Advocate.
SERVING SOUTH CAROLINA UNITED METHODISTS SINCE 1837

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In this issue

Visit our new website:

Bridging generations

Men's event draws large crowd for wisdom on connecting

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—More than 225 men headed to Journey United Methodist Church Feb. 20-21 for what became the largest men's ministry event in many years.

The "Building Bridges Across Generations" Men N Ministry event brought all ages of men and boys—including a host of Scouts—together for a wisdom-filled event that its leaders are calling "highly successful and impactful."

"It far exceeded our expectations," said Dyron V. Anderson, president of the South Carolina Conference United Methodist Men. "It called men to step up, connect across generations, and share their journeys. By uniting younger and older generations, we bridged gaps of experience, wisdom and faith. And now, living with purpose, we commit

See "Bridging Generations," Page 11

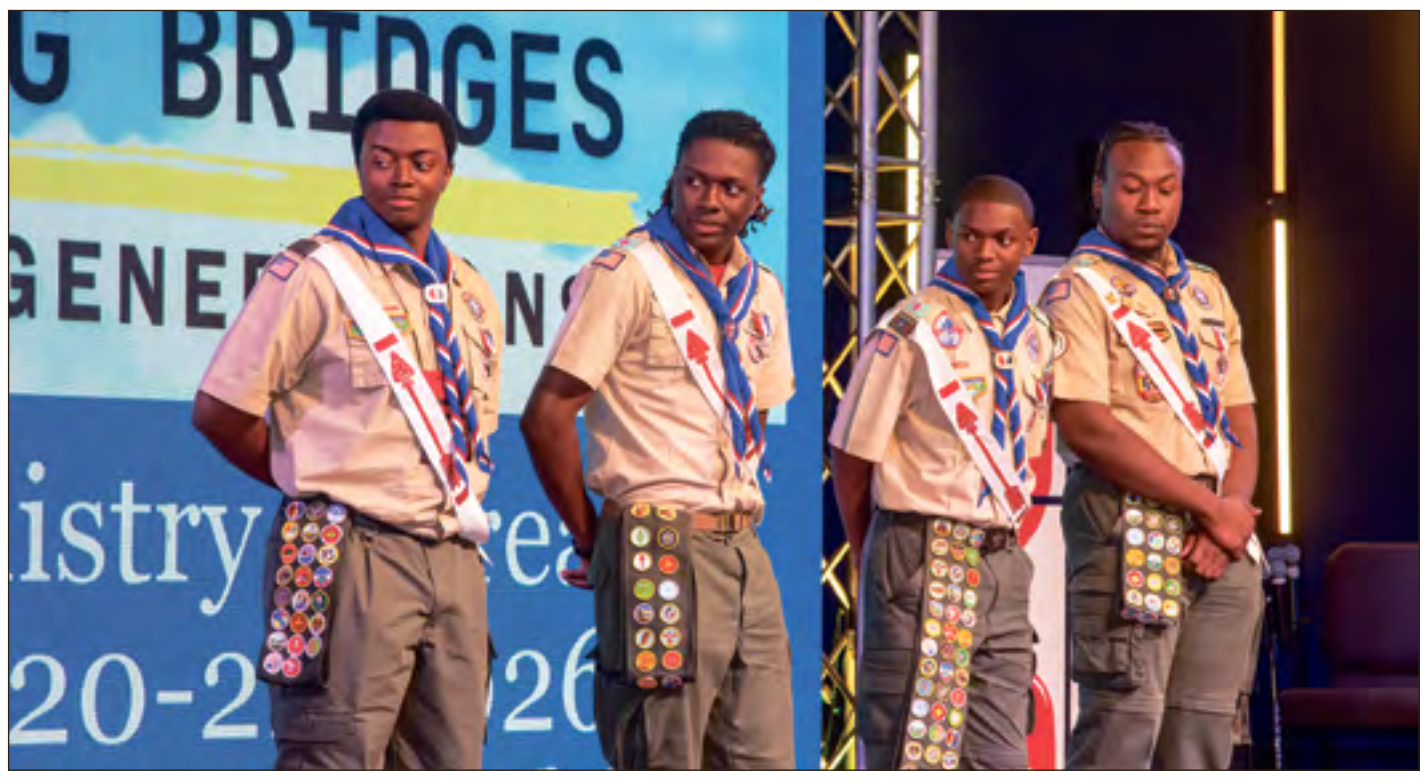

Photo by Jessica Brodie

Men N Ministry gave a standing ovation to the five young men who made history as the largest group of African Americans to be inducted into the Eagle Scout rank at one time in the history of South Carolina. From left are four of the five: Sean Nimmons, Khamary Cleckley, Derwin Brailey and Melvin Hart of Troop 500 at New Light UMC, Orangeburg (not pictured: Willie Townes III, of Troop 190 at Trinity UMC.)

Historic milestone reached as five young African American men inducted as Eagle Scouts

By the Rev. Shirley Gordon and Jessica Brodie

ORANGEBURG—More Black history has been made, and it happened during Black History Month.

On Feb. 7, during a reverent Eagle Scout Court of Honor ceremony at Trinity United Methodist Church, Orangeburg, five young men rose to Scouting America's highest rank, Eagle Scout.

This ceremony was particularly significant, as it represented the largest group of African Americans to be inducted into the Eagle Scout rank at one time in the history of South Carolina.

Feb. 7 was also a sacred day of remembrance in Orangeburg—the anniversary of the Orangeburg Massacre, when three students were killed and 28 others wounded.

See "Eagle Scouts," Page 24

One year in, UMCSC missionaries finding footing in Hungary

By Jessica Brodie

One year after they left their nation, their families and everything else they knew to become full-time missionaries in Budapest, Hungary, two South Carolina United Methodist pastors are making slow but positive strides.

Clergy couple the Rev. Weston Pendergrass and the Rev. Chrisie Reeves-Pendergrass, along with their nine-year-old son, Samuel, now live in an apartment in the eastern European capital of a nation so old it slightly predates the kingdom of England.

The Pendergrasses are both ordained elders in the

See "Hungary," Page 13

Registration opens as preparations continue for Annual Conference

By Jessica Brodie

GREENVILLE—Registration is now open for this year's Annual Conference, set for June 7-10 at the Greenville Convention Center.

With the theme "See the Possibilities, Live the Promises," this year's Annual Conference will feature four days of business, worship and fellowship as clergy and laity from United Methodist churches across South Carolina come together.

"Annual Conference is more than business," said Conference Secretary the Rev. Mel Arant. "It is the opportunity to remember our shared mission of making disciples by

See "Annual Conference," Page 12

Advocate.

Hours & Location
Open Monday through Friday
9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
S.C. United Methodist Conference Center
4908 Colonial Drive, Suite 207
Columbia, SC 29203

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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.

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

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

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

New redesigned Advocate website now live

A fresh, clean, organized and decidedly journalistic look is now available for those browsing South Carolina United Methodist news with the *Advocate's* launch of its brand-new website.

Found at https://www.advocatesc.org, the website was designed by BLOX Digital, which has overseen websites for more than 2,000 media organizations, including the Post & Courier and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

"It's attractive, streamlined and user-friendly, and it looks much more like the typical news website most people are accustomed to navigating," said Jessica Brodie, *Advocate* editor.

The new website has a stronger e-edition feature, plus a host of exciting new United Methodist-focused content, including food, home and garden, travel and entertainment, in addition to the ongoing local church, district, conference and national news the *Advocate* already provides.

Soon, an app will also launch for Android and Apple users, making this same content available in another way.

"We know people get their news in a variety of ways, whether that's through a print newspaper, on the web, on social media or through an app. We are trying our best to make sure the *Advocate* is providing news in all the ways people enjoy," Brodie added.

Some of the content is only available to subscribers, while other content is available to all. The *Advocate* offers both print and digital subscriptions. To subscribe, visit https://www.advocatesc.org/subscribe.

Those who have print subscriptions to the *Advocate* automatically have free access to the digital content. To get your access if you are already a subscriber, email us at subs@advocatesc.org for how to access your account.

The *Advocate* is also about to start rolling out frequent, free e-newsletters updating people on news, events and other things. All are invited to sign up for these at https://www.advocatesc.org/newsletter.

Three new district superintendents, director of innovation and strategy to serve UMCSC

Bishop Leonard Fairley, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, has appointed three new district superintendents as well as the newly created conference director of innovation.

The Revs. James Friday, Megan Gray and Tiffany Knowlin Boykin have been tapped as the new district superintendents, with appointments effective June 24.

They are expected to be appointed to serve in the Anderson, Spartanburg and Walterboro districts; their exact district has not yet been assigned.

Dr. George Ashford, pastor of Journey UMC, Columbia, has been named the new conference director of innovation and strategy, the part-time position created when the Annual Conference formed the reorganized Office of Congregational Excellence, which continues the work of the Office of Congregational Development. Ashford will also continue in his appointment to Journey.


Ashford


Friday


Gray

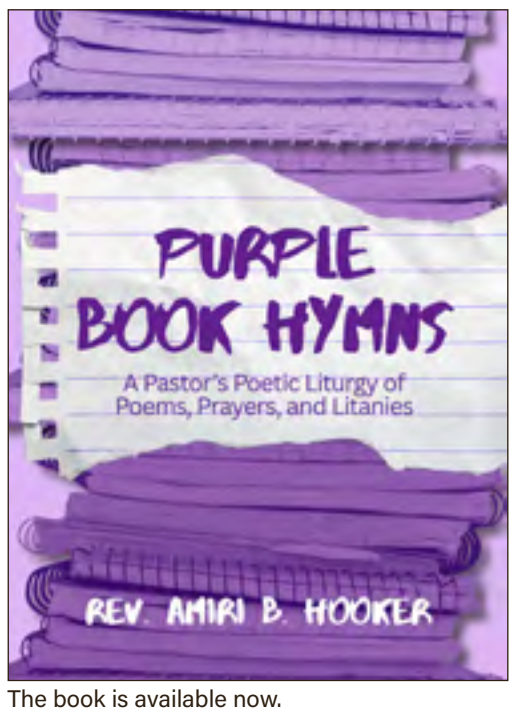

Knowlin Boykin

Friday, Gray and Boykin are replacing Florence District Superintendent Terry Fleming, Spartanburg District Superintendent Cathy Mitchell and Anderson District Superintendent Steve Patterson, all of whom have completed their eight-year tenures as district superintendent. Fleming, Mitchell and Patterson will receive new appointments on July 1.

Annual Conference voted in a special session in October to restructure the districts, reducing the number to 10 from 12, effective July 1. That results in the dissolution of the Florence and Greenville districts. Also beginning July 1, the Walterboro District will have its own appointed district superintendent, after two years of shared leadership by superintendents from adjacent districts.

(Read a longer article with biographical information on each at https://advocatesc.org.)

Advocate Press releases Hooker's 'Purple Book Hymns'



The book is available now.

The Advocate Press has just released its 39th title, "Purple Book Hymns: A Pastor's Poetic Liturgy of Poems, Prayers and Litanies," by South Carolina United Methodist pastor the Rev. Amiri B. Hooker.

The book is a deeply personal collection of poems, prayers and litanies born from the intersection of faith, justice and identity. These aren't just devotional writings, Hooker says, but declarations forged in the fire of lived experience. Here, church and culture collide, biblical interpretation meets racial reality, and priestly liturgy expands to embrace the prophetic cry for justice. Each poem is a prayer and each line a step toward understanding the divine dance between Scripture and struggle, worship and witness.

It arose from the struggles Hooker faced as a child, when he was told reading and writing weren't his gifts. Diagnosed with dyslexia and dysgraphia, he spent his early years in learning disability classes, fighting to decode the words on the page. But one teacher saw something different—and handed him a small purple book with a simple instruction: "Write in this whatever you want."

That purple book became a sanctuary: a place where words weren't obstacles but openings, where faith could be felt in rhythm and meter and where justice could be spoken in stanza and verse.

Whether you're a pastor seeking fresh language for Sunday morning, a poet hungry for work that grapples with both God and the world or simply a soul searching for words that name what you've always felt, this collection offers a poetic liturgy unlike any other.

"Purple Book Hymns" is available from the Advocate Press at https://store.advocatesc.org/product/purple-book-hymns. The paperback is $17 and the e-book is $9.

Virtual listening sessions on Transition Teams' plans set for March

South Carolina United Methodists will have the chance to attend one of four virtual listening sessions in March to learn about plans Transition Teams have developed to implement changes approved at the special called session of the 2025 South Carolina Annual Conference.

In October, South Carolina Annual Conference members voted to reduce the number of districts to 10 from 12, and the Appointive Cabinet has finalized the configuration of new district lines. Members also voted to create a new Office of Congregational Excellence, overseeing the work of the Office of Congregational Development and the Office of Connectional Ministries.

Each of the tri-district listening sessions – scheduled for the first four Sundays in March – will take place at 4 p.m. via Zoom.

People may participate in any session:

- March 1: Charleston, Walterboro and Orangeburg districts
- March 8: Columbia, Rock Hill and Greenwood districts
- March 15: Hartsville, Marion and Florence districts
- March 22: Greenville, Anderson and Spartanburg districts

The sessions will center primarily on the work of the Logistics Transition Team, which is studying and planning how to handle the logistics of reducing the number of districts. Participants will learn specifics, including which local churches will become part of newly configured districts and which will remain with their current districts.

To participate, go to http://bit.ly/UMCSCtransition.

Lowcountry signing for bishop's memoir set for May 4

Bishop Leonard Fairley will visit New Life United Methodist Church, Walterboro, to sign copies of and speak about his acclaimed memoir, "Silver Linings."

All are invited to the event, set for Monday, May 4, at 6 p.m. at the church, located at 763 Green Pond Hwy., Walterboro, SC 29488.

Fairley will speak about the book, as well as answer questions and sign copies. Books will be available for purchase.

"Silver Linings" is the riveting, inspiring and heart-wrenching coming-of-age account of South Carolina's bishop, who recounts his upbringing through the eyes of a young boy. Fairley grew up as one of nine children to a single mother in Laurinburg, North Carolina.

In addition to being available for purchase at the book signing, the book is available as a paperback ($25) and ebook ($10) from https://advocatepress.org.

Legal action continues in UMCSC property lawsuit

By Jessica Brodie

Legal action continues in property disputes surrounding churches' attempts to leave The United Methodist Church but keep their property.

The South Carolina Conference of the UMC has brought suit against nearly 70 such churches, alleging fraudulent deed filing and unlawful occupation of the church parsonage and property owned by the UMC, among other things. Some of these churches changed the locks on the church as well as the church name, the lawsuits allege, which the conference says is in violation of the denomination's trust clause.

Per an order by South Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice John Kittredge, the cases are all being handled by one judge, the Hon. Brian M. Gibbons, circuit court judge for South Carolina's Sixth Judicial Circuit, based in Chester.

On Feb. 6, in response to defendants' motions to dismiss the lawsuit, the conference asked the court to deny the defendants' motions to dismiss the case, which currently includes 65 churches across the state in a consolidated lawsuit titled South Carolina Conference of the UMC et al. vs. Fort Lawn Methodist et al.

Several other churches are also in litigation with the conference outside this particular lawsuit, including The Methodist Church of Simpsonville and Eutawville in Orangeburg County.

Additionally, Belin Revival Group—a group comprising some people who are part of Belin Memorial UMC, Murrells Inlet—is suing the conference, Belin Memorial UMC and others to ask the court to order a meeting and vote allowing the congregants to decide whether to disaffiliate from the UMC; they also want the court to declare that the conference has no property rights to the church. This lawsuit is in the 15th Judicial Circuit, as the primary issue is not the same.

Background on the litigation

A host of churches have indicated in writing their intent to separate from South Carolina Conference of the UMC. They seek to separate over theological differences surrounding human sexuality. In 2024, the UMC General Conference voted to change its stance on homosexuality, removing language from the *Discipline* that previously stated "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." It also voted to remove bans on the ordination of LGBTQ+ clergy and same-sex marriages.

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

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

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

In March 2025, the conference filed a motion asking the South Carolina Supreme Court to assign all cases regarding the conference and separating churches to a single trial judge. Last April, these churches filed a petition in the state Supreme Court asking the case be brought under the court's original jurisdiction.

On Aug. 13, 2025, the Supreme Court of South Carolina declined to hear the cases directly, so all related litigation has been assigned to a single circuit court judge to handle.

In October 2025, in South Carolina Conference of the UMC et al. vs. Fort Lawn Methodist et al., the conference gave notice of Kittredge's order, asking Gibbons to hear the case.

In February, after defendants' motions to dismiss, the conference asked the court to deny the defendants' motions to dismiss in the case.

The consolidated case currently includes 65 churches.

The UMC is arguing the denominational trust clause prohibits churches from being able to leave the denomination and keep their property. The trust clause provides that all property and assets of any local United Methodist church are held "in trust" for the benefit of the entire denomination. Those churches remain the property of the UMC if a congregation decides to break ties with the denomination.

Which are the 65 churches in the consolidated lawsuit?

- Aldersgate UMC, Greenwood County
- Andrews Chapel UMC, Clarendon County
- Bellinger Chapel UMC, Allendale County
- Bethel UMC, Bethune, Kershaw County
- Bethlehem UMC, Pamplico, Florence County
- Bethsaida UMC, Florence County
- Beulah UMC, Calhoun County
- Bogansville UMC, Union County
- Boiling Springs UMC, Lexington County
- Brunson UMC, Hampton County
- Calhoun Falls UMC, Abbeville County
- Camp Swamp UMC, Horry County
- Canaan UMC, Cherokee County
- Dickson Memorial UMC, Oconee County
- Duncan Memorial UMC, Georgetown County
- East Bethel UMC, Calhoun County
- Ebenezer UMC, Abbeville, Abbeville County
- Ebenezer UMC, Bennettsville, Marlboro County
- Emma Gray Memorial UMC, Spartanburg County
- Folly Beach UMC, Charleston County
- Fork Creek UMC, Chesterfield County
- Fort Lawn UMC, Chester County
- Good Shepherd UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County
- Gordon Memorial UMC, Fairfield County
- Grace UMC, Union, Union County
- Greenbrier UMC, Fairfield County
- Hardeeville UMC, Jasper County
- Hopewell UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County
- Jackson Grove UMC, Greenville County
- Jefferson UMC, Chesterfield County
- Livingston UMC, Orangeburg County
- Lupo Memorial UMC, Greenwood County
- McLeod UMC, Richland County
- Montgomery Memorial UMC, Spartanburg County
- Monticello UMC, Fairfield County
- Mount Zion UMC, Sandy Run, Calhoun County
- Nichols UMC, Marion County
- Panola UMC, Greenwood County
- Paxville UMC, Clarendon County
- Philadelphia UMC, York, York County
- Pinewood UMC, Sumter County
- Pleasant Hill UMC, Bamberg County
- Providence UMC, Holly Hill, Orangeburg County
- Quinby UMC, Florence County
- Rehoboth UMC, Greenwood, Greenwood County
- Republican UMC, McCormick, McCormick County
- Salem UMC, Pageland, Chesterfield County
- Sampit UMC, Georgetown County
- St. James UMC, Laurens, Laurens County
- St. John UMC, Graniteville, Aiken County
- St. Luke UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County
- St. Paul UMC, Florence, Florence County
- Summerton UMC, Clarendon County
- Swallow Savannah UMC, Allendale County
- Tabor UMC, Pickens County
- Trinity UMC, Bamberg, Bamberg County
- Trinity UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County
- Trinity UMC, Laurens, Laurens County
- Trinity UMC, Smoaks, Colleton County
- Union UMC, Cope, Orangeburg County
- Van Wyck UMC, Lancaster County
- Wesley Memorial UMC, Charleston, Charleston County
- West Bethel UMC, Calhoun County
- Zion UMC, Dorchester County
- Zion UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County

The court is expected to hear motions in May.

Perspectives.

Editorial
by Jessica Brodie

Healing the church

It's been six years this month since COVID-19 ravaged our nation, our state and our world. It could have been worse, but it was difficult, and it changed so much of society in tremendous ways, changes we're still experiencing. Some of those changes are good—look how many churches have thriving online ministries post-pandemic, ministries that are changing hearts and lives every single day.

But there's also been change for the worse. The isolation and church drift that ensued for some, teamed with the painful, heart-wrenching season of disaffiliation and church in-fighting in our denomination, has left many United Methodists grieving and traumatized.

Some churches split in two, half of their members leaving to start their own denomination or congregation. Some are still going through those battles. Some United Methodists, myself among them, were forced to leave churches they loved because those churches left the denomination and they had to find new church homes. Pastors who wanted to remain United Methodist (yet whose churches made up their minds to leave) had to endure political, emotional and spiritual hardship, navigating division most felt decidedly ill-equipped to handle.

It's been difficult. Tremendously difficult.

Yet for many, that time of darkness and grief is now starting to give away to healing and fresh life. Not all churches or United Methodist individuals are at this point yet, but for those who are, and for those who truly want to be, I think now is a good time to start using this newspaper to share those stories of healing. (A conversation with Herman Lightsey this past weekend at the men's ministry event further inspired this idea and cemented my resolve.)

Take a look at the article on page 15 about the new healing that has been happening at Trinity United Methodist Church in Aiken since their own church split because of theological differences. I hope to include a new, similar type of article every single month in our pages about this sort of healing, whether that is individual healing or the healing a church has been doing.

I invite you to share your story. If you need help sharing it, please reach out to me by email and I will be glad to help you write it. My direct email is jbrodie@advocatesc.org.

Grief is a process. It involves stages, including denial and anger, and ultimately ends in acceptance. Grief can happen in a church, too, but there's healing available. It's the healing and hope only experienced through Jesus Christ, who can take our dry bones, our broken pieces, and weave them together in a beautiful tapestry.

Share your stories of healing, and perhaps inspire other churches or people across the South Carolina Conference.

Perhaps your story will help someone else.

Topic for April *Advocate*
Does your church do something beyond Holy Week and Easter services to mark the resurrection? Share at new@advocatesc.org (include church name/city).

Bishop's Column
by Bishop Leonard E. Fairley

Confessing in the wilderness

Well before the season of Lent begin, I was already in confessional mode. However, my confessions had not yet been anything dramatic—I guess those will come as we continue the Lenten journey. Simple confessions have given me needed practice, and some have taken me back to childhood memories.

When I very young, I understood nothing about the Christian calendar. I confess that my understanding was limited to none at best. I actually thought Lent was "lint," which I would find in my empty pockets. I also thought of Lent as the nickname my Grandma Mary (my "other" grandma) gave me.

It was a nickname I hated. "Come here, 'lint,' and give me some sugar," she would say with a lip full of snuff. You get the picture as to why I hated the nickname, but I learned to suffer through it.

Of course, now the season of Lent means so much more to me as I have come to realize that it is a journey that must be taken through the wilderness places of life. There are no shortcuts, and there is no denying that I am dust with a bent toward sinning.

I have travelled through many wilderness places, but the one constant in each journey was that Jesus walked with me as guide and encourager. He is the Word made flesh, understanding what it is like to weep, hurt, grieve, love, hope and cry. Jesus understands wilderness wandering.

Despite all my shortcomings and failures, despite my propensity to give up and turn around, Jesus still walks with me in the wilderness.

While I now know that Lent is not something in my empty pockets, there is something confessional about emptying my pockets of all that would distract me from following the path Jesus has for me. If we are to follow Jesus, we must empty ourselves so that Jesus might fill that emptiness with his sacrificial and redemptive love.

Lord, in these days of confession, pardon and mercy, make us quiet and prayerful. In these days of challenge, make us stronger in you. In these days of wilderness wandering, open our hearts to the mystery of your cross. Amen.

Letter to the Editor.

Actions speak louder

"The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep" (John 21:17 NIV).

There are several songs with lyrics extolling love's broken promises, that saying it does not make it so. Albert Collins' blues rendition asks why his beloved treats him the way she does if she loves him as she says she does. No matter what we say, in the end it is a moot point unless it is undergirded with action. Even though voluminous words are used to confirm or declare our promises, only actions are truly heard. Actions always speak louder than words.

Every political season, which is constant, we are bombarded with showcases of Christian virtues, church affiliation, godly intentions and reminders of a God-fearing nation. However, before the television sounds off for the evening, the horror stories begin: old people who worked all their lives having to choose between paying for their medication or eat. Bright young people with potential to be self-supporting, contributing citizens, but a debilitating class system that limited their parent's ability to progress is being resurrected again under the guise of "greatness." Invaders and terrorists are roaming the streets of our city in uniform, but with masks on, kidnapping and killing American citizens at will. People from every walk of life are suffering and crying, except the wealthy.

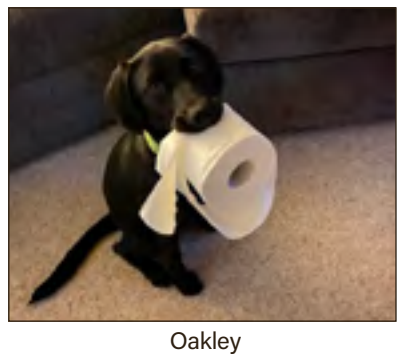
"It seems that someone would call and tell the president what is going on, and if he is asleep, call those big, beautiful representatives that seem to know him so well," I thought for a moment. Then I realized that this was not a foreign invasion but one from those that we had so foolishly elected who had been radicalized by lies and had become so obsessed by money, power, greed and/or fear, who have become America's greatest threat. There seems to be a willingness to sell out everybody and everything we confessed to hold sacred. Our actions are drowning out our words.

Maybe we fail to see or understand that whatever we do for or against the least, we have done to God (Matthew 25:40).

Do we love him? Remember, no one is above the law—the law of God.

Rev. Joseph Abram Jr., retired
St. Matthews

Precious Pet of the Month.



Oakley

Meet Oakley

Oakley was adopted from Homeward Bound rescue as a 5-month-old puppy who had been given away twice and left in a backyard. Oakley's humans said, "Homeward Bound provided excellent training and medical care so Oakley can bring us laughter and comfort in all of life."
Submitted by Laurie Brandes, pastor of Asbury Memorial UMC, Columbia

Do you have a pet who is near and dear to your heart? Share a photo and brief story about your pet and what they mean to you in the *Advocate* newspaper, and be sure to include your name and church name with city.

Whether your animal friend is furry or has feathers or scales, we welcome your submission.

Email news@advocatesc.org.

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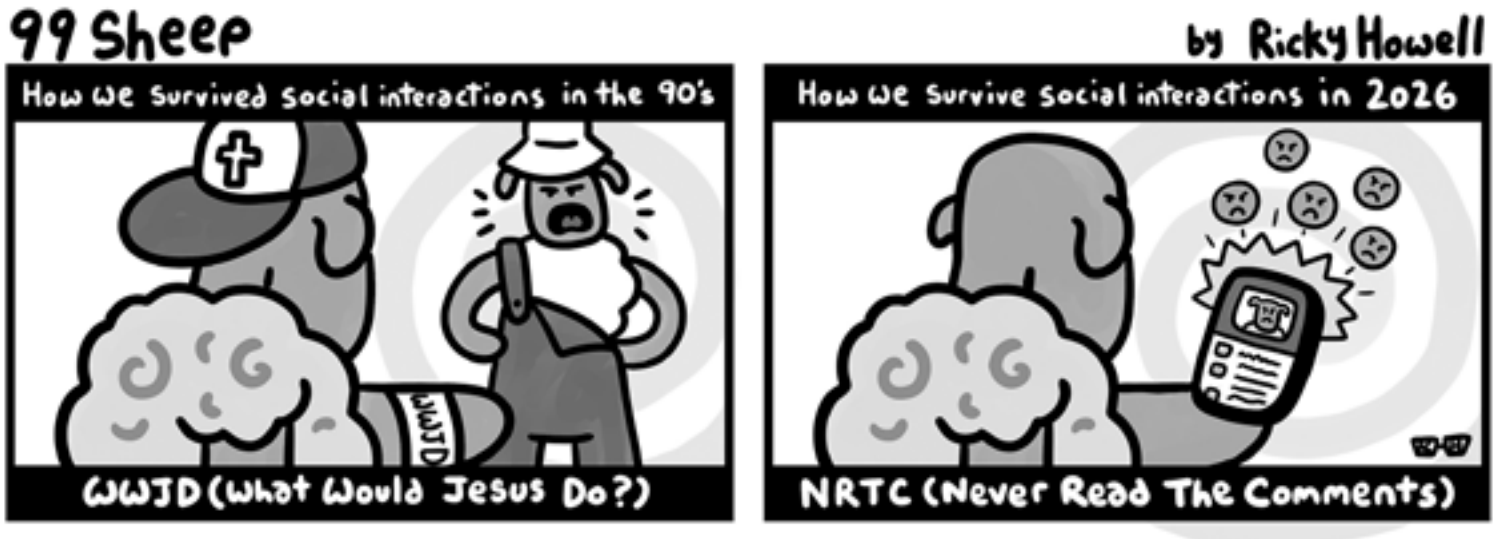


Commentary
by S. Jnatel Sims, Esq.

My great-grandmother's black leather purse: an enduring legacy

Author's note: The author, a lay servant serving at Journey United Methodist Church in Columbia, participated in the Storytelling Course offered as part of the Winter 2026 Lay Servant Ministry Training in January. Participants learned about how storytelling is integral to cultural preservation, developed an understanding of critical elements of the storytelling process, created storyboards and as a final assignment, presented stories to the class. This author told this story for her final assignment.

Mrs. Mattie Roberson Moore, my great-grandmother, was born in 1902, in Inman. During her lifetime, many events occurred that became poignant moments in history—like the sinking of the Titanic, World War II, the stock market crash, the Great Depression and Jim Crow. She survived and even thrived in a world that often was hostile and inhospitable to her. She married, and to that union four children were born including my grandmother, Mrs. Lillie Moore Simmons (or Big Mommy Simmons, as my brother and I affectionately called her). She herself had four children and was a nurse, a pillar of the church and an excellent storyteller.

As a child and later as an adult, I had the great honor of listening to stories that Big Mommy Simmons told us grandchildren while we sat around the kitchen table in my grandparents' Charlotte, North Carolina, home. As we gathered, she would be making some mouth-watering meal (usually from scratch). Not really measuring anything, a pinch of this, a little more of that would turn into a culinary masterpiece that soothed both the soul and palate. Not missing a beat, she told stories about our family history.

One of those stories was about my great-grandmother's black leather purse.

As Big Mommy Simmons told it, on one occasion, my great-grandmother went into Belk's Department Store. She'd been there before, and on one of those trips, she eyed a beautiful, black, all-leather pocketbook (we call it a "purse" or "bag" these days). The price tag displayed $100, which today is equivalent to almost $600.

My great-grandmother didn't purchase the bag on her prior visit. She was a woman of modest means,

The author stands with her great-grandmother's purse and the receipt.

but she also was thrifty, patient and persistent. When she returned to the store, the bag was marked down, and she bought it.

Big Mommy Simmons how my great-grandmother kept the receipt for the bag in the purse. Each time she told the story, Big Mommy Simmons shared this detail. I wondered why Big Mommy Simmons kept telling that part. Why was keeping the receipt significant?

One day, my grandmother answered that question. She said my great-grandmother kept the receipt in the purse because when she was growing up, folks who looked like her—Black folks—who had nice things could be and routinely were accused of stealing those things. Authorities would haul them off to jail if they couldn't prove ownership. So my great-grandmother kept the receipt in her purse.

My beloved Big Mommy Simmons went home to be with the Lord in 2017. When my brother, my cousins and I were cleaning out her things from her house, I came across a black all-leather purse in very good condition. I rifled through the pockets, preparing to possibly donate it.

Then I saw a receipt with "Belk" at the top. It was signed: "Mrs. Mattie Moore" and dated Feb. 20, 1976, with the description "Black Handbag" and recorded a purchase price of $69.34 including $2.67 in tax. A Belk's price tag also was in the pocket showing a mark-down from $100 to $66.67.

A wave of emotion hit me. Looking at that receipt, I realized that the story wasn't just a story Big Mommy Simmons told. It was part of our family's history and my great- grandmother's legacy.

You see, up until that point, I'd never seen the purse or the receipt. I don't even know what compelled me to go through the pockets of the bag that day, but when I saw the receipt, I was overcome with a sense of pride, thanks and remembrance. Pride in the stock from which I come. Thanks for the legacy of wisdom, strength and grit my great-grandmother passed down simply through the act of keeping a receipt. Remembrance of the life my great-grandmother lived and what she endured. I was reminded of the road she traveled and the miles still to go more than a century after she was born. Because of the lesson of this story, to this day, I make sure to get store receipts for even the smallest of purchases.

My great grandmother's black leather purse is now among my most beloved treasures. I see it each time I walk into my closet. It still has the receipt and price tag in it. I hold dear everything the purse and its contents mean, and I was happy for the opportunity to share them with my fellow Lay Servants during January's training.

It is my hope that you, too, find meaning and perhaps will carry some part with you on your journey.

Sims, a lay servant, serves at Journey UMC, Columbia.

Advocate new Zoom-based United Methodist book club continues

'Silver Linings' is March book and' A Moment to Breathe' is April book

The *Advocate* is gearing up for its March Virtual Book Club and also preparing for its April gathering.

The *Advocate* Virtual Book Club is an effort to bring together reading lovers to discuss books of interest to United Methodists. The gatherings are held the first Tuesday evening and second Thursday morning of each month and hosted by *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie.

The March book is "Silver Linings," the memoir authored by South Carolina Bishop Leonard Fairley and published by the Advocate Press, the book publishing arm of the *Advocate*. It will be held Tuesday, March 3, at 6:30 p.m. or Thursday, March 5, at 11 a.m.—your choice.

The April book is "A Moment to Breathe," by the Revs. Amenti Sujai and Daniel Hembree. It will be held Tuesday, April 7, at 6:30 p.m. or Thursday, April 9, at 11 a.m.

To get the books, go to https://advocatepress.org or Amazon.

The book club is free, but you must register to receive a Zoom link. To sign up for the March meeting: https://forms.office.com/r/UZwWvwG2xR. To sign up for the April meeting: https://forms.office.com/r/YWbuhPHE4e.

Perspectives.

Humanity Behind Bars
by the Rev. Nichole Middleton

When the trap is in the house

There is a familiar parable about a mouse who discovers a mousetrap in the house. Alarmed, the mouse warns the other animals. The chicken dismisses the concern. The pig offers sympathy and prayers. The cow assumes the danger is distant enough to ignore.

That night, the trap catches a snake instead of the mouse. The snake bites the farmer's wife. In the days that follow, the chicken, the pig and eventually the cow all perish as the household struggles with illness, visitors and loss.

The mouse survives, having seen clearly what others did not take seriously.

The power of this story lies not in the trap itself, but in how each responds. Each animal's reaction feels reasonable, even faithful. None intend harm. Yet their individual disengagement leads to collective loss.

This story echoes a concern Paul raises in his letter to the Corinthians: "That there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Division rarely announces itself as dangerous. It often arrives quietly—as disengagement, selective concern or the belief that another person's struggle is not our responsibility. In the church, it may sound like, "That issue does not affect my congregation," or "Someone else is better positioned to respond."

The season after Epiphany reminds us that light reveals not only beauty, but truth—and truth can be unsettling. When we ignore threats to the well-being of our neighbors—whether injustice, exclusion, poverty or neglect—we risk becoming a community that responds only after harm has multiplied.

The prophet Micah calls us clearly: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

Justice, in Micah's vision, is not abstract. It is lived in how we relate to one another. It requires attention, proximity and action. It asks us to notice the "trap" early and respond together rather than retreat into private concern.

Jesus' words in the Beatitudes reinforce this vision, blessing not those who remain comfortable, but those who hunger and thirst for righteousness—right relationship with God and neighbor (Matthew 5:6). The peacemakers Jesus blesses are not passive observers; they are active participants in repairing what is broken.

The mousetrap story reminds us that the church is not a collection of isolated lives, but a shared household. What threatens one part of the body ultimately affects the whole. Our connectional tradition calls us to resist saying, "This does not concern me," and instead to ask, "How are we being called to respond together?"

Faithfulness is measured not only by belief but by the willingness to stand with one another before the snap is heard. It is lived in quiet attentiveness, compassionate presence and the courage to act where we are able.

As we journey in faith, may we reflect on those who live on the margins—whose needs are too often overlooked, whose voices are seldom heard. May we take seriously the call to see, to act and to protect one another as siblings in Christ. And may we trust that our faithful response can bring hope and life before tragedy arrives.

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 Minister Anna S. Bright

If God can use a donkey, surely he can use a woman

During Women's History Month, we celebrate women who have led nations, built businesses, raised generations and shaped history. However, in some circles, there is still debate about whether God calls women to preach or lead in the church. Some reference passages about women being silent and conclude that God's call somehow stops at the edge of a pulpit.

Let's take a deeper look at Scripture as a whole.

The Bible does not present women as "spiritually muted." In fact, it presents them as "spiritually mobilized." In Acts 2:17 it states: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (ESV). Notice that: sons and daughters! The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was not gender-specific. Heaven did not install a "men only" sign on the Day of Pentecost.

In the Old Testament, Deborah served as a prophetess and judge over Israel. Judges 4:4 says: "Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time." Judging Israel wasn't a small administrative role. She led a nation spiritually and politically. Interestingly, nobody complained when she delivered victory. Then consider Priscilla who, alongside her husband Aquila, helped teach Apollos more accurately the way of God. Acts 18:26 affirms: "He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." Just in case anyone thinks that spiritual gifting has a gender restriction label attached, hear Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The same Spirit, the same salvation and the same calling to proclaim truth!

There are Bible passages that must be studied carefully and understood within their cultural and contextual framework. However, one verse cannot erase the overwhelming testimony of Scripture that God uses women powerfully. If God trusted women to be the first witnesses of the Resurrection (Luke 24:9-10), the greatest news in human history, I think he trusts them with a microphone! Adding just a little humor here, if women were meant to be silent, somebody probably should have told Deborah. Further, somebody certainly forgot to tell your praying grandmothers, because when they got "hold of heaven," things started moving!

Throughout history, women have preached in pulpits, taught classrooms, led ministries, raised pastors, funded missions and interceded on behalf of nations into breakthrough. The church would not look like it does today without faithful women who answered God's call, despite resistance.

The real question is not whether God calls women. The real question is: Are we willing to limit what God has clearly empowered?

If God has placed a word inside of you, will you silence it, or will you surrender and speak? When God calls, he equips. When he equips, he expects obedience, regardless of gender. So during this Women's History Month, let us not merely celebrate women in society. Let us honor the women God has called, gifted, and anointed in his kingdom.

If God can speak through a burning bush, if he can use fishermen, if he can even use a donkey, surely he can use a woman!

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

Bright is a member of Isaiah United

Commentary
by the Rev. John Culp

Evil is real

The Doomsday Clock ticks closer to the end. There is bad news for humanity. We are closer than ever to Armageddon (Revelation 16:16, Luke 21:5-34). Reasons include a failure of leadership, nuclear weaponry, climate change, AI, disinformation, nationalistic autocracies, etc. The Epstein scandal reveals prominent figures in the financial and political world being accused of pedophile behavior.

Meanwhile, the people who live in Minnesota feel unsafe, hurt, scared and abused. These good citizens have been invaded by hateful, barbaric individuals being given permission to abuse and even kill. Thousands of Minnesota citizens are expressing their constitutional rights by protesting with whistles, videos, singing and walking the streets in sub-zero temperatures. Clergy and churches are participating. "Onward, Christian Soldiers" is the hymn against this evil.

Alex Pretti, a 37-year-old veteran hospital nurse, was a modern day Christian martyr killed by six ICE agents with guns. He was shot ten times as he laid helpless on the ground. The witnesses said the ICE agents clapped and laughed and counted the bullet holes in the dead body then walked away to save themselves. There are biblical stories of Christians being stoned and hanged. Evil is real.

Emerson said, "The martyr cannot be dishonored." Millions and millions of Americans and the world saw the video from all directions many times. People are reporting on what they are seeing. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "A lie cannot live." King also said, "Never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was legal."

Alex Pretti grew up in the Catholic faith. He was a nurse at the veterans hospital and showed deep care for his patients. At the memorial sight are stethoscopes. Alex listened to the hearts of veterans and the heart of America. His father said, "He cared about people first, deeply." A former patient said, "It broke my heart, Pretti didn't deserve this." A fellow doctor said, "He had compassion and empathy for everyone." A Catholic priest said, "He was known for his kindness and gentleness to patients"

He was not a domestic terrorist. Nurses are angels, not killers.

An ICE agent assaulted and pushed a woman to the ground. Alex responded with care to help the woman. He was pepper-sprayed, kicked and pushed to the ground by six ICE agents. His last words to the lady were, "Are you OK?" He was shot 10 times as a helpless life. Alex was crucified by guns. A woman cried out, "Oh, God, what did you do?" Evil is real.

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

"To offer your bodies as living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1).

"Love does no harm to its neighbors" (Romans 13:10).

The Minnesota people are loving their neighbors as Scripture says to. Alex Pretti was a modern day martyr and saint.

Evil is real. As followers of Jesus, what are we going to do?

Amid all this, a conversation in many churches is, "What is going to happen to our church?" There is always a wave of deaths in every church, and there has been a major split in The United Methodist Church. Our society is moving away from the institutional church, and recreation is a major activity on Sunday. Since the "Blue Law" was dropped, Sunday is no longer a day of worship.

The South Carolina United Methodist Conference membership was 203,313 members in 2022, and it is 142,752 members in 2024. The question remains, "Who will come and fill the pews and commit to Christ?"

The challenges are real. Evil is real.

Pray that the faithful will remain faithful and that Christ will lead individuals to his church again.

Christ said, "On this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). Christ's church will survive. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Culp is a retired United Methodist elder living in West Columbia.

Commentary
by the Rev. Darlene L. Kelley

What I learned from Adam Hamilton

My birthday is on Feb. 1, and year after year I have used my birthday as the inspiration for a celebratory trip. After all, we're not getting any younger. Consequently, I've managed to be out of town for Bishop's School of Ministry since arriving in South Carolina eight years ago.

But I have made a few friends, thankfully, and more than one of them encouraged me to forego my birthday sojourn, or at least reschedule one so I could attend the classic conference event, the Board of Ordained Ministry-sponsored Bishop's School of Ministry.

The event has been held in Myrtle Beach every year since anyone can remember, and this year was the year. I admit the draw was Adam Hamilton. I've been a big fan for years—aren't we all? I wanted a chance to see him in person, and as the saying goes, he didn't disappoint.

In fact, I was surprised that listening to him for hours and seeing him up close—and I confess, watching him like a stalker—increased my admiration and respect for him. That's unusual for me. Familiarity generally breeds contempt, and I'm quickly susceptible to its charms. Besides, I like to think of myself as too cool to be much of a groupie. Yet, Adam Hamilton possesses a disarming set of character traits and charismatic energy that pulls in the room.

First, Hamilton is full of enthusiasm and genuinely excited to be sharing what he knows. Even after years of preaching, leading, writing books and talking to crowds, Hamilton doesn't show a hint of burnout. Instead, he shares exuberance and energy for his topics that feel new and novel and delightfully fresh, not the result of 36 years leading the largest United Methodist church in the United States, Resurrection UMC. He loves his vocation, and it shows. That alone is inspiring.

Yet while Hamilton may be enthusiastic and extremely knowledgeable, he possesses a generosity of spirit that makes him available to others, and he holds humility close like an old glove. His prolific life as a writer, combined with his monumental success as a pastor and community builder, may layer most men with a tinge of aloof arrogance, but Hamilton embodies deep humility even with all his success. He signed books and introduced himself to people and took selfies with everyone who asked. It is hard to feign authenticity, humility and delight, and Hamilton radiates all three in abundance. From the beginning of his presentation to the very end, I was captivated, and so were the many United Methodists packed in around me.

Adam Hamilton signs his book for the Rev. Kathy Cinnamond.

In fact, I checked on the crowd here and there, knowing I'd be writing about our Hamilton experience, and it was easy to see heads nodding and fingers tapping and attention wrapped tightly with all eyes on the speaker. People were excited to hear him, and there was a lot to learn.

Hamilton took us on a Wesley tour through England, reminding us of all our good roots, founded at Oxford, the only denomination starting as a renewal movement. Hamilton reminded us of our history and our traditions, pausing for a short, back-to-the-basics lesson within a lesson on the Three Simple Rules and Wesley's Covenant Prayer. Hamilton reminded us of the power of surrender and simplicity. We have a solid foundation, and Hamilton suggested all the tools for leadership are already at our fingertips, already part of our tradition because God is relational and it's all about relationship.

It's all about the people, Hamilton affirmed, and he shared poignant stories to illustrate the love and outreach foundational to ministry's success. Jesus met people where they are, and Hamilton reminded us of John Wesley's declaration: The world is my parish.

Hamilton lives by Wesley's declaration. He personally visited the first 400 new families that showed up for worship at his church, and he knocked on the door with a mug in his hand, something to give. Listening to his stories and shared wisdom, it is easy to catch his passion for ministry, and you want to go out and knock on a few doors too. One of our phrases past was Catch the Spirit, and it is a good line for Hamilton. His passion for ministry is contagious. Perhaps that is one of the lessons I am most grateful for receiving.

Besides, we got to hear questions like: How tall was John Wesley? What was his girlfriend's name? What were his parent's names? I was embarrassed by how much I didn't know. Our speaker didn't leave us hanging. Well versed in facts about John and Charles Wesley, Hamilton painted an enlightened picture of the two methodical brothers responsible for the Holy Club that turned into our UMC. Inspired by the strangely warmed heart of Wesley, Hamilton taught us about Wesley's faith and striving to live as a soul giving "everything for the glory of God." Yet, despite striving for perfection, Wesley failed miserably at times. Hamilton read a letter criticizing John Wesley as a pastor, showing us that criticism is part of the walk; leaders make a difference. Don't give up.

Our purpose is to build a Christian community where nonreligious and nominally religious people are becoming deeply committed Christians. Hamilton shared his church's mission statement and spoke emotionally of the deep significance the statement makes. Staff members memorize the statement, and it is hanging over all the doors in the church. I venture to say most of the pastors present in the room began to think about their own church's mission statement or lack thereof or where one might be or didn't I see one somewhere? From mission to membership, Hamilton spoke of the requirements for joining them in Kansas and how commitment and effective follow-up helped his church grow.

Hamilton listed the commitments necessary to become part of the congregation, the expectations placed on folks who want to become official members of the Resurrection family. They include worship on Sunday, prayer at least five times a day, five verses of Scripture a day, service at least once a year and giving a tithe that includes generosity to others, and bearing witness to your faith. Hamilton made us realize we shouldn't be afraid of asking too much of our people. We should fear asking too little.

I won't have to be encouraged to pack my bags next year. I will go willingly to the Bishop's School of Ministry, even if Hamilton will not be returning. A first-timer blessed by the opportunity, I also learned the Atlantic Ocean was right outside the door. Remember to step out on the balcony at least twice a day. I recommend sunrise and sunset. There won't be Adam Hamilton every February, but there will always be the Atlantic.

Kelley pastors Trinity UMC, West Columbia, and is a member of the Advocate *Board of Trustees.*

Conference launches campaign to help local churches share impact of apportionment giving with members

By Dan O'Mara

Responding to a growing need for education and awareness across the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, finance leaders are renewing their efforts to help local churches and their members better understand the purpose and impact of connectional giving.

The Conference Council on Finance and Administration says the challenge is not new but has become more acute in recent years. Historically, United Methodists in South Carolina had a clear understanding of apportionments and how those funds supported the mission and ministries of the wider church.

Smith Patterson, CF&A chairperson and a member of First UMC, Laurens, said that shared understanding can no longer be assumed.

"Our goal," Patterson said, "is for every United Methodist in South Carolina to understand that their local church's giving connects them to a much larger ministry—one that changes lives locally, regionally and globally.

"Apportionments serve as our financial partnership with all United Methodists, and as a unified body, we can reach out to our local communities and beyond in sharing God's love."

To help reach that goal, CF&A has assembled a collection of resources—including downloadable videos, printable pew cards and links to even more informational materials—that local church leaders can use to help their members truly recognize the impact of their generous giving.

These resources can be found at https://www.umcsc.org/giving.

The conference also will be sharing on social media videos telling the stories of ministries funded by your apportionment giving.

Many church members and even some congregational leaders are unfamiliar with how apportionment dollars are used or why connectional giving matters. Without that awareness, leaders say, it becomes more difficult for congregations to fully embrace their role in supporting the ministries that extend far beyond their local communities.

"Our connection is one of our greatest strengths as United Methodists," Bishop Leonard Fairley said. "Through apportionment giving, we join our resources so that ministry can happen in places and in ways no single congregation could accomplish alone.

"When we give faithfully, we are living out our commitment to be the church together—sharing the work of making disciples, responding to human need and bearing witness to God's love across South Carolina and around the world."

Apportionments help pay for a wide range of ministries that no single congregation could accomplish alone. These include clergy support and benefits, ministerial education, disaster response, global mission partnerships, new church development, campus ministries and programs that strengthen local congregations. Through connectional giving, United Methodists share resources so that the church's mission can be carried out more effectively and equitably.

CF&A leaders emphasize that the issue is not simply financial, but theological and relational. Connectional giving reflects the United Methodist understanding that the church is stronger when it works together.

Conference leaders say future efforts will focus on telling the story of connectional impact more clearly and equipping pastors and lay leaders with tools to communicate that story in their local contexts. By strengthening understanding, they hope more congregations will see apportionments not as an obligation, but as an opportunity to participate in a shared mission.

Constant Partners: UMCSC and Africa University

By Pamela Crosby


Salley

The South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church continues to set a high bar in support of the mission, vision and ministry of Africa University. The conference leads in consistent annual apportionment investment at 100 percent, and there's intention and sacrificial giving behind that fact.

In 2025, as the conference approached just coming under its apportionment goal, the clergy and laity of the Orangeburg District and District Superintendent Kenneth Nelson gifted the $8,000 balance so the conference could meet that goal. This gift was the Orangeburg District's way of honoring their native son, James H. Salley.

About this gesture, Salley, the president and chief executive officer of AU (Tennessee) Inc. said, "That's faith in action; the action provides the gift. I'm honored and thrilled that the churches have rallied to the call because the general church has indicated that churches would only give 50 percent of their apportionment goals and for South Carolina to lead in that giving—it's an honor."

About this recognition, Nelson said, "Jim Salley has been the most passionate advocate and consistent voice for this partnership within the South Carolina Conference. He lives, serves and worships in the Orangeburg District as a member of Edisto Fork United Methodist Church, where he also serves on the Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries Team. He is fond of reminding others that 'you are only as good as your home folks say that you are.'

"Two years ago, in partnership with his pastor and the congregation of Edisto Fork, Jim helped initiate Africa University Sunday, celebrated the day before the annual golf tournament, further grounding global mission in local faithfulness."

The 2025 Wespath-Bishop Leonard Fairley Golf Invitational held in September each year started as an initiative to help close the gap if the conference fell short in apportionment giving. This year's tournament supported student scholarships. By the will of God and the commitment of clergy and laity people in South Carolina, 2025 brought the strongest and most participants in the history of the tournament.

Conferences may wonder how this conference does it. The clarion call from the people of South Carolina is, "When one ministry reaches 100 percent, it helps people understand that it's possible to get to 100 percent; other ministries can meet that 100 percent goal as well."

Bishop Leonard Fairley and his wife, Dawn, lead in investing in Africa University. They are a big part of why this conference is so successful in their Africa University apportionment giving. Every church in the South Carolina Annual Conference supports Africa University. They and the conference's capable staff can provide a template to supporting AU at 100 percent. Where the bishops lead, congregations—clergy and laity—follow.

"Part of the role with South Carolina with Africa University," Fairley said, "is that we see and feel and understand—in our minds and in our hearts and in our spirits—the soul of AU. How the soul of Africa University is the heartbeat of what happens on that continent. We know there are gifted young people on the continent who add to who we say we are as UMs. If that's their heart, then our hearts beat as one with theirs. John Wesley used to say (paraphrasing), 'If your heart is as my heart, then take my hand and let us walk together.'

"So, South Carolina has not veered from that walk together with AU. The impact that it makes is that important. Let me encourage all the other annual conferences to do the same. This is your university. It's South Carolina's university. It is our heartbeat. And how can we not respond when our hearts are one. It's just that critical ... it's just that important.

"We always want to make sure that we're giving 100 percent of not just our finances, but our hearts to this ministry that affects so many lives—not only on that continent, but here. So we're grateful."

Salkehatchie registration opens March 1 for 30 camps

By Jessica Brodie

Ready for Salkehatchie Summer Service? Registration kicks off March 1 for 30 weeklong mission camps this year, offering youth and adults the opportunity to engage in meaningful home-repair ministry across South Carolina.

Salkehatchie was founded in 1978 by the Rev. John Culp. It brings youth, young adult and adult volunteers together to repair and rebuild homes for people in need, many living in poverty situations without the ability to fund the work on their own.

Volunteers must be at least 14 years old, and all adult volunteers must do a background check. Cost is $250 per volunteer and covers the cost of shingles, building supplies and other materials. Lodging and meals are included. Volunteers go directly into communities of chronic poverty and repair the homes of local families there.

This year's camps are as follows:

June 6-13
Winyah Bay

June 13-20
Piedmont
Moncks Corner
Sumter
Edisto Island
Clover

June 20-27
Union
Rock Hill
Sand River (Aiken)
Penn Center
Marlboro-Flowers
Catawba
Circuit Rider (Johnsonville)
Bishopville

June 27-July 4
Foothills
Lake City

July 4-11
Santee
North Strand

July 11-18
Columbia
Black Swamp
Fairfield
Lake Murray
Bamberg
North Augusta
Baker Creek (McCormick)
Emerald City (Greenwood)

July 18-25
Summerville (NEW)
Calhoun County

July 19-24
Newberry

July 19-25
Creekfront (Murrells Inlet)

Salkehatchie's main focus is serving God. Over the years, hundreds of homes have received new roofs, ramps, flooring, ceilings, bathrooms, kitchens and improvements in accessibility through the hands of volunteers.

To register, go to https://www.salkehatchie.org.

Disaster Recovery

Q&A with Theo White

UMCSC disaster recovery case manager


White

Theo White is a case manager with South Carolina United Methodist Disaster Recovery serving in the Upstate counties of Anderson and Pickens. Here, he answers a few questions about his ministry.

How does disaster recovery help those affected by Helene?

The disaster recovery program helps people get back on their feet after Hurricane Helene by guiding them through a process that can feel overwhelming during a really hard time. The program gives them hope, a starting point and tangible steps they can be informed of to reassure the client that there is a plan to help them recover.

Why did you want to work in this position?

I want to work in this position because I've seen firsthand how devastating storms can be for families. I wanted to be in a position where I could be a part of the solution instead of just watching from the sidelines. This role give me the opportunity to serve people during one of the hardest moments of their lives and help them take steps toward rebuilding and moving forward.

How do the tasks that you are responsible for help the homeowner get the help they need?

A lot of people are stressed, confused or discouraged, so part of my job is helping break things down into clear, manageable steps by making sure the information is accurate and complete and to help ensure they are connected to the right resources and assistance programs efficiently as possible.

How does your position contribute to the success of the program?

My role helps bridge the gap between the homeowner and the recovery program. If the information is incomplete or the process isn't explained well, people can fall through the cracks.

By building trust with homeowners, staying organized and following through on cases, I help the program run more effectively and ensure that the assistance reaches the people who are truly in need.

Every completed case and every family that gets support is a small part of the overall success of the program, and I take that responsibility seriously.

East African refugees help raise funds for well

The Hope of Life/Faith Gospel Choirs, a group of East African refugees now living in Austin, traveled to South Carolina for a special benefit concert Feb. 7 at St. John's UMC, Anderson. The concert helped raise much-needed funds for a project St. John's is doing to help install a well in Ntinyika, Kenya, that will improve the life of the people there. The people walk as far as two miles every day to gather water from creeks or bore holes, which is often dirty and unsanitary. St John's is raising $50,000 for the project. To learn more or to help, visit https://stjohnsanderson.net/africa-well-project.

Photos courtesy of St. John's UMC, Anderson

Killingsworth golf tourney March 9 to raise funds for women's home

A golf tournament this month will help raise needed funds for Killingsworth, a residential home for women in crisis starting over.

The tournament will be held Monday, March 9, all day at the Players Club, 1626 Main St., Columbia.

Cost is $400 per team (four players per team). Sponsorships are available.

Lunch vouchers are included, and there will be prizes.

To register or learn more: https://www.killingsworth.org/events.




Courtesy of Chuck Sovick and Sylvia Harris-Greene

Columbia LSM Winter School draws 50 students

The Columbia District of the Lay Servant Ministry held its Winter School Jan. 16-17 Ashland UMC, Columbia. Approximately 50 Lay Servants attended the following classes: Basic 101 (facilitator Mellanie Jeanette), Evangelism (facilitator Marlene Sipes), Storytelling (Facilitator Kathy Hart), Organizing Worship (facilitator Dr. Sarah Bryant) and Polity (facilitator Herman Lightsey). The school had a very large Basic Class with 15 members, including two youth. Here are pictures from some of the classes.

UMVIM-SEJ reports financial struggles amid shortfall

United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, Southeastern Jurisdiction, is sounding an early alarm after 2025 fundraising fell far short of its goals.

"2025 was a tough year for UMVIM-SEJ," said the Rev. Matt Lacey, UMVIM-SEJ executive director.

Lacey reported they had churches and annual conferences inform them they were unexpectedly unable to give, or could only send reduced gifts.

"This is a tough financial situation for everyone, including ACs and churches. Despite a successful Giving Tuesday, the rest of our fundraising efforts were not very productive," Lacey said. "This is not a situation where we have to shut down tomorrow or anything, but I am concerned looking at the bank balance and forecasting expenses."

He further noted income fell by 30 percent because of effects of disaffiliation.

UMVIM-SEJ does not receive direct apportionment funds and has not since the late 2000s.

Lacey also shared a video report for those who wish to see at https://youtu.be/1Vua-sEjNvY.

For more on UMVIM-SEJ and its work or how to help, visit https://www.sejumc.org/umvim.

Disaster Recovery stays busy meeting needs

South Carolina United Methodist Disaster Recovery is reaching families and repairing homes in the Upstate, Lakelands and Midlands that were damaged by Hurricane Helene.

So far, they have communicated with more than 70 families in need. Last month, they served a family in the Midlands with volunteers from the coast and locally. Repairs included roof repairs, ceiling, walls and floor repairs. There were also lots of visits and sharing about life, grief and challenging circumstances.

This month, they are serving with volunteers from Virginia and local South Carolina volunteer teams.

There is always roof work. Roof repairs and replacement involve lots of volunteers on the ground who make the tasks on the roof progress better.

Many churches are housing these volunteer teams near where the homesites are.

If your church is interested in hosting volunteers, please email the Rev. Shay Long, volunteer coordinator, at sllong@umcsc.org.

Volunteers are also needed from across South Carolina to complete repairs and assist families to recover.

Ward Smith, who serves as the director of Disaster Recovery and construction manager, can also be contacted for additional information and involvement at wsmith@umcsc.org.

Native American Ministries Sunday set for April 19

In accordance with the *Book of Discipline*, Para. 816(6), "Native American Ministries Sunday shall be observed with an offering, preferably on the Third Sunday of Easter (second Sunday after Easter)."

This year, that date will be April 19. The Native American Committee provides speakers for Native American Ministries Sunday, thus making this date the most requested date.

With limited number of speakers, this date books sometimes a year in advance, so we provide this special Sunday throughout the entire year. Pastors or Native American representatives simply have to call and set up a date that matches both the church's schedule and our speakers.

In the *Discipline*, Native American Ministries Sunday is one of the six Special Sundays; we are not an outside agency asking to come into your church. We are part of this conference. All offering monies are sent directly to the conference office with 50 percent remaining in conference to support the NAC.

The purpose of Native American Ministries Sunday is to provide education about American Indian tradition, culture, spirituality and inclusion in our conference. Even today, American Indians are often questioned about whether we worship the same God or if we are going to do something "strange" if we come and speak at your church. We address these myths and stereotypes, explore American Indian history, explore Native spirituality and identify the obstacles facing American Indians today. We also provide updates about NAC actions including outreach, education and ministry.

If it is your church's first time, we have a set first Sunday message presented by our committee. However, after that first Sunday presentation, we have a number of other Sunday messages including traditional storytelling as the message, tribal histories, connections between God and Native Americans, Native Americans and Christianity, relationships with nature and more.

All of these are free. Honorariums are welcome to offset travel costs.

To arrange a Native American Ministries Sunday, please contact Native American Chair Z. Tracy Pender at 803-905-5672 or tracypender@hotmail.com. (The easiest way to make contact is via email because of Pender's work schedule.)

From crisis to keys: love in action through Alston Wilkes Society

"I just wanted my kids to be safe," a South Carolina mom and U.S. Army veteran told Alston Wilkes Society after fleeing a violent situation with nothing but the clothes they could carry and a car to sleep in.

AWS placed her family in a hotel that same day and got to work on a housing stabilization plan. As she searched for an apartment, she discovered something unexpected: She qualified for a VA home loan—and monthly mortgage costs would be less than rent. With the program's standard 30-day hotel limit approaching, the pressure was real. But instead of giving up, she pressed forward and signed a contract on a home just in time.

After she provided proof of the sales contract and VA loan approval, AWS extended her hotel stay until closing. On day 59, she didn't leave the hotel wondering what came next—she left with keys. Today, her children sleep in their own beds. Their mom sleeps without fear. And with ongoing support from the AWS Aftercare team, this veteran isn't just surviving—she's building a new life marked by safety, dignity and hope.

This is the kind of transformation the prayers, service and generosity of AWS supporters make possible. In 2025 alone, AWS walked alongside 2,995 neighbors across their programs in meeting urgent needs, strengthening families and opening doors to stability.

AWS re-entry work through the Federal Bureau of Prisons sites supported 649 individuals and achieved an overall 94 percent success rate—evidence that second chances and strong support networks change trajectories. AWS also served 607 people through Supportive Services for Veteran Families, helping veteran households secure and sustain housing. Also, their Community Services team assisted 1,330 neighbors with essential, practical help, and their GPD, VSI Aftercare and HVTG programs served 395 homeless, those at risk of homelessness and veterans and their families.

As people of faith, they believe God's love shows up in tangible ways—in safe shelter, in case managers who won't quit and in congregations that link arms with families in crisis.

For more on AWS and how the United Methodist-founded ministry helps, visit https://www.alstonwilkessociety.org.

By the Numbers (2025)
Total neighbors served across AWS programs: 2,995
FBOP reentry (combined across four sites): 649 served; 94 percent overall success rate
Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF): 607 served
Community Services: 1,330 served

BRIDGING GENERATIONS

From Page 1

to developing new, creative ways to move men's ministry forward for the next generation."

The event kicked off with a daylong golf tournament Friday, Feb. 20 at The Spur at Northwoods Golf Course—its largest ever, thanks both to increased awareness and energy about men's ministry as well as springlike temperatures that reached 83 degrees. The team from Philadelphia UMC, Fort Mill, took home the top award.

Friday night featured Cigars and Scriptures, with its highest attendance yet. The event offered men a good outdoor meal, hearty fellowship and the chance to dive deep into discussion together over matters of faith.

Saturday brought a daylong spiritual retreat attended by both men and boys, with teaching brought by South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley, along with the Revs. Tyler Strange and Martin Quick, United Methodist pastors and authors. An intergenerational panel discussion helped attendees embrace some of the key topics of the day, moderated by Steven Scheid and the Rev. Chris Lollis with panelists the Rev. Matt Alexander, the Rev. Mallory Forte Nickerson, the Rev. Jason Wilson, Joseph Patton, and Troop 287 Scout Jesse Caughman.

"We are mission-minded men, living with purpose, leading with vision, adapting with creativity and ensuring our impact lasts for generations to come in reaching out to all men to build disciples for the transformation of the world," Anderson said.

He added, "God truly showed up in a mighty and magnificent way, and the men of South Carolina are fired up and ready to go in continuing this journey, leaving no man behind!"

Other highlights of the event included the awarding of Bishop Fairley and Charles Shipman with the John Wesley Award, the highest honor for a United Methodist Man, recognizing exceptional, long-term Christian leadership and service to the church, as well as the Rev. Fran Elrod and Nelda Canada being awarded the Susanna Wesley Award, a prestigious honor given to women who demonstrate exceptional spiritual leadership, service, and devotion, emulating the "Mother of Methodism." It recognizes women who help others in their Christian walk.

Special recognition of a group of Eagle Scouts rounded out the day. Officially inducted Feb. 7, the young men made history as the largest group of African Americans to be inducted into the Eagle Scout rank at one time in the history of South Carolina. Four of the five were present and received a standing ovation from the packed crowd, in addition to certificates.

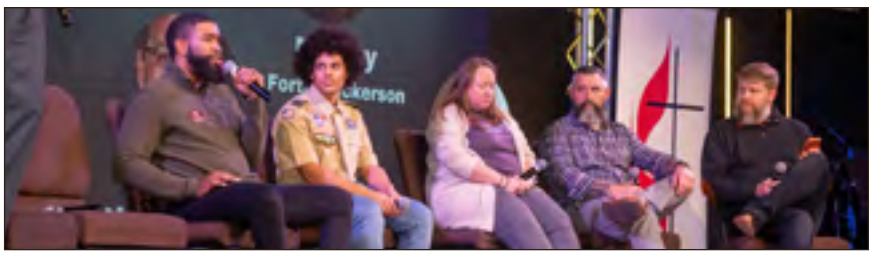
Bishop Fairley expressed gratitude and awe "to be standing in presence of something I've never seen before—four African-American Eagle Scouts."

The men's event was inspired this year by Psalm 145:4, "One generation commends 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).

Learn more about Men N Ministry at https://umcsc.org/men.

See photos from the event at https://advocatesc.org.

Save the date: Next year's men's event is Feb 19-20, 2027.



Joseph Patton answers a question during the panel talk.

Photos by Jessica Brodie, Jerry Newlon Jr. and Dan O'Mara.

Bishop Fairley offers the opening keynote Saturday.

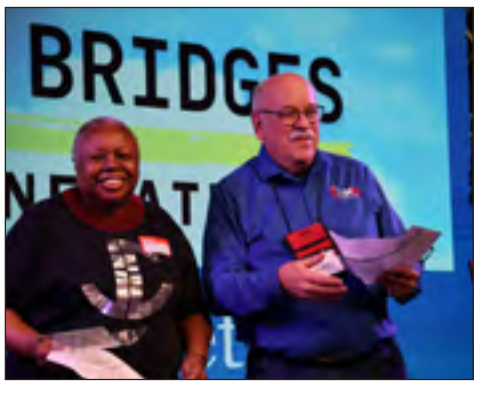
The Rev. Tyler Strange offers motivation.

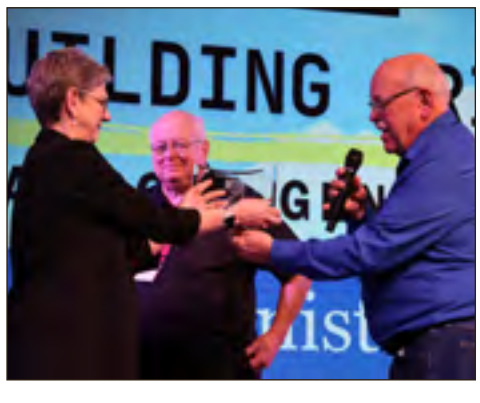
Dr. Marty Quick teaches the crowd.

A golfer takes a swing Friday at The Spur.

Men enjoy fellowship—and a good cigar.

Plenty of humor had the crowd laughing, too.





Men also awarded four people with top honors during the retreat. They awarded of Bishop Fairley (top left) and Charles Shipman (top right) with the John Wesley Award, the highest honor for a United Methodist man, recognizing exceptional, long-term Christian leadership and service to the church. They also awarded Nelda Canada (bottom left) and the Rev. Fran Elrod (bottom right) with the Susanna Wesley Award, a prestigious honor given to women who demonstrate exceptional spiritual leadership, service and devotion, emulating the "Mother of Methodism."

Bishop: 'Where are the men?'

By Dan O'Mara

Bishop Leonard Fairley, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, had one question for the United Methodist Men gathered Feb. 21 at Journey United Methodist Church in Columbia.

"It was a brilliant and very timely moment of epiphany "at the 'Lights, Camera, Action' Laity Convocation," Bishop Fairley recounted of the January event, "when a young woman in her late 20s stood up and asked a question concerning leadership in the local church."

"Where are the men?" the woman had asked, looking around the room populated primarily by female lay leaders from across the conference.

"Fellow followers of Christ," Bishop Fairley said, "this was not the first time this question has been asked, but the more troubling question is, 'Where are the young men?'

"If we are to be honest, we must admit there is a generational gap that exists in the church that deeply affects men. Now more than ever, bridging this gap is vital not only to the health of men's ministry and scouting, but to the entire church."

Identifying these gaps and finding ways to bridge them is imperative, Bishop Fairley said, citing the guiding Scripture of the 2026 United Methodist Men's Retreat: "One generation shall praise your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts." (Psalm 145:4)

"The important question becomes how and in what ways does this happen?" he said. "The biblical concept of bridging the gap between old and young men is rooted not only in Psalm 145, it runs throughout the teachings of the Apostle Paul—especially in his letter to the Ephesians.

"That is where Paul emphasizes the importance of unity in the body of Christ where all ages are called to participate in the church."

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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recognizing and celebrating our efforts to be the hands and feet of Jesus here and now. My hope is that we can use these four days to not only see the possibilities around us, but also to seize the opportunities that are before us."

Arant encourages people to begin to register now and book their hotel rooms, available at a group rate with discounted pricing. All of that information and more is available at https://www.umcsc.org/ac2026.

Also on that site is a work-in-progress agenda. Highlights so far include the Commissioning, Ordination and Retirement Recognition Service, slated for 7 p.m. Sunday and featuring South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley presiding and retired Bishop Paul L. Leeland preaching.

Business kicks off Monday, June 8, with an opening worship service preached by Fairley.

Dr. Sheila Elliot Hodge, pastor of Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC, Columbia, is slated to preach the Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving at 2 p.m. Tuesday, June 9.

In addition to registration, agenda and hotel information, there is also space for people to order meals, apply for an exhibit and nominate tellers; for pastors to initiate a Lay Member change post-charge conference; and for committees to submit their reports if they have not already done so. This will also be the page where reports will be posted as they become available.

Arant notes that this year, registration for attendance and ordering meals are separate actions. In the past, people were given the option to order meals when they registered to attend. This year, they will notice two separate links—one to for registration and one for order meals.

Another change this year is that an offsite Kids Camp will not be provided, though plans are under way for an onsite kids' space. (More on this in the April *Advocate*.)

Arant also encourages people to reserve hotels rooms using the links or codes provided on the website, as VisitGreenville uses the number of rooms reserved using those links and codes to help keep the cost of Annual Conference down.

Advocate Press Book Signing set for Tuesday at Annual Conference

The Advocate Press will be hosting its annual book signing event during Annual Conference. The press is the publishing arm of the *Advocate* newspaper.

The book signing will be held Tuesday, June 9, from 12-2 p.m. in the Annual Conference information/registration lobby at the Greenville Convention Center.

A number of authors whose books are available from the Advocate Press will be available to sign books, plus all Advocate Press books will be available for purchase. Authors in attendance include Mark Barnette, the Rev. Meg Cook, the Rev. Ted Goshorn, Dr. Roger Gramling, Kathy Hart, the Rev. Arthur Holt, the Rev. Cathy Joens, the Rev. Lyn Pace, Dr. Phillip Stone, the Rev. Tyler Strange, the Rev. Kim Strong, Stephon Void, and more.

To date, the Advocate Press has produced 39 books, available at https://advocatepress.org.

HUNGARY

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South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, and they arrived in Hungary March 4, 2025, under extension ministry to One Missionary Society, a Wesleyan-influenced interdenominational mission organization that started in 1901.

There, they work with a team of a dozen OMS missionaries, most from the United States, to share Jesus Christ in that region through strategic partnerships and English-language ministries.

While young Samuel goes to an English-speaking international school, his parents are hard at work making inroads. Weston serves as the disciple making coordinator and Chrisie the community impact coordinator, working closely together and with pastors and leaders of Hungarian congregations, as well as the Danube International Church's Children's Ministry, to do their work.

Photo by the Rev. Weston Pendergrass

The Rev. Chrisie Reeves-Pendergrass, community impact coordinator, preaches at the United Methodist church in Kaposvár alongside the Rev. Donát Gyurkó.

Photo by the Rev. Chrisie Reeves-Pendergrass

The Rev. Weston Pendergrass and Andrea Kopataki, children's ministry coordinator of Danube International Church in Budapest, lead the children's candlelight Christmas drama.

A slow and steady process

Hungary is a relationship-based culture in a part of the world long-used to the harm the church has done in the past—think the Crusades. Weston said it takes a very long time to establish relational trust in that culture.

"They're very slow to open up," he said.

But once it happens, it's strong.

"It was described to me like this," he said. "Americans are like a house that keeps their front gate wide open but their front door locked—no one goes in the house. But in Hungary, the gate is locked but front door is always open. There's hardly anyone they let in the gate, but once you're in, you're welcome at every level. This takes a lot of time and trust."

One of the primary ways they are building relationships—and trust—is through English-language clubs. English is a skill Hungarians want, as it leads to better jobs and prosperity.

OMS offers English clubs at schools, coffee shops and elsewhere in the community, and though the work takes a long time, they're beginning to see inroads with the younger people.

"The English clubs are a foot in the door, both an interest and a need," Weston explained. "If we keep showing up and doing it and are good at it, then over time we build relationships and then start to share the Gospel."

OMS has been in Hungary consistently for the last 30 years, and Weston said they're starting to see some fruit now that has been decades in the making, as parents who went to English camps as kids themselves are now sending their own kids.

That's part of the reason why the Pendergrasses are there as long-term missionaries; they hope to stay at least ten years and possibly longer.

"The people of Hungary have had so many foreign powers come in and rule over them through centuries of history, and even just since the fall of communism they've had so many foreign mission groups come in, make promises, break promises, leave and quit because things are hard.

"We feel it is important to stay even when things are hard, to work alongside them, to love with them, to honor what God is already doing there."

A hard road

But their work is indeed hard. Not only do they work day after day in a foreign land where the culture is not terribly welcoming and the language almost impossible to learn—Hungarian is a language the State Department considers to be the most complex for English speakers to learn—but they also have been experiencing financial setbacks further complicating matters.

Even though they are United Methodists under extension ministry to OMS, the Pendergrasses don't get funding from the denomination. They have to raise all their own financial support for salaries and ministry expenses, which they said is how most mission organizations work these days.

While they went to Hungary decently funded last year, because of the economic crash last year globally and in the United States, it's taken a heavy toll both on the people who support them and their own support account.

"We're in a spot where we have to utterly trust that God will find a way for us to stay and continue to do ministry," Weston said.

Recently, he made a trip back to the United States, visiting churches all over South Carolina and beyond to share their work and hopefully inspire others to partner with them financially.

Weston told the *Advocate* their work is incredibly important. Hungary is a beautiful, historic nation with many cathedrals and other church buildings, but the society is largely secular, and their history with religion is complicated. Most of the churches are empty or have become museums. He said people might grow up as children being somewhat religious, but by the time they become teens and adults, apathy sets in.

"Religion is something that's not been very helpful to their world," he said, from the 17th-century Habsburg oppression of Protestants to the Jewish persecution under Nazi occupation to the total religious suppression by the Soviets.

Also compounding things is the blatant racism experienced by the Roma community, the country's largest ethnic minority and often referred to as "the gypsies."

However, that is also becoming an inroad. Weston noted that some of the local congregations have recently been reaching out to the Roma people, who he described as "very marginalized and ostracized, viewed as dirty, unintelligent people in society at large." He said they also tend to be less educated, so their employment and other opportunities can be limited.

OMS and partner churches are doing outreach with that community, in addition to their English-language outreach, and they are hopeful relationships will blossom.

God is at work

The Pendergrasses aren't discouraged, however—they know this is how things work in Hungary, and they're committed to seeing it through and trusting that God will make a way.

Photo by the Rev. Chrisie Reeves-Pendergrass

OMS Missionary Haylee Caldwell at an English Club at Forrai Metodista Gimnázium (Forrai Methodist High School) in Budapest.

"We're adapting to their culture," Weston explained, coming alongside the people and the missionaries there to help the good work already in place.

As he noted, "God's already at work just fine."

The Pendergrasses covet consistent prayers from their South Carolina friends back home—prayers for them, their colleagues, their ministry and the people of Hungary. Those who feel led to help financially can help with special gifts or recurring giving at https://onemissionsociety.org/pendergrass-reeves.

Across SC.

Photo by Lisa Gibbs

A joyful noise
The Fellowship of Worship Arts sponsored a Handbell Festival at Shandon UMC, Columbia, Feb. 14. Six different church bell choirs from South Carolina participated in the event. David Harris, of the Raleigh Ringers, was the director at the festival. The festival is held each year at Shandon UMC and is open to all handbell choirs that are interested in participating. Email Eddie Huss at ehuss@shandonumc.org for more information.

Photo by Judy Hames Turner

Devoted care
Bethel Park UMC, Denmark, ladies clean the chrismons damaged in the fire at the church in November 2024.

Photo by Kelly Gottheiner

Helping the children
Members of the Myrtle Strange Circle at Manning UMC, Manning, assembled bags last month filled with a homemade blanket, stuffed toy and other things for the 13 residents of Turbeville Children's Home.

The churches have been working together since 2022.

North Hope Community Co-op do ministry together for community, God's kingdom

By the Rev. Meredith M. Dark

In the Charleston District, our churches are divided into groups that do ministry together. The North Hope Community Cooperative came out of a post-COVID 2022 relaunch of the churches in the North Charleston area by the Revs. Morris Waymer of New Francis Brown UMC, Bryan Pigford of Cokesbury UMC, Michael Wood of Aldersgate Methodist and Daniel Griswold of North Charleston UMC.

The first ministry focus was Wednesday Lenten worship services and lunch after. The ministers in the cooperative swapped pulpits for worship beginning at noon, and the churches hosted lunch with a simple meal. This is a great way to get the community together and foster more interaction.

There are several projects that the North Hope Community Cooperative works on together. One main project is the Food Bank at New Francis Brown UMC. The Food Bank gives away 65-plus bags of food per month, feeding more than 100 people. Moses Nelson, of New Francis Brown UMC, is an active part of this project as an octogenarian! Recently, the Food Bank has been told it can expand to giving out food two times a month beginning in July. One of the weeks the food will be delivered to New Francis Brown, and the other week the cooperative will go get the food to be packaged.

A second project is a reading program and after-school program with Goodwin Elementary School called the Goodwin Initiative. Members participate as reading buddies at Goodwin Elementary School and participate as volunteers in an after-school program held at Cokesbury UMC called Later Gators. Ella Perry was recently hired to lead Later Gators, which began in mid-February. Cokesbury UMC also provides midweek meals to Goodwin Elementary through a backpack buddies program, which feeds 65-70 children per week. Volunteers at Cokesbury UMC pack the bags and the Rev. Suzanne Walker and the Rev. Brent Dehlbom deliver the bags.

In 2024-2025, the churches in the cooperative met to hold vigils for those being put to death in our state. We support our sister in Christ, the Rev. Hillary Taylor, and the work she does with South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty. We have remembered Freddie Eugene Owens, Richard Bernard Moore, Marion Bowman Jr., Brad Keith Sigmon, Mikal Deen Mahdi, Stephen Christopher Stanko and Stephen Corey Bryant.

Grace UMC opens their food bank every Monday at 1:30 p.m. The Rev. Kim Bryant and the Rev. Ben Burt are the pastors at Grace, and St. Andrews Parish, where Dehlbom is, contributes to this ministry.

At Enoch Chapel UMC, the Rev. Victoria Richardson has a coat ministry as well as a ministry in memory of her daughter at local hospitals. When she expresses a need, the cooperative steps up and gives assistance.

All of the members of the North Hope Community Cooperative are proud to be a part of the United Methodist connection. We enjoy supporting one another and doing ministry together to uplift our community.

Members past and present of the North Hope Community Cooperative are as follows: New Francis Brown UMC: the Rev. Morris Waymer, the Rev. Cindy Shaw, Evelyn Burwell, Moses Nelson; Cokesbury UMC: the Rev. Bryan Pigford, the Rev. Suzanne Walker, Emily Vandall, Ken Stovall; Enoch Chapel: the Rev. Victoria Richarson, Robin Dean; St. Andrews UMC: Hope Treadway, the Rev. Brent Dehlbom; Grace UMC: the Rev. Kim Bryant, the Rev. Ben Burt; North Charleston UMC: Linda Vaughan, the Rev. Daniel Griswold, the Rev. Meredith Dark; Aldersgate Methodist Church: the Rev. Michael Wood; Charleston Wesley Foundation: the Rev. John Poole.

Dark is pastor of North Charleston UMC, North Charleston.

District News.

Columbia District

Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC, Columbia, welcomed guests from Killingsworth and the T.U.C.K. Project Jan. 18 in celebration of the MLK holiday observance. Terrance Tucker, founder of the T.U.C.K. Project was the guest speaker.

Trinity goes from split to unified to clarity of vision

AIKEN—On Jan. 27, almost one year since Trinity United Methodist Church experienced a church split, leaders gathered to pray and consider this new chapter of Trinity's life.

The Rev. Matthew Alexander invited the congregation, saying, "If you have an interest in the future of Trinity, this day of visioning is for you."

Members spent hours sharing stories, reflecting on who they are and asking who God is calling them to be. They offered prayers acknowledging the grief and pain of the last year, both for those who left and for those who call Trinity home today. They also celebrated the many beautiful and wonderful things God has done in and through Trinity UMC throughout 2025.

Their time together culminated in identifying what they called "Our Words." With thoughtful contemplation, they answered the question, "What kind of church is Trinity aiming to be?" They went through multiple rounds of discussion, reflection and refinement, and eventually they named six things Trinity UMC is called to be: Trinity UMC is a church who embraces adaptive innovation, valuing every voice, inclusion of all people, serving courageously, growing in faith and developing leaders.

Created by Diane Kingery, the church's 2025 Celebration Board highlights wins for Trinity UMC in 2025.

In the next 90 days, they are experimenting with ways to live into these defining traits. Members of Trinity are invited to pray and consider how they can be a part of living into these words. Those considering whether Trinity is the community to which they are called are invited to consider the church Trinity UMC aims to be.

During a survey following the retreat, when asked to describe the momentum of the church at this time, leaders unanimously said Trinity UMC is unified.

"Clarity of vision and identity creates the perfect environment into which to invite new people, and Trinity UMC has had it biggest year of new people in nearly three decades," Alexander said. "I'm blessed to serve among a congregation that truly gets it and is invested! The kin-dom of God is visible in Aiken, South Carolina."

Murray closes 2025 with service, cheer, fellowship

By Jamelah Youmans

Murray United Methodist Church, Summerville, closed 2025 with community service, holiday cheer and fantastic fellowship.

Murray kicked off the month of December with a community breakfast sponsored by the church food bank. This was a time to serve the community as well as honor the food bank volunteers.

Sandra Christopher and Keisha Banks, food bank chairs, were delighted and grateful to all who donated, helped and volunteered throughout the year.

On the first Sunday of December, there was extra twinkle in the sanctuary as members decorated the Christmon tree. This was led by Sunday Superintendent Gladys Lemon and faithful youth Sunday school students Nyelle Lucas, Symone Banks and Ramon Banks Jr.



Murray hosted a community breakfast, Christmas ball and much more to round out a rousing year of ministry.

Murray also had a formal Christmas ball in their Fellowship Hall. Members wore their fine dresses and suits and enjoyed fellowship with each other. They were blessed with the sounds and singing of the live gospel band "The Original Peacemakers." Many said the songs were inspiring and uplifting.

A delicious meal was catered by Dynamic Catering, owned by Murray's very own Lamar Green.

Murray concluded December with their final free produce giveaway. An abundance of volunteers and workers were in attendance and eager to prep, pack and give to those in need during the holiday season.

It was a blessing to be a blessing at the close of 2025. Murray United Methodist Church is expecting great things in 2026.

Youmans is Murray UMC communications chair.

Resource Center.

Lenten Bible studies

If you have not reserved your Lenten Bible study, the Resource Center still has numerous titles available. The resources listed below are new studies for 2026. Check our website for more Easter Bible studies and Easter musicals, too.

An Unlikely Lent: Extraordinary People of the Easter Story

(DVD3020EA=) Author: Billups, Rachel. 6 sessions, 10-12 min/leader's guide/bk/2025.

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are at the heart of the story of Easter. But the resurrection was not witnessed in isolation; it unfolded before a crowd. What might the stories of those women and men teach us today? How will they help us step into the story of Easter? Here, we can see what has been overlooked, not just in the grand moments but in the in-between: the silence, the side characters and the questions. CC. Age: YAS.

The Last Supper: Conversations that Led to the Cross

(DVD3021EA=) Author: Willimon, William. 6 sessions, 10-12 min/leader's guide/bk/2025.

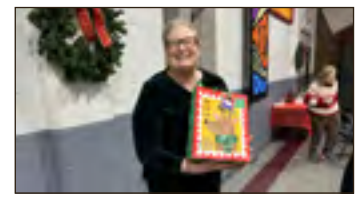
Travel with Jesus on the road to Jerusalem in this profound six-week Lenten study that explores the parables and stories Jesus told at tables along the way to his final meal. Through engaging biblical exploration and Willimon's characteristic storytelling wisdom, readers will discover how Jesus used meals to reveal the surprising nature of God's kingdom; explore how stories of mercy, invitation and radical hospitality prepare us for Holy Week; understand why sharing bread and wine became the central ritual of Christian faith; experience Maundy Thursday's profound significance in fresh, meaningful ways. CC. Age YAS.

Why Did Jesus Have To Die?: The Meaning of the Crucifixion

(DVD3019AH=) Author: Hamilton, Adam. 6 sessions, 14-20 min/leader's guide/bk/2025.

Despite the crucifixion's central place in Christian faith, the New Testament offers few clear answers about how Jesus's death saves, or why, exactly, he had to die. What if that's because we've been asking the wrong question? What if the cross isn't a transaction to be explained, but a living Word from God meant to transform who we are and how we live? CC. Age: YAS

The South Carolina Conference Resource Center is your connection to DVDs and seasonal musicals. We are here to serve your church family. To reserve resources, call 888-678-6272 or 803-786-9486, or visit http://www.umcsc.org/resourcecenter.

Clockwise from top are the Rev. Thomas Bowman, Dr. Sheila Elliott Hodge and the Rev. Beth Drennan.

Rock Hill clergy gather for district Christmas party

Rock Hill United Methodist clergy gathered for a Christmas party at Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Rock Hill, Dec. 11, with clergy from across the district gathering for an evening of fellowship and celebration.

Dr. Anthony Hodge led the group in several fun and engaging activities, including rounds of trivia, where participants were asked to write down a little-known fact about themselves. Laughter filled the room during a guessing game to determine how many balls were in a jar. Pastor Beth Drennan guessed the closest number and took home a win.

One of the highlights of the evening was the classic Left-Right game, as Hodge creatively incorporated attending clergy into the story, making it both funny and exciting. Mr. Drennan ended the game as the last one holding the Christmas stocking and was also recognized as one of the night's winners.

The evening was made even sweeter with desserts prepared by Dr. Sheila Hodge, while Trent BBQ provided the catered meal.

It was a joyful occasion filled with laughter, connection, and celebration and a wonderful opportunity to welcome and get to know Rock Hill's new district administrator, Henrietta McCollough.

Four churches, one connection: unity in the Lowcountry

In a time when division often dominates headlines, something powerful—and refreshingly hopeful—has been unfolding in the Bluffton and Hilton Head Island area since 2023.

Four United Methodist churches. Four congregations. One shared commitment to togetherness.

It began when Bluffton UMC and St. Luke UMC decided ministry was stronger side-by-side than siloed. Worship services were shared. Programs were combined. Relationships deepened. What started as collaboration quickly became connection.

By 2024, the circle widened. Church of the Palms UMC joined the fellowship, strengthening what had already begun. Together, they launched Wednesday Service and Luncheon gatherings, moments of midweek worship that nourished both spirit and body. Holy Week services became a shared sacred journey rather than separate observances.

Then in 2025, the unity expanded once again as St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC became part of the connection. The collaboration deepened beyond worship services into shared spiritual formation. The four congregations co-authored Advent and Lenten devotionals—blending voices, perspectives and prayers into one unified testimony of faith. Working together. Praying together. Growing together.

The pastors of Bluffton UMC, Church of the Palms, and St. Luke UMC launched a new annual tradition: a Valentine's gathering.

But in 2026, something beautifully human was added to the equation. Recognizing that healthy churches are led by healthy leaders—and that time with family and friends strengthens both ministry and mission—the pastors of Bluffton UMC, Church of the Palms, and St. Luke UMC launched a new annual tradition: a Valentine's gathering centered around rest, renewal and relationship. This year, it was a cruise. Next year? Another Valentine's cruise.

Every year going forward? Something intentional. Something relational. Something rooted in togetherness—always around Valentine's Day. Because love is not just something we preach. It is something we practice.

This growing connection models something essential for today's world. Ministry does not have to compete to be effective. Churches do not have to operate in isolation to thrive. Collaboration multiplies impact. Shared worship strengthens witness. And shared joy sustains longevity.

In everyday life, this principle applies beyond church walls. Families grow stronger when they work, pray, and vacation together. Organizations flourish when partnerships replace competition. Communities heal when unity becomes the priority.

The Bluffton-Hilton Head connection is quietly showing what is possible when churches choose cooperation over comparison.

Four churches. One mission. A shared rhythm of worship, service, devotion, and even vacation.

Togetherness isn't just an idea here. It's a lifestyle. And it's only just getting started.

Members sang "We Shall Overcome" while they walked.

Friendship celebrates King Day Observance

NESMITH—A King Day Observance was held at Friendship United Methodist Church Jan. 19 at 10 a.m.

Gathering at New Hope Lodge Hall, participants started with a prayer by the pastor, Dr. Ernest W. Frierson. Following the prayer, those in attendance marched from the lodge hall to Friendship UMC while singing "We Shall Overcome." Once there, they formed a circle in the church yard.

Frierson offered a welcome and brought greetings, and then Prayer Coordinator Sammie Pressley gave each member the opportunity to remember Dr. King in their own way. Some sang, some prayed and some shared their favorite quote by Dr. King and what it meant to them.

The event ended with a prayer by Frierson. At the end of the prayer, everyone marched back to the Lodge Hall for refreshments.

Members focused on witness for February.

Mount Zion shifts prayer focus to witnessing

By Toni Strawther

KINGSTREE—Mount Zion United Methodist Church began the month of February with a prayer focus on witness.

"Part of our witness is publicly living out our baptismal vows through our faith journey, advocacy and service to God," said pastor the Rev. Walter Strawther.

Members at Mount Zion shared their faith journey and ways God has seen African Americans through slavery and Jim Crow.

"African Americans are resilient and continue to stand up against forces of oppression and systematic racism," Strawther said.

Revelation 12:11 says, "And, they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony."

Each month, Mount Zion will have a prayer focus. The purpose is to intentionally center thoughts toward God and foster a closer relationship with God.

Will you be an Advocate advocate in your district?

The *Advocate* is seeking *Advocate* advocates for every district in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. Will you consider being the advocate for your district?

Responsibilities are varied and involve sharing about the *Advocate* on social media, talking about the *Advocate* at your church and any district events you attend, helping steer stories about good news in your district to the *Advocate* so we can share it, and more.

If you're interested, email *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie at jbrodie@advocatesc.org.

Photo courtesy of the Rev. Shannon Bullion

'Zombies' concert helps food pantry

Trinity UMC, Honea Path, hosted a live concert, "Love, Laughter, and Zombies?!" Feb. 20. The concert featured two rising stars, Evelyn Clary and Dr. Michael Brown. A love offering benefitted the Honea Path Food Pantry. Trinity's Mary Jane Young served as accompanist to the performance. Here, Young (far left) stands with Clary, Brown and Clary's daughter at the concert.

Mays UMC celebrates new fellowship hall, community garden

NINETY SIX—The year 2025 was an incredible year for the Mays United Methodist Church family.

With hearts full of gratitude, they celebrate the successful completion of two monumental projects: their new fellowship hall and their thriving community garden.

Members say these achievements stand as a testament to the visionary leadership of their pastor, Gerald Clickscales, and the tireless dedication of their members.

The fellowship hall is already becoming a vibrant area for many church events and gatherings, while the community garden has begun its mission of cultivating hope and providing fresh produce to feed local families.

None of this would have been possible without the collective effort and boundless generosity of this congregation, members said.

"We want to extend a sincere thank you to our pastor for guiding us with faith and to every member who contributed their time, labor and resources throughout 2025," said Deidra Frazier, church secretary. "These spaces are more than just additions to our campus; they are tools for ministry that allow us to share God's love in tangible ways.

"As we look forward, we are excited to see how these gifts will continue to strengthen our bond and bless our neighbors for years to come."

Fresh produce from the garden will feed local families.

Young Methodists.

Wesley Foundations
by the Rev. John Sterling Poole

Wesley Winter Weekend 2026

From Feb. 6-8 at Asbury Hills, more than 130 college students from more than 10 campuses came together in faith, fellowship and fun at the annual Wesley Winter Weekend. WWW has been happening for more than 10 years now, and the tradition seems to grow stronger and stronger with every successful year.

This weekend is an opportunity to bring students together from across college campuses around the state in order to celebrate the diversity and wonder of God's work in the various Wesley Foundations and Fellowships. Over the course of the weekend, there were four worship sessions focusing on Micah 6:8, there were three small group discussions, there were four meals shared, there were two bonfires made and there was one communion shared on Sunday morning. While the students enjoyed the amenities of Asbury Hills, the heart of the weekend was worship.

Each session was led by a different worship team comprised of students, and each of the bands brought their own unique sound to the Recreation Shelter. The sermons were preached by a different campus minister to show the diversity and capabilities of the various clergy and lay leadership found in Wesley Foundations/Fellowships.

Really and truly, this weekend was about connection: the connection of the South Carolina Annual Conference and the connection of the Body of Christ. College students were making friends, growing in their faith, finding a spot for sabbath and celebrating the wonderful work of the Spirit from Wofford to Winthrop, Clemson to Charleston (College of Charleston, The Citadel and Trident Technical were present), Francis Marion to Furman, Claflin to Coastal Carolina and Methodist Student Network (University of South Carolina) in the middle of this network of campus ministries faithfully serving the students.

WWW is a yearly tradition that my colleagues and I are all committed to continuing, even though it may be difficult to do so. Historically, WWW has been paid for by Connectional Ministries through the Discipleship Ministries budget. Given the present circumstances and questions of funding, WWW will now have to be fundraised for. My colleagues and I are stepping up to this reality and challenge, because we believe in the Spirit's powerful work over this weekend.

Will this mean we'll have to cut costs where we can? Yes. Will this mean that each participating campus ministry will need to fundraise (beyond what they are already fundraising for) in order to create this opportunity for their students? Yes.

The bigger question is not for my colleagues and me, though. The bigger question lies with you, the reader. How can you help continue this holy tradition of WWW and uphold space for the Spirit to work in this connection?

Please reach out to me or your nearest campus ministry on how you can help. We need you. Prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. Amen.

Poole is director of the Charleston Wesley Foundation. To learn more about each Wesley Foundation: https://linktr.ee/UMCSCWesley.

Advocate announces Young Voices kids writing contest

Prizes for first, second, third place winners

South Carolina United Methodist children of all ages (elementary through end of high school) are invited to participate in a new *Advocate* Young Voices Writing Contest.

Held throughout the spring, the *Advocate* will collect writing from participants through May 15. The winner will be announced in the June edition, and the *Advocate* will run a collection of the submitted material in a future edition of the newspaper, as well as online.

Any youth up to age 18 who attends a UMC in South Carolina is eligible to participate. Writing can be anything from a poem or song to an essay or short story, but it should address a matter of faith in some way. There is no word count minimum, but there is a maximum of 1,500 words. The work must be completely original and not created through the use of artificial intelligence.

First, second and third place winners will be awarded Amazon gift cards.

Participants should email their writing submission to jbrodie@advocatesc.org by May 15, either as a Word document, text file or typed into the body of the email. Be sure to include your church name and city. If it is handwritten, a photo of the entry is acceptable.

Columbia College earns nod in U.S. News & World Report rankings

COLUMBIA—Columbia College has earned significant recognition in the 2026 U.S. News & World Report Best Online Programs rankings, highlighted by a 28-spot rise in the Best Online Bachelor's Programs category and multiple rankings for veteran-focused programs.

The college moved from No. 84 to No. 56 (tied) among 348 institutions in the nation for Best Online Bachelor's Programs, marking one of the most notable advancements in its online academic portfolio to date.

Columbia College also improved in two veteran-specific rankings, reflecting continued growth in access, quality and student support for military-affiliated learners.

The 2026 U.S. News Best Online Programs rankings for Columbia College are as follows:

- Best Online Bachelor's Programs: No. 56 (tied)
- Best Online Bachelor's in Business Programs: No. 191 (tied)
- Best Online Bachelor's Programs for Veterans: No. 35
- Best Online Master's in Criminal Justice: No. 51 (tied)
- Best Online Master's in Education: No. 157 (tied)
- Best Online Master's in Education for Veterans: No. 46 (tied)

Clergy explore intergenerational worship at Bishop's School

By Toni Taylor

During Thursday morning's session at Bishop's School in February, clergy considered questions such as: Do all generations—including children—have a voice and feel heard in your congregation? What does it feel like to belong, and why is belonging so important in the church?

Many named times when decisions, worship styles or schedules unintentionally served one generation while sidelining others, recognizing that naming these patterns is a first step toward a more intergenerational culture.

What does an intergenerational church look like?

The family dinner table is a metaphor used for intergenerational worship. Around that table, the youngest do not understand everything that is said, but they are present, they are welcome and they are invited to ask questions and find their voices over time. Likewise, in intergenerational worship, children and youth are not observers on the edge of adult faith; they are full participants whose presence and leadership enrich the entire body.

Why children need to be in worship

From the outset, leaders framed intergenerational worship as a call to deeper belonging, grounded in Scripture and the Baptismal Covenant.

Participants revisited the promises spoken at baptism and reflected on what it means for those words to shape every aspect of congregational life. Churches that welcome all ages, including children, into the center of worship, discover again and again what it means to be one body in Christ—belonging, praying, and serving together.

Experience a Messy Church activity in worship

Dr. Johannah Myers, one of the key partners of this initiative, shared at Bishop's School from her experience with Messy Church.

Messy Church USA brings people of every generation together around hospitality, hands-on creativity, joyful worship and shared meals. Myers selected a Messy Church role-play activity on Samuel hearing God's voice as a child and becoming a faithful judge and prophet. She asked for three participants from the clergy in the room to portray God, Samuel and Eli. By involving multiple people and perspectives in the story, Myers helped attendees experience a concrete example of what intergenerational ministry can look like on the ground—interactive, relational and rooted in Scripture.

Voices from Cohort 1: Learning in real time

Toni Taylor facilitated a panel of clergy from the first "Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer" cohort to share how this initiative is reshaping their congregations.

The Rev. Tyler Strange described how as a new church plant, belonging is a core value, seeking a culture where every person, including children, knows they are needed, known and have a voice.

The Rev. Brian Underwood spoke of moving beyond a model where children serve briefly as acolytes or attend a children's moment before being dismissed, instead shifting toward worship where children remain in the sanctuary, hear Scripture and the sermon, and offer their own perspectives.

The Rev. Meg Cook highlighted how shared language and concrete tools—such as Narrative 4 Story Exchanges and Messy Church—have helped move her churches from theory to practice, giving congregations real ways to "practice belonging" together rather than only talk about it.

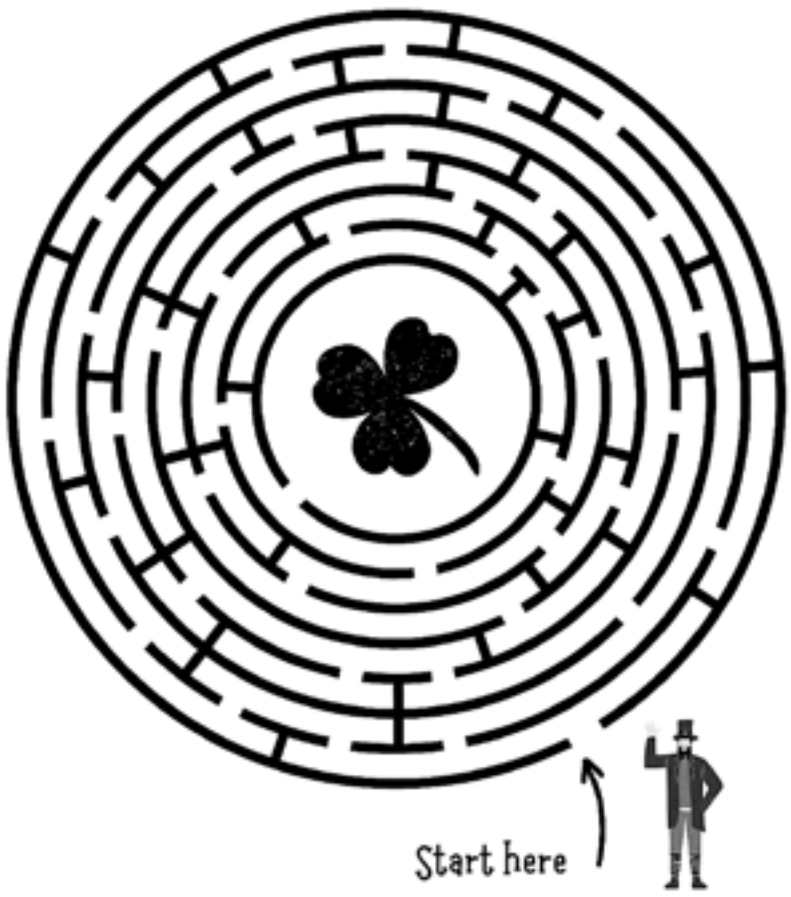
The Rev. Constance McLeod lifted-up the potential of ministries such as United Women in Faith, which already support women, children and youth, as key partners in intergenerational ministry.

The Rev. Nona Woodle shared how the cohort churches share ideas, struggles and learning together as a real connectional system. As she noted, this is not a program; it is a process that will take time and will be shaped by each church's own context.

The Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer initiative is funded by the Lilly Endowment.

St. Patrick's Day Maze Puzzle

Help Lucky the leprechaun to find the way through to the shamrock.



Revolution rescheduled for March 27–29 in Columbia


Cook


Brenner

COLUMBIA–Heavy snowfall in late January prompted the youth spiritual retreat Revolution to be postponed to this month. Instead of Jan. 30-Feb. 1, the event will now be held March 27-29.

The location is the same place: The DoubleTree Conference Center in Columbia.

For those who registered for the event in January, there is no need to re-register. Those who were not registered who now would like to participate are welcome to attend; register at http://scmyp.org/revolution.

Everyone who needs hotel rooms will need to rebook their hotel rooms; find that link at http://scmyp.org/revolution.

This year's theme is "Seek First," 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."

The Rev. Jason Cook, senior pastor of Fellowship Bible Church in Roswell, Georgia, will bring the message as the featured speaker each session.

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

Deadline is March 1 for the Advocate's annual $1,000 college scholarship

Students have until March 1 to apply 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 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.

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.

Download the application at https://advocatesc.org/scholarships. For questions, email jbrodie@advocatesc.org.

Across the UMC.

Tips for stopping pastor-impersonation scams
NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Across the country, churches and ministries are seeing a troubling rise in identity spoofing scams—particularly those that impersonate pastors, bishops or other trusted church leaders. These scams often arrive as emails or text messages that appear to come directly from a pastor and urgently request gift cards, financial assistance or sensitive information. The General Council on Finance and Administration offers tips to help pastors and congregants avoid falling prey to such scams.

Church connection bolsters college finances
GREENSBORO, N.C.—At a time when many U.S. colleges struggle to survive, United Methodist-related Greensboro College credits Wespath and Wesleyan Impact Partners with putting it on firmer financial footing. Leaders say the partnership could be a model for United Methodist higher education across the U.S.

Remembering Jesse Jackson, civil rights icon
CHICAGO—United Methodist Bishop Julius C. Trimble, a Chicago native, took a moment at a church meeting to remember the Rev. Jesse Jackson, a U.S. civil rights leader who died Feb. 17 at age 84. "He was one of the foremost proponents of global peace and justice that history will record," said Trimble, who was in high school when he first met Jackson. Both the World Council of Churches and Religion News Service have tributes to Jackson.

Making regionalization a reality for the church
COPENHAGEN, Denmark—United Methodist leaders from four continents are pressing forward with a significant reimagining of the *Book of Discipline* that will go before General Conference voters. They also heard an update on the formation of a U.S. regional conference.

In DHS talks, bishop joins call for accountability
WASHINGTON—Council of Bishops President Tracy S. Malone has joined with other faith leaders in a letter to the U.S. Congress ahead of the Feb. 13 deadline to determine funding for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The letter says, in part: "Our churches have decried denial of due process and recent violence by federal law enforcement agents, including the shootings of Keith Porter Jr., Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti by federal immigration agents. We call for investigation, accountability and justice in these cases."

Monks end trek with United Methodist stop
WASHINGTON—After more than 100 days and 2,300 miles on foot, the Venerable monks of the Dhammacetiya concluded their Walk for Peace in the U.S. capital. On Feb. 10, they arrived first at United Methodist-related American University and later at National United Methodist Church, where they took their one meal of the day, before continuing on to Washington National Cathedral.

Churchgoers take Social Principles to lawmakers
NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Over 200 United Methodists participated in United Methodist Day on the Hill at the Tennessee Capitol. The Tennessee-Western Kentucky and Holston Conferences sponsored the day of advocacy for UMC Social Principles.

Worship conference planned for Black churches
DALLAS—Leaders from Black Christian congregations across the U.S. are invited to participate in a national worship revival conference April 29-May 2 at Hamilton Park United Methodist Church. Leading the "Shifting the Atmosphere" conference are the Junius B. Dotson Institute for Worship and Music in the Black Church and Beyond, part of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, and Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century.

United Methodists ordain first elders in Honduras
TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras—The United Methodist Mission in Honduras is experiencing a defining moment in its history, with the ordination—for the first time since its founding—of native elders of the country. Juana Jamileth Moncada Torres, Héctor Mauricio Laínez and María Magdalena Zelaya Cruz are the first pastors to be ordained as United Methodist elders in the region.

UMCOR's Sager Brown Depot to close
BALDWIN, La.—The United Methodist Committee on Relief has announced it will conclude operations at the Sager Brown Depot in 2027 as it reimagines how disaster relief supplies are assembled, stored and deployed. Plans are to modernize the way the relief agency manages materials while reducing costs. UMCOR will continue its work at the Sager Brown campus through the end of this year and host all scheduled mission experiences.

Decision on 'sensitive location' policy coming
WASHINGTON—As a Los Angeles United Methodist church reels from a recent raid by ICE that led to the quick deportation of one of its members, attorneys for churches and synagogues argued at a Washington appeals court hearing that the federal memo that led to the raid should be struck down.

Church members take public stand on immigration
CHARLOTTE, N.C.—More than 1,000 United Methodists across the Western North Carolina Conference have signed onto a faith-rooted, nonpartisan public statement denouncing "aggressive, undisciplined, illegal, and inhumane" federal immigration raids. The statement appeared as an ad in regional newspapers on Feb. 4. The conference has the statement and list of signers.

Church responds to flooding in Mozambique
MAPUTO, Mozambique—United Methodists are responding to deadly flooding in southern Africa that has left more than 100 people dead, destroyed infrastructure and impacted more than 500,000 people.
Courtesy UMNews

Bishops invite United Methodists to participate in survey, webinars

The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church has launched a historic engagement initiative designed to give every United Methodist a direct voice in shaping the denomination's future through the 2026 COB Leadership Gathering, "Emboldened by the Spirit: Imagining a Church Yet to Be."

The gathering will convene Oct. 20-24 at Knox United Church in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, bringing together nearly 300 participants including bishops, clergy, lay leaders, young adults and worldwide representatives.

At the heart of this initiative are three major participation pathways—a denomination-wide survey, a worldwide webinar series, and a newly coordinated website.

The survey launched in January and is available in seven languages. Access the survey at https://www.resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/council-of-bishops-leadership-gathering/survey

Three interactive webinars will explore core Wesleyan themes with diverse panelists from around the world. All sessions are open to the entire denomination, with multilingual recordings available for worldwide access.

Access them at https://www.resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/council-of-bishops-leadership-gathering.

Obituaries.

Rev. Washington Webster Belangia IV


Belangia IV

REEVESVILLE—The Rev. Washington Webster Belangia IV, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Feb. 5, 2026.

Prior to his retirement in 2008, Dr. Belangia served the Grover, Emory-Nazareth, Bethel, Francis Asbury, Charleston-Trinity and St. George's charges. He served the Main Street, Bamberg, charge after his retirement.

Funeral services were held Feb. 20 at St. George Methodist Church.

Memorials may be made to St. Stephen Episcopal Church Restoration Fund, P.O. Box 517, St. Stephen, SC 29479.

Dr. Belangia is survived by his son and daughter.

Rev. Hazel Correll Bennett


Bennett

GREENWOOD—The Rev. Hazel Correll Bennett, a retired deacon of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Jan. 20, 2026.

Prior to her retirement in 1997, Rev. Bennett served Inman UMC as director of Christian education and Spartanburg Methodist College as adjunct instructor of religion.

Funeral services were held Jan. 23 at Main Street UMC with burial in Greenlawn Memorial Gardens, Spartanburg.

Memorials may be made to Main Street UMC (operating fund), 211 N. Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646.

Sarah Anne Bradshaw Copeland

CLINTON—Sarah Anne Bradshaw Copeland, mother of Dr. Jennifer Copeland, died Feb. 14, 2026. Dr. Copeland is the executive director of the North Carolina Council of Churches and a member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Feb. 21 at Broad Street UMC with burial in Rosemont Cemetery.

Mrs. Copeland is survived by her two daughters and son.

Lessie Simmons Detwiler

CARRBORO, N.C.—Lessie Simmons Detwiler, widow of the Rev. John Christopher Detwiler, died Nov. 2, 2025.

Funeral services were not announced.

Mrs. Detwiler is survived by her daughter.

Ruby Dean Peterson Goodwin

GREENWOOD—Ruby Dean Peterson Goodwin, mother of the Rev. Thessa Smith, died Jan. 26, 2026. Rev. Smith is the pastor of the Trinity-Harris Charge.

Funeral services were held Jan. 30 at Young's Chapel Baptist Church.

Memorials may be made to Young's Chapel Baptist Church, 1214 Siloam Church Road, Greenwood, SC 29646; or to Piedmont Agency on Aging, 808 Emerald Road, Greenwood, SC 29646.

Mrs. Goodwin is survived by her two sons and daughter.

Betty Miller Goupil

SWANSEA—Betty Miller Goupil, widow of the Rev. Roger Charles Goupil, died Jan. 27, 2026.

A memorial service was held Feb. 7 at Mount Holly Methodist Church, Rock Hill.

Memorials may be made to Lexington Medical Center Foundation, 107 Sunset Court, West Columbia, SC 29169.

Mrs. Goupil is survived by her daughter.

Velda Renee Blakeney Holloway

BRONX, N.Y.—Velda Renee Blakeney Holloway, sister of the Rev. Mary Burnell, died Jan. 20, 2026. Rev. Burnell is the pastor of Kellybell United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Jan. 30 at Herbert T. McCall Funeral Home with burial in Rose Hills Memorial Park Cemetery, Putnam Valley, New York.

Rev. James Donald Medley


Medley

GREENWOOD—The Rev. James Donald Medley, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died April 22, 2020.

Prior to his retirement in 1986, Rev. Medley served the Kinards, Valley Falls-Fingerville, Branchville, Mount Olivet-Pleasant Grove, Chesterfield Cooperative Parish, Goose Creek, Emma Gray, Whitmire and Gordon Memorial-Greenbrier charges.

Because Rev. Medley died during COVID, no service was held. A memorial service will be held March 21 at Main Street UMC.

Rev. Medley is survived by two sons.

Rev. Theodore Roosevelt Morton Jr.


Morton Jr.

GREENWOOD—The Rev. Theodore "Ted" Roosevelt Morton Jr., a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Feb. 6, 2026.

Prior to his retirement in 1995, Dr. Morton served in the Division of Chaplains, the Shandon Associate and Jackson charges, as executive director of the Greenwood Methodist Home and as associate in development at Greenwood Methodist Home.

A memorial service will be announced at a later date with a private burial at Elmwood Cemetery, Columbia.

Memorials may be made to the South Carolina Methodist Foundation, P.O. Box 6087, Columbia, SC 29250-5087 and designated for the Theodore R. Morton Jr. Scholarship Fund.

Dr. Morton is survived by his wife, Henrietta, two sons and daughter.

Paula Ann Brafford Wilson

COLUMBIA—Paula Ann Brafford Wilson, widow of the Rev. Rex Wilson, died Feb. 9, 2026.

Funeral services were held Feb. 15 at Trenholm Road United Methodist Church.

Memorials may be made to the Paula Wilson Music Ministry Development Fund at Trenholm Road UMC, 3401 Trenholm Road, Columbia, SC 29204.

Mrs. Wilson is survived by her two daughters and son.

Historical Society
by Dr. Roger M. Gramling

Methodism and the Holiness Movement

While the schisms leading to the formation of both the Wesleyan Methodist Connection and the Free Methodist Church were largely the result of issues related to doctrine, polity and the abolition of slavery, there was yet another issue involved, an emphasis on the "seeking of holiness."

This emphasis, of course, had its origins in John Wesley's emphasis on "Christian Perfection" or "Perfect Love," a second work of grace leading to entire sanctification by which the Christian could lead a life free from sin, indeed removing the very nature of sin and replacing it with perfect love through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

This emphasis gained momentum as a result of the revivalism of the first half of the 19th century, what is called the "Second Great Awakening." It found expression in the preaching and teaching of people like Presbyterian Charles G. Finney (1792-1875), the writings of Methodist Timothy Merritt (1775-1845) and the work of Methodist Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874) and her husband, Dr. Walter C. Palmer (1804-1883), in whose thinking the solution of all social ills lay exclusively in the conversion of individuals. This emphasis on holiness found support among some Methodist leaders (Frederick A. Norwood, "The Story of American Methodism," pp. 292-297).

Following the Civil War, the emphasis upon "holiness" became much more central in the life of the church and much more controversial. The "National Campmeeting for the Promotion of Holiness" was organized at Vineland, New Jersey, under the leadership of John S. Inskip, a Methodist preacher from New York. While interdenominational in nature, it had strong Methodist support and grew rapidly. Leaders at Drew Theological Seminary supported it. It attracted the interest of bishops in both the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Among the layman who supported it was Washington C. DePauw (Norwood, pp. 297-298).

Dr. Brian Black, author of "The Holiness Heritage," writes in his article "A Brief History of the Holiness Movement" that "by the 1880s, holiness was the most powerful doctrinal movement in America and seemed to be carrying away all opposition ... and was quickly spreading throughout many other denominations."

The first General Holiness Assembly met at Park Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church in 1885.

However, criticism of the Holiness Movement was growing as some leaders within the movement began to call for adherents to leave their denominational families and "come out," so to speak. A debate over the meaning and manner of "entire sanctification" now took center stage. Some argued that sanctification was "entire and instantaneous" while others allowed for a "progressive and gradual" experience. Many critical studies of the doctrine were published between 1888 and 1895. Neither side favored toleration of the other. Strict adherents of the Holiness Movement insisted that sanctification was "entire," and a "second work" or "second blessing" or "baptism of the Holy Spirit" led immediately to a complete cleansing of one's sinful nature, resulting in the perfect love of God.

While affirming the validity of Wesley's teaching on Christian perfection, the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in their episcopal address in 1894 issued a statement deploring "the tendency to claim monopoly over holiness as susceptible of only one definition and one process (Norwood, pp. 298-299).

Those insisting upon "one definition" and "one process" separated from their church to join any number of smaller groups, many of whom counted Methodists among their leadership. By the 1890s, separate holiness groups had come into existence, some becoming independent denominations and some independent associations. One such denomination, the Church of the Nazarene, was founded in the early 1900s by Phineas F. Breeze. A prominent Methodist leader in California, Breeze reluctantly left the Methodist Episcopal Church to become founder and first general superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene (Norwood, p. 300).

Although earlier in origin, both the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Free Methodist Church of North America are counted as a part of the Holiness Movement because of the holiness emphasis present in their organization. Emerging later and joining the Church of the Nazarene among the major developing holiness groups were the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), the Christian and Missionary Alliance and the Salvation Army in the USA.

While holiness and pentecostalism are related, they are not the same, and some in the Holiness Movement have been critical of the Pentecostal Movement. Pentecostalism developed from a division within the ranks of the Holiness Movement, the claim being made that "speaking in tongues" was the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. While some who became Pentecostals were Methodists, and while some of its leaders had Methodist backgrounds, the Pentecostal Movement was no more particularly Methodist than it was Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopal or any other denomination.

Methodism's contribution to the Holiness Movement, on the other hand, was much more pronounced as was the movement's effect upon Methodism. The movement cost Methodism its stronger advocates and adherents to the Wesleyan teaching on Christian perfection, reducing the teaching to the arena of theologians and fundamentalist laymen. It would not surface again until the mid-20th century (Norwood, pp. 300-303).

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

From the Archives
by Dr. Phillip Stone

Columbia College: A college for Methodist women

With construction under way in Spartanburg for the conference's first college for men, South Carolina's Methodists recognized that they needed to provide similar opportunities for women in the state. Conference leaders felt that the other conference-related institutions—the Cokesbury Conference School in Cokesbury and the Carolina Female College in Wadesboro, North Carolina—were not ideally located. (Anson County, North Carolina, where Wadesboro is located, along with several North Carolina counties, was part of the South Carolina Conference until 1870.)

The conference appointed a committee in January 1853 to consider proposals for a new college for women in South Carolina. They noted, "There is no reason to delay much longer an enterprise so generally deemed important by Methodist public opinion of this state."

Communities around the state showed interest in being the home of this new college, and the committee heard proposals from a half-dozen Upcountry towns at a meeting in Spartanburg. The committee believed that the proximity of Wofford meant Spartanburg had the greatest advantages of those proposals. However, the conference wasn't convinced and heard additional proposals. In the end, the conference established colleges in Spartanburg and Columbia. And so, with the support of clergy and Columbia leaders, the Columbia Female College was established.

The college received its charter from the General Assembly in 1854, and the trustees acquired two acres of land on Plain Street, now Hampton Street, and began construction. It took until October 1859 for the four-story college building to be completed. The building had reception, recitation and music instruction rooms on the ground floor as well as a dining room. On the second floor were dormitory rooms, a parlor and the chapel. The third floor had other living quarters, including a parlor and living quarters for any women on the faculty. The fourth floor had the library and other living quarters.

The curriculum for each of the four classes included English, mathematics, history, geography, rhetoric and composition, and botany, and in the upper classes, chemistry, mineralogy, natural philosophy, evidences of Christianity, physiology, trigonometry and astronomy. Students were offered Latin with their parents' permission. French, music and fine arts were also offered at an extra charge. This core curriculum was not radically different from the men's college in Spartanburg, though Wofford was a bit heavier on Latin and Greek and didn't offer music and fine arts.

President Whitefoord Smith remained only a short time, his health forcing him to return to his post at Wofford after only a few months. By December 1859, the college had more than 120 students. In 1860, the college had 12 instructors, five men and seven women.

The Civil War years were tumultuous at the college and for the city of Columbia. The college saw frequent leadership changes and, with no endowment, operated on tuition and fees alone. The student body expanded, with residents of other parts of South Carolina moving to Columbia, which was seen as more secure. The college laid out strict rules for the students. They had to live on campus unless their families lived in Columbia. They were not permitted to leave campus without a chaperone. One rule instituted early on was that the students were not allowed to receive the attention of gentlemen. That rule, Jerold Savory's history of the college noted, remained in effect until the 1920s.

The end of the Civil War brought hard times for Columbia College. It was one of the few buildings in the city not burned in February 1865, though the college did have to close for nearly eight years.

The buildings saw other uses until the conference raised funds to help reopen the college. From that new foundation in 1873, Columbia College has grown and thrived.

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


LIFE AT SCARRITT

Clipping courtesy of Dr. Phillip Stone

100 years ago this month
In the March 1926 *Advocate*, Allie Cobb wrote this letter sharing about her studies at Scarritt College for Christian Workers, which trained young women missionaries, equipping them for global leadership in the church.

Adult Lessons
by the Rev. Darlene L. Kelley

From suffering to hope

About the Author

Kelley pastors Trinity United Methodist Church, West Columbia, and is a member of the Advocate *Board of Trustees.*

March 1
Waiting and Hoping, Really?
Lesson Scripture: Lamentations 2:1-9, 18-22; Psalm 130:1-8
Background Scripture: Lamentations 2; Psalm 130
Key Verses: Psalm 130:1-2, "I cry out to you from the depths, Lord—my Lord, listen to my voice!"

Beginning with Lamentations and ending on Palm Sunday with John's Gospel, this month's Bible lessons take us from the cries and agony of exile to the blessings and triumphant shouts of Hosanna, but it is not an easy journey.

Both books speak of the Daughter of Zion. She is lost in Lamentations, weeping bitterly for the empty city of Jerusalem, devastated after what most scholars agree is the central theme of the book—the military defeat of Judah and the resulting Babylonian exile. A collection of five poems thought to be written by Jeremiah, Lamentations is rarely used for sermons and appears only twice in our three-year lectionary rotation. Yet laments and pleas to God for help, healing and the end of suffering appear throughout the canon and are a common theme in our prayers.

In Lamentations, an angry God destroys without mercy and lays to ruin the city of Jerusalem while the elders of Daughter Zion sit on the ground in sackcloth and silence and throw dust on their heads (2:2-11). Indeed, the book describes God like an enemy who, like a foe, has slain all who were pleasing to the eye (2:4).

As we begin the month, the hope of Palm Sunday seems a long way off, and we can do little more in this first week than pour out our hearts like water before the presence of the Lord (2:19) and beg God to hear our voices and be attentive to our supplications (Psalm 130:1). We will have to hang in there and see what the rest of the month reveals.

Have you ever felt God was like an enemy? Have you ever felt God was angry with you or someone you love? Have you ever felt angry with God? What are some of the tools we might use to help us during our own times of anger and lament?

March 8
Navigating Depression
Lesson Scripture: Lamentations 3:1-20, 31-33, 42b-48; Psalm 103:1-10
Background Scripture: Lamentations 3; Psalm 103
Key verse: Lamentations 3:18, "I thought: My future is gone, as well as my hope from the Lord."

We all have good days and bad days, but the main character in this week's lamentation suffers into darkness without any light (3:2). Most scholars agree the character describing his agonies in the third chapter of our focal book is most likely male and may even be a soldier suffering from depression or post-traumatic stress disorder after the battles with Babylon. Defeated in those battles, he has become the laughingstock of all his people, filled with bitterness, sated with wormwood and grinding his teeth on gravel (3:13-16).

Yet this week's lesson gives us one of the only glimmers of hope among the lamentations. Our soldier remembers that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end. He offers verses that inspire one of our most popular hymns: God's mercies are new every morning; great is your faithfulness (3:22-23).

In a book full of suffering, remorse and pain, these lines may be some of the most hopeful in this month's study. So it will be wise for us to balance our lamentations with verses from Psalm 103 that remind us that the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (103:8).

According to recent findings from the National Institute of Mental Health, depression affects an estimated 21 million Americans, so finding balance and hope during times of suffering and sadness is extremely important. Perhaps Eugene Peterson says it best in his introduction to Job in "The Message" Bible: Real faith cannot be reduced to spiritual bromides and merchandised in success stories. It is refined in the fires and the storms of pain.

Perhaps we should begin entering the suffering, participating insofar as we are able—entering the mystery and looking around for God.

March 15
When There Is No Way Out
Lesson Scripture: Lamentations 4:3010, 13-19, 21-22; Psalm 56
Background Scripture: Lamentations 4; Psalm 56
Key Verse: Psalm 56:13, "For you have delivered my soul from death, and my feet from falling, so that I may walk before God in the light of life."

There's a powerful burial scene in the film "The Shack" when the character representing the Spirit of God pours tears from a bottle onto the ground and colorful flowers and a beautiful tree sprout up from those tears. Our background Scripture inspires the idea that God collects our tears as Psalm 56:8 proclaims: You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your record?

Tears continue as we wander through the fourth chapter of Lamentations, and this week's suffering turns to deprivation as the tongue of the infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst and the children beg for food, but no one gives them anything (4:4).

Working in a soup kitchen in Upstate New York, I remember the impact two small children made as I watched them devour day-old rolls set out at the end of the lunch line. Dry and unappealing to my privileged and well-fed eyes, the rolls must have been the first edible offerings available for far too long to the two little ones, and they pounced on those rolls, tearing into them with a level of desperation and ferocity that left a mark on my soul and inspired years of ministry. Perhaps that's the best response we can give to suffering—the inspiration to end it.

Yet the suffering continues in Lamentations with a tiny glimmer of hope at the end of the chapter: The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter Zion, is accomplished, he will keep you in exile no longer (4:22). The prophet Jeremiah writes of 70 years of exile (29:10), and there is no sure way of knowing how many people it affected, but there is no question that conquest by the Babylonians changed everything and left a mark on the Hebrews emotionally, theologically and culturally.

Have poverty and hunger impacted someone you love? As people of faith, how can we respond to suffering and hunger in our communities?

March 22
Where Justice Is Found
Lesson Scripture: Lamentations 5:1-5, 14-22; Psalm 98:1-9
Background Scripture: Lamentations 5; Psalm 98
Key Verse: Psalm 98:3, "He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel."

Most scholars agree the lack of comfort, grace and divine intervention apparent in Lamentations serves to honor the nobility and depth of human suffering. There are no satisfactory answers in our attempts to explain why evil exists if God is good or why so many good people suffer. Lamentations makes no attempts to placate the confusion, pain and anger that swirl like a hurricane in our hearts when we feel loss and grief, injustice and cruelty and the joy of our hearts has ceased; our dancing turned to mourning (5:15). Lamentations honors our suffering while God remains out of the office for lunch.

If we want any comfort at all, we have to hop back to the Psalms where we can sing to the Lord a new song (Psalm 98:1). With Psalm 98, we can make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth while the fifth chapter of Lamentations ends wondering if God has utterly rejected us, and will be angry with us beyond measure (5:22). It's God's steadfast love and faithfulness that save us in the psalter (98:5).

Lamentations doesn't wrap us in God's warm and steadfast love; the book doesn't sustain us with God's faithfulness. Instead it leaves us miserable and uncertain, not a comfortable place to sit, but one that often describes the human condition. Lamentations is the dark night of the soul, the unrelenting wail of a wounded animal, the heartbreaking sobs of a lost and abandoned child.

Lamentations is humanity on our worst days, and it doesn't hide the wounds or muffle the cries, but it does leave us admitting our fear and owning our disgrace. And maybe that's a good spot to sit on during Lent.

How can we help one another in our suffering? How does faith inform our response to suffering?

March 29
A Different Parade
Lesson Scripture: John 12:12-19
Background Texts: John 11:45-12:33
Key Verse: John 12:13, "So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him shouting, 'Hosanna!'"

We end the month with hope and resurrection in John's Gospel, yet threats linger in the background as the chief priests and the Pharisees plan to put Jesus to death (11:53). Pulling Lazarus from the grave was a powerful miracle, and folks are talking about it and following Jesus around in ever growing numbers. After all, it's not every day you meet someone who conquers death by calling your name on the far side of four days in a tomb. It might even attract the wrong kind of attention.

Palm Sunday is also known as Passion Sunday, and while our main Scripture lesson ends with Pharisees who can do nothing because the world has gone after him, our background text ends: Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out ... Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die (12:33). Not long before, Jesus talks of a grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies, but if it dies, it bears much fruit (12:24).

The triumphal entry of Jesus on the back of a humble donkey foreshadows his humble death on the cross. People may be shouting for a king to liberate them from the tyranny of Rome, but they hear what has been written: "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming sitting on a donkey's colt!" (12:15). Jesus didn't seek the power of the empire; Jesus was the power of love.

How do we witness to the love of Christ in our own lives? What do you think it means that Jesus enters Jerusalem on the back of a donkey?

Pajama party at Philadelphia UMC

Philadelphia UMC, York, had a pajama party recently. The United Women in Faith of the church encouraged the congregation to bring pajamas, which would be given to Epworth Children's Home. Thanks to their generosity, 52 pairs of pajamas were collected and delivered prior to Christmas.

Happenings.

Event Calendar.

February
Black History Month

Feb. 27-March 1—Diakonos: Hands & Feet weekend, Asbury Hills, Cleveland, $65. Register: https://asburyhills.org/hands-and-feet/

Feb. 28-March 1—Theotokos Confirmation Retreat, Hinton Life Rural Life Center, Hayesville, N.C. https://hintontheotokos.org

March
Women's History Month

March 7—Paths to Wholeness Annual Signature Brunch, Orangeburg Country Club, Orangeburg, 10 a.m. $55. Register: https://tinyurl.com/ptw-brunch

March 8—Daylight Savings Time starts

March 9—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.

March 9—Killingsworth Annual Golf Tournament, Players Club, Columbia, 9 a.m.-6 p.m.

March 13-15—Theotokos Confirmation Retreat, Hinton Life Rural Life Center, Hayesville, N.C. https://hintontheotokos.org

March 17—St. Patrick's Day

March 17—UWF Legislative Advocacy Day, Epworth Children's Home, Columbia, 9 a.m. Register: https://tinyurl.com/uwf-lad2026

March 19—Clergy Orders Gathering

March 20-22—South Carolina Tribal Bus Tour, $100. Contact Zan Tracy Pender, 803-905-5672 or tracypender@hotmail.com to register.

March 20-22—Theotokos Confirmation Retreat, Hinton Life Rural Life Center, Hayesville, N.C. https://hintontheotokos.org

March 27-29—Revolution, DoubleTree Conference Center, Columbia

March 29—Palm/Passion Sunday

March 30-April 3—Stations of the Cross display, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. https://standrewbytheseaumc.org

April

April 2—Maundy Thursday

April 3—Good Friday (United Methodist Center closed)

April 3—"The Passion of the Christ" viewing, Celebration Center, St. Andew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head, 2 p.m.

April 5—Easter Day

April 10-12—Theotokos Confirmation Retreat, Hinton Life Rural Life Center, Hayesville, N.C. hintontheotokos.org

April 19—Native American Ministries Sunday

St. Andrew By-The-Sea invites all to Holy Week events

HILTON HEAD ISLAND—St. Andrew By-The-Sea United Methodist Church has big plans for Holy Week, including its annual community Sunrise Easter Service on the beach at Coligny Park.

The community and conference are invited to attend all.

On Palm Sunday, March 29, the church will hold its regularly scheduled traditional worship service at 9 a.m. and modern worship service at 11:09 a.m.

From March 30 through April 3, daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., the church will display "Stations of the Cross," a series of 14 images depicting Jesus Christ on the day of his crucifixion and accompanying prayers. This will be in the sanctuary of the church with participants walking through the images and prayers at their own pace. The display will also be available on the church website https://standrewbytheseaumc.org/ for in-home viewing.

On Maundy Thursday, April 2, at 6 p.m., St. Andrew will host a worship service with communion in the sanctuary. It will be in-person and livestreamed.

The church will join with other area churches on Good Friday, April 3, at noon at Christ Lutheran Church in Hilton Head for the Community Worship Service. Also on April 3, the church will be showing the film "The Passion of the Christ" in its Celebration Center at 20 Pope Avenue.

On Easter Sunday, April 5, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC will host three worship services, starting with the popular 7 a.m. Sunrise Service on the beach at Coligny Park. Celebrate the Resurrection as the sun rises at the edge of the ocean. The church will also have services in its sanctuary at 9 a.m. and 11:09 a.m.

Children's Sermon
by the Rev. Meg Cook

What we believe

Date: Sunday, March 2 (Second Sunday in Lent)

Scripture: John 3:1–17

Time frame: 3 minutes (aiming for 3–5 minutes max)

Supplies: Three building blocks or large cards labeled God, Jesus and Holy Spirit

Do: Welcome the children, invite them to sit down and show the three blocks or cards.

Ask: Does anyone know what this is? (Hold up one block.) Yes, it's a block! What can you do with blocks? (Pause for answers.) That's right, you can build things with them.

Say: Today I brought three special blocks. Each one has a word on it. (Read them one at a time.) This one says God. This one says Jesus. And this one says Holy Spirit. (Stack the blocks slowly.)

These three words help us remember what we believe as Christians.

In our Bible story today, a man named Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night. Nicodemus had questions. He wanted to know what it really meant to believe and follow God. Jesus told him that God loves the whole world so much that God sent Jesus to us. And Jesus said that God gives us the Holy Spirit, who helps us live a new life.

So in just this one story, we hear about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

In church, there are some very old and very important words that Christians have said together for hundreds and hundreds of years. Those words are called the Apostles' Creed. The creed helps us say what we believe about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

(Hold up the stacked blocks and, as you are talking, stack them up.)

It's like these three blocks. We believe in God. We believe in Jesus. We believe in the Holy Spirit.

And when we say the creed together, we are joining Christians all over the world, and even people who lived long, long ago, saying what we believe about God's great love.

Let's pray together.

Prayer (echo): Dear God (echo), we love you (echo). Thank you for Jesus (echo) and the Holy Spirit (echo). Help us grow in faith (echo). Strengthen our belief (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.

Classifieds.

Marketplace

Jobs

Part-time Organist/Accompanist

Bluffton United Methodist Church is seeking a part-time organist/accompanist for Sunday worship services (48 of 52 Sundays each year) and all music ministry rehearsals and/or additional services during Lent and Holy Week. Qualifications: Professional level of musical talent from training and experience, Bachelor degree in Music is desirable. For more information, send resume and letter of interest to: Bluffton United Methodist Church, Attn: SPPRC Chair, P. O. Box 368, Bluffton, SC 29910-0368 or email to: sprc@blufftonumc.org.

Executive Director Position Available
Wallace Family Life Center, Wallace, SC

Faith-based nonprofit seeks servant-hearted leader to oversee daily operations, staff, finances and ministry programs serving families and children.

Qualifications: Bachelor's degree or equivalent experience; nonprofit leadership background; strong communication skills; commitment to upholding Christian values and Safe Sanctuary policies.

To apply, submit a letter of interest, résumé, references, and background check authorization to:

Wallace Family Life Center
P.O. Box 56
Wallace, SC 29596
Attn: Sarah Woods, Personnel Committee Chairperson

An application packet will be provided upon receipt of initial materials. **Deadline: March 21, 2026**

Did You Move Recently??

Send your new address to us!

EAGLE SCOUTS

From Page 1

Yet now history unfolded once again, this time marked by hope, faith and achievement.

Four of the Eagle Scouts—Derwin Brailey, Khamary Cleckley, Melvin Hart and Sean Nimmons—are members of New Light UMC's Scouting ministry, Troop 500. The fifth Eagle Scout, Willie Townes III, is a member of Trinity UMC's Scouting ministry, Troop 190.

Earning the rank of Eagle Scout is a rare and distinguished honor, achieved by only 6 percent of Scouts nationwide representing years of perseverance, disciplined character development, servant leadership and community service.

Each Scout met rigorous requirements, including earning a minimum of 21 merit badges, serving in leadership roles and completing a significant community service project designed to leave a lasting impact. These achievements are not only a testament to their commitment but also to the guidance and mentorship provided by their leaders.

These young men were shaped and guided through years of mentorship under faithful leadership. Scoutmaster Ron Mosley of Troop 500 at New Light, where the Rev. Enrique Gordon serves as pastor, and Scoutmaster Ernest Nimmons of Troop 190 at Trinity, where the Rev. Eddie Williams serves as pastor, poured into their growth alongside a committed team of Scout leaders.

Troop 500 is chartered by Way Makers Community Center Inc. of Kingstree, co-founded and led by the Rev. Shirley Peterson Gordon, CEO.

In keeping with tradition, each Eagle Scout class is named in honor of individuals who have played a significant role in the troop's journey and have made a profound and lasting impact on the unit.

The Eagle Scout Class of 2026 was named in honor of the Rev. Shirley Peterson Gordon and Scoutmaster Ernest Nimmons, whose visionary leadership, steadfast mentorship and unwavering commitment to youth development have helped shape history in Orangeburg and beyond.

The new Eagle Scouts were also recognized Feb. 21 at the United Methodist Men's conference-wide Men N Ministry spiritual retreat, held at Journey UMC, Columbia.

Four of the five Eagle Scouts were present and received a standing ovation from the packed crowd, in addition to certificates.

The UMC's South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley said he was beyond impressed by the achievements of these young men, and to know they are all African Americans who have just achieved a historical milestone was especially impactful.

Fairley expressed sheer awe "to be standing in presence of something I've never seen before—four African-American Eagle Scouts."

Grounded in faith, these Scouting ministries embody the church's call to raise up servant leaders, echoing the words of Scripture: "Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12).