

In this issue



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Manning preschoolers learn about therapy dogs. Page 10.

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‘What Do You See?’ United Methodists to gather for 55th Annual Conference

By Jessica Brodie

GREENVILLE—United Methodists across South Carolina will gather in June for Annual Conference—four days of worship, business and ministry.

Slated for June 7-10 at the Greenville Convention Center, key on this year’s lineup are two conference-wide

mission efforts—one to pack 125,000 meals together for Rise Against Hunger and the other to write encouraging notes for United Methodist camp staff and students in United Methodist campus ministries.

Additionally, Annual Conference will have a decidedly more youthful feel as the event incorporates children

and youth in a host of ways: a prayer-ground on the floor of Annual Conference with activity stations so kids can participate in Annual Conference in age-appropriate ways; the first-ever intergenerational worship service that will incorporate children into most aspects of the service; and the return

See “Annual Conference,” Page 11



Playing bingo with residents at Wesley Commons, a retirement community, was one of the day’s service efforts.

Photo by the Rev. Robby Lybrand

Leaving the building

‘Community Care Day’ gathers congregation for service effort

By Jessica Brodie

GREENWOOD—A random weekday dog-walk epiphany prompted a new ministry effort in Greenwood, and its impact is reverberating in big ways.

The Rev. Jason Wilson is used to good ideas when he walks his dogs. After all, it’s his designated time to reflect, think and talk with God.

But one morning, he couldn’t stop thinking about the way he and his associate pastor, the Rev. Robby Lybrand, end their benediction at St. Mark United Methodist Church: “It’s time for the church to leave the building.”

“I was just thinking, ‘Lord, what can we do to try to reach out more into the community?’” Wilson told the *Advo-*

cate. “We say that every Sunday, but how intentional are we? What would it look like to gather on a Sunday, have an abbreviated worship, then go out and serve in various capacities?”

Inspired, Wilson called Casey Tompkins, St. Mark’s Growth Committee chair. Immediately, she caught his enthusiasm and got to work, rallying

See “Leaving the Building,” Page 13

Native American Bus Tour raises awareness

By Debra Schooler

Thirty-one people boarded a bus this spring for the first of what organizers hope will be a biennial tour to learn more about South Carolina Native American tribes.

I attended the trip with my husband and found it to be a spiritual, educational and well-designed trip.

The South Carolina United Methodist Native American
See “Native American Bus Tour,” Page 11

Crash destroys steps of historic Swansea UMC

By Jessica Brodie

SWANSEA—A historic church in the Orangeburg District is left without a front entrance after a car crash demolished half of their century-old steps.

The Rev. Jessica Leigh Kight, pastor of Swansea United Methodist Church, said a driver experienced a medical emergency the morning of April 15 and drove across the

See “Crash at Swansea,” Page 12

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

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

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

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

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

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Good Food, Good Feet, Good Friday

Community comes together in day spent ministering to feet, hunger, more

By the Rev. Darlene L. Kelley

It all started at a red light in downtown Columbia. Donna Muszynski noticed a man on the corner. He looked weary, and his shoes were worn and curled at the top.

"You could tell just by looking at him that his feet hurt, and I wanted to help him. I wanted to wash his feet," Donna explained.

Granted, this is not the No. 1 thought going through the minds of most folks when they encounter a homeless soul standing on the corner, but Donna is not most folks. Donna is a woman of faith, compassion and determination. She is also a woman who sees signs and hears when God calls.

"Now I couldn't just put the poor guy in the back of my car and carry him to my house to wash his feet, but I never forgot him," Donna said. "Then one day I got on a plane and in the seat pocket in front of me—you know, the one they're supposed to clean out—there was a local paper with an article about a group of podiatry students who were going to wash the feet of folks in need in the park."

With that, a mission was born.

A former nursing student and certified master pedicurist, Donna is the owner of Mrs. Goodfoot, a holistic foot-care salon and the perfect founder of "GF3: Good Food, Good Feet, Good Friday," a day dedicated to helping anyone with foot care issues, anyone who is hungry, anyone who is looking for compassion and community or anyone who wants to celebrate Good Friday in a meaningful, hands-on way.

It all came together in the spring of 2013 when Donna created a social media post and asked a few of her friends if they'd like to wash feet. About two dozen people volunteered that first year, arriving with donations, breakfast and open hearts. Thirteen years later, GF3 is still going strong.

This year, Donna shared her vision and service at the Brookland United Methodist Church on Meeting Street in West Columbia, and that move too starts with a God moment. Donna came to Brookland UMC in the fall when the Buddhist monks visited. She came to donate socks and met the Rev. Mark Payne, the pastor of Brookland, and it was an opportunity for community and Methodist connection.

After years spent working downtown and outside, Donna wanted to move GF3 to a new location, and the good people of the Brookland UMC graciously agreed to host the event. On Good Friday this year, 69 people were fed and 23 of them



Volunteers at GF3 prepare for the day's event.

received needed foot care with the help of volunteers from all over, including several from Brookland UMC and Trinity UMC, West Columbia.

Volunteers make all the difference to the mission and to Donna.

"Every single person standing here is the reason this day exists," Donna proclaimed to the crowd. "There is no 'extra.' There is no 'more important.' If you showed up today, you are essential. This day does not happen without you."

Washing the feet of strangers is a humbling experience that can leave an impact on your soul. It is an opportunity to see Christ in the face of others, especially the least among us, and it is one of the greatest motivations to return, like so many do, year after year.

Greeting her volunteers, Donna summed the mission up nicely: "When you kneel to wash someone's feet, when you hand them a plate of food, when you look them in the eye, remember this: This is holy work not because of what we're doing, but because of how we're doing it—with humility, with respect, with love. And if you feel nervous or unsure, or out of your comfort zone—good. That means you're right where you're supposed to be. Let's go serve."

But there is one more God moment worth mentioning. The first year Donna created the mission, she looked up to see the face, and the feet, that inspired it all. There was the man from the corner, the weary man with the curled up shoes, standing in front of her.

Donna washed his feet, and the healing began.

Kelley pastors Trinity UMC, West Columbia.

Belin Memorial UMC takes journey of community, justice

By the Rev. Will Malambri

Maya Angelou said, "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again."

Believing that to be true, a group of 45 intrepid souls from Belin Memorial United Methodist Church, Murrells Inlet, joined in a spring Journey of Community and Justice April 20-23.

Community was built by shared experiences. History was faced with courage. Justice was witnessed and honored through our destinations on the journey.

Our first night we stayed at Calvin Center in Hampton, Georgia. We knew we were in the right spot when our Presbyterian host greeted us in an Epworth By The Sea T-shirt. The Christian retreat center gave our large group time and space to get to know one another better. Had our group been smaller, we would have stayed onsite at Koinonia Farm in Americus, Georgia, our first justice destination.

Koinonia Farm began in 1942 when Clarence and Florence Jordan and Martin and Mabel England began a Christian community rooted in the Sermon on the Mount. They wanted to be "an outpost of the Kingdom of God" and sought to accomplish that by treating everyone justly. Contrary to the custom of the day, all workers (Black and White) received the same wages, sat at the same tables for meals and worshiped together.

At first the local neighbors saw this as

an odd experiment, but relatively harmless. When Black workers from other farms pointed out that they could make the same wages as White workers at Koinonia and when Black and White members of the Koinonia Community began showing up at the town church to worship together, the locals determined this experiment was harmful after all.

There were attacks and boycotts (learn more by watching "Briars in the Cotton Patch" on YouTube), which resulted in a mail-order business that remains Koinonia Farm's primary source of support. People from other parts of the country helped Koinonia, as the slogan went, ship the nuts out of Georgia. Clarence Jordan offered his version of the Scriptures: The Cotton Patch Gospels. Millard and Linda Fuller discovered Koinonia Farms, and Habitat for Humanity was born. People have continued to have day, overnight, week, month and yearlong stays helping to work the farm, experiencing a community committed to peace and justice and sharing in the love found and shown there.

After touring and receiving the hospitality of Koinonia's community lunch, we made a brief peanut ice cream stop in Plains, Georgia (home of President Jimmy Carter) before making our way to Montgomery, Alabama.

In Montgomery we visited the Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Sites. There are currently four sites: The Legacy Museum, The National Memorial for Peace and Jus-

tice, Freedom Monument Sculpture Park and Montgomery Square. Their website—<https://legacysites.eji.org>—will describe them for you. Our group found the sites to be movingly presented with state-of-the-art exhibits, beautiful art and as much welcome as sites focused on such painful injustice can offer.

We learned more about the transatlantic slave trade, the Jim Crow era, racial terror lynchings and the grave challenges of mass incarceration.

After an emotional day at the Legacy Sites, United Methodist-related Huntingdon College hosted our group for a dinner where a woman—who grew up in Montgomery during the Civil Rights movement and remembers vividly the Selma to Montgomery March—shared her memories and perspective, helping our group process the day and find hope for the future.

As one participant put it, visiting the Legacy Sites was "a profoundly emotional and enriching encounter." Another said that while "This trip is something I would have never thought to do, (going) put a lot of things in a different perspective for me."

A man in his 80s said that while he lived through the 1950s and 1960s, he had been naïve to the depth and breadth of the struggle many in our nation faced.

The trip helped our group to face our history and be challenged in our present so that we can be part of a future that more closely resembles the one Christ calls us to.



A Day of Advocacy with Able SC

On April 14, Jensen Jennings, a member of Trinity UMC, Aiken, served as co-emcee for the Able SC Advocacy Day for Access & Independence at the South Carolina Capitol Building. South Carolinians gathered from all around the state to be educated and to advocate for people with disabilities. More than 50 organizations united in the effort to ensure people with disabilities have equal access and opportunity. Jensen also serves as Voting Coordinator for Disability Rights SC. Para. 163 of the UMC Social Principles affirms the full humanity and acknowledge the gifts of people living with disabilities, also calling for the elimination of barriers that prevent people with disabilities from participating fully in the life of local congregations and the broader society. At left, Jennings serves as co-emcee for the day. At right, the Rev. Matthew Alexander and Jennings share a moment.

5 Things to Know.

About Emmanuel UMC, Anderson

The *Advocate* is starting a new feature that showcases a different United Methodist church in every district throughout South Carolina with answers to five questions. This month, get to know Emmanuel United Methodist Church, Anderson.

1. What's one local ministry or outreach effort your church is especially proud of, and what impact has it had?

One local outreach effort EUMC is especially proud of is its blessing box ministry. The box provides nonperishable food items for people in need, and community members help keep it stocked through donations. Its purpose is simple but meaningful: to make sure individuals and families have something to eat when they need it most.

2. How does your congregation serve people who may never set foot inside your building?

We offer several ways for people to take part in our ministry, even if they never attend in person. Our Wednesday Bible Study (phone only) and Sunday worship service are available by phone and through Facebook Live.

We understand that not everyone is comfortable attending an in-person church service. By offering these options, we can stay connected with people wherever they are.

Everyone is welcome to join us live each Sunday at 10 a.m.

3. What's the biggest challenge facing your congregation right now, and how are you addressing it?

The biggest challenge facing our congregation right now is attendance.

4. What are you doing well?

We offer meaningful opportunities for connection and spiritual growth through worship services, vacation Bible school and Wednesday Bible Study. We also have a dedicated church family and are grateful for members who remain committed to the life of the church.

5. What is your focus moving forward?

While we value the strong foundation we have, we are working to reach new people and encourage greater participation within our charge. One of our church's goals for the next five years is to be a light in the community by offering Youth Night Out (by having conversations, games and a space to be kids) and reaching adults by having a health, finance and social talks from professionals. We want to live out that calling through service, strong leadership and a continued commitment to being servants of God.

—Submitted by the Rev. Annie Jackson



Emmanuel UMC focuses on meaningful opportunities for connection and spiritual growth.

Need-to-Know Roundup.

Six key takeaways from this month's Advocate

- Annual Conference will feature a hand-on mission project that all United Methodists—not just delegates—are invited to help with (Page 1)
- Epworth is celebrating its 130th anniversary (Page 23)
- Advocate names winners of inaugural Young Voices Writing Contest (Page 3)
- Applications for the Year 3 cohort of the Connecting Children grant will open at Annual Conference (Page 10)
- Laundry of Love Ministry brings clean clothes and compassion to Edisto Fork community (Page 16)
- Advocate Press Book Signing set for Tuesday at Annual Conference (Page 23)

Andrews 11-year-old wins Advocate's Young Voices kids writing contest

Three young people have won prizes from the *Advocate* for their faith-based writing.

Brielle Bluefort, 11, is the first-place winner in the *Advocate's* inaugural Young Voices Writing Contest.

Brielle, a member of Asbury United Methodist Church, Andrews, penned a poem titled "Jesus Is Our Savior." (See the winning poem, at right.)

"We were overjoyed to God is working in the lives of our United Methodist youth in this way," said *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie. "We're proud of those who entered and pray we can help nurture and encourage their writing now and in the future."

The second-place winner was Jenna Weber, a 12-year-old member of Memorial UMC, Greer, and the third-place winner was Trinity Reed, 11, also a Memorial member.

Any youth up to age 18 who attends a UMC in South Carolina was eligible to participate in the writing contest. Writing could be anything from a poem or song to an essay or short story and needed to address a matter of faith in some way. The work was required to be original and not created through the use of Artificial Intelligence.

First, second and third place winners will be awarded Amazon gift cards. The *Advocate* plans to hold the writing contest again. For questions, email jbrodie@advocatesc.org.

Jesus Is Our Savior

Jesus is our lord and savior, because he is the only one can return the favor.

We love Jesus, and Jesus loves us.

Without him, who would we trust?

Jesus is our lord and savior, because he has great behavior. He treats everyone with kindness.

And we treat him with politeness.

Jesus is our lord and savior, because he made his sacrifice. He died on the cross that very day.

That's why we go to church to celebrate.

Jesus is our lord and savior, as he had given us various gifts. Each one has their own little shifts.

But in the end, we are all different.

Jesus is our lord and savior, because he protects us.

Jesus will always keep us safe. Even if the time isn't paced.

—By Brielle Bluefort, 11, member of Asbury UMC, Andrews

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Editorial by Jessica Brodie



Bishop's Column by Bishop Leonard Fairley

Are you listening?

Sometimes it feels like God is silent. But he's not, is he? All day long, in every moment, he's speaking to us. Sometimes he uses words, sometimes it's other people and sometimes it's dreams or strange little "intuition moments." Other times it's a planned talk, a rhythm, a song we've trained ourselves to hear because of a discipline we've implemented in our life—like hearing him in that quiet moment with coffee on our screened-in porch while we bask in creation. We tune our hearts and minds to this time with God, and soon we hear him so much better. The noise of the world is loud, but he's always there.

Yet we're not always listening. And we're certainly not always obeying.

Thankfully, throughout this newspaper, evidence abounds of real-life examples of people hearing God and stepping out in faith. Of people choosing to heed that nudge God sends our way. Sometimes it's not a nudge, of course—sometimes God hits us over the head with it and we can't possibly ignore it. But it's still our choice, isn't it? It's still up to us whether we do the follow-through.

In one story in this edition, we learn about how the Rev. Jason Wilson was walking his dog and having his daily prayer time when God gave him the idea for a Community Care Day (see "Leaving the Building, Page 1"). Wilson listened, made some phone calls and got a whole group of people to join in.

Then there's the Rev. Ellis White Jr., who felt God tugging his heart to start a laundry care ministry in his community (see "Laundry of Love Brings Clean Clothes, Compassion to Edisto Fork," Page 16). He listened and stepped up. He obeyed.

There are so many demands on our time. Often, our priorities seem like good ones—taking care of our family, fulfilling our responsibilities at work, doing that preplanned, prearranged priority project. Worldly interruptions might tempt us to detour, and those are the interruptions we can ignore. But sometimes God interrupts us. And those God interruptions are the ones we need to pay attention to.

The trick is listening, training ourselves to hear his voice amid the chaos of the world.

God is asking. Maybe he's asking you today, or he asked you this morning, or he is asking you right now as you read these words.

Are you listening?

What do you see?

"They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly."—Mark 8:22-25 (NIV)

Dawn and I give thanks to God for each of you, and we look forward with joy to welcoming many of you to the 2026 session of the South Carolina Annual Conference in Greenville.

In this season of our life together, we continue to live into a sacred calling—a calling to see the possibilities and to live the promises. And this year, we gently ask one another: What do you see?

Do you see the quiet ways God is at work among us? Do you see the signs of hope breaking through? Across our conference, I have seen it. I have seen healing where there once was hurt. I have seen love where there once was division. I have seen faithful disciples showing up—again and again—to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

The Spirit is moving, friends, and the church is alive. When we gather, we will listen together—

through prayer, through worship, through Holy Conferencing—for the voice of Christ still speaking to his people.

And as we listen, we will also serve. Through Rise Against Hunger, we will join our hands and hearts to pack 125,000 meals, offering nourishment and hope to God's children around the world. And in quieter moments, we will write words of encouragement to our young people, reminding them that they are seen, that they are loved, and that they belong to God.

We will pause to celebrate and give thanks for those being commissioned, for those to be ordained and for those retiring after years of faithful service. We will remember and thank God for the ministry of those who have passed on to glory over the past year. These are holy moments, markers of grace in the life of our connection.

And we are grateful for all who have made this gathering possible—servants whose faithfulness often goes unseen, but never unnoticed by God.

So I invite you: Come to Greenville, or follow along on the livestream, with open hearts. Come with a spirit of expectancy. Come ready not only to look, but to truly see. To see where God is moving. To see where God is calling. To see what new thing God is already bringing to life among us.

And together, may we have the courage to follow. Tell me, what do you see?

Letters to the Editor.

Grateful for Middleton's witness

Thank you for the Rev. Nichole Middleton's monthly column "Humanity Behind Bars." I look forward each month to her words. She writes with clarity and compassion, bringing the words of Scripture to life for both those who live behind prison walls and those outside. She invites all of us to open our minds and hearts to those who are incarcerated and see them as our brothers and sisters and siblings.

I am grateful for her witness and ministry.

*Rev. Carol Rexroad Cannon, retired
Hendersonville, North Carolina*

Take cover

The White House Correspondents' Association

dinner was interrupted with gun violence. Those at the event included hundreds of journalists and many Trump administration officials—including President Trump, Vice President J.D. Vance and First Lady Melania Trump. The suspected gunman, Cole Tomas Allen, was a serious threat to every life.

This event of gunshots was similar to the killings in elementary and high schools, colleges, shopping malls, churches and concerts. The surprised guests crawled under tables and hid, just as schoolchildren are trained to do. No one is safe today.

This reality hopefully will awaken people's awareness to do something about guns and pass laws to pro-

See "Letters," Page 5

Precious Pet of the Month.

Meet Rocky

This is Rocky. He's a 5-year-old miniature dachshund. I got him while I was transitioning to medical retirement from the South Carolina Department of Corrections. He truly lives up to his name as my rocky—I have PTSD, and he's my calming buddy who looks at you with no judgment. He's the middle fur baby; we have my son's 6-year-old Dachshund mix and a 2-year-old German shepherd, but Rocky runs the house.

—Submitted by the Rev. Melissa Williams, pastor of the Williston Charge, Orangeburg District

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*, 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.



Rocky

Topic for July Advocate

How is your congregation trying to listen intentionally to what God is saying? What ways are you actively seeking God's voice? Share at news@advocatesc.org (include church name/city).



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99 Sheep



by Ricky Howell



Humanity Behind Bars by the Rev. Nichole Middleton

The empty seat beside them

Today, I will sit beside my mother in church.

I do not get to do this often. Most Sundays, ministry carries me many miles away, where my days are shaped by worship services, chaplaincy, and the rhythms of prison ministry. But a few times each year, I intentionally return home to worship beside her.

When I arrive, the pastor often invites me to sit in the pulpit. I always decline.

I want to sit beside my mother.

Perhaps it is because I understand now, in a deeper way, that time is holy. I likely have more yesterdays than tomorrows with her. So I choose the pew over the platform. Presence over position.

When I announced at the prison that chapel service would not be held because I planned to attend church with my mother, several of the men immediately responded, "That is a good idea, Chaplain."

Their words stayed with me.

They understand something many outside prison walls seldom consider: the ache of absence during holidays and sacred celebrations.

They cannot sit beside their mothers in church. They cannot linger after worship over dinner or embrace aging parents whose health is fading. For many, their mother is the one person who has remained faithful through every failure, sentence and setback.

I think about Ollie.

He is an only child. His father died after battling dementia, and now his mother faces the same illness. There are no siblings or relatives to help carry the weight. Recently, after one of her hospitalizations, Ollie learned there would be a guardianship hearing.

Now he sits with incarceration differently.

His deepest grief is not simply being confined. It is fearing he will lose connection to the woman he calls "the kindest person I have ever known." He knows he cannot care for her physically, but he longs to hear her voice while she still remembers his name.

And then there is Mark, whose mother introduced him to selling drugs. The road to prison has many entrance points. Some were nurtured toward stability; others were shaped by trauma, addiction, poverty and survival long before they made destructive choices of their own.

Still, holidays soften even hardened places.

Mother's Day, Father's Day, graduations, weddings, summer gatherings—behind the fence, these occasions become mirrors. Men and women quietly reflect on the cost of their choices, not only in years lost, but in moments missed.

The cost of incarceration is not only confinement. It is the empty seat beside someone you love. It is hoping there will still be time to celebrate together beyond a visitation room—without restriction, supervision or goodbye lingering nearby.

Perhaps that is why holidays matter so deeply inside prison walls. They remind us that every person longs for home, for belonging and for the people whose love still calls their name.

Middleton is an elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, endorsed by the United Methodist Endorsing Agency for prison ministry. She serves as a chaplain in the federal prison system.

LETTERS

From Page 4

protect our citizens, children and adults. America does have a problem.

"In the wake of this shooting, politicians of all sides issued statements decrying violence and extolling the virtues of tolerance and respectful debate. It's past time for the country's leaders to offer more than trite verbal platitudes and to embrace real efforts to cool the rising temperature warping today's political climate" (The State, April 29).

"For God is not a God of disorder but peace" (1 Corinthians 14:33).

"You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance" (Psalm 32:7).

Also: The U.S. Supreme Court decided by a 6-3 vote that congressional maps used in Louisiana are unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court has undercut the Voting Rights Act, rolling back generations of progress by civil rights leaders and heroes like Congressman John Lewis, Fannie Lou Hamer and the Rev. Martin Luther King, who worked diligently for decades to establish one of the most important protections against racial discrimination in voting. South Carolina United Methodists had many dedicated ministers and lay people who fought for these rights.

In practice, it means millions of Black, Brown and Indigenous people will have less of a political voice and representation as politicians. "Gerrymandering was done to keep Black folks out," Representative James Clyburn said. This is going back to Jim Crow days.

The UMC's General Board of Church and Society and General Commission on Religion and Race call on all United Methodists to stand in solidarity with those most affected by the weakening of the Voting Rights Act. As United Methodists, we believe justice is sacred work.

The saints of the past are crying. Vote.

*Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia*

A poem: 'Still Waters of Jesus'

His still waters fill my soul
Purifying my sins of old
Each droplet represents a view
Cleansing me with faith renewed.

So calm and quiet is the sight
Of silent waters in the night
This miracle I've never known
Peaceful water bring me Home

As my life becomes fulfilled
I'll follow His enlightened will
Across the water my soul will be
Forever in eternity.

*Dr. Linda Hodgin, member
Ashland UMC, Columbia*

Echoes of the past, hope for the future

Shiloh UMC, at Shiloh Church Road in Inman, is the oldest church building in existence in the Upstate area of South Carolina. It evolved from its initial gathering place for all nearby Protestants to worship in the late 1700s, but its preservation is now in jeopardy.

Inman UMC, which is the caretaker for Shiloh UMC's building, is facing a difficult decision. With repairs needed for the Inman sanctuary, the ability to continue upkeep and needed repairs for Shiloh and the Shiloh cemetery and property exceeds the funds that Inman members can provide.

Through the years, Shiloh has served as the base each year for Homecoming events, Christmas Eve services, weddings, christenings and funerals. Picnics and music festivals have also taken place there.

If you know of an organization we may contact to help preserve this beacon of history and religious heritage, please contact Inman UMC, 27 Bishop St., Inman, SC 29349. Your assistance would be most appreciated.

*Steven Smith, Shiloh board member
Bethel UMC, Spartanburg, member*



Shiloh UMC preservation in jeopardy, says letter writer.

District News.

Columbia District

Virginia Wingard UMC, Columbia, will host a children's acting workshop July 6-10 from 9 a.m.-Noon. Children in fourth to sixth grade are invited to a fun and faith-filled acting workshop where they'll grow in confidence, build friendships and explore their God-given creativity. The cost is \$10, but scholarships are available. For more information, call 803-772-0794.



Commentary
by the Rev. Tyler Strange

20 by 2040: A challenge

Over the last year, I hope you have reflected upon Bishop Leonard Fairley's invitation to get in the dirt and plant "seeds of possibility." As the founding pastor for Carolina Forest United Methodist Church (a new church start in Myrtle Beach), I have watched our people live the story of what is possible when the connection comes together to plant these seeds of possibility.

It has been one of the greatest experiences of my life to see seeds planted, nurtured and cultivated in a new place. The shared joy was unmistakable when someone from our launch team said, "Our one day finally became a day one!" Seeing new life emerge from "seeds of possibility" surprised her in the best way.

What started as a church of four has now become a community of more than 30 people committed to building the body of Christ in Carolina Forest. And we want this experience for others in South Carolina who feel called to the work of starting new churches.

I want to offer an invitation to our connection across South Carolina: Can we start 20 new United Methodist churches across the state by 2040?

Achieving this goal means each district starts two new churches over the next 14 years, reaching 20 by 2040.

It is big. It can feel challenging. And it leaves plenty of room for God to move among us.

Twenty new churches by 2040 must complement the revitalization of existing congregations. This is not either/or. It's both/and.

We need a movement that both births new churches and revitalizes existing ones.

In Carolina Forest, our church has a unique lane in being a new church start. However, we are passionate supporters and encouragers of the renewal of the United Methodist movement across South Carolina.

I understand the complexities of starting new churches. For years, I waited for someone else to start what I needed as a United Methodist who felt a call to plant a new church. After more than 15 years of seeking out learning opportunities and mentors outside of South Carolina to starting a campus ministry and two new churches, I understand the challenges of creating pathways to start new things.

In South Carolina, we can work together to develop pathways for calling, discernment, formation, apprenticeship, funding, development and sending for individuals exploring a call to start new churches across the denomination.

This starts in existing churches and extends across our Annual Conference as we work together to create pathways for individuals and communities to discern a call to start new churches.

We all share responsibility for reaching the people of South Carolina.

If you are interested in talking more about starting new churches (clergy or laity), please email me at ETStrange@umcsc.org. If you will be at Annual Conference in Greenville, I would love to get together.

One day, my 5- and 11-year-old daughters will be adults. My hope is if their story takes them to another community in South Carolina, they will find a UMC that loves boldly, serves joyfully and leads courageously. I believe this responsibility is a call and an invitation for our generation to ensure that the churches we plant and revitalize today become the fruit of our vision statement for generations to come.

As a lifelong United Methodist in South Carolina, it is a privilege to be connected in mission and ministry with you and to offer this vision. Thank you for being a church that instilled in me a belief so powerful that, as I have grown up among you, I now want to see this happen for generations to come.

Strange pastors a new church start in Carolina Forest in the Marion District.



Commentary
by the Rev. Amiri B. Hooker

Why we still need Black sacred space

There is a question rising in denominational life—sometimes whispered, sometimes shouted: Why do we still need gatherings that are intentionally Black?

The answer is not rooted in division, but in truth. What has been formed in struggle cannot be sustained in erasure. What has been birthed in fire cannot survive in forgetting.

Three sacred gatherings in March—the General Meeting of BMCR the Black Methodist Men's Retreat, and the African American Clergywomen's "Seven Last Words" in the South Carolina Conference—made it plain: this legacy has not expired; it is still required.

The Black Church is not simply a demographic expression of Christianity. It is a theological response to oppression, a cultural sanctuary of survival and a prophetic engine for justice. If the church is serious about making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, it must remain serious about protecting and cultivating spaces where Black faith, leadership and community are centered—not as an afterthought, but as a necessity.

At the 59th General Meeting of Black Methodists for Church Renewal in Charlotte, North Carolina, I was reminded that we still need spaces where Black Methodists can gather, wrestle and respond together. Under the theme "Call to Action," voices like C. Denise Pickett, Saneta Maiko and Dr. Hanna Broom did more than speak—they summoned us. When Julius C. Trimble named injustice embedded in immigration policy, it became clear: you cannot fully tell the truth about justice without a people who know injustice in their bones.

In that room, there was no need to translate pain or soften critique. We did not have to explain why justice matters—we already knew. That is why Black gatherings remain essential—not to exclude, but to empower truth-telling too often diluted in broader spaces.

At the Black Methodist Men's Retreat at Epworth by the Sea, the Spirit moved in a different but equally necessary way. There, Black men were formed not just as attendees but as disciples. Through preaching, teaching and honest conversation, we wrestled with race, health, calling and generational responsibility. We were challenged to become "God-approved men"—not performative, but rooted in integrity.

In that sacred space, Black men were allowed to be whole—not stereotypes, not statistics, not silent, but whole. Messages from leaders like Olu Brown and Bishop Robin Dease called us deeper into purpose. That kind of formation does not happen by accident. It requires intentional space—space that understands both the weight Black men carry and the calling they bear.

Then, at New Hope United Methodist Church, during the African American Clergy Women's "Seven

Last Words" service, another sacred truth emerged. Seven women. Seven sermons. One cross. Mimicking the larger service led by the ebony female bishops of the church, these women did not simply recite Christ's words—they embodied them. They carried history, leadership and proclamation with power. In a world that has too often marginalized Black women's voices, this was more than a service—it was a declaration: Black women are already anointed. They are not waiting for affirmation.

That moment also revealed a challenge before us—we must be more intentional about the freedom we give young Black clergywomen to preach justice, culture and truth without constraint.

Spaces like these are not optional. They are corrective. They restore balance where systems have distorted leadership and silenced voices. Across all three gatherings, one truth echoed: we are strong—but we must be strategic. There is a growing emphasis on training and educating clergy and laity, and that work must continue. But it cannot stop there.

We must also build organizational structures that sustain Black ministry beyond moments of inspiration. We must engage in strategic planning that moves us from survival to sustainability. We must strengthen discipleship systems that form believers not just for attendance, but for transformation.

Because the future of the Black Church will not be secured by nostalgia. It will be secured by intentional, disciplined, Spirit-led development.

Some will ask, "Why can't we all just gather together?" And the answer is: we should. But unity without equity is not unity—it is erasure. Black-centered gatherings are not about separation. They are about preparation.

They are the spaces where truth can be spoken without translation, leadership can be cultivated without limitation, culture can be celebrated without apology and faith can be practiced in the fullness of our story.

The question is no longer whether we need these spaces. The question is whether we will invest in them. Will we train the next generation? Will we build structures that last? Will we deepen discipleship that transforms communities?

Because if we do, the Black Church will not just survive. It will lead.

And not just for itself—but for the healing of the whole church.

Hooker is a congregational specialist for the South Carolina Conference of the UMC.

Have a commentary you'd like the *Advocate* to consider? Email oped@advocatesc.org



Commentary by the Rev. Bill Rogers

Can this war be justified?

We are at war. Our president declared it, our senator rejoiced in it and we are borrowing money to pay for it.

When at war, I remember my friend David Smith, 23, died in Vietnam. We, Rogers and Smiths, grew up together in Brazil as missionary kids, every monthlong vacation playing soccer, eating churrasco and talking about God and family. I miss him and worry and sorrow for all who face today's trying times, especially those in harm's way. I pray. Yes, we must pray and more.

In times like these, we must ask: What does the Bible and our Christian tradition have to say about war and David? Early Christians were pacifists, and Jesus was hailed as "the Prince of Peace," but when Christianity became the empire's religion, they had to rethink their understanding of war. Through the centuries, great biblical theologians developed guidelines for international conflicts. Attitudes toward war were divided into three Christian views: pacifists, crusaders and just war. There is a fourth understanding, self-seeking, that asks what is best for the nation but mainly for an individual or specific group, not what is the will of God.

Look at our war with Iran and consider whether it is justified.

The pacifist rejects any participation in war, reminding us that Jesus is against any use of violence. Crusaders argue that war against "God's people" is a war against God. Though Holy War tends to throw off all restraint in how one wages war, a Holy War is supposed to have a just cause. Feelings or fabricated claims of imminent threat do not justify aggression. Self-seekers argue that state interests override moral considerations, including those of a loving God. These may use the Bible or speak with religious aggression but are not biblical or godly.

Not all those quoting Scripture know Scripture and the will of God.

The justifiable war criterion is an ethical framework that evaluates not only when war is morally initiated, but also how it should be conducted and how peace and justice should be restored afterward. The deepest question is, whom shall we obey?

Consider whether the following criteria are pertinent today. Plan for all three before the war begins.

1. Justification for initiating war includes:

Is this a just cause? Does it address major wrongs, such as self-defense or protection of innocents?

Does it have legitimate authority? Are the government officials representing the people they serve?

Does it have the right intention? Is the aim morally sound, seeking justice and peace rather than personal gain? Financial profit is not a moral goal.

Is it a measure of last resort? Have all peaceful alternatives been exhausted, or is it a sneak attack like Pearl Harbor?

Is there a strong probability of success? Does it have a reasonable chance of achieving its goals?

And does it meet the test of proportionality? Do the expected benefits must outweigh the harm caused?

2. Ethical behavior during conflict:

Is there discrimination between combatants and civilian targets? Are military actions confined to legitimate military goals, not civilians?

Is the force used to achieve the war objectives proportional to what is necessary to achieve the objectives?

Are prisoners and noncombatants treated ethically?

3. Justice after war:

Is there a plan to rehabilitate and restore the dignity and stability of those affected by the conflict?

Are war crimes punished? Are violators punished by holding both sides accountable?

Are there reparations and reconciliation to promote a just and lasting peace?

In conclusion, I ask you to think with the beautiful and keen mind God gave you. If we wonder about our war with Iran, consider these measures to make a reasonable, charitable, practical and visionary Christian mind.

Again, I think of David, my friend. War is a serious and tragic thing. We are at war; let us do so with sober minds, loving hearts and an eye for him, our only Lord Jesus Christ, who called us to be just and peacemakers. Pray for all of us. Pray for us here and there, friends and enemies, pray for Americans, also pray for Iranians and more, as our Lord taught us to love.

I want to thank the authors of dozens of books, the seminar group, Dan Bell, Bobbie Jean, my wife and especially Cy, my brother, for their help and encouragement in writing this article.

Rogers is a retired elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.



Commentary by the Rev. Mike Bowers

When unity becomes illusion

Somewhere along the way, Methodists became convinced that unity is the highest of all ecclesial virtues. We stitched it into our name, printed it on our letterhead and repeated it often enough that we began to believe it.

"United Methodist" has a lovely ring to it—hopeful, confident, almost melodic. The only problem is that it hasn't been true for a very long time.

Now, I'm not opposed to unity. I'm all for it when it's real. But unity pursued for its own sake—unity that papers over deep fractures or demands silence where conviction ought to speak—has a way of becoming something other than unity. It becomes illusion. And illusions, as Jesus once pointed out, tend to hide themselves from the "wise and learned" while remaining plain as day to anyone with childlike faith. At some point, someone has to clear their throat and say what everyone else has been tiptoeing around: The emperor has no clothes.

Methodism has always had a complicated relationship with unity. We have merged when we should have paused, and we have split when we might have stayed at the table a little longer. We absorbed the Evangelical United Brethren with great enthusiasm, but one wonders what we lost in the process—what distinctives were quietly folded into the larger Methodist dough and never tasted again. And yes, we rightly denounced the racism that fueled the old Southern Methodist division, but I sometimes wonder what might have been possible if repentance and reconciliation had been allowed to do their slow, painful work instead of letting geography and grievance do the talking.

In other words, some of our mergers were celebrated too quickly, and some of our schisms were lamented too deeply. Both have shaped us and not always for the better.

The truth is, unity is only a virtue when it is grounded in authenticity. When unity becomes a substitute for conviction, it begins to sag under its own weight. When unity becomes a way of avoiding hard questions, it becomes brittle. And when unity becomes a slogan rather than a lived reality, it becomes well—something other than normal.

Methodism has always relied on a set of standards to define who we are and what we believe. Scripture, tradition, reason and experience—the Wesleyan Quadrilateral—have served as our compass points. They have not always pointed in the same direction, but they have kept us oriented toward something larger than ourselves. They

informed the *Discipline* by which we live. At least, they did until recently.

In recent years, the UMC has found itself in the awkward position of reverse-engineering its own *Discipline*. Instead of our shared standards shaping our practice, our practice began shaping our standards. When the established processes proved too slow or too uncertain, a workaround was devised. Convinced that it alone can define Methodism, the denominational hierarchy told churches, in effect, that they could either ignore the *Discipline* or buy their way out of it. And once enough congregations had left, the *Discipline* could finally be rewritten to reflect their desired reality.

It was, depending on your point of view, either a stroke of genius or a sign of desperation. But it certainly wasn't normal.

And that brings me back to unity. We have spent so much time insisting that we are united that we have forgotten to ask whether we are authentic. We have clung to the illusion of togetherness long after the togetherness itself had evaporated. And in doing so, we have missed the possibility that honest differentiation—dare I say, separation—might be a healthier, holier path than forced cohesion.

Unity is not all it's cracked up to be. Authenticity, on the other hand, has a way of clearing the fog. It allows us to bless one another even as we walk different paths. It allows us to rediscover distinctives that once made Methodism a movement rather than a monument. And it allows us to tell the truth about who we are, what we believe and where we are going.

If there is a way forward for any of us—those who stayed, those who left and those who are still trying to decide which way is up—it will not come from pretending that unity can be manufactured by slogans or salvaged by parliamentary maneuvers. It will come from the quieter work of telling the truth about who we are, reclaiming the standards that once shaped us and blessing one another even when our paths diverge.

Methodism has always been at its best when it remembers that holiness is not a committee assignment and that authenticity is a far sturdier foundation than institutional choreography. If we can manage even a little of that, there may yet be hope for all the branches of this family tree.

And that, truth be told, would be the most Methodist thing we've done in a very long while.

Bowers is a retired United Methodist elder living in Wellford.

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Commentary by the Rev. Brian Humphries

Becoming the church we choose to be

The official name for what we've been through for the past several years is disaffiliation. The bolder among us call it a schism. The more timid refer to it as our recent unpleasantness.

It feels like a divorce.

Not the clean, mutual kind we sometimes imagine, but the kind that leaves the house quieter than it used to be. The kind where familiar names are suddenly absent, where the rhythms we took for granted no longer hold, where even ordinary conversations carry an undercurrent of "before" and "after."

We have lost churches. We have lost colleagues. In some cases, we have lost friendships that once felt like givens. And even where relationships remain, they have been strained by years of tension, debate and, for many, exhaustion.

We can debate the causes—and no doubt we will for years to come. Some will point to decisions made in recent General Conferences. Others will trace the conflict back decades, to the growing influence of advocacy groups like the Institute on Religion and Democracy and the steady hardening of theological lines. Still others will name sexuality as the presenting issue, or the deeper divide over how we read Scripture.

There is a temptation in divorce to make an accounting of all the wrongs done, to assign blame, to nurture resentments that burn in our hearts to keep some sort of fire going. But if we are honest, continuing to litigate the "why" will not tell us what to do with the "now." And the "now" is that we are a church diminished by the battles fought.

Another quiet but persistent temptation in the aftermath of a divorce is to try to re-create what was. To return to familiar patterns. To stabilize quickly. To assure ourselves and others that

nothing essential has changed. But something has changed. A quarter of our churches have left The United Methodist Church. Some have joined the Global Methodist Church. Others now stand independently. The institutional landscape is different, but so are we.

We are more tired than we were. More wary. More guarded in our trust. And yet, in many of our congregations, there is also a quieter reality: a sense of relief, a lessening of constant tension and a cautious openness to what might come next. This is not a moment to pretend nothing has happened. It is a moment to ask who we are becoming because it has.

For much of our history, the United Methodist identity has been described as a "via media"—a middle way. Too often, we have been accused of compromise, or worse, indecision. We've been called soft on sin. But in truth, via media acknowledges that the reality of our lives is often not simple. We're faced with choices that aren't between a clear right and wrong, but attempting to find the better good, or the least bad option. Often we are trying to find a way to stand downstream of poor decisions and live with those consequences. That is the via media, understanding that discernment is a necessary feature of the life of faith.

But in this moment, the via media can no longer be assumed. If we claim it, it will be because we have chosen it. And choosing it now is not the easy path. It is, in many ways, the harder one.

To be a via media church after this split is not to avoid conviction. It is to refuse to let conviction end the conversation. We have not always known how to stay connected to one another across those differences. The via media,

then, is not a position on a spectrum. It is a discipline. It's the discipline of staying when leaving would be easier, the discipline of listening when certainty would be easier, the discipline of charity when caricature would be easier.

This is not a lesser calling. It is a demanding one.

If via media is the path, grace is what makes the path walkable.

We know the language well: prevention, justifying, sanctifying grace. But in this season, grace must become more than doctrine. It must become posture. Without grace, a commitment to staying together will collapse into quiet resentment or polite avoidance. With grace, it can become something else: patience, humility and the possibility that we may yet be changed by one another, as God changed Peter through his encounter with Cornelius.

So the question is not simply what we believe, or even how we interpret Scripture. The question is what kind of people do we need to become in order to remain a faithful church after this? Structures alone won't hold us together. Policies won't heal what has been strained. And clarity, by itself, won't create communion. Only formation will.

If this truly has been like a divorce, then we should not be surprised that we are carrying wounds. Some of us are exhausted from years of conflict. Some are grieving relationships that have been lost. Some are still on edge, waiting for the next disagreement to surface. Some are unsure whom to trust, or how much to say. And many of us are trying to lead congregations while carrying all of this quietly, professionally, faithfully. But unacknowledged wounds do not disappear. They shape us, often in ways we do not intend.

If we are to move forward with integrity, we will need something like institutional therapy: a willingness to tell the truth about what we have experienced, to name what we have lost and to attend to how it has changed us.

What might that look like in the life of a local church or a conference? Or even in the lives of individuals within them?

This moment is asking us to live and love through practices that are both frank and courageous. First, we must tell this story truthfully. Help your congregation understand what has happened—not to assign blame, but to create shared understanding. We must also create settings where people can name what they have lost without those losses being corrected, challenged or explained away. Yes, people have acted deceitfully and in secret. There are people with whom I am gravely disappointed. I struggle to continue loving people, but I also miss them nonetheless. This grief will lessen over time, but only if we allow ourselves to feel it now. Perhaps more importantly, within

our churches and our institutions, we need to model and teach forms of conversation that are slower, less reactive and more curious than what many of us have experienced in recent years. We have raised our voices more often and more quickly. We must examine ourselves and ask: Where has conflict become habitual? Where do we assume the worst of one another? Where are we still carrying the dynamics of a larger denominational struggle into our own communities?

Finally, connectionalism is no longer something we can take for granted. It will need to be practiced through relationships, collaboration and a renewed commitment to one another. As we attempt to reduce districts and staffing, we can't neglect that we are bound together in the body of Christ. As churches, as clergy, we need one another for support, for ideas, for care. With fewer resources, new systems and structures must emerge so that no one is alone.

Maybe the strongest temptation is to move on too quickly without healing. Something has actually broken in United Methodism. To continue to push forward without rehabilitation, without therapy, risks further crippling damage. Rebuilding trust and relearning our assumptions will move us toward renewed health. Without it, we risk moving forward as strangers to ourselves.

After a divorce, people often ask: Who am I now? That is exactly the right question for this moment. I hope that we will uncover our United Methodist identity as something chosen, not simply as an inheritance. I hope we will remember that we are a people formed by grace, who believe that God is at work in places we don't expect, for the redemption of all creation. We have churches that remain faithful to the one who calls us and seek to love our neighbors' whole selves.

The question is whether we will carry our old patterns into a smaller church, or allow this moment to form us into something more faithful, more honest and even more deeply connected than before. Will we become a people who truly understand that God shows no partiality but loves beyond the limits we set? Will we become people who don't look for quick fixes, but do the slow work of knowing and being known? Will we hold tensions rather than rush to judgment? Will we try to control the Spirit that moves even beyond the bounds of the church, or will we follow where its wind blows? Will we become bound to our pain, or seek healing that allows us to be who we truly are, and become more than we think possible?

Like any good therapy, that healing will take time.

Humphries is the pastor of St. Paul UMC, Greenville.

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God provides through new fence at St. John's in Lugoff

The privacy fence at the parsonage of St. John's United Methodist Church, Lugoff, was in great disrepair. Nails were sticking out where patchwork repairs had been made. Several boards were badly warped. One section, which fell completely, was held up with bungee cords. One pastor's dog had been attacked by a dog that had gotten through the fence.

The present pastor, the Rev. John Jordan, was concerned about his toddler granddaughter being hurt by a nail sticking out. Also, he was concerned about his dog getting hurt or escaping. The fence was not only an eyesore but also a hazard.

Unfortunately, St. John's has experienced a decline in membership and revenue over the past few years. Many members left over the changes in the *UMC Book of Discipline* regarding the LGBTQ+ community. With revenues being down, the church did not have the funds to replace the fence.

Trustees decided to get some estimates to replace the fence. Jordan was tasked with this.

Jordan's first call was to J.B. Nealey Fence in Elgin. Mr. Nealey gave an estimate that was high but reasonable. Jordan explained that the church did not have the funds now and that it might be some time before the work could be done.



The new fence is an example for the congregation of how God provides.

Mr. Nealey was quite disturbed about the state of the fence and the church's inability to pay. He said the Lord had made a major change in his life a couple of years before and he wanted to do all he could for the Lord. When he left the parsonage after giving the estimate he said, "I'm going to have to pray about this."

Jordan was quite discouraged when he gave the estimate to the trustees, knowing it would be several months if not a couple of years before the work could

be done. However, about a week later he received a text from Mr. Nealey stating that if the church could not afford to pay for the fence, he would do it as a gift to the church.

Jordan immediately emailed the trustees; most were in agreement but thought the church should offer to pay for the materials. Mr. Nealey refused and stated he wanted to give everything as a gift to the church. Now the parsonage has a beautiful new fence that should last many years.

This is an example of how God provides answers to prayers. The fact that the first estimate was to someone who had been blessed by God and wanted to pass the blessing along was divine intervention. The call to Mr. Nealey was just because Jordan had seen the J. B. Nealey Fence sign in the neighborhood. Within two weeks what began as a discouraging situation became the fulfillment of prayers.

This also demonstrates that there are good, generous people who are more focused on serving others than making a buck.

So if you, or your church, is in need of something that seems impossible, keep praying and follow any nudges as to what to do. You never know how God will provide.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Mark E. Thompson

Reaching out to the community

This spring, Gilbert UMC, Gilbert, volunteers partnered with Assist Driving Academy to help 25 students prepare and pass their driver permit test. Many students are anxious about taking the test, and many have not been successful in their previous attempts on the test, pastor Dr. Mark E. Thompson said. "It has been a blessing to meet these students and see them build confidence by being successful in acquiring their driver license," Thompson said, noting it was a great idea for community outreach. He offered special thanks to John Nix, outreach coordinator.

Women's Day event focuses on 'Mapping Our Way Forward'

By Toni Strawther

KINGSTREE—Mount Zion Women in Faith celebrated Women's Day in the month of April. The theme was "Mapping Our Way Forward," and the guest speaker was Olisa Ashford, educator and first lady of Journey United Methodist Church, Columbia.

The referenced Scripture for her message was Psalm 119:101-105. Based upon the Scripture, the women were asked two questions: Are you a map thinker or a lamp thinker? A map thinker focuses on their destination in life. A lamp thinker focuses on their next step in life.

"God's light guides us even when we don't see a way forward," Ashford said. "It is God's light guiding us step by step and telling us what path to take.



Women gather after hearing Olisa Ashford, educator and first lady of Journey UMC, Columbia.

"You cannot use God's lamp to walk down a path that was never intended for you."

As a visual illustration to conclude her message, Ashford provided pieces of a map for every woman, reminding them that God is the only one who can guide them.

Murray UMC enjoys busy spring of worship, community and fellowship

By Jamelah Youmans

Murray United Methodist Church had a spirit-filled April filled with worship, community and fellowship.

We started off the month with a Resurrection Sunday service. The church was filled with worshipers celebrating our Risen Savior. We had many children and youth recite Easter speeches including an instrumental performance. The children and youth looked beautiful and handsome in their Sunday best.

We also held our second annual Community Car Show. We had vintage cars, Corvettes, custom cars and motorcycles. We had a great time enjoying the beautiful rides, the music and food.

Two of our members went to the Statehouse in Columbia to advocate for worthy causes. The Rev. Bernie Mazyck went to fight for a bill that gives a tax credit to South Carolina taxpayers who contribute to nonprofits developing affordable housing. Dr. Jamelah Lemon Youmans was there with the South Carolina Podiatry Medical Association to educate legislators on the importance of podiatry and offer free foot screenings.

A small group of members from the United Women of Faith visited the International African American Museum.

Clara Tucker stated, "I personally loved the makeshift church with window panels and how they portrayed gospel music and what it meant to the slaves."

She also enjoyed the ancestry room and looking up her ancestors and where she came from. It was a fun and educational trip as we learned about our history and how it connects to the Lowcountry.

The Children's Ministry recognized students who made the A/B honor roll for the third quarter: Chelsea Powell, T.J. Bryant, Christian Brown, Symone Banks, Bryelle Lucas, Parker Grant, Brazil Pryor and Kingston Pryor.

We ended the month with our Annual Women's Calendar Tea. This year's theme was NFL, so all 12 tables were decorated with NFL team merchandise, and members and guests wore their favorite team shirts or jerseys. Everyone who attended the tea had an enjoyable time. The first-place winner was the December table, whose table was the Carolina Panthers and raised roughly \$4,000. Second place was the January table whose team was the Philadelphia Eagles. The program was arranged by our United Women of Faith Vice President Keisha Banks.

We are looking forward to our Pastor Appreciation program next month and

we are excited about taking a group trip to the conference to see our beloved pastor, the Rev. Darlene M. Richardson get ordained as an elder.

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Young Methodists.



Photo by Jamie Collins

Celebrating confirmation

Shandon UMC celebrated the confirmation of 21 sixth-grade students as they publicly professed their faith in Christ and were welcomed into The United Methodist Church on Sunday, April 19. Bishop Leonard E. Fairley preached and officiated the rite of confirmation for these students. Pictured along with the students are Fairley, the Rev. Smoke Kanipe, the Rev. Maggie Cantey, the confirmation mentors and the sixth-grade Sunday school teachers.



Photo by Kelly Gottheiner

Dog days

The Clarendon County Sheriff's Department brought their two therapy dogs to the Manning UMC, Manning, day school recently, entertaining and educating the preschoolers about how they work.

Youth Harambee set for June 24-28

ORANGEBURG—Rising seventh graders through high school graduates (ages 12-18) will head to Claflin University June 24-28 for Harambee.

Harambee is a youth conference planned by the Harambee Planning Committee under the guidance of the executive board of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Black Methodists for Church Renewal, Inc.

The conference is held annually to help youth develop their spiritual, leadership and interpersonal skills. In doing so, youth will begin to develop relationships, connect with each other and learn how to bridge the gap from generation to generation.

All registration forms are online only this year. Each person attending must complete the Harambee Registration Form.

Cost is \$355.

Register at <https://www.twkbmcr.org/harambee>.



Wesley Foundations by the Rev. John Sterling Poole

Good news on the day of Good News

At 10:06 p.m. on April 5, I got a message from Colton Pitts, a freshman at The Citadel. It read: "Hey John. I know this is late notice but am I able to get baptized tomorrow? ... I'm just done waiting and feel like sooner the better."

We had already planned one baptism for the evening of Easter (April 6), and this message came to me in almost the 11th hour. It reminded me so much of the Ethiopian's response to Philip's evangelism: "What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" (Acts 8:36b, NIV).

On Easter Sunday at 5 p.m. on the Isle of Palms (shoutout to First United Methodist Church for allowing us to park in their lot!), Gabriel Jacquez and Colton Pitts, both freshmen from the same campus, publicly professed their faith before God and the witnesses of the church, covenanted to serve Christ's holy church, joined the UMC and were baptized in the name of the Triune God.

After wading back to shore, we celebrated the Lord's Supper with the two newly baptized members serving the elements. Talk about some good news on the day of Good News! The amount of

hugging among their classmates alone would bring tears to any believer's eyes, but what was most touching was the joy between the two young men who went from classmates and friends to brothers in Christ.

Needless to say, this was my favorite Easter that I have ever witnessed and been a part of, and this Easter reminded me of the core mission of campus ministry: make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. It is such an easy and difficult, simple and complex mission, and yet I have the privilege to serve in this extension ministry. I also have the humbling privilege to serve alongside so many other amazing Wesley Foundation/Fellowship directors who are doing the same work of making disciples.

The fruit of campus ministry is not hard to find; in fact, the picture shows the fruit! There really isn't a conversation to be had about if campus ministry is effectively discipling; the conversation to be had is how is campus ministry effectively discipling.

With Colton and Gabriel's baptisms, this makes a total of six baptisms this school year in

Charleston Wesley Foundation. There are at least two more lined up for the upcoming fall. Disciples are being made, and this only happens through the connection of the conference. Through your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness, each of you are discipling young men and women who are boldly proclaiming their faith and boldly joining the church!

I know I speak on behalf of my colleagues in campus ministry when I say how thankful we all are for our donors and partner churches as well as the apportionment funds that are allocated to this ministry. Thank you, thank you, thank you! To those of you unsure how you can support a campus ministry, reach out to us. We would love to partner, and we need partners to continue.

The connection is powerful, and everyone in the conference should know: two new disciples are in downtown Charleston overjoyed and are going on their way rejoicing.

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

Multigenerational to intergenerational: An invitation

By Toni Taylor

At South Carolina Annual Conference this June, a new door is opening for congregations that long to see all generations worship, pray and grow together—not just in the same building, but in the same space and the same story.

The Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer initiative invites churches into a journey from "many ages present" to genuinely intergenerational worship, where children, youth and adults share leadership and encounter God side by side.

Across our conference, children's worship attendance has dropped by about half in the last five years. Many congregations still describe themselves as multigenerational, yet adults and children often move in parallel tracks—separate services, separate spaces and separate experiences of church.

Intergenerational ministry goes deeper, intentionally creating worship and learning where genera-

tions experience God together.

Each year, 12 churches are selected to join a leadership cohort, bringing a team of four to five people—pastors, children's and youth leaders, worship planners and laity from different generations—into a shared learning journey. Through quarterly in-person trainings and online sessions, churches explore what intergenerational worship is, why it matters and how to design services where children, youth and adults all participate in prayer, Scripture, music and sacrament.

For congregations feeling the strain of disconnected generations or declining children's participation, Cohort 3 offers not "one more program," but a way to align worship and discipleship around a shared vision: all generations together, growing in faith in Jesus Christ.

Applications for the Year 3 cohort will open at Annual Conference 2026; your church is invited to step into this intergenerational journey.

For more information: ttaylor@umcsc.org or <http://www.umcsc.org/children>.

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SCAN ME



CONFERENCE

From Page 1

high school-age youth delegates to bring younger voices to the table.

Also on the slate are consideration of a proposed \$1.3 million budget for 2027 (a 2.3 percent decrease from the 2026 budget), several resolutions and new district line changes arising out of a called special session.

At the called Special Session in October, roughly 700 delegates approved reducing the number of districts from 12 to 10 in South Carolina, a change that goes into effect July 1. This means the Greenville and Florence districts will see their churches merged into other districts, and those charge district line changes will be addressed at this Annual Conference. The Greenville District will be merged into the nearby Anderson and Spartanburg districts, and several churches in the Spartanburg District will be realigned to the Rock Hill and Greenwood districts. The Florence District will be merged into nearby Hartsville, Marion and Orangeburg districts, with some churches in those districts shifted into a closer district.

The Anderson District Office will relocate to Easley and the Marion District Office will relocate to Conway, which are both a more central location for the newly aligned district offices.

Also at Annual Conference, the body will commis-

sion or ordain 16, license 11 local pastors for service, honor 26 retirees and remember 58 people who passed away over the last year.

This is the 55th session of Annual Conference since the denomination organized in this state in 1972. The theme is “See the Possibilities, Live the Promises: What Do You See?” drawing from Mark 8:22-26, which details Jesus’ healing of the blind man at Bethsaida.

A more extensive article is available on the *Advocate’s* website with all details (<https://go.advocatesc.org/ac2026-preview>). Here are the basics:

- Annual Conference begins at 2 p.m. Sunday, June 7, with packet pickup, orientation, clergy session.
- On Sunday at 7 p.m., the body will celebrate 26 retirees and 16 people who will be ordained or commissioned. South Carolina Bishop Leonard Fairley will preside; Bishop Paul L. Leeland will preach.
- Fairley will preach Monday opening worship.
- Five resolutions will be considered: Exploring Pension and Health Benefit Coverage for Provisional and Ordained Deacons; Resolution to Develop and Expand Campus Ministries in the South Carolina Annual Conference; Resolution to Increase Support and Resourcing of Local Pastors in the South Carolina Annual Conference; Resolution to Develop and Expand Ministries with Young Adults in the South Carolina Annual Conference; and Resolution for the Development and Support of Young Clergy for the South Carolina Annual Conference.
- AC will recognize 11 new licensed local pastors.

- A service of remembrance and thanksgiving Tuesday will be preached by Dr. Sheila Elliot Hodge to honor 58 saints who died over the last year.
- Proceedings will end early Tuesday so the body can join for a Rise Against Hunger conference mission project; see <https://www.umcsc.org/ac2026>.
- On Wednesday, a Morning Praise and Prayer Service kicks off at 9 a.m. and is the first intergenerational worship service to be held at South Carolina’s Annual Conference.
- Given changes in space and financial needs, the body will consider a resolution from the Conference Center Board of Trustees to begin investigating alternative office space for the conference, including possibly selling the existing building.
- Trustees noted the South Carolina Conference hired the law firms of Haynesworth Sinkler Boyd and Cassidy and Coates and filed 72 lawsuits, all pending in district court, against churches that have declared they are no longer United Methodist.
- The Commission on Equitable Compensation is recommending clergy get a 2 percent cost of living increase in 2026.

The *Advocate* will produce the *Daily Advocate* once again at Annual Conference, a two-page guide to what is happening every day of business at the event. We’ll also have email updates each day. Sign up for our email list to stay abreast of the news at <https://www.advocatesc.org/newsletter>.

NATIVE AMERICAN BUS

From Page 1

Committee hosted the three-day bus tour March 20-22 with stops at the Catawba Reservation, a fire ceremony with the Waccamaw tribe, drumming with the Edisto tribe, historical tribal presentations, a traditional Native worship service with drumming on Sunday and more.

“The tour was an effort to help people learn about where tribes are located and the rich, cultural history and traditions of South Carolina’s Native American peoples,” said Zan Tracy Pender, chair of the NAC.

Pender said this year’s tour was aided by a significant donation from the now-closed Columbia Place United Methodist Church, Columbia, and NAC set aside those funds to offset participant costs for the bus trip.

As a result, the cost was significantly reduced for those who went, including myself—only \$100 per person for the bus, two nights of hotel rooms, a Chick-Fil-A lunch, tribal fees, a fan for Sunday morning worship, drinks and snacks. Each participant also received a folder filled with information, including a NAC brochure and contact card and a map of all of the tribes of South Carolina.

“We are truly grateful for that contribution,” Pender said.

Along the way, the NAC provided “bus chats” informing participants about the history of South Carolina American Indians, myths and stereotypes about Native peoples, drumming and flute playing and Native traditional storytelling, as well as information about the NAC’s history, mission, purpose and activities. Participants also learned more about the role of a church’s Native American Representative, which the *UMC Book of Discipline* requires for all churches (this person does not have to be a Native American). Participants also heard testimonials from each of the tribes about their history and struggles.

Friday: Catawba, Hagood and PAIA

We boarded our tour bus on Friday morning at Mission Lake in Gaston and headed out on a tour of seven Native American sites in South Carolina. There

The Native American Committee is seeking a volunteer secretary for the committee; the person does not have to be Native American. The committee meets four times a year in Columbia, and NAC covers mileage. If interested, email tracypender@hotmail.com or call 803-905-5672.

are 11 tribes in South Carolina; 10 are recognized by the state of South Carolina. Only the Catawba are recognized by the federal government.

The first stop took us to the Catawba Cultural Center in Rock Hill. We toured the center, and the director talked to us about the history of the Catawba Nation. The Catawba’s federal recognition allows them to apply for grants to help fund a Native American school, and if grant proposals are accepted, other financial assistance could provide various services to their tribal members.

Next, we went to the Hagood Mill Historic Site and heard from Chief Lamar Nelson about the history of South Carolina’s Eastern Cherokee, Southern Iroquois and United Tribes—or, ECSIUT. We learned about petroglyphs and visited the preserved petroglyphs at Hagood Mill in Pickens. A petroglyph is an image created by carving symbols into the surface of the rockface. One purpose of petroglyphs is to communicate with others.

We ended the first day with a visit to the PAIA Lower Eastern Cherokee Nation at their tribal grounds in Gray Court. We all gathered inside their building and heard from local tribal members about history and customs.

A young lady wearing what is called a “jingle dress” treated participants to a dance. Metal cones had been sewn onto her dress. The dress weighed 35 pounds; each cone was prayed over before being sewn onto the dress. The jingle sounds that the metal cones made when she danced were haunting and beautiful.

Saturday: Waccamaw and Ridgeville

On Saturday, we headed to the Wac-

For photos of the bus tour, visit <https://go.advocatesc.org/nac-bus-tour>.

camaw Indian tribal grounds in Aynor. We were led by Waccamaw Vice Chief Cheryl Cail around the grounds with information about the history of the Waccamaw Tribe. We also learned about the fire circle from the Waccamaw Tribal Firekeeper Marion Craddock, who is also known as White Hawk. Firekeepers are apprenticed for seven years and guided by an elder Firekeeper before they can lead the Fire Circle ceremonies.

I was blessed beyond measure to participate in the Fire Circle with the Firekeeper and his apprentice. The tradition and customs were followed, and I was cleansed with sage smoke before entering the circle and instructed on the proper way to honor the tribal customs in the Fire Circle.

From the moment I stepped in the circle I could feel the overwhelming presence of God and the holy presence of the Native American traditions in the circle. I prayed toward the east, the south, the west and the north as I walked around the circle, adding herbs to the fire while I prayed. As I backed out of the circle, I could still feel the power of the circle all around me and I could not stop praying.

This experience was so special and wonderful that I am still feeling the presence of the Native Americans who shared this tradition with all of us on the trip.

After this wonderful experience, we heard from Chief Buster Hatcher, who has served as chief for more than 30 years. He told us about his experiences with people who participated in the Fire Circle. The local tribal members invited us to share a meal with them. We ate, talked and enjoyed fellowship with our new friends.

We finished our day in Ridgeville visiting with members of the Edisto Natchez-Kusso Tribe. We enjoyed a talk with a tribal member, Michael Mukulvaney, about the history of their tribe. Then he honored us with a drumming exhibition and a tribal dance. “Wow!” is all I can say.

Sunday: Mission Lake

On Sunday morning we headed back to Mission Lake for our worship service. We gathered in the prayer circle and sang songs, watched tribal members dance and listened to the Keepers of the Word present worship through drumming and singing. Again, the holiness and spirit of the ceremony was felt and received by all of us. Powerful, spiritual love surrounded us in that worship ceremony.

“We dance to pray; we pray to heal; we heal to live; we live to dance. our life is like a sacred circle,” proclaims “Sacred Circle” by Cathy Nelson. This song has taken on a deeper meaning for me after this journey that has enriched my understanding of Native American faith, culture and community.

It was hard to leave the new friends we made on the trip. The prayers, the ceremonies and the sharing of the history and challenges faced by our Native American tribes in South Carolina was so sad yet inspirational. My husband and I left with a sense of awe and a commitment to share the information and history that we learned during this weekend.

Others felt the same way. In this thank you note, the Rev. Susan Culler of Whaley Street UMC, Columbia, wrote, “We really enjoyed the bus tour this weekend. Y’all really planned and carried it out in a great way. And experiencing tribal lands and customs in context makes it come alive for those of us like me. Thank you for who you are and for everything that you do.”

My husband and I are learning and researching the history of these tribes and are planning to attend our first powwow. If you want to know more, a great place to start is South Carolina Archives and History, or reach out to NAC.

Next event

Organizers are planning another trip in 2028, and they hope for it to be held every two years. The cost will probably increase as the low cost this year was made possible by the College Place UMC donation. For more information on NAC or the next event, email tracypender@hotmail.com.

Schooler is president of South Carolina United Women in Faith.

CRASH AT SWANSEA

From Page 1

lawn in front of the parsonage, his Chevrolet Silverado crashing into the brick steps in front of the church.

While the church is thankful the driver wasn't severely hurt, the steps were destroyed and the entrance left unusable. For now, the congregation is using a side door to enter the sanctuary.

However, Kight said the age of the church building, founded in 1924, means they're struggling to find

someone who can repair the steps and replace the demolished bricks.

As Kight said, "102-year-old bricks are difficult to come by."

She said they have sought bricklayers and other restoration companies to assess the damage, but so far, they cannot find someone to help them.

"We've had two say 'We're not touching it,' so we don't really know what we're going to do at this point," Kight said.



For now, the congregation is using a side door to enter the sanctuary.

Photo courtesy of the Rev. Jessica Kight

For now, the church is grateful for all the calls and prayers they have received, and Kight urges anyone with

restoration knowledge to reach out to her. She can be reached at jlright@umcsc.org.

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LEAVING THE BUILDING

From Page 1

members to organize what they hope will be the first of many Community Care Days.

The idea was simple: Gather adults and kids from both the church and the community for a day of service designed to show compassion and care for their neighbors. They held it April 12, the Sunday after Easter, intentionally.

“The Sunday after Easter is typically a ‘low day,’ and we didn’t want it to feel like a low day,” Wilson explained. “We wanted to continue that Easter cheer and joy and do it all through service.”

Tompkins and a team gathered ideas from the congregation and landed on a variety of mission opportunities. One group put together 53 hygiene kits to give out to homeless people, collecting

items for a month prior. The bags were filled with toothbrushes, toothpaste, socks and more, plus they assembled 54 “grab bags” of leftover items, which they put in their blessing boxes.

Another team put up two new church blessing boxes in addition to the one already onsite. They sorted canned goods and made sure the boxes were stocked.

Another group cleaned up four yards and hauled off debris, while another brought communion to people who couldn’t come to church to receive it.

A group went to a local retirement home, Wesley Commons, and played bingo with residents. Others wrote encouraging notes and prayer cards that were inserted into the hygiene kits and blessing boxes. And some of the

church children painted 32 flower pots, which were sent to retirement home residents.

“It was fun,” Tompkins said. “We were able to go out and do worship in action, and I was super excited to be part of it.”

She said she volunteered on the blessings box team, and as she was leaving, she had the opportunity to witness a man drive up in a truck, get out, and take a few of the donated items.

“Just to be able to see it used was

like, aw, yay!” Tompkins said, noting it inspired her to do more in the future.

Wilson said it was great to be able to see his congregation come together and serve God as one body.

“This is part of the work we’re called to do—not just tell people about Jesus but also about serving, and service can look like a variety of things.”

He said he’s gotten much positive feedback about the Community Care Day, with many people urging the church to do it again.

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26 to retire at Annual Conference

The South Carolina United Methodist Advocate congratulates this year's class of retiring pastors. Together, they have served more than 520 years in local churches, universities, agencies and the conference. We wish them well in their future ministries and their time away from the pulpit.

This year's class of retiring pastors was asked to respond to the following questions.

1. Think of one ministry or occasion that makes you smile.
2. What do you plan to do June 30 or slightly after that?
3. How are you planning to continue your ministry after retirement?
4. What's one thing you're glad to leave behind?

Constance Nelson Barnes
22 years of service



Journal Entry: FE: FL 2004, PE 2005, FE 2008. SC: 2004 Brookgreen Charge, 2009 East Camden, 01/01/2014 Orangeburg Wesley Foundation, 2017 Rehoboth (Columbia), 2021 New Grace.

1. There have been many meaningful moments in ministry, but one that recently brought me joy occurred during a Sunday morning worship service. Two elementary-aged sisters came forward to read the Scripture. One had initially been asked to read alone but felt nervous, so she invited her sister to join her. Smiling and holding hands, they took turns reading each verse until the passage was complete. Their beautiful display of teamwork, courage and support for one another brought smiles and applause from the congregation. In that moment, they became wonderful examples of ministry in action.
2. On June 30, I plan to spend time reflecting on both the accomplishments and challenges of my personal life and ministry, past and present. I also hope to prayerfully discern how best to move forward into a season of refreshment, renewal and continued purpose.
3. I plan to continue a ministry of encouragement and empowerment by supporting, inspiring and equipping others to discern their calling and purpose. My goal is to help people believe in their God-given potential, take initiative and strive to live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. I also intend to continue providing spiritual leadership and mentorship to children, youth and young adults as they grow in faith and service.
4. One thing I am glad to leave behind is the demanding 24/7 schedule, especially weekend responsibilities. I look forward to having more balance, time for renewal and opportunities to focus on personal well-being while continuing to serve in meaningful ways.

Joan Kristine Bergmann
4 years of service



Journal Entry: Certified/License Approved: SY 2016, PL 2018, NA 2024. SC: 2016 St. Stephen Charge (SY) (1/2), 2020 Not Appointed, 2022 Jamestown (1/2), 2024 Not Appointed.

Eleanor Cooper Brown
3 years of service



Journal Entry: PL: PL 2023. SC: 2023 Centenary (Moncks Corner) (1/2).

Mary Burch Burnell
12 years of service



Journal Entry: PL: PL 2014, NA 2017, PL 2019. SC: 2014 Chesterfield Parish, 2017 Not Appointed, 2019 Kellybell-Sandy Bluff (1/2), 2023 Kellybell (1/2).

1. One Sunday during worship, after the Altar Call, little "Q" (a 6-year-old boy) asked, "Pastor Burnell, now can I pray for you?"
2. Continue giving God thanks for all he has done, and will do!
3. I plan to remain in ministry as a UMC LP.
4. If I do leave, it would be charge-conference paperwork.

Jeffrey Weldon Childress
22 years of service



Journal Entry: FE: SY 2002, PD 2005, FD 2008, FD/FL 2016, FE2018. SC: 2005 St. Mark (Seneca) Minister of Congregational Care, 2016 St. Andrew (Easley), 2021 Salem (Irmo).

Gerald Farrow Clinkscales
10 years of service



Journal Entry: PL: PL 2016. SC: 2016 Branch Hill-Martha's Chapel, 2021 Crossroads-Martha's Chapel-Mays.

David Lloyd Fields
18 years of service



Journal Entry: PL: PL 2008. SC: 2008 Grover Charge, 2011 Fairfax, 2018 Dorchester Circuit (1/2), 2020 Wagoner (1/2), 2022 Eutaw Circuit (1/2), 2025 Target-Gerizim (1/2).

1. Looking back over the past 18+ years, the ministry events that have most consistently left me smiling have been baptisms. From a young man's baptism in the Edisto River to more "traditional" infant baptisms to a marvelous opportunity to baptize nine cousins, these moments of reception into community have never failed to make my heart grow at least three sizes.
2. The same thing I do every day, Pinky: try to take over the world, or at least make it a little more like the Kingdom of God.
3. So long as my health permits and The United Methodist Church has need, I anticipate continuing the same ministry to which I felt called at the outset. I'm examining the possibility of service in Costa Rica, but whether that is the leading of the Holy Spirit or what the late Jimmy Buffett called "the lure of the sea" is still uncertain.
4. To paraphrase Dan Hicks' pop tune from the '60s, how can I miss it when I won't go away? And to quote Monsieur Buffett one more time, "Some of it's magic, and some of it's tragic, but I've had a good life all the way."

James Alan Grubb
20 years of service



Journal Entry: FE, FL 2006, PE 2007, FE 2010. SC: 2006 Ruffin Circuit, 2010 Pinopolis, 2014 Union (Conway), 2018 Shandon Associate.

1. So many things in ministry have brought me great joy, from 20+ Salkehatchie and other mission trips to hosting four trips to the Holy Land. But I have to say the last eight years of leading the Men's Ministry at Shandon UMC, watching these men's participation, faith and commitment grow has been an incredible blessing. They truly live out Proverbs 27:17 "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." I will greatly miss our weekly meetings!
2. Knowing my love for travel and passion for soccer, my wife, Claire, suggested we take a trip to Los Angeles and Seattle to take in some sights and a couple of World Cup '26 matches. The flights are booked, lodging secured and tickets purchased. We can hardly wait!
3. My ministry has been built on the basic principles that I love God, I love people, and I want to help people come to know and love God themselves. Relocating to the Clemson/Seneca area, I hope to reconnect with the university, where I can work with students, faculty and community members and continue to live out that simple model of ministry. I also plan to occasionally fill the pulpit for vacationing pastors when requested.
4. I look so forward to sitting in the congregation with my wife, holding her hand and being fully present and engaged as

we worship together on Sunday mornings, again. So, I'm excited about leaving behind the responsibility and distractions of overseeing all aspects of worship every week.

Michael Leon Hayhurst
21 years of service



Journal Entry: FE: FL 2005, PE 2006, FE 2009. SC: 2005 Simpsonville Associate, 08/01/2009 Chaplain U.S. Air Force (Active Duty).

Kathy Priest Hudson
17 years of service



Journal Entry: RE: FL 2008, PE 2009, FE 2012, RE 2025. SC: 2008 Grace (Lancaster), 2012 John Wesley Associate (Charleston), 09/28/2015 Chaplain Wesley Commons, 2018 Chaplain Wesley Commons and Harris

UMC (Greenwood) (SY) (1/4), 2021 St. George, 2024 Hibben, 2025 Retired.

1. I suppose looking back, I have smiled for most of ministry because it has been so rich and heartfelt. From baptisms to remembering those who have entered the church triumphant, it is the love that we have for others because of God's love that blesses and makes joy possible and inevitable. Children's sermons, mission work, the love felt for a congregation's walk in the Spirit. It is all complete and deeply gratifying to witness. I can't pick one thing because I have been so blessed!
2. I plan to discern each day where God leads and to allow time to venture into some creative pursuits and hobbies I have been yearning to try like painting and mosaics.
3. I will continue to serve God as led. I am constantly discerning. Currently, I serve at Killingsworth Home for Women. There may be other projects to be discerned. There are new ventures ahead in the Church and in our world. I want to be a Jesus-link in those new ventures.
4. I will not/do not miss church gossip or misunderstandings.

Catherine Jamieson
37 years of service



Journal Entry: FE: PE 1988, FE 1994. SC: 1988 In School, 1989 Holston Conference, 1993 Marion-Shiloh, 1996 Chaplain Columbia College, 2000

Continued on next page

Retiring Ministers.

Continued from previous page

Trenholm Road Associate, 2001 Trinity (Blythewood), 2014 Columbia District Superintendent, 2022 Grace (North Augusta).

1. The most meaningful moments have been the adult baptisms and professions of faith. I have a passion for evangelism. I have even baptized a 70-year-old!
2. I'm getting married May 16 and we will be travelling. I also bought a new horse and plan on a lot of saddle time.
3. I may coach clergy through Pinnacle Leadership Associates and substitute preaching occasionally.
4. Working nights and weekends!

Martha Ann Johnson
3.50 years of service



Journal Entry: PL: PL 2020, Disc. 02/01/2022, SY 10/11/2022, PL 10/17/2022. SC: 2020 Lebanon (Fork Shoals) (1/2), 11/30/2020 Not Appointed, 02/01/2022 Discontinued (¶320.1), 10/11/2022 Slater (SY), 10/17/2022 Reinstated

PL (¶320.4), 10/17/2022 Slater (1/4), 2023 St. John (Greenville) (1/4).

Miriam Wilson Mick
28 years of service



Journal Entry: FE: FD 2001, FD/FL 2014, FE 2016. SC: 2001 Rock Hill Hospice Community Care, 01/01/2004 LOA, 04/01/2005 Spiritual Director-St. John's (Rock Hill), 2014 Pine Grove-Salem, 2018 Buffalo, 2021 Inman

Charge, 2023 Cannon's Camp Ground.

1. Serving communion with a young woman last year, we were in the act of serving communion to each other before serving the congregation. We each took our plastic cups of juice out of the serving tray and before I could say, "The blood of Christ ..." she clinked her cup to mine in a "cheers."
2. I have already moved into a retirement community with a wellness center leading daily classes and having social community games in the afternoon. Because I've been working full-time I haven't been able to participate. June 30 seems like a good day to join in the small group action for those of us living independently.
3. If I were to fully commit to practicing what I've been preaching, that would be a full-time job. I hope to be still and listen on an on-going basis, without an agenda, to what the divine has in mind for me. I am open to short-term supply and to having a part-time practice in spiritual direction, for which I am already certified.
4. I am happy to leave behind the struggle with beliefs we United Methodist do not hold, but which remain in our congregations. In short, we clergy have not been able to teach well that we worship a living God, and not a book. While our Holy Scriptures hold within them all we need to know for a life of deep faith, too

often the ancient words are taken out of context and used as reasons to hate or as weapons with which to attack our brothers and sisters as if the users have been sanctioned by God to do that. It is heartbreaking.

Valerie Know Mireb
35.25 years of service



Journal Entry: FE: OE 2009, FE 2012 (Transferred from North Texas). SC: 2009 Central Associate (Florence), 2010 Wesley Chapel (Lydia), 2013 St. Paul (Ninety Six), 2021 Grace (Pickens).

Deborah McKnight Patterson
11 years of service



Journal Entry: PE: SY 03/29/2015, PL 2015, FL 2019, PE 2022. SC: 03/29/2015 Bethel (Greer Circuit) (SY), 2015 Bethel (Greer Circuit) (1/2), 2017 Greer Circuit (Bethel & St. Paul) (1/2), 2019 Brookgreen,

01/01/2022 The Brook.

Audrey Gessinger Ritter
12.50 years of service



Journal Entry: HL: PM 1992, FE 1995, HL 2010. SC: 1992 Kershaw Charge, 1995 Cottageville, 1997 Ruby, 2001 Friendship (3/4), 2002 Ebenezer-Smyrna, 07/15/2003 Ebenezer (3/4), 2004 Greeleyville-Lane,

12/15/2004 LOA, 2010 Honorable Location.

Arthur Rose Jr.
18 years of service



Journal Entry: OM: OM 2008 (¶346.1). SC: 2008 New Beginning (Norway) (1/2), 2017 Bamberg Circuit (1/2).

Rosetta Everna Ross
34 years of service



Journal Entry: FE: PM 1990, FE 1995. SC: 1990 In School, 1992 Mount Zion-Sumter, 1993 In School, 1995 Faculty ITC, 1998 Assistant Professor of Ethics Gammon Theological Seminary, 08/01/1999 United

Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, 2004 Associate Professor Spelman College.

Gracie Lee Singletary
14 years of service



Journal Entry: PL: LP 20 2002, PL 2012. SC: 2012 St. Paul (Morrisonville), 2019 St. John (Shiloh) (1/2), 2024 St. Paul/Wisacky-Warren Chapel (1/2).

Nathan Smalls
9 years of service



Journal Entry: FE: PE 2017, FE 2020. SC: 2017 Wesley-Open Hearts Charge, 2018 Mount Carmel (Orangeburg) (1/2), 2020 Mount Carmel (Charleston).

1. Joined on ecumenical partnership with another race to provide care for the homeless and underserved.
2. Fishing trip to Alaska for salmon and halibut.
3. I plan a six-month sabbatical and will return to preaching part-time.
4. Sleepless nights.

Asa Gray Stallworth
6 years of service



Journal Entry: FL: SY 2019, PL 2020, FL 2022. SC: 2019 Main Street Associate (Greenwood) (1/2), 2022 First (Laurens).

Mary Victoria Teasley
49 years of service



Journal Entry: FE: OT 1977, FE 1980. SC: 1977 In School, 1979 Cayce Associate, 1980 Trenton-McKendree, 1982 Main Street Associate, 1986 Greenville-Aldersgate Associate, 1989 Emma Gray Memorial, 1993 Lewis

Memorial, 1996 Harris, 1998 Platt Springs, 2006 Greenwood District Superintendent, 2012 Greenville District Superintendent, 2014 Trinity (Anderson), 2020 Surfside.

1. Describe one ministry or occasion that has made you smile: At one appointment, when it had been announced that I would be moving, a mother was explaining to her young daughter that Pastor Mary would be moving, but that they would be getting a new pastor and she knew they would like him just as much. The daughter exclaimed, "HIM! You mean a MAN? I didn't know men could be preachers!"
2. Get ready to start work on July 1.
3. I will be going on staff part-time at Advent UMC in Simpsonville as Minister of Congregational Care and Older Adult Ministries.

4. I really can't think of anything. While there have been some hard days and challenges, they have all been opportunities for ministry.

Kenneth Byrnes Timmerman
50 years of service



Journal Entry: FE: PM 1982, FE 1987. SC: 1982 Greeleyville-Lane, 1985 Fairfax, 1989 Gramling, 1993 First (Myrtle Beach), 1998 St. Mark, 2002 First (Myrtle Beach), 11/01/2012 Incapacity Leave, 2016 First (Cheraw), 2018 Lexington, 2020 John Wesley (Charleston).

Tom Hennies Brodie Wall
40 years of service



Journal Entry: RE: PM 1977, FE 1987, RE 2024. 1979 Palmerstone Place Church of Scotland (Edinburgh), 1980 St. Cuthbert's Parish Church of Scotland (Edinburgh). SC: 1977 In School, 1984 LOA, 1986 Holly-

wood-St. Paul, 1990 USC-Columbia Wesley Foundation, 2024 Retired, 2024 Cayce (RE).

1. Campus ministry brought many smiles. Particularly gratifying was witnessing "Ah Ha" moments in students' lives and seeing the growth and transformation, often through service and mission.
2. I hope to take some time to become more of a human being that a human doing! And then? ... (I won't be going to Disney World.)
3. I have some ideas but mostly still discerning. I hope not to retire from ministry so much as to re-attire ... practicing ministry as a child of God rather than serving a role in clerical garb.
4. I plan to leave behind the tension in church work between trusting by letting things go and being the Messiah.

Ardell Washington Sr.
22 years of service



Journal Entry: PL, Reinstated 2003, PL 2004. SC: 2004 Lugoff Parish, 2007 St. Michael, 2015 Latta Charge, 2018 St. Phillips (1/2)

Cynthia Burrows Williams
4 years of service



Journal Entry: PL: SY 2021, PL 2022. SC: 12/05/2021 Mount Seal (SY), 2022 Mount Seal (1/4).

Sign Up for a Church Plan!

Ministries.

Laundry of Love brings clean clothes, compassion to Edisto Fork

ORANGEBURG—What began as a deeply personal experience for the Rev. Ellis White Jr. has become a lifeline of grace and practical help for neighbors facing financial strain.

The Laundry of Love Ministry at Edisto Fork United Methodist Church was born out of his desire to ease a simple but often overlooked burden: the rising cost of doing laundry during these tough economic times.

Recognizing that many families must choose between clean clothes and other basic needs, White envisioned a ministry that would quietly and compassionately stand in the gap. Through Laundry of Love, volunteers provide quarters, detergent pods and dryer sheets so community members can wash and dry their clothes at no cost. The goal is as spiritual as it is practical, offering dignity, relief and a tangible expression of God's love in the rhythms of everyday life.

On May 9, that vision came to life in a powerful way as the ministry served 21 persons at two local laundromats, ensuring that each guest had what they needed to complete multiple loads of laundry. Laughter, conversation and prayers flowed as freely



White describes the effort as a direct response to the biblical call found in Galatians 6:2

as the machines, turning an ordinary chore into a moment of fellowship and encouragement. For many participants, the assistance meant stretched budgets,

cleaner homes and a renewed sense that their community has not forgotten them.

White describes the effort as a direct response to the biblical call found in Galatians 6:2, which urges believers to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” In providing clean clothes and compassionate presence, Edisto Fork UMC seeks to live out that mandate in a way that is both humble and transformative. The ministry reminds the church that sharing Christ’s love sometimes looks like a basket full of laundry, a roll of quarters and a listening ear.

As economic pressures continue to impact families across the region, the Laundry of Love Ministry plans to continue and expand its outreach in the months ahead. Community members, businesses and civic groups are invited to partner through donations of quarters and laundry supplies, or by volunteering their time on future Laundry of Love days.

In a world where many feel weighed down by invisible loads, Edisto Fork UMC is proving that even the simple act of helping wash clothes can help carry a neighbor’s burden—and in doing so, reflect the heart of Christ.

St. Mark UMC holds Great Day Of Service across Seneca

SENECA—Congregants of St. Mark United Methodist Church participated in a Great Day of Service April 18.

Approximately 75-100 volunteers broke into small groups to tackle various service projects throughout Oconee County and beyond. The effort was the result of brainstorming between St. Mark’s the Rev. Alex Stevenson and the church’s Mission and Service Team, headed by Alicia Spivey.

“Pastor Alex said that in one of his previous churches, they had a Great Day of Service where all of the members would go out into the community and perform acts of service,” Spivey said. “That idea sounded like a great one for St. Mark, so we decided to forge ahead with plans. Melissa Higgs volunteered to coordinate it,

and Anne Cannon and I called local groups to see if they needed help.”

Projects included landscaping the grounds at the Oconee Humane Society; building bed kits for children (with Sleep in Heavenly Peace); serving lunch at Our Daily Bread soup kitchen; assembling health kits for distribution to the needy; helping in the kitchen for the Collins Children’s Home fundraiser and completing quilts for international refugees. As well, the youth group picked up litter around two neighborhood sports fields.

The Oconee Humane Society posted a thank you on their Facebook page: “Weren’t we lucky to have the wonderful folks at [Saint] Mark Methodist Church Seneca, SC descending upon the shelter early this morning

for a much needed and appreciated outside area clean up! These talented folks were one of several groups from the church who were spread out working in the community today as part of their service to others in our county. ... Their work is best summed up by the motto on the back of their shirts today: ‘Serve one another humbly in love.’ Galatians 5:13.”

The event accommodated all ages and physical capabilities. Whether wielding a shovel or threading a needle, everyone could find a way to help.

“On behalf of the Mission and Service team, I would like to thank all disciples who helped in any way to make the Great Day of Service a success,” Spivey said. “Hopefully this will become an annual event.”



The event accommodated all ages and physical capabilities, and between 75-100 volunteers helped in various ways.

Disaster Recovery.

Q&A with Joe Patton

UMCSC disaster recovery monitoring and evaluation specialist

Joe Patton is the monitoring and evaluation specialist with South Carolina United Methodist Disaster Recovery, monitoring all activities of the program to provide information so we can be more efficient and effective and prepare reports for donors. Here, Patton answers a few questions about the ministry.

How does Disaster Recovery help those affected by Helene?

The work stretches far beyond repairing houses. Anyone can fix a roof. What we are actually trying to restore is something harder to measure—dignity, stability, the quiet confidence that a family’s life is not permanently broken.

After a disaster, the physical damage is only the beginning. What families carry with them into the wreckage is exhaustion, confusion, financial terror and the particular grief of having to rebuild a life they did not choose to lose. Some of them feel the rest of the world has already moved on. Part of our job is to prove them wrong.

Sometimes the greatest thing we can provide, beyond any resource or repair, is the assurance that you have not been forgotten.

Disaster recovery exists in the distance between complete devastation and active healing. We help bridge that gap. When we do it right, a community learns something it desperately needs to know: even after the storm passes, compassion remains.

Why did you want to work in this position?

I came to understand, fairly early, that recovery work does not only happen on rooftops and construction sites. The work lives in the details—in the coordination, the accountability, the careful documentation that happens long before a crew ever pulls into a driveway.

What drew me here was the chance to combine what I’m good at with something that actually matters at the scale of a human life. Every report I file, every assessment I complete, every data point I track; those aren’t just administrative tasks. They are a real family on the other end of a very long chain, trying to regain their footing after a loss most of us cannot imagine. I wanted to be the person who makes sure that chain doesn’t break.

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

Strong monitoring and evaluation is what transforms good intentions into measurable, accountable action. That distinction matters enormously. Good intentions alone don’t rebuild houses. Documented outcomes do.

When I develop accurate reports and track outcomes rigorously, I give our funders the ability to see exactly what their investment is doing inside these communities. That visibility is what keeps resources moving. Without it, the pipeline slows. Families wait.

And the longer a family waits in the aftermath of a disaster, the harder it is to come back.

The goal is simple: help people spend less time navigating systems and more time mending their lives. Every hour we save a homeowner from chasing paperwork is an hour they spend healing instead. That’s the whole point.

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

I think of my role as the connective tissue between the daily work happening on the ground and the larger vision the program is built on. Our director, case workers and volunteers do extraordinary things. But if those things go undocumented, unverified and unreported, the program cannot sustain itself—and sustainability is what separates disaster response from disaster recovery.

My position is about trust. Trust between the South Carolina Conference and the communities we serve. Trust between our organization and the funders who make the work possible. Trust that when we say we are going to show up for a family, we actually show up—and that we can prove it.

I believe success is not measured in a single moment of relief.

It is a long effort, transparent and accountable, that makes a difference not just in the weeks after a disaster but in the years that follow.

Ministries.

Border trip helps Columbia Wesley students learn about immigration

By Ella Stilwell

A border is not just a place; it's a collection of rich and beautiful stories.

Over spring break, a group from Columbia Wesley (Methodist Student Network) traveled to El Paso, Texas, to learn about the realities of immigration from the people who live it every day. The group of 12, led by Campus Minister Rev. Jad Taylor and Assistant Campus Minister Ella Stilwell, participated in a "Border Encounter" through Abara, an organization that hosts immersive border education experiences focused on proximity, storytelling, peace and justice.

The journey, best described as a form of "reverse service," emphasized listening. The goal was not only to serve, but to receive and learn from lived experiences. Throughout the week, the group heard countless stories of courage and sacrifice, of long journeys marked by both hardship and hope. In those moments, it became clear what people often need most is not just assistance, but dignity and compassion.

Participants left with a deeper understanding of what it means to show up, listen and love one's neighbors in tangible ways. One participant reflected that "the most meaningful part of the experience for me was getting to learn directly from the people who live in El Paso and hear how their experiences living near the border have influenced their lives and identity." Another shared, "The trip not only contextualized issues but made them deeply human."

Early in the week, the group began to understand that the border cannot be understood through num-



The experience challenged assumptions and expanded understanding.

bers alone. Behind every statistic is a person with a name and a story worth hearing. This became apparent during a visit to Agape Church Under the Bridge, a ministry that gathers weekly for worship and a shared meal. There, participants encountered a powerful message: "Jesus is the bridge" (Jesús es el puente). This statement resonated with the group throughout the rest of the trip.

Throughout the week, Abara led discussions with immigration experts, local residents and those directly impacted by immigration policies. One session was led by students from The University of Texas at El Paso, who shared reflections on their border identities.

One MSN participant shared, "Hearing the various stories of the students at UTEP helped me understand

on a deeper level the experiences that shape the people who live in the borderlands."

This experience invited participants to reflect on what it really means to live out their faith. Again and again, it was evident that faith is not passive. It calls people to move toward others, to respond with empathy, and to be present even when situations are complex or uncomfortable.

Another key takeaway was what Abara calls "Border Joy." Even in the face of hardship and discrimination, many in the borderlands continue to live with deep joy and resilience. This joy could be seen in shared meals, in laughter and in the way communities continually support one another.

The experience challenged assumptions and expanded understanding. One student reflected, "I learned not only the logistical elements that concern immigration but also the heart-wrenching elements. I was challenged to sit with the very difficult realities I was previously separated from. I feel much more connected to this issue and able to describe and advocate for migration rights."

The group left El Paso with a renewed sense of purpose, committed to sharing what they learned and continuing to engage with immigration policy. As a community, MSN remains committed to being a place where faith leads to action, where all are welcomed and where loving our neighbors is not just an idea, but a practice.

Stilwell is the assistant campus minister of Columbia Wesley (Methodist Student Network).



Photos courtesy of the Rev. Annie R. Crocker

Finishing strong, again

The Spartanburg District Lay Servant Ministries spring classes finished strong once again. Through the classes, 25 people took an oath to serve the UMC using their gifts and talents. "We praise and thank God for continuing to raise up and send his servants to be trained for his mission field," the Rev. Annie R. Crocker said.



Blessed to be a blessing

Ebenezer UMC, Wallace, collected items recently that they delivered to the Marlboro County Detention Center. Items included ladies' and men's socks and briefs, toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, Bibles, Sunday school books, spiritual reading books and more. The captain and staff were happy to receive these items. Pictured, the church outreach department and pastor the Rev. Larry McCray were pleased to have the opportunity to help.



Photos courtesy of Katie Harrington

St. James yard sale funds UMVIM buckets after hurricane



Yard sale pre-sale admission fees made the church \$400, which they used to buy items for the buckets.

For several years during its annual fall festival, St. James United Methodist Church, Spartanburg, has invited non-profit organizations to set up booths to display what they are doing in the community. In this way they gain exposure to all who come to the fall festival.

Starting in 2023, St. James decided to give a portion of yard sales profits to non-St. James organizations, and in 2024, they split 10 percent of total yard sale profits between these nonprofit organizations.

After years of difficulty and challenges about pre-sales in the yard sale, it was decided in 2025 to change. St. James would not allow any pre-sales except for a two-hour window on the day before opening day. They charged a \$10 admission fee, with this money to go to something outside of St. James. People did not seem to mind paying this entrance fee since they could do pre-sales, and they knew this money was to be specifically given away.

The church made \$400 from this

pre-sale admission fee.

All the sales of items during this pre-sale event went into the normal church yard sale profit.

Given the flooding devastation from Hurricane Helene, the decision was made to use the \$400 to purchase items to fill United Methodist Volunteers in Mission flood buckets.

They celebrated the filling of these 50 buckets in a production line with about 30 St. James members after church one Sunday.

A Day Apart in the Marion District

Marion District United Women in Faith held their Day Apart Spiritual Growth Retreat April 18 at Little River UMC, Little River. With the theme "Stressed Spelled Backwards is Desserts," the gathering lifted up Philippians 4:6-7, on replacing anxiety with prayer. Here are scenes.

Photos courtesy of Katie Harrington



Ladies' Soirée

Manning UMC, Manning, held a Ladies' Soirée at their church April 30.

Photo courtesy of Kelly Gottheiner

Ministries.

Host of Healing Guatemala medical camps help underserved people

Healing Guatemala's Hospital Bethesda has hosted a number of medical camps so far in 2026.

Healing Guatemala is a medical mission founded by Dr. Luke Rhyee, a South Carolina elder, and supported by the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

First, they held a Cataract Camp Jan. 23. Staff successfully performed 41 cases of cataract surgeries.

Next, they held an Endoscopy and Colonoscopy Camp Jan. 26 to 28, performing 49 procedures over the three days. During the camp, they identified the

initial stages of various diseases affecting the gastrointestinal tract. Some of the participants were found to have advanced malignant conditions, such as esophageal or colon cancer.

They plan to hold an Endoscopy and Colonoscopy Camp four times annually.

The third camp was the Pterygium Camp, which was held Jan. 19. Pterygium is a condition where tissues overgrow and cover the pupil, affecting the vision. They successfully performed 10 surgeries at the camp.

They also hosted four mobile clinics that served the rural communities—helping approximately 900 patients—and one that offered general medicine, dental services and ophthalmology services and served approximately 400 patients.

“In their harsh and challenging life, they can live in hope, experiencing the mercy and grace of the Lord. Please continue to lift our mobile clinics in your prayers,” Rhyee said.

For information on how to help, visit <https://healingguatemala.org>.

Alston Wilkes Society.

From receiving support to giving it: William Godfrey honored

For many veterans, the transition back to civilian life can come with unexpected challenges. For William Godfrey, that season included financial hardship, housing instability and the difficult task of rebuilding from the ground up. Today, however, his story has become one of perseverance, purpose and hope for others walking a similar road.

On May 7, Godfrey was recognized by Goodwill Industries at the Champions for Change banquet in Anderson, where he received the prestigious Bill Hummers Mission Impact Award. The award honors individuals whose lives reflect resilience, determination and meaningful personal transformation.

A United States Army veteran, Godfrey turned to the Alston Wilkes Society and Goodwill's Homebound Heroes program during one of the most difficult periods of his life. Through those programs, he focused on rebuilding stability step by step by gaining new skills, pursuing em-

ployment opportunities and working toward permanent housing.

Along the way, Godfrey earned several certifications, secured stable housing and regained his independence. Today, he serves as a resident manager and driver for the Greenville Veterans Home with the Alston Wilkes Society, where he now helps support and encourage fellow veterans on their own journeys toward stability and self-sufficiency.

What makes his story especially powerful is not simply where he started or where he is now, but the way he continues to give back to others every day. His journey is a reminder that recovery and rebuilding are possible and that compassionate support paired with personal determination can truly change lives.

AWS is proud of Godfrey for this well-deserved recognition and grateful for the impact he continues to make within our Veteran Services program and the veteran community.

On May 7, Godfrey was recognized by Goodwill Industries at the Champions for Change banquet in Anderson, where he received the prestigious Bill Hummers Mission Impact Award.



United Women in Faith by Janice Eaddy

SCCUWF award two scholarships

The 2026 South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith Presidential Scholarship was awarded this year to two deserving future leaders: Nevaeh Gaston and Deshanell Zaikeya Madison.

Each scholarship is awarded to financially assist young women with their higher education needs. The goal is to recognize future leaders and provide support through prayer and financial gifts.

Scholarship applications were received by the chairperson, postmarked no later than March 1. The scholarship committee then met to select the recipients based on a combination of grade point average, leadership in community service projects, United Women in Faith and church involvement.

The South Carolina Conference Presidential Scholarship Awards began in 2017. Including 2026, the UWF have awarded 32 scholarships of \$1,000 each. Gifts are accepted and will be used to further support young women annually through the scholarship program.

Members are asked to encourage young ladies in their church to apply for the scholarships; the application package is available online at <http://umcsc.org/women>.

UWF leaders said both of the 2026 winners are outstanding, intelligent and dedicated Christians and phenomenal young women with very bright futures.

Nevaeh Gaston

Nevaeh is a graduating senior from Georgetown High School in Georgetown. Nevaeh is ranked in the top percentage of her class. She has worked hard to maintain a 4.0 GPA while playing on the Georgetown Varsity Basketball Team the past four years. She believes that being on the team has allowed her to grow as a leader and supportive teammate.

Nevaeh is a member of Asbury United Methodist Church and loves

being involved in the drama ministry, attending vacation Bible school and helping out with the youth throughout the church and the community. Giving back and staying connected to the people around her is something that she truly values.

Deshanell Zaikeya Madison

Deshanell graduated from Mauldin High School in May 2024. She is a current student at Midlands Technical College pursuing a Bachelor of Science in nursing. Presently she is a full-time student and has worked hard to maintain a 3.5 GPA.

Deshanell is a member of Francis Burns United Methodist Church in Columbia. Her church involvement includes singing on the choir's praise team, ushering, being an acolyte and spending summers attending Salkehatchie in Bamberg. Being a member of this faith-based weeklong mission camp is a blessing to her as she partners with other youth and adults to repair homes for families in need.

She was selected to be a college volunteer at Revolution, which is an annually held weekend event for United Methodist youth in South Carolina. Thousands of students gather for worship, music and speakers focused on faith, connection and ministry.

She has continued her involvement taking on major roles with clubs and organizations at Midlands Technical College.

Local unit presidents are asked to encourage young ladies in their church to apply for the annual South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith scholarships.

The 2026 SCCUWFaith Presidential Scholarship Committee includes Janice Eaddy, chairperson, as well as Debra Schooler, Kathy Roys, Ann Alexander, Gladys Lemon, Rebecca Rochester, Beth Addis, Lynne Chandler and Betty Swinton.

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Ministries.

Obituaries.

Connie Bossons Bishop

GIBSONVILLE, N.C.—Dr. Connie Bossons Bishop, wife of the Rev. Benjamin Bishop, died July 15, 2023. Rev. Bishop is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held July 22 at St. Marks Community Church, Burlington, North Carolina.

Memorials may be made to Authoracare, 914 Chapel Hill Road, Burlington, NC 27215; or to St. Marks Community Church, 1516 St. Marks Church Road, Burlington, NC 27215.

Dr. Bishop is survived by her husband.

Rev. Jimmy Taylor Campbell



Campbell

GREENWOOD—The Rev. Jimmy Taylor Campbell, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of the South Carolina United Methodist Church, died April 24, 2026.

Prior to his retirement in 2006, Rev. Campbell served the Seneca Circuit, Bethesda-Beulah, Woods Chapel, Fort Mill-Pleasant Hill, Greenville-Salem, Mullins-Macedonia, Hartsville-St. Luke and

St. John's charges. He was the superintendent of the Greenwood District from 1998 until 2006.

Funeral services were held April 30 at St. Mark UMC with burial in Bramlett Methodist Church Cemetery, Gray Court.

Memorials may be made to Hospice and Palliative Care of the Piedmont, 408 W. Alexander Ave., Greenwood, SC 29646.

Rev. Campbell is survived by his three sons and daughter.

Wilma Lena Frasier

ROCHESTER, N.Y.—Wilma Lena Frasier, sister of the Rev. Pernerva Thomas, died May 8, 2026. Rev. Thomas is the pastor of St. Paul-Elliott United Methodist Church, Lynchburg.

Funeral services will be held May 28 at Memories Funeral Home-Rochester.

Mark Wilson Gramling

ANTIOCH, Tenn.—Mark Wilson Gramling, son of the Rev. Roger and Marilyn Gramling, died May 7, 2026. Rev. Gramling is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

No service is currently planned.

Mr. Gramling is survived by his wife, Jennifer Muller Gramling, parents and brother.

Helen Daughdrill Mack

HEATH SPRINGS—Helen Daughdrill Mack, widow of the Rev. Kinsler Boyd Mack Sr., died May 8, 2026.

Mrs. Mack is survived by her stepdaughter.

Rev. James Herbert Nates Jr.



Nates Jr.

COLUMBIA—The Rev. James Herbert Nates Jr., a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died May 2, 2026.

Prior to his retirement in 1999, Rev. Nates served the Fairfield Circuit, Irmo Charge, Charleston-Dorchester, Mount Lebanon Charge, Whitmire, Charleston-Grace, Irmo-Union, Spartanburg-

Trinity and Simpsonville charges. He also served as the director of Adult Works, Board of Education.

Funeral services were held May 23 at Ashland UMC with burial in Elmwood Cemetery.

Rev. Nates is survived by his wife, Patricia Nates, two daughters and two sons.

Nancy Holcombe Smith

MARIETTA—Nancy Holcombe Smith, wife of the Rev. Larry Smith, died May 8, 2026. Rev. Smith is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and currently serving Christ UMC, Greenville.

Funeral services were held May 17 at Christ UMC.

Mrs. Smith is survived by her husband and son.

Rev. Stanley Edgar Weber Jr.



Weber Jr.

LEXINGTON—The Rev. Stanley Edgar Weber Jr., a retired local pastor of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died April 25, 2026.

Prior to his retirement in 2018, Rev. Weber served the St. Stephen Charge, Joseph B. Bethea-Salem and Poplar-Salem charges.

Rev. Weber is survived by his wife, Debra Weber, daughter and two sons.

Trinity UMC Men's Ministry donates needed supplies to Paths To Wholeness women

ORANGEBURG—Demonstrating a strong commitment to service and community care, the men's ministry of Trinity United Methodist Church recently made a generous donation of paper goods and a mattress to support the residents of Paths To Wholeness Transitional Home. Dr. Eddie C. Williams is the pastor.

The Men's Ministry continues to be a pillar of outreach, meeting practical needs in the community. Their donation provides both comfort and daily essentials for the women residing at Paths To Wholeness, helping ensure a stable, supportive living environment.



The men gave paper goods and a mattress.

The contribution of paper goods helps in meeting ongoing household needs, while the donated mattress offers added comfort, reinforcing the organization's mission to provide a safe, dignified

space for women transitioning toward independence.

The Rev. Minnie Anderson, executive director of Paths To Wholeness, expressed heartfelt appreciation for the men's ministry's thoughtful generosity, noting that such acts of kindness directly impact the quality of life for residents and affirm the importance of community partnerships.

"This act of giving reflects the spirit of compassion and service that defines Trinity United Methodist Church and highlights the powerful role local ministries play in uplifting and strengthening the Orangeburg community," Anderson said.

This award underscores the agency's dedication to delivering concise, essential resources to South Carolinians. The resource provides tools and information, including early warning signs, diagnosis and next steps.

Department on Aging's Dementia Toolkit honored

The South Carolina Department on Aging's Dementia Toolkit has earned a 2025 Notable State Documents Award in the Monograph category.

The toolkit is used by Department on Aging in their work with

the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church's Cognitive Care Ministry, an effort that started in spring 2024 to help churches be in ministry with their community struggling with dementia-related issues.

Epworth News.

Foster Parent Appreciation Month: Honoring Hearts That Make a Difference

Each May, we recognize Foster Parent Appreciation Month, a time to celebrate the individuals and families who open their homes and hearts to children in need. Across South Carolina, foster parents provide more than just a safe place to stay; they offer stability, compassion and hope during some of the most uncertain moments in a child's life.

Foster parenting is not easy. It requires patience, resilience and an incredible capacity for love. Foster parents step in during times of crisis, often caring for children who have experienced trauma, loss or instability. They help children feel seen, valued and supported—sometimes for a few days, sometimes for years. Their impact lasts a lifetime.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the foster parents who are already serving across our state. Your commitment changes lives. Because of you, children are able to experience consistency, encouragement and the simple joys of being a kid. You are the backbone of the foster care system, and your dedication does not go unnoticed.

At the same time, the need for more foster parents in South Carolina is urgent. Hundreds of children enter foster care each year, and too many are placed far from their communities, schools and support systems because of a shortage of available homes. Sibling groups are often separated, and older youth face even greater challenges in finding placements. More foster families mean more opportunities to keep children connected to what is familiar.

Becoming a foster parent may feel like a big step, but it starts with a willingness to make a difference. Foster parents come from all walks of life, and there is no "perfect" family—only caring individuals ready to provide a safe, nurturing environment. Whether you can offer short-term care or long-term support, your role can have a lasting impact.

This month, we encourage our community to do two things: thank a foster parent and consider how you might be part of the solution. Support can look different for everyone—whether that's fostering, mentoring, donating, or simply spreading awareness.

To our foster parents: thank you for your selflessness, your strength and your unwavering compassion. You are making a difference every single day. And to those considering this path, there has never been a greater need—or a greater opportunity—to change a child's life for the better.

—Beth Williams



Photo by Sabrina Setaro, SCADP

Second Chance Day at the Statehouse

United Methodists were among returning citizens and criminal justice reformers who participated in Second Chance Day at the Statehouse April 15—a day of advocacy with lawmakers, formerly incarcerated individuals, families and community stakeholders. The day highlighted their challenges with employment, housing, medical care, etc. and pointed to supportive strategies for re-entry success beyond incarceration. United Methodist pastor the Rev. Hillary Taylor, South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, participated, as well as Jerry Blasingame, Soteria CDC; Dr. Vanessa Harris, BEST Lives; Lulu Cameron, SCRJ; and William Harrison, The Bridge.

Kingtree UMC honors William Calvin Baker on his 103rd birthday

KINGSTREE—Kingtree United Methodist Church honored William Calvin Baker with an early 103rd birthday celebration during its worship service Sunday, April 19, 11 days preceding his actual birthday on April 30.

A loyal KUMC member of 60 or 70 years, Baker was accompanied by one of his caregivers, his daughter Margie Baker Myers, her husband, Winn, their daughter Marla Myers Godwin and her husband, Timothy, and their daughter.

Dr. George K. Howle, KUMC Minister, wove Baker's life story in with the day's sermon topic, "Cleopas Believed," and invited the children to the front of the church to see and understand memorabilia displayed—Baker's baptism gown, his baby cup and plate, pictures and mementoes of his Navy days during World War II and of his family over the years. He allowed each one of them to individually offer Baker "happy birthday and thank you for your service to our country" messages. The congregation was treated to a taped interview with Howle and Baker discussing various aspects of his long and amazing life.

Shortly after Pearl Harbor was bombed, 18-year-old Calvin Baker, who had graduated from Hebron School, enlisted in the United States Navy. His first shipboard cruise was through the Panama Canal. During his service, he visited many places throughout the world, including Okinawa, Cuba, Trinidad, the Philippines, Japan, Puerto Rico, Hawaii and Jamaica, all of which he had listed on the sheaf of a Japanese knife. In the invasion of Iwo Jima, he served as a co-pilot of a boat delivering Marines to the beach. While he stood briefly on the beach, he noticed the sand dancing around—and realized it was because the enemy was shooting in his direction, so he rapidly returned to his boat! He viewed the young, strong Marines being killed much to his horror.

Calling him a hero, Howle said Baker is likely the oldest veteran living in



Photo and text courtesy of Rosa T. Cherry

"Kingtree's hero of the day," William Calvin Baker, World War II survivor, with his daughter Margie Baker Myers, her husband Winn Myers and Dr. George K. Howle, KUMC pastor.

Williamsburg County and perhaps the only surviving World War II veteran. He further stated, "The oldest veteran in the United States is 110 years old; will you make it to that age?"

Baker replied calmly, "I'll try!"

Observing that Baker has lived an amazing Christian life as a farmer, enjoyed a long marriage with his late wife, Buena, while being a loyal and active church member and good citizen, Howle asked what advice he would offer to the young people of today.

His answer: "Don't take shortcuts!"

Michael Smith, a fellow Shriner, came from his seat in the congregation to shake Baker's hand, congratulate him and announce that he admires him and considers him his older brother.

To close the service, all stood and sang "Happy Birthday" enthusiastically to the honored gentleman about to turn 103 years old. After the benediction, there was a steady stream of well-wishers waiting their turn to speak with Baker and his family.

UMC agencies: Supreme Court ruling unjust

In April, the U.S. Supreme Court decided by a 6-3 vote that the congressional maps used in Louisiana are unconstitutional and must be redrawn.

In response, The United Methodist Church's General Board of Church and Society and General Commission on Religion and Race are calling on people of faith to step up.

GBCS and GCORR call on all United Methodists to stand in solidarity with those most affected by the weakening of the Voting Rights Act. They said the Supreme Court's decision guts the enforcement and constitutionality of Section Two of the Voting Rights Act.

"As United Methodists, we believe justice is sacred work," they said in a press release. "Protecting the voice of every person is not only a civic duty, but a spiritual mandate, including committing ourselves to the ongoing work of dismantling systemic racism in all its forms."

Group opposes weakening of voting rights

SELBYVILLE, Del.—The Native American Inter-Tribal Caucus released a statement announcing its "firm opposition to the weakening of protections under the Voting Rights Act of 1965—a law born through sacrifice, struggle and the unyielding demand for dignity, equality and representation." The caucus also shares steps Americans can take to ensure people have a representative government.

Church women urged to resist authoritarianism

INDIANAPOLIS—United Methodists Stacey Abrams and her mother, the Rev. Carolyn Abrams, challenged those attending the United Women in Faith Assembly to disrupt rollbacks to voting rights. Elizabeth Eckford, one of the Little Rock Nine, also shared her story of bravery in the face of brutality.

Agency launches new website, logo

GLENVIEW, Ill.—The United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women has launched a newly redesigned website alongside a refreshed agency logo. The updates were developed to better communicate the agency's mission to advocate for the full and equal participation of women across the worldwide connection, to improve user experience and create clearer pathways for individuals seeking support and guidance.

South Congo pledge kicks off Miracle Sunday

ZURICH—The South Congo Episcopal Area, led by Bishop Marie Jeanne Mujinga Kashala, has pledged 912.8 million Congolese francs (about \$326,000 in U.S. dollars) to support Miracle Sunday on May 17. The one-time, denomination-wide offering supports scholarships for United Methodist theological education in Africa, Europe and the Philippines.

Lessons from past shape jurisdictions' future

JACKSONVILLE, Fla.—Bishops spent part of their meeting in Florida learning more about the history of the segregated Central Jurisdiction and the jurisdictional system in general. The lessons came as United Methodist leaders consider proposing changes to the structure.

AME scholar becomes Candler's dean

ATLANTA—The Rev. Terrence L. Johnson, director of religion and public life and Charles G. Adams Professor of African American Religious Studies at Harvard Divinity School, has been appointed the next Mary Lee Hardin Willard Dean of Emory University's Candler School of Theology. A theologian and elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Johnson will begin his five-year term on Aug. 1. Candler is one of 13 U.S. United Methodist seminaries.

Atlanta pastor named advocacy group head

CHICAGO—Reconciling Ministries Network announces that the Rev. Andromeda "Andi" Woodworth will be the next executive director of the advocacy group that champions LGBTQ equality in church life. Woodworth, a United Methodist elder, founding co-pastor of Neighborhood Church in Atlanta and trans leader, will step into the role on June 1.

Pension program gets new name

GLENVIEW, Ill.—Wespath announces that the Central Conference Pensions program is renamed Connectional Pension Support. The name change reflects the significant regionalization structural change within The United Methodist Church and reaffirms the program's connectional, worldwide mission. The program helps provide a steady source of retirement income for about 3,700 clergy and surviving spouses and surviving children in the regional conferences outside the U.S.—across Africa, the Philippines and Europe.

AME member joins Africa University development board

MUTARE, Zimbabwe—Monifa McKnight, an entrepreneur and educator from Maryland, is the first non-United Methodist to sit on the executive board of Africa University (Tennessee) Inc. The African Methodist Episcopal lay member hopes to provide a bridge between the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the 34-year-old Pan-African institution.

Drawing closer to God through dance

HARARE, Zimbabwe—A United Methodist church in Zimbabwe is hosting Zumba classes to help community members shake off stress and connect physically and spiritually. The program is a ministry of Rukwadzano RweWadzimai, the women's organization at Chisipiti United Methodist Church. Bishop Gift K. Machinga said the classes demonstrate that spiritual care and physical health belong together.

Douglas Ward to lead agency's data services

GARNER, N.C.—After 23 years leading information technology for the North Carolina Conference, Douglas Ward on June 1 will start a new role leading data services for the denomination's General Council on Finance and Administration. Ward is also continuing as head of IT for General Conference.

New suicide prevention resource for faith leaders

ATLANTA—The E. Stanley Jones Foundation and the United Methodist boards of Higher Education and Ministry and Global Ministries have partnered to develop a suicide prevention video training course. "Suicide Prevention for Faith Leaders and Faith Communities" is designed to equip students with the knowledge, skills and confidence to prevent suicide, respond to crises and care for individuals and families affected by suicide loss.

Wespath unifies brand under 1 name, website

GLENVIEW, Ill.—Wespath has announced that Wespath Benefits and Investments and Wespath Institutional Investments have come together under one unified name and website: Wespath and wespath.org. Courtesy UMNNews



From the Archives by Dr. Phillip Stone

AC 1966: Sixty Years Ago

In June 1966, South Carolina's Methodists were, just as we are today, getting ready to convene at Annual Conference.

In 1966, the 1785 conference met in Columbia, with College Place Church as the host, and members used residence hall space at Columbia College. The conference met two weeks after the 1866 Conference, which met at Emmanuel Church in Sumter. Both conferences continued to debate the early steps that would lead to the merger of the two conferences six years later, with the White conference approving an invitation to the historically Black conference to join the Southeastern Jurisdiction. This resolution did cause concerns in the 1866 Conference, which did not approve it, as it did not call for outright merger of the conferences or set a timeline for when that merger might happen.

Bishop Paul Hardin's column in late May noted that the conference would fall during the 1966 state primary elections, and he promised to excuse any clergy and lay members who needed to return home to vote. He cautioned the clergy (in particular, I note) not to use this as an excuse to absent themselves unnecessarily or for an unreasonable amount of time. The bishop did note that clergy and laity were citizens who cherished their right to vote. It's interesting that our session of Annual Conference this year also falls during the primary election. My own encouragement to my fellow members of the 2026 conference is to exercise your right to vote early before coming to Annual Conference.

The 1966 session expected to see 26 new clergy ordained as deacons and 26 ordained as elders. Methodists contributed \$11.2 million to all causes in South Carolina in the previous year, and the conference expected to pay almost its entire world service and conference benevolences budget, a total of \$686,000. It was the largest budget for that item the conference had ever approved.

In one editorial, editor the Rev. McKay Brabham criticized the John Birch Society directly, suggesting that the group had nothing to offer freedom-loving Methodist Christians. The editorial came because of a resolution at Annual Conference from the Board of Christian Social Concerns that was critical of the group's aims. The board also championed a resolution, which the conference approved, to encourage South Carolinians to defeat a constitutional amendment that would allow liquor by the drink in South Carolina. The board argued that passage would increase the social problems that came with alcohol as well as weaken enforcement of existing laws.

The Rev. Carl Griffith, who was a retired minister at this point, wrote in late June his observation that the laity, and especially laywomen, almost never spoke on the floor. He felt that the clergy dominated the discussions too much but was glad to see the younger clergy speaking in greater numbers. Maybe they will "drag their elders kicking into the twentieth century," Griffith joked.

Budgets, social concerns, church structure and the future of the church are always up for debate at Annual Conference, and I am sure that will be no different this year than it was 60 years ago.

Stone is archivist for the South Carolina Conference and Wofford College.

A look back.



A look back

Here's a copy of the front page of the June 9, 1966, *Advocate*. The photo depicts an all-White male cabinet and bishop, which is quite different from the diversity of today.



Historical Society by Dr. Roger M. Gramling

Aldersgate revisited

On Wednesday evening, May 24, 1738, John Wesley went "unwillingly" to a society composed largely of Moravians, but meeting under the auspices of the Church of England, in Aldersgate Street, London. Before going out that day, he happened upon the words, "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God."

In the afternoon, he went to St. Paul's, where the words of the anthem seemed especially appropriate to his spiritual condition: "Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord, hear my voice. O let Thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint. If Thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it? For there is mercy with Thee; therefore, shalt Thou be feared. O Israel, trust in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plentiful redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his sins."

That evening in the meeting in Aldersgate Street, one was reading aloud from Martin Luther's "Preface to the Epistle to the Romans." In his journal, Wesley described his experience in the following way: "About a quarter before nine, while he (the reader) was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Here then was Wesley's personal and intimate claiming of the saving work of God in Jesus Christ for his own life. Wesley had come to that point in his own spiritual pilgrimage where he could accept and profess that what Christ had done for all, he had also done for him. Further, this was not because of anything Wesley himself had done but rather that it was a gift, the loving gift of God's grace, which is Jesus Christ.

This experience has been described as that change in Wesley when he moved from the "faith of a servant" to the "faith of a son." Wesley himself used these phrases. Speaking of his life pre-Aldersgate, he wrote, "I had then the faith of a servant, but not of a son." For 10 years, Wesley had served the ministry of the church out of duty and out of a longing to "merit" God's love, to "earn" God's acceptance; henceforth, he would serve God moved by the spontaneity of love and acceptance, which he had now experienced as a gift from God. There would now be an immediate and burning desire to share with others what he himself had come

to embrace—namely, the act of God's grace and loving acceptance prior to any "human work" of holiness.

In some circles Wesley's "evangelical experience" has been described as his "conversion." Those who take this view largely dismiss all of his previous experience and discipleship as insignificant and unprofitable. However, what happened within Wesley that night at the meeting in Aldersgate Street was a long way from a "conversion" in the traditional meaning of the word. While Wesley saw it as a new beginning and a very real experience that he would forever describe with care and reverence, he did not repudiate his past. His post-Aldersgate preaching on conversion differs from his pre-Aldersgate preaching only in its reliance upon saving faith and faith alone as pivotal.

What happened in Aldersgate Street should better be interpreted as a singularly significant event in a continuing spiritual journey. The spiritual fire which blazed forth from John Wesley's Aldersgate experience came from a spark igniting a well prepared pile of wood that had been carefully stacked across some 35 years from the lap of his mother, Susanna, and his rearing in the Wesley home, through the seeking after personal holiness of the Holy Club days, through the disillusioning experience in the Georgia Colony, right up to that Wednesday evening meeting in Aldersgate Street.

In his personal spiritual strivings, he had lost a perspective on the grace of God. His conscientiousness, his pursuit of good works, his seeking to merit the assurance of acceptance before God had led him to a kind of Pharisaism. He had come to think of God in terms of laws to be obeyed and rituals to be dutifully followed rather than a gracious father who loved without prejudice and was to be loved.

Discipline and obedience would indeed continue to be central in the preaching and teaching of John Wesley, but they would now follow as the "fruit" of faith, as the spontaneous and natural response to the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

In the Wesleyan tradition, Aldersgate is the event that always speaks to us of what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ. Such is ours to accept as a gift, never merited or earned, but a gift freely offered which is ours to claim through faith and faith alone.

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.

Leave A Legacy To Change Lives

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Adult Lessons by the Rev. Mary L. Johnson

Acts of the Spirit

June 7
The Spirit Equips with Boldness
Focal Passage: Acts 4:1-22
Background Text: Acts 4:1-31
Purpose: To understand the Holy Spirit's role in empowering the church.

This scripture speaks to the first core pillar of the new guiding vision statement for The United Methodist Church, adopted in 2025—to “love boldly.” The Holy Spirit equips each of us to passionately proclaim our faith in Jesus in word and in deed with boldness. Loving God and our neighbors in this way is a means of grace that epitomizes bold love! When is the last time you were in a situation that required bravery and boldness? Peter and John remind us of the need to be willing receivers and risk-takers, even among those who may question our authority.

In our lesson, Peter and John found themselves in a situation requiring bravery and boldness of speech. After the healing of a lame man, Jewish authorities questioned the source of their authority. In this difficult situation, the Spirit equipped Peter with a fearless tongue. He declared without hesitation that the man's healing resulted from the name of Jesus. Although threats were made against Peter and John they refused to be intimidated by them. The Spirit inspired them to speak boldly; they were determined to proclaim the good news with boldness and would not be silenced.

What are some ways in which you and your congregation might demonstrate bold love while witnessing to your faith in Christ? We all face circumstances that require us to take a brave stand for justice and righteousness, or opportunities arise that allow or even compel us to share our Christian faith. True boldness centers on living for Jesus in our daily relationship with others. The Holy Spirit will inspire and strengthen you so that you can boldly share the story of salvation and testify to the power of the name of Jesus, but you must be a willing recipient and spokesperson. So let us commit to using our voices, our hearts, our hands and our feet to be bold in sharing our faith and our love.

June 14
Pray for and Give with Boldness
Focal Passage: Acts 4:23-37
Background Text: Acts 4:1-37
Purpose: To recognize the importance of sharing our faith in word and deed.

This week's lesson centers on both bold praying and bold giving. When prayer joins faith, the grace of God abounds in ways that surpasses our understanding. The community of faith gathered in prayer after learning of the imprisonment of Peter and John. Luke tells us that this was the longest prayer recorded in the Book of Acts. They prayed in unity with one accord with no strife among them. In response to their bold prayer petitions, the place where they prayed shook and they were immediately filled with the Holy Spirit. The prayer showed their total dependence on God. This attitude makes a radical difference in how we face and respond to life's issues and hardships today.

Luke describes a Spirit-filled community whose members formed themselves into a tight-knit group that held everything in common. Love characterized this community of faith, and their economic sharing expressed their union of hearts and minds. Members were not obligated to give their money to the church; but they gave generously when they made the decision to share it with others. Unified by the Spirit, the followers of Christ boldly share their belongings with those in need.

From this Scripture, we are reminded of what it means to practice extravagant generosity in our own lives and in our congregations. We are also challenged to seek some new ways to boldly share our faith in word and deed. In your prayers, I urge you to pray with boldness, asking the Spirit to equip you to share your faith boldly in word and deed. As Christians, we must be bold in prayer and giving.

The Holy Spirit, which blew fresh winds of change at Pentecost, still works today in amazing ways. The responsibility falls upon us to humble ourselves before the Spirit, never quenching the fires of freedom and truth. We must allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse, empower and refresh.

About the Author
Johnson is retired and serves as the chair of the Orders of Elder.

June 21
The First Christian Charity Scam
Focal Passage: Acts 5:1-11
Background Text: Acts 4:32-5:11; Galatians 6:1-10
Purpose: To beware of deceptive practice in ministry

Our actions can have a positive or negative effect on others. However, when deception rears its ugly head, harmony in the community of faith is disrupted. Too often, Satan lurks in the background, influencing our thoughts and actions. This is what happened among the early Christians when a couple (Ananias and Sapphira) deceived the believers in order to look good in the eyes of others. This sad saga confronts us with our own capacity for deception and greed and our selfish yearning for self-esteem.

This week's lesson presents us with the first case of a charity scam in the history of the church. However, unlike most church scams today, it took place quickly, and the Holy Spirit allowed Peter to immediately detect the lie that Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sought to conceal. Peter asked, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has influenced you to lie to the Holy Spirit by withholding some of the proceeds from the sale of your land? How could you scheme with each other to challenge the Lord's Spirit?”

Ananias desired the recognition and praise from the community of faith to the extent that he was willing to have them think he gave the total profits from the sale of his property, when in reality he only gave a portion. After all, giving was voluntary and not mandatory. Peter made it clear that Ananias fell under Satan's influence when he committed the sin of dishonesty. By betraying the community, Ananias lied to God and the Spirit. Get this: lying was the offense, not withholding the proceeds. Genuine generosity deserves to be recognized, but not in the case of false pride or when an individual appears to be more generous than they actually are.

The work of the Holy Spirit guides us to make wise choices; however, Satan will surely tempt us to make bad decisions. Each of us must be accountable for our own discipleship. Therefore, I

encourage you to employ various spiritual practices in order to safeguard yourself and your congregation against negative influences.

June 28
Obeying God Above Human Authority
Focal Passage: Acts 5:17-42
Background Text: Acts 5:12-42
Purpose: To examine the apostles' bold faith in overcoming life's obstacles

As we delve into Scripture, we are reminded to obey those in authority, as long as they do not conflict with the will and commands of God. We also must be careful not to merely go along to get along. This passage highlights the second interrogation of the apostles by the Jewish authorities. The Jewish religious leaders feared losing power and control over the people.

Even after being imprisoned and tried in court, the apostles still boldly declared Jesus as the Messiah and appealed to religious leaders to change their hearts and affirm Jesus as God's chosen one who brought salvation. The apostles did not enjoy pain and suffering by the hands of the religious authority. However, they rejoiced because Jesus was so important to them that even suffering could not silence them.

It takes courageous leadership and authentic faith to keep loving boldly and serving joyfully while facing opposition. An example of this type leadership was demonstrated by Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch Christian, who along with her family used their faith-driven conviction to hide hundreds of Jewish refugees during World War II. Her steadfast belief in God's love allowed her to survive the horrors and eventually lead a global ministry of forgiveness.

It also takes courageous leadership and trust in God to challenge systems built on injustice, hypocrisy, pride, and corruption. This type leadership was exhibited by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. a Baptist minister, with spiritual conviction and unwavering belief in justice. With these attributes he had the courage to face death threats, bombings and imprisonment, which led to a nonviolent revolution that reshaped society.

Luke makes it clear that the apostle led courageously to resist and tear down systems of evil, injustice and oppression and build-up a community where peace, justice and reconciliation prevail. We, too, must demonstrate bold leadership in sharing our faith and in making disciples of Jesus.



Children's Sermon by the Rev. Meg Cook

Abram, Go!

Date: Sunday, June 7
Scripture: Genesis 12:1-9
Time frame: 3 minutes (aiming for 3-5 minutes max)
Supplies: None
Do: Welcome the children, invite them to stand up with you.
Ask: Do you want to play a game? (Make an excited face, invite them to play.)

Say: Yes? Oh good! When I say, “Ready, set, GO!” We are all going to take three big steps forward. Ready? Ready ... set ... GO!

(Do it.) Well done! Let's try it again, but this time, jump when I say GO. Ready, set, GO! (Jump.) One more time, but turn in a circle! Ready, set, GO! (Turn circles.) Oof! That was fun. I like playing games with you.

Now what if I said, “Ready, set, GO!” but I didn't go with you? (Pause.) Would that feel as fun? I don't think it would.

Say: In our Bible story today, there was a man named Abram. God spoke to Abram and said, “Go from your country and kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you.” Wow. That's a big GO! Go somewhere you have never been (ponder).

And did you know Abram was 75 years old when God asked him to go! Wow. You really are never too old, or too young, for God to call you (pause).

Abram may have been 75, but he did go! Abram took his wife, Sarai, and their whole family. They followed God, going where they didn't know. That's big faith. And God went with them.

Sometimes in our lives, we don't know exactly what's next either. Maybe it's trying something new, helping someone, or going somewhere unfamiliar. But just like Abram, we are not alone. God doesn't just say “go.” God says, “Let's go together” (breathe).

Hmm, I like that reminder. God goes with us. There is nowhere God calls us to go that we have to go alone. Will you pray with me?

Prayer: Dear God (echo), we love you (echo). Thank you for going with us (echo). Help us trust you (echo) wherever we go (echo). Amen (echo).

Cook is the pastor of Grace United Methodist Church, Columbia. She's also the author of the “Herbert the Hippo” children's book series available from the Advocate Press (buy at <https://advocatepress.org>).

Would you like to be a Bible lesson writer for the Advocate?

We'd love to have you.
Email jbrodie@advocatesc.org with your interest.

Happenings.

Event Calendar.

May

Asian Pacific Heritage Month Christian Home Month

May 30—LSM Advanced Class (Greenwood District), Central UMC, Newberry, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Greenwood-District-Special-LSM-Opportunity.pdf>

May 30—May on Millwood, Epworth's 130th anniversary celebration, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. <https://friendsofepworth.org/may-on-millwood/>

June

June 6—LSM Advanced Class (Greenwood District), Central UMC, Newberry, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Greenwood-District-Special-LSM-Opportunity.pdf>

June 6-11—Inaugural Wilderness Trail ministry event, Lake Junaluska, N.C. <https://lakejunaluska.com/events-calendar/ljwildernesstrail/>

June 7-10—Annual Conference, Greenville Convention Center, Greenville.

June 9—South Carolina Reconciling Ministries Network Breakfast, Open Hearts UMC, Greenville, 7:15-8:45 a.m., \$20. Register at <https://www.scrmn.org>

June 14—Flag Day

June 14—Juneteenth Service, Joseph B. Bethea UMC, Myrtle Beach, 11 a.m. <https://www.josephbbetheaumc.org>

June 19—Juneteenth (United Methodist Center closed)

June 21—Father's Day

June 24-28—Harambee Youth Conference, Claflin University, Orangeburg. Register: <https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/sej-bmcr-harambee--2026>

July

July 3—United Methodist Center closed

July 4—Independence Day

July 6-10—Children's Acting Workshop, Virginia Wingard UMC, Columbia, 9 a.m.-Noon. \$10. Call church office, 803-772-0794.

July 13—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.

August

Aug. 1—Lay Servant Ministries Academy (Train the Trainer), Washington Street UMC, Columbia, 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. \$25.

September

Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)

Sept. 7—Labor Day (United Methodist Center closed)

Sept. 14—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.

Sept. 16-18—"A Time to Build," Granville Hicks Lecture Series, Claflin University, Orangeburg.

Sept. 17-20—Smoky Mountain Ukulele Zen Retreat, Lake Junaluska, N.C. <https://bit.ly/LJukulele>

Sept. 22-24—Clergy Connexion (formerly Young Clergy Cohort) Annual Retreat, Asbury Hills Camp and Retreat Center. For information, email Matt Alexander, mlalexander@umcsc.org, or Jad Taylor, jdtayloriii@umcsc.org

Granville Hicks Leadership Academy set for September

ORANGEBURG—Organizers of the Granville Hicks Leadership Academy have rescheduled the event for Sept. 16-18 at Claflin University.

The theme is "A Time to Build."

The Granville Hicks Leadership Academy honors the legacy of Dr. Granville A. Hicks, a 1957 graduate of Claflin University, whose distinguished leadership as a pastor and district superintendent in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church left a lasting impact on the church and its witness. Hicks was a visionary leader who worked tirelessly to strengthen race relations, expand educational opportunities and cultivate faithful, effective leadership across the conference.

Today, the academy builds upon that legacy by responding to the emerging realities facing the church. It is committed to nurturing the holistic health of both clergy and laity spiritually, emotionally, intellectually and communally, while equipping them to lead with wisdom, courage and faith in a rapidly changing world. It creates space for leaders to discern, engage and respond to the challenges and opportunities shaping the future of the church.

Grounded in a rich heritage and guided by a forward-looking vision, the Granville Hicks Leadership Academy continues to unite voices across generations, cultures and ecumenical traditions. It serves as a shared space for learning, reflection, growth and leadership formation in an ever-evolving ministry landscape.

As Dr. Henry N. Tisdale, eighth president of Claflin University, stated, "Throughout its history, Claflin University has always maintained and celebrated its Christian roots. The relationship between Claflin and the church has always been more than just an affiliation. I is, and continues to be, a true partnership. Claflin is indeed a place where the spiritual meets the intellectual."

Epworth to celebrate 130 years with barbecue

COLUMBIA—To celebrate 130 years of serving South Carolina children, Epworth is hosting a family-friendly anniversary barbecue. All are welcome.

The event, May on Millwood, will be held 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday, May 30, on Epworth's campus at 2900 Millwood Avenue, Columbia.

Guests will enjoy a pork barbecue or fried chicken plate from Shealy's BBQ, peanut butter ice cream, live bluegrass and Americana music from The Blue Iguanas, a Columbia Classic Chevy Car Club display, children's activities, tours of the campus and more.

The Friends of Epworth chari-

table organization is hosting the celebration.

Epworth was founded in 1896 in response to suffering and deprivation. Following the Civil War, many South Carolina families survived on near starvation-level provisions in homes with poor sanitation. Disease was rampant, and often fathers died young, leaving children to be cared for by mothers who had no way to support them. Deeply troubled by the suffering around them, South Carolina Methodists founded what was originally called Epworth Orphanage on property formerly used by wealthy landowners to race thoroughbred horses. The mission of Epworth Orphanage

was to care for children whose mothers could not care for them.

Today, Epworth provides residential services for children and teens who have faced trauma, loss, neglect or abuse, but it also runs foster and kinship care programs as well as innovative community-based services for children and families across the state.

Admission to the event is free. Plates are \$15 for adults and \$10 for kids (10 and younger).

Pre-orders are preferred, but walkup orders on day of event are welcome while supplies last.

To reserve your plate, go to <https://friendsofepworth.org/may-on-millwood>.

Advocate's June Virtual Book Club to discuss 'Loving Hands'



The June Advocate Virtual Book Club will discuss "Loving Hands: A Caregivers' Devotional," by Stephon Void.

Book club dates are June 2, 6:30 p.m., or June 4, 11 a.m.

The Virtual Book Club is a Zoom-based monthly effort by the *Advocate* 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.

Sign up to receive a Zoom link at https://www.advocatesc.org/about/virtual_book_club.

To get the books for the club meetings, visit <https://advocatepress.org>.

They are also available on Amazon and other major book retailers.

Advocate Press Book Signing is Tuesday at Annual Conference

The Advocate Press will be hosting its annual book signing event during Annual Conference.

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

A number of Advocate Press authors will be present to sign

books, plus all Advocate Press books will be available for purchase. Bishop Leonard Fairley is hoping to be able to come by as well and sign copies of his books.

The Advocate Press is the publishing arm of the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* newspaper. Founded in 2017, the mission of the Advocate Press is

to produce books of interest to South Carolina United Methodists on matters of faith and to amplify regional voices and those that advocate for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

To date it has produced 38 books, available at <https://advocatepress.org>, as well as from Amazon and other retailers.

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SAVE THE DATES & JOIN US:

SEPTEMBER 25

Richard E. "Dick" Reeves Legacy Society Dinner (Invite only)

SEPTEMBER 26

Wespath Stakeholders Seminar

SEPTEMBER 27

Africa University Sunday - Bishop Leonard Fairley, preaching

Venue for all above events:

Edisto Fork UMC, 356 Lariot Road, Orangeburg, SC 29115

SEPTEMBER 28

Wespath - Bishop Leonard Fairley Golf Invitational
for Africa University (BLFGI)
at Orangeburg Country Club
2745 Griffith Dr NW, Orangeburg, SC 29118