Thank you everyone for serving, advocating and making a difference in the lives of women, children and youth. Columbia District UWFaith is blessed to be a blessing to others.

Murray is president of Columbia District United Women in Faith.

Final Palmetto Journey of Hope series to feature death row survivor MacPhee

AIKEN—Trinity United Methodist Church will host the Rev. Jimmy MacPhee, a death row survivor and executive director of On The Rock Ministries, as part of the Palmetto Journey of Hope, a speaking series empowering the voices of murder victim family members towards the abolition of the death penalty.

The event will be Nov. 9 from 10:25-11:25 a.m.; the worship service will feature a sermon by MacPhee.

The Palmetto Journey of Hope is a collaboration between SCADP and Journey of Hope.

The Nov. 9 event is the series finale. MacPhee, a returning citizen from a 45-year prison journey, is an ordained minister and has co-authored three prison writing books: “Letters to Our Sons,” “Didn’t See It Coming” and “Frankie San, a Burning and a Shining Light for Christ.”

Today, as an ordained minister, he serves God with On the Rock Ministries, providing funding for inmate Bible correspondence courses.

RSVP for the event to <https://tinyurl>.

[com/palmetto-journey](https://tinyurl).

Palmetto Journey of Hope has held similar events elsewhere across the state.

On Oct. 8, they hosted a speaking event featuring the voices of a murder victim family member and a death row survivor. Held at Cokesbury UMC, North Charleston, it featured Jackie Morfesis (a murder victim family member and community advocate) and Raymond Patterson, a death row survivor.

“South Carolina is currently third when it comes to states with the most executions this year,” said Rev. Hillary Taylor, a United Methodist pastor and the executive director of South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty.

“We hope these events will show South Carolinians, state leaders and Gov. McMaster that not all victims want the death penalty.”

On Oct. 9, they hosted a Palmetto Journey of Hope event at Benedict College featuring Moses Peterson (a death row survivor) and Yvonne Patterson Johnson (a murder victim family mem-

ber and death row family member).

And on Oct. 19, they hosted a Palmetto Journey of Hope event at Washington Street UMC, Columbia, featuring

Michael McClinton, a death row survivor and murder victim family member.

For more about the work of SCADP, visit <https://www.scadp.org>.

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Ministries.

Native American Ministries.

The eagle in Native American culture

By Guy Burney

They can spot prey from over two miles away. They have talons that exert 400 pounds per square inch. The heaviest load verified by any flying bird was a 15-pound mule deer fawn. Recognized as our country’s national bird, the eagle is prominently featured on the Great Seal of the United States. The Bible symbolizes the eagle as divine protection and strength under God’s guidance. Today, it even represents the defending Super Bowl champions of the National Football League (“Fly, Eagles, Fly!”).

To Native Americans, eagles are sacred messengers between humans and Creator. It flies highest in the sky, closest to Creator. It delivers prayers and is the symbol of wisdom, courage and strength. During prayer, the eagle feather is used to capture the attention of Creator with focus and respect toward the message being delivered.

The two eagles native to the United States are the bald eagle and the golden eagle. As with all other cultural identities, the eagle means different things to different tribes. While some associate eagles with peace and healing, others associate it as a symbol of war. The golden eagle, also known as the “war eagle” (shout out to Auburn University) is associated with warriors and courage in battle. Members of some Plains tribes earned eagle feathers as war honors, which would be worn in their feather headdresses. Some nations continue this practice today to honor war veterans and tribal members of the military who have achieved great accomplishment.

Some Pacific Northwest tribes use eagle down to dust the floor for ceremonies as a symbol of peace and hospitality. One of the ceremonies is a potlatch, a feast at which possessions are given away or destroyed to display wealth or enhance prestige.

In some Inuit mythology, the Thunderbird is a legendary giant eagle that creates thunderclaps with its wings. Cherokee and Navajo also include the Thunderbird in stories.

Declining eagle populations resulted in U.S. laws that restricted use and access to eagle feathers and other parts. This negatively affected the religious and cultural practices of many indigenous nations. After years of advocacy, the Eagle Feather Law allowed enrolled members of federally recognized tribes to legally obtain eagle feathers and parts from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Eagle Repository. The repository processes approximately 1,000 requests annually from Native Americans seeking eagle feathers for ceremonial purposes. This allows native religious freedom and the continuing significance of the eagle in indigenous culture.

The eagle bone whistle is a religious

object used by members of Native American spiritual societies in sacred ceremonies. It is not to be considered a musical instrument, but rather a spiritual object. Its distinct sound is believed to carry prayers to Creator. The Lakota use it in some Sun Dances, as do the Crow Nation.

Eagle Dances involve performers with movements, calls and the spirit of eagles. Their specialized regalia feature eagle feathers and choreography that mimics the bird’s soaring flight and hunting behaviors. Eagle motifs are woven into fabrics, beaded into accessories and painted onto drums and shields. Bustles, plumes and headdresses are also adorned. The Lakota and Blackfeet use eagle dancers with fans made of eagle feathers to represent wings. The dancers move in circular patterns that simulate eagles riding thermal currents. The Hopi Eagle Dance is performed in the winter and brings blessing and rain for future crops.

Some Native American tribes were organized into clan systems, with each clan represented by an animal symbol. Clan animals define family lineages and establish systems of kinship and social organization. Through the clan system, groups of families trace descent from common ancestors or totemic animals. Membership in a clan means you are spiritually connected to that animal. The eagle is one of the most common clan animals. Tribes with eagle clans include the Iowa, Chippewa, Creek, Hopi, Cherokee, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian and Pueblo.

Eagles are a common motif in Native American art: jewelry, carved totems, basket weaving, pottery and leather goods. Ancient rock paintings and petroglyphs dating to 14,000 B.C. show their importance.

Native Americans developed ecological knowledge about eagles and used their behaviors to understand environmental conditions and seasonal changes. Healthy eagle populations indicated balanced ecosystems with abundant fish and small game. As a result, fishing expeditions and planting schedules could be determined. Collecting molted eagle feathers lessened harm to the population. This helped create a mutual respect that passed down to generations. Contemporary tribal wildlife management contributes valuable information to non-native agencies. Meanwhile, tribal colleges and language revitalization programs include traditional knowledge as part of their cultural curriculum.

Through oral traditions, literature, art, dance and spirituality, the eagle remains an important part of indigenous heritage.

Burney is a member of Disciples United Methodist Church, Greenville, and the EBCI Wolf Clan.



Photos courtesy of Violet Legette



Fun while doing ministry

The United Women in Faith of Midland Park UMC, North Charleston, got together and made 25 adult bibs to distribute to the different local organizations that might need them for their residents. Members said they had so much fun making these bibs and hope they bring a little enjoyment to the folks who might use them. (Missing from the pictures are Deidra Troxel and Claudia Thomas.) At top, Sylvia Tomberlin, Patricia Ganus, Mary Hutto, Beth Hairfield and Doris Freeman work on the bibs. Above left, Hairfield holds a bib. Above right, Violet Legette and Mary Trussell iron the bibs.



Epworth News by Beth Williams

Stand Sunday

Sunday, Nov. 9—circle this date on your calendar. Nov. 9 is a special Sunday, a day on which churches in more than 120 countries will focus on the issues surrounding abused, neglected and abandoned children and families who live within our midst.

Called “Stand Sunday,” this observance began in Brownwood, Texas, in 2001. The Rev. Aaron Blake, a young pastor there, got to know a foster child in a local high school. He befriended this young man and eventually brought him and five other foster children into his own home. He realized the stark need for more and better foster homes to care for children who had been abused and abandoned by their families.

One Sunday, called by the Holy Spirit, Blake abruptly tossed aside his prepared sermon and asked boldly of his congregation, “Who will stand with us to defend and care for the neglected, abused, and abandoned children in our community?”

His congregation responded mightily, and “Stand Sunday” became an annual observance. This idea of a dedicated Sunday each year to call attention to the plight of children and families in distress spread quickly nationally and internationally.

The willingness to help others defines us as God’s servants. Scripture tells us; “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ... Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

Here in South Carolina, there are currently 3,354 children living in foster care, with many more on a waiting list. The need is critical.

Statistics tell us that South Carolina ranks 40th in general child wellbeing in the nation. In 2024, 13,796 children younger than 18 in South Carolina were victims of maltreatment and 210,374 children younger than 18 in South Carolina lived in poverty. As well, 13,770 children younger than 18 were classified as homeless in South Carolina, an increase of 13 percent from the previous year (SC Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children 2024 Report).

Last year, Epworth served nearly 1,700 children and families. Most of the children who come to Epworth have been abused, neglected or affected by some type of family dysfunction.

We ask you to join us on Sunday, Nov. 9, to observe “Stand Sunday” and focus with us on those children and families who need our help in creating safe, secure and stable lives. We ask that you become more aware and more committed to providing support, either through financial assistance to organizations that help, or through volunteering your own time and efforts with these organizations.

Whether it’s “Stand Sunday” or any other day of the year, we need to remember the children and families who live on the edge of poverty and disconnection from support that they need to turn their lives around. As John Wesley told us, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”

Epworth invites you to “stand” with us on Nov. 9 and throughout the year for children and families by “doing all the good we can.”

For more information: <https://www.standsunday.com/church>.

Williams is the CEO of Epworth.

Leave A Legacy To Change Lives

The South Carolina United Methodist Foundation
P. O. Box 5087, Columbia, SC 29250-5087
scumf@bellsouth.net



Photo courtesy of Jodie Plyler

Helping homeless people
Tabernacle UMC, Lancaster, packaged 78 kits to benefit homeless individuals through the Ray’s Flowers Backdoor Buddy program in Lancaster. Kits included non-perishable food items, small toiletries and waters. Tabernacle’s pastor is the Rev. Kendell Healy.

Annual gala to raise funds for Killingsworth Home

COLUMBIA—South Carolina United Methodists will join other supporters from across the state this month for Killingsworth’s annual gala, a beloved event described by many as the official kickoff to the holiday season.

Set for Thursday, Nov. 13, from 6-9 p.m., the Killingsworth Gala will be held once again at Seawell’s Restaurant in Columbia.

Tickets are \$70/person and \$525 for a table of eight, and sponsorships are available starting at \$600.

The event will feature a silent auction, a Dillard’s Fashion Show, live music and a full course meal.

Proceeds will support Killingsworth Home, a unique community residence for women who are emerging from crisis situations. Within the eight-bedroom Columbia home, women recovering from addiction, incarceration, mental and emotional problems, violence and assault or family crisis situations can find shelter and support. The residential program includes room, board, guidance and support for a nominal fee. Vocational assistance is also available.

To purchase gala tickets or be a sponsor: <https://killingsworth.org/events>.



One participant at the LSM was 12 years old.

Spartanburg District LSM helps students be better prepared to serve

By the Rev. Annie R. Crocker

Spartanburg District LSM School held its closing ceremony Oct. 5 after completing three Sunday afternoons in the classroom.

The school offered three classes: Basic, Worship and Ministry with the Forgotten. All learned a lot, filled hearts and minds and finished ready to go to work to fulfill the mission God has called us to.

Our Basic class, led by Eugenia Young, had eight people, with the youngest being 12 years old. He brought a lot of joy and inspiration and gave others confidence by just watching him at work. They all expressed that they learned a lot and looked forward to returning in the spring to continue their training.

Our Worship class had four people, all men, and they said they enjoyed spending their Sunday afternoons together studying with Barbara Wright instead of being at home watching football. They left very impressed, ready to lead in worship and happy to



All finished ready to go to work to fulfill the mission God has called them to.

have gained all the knowledge they received in the last three weeks.

The Ministry with the Forgotten class, led by Sue Owens was very informative, offered a lot of first-hand knowledge and sent students out better prepared, more aware and feeling equipped to help persons who may not be able to help themselves, may not know that they are loved and may not know how to love.

Nine people left the class better prepared to serve.

ERT training session set for Sand Hill UMC on Nov. 15

The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church will offer an opportunity this month for people to get needed disaster response training to serve on an Early Response Team.

ERTs serve in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and operate as God’s hands and feet to hurting people.

On Nov. 15, Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville, will host a training.

Space is limited. Register at <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration>.



United Women in Faith by Debra H. Schooler

All about Church Women United

Let me introduce you to Church Women United, an incredible organization you may not yet know much about.

CWU is a movement of women united in their Christian faith, dedicated to celebrating both unity and diversity while working toward a more just and peaceful world. Our state chapter includes three districts that actively promote the vision and mission of CWU through faith, service and advocacy. The following information and history are drawn from the official <https://www.churchwomenunited.net> website. I believe you’ll find this organization to be a breath of fresh air, and I encourage you to support us in our important work of empowering women and strengthening communities through Christian unity:

CWU is truly an ecumenical movement, bringing together women from diverse Christian faith traditions. All are welcome to participate and serve. Since 1941, women of the CWU movement have held a vision of Christian unity and prayerful action. CWU was founded as a racially, culturally, theologically inclusive Christian women’s movement to celebrate unity and diversity and work for peace in the world.

At its founding, the movement was named the United Council of Church Women. Women of faith from three interdenominational women’s groups representing 70 denominations convened in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in December 1941 while bombs were being dropped and the world was at war. The United Council of Church Women’s first action was to circulate a petition signed by 84,000 church women urging the United States at the signing of the United Nations Charter to join and take full responsibility in a world organization.

The action received wide publicity in the media, and Eleanor Roosevelt later involved the UCCW in a conference at the White House on how women may share in post war policy-making. Such action remains typical for CWU today, as its quest for information and prayerful action continues. Women of the movement affirm that prayer and action are inseparable and that both have immeasurable influence in the world.

With Ephesians 2:10 in mind, we are focused on priorities of the heart. Since we should be “living a loving, faith-filled, purpose-driven life ... [with] God leading the way,” we should be concerned that every person is afforded the opportunity to have basic human needs met. Therefore, priorities for the 2024-2028 quadrennial focus on peace, freedom, education and housing. These are the basics that everyone should be able to access regardless of any differences.

CWU groups promote their mission and vision through four celebrations held each year: World Day of Prayer (first Friday in March), May Friendship Day (first Friday in May), Human Rights Day (first Friday in October) and World Community Day (first Friday in November). We are also proud of our partnerships and support received from affiliated denominations/organizations.

CWU, supported in part by our own United Methodist churches and United Women in Faith, is an ecumenical, service-oriented organization dedicated to improving lives and strengthening our communities. Visit CWU’s website to learn more about our mission and discover how you can get involved in supporting this growing fellowship of women.

Schooler is president of South Carolina Church Women United and South Carolina United Women in Faith.

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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.



Photo courtesy of the Rev. Brent L. Dehlbom

Deb Underwood, chair of missions, took the splash with laughter and good spirit.

St. Andrews Parish fall festival raises \$2K+ for Wesley Foundation

CHARLESTON—St. Andrews Parish United Methodist Church, known as “The Church on the Path,” held its annual fall festival this September and raised more than \$2,000 to support Charleston Wesley Foundation Student Ministries. The highlight of the day came when Rev. Brent L. Dehlbom, pastor of St. Andrews, outbid the congregation in a lighthearted auction for the chance to avoid being drenched with a cooler of Gatorade. Instead, he gleefully passed the honor on to Deb Underwood, chair of missions, who took the splash with laughter and good spirit. The festival featured food, music,

games and a strong sense of community, drawing together church members, neighbors and friends from across the Charleston area. All proceeds were directed toward missions with a focus on the Charleston Wesley Foundation, which provides spiritual growth, fellowship and leadership opportunities for college students in the Charleston area. “The support from our church family is overwhelming,” Dehlbom said. “Investing in campus ministry means investing in the next generation of disciples. We’re grateful for the joy, generosity and mission focus that made this festival such a success.”



Wesley Foundations by the Rev. John Sterling Poole

Fall Retreat transforms students

On Sept. 12, the Charleston Wesley Foundation held its Fall Retreat in Flat Rock, North Carolina. Thirty-eight students from five different campuses (The Citadel, Charleston Southern, Trident Tech, American College of the Building Arts and College of Charleston) joined in for a weekend of worship, sabbath and fellowship. The theme of the weekend was “Not My Will But Yours,” and we discussed how we discern God’s calling on each of our hearts. This topic is near and dear to college students, because everyone is asking them these questions: “What are you going to do after college?” and “What are you studying for?” and “What is your plan?” The sad reality, though, is very few people are asking: “What do you think God is calling you to do?” This Fall Retreat, we really sat with that question. We created space for students to reflect. For many, this was their first free weekend since they moved onto campus, and God does a lot at the beginning of a school year, especially for freshmen. Sitting with this reflection, we then create an opportunity for response. On Sunday, the students could respond to God’s work in their hearts. We celebrated Communion, remembered our baptisms, four students were baptized and one student reaffirmed their faith and joined The United Methodist Church. It was a good Sunday for the Charleston Wesley Foundation and for the South Carolina Annual Conference. Campus ministry serves to help




On the far right, Rev John Sterling Poole asks the four baptismal and one reaffirmation candidates a question. students respond to God. We create spaces for reflection, for education, for discernment and for response. Because of the Spirit’s work over this Fall Retreat, five people joined our denomination. That is good news, and we are a people of good news. This is why it is vital that every member of the South Carolina Annual Conference consider how they can support their closest campus ministry with their prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. Because of Charleston Wesley’s donors and prayer warriors, this weekend happened, and God did some amazing things in the hearts of students. Please consider pouring into your local campus ministry so that that campus ministry is more equipped to pour into 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>.*

SMC partners with Spartanburg Academic Movement to expand college access

SPARTANBURG—Spartanburg Methodist College partnered with Spartanburg Academic Movement to provide more area high school seniors with the resources and financial assistance they need to attend college. The new Big Mo program from SAM provides seniors with the answers, support and resources they need to pursue college, including financial assistance if they choose to attend SMC. “SMC takes pride in providing every possible resource to potential students to eliminate the barriers to attending college,” said Ben Maxwell, vice president for enrollment at SMC. “Through this partnership, we can show students the opportunities at SMC

and provide some important financial support.” Students participating in Big Mo who choose to attend SMC will be eligible for up to \$1,000 per year to help cover fees. In addition, the program provides assistance with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, reminders about application deadlines, degree and career guidance and community-based resources and support. “This is more than a program for students; it’s an investment in Spartanburg’s future,” said Dr. Russell Booker, CEO for SAM. “By helping every student take their next step after high school, we’re strengthening our workforce, building healthier and more prosperous families and laying the foundation for a stronger

community and economy for years to come.” SMC has been a partner in SAM’s Movement 2030 from its inception, focusing on increasing the number of college graduates in Spartanburg County. The college developed a 100 percent online general studies degree for the program, targeting returning adult students who started college but weren’t able to finish their degree. “Our partnership with SAM and Movement 2030 is a direct complement to our own students first, students always mentality here at SMC,” said SMC President Scott Cochran. “We’re both focused on providing more opportunities for students to earn their degree and help advance the Spartanburg community.”



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Cochran named SCICU board vice chair



Cochran

SPARTANBURG—South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities has named Spartanburg Methodist College President Scott Cochran as the vice chair of its board of trustees and chair of the Council of Presidents. “I appreciate the opportunity to serve SCICU in these positions,” Cochran said. “We are grateful for all the SCICU does for its members, and I look forward to putting my experience and skills to work for the organization.” As the vice chair of the board, Cochran will help shape the direction of SCICU for the coming year. In that position, he will also serve as the chair of the Council of Presidents, a smaller group of college presidents who discuss shared challenges and alignment on advocacy priorities for SCICU. He will also serve on the audit committee and investment committee. SCICU represents the independent colleges and universities in South Carolina, providing collaboration, advocacy, fundraising and public engagement.

Theotokos confirmation retreats celebrate fifth year

HAYESVILLE, North Carolina—This coming spring, Hinton Rural Life Center will celebrate its fifth season of Theotokos Confirmation Retreats. (*Theo-TO-kos*: God-bearer.)

Located in the Appalachian Mountains, Hinton is a United Methodist mission outreach and retreat agency of the Southeastern Jurisdiction. Theotokos retreat weekends offered in 2026 include Feb. 28–March 1, March 13–15, March 20–22 and April 10–12.

“We encourage local churches to integrate a Theotokos Confirmation Retreat into their confirmation ministry,” said Rev. Karen Kluever, minister of church relations at Hinton Center and director of the Theotokos retreat ministry. “It can launch a confirmation ministry, serve as a capstone event or simply add a UM connectional experience for confirmands that can be faith shaping and life changing.”

Retreat numbers are limited to about 85 per weekend for a more intimate atmosphere that is especially conducive to smaller groups.

“Whether you have one, five or 27 confirmands, I



There are four retreats set for 2026.

always say ‘Bring ‘em,’” Kluever said. “We are intentional about making sure everyone feels welcome and comfortable in this retreat setting. For younger youth, going on retreats can be stressful. We want this to be enjoyable and meaningful for everyone.”

The retreat features a Friday evening session and then Saturday sessions, with service activity, workshops on vows, free time and evening worship with baptism renewal/expectation. The retreat wraps up

Sunday with a final session, worship with Holy Communion, presentation of stoles, blessings and lunch.

Theotokos retreats were created by a design team that included several South Carolina clergy who had participated in FCF Confirm Retreats at Lake Junaluska (through March 2020): the Revs. Elizabeth Murray (team leader), Michael Goldston, Sheila Elliott Hodge, Jad Taylor and Megan Boatwright. The team crafted the retreat goals, components and schedule and selected the Scriptures. Their vision and ideas provided the foundation that the Theotokos team has consistently and creatively built upon and enhanced over the last four years, focusing on engagement, being youth friendly and reflecting Wesleyan theology.

“I love this retreat so much, and you guys continue to crush it, and we will keep coming back,” said Todd Handell of Lexington UMC, Lexington.

“The Prayer Passports are cool, and the stoles are very special,” said the Rev. Meg Wilkes, Clemson UMC, Clemson.

For more information: <https://hintontheotokos.org>.

UMCSC cohort churches embrace prayer through Lilly initiative

By Toni Taylor

Twelve South Carolina United Methodist churches have embarked on an inspiring journey to transform children’s ministry and worship life thanks to a major grant from the Lilly Endowment.

As part of the “Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer” initiative, these cohort congregations are pioneering new approaches to help children and adults pray together authentically, deepen their walk with Christ and cultivate vibrant, intergenerational church communities.

The multiyear, \$1.1 million Lilly Endowment grant positions South Carolina’s churches at the forefront of a national movement to nurture the spiritual lives of children by equipping local leaders and laity, resourcing families and promoting innovative worship. Through partnerships with organi-

zations like Messy Church USA and Narrative 4, the conference is creating creative, story-rich spaces for children to encounter God as part of the broader worshipping community, not just as spectators but as full participants.

At the heart of the 2025 grant cohort are two thoughtfully selected study resources: “Pray with Me: Help Your Children Engage in Authentic and Powerful Prayer,” by Erica Renaud, and “Common Prayer for Children and Families,” by Jenifer Gamber. Each church is engaging in a ready-to-use, six-session small-group study based on “Pray with Me.” The study uses practical rhythms, Scripture engagement and creative activities to help adults invite children into real, everyday prayer—empowering even the youngest to express faith, gratitude and doubt honestly before God.

Complementing this, “Common

Prayer for Children and Families” is a beautifully illustrated collection of prayers and liturgies tailored for use in the home or church, spanning daily routines, church seasons and special occasions. This resource makes prayer accessible for all ages and stages, binding families together in common prayer that celebrates God’s presence in every moment of life. Each prayer, from meal-times to major milestones, is written with language and themes that resonate with children, inviting them to participate fully in the life of faith. Participants reflect on how prayer can become a natural, joyful and intergenerational practice, moving beyond routines to meaningful habits that connect home, church, and community. Churches are encouraged to create cultures of belonging, foster cross-generational relationships and increase the ways children participate in and help lead

corporate prayer and worship.

Pastors and laity across this 12-church cohort affirm that these new tools and the support from the Lilly Endowment are “answering long-standing prayers” for a renewed, inclusive approach to faith formation.

As the initiative continues, the conference anticipates that hundreds of children—and the adults who guide them—will experience deeper spiritual growth and stronger bonds across generations, ensuring that the language and experience of prayer are passed on for years to come. A goal is to publish a book written by South Carolina United Methodist children over the five-year project.

For more information on “Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer” and the Lilly Endowment initiative, visit <https://www.umcsc.org/children> or email ttaylor@umcsc.org.

Columbia College names Cook interim associate VP of safety, emergency services

COLUMBIA—Columbia College has appointed Howard M. Cook as interim associate vice president of safety and emergency services.

Cook, who previously served the college for 17 years—14 of those as chief of police—returns to campus with more than three decades of law enforcement and safety leadership experience.

“Howard’s dedication to his alma mater, Columbia College, and his unmatched expertise in campus safety made him an immediate choice for this role,” said Columbia College President



Cook

Dr. John H. Dozier. “His vision, experience and commitment to service will move our police department and emergency operations forward in powerful ways. We are thrilled to welcome him back home.”

Cook’s distinguished career spans 34 years in law enforcement. A graduate of the FBI National Academy (224th session), he has held leadership roles at the local, state and national levels. Most recently, he served as coordinator of safety and emergency services for Lexington School District One, supporting more than 27,000 students across 32 schools. Previously, Cook was the executive director of the FBI National Academy Associates in Quantico, Virginia, representing 17,000 members across 48 chapters worldwide. He

also served as executive director of field operations for Savant Learning Systems.

Under Cook’s leadership, the Columbia College Police Department received national and state recognition, including the National Exemplary School Safety Award (2013), the SCAA Crime Prevention Award (2009) and the Santee Cooper Award of Excellence in Law Enforcement (2006). Beyond campus, Cook has been a vocal advocate at the South Carolina State House, lobbying for training and funding for campus law enforcement.

Cook assumed his role in early September and has already begun advancing campus safety and emergency initiatives.

Columbia College earns top rankings in Best Colleges List

COLUMBIA—Columbia College has achieved strong placement in the 2026 U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges Rankings, continuing its tradition of academic excellence, value and commitment to student success.

For the 2026 edition, Columbia College was recognized across four major categories: #59 (tie) in Regional Universities South; #22 in Best Value Schools; #30 (tie) in Best Colleges for Veterans; and #17 (tie) in Top Performers on Social

Mobility.

“These rankings affirm our mission to provide a transformative and accessible education that equips our students for success,” said Columbia College President Dr. John H. Dozier. “We are especially proud to be recognized for both value and social mobility, which speak directly to our dedication to keeping higher education affordable while ensuring that every student, regardless of background, has the opportunity to thrive.”



Uno!
Students at Columbia Wesley Fellowship (formerly Methodist Student Network) enjoy a game of Uno on movie night, held Oct. 6.

Photo courtesy of Lexie Chatham

Joyce Osborne Campbell

GREENWOOD—Joyce Osborne Campbell, wife of the Rev. Taylor Campbell, died Oct. 5, 2025. Rev. Campbell is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

A memorial service was held Oct. 9 at St. Mark UMC followed by a commital service at Bramlett Methodist Church Cemetery, Gray Court.

Mrs. Campbell is survived by her husband, three sons and daughter.

Rev. Clara Martin Gary



Gary

SIMPSONVILLE—The Rev. Clara Martin Gary, a retired local pastor of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Sept. 29, 2025.

Prior to her retirement in 2015, Rev. Gary served the Chapel Charge, Pickens Charge and Williamston Charge.

Funeral services were held Oct. 6 at Bethlehem Baptist Church with burial in Graceland East Memorial Park.

Rev. Gary is survived by her husband, Willie, and son.

Annie Lee James

FLORENCE—Annie Lee James, mother of Stephanie Ashley, died Sept. 29, 2025. Mrs. Ashley is the wife of the Rev. Louis Ashley, pastor of Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church, Lake City.

Funeral services were held Oct. 5 at Elizabeth Baptist Church.

Mrs. James is survived by her five daughters.

Lorna Jean Maples

LUGOFF—Lorna Jean Maples, mother of Darryl B. Maples Jr., died Oct. 7, 2025. Mr. Maples is the husband of Donna Maples, the accounts payable assistant in the Conference Treasurer’s Office.

Funeral services were held Oct. 10 at Springvale Baptist Church.

Mrs. Maples is survived by her daughter and son.

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“Give thanks to the
Lord, for He is good.”
Psalm 107:1

Worldwide News.

Theologian in residence named for assembly

INDIANAPOLIS—United Women in Faith has named the Rev. Stephanie York Arnold as theologian in residence for Assembly 2026, scheduled for May 15-17 in Indianapolis. The assembly, the organization’s signature gathering, will meet under the theme “Dream it! Believe it! Do it!” York Arnold is the top executive of the United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

Resurrection’s Hamilton to retire

LEAWOOD, Kan.—The Rev. Adam Hamilton, pastor of Resurrection, a United Methodist Church, announced that he will retire from that post in five years, after four decades with Resurrection. Hamilton made the announcement during the church’s Leadership Institute, held Oct. 1-3. During the conference, Hamilton also lamented the rise of Christian nationalism and polarizing churches. More than 1,600 people attended the event in person and online.

Group calls for prayer for Alaskan community

SELBYVILLE, Del.—The Native American International Caucus is calling for prayer after powerful storms and flooding have struck western Alaska, including the Yup’ik village of Kwigillingok along the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Homes were lifted and carried by the water, displacing families.

Church court: Question improper

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The Judicial Council, the denomination’s top court, said it could not take jurisdiction on the one item on its fall docket. The request for a declaratory decision from the New England Annual Conference’s clergy session about the ordination process did not refer to any specific paragraph in the denomination’s *Book of Discipline*. “Since the question asked does not refer to a disciplinary paragraph, it is improper,” Memorandum 1520 said, “and we cannot take jurisdiction.”

Church responds to crisis in Madagascar

ANTANANARIVO, Madagascar—Protests led by Madagascar’s Generation Z have erupted nationwide over water shortages, power cuts and worsening poverty. The president has fled the country. United Methodist Bishop João Sambo, whose episcopal area includes Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa and Eswatini, calls on congregations to pray for peace and national reconciliation.

With warm faith, pastors seek to counter ICE

CHICAGO—United Methodists in Chicago and Portland, Oregon, are striving to lead courageously as their cities face threats of militarization and an onslaught of masked federal agents. In both the Northern Illinois and Oregon-Idaho conferences, pastors are seeking to protect neighbors, share Christian witness and set the record straight on what’s happening in their cities.

Grant helps to empower women in West Bank

ATLANTA—A program funded by the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries’ Yambasu Agriculture Initiative is helping women in the West Bank address food security. The Rural Women’s Development Society, a Palestinian nongovernmental organization working in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, has created a project that promotes traditional Palestinian slow-food cooking and entrepreneurship among women.

Eyesight fading, bishop envisions new role as evangelist

GOSHEN, Ind.—After glaucoma forced him to step down from overseeing the Illinois Great Rivers Conference, United Methodist Bishop Frank Beard is launching a new ministry of evangelism. He and his wife, Melissa, are using their love of fishing to teach fellow United Methodists how to hook new disciples.

Ecumenical group welcomes Middle East ceasefire

GENEVA—The Rev. Jerry Pillay, top executive of the World Council of Churches, welcomed with profound relief the initial implementation of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. On behalf of the ecumenical group that United Methodists helped found, he also welcomed the news on Oct. 13 of the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners.

Inaugural training held for faith-based organizing

BALTIMORE—United Methodist leaders from across the United States gathered Oct. 1-3 for the inaugural National Faith-Based Grassroots Organizing Gathering—a denomination-wide training designed to equip leaders for justice work rooted in the Gospel and the United Methodist Social Principles. Participants described the gathering as helpful both spiritually and practically.

Church responding to federal cutbacks

ATLANTA—A fundraising campaign dubbed “This Moment Matters” aims to raise \$17 million to support the work of the United Methodist boards of Global Ministries and Higher Education and Ministry. Roland Fernandes, top executive of both boards, announced the campaign during joint board meetings Oct. 8-10 on Zoom. Projections estimate 14 million deaths by 2030 because of the dismantling of USAID programs.

Conference sets up fund for immigrants

CHICAGO—Bishop Dan Schwerin announced that the Northern Illinois Conference has set up an “Emergency Solidarity Fund” for immigrants afraid to leave their homes amid the onslaught of masked federal agents grabbing people from the streets. “You can imagine that winter brings economic challenges to many, but in this moment, immigrant communities in particular are suffering,” he writes.

Courtesy of United Methodist News



Historical Society
by Dr. Roger M. Gramling

The Great Schism—1844

While the Methodist Episcopal Church saw clergy and lay members leave the church before 1844—most notably the Methodist Protestants, the African American Methodists (the AME and the AME Zions and the Wesleyan Methodist Connection)—it was the institution of slavery in America that brought the first “true schism” in the sense of actually dividing the newly created Methodist Episcopal Church.

In the beginning, Methodism and the Methodist Episcopal Church had opposed slavery following the lead of John Wesley. The early emphasis upon the emancipation of slaves quickly declined in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The General Conference of 1808 authorized each annual conference to take its own stand on the issue of slavery to accommodate differences in state laws. Arguments were advanced that slavery was a “political issue” and that the church should not “meddle” in politics. During this period, the Methodist Episcopal Church confined its efforts primarily to missionary work among the slaves focusing upon the promotion of their spiritual and moral welfare within the system of slavery.

However, at the General Conference of 1844, held at Green Street Church in New York, several cases arose that showed that the majority mood at this General Conference was decidedly, actively and strongly anti-slavery. Other issues entered the debate, but clearly the issue before the General Conference was the church’s position on slavery, and clearly it became a sectional issue resulting in the presentation of a “Declaration of the Southern Delegates” stating that a “continuance of the jurisdiction of this General Conference over these annual conferences” is “inconsistent with the success of the ministry in the slave-holding states.”

After two days of deliberation, a representative committee of nine members reported a “Plan of Separation” for the Methodist Episcopal Church, dividing the church into two separate and distinct churches: the “Church in the South” and the “Church in the North,” with the right extended to societies, stations, conferences and ministers to choose between the two. Commonly held property was to be appropriately and proportionately divided.

Commissioners were to be appointed to see that claims and equity were properly adjusted. Resolutions in support of the plan were adopted by significant margins. The General Conference of 1844 ended after a 36-day session with what it felt to be a fair, amicable and responsible resolution of a problem that otherwise seemed impossible of any other manner of resolution.

Before leaving New York, the delegates from the southern conferences prepared a statement for their conferences inviting a response to the Plan of Separation and proposing a general convention to meet in Louisville, Kentucky, on May 1, 1845. With 95 percent of their constituencies favoring the organization of a separate church, delegates to the convention in Louisville approved the formation of a new church to be organized under the same “rules, polity, doctrine and discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, to be known as the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. With the new church’s subsequent approval by the southern annual conferences, 87 delegates gathered in Petersburg, Virginia, on May 1, 1846, for the first General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

The northern annual conferences were not as hospitable to the Plan of Separation as were the southern annual conferences. Difficulties arose. The 1848 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church repudiated the Plan of Separation and claimed the actions of the southern annual conferences to be a “secessionist movement.” Legal arguments and lawsuits ensued. One case was appealed to the United States Supreme Court, which in 1854 rendered a decision that the Plan of Separation was legal and that each division of the previous church was legitimate.

Contention over slavery also embroiled the Methodist Protestant Church. Beginning in 1855, 19 annual conferences in the northern and western parts of the Methodist Protestant Church withdrew from its general conference and formed a church called simply “the Methodist Church” to continue “until such time as slavery be ended.” This separation lasted until 1877, when the two churches reunited under their former name, the Methodist Protestant Church.

The adoption of Para. 2553 by the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church represents only the second time in our long history that the General Conference has adopted a denomination-wide plan that provided for the orderly exit of churches. Both the 1844 Plan of Separation and Para. 2553 included provisions for the transfer of property. The 1844 Plan of Separation also included ministers and conferences wishing to separate as well as provisions for the disposition of commonly owned denominational assets, while Para. 2553 made no reference to any such rights, thus applying solely to right of local churches to disaffiliate.

Clergy wishing to leave The United Methodist Church would have to do so under other existing disciplinary paragraphs.

Gramling serves as secretary-treasurer of the Conference Historical Society and is currently the president of the SEJ Historical Society and a member of the SEJ Commission on Archives and History.



From the Archives
by Dr. Phillip Stone

Camak founds a college

Spartanburg Methodist College came about because of a clergyman who had been formed in a religious tradition that called for him to act when he saw a need.

The changing economy and society of early 20th century South Carolina had created a group that needed educational opportunities. Many men and women who came to work in textile mills had not been able to study much beyond elementary school. Methodism’s historic support of education, the advice of textile and other college leaders and a vision came together to create a new school.

David English Camak was born in Fairfield County in 1880 into a Methodist family. He attended Wofford’s Fitting School before enrolling at Wofford. He left after his junior year to teach, then came back in 1902 to finish his senior year. As a student, he cobbled shoes to help pay his way. Most sources suggest he had felt a call to the ministry some time before, and he was licensed to preach while in his senior year.

A class lecture by Wofford’s new president, Henry Nelson Snyder, about the challenges facing the textile workers got Camak’s attention. He explained that he felt God was calling him to do something for the “rising generation of cotton mill operatives educationally,” which then would help them “morally, religiously, socially and industrially.” Snyder and Camak here are fairly typical of the attitudes of town people toward the textile class, though I think they both meant well.

According to “Common Ties,” Dr. Katherine Cann’s history of SMC, Camak volunteered to teach Sunday school to adults at nearby Duncan Memorial Methodist Church. He realized how many of his students couldn’t read. Rather than turn him into some pontificating progressive, Camak was touched by the people he got to know. After graduating from Wofford in June 1903, he was appointed to a vacant position as junior preacher on the Union Circuit, where he had five mill churches. In December 1903, he requested a mill church for his appointment and was sent to Green Street Church in Union, serving the large Union Cotton Mill village. In his first year, he came up with the idea of a cooperative school for adult mill workers who had not had a chance to get an education.

Camak didn’t get much support at first. His own uncle, a leading clergyman, told him to “leave the factory folks alone.” Among many clergy, the bias against them was strong, and the sense was that Camak was wasting his time and talents on them. While the social gospel movement in Methodism may have inspired Camak’s vision, the conference was not enthusiastic about supporting it.

In 1911, Camak managed to get appointed to Duncan Memorial, where he was finally able to put his ideas into action. Camak knew from his earlier work that the support of the local mill executives was critical. The leadership of Spartan Mills was open to the idea. Camak wrote that owner Walter Montgomery received him graciously and offered assistance as he got started as a new pastor. Camak seized the opportunity, telling Montgomery about his idea for a cooperative school, where students would work in the mill one week and study the next. Montgomery immediately agreed, “Tell the young folks we’ll meet them half way.”

Montgomery provided a house in the village, at the corner of Farley and Brawley streets, rent-free and sent his carpenters over to make any modifications Camak needed for the house. The Textile Industrial Institute had its beginnings in the fall of 1911, and Camak would remain at the helm for the next decade.

And with the support of others in Spartanburg and in the conference, his school would continue to grow.

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

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Adult Lessons

by the Rev. Sharon Spann Gamble

Letters for living

Nov. 2

Live in Love

Focal Passage: 2 John

Background Text: Same

Key Verse: “Watch yourselves so that you don’t lose what we’ve worked for but instead receive a full reward” (2 John 1:8).

Purpose: To embody God’s command to love God and neighbor daily and resist voices that distract and deter us from God’s high and holy calling.

In the New Testament era, long-distance communication methods were much fewer than those available to us today. During this time period, letters were one of the main means of communications. 2 John is a letter with the message that those in the church to which it was addressed should continue to love God and neighbor daily and resist voices that sought to distract and deter them from God’s holy calling. This brief epistle is addressed to the second generation of the church as it approached the end of the first century, and is focused on Christian living—offering advice, warnings, encouragement, instruction, commendations and thanksgiving that continue to be meaningful and practical today.

The elder expresses joy that some of the gentlewoman’s “children were living in truth.” That implies that some were not living in the truth. The nature of the controversy that sparked the elder’s letter: “Many deceivers” insisted that while Jesus was wholly divine, Jesus had not come to earth as a human being. We get a sense of just how dangerous he regarded such people by the words, where he referred to “this kind of person” as “the deceiver and the antichrist.” “Deceiver” (in New Testament Greek) is a strong word, which means “one who seduces or corrupts.” However, it would be wise for us to keep in mind that not all Christian who disagree with us are agents of evil.

The elder was not calling for something new, and he stated plainly that loving one another was a command they’d had “from the beginning.” Nor was the elder asking his readers to translate “love one another” into sentimental warm feelings. Rather, the command called for obedience to Christ. As the elder said; “This is love: that we live according to Christ’s commands,” an interpretation of “love one another” they had also heard “from the beginning.”

The request for participants

to wear “ ... by our love” T-shirts on the last day of the 2025 Annual Conference as well as on the last day of the 2025 Pastor’s Convocation reflects our commitment to loving all people with selfless, sacrificial actions.

Nov. 9

Imitate What Is Good

Focal Passage: 3 John

Background Text: Same

Key Verse: “Dear friend, don’t imitate what is bad but what is good. Whoever practices what is good belongs to God. Whoever practices what is bad has not seen God” (3 John 11).

Purpose: To practice radical hospitality by imitating Jesus, our truth and life.

Although 3 John is the shortest book in the entire Bible by word count, the message contained has a long-lasting effect on the life of the Christian community. This letter is from a church leader identified as the elder to a fellow Christian named Gaius for the purpose of requesting him to serve as a host for the traveling missionaries in the area. The elder had previously written to the church about the need for hospitality for missionaries; however, a leader named Diotrephes had been hostile to the idea and even expelled from the church those who were in favor of showing hospitality. It appears that even the early church was not immune to having members who wielded their influence in toxic ways. The request that Gaius greet the members of his church on behalf of the elder reminds us that the church is not a building, but a people.

The letter of 3 John gives us a picture of church hospitality, which had special application to the growth of the early church. As a way to picture church hospitality, what comes to mind? My mind immediately recalls the words on many church signs that read, “All are welcome.” This statement highlights the congregation is inviting people to come as they are, even with whatever “baggage” they may carry. “Baggage,” as used here, does not mean luggage but feelings, beliefs, problems or past events that can make life difficult.

Creating a culture of intentional hospitality is far more than a simple courtesy. The way to practice radical hospitality is to imitate what is good; imitate Jesus—not impersonate Jesus. There’s a big difference between an imitator and an impersonator. Impersonators

About the Author

Gamble pastors the Pineville-St. Stephen Charge, Bowman. She is a member of the Advocate Board of Trustees.

go to great lengths to make people believe they are who they are not! imitators strive to live up to the challenge of being a reflection of the person they look up to—and in our case, that person is Jesus.

The ongoing question for us is: What might we do to expand and enhance our church’s ministry of hospitality?

Nov. 16

Live Faithfully

Focal Passage: Jude

Background Text: Same

Key Verse: “But you, dear friends: build each other up on the foundation of your most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit “ (Jude 20).

Purpose: To recommit ourselves to practices that build up the body of Christ and spur others on to greater love and faith

In the opening line of this epistle, the author identified himself as “Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and brother of James.” Many New Testament scholars assert that this Jude is one of Jesus’ four brothers. Since Jude mentions no specific church as the recipient for his letter, it was likely intended for general circulation among several churches.

Jude had been planning to write to the recipients on a happier topic but realized he needed to alert he church about the godless people who had slipped in among them. These people had turned the grace of our God into unrestrained immorality and denied Jesus Christ as Lord. Jude wanted to warn the faithful not to be taken in by this offensive twisting of the gospel and to urge them to “fight for the faith.” He wanted God’s mercy, peace and love for his readers as a counterbalance to the discomfort of the naysayers.

Every age has had godless people who sought to misdirect the faith of others for their own ends. For example, in our age, proponents of the “prosperity gospel” encourage people to give them money that most times line the pockets of leaders. Other so-called Christians don’t have the Holy Spirit but are worldly and practice various deviations that reject the authority of Jesus.

As background and to reiterate that God’s has the final word, Jude offered familiar examples from Israel’s history of what happened to those who thought they knew God’s will by their own judgment. The same encouragement Jude gave to his original readers is pertinent for us today. We, too,

must “recommit ourselves to practices that build up the body of Christ and spur others on to greater love and faith.”

Jude ended with a benediction calling for protection from the God who is able “to present you blameless.” The benediction invokes God’s power and mercy for us as we begin our week outside of the walls of the church—keeping us in the love of God and the need for us to show others mercy.

Nov. 23

Pray with Confidence

Focal Passage: 1 John 5:13-21

Background Text: 1 John 5

Key Verse: “We know that God’s Son has come and has given us understanding to know the one who is true. We are in the one who is true by being in his Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

Purpose: To manifest a greater confidence in prayer and the power of God to transform hearts and lives.

When I was a teenager, I went to my monthly youth group meeting where our leader asked a very pointed question about prayer. She asked how many of us pray; we all raised our hands. She preceded to ask a more probing question concerning why we pray. Up until that moment, I hadn’t thought much about why we prayed. I was reluctant to respond, and so were my peers. Conversely, I was not averse to posing some why questions of my own: Why do some people say, “I’ve tried everything else; the only thing left to do now is to pray”? Why is praying a last resort for these people? Why do so many adults tell people they are going to pray for them, but many times they do not?

While my youth leader may have used different terminology, her responses emulate the main purpose of this passage. The author of this epistle states his purpose in writing is simply this: “That you who believe in God’s Son will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life, the reality and not the illusion. And we are sure of this, ... if we really know he is listening when we talk [pray] to him and make our requests, then we can be sure that he will answer us.”

And without a doubt, prayer is a fundamental way to learn God’s will and align our hearts with God’s purposes and listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I have been a Christian for a lot longer time, and I have no doubt about how I would answer that question today. Jesus didn’t urge us to pray to make us feel guilty. Rather, he knew about prayer’s power to transform our hearts and lives. We will not all become prayer warriors. But the testimony of the Bible and the church through the centuries (whether we are talking about private

or public prayers) is that every Christian needs prayer and every Christian needs to pray.

Nov. 30

The Light Comes into the World

Focal Passage: John 1:1-18

Background Text: Genesis 1:1-5; Proverbs 8:22-23, 30-31; John 1:1-18

Key Verse: “What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn’t extinguish the light” (John 1:3-5).

Purpose: To celebrate and welcome the Light that has come into the world.

The first 18 verses of John are traditionally known as the Prologue, which “begins the Fourth Gospel with a hymn of celebration of Jesus’ origin and his coming into the world. This prologue helps us to better understand Jesus and his relationship to God. The Word is not a second God but is one with the Creator. “Life” and “light” are important words in John’s Gospel, and they symbolize ways in which God and the Word sustain creation. And the light shines in darkness, which stands for all that is opposed to God.

The TV series “CSI” (Crime Scene Investigation) began in 2000, and by 2007 it was watched by nearly 84 million viewers around the world. The premise behind a visual effect in the TV series was the notion that dark is the new light. According to Ron Rosenbaum, writing in *The New York Observer* in 2007, the lighting scheme used on CSI gave the series a visually dark effect because the show was shot using dark filter lens. In those episodes, much of the outdoor work of the crime scene investigators was done at night, but even when they were out in daylight, it was never bright.

This visual darkness on the show conveys (at least on a subconscious level) that the realm of crime and death in which the intrepid investigators had to work was one of moral darkness, where people had done awful and gruesome things to other people. That brings us to John 1, where darkness stands in contrast to the “light for all people.” The Gospel writer, declares, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn’t extinguish the light” (John 1:5).

Where do you see darkness in the world today? Where do you see the light of Jesus impacting that darkness? This week as you ponder the questions above, also celebrate that the light is still in the world and welcome this awesome blessing. Remember, it is important that we do not despair of the present while we wait for God’s future. Give thanks for Jesus, who shines in the darkness of our lives and brings us hope, restoration, and new life.

Happenings.

Event Calendar.

October

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

Oct. 31—Halloween

November

Native American Heritage Month

Nov. 1—All Saints’ Day

Nov. 1—LSM School (Greenville District), Travelers Rest UMC, Travelers Rest, 9 a.m.-12 p.m. \$35. Info: <https://tinyurl.com/gv-lsm-fall25>

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. 8—Fall Festival, Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Nov. 8—LSM School (Greenville District), Travelers Rest UMC, Travelers Rest, 9 a.m.-12 p.m. \$35. Info: <https://tinyurl.com/gv-lsm-fall25>

Nov. 8-9—LSM School (Charleston District), Stallville UMC, Summerville, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. (Sat.), 2:30-5 p.m. (Sun). Info: <https://tinyurl.com/ch-lsm-fall25>

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. 9—LSM School (Marion), Little River UMC, Little River, 2:30 p.m.-8 p.m. Info: <https://tinyurl.com/ma-lsm-fall25>

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>

Nov. 14-16—Immerse 2025, Asbury Hills Camp and Retreat Center, Cleveland, <https://www.umcsc.org/event/immerse-2025/>

Nov. 14-16—“Journey to Joy: Blessed, Not Stressed” Women’s Weekend, Lake Junaluska, N.C. More information: lakejunaluska.com/joy or call 800-222-4930.

Nov. 15—ERT Basic Training Session, Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

Nov. 15—ERT Renewal Training Session, Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

Nov. 15—LSM School (Greenville District), Travelers Rest UMC, Travelers Rest, 9 a.m.- 2 p.m. \$35. Info: <https://tinyurl.com/gv-lsm-fall25>

Nov. 16—LSM School (Marion), Little River UMC, Little River, 2:30 p.m.-8 p.m. Info: <https://tinyurl.com/ma-lsm-fall25>

Nov. 17—Advocate Community Listening Session (Charleston), Stallville UMC, Summerville, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Nov. 20—Universal Children’s Day

Nov. 20—Alston Wilkes Society Annual Meeting and Awards Luncheon, Seawell’s Restaurant, Columbia, Noon-2 p.m. <http://www.alstonwilkesociety.org/events>

Nov. 22—Follow Me Together Discipleship Workshop (Columbia, Greenwood, Rock Hill districts), Trinity UMC, Blythewood. Information: clynch@umcsc.org

Nov. 22—Follow Me Together Discipleship Workshop (Anderson, Greenville and Spartanburg districts), Lee Road UMC, Taylors. Information: clynch@umcsc.org

Nov. 23—United Methodist Student Day

Nov. 23—Christ the King/Reign of Christ Sunday

Nov. 23—Family and Friends, Bethel UMC, Edgemoor, 2 p.m.

Nov. 27—Thanksgiving Day

Nov. 27—26th Annual Community Thanksgiving Dinner, Hudson’s Seafood, Hilton Head Island, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. For more information: <https://communitythanksgiving.com>

Nov. 27-28—United Methodist Conference Center closed

Nov. 30—UM Student Day



Photos courtesy of the Rev. Arthur Holt

Small groups spawn ideas

Since taking the helm at Central UMC, Spartanburg, this summer, the Rev. Bryan Pigford has been meeting with small groups of church members in homes and the church parlor. The groups brainstorm ideas about where the Spirit is calling the church in the future and also discuss what led each person to join Central.

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Children’s Lessons

by the Rev. Meg Cook

Christ the King Sunday

Date: Christ the King Sunday, Nov. 23
Scripture: Luke 1:68-79

Time Frame: Three minutes
Props: A cardboard or construction paper crown (think traditional kingly and a simple crown made with peace signs and hearts around it). Noisemakers or pom-poms, etc., for a parade.

Say: Good morning, friends! Today is a special day called Christ the King Sunday. What do you think of when you hear the word “king”? (Pause for answers—castles, crowns, money, etc.) You are so smart! I think of a crown when I think of a king. (Show the kingly crown.) Most kings wear fancy crowns like this one. They sit on thrones and tell people what to do. They want to be in charge.

But Jesus is a different kind

of king. He didn’t wear a shiny crown or sit on a golden throne. Jesus’ crown was made of peace and love. He showed people how to care for others, forgive and share God’s light. I think of a crown like this one. (Show the heart crown.) This is a crown of love and caring.

In our Bible story, Zechariah, a prophet of God, sang a song to thank God for sending Jesus. Zechariah said Jesus would bring light to the darkness and guide us into the path of peace. That’s the kind of king Jesus is. A king who brings peace! A king who brings love!

You know, when a king comes to town, people cheer and celebrate, right? (Offer a mischievous look towards the kids.) Ask: Do you think we should? (Pause and hmm like you are really thinking

about it.) I think we should. Let’s have a parade to celebrate Jesus, the King of Peace and Love! In fact, I already have noise makers and props. (Pull out bin or bag of props.)

Do: Have the children march around the sanctuary aisles waving or clapping and repeating: “Jesus is King of Peace and Love!” (Encourage the congregation to join in, too. If you have a good rapport with the musicians, ask for parade music.)

Say: That was so fun and joyful. We celebrate Jesus because he rules with love, not with bossiness or power, but with kindness and peace. That’s the kind of king we want to follow! And the kind of king we celebrate. Phew, that was great.

Will you pray with me?
Prayer: Dear God (echo), thank you for Jesus (echo), our King of Love (echo). Help us follow him (echo) and share his peace (echo). Amen (echo).

Cook, the pastor of Grace United Methodist Church, Columbia, is the author of two children’s books from the Advocate Press: “Herbert the Hippo” and “Herbert the Hippo In the Moment.” Find them at <https://advocatesc.org/books>.

LEGAL
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As he explained, "We are asking the court to analyze the facts and the law that would apply in a situations such as this and declare that the conference and members of the local church who remain loyal to The United Methodist Church have first rights on the property of the local church."

As of Oct. 18, Becker said, they had successfully resolved one of those disputes, regarding Grace UMC, Pickens. He said the defendants in that case agreed to settle the matter in a way that was beneficial for the conference and for the local members who remain loyal to the UMC.

Becker noted that the lawsuits have nothing to do with First Amendment freedoms of religion, belief or association; those are guaranteed under the Constitution. It's about the property.

"What's at issue is who—between the parties to the dispute—gets to keep and control the local property, both real and personal, of the local church," he said.

That personal property includes things like bank accounts, money, furniture and other things of that nature.

The first lawsuit of this nature was filed in November 2024, Becker said.

He shared that the "other side" filed a lawsuit in the South Carolina Supreme Court seeking for them to take over case and decide issues about it in what is called "original jurisdiction," and in response the conference filed a motion asking the court instead to appoint a single trial court judge to have jurisdiction over every one of the cases.

"I'm happy to report the Supreme Court granted our motion," Becker said. The court's chief justice ordered 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. Becker said they expect to appear before Gibbons Nov. 24 for a status conference.

"We expect the first order of business will be hearing motions to dismiss our lawsuits," he said. "Assuming that motion is denied, then we will proceed to conduct some discovery and potentially have pretrial motions."

How long it all takes will depend a lot on what the other side will do legally.

"Litigation is not a quick and simple way of resolving civil disputes," Becker said. However, "It is the best way we have in this country—the model for justice—but it is consuming."

He pledged to provide the best legal representation they can and to do so efficiently and economically to ultimately obtain justice.

The conference released the list of 37 UMCs it is currently in litigation with because, as they state, their "leaders have taken steps to depart the denomination in violation of The Book of Discipline." These 37 churches are:

- Aldersgate UMC, Greenwood (Greenwood District)
• Andrews Chapel UMC, Florence (Florence District)
• Bethel UMC, Bethune (Hartsville District)
• Bogansville UMC, Jonesville (Spartanburg District)
• Boiling Springs UMC, Lexington (Columbia District)
• Calhoun Falls UMC, Calhoun Falls



James Becker, joined by Elizabeth Black, shares an update with the annual conference about the litigation the conference is involved with surrounding 70 churches wanting to leave the UMC.

Screenshot by Jessica Brodie

- (Anderson District)
• Dickson Memorial UMC, Townville (Anderson District)
• Duncan Memorial UMC, Georgetown (Marion District)
• East Bethel UMC, Cameron (Orangeburg District)
• Emma Gray Memorial UMC, Woodruff (Greenville District)
• Eutawville UMC, Eutawville (Orangeburg District)
• Folly Beach UMC, Folly Beach (Charleston District)
• Fork Creek UMC, Jefferson (Hartsville District)
• Fort Lawn UMC, Fort Lawn (Rock Hill District)
• Good Shepherd UMC, Lancaster (Rock Hill District)
• Gordon Memorial UMC, Winnsboro (Columbia District)
• Hopewell UMC, Lancaster (Rock Hill District)
• Jackson Grove UMC, Travelers Rest (Greenville District)
• Lupo Memorial UMC, Greenwood (Greenwood District)
• McLeod UMC, Eastover (Columbia District)
• Panola UMC, Greenwood (Greenwood District)
• Philadelphia UMC, York (Rock Hill District)
• Pinewood UMC, Pinewood (Florence District)
• Providence UMC, Holly Hill (Orangeburg District)
• Rehoboth UMC, Greenwood (Greenwood District)
• Simpsonville UMC, Simpsonville (Greenville District)
• St. James UMC, Laurens (Greenwood District)
• St. John UMC, Graniteville (Greenwood District)
• St. Paul UMC, Florence (Florence District)
• Tabor UMC, Easley (Anderson District)
• Trinity UMC, Bamberg (Orangeburg District)
• Trinity UMC, Lancaster (Rock Hill District)
• Trinity UMC, Laurens (Greenwood District)
• Union UMC, Cope (Orangeburg District)
• Wesley Memorial UMC, Charleston (Charleston District)
• West Bethel UMC, St. Matthews (Orangeburg District)
• Zion UMC, Lancaster (Rock Hill District)
The conference stated 32 more UMCs have notified the conference of their intent to separate from the denomination, and these churches have been referred to the conference's lawyers for their recommended actions. As the litigation has not yet been filed, the names of these churches are not yet public record.
The legal case involving one church (Grace UMC, Pickens) has been resolved, with the church continuing as a United Methodist church.

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