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# Help for the hungry

## UMCs step up with food assistance across South Carolina

By Jessica Brodie

With the food assistance hardship because of the government shut-down and other economic difficulties, many United Methodist churches throughout South Carolina stepped up to bridge the gap this fall. Not only did they offer their regular, ongoing

food ministries, but some significantly increased support and even hosted additional special collection drives.

The shutdown, which lasted Oct. 1-Nov. 12, caused food shortages by disrupting federal nutrition programs like SNAP and WIC, freezing USDA food purchases and reducing food safety inspections, causing difficulty

not only for the people but also for large-scale food pantries like Harvest Hope from the vast demand.

As churches heard about the shortages, they responded with compassion and love.

For example, one church, Wesley UMC, Ladson, held a drive-through

**See "Hungry," Page 8**



Photos by Matt Brodie

### Gala raises needed funds for Killingsworth women

Roughly 400 people headed to Seawell's Nov. 13 for Killingsworth's annual gala and fashion show. Proceeds support the community residence for women who are emerging from crisis situations. Clockwise from top, former Killingsworth resident Alliah shares her success story; Bishop Leonard Fairley and his wife, Dawn, walk the runway as fashion show models; current Killingsworth residents Stormy, Cassie and Harmony share a smile during the dinner. See more, Page 7.

## New ministry helps local churches aid homeless families in Spartanburg

By Jessica Brodie

SPARTANBURG—Churches in South Carolina's Upstate are working together to open their doors and their hearts to families experiencing homelessness in Spartanburg County, and it's transforming members of one host—St. Paul United Methodist Church.

Called A Way Home, the newly launched program provides short-term shelter and support, helping families move from crisis to stability through safe shelter, daily support and case management services.

**See "A Way Home," Page 9**

## Healing Guatemala to launch major expansion for Hospital Bethesda

By Jessica Brodie

QUETZALTENANGO, Guatemala—Healing Guatemala has a God-sized dream, and they are calling on South Carolina United Methodists to join them in helping to achieve it.

Dr. Luke Rhyee, a South Carolina elder who founded Healing Guatemala, said the ministry is embarking on a plan to extend Hospital Bethesda, adding a concrete metal building spanning 27,000 square feet and consisting of six stories, each measuring 4,500 square feet.

Rhyee said this project is essential for Bethesda to

**See "Hospital," Page 9**

## All four UMC constitutional amendments approved, take effect

By Jessica Brodie

United Methodists around the world have collectively approved four new amendments to the denomination's constitution, one advancing worldwide regionalization.

Regionalization is a major restructuring that will enable different geographic regions in The United Methodist Church to have equal decision-making authority.

On Nov. 5, the Council of Bishops announced that all four constitu-

tional amendments were ratified by a more-than-two-thirds majority, which was required for them to be officially approved and take effect. All received more than 91 percent "yes" votes

**See "Amendments," Page 9**





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

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

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

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

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

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# Bishop Fairley to release memoir this month

Just in time for Christmas (and Christmas gifts), the Advocate Press will release the riveting, inspiring and heartwrenching coming-of-age account of South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard E. Fairley.

In his memoir, “Silver Linings,” Fairley recounts his upbringing through the eyes of a young boy who discovers that even the unpredictable nature of everyday life is a woven tapestry held together by God’s providence.

Fairley grew up as one of nine children to a single mother in Laurinburg, North Carolina. And while he ex-



perienced a great deal of suffering and difficulty, times

that caused him to question life’s circumstances and even faith, Fairley shares how he learned ways to straighten out the question marks of his life into the exclamation points of purpose.

“I will never accept injustices such as poverty, oppression and racism as natural realities of life,” Fairley writes in the preface. “I have gleaned wonderful lessons through the joys, laughter, tears, heartaches, trials and friendships shared in these pages. It is, was and will be these lessons that remind me never to allow the unfairness of life to strip me of a hope that is rooted

in God’s desire to make life worth living for all his children.

“I hope that this work will be of help to people who have allowed darkness to blind them to the many threads of light that make life worth living. It is my hope that it will restore hope in those who have lost the ability to believe in silver linings.”

Learn about the upbringing that shaped this man of God into the leader, Christ-follower, and hope-bringer he is today.

“Silver Linings” will be available in early December from the *Advocate* as an ebook and paperback; find it at https://advocatepress.org.

# Advocate honored with two journalism awards from UMAC

The *Advocate* has been honored with two journalism awards this fall, these from the United Methodist Association of Communicators.

At the UMAC annual meeting in Octo-

ber in Leawood, Kansas, the 189-year-old newspaper was honored as the first place winner in the Newspaper & Magazine category. As well, *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie won third place in the Feature

Article category for “A Church and Then Some” (March 2024).

The *Advocate* has won more than 150 journalism excellence awards during its tenure.

# Men’s retreat to build bridges across generations

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—South Carolina men will gather in February for a conference-wide spiritual retreat designed to help them build bridges across generations.

Held at Journey United Methodist Church in tandem with a Boy Scouts Jamboree that weekend, the Feb. 20-21 event will focus on passing faith and wisdom between generations.

With the theme “Building Bridges Across Generations,” the event is inspired by Psalm 145:4, “One generation com-

mends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts,” and Luke 22:31-32, where Jesus says, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (NIV).

“I’m very excited about the event,” said Dyron V. Anderson, president of the South Carolina Conference United Methodist Men. “We have a special emphasis on trying to regain youth and younger men, as we’re missing a lost generation in many of our churches.”

The event kicks off that Friday with a daylong golf tournament at The Spur at Northwoods Golf Course, followed by a “Cigars and Scriptures” fellowship event at 6 p.m. Friday at Journey.

Saturday starts around 8 a.m. with a full day of preaching, teaching and praise.

Speakers include South Carolina Bishop Leonard Fairley, along with the Revs. Tyler Strange and Martin Quick, United Methodist pastors and authors. Other guest speakers include the Revs. Jason Wilson, Matthew Alexander and Mallory Forte Nickerson.

The cost is \$90 for the golf tournament, \$20 for Cigars and Scriptures, and \$65 for the main event. Local church sponsorships are available for \$300, while major church sponsorships are available for \$600.

Anderson said he and the other event leaders are very excited about the new challenges and opportunities before them as they move men’s ministry forward and continue to build and grow their outreach and connection.

To learn more or register, visit https://www.umcsc.org/men.

# Lay leadership event set for January

On the heels of the fall’s successful clergy leadership convocation, the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church is gearing up for an event designed for laity.

The Lights, Camera, Action Lay Leadership Convocation is set for Jan. 9-10, 2026, at Journey UMC, Columbia. Registration is now open at https://www.umcsc.org/lead.

Participants can register to attend both Friday and Saturday, or Saturday only. There is no cost for this event, and a limited number of \$50 reimbursement scholarships are available to help cover hotel expenses.

Because of limited space, the event is open to one person in lay leadership from each local church who may attend in person, though others are invited to join online. Registration is required for both in-person attendance and online viewing.

Leaders who are invited to attend include church council chairs, lay leaders, lay members to Annual Conference, Staff Parish Relations Committee chairs, finance or trustees chairs, church treasurers, United Methodist Men or United Women in Faith presidents, young adult representatives, youth ministry representatives or nominations chairs.

The event begins Friday night with “Tailgating with Bishop Fairley,” complete with barbecue and fixings, as well as a performance by comedian/speaker Jody Fuller, all from 6:30-8:30 p.m. (check-in begins at 5:30 p.m.) A full day of programming is planned for 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, with check-in starting at 8 a.m.

The Lights, Camera, Action theme focuses on those three aspects. “Lights” refers to being seen and present, shining the gospel clearly and widely both online and on the ground. “Camera” refers to the mission and vision—where are we pointing our lens, and how do we refocus on discipleship and community impact? “Action” refers to engaging, equipping and expanding, moving strategically and boldly with purpose and power.

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



## Men elect first Black president

South Carolina MenNMinistry has elected its first African-American president in its history. On Oct. 4 at their annual business meeting at Windsor UMC, Columbia, the men officially elected Dyron Anderson as their new president. Anderson, a native of Mayesville, is a member of Mount Moriah UMC in the Hartsville District, where the Rev. John Dicks Sr. serves as pastor. The men also elected Bob James as vice president, Charles Shipman as treasurer and Rolland Fitch as secretary and scouting coordinator. “I’m thankful to stand on the shoulders of giants who have gone before me,” Anderson said. Here, Anderson (left) shares a smile with Bishop Leonard Fairley at the meeting. The men also recognized former president Kenny Bingham and presented him with a lifetime achievement award.



## Dr. Joseph E. Heyward honored with the Order of the Palmetto Award

By Dr. Martin Luther Quick

FLORENCE—On the evening of Oct. 23, Cumberland United Methodist Church was filled with warmth and admiration as community members gathered to honor Dr. Joseph E. Heyward with the esteemed Order of the Palmetto Award.

This ceremony recognized Heyward’s outstanding contributions to the state of South Carolina and his unwavering commitment to enhancing the lives of those around him.

As the sun set over Florence, the event commenced at 7 p.m., drawing an enthusiastic crowd of friends, family, colleagues and local leaders. The atmosphere was charged with appreciation as speakers took to the podium to share personal stories and reflections on Heyward’s career and community service.

Heyward, a respected figure in the Florence community, has dedicated countless hours to various initiatives aimed at improving public health, education and social welfare. His efforts have made a significant difference in the lives of many residents, inspiring others to engage in community service.

Several speakers highlighted Heyward’s innovative approaches to problem-solving and his ability to unite people for a common cause. Among those who shared their thoughts were State Rep. the Rev. Terry Alexander (District 59), who commended Heyward for his unwavering commitment to public service; Janice Howard from Florence Public School District One, who spoke to his dedication to education and youth empowerment; and Ryan Christopher Heyward, who shared anecdotes reflecting Heyward’s values and compassion.

LaTasha Brand, vice president for student life and dean of students at Francis Marion University, praised Heyward’s mentorship and influence on students. Reginald F. Derry from



Heyward, second from right, received the award Oct. 23.

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. highlighted Heyward’s leadership and community impact. Alethia S. King from Cumberland UMC expressed gratitude for Heyward’s contributions to the church and its mission. Pastor Martin Luther Quick emphasized the spiritual and communal significance of Heyward’s work.

The Order of the Palmetto, South Carolina’s highest civilian honor, was presented to Heyward in recognition of his exemplary service. The award symbolizes the state’s appreciation for individuals who have made meaningful contributions to society and improved the quality of life for its citizens.

The ceremony concluded with a heartfelt standing ovation for Heyward as he stepped forward to accept the Order of the Palmetto. In his acceptance speech, he expressed gratitude to those who have supported him throughout his journey, emphasizing that this award reflects the collective efforts of many.

The turnout underscored the community’s deep respect for Heyward. The evening served not only as a celebration of his achievements but also as a reminder of the importance of community engagement and service. As Heyward continues his work in the Florence community, the award stands as a testament to his dedication and positive impact.

## Inclusion Team to help UMCSC ‘embrace empathy, praise diversity’

By Dan O’Mara

Bishop Leonard Fairley has named the members of the newly formed South Carolina Conference Inclusion Team, which was created by the 2025 Annual Conference when it convened in June.

According to the resolution approved by the Annual Conference, the Inclusion Team is tasked with:

- Supporting LGBTQ+ laity, clergy and candidates for licensed/ordained ministry with community-building, faith and leadership development, solidarity and advocacy.
- Centering and amplifying the voices and experiences of the LGBTQ+ community, especially those who have been marginalized by church and society, most notably, transgender and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) persons.
- Monitoring Annual Conference committees and policies, as well as the status and needs of candidates and clergy under appointment, to ensure justice and equity on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and self-expression and to report findings to the Annual Conference.
- Curating, creating and sharing resources to equip local churches for relationship building and continuing education and meaningful ministry with and for LGBTQ+ church and community members.
- Collaborating with ministry-specific areas, particularly children’s, youth and campus ministry, to safely and most effectively be in ministry with and for LGBTQ+ people of all ages.

The members of the Inclusion Team are as follows:

- The Rev. Fran Elrod, Columbia District Superintendent
- The Rev. Meg Wilkes, a full deacon and minister of discipleship at Clemson United Methodist Church
- The Rev. Rachel Headden, a provisional elder and associate minister at Bethany UMC in Charleston
- The Rev. Ellis White, a full elder and senior pastor of Edisto Fork UMC in Orangeburg
- Dr. Jim Lane, a member of Washington Street UMC and co-chair of the church’s Social Justice Team
- The Rev. Meegian Gossard, a full elder and associate pastor at Lexington UMC

## Conference hoping for 75 percent in apportionments for 2025

By Jessica Brodie

As the year-end financial push ramps up, conference financial leaders are hoping to achieve three-fourths of their budgeted goal for the year.

Leaders reported that as of Oct. 31, of the \$11.7 million in ministry funding budgeted for 2025, South Carolina United Methodist churches have paid almost \$6.8 million of the total, or 57.96 percent. If they include the apportionment rebate from the Conference Council on Finance and Administration because of the separation fees from churches that separated from the denomination in 2024, the total is roughly \$7.6 million, or 64.79 percent.

“We appear to be on target to collect 75 percent for 2025,” Conference Treasurer Beth Westbury said. “This 75 percent rate includes amounts received

from separating churches. When you add in the amount paid by the apportionment rebate (approximately 7 percent), the total amount of budget that is projected to be collected is 82 percent.”

Of the 714 churches that pay apportionments in the conference, 25 percent (177 churches) have already paid 100 percent of their apportionments, while 29 percent (205 churches) have paid nothing toward apportionments. Last year at this time, of the 836 churches total, 37 percent had paid 100 percent while 18 percent had paid zero.

So far, the Walterboro District is leading the others at 79.55 percent in percentage collected as of Oct. 31, followed by the Marion District (76.83 percent) and Columbia District (69.25 percent).

The last day to pay apportionments for 2025 is Thursday, Jan. 15, 2026. The

payment must be in the treasurer’s office by 4 p.m.

Westbury said the postmark is not the deciding factor and the treasurer’s office is not responsible for delivery

delays regardless of which carrier is used. They can accept wires if necessary. If paying by Vanco, the payment needs to be initiated by 3 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 14.

### Advocate survey to help newspaper improve

How can the *Advocate* address your news needs better? How can we improve generally? What do you like (and don’t like)?

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

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

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

To take the confidential survey, go to <https://advocatesc.org/survey>.

Advocate.

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Editorial  
by Jessica Brodie

A heart for the least

As we go to press on the *Advocate* this month, my heart tugs toward Advent—the holy work we do as we prepare for Christmas and the celebration of Christ’s birth.

For me, Advent looks different in different seasons of my life. For many years, I was too caught up in being the mom of four young kids to really ponder this time of quiet, this necessity of drawing close and readying myself not only for the celebration of the birth of the Lord of my life, but also for his return one day in the future. Thankfully, over the years, I’ve felt the Lord speak into my soul about the importance of stillness, silence and holy preparation.

This year I’m finding my soul steered in a new direction once more—not only to contemplate the events of Christ birth, but also what happened not long after. We’re told in Scripture that Jesus lived during a time of deep unrest, and his family was forced to flee their homeland and become refugees in Egypt, immigrants in another land. And Egypt took them in, allowing them to stay and have this critical time of refuge. I’m certain it wasn’t easy for anyone, and I’m certain resettling far from home wasn’t what Jesus’ parents wanted for their beloved young son.

But they did what they needed to do to survive.

My heart settles on this as I consider how many other countless souls are living just this way today. Perhaps they, too, would love to stay in their homeland, but because of unrest or persecution or economic turmoil, they’re forced to seek shelter in a strange land, doing whatever they must to survive.

Just as our Lord did.

There is a lot of talk economically, socially, even emotionally about immigrants in this nation—legal and not. This year, I feel called to remember and to deeply consider the truth that our savior was also a refugee and an immigrant. I feel called to remember that, in a sense, we are all immigrants, strangers in a strange land far from the perfect kingdom of God—our true and righteous home. I feel called to open my heart and mind with renewed empathy toward my refugee neighbor.

And I pray that you will join me in this opening, this empathy, this understanding.

Instead of judging, let’s try to understand their experience and what they must endure. Let’s try to imagine what we might do if it was our reality, too.

We are commanded to have a heart of love, mercy and compassion. Jesus said that when we love “the least of these,” that is how we love him (Matthew 25:40).

This season, as we prepare for the birth of Christ, let us allow our hearts to open wide in understanding and empathy for the struggling around us.

We are far more alike than many of us suspect. And when we live, think and do with that understanding at our core, the world becomes a little more like heaven on earth.

Thanks be to God.

Reflection topic for January *Advocate*

How can your church show love for our refugee neighbors? Share with the *Advocate* at [oped@advocatesc.org](mailto:oped@advocatesc.org) (include church name/city).



Bishop’s Column  
by Bishop Leonard Fairley

What do you see?

You cannot unsee what you’ve seen, or in Yoda speech, “unsee you cannot.” So the question becomes what do you see?

“And when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid hands on him, he asked him, ‘Can you see anything?’ and the man looked up and said, ‘I can see people, but they look like trees, walking’” (Mark 8:23-24).

The rest of the story says that Jesus touched the man a second time, and his sight was restored and he saw everything clearly.

True thanksgiving begins when we see the world and each other through the eyes of Jesus Christ. The beauty of creation shines through. The light of hope outshines despair; love outshines the darkness of hatred.

The sheer beauty of diversity bursts forth in every corner of creation—from the duck-billed platypus to different hues of human skin color created in the heart of God—beautiful in their own right. And that, my friends, is worth giving thanks for.

When we see through the eyes of Jesus, we embrace empathy and praise the beauty of diversity inherent in all creation with hearts of thanksgiving and joy.

Yet in some circles, diversity and empathy have become trigger words of derision and demonization in our polarized and divisive culture. It is impossible to see clearly without some degree of empathy.

There is a difference between sympathy and empathy. Dr. Erin Leonard describes it this way: “When a person has empathy, they resonate with how the other person feels as a fellow and equal

human being. Sympathy is pity. When someone pities someone else, they are looking down on that person.”

Have our eyes become blinded by our own self-righteous ideologies and unhealthy loyalties until we cannot see or acknowledge that creation is filled with beautiful, awe-inspiring diversity? It is the way God created nature and wired us, each of us uniquely shaped by God’s design.

What if we truly saw each other as persons who are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14)?

We are living in a season where it is easy to buy into the false assumption that empathy and diversity are weaknesses not to be tolerated. What if we saw each person and ourselves as uniquely inspired creations of God who are loved and created for a specific purpose and not as random accidents. I don’t believe God created anything by accident. I do believe it is how we choose to see God’s creation that makes the difference.

I pray that we choose not to look down on each other, but instead give thanks to God for counting each of us redeemable and worthy of reconciliation and salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” -John 3:16-17.

Now that is worth an “Amen!” or a “Hallelujah!” and a praise of thanksgiving. Can you see it?

Correction.

In the photo and cutline titled “Uno!” (November *Advocate*), we incorrectly identified the name

of the Wesley Foundation. The correct name of the group is the Methodist Student Network.

We apologize for this error and, as always, strive to set the record straight.

Letters to the Editor.

**Shame on us!**

Former President Bush offered to us the infamous, “Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me!” statement. In 2017, we had the dubious honor of meeting face to face, on public display, with what we had been hearing and reading for years. We were too slow, too dense or too in sync with what we were witnessing, so we ignored the truth of the matter.

The truth was that this was not an episode of “The Apprentice,” to be laughed at when some unsuspected play character heard, “You’re fired!” We had become anesthetized by the notion that the strong and powerful had every right to exploit the weak and vulnerable. The courts have sanctioned it again and again, and we have blessed it over and over again.

Many of us knew that it was real, but for some misinformed thinking we secretly or openly harbored, it played into our narrative. However, the gallows we allowed to be built for others are being

prepared for us. Some noted, “When we dig ditches for others, be sure to dig two—one for us.” It is a known fact that what goes around comes around, like a boomerang. All over this country, every American from every ethnicity, religion and background is crying.

Everyone, that is, except the political perpetrators, who go along to get along with every lie, misdeed, injustices, unlawful act, calling wrong “right” and right “wrong.” In the same breath, they’re confessing the God of creation as Lord while trembling in their boots and polluting their pants. That includes Judge Roberts and his “Supremes,” who sing unconstitutional songs, in my opinion.

How gullible to trust professional criminals to man the Treasury. We have been fooled repeatedly. Shame on us!

*Rev. Joseph Abram Jr., retired  
St. Matthews*

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Advocate

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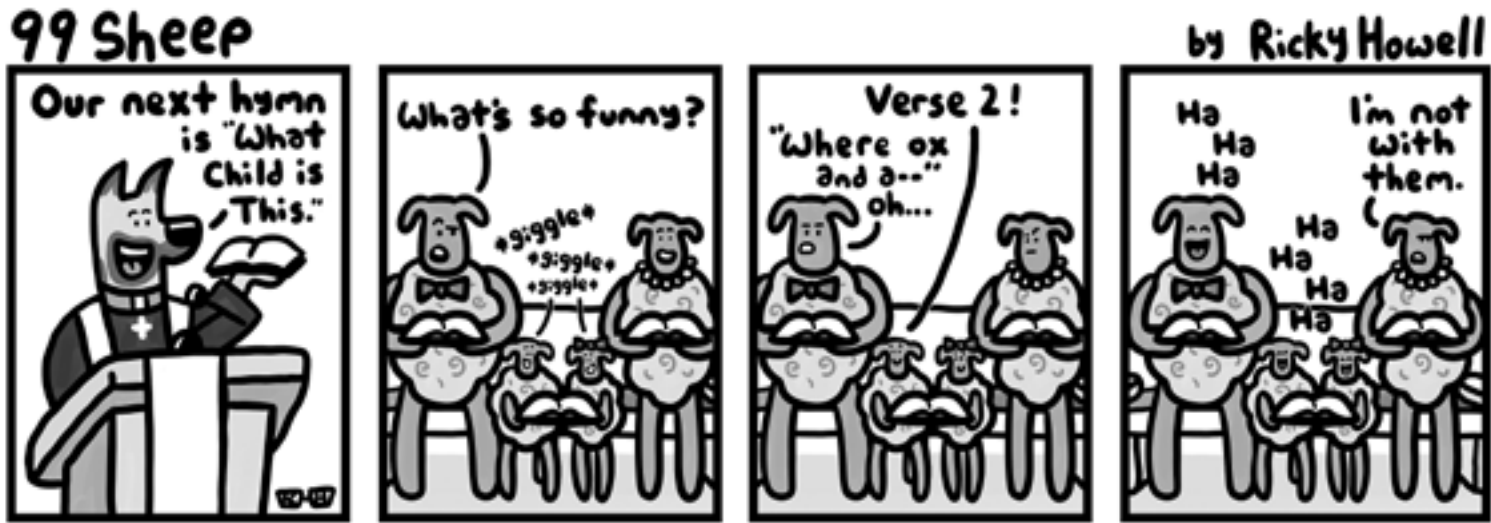
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Advocate



Commentary  
by the Rev. Steven L. Brown

All he could remember

All he could remember, when he began to come to, was walking down a side street, a shortcut he sometimes used, and then the feeling of falling. Slipping on some ice.

As he became more conscious, he also became aware of the pain shooting up from his leg and flaring across his back. He couldn't get up! Lying on his back, his head throbbing, he tried to get a look at himself. The red velvet pants and white fur trim were covered with mud and there looked like a gash on the boot on his twisted left leg. Oh, no, his Santa suit was ruined! What would Macy's do? He couldn't afford to have it fixed. Here was a Santa on Christmas Eve flat on his back on some side street with no one in sight.

He thought, "What a Christmas this will be—if I even get home."

He heard the sound of a car approaching fast and then the squeal of brakes as the cab swerved by and stopped.

"Did you hit him?" said a voice from the back seat.

"I don't think so," said the driver.

"Good, then let's hurry. We might still make the beginning of the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall.

"But what about—" the driver began.

"Drive on," the man interrupted, "I don't have time for this tonight. Besides, who's paying you?"

The injured Santa couldn't lift up his head to see, but he heard the cab drive off into the night.

Whether it was hours or minutes later, he wasn't sure, but he heard the sounds of approaching footsteps on the sidewalk.

"Look, Momma, it's Santa Claus!" squealed the child.

"Hush, Billy," said the mother, "It's not the real Santa. It's just some bum who found a Santa suit and thought he could take advantage of people like us to give him money for whiskey."

"But he looks hurt," exclaimed the older daughter.

"He's probably just passed out from the alcohol" explained the mother, "Come on now. Hurry. We don't have time to stop or we'll be late for church. Come on, I said. He'll be okay when he sobers up."

He listened as the footsteps quickly grew fainter and turned to silence.

Time passed but he didn't know how long. He didn't even realize someone was there until he felt the young men trying to lift his arms. He saw the bandanas and earrings and then the "Cribs" in red letters on each jacket.

"I don't have any money," he stammered in fear, "My wallet's empty, I swear it!"

"Relax, Santa-man," said the youth by his shoulder. "We didn't come for your wallet. We came to help you."

"We were on our way to shoot some hoops and saw you lying there," added the teen at his feet. "We don't have much but we put it together to get you cab fare to the hospital. They'll be here in a minute."

As they loaded him into the cab, he said, "Wait. I'd like to give you all something for helping me."

"No way, Santa-man," piped up the youth. "This is our gift to you 'cause, you know, man—it's Christmas!"

And Jesus said, "Which one was a neighbor to him? Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:25-37).

*Brown is Marion District superintendent.*



Commentary  
by the Rev. Amiri B. Hooker

All in the same muddy water

As we come to the close of this year, Mr. Rogers is still on my mind. I am remembering how, in 1969, Fred Rogers quietly preached one of the most profound sermons ever televised. Sitting beside Officer François Clemmons, a Black man, Mr. Rogers invited him to rest his feet in a small wading pool. No podium, no pulpit—just two men, one White, one Black, cooling their feet in shared water.

In a time when many public pools across America were still segregated, that moment became a baptism of hope.

Officer Clemmons wasn't just a character; he was a witness. When Rogers dried Clemmons' feet with his own towel, it was an echo of Jesus kneeling to wash the feet of his disciples—a symbol of humility, equality and shared humanity. Rogers could have drained the pool to avoid controversy, but instead he filled it with grace.

Today, as our nation wades through political division, moral fatigue and social fragmentation, the church is called to return to that same water. To be a good disciple is to be a good neighbor—especially when it's inconvenient. Discipleship in this season of unrest means refusing to "drain the pool" because we disagree or because someone we fear might want to share the blessing. Too often, like those towns Heather McGhee describes in "The Sum of Us," we destroy our own common good just to deny it to someone else. In Montgomery, Alabama, officials literally poured dirt into their public pools rather than integrate them—robbing their own

children of joy. The lesson is painful and prophetic: racism doesn't just poison others; it impoverishes us all.

The same spirit of fear and competition still tempts us today—to close our hearts, shut our churches or hoard our resources in the name of purity or power. But discipleship calls for a different posture. Jesus didn't build walls; he built tables. He didn't drain the water; he offered living water. Jesus shared a manager with the house-less and SNAP recipients of his time.

Being a disciple in 2025 means we must resist the tribalism that defines our politics and our pews. It means stepping back into the muddy water together—sharing life, faith and even discomfort. It means realizing that we cannot heal what we refuse to touch, and we cannot love what we refuse to share.

We need more Officer Clemmonses—people willing to sit at the water's edge and trust that God's grace is deep enough for all of us. And we need fewer undercover ICE agents and King Friday 13ths—those royal voices that rule from castles and ballrooms of comfort, afraid of what equality might cost.

When the world grows cynical, the disciple must stay compassionate. When government fails, the neighbor must keep serving. When fear tells us to drain the pool, faith says fill it again. Because we are, indeed, all in the same muddy water—called by the same Christ who still whispers across the waves, "Love one another, as I have loved you."

*Hooker is congregational specialist for Florence and Marion districts.*

LETTERS  
From Page 4

**The Prophet's Whistle**  
One of the oldest instruments in biblical times to give a warning was the trumpet. As 1 Corinthians 14:8 says, "Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?" (NIV).  
A warning is to put us on

guard or notify in advance. What is the sound of a warning today? It is the whistle. American citizens are using "whistles" to give warnings of ICE raiding neighborhoods, homes, grocery stores, children schools and Walmart parking lots.  
Charlotte, North Carolina, is being terrorized, as are other cities and more to come. Reporter Jacob Soboroff says, "It is bonkers, frankly, when

you see what is happening in Charlotte yourself." These are our neighbors being hurt.  
On Monday, Nov. 19, 40,000 students were fearful to go to school. Parents are scared for the safety of their children. ICE is not there to be peace and security but fear and injustice.  
First United Methodist Church in Charlotte is training citizens to respond. There were more than 400 people on a Monday night for training.

Are UMC churches in South Carolina prepared to do this? The presence of Christians with no guns facing the covered face of evil with just whistles is God in action. In some cities, Catholic priests are being arrested and wounded. Pope Leo says, "Immigrants are children of God." ICE is not going after the worst criminals but innocent Americans.  
The prophet's whistle is the warning sound of evil and

danger ahead. Ezekiel 33:9 says, "But if you do not warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sins, but you will have saved yourself."  
Thank God for these brave Christians for their whistles. Read also 1 Corinthians 10:6-11 and 2 Corinthians 15:52.  
The trumpet will sound. Do we hear the warning?  
*Rev. John Culp, retired West Columbia*





Humanity  
Behind Bars  
by the Rev. Nichole  
Middleton

Cost of inconsistency

Contrary to widely held belief, there is a quiet rhythm behind the fence—a rhythm that brings order and meaning to life inside. When that rhythm skips a beat, when noise replaces the steady pulse of routine, something vital has gone awry.

In the quiet rhythm of prison life, small things carry great meaning—a class that meets as scheduled, a counselor who shows up, a promise kept. These consistencies whisper that hope is alive, that growth is possible, that someone believes their future matters.

But what happens when that rhythm breaks?

During a recent government shutdown, I sat across from a man who had finally reached the top of the waiting list for a workforce training course—a class he had hoped to take for years. Just as the instructor—a contractor—was ready to enter the institution, the shutdown halted the program. His folder, soft from being opened and closed each week, lay before him with yet another postponement notice. He looked up and said, “Chaplain, I finally started believing I could do this ... and now they stopped the program again.” The hope he had nurtured felt pressed flat, and I could feel the weight of his waiting settle between us.

Moments like this pierce deeper than any policy debate. A government shutdown may look like a pause in politics, but inside prison walls, it sounds like the silence of halted progress—the silence of someone losing faith that change is possible.

Rehabilitation is not an event; it is a rhythm—steady, patient and faithful. It depends on presence that does not waver when the budget does. When paychecks stop, stability collapses—inside and outside the prison. In the community, paused programs can drive people back toward survival crimes or addiction. Inside, staff—teachers, counselors, chaplains—are shaken, wondering how to pay rent or put gas in the car while still showing up.

Education programs shutter without money for materials or contractors. Counseling sessions vanish because morale is low. Mental health care dwindles because stress becomes the backdrop, and hurting people cannot help the hurt. For those shaped by poverty, trauma and inadequate schooling, these interruptions do more than delay growth—they reinforce the message that consistency belongs to others, not to them.

The roots of incarceration—poverty, mental illness, lack of education—wither when resources run dry. When appropriations lapse, the cost is measured not just in paperwork but in human potential. Every suspended class, missed counseling hour or delayed reentry program is a seed of hope left unwatered.

Faith calls us to a different standard. God’s mercy does not come and go with the economy. Grace shows up. It stays. It holds fast. As the Church, we are called to mirror that steadiness—to refuse to let funding or fear decide who is worthy of transformation.

When we withhold support from those striving to rebuild their lives, we do more than pause a program—we pause a soul in motion. People are not the problem; systems that value agenda over compassion are.

The cost of inconsistency is not in unpaid wages or postponed programs alone. It is in the faces of those waiting—for a class to restart, a counselor to return, a promise to be kept. It is in the loss of another tomorrow that could have been different if we had chosen to stay.

May we refuse to look away. May we ask not who will pay for this, but who will suffer if we do not. And may we remember that faithfulness—like grace—is never optional.

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. Joseph  
James

Finding grace when we  
keep hitting replay

We live in a world where “Monday morning quarterbacking” is the norm. We are obsessed as a culture with figuring out what went wrong in a particular game, situation or project; we easily assign blame and boldly say what should have been done instead.

That kind of review is good for correcting golf swings and teaching us how we might respond to a situation in the future, but it is not helpful in healing from trauma or moving forward beyond the mistakes we’ve made. We don’t need digital media to “review the tape”; we can endlessly relive (or relitigate) the experience in our minds and see where we should have gone right instead of left, or where we should have spoken up instead of staying silent. It’s one thing to review a game film. It’s another to replay the painful moments of ministry. Healing rarely comes from repeatedly replaying the loss.

We are still dealing with the effects of the separation crisis in the South Carolina Annual Conference. Many of us are doing more than our fair share of reviewing the tape, speculating about the what-if’s, if onlys and supposes, both for ourselves and for those who lived through this season with us.

Clergy of all stages and ages faced the fierce leading edge of the storm. There were clergy with years of experience in Wesleyan theology and conflict management skills who struggled to lead congregations in and through the discernment process. Over the decades they shepherded their congregations—they stood with church members and wept at the bedside of their loved ones; they baptized the children and laughed over Wednesday night meals. They knew how to connect and communicate with people who thought differently. Far from perfect, they sought to stay true to their ordination or licensing vows; they loved all members in the churches they served, no matter what their theological, political or cultural bent.

Yet it was not enough to stop the bleeding of ministry, the departure of members or the separation of churches. In some cases, congregations banned the pastor from fulfilling their call in that appointment. These clergy were, and still are, solid pastoral leaders.

And it wasn’t only seasoned clergy who bore the strain. There were also clergy in their first or second appointment, fresh from seminary and the commissioning and ordination process, leading conflicted congregations. These new clergy did everything in their power to do the right thing in caring for and leading their congregations in that impossible season. The miracle in all of this may be that so many of them are still pastoring after what they endured.

The thing is, we can do everything right and things can still go horribly wrong.

Job, a man who was “blameless and upright,” testifies to this through all that he endured. Time and again, John Wesley was banned from pulpits, mocked and faced physical attack; these instances fueled the fire of his witness and put him on the road to his understanding of perfection. We do not see Wesley or Job as failures.

What we need to move forward as clergy, local churches and an annual conference is not found in Monday morning quarterbacking or in endless relitigation of hurts. Looking in the mirror or out the window to find scapegoats and to blame-shame may move us, but not forward into a healthy next season.

“Success is not the criterion of right and wrong,” as Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us. Put another way, doing the right thing does not always guarantee a good outcome. Clergy can act with integrity, care and faithfulness, yet still face loss, rejection or failure—and that does not make their actions wrong.

Perhaps the call before us now is not to keep replaying the past but to release it to grace. Healing begins when we stop agonizing over the tape and start trusting God is still writing the next chapter of our story. We are not able to control every outcome—even when we have done all the right things—but we can keep showing up, loving the people before us and trusting our labor in the Lord is never in vain.

James is the pastor of Zion UMC, Prosperity.



Commentary  
by Minister  
Anna Stevens  
Bright

Christmas is love

When we look at all that is going on in the world today, we have to wonder: Does anyone know what love is all about?

Our society has become so materialistic. The news is blanketed with sexual harassment allegations and denials; leaders are falling from grace one by one; domestic abuse situations is rampant; disrespect is soaring; and hate is sadly off the charts.

What is the problem? In my heartfelt opinion, there are too many people who still do not know about the love of Jesus, or they do know it but don’t live by it.

The true meaning of Christmas is about the birth of Jesus and his love for all mankind. Jesus is love; therefore, Christmas spells love, not a loaded tree of presents!

If we as a people would show more love toward each other and would be more about our father’s business, what a wonderful world this would be! Backbiting, jealousy, hatred, rampant crime, dissolution of families and so many other evils of society would have no place if the love of Jesus were placed at the forefront of everything.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul gives us three variations of love, according to Pastor Keith Krell, former senior pastor of Fourth Memorial Church in Spokane, Washington: Love is greater than any spiritual gift (13:1-3), is expressed by supernatural responses (13:4-7) and is an eternal gift (13:8-13). In other words, love is an action, not an emotion. The kind of love Paul describes is one that is demonstrated.

During this holiday season, please read and share this anonymously written illustration about love, titled, “1 Corinthians 13: Christmas Version.” I do believe it will help:

If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls, but do not show love to my family, I’m just another decorator.

If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family, I’m just another cook.

If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love to my family, it profits me nothing.

If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend myriad holiday parties and sing in the choir’s cantata, but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point.

Love stops the cooking to hug the child.

Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the husband.

Love is kind, though harried and tired.

Love doesn’t envy another’s home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.

Love doesn’t yell at the kids to get out of the way, but is thankful they are there to be in the way.

Love doesn’t give only to those who are able to give in return but rejoices in giving to those who can’t.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

Video games will break, pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust. But giving the gift of love will endure.

Merry Christmas!

Bright is a member of Isaiah UMC, Walterboro.



# Delegate counts released for 2028 General Conference

By Jessica Brodie

When General Conference gathers again in 2028, not only will the number of delegates be significantly smaller, but for the first time, most of the delegates will come from outside the United States.

That's the word from General Conference Secretary Dr. Aleze Fulbright, who announced Nov. 11 that the next gathering will have 708 delegates representing regional conference around the world. That 708 is 154 delegates fewer than the 862 delegates at the 2020/2024

General Conference, a roughly 18 percent reduction.

The 2028 General Conference is set for May 8-18, 2028, at the Minneapolis Convention Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Of the 708 delegates, 46 percent will come from the United States, while 54 percent will come from Africa, the Philippines, Europe and concordat churches with close ties to the UMC.

South Carolina's delegate numbers have not yet been released, said the Rev. Melton Arant, South Carolina's conference secretary. Arant said

he is not expecting to receive those numbers until mid-December.

Delegate allocations are as follows: 284 from Africa; 56 from the Philippines; 32 from Europe; 326 from the U.S.; and 10 from concordat churches (The Methodist Church of Great Britain; The Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas; The Methodist Church of Mexico and The Methodist Church of Puerto Rico).

The breakdown of United States delegates is as follows:

- 58 North Central jurisdiction
- 60 Northeastern
- 66 South Central
- 122 Southeastern
- 20 Western

Half of all delegate counts will comprise clergy and half will be laity.

"I pray that our members will join the commission in celebrating the completion of this work and what it represents," Fulbright said. "This is a time to celebrate that we are truly becoming a worldwide church. We celebrate the moving of God's Spirit that has led to growth in and throughout Africa. We celebrate that there have been new regional con-

ferences established, with new annual conferences created. We also celebrate the ways regionalization will continue to inform how we will be The United Methodist Church into God's faithful future."

By Dec. 15, resident bishops and annual conference secretaries will have received their count information.

General Conference is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church, which meets once every four years to revise church law, set budgets and adopt resolutions on social, public policy and economic issues.

# A full, positive life: Pfeiffer marks 60 years in ordained ministry

By John R. Brooks

If you live in Beaufort, chances are you've met or seen the Rev. Terry W. Pfeiffer—or "Pastor Terry," as most people know him.

Pfeiffer, 84, is an active church leader and teacher, complemented by a vigorous lifestyle that includes a water aerobics class at a local YMCA each weekday, riding his bicycle through city neighborhoods and freshwater fishing when he visits his family. Pfeiffer's emphasis on living well and maintaining a positive outlook are part of a 60-year career in The United Methodist Church, including his calling in 2022 as associate pastor at Carteret Street UMC, Beaufort.

The Carteret Street congregation joined with Pfeiffer and family members



Pfeiffer

Oct. 12 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of his ordination, a rare accomplishment. Members know him for his friendly, approachable manner and his regular practice of introducing them to each other. Not-so-well known are his pursuits in scholarly and theological study, his Sunday routine that begins with early morning meditation (beginning at 4 a.m.), his behind-the-scenes work to minister to people who are ailing and hospitalized and the meaningful funerals he performs for people who have little or no family, said one of his sons, Dr. Douglas Pfeiffer, who teaches English at Stony Brook University in New York.

"My dad has always believed that people are fundamentally good," he said. "He trusts that ultimately there is good in everyone."

Pfeiffer's ministry at Carteret Street UMC is both a privilege and honor, he said at his ordination celebration.

"We are all called into the ministry by virtue of our baptism to serve others," he said. "We are the representatives of God on this Earth. We share this together, and I happen to have the wonderful privilege of being ordained in The United Methodist Church."

"He has the best heart and utmost enthusiasm for ordained ministry," said the Rev. Bryson Williams, senior pastor. "Terry loves being a pastor as much as anyone I have ever known."

Pfeiffer, he added, "is a good friend and pastor to me."

Pfeiffer retired from full-time ministry in 2008 and moved to Beaufort with his wife, Margey, who died in 2022, after serving 16 years as pastor of Newtown UMC, Sandy Hook, Connecticut, his longest pastoral appointment. He served

five other congregations full-time in the New York Annual Conference and served as many as six more congregations in part-time roles. Baptized in the Evangelical United Brethren Church, a predecessor church body of the UMC, Pfeiffer was ordained a deacon in 1965 in the North Indiana Annual Conference. Less than two years later, he was ordained an elder by the conference.

Pfeiffer earned a Master of Divinity and Master of Sacred Theology, both from Yale Divinity School. He was also a short-term teaching fellow in pastoral care and counseling at Yale Divinity School.

Attending were his son and daughter-in-law Dr. Karen Karbiener and their daughter, Annike Pfeiffer, who performed an offertory anthem on piano. A stepdaughter, Karen Roberts, also attended. Other family members are his son Michael and stepson David.

# STOMP exercise ministry fosters fellowship, fitness on Johns Island

In October 2024, the Johns Island Parish—Bethlehem-St. James and New Webster United Methodist churches—started a new exercise ministry.

Called STOMP (Stepping Toward Our Master's Purpose), the Health and Welfare initiative was created with an emphasis on community outreach and wellness. Today, the ministry is still going strong.

STOMP received a grant from the Belin Trust, which has been instrumental in supporting the program's mission to promote health, fellowship and physical activity. Initiated under the leadership of the Rev. Pattie E. Gordon and supported by the Belin Trust Grant Board, the Johns Island Parish created an on-campus gym that offers twice-weekly fitness classes led by Sam Brown Jr.

This facility aims to provide a safe environment



About 20 attend the line dance segment of the program, while approximately 15 individuals use the gym facilities.

for physical fitness and community interaction, serving both members and the broader community. Additionally, through the Belin Trust Grant, a community

line dance class led by Ann Bellamy was established, broadening the range of fitness opportunities available.

The line dance segment of the program typically includes about 20 regular participants, while approximately 15 individuals use the gym facilities.

These programs have seen steady participation and have encouraged intergenerational involvement, supporting general well-being and healthy lifestyles.

The STOMP Exercise Ministry continues to focus on integrating spiritual and physical health and, with ongoing support from the congregation and partners, plans to expand its activities in the future.

"To God be the glory for the great things he has done through STOMP," said RoShonda Brown, STOMP coordinator.



**Gala helps women**

Hundreds headed to Seawall's Restaurant in Columbia Nov. 13 for Killingsworth's annual gala, a beloved event described by many as the official kickoff to the holiday season, as well as an opportunity to raise funds for the women's home. Proceeds support Killingsworth, a community residence for women 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 find shelter and support. The gala featured a fashion show, silent auction and live jazz music. Far left, Ned Wallace models a Dillard's suit; center, the auction was a hit; top right, Killingsworth President Azilee Dickey speaks to the crowd; bottom, WIS-TV's Von Gaskin, Killingsworth's Flo Johnson and retired WIS anchor Dawndy Mercer Plank share a smile. Learn more at <https://killingsworth.org>.

Photos by Matt Brodie



# HUNGRY

From Page 1

food giveaway in partnership with the Lowcountry Food Bank.

Initially, the church was told they were picking up 3,000 pounds of food. But when a church volunteer arrived with a semi to pick up the food, the food bank gave them 10,000 pounds. A large number of volunteers from the congregation helped sort the donated food, as well as to create packages for the drive-through giveaway.

Another, Mount Hebron UMC, West Columbia, held a monthlong food drive, partnering with Cu-

mulus Radio for the SNAP Together Food Drive to collect canned goods and nonperishable food items for families in need.

As a way to help, the *Advocate* compiled a conference-wide list of food assistance available via South Carolina UMCs, which it distributed on the web and social media (see article, this page).

As well, South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley urged United Methodists in this state to “be the you in Matthew 25” through what he dubbed the #ByOurLove Challenge.

In Matthew 25:35-36, Jesus taught, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I

was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

Fairley asked every local church to increase their giving to food pantries in their area and also to invite members of their church and the local community to increase giving to help keep the shelves stocked.

“This passage of Scripture is a clear mandate from the lips of Jesus, a central theme of the Christian faith, and a true example of how disciples of Jesus Christ should live in the world,” Fairley said. “Sisters and brothers, now is not the time to sit idly by and assume someone else is going to fill this enormous gap in the social safety net.

“Now is not the time to let people go hungry in the richest country in the world.”

## Which UMC churches are offering food assistance in South Carolina?

The *Advocate* has compiled a conference-wide list of food assistance available via United Methodist churches throughout South Carolina.

This is intended to be an ongoing list, and we will update it as we receive new information.

A brief listing is below, and a longer list is online at <https://advocatesc.org/articles/food-assistance>.

If your church offers a food pantry, blessings box or other similar program, send know the details, (including church name, address, city, what you offer, what days it is offered, other instructions, contact info, etc.) to [news@advocatesc.org](mailto:news@advocatesc.org).

### Anderson District

Lawrence Chapel UMC, 2101 Six Mile Hwy., Central, parking lot food pantry. Info: 864-653-4461.

Zion UMC, 5708 Hwy. 187 North, Anderson, outside blessings box.

### Charleston District

Hibben UMC, 690 Coleman Blvd., Mount Pleasant, two blessings boxes on-campus. Info: [thomas.r.cook@comcast.net](mailto:thomas.r.cook@comcast.net).

Midland Park UMC, North Charleston, blessings box.

Smyrna UMC, 724 Cypress Gardens Road, Moncks Corner, blessings box. Also a backpack ministry for Whitesville Elementary School.

Spring Hill UMC, 2589 Old Gilliard Road, Ridgeville, blessings box.

Stallsville UMC, 255 Stallsville Loop Rd., Summerville, blessings box. Also emergency food bags Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Info: [office@stallsvilleumc.org](mailto:office@stallsvilleumc.org).

### Columbia District

Asbury Memorial UMC, 1005 Asbury Drive, Columbia, food pantry on Tuesdays, 10 a.m. to noon. Clients are asked to call the church office at 803-776-7237 from the parking lot, and a volunteer will bring a bag of food outside.

Ashland UMC, 2600 Ashland Road, Columbia, blessings box. Also snack pack program for Seven Oaks School.

Bethel UMC, 4600 Daniel Drive, Columbia, blessings box.

Brookland UMC, 541 Meeting St., West Columbia, community lunch Fish and Loaves on second Saturday of every month from 11 a.m. to noon. No qualifications needed.

Cayce UMC, 1600 12th St., Cayce, blessings box.

Columbia College, food pantry for students.

Grace UMC, 410 Harbison Blvd., Columbia, blessings box in parking lot.

Lexington UMC, Lexington, blessings box onsite. Also food backpacks for Richland and Lexington county schools.

The Methodist Student Network (University of South Carolina) serves breakfast 8-9 a.m. one Saturday a



Photo by Brenda Rau

The food pantry at Hopewell UMC, Simpsonville, offers assistance for many in their community who are food insecure.

month out of Washington Street UMC's parking lot, at the corner of Bull and Washington streets. Info: <https://msnatusc.com/service>.

Mill Creek UMC, 1041 Old Garners Ferry Road, Columbia, food pantry the third Saturday of every month from 9-11 a.m. Info: 803-309-3842.

Mount Hebron UMC, 3050 Leaphart Road, West Columbia, limited food pantry Tuesdays 9:30 a.m. to noon. Walk-in requests for assistance are accepted if urgent.

Northeast UMC, 4000 Hardscrabble Road, Columbia, blessings box.

Shiloh UMC, 1000 Spring Hill Road, Gilbert, blessings box.

Trinity UMC's Christian Assistance Bridge, across the parking lot from Trinity at 126 Blythewood Road, Blythewood, emergency assistance such as utilities, rent, food, medication, transportation and traveler's aid to residents of Blythewood and the surrounding areas. Info: 803-786-1903 or <http://christianassistancebridge.com>.

Union UMC, 7582 Woodrow St., Irmo, blessings box.

Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC, 1500 Broad River Road, Columbia, food pantry Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 1-3 p.m. Also an emergency food site.

### Florence District

A Florence Blessings Box with non-perishable food items is located on Coit Street in Florence, between Central and Cumberland UMCs (163 S. Coit St. Florence). Info: [rbcrimm@umcsc.org](mailto:rbcrimm@umcsc.org) or 843-662-3218 ext. 106.

### Greenville District

Dacusville UMC, 1339 Thomas Mill Road, Easley, blessings box.

Hopewell UMC, 1420 Neely Ferry Road, Simpsonville, food pantry.

Jackson's Grove UMC, Landrum, blessings box at Landrum Veterinary Hospital, 1600 E. Rutherford St., Landrum.

Lee Road UMC, Taylors, helps operate the Feed Our Neighbors Food Pantry, 2600 Wade Hampton Blvd., Greenville. Tuesday and Thursday, 12:30-2:30 p.m. Info: 864-244-2836.

Memorial UMC, Greer, blessings



Volunteers pack bags for the Travelers Rest UMC food ministry, which helps the community in a number of ways.

box adjacent to the sanctuary on West Church Street (instead of Main Street).

Monaghan UMC, 1 McBeth St., Greenville, small food pantry and blessings box. Also prepares 10 food bags for a local Title I school.

Travelers Rest UMC, Travelers Rest, blessings box and a backpack ministry that serves six area schools.

### Greenwood District

First UMC, Laurens, food bank Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12-2 p.m. Also provides food in Waterloo with Bethlehem Union Church, and they help pack weekend backpacks for a local elementary school.

### Hartsville District

Aldersgate UMC, 211 Alice Drive, Sumter, blessings box.

Emmanuel UMC, 421 S. Main St., Sumter, soup kitchen and a small food pantry.

Mechanicsville UMC, 184 Lake Ashwood Road, Sumter, food pantry. Info: [ruthmccants1@yahoo.com](mailto:ruthmccants1@yahoo.com).

Mount Zion UMC, 130 Loring Mill Road, Sumter, outreach ministry, Blessing Table, every fifth Sunday after worship, which begins at 9:30 a.m. They also offer fully confidential food assistance by emailing the pastor at [tjcato@umcsc.org](mailto:tjcato@umcsc.org).

Zion UMC, 671 Zion Church Road, Pageland, blessings box.

### Marion District

Salem UMC, 2376 SC-90, Conway, food pantry every Wednesday, 2-6 p.m.

### Rock Hill District

Belair UMC, 8095 Shelley Mullis Road, Indian Land, food pantry every first and third Thursday 8 a.m. to noon behind the church. Please bring a valid form of identification. Info: 803-547-6631.

Bethel UMC, 101 York St., Chester, hot meal in their Loaves and Fishes Community Café each Wednesday, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Mount Harmony UMC, 6268 Ridge Road, Clover, food pantry, first and third Saturdays, 8-10 a.m. Info: 803-831-7364.

Trinity UMC, York, lunch bags Tues-



As of October, Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC's Food Pantry has provided roughly 3,500 bags of food to 1,300 families.

days and Thursdays, 10-11:30 a.m. Also partner to provide 300 Thanksgiving boxes.

Woodland UMC, Rock Hill, blessings box.

### Spartanburg District

Beaumont UMC, 687 N. Liberty St., Spartanburg, blessings box.

Duncan UMC, 139 W. Main St., Duncan, free community meal Wednesdays at 5 p.m. in the gym.

New Beginnings UMC, 210 Rainbow Lake Road, Boiling Springs, blessings box.

Silver Hill Memorial UMC, 778 John B. White Sr. Blvd., Spartanburg, food pantry Wednesdays, 9 a.m. to noon.

St. Mark UMC, 3055 E. Main St., Spartanburg, blessings box in church's front parking lot. Also a food program during holidays. An announcement is posted on their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/100079620254322> for about a week before events.

United Methodist Church of the Covenant, 9020 Asheville Hwy., Boiling Springs, blessings box in the parking lot.

### Walterboro District

New Hope UMC, 1568 Carter Road, Ridgeville, blessings box.

Port Royal UMC, 1602 Columbia Ave., Port Royal, food pantry Tuesdays, 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Shady Grove UMC, 9221 Charleston Hwy., St. George, food pantry the first, second and third Fridays of each month at 4:30 p.m. (pick off the table). Drive-thru food distribution is the fourth Saturday of the month from 8-11 a.m. Food is also available in emergencies. Info: 803-347-5341.

Springtown UMC, 8807 Augusta Hwy., Smoaks, food bank, second and fourth Thursdays, 12-2 p.m., and on third Saturdays, 10 a.m. to noon. Senior citizens (age 60 and older) receive additional food. Info: 843-270-5169.

St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, 20 Pope Ave., Hilton Head, blessings box in church parking lot. Also a twice-a-week soup kitchen, Tuesdays and Fridays, 9-11 a.m. Diapers and clothing available.



# A WAY HOME

From Page 1

A Way Home is operated by A Place to Call Home, a countywide initiative and collaborative effort to end homelessness and housing instability, in partnership with The Faith Initiative to End Child Poverty.

Families who meet eligibility criteria rotate from church to church, staying a week at a time at one church. While staying at the church, they are provided with meals, a safe and clean place to sleep, tutoring assistance for the children and ongoing help to achieve goals such as reliable transportation, employment, financial stability, etc.

St. Paul United Methodist Church, Spartanburg, is one of the congregations involved with A Way Home.

Carol Mabry, a St. Paul member who serves as their point person with the ministry, said being involved with the program has been a blessing for their church.

“We are grateful to have this unique opportunity to show God’s love to our neighbors who need it the very most,” Mabry said. “They are hungry, they are thirsty, they have no acceptable place to live and don’t have even the barest necessities to thrive. These families can be found living in cars, in substandard housing, unsafe trailer parks or couch surfing, staying with family or friends when they can.

“These are families who are in chronic crisis and are suffering undue stress and worry. And these are our neighbors, right here in our community.”

Mabry said that when St. Paul members heard about the opportunity to help, no one hesitated. Even more exciting, she said, is that since A Way Home began about five months ago, four families have completed the program and are now living in permanent housing.

“They each have found a way home—a tremendous



Photo courtesy of St. Paul UMC

Carol Mabry plays piano with one of St. Paul’s guests.

victory!” Mabry said. “Every volunteer at our church has contributed to this outcome, whether preparing a meal, serving as an overnight host, setting up and breaking down rooms and interacting with children and parents. Families have moved from chronic crisis to actual stability. It has been a great success, and we at St. Paul are proud to serve as a host church for the AWH program.”

St. Paul member Paige Candler said she decided to participate because the guests who are served in this program may be “the least of these” that Jesus spoke of.

“I feel uplifted knowing that St. Paul is making a big difference in the lives of the homeless families that we serve and that I had a small part in that service,” Candler said.

Member Chris Boyett participates to try to provide “a small portion of help” in the lives of fellow community members.

“Life is difficult. I can’t imagine someone having to deal with the uncertainty of if they will have shelter for the evening or if they’ll be able to eat that day and what will they be able to provide for their child or

children under that type of stress. It’s difficult enough to weather the unexpected storms of life and it’s our most vulnerable that suffer the most in these times,” Boyett said. “Many small portions of help can make a huge difference in the lives of families.”

Susan Owens said that as an overnight host for A Way Home, she has the privilege of welcoming guest families during one of the most challenging volunteer shifts to fill.

“Meeting these families, especially the children and teens, is always a rewarding experience. I enjoy engaging with them, listening to their stories and sharing moments of joy,” Owens said. “Additionally, interacting with guests from diverse backgrounds has expanded my perspective and increased my empathy. For example, hearing about the different journeys that brought each family to A Way Home emphasized the importance of creating a welcoming and supportive environment for everyone who walks through our doors.”

One child, who was a guest at St. Paul through A Way Home, commented, “The people were very nice” and “they made me feel good.”

Another said, “The snacks and food were the best!”

One single mom shared at the end of her family’s stay during the summer, “We go from church to church, and we don’t know how people will be. Every person I met at St. Paul was wonderful to us. The volunteers were very involved. We were provided comfort, and you all remembered the little things. We didn’t have to ask for anything. You kept your word and paid attention to our needs. You heard us, you listened to us and you saw us.”

For more about A Way Home or to get involved, visit <https://www.apтчspartanburg.org/a-way-home>.

*Chris Boyett and Carol Mabry contributed to this article.*

# HOSPITAL

From Page 1

serve more people with improved quality of service.

“Last February, I experienced a unique moment during a pediatric ophthalmology camp at Bethesda. It took place in our surgery room, where many surgical operations were being performed. It was a moment to see clearly that all the dreams that I have dreamed with the Lord are being realized right before my own eyes,” Rhyee shared.

He noted that 10 years ago, Bethesda was just an empty cornfield filled with weeds. Today, numerous sick individuals have been restored to health through their medical and surgical services in internal medicine, orthopedic surgery, general surgery, obstetrician and gynecology, odontology and other



The project is expected to cost \$1.8 million.

areas.

Rhyee said God laid a vision on his heart that Bethesda would not only provide specialty-level medical and surgical treatments, but also subspecialty-level services.

Currently, Bethesda serves about 150 outpatients daily and performs around 70 to 80 minor or major surger-

ies each month, with a staff of about 50 employees.

With the expansion, the first floor will house an emergency department and three surgical rooms. The second floor will contain a neonatal intensive care unit and an ICU and three operating rooms for OB/GYN. The third floor will house specialty and subspecialty outpatient clinics. The fourth floor will feature a hemodialysis center, a physical therapy room and additional outpatient clinics. The fifth and sixth floors will include inpatient wards.

“I am confident that this expansion will elevate Bethesda to a new level of health care and provide more comprehensive and holistic healing to the communities in the Lord’s name,” Rhyee said.

He said they will also need to install elevators.

The total budget for the extension is

\$1.8 million (US).

They plan to divide the total construction into two stages. In the first stage, they aim to finish the first and second floor, along with the installation of two elevators. The budget for the first stage will be approximately \$800,000. Following the completion of the first stage, they will proceed with the second stage, completing the rest of the work.

“We are confidently taking the first step, trusting in the faithfulness of the Lord as demonstrated during the construction of the current Bethesda Hospital.”

For questions about donations or how to help, email Rhyee at [rhyeemt@gmail.com](mailto:rhyeemt@gmail.com); write Healing Guatemala, P.O. Box 1835, Duluth, GA 30096; or visit <https://healingguatemala.org>. If sending a check, write “Bethesda extension” in the memo line so they can allocate the funds properly.

# AMENDMENTS

From Page 1

by lay and clergy voting members at more than 120 annual conferences worldwide; this includes the South Carolina Annual Conference as well as conferences across the United States, Europe, Africa and the Philippines.

The amendments become effective immediately.

All four amendments passed at the 2024 General Conference in Charlotte. But because they change the UMC constitution, they required ratification by at least two-thirds of the total voting members of all the annual conferences combined around the world.

## What are the amendments that passed?

The amendments are as follows:

1. Regionalization: This package of amendments creates new regional conferences that will each have equal power to adapt portions of the UMC’s *Book of Discipline* within their respective regions (91.6 percent approved).

2. Inclusiveness of the Church: This adds the words “gender” and “ability” to Paragraph 4, Article

4, of the UMC constitution to categories that cannot be used to exclude membership in the denomination (92 percent approved).

3. Racial Justice: This strengthens Article V of the UMC constitution by explicitly recognizing the church’s role in combating racism, racial inequity, colonialism, White privilege and White supremacy (91.9 percent approved).

4. Educational Requirements for Clergy: This amends Section VI, Article IV of the UMC constitution, which establishes the educational requirements for clergy members of annual or provisional conferences who are eligible to vote for clergy delegates to the General Conference (92.4 percent approved).

The language of the amendments could not be changed; votes were simple “yes” or “no” choices on four ballots.

“The ratification and certification of these constitutional amendments mark a defining moment in the continuing renewal and unity of The United Methodist Church,” said Bishop Tracy S. Malone, president of the Council of Bishops. “These amendments reflect the church’s rich diversity and deep commitment to live more fully into our shared mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation

of the world and strengthens our world-wide connection to serve faithfully and inclusively in every context.”

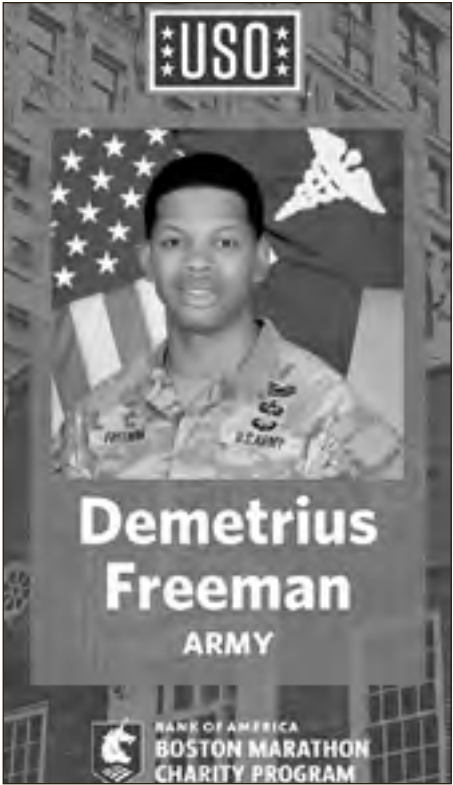
## What is regionalization?

The worldwide regionalization amendment is a package of legislation that gives the different geographic regions in the UMC equal decision-making authority. The United States and every central conference (in Africa, Europe and the Philippines) have now become regional conferences, for a total of nine regional conferences around the world. The United States is one of the nine. Each regional conference now has the ability to adapt the *Discipline* as missional needs and different legal contexts require. Previously, only central conferences could do this, but now the United States will be able to do so, too.

This means each regional conference, if it wishes, is able to publish its own hymnal, *Book of Worship* and regional *Book of Discipline*; set ordination and licensed ministry requirements for pastors; set standards for lay membership; develop practices around marriage ceremonies, funerals and other rites; etc.

Read more about the amendments at <https://advocatesc.org/articles/4-constitutional-amendments-approved>.





**UM captain, pastor's son helping USO with Boston Marathon run**

One United Methodist is doing his part to raise funds for the USO—United Service Organizations Inc. A member of St. Mark UMC, Sumter, Cpt. Demetrius Freeman is the son of the Rev. Sarah Johnson of Clark UMC, Sumter. He has been selected to run the 130th Boston Marathon with Team USO, which supports our active duty service members and their families. Through his run, he's hoping to raise \$10,000. Freeman has distinguished himself as a dedicated officer in the Medical Service Corps, serving in a variety of critical leadership roles. He completed a rotation at the Army Trauma Training Center as a surgical team executive officer, served as a battalion medical officer with 1-505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and currently commands a company in the 44th Medical Brigade. To learn more about his run, visit <https://tinyurl.com/33jfx86j>.



The Williamses share a moment,

Churches celebrate love as their pastor gets married

SUMTER—The Sumter community is rejoicing as Dr. James E. Williams, pastor of the Lamar-Ebenezer Charge—John Wesley, Sandy Grove and Ebenezer United Methodist churches—celebrated a joyous milestone.

On Nov. 1, Williams and Valarie Pryor were united in marriage at Trinity UMC, Sumter.

The ceremony was led by Bishop L. Jonathan Holston, with Pastor Angela Marshall serving as the host minister. Friends, family and members of the community gathered to witness and celebrate this sacred union.

Williams, known for his dedicated pastoral leadership and service to multiple congregations, and First Lady Valarie Williams now begin a new chapter together, sharing a life rooted in faith, love and service.

The couple extends heartfelt thanks to all who celebrated with them and supported their journey.



Photo courtesy of the Rev. Susan D. Culler

**Helping Navajo children**

Whaley Street UMC, Columbia, wrapped 154 Christmas boxes after church Oct. 26. The Christmas boxes go to children on the Navajo reservation, also known as the Navajo Nation, spanning parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. Items in each box include school supplies, clothes, gloves, personal hygiene products and a toy or gift. Whaley Street collects items throughout the year. The Christmas boxes arrive in Arizona prior to heavy snows that would make delivery impossible.



Photo courtesy of Connie DeRamus

**Honoring veterans**

Unity UMC, Lugoff, celebrated Veterans Day Nov. 10. The service opened with the Presentation of Colors from the Camden High School JROTC and the singing of the National Anthem, followed by a powerful testimony from Jim Stradford, who served in Vietnam. After the history of Veterans Day, Unity lit a candle in memory of veterans who have passed away. Each veteran received a gift bag. Everyone was served soup and cornbread after service. Thanks go to Virginia Hudson for her yearly efforts ensuring Unity's veterans receive the recognition they deserve.

Grove Hall celebrates longtime pastor's anniversary



Stafford enjoys the event.

In August, the members of Grove Hall United Methodist Church celebrated the anniversary of their pastor, the Rev. Virginia Stafford.

Members said even though Stafford experienced health challenges, she never stopped talking about the goodness of the Lord.

Stafford received her calling in 1993. She served as the associate pastor the St. Thomas Charge from 2001-2004 and was then appointed as associate to the Enoch Chapel-Grove Hall Charge in 2004. She ws appointed in 2019 to Grove Hall. She completed five years of her Course of Study and was ordained into the ministry at Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina, on July 24, 2008. She served on the District Committee

on Superintendence from 2010-2012.

Members said that while Stafford has served and volunteered on many other committees during the years, most of all she is a child of God, joyfully spreading the good news of what God has done for her and providing guidance to those who wish to be disciples for God's kingdom.

Bamberg Cluster thriving with ministry outreach

The Bamberg Cluster formed in 2024 with three churches: Franklin United Methodist Church, Denmark, and Mount Carmel and Orange Grove UMCs, Bamberg.

Since forming, the cluster has done some vital and vibrant ministry that is transforming lives in the community.

**Franklin UMC**

Franklin UMC partnered with Clemson Rural Health/MUSC Orangeburg in offering mobile primary care. Clemson Rural Health is an organizing framework for statewide health service delivery with prevention efforts housed in the College of Behavioral, Social and Health Sciences. Care included acute care, physicals, vaccinations and more.

Franklin has since had a telehealth cart placed in the church available for the community to receive care with the assistance of Franklin's certified medical professionals, who assist patients with connections from the Clemson Rural Health professionals and other providers as needed. The launch for telehealth will be October 2026.

On Aug. 24, Franklin offered a One Day Revival organized by Evangelism Chair Essie Steward. Guest revivalist was the Rev. Arthur Rose Jr.

For the last two years, Franklin celebrated Halloween with a Truck or Treat. United Women in Faith President Sharron Steedley brought the idea to fruition with Linda Brown and church veterans immediately after Friends and Family Day Oct. 26.

Franklin held its first Community Thanksgiving Service and Dinner Nov. 18, 2023, the Saturday before Thanksgiving. Franklin also hosted its first Community Holiday Celebration.

Franklin went on a "road trip" starting July 9 for vacation Bible school. They also held a grand Back to School Bash at the Denmark Gazebo.

A corn box distribution was July 2.

**Orange Grove UMC**

Orange Grove UMC has also been extremely busy. Orange Grove's One Day Revival was Sunday, Aug. 17, with the Rev. Warren Murdock as the guest revivalist. He reminded all of needing "Walking Water Faith."

Orange Grove's UWF led the way for the Community Garden of Hope kickoff by hosting a Calendar Tea and Interest Meeting with a theme based on Psalm 126:5. The second part took place at Franklin with a clothing giveaway on Sept. 27 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. A VA Community Outreach Center held a grand opening Oct. 3 with a food and clothing pantry. The telehealth cart will be located within the outreach center. Mount Carmel anchored the third part with the Grief, Grace and God series Oct. 4. These services will be ongoing.

Orange Grove celebrated its 165th church anniversary Oct. 19.

Orange Grove has a dynamic youth and young adult program, Back to School Bash, vacation Bible school, etc.

Franklin, Mount Carmel and Orange Grove's veterans were honored with a brief service at each church with gift bags that were appreciated.

Orange Grove celebrated its seniors and community with Brunch and Bingo last November and will do the same this year. Orange Grove youth, young adults, men and women were in attendance serving.

Orange Grove will hold its Christmas Fellowship Dinner as always. Last year, the church was beautifully decorated, and the Hanging of the Greens service, written by Carolyn Grimes and Nadine McMillan, was phenomenal. The Christmas Program with the youth participants was fabulous. All the members of Orange Grove were outstanding in their service, sharing, encouragement and love.

**Mount Carmel UMC**

Lastly, Mount Carmel has been busy serving as well. Mount Carmel observed all the holidays and traveled,

visiting other churches with its choir and lay servant Helen Kirkland, who has spoken on numerous occasions. Last year was their first year as part of the Bamberg Cluster, but everyone was familiar with their love for God and service. Mount Carmel held a revival service Sept. 7 with the theme "Give Me That Old Time Religion," featuring retired elder the Rev. Warren Murdock.

Mount Carmel kicked off the "Road Trip" VBS in June with Donnell Davis, Glendoria Davis and Christopher Ottley mapping out the route. They coordinated with the MUSC Prostate Education Training on July 11 as part of the SC Amen Program.

Mount Carmel had a wonderful Back to School Bash coordinated by Kelshia Manigault. Glendoria Davis hosted a Painting Day July 26. Donnell Davis showcased his grilling skills to the participants. They also coordinated "Brother Ottley Movie Day."

Mount Carmel is excited to host Grief, Grace and God as a free and freeing offering for those grieving the loss of loved ones, broken relationships, changes in health and more. Saturday SIP (Spiritual Study, Inspiration and Prayer) gatherings anchor the series in authenticity, fellowship and gentle nourishment, spiritually and physically. Guests offer support in addition to the planned series including chaplains, funeral directors and other ministers/pastors.

Grief care will be coordinated by Sheera Yates, the Bamberg Cluster pastor, licensed funeral director and embalmer and ACPE-trained chaplain and spiritual care specialist.

All three churches recognize the importance of mental health and wholeness and support the community by offering AS+K to Save A Life Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper training, which will resume virtually in January 2026.

The cluster actively participates in all the Bamberg County Ministerial Alliance services and program.



## Wesley celebrates first United Methodist Men’s program with spirit, purpose

By Linda Howard and Barbara Phillips

SUMMERVILLE—On Sunday, Nov. 9, Wesley United Methodist Church marked a joyful milestone with the revival of its United Methodist Men’s program—the first in modern times for the congregation.

The sanctuary was filled with warmth, reverence and celebration as men of faith, family and fellowship gathered to honor service, uplift one another and recommit to spiritual leadership in the church and community.

“This event was the fulfillment of a vision casted by our pastor, the Rev. Darlene Moore Richardson, and was brought to life with God’s divine guidance, her leadership, prayers and the hard work of the men of our church,” said Harold Phillips, president of the United Methodist Men.

The theme, “Strong Men in Tough Times,” drawn from Matthew 4:18-22, resonated deeply throughout the afternoon. From the opening processional to the closing song, the program reflected the strength and resilience of men who continue to follow Christ’s call in challenging seasons.

Richardson welcomed guests alongside Phillips and Worship Leader and Lay Servant Harold Brown Jr. The processional, set to “The Lord Is Blessing Me



Wesley UMC’s inaugural Men’s Day was not only a celebration but also a declaration of purpose, a revival of brotherhood and a reaffirmation of faith in action.

Right Now,” set a tone of gratitude and unity. Thomas Sanders offered a heartfelt welcome, followed by Benjamin Miller, who shared the occasion’s significance. The Rev. Bernie Mazyck, of Murray UMC, Summerville, led the congregation in prayer, and Phillips read the Scripture with conviction.

A moving Memorial Moment honored the life and legacy of Tyrone “Jeff” Myers, led by Benny Snipe and Kenny Varner.

Eric Youman, our gifted musician, along with the Murray United Methodist Men and St. John United

Methodist Men (Lake City) choirs, lifted spirits and prepared hearts for the message. The Rev. Mark Mitchell, pastor of St. John UMC, delivered a powerful sermon that echoed the theme—calling men to stand firm in faith, serve with humility and lead with courage. His words were both timely and timeless, offering encouragement in a world that often tests the strength of spiritual conviction.

The program also celebrated service and dedication:

- Samuel Greene was honored for his unwavering devotion to the upkeep of the church and his leadership across numerous committees.

- Eugene H. Willis received recognition as Wesley’s Beloved Patriarch Member, a symbol of wisdom and faithful presence.

- Phillips was celebrated for his leadership as president of the United Methodist Men, guiding the revival with vision and commitment.

- Linda Howard and Barbara Phillips were acknowledged for their assistance in planning the program and designing the flyers and materials that brought the event to life.

The program concluded with the closing song, “Let the Church Say Amen,” leaving attendees inspired and united.



At the Fall Fun Festival, kids enjoyed games, bounce castles, face painting, a hay ride and more.

## Murray’s fall fosters outreach, fellowship, fun

Murray United Methodist Church has had a busy fall with a number of fun events occurring in various ministries.

Murray’s United Women of Faith kicked off November with a Parish Prayer Breakfast. Guest speaker Lashawn Ellington gave a powerful and dynamic message, and attendees enjoyed a delicious spread for breakfast. The United Women of Faith unit also traveled to Spartanburg for the annual meeting at St. Paul UMC. Murray’s United Women of Faith president, Lakeshia Haynes, was excited that 12 women attended, including their pastor.

Next, Murray lifted up breast cancer awareness on the fourth Sunday in October with Clara Tucker sharing important information on early detection. She also had

brochures and literature for members that was handed out after worship service.

November kicked off with two fun events on the 1st. A fish fry for the community helped raise money for the church. This was led by Stewardship Ministry Chairperson Tony Black. Also that day the Fall Fun Festival was led by Children’s Ministry Chair Jamelah Youmans and her team. The kids enjoyed games, bounce castles, face painting, a hay ride and more.

With four other churches, they delivered Thanksgiving baskets to families in need; some great volunteers held with packing and delivering. This was led by Missions Ministry chairpersons Sadie Hollings and Jackie Haynes.

## Four Lowcountry churches unite to create Advent devotional booklet

This Advent season, the spirit of collaboration and faith shines brightly through a special devotional booklet, “Anticipation & Preparation: Daily Devotionals for Advent 2025.” Spearheaded by Edward J. Corbitt, spiritual formation chair at Church of the Palms United Methodist Church, the project brought together writers and pastors from St. Luke UMC, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Bluffton UMC and Church of the Palms UMC.

The devotional, crafted with care and prayer, offers readers daily reflections designed to inspire hope, peace, joy and love throughout the Advent season. Each church contributed a week of devotionals, weaving together diverse

voices and shared faith into one unified message of preparation and anticipation for the coming of Christ.

A special note of gratitude is extended to all the contributing writers from the four congregations whose heartfelt words will guide and comfort many during this sacred season. Their reflections embody the unity and compassion that define our local United Methodist community.

The booklet also features messages from South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard E. Fairley and District Superintendents the Revs. Jeffrey Salley, Terry Fleming and Kenneth L. Nelson. Their devotionals add a profound spiritual depth to the collection, reminding us of

the hope and renewal found in Christ’s promise.

Through the collective efforts of these congregations, the book stands

as a beacon of unity and reflection—a reminder that as we wait for the coming of Christ, we do so together, with hearts open and faith renewed.

## District News.

### Anderson District

**Mount Sinai UMC, Anderson**, provided a luncheon for the congregatin of **South Main Chapel and Mercy Center, Anderson**, Nov. 23. This meal was part of their ongoing partnership with area churches to share in community fellowship and service. Local congregations come together to offer food, friendship and encouragement to their neighbors.

### Charleston District

Six UMCs in Summerville are joining on three major projects: Salkehatchie, Elder Food Programs and Epworth’s Resource Center.

**Stallsville UMC, Summerville**, is helping **Boone Hill UMC, Summerville**,

revitalize their ministries and is working on starting a dementia day care program. Also, the men of the church are starting a speaker’s group for the community to engage and bring attention to important information on social security, men’s issues, community involvement, etc.

### Greenwood District

**Tranquil UMC, Greenwood**, collected new hats and gloves for the veterans of Greenwood County in October and early November. The church also sent 24 filled shoeboxes to Operation Christmas Child this year. The Tranquility Circle collected diapers in October to benefit the children of Epworth.

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# Across SC.

## Special session transition teams now in formation

By Jessica Brodie

While the changes approved at October's called special session of Annual Conference won't take effect until next summer, work is going on now to name members of a transition team to help guide the conference through the decisions made.

The team is being formed now and will deal with elements of the two

changes passed by South Carolina United Methodists, which 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 conference'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.

Fairley said the transition team will address issues such as if there's to be

renaming of a district; property and finance considerations; and preserving connectionalism for navigating change.

He 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.

The members and work of the transition team will be reported as it is made available.





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# Rising costs prompt Advocate rate increase in January

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

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

The *Advocate* is also eliminating its Church Leadership Plan and replacing it with streamlined group rates.

Churches now have two different options to subscribe with a group rate:

- The Print Plan, which enables 10 or more people in a church to subscribe for \$15 per person for the year; or
- The Digital Plan, which enables everyone in a church to receive a digital subscription to the *Advocate*; this costs only \$1.50 per person for the year and is priced based on a church's average weekly attendance.

The *Advocate* was founded in 1836 as the *Southern Christian Advocate* and is the oldest newspaper in Methodism. It has won more than 150 journalism, marketing and advertising awards and strives to foster discipleship within

South Carolina United Methodism by providing relevant news in various formats to unite followers in Christ.

"Several exciting new changes are coming for our readers, including a new website, an app, e-newsletters, video content and even a podcast, all rolling out within the next few months. These rate changes will help make it all happen," said Editor Jessica Brodie.

Email questions to [subs@advocate-sc.org](mailto:subs@advocate-sc.org). To sign up for a church plan: <https://advocate-sc.org/church-subscription-plans>.



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**Advocate**





Epworth News  
by Beth Williams

Everyday miracles

We use the word “miracle” to describe dramatic moments in life, but I have come to see miracles more frequently in the everyday world around me.

I’ve been thinking about these ever-present miracles lately and how, here at Epworth, miracles can be found without having to look very hard.

Children and families come to Epworth from situations of trauma, neglect and various kinds of abuse. Our job is to provide services to help them recover and feel safe and secure about their futures. We provide them with stability, which helps them to recognize their own sense of worth. We help them discover their own strengths and, by doing so, assist them in gaining confidence and positivity toward their own futures.

Our work at Epworth helps them to realize that they have a great capacity for success and happiness in their future.

The metamorphosis we see daily in the children and families we serve is nothing short of a miracle. We see God’s love for them manifesting itself in the way they slowly recognize their own worth and their abilities to improve their own lives. We see the sparkle come back into their eyes and their enthusiasm grow for even the smallest of life’s opportunities.

As I walk around our campus, I think about the small miracles we see every day through the youth we serve.

It always amazes me that our young people have gone through so much in their short lives and yet they are not just existing but are thriving.

At our Halloween celebration, there were so many smiles and laughs from these youth who have endured so much that it makes me pause and realize how blessed we are to have the opportunity to see such transformations.

A sibling group of four arrived about this time last year and was placed into our residential program. They did not smile and barely spoke with others. They gradually came out of their shells, and when I spoke with them at the Halloween party, they were all smiles and happy.

The transformation has been amazing. We have several young ladies who live at Epworth who are working various part-time jobs and doing well in school. They are approaching young adulthood with a sense of their own abilities and their potential for success in life.

One of these young women is saving money so she can buy a car before she graduates from high school. She has saved more than \$5,000.

She doesn’t complain about working and wants to go to college to study early childhood education. She has developed into a special young woman who has a plan for her future and the growing confidence to achieve her life goals.

These examples are just a few of the stories I could relate about how love, security, safety and support can help the children and families we serve find new pathways in life for success and happiness.

For me, their stories of growth are all miracles.

As we enter this holiday season, there will be much talk about miracles and the beauty of God’s love surrounding us.

I don’t have to go very far every day to see God’s love manifested in miracles on Epworth’s campus.

*Williams is the chief executive officer of Epworth.*

Sidewalk Hope takes church outside the walls

By Lexie Chatham

At the South Carolina United Women in Faith annual meeting in Spartanburg in October, we learned about Sidewalk Hope, a local outreach program to impoverished communities in that city.

Chip Walters, its founder and executive director, explained that the effort set out in 2015 as a bus ministry to provide transportation to Hope Point Church for children who had no other way to get there. However, the need was too great and the bus was too small. The outreach needed to evolve. After Walters saw a sidewalk ministry in New York, she became determined to start a similar program in Spartanburg.

“Take church outside the walls, and that’s what we did,” Walters said.

So the church bought a box truck and outfitted it with a drop-down stage and a full media system to create a mobile children’s church. Thus began the weekly visits to low income neighborhoods in order to provide praise and worship to the residents. Besides spiritual growth opportunities, the volunteers brought snacks, games and even Christmas presents in addition to Bible studies.

The need for this ministry grew larger and more urgent. In 2017, Sidewalk Hope obtained 501 (c)(3) status. Other churches joined this outreach, including Bethel United Methodist Church. Additional volunteers were trained, and their outreach expanded to four communities. More activities for the children became possible to meet both their emotional and physical needs as well as their spiritual ones. Summer programs were added that provide health screen-



Santa arrived on a decked out Harley Davidson to give one boy a ride and to leave him some Christmas presents.

ings, vacation Bible school and back-to-school backpacks.

Often where the children go, the parents follow. As one parent explains why she loves Sidewalk Hope, “The happy faces are what makes me come!”

Times were difficult during the COVID-19 shutdown, but a pressing need was discovered when restrictions ended. Teenagers came to Sidewalk Hope asking for outreach options more age appropriate for themselves. Soon, teenaged leaders were identified and trained to form their own Teen Groups, which address their specific difficulties and needs. These groups continue to grow.

As one of the teens says, “It’s my church on Tuesdays.” He’s proud to report that he attends a brick and mortar church on Sundays, too.

Walters’ memories of how Sidewalk Hope has touched the lives of those living in these communities tugged at all our UWF sisters’ hearts. She reminisced about finding a young boy digging in a dumpster to pull out a fully decorated Christmas tree. When his

mother asked what he was doing, the boy explained that Santa Claus might bring presents if he only had a tree. But his mother admonished him, “I already told you Santa doesn’t come to places like this.”

So Walters arranged for a visit from a fully costumed Santa Claus. However, instead of a sleigh, this Santa arrived on a decked out Harley Davidson to give the boy a ride and to leave him some Christmas presents.

Originally only around 60 children could be impacted by the bus ministry, but now more than 300 children and nearly 100 teenagers learn about Jesus each week through Sidewalk Hope’s outreach effort. During the year, more than 700 community members come out to weekly neighborhood visits and special events.

But it’s not about how many show up that’s important to Walters.

“I never worry about the numbers,” she says. “Help one person at a time and start with the person nearest you.”

That’s advice we all can and should implement.



Caring for those with cancer

In observance of Cancer Awareness Month, the United Women of Faith and United Methodist Men of St. Phillips UMC, Marion, along with Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. (Mu Kappa Chapter of Marion) presented 30 cancer care bags Oct. 19 to the patients at the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research, Florence. Sara Beth Averette (Hope Center coordinator) and Jaleesa Rowell (oncology social worker) were in attendance. Above left, Sara Averette and Jaleesa Rowell with some of the bags. Above right are Marie Grant (United Women of Faith), Tony McKenzie (VP of Mu Kappa Zeta Chapter), Sara Averette, Jaleesa Rowell, Norris Barr-Mack (president of United Methodist Men), the Rev. Ardell Washington Sr., Betty Washington, Rebecca McCall, the Rev. Earl Barr (chairperson of Administrative Council) and Lillie Page (Mary Kay senior consultant).



Prison Fellowship Angel Trees help Augusta Road give back

By Connie Derr

PELZER—This year, the United Women in Faith at Augusta Road United Methodist Church will participate in the Prison Fellowship Angel Tree Christmas Program.

The program gives incarcerated parents a way to strengthen and restore their relationships with their children and families. It’s a way to foster hope and let children know they are loved and not forgotten.

Through partnering with a church or a community organization, children receive a Christmas gift, a gospel message and a personal message of love from their incarcerated parent.

The Augusta Road women received the names of

nine families this year, to include 23 children. A Christmas tree will be placed in the narthex of the church decorated with angel ornaments, and each ornament will have a child’s name along with a message from their loved one. Individuals will have the opportunity to take an ornament, purchase a gift for the child shown on the ornament and return a wrapped gift to be delivered in person to the child.

As the old saying declares, “It’s better to give than to receive.” It’s hard to say who will receive the greatest joy and happiness through the Prison Fellowship Angel Tree Christmas Program—the children receiving their gifts or the UWF member giving the gift. It’s the gift of connection that transforms lives.





Mount Harmony members are willing to do what they can to spread Christian love.

## Mount Harmony loves neighbors through food, clothes ministries

CLOVER—The parishioners at Mount Harmony United Methodist Church took Jesus’ parable of “The Sheep and Goats” to heart.

The parishioners and volunteers work tirelessly to provide for the community. Mount Harmony offers free food distribution, “The Mount Harmony Food Pantry,” on the first and third Saturdays of each month. Members and volunteers unload a U-Haul truck on the third Friday of each month, bringing in dry goods, fruits and vegetables, meats and dairy products. The members look forward to serving the community and letting everyone know that Mount Harmony UMC is here to help meet their needs.

The church also has a clothes giveaway during the food giveaway, when items are collected. Jesus said, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I needed clothes and you clothed me.” Mount Harmony UMC believes that what we do for the least of these brothers and sisters, we have done it for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Mount Harmony UMC understands that we are living in uncertain times, and the people must have somewhere to turn. The church provides opportunities for the public to turn to in their times of need. The pastor and members are willing and able to do what they can to spread Christian love through giving.

Mount Harmony UMC will continue to serve its community with food and clothes giveaways. The parishioners and volunteers believe that serving one another is serving Jesus Christ.

## ‘Boots on the Ground’ fundraiser helps Paths to Wholeness grow

Supporters of Paths to Wholeness headed to the I.P. Stanback Museum & Planetarium at South Carolina State University Nov. 15 for Boots on the Ground, an evening of music, food and community spirit to help the United Methodist-associated ministry.

Held from 5-9 p.m., the evening featured live music, food trucks and line dancing, featuring a special appearance by DJ Franklin Jones.

Started by Dr. Minnie Anderson, a retired United Methodist local pastor, Paths to Wholeness is a nonprofit,

faith-based organization dedicated to empowering women and leading them down a restorative path. Their mission is to effectively assist formerly incarcerated women with a preventive program for sustainable re-entry into the community through personal and professional development, as well as interventive and supportive programs and services.

For more on the organization, or to learn how to help Paths to Wholeness, visit <https://pathstowholeness.org>, email [pathstowholeness2020@gmail.com](mailto:pathstowholeness2020@gmail.com) or call 803-387-8226.

## UMVIM-SEJ hoping Giving Tuesday will help them achieve goal

As United Methodists across the nation gear up for Giving Tuesday, United Methodist Volunteers in Mission-Southeastern Jurisdiction is hoping all will prayerfully consider participating in their Giving Tuesday campaign.

United Methodist Volunteers in Mission is a grassroots movement of United Methodists who seek to put their Christian love in action.” Since the 1970s, UMVIM has offered a framework through which disciples can engage in short-term mission locally, nationally and globally. Tens of thousands of lay and clergy United Method-

ists engage in short-term mission each year in ministries as varied as disaster response, community development, pastor training, microenterprise, agriculture, vacation Bible school, building repair and construction and medical/dental services.

UMVIM-SEJ Executive Director the Rev. Matt Lacey said they are hoping to raise \$20,000 by Dec. 2 so they can receive a matching gift of \$10,000.

Information can be found at <https://umvim.org/tuesday>.



Photo courtesy of Lavone Breland

### Cheerful givers and faithful neighbors

In October, the Outreach Ministry of Hickory Hill UMC, Smoaks, joined hands with Keepers of the Word and the Conference Council of Native American Ministries to support the Elders’ Comfort Basket Project. Through the generous giving of the Ruffin Parish family, 12 comfort baskets were lovingly assembled and will be distributed to elders in the communities in time to share Thanksgiving blessings. The ministry continues to embody Christ’s call to love and serve others through the annual “Angel Tree” clothing and toy collection. This year, they will partner with Bamberg County First Steps, bringing warmth and joy to local children and families in need. Through every act of giving—whether a gift, a prayer, or a kind word—they strive to reflect God’s love in action in service to others. As 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” Here, the Rev. Minnie C. Dickerson blesses the baskets.



### United Women in Faith by Wanda Chandler-Flowers

## Women gather in Spartanburg for 53rd annual meeting

Women from across South Carolina gathered in Spartanburg for the 53rd South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith Annual Meeting, held Oct. 24-25 at St. Paul United Methodist Church.

The weekend’s theme, “The Good Shepherd Cares,” guided every moment of worship, fellowship and service.

The Spartanburg District United Women in Faith stood out in their vibrant purple shirts, welcoming and directing attendees and representing their district with pride.

Friday evening featured an inspiring lineup of speakers, including the Rev. Cathy Mitchell, superintendent of the Spartanburg District, and South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley. Fairley spoke passionately about the importance of the work United Women in Faith are doing to uplift women, children and youth across the state.

“South Carolina United Methodist Church is better because of the work being done by United Women in Faith,” he told the nearly 200 participants in attendance.

Following Fairley’s remarks, Mitchell delivered a heartfelt and personal message that resonated deeply with attendees.

“I liked how she shared her personal story to draw us in and drive home the theme that the Good Shepherd cares,” said Ruenetta Loveless, a first-time attendee from the Florence District.

Mitchell’s honesty and humor brought smiles, laughter and reflection as she shared her journey of faith—and how finding the guidance of a “good shepherd” transformed her life. Her

story drew an enthusiastic response from the audience.

After Mitchell’s message, Fairley led the Communion service, offering various ways to partake—whether by dipping, using an individual serving cup or selecting a gluten-free option—ensuring that every attendee could participate fully in the sacred moment.

On Saturday, Chip Walters, founder of Sidewalk Hope—a ministry on wheels, delivered an inspiring presentation. Walters shared how Sidewalk Hope reaches children in their own neighborhoods using a specially modified truck with a drop-down stage, turning it into a mobile ministry center. The program serves between 300-375 children each week, bringing the gospel and hope directly to them. She also shared a touching video featuring children expressing what the ministry means in their lives. On Friday afternoon, attendees had the opportunity to see the Sidewalk Hope truck in person before the session started, and Walters was available to answer their questions.

During the business session, members conducted the memorial, retirement recognition, election and installation of new officers. The Walterboro District graciously accepted the invitation to host the 54th annual meeting in 2026.

Conference President Debra Schooler closed the weekend by thanking everyone for their faith, fellowship and commitment to serving others. It was truly a weekend filled with laughter, learning, worship and sisterhood—living proof that The Good Shepherd really does care.



# Young Methodists.

## Revolution 2026 urges youth to ‘Seek First’

COLUMBIA—Registration is now open for Revolution 2026, the annual youth gathering of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, scheduled for Jan. 30-Feb. 1.

This year’s theme—“Seek First”—is centered on Matthew 6:33: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Youth from all across the conference will gather this year at a new location—The DoubleTree Conference Center. That means, for the first time, youth groups participating in Revolution have the option of staying on-site.

“Each year at Revolution, hundreds of youth experience a powerful weekend of worship and music and messages focused on sharing God’s love in a relevant way,” said Chris Lynch, the congregational specialist who coordinates youth ministry for the conference.

“Revolution exists so that your youth might come to know Jesus Christ, so that your youth might discern a call to ministry. Youth and their leaders see the awesome picture of The United Methodist Church in action through worship and connection.”

### Who is speaking?

The Rev. Jason Cook, senior pastor of Fellowship Bible Church in Roswell, Georgia, will bring the message as the featured speaker each session. With more than 20 years of public speaking, pastoral and leadership experience, Cook is a master of inspiring every room.

He’s been a leader in locker rooms, elder rooms and board rooms at a young age, showcasing his wisdom, humility and skill in multiple venues. Cook has been an entrepreneur, evangelist, itinerant preacher, church planter, team captain and business owner.

Cook has started and sustained multi-ethnic churches, including Iron City Church in Birmingham and Fellowship Memphis in Tennessee. He credits God’s providence for allowing him to be a part of multiethnic movements in four major southern cities that were prominent in the Civil Rights Movement.

He holds a Master of Divinity from Beeson Divinity School and serves on its advisory board. He and his wife, Courtney, have four children: Charlie, Cager, Boss and Bishop. They live in the Atlanta area with their two dogs, Apollo and Minnie.

### Who is leading worship?

Mary-Michael Brenner, creative director at Home Church in Roswell, Georgia, will lead the youth in worship throughout



Above, Cook will be the speaker, while below, Brenner will lead worship.



the weekend. Brenner brings a deep love for worship and a steady conviction that leading people to encounter the presence of God is one of the most sacred things she gets to do in this life.

Brenner is not about hype or perfection—she’s about sincerity. Whether it’s a room of thousands or a quiet gathering of a few, her heart is the same: to lift up the name of Jesus with honesty and awe. She leads with joy, depth and the kind of voice that makes space for others to lift theirs, too.

Brenner previously served with Passion City Church and Passion Music, helping shape moments of worship at Passion Conferences and beyond. In her work today with Home Church, she leads with intentionality, theological depth and a love for both the big picture and the behind-the-scenes.

A seasoned worship leader, producer and communicator, she continues to invest in the local church while also serving at camps, events and gatherings across the country, often accompanied by her favorite co-worship leader, her husband, Jordan. Together, they consider it the joy of a lifetime to follow wherever Jesus leads them.

Registration is now open. Groups who register by Dec. 31 receive free Revolution 2026 T-shirts. Learn more at <http://scmvp.org/revolution>.



The team leads worship Oct. 5 at Underwood’s church.



Carolina Forest worship launched “Word & Table” at Ten Oaks Middle School.

## Cohort churches share ways intergenerational ministry helps them

By Toni Taylor

As we shift into gift-giving season, three Cohort One churches leading intergenerational ministry have shared information about unexpected gifts their ministry efforts have prompted.

The Rev. Brian Underwood, of Dacusville United Methodist Church, Easley, said Growing Children in Worship and Prayer has been a huge gift for them.

“Being selected as one of the twelve churches in the first year of the ‘Connecting Children in Worship’ grant had been an amazing experience,” he said. “It has brought our worship, youth and children’s teams together creating energy. It has accelerated our growth through the implementation of the knowledge being shared through our gatherings, training groups and Zoom sessions. It has caused us to become very intentional in every aspect of church life to focus on an intergenerational presence.”

Underwood said they currently have children and youth participating in every aspect of worship.

“We will soon be implementing an intergenerational prayer team, which will include training and practice in writing, praying and public prayer, both within and beyond our church’s walls. This has been one of the best connections we could have engaged with.”

As an example, Underwood served at Perry Correctional as a Kairos leader in October and left worship in the hands of his children and youth. A small group of children who help regularly with worship approached Underwood with an offer to substitute for him while he served at Kairos. Underwood told them they would need to lead worship in both his churches, not just their home church, Dacusville UMC. That did not slow these children down. They agreed and planned with him, as a worship team. They led worship in both churches, Dacusville UMC and Antioch UMC, while he served at Perry Correctional for Kairos. The team of children did a great job leading a spirit filled worship in both churches

while he was away.

Meanwhile, the Rev. Meghan “Meg” Lindsey Sweeney Cook, of Grace UMC, Columbia, said her church has been embracing Narrative 4 Story Exchange in worship. On Nov. 9, Grace practiced a Narrative 4 Story Exchange as part of the sermon series “Let Me Tell You a Story.” Centered on Mark 12:41-44, the story of the Widow’s Mite, worship invited participants from ages 5 to older than 80 to pair up and share brief stories of generosity. They reflected on one of four prompts: 1) Tell a story about a time when a small act of generosity—yours or someone else’s—made a big difference; 2) Who is someone who taught you what generosity looks like? 3) What’s a simple thing that always feels like a gift to you? 4) What’s something small that made your day recently?

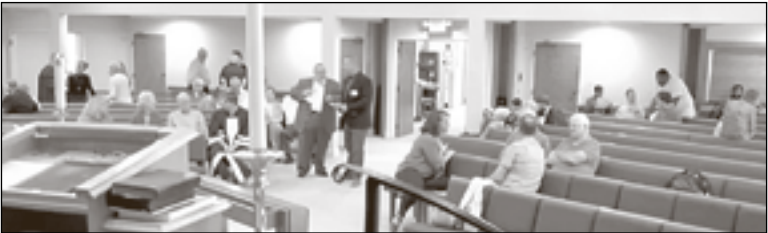
“Each person listened closely enough to retell their partner’s story in the first person, honoring another’s experience as their own,” Cook said. “Then the pairs connected with another pair and exchanged their stories. Many remarked that they learned stories of fellow church members they might never have known otherwise.”

Through the experience, Cook reminded the congregation, “Sharing—and truly hearing one another’s stories—is sacred work; the kind that reminds us that stories are a universal language of learning and love. In the end, we are made up of stories, remembered by stories, so, the gift of listening is among the holiest offerings we can give.”

Finally, the Rev. Tyler Strange shared about impact at Carolina Forest UMC, a new United Methodist community in the Grand Strand region. Carolina Forest launched a “Word & Table” Service, held at Ten Oaks Middle School.

“We are committed to intergenerational worship and to doing the hard work of creating systems that advocate and promote this value,” Strange said.

*Taylor is the grant leader for Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer.*



Grace UMC holds their story exchange.

### Getting ready

The robotics team at Manning UMC, Manning, prepares for an upcoming competition. The team will compete as a church Dec. 13.



Photo by Kelly Gottheiner





Photo by Sadie Way

Pumpkin sales help church

Mount Hebron UMC, West Columbia, youth sold pumpkins this fall to benefit the church. Here, one of the youth, Sadie Way, snapped an artistic photo of the pumpkin patch.

Wofford’s Roger Milliken Arboretum gets Heritage Tree of the Year Award

SPARTANBURG—TreesSC recognized Wofford College’s distinguished Roger Milliken Arboretum canopy with the 2025 Heritage Tree of the Year Award. The award was presented on Wofford’s campus Nov. 5, as part of the TreesSC annual conference, held this year in Spartanburg.

Accepting the award on behalf of Wofford College were President Nayef Samhat and Director of Horticulture and Landscape Design Stewart Winslow.

A bronze marker commemorating the award was placed by the Franklin W. Olin Building, near the Hugh R. Black Building, home of the college’s Admission and Financial Aid Offices.

This prestigious recognition celebrates outstanding landscapes that embody the spirit of South Carolina’s natural heritage and the ongoing commitment to the preservation and appreciation of natural resources.

“Ahead of his time, Mr. Milliken, for whom our arboretum is named, knew that the college’s buildings and grounds were a huge factor in the college admission process. He

knew that first impressions matter to prospective students, so during his 48 years of service on the board of trustees, he brought landscape architects and giants in the world of botany to Wofford’s campus,” Samhat said. “Because of this commitment, thousands of trees and shrubs have been planted. What you see on our campus today is the ongoing evolution of their vision.”

While accepting the honor, Samhat also thanked Winslow and the college’s ground crews, led by Jason Getgasorn, Bill Littlefield and Jason Burr.

The Roger Milliken Arboretum at Wofford College spans 195 acres and was purposefully designed to calm and soothe the souls of those on campus. The arboretum incorporates sustainable practices to control erosion and water runoff through its extensive tree canopy.

TreesSC was founded in 1991 as a nonprofit organization to foster the stewardship of South Carolina’s urban and community forests through education, advocacy and networking.

Letting her light shine: Celebrating Kamya Atyra Haynes

By Wanda Shuler

This month, New Covenant United Methodist Church, Bowman, celebrates Kamya Atyra Haynes, the daughter of Julia Rickenbacker and Daniel Williams. Haynes is a sophomore at Claflin University, Orangeburg, where she majors in art education. She continues to let her light shine in and out of the classroom.

Recently, she received third place in one of the Claflin University Departments of English Creative Writing awards competitions (2025 Edisto River Review Launch Party) for one of her original poems, “A Volcano Ready to Explode.” This achievement highlights not only her creativity and writing talent but also her dedication and determination to use the gifts God has given her.

New Covenant not only celebrates Haynes for this accomplishment but also thanks God for the ways he is shaping her journey. May she continue to grow in faith, wisdom and purpose—and may her words continue to inspire all who read them.

Here is her winning poem:

A Volcano Ready to Explode

I look like a normal person  
One who does all the work  
Yet I feel like I’m failing  
And I hide behind a smirk

People do me wrong  
Yet I still have a big heart  
Give them chance after chance  
While I’m being torn apart  
Does anybody know the pain I feel?

I’ve been betrayed so many times  
Yet when I speak up  
It feels as if I’m committing a crime

One day I’m fine  
The next I’m ready to crash  
I can do so much for someone  
Then I receive the backlash

So yes, I’m ready to explode  
Because I can only take so much  
Everyday when I wake up  
I feel as if my feelings are already crushed

Shuler is part of the New Covenant UMC Communications Committee.



Wesley Foundations  
by the Rev. John Sterling Poole

How do we join a Wesley Foundation?



From left are the Rev. John Poole, Ava Hussey (senior, College of Charleston), Matthew Walker (sophomore, College of Charleston), Desire’ Johnson (junior, College of Charleston), Kevin Lopez (senior, The Citadel), Hannah Kelley (junior, College of Charleston), Isabella Knapp (senior, College of Charleston) and River N (youth at North Charleston UMC).

On Oct. 26, the Charleston Wesley Foundation was invited to help lead worship at North Charleston UMC’s “Student Takeover Service.”

The service was an opportunity for youth at the church to participate and lead worship. The Praise Team of CWF was asked to lead in worship with one of their youth joining to play bass. The service was spectacular with youth doing an amazing job of leading the service with a children’s moment, prayer, Scripture reading and more. The students and I were honored to be a part of such a special moment.

Three of my students have worked specifically with this youth group over the past two and half years. Brendan Cerling, senior at the American College of Building Arts, served as youth leader for two years, and he brought in Isabella Knapp, senior at College of Charleston, and Hannah Kelley, junior at College of Charleston, to serve as youth assistants. While Brendan and Isabella no longer actively serve, they attended this service to show support of the students.

What touched my heart the most was to see my students pouring into youth. As someone who has a soft spot for youth ministry, I was almost moved to tears to see the youth excited to talk to their college student leaders. The youth were begging each of us to join them that evening for their pumpkin carving, and it was such a holy moment of local church connectionalism.

While that touched my heart the most, what excited me most was when

three of the youth came up to me to ask, “How do we join a Wesley Foundation when we go to college?”

Charleston Wesley is particularly honored to be partnered with so many different local churches, and this snapshot of the partnership at North Charleston UMC shows exactly my dream and hope for campus ministries around the state: We bring the local church to college students, and we bring college students to the local church. When we do that, youth take notice, and youth get excited to see an opportunity to continue their spiritual journey after high school.

Parents, grandparents, pastors and ministers, please tell youth about Wesley Foundations and fellowships. They need to know that even though they’ll graduate and possibly leave their church back home, the church will not have left them on campuses. It is great to see youth excited to worship God and grow in their faith before they even apply to a college. Youth and campus ministry matters. Both need your support now more than ever.

Please advocate for both in your church and district, and please support the nearest campus ministry with your prayers, presence, service, witness and especially your gifts.

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>.

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## Summer acting workshop brings kids to church in new way

By Dr. Sheila Elliott Hodge

COLUMBIA—When I arrived at Virginia Wingard Memorial United Methodist Church, this was an oft repeated phrase: “We don’t have any children here.”

The circumstances of the church have changed significantly from past years, as has their ministry context. Occasionally, grandchildren are present in worship and at special church ministry events. VWM’s interaction with children is primarily through supporting Rhame Elementary School in collaboration with neighboring churches.

In worship, we challenged ourselves to consider our “Next Chapter” as a community of faith, remembering that God is still writing our story.

Next, we centered our worship on what it means to be “On Purpose” in our current context and that we can still “Make the Connection” with our community and across barriers.

It was after worship one Sunday that the co-pres-



The July workshop was a great success.

idents of the United Women in Faith, Jackie Durham and Ceylle Stroupe, presented the idea of a children’s acting workshop.

Stroupe had done some acting as a child, and the two of them thought this might be a new way to con-

nect with the community and a way to live out our purpose in our continuing story with God.

Diane Gilbert, a member and arts educator, agreed to facilitate the workshop, and other United Women in Faith members would also support the effort.

The workshop was held in July, and it was a great success, surpassing what we had hoped. On a Sunday morning the picture of the children appeared on the screen, and I said, “Look, there are children at Virginia Wingard Memorial!”

In Haggai 2:1-5, the Word of God comes to Haggai, and through him, God asks, “Is there anyone here who saw the Temple the way it used to be, all glorious? And what do you see now? Not much, right? So, get to work. ... God is speaking. ... Yes, get to work! For I am with you” (MSG).

I heard someone say that God is not going to do a new thing the old way, but God is still doing, still speaking, still creating and still calling. So we’re going to get to work.

Team player

Johanna Williams, a senior at Lugoff-Elgin High School and a member of Unity UMC, Lugoff, was recently named “Jersey Mike’s Player of the Week.” The church is celebrating her achievement.

Photo courtesy of Connie DeRamus

## Advocate seeks youth talents

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

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](mailto: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.

## College scholarships available

The United Methodist Higher Education Foundation invites churches to join their popular United Methodist Dollars for Scholars program.

Each church scholarship can grow to a possible total of \$4,000 per student through partner matches.

Applications open Jan. 1 for the 2026-2027 school year.

Learn more about this and other scholarship opportunities for Methodist students today at <https://umhef.org/scholarships>.



Stuffed with love

Manning UMC, Manning, young adults took a trip to Build-a-Bear recently. Here, one of the young adults shares her newly created bear.

Photo by Kelly Gottheiner

## Students encouraged to apply for Advocate’s \$1,000 college scholarship

### Deadline is March 1

Scholarship applications are being accepted now for the South Carolina United Methodist Advocate annual \$1,000 college scholarship.

The scholarship is for South Carolina United Methodist students for the 2026-2027 academic year who are planning to attend or are currently attending one of the four United Methodist colleges in South Carolina: Claflin University, Columbia College, Spartanburg Methodist College or Wofford College.

Students ideally will have an interest in communications, journalism or business.

Requests for the scholarship are due March 1.

Required are an application with an essay, a college or high school transcript, and a letter from the senior pastor of the applicant’s home church or a college chaplain confirming the applicant is a United Methodist and describing their participation.

Learn more and download the application at <https://advocatesc.org/scholarships>.

For questions, email [jbrodie@advocatesc.org](mailto:jbrodie@advocatesc.org).

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Nancy Lynn Hooper Broomall

JOHNS ISLAND—Nancy Lynn Hooper Broomall, wife of the Rev. Dick Broomall, died Nov. 13, 2025. Rev. Broomall is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Dec. 14 at Bethany UMC, James Island.

Memorials may be made to Shawn Jenkins Children’s Hospital, 10 McClennan Banks Drive, Charleston, SC 29425 or online at [www.musckids.org](http://www.musckids.org).

Mrs. Broomall is survived by her husband and son.

Sandra Burgess

HILLSIDE, N.J.—Sandra Burgess, sister of Beverly Cantey, died Nov. 12, 2025. Mrs. Cantey is the wife of the Rev. Lawrence Cantey, pastor of the Triune-St. John Charge, Orangeburg.

Funeral services were unavailable at press time.

Betty Jean Connor

SPARTANBURG—Betty Jean Connor, mother of Gail Varner, died Oct. 19, 2025. Mrs. Varner is the administrative assistant for the Spartanburg District of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Graveside services were held Oct. 22 at Greenlawn Memorial Gardens.

Memorials may be made to the food pantry of Cannons Camp Ground UMC, 3450 Cannons Camp-ground Road, Spartanburg, SC 29307.

Mrs. Connor is survived by her three daughters and son.

Christine Davenport

GLEN BERNIE, Md.—Christine Davenport, sister of Vastine Graham, died Nov. 10, 2025. Mrs. Graham is the wife of the Rev. Benjamin Graham, pastor of Mount Beulah United Methodist Church, Lake City.

Funeral services were held Nov. 19 at Mid Atlantic Community Church, Gambrills, Maryland.

Monroe A. Friday

TIMMONSVILLE—Monroe A. Friday, father of the Rev. James Friday, died Oct. 28, 2025. Rev. Friday is the director of Congregational Development of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Nov. 1 at New Haven UMC with burial in Dickfield Cemetery.

Mr. Friday is survived by his three sons and three daughters.



Hyder

Rev. Larry R. Hyder

CHESNEE—The Rev. Larry R. Hyder, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Oct. 16, 2025.

Prior to his retirement in 2013, Rev. Hyder served the Golightly-Tabernacle, Kelton, Ben Avon-Glendale, Ben Avon-Roebuck and Hickory Grove charges.

A private funeral will be held at a later date.

Rev. Hyder is survived by his wife, Frances, son and daughter.



Jarrell

Rev. Larry Michael Jarrell

ROCK HILL—The Rev. Larry Michael Jarrell, an elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church serving the Rock Hill Circuit, died Oct. 21, 2025.

Before being appointed to the Rock Hill Circuit in 2024, Rev. Jarrell served Zion (Lancaster) and Adnah charges after transferring from the Rocky Mountain Conference.

Funeral services were held Oct. 27 at Greene Funeral Home.

Memorials may be made to Bethel Shelters of Rock Hill, 1232 Curtis St., Rock Hill, SC 29730 or online at [bethelshelters.org](http://bethelshelters.org).

Rev. Jarrell is survived by his wife, Heather, daughter and son.

Betty J. Rabon Jones

LUGOFF—Betty J. Rabon Jones, grandmother of the Rev. Melissa Williams, died Nov. 12, 2025. Rev. Williams is the pastor of Blackville and Williston United Methodist churches.

A time of gathering was held Nov. 15 at Powers Funeral Home.

Mrs. Jones is survived by her three sons.

Theodore H. Kohl

JOHNSTON—Theodore “Ted” H. Kohl, husband of Laura Kohl, died Oct. 26, 2025. Mrs. Kohl is a supply minister serving the Ridge Spring United Methodist Church, Ridge Spring.

Funeral services were held Nov. 1 at Bethlehem UMC with burial in the church cemetery.

Mr. Kohl is survived by his wife.

Jean Bell Long

SPARTANBURG—Jean Bell Long, widow of the Rev. Allen Eugene Long, died Sept. 25, 2025.

Graveside services were held Oct. 1 at Greenlawn Memorial Gardens.

Memorials may be made to St. Jude Children’s Hospital, 501 St. Jude Place, Memphis, TN 38105 or online at [www.stjude.org](http://www.stjude.org).

Mrs. Long is survived by her three daughters and son.



Smith

Rev. Debra Quilling Smith

HOLLYWOOD—The Rev. Debra Alice Sylvia Quilling Smith, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Oct. 26, 2025.

Prior to her retirement in 2018, Rev. Quilling Smith served the Marlboro Circuit, Myrtle Beach-First Associate, Rehoboth, Manning, and St. John’s Rock Hill charges. She also served as the director of the USC Wesley Foundation from 1983-1990.

Funeral services were held Nov. 6 at Shives Funeral Home Trenholm Road Chapel, Columbia, with burial in Fort Jackson National Cemetery, Columbia.

Memorials may be sent to Healing Properties, P.O. Box 8296, Columbia, SC 29202 or online at [www.healingpropertiesinc.com](http://www.healingpropertiesinc.com). Rev. Quilling Smith is survived by her husband, Carlisle Smith, two sons, two stepdaughters and stepson.

Worldwide News.

Justice and peace gatherings planned

WASHINGTON—Each jurisdiction in The United Methodist Church will host a gathering in 2026 to explore how members can respond to pressing social issues. The Justice and Peace Gatherings were announced during a three-day retreat at the United Methodist Board of Church and Society. Also planned at the 2026 meetings are training on faith-based advocacy and community organizing and building networks that extend the church’s witness for justice, peace and compassion.

Church welcomes board gamers

HOLLYWOOD, Md.—Giving a group of board game enthusiasts a place to meet is proving beneficial for Hollywood United Methodist Church. The father who made the original request to meet at the church has since become a youth leader there, and a member of the board game group helped to secure a \$500 donation for a mission trip. “The church building is one of the most underutilized things that a church has to offer,” said the Rev. Matthew Tate, the church’s pastor.

Bishop warns of financial troubles ahead

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The president of the UMC’s finance agency urged leaders to face the reality of dramatically reduced resources but also expressed hope that the denomination can rebuild for a faithful future. Bishop David Graves was addressing the General Council on Finance and Administration board as it struggled to meet funding requests in the aftermath of a denominational splintering.

Camp director becomes trail chaplain

KINGSPORT, Tenn.—The Rev. Jeff Wadley has shared his intent to retire as director of United Methodist Camp Bays Mountain, just as the Appalachian Trail Chaplaincy board has announced that Wadley will serve as its 2026 chaplain.

Conference donates \$1 million to fight hunger

CARMEL, Ind.—After prayerful discernment, the Indiana Conference cabinet has approved the allocation of \$1 million from the conference’s closed church funds to launch the new ALL IN: Feeding Indiana Through a Legacy of Love initiative. Of this total, \$300,000 will be available in grants to local churches that are currently responding to the urgent food crisis, Indiana Conference Bishop Tracy S. Malone announced. She also is the Council of Bishops president.

Lunch-hour prayer service draws crowd

MUTARE, Zimbabwe—Lunchtime services at St. Peter’s Inner City United Methodist Church offer time for prayer and worship. United Methodists, along with members of other denominations, have access to pastors for individual attention, as well as counseling for spiritual needs. The sessions often attract around 500 people.

Grants available for rural churches

CONCORD, N.C.—United Methodist rural churches may apply for \$750 grants for new or emerging social justice ministries. United Methodist Rural Advocates will approve six of the grant applications submitted by Jan. 20. Churches can enter justice-oriented ministries developed within the last six months or those they would like to develop in response to needs in the community.

Lectionary 2026 available

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The 2026 Revised Common Lectionary is available in a free two-page document to help with weekly and longer-term worship planning. The lectionary is a three-year cycle of Scripture texts following the liturgical year and is designed to be used in worship week by week.

Agency seeks help with funding gaps

ATLANTA—The United Methodist Board of Global Ministries has been analyzing its resources, global partners and available funding to try to fill some of the gaps after the United States shut down most of its \$34 billion budget for the U.S. Agency for International Development. Programs for maternal and child health, HIV and AIDS, malaria and hospital and clinic operations that receive U.S. federal funds are struggling to survive in the wake of the budget cuts.

Regionalization starts taking effect

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—What is now the Standing Committee on Regional Conference Matters Outside the USA has a new name and a new responsibility. The international United Methodist body met to celebrate the ratification of the denominational restructuring and get to work on next steps.

Courtesy UMNews



# History.

## Conference Historical Society elects new officers

On Nov. 1, the South Carolina Conference Historical Society and the South Carolina Commission on Archives and History held a joint meeting at Bethel United Methodist Church, Spartanburg. The meeting focused on a “ministry of memories” and included a business meeting and a program.

During the business session, new officers were elected for the 2026-2027 term: The Rev. Joseph Kovas was elected president, the Rev. Meredith Dark (past president) was elected vice president and Dr. Roger Gramling was elected secretary/treasurer.

The mission of the Conference Historical Society is to bring awareness of the history of Methodism in South Carolina and to encourage the study and preservation the history of the South Carolina Conference, as well as its predecessor conferences.

The historical society is a volunteer membership organization that works alongside the Conference Commission of Archives and History to promote historical preservation and awareness. It sponsors programs relating to the history of local churches as well as Methodism generally. It also seeks to support the work of archival preservation at the conference and local church levels. The preservation and study of history are important because history reminds people of the roots of our faith and unites people in the love of Christ through common bonds. They also recognize that the study of history teaches how the church has functioned in the past within the contours of culture and society, providing valuable lessons for the church’s ministry today.

The society has created a “Heritage Trail” of 44 historical sites that are representative of the broad nature and history of early Methodism in South



From left are Gramling, Dark and Kovas.

Carolina. This project was led and developed by Dr. A.V. Huff Jr., conference historian, and assisted by Gramling. Learning about the sites along the Heritage Trail brings to life the struggles and successes of early Methodists who met Bishops Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke along with a group of preachers who first came to South Carolina in 1785, right after the Christmas Conference. Early South Carolina Methodists housed the early circuit riders, built the brush arbors and early churches and fought against slavery. The richness of the stories along this trail helps us appreciate our ancestors who developed the foundations of our Methodist faith in the state.

During the meeting, Dr. Phillip Stone presented a report of the Commission on Archives and History and led a discussion of ways to help churches



New society president Kovas speaks to the crowd.

capture and save their church history. Gramling led a “Time of Remembrance” to recall the work of members of the society who passed away within the last few years. He also presented the fall issue of The Mark, a newsletter of the Historical Society.

In Kovas’ visioning of the future of the historical society, he said, “We’ve been given a beautiful opportunity to plant seeds of possibilities (in the words of Bishop Fairley) that witness to us that God is still writing our stories.

The society is always looking for new members to join them. Individual memberships are \$15; senior memberships are \$10; annual church or institution memberships are \$25; and lifetime memberships are \$100. To join, please contact Gramling at gramlingr@bellsouth.net.

## St. Stephen UMC celebrates 156 years, launches renewed ministry vision

ORANGEBURG—St. Stephen United Methodist Church celebrated 156 years of faith, service and community Oct. 18-19.

The milestone weekend honored the congregation’s legacy while embracing a new beginning centered on renewal, outreach and growth under the leadership of the Rev. Kenneth Middleton.

### Launching a renewed vision

In a time of post-pandemic transition and denominational change, St. Stephen UMC is reimagining its mission through Middleton’s vision known as LAUNCH—Love, Action, Unity, Nurture, Communication and Hospitality. The six guiding principles encourage members to strengthen relationships, rebuild connections and renew their witness to the community.

“After a season when many were unsure or disconnected, we made a conscious decision to refocus our efforts,” said Rev. Middleton. “LAUNCH is more than a theme – it’s our commitment to love boldly, act faithfully and nurture relationships within our church and throughout the community.”



Pearl Thompson, Theresa Baylor, Angela Williams and Rashonda Fields, children’s ministry leaders at St. Stephen UMC, gather for a smile.

As part of this renewed direction, the church has begun facility renovations, leadership training and inter-generational ministry development. St. Stephen has also expanded its digital presence, welcoming virtual participants as full members of its faith family.

### Celebration weekend

Held under the theme “Sow the

Gospel, Reap the Harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38), the anniversary weekend embodied St. Stephen’s mission of spiritual renewal and community engagement.

Saturday’s Fall Festival brought together members, families and neighbors for a day of fellowship, food, music and fun. Organized by Festival Chair Janelle Mitchell, First Lady Jenny Middleton and Trustee Chairman Lamont Green, the event reflected the welcoming spirit of the LAUNCH initiative.

“As chairman of the Fall Festival, I wish to thank all of our sponsors who made it possible,” Mitchell said. “We had gorgeous weather, great attendance and everyone had a wonderful time. Can’t wait for the next one!”

Middleton added, “This was a great opportunity to be a witness to the Orangeburg community. I could not be prouder of our congregation and thankful for the community leaders who came to support us.”

The celebration concluded Sunday with an inspiring anniversary worship service, featuring a sermon by the Rev.



The Rev. Kenneth and First lady Jenny Middleton talk to the crowd.

Anna Graham Miller, an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church and music by the Claflin D.R.E.A.M. Gospel Choir. The service offered gratitude for the past and excitement for the future.


### Looking ahead:

#### A future rooted in purpose

As St. Stephen UMC moves forward, it remains dedicated to reconnecting with past members, welcoming new ones and embracing online worshippers. Guided by LAUNCH, the church strives to be a community that listens, serves and leads with love.

“This is only the beginning,” Middleton said. “Through LAUNCH, we are planting seeds of faith and hope that will bear fruit for generations to come.”

For more information, visit <https://ststephenumc.com> or follow St. Stephen UMC on social media for updates and opportunities to get involved.



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From the Archives  
by Dr. Phillip Stone

South Carolina Methodists, 1945

Too often when we reflect on historical events, we fail to consider that while an event such as a war, crisis, pandemic or natural disaster might have an official concluding date, that doesn't mean life immediately returns to normal.

Reading the pages of the *Advocate* in November and December 1945 shows that though the Second World War had officially ended in early September, it continued to affect daily life and thought.

World War II was one of the most destructive and deadly events in modern history, and it is a major turning point in 20th-century American history. The war's effects on everyday life, in South Carolina and elsewhere, continued well past the war's official end. The Nov. 29 issue of the *Advocate* noted the end of rationing of meat in the United States, but several articles talked about the plight of the citizens of Europe and the need for relief. Reports from the Philippines, Korea and Central Europe documented devastation, destruction and hunger in staggering amounts. And alongside the fledgling United Nations, Methodist relief workers were there.

One denominational educational leader noted that the G. I. Bill was likely to see some 250,000 Methodist men attend college. He had the vision to see this as a tremendous opportunity for the church to influence a generation of leaders "who will represent the Church in industry, politics, and education and who will perform the Church's task in Christian work during the next thirty years." That predicted influx of veterans into colleges proved to be accurate, and colleges like Wofford saw their enrollment double from their pre-war numbers.

While the war's aftermath appeared on most pages, the *Advocate* also noted news of the conference. In this era, Annual Conference met in late fall, and so moving day occurred in late November. (Imagine, for those of you in the clergy, walking into a new appointment at the start of Advent!) The Rev. James Cope-land wrote that he and his family had been well-received on their arrival in

Leesville on the day before Thanksgiving, that the parsonage was warm and "the ladies had prepared a delightful dinner—chicken and all the fixings."

The Rev. D. R. Dickerson had a similar reception at Bethel in Union, noting "After the ladies placed the supper on the table they left, but ... they came back later with a great host of people who completely loaded our dining table with good things to eat." The help in building a parsonage pantry seems to have been common around moving day.

A campaign for additional facilities at Epworth Children's Home also featured in one issue, with several districts assuming responsibility for raising \$40,000 to \$75,000 each for needed buildings. And the *Advocate* continued to carry letters and reports from Methodist missionaries serving in distant lands, even during and after a war. One issue carried a letter from the Rev. Joe Maw, whose family was sailing just before Christmas to work in the Belgian Congo. They would travel from New York to Buenos Aires to Cape Town and then drive 3,500 miles to their new appointment. Another note reported on the Rev. D. L. Betts, on furlough from Brazil, who spoke at Lander College's chapel. His wife was a Lander alumna, and she also spoke with student groups.

The pages of the *Advocate* in December 1945 reflect past and future eras in a way that is a little bit disorienting to modern readers. The articles reflect both the customs of previous years, advertisements reflecting a pre-war state and the uncertainty and promise of the postwar world to come. That is a fair reflection of the mood of the state and the nation in 1945, which was a mixture of a desire for a return to an idealized past mixed with recognition that the world had been shattered and would have to be built into something new.

*Stone is archivist for the South Carolina Conference and Wofford College. Read his blog at [https://blogs.wofford.edu/from\\_the\\_archives](https://blogs.wofford.edu/from_the_archives).*



Historical Society  
by the Rev. Meredith M. Dark

The Love Feast

We've heard of the "Love Shack" from the song by the B-52's and the "Love Machine" from the song by The Miracles, but have you heard of the "Love Feast" by John Wesley?

The Love Feast is a recognized United Methodist Church meal, and Discipleship Ministries reminds us that John Wesley came to know about the Love Feast from Count Nicholas Louis Von Zinzendorf and the Moravians from Germany.

It was the Moravians who "introduced a service of sharing food, prayer, religious conversation, and hymns in 1727." John Wesley became aware of the Love Feast in approximately 1737 when he was a missionary to the colony of Georgia. Wesley writes, "After evening prayers, we joined with the Germans in one of their love-feasts. It began and ended with thanksgiving and prayer and celebrated in such a decent and solemn a manner as a Christian of the apostolic age would have allowed to be worthy of Christ."

The Love Feast is not The Lord's Supper. It is a separate meal that we can take part in with our congregations. I remember partaking in the Love Feast at Christmastime with my family in church. We had Moravian buns and heated apple cider. The buns were shipped in from Winston Salem, North Carolina, where a group of Moravians settled from Pennsylvania. Today if you would like to get Moravian buns, you need to go in person as their website says they no longer ship the buns, but they do sell a two-pack Devonshire Coffee Cake and a Grandpa Coffee Cake that look delicious (<https://deweys.com>).

The Love Feast was an important facet of the early American Methodist movement. We remember how important the Moravians were to John Wesley, especially when he was on the ship homebound after the mission to Georgia. He met Peter Bohler, the famed Moravian who gave Wesley the advice, "Preach faith until you have it. Then you will preach faith because you have it!" Shortly thereafter, Wesley had his Aldersgate experience, and was able to preach faith.

Love Feasts are historic to our denomination and also something you may want to consider resurrecting as a moment of sincere worship and fellowship time together. Many folks wonder what to serve with the buns, and the appropriate drink includes lemonade, tea, coffee, apple cider, etc. Historically, a cup called a "loving cup" with two or three handles was used during the Love Feast. In today's day and time, participants will likely have their own cup to drink from.

Appropriate times to hold a Love Feast include around Annual Conference, Charge Conference, Covenant Discipleship group, congregational supper, Christmas, New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, the weekdays of Holy Week and the Day of Pentecost.

Discipleship Ministries suggests that these are times "where persons may report on what God has been doing in their lives and on the hope and trust they place in God for the future." Since many districts will be having cluster Charge Conferences next year, a Love Feast may be something to consider.

*Dark pastors North Charleston United Methodist Church, North Charleston, and is vice president of the Conference Historical Society.*

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Luke 2:10





Adult Lessons  
by Dr. J. Christopher Greene

About the  
Author

Greene pastors  
New Beginnings  
United Methodist  
Church, Boiling  
Springs.

Discovering Jesus through his own words

**Dec. 7**  
**Bread of Life**  
**Lesson Scripture: John 6:25-40**  
**Background Scripture: John 6**  
**Key Verse: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35).**

Advent is a season of anticipation—waiting for Christ with hope, peace, joy and love. In John 6:25-40, Jesus declares, “I am the Bread of Life” (v. 35), shifting expectations from Moses’ manna to the “true bread from heaven” (v. 32) that grants eternal life. This bread satisfies humanity’s deepest hunger. In a spiritually starved world, Jesus offers nourishment that endures.

The crowd seeks more miracles like the loaves and the fishes, but Jesus redirects them: “Don’t work for the food that doesn’t last but for the food that endures for eternal life” (v. 27). This is a radical call for us to prioritize eternal transformation over temporary fixes. Christ invites not a one-time miracle but an ongoing relationship that shapes us toward holiness and love.

When asked, “What must we do?” (v. 28), Jesus answers: “Believe him whom God sent” (v. 29)—an active trust, not mere intellectual assent. Wesley taught salvation as relational, sustained daily by Christ, like bread sustains life. It is renewal in love, not escape from punishment. Jesus assures, “I won’t send away anyone who comes to me” (v. 37), promising perseverance in grace.

Advent anticipates the Incarnation—God with us. Bread, ordinary yet essential, symbolizes grace meeting us in rhythms of life. At the Lord’s Table, we experience this presence and are called

to extend it through acts of mercy and justice. “Whoever comes to me will never go hungry” (v. 35) proclaims abundance without barriers—race, ability, gender, status, orientation, etc. In a world of exclusion, the Bread of Life challenges scarcity and invites radical hospitality.

Christ’s coming is both past and future. We wait actively and with hope—joining God’s mission, offering bread literal and spiritual to a hungry world; trusting that Jesus meets our ultimate needs, calling us to trust divine abundance and share generously.

What does it mean for us today to “never go hungry” when so many experience physical and spiritual scarcity?

**Dec. 14**  
**Light of the World**  
**Lesson Scripture: John 8:12-20; 9:5**  
**Background Scripture: John 7:37-52; 8:12-30; 9:5; 12:35**  
**Key Verse: “Jesus spoke to the people again, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me won’t walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).**

Advent is a season of promise and anticipation, celebrating Christ as the Light of the World who dispels darkness and brings hope. In John 8:12, Jesus declares, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me won’t walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” This statement, made during the Feast of Tabernacles—a festival marked by the lighting of great lamps, menorahs, recalling God’s guidance in the wilderness—reveals Jesus as the fulfillment of that promise. He is not merely a source of illumination but the divine presence

that transforms lives.

Our theology frames this light through grace: prevenient grace awakens us to God, justifying grace reconciles us through Christ, and sanctifying grace leads us toward holiness and love. Jesus’ light is active and restorative, as seen in John 9, when he heals a man born blind, granting both physical and spiritual sight. This miracle underscores that God’s light brings renewal, not just clarity.

The Light of Advent offers comfort and challenge. It comforts us by assuring God’s presence amid fear and grief, yet it also exposes injustice calling believers to action. Following Christ means reflecting his light through personal discipleship and public witness: examining our hearts, repenting and engaging in works of mercy and justice that transform the world around us—living in the light rather than merely professing it.

Lighting Advent candles symbolizes this ongoing mission: to reignite hope and proclaim that Christ’s light still shines and will one day illuminate all creation (Revelation 21:23). As we await the fullness of God’s reign, we are invited to embody this light—bringing healing, equity and peace to a world in need—being active participants in God’s transformative work.

Where do you see the light of Christ challenging the darkness in our world today, and how can we join that work?

**Dec. 21**  
**The Open Gate**  
**Lesson Scripture: John 10:1-13**  
**Background Scripture: John 10:1-21**  
**Key Verse: “I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture” (John 10:9).**

Advent is a season of anticipation, inviting believers to expect God’s transformative presence. In John 10:1-13, Jesus declares, “I am the gate,” portraying himself as the sole, legitimate entrance to God’s flock. In ancient shepherding, a single gate guarded the sheepfold, often with the shepherd lying in its opening—both protector and passage. Jesus uses this imagery to affirm that true life and safety come only through him.

The metaphor contrasts thieves and outlaws, who climb over walls to exploit, with the shepherd who enters openly, recognized by the gatekeeper and the sheep who know his voice (v. 14). This duality signals inclusivity—all who enter through Christ are welcomed—and exclusivity, as false shepherds are exposed.

Advent illuminates this metaphor through the lens of grace: Prevenient Grace—God’s invitation precedes our response; Jesus as the gate embodies constant divine welcome. Justifying Grace—Salvation hinges on trusting Christ alone, not on transactional or partial means. Sanctifying Grace—Those entering through Jesus find abundant life in transformative community.

Advent proclaims both Christ’s

coming and his return. The gate beckons us toward personal renewal and communal transformation, confronting barriers like poverty, exclusion, and systemic injustice to name a few. Following Christ means dismantling these barriers—sharing resources, welcoming the marginalized and advocating for equity.

John Wesley underscores in his explanatory notes that Christ is both door and shepherd, with the Father as gatekeeper granting him authority. Thus, the gate symbolizes sanctuary and passage—from darkness into light. Advent invites disciples to enter daily through prayer, Scripture and community; to break barriers of race, gender and economics; and to live abundantly in Christ’s light.

From Bethlehem’s vulnerability to Calvary’s sacrifice, the gate remains open. Until Christ returns to end all injustice, we live in hopeful readiness, walking through the gate and inviting others into true and abundant life.

How does Jesus as the open gate challenge our ideas of who belongs in God’s family?

**Dec. 28**  
**The Good Shepherd**  
**Lesson Scripture: John 10:11-18**  
**Background Scripture: John 10:1-21**  
**Key Verse: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).**

Advent is a season of hopeful waiting, inviting us to center our hearts on Christ—the Good Shepherd who cares deeply for creation and for us. In John 10:11-18, Jesus declares, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep,” contrasting his sacrificial love with hired hands who abandon the flock at any sign of danger.

This passage offers both comfort and challenge. It assures us that we are known, loved and protected, yet it calls us to courageous discipleship. The shepherd’s pursuit of the one lost sheep (v. 16) compels the church to embody radical inclusion, extending grace and justice to those marginalized or overlooked. Jesus’ shepherding contrasts sharply with political saviors or systems exploiting fear for gain. True leadership reflects presence, constancy and self-giving—not opportunism—prompting us to examine church practices and societal structures that scatter sheep rather than heal and unite.

Wesley’s reflections highlight the relational love between Father and Son (vv. 15-17), modeling unity and intimacy. Advent becomes a time to return to this care, attune to the Shepherd’s voice, and mirror his love to others. The mention of “other sheep that don’t belong to this sheep pen” (v. 16) underscores an inclusive, missionary call—affirming that no one is beyond Christ’s reach. In the struggle against exclusion and prejudice, this passage offers hope and direction.

As Advent candles pierce the darkness, we remember: the Good Shepherd enters our fears and unjust systems, not as a hired hand but as one who redeems and unites. He calls us to worship and prayer in order to relearn his voice; reflect his self-giving love by caring personally for those around us; and advocate for justice and systemic change that embodies his protection and inclusion—leading us together into abundant life.

What does it mean for us to follow a Shepherd who leads through self-giving love in a world driven by self-interest?

Leave A Legacy To Change Lives

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





# Event Calendar.

<b>November</b> <b>Native American Heritage Month</b> Nov. 27—Thanksgiving Day	Dec. 13—Lake Junaluska's Holiday Craft Market, Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.
Nov. 27—26th Annual Community Thanksgiving Dinner, Hudson's Seaford House on the Docks, Hilton Head Island, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. For more information: <a href="https://communitythanksgiving.com">https://communitythanksgiving.com</a>	Dec. 21—Winter Equinox
Nov. 27-28—United Methodist Conference Center closed	Dec. 24—Christmas Eve
Nov. 30—UM Student Day	Dec. 25—Christmas Day
<b>December</b> Dec. 1—Advocate Community Listening Session (Walterboro), New Life UMC, Walterboro, 6:30-8:30 p.m.	Dec. 31—New Year's Eve/Watch Night
Dec. 2—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 6-7 p.m.	<b>January</b> Jan. 4—Prayer Walk, Columbia UMC, Columbia, 3 p.m. (tentative).
Dec. 5-7—The Living Christmas Story drive through nativity, Union UMC, Irmo, 6:30-9 p.m.	Jan. 9-10—"Lights, Camera, Action: Leading and Learning for Laity." <a href="https://www.umcsc.org/lead">https://www.umcsc.org/lead</a> .
Dec. 6—UWF Limitless Event, 10 a.m.	Jan. 12—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.
Dec. 10-13—"Return to Bethlehem," a living nativity experience, Grace UMC, North Augusta, 6:30-8:30 p.m. <a href="https://www.gotgraceumc.org/bethlehem">https://www.gotgraceumc.org/bethlehem</a> .	Jan. 19—Martin Luther King Day
	Jan. 19—United Methodist Center closed
	Jan. 30-Feb. 1— Revolution, DoubleTree Conference Center, Columbia. <a href="http://scmyp.org/revolution-registration-2">http://scmyp.org/revolution-registration-2</a> .

## Large response to LSM class creates new opportunity

God isn't finished with The United Methodist Church.

In September, Charleston District Lay Servant Ministries prepared for their fall classes. One of the classes, "A Disciple's Path," filled early. It was not long before the district director, Constance Wilborn, realized there was a problem—registration went through the roof. Too many people wanted to take "A Disciple's Path."

"A Disciple's Path" is a United Methodist guide for deepening your relationship with Christ and the UMC. The topics covered are the way of grace, biblical prayer, focusing on God's presence, financial generosity, spiritual gifts and evangelism.



Fifty from both classes were able to complete the "A Disciples Path" study.

It looked like she would have to return money and schedule the class again next year, for there was simply no way to teach everyone at the September Lay Servant School. At that time, God opened a new door.

Stallsville United Methodist Church wanted to offer a Basic Lay Servant class. Listening to the Holy Spirit, Wilborn asked Stallsville if they could add a class for "A Disciple's Path." Stallsville agreed, and a total of 50 students from both classes were able to complete the study.

Students discovered that some information was a refresher, approached from a fresh angle to take out into the world.

Hope can be celebrated when 50 people are willing and eager to spend a weekend learning how to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.



### Children's Sermon by the Rev. Meg Cook

## Gaudete Sunday

Date: Dec. 14  
Scripture: Luke 1:47-55 (The Magnificat)  
Props: Advent wreath in the sanctuary  
Welcome the children: Good morning, friends!  
Say: Today is a special Sunday in Advent called Gaudete (say it with me: gow-DET-eh) Sunday. "Gaudete" is a Latin word that means "Rejoice!" That's why today we light the pink candle on our Advent wreath, the candle of joy. Some people even call it Mary's candle, because we remember the joy Mary felt when she learned that she would be the mother of Jesus.

Now, when the angel of the Lord told Mary that she would have a baby who would be God's son, she didn't get scared or say, "No, thank you." Instead, she

started to sing! Her song, which we read in Luke 1:47-55, is called the Magnificat, and it's full of joy and power.

Mary sings that God brings down the proud and powerful and lifts up people who are humble. Mary says God fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty.

Mary knew that God was doing something big and good through Jesus. She didn't just sit quietly and smile. She praised God with her whole heart! Mary shows us that joy isn't just about being happy. Joy means trusting that God is doing something good, even when the world feels unfair or scary. Sometimes, finding joy is a brave thing to do.

Maybe there is something we can do in this season that might be brave? (Pause.) I wonder if

maybe we could share some toys we have outgrown? It's hard, but good to share. (Pause, thinking.) I wonder if we could help the big people in our church (motion to the congregation) to donate food to those who are hungry (lift up your church's blessing box or food pantry or a partner organization like Sharing God's Love).

Helping others gives me joy. And Mary said in her special song that the hungry would be filled with good things.

Helping feed people is brave and good.

That's what Gaudete Sunday is about: rejoicing even when it's hard, because we know that God is with us, working to bring love, justice and hope to everyone.

Let's pray: Dear God (echo), thank you for Mary (echo), who sang with joy (echo) and trusted your goodness (echo). Help us find brave joy (echo) and praise you with our whole hearts (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>.*

# Recipe Swap.

## Jalapeño Squash Casserole

*From the kitchen of Melanie Dozier, member of First United Methodist Church, Marion.*

**Ingredients:**

2 lbs. squash  
8 slices bacon  
1 lg. onion, cut in rings  
1 can mushroom soup  
6 to 8 oz. jalapeño Monterey Jack cheese, grated  
Bread crumbs

**Directions:**

Slice squash and boil in water until tender. Fry bacon and remove. Brown onion in drippings. Crumble bacon. Layer half the squash, soup, bacon, onion and cheese in a 9 x 9-inch baking dish. Repeat layer.

Sprinkle with bread crumbs. Bake at 325 degrees for 40 minutes.

*Do you have a favorite recipe? Share it with the Advocate! Email [news@advocatesc.org](mailto:news@advocatesc.org).*



Photo by Kelly Gottheiner

**Yard sale helps youth**  
Manning UMC, Manning, youth participated in their church yard sale recently, raising more than \$3,300 for their youth program's missions and service projects.

# Classifieds.

## Marketplace

FREE ESTIMATES

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# Across SC.

## Churches to save through ACH bank draft signup

What would your church do with an additional \$1,800? Seed a new ministry? Give additional support to an existing ministry? Upgrade technology in order to enhance the church's outreach and discipleship?

Beginning in January 2026, the South

Carolina Board of Pension and Health Benefits will increase the ACH discount on direct billing from \$15/month (or \$180/year) to \$150/month (or \$1,800/year). Simply by signing up to pay direct billing by automatic bank draft rather than mailing in a check or pay-

ing through Vanco, churches will save \$1,800 in direct bill costs in 2026.

As reported at the 2025 Annual Conference, this discount is being provided through investment income generated by funds held by the South Carolina Board of Pension and Health Benefits.

If you are not sure if your church is already paying direct billing through ACH, or if you would like to sign your church up for ACH, contact Conference Benefits Officer the Rev. Rett Haselden at wehaseldenIV@umesc.org or 803-602-0710.



# BRIDGING VISIONS

PROPHETIC VOICES, PASTORAL HEARTS

*A Preaching Event in Honor of Rev. Dr. Joseph E. Lowery*

DATE

January 15th - 17th, 2026

LOCATION

North Georgia Conference Center  
Duluth GA

Workshops topics include: the connections between Dr. Lowery's and Dr. King's work, Ministry to the Marginalized, the Poor People's Campaign, Technology and Preaching Prophetically, and Mystic Theology and Practice of Howard Thurman.



For registration and a full schedule, scan the QR code.



Rev. Dr. William Barber  
Preacher



Bishop Karen Oliveto  
Preacher



Rev. Dr. Jeremy Williams  
Keynoter



Cole Arthur Riley  
Speaker



Hon. Rev Andrew Young  
Speaker



Dr Hal Recinos  
Speaker

### Additional Leaders



Amiri B. Hooker



Joe Daniels



C. Anthony Hunt



Martin Quick



Michael Armstrong



Ann Kovan

24 | December 2025

Advocate