

In this issue



New Life UMC brings iced drinks to porch-sitting seniors. Page 3.



Aldersgate UMC hosts community back to school celebration. Page 15.



Trinity kids squeeze lemons, raise \$176 for shelter animals. Page 16.

Visit our website:



Photo by Ty Williams

Finding your mission field

Held Sept. 1-3 at Journey UMC, Columbia, LIFT challenged lay and clergy South Carolina United Methodists to find the mission field right outside their doors. Here, Carol Singletary (right) talks with her tablemates about ways to think differently. See full story, Page 9.

From Bamberg to the world

Rev. George Strait recalls how Volunteers in Mission began

By Jessica Brodie

Author's note: The Advocate had the opportunity for a lengthy conversation with the Rev. George Strait, who—with the late Dr. Mike Watson and other committed South Carolina United Methodists—helped found United Methodist Volunteers in Mission and

grow it from its nascent beginnings in this state into the worldwide sending agency it is today.

Before he went into the ministry, South Carolina elder the Rev. George Strait had been a pharmacist. So when physician Michael Cunningham

UMVIM will host a 50th anniversary party Oct. 6. See Page 11 for details.

Watson moved to Bamberg in the 1950s and set up his practice, the two easily became friends.

See "UMVIM's George Strait," Page 10

Socastee book ministry get 50,000 books to kids

By Jessica Brodie

MYRTLE BEACH—COVID brought all sorts of ironic positives, most particularly through churches' creative online engagement.

But in one Grand Strand neighborhood, the pan-

demic prompted something more—a thriving books ministry that puts reading materials into the hands of children and families in low-income schools, businesses and housing communities.

Sunny Fry is a member

of Socastee United Methodist Church, a congregation filled with retired teachers. She said when COVID hit and they saw the effect it would have on schooling, "We all just panicked."

A former English major

who worked for five years with a nonprofit that helps tutor children, Fry said she knew the students were already behind academically. COVID would only make things worse.

See "Books," Page 12

Couple delays retirement to fund Aldersgate's ninth home

By Jessica Brodie

A new home for adults with special needs is on the cusp of opening, and it's all thanks to one couple who decided to raise the funds by postponing retirement just one year.

This fall, Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry plans to open its ninth home, Benjamin's House, in the Coldstream area of Columbia.

Executive Director Kim Thomas said they purchased the home and are currently working through all the licensing steps needed with the hope of being able to open the

See "Aldersgate," Page 12

Two years after Helene, hope restored for Greenwood couple

By Jessica Brodie

Almost two years after Hurricane Helene devastated the region, one United Methodist couple now has a mostly repaired home. And it's all thanks to South Carolina United Methodist Disaster Recovery.

Bill Williams Jr., a member of Harmony United Methodist Church in Ware Shoals, said a deluge of rain barreled down the hillside and caused major damage to the mobile home he shares in Greenwood with his wife, Linda.

"It was like a river that came down our steep driveway,"

See "Helene Hope," Page 13



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

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

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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.

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

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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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Campus ministry stint ignites interim leader

By Jessica Brodie
GREENWOOD—When the Rev. Ed Stallworth was asked to step in as interim campus minister for the Wesley Foundation at Lander University, he was excited.

While today he pastors O’Neal Street United Methodist Church in Newberry, Stallworth started out in campus ministry and as a youth minister in Simpsonville, so he’s familiar with the energy required for hands-on, regular ministry with young adults.

“They figured I’d be a good fit,” he said, so he agreed to step in.

What he didn’t expect was how much the work would ignite a place within him that needed a spark. He loves his work at O’Neal Street UMC, and he’s constantly inspired by the people there and the ministries they do, but this extra work with Lander students has brought him deep hope for the future of the church and an understanding of how critical it is to invest in young people.

“Oh my gosh, I love it!” Stallworth enthused, describing the small but active group of college students he’s blessed to meet with each week. “It’s the smallest group I’ve ever worked with, but the discussions, the energy, the openness of them talking, wow. They’re very opinionated, which I love, and the acceptance of one another has been so good to see.”

Stallworth usually spends Tuesdays walking around the campus, making connections and generally being a pastoral presence there, going to Starbucks and meeting with people. At 6:30 p.m., he heads to nearby Main Street UMC in Greenwood, where they have a meal in the youth room and then do a discussion-oriented Bible study.

Other churches in the surrounding community chip in to help, buying pizza or delivering a prepared meal for the students.

“Our college kids are really fantastic people,” Stallworth said. “They have one foot in the youth world and one in the adult world, and it’s really important we have a presence there to help them and inspire them and give them avenues to lead and be involved and empowered and think in terms of faith and Christ and God.”

He remembers his own experience as a college student having a stirring discussion about the ancient poem “The Dream of the Rood” in his British literature class. The poem depicted Christ as a Viking-like ancient warrior, and he remembers at the time being struck by how much culture shapes faith and is intricately involved in faith formation.



Some of the Lander Wesley Foundation students gather on campus. Stallworth said it’s the smallest group he’s ever worked with, but they have inspired and encouraged him in new and unexpected ways.

“There are these kernels of light and truth and hope and joy and faith and all of that in the everyday, and our job in campus ministry is to think through that and ask those questions: How did economics class inspire you? Political science?” Stallworth said. “There are so many opportunities you get in college that you didn’t get in high school.”

He’s also encouraged by what he calls the “campus ministry subculture”—a whole community of Wesley Foundation pastors who are amazing and involved on college campuses all over the state, from Winthrop to Clemson to Coastal Carolina.

“These are really good people who are dedicated, smart, passionate, just all-out, and the connection and the joy they have with one another is incredible. I’ve been inspired by them,” he added.

The challenge, Stallworth said, is helping other churches in South Carolina know how much their support is needed and all the ways they can help and make a difference.

“I keep hearing lots of pastors were inspired in college to become a pastor, and a college student who’s connected to a campus ministry group has much more support,” he said.

Stallworth said he’s excited to see what happens at Lander through campus ministry, and they are doing their best to spread the word and invite all students—not only United Methodists but anyone interested in matters of faith.

For more on campus ministry in the South Carolina Conference, visit https://www.umesc.org/campus-ministries.

Readers to the Advocate: We trust you, we need you

Readers of the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* trust the news ministry, value it and aren’t sure where else they’d get their church news without it, according to a 2025 market research survey.

The survey was conducted over the past year, mostly through conference-wide listening sessions the *Advocate* conducted in each of the then-12 districts.

Of the 122 responses, half came in online, and half were paper surveys.

Trusted and hard to replace
Eighty-nine percent of respondents agreed the *Advocate* is a trustworthy news product, and most said it offers coverage they can’t get anywhere else.

When asked where they would turn for United Methodist news if the *Advocate* stopped publishing, nearly half said they didn’t know or that they simply wouldn’t get it. Those who named an alternative most often pointed to the conference website, UM News, Facebook or their pastors.

“I would be lost,” one reader wrote. Another said, “We would lose our voice.”

A loyal readership
About four out of five respondents who had heard of the *Advocate* currently

subscribe. Most read every monthly issue, and almost two-thirds had looked for United Methodist or local church news within the past week.

The local church is the *Advocate’s* biggest recruiter. The most common way respondents first heard of the paper was by seeing a copy at their church.

Seventy-eight percent read the *Advocate* in print, and 64 percent prefer to receive it by mail. That reflects who reads the paper: About 65 percent of respondents were age 65 or older.

What readers love, and what they’d change
Readers named local church news as their favorite feature far more often than anything else.

“I enjoy finding out what other churches are doing,” one wrote. Others praised the bishop’s column, editorials and Annual Conference coverage.

Letters to the editor split readers more than anything else. Many listed them as a favorite, but letters and opinion pieces were also the most frequent complaint.

- Readers most often asked for:
- More stories from small and rural churches
 - More about congregations that are growing or rebuilding after disaffilia-

- tion
- More content for children and youth
 - More photos and personal-interest stories

Feedback is helpful, says *Advocate*
The survey was not a scientific poll, and most respondents were longtime readers. Still, their message was clear.

As one put it, “I will subscribe as long as I can read and understand it.”

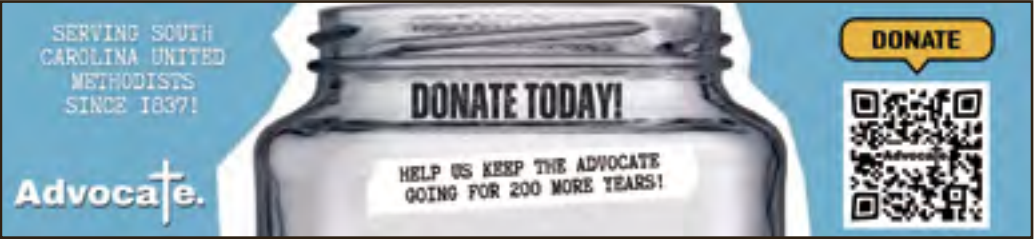
Advocate Board Chair the Rev. Michael Henderson said the board and staff appreciate having the survey feedback.

“The good news of Jesus Christ and God’s love for the world never changes. But the ways we communicate that good news do,” Henderson said. “Throughout its history, the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* has adapted to changing methods of communication while remaining committed to its mission: to be a trusted source of news, information and connection for United Methodists, especially those within the South Carolina Conference.

“We are grateful to everyone who participated in our listening sessions and to those who shared their thoughts, ideas and hopes with us in other ways. We have listened, and we are excited about what lies ahead.”

Henderson said the Board of Trustees of the *Advocate* looks forward to building on its long tradition while finding new and effective ways to serve as a resource for individuals, local churches, districts and the conference in the days to come.

“The methods may change,” Henderson added. “The mission remains.”





Editorial
by Jessica Brodie

The real ‘real world’

I went on my first mission trip in 2012, part of a team through United Methodist Volunteers in Mission that went to Harare, Zimbabwe, to build a church. My second came in 2018, when my husband and I did an UMVIM trip to Puerto Rico to help after hurricanes Irma and Maria. I pray I have the opportunity to do many more in this next season of my life, now that my kids have started college. Beyond UMVIM, I volunteer with Salkehatchie every summer, doing in-state mission work to help people get the home repairs they need to live safely and securely. I’ve seen firsthand how important it is to go into communities and serve in the name of the Lord—not just for the work being done but for the connection, for the way we represent the Lord, for the way shining Christ’s light into a dark circumstance can bring hope and healing and love.

It’s transformed my life as a child of God. This year, UMVIM marks its 50th anniversary. We have two stories in this edition that talk about the impact of this mission and ministry over the years. In one of them, “Half a Century of Hands-On Mission,” Cathy Trevino shared about how, when she came back from a mission trip, a coworker welcomed her back to the “real world.” She told her friend this wasn’t the real world—she gets to experience the true “real world” every time she goes on a mission trip. I could not agree more. These busy lives we lead and all of the priorities we think are important—the diversions that fill our hours and minutes—eclipse the truth: We are only truly alive when we are living and walking in God’s Word and loving others in his name. While this doesn’t have to be on a mission trip, I know I’ve experienced it doing mission. Perhaps you have, too.

My heart was warmed to have the opportunity to talk to the Rev. George Strait at length, getting his story about how UMVIM started all those years ago. He shared how it evolved out of an idea he and the late Dr. Mike Watson had about how laypeople needed an opportunity to do more in their church, needed to use the skills God had given them. The idea opened their eyes, and eventually they started doing medical mission work, first in Anguilla and then Haiti. Today, that initial work is now the official sending agency for The United Methodist Church for short-term mission workers across the globe. It’s a beautiful and powerful thing.

One of the things Rev. Strait said has been haunting me since our conversation. He said, “When United Methodist people know there’s a genuine need, we don’t have any trouble getting it done. And we never have!”

And it’s true! We United Methodists, when we are fully living in the Spirit and walking righteously with generous hearts, are able to accomplish so much in the name of the Lord. Our connection enables us to do far more than we could do alone. When we see a need, we step up.

The *Advocate* is filled countless stories of United Methodist people stepping up in the name of the Lord. From an ice ministry to intergenerational vacation Bible school to mission trips, we respond in Christian love over and over again. We get it done.

I invite you to share your stories with me so we can share them with the other readers across the Palmetto State. How is your church responding in love to the needs in your community? How are you doing this? How are people you know doing this?

I look forward to hearing all of these inspiring stories and sharing them far and wide. “No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house” (Matthew 5:15 NLT).



Bishop’s Column
by Bishop Leonard Fairley

Persevering in the Lord

In keeping with my last *Advocate* article, I’d like to continue that trend of thoughts with the following question. Is perseverance an art or a skill?

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that also clings so closely, and let us with PERSEVERANCE the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Running the race that is set before us as Christian disciples of Jesus Christ requires perseverance, but is perseverance art or skill? If we see perseverance as a skill, it will involve patience as well as the other fruits of the Spirit. It will require resilience and adaptability.

If we see perseverance as an art, it will involve balancing determination with a spirit of flexibility. Perseverance will also require the ability to pivot when conditions or situation call for something different. It will mean moving forward regardless of the circumstances or situations and the willingness to adapt our strategies and plans when necessary.

Whether we see perseverance as art or skill, it must be deeply rooted in the spiritual understanding that God provides a grace sufficient enough through Jesus Christ to make it through anything or anyhow. God grants us a go-ahead spirit that reminds us that “this, too, shall pass”

and “trouble don’t last always.” Perseverance is the Holy Spirit’s work of encouragement, equipping and empowering us to overcome life’s many challenges. One of my all-time favorite books is written by Lakota Native American Joseph M. Marshall titled, “Keep Going: The Art of Perseverance.” The book begins with a young man and his grandfather sitting beneath a cottonwood tree. The young man, who has lost his father to cancer, turns to the old man with a question. It is a question I am sure we’ve all asked in some form or fashion.

“Grandfather,” asks the young man, “why does life have to be so difficult sometimes?” The grandfather begins to share his thoughts on life and the perseverance it takes and the pleasure and pain of the journey. My favorite paragraph of the grandfather’s answer reads like this: “Life can give you strength. Strength can come from facing the storms of life, from knowing loss, feeling sadness and heartache, from falling into the depths of grief. You must stand up in the storm. You must face the wind and the cold and the darkness. When the storm blows hard you must stand firm, for it is not trying to knock you down. It is really trying to teach you to be strong.” Whether you see perseverance as an art or a skill, my word to you today is to keep going. Keep persevering in the Lord!

Letters to the Editor.

Vote

As Greg Howell, a North Carolina AARP volunteer put it, “voting is one of the foundational privileges of our experience in democracy. It’s one of the ways we help write the next chapter in the life of our country.”

The members of Congress elected will help determine the future of issues(gas prices, war in Iran, Social Security, health care) that affect millions and millions of Americans every day. The millionaires will not be hurt but the average person will.

Pray for your country and democracy and the right candidate. Learn about the candidates, understand the issues and then get out and vote. Your Voice and your Vote matter (AARP).

See “Letters,” Page 5

Precious Pet of the Month.

My special Austrian Labradoodle is Lily Noel (as she was born Dec. 28). Lily Noel is supposed to be miniature and does still fall in that category, weight and height wise. In this picture, she just got home from the groomer with her summer cut. I did a lot of research before getting her, knowing she is likely my last of a long line of dogs, which were mostly rescues. I found a breeder in Wake Forest, North Carolina, who worked with Duke on intelligence. And Lily Noel is extremely intelligent. She knows so many commands. At 8 years old, she still has a lot of energy. The only thing I have not been able to break her from is losing her mind when someone comes to the door. And she jumps on visitors and is not happy until she kisses them in the face. Some people don’t mind, but some, especially small children,



Lily Noel

do. I sometimes just put her in the back hall and close the door. Lily Noel is a great traveler. I put her in her harness and put a bath mat on the backseat and fasten her to the headrest. You never know she is there. She never barks, rarely stands up, may lay down some but mostly just sits there. She is certainly a lot of company for me and an excellent squirrel chaser (though she has never caught one).

—Submitted by Diane Wilson, member Disciples United Methodist Church, Greenville 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*; include your name and church name with city. Whether your animal friend is furry or has feathers or scales, we welcome your submission. Email news@advocatesc.org.

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Commentary
by Sandy Thrasher

Day 27: Finding grace
in a hospital room

Today is day 27 and counting of what was supposed to be an overnight hospital stay at the Medical University of South Carolina with my mom. We still don't have a discharge date.

Twenty-seven days. Two major abdominal surgeries. Several procedures. At least one still upcoming. Complications, setbacks, good news, bad news and more ups and downs than I can count. We are still here, trying to find our way back home to Anderson and, hopefully, to rehab.

There was a point before Mom's second major abdominal surgery when we were told she might not make it. If she did, we were told to expect her to wake up in the intensive care unit on a ventilator.

Thankfully, that did not happen. She's still here. And so am I.

Somewhere in these 27 days, I started noticing grace. Sometimes God's grace has been big and unmistakable. It was Mom coming back from that surgery breathing on her own, not a ventilator. It was good news on a scan when I was terrified of what it might show. It was watching her walk after seeing her so incredibly sick.

But I've learned that grace doesn't always arrive with big news.

Sometimes it drives four hours just to sit with you.

Sometimes it is Mom's best friend making that long trip not once but twice.

Sometimes grace looks like clean clothes and toiletries when you've practically moved into a hospital room. Sometimes it's food, jellybeans, flowers, water, Propel, a GrubHub gift card or a Venmo notification that says, in its own way, "Let me take care of this one little thing for you."

Grace has been phone calls and messages. Funny reels. Friends checking on us day after day. Family showing up. Church family praying. Old friends reaching out. People taking care for things at work so I can be here. Nurses who have treated Mom with kindness and understood that sometimes her daughter needed a little reassurance, too.

And sometimes grace has simply been sitting in this room talking with my mom.

We've laughed. We've cried. We've shared memories. We've gotten aggravated. We've been scared. We've celebrated tiny victories that would have seemed completely insignificant just 28 days ago.

I wouldn't have chosen any of this. I would much rather that overnight hospital stay had actually been overnight. But even here, especially here, God has reminded me that we aren't walking through this alone. Maybe we don't always recognize grace when it first arrives. Sometimes we're too tired, scared or overwhelmed to see it. But looking back over these 27 days, I can see it everywhere.

Grace didn't make the hard things disappear. It showed up right in the middle of them.

And maybe that's what grace does best. It finds us where we are. Even in a hospital room.

Thrasher is the co-lay leader for the Anderson District.



Commentary
by the Rev. Joseph
Abram Jr.

Remembering my little
brother Fred

I've been sitting at the word processor daily, trying to proof the manuscript for my third book, and I decided I would go out in the yard to rest my mind and exercise the body.

I stopped to attend to my phone's notification alerts and noticed that one was on the conference concerns line. I saw the call came from what was then the Florence District, next door to my hometown of Marion, announcing the death of the Rev. John Allen Sellers, whom I knew well from our Duke experience and his proud tenure as mayor pro tem of Florence.

Without a second thought, I said in my mind, "I need to call Fred and let him know!"

Suddenly, I realized I could not—for my little brother Fred had also departed this life. I know in my heart that he is gone to a better place, but it is hard to get my head to accept his absence after years of sharing everything, the good and bad.

I eulogized all my brothers except one, Fred, and am the only one left of five. July 27, 2002, on my birthday, I said, "Farewell!" I wrote a poem for you and placed it in my first book so we would not forget:

Rest When The Work is Done

Some assessing your life as folks always do
might conclude that the work was too much and too hard for you.
And even your caring for others was just too much and might also add "this-n-that" and "such-n-such"

But you've always done what your heart says do
because when it was over, you had to live with you
Your heart said, "Always do your best,"
for every word and deed must stand the test.

You gave your best, holding back nothing
Even those who disagreed are saying, "He surely was something"
You made us proud, represented us well
You will not be forgotten—your deeds I promised to tell.

Because you chose work rather than excuses weak you
have that resting place that all men seek
Now the pleased Savior's voice is heard
above all the painful, confused words:
"Sit down, servant, it's been a hard time.
There is no rest in your world, only in mine!"

Thanks for the reminder that when all is said and done
One must be satisfied within oneself and has pleased the Son.

Happy 82nd Birthday(May 16, 2026). Remembering you still with love, gratitude and pride.

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

LETTERS

From Page 4

Read Matthew 25:31-46. Please vote.
*Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia*

A poem: Families of Christ

Families of Christ
draw close to him
With all your faith
and love within.
Support each other
with Jesus to guide;
Let each in peace stand
side by side.
Christ will uphold you,
wach one on your own.
And altogether
his strength will become
The greatest purpose
of all Heaven above
Belonging to Father,
Creator with love.

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

Thank you, South Carolina!

We give God thanks and extend our heartfelt appreciation to the churches and faithful people across the South Carolina United Methodist connection who came together to support the Miracle Sunday Initiative.

Through your generosity, you raised more than \$10,000 to support women and men called to ministry to have opportunities to receive a theological education! This incredible response is a powerful testimony to what can happen when we join together in faith and compassion for those striving and working to lead and guide believers to share the Gospel.

Your gifts will help support the important work of the Miracle Sunday Initiative and make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we are called to serve.

To every congregation, pastor, church leader and individual who gave—thank you! Your generosity reflects the spirit of Christian love and reminds us that when we work together, our collective gifts can become a blessing far beyond what any one of us could accomplish alone.

Thank you for believing in the mission! Thank you for giving generously! Thank you for being a part of the miracle!

May God continue to bless the South Carolina United Methodist connection as we faithfully serve Christ and our communities.

Together, we are making a difference.

*Rev. Faye Jones, associate pastor and
South Carolina Miracle Sunday
Coordinator
Union UMC, Irmo*



Commentary
by Bryce Williams

Can you handle the Golden Ticket?

Everybody wanted the ticket. Not everybody could handle the factory.

Before we get started, I have to give credit where credit is due. This article started the way all great theological discoveries apparently start: I was on TikTok. I came across a video from Desmond Adams, @draydams, using “Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory” to talk about character and what the factory revealed about the children who entered it. Something about it stayed with me.

Then my mind started wandering, and somehow we went from Willy Wonka to Scripture, from Scripture to John Wesley, from Wesley to grace and from grace to justice and politics.

Grab your Golden Ticket. We’re going on a tour.

Everybody wanted that ticket. People were buying Wonka Bars like their lives depended on it. Everybody wanted access to the factory.

But nobody seemed to be asking: Can you actually handle the factory?

Augustus couldn’t control his appetite. Veruca wanted everything now. Violet’s pride and competitiveness got the best of her. Mike was consumed by what had his attention.

The factory didn’t create their problems. The factory revealed what they had never dealt with.

Luke 6:45 teaches us that what comes out of us flows from what’s stored within our hearts. Sometimes it just takes the right “factory” to reveal it.

For some people, that’s money. For others, popularity, leadership, a pulpit, political office or finally receiving the thing they’ve prayed for.

We spend a lot of time asking God for Golden Tickets: “Lord, open this door. Give me this opportunity. Put me in that room.”

Maybe we should add: “Lord, prepare me for what happens after you open the door.”

Because every downfall in Wonka’s factory started with something remarkably simple: an ignored instruction.

Don’t touch that. Touched it.

Don’t eat that. Ate it.

Don’t go over there. Went.

I know those Oompa Loompas were in the break room saying, “Here we go again.”

First Samuel 15:22 reminds us that obedience is better than sacrifice. Sometimes your greatest test isn’t your gift; it’s your obedience.

If getting the promotion costs your integrity, it’s too expensive. If gaining power requires losing your compassion, keep the power. Mark 8:36 asks what good it is to gain the whole world and lose your soul.

You can have the factory, the chocolate river, the glass elevator and the Oompa Loompas. But if getting it requires losing yourself? Keep it.

Then there’s Charlie.

Charlie didn’t have money to buy Wonka Bars by the box. Instead, he unexpectedly found money, bought another bar, opened it and—gold.

Now I’m not telling anybody to go stare at the sidewalk waiting for God to drop \$20. But maybe the blessing doesn’t always come in the box we expected.

And that’s where the Methodist in me got excited. Yes, somehow John Wesley has entered the chocolate factory. Our Wesleyan understanding of grace fits this journey surprisingly well.

Prevenient grace is God’s grace working before we even recognize it—God reaching toward us before we know to reach toward God. Before you found the ticket, grace was already there.

Then comes justifying grace: God’s work through Christ, forgiving and restoring us into right relationship with him. Grace isn’t something we earn by finding the right candy bar, but for our Wonka illustration, justifying grace brings us through the gate.

And Christians sometimes act like getting

through the gate is the end. Ticket punched. Made it. See y’all in heaven!

Except Wesley would probably be standing near the chocolate river saying, “We’re not finished.”

Because then comes sanctifying grace—God continuing to shape us, correct us and help us grow in love.

So on our strange theological tour: Prevenient grace is God working before the ticket. Justifying grace brings us through the gate. Sanctifying grace walks with us through the factory.

The factory isn’t just life. The factory is the journey. And grace doesn’t just get us inside. Grace changes who we are while we’re there.

Wesley taught about going on toward Christian perfection—not becoming flawless, but growing toward perfect love of God and neighbor.

And that’s where Wonka suddenly becomes very real.

Everybody is fighting for a Golden Ticket: money, influence, leadership, recognition, political power. But maybe we’ve spent so much time asking who can get the ticket that we’ve forgotten to ask who can handle the factory.

Can you have authority without abusing it? Can you lead people who disagree with you without treating them as less human? Can you fight for somebody else’s rights as hard as your own? Can you enter rooms of power and remember the people who couldn’t get through the door?

Because if your Golden Ticket gets you into rooms of power but makes you forget the people outside the gates, then somewhere along the tour you missed the point.

And that’s not only for politicians. It’s for pastors, churches, community leaders, young people, me—and you. If we Methodists are going to talk about grace, people ought to see evidence of it. Grace should make us more loving, compassionate and concerned about justice.

Which brings us back to Charlie.

When everything he’d dreamed about was placed before him, Charlie still understood what mattered: family, love and people. His relationship with Wonka even helped Wonka confront his own brokenness surrounding family.

Charlie didn’t just inherit a factory. In his own way, he helped restore a family. Maybe real leadership isn’t, “Look what I got.” Maybe it’s, “Look what became better because God allowed me to be here.”

So pray for your Golden Ticket. Dream big. Walk through open doors. Speak up. Fight for justice. But while you’re praying for the ticket, pray for character, too.

God, give me enough humility that success doesn’t make me arrogant. Enough courage to stand for what’s right when it costs me something. Enough compassion that power never makes me stop seeing people. And enough grace that when I walk into everything I’ve prayed for, I don’t lose myself inside of it.

Everybody wants the Golden Ticket. But by the grace of God, may we become people who can actually handle the factory.

The chocolate river is still flowing. The Great Glass Elevator is waiting. The Oompa Loompas have clocked out. And somewhere, John Wesley is probably wondering how he ended up in a chocolate factory.

Yet here we are.

Thus you have read the Chronicles of Wonka.

Go forth in grace. Do good. Love God. Love people. Fight for what’s right. And please—stay out of the chocolate river.

Williams’ home church is Camden First UMC, Camden. He currently attends the Williston Charge, where his mother serves as pastor.



Humanity
Behind Bars
by the Rev. Nichole
Middleton

What will we do with
what we heard?

This summer, I had the sacred privilege of serving as primary caregiver to a loved one after a medical issue made independent living difficult. For 70 days, I listened deeply, made memories and experienced one of the greatest honors of my life.

Ministry taught me. Prison showed me. And caregiving reminded me that listening is a spiritual discipline.

But listening is not the destination.

It creates a responsibility: What will we do with what we heard?

As a prison chaplain, I have learned that people often tell us what they need. Sometimes their words are clear. Sometimes their stories are complicated. Sometimes what they say challenges what we thought we knew.

The temptation is to listen, nod, feel compassion—and then return to business as usual.

But if we are serious about loving our neighbors, listening should change us. And if it changes us, it should eventually change what we do.

This is where ministry gets harder.

It is one thing to ask a community what it needs. It is another to allow the answer to influence our priorities, reshape our programs, redirect our resources or challenge assumptions we have held for years.

Imagine a congregation learns that people returning home from incarceration do not primarily need another food basket or to be “fixed.” They need relationship—help navigating employment, transportation, housing, relationships and the stigma that follows them long after they leave prison.

What happens next?

Do we create another program because programs are what we know how to do?

Or do we pause long enough to ask, What would it look like to become the kind of partner our neighbors are actually asking for?

That question requires discernment.

It may mean changing an existing ministry rather than creating something new. It may mean inviting people with lived experience into leadership. It may mean partnering with organizations that already do something well. It may mean admitting that the Church cannot meet every need—and deciding where it can contribute meaningfully.

Most importantly, it means allowing what we heard to have genuine influence over what happens next.

Good ministry is not simply about having compassion. It is about translating compassion into faithful action.

Before launching the next outreach initiative, perhaps churches should ask:

What did we hear? What surprised us? What needs to change because of what we heard? And who should help us decide what comes next?

The answers may reveal that the most faithful response is not another program at all.

It may be a partnership.

It may be advocacy.

It may be a new way of using the resources already in our hands.

Or it may be the courage to begin something we have never tried before.

The church has no shortage of people willing to serve. What we need are ministries shaped by the people and communities they are intended to serve.

Listening opens the door.

Discernment tells us where to walk.

And faithful action is what happens when we are willing to walk through that door together.

Because sometimes the next faithful step is not to do more.

It is to do differently.

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



Commentary
by the Rev. Daniel
Flessas

44 days in Kyiv: A Methodist elder’s plea to stand with Ukraine

Editor’s note: Flessas, a South Carolina United Methodist elder, spent 44 days from Aug. 19 to Oct. 4 in Kyiv, Ukraine, volunteering at a kitchen that preps dehydrated meals and sends them to frontline Ukrainian troops.

An airport sign in Krakow, Poland, caught my attention when I was there in August. In a 1991 sermon, Pope John Paul II said, “True civilization does not consist in power, but is the fruit of victories over oneself, over the forces of injustice, selfishness and hatred, which are capable of distorting the true face of the human.”

In early October, I return from 44 days in Kyiv, Ukraine. While there, I heard, felt and witnessed the destruction that Russian ballistic, hypersonic and cruise missile attacks and jet-powered drones do to people, their homes and their livelihoods. Corrupted, distorted, Vladimir Putin has nothing life-giving to offer Ukrainians.

Civilian deaths in Ukraine were higher this summer than at any time since the beginning of Russia’s full scale war. Some days in Kyiv, air raid sirens and alert apps sounded around the clock. Disruption of daily life is the norm. The toll of death and destruction is similar in Kharkiv, Kherson, Sumy, Zaporizhzhia and Odesa, not to mention the battlefield.

A resident of Bucha, where many were massacred in 2022, drove me around the city and shared with me how Russian soldiers occupied his family’s home for a month. A resident of Avdiivka, near Donetsk, recalled how the Russian military razed her home after she evacuated and turned the town into a “bandit mafia hole.” A former resident of Kherson recalled how she feared for the life of her aunt, niece, herself and another woman as they evacuated and drove 20 hours in fear through 20 Russian checkpoints on their way to Odesa, normally a three-hour trip. This is also the city where a vegetable vendor this summer suffered a concussion and shrapnel injuries after a Russian drone operator “safari” hunted him. A young adult who was a courageous veteran of the 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests in Kyiv told me how bloggers encouraged the spread of lies about Ukrainians in Crimea as a pretext for the “little green men” invasion there in 2014.

“This is what they do,” she said. My assessment is that Putin only wants Ukraine to surrender and is using a false narrative about Russian and Ukrainian history, alleged wins on the battlefield and fear of what a strong, sovereign Ukraine with allies would do, to keep the United States on his side.

Sooner or later, we will pay a price for siding with a bully and continuing to not hold Putin accountable. The Russian military went almost all the way to Kyiv in 2022. It will not hesitate to return for more of Ukraine when the Donbas and other areas are gifted to them. Be clear-eyed about the parallel of the 1930s and 1940s. Our children



Photos courtesy of the author

Above is a building in Kyiv damaged in a Russian attack. The damage to adjacent buildings was much wider than shown here. Below is a memorial wall to massacre victims in Bucha at the Church of St. Andrew the First-Sent.



and grandchildren will fight this war in a more direct way later if we continue to turn aside as if this is not our concern.

In the middle of a ballistic missile attack one night, what washed over me the most was the frustration that if by some chance I got hit (I was in an area of the city not often targeted), the U.S. could have done and said much more to hold Putin accountable.

As you read this, I urge you and other South Carolina United Methodists to get behind Ukraine. You can:

1. Pray for the strength to tell people in power, “Support Ukraine, not Putin.” Then, speak to them with courage.
2. Fly a Ukrainian flag.
3. Follow events there by reading the Kyiv Independent and Kyiv Post.
4. Help fund authorized NGOs in Ukraine.
5. Volunteer in Ukraine (<https://volunteeringukraine.com>), realizing the risks in doing so.

What do U.S. and other international volunteers do there? They clear debris from and board up windows in damaged residences. They deliver ambulances, work in kitchens and put together camouflage netting. For example, I worked in a kitchen that dehydrated and packaged food and sent it to “Zero Line” Ukrainian soldiers. I’d be happy to discuss my experience with you and how you can help.

The critical thing I would ask you to do is this: Do not stand for the distorted truth that distracts us from helping a country that was invaded and plundered, whose many children were abducted and relocated, whose civilians are purposely killed every day and whose existence hangs in the balance.

We should want both Ukrainians and Russians to thrive. But the U.S. and those who represent us need to help create the conditions for that to happen.

United Methodist insurance announces updates to proper coverage standards

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The General Council on Finance and Administration has approved changes to the Proper Insurance Coverage Standards.

The changes were made following a review of commercial insurance offerings, policies sold through the United Methodist Insurance Program (UMIP), programs and recommendations offered by our Annual Conferences and other denominations and considerations related to the need for proper coverage. The updates provide more nuanced figures by addressing three size categories instead of the two groupings used in prior documents.

The new standards now address inland marine coverage, boiler and machinery/equipment breakdown, earthquake and flood insurance.

Additional guidance on the use of functional replacement valuation for property insurance can help churches to make sure the savings justify any additional risk retained. Churches in states with monopolistic workers compensation programs (North Dakota, Ohio, Washington and Wyoming) should be aware that their policies do not include employers liability and they should purchase this coverage separately.

Lower limits of misconduct coverage may be purchased if the state limits damage, but churches should also be aware that legal fees are a significant part of any claim.

“The document also reminds churches that there are circumstances that may require them to purchase additional limits or coverages,” said Jeff Koch, president and CEO of the United Methodist Insurance Company. “Churches continue to be responsible for maintaining proper coverage which may include higher limits and additional coverages. We recommend that these decisions be made in consultation with a licensed insurance advisor experienced in the church market.”

Koch added, “Also, if they are part of an Annual Conference program they may have limited options, but access to premium, terms and limits they may not get by shopping on their own.”

GCFA General Secretary Caitlin Congdon said, “This update provides important guidance for our churches on a key part of stewardship. Our ministries should make sure that coverage is available to help protect the people, property and finances of the United Methodist Church.”

These documents are available at <https://www.gcfa.org/resource/umc-minimum-insurance-requirements>.

Senior adults share lunch, fellowship, old-school gospel

By Debi Young
COLUMBIA—“Daytimers,” the senior adult group at Virginia Wingard Memorial United Methodist Church, enjoyed a monthly meeting Sept. 3.

The gathering included fellowship, a covered-dish lunch and special musical entertainment by the Greenview Community Old School Gospel Choir, a local gospel choir based at Greenview Park in Columbia.

The choir, made up of senior adults, performs traditional, soulful, “old school” feel-good gospel music for community gatherings, seasonal celebrations and heritage events. Through partnerships with local service programs and neighborhood associations, they bring music and fellowship to the community.

Directed by Linda Barnes, the group of 20-25 singers sings entirely without instruments.

Contact the Greenview Park Community Rec Center administrative staff (803-754-5223) for more information about booking the group for your event.

Young is church program director for Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC, Columbia.

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Church property lawsuits consolidated before one judge

By Jessica Brodie

The 68 lawsuits the South Carolina Conference filed over churches seeking to separate from the denomination with their property are now consolidated before Sixth Judicial Circuit Judge Brian M. Gibbons.

On July 31, Gibbons signed a consent order, agreed to by attorneys on both sides, consolidating the cases for all pretrial, discovery, motion and case-management purposes.

The cases are not consolidated for trial, though the parties may seek that later.

The case against Aldersgate Methodist Church of Greenwood serves as the lead case, and the others will proceed under its caption, The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, et al v. Aldersgate Methodist Church of Greenwood, et al.

Aldersgate is the first in the alphabetized list of the 68 churches involved (see full list below).

The order follows about a year filled with motions to dismiss the lawsuits from defendants and oppositions to that dismissal from plaintiffs; those are not yet resolved.

The order noted that each lawsuit shall retain its separate case number and individual identity.

“It does not merge the actions into a single cause for purposes of final judgment or appeal, does not effect a substantive joinder of the claims or parties asserted in the separate actions, and does not alter the burden of proof or the rights of any party in any individual action,” the order states.

James Becker, partner with Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd in Columbia, who is representing the conference in litigation said the lawsuits center on property.

“What’s at issue is who—between the parties to the dispute—gets to keep and control the local property, both real and personal, of the local church,” he said in October during the special called session of Annual Conference.

Becker also said then that he anticipates the first order of business will be addressing the motions to dismiss.

“We recognize that these legal matters are important and must work their way through the appropriate process,” said Dan O’Mara, director of communications for the South Carolina Conference. “At the same time, the South Carolina Conference and more than 600 local United Methodist churches remain focused on what God has called us to do: ministry in our communities. Across South Carolina, United Methodists are feeding people who are hungry, caring for our neighbors, nurturing children and young people,

making disciples and sharing the love of Jesus Christ. We are moving forward together, seeing the possibilities and living the promises.”

Background on the case

The case originated when defendant churches indicated in writing they planned to separate from the South Carolina Conference of the UMC, mainly over theological differences about human sexuality. (In 2024, the UMC General Conference voted to change its stance on homosexuality, removing language from the *Discipline* that said homosexuality was “incompatible with Christian teaching” and removing bans on the ordination of LGBTQ+ clergy and same-sex marriages. These churches disagreed with this.)

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

A number of churches continued separating anyway, some removing the “united” from their name and informing the conference they wished to leave the denomination but keep their property. However, the trust clause in Para. 2501 of the *UMC Book of Discipline* provides that all property and assets of any local United Methodist church are held “in trust” for the benefit of the entire denomination. Those churches remain the property of the UMC if a congregation decides to break ties with the denomination.

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

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

In October 2025, in South Carolina Conference of the UMC et al. vs. Fort Lawn Methodist et al., the conference gave notice of South Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice John Kittredge’s Aug. 13 order, asking Gibbons to hear the case.

In February 2026, after defendants’ motions to dismiss, the conference asked the court to deny the defendants’ motions to dismiss in the case.

On March 11, the conference filed an amended complaint.

On March 12, defendants filed an om-

nibus reply in support of their motion to dismiss and, on March 18, a memorandum of law in support of the motion to dismiss.

On March 27, the conference filed an omnibus memorandum of law in opposition to defendants’ motion to dismiss.

On April 2, defendants filed an omnibus reply in support of motions to dismiss.

On July 31, Gibbons issued the consent order of consolidation.

Expected next to be addressed are the motions above.

What are the arguments?

The conference argues the denominational trust clause prohibits churches from being able to leave the denomination and keep their property.

Defendants argue the court should not hear the case because it involves internal church matters and religious doctrines, and because they argue the UMC trust clause does not comply with South Carolina law. They also argue the plaintiffs lack legal standing to challenge defendants’ actions.

Which are the 68 churches in the consolidated lawsuits?

- Aldersgate UMC, Greenwood County
- Andrews Chapel UMC, Clarendon County
- Bellingers Chapel UMC, Allendale County
- Bethel UMC of Bethune, Kershaw County
- Bethlehem UMC of Pamplico, Florence County
- Bethsaida UMC, Florence County
- Beulah UMC, Calhoun County
- Bogansville UMC, Union County
- Boiling Springs UMC, Lexington County
- Brunson UMC, Hampton County
- Calhoun Falls UMC, Abbeville County
- Camp Swamp UMC, Horry County
- Canaan UMC, Cherokee County
- Dickson Memorial UMC, Oconee County
- East Bethel UMC, Calhoun County
- Ebenezer UMC, Abbeville, Abbeville County
- Ebenezer UMC, Bennettsville, Marlboro County
- Emma Gray Memorial UMC, Spartanburg County
- Folly Beach UMC, Charleston County
- Fork Creek UMC, Chesterfield County
- Fort Lawn UMC, Chester County
- Good Shepherd UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County
- Gordon Memorial UMC, Fairfield County
- Grace UMC, Union, Union County

- Greenbrier UMC, Fairfield County
- Hardeeville UMC, Jasper County
- Hopewell UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County
- Jackson Grove UMC, Greenville County
- Jefferson UMC, Chesterfield County
- Livingston UMC, Orangeburg County
- Lupo Memorial UMC, Greenwood County
- Lynchburg UMC, Lee County
- McLeod UMC, Richland County
- Montgomery Memorial UMC, Spartanburg County
- Monticello UMC, Fairfield County
- Mount Zion UMC of Sandy Run, Calhoun County
- Nichols UMC, Marion County
- Panola UMC, Greenwood County
- Paxville UMC, Clarendon County
- Philadelphia UMC of York, York County
- Pinewood UMC, Sumter County
- Pleasant Hill UMC, Bamberg County
- Providence UMC of Holly Hill, Orangeburg County
- Quinby UMC, Florence County
- Rehoboth UMC of Greenwood, Greenwood County
- Republican UMC of McCormick, McCormick County
- Salem UMC of Pageland, Chesterfield County
- Sampit UMC, Georgetown County
- St. James UMC, Laurens, Laurens County
- St. John UMC of Columbia, Richland County
- St. John UMC of Graniteville, Aiken County
- St. Luke UMC, Elliott, Lee County
- St. Luke UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County
- St. Paul UMC, Florence, Florence County
- Summerton UMC, Clarendon County
- Swallow Savannah UMC, Allendale County
- Tabor UMC, Pickens County
- Trinity UMC, Bamberg, Bamberg County
- Trinity UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County
- Trinity UMC, Laurens, Laurens County
- Trinity UMC, Lynchburg, Sumter County
- Trinity UMC, Smoaks, Colleton County
- Union UMC of Cope, Orangeburg County
- Van Wyck UMC, Lancaster County
- Wesley Memorial UMC, Charleston, Charleston County
- West Bethel UMC, Calhoun County
- Zion UMC, Dorchester, Dorchester County
- Zion UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County



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Smyrna UMC to celebrate 181 years of service

BENNETTSVILLE—Family and friends are invited to share in Smyrna United Methodist Church’s annual homecoming service Oct. 11 at 10 a.m.

The Rev. Anthony Alford from the Marion Parish (Bethel, Pleasant Grove and Springville UMCs), will deliver the homecoming message. Dinner will be served immediately following morning worship.

The theme for this year is “Because of God’s Amazing Grace” as Smyrna celebrates 181 years of gratefulness.

The church is located on Burnt Factory Road in the Lester Community of Bennettsville. Maurice McZeke pastors the Bennettsville Parish, which consists of Smyrna, Shiloh and St. Michael UMCs.

The theme is “Because of God’s Amazing Grace.”

Photo courtesy of Betty P. Mailloy

8 | October 2026

Advocate



Over three days, participants worked through a journey of listening, loving, serving, visioning, gathering, discipling and worshiping. (See all photos of LIFT at <https://go.advocatesc.org/liftpics>.)

LIFT challenges South Carolina United Methodists to find the mission field right outside their doors

By Kate Ritchey and Dan O'Mara
COLUMBIA—The mission field may be closer than the church thinks.

It may be across the street, around the corner or among people who have never considered walking through the doors of a United Methodist church.

That was one of the challenges facing church leaders at LIFT Innovation Launch Pad, a three-day gathering from the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church focused on helping congregations listen to their communities, experiment with new approaches to ministry and build relationships with people beyond the walls of the church.

Held at Journey UMC Sept. 1-3, LIFT (Launching, Innovation, Fresh Expressions and Transformation) was led by Dr. George A. Ashford, director of Innovation & Strategy for the conference. Bishop Leonard Fairley joined the gathering along with Dr. Paul Nixon, Dr. Michael Adam Beck and Dr. Olu Brown.

Rather than beginning with the question, “How do we get more people into church?” participants were challenged to begin by going into their communities and listening.

Active and deeper listening emerged as a central theme. Congregations were encouraged to learn the needs, hopes and concerns of their neighbors instead of assuming they already know them. One practical challenge was simple: intentionally meet two to five new people every week.

That also means paying attention to the neighbor-



Held at Journey UMC Sept. 1-3, LIFT (Launching, Innovation, Fresh Expressions and Transformation) was led by Dr. George A. Ashford, director of Innovation & Strategy for the conference.

hood immediately surrounding a church, even when many of the congregation’s existing members commute from somewhere else.

Fairley encouraged leaders not to become discouraged when new approaches to ministry take time.

“Do not get weary in well doing,” Fairley said. “Keep getting together like this, keep trying new things, keep doing these things; let it become like a spiritual discipline.”

That spirit of experimentation carried through the gathering.

Nixon helped participants explore church revitalization and ways congregations can break out of traditional ministry paradigms. Beck led a Fresh Expressions learning experience focused on cultivating new forms of Christian community alongside existing congregations, particularly among people who do not attend traditional worship. Brown addressed leadership, transition and preparing congregations for what comes next.

But LIFT was designed to move beyond ideas.

Over three days, participants worked through a ministry journey of listening, loving, serving, visioning, gathering, discipling and worshiping.

The gathering concluded by organizing peer cohorts designed to provide accountability as leaders return home and begin putting their ideas into practice.

The gathering was grounded in John 12:32: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

For South Carolina United Methodists, the message of LIFT was ultimately less about finding the next church program and more about rediscovering the church’s missionary calling—listening to people, building relationships, making disciples and being willing to try something new.

As one of the gathering’s central messages reminded participants, “The future of ministry is not somewhere down the road. The mission field is in front of us right now.”

Forgotten chimes ring again at Whitmire UMC

In June, when Karen Kirchel became the pastor at Whitmire United Methodist Church, Whitmire, her husband found some old chimes lying on the floor of the church’s sound room.

He had to move the chimes to fix the amplification system, Kirchel said, and he thought he could turn the chimes into something that could be played, so he asked the Church Council and trustees if he could do something with them.

Inspired, her husband created a keyboard that plays the chimes. Then he and Kirchel and a good friend transported the chimes back to the church and set them up so Kirchel could play them.

Fascinating to them all was a history of the chimes, which her husband also found.

As he discovered, the chimes were dedicated to Whitmire in memory of Mrs. Fannie Mae Henderson Abrams by her husband, Marvin Eugene Abrams, in 1946. The Abramses had two children, Lucy and Margaret.

Marvin Abrams was a prominent businessman and community member of Newberry County. He served as state senator for Newberry County for 20 years, as well as the director of the Whitmire Bank and the clerk of the Town of Whitmire.

While he was the chairman of the Whitmire School Board of Trustees, Abrams was instrumental in having the high school erected and secured the funds necessary to



Kirchel stands with the chimes.

build the Whitmire Library. As a member of Whitmire UMC, he served as steward for 50 years and Sunday schoolsuperintendent.

The bridge that spans the Enoree River (along U.S. Highway 176 and South Carolina Highways 72 and 121 in Newberry and Union counties) is named for him.

The chimes were made by the Rowland H. Mayland Company of Brooklyn, New York. Mayland received his patent for a chime design in 1900. They went into production in 1913 and were discontinued in 1916, the same year of his death.

To see a reel of Kirchel playing the chimes, visit <https://go.advocatesc.org/chimes>.



Wrapped in Love
Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville, marked a day of faith, fellowship and love as members celebrated their Annual Tea during worship. The event was sponsored by our United Women in Faith. First Lady the Rev. Millie N. Smith shared a powerful and uplifting message titled “Wrapped in Love.” Her message reminded all of the importance of surrounding one another with God’s love, grace, compassion and encouragement. Organizers said they are grateful for their United Women in Faith for creating such a beautiful celebration and for everyone who participated and helped make this special day a blessing. (See more photos at <https://go.advocatesc.org/sandhill-tea2026>.)

UMVIM’S GEORGE STRAIT

From Page 1

Strait, who pastored the Edisto Charge not far from Bamberg, had a number of congregation members who saw Dr. Watson for their medical needs, and he respected the man.

“We became good friends who talked about things like the church and medicine and life and all those kinds of things,” Strait recalled.

Watson was active at then-Trinity Methodist Church in Bamberg, and the two had a passion for enabling people to serve the church with the gifts God gave them.

“We both felt really there were so many things that laypeople could do in the church in terms of serving if they just had an opportunity to do it,” Strait said, chuckling as he noted they didn’t always want to just go water flowers. “They wanted to use the skills they had.”

When Strait moved to pastor a church in Prosperity, the men remained friends, and their interests continued to mirror each other. By then Strait was the district missionary secretary and on the Annual Conference Board of Missions, and Watson had been elected chair of the Minimum Salary Commission (now the Board of Equitable Compensation), serving ex officio on the Conference Board of Missions.

At the time, the denomination had a world division (located in New York), a national division, a women’s division and a Methodist Committee on Relief, and the two wrote to the world division pitching ways that laypeople and clergy could work together to help in missions.

“They weren’t being ugly, but they basically said ‘we’re the professionals and you leave that to us,’” Strait said. “That was the way things worked back then.”

But they kept thinking “outside the box,” Strait said. They wanted to start some sort of organized mission opportunity for people to do God’s work on behalf of the church.

Meanwhile, Strait said, there had been concern in the church about whether the National Council of Churches had ties to communism, a growing issue of the day.

Watson, who had investigated this and discovered no substance to those rumors, was asked by then-South Carolina Bishop Paul Hardin Jr. if he’d be willing to be a member of the NCC. Watson agreed, and out of those NCC meetings, he came to know Dr. Harry Haines, of the Committee on Relief.

Soon, Haines invited Watson to be part of the Committee on Relief, an invitation he accepted, and eventually

Watson became its medical advisor.

“That was really sort of the opening door that helped us,” Strait said.

Strait and Watson got to know a new conference staffer, the Rev. David Reese, who worked with the district missionary secretaries promoting missions. Reese shared that he’d heard a group out of Myers Park UMC, Charlotte, was organizing a mission trip to send 27 people to three different countries on the continent of Africa, so the three decided to go learn more about the trip and see if it was something South Carolina could emulate.

The visit proved fruitful.

“We came away knowing this could be done,” Strait said.

Then came the phone call that changed everything. In 1968, Watson got a call from Dr. James Thomas, associate director of the Committee on Relief, who told Watson about a medical need in Anguilla, an island in the Caribbean with 6,000 people. The doctor there had retired, and the new doctor wasn’t a good fit—and they would have no doctor to help the people of Anguilla after Jan. 1, 1969.

Thomas asked Watson to go there and investigate whether there was a way the church could help.

Watson agreed and left for Anguilla two days later, where he saw the vast need firsthand.

Upon his return, Watson called Strait.

“He said, ‘I told them that South Carolina would send a doctor every two weeks to Anguilla for the first six months of 1969. And I’m going to need your help!’” Strait remembered.

The friends lined up help and sent 12 doctors to Anguilla over six months, and while they had some hiccups, Strait said, “Overall it went quite well.”

When the doctors who had been to Anguilla came back, they wanted to share about what they’d done and seen, so Strait, Watson, the other doctors and like-minded missionaries began to meet at The Market Restaurant on Assembly Street across from the Statehouse in Columbia.

“It was an exciting time as people shared their enthusiasm,” he said. “They were just grateful to help.”

Then Haines asked Watson if he’d make a similar trip to Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

“Dr. Haines told Mike, ‘That’s the saddest, most needful place that I’ve seen with the poverty and the sickness and all that—why don’t you go and see if there is something South Carolina can



One of the special projects UMVIM started with the late Dr Hal Crosswell Jr. (pictured far left) was the Eye Clinic in Jérémie, Haiti, west of Port-au-Prince. Here, the eye team prepares to travel to the eye clinic.

do?” Strait recalled.

Watson and his brother Joe, an agricultural scientist, did just that. They discovered children didn’t live very long there; roughly half died from tetanus just after birth.

“Mike said, ‘Well, obviously we could do something with that,’” Strait said, and soon South Carolina’s program in Haiti began.

They established an immunization clinic and gave diphtheria and tetanus shots in rounds of three—the first in early 1970, the second midyear and the third in September 1970, with Strait on the team—all in the hills of Jérémie, Haiti, west of Port-au-Prince.

Throughout all that time, the growing group kept meeting regularly on Tuesday nights at a church and with a meal—a tradition they continue today on the first Tuesday of each month.

Strait said the work of the newly forming group felt natural, coming out of a Christian response to a perceived need.

Eventually, Watson and South Carolina pastor the Rev. Needham Williamson got on a steering committee for the Southeastern Jurisdiction, out of which the name UMVIM arose.

By 1976, UMVIM had become an agency of the SEJ Administrative Council, and in 1980 it was sanctioned by the UMC General Conference.

Today, all these years after his close friend’s first trip to Anguilla, Strait continues to be inspired and heartened by the work they started and the work that continues.

“We didn’t have any great outline then. When people saw something, they asked, ‘Why can’t we ... ?’ and that is what we worked on.”

Strait said that’s what God’s people do—they respond out of Christian love.

“When God puts something on a person’s heart and when they see the need or hear about the need, they do it,” Strait said. “When United Methodist people know there’s a genuine need, we don’t have any trouble getting it done. And we never have!”

Now 93, Strait looks back at those early years with fondness and gratitude.

Seeing the work that has evolved “has been wonderful,” he said.

“I’ve met some marvelous people,” Strait said.

“The things that UMVIM has done, the volunteers that have gone, the money that has been raised and the lives that have been changed—you know, that’s a rich, rewarding kind of feeling that has given people an opportunity to be what God’s called us to be.”

UMC Disaster Response launches online ERT renewals, more trainings

South Carolina United Methodist Disaster Response has some exciting new updates.

In addition to two more Early Response Team trainings this fall—Saturday, Oct. 10, at Sand Hill United Methodist Church, Ridgeville, and Saturday, Nov. 7, at Dacusville UMC, Easley—the ministry is now launching online ERT renewals.

They now have six ERT trainers in the state, and they are currently seeking district disaster response coordinators.

As well, if your church offers a ramp building ministry, they want to know; contact the Rev. LaTonya Dash, conference Disaster Response coordinator, at ldmdash@umcsc.org.

Finally, churches who are seeking to serve as Red Cross sites or renew their status as such should contact Dash to let her know.

To sign up for ERT trainings, register at <http://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration> and complete a background check.

Advocate.

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Half a century of hands-on mission

UMVIM-SC gathers Oct. 6 to celebrate ministry’s 50th anniversary

By Jessica Brodie

It all started in the 1950s as the Christian response of a Bamberg physician, Dr. Mike Watson, and some mission-minded Christians, particularly United Methodist pastor the Rev. George Strait.

The two friends were inspired by the notion that laypeople could use their God-given skills and passions to help within the church, and the idea built slowly between them.

“We both felt really there were so many things that laypeople could do in the church in terms of serving,” Strait, now 93, told the Advocate.

And when Watson was invited to travel to the island of Anguilla in 1968 to investigate the dire medical needs there, he returned with a plan: Send doctors. Send help.

Out of that, and fueled by the passion of dozens of committed Christian people who began meeting monthly to learn more and support each other in overseas mission and ministry, the nascent framework of what would one day become United Methodist Volunteers in Mission was born.

And now, 50 years after it officially became an SEJ agency, UMVIM-South Carolina is gathering Oct. 6 to mark a half-century of Christian love in action.

Held at Grace UMC, Columbia, the anniversary celebration will begin at 6 p.m. and feature a meal and program highlighting the many missions and ministries of UMVIM around the world.

Back in the 1960s, the group met casually, gathering for a meal at The Market Restaurant on Assembly Street across from the Statehouse in Columbia once a month to hear from the doctor who had just been to Anguilla and to bolster whoever was going next.

But help in Anguilla soon evolved to help in Haiti, too. And the needs—and awareness about them—just kept growing.

Four years later, in 1972, a group of individuals from the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the UMC—including Watson and South Carolina’s the Rev. Needham Williamson—formed a steering committee that would organize what became UMVIM. By 1976, UMVIM had become an agency of the SEJ Administrative Council, and in 1980 it was sanctioned by the UMC General Conference.

Today a denominational sending ministry that has deployed half a million volunteers on short-term mission trips around the world, UMVIM offers disaster relief, construction mission work and community care, including medical and dental clinics, teaching and youth programs through the efforts of laypeople and clergy locally, nationally and globally.

Yet its roots are in South Carolina. Those involved with UMVIM say the ministry isn’t a casual one. In fact, a popular saying acknowledges that once you get bitten by “the mission bug,” you never really get over it.

Jim Smith, UMVIM-SC chair, did his first UMVIM trip in 1981, when the late Rev. Nick Elliott invited him to help build a school in the mountains above Jérémie, Haiti.

“I’ve been involved ever since,” Smith said, noting he’s been all over South America with UMVIM and on



Here, an UMVIM volunteer works on a home in Puerto Rico damaged by a hurricane.

many trips within the United States after natural disasters, and he plans to go to Guatemala in October.

Smith remembers the first time he realized how crucial their work is in the places UMVIM serves. He’d been eating a can of tuna with some crackers on their lunch break, and he set the can down on the window ledge next to him.

“All of a sudden this hand grabbed that can,” Smith recalled. “It was a little girl, and I looked out and she was taking her finger and running it around the can to see what she could get.

“I knew right then I could make a difference. And I hope I have made a difference.”

The Rev. Cynthia Taylor has been involved with UMVIM for 17 years. To date she’s served on 11 international teams and one domestic team, and she is the team leader trainer for South Carolina and has served on UMVIM-SC’s executive board for more than a decade.

“UMVIM is a great organization of the South Carolina Conference,” Taylor said, noting it provides resources, including training, guidelines, connectional opportunities and financial grants for teams who are called to mission.

“I continue to be enthusiastically involved in UMVIM as I continue to live out my calling to love and to serve. My experience of working alongside fellow missionaries has taught me a great deal

about our connection and about forming lasting connections with my siblings in Christ,” she said.

Taylor noted she’s learned over the years that the most important task in missions has little to do with the trip’s stated purpose, whether building, medical care or education.

“Our most important task is to simply be present so that those we encounter will surely know they are seen and known and loved by God who sends us,” Taylor said.

Cathy Trevino, UMVIM-SC’s secretary, said her UMVIM work started in 2009. She was a relatively new Christian and had been a member of St. Mark UMC, Greenwood, for about 18 months when she learned the church was sponsoring a trip to Panama to work alongside a missionary they supported, the Rev. Rhett Thompson.

“One of the guys in a Bible study I was taking asked me if I would be interested in going,” Trevino recalled; the man and the study’s co-leader had both taken the UMVIM Team Leader training and were taking a team that had been approved by UMVIM-SC.

Trevino remembers being nervous but excited—and a little hesitant.

“I didn’t know if I could afford it,” she said.

But her friend said they’d be having a large yard sale fundraiser, and anyone who helped would get a portion of the

funds to go toward their trip costs.

“That was the start of my mission trips,” Trevino said. “That first trip had me hooked. I can remember going back to work after one trip and a coworker saying, ‘Welcome back to the real world!’ I replied, ‘Oh, honey, this isn’t the real world!’ I got to see the real world every time I joined an UMVIM team.”

Since then, Trevino has been on seven UMVIM trips—five as a team member and two as a co-leader—to Tanzania, Ecuador, Panama, Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

“I have painted, mixed concrete, helped with VBS, moved dirt, but most of all I was the hands and feet of Christ. My favorite times were always the times we were able to fellowship with our hosts and play games with the children, to watch their faces light up when bubbles were blown, or we put on a puppet show or sang songs.”

Smith said UMVIM volunteers have served around the world and work closely with the United Methodist Committee on Relief to assist after natural disasters. UMVIM has also spawned other missions, including the eye clinic at the Methodist Project at Gebeau in Jérémie, Haiti, founded by late South Carolina ophthalmologist Dr. Hal H. Crosswell Jr.

UMVIM’s motto, Christian love in action, comes from 1 John 3:18, as the apostle urges God’s children to “not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (NIV).

“It’s hands-on mission,” Smith added.

Strait said watching UMVIM evolve from the budding idea between him and Watson and other United Methodists into the worldwide sending agency it is today has been “wonderful.”

(Read his story, Page 10.)

For more on UMVIM and UMVIM-SC, visit <https://www.umcsc.org/outreach-2/volunteers-in-mission> or <https://umvim.org>.

There is no cost to attend the Oct. 6 UMVIM anniversary dinner. RSVP by Oct. 2 to cathy24@yahoo.com.



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BOOKS MINISTRY

From Page 1

Then she got an idea: What if their church could figure out a way to put books in the homes of local children, particularly those in low-income families without the resources to get books of their own?

She took it to the church, which immediately got behind her to help.

“We started small, just walking into local public housing places,” Fry said. “I’d introduce myself and say we’d like to put books out on a table on Saturday.”

The children responded so eagerly that Fry and her team soon realized they needed a standing rack to hold all the books they were collecting. Eventually they began taking books (and book racks) to other places—hair salons, the laundry rooms of two local apartment complexes, a counseling center, the church preschool, an Horry County nonprofit that helps teen mothers, a summertime food bank and two local elementary schools. They’re currently working on adding a third school.

When she approached the first school—a Title I school that at the time had very low test scores—Fry remembers walking in and asking, “Do you want a little free book fair?”

Delighted, they said yes. Now they deliver 150 books each week to one school, 105 to another and the rest to other local establishments. They started the ministry in fall 2020 but didn’t start counting until July 2021, and to date they have distributed more than 50,000 books to children.

Fry said reading is incredibly important, and studies show that children who read tend to perform better academically.

“I knew from my time in the nonprofit that if you can put books in homes, seriously—the scores go up! If a child is bored on a rainy afternoon and they pick up a book and read three pages, that helps keep their skills up,” she said.



Photo courtesy of Sunny Fry

Today, volunteers deliver 150 books each week to one school, 105 to another and the rest to other establishments.

Church and community members help by holding book drives, finding books through local libraries and at yard sales, as well as purchasing them online from eBay and other sources.

“We go through the books, clean them, wipe them down with alcohol and make them as pretty as we can,” Fry said. “We want to respect the reader. We’re after reluctant readers, so we don’t want to give them something gross.”

Today, one of the schools they work with, Socastee Elementary, has seen rising test scores and recently earned an ‘excellent’ rating. Last year it was named a Palmetto’s Finest school. While they can’t take credit

for the school’s achievement, they believe access to more books has helped.

Jan Terrell has been a longtime volunteer with the project, spending many hours each week in the book room cleaning the books that will be given to local children. She said there’s a “large army” of volunteers at the church who do the same, and many local high schoolers come to volunteer and get points for their honor societies, then love the work so much they come back to help even after they have graduated.

A former educator who retired after 43 years of teaching, Terrell taught every grade from kindergarten through fifth in local schools, and she knows firsthand how important it is that children love to read.

“These children can find themselves in a book, and once you can relate to a character or love a character—even an animal book!—we find those are the books children want more and more of,” Terrell said. “We want that hunger; we want them to love reading.”

She said the schools welcome the books and the volunteers, and often the volunteers stay to read aloud to classes, too.

“They think we’re just little old women who need something to do,” Terrell said, chuckling. “Little do they know there’s a method to our madness.”

She said many of the children face difficult circumstances, but if they can lose themselves in a book and love something, it helps their outlook.

“That’s so important now. We see so many problems,” Terrell added.

She is particularly passionate about bilingual books, which can help Spanish-speaking children. She said the bilingual books go especially fast.

“They were starved for the books,” she said. “Teachers kept asking us for more.”

Both Fry and Terrell hope other United Methodist churches across the conference are inspired by their story to start a similar ministry.

Any church interested in talking to Fry about starting a similar books ministry is invited to reach out for advice and help. Email familiesreadsc@gmail.com.

ALDERSGATE

From Page 1

home this month.

Thomas said the home was made possible by the generosity of Elliott and Kathy New, members at Union United Methodist Church, who live in Chapin.

The News were at Union the day Aldersgate made a presentation about Stephen’s House—named for the Rev. Stephen Taylor, Union’s pastor. Kathy New, a former real estate agent, wanted to be involved in the house selection, so she, Thomas and local Realtor started looking for houses.

The News told Thomas that Elliott had planned to retire, but when they were inspired to fund a house, they decided he would work one more year, then use those funds plus his stocks toward purchasing a home for Aldersgate.

Kathy New said they had felt a nudge for a long time to do something meaningful with their money to help others.

“We were extremely fortunate, and I had this feeling I would like to do some-

thing that would carry forward and leave a legacy,” New said.

The house is named for their late son, Benjamin, who had Trisomy 13 (Patau syndrome), which is similar to Down syndrome but more severe and usually fatal. Benjamin lived for five days in May 1999.

“If he had lived, he would have been disabled, and we know other families who have to live with situations like this, and it touched my heart,” New said, noting her nephew also has cerebral palsy and autism and will likely need a home like Aldersgate in the future.

Her husband agreed, and while they worried that his salary and stock value might not be enough to purchase a home, they decided to try.

“He just decided he would have faith that God would do what he could with the salary and the stock, and it came through,” New said.

At first, they didn’t find a house that seemed right.

“We just decided to pray on it and trust God would bring the right house,” Thomas said.

Three weeks later, God answered when what seemed like the perfect house hit the market, needing little work and with the kitchen and bathrooms already updated.

“It was God!” Thomas told the *Advocate*. “It really was God lining it up, and it was as close to perfect as we’re going to get.”

They bought the house, only needing to add a sprinkler system, install a shower in one bathroom, and add a door so the master bathroom would be accessible to all.

“It was an absolute blessing, and it’s just how the Lord works,” Thomas said.

At first, the News thought they would keep their gift anonymous. But they realized their story might encourage others, and if one more year of work

could result in a home for Aldersgate, they wanted others to know that.

Thomas is busy lining up residents for the home, selecting people who seem like they would be a good fit and finding the right staff members.

“There are a lot of people who need a Christian home, and it’s all in the timing of things,” Thomas said.

New agreed. “I think there’s a huge need for this ministry.”

Founded in 2003, Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry is a ministry of the South Carolina Conference of the UMC that provides homes for adults with developmental disabilities. It does not receive funds from apportionments and depends on contributions. Residents live in a Christian environment and aim to be as independent as possible with the support of trained staff. For more, visit <https://aldersgatesnm.org>.



Kim Thomas (right) with Elliott and Kathy New on the steps of Aldersgate’s ninth home, Benjamin’s House.

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Disaster Recovery lined up funds to repair his porch, build a new deck on the back of his home, paint and more.



They also were able to build a wheelchair-accessible ramp for his wife and construct a small sidewalk going from the ramp to their car so the couple can get out easily for doctor visits.

HELENE HOPE

From Page 1

Williams said. The water washed out some of the foundation under their home, he said, extending their gravel driveway by at least eight feet. Wind damage caused further problems. Williams reached out to FEMA, but it sent only \$300 and couldn't help further because he was technically outside the hurricane-affected area, he said. After haggling for almost two years with the insurance company, he received just \$795, but the damage was far more costly than that. And given their health struggles—at 74, he is fighting non-Hodgkin lymphoma, while his 69-year-old wife has battled cancer since 2017—they couldn't afford to do anything more than temporary fixes. One day, Williams received a flyer at

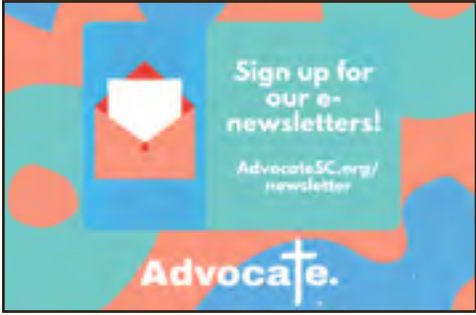
church letting him know help was available through South Carolina United Methodist Disaster Recovery. South Carolina United Methodist Disaster Recovery works with local partners and organizations and long-term recovery groups across affected counties to help families needing assistance in their recovery from Hurricane Helene damage. As the son of a Methodist preacher and whose grandfather, great-grandfather, uncle and nephew were all Methodist preachers as well, Williams was overjoyed when he realized the church that had nurtured his faith was also going to be the church that made his home repairs possible. Ward Smith serves as the director of disaster recovery and the construction

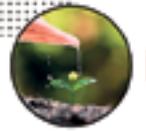
manager, and Theo White, a disaster recovery case manager, both assessed the home. Then White connected him with available funding resources, which ultimately paid to repair his porch, build a new deck on the back of his home, paint, build a wheelchair-accessible ramp for his wife and construct a small sidewalk going from the ramp to their car so the couple can get out easily for doctor visits. "They put me in line with all the resources to get everything done, all of the things we desperately needed," Williams said. "My wife and I are incredibly grateful." White said he was honored to help the Williamses get what they needed. "It's very rewarding because they definitely were at a dead end," White said. "They were losing hope." Being able to restore their hope "was a great feeling," White said.

While the couple still has a little work left to be done—the skirting under their house, which was damaged from the water flow—the home is livable and much improved. Smith said he's thankful for the chance to help people like the Williamses who were overlooked in the storm's aftermath. "We're blessed to have the opportunity to continue to serve the families in South Carolina who desperately need help and will not get it unless we help them," Smith said. Smith said disaster recovery is busier than ever and has work lined up through next year. He said they still need volunteers. If you are interested in becoming a disaster recovery volunteer, email the Rev. Shay Long, disaster recovery volunteer coordinator, at sllong@umcsc.org. Churches that can host teams are also encouraged to contact her.

South Carolina United Methodists to gather for the Summit on the Black Church

COLUMBIA—The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church will hold its Summit on the Black Church October 29–31, 2026. Held at the DoubleTree hotel, 2100 Bush River Road, the three-day gathering is built around the theme "Faith. Leadership. Justice. Together: A Stronger Church for a Brighter Tomorrow." The summit offers separate programs for adults and young people. General admission for adults is \$200 per person and includes workshops, plenary sessions, a luncheon, a banquet and admission to both event venues. Youth and youth leaders can register for \$50 per person. Their package includes admission to Riverbanks Zoo & Garden on Saturday, meals and live entertainment. Organizers have set two key deadlines. The hotel reservation deadline is Sept. 30, and event registration closes Oct. 15. Registration for both adult and youth tracks is available. Adults can register at <https://www.umcsc.org/october2026summitregistration>. Youth can register at <https://www.umcsc.org/october2026dayatzooregistration>.





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Aldersgate UMC hosts community back to school celebration

By Bruce Schug
GREENVILLE—On Aug. 23, Aldersgate United Methodist Church hosted a gala “Community Back-to-School Celebration” for their neighbors.

Attendees said the event was great fun and highly acclaimed.

The outdoor event provided a welcoming space for families from Lake Forest Elementary and the neighborhood to gather, build relationships and receive support as they began a new school year. The goal was to bring together churches, community organizations and local partners who share a commitment to serving children and families in the neighborhood.

The afternoon included a cookout by the Scout troop, bounce houses, ice cream, music by a DJ, games, crafts, three fire engines and other family-friendly activities.

Joining were approximately 20 community part-



Several bikes were tuned up and repaired at the event.

ners representing churches, community organizations and local businesses. These included Aldersgate’s own child development center, United Women in Faith, Todd and Pam Attaway (Aldersgate missionaries with TMS Global), Messy Church USA and Aldersgate’s Scout troop. Several nonprofit organizations

also shared information about the services and resources they offer to the community. These included Epworth, United Ministries, MOSAIC (an educational and arts program Aldersgate hosts on its campus) and Habitat for Humanity.

Neighbors from Servant King Presbyterian, John Knox Presbyterian Preschool, St. Thomas Anglican and First Christian Church Disciples of Christ joined to welcome guests.

The celebration brought more than 400 in attendance and 420 hot dogs and hamburgers served.

More importantly, Aldersgate members were told how much the event meant to the families. Some found help from one of the agencies. Several bikes were tuned up and repaired, and most children left with a temporary tattoo of their choosing.

Most importantly, they also left knowing they are loved and supported by their community.

Rock Hill District clergy and their families enjoy ‘Fun Day’

By Dr. Anthony Hodge

Clergy, are busy, aren’t we? When we are not preparing sermons, we are visiting parishioners. When we are not visiting parishioners, we are preparing for various meetings we need to attend. When we are not preparing to attend meetings, we are engaging in some form of pastoral care or short term counseling.

If that’s not enough, many clergy are actively engaged in community events in close proximity to their ministry contexts. If we have families, we try to set aside time for our families as we endeavor to serve God and others.



Photo by Jerry Newlon Jr.

Hodge said it was good for clergy and their families to have some fun together.

At times, these activities and responsibilities can be overwhelming. That’s why it was good for the Rock

Hill District clergy and their families to come together at Woodland United Methodist Church on Saturday, Aug. 29, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Given that clergy and their families rarely make time to gather to simply enjoy one another around conversation, laughter and fun activities, the recent Rock Hill District Family Fun Day was definitely a change of pace and enjoyable for all who attended.

In addition to the clergy and their families in attendance, we were blessed that District Lay Leader Bob James helped to prepare food for the event.

My wife, Sheila, and I are grateful

that we were able to be a part of the Rock Hill District Family Fun Day and want to thank everyone who helped to make the event a memorable occasion, including Pastor Robin Griffeth and the members of Woodland who helped to make sure everything was properly set up and taken down after the event.

We also want to give special thanks to Mallory Forte, Laurel Fraser, Tammy Grey, John Howle and Bob James, who helped to plan this meaningful event that brought the district clergy together.

We really did have fun together, and I hope we are able to do something like this again in the Rock Hill District.

Sylvia Stone: Fifty years of prophesying with music

Beginning with chapter 22, 1 Chronicles recounts David’s plans for the building of the Temple and the ordering of worship. Chapter 25 focuses on Temple musicians. David set apart the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun, “who should prophesy with lyres, harps, and cymbals.” From the beginning, music has been an integral part of worship, and these musicians were to express God’s word—prophesy—through the medium of music.

Sylvia Stone has been prophesying with music at St. John’s United Methodist Church, Lugoff, for 50 years.

Stone began when her husband, George, was hired as the music director. He requested that she play the piano while someone else played the organ. He said she was the “bonus.” When her husband left St. John’s, Stone was asked to stay. She said she would for \$10 a week. She has continued to play ever since—though for more than \$10 a week.

Stone began piano lessons as a child from the pianist at her home church, who taught her to play



Sylvia playing on the piano she first played on 50 years ago.

the hymns. She did not major in music in college or receive any formal training. She simply had a love for music and for the Lord.

So she became a prophet through music.

In honor of her 50 years prophesying at St John’s,

a special Sylvia Stone Sunday was held Aug. 30. Several former choir directors attended and sang solos. The special music and congregational hymns were all selected from Stone’s top 10 list.

The worship committee presented her with a stained glass suncatcher, the Prayers and Squares ministry gave her a prayer quilt, the choir gave her an embossed leather-bound United Methodist hymnal and the Staff Parish Relations Committee gave her a plaque commemorating her service. She was also presented with many cards and notes from the congregation.

The piano in the sanctuary was dedicated in Stone’s honor for her years of playing it.

The church said they could think of no better way to honor her, as she has been the only person to regularly play on that particular piano.

“We at St John’s give thanks to God for sending this dedicated musician and wonderful person to us 50 years ago,” said St. John’s pastor the Rev. John Jordan. “Thank you, Sylvia!”

Shiloh UMC thanks 110 educators with lunch, gifts

On July 30, Shiloh United Methodist Church, Gilbert, greeted and welcomed 110 faculty and staff from Centerville Elementary School for their fourth annual lunch.

After a brief greeting and blessing by the Rev. John Kronz, a catered lunch, complete with homemade rolls and desserts, was served. Following lunch, there was a drawing for many door prizes that included school supply baskets, homemade cinnamon rolls, produce baskets, snack baskets and gift cards.

Each attendee was also given a

goodie bag with all sorts of items donated by individuals and businesses such as classroom books, thank yous written by Shiloh children, coloring books, pencils, pens, snacks, etc.

The lunch is made possible through the efforts and support of Shiloh members, including the children, as well as many community businesses and individuals.

This is one way that Shiloh can show their appreciation for the care and nurturing that Centerville Elementary provides to the community’s children.



Dacusville celebrates renovated fellowship hall

In late 2025, it became apparent that renovations were needed to Dacusville UMC’s Fellowship Hall, which was built for carrying out God’s mission in the Dacusville community under the leadership of the Rev. Matt Booker in 1988. Most of the appliances were failing, and a fresh look was needed. The leadership team and trustees began working with the Rev. Brian Underwood and developed a renovation plan. The total cost of the renovation was \$30,000. They were able to secure a grant for 25 percent of the cost, and using church funds and donations, they were able to complete the project and had the rededication ceremony on Aug. 30.

Photo courtesy of the Rev. Brian Underwood

Young Methodists.

For four hours, children squeezed fresh lemons and served cold drinks to neighbors and shoppers. See a video about the day at <https://go.advocatesc.org/trinitylemonade>.



Trinity kids squeeze lemons, raise \$176 for shelter animals

AIKEN—Trinity United Methodist Church's Children's Ministry hosted a lemonade stand during the church community yard sale on Sept. 19, raising funds to help shelter animals.

For four hours, children squeezed fresh lemons and served cold drinks to neighbors and shoppers.

Their cheerful work raised \$176 for FOTAS, the Aiken County Animal Shelter. The money will help care for homeless dogs and cats in the community.

The stand became a hands-on lesson in generosity and service. Young helpers learned that even small acts of kindness can make a real difference for animals in need.

"Thank you to everyone who stopped by, bought a cup, and encouraged our kids as they put their faith into action," said pastor the Rev. Matthew Alexander.

Trinity UMC Children will present a check to FOTAS on Oct. 18 during the church's annual Blessing of the Animals service.



The money will help care for homeless dogs and cats in the community.

Immerse youth weekend registration runs until Oct. 20

Registration for Immerse 2026 is now open, and United Methodist churches across South Carolina are invited to join with their youth for a discipleship weekend as youth are challenged to dive deeper in their faith.

Immerse will be held at Asbury Hills Camp and Retreat Center Nov. 20-22. The Rev. Faye Jones will be the speaker for the weekend alongside Groovy Music and Entertainment who will be leading us in worship.

As always, there will be plenty of time for fun and family groups for all participants.

The theme for Immerse, 2026 is "OFF SCRIPT." Using the life of Joseph, they will spend the weekend equipping youth to navigate life when things don't go as we had planned. Whether it is a tragedy in life, a breakup, not making the team or any other unplanned surprise, life rarely goes as hoped. The good news is that those surprises are never a surprise to God. The story of Joseph is one that held plenty of unexpected turns, and young people can learn from how Joseph handled each one and consider how to be better equipped to react in a godly way when those curveballs come.

Registration is open now at <https://scmyp.org/mountain-immense-registration> and available on a first-come, first-served basis; be sure to register early. The cost is \$210 until Oct. 20. For questions, email immerse@scmyp.org.



Each Bible was wrapped in five layers, each with its own meaning.

Five layers, one gift: Grace children get study Bibles on Bible Sunday

COLUMBIA—On Sept. 13, Grace United Methodist Church celebrated Bible Sunday with the joy of presenting five children with their own children's study Bibles.

Grace made the presentation extra special: Each Bible was wrapped in five layers, each with its own meaning. Brown paper reminded the children of the Bible's ancient story. Map paper represented Scripture as a guide for their lives. Superhero paper reminded children that the Bible is filled with adventure and we have a responsibility to use what we have been given. Red paper pointed to the Holy Spirit and Jesus. And silver reminded the children that God's Word is more precious than silver or gold.

The children carefully unwrapped each layer, listening attentively and discovering their Bibles underneath it all.

It was a fun and meaningful way to celebrate the gift of Scripture.

For pastor the Rev. Meg Cook, the tradition was especially sweet because this is how she received her own Bible as a child while growing up at Elma United Methodist Church.

"What a gift to be able to pass that tradition on to a new generation," she shared.

Grace members pray these Bibles will be opened often, filled with notes and questions, carried into new adventures and become treasured companions as these children grow in faith.

Youth talents wanted for the Advocate

Are you a child, youth or young adult United Methodist with writing or artistic talent? We would love to feature young people's contributions on an ongoing, monthly basis in the *Advocate*. Whether it's a church- or faith-related photograph, drawing, painting, essay, poem or story, share your efforts with us, along with your name, age and church name/city. Email jbrodie@advocatesc.org or mail to Jessica Brodie, *Advocate*, 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203.

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Young Methodists.

New confirmation retreat launches

Koinonia, South Carolina Ministries with Young People’s new confirmation retreat designed specifically for churches in South Carolina, is preparing for its inaugural event Feb. 26-28. Koinonia will be held at Camp Bob Cooper in Summerton. It is designed to be an integral part of a local church’s confirmation process through youth ministries in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. “Koinonia” is a Greek word meaning fellowship, communion or sharing in common. Organizers chose this word intentionally, as the focus of Koinonia will be the community and connectional aspects of confirmation. Participants can expect a week-end of worship, teaching, small group activities (including making stoles) and plenty of time to connect with those from their church and beyond. The design team is hard at work to create an experience for confirmands that they pray will help create a foundation of faith as young people begin their walk with Jesus and their connection to the local church. Registration is \$200 per person. To register, visit <https://scmyp.org/koinonia-registration>.



Wesley Foundations by the Rev. Steve Simoneaux

What is your ‘major’?

During the last weeks of August, my sleepy town of 18,000 residents more than doubles as college students move to town. There was energy in the air this August as seasoned students returned and new students began their collegiate adventure. Even a dismal start to the football season can’t stop the rising tide of energy that I’ve come to know and love in campus ministry. As students arrive on campus and begin to connect with new friends, they undoubtedly are faced with the same three questions over and over again: What’s your name? Where are you from? What’s your major? While the first two questions are straightforward and easy to answer, the third question can bring a little more angst. So what is your major? While some will be ready to answer anything from engineering to nursing to business, here at Clemson Wesley, and at Wesley Foundations across the conference, we will be challenging each other to answer this question in a different light: What are the important things that we are called to major in as people of faith, and what are the minor things that perhaps we need to set aside? In Deuteronomy 6 we find these familiar words, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.” In the New Testament, Jesus was asked what is the greatest com-

mandment. His response in Matthew 22 says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” It’s clear from these two well-known texts that our priority as people of faith must be loving God and loving neighbor. This fall, the students, alumni and campus ministers at Wesley Foundations across the conference plan to “triple major” in hospitality, growth and love. We’ll live into a culture of hospitality and radical welcome because that is one of the best ways we know how to love our neighbor and honor God. We’ll challenge each other to grow in our faith through small groups, individual discipleship and worship because that is one of the best ways we know how to love our neighbor and honor God. We’ll encourage one another to serve our neighbors and God in authentic concrete ways because that is what we’re called to major in. Whether you are a college student, layperson or clergy, know that it’s never too late for you to “change your major” as we begin this new school year. This is not a selective “college” with limited space. There is enough room for all who want to major in hospitality, growth and love!

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

Journey surrounds students with support as school year begins

By Delaine A. Frierson
COLUMBIA—Journey United Methodist Church is making sure its students are prepared for school and the challenges ahead. To let the students know they are loved, Journey UMC volunteers met at Longleaf Middle School on their first day back to school to cheer and greet them. Journey also supported the students with its annual Back to School Bash on Aug. 15. Volunteers met at the church to stuff backpacks with school supplies. In addition to school supplies, the students were treated to food and lots of activities. The following Sunday, students from preschool to college were presented with back-to-school backpacks filled with goodies and items to help them succeed in school. The following Sunday, educators at Journey were acknowledged and shown appreciation with a breakfast and gift bags. Everyone is ready for a blessed school year, church leaders said.



Journey worked hard to support its students and teachers in love. In another effort to prepare the students for the future, Journey sponsored a Speed Career Mentoring Session Aug. 29 where middle and high school students were matched with members of the congregation representing various professions. Students were provided the opportunity to gain insight about their chosen field. This pilot program will be expanded in the future.

Connecting Children.

Fall lineup brings published authors to intergenerational worship initiative

By Toni Norris
Two authors will bring national expertise to South Carolina congregations this fall as part of the Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer initiative, the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church’s Lilly Endowment-funded effort to help churches include children and youth as full partners in worship and prayer. On Oct. 17, Dr. Nelson Cowan, director of the Center for Worship and the Arts at Samford University and author of “Let the Children Lead: Models for Worship with All Generations,” will lead a full-day, in-person training at Washington Street UMC, Columbia. Cowan’s session, the initiative’s Q4 quarterly training, will explore what intergenerational worship actually looks, sounds and feels like and how congregations can plan for it with intention rather than improvisation. Drawing on the five models outlined in his book, from pray-grounds to sensory-sensitive worship, Cowan will help clergy and lay leaders move beyond simply including children toward recognizing them as worshippers and disciples in their own right. Then on Nov. 12, the initiative turns to preaching with the Rev. Peter Levenstrong, associate rector at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco and author of the newly released “Collaborative Sermons: A Guide to Authentic, Interactive Worship through Living Stories.” In a clergy/lay Zoom session, Levenstrong will introduce his “Living Stories” method, which turns the sermon into a shared, tactile conversation where every generation helps interpret Scripture rather than simply listening to it. Together, the two sessions provide cohort churches the opportunity to learn practical, research-backed tools for weaving children and youth into the full life of worship, from the liturgy to the pulpit.



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Ministries.

Mount Hebron’s 54th annual barbecue to support local missions

WEST COLUMBIA—What began as a church fundraiser more than five decades ago has grown into a beloved tradition of food, fellowship and mission.

On Oct. 3, Mount Hebron United Methodist Church will offer their 54th annual barbecue.

In 1971, the men of Mount Hebron held their first barbecue to raise money for the church building fund. Hosted at the Pineview Ruritan Hut in West Columbia, that first barbecue featured 10 pigs—approximately 1,300 pounds of pork packaged at the church and sold to support the project.

Today, the annual barbecue has grown into a community-wide event held on the Mount Hebron campus, with proceeds supporting mission and outreach projects locally and beyond. Since that first BBQ, more than



Volunteers get barbecue ready for sale, all to benefit misisons.

\$620,000 has been raised.

“Our annual barbecue brings our church, family and friends together

providing great food, and all the proceeds go to missions. Please support us,” said Troy Blalock, president of the United Methodist Men.

Nearly \$40,000 from the 2025 barbecue alone was distributed to ministries and organizations including United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, Salkehatchie Summer Service, Henderson Settlement, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, the Mount Hebron Counseling Service, Children’s Ministries, Pineview Ruritan Club, the Dementia Ministry Team, take-home snack packs for elementary students in need and other mission projects.

And there has been a lot of barbecue along the way. Over the years, volunteers have prepared more than 195,000 pounds of pork, 16,500 chicken halves and 6,200 gallons of

hash—not to mention plenty of ribs, mac and cheese, green beans, rice, slaw, sauce and rolls.

Dr. Ann Kovan, pastor of Mount Hebron, was surprised at the magnitude of the operation after her first experience with the barbecue in 2025.

“For a night and day, this whole church turns into a top-notch barbecue joint,” Kovan said. “From people working the pit all night long, to our United Women in Faith Bake Sale, to the hospitality shown in the ticket line and order fulfillment, this entire church is transformed so that others might be transformed through a good plate of barbecue of all things.”

To learn more or order, visit <https://www.mthebrnumc.com> or visit the church at 3030 Leaphart Rd., West Columbia.

SABTS again helps host annual community Thanksgiving

HILTON HEAD ISLAND—The 27th annual Community Thanksgiving Dinner—a joint effort from St. Andrew By-The-Sea United Methodist Church and Hudson’s Seafood House on the Docks with other local churches—is being planned now.

The dinner will be celebrated Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 26, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Hudson’s. The event is presented by founding partners St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC and Hudson’s with Hilton Head Island Community Church, First Presbyterian and Providence Presbyterian.

This year donations will be doubled, providing twice the donations to benefit local nonprofit organizations Bluffton Self Help, Deep Well Project and Second Helpings. To help: <http://www.communitythanksgiving.com> or on Thanksgiving during the meal.

Planning ‘essential to ministries’

Mount Zion UMC, Kingstree, recently held a planning session for its ministries for the next year. The Rev. Walter Strawther led the planning session that was well received by church leaders. They examined their “why” for doing ministries and how it aligns with the mission of the UMC in sharing the good news of God’s grace and love for neighbor. Church leaders are excited about planning meaningful ministries that help grow disciples for Jesus Christ.

Strawther ended the planning session with this quote: “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.” As a result of this planning session, church leaders learned that Mount Zion’s top two core values are inclusion and unity.

Photo courtesy of Toni Strawther



Alston Wilkes Society.

From hope to home: Veterans share their journeys in Greenville

On Aug. 20, the Alston Wilkes Society welcomed community partners and supporters to its Greenville Veterans Home for a special open house.

The gathering offered guests more than a look inside the facility; it provided a meaningful glimpse into the journey veterans take as they work toward stability, independence and a place to call home.

AWS Past President Gary Maynard opened the program by sharing a few words about the organization’s commitment to serving veterans. Guests then heard firsthand from two veterans whose experiences demonstrate the hope and transformation made possible through compassionate support.

William Godfrey shared his journey from receiving services as an AWS client to now serving others as an AWS employee. His story illustrated the lasting impact that encouragement, opportunity and a dependable support system can have on a person’s life.

Sidney Wolf also spoke about his experience with the program. After facing housing instability, Wolf recently secured a home of his own in Columbia. His story offered a powerful reminder that the path from homelessness to permanent housing is not simply about finding an address. It is about restoring confidence, rebuilding stability and helping a veteran move forward with dignity.

Following the opening program, guests were invited to walk through the facility and explore the “client journey.” At stations focused on housing, employment, finances, mental health and substance use, AWS team members explained the challenges veterans may face and the individualized support available to help them overcome those barriers.

These conversations allowed visitors to see how each part of the program works together. Safe transitional housing provides an essential foundation,

but lasting success also requires coordinated care, practical resources, personal encouragement and a team that refuses to give up on the people it serves.

The day was made even more welcoming by generous community partners. Cedar Shoals Baptist Church provided food for the gathering, while Chick-fil-A in Spartanburg donated beverages. Their kindness and hospitality helped create a warm environment where stories could be shared and relationships could grow.

The Greenville Veterans Home open house was ultimately a celebration of progress—both the visible milestones, such as receiving the keys to a new home and the quieter victories that happen along the way.

Together, veterans, staff members, supporters and community partners are helping turn uncertainty into stability and hope into home.

Camps & Retreat Ministries.

65 years of sacred ground: Asbury Hills

Every person who has stepped foot onto the grounds of Asbury Hills holds a story close to their heart.

Perhaps yours began decades ago, singing around a campfire on a cool mountain evening, learning to paddle a canoe or feeling the spark of a call to faith under the Blue Ridge foothills. Maybe your story is much more recent—a quiet weekend retreat with your church, a crisp autumn walk along the trails or watching your child or grandchild climb into the car with mud on their shoes and a renewed spirit.

No matter when you went to camp,

served on summer staff or attended a retreat, one truth remains: You are part of the Asbury Hills family.

As Asbury Hills celebrates 65 years of ministry, a special milestone effort titled “Tell Us Your ‘My Asbury Hills’ Story” is under way. The heart behind it is simple: gather, treasure and celebrate six and a half decades of transformation, growth, lifelong friendships and God’s enduring love—all while coming together to safeguard this sacred space for the next generation.

Every story that belongs to Asbury Hills is woven from the same thread: a

moment where the noise of everyday life quieted down long enough for faith and community to take root. Whether your “My Asbury Hills” story is a first spark of faith around a vespers campfire, enduring bonds formed on staff or a quiet moment of renewal on a trail, your memories are part of the fabric of this place.

To mark 65 years, the gates are opening wide to welcome alumni, families, churches and friends back home for a day of mountain fellowship, nostalgia and fun.

Mark your calendars for Saturday,

Oct. 17, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. for the Asbury Hills Fall Festival & Alumni Gathering. It promises to be a warm autumn day packed with simple joys for all ages:

- Commemorative 65th anniversary T-Shirts
- Photo booth
- Barbecue and apple cider
- Free petting zoo
- Live music and fellowship

Share your photos, written reflections or memories online before the event, or bring them along on Oct. 17. For information and story submission, visit <https://www.asburyhills.org>.

Ministries.

Obituaries.

Carolyn Peterson Epps

KINGSTREE—Carolyn Peterson Epps, sister of the Rev. Shirley Gordon, died Sept. 7, 2026. Rev. Gordon is the pastor of the East Camden Charge, Camden. Her husband, the Rev. Enrique Gordon is the pastor of Unity United Methodist Church, Lugoff.

Funeral services were held Sept. 14 at St. Michael UMC with burial in the church cemetery.

Rebecca Mack Ferguson

CROSS—Rebecca Mack Ferguson, mother of the Rev. Martha Sass, died Sept. 8, 2026. Rev. Sass is the pastor of the Harleyville Parish, Harleyville.

Funeral services were held Sept. 12 at Jerusalem United Methodist Church.

Robert Franklin Fowler

LEXINGTON—Robert Franklin Fowler, former chairman of the South Carolina United Methodist Youth Basketball Tournament, died Sept. 6, 2026.

A memorial service was held Sept. 11 at Shandon United Methodist Church.

Memorials may be made to the Allen Scholarship Fund, c/o Shandon UMC, 3407 Devine St., Columbia, SC 29205.

Mr. Fowler is survived by his wife, Rometta.

Joan Murdock Griffin

ROWESVILLE—Joan Murdock Griffin, wife of the Rev. Alfred Valentine Griffin Jr., died Sept. 6, 2026. Rev. Griffin is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

A memorial service was held Sept. 12 at Free Gift Baptist Church, Branchville.

Mrs. Griffin is survived by her husband.

Richard McClary

KINGSTREE—Richard McClary, a former local pastor of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Aug. 19, 2026.

A funeral service was held Aug. 28 at St. Paul UMC with burial in Friendship #2 Cemetery, Nesmith.

Mr. McClary is survived by his wife, Alberta Nesmith McClary, three sons and daughter.

Roberta Moultrie

ORANGEBURG—Roberta Moultrie, sister of the Rev. Leonard Huggins, died Aug. 25, 2026. Rev. Huggins is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Aug. 29 at Canaan UMC, Cope, with burial in Heavenly Rest Memorial Park, Cordova.

Mary Frances Tollner Nichols

SUMMERVILLE—Mary Frances Tollner Nichols, widow of the Rev. George Henry Nichols, died Aug. 16, 2026.

Burial services were held Aug. 31 at Fort Jackson National Cemetery, Columbia.

Memorials may be made to the Presbyterian Community of South Carolina Foundation, 2817 Ashland Road, Columbia, SC 29210.

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

Mary Elaine Whittington

NEW ORLEANS—Mary Elaine “Mudder” Whittington, sister of the Rev. Gary Compton, died Sept. 7, 2026. Rev. Compton is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Sept. 12 at Bayou Chicot UMC, Bayou Chicot, with burial in Ferguson Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Bayou Chicot UMC, c/o Mr. Bennie Helmer, 1042 Dossman Lake Road, St. Landry, LA 71367.

Mrs. Whittington is survived by her three daughters.

Rev. Arthur Desport Vick Jr.



Vick Jr.

ROCK HILL—The Rev. Arthur Desport Vick Jr., a retired local pastor of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Aug. 12, 2026.

Funeral services were held Aug. 17 at Lakewood Baptist Church.

Memorials may be made to The Anchor Building Fund at Lakewood Baptist Church, 3520 Mount Gallant Road, Rock Hill, SC 29732.

Rev. Vick is survived by his wife, Margaret Willis Vick, two daughters, three sons and stepmother.



Photos courtesy the Rev. Wanda Altman-Shirah

Churches pack 10,000 meals

The York/Clover Cluster of the Rock Hill District came together in a big way to support Rise Against Hunger Sept. 19. This is the third annual food packaging event they have participated in, and each year has raised more awareness and more volunteers. More than 10,000 meals were packaged. “We can do so much more when we come together,” said the Rev. Wanda Altman-Shirah. “Praise God!”

Annual gala to raise funds for Killingsworth

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

Set for Thursday, Nov. 12, from 6-9 p.m., the Killingsworth Gala will be held in a new location: The Moore Building on the South Carolina State Fair Grounds, 1200 Rosewood Dr., Columbia.

Tickets are \$85/person and \$650 for a table of eight, and sponsorships are available starting at \$700.

The event will feature a silent auction, a Belk Fashion Show, live music and a full

course meal. This year, a comedian will round out the fun.

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

To purchase tickets or become a sponsor, visit <https://killingsworth.org/gala>.

Native American Ministries.

Part One: The Iconic Hudson Bay Trade Blanket

By Lee Anne Lamar

Editor's note: This is a two-part article detailing history of the Hudson Bay point blanket, from its origins as a fur-trade good through its adaptation into coats, its imitators and successors and its tragic misuse in spreading smallpox, to its lasting role as a symbol of honor and gift-giving in Native American culture.. Part Two is slated to run in the November Advocate.

The British monarchy founded the Hudson Bay Company in London, England, in the 1600s primarily to support the fur trade in the Upper Great Lakes Basin—an area that today spans the border between the United States and Canada.

The Hudson Bay Company focused on trading goods and relied on Dutch, French and British backwoods trappers to build relationships with local Native tribes.

The region's harsh, cold climate produced animals with especially thick fur, making their pelts highly prized and valuable. The warm, water-resistant furs of beavers and otters became especially popular in England and France for making hats and coats.

At first, the Hudson Bay Company established six trading posts that stocked goods frontiersmen needed for the rugged backcountry. Items such as firearms, ammunition, knives, metal tools, pots and pans, glass beads and woolen blankets became valued trade goods by the various Native tribes because of the durability and usefulness. Some British trappers, but especially French trappers, built lasting rapport because they often lived among Native peoples.

The iconic Hudson Bay blanket quickly became known for its cream-colored background and broad, colorful stripes of green, red, yellow, indigo and black. These colors became known as the Queen Ann colors. The blankets also had several short black stripes, called points, which indicated size: 3.5 for twin, 4 for double, 6 for queen and 8 for king. Later, the colored stripes came to be called headings.

Because of wool's natural properties, Hudson Bay blankets retained warmth even when wet, a quality especially valued by Native tribes. Their practical strengths gave them broad appeal among Native peoples, frontiersmen and Europeans. In response, the Hudson Bay Company began producing these rough wool blankets in great quantities. The Hudson Bay Point Blankets became the company's signature item and remain so today.

Because they were so useful and popular with trappers, Hudson Bay blankets were soon adapted into two coat styles: the Capote and the Mackinaw. People began sewing these wool blankets into the French Capote, meaning hood or overcoat. It resembles a long, hooded robe tied at the waist with a belt. This style became so popular that people came to associate the Capote with the Upper Great Lakes region.

Read the rest of the article in the November Advocate.

Videos sought for Advocate website, app, social media

Do you have any videos of your church or ministry's concerts, celebrations or other events that you think other South Carolina United Methodists would appreciate? Share it with the *Advocate*. We'd love to help others learn new ways of doing ministry.

Email news@advocatesc.org with a link to a video file, or text it to 803-807-0018.



Historical Society by the Rev. Leo Roy

Simple rules

At a previous appointment, I was surprised to learn that the congregation’s members had never heard of the General Rules. Even when the term “three simple rules” was used, there was still confusion about what they were.

It was surprising to hear because the General Rules have been part of the United Methodist Church from the beginning, being developed in the 1700s with the formation of the United Societies. This movement began on a college campus, as people deeply convinced of their sin and earnestly desiring redemption gathered with John Wesley. It was in these meetings that John Wesley would counsel, guide, teach and help them hold each other accountable. John Wesley understood that people could fall back into the habits or practices that turned them away from God.

To counter this and provide guidance to a growing movement, he created the General Rules, rules that remain part of our tradition. These rules help us understand how to fulfill that desire and need to follow in Christ’s footsteps and live a Christlike life.

On the surface, these rules do seem simple: first, do no harm; second, do good; and third, attend to all the ordinances of God (Milford, Brian K. Ed, *Book of Discipline 2020/2024*, Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2024, 79-80). That last one has also become known as staying in love with God.

It seems odd to have such a change in wording, which can lead to misunderstandings of this rule. However, the word “ordinance” may not be well understood by many people who encounter these rules, especially if they have not heard it before, as we continue to uphold the traditions of our General Rules and teach them. Using both titles interchangeably can help us better understand the rule’s intent and meaning.

However, we all have a desire to put our faith into practice. When we practice our faith, we want to do so in a way that is life-giving and healing, and that allows us to be a reflection of our Lord and Savior. John Wesley was aware

of all this. As stated earlier, one of the reasons he created the General Rules was to help us gauge our progress in holy living, something that all Christians should strive to be a part of and strive to do as we live in our faith and seek to deepen our connection with our Lord and Savior (Rueben, Job P. “Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living.” Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007 14 Nook).

Going back to the General Rules, we are to do no harm, a rule that on the surface seems easy to accomplish. However, it is a rule that requires us to constantly ask whether our actions and words are harmful. It is a rule that helps us create places that are safe for all people and to discover new possibilities. While the language in the *Book of Discipline* can seem archaic, it offers valuable advice on doing no harm and avoiding evil of every kind.

As we move to the second rule of our tradition, we see something on the surface that is easy, as we are to do good. However, that is easier said than done. As we look out into the world and consider what it means to do good, how often do we start to limit the amount of good we do? This general rule tells us to do all the good we can, in all the ways we can, and by all the means we can. It is not a rule that is telling us good is limited. But human nature tends to limit whom we seek to help.

The final rule is to attend to all the ordinances of God. It is a rule that helps define our spiritual disciplines, which are actions and means of grace we use to grow deeper in faith and become more Christlike.

All of these rules come down to the very practical nature of our theology and our denomination—a very practical theology that is deep and rich in how we think and process.

Our connection and relationship with God tells us we are called to be out in the world, showing that the kingdom of God is here and will be fulfilled in the future.

Roy is the pastor of the Langley-Warrenville-Capers Chapel Charge, Greenwood District.



From the Archives by Dr. Phillip Stone

David Camak and his college

It’s fair to say that one of the four Methodist colleges in South Carolina came about because of the dogged determination of one early 20th-century clergyman. Without the vision and stubbornness of David English Camak, it’s likely that Spartanburg Methodist College wouldn’t exist.

Born in Winnsboro in 1880, Camak grew up in a farming family. He later said that at an early age, he wondered “what Jesus would have me do” and prayed that he could be of the greatest use to as many people as possible in his lifetime. He studied at a small academy in Fairfield County and at Wofford’s Fitting School before entering the freshman class at Wofford in 1898. While a student, he cobbled shoes to make money, and though someone offered to pay his tuition if he agreed to go into the mission field, he declined, as he felt called to church work in the United States.

Camak left college in 1901 to teach for a year, then returned to complete his senior year in fall 1902. Henry Nelson Snyder, who became Wofford’s president in the summer of 1902, was particularly influential in Camak’s studies. Camak remembered Snyder commenting in class about the plight of people moving from the farm to the growing textile mill villages in the Southeast. Snyder told his class that “whoever solves the cotton mill problem will do his country a great good.”

Thus, Camak began to feel a call, as he put it, “to do something for the rising generation of cotton mill operatives.”

Camak was licensed to preach in 1902, graduated from Wofford in June 1903 and, in the five months before he could join the Annual Conference in the fall, served as the junior preacher on a five-point mill charge in Union. He requested an appointment to a mill circuit when he joined the conference and was sent to Green Street in Union and later to Jonesville. He began to develop an idea of a cooperative school for adult mill workers who had never had a chance for an education. He didn’t find much support in the conference or from the mill owners in Union. His uncle, who was a prominent clergyman, advised Camak to “let the factory folks alone, they’re no’ count.”

The bishop appointed Camak to Saluda to get him away from textiles.

He took an appointment in 1909 in Charlotte, where he was able to experience the kind of cooperative school he had in mind. In 1911, he returned to Spartanburg to serve Duncan Memorial Church, where he had taught Sunday school while in college and where he began to put his idea into effect. He had the advice and endorsement of President Snyder, which no doubt went a long way. He also met Walter Montgomery, president of Spartan Mills, who agreed to cooperate with Camak’s ideas. For the next 10 years, he made the rounds of conference boards and the Woman’s Home Missionary Society to seek funds.

A few things are clear in this story. Most everyone involved exhibited some paternalistic attitudes toward the mill workers. Identifying them as a “problem” in need of reform or uplift, which was common among progressives and some church leaders, wasn’t necessarily the best way to build relationships. And Camak himself appears to have had some early stumbles.

However, he eventually developed enough practical skills and understood the political situation enough to achieve what he wanted.

Camak remained as president of Textile Industrial Institute until 1924, when he returned to the local church.

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



North Charleston gets proclamation for anniversary

On Aug. 13, North Charleston UMC, North Charleston, received a proclamation from Mayor Reggie Burgess recognizing Aug. 30, 2026, as North Charleston United Methodist Church 106th Anniversary Day. On Aug. 30, the church hosted a worship service at 10 a.m. in the sanctuary to commemorate this milestone with a lunch following. Sons of the church, Rev. Reggie Rowell and Rev. Len Ripley, were invited to deliver the message. “We are thankful for the city councilman in our congregation, Mr. Kenny Skipper, for getting the ball rolling with Mayor Burgess on the proclamation,” said pastor the Rev. Meredith M. Dark. Dark also extended thanks to Kevin Reynolds for his hard work on the 106th anniversary as the church historian.

A Partnership that Reaches Far Beyond the Course

Thank you, UMCSC, for supporting Africa University and our golf invitational. Together, we're opening doors, transforming lives and creating a brighter future.

Worldwide News.

BIG ISLAND, Va.—The Society of St. Andrew, a United Methodist partner, has Advent booklets available for order. For each day of Advent, the gleanings ministry offers Scripture, reflections and prayers written by people across the U.S. The booklets are free but the ministry asks for a \$2.50 donation per booklet to cover production costs and help its efforts to provide fresh produce to people in need.

AUSTIN, Texas—Small churches have distinctive strengths that The United Methodist Church should embrace, argues a new report from Wesleyan Impact Partners. The report profiles nine congregations across the U.S. that average 50 or less in worship but have outsized community impact. The congregations share certain qualities in common.

JACKSON, Miss.—Mississippi Conference Bishop Sharma Lewis Logan announced that on behalf of the conference, she and other conference leaders presented a \$50,000 check toward endowed scholarships at Gammon Theological Seminary, the historically Black United Methodist seminary. The Florida and Virginia annual conferences have already donated \$100,000 each to the seminary as part of efforts to raise \$500,000 by December.

LEAWOOD, Kan.—While campaigning against the Rev. Adam Hamilton, U.S. Vice President JD Vance decried Resurrection, the United Methodist church that Hamilton founded, for co-sponsoring a local Pride festival. Great Plains Conference Bishop David Wilson called the criticism of the congregation “inaccurate and unwarranted,” in a statement extolling the church’s outreach. “I, for one, am proud to know the people of Resurrection are United Methodists, and I am proud to serve beside them along with our other 680 churches across Kansas and Nebraska as their bishop,” Wilson writes.

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—The United Methodist Council of Bishops is taking steps to address the climate crisis in a new training course titled “Speaking Up for Climate Action,” specifically designed for United Methodist episcopal leaders. In doing so, the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement says, the bishops are preparing to take a leadership role in protecting and healing our relationship with God’s good creation.

LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C.—With a heartfelt apology, a wrong was righted during the Western North Carolina Annual Conference in June. Thirty-two years after coming out to the church as gay and surrendering her credentials at the request of her bishop, the Rev. Lauren Grace Scruggs was readmitted into full connection in the conference. Credentials or not, she has devoted her life to serving God and loving her neighbor.

TEMPE, Ariz.—Dayspring United Methodist Church includes stuffed animals in their Blessing of the Animals event, to help children without pets feel welcomed, included and connected. The stuffed-animal blessings take place on the same Sunday as the Blessing of the Animals and started a decade ago.

WILLISTON, Vt.—A United Methodist pastor was among seven faith leaders arrested Sept. 4 for blockading the entrances to a Vermont building where workers help immigration agents target their efforts. The clergy insisted their faith compels them to oppose President Donald Trump's ongoing mass deportation campaign. "I think it is imperative on me, as a faith leader, to proclaim that human beings are not targets and that God is a God of justice and of love," said the Rev. Rebecca Girrell.



Wedding feast

Say: Will you pray with me?
Prayer: Dear God (echo), we love
you (echo). Thank you for inviting us
(echo) into your love (echo). Thank
you for making room for us
(echo). Help us make room for oth-
ers (echo) and share your welcome
(echo) with everyone we meet
(echo). Amen (echo).

South Carolina United Methodist Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley will head to Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa next summer for a 12-day pilgrimage led by him and his wife, Dawn.

At the heart of the pilgrimage is a visit to the main campus of Africa University, the United Methodist-related institution in Mutare, Zimbabwe, to meet students, faculty and local leaders and see firsthand the ministry that United Methodist giving helps support.

The pilgrimage will also make stops in Harare, time with local congregations to experience the vitality of the church in Africa, a tour of Victoria Falls, a safari in Botswana's Chobe National Park and visits to historical sites in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Anyone wishing to join the pilgrimage can learn more at <https://bit.ly/4bTRk97>.

A Miracle in the Making

United Methodists pass \$2.1M milestone to fuel the future of pastoral leadership

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Across the globe, United Methodists are answering a vital call to support the next generation of spiritual leaders.

The Miracle Sunday Initiative has officially passed \$2,123,420 in gifts and pledges, marking an extraordinary step forward to permanently support theological education in Africa, Europe and the Philippines.

What began with a vision in September 2025 and an official kickoff with Miracle Sunday in April 2026 has quickly blossomed into a vibrant movement, inspired by the spirit of joyful, collective generosity found in 1 Chronicles 29. The initiative is driven by a shared dream: to ensure that courageous, compassionate leaders are equipped to shepherd congregations for generations to come.

Already, 50 annual conferences and hundreds of supporters have resulted in 322 distinct contributions from local churches, conferences and individual donors. Generosity is shining in every corner of the connection—from the South Congo and Zambia Episcopal Area, which leads with over \$340,000 raised and pledged, to remarkable 100% church participation in regions like North Macedonia and Denmark.

“Assisting a few students with their theological education is significant; but we believe God wants us to do even more—provide support for 500 leaders each year, every year,” said Bishop Eben Nhiwatiwa, MSI Co-Chair in his open letter to United Methodists. “That takes a miracle, and God is ready to perform it through us as we pray, learn and give together.”





Adult Lessons
by the Rev. Claire
Van Den Berg

About the Author

Van Den Berg is the pastor of Windsor UMC, Columbia, as well as chair of the Annual Conference Board of Trustees, a member of the District Committee for Advocacy and a member of the SEJ Connectional Ministry for Advocacy Committee.

Living by Faith

Oct. 4
Lesson Scripture: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-22
Key verse: Hebrews 11:8-16
Title: Living Toward the Promise

Living the faithful life has always been a challenge. The Patriarchs, our ancient ancestors—such as Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob—were strangers, pilgrims, pioneers, even in the land of promise. The promises God gave seemed elusive; still, they lived in the present in hope. Hope enabled these ancient ancestors to live as strangers amid a hostile culture.

When I moved 10 years ago from Dallas, Texas, to Durham, North Carolina, to attend Duke Divinity School, I left family, friends, home and a 20-year career. I felt like Abraham and Sarah when God called them out of their homeland to the promised land (Genesis 12:1-7). Duke wasn't the promised land; still, God called me to abandon everything and follow by faith into a new life. At the time, I had absolutely no idea what a new life would look like. Nevertheless, deep down I trusted that "He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 11:11). When have you had to trust God without being able to see where God was leading you?

The writer of Hebrews shows what real biblical faith looks like. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1-3). The verse could be translated as faith is the "confidence" of things hoped for that remain unseen to us. Faith is described in a twofold manner: it is the "substance of things hoped for" and "the evidence of things not seen."

Most instructive is the description given to us of the way in which faith prepared the ancient ancestors for the fulfillment of God's promises. From this, we can see that faith is the foundation that gives the believer confidence to stand.

Abraham and Sarah understood faith as holding onto the unseen promise by hope and perceiving God's hand in their lives. These ancient ancestors are held up as examples and inspiration in faith: they endured a great deal, persevered against all odds and accomplished spectacular, life-changing and one could say world-changing events through faithful obedience to God. True faith brings confident obedience to God's word, despite circumstances

and consequences. Their faith made them pilgrims and strangers and secured for them the divine blessing. Abraham and Sarah lived in the future hope of the promise of a country, of a son, of a seed that God promised. Their example reminds us that living faithfully does not require knowing where the journey will take us, but trusting the God who leads us.

What does it mean for you to live as a pilgrim, trusting God's promises even when you cannot yet see their fulfillment?

Oct. 11
Lesson Scripture: Hebrews 11:23-40
Title: A Faith That Endures

We could call Hebrews 11:23-40 the "Faith Hall of Fame." Moses, Noah, the martyrs, Rahab and Jesus are held together by their commitment to act in accordance with what God would have them do in the future. These are "heroes and heroines" of faith who acted in faith because they trusted realities they could not yet see. They trusted that the unseen was as real as the world around them.

Having faith in the unseen is the challenging part. It is easy to become so focused on the world around us that we lose sight of God. Sometimes, what we can easily see becomes more convincing than what we cannot. So many Christians cannot always separate from the world because we can become invested in what the world values that we forget our lives are shaped by faith in Christ.

Moses is a pattern of Jesus as a prophet, mediator and intercessor. What prepared him for this role? His choice to give up the treasures and wealth of Egypt (Hebrews 11:26) in favor of God; although invisible, by faith, Moses kept the Passover and passed through the Red Sea on dry land (Hebrews 11:28-29). God trained Moses to see with the eyes of faith. If we allow God, we too can be trained to see God everywhere. How does faith change what we see?

We cannot forget the only woman specifically named, Rahab. She gained a special role in God's story; the gospel writer records her in the genealogy of King David, Solomon and Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5). Rahab lived in a house built directly into the city wall of Jericho; she was an outsider and a foreigner (a Canaanite),

putting her at the lowest tier of local society, yet because she had faith and received the spies, she was not destroyed (Hebrews 11:31).

"(People of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and [living in] caves and holes in the ground" (Hebrews 11:38 AMP). These heroes and heroines won approval through their faith, although they did not receive what was promised. God had us in mind and had something better and greater in view for us. Faith does not depend on seeing the promise fulfilled. Like those who came before us, we are called to live faithfully toward what God has promised, even when we cannot yet see it.

Therefore, we might ask ourselves, "What does it mean for us to live faithfully toward a promise we may not see fulfilled?"

Oct. 18
Lesson Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-17
Focus text: Hebrews 12:1-2
Title: Faith's Source

Our Bible study continues picking up at Hebrews 12:1, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." The writer of Hebrews uses the sports metaphor of running. The narrative depicts running the good race of faith.

My good friend Kay lives in Dallas, and she ran marathons. The big ones: Boston, New York, Chicago, London and, of course, the Dallas Marathon. When I studied the text for this lesson, I thought about her and all the pictures adorning Kay's kitchen walls of her crossing the finish lines with her times posted. She is the epitome of shedding every weight and running her race with patient endurance, perseverance and steady, active persistence.

By the time Kay was finally diagnosed, she had stage four ovarian cancer. Her doctor told her to settle her affairs and wait for the end. That is not what she did. I was standing in her kitchen the night she confessed her faith: "I will not become another statistic." Right then she made the decision to run her course: "[Looking away from all that will distract us and] focusing our eyes on Jesus, who is the Author and Perfector of faith [the first incentive for our belief

and the One who brings our faith to maturity]" (Hebrews 12:2 AMP.)

Kay threw off the doubters, naysayers and negative nellies and kept the faith. Nothing held her back from running with her eyes fixed on Jesus. Do we stop long enough to think about where our faith comes from?

We do not have to muster up faith when ours is pooping out. The text says "Jesus is the Author and Perfector" of our faith. Faith begins with Jesus, and Jesus brings it to completion. Do we really hear and believe those words? How many times have we read and heard about the great cloud of witnesses, those people in the "Faith Hall of Fame," the departed heroes and heroines, who finished their race of faith successfully, without receiving the promise of God, yet they leave behind a legacy that encourages current believers to keep going?

We do not always have the privilege of witnessing someone else's faith in action; however, I had a front-row seat to Kay's. In the midst of chemotherapy and participating in a drug trial, she never took her eyes off Jesus or quit the race; quite literally, she ran the New York Marathon and finished. Then she ran and finished Boston and Dallas.

Jesus endured all the way to the cross. In Jerusalem, on Good Friday, you can walk the Via Dolorosa; he did not quit; he undertook the steps to Golgotha, which perfected his faith, knowing that God would keep the promise of resurrection and victory over death. Jesus' endurance on behalf of all believers then and all believers to come should fuel our endurance.

God always leads the way in faith. We do not look to ourselves for faith. Faith was perfected in God's own person. Just like Kay, she kept the confession of her faith. She looked at Jesus.

By the way, her diagnosis was 15 years ago. She's still running her race. Has Jesus been the author and finisher of your faith?

Oct. 25
Lesson Scripture: Hebrews 13:1-21
Focus text: Hebrews 13:16
Title: WWJWD: What Would John Wesley Do?

WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) was a big deal in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Youth wore woven bracelets as a symbol of asking themselves WWJD when making life decisions. The question itself is almost a century older than the bracelets. The saying originated with a Congregational minister, Charles Sheldon, in his 1896 novel "In His Steps," which asked Christians to shape their actions around the question, "What would Jesus do?" Sheldon was essentially asking a discipleship question,

not creating a slogan. Hebrews 13:1-21 describes what Jesus would do: Show love. Respect each other. Visit the imprisoned, help the sick, welcome the stranger, remember your mentors who taught you the Word of God and imitate their faith. Do not judge, do not neglect to do good and to share what you have ..." (Hebrews 13:1-16).

In Matthew 25:35-41, Jesus makes clear that this mission also shapes the lives of disciples who follow him. Listen to what he says: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Jesus doesn't speak in generalities. He identifies himself with the people he names. How have you shown discipleship based on WWJD?

Now let us ask ourselves WWJD: What would John Wesley do? Wesley lived 18 centuries after Jesus. He lived in a very different world but encountered the same kinds of human need; poverty hadn't disappeared. Neither had hunger. People were still sick. People were still imprisoned. People were still suffering. Here is John Wesley's response: He made Christian discipleship visible in the world.

In January 1740, Bristol, England, was hit by a severe freeze. People were out of work, and some were in desperate circumstances. Wesley did not simply preach about their plight. He took up three collections in a single week and used the money to feed between 100-150 people a day. Wesley did not just tell Methodists to care about suffering. Instead, he organized. One historical account describes how he divided London into districts, assigning class members, which is what the original Methodists called their house meeting groups (we weren't a denomination then). Wesley assigned them to visit the sick, find assistance, relieve their needs, provide spiritual care and do whatever else they could.

Wesley's deeds make it clear that he didn't choose between feeding the hungry and receiving communion, between visiting the sick and praying or between caring for suffering people and searching scripture. Both belonged to the life of a disciple.

As we grow as disciples of Jesus Christ through faith, we can continue Christ's mission and ministry found throughout Scripture. How do you shape your life around WWJD? I encourage you to search the Scriptures.

Happenings.

Event Calendar.

October

Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)
Oct. 4—World Communion Sunday

Oct. 4—LSM School (Spartanburg District), Beaumont UMC, Spartanburg, 2-5:30 p.m. \$40. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/SPARTANBURG-DISTRICT-LSM-SCHOOL-REGISTRATION-FORM-Fall-2026.pdf>

Oct. 4—Homecoming Celebration, Mount Seal UMC, Hemingway, 1-3 p.m. For more information, contact Ronnetta Mitchell, 843-254-0581, or Clarence Mitchell, 843-244-1152

Oct. 6—50th Anniversary Celebration, UVMIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 6 p.m. RSVP to Cathy Trevino, cathy24@yahoo.com; Jennifer Parker, jpclemsongirl@gmail.com; or Jim Smith, smithjames@comporium.net

Oct. 10—Annual Church Bazaar, Carteret Street UMC, Beaufort, 8 a.m.-2 p.m.

Oct. 10—Fall ERT Basic Training, Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. \$30. <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

Oct. 10—Beginner’s Quilting Basics workshop, Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m. Call Debi to register, 803-772-0794.

Oct. 10—LSM School (Orangeburg District), Edisto Fork UMC, Orangeburg, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. \$40. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ordistlsmregistration/>

Oct. 11—LSM School (Spartanburg District), Beaumont UMC, Spartanburg, 2-5:30 p.m. \$40. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/SPARTANBURG-DISTRICT-LSM-SCHOOL-REGISTRATION-FORM-Fall-2026.pdf>

Oct. 11—LSM School (Orangeburg District), Edisto Fork UMC, Orangeburg, 3-7 p.m. \$40. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ordistlsmregistration/>

Oct. 12—Indigenous People’s Day

Oct. 12—Clergy Connexion Monthly meeting, Trenholm Road UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. For information, email Matt Alexander, mlalexander@umcsc.org, or Jad Taylor, jdtayloriii@umcsc.org

Oct 15—Registration deadline for Sumitt on the Black Church. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/october-2026summitregistration/>

Oct. 16—LSM School (Walterboro District), Zoom, 6:30-9 p.m. \$25. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Walterboro-Fall-Flyer-1.pdf>

Oct. 17—LSM School (Walterboro District), Bethel UMC, Walterboro, 8 a.m.-1 p.m. \$25. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Walterboro-Fall-Flyer-1.pdf>

Oct. 17—Fall Festival, Asbury Hills, Cleveland, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. <https://www.asburyhills.org/fall-festival/>

Oct. 18—Laity Sunday

Oct. 18—Alston Wilkes Society Annual Oyster Roast, Bowens Island Restaurant, Charleston, 3-6 p.m.

Oct. 18—Cancer CARE Sunday, Joseph B. Bethea UMC, Myrtle Beach, 11 a.m. <https://www.josephbbetheaumc.org>

Oct. 18—LSM School (Spartanburg District), Beaumont UMC, Spartanburg, 2-5:30 p.m. \$40. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/SPARTANBURG-DISTRICT-LSM-SCHOOL-REGISTRATION-FORM-Fall-2026.pdf>

Oct. 18—LSM School (Walterboro District), Bethel UMC, Walterboro, 2-6 p.m. \$25. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Walterboro-Fall-Flyer-1.pdf>

Oct. 23—LSM School (Anderson District), First UMC, Easley, 6-9 p.m. \$50. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Anderson-District-Fall-LSM-School.pdf>

Oct. 24—LSM School (Anderson District), First UMC, Easley, 9 a.m.-2 p.m. \$50. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Anderson-District-Fall-LSM-School.pdf>

Oct. 24—Rock Hill District UMM Retreat, Anne Springs Close Greenway Field Trial Barn, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. \$50. Register by Oct. 17: <https://www.umcsc.org/rockhillummevent/>

Oct. 24—Dementia & Alzheimer’s Information and Resource Expo, Fellowship Hall, Union UMC, Irmo, 10 a.m.-Noon. Contact: info@unionirmo.org.

Oct. 25—Reformation Sunday

Oct. 25—LSM School (Anderson District), First UMC, Easley, 3-7 p.m. \$50. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Anderson-District-Fall-LSM-School.pdf>

Oct. 29-31—Summit on the Black Church, Doubletree, Columbia. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/october-2026summitregistration/>

Classifieds.

Announcements

70 Free RSV Pew Bibles Available

Any church wishing to have 70 free Revised Standard Version pew Bibles should contact Scott Allen at 864-879-7926 or pastor@sharongreer.com.

Jobs

Financial Administrator (Part-Time)

Bluffton United Methodist Church is seeking a qualified Financial Administrator. This role is responsible for maintaining accurate financial records and managing confidential financial information.

Qualifications

- Accounting degree with at least 5 years of experience, or equivalent experience.
- Proficiency in budget preparation, designated funds, and financial reporting.
- Proficiency in, or willingness to learn, Church Windows, MS Office (especially Excel), VANCO Online Giving, Payroll, AAtrix Efile, Gmail/or other necessary software.
- Successful background and credit check.

Interested parties should remit an email along with a recent resume to: sprc@blufftonumc.org

SUPPORT STAFF POSITON

Job Description – A responsible adult female to work at a transition home with residents who are emerging from crisis situations. All staff are responsible for assisting and helping the residents to reach their most achievable goals and to have reasonable knowledge of decision-making skills in references within the house rules. The Support Staff plays a crucial role in ensuring the smooth operation of the house; provides timely recorded notes or dossiers when required; ensures the safety of residents by maintaining the house rules, facility security, and reporting any potential hazards. The position requires one to move swiftly through the house and be able to climb stairs.

This is a part-time Position with 2 to 3 overnights per week (no benefits offered). Must be available to work weekends and rotate holidays; take part in a brief on-the-job training and regular virtual staff meetings. We welcome volunteers to work along with the staff. Call or email to schedule an interview time.

www.killingsworth.org or info@killingsworth.org
803-771-6359

1831 Pendleton Street, Columbia, SC 29201

Music Director

Lyttleton Street UMC is seeking a **Music Director** to lead and develop the church’s music ministry. Includes conducting chancel choir and bells, directing or overseeing additional age-level choirs, and administering music program. Requires a bachelor’s degree in music or equivalent experience. Salary range \$52,000-62,000. To apply, send resume to admin@lsumc.net or LSUMC, 1206 Lyttleton Street, Camden, SC 29020.

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Rise and Read with the Oak Pointe ‘Pioneers’

The Rev. Meg Cook had the opportunity to read all three of her Herbert the Hippo books Sept. 16 to a second grade class at Oak Pointe Elementary. About 40 adults volunteered to come read to the students in various classrooms at Oak Pointe. Here, Cook shares a smile with the school’s principal, Mr. English. Cook pastors Grace United Methodist Church, Columbia, and her books are all available from the Advocate Press at <https://advocatepress.org>.

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Kingtree says goodbye Howle, welcome Fallaw
On Father's Day, the Kingtree UMC, Kingtree, bid goodbye (for the second time 25 years later) to Dr. George Howle, who had come from retirement to spend a special year with the Kingtree congregation. A week later, at the beginning of Fourth of July week, they welcomed their newly appointed pastor, the Rev. Grayson Fallaw and his wife, Mackenzie, and baby son, Eddie. At Children's Moment, the family was welcomed by a parade of youth, each bearing a letter to spell out "welcome" and bringing the new pastor a booklet containing a picture and information of each of the church's children. Dr. Howle said goodbye using the same text—Moses' farewell sermon, from Deuteronomy 31:1-8—he had used when he departed from the Kingtree pulpit many years previously.

Photos courtesy of Rosa T. Cherry



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