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December 2024

‘A future with hope’

Bishop forms ‘Jeremiah Teams’ to transform conference structure, operation, alignment

By Dan O’Mara

Leaders of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church are taking concrete and practical steps to transform how the conference is structured, how it operates and how it aligns with “Our

4 Priorities,” encouraging South Carolina United Methodists to “see the possibilities and live the promise.”

Bishop Leonard Fairley, after consultation with the Extended Cabinet and the Ministry Advisory Team, is inviting about

two dozen persons to form “Jeremiah Teams” and take the lead in developing recommendations in four areas: missional priorities, strategy for the black church and ethnic ministries, district alignment, and conference staff alignment.

Their objective: To bring proposals for each of these areas to the 2025 session of the South Carolina Annual Conference for approval.

See “Jeremiah Teams,” Page 10

Separation process ends

Court rules no more UMCSA church separations via Para. 2549

By Jessica Brodie

South Carolina United Methodist churches hoping to separate from the denomination through the conference’s Local Church Discernment Process can no longer do so.

On Oct. 26, the Judicial Council—the top court for The United Methodist Church—ruled that Para. 2549 cannot be used to permit the exit of local churches.

In Decision 1512, the court states that Para. 2549 “cannot be construed or used as legislation permitting the gracious exit of local churches because it applies to church closure and the sale of property, not disaffiliation. Any application of Para. 2549 to that end would be a misapplication of church law.”

“As a connectional church, the South Carolina Conference is bound by the decisions of the Judicial Council,” said Bishop Leonard Fairley, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference, and the Rev. Shannon Bullion, chairperson of the conference trustees, in a joint statement released Oct. 29. “The impact of this decision is that, effective immediately, the Local Church Closure and Separation Process approved by the trustees of the annual conference is no longer available as a means of separation from the denomination.”

Earlier this year, on Aug. 5, the trustees released a statement affirming they planned to continue to offer the discernment process one more year as a means for local churches to determine whether they will separate from denomination. They said the process, which concludes with a vote by lay and clergy members of the annual conference, would not continue after

See “Separation Process Ends,” Page 24



Photo by the Rev. Javy Rudolph Gwaltney

Three fires were set in three separate areas in the church, the pastor said.

Bethel Park clings to hope after fire damages church

By Jessica Brodie

DENMARK—In the aftermath of a devastating fire, one South Carolina United Methodist church is clinging to hope and faith, certain God will use for good what someone meant for evil.

Bethel Park UMC is a historic church in the Orangeburg District of the state, nestled a block from the highway in a small community near Bamberg. The church has been a thriving part of the area for more than a century, known especially for missions in the community.

But in the wee hours of Nov. 9, what is suspected to be three arson-related fires broke out at the church, damaging the church nursery, an upstairs Sunday school room and the library near the front entrance, leaving the church and its sanctuary unusable for now.

“All of that front entrance area is ashes and charcoal, and the farthest corner of the building has layers of soot,” said Bethel Park’s the Rev. Javy Rudolph Gwaltney.

See “Bethel Park Fire,” Page 10

Memory Connection offers new space for joy in dementia

By Jessica Brodie

ROCK HILL—One United Methodist church in the Rock Hill District has started a new dementia care ministry, and it’s bringing joy to volunteers and participants alike.

Woodland UMC launched The Memory Connection Oct. 14 as a way to provide respite care for people living with dementia. Two days a week—Mondays and Fridays—people with dementia are dropped off at the church by their caregivers for a four-hour span. The participants, along with a host of volunteers, get to enjoy a time of cognitive, social and spiritual connection in a safe and loving space, while their caregivers get a break to go to doctor appointments or have other needed time to themselves.

selves.

It’s a huge blessing to both the volunteers and to the participants, said Woodland’s pastor, the Rev. Robin Griffith, bringing joy and meaning one encounter at a time.

“I’m their biggest cheerleader,” said Christian Gatlin, whose mom, Linda, is a participant in the ministry.

Before, her mom was often depressed because of dementia, only getting out of the house once a week for church.

“She was just at home, looking at the four walls,” Gatlin said.

See “The Memory Connection,” Page 11

Year-end apportionment payments continue as 2024 edges to close

By Jessica Brodie

Apportionment payments continue to roll in as South Carolina approaches the close of another conference budget year.

As of Nov. 20, the total apportionment percentage collected is 75.64 percent of the total, or nearly \$10.6 million of the 2024 budgeted goal

of \$14 million. However, Beth Westbury, treasurer and director of administrative services for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, said this amount includes apportionments paid by churches that separated in 2023 but were required to pay six months of apportionments into 2024.

If the amount paid by 2023 separating churches is removed, the percent collected as of Nov. 20 is 66.18 percent, or nearly \$9.3 million.

“I am optimistic that we will have a good December,” Westbury said.

See “Apportionments,” Page 10

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\$1.1 million grant to help local churches become more fruitful in their ministry with children

By Dan O'Mara

For years, churches have sought ways to be more fruitful in ministry with children. Soon, United Methodist churches in South Carolina will have new tools to support this effort thanks to a \$1.1 million grant from the Lilly Endowment.

This funding will enable the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church to establish a new ministry in collaboration with Messy Church USA, Narrative 4 and the West Virginia Conference UMC via its Portico online learning system.

Titled "Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer," the ministry will foster a culture of belonging in congregations and promote a shift in how worship is experienced, focusing on intergenerational practices involving storytelling and the arts.

This will incorporate the following:

Leadership Development: The five-year grant will support training for pastors and lay leaders from congregations large and small, beginning with an initial cohort of 12 churches. Each year after, leaders from 12 more churches will be added to this leadership cohort, until lay and clergy from a total of 60 churches will have been trained and as many as 500 children reached. Program leaders will recruit churches from across the conference to ensure diversity within the cohort.

Messy Church Partnership: Messy Church USA will walk alongside the conference in developing a family retreat program that empowers parents as spiritual leaders. It will help the conference create a children's worship day camp, where children can learn to design, plan and lead worship for the community using creative arts. These congregations will model and teach children ways to pray in these "messy" experiences.

Story Exchange with Narrative 4: Narrative 4 will train church leaders in story exchange, a practice that encourages participants to deepen their engagement with narratives, exercise curiosity, extend empathy and internalize wisdom. This process encourages a deeper connection among participants.

Online Learning through Portico: The collaboration with the West Virginia Conference will make its powerful online learning management system, Portico, available to the leadership cohort to provide courses, videos, Bible studies and webinars in support of these programs.

Bishop Leonard Fairley, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference, expressed his gratitude for all those who had a hand in bringing these resources to South Carolina.

"This generous grant will help us live into



The grant will enable the South Carolina Conference of The UMC to establish a new ministry in collaboration with Messy Church USA, Narrative 4 and the West Virginia Conference.

Jesus's mandate, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs,'" Fairley said. "The grant will help us give our children voice and agency, and we look forward to what they will teach us through this gift.

"I pray that their generation will teach ours some much-needed lessons in humility."

Connecting Children is funded through the Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer Initiative, a national initiative of the Lilly Endowment designed to help Christian congregations more fully and intentionally engage children in intergenerational corporate worship and prayer practices.

"Congregational worship and prayer play a critical role in the spiritual growth of children and offer settings for children to acquire the language of faith, learn their faith traditions, and experience the love of God as part of a supportive community," said Christopher L. Coble, Lilly Endowment vice president for religion. "These programs will help congregations give greater attention to children and how they can more intentionally nurture the faith of children, as well as adults, through worship and prayer."

The Rev. Millie Nelson Smith, director of Connectional Ministries for the South Carolina Conference, sees the grant as an answer to long-standing prayers.

"It affords us the opportunity to lean heavily into Our 4 Priorities by empowering local churches to nurture children, engaging them, their families and others in the congregation in exciting and vibrant worship experiences that involve all generations," Nelson Smith said. "It

will help children in our congregations develop in their faith while reaching out to children from extended families and within the community to connect and grow disciples of Jesus Christ who will be the ones who carry our faith into the future."

Toni Taylor, a member of Philadelphia UMC in Fort Mill who led the effort to secure the grant, said the Lilly grant "represents a strategic investment in uniting and revitalizing the United Methodist community through intergenerational worship, fostering belonging and inclusivity for all members—especially children."

Taylor added, "Our connectional system will leverage collective wisdom, innovative approaches and partnerships such as Messy Church USA and Narrative 4 Story Exchange to bring voice to our children in worship."

The Rev. Cathy Joens, during her ministry as a conference congregational specialist specializing in age-related ministries, invited Taylor to lead the effort.

"Worship is like blood is to the human body," said Joens, who is now the director of church relations for Epworth Children's Home. "We are created to worship and praise God. This grant allows us to work alongside churches in creative and meaningful ways that allow our families and children to grow deeper in their worship and daily lives.

"At the end of the day, it is about building deepening relationships with God and one another. The tools that we will be able to access and offer to local church leaders will make a lasting impact."

Advocate Press publishes three more books

Three more UMCSC books are now available from the Advocate Press, with two more scheduled for release this month.

The Advocate Press is the publishing arm of the *Advocate* newspaper, producing books of interest to South Carolina United Methodists on matters of faith and to amplify regional voices and those that advocate for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

The three newest books just released from the Advocate Press are as follows: "God's Disaster Warriors: Into the Danger Zone with South Carolina's UMCVIM Early Response Team," by Billy Robinson with other ERT members; "Loving Hands: A 40-Day Devotional for Caregivers," by Stephon Void; and "From the Vault: Stories You Probably Never Knew About South Carolina Methodism," by Dr. Phillip Stone. Two more books about to release include "Recollections: Stories from My Life in the Ministry," by Dr. Roger M. Gramling, and "Raise Your Ebenezer: A Field Guide to Suffering," by Dr. Ted Goshorn.

"God's Disaster Warriors" tells the 20-year history of the ERT disaster response ministry. In 2004, after South Carolina narrowly missed four back-to-back hurricanes, God began to open doors for a fledgling early disaster response program in this state. Since then, South Carolina's UM-



VIM ERT has responded to countless disaster calls to rescue people from dangerous situations and give them restoration of hope, care, and the love of Jesus.

In "Loving Hands: A 40-Day Devotional for Caregivers," when Void's father was diagnosed with cancer in fall 2021, Void and his mother immediately entered the beautiful yet often difficult world of caregiving.

The 40 devotionals are meant to help caregivers lean into and reflect on scripture during a time of hardships, transitions and new beginnings.

Finally, in "From the Vault," conference archivist Dr. Phillip Stone shares fascinating stories from the archives about South Carolina United Methodism. The book collection offers advice to local church historians on how to arrange a history room and how to think about their work; biographical selections and articles about conference institutions or Methodist history; Methodist history in some communities in the state; and resources that are available in the archives and online.

These five bring the total number of books produced by the Advocate Press to 32. The books are available for purchase <https://www.advocatesc.org/books> and most are also available on Amazon as a paperback or ebook.

Stephen's House

Aldersgate opens sixth house for special needs adults named in honor of UMCSC pastor

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—A sixth South Carolina house to help special needs adults live independently in a faith-based setting is now up and running.

On Oct. 29, supporters of Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry gathered for a dedication ceremony at Stephen's House, a home in Columbia near Irmo that accommodates four men with special needs.

Stephen's House was named in honor of the Rev. Stephen Taylor, senior pastor of Union United Methodist Church in Irmo and one of the original founders of Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry, which began organizing through The United Methodist Church in fall 2002 and launched as a legal nonprofit ministry in 2003.

Before a crowd of supporters and Aldersgate families, Aldersgate Executive Director Kim Thomas dedicated the home to Taylor "for all your dedication and work throughout the years."

In addition to honoring Taylor, the home also included a room dubbed "the Poston Room" in honor of the Poston family, whose donation helped make the home possible.

The dedication included a consecration prayer and litany of dedication led by Dr. Sheila Elliot Hodge and the Rev. Meg Cook, two Columbia-area United Methodist pastors. Columbia District Superintendent the Rev. Fran Elrod offered the benediction.

A reception and tour of Stephen's House followed.

"It's a humbling honor to be attached to the ministry of Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry," Taylor said in appreciation of the dedication, which came as a surprise to him.

Stephen's House is the latest Aldersgate home to house



Taylor said the house being named for him is a "humbling honor." Taylor helped found the ministry.

adults with special needs, enabling them to live as independently as possible in a quality home in a Christian environment.

The five other Aldersgate homes for adults with special needs are Aldersgate at The Oaks, in Orangeburg at The Oaks, which accommodates six men; Columbia Builder's Care Home, in Columbia near Epworth Children's Home, which accommodates six women; Rick's House, at The Manor in Florence, which accommodates four men; Sunshine House, also at The Manor, which accommodates four men; and Tommy's House, near Irmo in the Coldstream subdivi-



Led by the Rev. Meg Cook and Dr. Sheila Elliot Hodge, the crowd blesses and dedicates the new Aldersgate home.

sion, which accommodates four men.

Thomas said there is a vast need for homes for people with special needs in South Carolina, particularly as their caregivers—typically parents—age.

Enabling these men and women to have a Christian home where they can live relatively independently can be a huge relief for these families.

To learn more about Aldersgate, visit <https://www.aldersgatesnm.org>, or check out their book, available from the Advocate Press, at <https://advocatesc.org/store/books/aldersgate>.

Photos by Jessica Brodie

Jurisdiction's BMCR holds 55th annual meeting in S.C.

By Dr. Reginald Lee

COLUMBIA—The Southeastern Jurisdiction Black Methodists for Church Renewal marked a significant milestone with its 55th annual meeting, held Oct. 23-26 at Journey United Methodist Church.

This year's theme, "Building a Future of Faith, Family and Community," inspired attendees to unite for justice, resilience and transformation within the Black church and beyond.

The gathering served as a clarion call to confront pressing issues such as racial injustice, poverty and systemic oppression within Black communities. Drawing inspiration from Nehemiah 4:14, leaders urged participants to embody the spirit of Nehemiah, who famously led the rebuilding of Jerusalem against overwhelming odds.

South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley emphasized unity as he was introduced as the new bishop of the South Carolina Annual Conference.

The Rev. Tony Love, former chair of National BMCR, delivered a compelling keynote that set a passionate tone for the conference. He called for renewed dedication to justice and equity, urging attendees not only to vote but also to engage actively in political activism, integrating justice into their faith journeys.

Mississippi's Bishop Sharma Lewis delivered a message of faith for challenging times during a powerful Holy Communion service, reinforcing the shared commitment of clergy and laity to the church's prophetic mission.

Dr. Martin Quick led a session titled "Intergenerational IQ," fostering vital conversations about unity across generations within the Black church. Participants explored both their differences and shared values, creating a space to appreciate each generation's unique contributions.

In a dynamic town hall, Dr. Hanna Broome, director of religious affairs for Repairers of the Breach, highlighted the Black church's influence in public affairs. She emphasized the importance of a unified Black church vote in advocating for justice and shaping policies that promote equity.

An impactful Bible study on Black generational liberation theology and the effects of trauma on Black communities was also

conducted. This session provided attendees with practical tools and spiritual resources to overcome rubbish barriers to healing, empowering them to lead transformative, generational initiatives for liberation and justice.

A panel discussion featuring Bishops Fairley and Lewis along with Bishops Robin Dease (North Georgia), Kenneth H. Carter (Western North Carolina) and Gary Rivas (Methodist Church of Southern Africa)—addressed the future of Black Methodism amid evolving challenges and opportunities post-GC2024. Another discussion—led by Dr. Harry Singleton, a prominent James Cone scholar, and Bishop Dease—focused on the "Black Paper" on Black Methodism. They emphasized the need to confront White Christian Nationalism and encouraged Black Methodists to lead in the fight against racial injustice. The session concluded with a decision to create their own documents addressing Project 2025 and White Christian Nationalism.

The closing banquet featured Dr. Michael L. Bowie Jr., co-author of "Dare to Shift" and national director of SBC21, who delivered an inspiring message encouraging attendees to adopt "right-side thinking" and bold leadership during transformative times. His call to action resonated deeply, inspiring both personal and communal growth.

The 55th annual BMCR meeting was not merely a conference; it marked the inception of a movement. Attendees left invigorated and equipped to champion justice in their communities. The intimate setting of fewer than 100 lay and clergy fostered meaningful dialogue, allowing participants to address the future of Black Methodism and discipleship candidly. This gathering reaffirmed the mission of the Black church, strengthening attendees' commitments to faith, family, and community. Many expressed excitement about attending next year's meeting, to be held at the newly created Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference of the UMC.

United in purpose, the Black Church, with the support of SEJ-BMCR, continues to stand as a beacon of hope and a powerful force for justice, inspiring all to serve, uplift, and build a future where justice prevails and faith endures.



Bishops reflect on a topic during the annual BMCR meeting.

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Viewpoints



by Jessica Brodie

Editorial

What now?

This fall, we all saw the devastation Hurricane Helene brought to the Southeast—some firsthand, some during mission trips to offer assistance and some on television and social media. The wind and rain caused trees to tumble and roads and homes to wash away. The sheer power of nature felt staggering as the wreckage unfolded.

“How could this have happened?” many of us asked. “What could we have done?”

The other day, driving home from out of state, our family came across a wreck on the interstate. A young man, veering to avoid an animal, flipped his small car and landed upside down in the median. By the grace of God, he avoided hitting any other vehicles, and when we got to him, he was crawling out from the wreckage, stunned and in shock but seemingly uninjured. We prayed with him and stayed with him until emergency crews arrived.

“You’re a walking miracle,” I told him as we knelt together, and he stared up at me, his mouth agape.

“How could this have happened?” the young man asked, his eyes wide as he surveyed his demolished vehicle. “I was just getting my life back together!”

The truth is we don’t know why bad things happen, whether storms or illnesses or devastating car accidents.

We only know that God will use those things, God will use God’s people, to bring about much good in the aftermath. As Romans 8:28 reminds us, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (NIV).

The question in the aftermath becomes, “What now?”

Our church has been in a state of discord for some time. Since 2022, we’ve lost almost a quarter of the United Methodist churches in South Carolina to separation, not to mention the pastors and individuals who have left. I’ve seen firsthand how the process divided congregations and brought heartache and strife. Why and how are no longer the questions. As with natural disasters and car accidents and other calamities, the question becomes, “What now? How can God use me in the midst of this? How can I be the hands and feet of Christ?”

We at the *Advocate* appreciate the steps the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church is now taking in the aftermath of separation, strife and discord (see “A Future with Hope,” Page 1). Instead of remaining by the side of the road, stunned and in a state of shock, our leaders are choosing to move forward to embrace the peace and unity God desires. The bishop’s new Jeremiah Plan is a great start, encouraging us to shake off the old to figure out what new plan God has for us in this time and place. How can we live into our missional priorities? How can we restructure and realign our districts and our staffing to do the new things God has planned for us? How can we embrace our ethnic diversity and use it as a strength?

As we prepare our hearts and our minds for the season of Advent, let’s open ourselves up to this new way. Let’s ask important and sometimes difficult questions and be willing to allow God to use us in transformative, even uncomfortable ways.

“They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.”—Isaiah 61:4



by Bishop Leonard Fairley

Bishop’s Corner

Love came down

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”—John 1:14

Salvation history has its beginning in these profound words from the Gospel of John. Therefore, it is a right and good thing to celebrate our freedom from captivity, sin and death—freedom that is shining brightly in the eyes of Bethlehem’s child, Jesus, the Son of the Living God.

Prophets and hymn writers invite us to rejoice in this Christmas gift from God that redeems all of creation.

“For a child has been born for us, a son has been given to us; authority rests on his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”—Isaiah 9:6

“Love came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, Love divine, Love was born at Christmas; Star and angels gave the sign.”—Christina G. Rossetti, 1885

In the silence of the night, God’s word made flesh leaped down from the creator’s throne of glory, not in splendor or majesty, but in the voice of a child’s cry that pierced the night. In the humility of a stable, among shepherds and the marginalized, God sends God’s final word of peace, love, and justice. Therefore, as we anticipate Christmas Day, let our hearts rejoice and give God praise, that God’s word may live in us.

May we find the courage to say with Mary, “Let it be to me according to your word,” so that God might birth in us a light that overcomes all darkness. Joy to world, the Lord has come!

Christmas Eyes

In the eyes of a Bethlehem Jewish baby.
God gazes upon the world for the very first time
through human eyes.

In the scream of a newborn baby delivered in
the cave of shepherd’s field God speaks for the
very first time with human voice.

In the powerful tender grip of a baby’s fingers
intertwined with those of homeless parents God
holds fast to creation.

Who could have believed the cost of such a grip
would be nail prints, bloodstained tears, cries of
abandonment?

What Child indeed is this!
—By Leonard E. Fairley

Merry Christmas, and peace on earth.

Letters to the Editor

Wednesday morn and the sun is still shining

I awakened early this morning, with a slight disappointment of the electoral outcome of last evening, after a brief night of rest. Surprisingly, I really rested well, as though a burden had been lifted. Although the outcome was not what I wanted or even prayed for, I had done what I was led to do.

I have prayed, listened, observed, compared and considered who would best fit the scriptural suggestion of the righteous leader under whose authority the people would rejoice or mourn. I shared my opinion with family, friends and acquaintances from the outset, not at the 11th hour. As in most things, many agreed, and some did not. Some even suggested leaving the matter alone, just pray and God will fix it, but I decided to pray and vote.

This morning as I looked through the window shade and saw the sunshine and the squirrels scampering, and seeing and hearing the birds chirping, I felt really good. I realized that God had done his part. He had given me another day, another chance, and if I had gotten it wrong, another opportunity to get it right.

So I decided that I would again rejoice on the day that the Lord had made. It was made easier with the knowledge that at least I had tried—tried to help my family, neighbors, my country. I won’t grow weary in well doing, for in due season, I will reap and proudly tell my grands, when asked, “I tried!”

There is always tomorrow, and with it, new challenges, so let’s not waste time relitigating lost battles. New ones are coming. See you there!

Rev. Joseph Abram Jr., retired
St. Matthews

Equality

Will there ever be a total equality of the sexes? The Apostle Paul dealt with this highly controversial issue in the Bible (Galatians).

Women are rejected many more times than men. There is a glass ceiling and double standards when women seek to achieve. A woman is told she is not qualified or she does not have

See “Letters,” Page 5



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Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Steven L. Brown

Luke 10 at Christmas

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

As he became more conscious, he also became aware of the pain shooting up from his leg and flaring across his back. He tried to sit up but couldn't lift more than his head without overwhelming pain. He couldn't get up!

Lying on his back, his head throbbing, he tried to get a look at himself. The red velvet pants and white fur trim were covered with mud, and there looked like a gash on the boot on his twisted left leg.

Oh, no, his Santa suit was ruined! What would Macy's do? He couldn't afford to have it fixed.

Here was a Santa on Christmas Eve flat on his back on some side street with no one in sight. What a Christmas this will be—if I even get home.

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

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

"I don't think so," said the driver jumping out of the car.

"Good, then get back in and let's go. The Mrs. and I might still make the beginning of the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall.

"But what about—" the driver began.

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

"You are, Rev," said the driver as he got back in and shut the door. "You are."

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

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

"Look, Momma, it's Santa Claus!"

squealed the child.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We can't take you ourselves on account of a little incident that happened there last week," added another.

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

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

And Jesus ended his story, saying, "Which one was a neighbor to him who fell ... Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:25-37).

Brown is the Marion District superintendent for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.



Cognitive Connection

by the Rev. Morris Waymer Jr.

Doing the best we can

Summertime in Orangeburg was a great time. School was out, and my cousins, aunts and uncles would gather in Orangeburg. They would travel from Detroit, Maryland and Washington, DC, so we could laugh and have fun.

I may not be vocal, but I notice what is happening. The trips do not occur every summer. The family laughter is not as prevalent. The dynamic in the family is changing because my aunts and uncles are not remembering things like they used to.

As a young man and biology major, I wonder if I need to pay attention to this. Is this going to affect my dad? Is this going to affect me?

The answer is yes. It has affected my dad and our family.

My dad has worked since he was a little boy. In the 1940s, my grandfather purchased more than 100 acres of property. It was an amazing feat, but it came with hard labor. He worked on the family property and other people's property to help take care of the family. My dad was a great athlete and played baseball and basketball. His true love was football, but his mother thought he was not big enough to play and didn't want anyone to hurt her son.

Losing the ability to remember is painful to watch, and I can only imagine when my dad saw his identical twin brother lose this battle. As of today, he still knows who we are. He does not talk much on the phone, but when we are in his presence, we talk about everything from grade school until he retired from his job. Watching baseball and football on TV gives him joy. Playing solitaire on the computer or doing crossword puzzles in his recliner makes for a full day.

As a family, we know what is happening and still do our best to ensure his quality of life. As he is a Vietnam veteran, the services he gets from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs are truly beneficial. They have programs, counseling, health checkups

The South Carolina Cognitive Connection Ministry is an ecumenical initiative spearheaded by The United Methodist Church. Its purpose is to engage and support faith-based communities to provide loving, welcoming programs that help their members living with dementia and the family members. Faith organizations and individuals passionate about improving the lives of families living with dementia are encouraged to join dementia care workshops provided around the state. For information on upcoming workshops in your area or to find out how you can get involved, go to the Cognitive Connection Ministry Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/61561413972152> or email cognitive@umcsc.org.

and many other services they provide, with my mom as the primary caregiver and me as a secondary caregiver.

It is a joy to see that blue Honda pickup truck with the dings, scratches, dents and whatever else in the bed of the truck drive to church every Sunday morning so he can worship and count money after church. After Sunday service, he watches the New Francis Brown and Silver Hill Memorial services on his tablet. Now, once a week, you will find him at the pond with his fishing buddy as they catch bass and crappies. I won't tell you where the pond is, but I know where the key is to unlock the gate.

Life is slowing down, but we celebrate as often as we can. We have taken precautions to monitor his activity when he drives the truck. We do the best we can, knowing that more memory loss is coming.

Enjoy your parents while you can and keep them active as long as possible.

Waymer pastors Silver Hill Memorial UMC, Spartanburg, and is the chair of the conference Board of Ordained Ministry.

Bishop Fairley condemns racist texts sent to people of color in South Carolina

Bishop Leonard Fairley, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, issued a statement in response to racist text messages that were distributed to people of color in South Carolina. The texts were sent to students at Claflin University, a United Methodist-related school, and other colleges and universities in South Carolina and other states informing them they have been "selected to pick cotton at the

nearest plantation."

"Friends, the first place where this should be condemned is in the church. We must raise our voices as one in rebuke and make it clear that there is no room for this in our nation," Fairley said. "We are better than this because the love of Christ compels us to be."

Read the rest of his statement at <https://tinyurl.com/fairley-condemns-racist>.

LETTERS: Readers share on gender equality, personal transformation

From Page 4

have enough experience. The man gets the job even if not as qualified.

In corporations and sports, salaries of women are lower than men. The Bible is wrongly interpreted in saying that wives should submit graciously to their husbands. Women will be rejected medical care because of abortion laws. It will get worse. In some denominations, women cannot hold positions or be ordained. Thank God The United Methodist Church has ordained women ministers.

Women have gained many freedoms over the years (voting) compared to the suppression and mistreatment of women in other parts of the world.

Women of the Bible such as Mary, Mary Magdalene and Esther reveal God's love for women. God created man and woman, and there is equality and justice in God's eyes. Let us not go back.

A man who cares how woman are treated,

*Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia*

Slave ship captain and hymn writer

Let me tell you about a man named John Newton. He was a contemporary of John Wesley. While Wesley was

working among the sea islands outside Savannah, Newton, a sea captain, was transporting Black people from Africa to Gadsden's wharf in Charleston to be sold into slavery.

In Africa he watched as armed men herded Black families into the cargo deck of his ship. They crowded as many as 400 Black human beings into that dark and damp space for the six-week journey across the Atlantic. Most of those who were destined for a life of slavery never saw the sun during that trip!

Keep in mind that this was a cargo ship. It was not equipped for transporting people. There were too few restrooms and too little food for the number of people on board. Most of the passengers had never been aboard a ship, so there was an epidemic of seasickness with people throwing up and being unable to get to the top deck to let it go overboard.

The whole thing was a monstrous mess, creating a near unbearable misery for the journey that stretched into two months. Those who died en route, estimated to be 75 to 100, were buried at sea. They were simply tossed overboard without benefit of prayers or ceremony.

Trips such as that were a factor in Newton's decision to give up his work as a ship's captain. In London between voyages, he went with a friend to a Methodist class meeting. At that meeting he was converted and dedicated his life to

undoing the damage he had done as a slave ship captain.

His conversion was real and life-changing. In his new life he became a hymn writer. His hymns include "Amazing Grace" and "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken, Zion, City of Our God." Both are in the current United Methodist hymnal. Think about it. No one could guess that those hymns were written by a former slave ship captain.

Two of the church's greatest hymns came from the pen of a man who spent a good part of his life forcefully removing men and women from their families, putting them in shackles, transporting them half a world away and selling them into a life of forced labor.

From slave ship captain to the author of great hymns. That is a huge, huge change! That's the miracle of the Christian gospel. It has the power to change the worst sinner into a convinced and caring believer.

Do you know what that means for us? It means that we who continue to benefit from the sufferings of the slave trade owe a great debt of gratitude to those whose ancestors endured horrendous pain and indignity without appreciation and compensation.

It also means that the Christian gospel can change us into joyful, caring and loving human beings.

*Rev. Mickey Fisher, retired
Spartanburg*



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Amiri B. Hooker

The church's call in the aftermath of the election

In the wake of the recent election on Nov. 4, America stands at a crossroads, and it's clear this wasn't just a political shift. This election represented a deeper crisis—a moral one.

This wasn't simply a victory or loss for the Republican or Democratic parties. It was a call to the church to examine its own moral compass and ask: Have we lost our prophetic voice? Are we still a beacon of integrity in a fractured society?

A day after the election, I was privileged to sit in on a community Bible study at a Black church. During the discussion, a young Black man shared openly about his reasons for voting. His decision, he said, was based on a promise of economic gain—lower taxes and personal wealth—not considerations of race or gender. In this moment, I heard the tension that many of us are experiencing: How can we balance personal gain with the gospel call to justice and compassion?

This tension is not new. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., through the Poor People's Campaign of 1968, recognized this very conflict. He challenged America to consider a society grounded in love and equity, pushing for a radical redistribution of economic and political power. King spoke of a vision where “we are called upon to raise certain basic questions about the whole society.” The church, as a community of love and faith, should be willing to ask these hard questions—about economic justice, about the least among us and about our shared humanity.

But today, as I observe our divided political and social landscape, I wonder if we have forgotten King's vision. The church should stand as a community that not only prays but also actively cares for the poor, feeds the hungry and advocates for the marginalized. As Fannie Lou Hamer famously said, “You can pray until you faint, but unless you get up and try to do something, God is not going to put it in your lap.” Our faith should move us to action.

In recent decades, structural and cultural shifts have profoundly impacted the Black church and its political influence. Today's Black church is made up of diverse branches, from mainline Methodists and Baptists to Pentecostals and nondenominational congregations. Each tradition carries its own unique legacy and political alignment, leading to a complex and varied landscape. For example, while 77 percent of Methodists align with the Democratic Party, only 60 percent of nondenominational Protestants do, and more than half of religious nonaffiliates claim no party at all (“How Will U.S. United Methodists Vote?” by the Rev. Lovett H. Weems Jr., UM News).

The Black vote, which was once seen as reliably Democratic, is now more diverse. Political diversity within Black congregations shows that economic, cultural and generational shifts are changing the fabric of the Black church itself. Many young Black Americans, particularly Gen Z and Millennials, don't attend church as their parents and grandparents did, resulting in fewer opportunities for the church to engage and influence their perspectives.

In the 2024 election, we've seen how crucial this shift is. African-American political identity is not a monolith, and assumptions about automatic support for Democratic candidates are no longer accurate. The church must engage with these changing dynamics if it wishes to remain relevant in guiding both moral and political choices.

As the church, we must also remember the clear biblical call to justice and compassion. The prophet Isaiah warns against leaders who “make unjust laws ... to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people” (Isaiah 10:1). Ezekiel condemns leaders who exploit the vulnerable, saying they are “like wolves tearing their prey; they shed blood and kill people to make unjust gain” (Ezekiel 22:27). These words remind us that the church cannot remain silent in the face of policies that harm the most vulnerable.

Our mission is to be agents of peace, justice and reconciliation. This means standing alongside the poor and oppressed, just as Jesus calls us to do in Matthew 25:45: “When you did not do it unto the least of these, you did not do it unto me.” In today's political and social landscape, we are called not only to care for the least of these but to challenge the systems that create and perpetuate poverty, inequality and division.

It's tempting to believe in a nostalgic past where all was well, but our American story tells otherwise. From the Trail of Tears to slavery, from disenfranchisement to systemic racism, our history is filled with stories of rejection and oppression. As Christians, we must acknowledge these truths, not to dwell in despair but to work toward a new and inclusive vision for the future.

In this post-election moment, let us, The United Methodist Church, reclaim our prophetic voice. Let us be a church still united that stands as a moral compass, speaking out against injustice, advocating for the marginalized and building a community rooted in compassion and love.

As we move forward, may we seek to embody Dr. King's dream of a beloved community, where all people are valued and justice prevails.

Hooker is the congregational specialist for the Florence and Marion districts of the UMC. He's also the author of two books from the Advocate Press (<https://advocatesc.org/books>): “My Banned Black History Sermons” and “Preaching in the Midst Of...”



Local United Women in Faith units hold fall retreat

The Ebenezer United Women in Faith, Bishopville, and the Antioch United Women in Faith, Sumter, hosted a Fall Retreat at the Dayton House Resort, Myrtle Beach, Sept. 18-20. The theme was “Sisters Encouraging Sisters.” The event was well attended with 31 participants from various states, including New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Virginia and various sites in South Carolina. Thanks go to President Rosa Wingate of Ebenezer UMC, President Valerie Pryor of Antioch UMC and Secretary Lillie Stephenson of Ebenezer UMC for organizing the event.



Guest Commentary

by Donna Polk Fisher

Lessons From Noah's Flood II

I moved to Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, last October from the suburbs of Atlanta, and since then, my husband and I have been blessed with the culture and kindness of everyone whose paths we have crossed. Having come to Lake Junaluska in the 1960s and 1970s, this place has always been my spiritual home, “halfway to heaven.”

But our quick access to our glorious surroundings, where we could view the stained-glass colors of fall leaves in a few minutes, recently lay in stark contrast to the mountains of destroyed remnants of entire lives of our neighbors.

And then, the character of Haywood Strong took action. Every group, every church, almost every person sprang immediately into serving their community in need. Cooking meals for the multitudes, miraculously turning a few loaves of bread into a feast. Providing every single need possible. Being the hands and feet of Christ. If the Bible says, “We will know them from their fruits,” every single one of these proved their grit, strength and their love and dedication to their neighbors. (I'm certain my progressive friends will claim this Scripture is taken out of context, but, ironically, that is part of the lesson, isn't it?)

That brings me to our most recent flood of political discontent—some might describe it as “holy discontent.” During these critical moments of life and death, not a single person that I heard asked someone in need, “Who are you voting for?” Republicans and Democrats alike both served and were served—no questions asked.

One thing that I have learned listening and hearing from those who helped bring about the surprising extent of victory is that many authentic Christians on both sides believe deeply that they are doing what God has told them to do. If that's true, then God must be sending all a few lessons and blessings. Our recent struggles in The United Methodist Church have taught me that no reconciliation can take place without first establishing relationships of trust. And trust cannot exist without mutual respect and humility. None of this currently exists in our attempts to move forward.

No number of debates on policy and issues can be a source of solution until these necessary steps are complete. We all “see through a glass darkly.” The problem is that we all have different blind spots.

We can take this bright opportunity to reflect on our own. Garret K. Woodyard captured the essence of this last week: “The only way to grow as a human is to connect, especially with those you may disagree with. That's real democracy.”

So what have been my lessons in reflecting on my own part in this divide?

- Good people who are deeply motivated to solve problems have drastically different perspectives that we all need to hear to understand.

- Both sides share deep pain and fear for the future.

- Establishing relationships based on trust is not as difficult as it may seem—if we go into conversations with respect and humility ensured up front.

- Perception becomes reality. Despite the best intentions of progressives, seeking justice and grace for all, many hearing that message have been left feeling that their voices have not been heard. Sometimes people need to preach, but being a great pastor is what brings grace to all.

- We must reflect on and assess what we all have in common and begin to work together to start there, healing our world.

And now, you must stand by for the rest of the story. On Saturday morning, I was sitting in the library at Lake Junaluska writing thank-you notes to the many incredible staff who indeed worked miracles in the aftermath of Helene. Suddenly, a happy gentleman pulled a seat right in front of me to help. Got to love God's humor. David Lawson, my neighbor from down the hill, whom I had just met for the first time, was here for me to practice what I preach. He had just last week submitted two columns of reasons explaining why he had voted for Trump in our regional newspaper, responding in a point-counterpoint to recent events. So, David, I have heard you, and I appreciate all that you have done to help our neighbors. I am thrilled that we both agree that working together is the only way forward to the unity that our God is seeking for us all. We are better together.

“Let there be peace on earth.”

Fisher is the daughter of the late Rev. Charles Polk, an elder in the South Carolina Conference of the UMC. A South Carolina native, she now makes her home in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina.



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Guest Commentary

by Minister Anna Stevens Bright

The availability of your inn

Pastor Ken Trivette shares a story: In the fall of 1775, the manager of Baltimore's largest hotel refused lodging to a man dressed as a farmer. The manager thought that [the farmer's] lowly appearance would discredit his Inn. The man left and found a room in another place. Shortly thereafter, the manager discovered that the man he had refused lodging was none other than Thomas Jefferson, then vice president of the United States. Immediately, he sent a note to Jefferson and invited him to return as his guest. Jefferson replied by instructing his messenger: "Tell him I have already engaged a room. I value his good intentions highly, but if he has no place for a dirty American farmer, he has none for the vice president of the United States."

This same occurrence took place hundreds of years before Vice President Jefferson was refused lodging in an Inn. However, it was an occurrence like no other. According to Luke 2:1-7 (KJV):

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

It was time for the Messiah to be born, but because "there was no room for them in the inn," Jesus had to be born in a lowly, humble condition, in a manger in the stable among the animals.

Let's look at some things of which the innkeeper had no knowledge about "this child" to be born on this particular night:

- His mother, Mary, was chosen by God to give birth to this child.
- At 12 years old, this child would be in the temple in Jerusalem dealing with spiritual matters, listening and asking questions that amazed others. He would be "about

[his] Father's business."

- The first miracle this child would perform would be to turn water into wine at the Marriage at Cana when the wine ran out.
- This child would cleanse ten lepers.
- This child would give sight to the blind.
- This child would raise the dead.
- This child would make the lame walk.
- This child would drive out demons and evil spirits.
- This child would calm a raging storm on the sea just by saying, "Peace be still."
- This child would heal a woman who had been sick with "an issue of blood" for 12 long years.
- This child would feed 5,000 hungry souls with five loaves of bread and two fish.
- This child would walk on water.
- This child would be the Savior, crucified to save a dying world from sin.
- After this child was crucified, dead and buried, he would be resurrected on the third day, with all power in his hands.
- If any man comes unto the Father, it has to be through this child because he is "the way, and the truth, and the life."
- This child would become King of Kings.

There would be much more about this child for whom "there was no room in the inn."

Then what does the inn symbolize today? The inn represents mankind's heart. Do you have room in your heart for Jesus? He doesn't force himself on anyone because he said in Revelation 3:20 (KJV), "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Is your "inn" pure and clean, bathed in the love of Jesus Christ? Is your "inn" one that doesn't mind giving to help a fellow man? Is your "inn" willing to wait on God, no matter how long it takes? Is your "inn" selfless or selfish? Is there a vacancy for Jesus in your "inn"?

Only you know "the availability of your inn."

Have a wonderfully blessed holiday season and Christmas, and never leave home without him.

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



Guest Commentary

by David Bryant

Capitalizing on heritage

As our unsettled season of church exits and anxiety has ended, many congregations have been left without satisfactory closure. In the churches who have chosen to remain within the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, however, I have seen and experienced a new emergence of hope, vision and vitality. Much of this renewal has led to a renewed interest in our commonality found in both Scripture and the life and theology of John Wesley.

For now, let us focus briefly on John Wesley and the heritage he provided us.

Wesley began his formal education at the hands of his mother, the daughter of a Puritan preacher, when he was five years old. At the same time, his father, rector of the local Anglican church, started his religious training. Wesley experienced his first exposure to divine intervention in the form of his rescue from a devastating fire in the manse of St Andrew's Church in Epworth, England. As a result of this experience, Wesley embraced the description of being a "brand plucked from the fire." He would repeatedly return to this event as evidence and affirmation of his mission, ministry and calling. To study the life of Wesley is to become aware of his ever-evolving theology, as well as his doubts, fears, foibles, contradictions and humanity. Perhaps his greatest lesson was taught on his deathbed when he said to those present, "The best of all is, God is with us"—a simple acknowledgment of the presence of God throughout our earthly journey.

Wesley, I believe, left us not just a heritage but also a vision for our earthly journey as expressed through service and love for others in the face of fear, doubt and obstacles. It's a visionary journey leading us from passive belief to active participation in God's kingdom, and it's a vision that is still valid today and is still the unique "brand" of what we as United Methodists have to offer the world.

Yes, we all know we are saved by grace through faith and not by works, but how many embrace that we are saved precisely for our works? Jesus is abundantly clear in who, how and why we are to love and what that love looks like. We are told that his rain falls on us all and his love endures forever. We are told that we are to seek justice, show mercy and live humbly. We are told that to those to whom much is given, much is required.

Yet we steadfastly cling to the peace of quietness over the peace of his kingdom that requires the work of uncomfortable conversations, dissonance of evolving beliefs and risk of saying aloud that which must be said.

If we could see the above, would it change the way we see others? Would it change the way we see the kingdom? True surrender to God and Jesus could indeed change the world. Our denomination must embrace risk and love in intentional action to advance the kingdom through genuine selfless service and acceptance.

Under our new leadership and energy, perhaps we will move beyond the codified listing of what we do and come to a consensus on who we are as a people. We have established who we are not. We must establish who we are and what—if you will pardon the language of business and industry—is the "product niche" of our denominational identity.

How are we to answer the spiritual but unchurched member of our community when asked, "Why United Methodism?" "Why your church?"

What we are to respond individually as corporate members of a historic, yet vital and vibrant, denomination is the most important task before the episcopacy of our new bishop.

The answer must come from the pews.

Bryant, a member of Bethesda UMC, Easley, is also a member of the Advocate Board of Trustees.



Guest Commentary

by B. Ron Gilmer

Can a mistake be good?

Can a mistake be good? Yes (sometimes).

It is Friday night in a small town in South Carolina. The local high school has a football game. The Baptist pastor schedules the church that provides the pregame meal for the football team. The United Methodist Church is assigned this task. The UMC pastor and his father pick up the food and deliver it to the stadium. Upon arriving at the stadium, the UMC pastor notices the Pentecostal Holiness Church pastor is also arriving and has food to feed the team. Yes, we now have twice the food to feed the football team.

The Baptist pastor is called, and he advises he made a mistake and just let the team eat from all the food. There was plenty of food for all.

The Methodist pastor does a devotional for the team after they eat. It is good to see young men listening to a message from the Bible.

After the event, the real ministry begins. There is a considerable amount of food remaining. The Baptist pastor says he is hosting an after-the-game gathering for area youth. He takes some of the food. The Pentecostal Holiness pastor takes some of the food and feeds a crew working at his church preparing

for an event. The UMC pastor knows one of his church members is hosting some of the school band for a party after the game. He drives over to her house and delivers some of the food for use at her gathering.

There is still some food left. A church member takes some of it to work and shares it with a family in need. The next day, there is a family packing to move to Kansas that does not have a planned meal, so they receive some of the food to share with all the packing crew.

Another family in the area receives some food also that feeds them for two days.

All the food delivered to these people was well received, and it came from three local pastors working together.

All this was a good reflection on these churches. Jesus set a good example for this type of ministry. Ministry can be done at any time and any place. We just need to act or react to the situation.

Back to the question. Can a mistake be good? Yes! All this ministry happened because of a scheduling mistake that generated goodwill.

God is good!

Gilmer is a member of St. Paul United Methodist Church, Ninety Six.



Photo by Jessica Brodie

A bookishly good time

Three Wofford alumni whose books have been published by the Advocate Press shared a table at Wofford College's recent Alumni Day, selling and signing their books and chatting with people about their writing process. United Methodist pastors the Rev. Arthur Holt (left), Dr. Kim Strong (second from left) and Dr. Lyn Pace (right, talking with a reader) enjoyed what turned out to be a lovely fall afternoon on campus. Holt authored "People of My Journey" and "What I Have Come to Believe," Strong authored "Laughing All the Way to Heaven" and Pace authored "The Sacred Year: A Contemplative Journey through the Liturgical Year." All are available on Amazon and at <https://advocatesc.org/books>.

Trinity UMC hosts Midlands-area Tri-District Connectional Gathering

By the Rev. Darlene L. Kelley

On Saturday, Nov. 2, United Methodists from the Columbia, Rock Hill and Greenwood districts gathered at Trinity United Methodist Church, Blythewood, to worship God, meet their new bishop and make a renewed commitment to “Hope, Healing and Health.”

The gathering was one of four total tri-district gatherings being held throughout South Carolina. In addition to the Nov. 2 event, two others were held: Oct. 12 in Florence and Oct. 19 in Easley. The event for Charleston, Orangeburg and Walterboro, originally scheduled for Nov. 9 in Orangeburg, was postponed because of weather issues and washed-out roadways. The new event will be Dec. 7 at Cokesbury in North Charleston.

At the Nov. 2 event in Blythewood, clergy and laity alike welcomed Bishop Leonard Fairley and his wife, Dawn, in a morning filled with singing, praying, communion, fellowship and good food. Hosted by the Rev. Scott W. Smoak and the gracious people of Trinity, the event reflected what was echoed at the other tri-district events. The message centered on our priorities as a church and how we become healthy together through the power and beauty of connectionalism.

Fairley shared a definition of connectionalism written by Dr. David W. Scott, director of mission theology at the General Board of Global Ministries. Scott defines connectionalism as “a fundamental theological and practical conviction for United Methodists around the world. It emphasizes that the church’s nature is primarily rooted in the connections among local congrega-



Martha Alewine chats with the Rev. Jim Arant during the gathering.



After the work, all crossed the parking lot to the fellowship hall and enjoyed a buffet and the company of one another.

tions” and “points to partnerships for collaboration in ministry, mission and mutual accountability.”

Fairley also shared an inspiring video about people working together to build



Fairley recognized the reality of differences but assured those gathered that we can still “share connection” despite this.

“The Living Bridge of Meghalaya” and then asked participants to work together in small groups. The groups discussed five questions about the power of connectionalism and how it can help heal churches, improve ef-

fectiveness and provide hope, including how connectionalism can give us healthy churches and how it can give us effective leaders. Spokespersons from each group then shared their collective wisdom.

Fairley also recognized the reality of differences but assured those gathered that we can still “share connection” despite those differences.

“No one wants to be part of an institution that fights with itself,” Fairley said. “There is no shortcut to healing. We can’t bypass the pain. We must make sure we are connected to the divine. We can let go and ask the Lord to make us healthy.”

Fairley’s message inspired yet also challenged the crowd.

“We have the leaders, but do we have the will?” he asked, and the crowd didn’t have long to wait for an answer. “We are water-washed, Spirit-born children of Christ! We can do this.”

And the people cried, “Amen!”

After the work, all crossed the parking lot to the fellowship hall and enjoyed a buffet and the company of one another. For many, it was a time to shake hands with the new bishop and chat with old friends across the region.

“I’ll admit. I was reluctant to go,” said Jo Ann Heiting, treasurer of Trinity UMC, West Columbia, with a chuckle. “I hate giving up Saturday morning, and you can quote me on that, but I was inspired beyond my expectations. The bishop’s message of hope combined with his love. It was powerful.” Her smile said the rest.

Kelley pastors Trinity UMC, West Columbia, and serves on the Advocate Board.

20 years of Christian love in action

Mount Hebron hosts conference Early Response Team’s 20-year anniversary celebration

By Jessica Brodie

WEST COLUMBIA—Missioners headed to Mount Hebron United Methodist Church Nov. 16 to celebrate 20 years of the South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission’s Early Response Team.

The ERT started in 2004 after South Carolina narrowly missed four back-to-back hurricanes. South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission provided a ten-foot trailer for the new program, and North United Methodist Church in the Orangeburg District donated \$4,000 to purchase tools. That fall, a team of ten from that church gathered in North UMC member Billy Robinson’s backyard to put shelving in the trailer and mount the tools. They had no chainsaws or heavy equipment, but they were ready to roll when the time came.

Since then, South Carolina’s UVMIM Early Response Team has done just that—rolled into action on countless disaster calls to rescue people from dangerous situations and give them restoration of hope, care and the love of Jesus Christ as members of the family of God.

Throughout the past 20 years, the ERT ministry has evolved into a program with 10 fully equipped response trailers and hundreds of volunteers, with thousands more trained to go into communities after a disaster to do whatever God requires. Over the years, they have responded to every hurricane and major tornado outbreak in the Southeast, mucking out flooded homes, tarping crumpled roofs and using chainsaws to extricate people trapped by fallen trees.

On Nov. 16, 80 people gathered at Mount Hebron UMC for a day to celebrate the fruits of the ministry.

Attendees gathered at 10 for greetings and fellowship, followed by music from Beaver Creek Gospel Band and a book signing for “God’s Disaster Warriors: Into the Disaster Zone with South Carolina’s UVMIM Early Response Team,” the brand new ERT book from the Advocate Press covering the ministry’s work over the past 20 years.

Similar mission-oriented books from the Advocate Press were also available for signing and sale: “Eyes for Haiti” about the UVMIM eye clinic in Jeremie, Haiti, by Dr. Hal Crosswell; “Send Me! The Story of Salkehatchie Summer Service,” by Arlene Andrews, the Rev. John Culp and the late Art Dexter; and “Faith In Action: Stories Of Salkehatchie Summer Service,” by Culp.

After a lunch of pulled pork provided by Don Beatty, attendees enjoyed a program of thanksgiving through ERT videos, speakers and storytelling of special experiences and inspirational moments throughout the years.

“We had a very good time celebrating what Jesus had done over 20 years of our ministry, which was projected in 18 20x-30-inch posterboards full of photos over the

years highlighting all the mission work done as God’s hands and feet to others in need throughout the Southeast,” Robinson said.

For more on the ERT and how to get involved, visit <https://www.umcsc.org/disaster>.

To purchase the ERT book or any of the other books listed above go to <https://advocatesc.org/books>.



As Sue Haddock and David Corley watch, ERT Coordinator Billy Robinson (left) and Dr. Hal Crosswell sign copies of their books during the ERT anniversary celebration.



ERT members and supporters gather behind photos of their work spanning 20 years.

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south carolina
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Surfside Beach, SC 29575
Register here:



February 12, 2025
9:30 a.m.-12 p.m.
Silver Hill Memorial UMC
778 John B. White Sr. Blvd.
Spartanburg, SC 29306
Register here:



‘Justice for all’

United Women in Faith gather in Rock Hill for 52nd annual meeting

By Allison Trussell

ROCK HILL—The United Women of Faith held their annual meeting Oct. 26 at Woodland United Methodist Church.

Pulled from Psalm 146, the theme of the two-day meeting was justice for all.

The Rev. Anthony Hodge, superintendent of the Rock Hill District, provided the message during the Friday evening service, and he continued that message based on Luke 18:1-18 during the Saturday meeting, after the scheduled speaker was delayed.

There are injustices throughout our world, Hodge said, including the lonely, the homeless, those with mental health issues, environmental issues and our polarized nation.

But, Hodge said, “Justice is justice. ... At the end of the day, we are more alike despite our differences and opinions.”

Hodge told the story of when he was pastoring a church in Charleston and his friend Dave started a running group with the youth to prepare for the Cooper River Bridge Run. To support the youth, Hodge joined in the training. Dave was a long-distance runner and could have left Hodge behind in the race.

“But he didn’t; stayed with me until I crossed the finish line.”

Isn’t that what we’re called to do, Hodge asked the women. Regardless of what we may think about someone, Christ calls us to meet them where they are and walk with them.



Dr. Anthony Hodge brings a message based on Luke 18:1-18.

The work should be done not for praise or notoriety. In the parable of the workers in the vineyard, everyone got paid the same regardless of how long they worked. “In churches, we should make room for all because at the end of the day, I was taught, ‘The first shall be last.’”

Patricia Leach, the scheduled speaker, is the Catawba Nation Assistant Chief, the first woman to hold the position.

Leach grew up in humble surroundings



Catawba Nation Assistant Chief Patricia Leach gives a history of the Catawba Nation.

and said her journey was not planned or particularly clear. However, with hard work and determination, she received bachelor and master degrees and now owns a human resources consulting business.

“Destiny has a way of finding you even if you don’t want to be found,” she said with a chuckle. She had strong mentors and people who encouraged her, but what she learned quickly is that those people were as flawed as her; they weren’t perfect.

She recalled that she didn’t really campaign for her position—“I’m not a politician”—but she was given so much guidance and encouragement by others to pursue the role. During the campaign, she recalled her mother’s main lesson: “People can only meet you where you are.” Her running for office meant getting out and talking to people, making those connections.

She offered a brief history of the Catawba Nation and said it was its strength that allows the nation to give back despite the hardships the people have endured.

One of her main focuses, and that of the nation’s leadership, is the youth, connecting them to their history while preparing them to take on the world. She works closely with public schools, and the programs they’ve developed are for the entire person.

An example she gave was a Healing Court. Substance abuse affects everyone, not just the user. The Healing Court focuses on healing, not punishment, and the healing is aimed at the family unit, not just the substance abuser.

Her position has allowed her to break barriers, cultivate relationships, encourage authenticity and show the next generation that you don’t have to fit the mold.

Informational moments were offered by leaders of the CRJC Project, Presidential Scholarship, Legacy Fund, Mission u, National Program Advisory Group and Limitless, as well as committee reports.

A memorial service was held to remember those who had passed since the last meeting.

Following a recognition of retiring officers, new officers were elected and installed for the coming year: Debra Schooler, Columbia District, president; Kimberly Graham, Florence District, vice president; Sandra Love, Columbia District, spiritual growth coordinator; Vickie Failor, Greenville District, program resource; Ann-Marie Wallace, Greenville District, Committee on Nominations chairman; Samoria Session, Hartsville District, Committee on Nominations Class of 2027.

The 2025 meeting will be held Oct. 24-25 in Spartanburg.



Women honor those who have died since their last meeting.



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Tommy Wilkes

Post-election thoughts

Imagine this column finds some of you happy about the 2024 election results and others of you very concerned and disappointed. Although we all understood that division was deep in our country, there is something about an election that show us graphically just how divided we are. While both candidates and parties fought hard for the American vote, we all knew going into the election there could only be one presidential winner.

Today, I am thankful that this election is over. I am now trying to focus on being the best person I can be in Clemson, South Carolina, and will continue to do what I can to advocate for our country, including the least of these and the ideals of Christ and the needs of my neighbors. I realize today, as you should, that the election results are about much more than one topic/agenda or platform. It is a mysterious thing to me why people vote the way they do and who decides to vote and who decides to stay home. As a citizen of the U.S. today, I have to honor the majority vote (process of the electoral college) and try make the best of my situation whether I voted for the candidate or not.

I do know that Christ Jesus is Lord today, and I put my trust in God first. I believe the same mandates from God are active today as they were last month. My prayer is that we will do our best to stand for justice and advocacy for all people, but also give this administration and leadership a chance to lead our country with respect. I realize that some are so hurt and afraid of the future, but my encouragement to you is to have hope. Put your trust in God and seek to follow his will in all that you do to be the best person you can be.

If you are today worried about the future and feeling unsure about our future government, be thankful for the balance of powers that is baked into our U.S. Constitution. Be thankful for the freedom of press and

freedom of speech, and pray for our country and leaders at all levels. My prayer is that we will try to not demonize people or administrations, but rather try to honor our leadership as long as no harm is caused to people. If harm is caused by any, we have a right to respectfully speak justice to power.

I don’t know the future, but I trust that God is not done with us yet as a nation. I don’t know exactly what I can do to influence national politics, but I am pretty sure I can make a difference right here in Clemson, at Clemson United Methodist Church, in South Carolina and in the wider world. I trust that you, too, can make a difference in your neighborhood.

I learned a long time ago that we need good politicians (people of integrity willing to serve), and we need the public to be informed about the issues before us and to engage at every level. But I have also learned not to put my total trust in politics or football. While I enjoy the banter of ideas and strategies for success, I would rather focus on the transformation of the world and the kingdom of God. It gives me great comfort today to follow Jesus Christ of Nazareth and a gospel of grace and love.

“The best thing to give to your enemy is forgiveness; to an opponent, tolerance; to a friend, your heart; to your child, a good example; to a father, deference; to your mother, conduct that will make her proud of you; to yourself, respect; to all others, charity.”—Benjamin Franklin

“Little minds think and talk about people. Average minds think and talk about things and actions. Great minds think and talk about ideas.”—Benjamin Franklin

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”—Jesus
“Joy and peace to you all.”—Rev. Tommy Wilkes

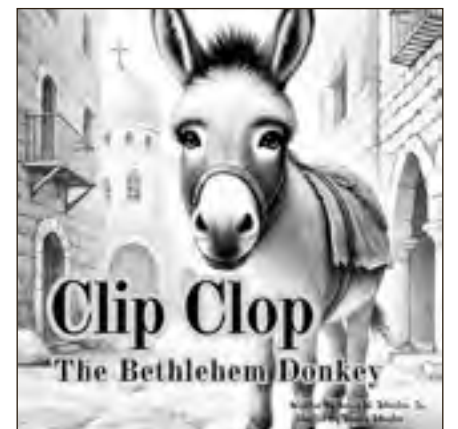
Wilkes is senior pastor of Clemson UMC, Clemson.

Late UMCSC pastor’s sermon adapted into children’s Christmas book

The granddaughter of a South Carolina United Methodist pastor has adapted a sermon he preached over the years and turned it into a Christmertime children’s book now available for sale.

“Clip Clop The Bethlehem Donkey” is based on a story Jessica Johnston’s grandfather, the late Rev. James Johnston Sr., shared many times over the course of 50 years of preaching in South Carolina UMCs.

Clip Clop was once a mistreated donkey, living a difficult life under the harsh hand of Reuben of Nazareth. But everything changed when a kind man named Joseph rescued him, offering not just a new name, but a new beginning. Now known as Clip Clop, he finds himself with a very special task: To carry Mary, the mother of Jesus, on a journey to Bethlehem. Through deserts and dusty roads, Clip Clop faithfully carries Mary, feeling the weight of something extraordinary. He is there in the quiet stable when the greatest miracle of all happens—the birth of Jesus. Join Clip Clop on this incredible journey, where he discovers that even a small donkey can play a big part in a story that changed the world.



The late pastor’s granddaughter adapted his sermon into the book.

Jessica Johnston is the daughter of the Rev. James Johnston Jr., a retired United Methodist pastor; his father inspired the book. She is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Protestant Church and lives in Cayce.

“I honor my grandfather’s memory in adapting, editing and illustrating this story to continue his legacy,” Johnston said about the book.

“Clip Clop The Bethlehem Donkey” is available on Amazon at <https://a.co/d/aqstaEZ>.

BETHEL PARK FIRE: Closed doors likely saved building

From Page 1

While the building was not destroyed, the damage was so intense it will likely take until May, maybe longer, before it becomes operable once more, Gwaltney said.

Gwaltney got the call about the blaze around 2 a.m. Nov. 9 after a local firefighter just happened to notice fire at the church after responding to a false alarm at another church.

"Our church is not on main road, and one of the firefighters happened to go down the road our church is on and saw the fire, so they were able to get crews there very quickly," Gwaltney explained.

By the time Gwaltney arrived, fire crews were on the scene actively working to extinguish what turned out to be three small fires set in various corners of the church, the worst in the church library.

Fortunately, Gwaltney said, doors were closed that contained most of the damage and probably saved the building from the fire spreading any further, and the sanctuary is largely intact. However, heavy smoke caused massive damage throughout the entirety of the structure.

"We're going to have to literally clean every square inch of the building," Gwaltney said. "Smoke just got into everything."

The sanctuary has a 20-foot ceiling, so they need to build scaffolding to reach that high, and he said there's about an eighth of an inch of soot everywhere else—the pews, the stained-glass windows, hundreds of individual tubes in the church's old pipe organ, everything.

"It almost looks at first glance like we have wallpaper with black streaks going down it,



The damage was so intense it will likely take until May, maybe longer, before it becomes operable once more.

literally streaming beads of water and soot in perfectly straight lines," Gwaltney said.

"It's going to be a very long process."

Gwaltney said several of the church's members have homes in a neighborhood on the Edisto River, where there is a pavilion they are able to use for worship for the time being.

Now, they are trying their best to work through emotions about the fire. The first Sunday they gathered after the blaze, Gwaltney led a service with a message on overcoming evil and using good to triumph as they work to let go of negative feelings.

"After you get past the anger and shock, it's mostly hurt we're feeling," Gwaltney said.



"We're going to have to literally clean every square inch of the building," the Rev. Javy Rudolph Gwaltney said.

"This congregation is about 125 years old, and a lot of their history was destroyed in that library."

As well, they now have challenges they didn't have before. For instance, the church is very mission-focused and does a lot of outreach in the area, and they had a big kitchen where they cooked for Meals On Wheels and did a lot of work for a residential care facility. But now their kitchen is unusable.

"We'll find ways to do it, but we're hampered," Gwaltney said. "It may be a year before the entire church is to the point that we can use it again."

Still, he's heartened by blessings they're experiencing even now. For instance, they

“

We realized we're blessed in a lot of ways.

—Rev. Gwaltney

”

have a \$5,000 deductible on their insurance policy, so Gwaltney started a Go Fund Me campaign to see if they could get some help meeting that amount.

To his astonishment, the deductible was met in three hours, and within a day and a half, the church had received double what they were requesting. He said any extra funds will go toward whatever insurance doesn't cover.

"Far and away the most costly thing will be cleaning and decontaminating, and replacing the things the fire and soot has damaged," Gwaltney said.

He's also been heartened by the prayers and well wishes Bethel Park has received from other denominational churches in the area, as well as from United Methodists across the connection.

"We realized we're blessed in a lot of ways," he said.

To learn more about the church's Go Fund Me campaign, visit <https://gofund.me/2695d521>.

JEREMIAH TEAMS: 'We cannot afford to operate in silos'

From Page 1

Leaning into Jeremiah 29:11, in which God reveals plans to give us "a future with hope," Fairley made it clear to conference leaders that simple survival after a time of separation from the denomination is not the goal of this effort.

"We have learned through this difficult season that the next faithful steps we are called to make will not be easy, but they will be full of God's great possibility," he said. "They will position us to live more meaningfully, more nimbly, more connectionally and more practically into Our 4 Priorities."

"The season we are currently living in calls for and affords us a unique opportunity for resetting, renewing a resilient course as we journey toward the future God has promised. We take these next faithful steps not as a means of surviving, but as a means of thriving."

Our 4 Priorities are the four missional priorities identified by the South Carolina Conference: developing leaders, engaging our communities, connecting with and growing disciples, and measuring and evaluating current realities and missional possibilities.

Members of the four Jeremiah Teams are being selected to ensure inclusivity and the ability to operate efficiently and effectively within a limited timeframe. The invitation process

is ongoing.

"Each of these Jeremiah Teams will work in a healthy atmosphere of collaboration," Fairley said. "If we are to move into God's future for The United Methodist Church in South Carolina, we cannot afford to operate in silos with heroic solo leadership. The only turf we are talking about is God's turf."

The four teams will begin their work initially from these ideas:

1) Missional Priorities:

- Evaluating the effectiveness of all of the conference's current ministries and missions to identify ineffectiveness and duplication;
- Asking, from among so much good work that is done across the conference, "What things are essential to living into Our 4 Priorities?"; and
- Visualizing an effective "stop-do list" to free up laity and clergy for more imaginative, creative ideas that will help reach new people in new places and in new ways.

2) Strategy for the Black Church and Ethnic Ministries:

- Acknowledging that the conference cannot move into God's hopeful future without strong leadership in this area;
- Creating and resourcing an effective conference strategy for strengthening the Black church and other ethnic minis-

tries; and

- Asking, "What is the new thing, including the lifting up of new leaders, God is calling for in this area?"

3) District Alignment:

- Reviewing district lines and reducing the number of districts;
- Creating a more nimble, cost-effective structure; and
- Allowing district superintendents to truly be a missional strategist in more places among new people, to spend more time in communities with the people of their areas, and to develop new ideas to strengthen witness and work.

4) Conference Staff Alignment:

- Aligning conference and district staff with missional priorities and resources;
- Compensating conference and district staff properly for their work and leadership; and
- Creating more space for staff to be creative and imaginative in their work.

Anyone who has questions about the Jeremiah Teams is asked to email mat@umcsc.org, and their information will be shared with the appropriate team.

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APPORTIONMENTS: Cont'd

From Page 1

"We typically collect 20 percent of our total payments in December and early January."

As of Nov. 20, 42 percent of churches have already paid 100 percent of their apportionments, slightly fewer than the 44 percent that paid 100 percent last year at this time.

The Columbia District is leading the conference's districts in total percentage collected as of Nov. 20 with 94.5 percent. The Walterboro District is in second place, with 85.3 percent, and the Marion District is in third with 84.7 percent.

Westbury said she believes the message of hope and healing that South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley brings is comforting, and she hopes churches will continue to step up and pay their apportion-

ments, hopefully bringing the percentage as close to the budgeted goal as possible.

"I am heartened that some of the churches that expressed interest in separation in 2025 are continuing to contribute to apportionments even though the separation process is cancelled," Westbury said.

Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025, is the last day to pay 2024 apportionments. Payments must be in the treasurer's office by 4 p.m. that day. The postmark is not the deciding factor, and the treasurer's office is not responsible for delivery delays regardless of which carrier is used. The treasurer's office can accept wires if necessary, but wires can be expensive to send and receive. If paying by Vanco, the payment must be initiated by 3 p.m. Jan. 14.

Learn how to pay by Vanco at <https://www.umcsc.org/apportionments>.

THE MEMORY CONNECTION: Church offers dementia respite care

From Page 1

Gatlin is convinced God had her drive down the road past the church one day, where she saw a sign advertising the ministry. She went to an informational meeting, and now her mom comes every time, eager to connect with others.

“She likes to socialize, and she wants to go. Everyone’s so friendly, so open, and they make her feel at home,” Gatlin said. “When she gets around people, she’s in a good mood.”

That’s exactly the idea—to bring joy and socialization to people often isolated because of their struggles with cognitive and other issues caused by dementia.

‘Woodland can do this’

It all started in May, when Griffeth decided to go to the conference’s first Cognitive Connection Ministry event at Cokesbury UMC, Charleston. At the time, Woodland had four families affected by dementia, and Griffeth wanted to learn more about what her congregation could do to be helpful. One man’s caregiver had shared with her how lonely he was and how much he missed simple conversation with others, and this weighed on Griffeth’s heart.

There, listening to ministry leaders share about what churches can do to help, Griffeth had a divine encounter.

“I heard God say, very quietly, ‘Woodland can do this.’ I said, ‘Are you serious?’ and I heard again: ‘Woodland can do this,’” Griffeth said.

A twice-weekly dementia ministry seemed like too big a project for Woodland to take on, especially without any funding, but Griffeth approached her members anyway.

Their excitement was contagious. In fact, her director of Christian education, Juliette Phillpot, was so enthusiastic about the program that she asked to have her job description updated to include serving as the program director.

And to Griffeth’s surprise, what was an idea quickly morphed into reality as God opened one door after another for the new ministry. They received \$3,000 from the church’s Finance Committee, and then, in the fall, were astounded to learn they had received an additional \$30,000 Hope Fund grant from the district and conference.

“This was all God,” Griffeth said.

Meanwhile, Woodland’s congregation got to work, lining up volunteers and building their program on the Respite For All model, a foundation that works to teach churches how to provide social support for families living with dementia through a team of volunteers.

Griffeth was continually amazed at how quickly everything fell into place, from funding to volunteers to needed supplies. Respite For All connected them with a similar ministry in Greenville, called Side-By-Side, which allowed Woodland’s

team to visit their program and work alongside their volunteers, providing pointers and offering support.

“Again, this was God opening doors,” Griffeth explained.

Joy and laughter abound

Now Woodland has more than 20 regular volunteers and a number of people with dementia who participate.

They typically start their day with games. The day the *Advocate* visited, Nov. 2, two tables were busy with activities, one assembling puzzles and another playing a memory matching card game. Volunteers sat shoulder to shoulder with participants, everyone laughing and having such a good time; it was difficult to tell who had dementia and who did not.

After social time and games, Phillpot led the room in cognitive exercises, then a devotion, before all gathered for a service project. The day the *Advocate* visited, they assembled blessing bags for homeless people, filled with items such as socks, Chapstick and various toiletries. A few weeks ago, they packed Christmas stockings for children in Haiti, and other days, they do crafts.

After the project, everyone pushed chairs into a big circle for exercises, such as stretching and chair yoga. Next, church music director Pam Johnson led song time, as everyone sang popular favorites such as “Amazing Grace,” “Shall We Gather at the River” and “America (My Country ’Tis of Thee).”

“Doing this is such a blessing to me,” Johnson said. “It just makes me realize we’re all in the same boat. I’ve never laughed so much in my whole life, and they are such sweet spirits.”

The volunteers, participants and caregivers shared that the joy that permeates the space is what keeps everyone in good cheer. Smiles fill the room.

“You are beautiful—just beautiful. I love you!” one woman remarks, clasping a volunteer’s hand as they both share a connection.

Trivia, fun facts, a hot lunch and games round out the rest of the day. Balloon volleyball played with pool noodles is a huge hit with everyone.

Caregivers arrive around 2 p.m. to pick up their family members, who look tired but happy, energized by the much-needed social interaction.

Caroline Hasselle, who brings her husband, Bob, to the ministry, said the “people time” her husband gets is the biggest draw. “The main thing for me is the socialization he gets,” Hasselle said. “He has Alzheimer’s disease and is very isolated. He doesn’t drive, and people don’t invite him places, but he needs that.”

Here at The Memory Connection at Woodland, he gets the social nourishment his soul so desperately craves.

Susan Murphy, who brings her husband, Ron, agrees.

“It definitely beats sitting home all day,” she said.

A valid ministry

Griffeth said the success of the ministry, and its rapid initiation, is a “God thing.”

“In the few weeks we’ve been in operation, we’ve already seen God changing people’s lives. We received a text from a participant’s wife one day after respite saying that twice during the afternoon he teared up and told her he’d ‘had the most fun day ever’ in the program,” Griffeth said.

Another participant was agitated and reluctant at first with the program, but they sought advice from dementia care specialists and put new suggestions in place.

“Now the participant loves coming to respite. When she walked in yesterday she said, ‘I feel like this is where I’m supposed to be.’ She also continually tells us how much she loves being in respite surrounded ‘by so many good people.’ Again, this was God blessing our work.”

The volunteers also said they get much out of the ministry. Woodland member Mary Morrison said she lost some family members to dementia, so she appreciates having a way to give back in their memory.

Woodland member Lynne Chandler saw her dad slowly decline and then pass away years ago after a battle with Alzheimer’s, and it’s a blessing for her to be able to help with a program she knows would have benefitted him.

“Something like this would have been great for him, as he was a people person,” Chandler said, noting she immediately said yes when she first learned the ministry needed volunteers. “Dementia is a struggle, and caregivers need a break. This is a very valid ministry.”

In addition to the two days a week of respite care, Griffeth leads a support group for caregivers on the second Monday of each month, as well as a dementia-friendly worship service on the last Monday of the month. Soon, they hope to expand the program from two days a week to four days.

“We are thrilled we can help people with dementia, their care partners and our volunteers reclaim joy together,” Griffeth said. “Rather than being depressing, respite is a time of laughter, friendship, praising God and living their best lives.”

Griffeth said The Memory Connection brings more blessings than they can count. “Each smile, each joke and each voice raised to praise God gives us a glimpse into the kingdom of heaven manifesting itself on earth. It also brings us great joy knowing that we are giving our participants’ care partners a much-needed break to take care of themselves. Without respite, some of the care partners would never have a break from giving their loved ones around-the-clock care. Being a care partner is very difficult work, and we delight in knowing that we can make their jobs a little bit easier.”

To learn more about how to start a similar ministry in your church, email cognitive@umcsc.org.

Florence District pastor leads trip helping after hurricane

A South Carolina United Methodist pastor led a small group of friends and church members to help in North Carolina in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

The Rev. Richard C. Jayroe, who pastors Union United Methodist Church in Hemingway and Elim UMC in Union, led a trip to the Plumtree and Newland areas Oct. 23-29.

Jayroe’s group installed plywood flooring at a home that was flooded with approximately four feet of water. The homeowners had already cleaned the 12 inches of mud out of the home when the team arrived, and they had fans and heaters going to dry the lumber out.

Three others in the group cleaned the disabled veterans building in Newland.

They also provided the lumber and insulation for the home.

They prepared their own meals and stayed in two cabins in the area.

“Photos and videos do not show the

destruction that we saw four weeks out from the storm,” Jayroe said.

He said the most rewarding part of the trip came the last day, when they served 35 pounds of whiting fillets and 10 pounds of shrimp in a Lowcountry boil, as well as a chicken and sausage pilau, outside Plumtree Church. Jayroe said they started serving at 11:30 a.m. and were out of food by 12:45.

“We got to talk and listen to those who came, and they truly enjoyed it,” Jayroe said. “We all were blessed greatly as we served those in need.”

Jayroe said the group was able to raise about \$9,000 to help before making the trip. Union Church members and friends participated in the trip, and Elim and others helped financially.

Those who went on the trip besides Jayroe were Fran Hall, Karen Ard, Greg Jordan, Wes Barr, John Assenmacher, Lucas Brandon, Michael Lane, Brad McConnell, Josh Baxley and Trey Chandler.



The team (above) sent a week helping in North Carolina after the hurricane. Below left, two cars and a tractor are piled together. Below right, the team does flooring.



Lee Road UMC bakes 563 dozen cookies for Kairos Prison Ministry

TAYLORS—In October, Lee Road United Methodist Church’s pastor the Rev. Rusty Godfrey challenged his church to produce 500 dozen cookies for Kairos Prison Ministry International.

Godfrey serves on the prison ministry team that serves Tyger River Correctional in Spartanburg County, which just conducted its fall long weekend Nov. 14-17. The total need for one of the two biannual “long weekends” (3.5 days) for the Tyger River prison ministry is 3,000 dozen cookies, so Godfrey asked his church of 100 active members to provide one-sixth of the total cookies needed.

Gina Turcotte served as the “Cookie Czarina” for the campaign, educating the congregation with a promotional

video run on Sunday mornings as well as baking more than 60 dozen cookies herself.

Sandy Davis, chairperson of the Unity Team, provided vital tactical support to organize small group baking parties of three to four persons in the church kitchen.

In the end, 563 dozen cookies were produced (6,756 cookies) and a celebratory giant cookie was baked by Gina Turcotte for the final count of 6,757.

“This event was very personal to me as my children have all participated for years in baking for various causes,” Turcotte said. “In fact, Pastor Rusty has brought the Kairos ministry back to Lee Road. I was glad to do my part to spread Jesus’s love.”



Gavin Turcotte and his mother, Gina Turcotte, prepare trays of cookies.

Immerse draws 250 youth to Asbury Hills

By Rev. Megan Gray

ASBURY HILLS—Anyone who may have harbored reservations about the future of The United Methodist Church in South Carolina need only look to the masterpiece that unfolded at Asbury Hills Camp and Retreat Center last month.

More than 200 high school and middle school students—primarily from South Carolina, with several from Georgia—gathered Nov. 15-17 for Immerse 2024, the annual discipleship retreat presented by South Carolina Ministries with Young People, a ministry of the South Carolina Conference.

Youth from 18 churches gathered for worship, preaching, family groups, educational breakout sessions and fellowship. The retreat’s “Masterpiece” theme was inspired by Ephesians 2:10: “We are God’s masterpiece. God has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things God planned for us.”

The Rev. Laurel Capesius, the director and campus minister of the Wesley Foundation at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, brought the message throughout the retreat. She spoke with clarity about God’s blessings that are upon the youth, the uniqueness they bring to the world and the seriousness of their calling in Jesus Christ.

“You, who might be wondering what makes you special, what makes you loveable, what makes you a masterpiece,” Capesius said. “You are special because you have within you the breath of God. You are loveable because you exist, and you were created to bring joy to others and to feel the joy around you.

“Here on this mountaintop, we are a community of amazing individuals made one in the God of new life, the God of hope for creation, the God of love for this kingdom on earth that is here before us. We are God’s handiwork and God’s masterpiece, sitting in the midst of all the beauty of God’s creation.”



More than 250 youth attended the event.

With a total of 250 in attendance, Immerse 2024 was the largest retreat gathering ever hosted by Asbury Hills.

Chris Lynch, a congregational specialist who helps guide youth ministry within the conference, believes the “Masterpiece” theme served as a reminder that “even in the midst of tumultuous times in our church, we are still a reflection of God.

“We saw the fullness of God’s masterpiece in the hearts and lives of all the youth, the youth leaders, and the retreat leaders throughout the weekend,” Lynch said.

Bishop Leonard Fairley, who celebrated communion and led small-group sessions for youth who may be discerning a call to church ministry, called the weekend experience “spiritually awesome.”

“The beauty of Asbury Hills was matched only by the spirit of amazing leaders who poured into this event and into young people in attendance a double portion of God’s Spirit,” Fairley said. “What an inspiring time of worship, learning, adventure and fun.

Dawn and I would hang out with these young people any day.

“We left with a deep understanding and sense of hope that the future of The United Methodist Church is in good hands.”

One of the most distinctive parts of the Immerse experience are the “family group” sessions. Family groups consist of youth from different churches, intentionally created to ensure that students meet and connect with youth throughout the connection, not just from their own church.

This opportunity is made possible because adults from each church are willing to lead a group of teenagers who start as strangers but become friends as they share in learning and conversation throughout the weekend.

In small-group breakout sessions, youth had the opportunity to learn about relationships, nontraditional prayer practices, worship leadership, their spiritual type, the work of justice and mercy in the UMC, how to participate in missions and how to become leaders in their local congregations.

The Immerse Design Team reflected on what they called a new energy in South



Bishop Fairley presents a trophy to the winners of one of the fun competitions they had during Immerse.

Carolina United Methodism and an obvious hunger for connectionalism. They expressed their appreciation to the conference and to Lynch for allowing the team to dream and then helping it make those dreams become a reality.

The Immerse Design Team includes the Rev. Skipper Brock, Thomas Brooks, the Rev. Maggie Cantey, the Rev. Megan Gray, the Rev. Rachel Headden, the Rev. Brian Humphries, the Rev. Emily Kirby, the Rev. Katie Lesh, Bonnie Riley and J.C. White.

Gray pastors St. Paul UMC, Spartanburg.

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'Know Christ, Make Christ Known'

Bishop Fairley leads Fall Clergy Orders gathering at Mount Hebron UMC

By Dan O'Mara

WEST COLUMBIA – More than 300 clergy members of the South Carolina Conference gathered Nov. 14 at Mount Hebron United Methodist Church for worship, a celebration of ministry and a time of fellowship.

The Gathering of the Order of Elders, the Order of Deacons and the Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members also served as another opportunity to welcome Bishop Leonard Fairley, who began his tenure as resident bishop in September.

Touching upon the theme of the semi-annual gathering, "Know Christ, Make Christ Known," Fairley centered his message on Jesus's prayer for unity among his disciples in John 17.

"Listen to him pray," Fairley said. "Father, I ask that they may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I am in you, so that the world may believe. So that the world may know that you sent me.' And this was not the end of the prayer, but Jesus moved beyond the disciples and prayed for the generations to come.

"Jesus shows us a unity that is worth dying for, a unity that stretches beyond the passage of time and space. That unity is something given, not achieved by our own power. Maybe that's been the problem: We've been trying to do this thing on our own power. ... Sometimes, brothers and sisters, we have to learn to get out of God's way."

Fairley pointed out that Jesus did not pray for what his disciples might do; he prayed for what they might be.

"Jesus prays that they might be one," he said. "Something in me tells me that Jesus understood clearly that before we can do anything, we must be rooted and grounded in Jesus. That's the only way. To know Christ is to live in unity, and unity is one of the great witnesses of the power of the Holy Spirit among us, doing what we cannot do on our own.



Bishop Fairley urges the crowd to see through the eyes of Christ.



Sara Flores, GBGM missionary serving in Ecuador, presents Bishop Fairley with a stole from that country.

"To know Jesus is to know a unity that sounds and looks like Pentecost. That's what we need in the church—a new Pentecost."

Fairley acknowledged the pain and heartache clergy have endured as churches have separated from The United Methodist Church. He challenged them not to see their ministry during this difficult season as "an overwhelming burden" but as "an opportunity to see the possibilities and live the promises."

"Brothers and sisters, this is what I'm asking of you: Let us choose to see all that has happened in the world through different eyes; through the eyes of Jesus who prayed for us; through the eyes of Jesus who stood in the temple and said, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, release to the captives, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.'"

"That's your work. That's my work. And I join you not as a bishop, but as a colleague in Jesus Christ."



The Rev. Ed Stallworth delivers the opening prayer.



The Rev. Shawna Darnall Vandelune plays flute during the event.

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An example of Native American agroforestry is the “three sisters”: corn, squash and beans.

Native American use of plants

By Guy Burney

Long before the arrival of Europeans, indigenous populations protected local ecosystems and preserved biodiversity through land management and farming practices. The New World was not simply untouched land.

As was their relationship with animals, Native Americans’ use of plants respected the natural world. Being in touch with the earth meant food gathering involved a spiritual approach. The habitats and uses of plants passed down through generations of families and communities. Unfamiliar plants were subjected to scrutiny and experimentation of a new gift given by the creator.

Indigenous people believe that one must eat right to stay fit. Diets that are unhealthy or unbalanced are the result of a scarcity of food as opposed to poor eating habits. Native culture involves living within the natural limits of the environment rather than changing the environment to suit the needs of the people. Climate factors determine the location and succession of adaptability or movement. The impact to the environment is not long lasting.

Native farmers save the best seeds for the following season, resulting in selected breeding suited for the environments in which they are grown. Unfortunately, many nations were forced out of their ancestral land and mainstream agricultural practices were implemented in those areas.

Native people always understood that fire is an essential agent to having a healthy diversified plant community. Seeds of different plants survive in the soil for many years, but germinate and bloom only after a major fire alters the environment. Fires clear a forest canopy by removing leaves and needles. This allows plants to grow where they would otherwise not survive. Fire has helped keep some plants from completely disappearing from an area. These efforts are meant to restore plant growth, benefit wildlife and put nutrients back into the soil. This also helps to clear the dense underbrush that fuels major wildfires. Today’s prescribed fires differ from indigenous cultural fires in that they do not result in new plant growth.

Another major impact not practiced by Native Americans is tilling. Conventional farming involves turning soil eight to 12 inches using a plow or tiller. Excessive tilling can cause soil erosion as the top layer can be removed by wind or rain. The nutrient-deficient bottom soil is exposed, bringing a need for fertilizer. Beneficial bacteria, fungi, beetles and earthworms are negatively affected by tilling.

Agroforestry is a native-inspired approach to agriculture. Agroforestry is the intentional integration of trees and shrubs into crop and animal farming systems to create environmental, economic and social benefits. It plays a critical role to enhance the nation’s economy and its agricultural landscapes, watersheds and communities.

One example is planting crops between rows of trees to provide income as the trees mature. Riparian forest buffers are trees and shrubs planted along rivers and streams. This helps to filter farm runoff while the roots stabilize the banks to prevent erosion. Wildlife can exist here, providing another source of income.

Windbreaks shelter crops and soil from the wind, dust, snow and odors. They are also called shelterbelts, hedgerows, vegetated

environmental buffers or living snow fences.

A prime example of Native American agroforestry is the “three sisters.” They are a symbiotic farming or gardening system involving corn, squash and beans.

All corn grown today is Indian corn. It started out as big and black with pointy hard kernels called teosinte. Initially, corn (or maize) wasn’t eaten like sweet corn. It was allowed to dry on the stalk and then ground into flour. Although kernels can be yellow, white, purple or black, the edible varieties are yellow, white or a combination of the two.

Referred to as pumpkins, gourds or squash, five species make up all of our domesticated varieties of squash. Hybridization has led to a large assortment. Equally numerous are the shapes and sizes. There are two main varieties of squash. Summer squash are smaller, quicker growing, and are eaten before the rinds and seeds mature. Winter squash grows later, has a variety of shapes and sizes and has a tough, warty skin that keeps longer.

Beans are one of the most important domestic legumes in the world because of their high concentration of protein, fiber and complex carbohydrates. They are a vital part of vegetarian and vegan lifestyles.

The three sisters begins with corn planted, usually in a checkerboard pattern. Beans would be planted at the base of the cornstalk. Squash was planted between cornstalks. Cornstalks provide a pole or trellis for bean vines to climb along. Shade from the corn benefits the squash that grows under the leaves. Squash vines thread through the corn and beans, holding the soil and protecting the root system. The vines also protect the bean plants from predatory animals and prevent excessive weed growth. Beans absorb nitrogen from the air and combat bacteria that would otherwise infect the roots. Each plant provides nutrients for the others. Some tribes in the southwest planted a “fourth sister.” The Rocky Mountain bee plant was an “attractant plant” that lured bees to pollinate the gardens.

Sweet corn is also combined with lima beans or other shell beans as succotash. The name is derived from the Narragansett word “Sahquittahhash,” which means “broken corn kernels.” Other added ingredients include onions, potatoes, turnips, tomatoes, bell peppers or okra. Combining a grain with a legume provides a dish that is high in all essential amino acids.

Despite challenges, many indigenous communities continue to practice traditional agriculture and adapt it to contemporary needs. Diverse farming systems are central to today’s regenerative agricultural movement. A solution is reintroducing practices that are thousands of years old.

As much as three-fifths of the world’s agricultural crops originated in the Americas. As of today, 75 percent of the world’s plant genetic diversity has been lost. Agroforestry, crop rotations, mixed cropping (intercropping), polyculture (growing many plants of different species in the same area) and water harvesting (redirection and productive use of rainfall) are methods rooted in the indigenous way of living in the natural world.

Burney is a member of the Native American Committee, a member of Disciples UMC, Greenville, and a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Wolf Clan.



Gifts of love

Manning UMC, Manning, held an Operation Christmas Child packing party Nov. 10. Here, pastor the Rev. David McManus poses with some of the kids during the event.

Camps & Retreat Ministries

‘Why can’t we be friends?’

Whenever you ask someone, “How are you?” nine times out of 10, you will get the response, “Good! Just busy.”

For most of us, our default response to being asked how we are is to discuss everything we do. We love to pride ourselves on our busyness. Have you ever been talking to someone from your church, work, gym, etc., and thought, “We should hang out?” Then you looked at your schedule and saw that your next availability is in two weeks. The older we get, the worse it seems to make friends, and it is harder to slow down and connect with those around us.

A study by University of Kansas Professor Jeffrey Hall studied how long it takes to become friends with someone. His results were staggering: Becoming a casual friend takes more than 50 hours of interaction, more than 90 hours to become a regular friend and more than 200 hours to become a best friend. That makes it almost impossible to connect with new people amid our busy lives.

That is why places like Asbury Hills, Camp Providence and Sea Islands are so crucial in our society today. When you come to our retreat sites, you are at a place where you and your group can get away from the distractions and business of everyday life and reconnect with God and each other. If you come for a two-to three-day retreat, you get anywhere from 36-48 hours of uninterrupted distraction-free time to get to know that church member you have been trying to meet up with or that coworker you wanted to be friends with outside of work.

To learn more about a retreat among the beautiful mountains of Asbury Hills, the calm lake of Camp Providence or the relaxing coastal breezes of the Sea Islands, visit <https://sccarm.org>.

— By Kate Nobles



Fourteen new Stephen Ministers are commissioned at Clemson UMC, Clemson.

Clemson UMC commissions 14 new Stephen Ministers

CLEMSON—In October, Clemson United Methodist Church consecrated and celebrated 14 Stephen Ministers, members of the congregation who have dedicated 50-plus hours in training and preparation to become exceptional listeners with helpful support and caring for others in times of crisis.

These faithful people are equipped and ready to serve by walking with fellow church members through many types of crises (small and large), including difficult life transitions, grief, divorce, financial stress, job loss, hospitalizations, loneliness, substance abuse, chronic illness, family issues, dementia concerns, parenting through all stages, caregiving for loved ones and more.

Besides extensive training, Stephen Ministers have a variety of God-given gifts to bring to the table, including their own critical life experiences and their expertise in teaching, nursing, financial, legal, spiritual and other skills to be shared in unique situations for everyone’s benefit. Stephen Ministers are friends waiting to be called upon, ready to serve by committing to weekly or biweekly meetings over a meal, on the porch for a sit, in a coffee shop, taking a walk, sharing at the kitchen table or even meeting at the church.

For more on Stephen Ministries, visit <https://stephenministries.org>.



Photos courtesy of the Rev. Paige Wheeler

Shoebboxes for Spirit Lake

Every year, Clemson UMC, Clemson, packs shoeboxes for Spirit Lake Ministries. This United Methodist ministry is dedicated to supporting the Spirit Lake Nation and is an approved United Methodist Volunteers in Mission destination. The shoeboxes collected are distributed in the Dakotas and in Minnesota. They go to Crow Creek, Pine Ridge, Spirit Lake, Turtle Mountain, Red Lake reservations, and several schools and churches in the three states. This year, Clemson's congregation, youth group and missions team packed 102 boxes. "We are proud to support United Methodist ministries, both domestically and abroad," said the Rev. Paige Wheeler. To learn more about this ministry, visit <http://www.spiritlakeministrycenter.org>.



Epworth Children's Home

Epworth launches new in-home program for families

Epworth has launched a new short-term in-home service to help families who are under stress or isolated get the resources they need to lower the risk of child abuse and neglect in the home.

The goal of Epworth's new Family Resource Connection and Preservation Services program is to provide support and services to families before abuse takes place. The South Carolina Department of Social Services refers families to Epworth's FRCPS staff, and families spend between 60 days and six months in the program.

The program serves families in the Midlands (Richland, Lexington, Aiken and Kershaw counties) the Pee Dee (Darlington, Horry, Florence, Sumter, Lee, Marion counties) and the Upstate (Laurens, Spartanburg, Greenville, Pickens and Greenwood counties).

Like Epworth's HOMEBUILDERS program, FRCPS is grounded in the belief that many children can safely remain in their homes when their parents receive proper support.

FRCPS empowers families to make positive changes by offering customized support. No family will receive exactly the same services, but services often will include helping the family meet basic needs (utility bills, food, etc.), parental education, skill building to help family members better manage their behavior in response to stress, anger and other emotions, and substance use disorder support.

"FRCPS will look differently, depending on the circumstances of each family," said Erinne Rodgers, senior director of growth and program development. "We may help a family find a way to declutter or organize a home, avoid utility disconnection or address a parenting challenge. Helping a family meet their basic needs avoids more serious DSS investigations, allows children to remain in the home safely and paves the way for the family to flourish and build upon their strengths and success gained through the program."

Kinship caregivers who need extra support and services to meet the needs of the children in their care will be among the families served by the new program.

— Beth Williams, president and CEO

UMCSC to offer more dementia workshops

Churches and individuals interested in a dementia care ministry are invited to join the South Carolina Cognitive Connection Ministry for a Dementia Care Workshop, one in January and one in February.

The workshop will be a morning of conversation and learning around a topic that affects all congregations: dementia.

Retired United Methodist Bishop Ken Carder and South Carolina Department on Aging representative Tori Anderson

will share essential information about how to be in ministry with those living with dementia.

Two events will be held:

- Jan. 15, 9:30 a.m. to noon at Surfside UMC, 800 13th Ave. N., Surfside Beach, SC 29575; to register: <https://tinyurl.com/dementia-surfside-beach>; and

- Feb. 12, 9:30 a.m. to noon at Silver Hill Memorial UMC, 778 John B. White Sr. Blvd., Spartanburg, SC 29306; to register: <https://tinyurl.com/dementia-silver-hill>.



United Women in Faith

by Wanda Chandler Flowers

Q&A with outgoing UWF President Clarice Blakeney

The 52nd Annual Meeting of the South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith meeting was held at Woodland United Methodist Church in Rock Hill Oct. 25 -26.

I sat down for a question-answer session with president Clarice Blakeney about her time as president before she passed the mantle. Blakeney passed the mantle to Debra Schooler, who was elected as the next president of the South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith at the 52nd Annual meeting on Oct. 26.



Clarice Blakeney

Q. What do you consider your most significant achievement as president of the South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith?

A. I feel great about the relationships I have made during my tenure. I am proud of the open communication with the local and district members. The attendance at the annual meetings and events has been very impactful and engaging. I am happy about the mission trips and our participation and contributions to the Southeastern Jurisdiction. If we are serving and meeting the needs of others, we are making a difference.

Q. How would you like people to remember your time as president?

A. I hope all United Women in Faith will remember my commitment to serve and be open-minded, available and helpful. I tried to be kind and loving.

Q. Why are social issues like clean water, the school-to-prison pipeline, predatory lending and human trafficking so important to the UWFaith?

A. We believe in justice for all. God loves us and requires us to be disciples. Creation is a place where all should be safe and live a life of comfort and peace. We show care for others as this Scripture reminds us, Matthew 25:35-36: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Q. How do you believe United Women in Faith has made a difference in addressing these issues?

A. United Women in Faith provides resources, programs and funding to make a difference for those suffering and facing injustice. We will always step up and do what we can to help the marginalized.

Q. What was a personal goal you had during your presidency that you were unable to achieve, and why?

A. I would have loved to visit each of the 12 districts doing my term as conference president. My schedule did not allow me the time to go to many events in person, but Zoom made most of them possible.

Q. Before taking on the role of president, what were your biggest concerns about the organization?

A. I was concerned about the obligations, many meetings with committees, awareness and following all the standing rules as well as the ability to respond to all the requests.

Q. Who are your role models, and how have they influenced your leadership style and values?

A. I have worked and served with so many ladies over my lifetime. I have been inspired and learned so much from past presidents, former principals and these Methodist women: Francis Hill, Mae Ruth Cook, Mary Cabaniss and Maureen Thomas. My birth family and church family have been my balance and guiding light for what is good and right.

Q. What are the most valuable lessons you've learned from mentors and experiences?

A. I have been encouraged to be confident, supportive, cooperative and truthful. Always do your best and know that learning is never finished. Keep moving, gaining experiences and never give up.

Q. What are some ongoing issues in the district that you believe need to be addressed?

A. We must let young people know that they are welcome and allow them to be involved in the organization at an early age. We need to have more events for young women and the youth. Do surveys to find out the interest and issues to help us engage future leaders.

Q. How confident are you in the ability of the next team to lead UWF effectively?

A. I am excited about the next executive team and what they will accomplish. The new handbook will give guidelines and ways to do things differently. Using digital resources, toolkits and virtual training will help them reach more ladies and achieve their goals.

Q. What are your plans for staying involved in the organization after your term ends?

A. Serving on the Charter for Racial Justice Committee will keep me involved. Working with my local unit and district will keep me busy. Attending conference events will definitely be on my radar.

Q. Anything else you would like to share?

A. I am so blessed to have served the South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith over the years. This was an enlightening, transformative and uplifting journey. My life has had a paradigm shift, and I am glad for the change this has had for me and my future.

Chandler-Flowers is the South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith communications coordinator.

Greenwood Wesley Foundation grows in size, reach



Greenwood Wesley Fellowship has doubled its attendance from last semester.

Greenwood Wesley Fellowship is having a great start to its 2024-2025 academic year. Having a strong presence at Lander University's club fair and freshmen inviting friends has doubled the attendance from last semester.

Mike Parrish leads Greenwood Wesley Fellowship, which serves students from Lander University and also Piedmont Technical College.

"It is such a blessing to have faithful students who make it a priority to attend our Bible studies and dinners during the semester," Parrish said.

"It is vitally important, now more than ever, to tell everyone about the good news

of Jesus and to help young people grow closer to God."

Greenwood Wesley Fellowship is always looking for churches to partner in ministry to help with our students' meals and activities. The group needs donations or prepared meals. Anyone interested in helping can send donations made to "Greenwood Wesley Fellowship" to GWF c/o Main Street UMC, 211 Main St. N., Greenwood SC 29646.

To learn more about opportunities to provide meals for the spring semester or for other questions about how to support this college ministry, email Parrish at GreenwoodWesleyFellowship@gmail.com.



Columbia College partners with state tech colleges

On Oct. 24, Columbia College welcomed South Carolina Technical College System representatives as well as presidents from many of the participating institutions (Central Carolina Technical College, Denmark Technical College, Midlands Technical College, Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College, Piedmont Technical College, Technical College of the Lowcountry and Tri-County Technical College) to announce the "Tech to Teach" partnership. The partnership is designed to enhance the preparation and transfer of students from SCTCS colleges to Columbia College's online programs in early childhood education and special education. The partnership is currently available as a pilot program at the seven participating colleges with plans for future expansion.



Doubling their goal

Memorial Child Enrichment Program, the preschool at Memorial UMC, Greer, set a goal to collect 300 boxes of cereal for Greer Relief as a part of their spirit week. They ended the week with more than 600 boxes of cereal donated.

Advocate Press

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Florence District youth gather

Manning UMC, Manning, hosted a district-wide youth event Oct. 20. Youth throughout the district were invited to come join together and worship.

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Photos courtesy of Crystal K. Varn

Churches sponsor scholarship gala

Friendship and St. Luke UMCs, Ehrhardt, and their pastor, the Rev. Vivian R. Lingard, recently sponsored their inaugural Scholarship Gala. Above are the Shinglers family. Below are the Givens family.



Wesley Foundations

by the Rev. John Sterling Poole



The Ugly Sweater Contest is a Christmas tradition for the Charleston Wesley Foundation.

Hear the good news: College kids love Christ

This season of Advent should be a season filled with good news. The joy, hope, love and peace of Christ's entering into this world is indeed good news, and from Christ's arrival some 2,000 years ago, the good news continues today.

One area that is often overlooked is the good news that takes place on college campuses around South Carolina! All across the state, Wesley foundations and fellowships gather together to worship Christ, disciple each other and learn to live into the Christian call on their hearts. That is good news indeed!

College students from all over the state, country and world are being ministered to at a Wesley Foundation, and the fruit born from these ministries is clear. In my context at the Charleston Wesley Foundation, I see students on fire for Christ delving deeper into Scripture weekly. Many students are discerning a call into vocational ministry, and one will begin the candidacy process next spring. Several students grew up Methodist, while others had never encountered the risen Lord until joining us.

This is all good news for the students in Charleston, but guess what? There is better news! This type of world-changing work is taking place at nine other Wesley foundations/fellowships, and through these, we serve more than 15 campuses around the state. College students are responding to

Christ through the ministries of Clemson Wesley, Methodist Student Network (University of South Carolina), Wesley of Orangeburg (South Carolina State and Claflin University), Francis Marion Wesley, Winthrop Wesley, Coastal Carolina Wesley, Furman Wesley, Greenwood Wesley (Lander and Piedmont Tech), Spartanburg Wesley and Charleston Wesley Foundation. That is good news!

These students are hungry for God and ready to serve, and the work that is being done by their hands and feet (not to mention the work that will be done by them) is good for this broken world.

We are a people of good news, and this time of year, we should boldly proclaim good news as often as we can to whoever will listen. The world will try to tell us there is no good news, but we must defy this notion and share good news always.

College students coming together to proclaim that Christ is king, the Spirit is still moving, and the Father is still creating is good news indeed.

Hear the good news: College kids love Christ! Glory to God. Amen.

Poole is the director of the Charleston Wesley Foundation (learn more about it at <https://www.wesleychs.org>). If you want to learn more about each individual Wesley Foundation and how to support them, go to <https://linktr.ee/UMCSCWesley>.



Need a Children's Sermon?

by the Rev. Meghan Lindsey Sweeney Cook

Advent and Christmas

Author's note: The following are sermon ideas developed as a resource to help churches reach young ones in their congregations. Everyone is free to use these and to modify as needed.

Date: Merry Christmas! You get a children's sermon for each Sunday of Advent, Christmas Day and Epiphany. That's six children's sermons in one column.

Objective: This Advent, we'll explore the nativity story by meeting different members of God's family. Just like the church, God's family is wonderfully varied, made up of people from all walks of life brought together by God's love—not just by blood. Each character reminds us that everyone belongs in God's family.

Time frame: Three minutes (The average attention span of a child is about one year per minute of life. In our setting the youngest at children's sermon are 3, so we aim for three or maybe five minutes at the most.)

Supplies: A nativity with all the following figures. Bonus if it's a nativity the children can touch or pass the figurine around.

Format for each week:

Say, "This week, we're meeting a member of Jesus' family. Today, we're meeting (name)." (Hold up the figurine.)

"I'm going to read their story, and then we'll add them to our nativity scene."

(Read the Scripture from a children's Bible or the pew Bible.)

After reading, pause and say, "It was nice to meet (name) and hear their story. Let's place them in our scene."

(Do this.)

Then ask the children to pray with you: Dear God (pause for repeat). We love you (echo). Help us to learn about your family (echo) and prepare our hearts for Christmas (echo). Amen. (echo).

Advent 1: Angel

Brings messages, encourages
Read: Angel coming to Mary (Luke 1:26-33)

Advent 2: Mary

Fearless, faithful
Recap: Angel coming to Mary
Read: Mary finding out about Jesus (Luke 1:38,47-55)

Advent 3: Joseph/Donkey

Does the right thing, stays by us, carries us
Recap: Mary finding out about Jesus
Read: Joseph and angel (Matthew 1:18-21)

Advent 4: Shepherds

Take care of others, humble, share the Good News
Recap: Joseph, Mary and angels
Read: Shepherds in the fields (Luke 2:8-14)

Christmas Eve: Baby Jesus

Comes for everyone; we are all part of Jesus' family
Recap: Angels, Mary, Joseph/donkey and shepherds—many gathered for Jesus
Read: Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-7)

Christmas Day: Baby Jesus

We celebrate Jesus
Recap: Baby Jesus in the manger
Read: Blessing from Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25-38)

Epiphany: Wise Men/Camel

We still seek Jesus
Read: Matthew 2:1-12

Cook, the pastor of Grace UMC, Columbia, has authored of two children's books from the Advocate Press: "Herbert the Hippo" and "Herbert the Hippo In the Moment." On Amazon or AdvocateSC.org/books.

Youth gear up for 'Belong'-themed Revolution in January

COLUMBIA—Registration is going on now for Revolution 2025, the youth spiritual event held Jan. 24-26.

The theme for Revolution 2025 is "Belong" and the verse is Ephesians 2:13.

The Revolution Design Team said they pray youth and youth leaders will join and have a powerful, life-changing event of worship and spiritual growth at the Township Auditorium.

Registration is \$75 per person and includes a free T-shirt for all who register before Dec. 31.

To register, visit <http://scmyp.org>.

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Members work hard to reach out to the community in Christian love.

Virginia Wingard Memorial celebrates 70th birthday with missions, outreach, more

Virginia Wingard Memorial recently celebrated its 70th birthday at 1500 Broad River Road. The church has been blessed by God during these 70 years and continues to be a blessing to its members and the community.

Members at Virginia Wingard Memorial United Methodist Church have been staying busy with many church activities, as well as outreach and mission activities. In addition to chair aerobics, reader's theatre, handbells, quilters, a senior adult daytimers group and church newsletter "angels" who assemble the monthly newsletter, members of the congregation volunteer their time each Tuesday and Wednesday in the food pantry and clothes closet ministry.

Emergency food and hygiene bags are available each week for members to pick up and have in their car to give to those they encounter who are in need. These bags travel all over the Columbia and Lexington communities with church members as they go about their daily lives. One member recently had an appointment at Duke University Hospital and was able to give food and hygiene bags to a person she encountered outside the hospital.

All the items for the bags are donated by the congregation.

Virginia Wingard Memorial, in partnership with St. Andrews Baptist, Westminster Presbyterian and St. Andrews Lutheran churches, minister to the staff, students and parents at H.B. Rhame Elementary School, and volunteers participate in many school activities throughout the school year, including the honor roll recognition, math and science events and teacher appreciation. Each volunteer is vetted through Richland School District One. The 4-Church Faith group of volunteers meets at the flagpole at Rhame the first Monday of each month to pray for the school. In addition, the 4-Church Faith group provides weekend food packages for food challenged students and will supply Thanksgiving and Christmas food boxes for identified families as well. Several needs have been met for students in the past, such as a school supply drive, sock drive, an underwear drive, a Chapstick drive, as well as other needs identified by the school guidance counselor, nurse and principal. These items are graciously donated by members of the 4-Church Faith group.

Around the Districts

Columbia District

Washington Street UMC, Columbia, will host the 20th Annual Sing Along Messiah Dec. 16 at 7 p.m. in its sanctuary. Doors will open at 6 p.m. for first-come, first-served seating. Nativity sets from around the world will be on display from 5-6:30 p.m.

Mary Maidens, a girls group at **Washington Street UMC, Columbia**, raised \$336.40 in donations to Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF. The money will be used to provide education, immunization, nutrition, safe water and other services in 190 countries.

Hartsville District

Congratulations to the Rev. Sharome and Stephanie Henry on the birth of their grandson. Solomon "Kross" Dunbar was born Oct. 21 to Nora Littleton and Solomon Maurice Dunbar and welcomed home by big sister Nova. Sha'Rome is the executive assistant in Clergy Services and serves New Haven UMC, Bishopville. Stephanie is an insurance specialist in the conference's health benefits office.

Marion District

Congratulations to the Rev. Steve and Karen Brown on the birth of their first granddaughter. Shiloh Parker was born Oct. 26 to Rachel and Weston Parker. Rev. Brown is the superintendent of the Marion District.

Bible blessings

October is Fire Prevention Month. Disciples UMC, Greenville, gave the Tyger River Fire Department 10 special Bibles specifically created for firefighters. Here, pastor the Rev. Narcie Jeter stands with two of the firefighters.



Recipes wanted

Do you have a favorite recipe? We'd love for you to share it with the *Advocate*! The *Advocate* is starting a new "recipes" feature. Each month, we hope to feature a new recipe, whether that's an individual favorite or one you use regularly at your church.

Share it with us at news@advocatesc.org, and don't forget to tell us your name and your church name and city.



The church's annual Fall Festival ended with a trunk-or-treat party.

Sandy Grove emphasizes outreach in busy season

October was a busy month for Sandy Grove United Methodist Church, Jefferson.

The busy month began with Pastor Appreciation Sunday on the first Sunday of the month. Appreciation to Sandy Grove's pastor, the Rev. Marion Loretta Cooper, was extended by the church, committees and members showed.

On the second Sunday, Praise in the Park was well attended by members of the Sandy Grove-Mount Elon Charge. The church went beyond its walls and reached out to the world as disciples of Christ.

On the third Sunday, Sandy Grove celebrated 174 years of serving the community. A fellowship dinner was served after the worship service.

On the fourth Saturday, the children and youth coordinators sponsored the church's annual Fall Festival, ending with trunk-or-treating for all. Children and adults said they enjoyed the gathering.

The month of October was full of excitement,



The church is committed to ongoing mission.

ment, but everything worked out well, said Church Lay Leader Ernestine McCaskill.

"We do not stop serving our community and the churches," McCaskill said. "Even though the next few weeks will be busy, we have a mission for the community and church to complete."

Clemson continues to strive toward faithfulness, inclusivity as a UMC congregation welcoming all

CLEMSON—Throughout September and October, several Clemson United Methodist Church members took a closer look at being faithful and inclusive in The United Methodist Church using the video-based study, "Faithful and Inclusive."

Together, the congregation celebrated the good news of Scripture, listened to the personal testimonies of fellow United Methodists, heard each other's stories and enjoyed encouragement from thriving churches living in the tradition of open hearts, open minds and open doors. They enjoyed the informative and comforting expertise of the Rev. Rob Fuquay, senior pastor of 6,000-member St. Luke United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, and participated in healthy small group dialogue.

Simultaneously, Clemson's As You Are Sunday school class has been studying "The Savvy Ally," by Jeannie Gainsburg, an informative guide for becoming skilled LGBTQ+ advocates and allies who are willing to stand, with Jesus, close enough to get hit by the stones thrown at others.

"Clemson's LGBTQ+ friends, family and neighbors continue to face discrimination, ostracization, villainization and hate based on false witness from those in society and religious organizations who ignore modern sociological, psychological, and biological sciences about the LGBTQ+ lived experience," said the Rev. Meg Wilkes, minister of discipleship at Clemson UMC.

Wilkes said they press on toward the goal of Christian witness as described in Romans 13: "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." (Romans 13: 8-10).

Contact Wilkes at meg@clemsonumc.org to inquire about the value of this short-term video/discussion resource, or just to have a conversation about how your congregation can work toward being more inclusive.



From the Archives

by Dr. Phillip Stone

Methodism in Orangeburg

Methodism has a long history in the Orangeburg area, with roots at the very beginning of South Carolina Methodism.

At the 1787 Annual Conference in Charleston, the Edisto Circuit was formed, although it stretched from modern-day Lexington County all the way to Walterboro. Later the circuit became the Orangeburg Circuit.

William Wightman, who was later the first president of Wofford College and a Methodist bishop, was an early minister on the Orangeburg Circuit. When he served in the area in 1829, at the ripe old age of 21, the circuit had some 26 preaching places. It took the minister a month to reach every place on the circuit. Wightman wrote to his brother that "Methodism has taken this part of the country, and it flourishes luxuriantly, like some towering oak—the pride of the forest, which has braved the storms of a century, and its spreading branches afford a shelter for hundreds."

What a great description of our Methodist connection!

The first Methodist church building in Orangeburg was built in 1836, with services before that time being held in other places, such as the courthouse. In 1860 a new wooden church was constructed, and then in 1896 a brick structure was built. St. Paul's in Orangeburg thus grew from 41 members in 1851 to some 577 in 1900, and 1,450 when it hosted the 1939 session of the South Carolina Annual Conference. The 1939 article describing the church called it the "mother church of Orangeburg Methodism."

The first superintendent of the Sunday school at St. Paul's after it became a station appointment was Samuel Dibble, who was Wofford's first graduate and later a member of Congress.

Another of the Orangeburg congregations originated in a Sunday school founded in the industrial section of the community, with pastoral leadership coming from the Rowesville Circuit. The church became St.

John, and by 1903, an Orangeburg Circuit, with Andrew Chapel, Gethsemane, Beulah and Trinity had been formed.

Orangeburg became a center of Black Methodism in South Carolina after the Civil War. On the first Sunday of January in 1866, presiding elder T. Willard Lewis and Thomas Phillips founded Trinity Church. For six years it was part of the Orangeburg Circuit of the 1866 Conference, which was organized later that year. The church met for its first three years in a school that had been built by the Freedman's Bureau. A church building was constructed in 1870, and Trinity became a station appointment and one of the beacons of Black Methodism in South Carolina in 1878. The church relocated in the 1920s after a property exchange.

No doubt both Claflin and South Carolina State helped Trinity's growth, and students and faculty at both colleges would have worshiped and led there. In the 1960s, Trinity was the headquarters of the Orangeburg Movement for Human Dignity and Civil Rights.

The presence of Claflin University in Orangeburg during the last 155 years has magnified Orangeburg's importance. Claflin was the primary educational institution for the 1866 Conference and was a frequent host of the Annual Conference, and many of the clergy would have been educated there.

After World War II, Methodists recognized that having places for retired and aging Methodists to live was becoming more important, and the first Methodist Home was organized. Over a half century of growth and evolution, the Methodist Home first became The Oaks, and after being sold, is now the Oaks of Orangeburg. Though no longer a Methodist agency, it still can serve as a representative of Methodism spreading its branches to shelter hundreds.

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



Conference Historical Society

by the Rev. Meredith Dark

A history of Arcadia

In 2025, Arcadia United Methodist Church located in the Spartanburg District will celebrate 121 years in ministry.

At Annual Conference this past summer, I had the opportunity to speak with Sharon McFalls and Arcadia's current pastor, the Rev. Skipper Brock, regarding the history of the church. I am recounting Arcadia UMC's history through different events and the names of different ministers under whose leadership those events took place.

Churches develop over time, and, like the parable of the farmer scattering seed in Matthew 13:8, "Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted."

Many thanks to Rev. Brock, Ms. McFalls and members of the History & Records Committee of Arcadia UMC for these notes on the history of Arcadia.

In 1904, a house was furnished on Spring Street as the first place of worship soon after Arcadia Mill began operation. On Jan. 21, 1906, a Methodist Church was formally organized on the Spartanburg City Mission Circuit, served by the Rev. W. H. Polk. In 1907, a new church was built on Main Street by Dr. Henry A Ligon Sr., president of Arcadia Mill and former proprietor of Ligon's Drug Store. The building was a white wooden structure, and the dominant features were the bell-towered steeple and a pot-bellied stove, which was used to heat the building.

The new church was used by both Baptist and Methodist denominations as a "Union Church."

Arcadia was placed on the West Spartanburg Circuit in 1910 during the pastorate of the Rev. J. W. Shell. The circuit included the Arcadia, Saxon and Tucapau churches. From 1908 to 1927, the superintendent of the Union Sunday School was R. L. Doggett. Joseph Joyner served as leader of the Union Church. Records of past meetings disclose that the two denominations worked and worshiped together in peace and harmony. When there was a vote to be taken, there seemed to be complete cooperation from both congregations, and the vote was always unanimous. This good feeling and harmonious spirit prevailed all through the years and was an asset to the growth of both denominations.

The West Spartanburg Circuit was dissolved in 1912, and Arcadia was placed on the Duncan Memorial-Saxon Charge, consisting of Arcadia, Duncan Memorial, Saxon and Whitney churches.

In 1918, the Session of the Upper South Carolina Annual Conference dissolved the Duncan Memorial-Saxon Charge and re-

placed it with the Saxon Circuit, consisting of Arcadia, Fairmont and Saxon churches.

Two years later Arcadia was reassigned to the Tucapau Circuit, consisting of Arcadia, Fairmont and Tucapau churches.

During the pastorates of the Rev. B. H. Tucker and the Rev. Charles Griffin, the Baptist pastor, the Methodists and Baptists moved into separate buildings. The Baptists moved into a new church building in December 1927.

In 1928, Tucapau, known today as Startex, became a station church, leaving Arcadia and Fairmont churches on a charge.

In 1931 the Arcadia-Fairmont charge was dissolved and the Arcadia-Saxon charge was formed.

Arcadia saw the formation of a Women's Society of Christian Service on July 8, 1940. Four years later Arcadia became a station church, thus dissolving the Arcadia-Saxon Charge. During the pastorate of the Rev. B. E. Locklair, a new classroom was added to the church building and, during the pastorate of the Rev. M. L. Greer, a new parsonage was purchased and paid for at Johnson City, and a new educational building that included a kitchen and recreational room was built on the church structure.

The parsonage was sold during the pastorate of the Rev. Rufus Rowe, and a new modern brick parsonage was built adjoining the church.

During the four-year pastorate of the Rev. Thomas B. Wilkes Sr., a building fund was started, final payment was made on the new parsonage, the Men's Class purchased a new Hammond Organ and Circle #2 of the Women's Society of Christian Service was organized by Nell Wilkes.

On April 28, 1963, groundbreaking ceremonies for a new sanctuary were held, and the building was formally opened on Nov. 24, 1963. The Rev. Donald H. Hawkins was pastor.

During the 1970s, improvements to the church's property continued.

In 1983, during the pastorate of the Rev. David Arant, a Family Life Center was built and dedicated. Ground was broken on March 20, and the Service of Dedication was held on July 16.

A new organ was purchased in 1988 while the Rev. David F. Ervin was pastor.

It is certainly interesting to read the history of Arcadia UMC and the way it grew over the years. Arcadia was on seven charges before it became a station church in 1944.

The Conference Historical Society wishes Arcadia UMC all the best in its future years of history.

Dark is pastor of North Charleston United Methodist Church, North Charleston.



Photo courtesy of Freddie Vaughn

Jesus picture at St. Mark

In 2017, St. Mark UMC, Columbia, celebrated its 75th anniversary by presenting a "Jesus picture," seen above, which features pictures of church members in the shape of the face of Jesus. Four members worked in secret for the surprise presentation. Last year at the church's October Homecoming, they brought the picture back out and added to it. This November to commemorate their Thanksgiving celebration, they brought the picture back to the sanctuary and have added 12 more pictures of new people now attending worship services.

MERRY Christmas

from **ALSTON WILKES SOCIETY**

Rebuilding Lives for a Safer Community

Global Briefs

Webinar looks at new U.S. overtime rule

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The U.S. Department of Labor has altered overtime pay eligibility for salaried workers. Updates to the law begin Jan. 1. The new rule raises the wage threshold for overtime exemption, which might affect various United Methodist ministries. Churches are not exempt from U.S. overtime rules. The General Council on Finance and Administration plans to have a webinar on overtime eligibility at 1:30 p.m. U.S. Central time Dec. 3. For more information, go to https://us02web.zoom.us/join/1117308528919/WN_FmgrDE-FmTii2TzdLpTV5uA#/registration

Combat injustice as a Global Mission Fellow

ATLANTA—Applications for The United Methodist Church's Global Mission Fellows program are being accepted until Jan. 15. The program places young adults, ages 20-30, in social justice ministries for two years of service. Only applications for the international track are being accepted. Those selected for the next cohort will begin onboarding in the spring.

Bishops urge halt to Côte d'Ivoire funding

ST. SIMONS ISLAND, Ga.—United Methodist bishops have voted to ask the denomination's finance agency to suspend all funding for bishop compensation in Côte d'Ivoire and to work to secure church property there. The move comes after the conference registered with the Ivorian government as an entity completely independent of The United Methodist Church.

Preparing for bishop elections outside U.S.

ST. SIMONS ISLAND, Ga.—United Methodist bishops are praying for the upcoming elections of colleagues in the Philippines, Africa and Europe. After the recent withdrawal of some bishops, one particular concern is ensuring that any new bishops are committed to the denomination.

Bishop Lee remembered as towering figure

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Bishop Clay Foster Lee Jr., who led the Holston Conference from 1988 to 1996, died Nov. 11 at age 94. Lee, whose sermons gained national attention during the Civil Rights Movement, is being remembered for "his storytelling, quick wit, deep friendships and strong work ethic."

Connectional Table plans for work ahead

DALLAS—Members of the Connectional Table, most of whom are new, gathered for an orientation meant to help them plan for "a new future." The leadership body coordinates the denomination's ministries and resources. A major emphasis of the meeting was learning more about colonialism, connectionalism and regionalization.

Ward named Candler's bishop-in-residence

ATLANTA—Retired United Methodist Bishop Hope Morgan Ward will serve as the next bishop-in-residence at Emory University's Candler School of Theology. She begins her new role at the United Methodist seminary Jan. 5. Ward is also one of two ecumenical officers for the Council of Bishops.

Bishops issue statement on U.S. election

ST. SIMONS ISLAND, Ga.—The United Methodist Council of Bishops, an international body meeting this week at Epworth by the Sea Conference Center, has released a statement following the U.S. elections on Nov. 5. "Amid the change and uncertainty that have resulted from the recent U.S. elections, and the ways in which these matters will impact the whole world," the bishops said, "we remember that we are held by the enduring power of God's love and the call to be agents of that love in the world."

Rallying to help Lake Junaluska after Helene

LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C.—Debris cleanup after Hurricane Helene is ongoing more than one month since the storm hit. At Lake Junaluska, 40 volunteers have already removed close to 7,000 pounds of trash and debris, including propane tanks, old tires and clothing. The lake area is home to the popular United Methodist retreat center.

Election Day tradition continues

PENINSULA, Ohio—Serving a meal on Election Day is a tradition going back more than a century for Peninsula United Methodist Church. The practice has grown into a fundraiser for the church, open to anyone who would like to avoid the worry of cooking a meal on such a busy day. The event creates an opportunity for the church to provide a service for the community and to build bonds among the congregation. More than 300 meals were sold this year.

Debunking disinformation about regionalization

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania—United Methodists from across Africa gathered for training on communications and regionalization. Many have been contending with disinformation about the regionalization legislation and the church in general.

Bishops urged to perceive God's 'new thing'

ST. SIMONS ISLAND, Ga.—On the eve of a tense U.S. presidential election, Council of Bishops President Tracy S. Malone acknowledged that United Methodist bishops must lead in chaotic times. But she reminded her fellow bishops that God's deliverance is a theme that runs through Scripture. She also sees God's will for liberation and love at work during this new day for The United Methodist Church.

Dispute over church property resolved

NAPERVILLE, Ill.—United Methodists in the Northern Illinois Conference are celebrating a settlement reached between the conference and a breakaway faction of the former Naperville Korean United Methodist Church. The remaining members of Naperville Korean have formed a new faith community and returned to worship at the site under a new name.

Committee responds to church court's ruling

HUNTERSVILLE, N.C.—The Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy responded to the Judicial Council's ruling that the committee exceeded its authority in recommending a bishop serve in both the Northeastern and Southeastern jurisdictions. The church court ruled in Decision 1513 that the committee's recommended bishop allocation was not consistent with what this year's General Conference approved. However, the Judicial Council did not offer any changes to the bishops' current assignments.

—Courtesy of United Methodist News Service



Global missions

On Nov. 10, Sara Flores and her husband, Deacon Cook, visit Manning UMC, Manning, to talk about their missionary efforts in Ecuador.



Resource Center

by Betty Stalnaker

'A thankful heart is a happy heart'

Do you need Christmas movies for the children this December? The following titles are available in the Resource Center. Call and reserve the one that best suits your need.

Bugtime Adventures: Joy to the World (The Story of Christmas)

(DVD2722CC) 25 min./2007. When an angel appears to Mary and explains that she's going to have God's baby, Mary agrees to do whatever God would have her do. She and Joseph travel to Bethlehem for the census, but when they arrive at the inn, there is no room for them. The innkeeper lets them stay in the stable where they prepare for the greatest event in history—the birth of Christ. Meanwhile, the bugs need to relocate their town of Bugglesville because of a fire. They ride along with Mary and Joseph to search for a new place but find the stable already occupied. Home use only. Ages 4-9. CC.

Go Look in the Manger/The Candy Maker's Christmas

(DVD1167CC) Author: Mead, David/Strahan, Chris. 2 stories, 30 min. each/2002. In "Go Look in the Manger," to eight-year-old Ricky Meyer, Christmas 1966 is a wonderland filled with snowballs and manger scenes. Desperate to impress his teacher and classmates with a memorable show-and-tell, Ricky strikes a deal with his mother, which jeopardizes his Christmas. In "The Candy Makers Christmas," the candy maker cheers, "Only the finest will be accepted," as he mixes and stirs and twirls his latest creation. "Only the finest for the king." And as he walks into the snowy night, August is certain that he has made the perfect Christmas present for the royal family. But an accidental encounter in front of the Cathedral teaches August that the only truly perfect Christmas present is the gift of Jesus. CC.

Jacob's Gift

(DVD118CC) Author: Lucado, Max. 30 min./2001. Young Jacob struggles to choose just the right project for his woodworking class to win a contest. His father's inn is very busy, and Jacob is pulled away from his woodworking by duties and distractions. In the end, he sacrifices winning the contest to do a kindness for a family with a newborn baby and learns an important lesson about giving. This story is based on the book by Max Lucado.

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever

(DVD1080CC) 60 min./1983/available in VHS format. Beware the Herdmans! They're the nastiest, dirtiest kids you could ever meet—and they've just decided they belong in this year's pageant. But the town thinks they belong in the care of the local police. When the curtain finally goes up, a miracle begins. Age: All.

The Crippled Lamb/Alabaster's Song

(DVD2454CC) Author: Lucado, Max. 2 stories, 24 min each/2001. "The Crippled Lamb" is based on Max Lucado's story of Joshua, a little lame lamb who has a chance to honor the Christ child one starry night in Bethlehem. Features the voices of Robby and Jodi Benson. "Alabaster's Song," also by Max Lucado, is the story of an angel teaching a little boy that Christmas is not about the gifts under the tree, but about the gift of Jesus.

The Prince of Peace: A Christmas Story

(DVD2721C) 29 min. Relive the Christmas story in the fascinating 3D animation spectacular. See the story unfold as Mary and Joseph are visited by angels while Herod plots to erase any competition to his throne. The birth of Jesus in that Bethlehem stable changed the world, and to this very day, men, women and children kneel to worship the One who is called the Prince of Peace. Recommended for ages 3 to 10. Approximately 29 minutes.

The Savior Is Born

(DVD23CC) 28 min./2005. Follow Mary and Joseph on their journey to Bethlehem and celebrate the birth of Jesus. An awe-inspiring musical score and Morgan Freeman's poignant narration capture all the power and beauty of the very first Christmas. Music by Christ Church. Grades 1-6.

Three Christmas Classics

(DVD1071CC) 3 stories/18-27 min./available in VHS format. "Christmas Is" is an animated classic about Benji, a disappointed little boy who must play the second shepherd in the school play—again. (22:00) "The City that Forgot about Christmas" is the story of a woodcarver who lived in a village that had forgotten about Christmas. When he taught the children of the town about the birth of Jesus, the uncaring village was filled with the joy of Christ. (18:00) "The Stableboy's Christmas," an award-winning dramatic special, finds 10-year-old Tammy traveling back in time to the first Christmas in Bethlehem and witnessing a stableboy's act of unselfish love when he gives the Christ child his pet lamb. (27:00) CC.

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

**Mary Irene Caynor
Armstrong Black**

WOOSTER, Ohio—Mary Irene Caynor Armstrong Black, grandmother of Matt Brodie, died Oct. 21, 2024. Mr. Brodie is the former conference production coordinator; his wife, Jessica, is the editor of the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate*.

Funeral services were held Nov. 15 at Wooster United Methodist Church with burial in Wooster Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Wooster Cemetery Association, 983 Madison Ave., Wooster, OH 44691.

Mrs. Black is survived by two daughters, son, two stepsons and stepdaughter.

Sammy L. Cruell

TAYLORS—Sammy L. Cruell, husband of the Rev. Twana Rogers Cruell, died Oct. 20, 2024. Rev. Cruell is the pastor of the Greer Circuit Charge, Greer.

Funeral services were held Oct. 28 at St.

Mark United Methodist Church with burial in Resthaven Memorial Gardens.

Mr. Cruell is survived by his wife, two daughters and four sons.

Eloise Pate Graham

ISLE OF PALMS—Eloise Pate Graham, widow of the Rev. J. Arthur Graham Sr., died Nov. 4, 2024.

Funeral services were held Nov. 8 at First United Methodist Church. A private burial will be held at a later date.

Mrs. Graham is survived by her two daughters and two sons.

Sharon Alcorn Holder

TYLER, Texas—Sharon Alcorn Holder, mother of the Rev. Shelly Holder, died Oct. 26, 2024. Rev. Holder is on leave.

A graveside service will be held at Memory Land Cemetery, Greenville, Texas.

Memorials may be made to First United Methodist Church, 200 W. Gay St., Lancaster,

Obituary Policy

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 S.C. Conference of The United Methodist Church.

SC 29720; or St. Luke Methodist Youth Ministry, 305 Dunlap Drive, Hartsville, SC 29550.

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

Robert Allan Pedigo

VALLEY, Ala.—Robert Allan Pedigo, father of the Rev. Debra Armstrong, died Oct. 23, 2024. Rev. Armstrong is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

A memorial service was held Nov. 9 at Callaway Gardens.

Memorials may be made to Global Ministries/UMCOR, GPO, P.O. Box 9068, New

York, NY 10087-9068.

Mr. Pedigo is survived by his wife, Sundra “Sunny” Godwin Pedigo, son and daughter.

Leroy Bruce Price

KINSTON, N.C.—Leroy Bruce Price, father of the Rev. Dawson Price, died Sept. 29, 2024. Rev. Price is the pastor of the St. John Charge, Scranton.

Funeral services were held Oct. 2 at Howard-Carter Funeral Home with burial Oct. 3 at Pinelawn Memorial Park.

Mr. Price is survived by his wife, Deborah Benton Price, three sons and daughter.

Thomas Singleton

ROCHESTER, N.Y.—Thomas “Skeeter” Singleton, brother of the Rev. Pernerva Thomas, died Oct. 9, 2024. Rev. Thomas is the pastor of St. Paul-Elliott United Methodist Church, Lynchburg.

A memorial service was held Nov. 3 at the Dimery and Rogers Chapel, Kingtree.

Zoom class offered on how Federal Fair Labor Standards Act can affect the church

The Biden Administration has recently proposed new changes to the laws and regulations that control when an employee must be paid overtime for more than 40 hours of work per week.

These employees are called nonexempt. Employees that are exempt from overtime pay requirement are employees that make over a certain amount and do managerial work.

Basic Church Administration will offer a Zoom class on the FLSA and how it works within the church environment. The class is for all members of the pastor/parish relations committee, pastors and anyone else who is responsible for managing employees.

The class will be offered Tuesday, Dec. 10, at 10 a.m. The class will be recorded for those who cannot attend.

The class will be led by Rev. Robert Cox from Basic Church Administration and Rebecca Tompkins, CEO of Forest Acres Payroll Service.

The class is free, but registration is required. Register at <https://church-admin.org/registrations>.



Oyster shell art helps church apportionments

The women of Disciples UMC, Greenville, gathered Nov. 12 for their regular monthly meeting. Diane Wilson shared about the *Advocate*, and Dee McManus dazzled all with her oyster shell art, many of which she sold. Proceeds from her art sales will be given to the church to go toward apportionments.

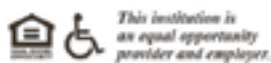
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November

Native American Heritage Month

- Nov. 24-30—International Bible Week
- Nov. 28—Thanksgiving Day
- Nov. 28—25th Annual Community Thanksgiving Dinner, Hudson's Seafood House on the Docks, Hilton Head, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.
- Nov. 28-29—United Methodist Center closed

December

- Dec. 1—World AIDS Day
- Dec. 3—Giving Tuesday
- Dec. 7—UWF Limitless Event, 10 a.m.
- Dec. 7—Tri-District Connectional Gathering with Bishop Fairley for Charleston, Orangeburg and Walterboro districts, Edisto Fork UMC, Orangeburg, 10 a.m.-Noon.
- Dec. 8—Children's Nativity, Washington Street UMC, Columbia.
- Dec. 10—Basic Church Administration class on Federal Fair Labor Standards Act changes, Zoom, 10 a.m. Register: <https://church-admin.org/registrations>
- Dec. 11—200th Anniversary Celebratory Service, First UMC, Cheraw, 5:30 p.m.
- Dec. 14—Merry Christmas Bash, Mount Zion UMC, Bishopville, 2-5 p.m.
- Dec. 16—20th Annual Sing Along Messiah, Washington Street UMC, Columbia, 7 p.m.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Cynthia Muncie

Welcome, 'John Wesley'

St. Andrews UMC, Orangeburg, held a Laity Sunday Ministry Fair premier, during which the Rev. John Wesley was available for photos on the church's red carpet. The ministry fair was a culmination of their stewardship season detailed by their trade show posters, "Blessed to Be a Blessing." Pictured at center is laity and Sunday school teacher Bob Elton as "John Wesley," with Lay Servant and Stewardship Chair Jeannine Kees and Laity and Food Pantry Servant Anita Raso. The fair highlighted the church's many ministries with displays, giveaways and sign-ups on various tables throughout the Fellowship Hall. They also offered an open house to their neighbors with coffee and donuts. "John Wesley" also blessed the congregation to be a blessing with an invocation during worship.

Dec. 19—Christmas Concert, First UMC, Cheraw, 7 p.m.

Dec. 21—Winter Equinox/First Day of Winter

Dec. 24—Christmas Eve

Dec. 24-26—United Methodist Center closed

Dec. 25—Christmas Day

Dec. 26-Jan. 1—Kwanzaa

Dec. 31—New Year's Eve/Watch Night

January

- Jan. 5—Epiphany
- Jan. 12—Baptism of the Lord
- Jan. 12—Human Relations Day
- Jan. 13—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.
- Jan. 15—Dementia Care Workshop, S.C. Cognitive Care Ministry, Surfside UMC, Surfside Beach, 9:30 a.m.-Noon. Register: <https://tinyurl.com/dementia-surfside-beach>
- Jan. 18—UWF Officer's Training
- Jan. 20—Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- Jan. 24—SMC Enrollment Day for prospective students, <https://smcsc.edu/enrollmentdays>
- Jan. 25—SMC Enrollment Day for prospective students, <https://smcsc.edu/enrollmentdays>

February

Black History Month and UWF Wallace Family Life Special Emphasis Month

- Feb. 2—Groundhog Day
- Feb. 5—Golden Cross Sunday
- Feb. 12—Dementia Care Workshop, S.C. Cognitive Care Ministry, Silver Hill Memorial UMC, Spartanburg, 9:30 a.m.-Noon. Register: <https://tinyurl.com/dementia-silver-hill>



Crafts galore

On Nov. 2, Manning UMC, Manning, held their third annual craft bazaar. The bazaar is becoming a tradition in the church.



Harvest drive

New Haven UMC, Bishopville, collected nonperishables to help families in need for Thanksgiving. Sharome Henry is the pastor.

Photo courtesy of Stephanie Ponds Henry



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Compelled by our faith

by the Rev. Morgan Byars

Dec. 1
Jesus is the reason

Lesson Scripture: Colossians 1:15-23
Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:11; Hebrews 12:1-12
Key Verse: Colossians 1:15, “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the one who is first over all creation.”

Advent is once again upon us. Advent comes from the Latin word “adventus,” meaning “arrival.” This word may prompt us to wonder what, or who, is arriving. The Christmas story is so well-known by so many that this question might seem silly—it’s Jesus, of course! Yet our familiarity with the Christmas story can often obscure the radical nature of this arrival.

In the Christian tradition we throw around all sorts of words like omnipotent, omniscient, transcendent, almighty, etc., to underscore just how far above our understanding God is. This text in Colossians is far more succinct, simply telling us that God is invisible. If we go looking for God on our own power, we will be eternally frustrated. Our finite sight will always fail us. If we are to know of God, we must rely on God’s self-disclosure.

Thanks be to God, that is exactly what God has done. In Jesus we are gifted the image of the invisible God. If you want to know what God is like, there is no greater image than the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. For in Jesus, we see that the incomprehensibly transcendent God not only chooses to disclose Godself, but does so through the humblest circumstances for the most loving purposes. In Jesus we see God born in a feeding trough in a backwater town far away from places of luxury and privilege, all out of a desire to reconcile us to Godself (Colossians 1:20).

This news, because it is so radical, requires constant reminders. We have to remind ourselves each year that, yes, this really is how God chose to come into the world! And not only that, but God continues to choose the unexpected places to meet us.

At what unexpected places might God be meeting you in this season?

Dec. 8
Called to love

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40
Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4-9
Key Verses: Matthew 22:37-38, “He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest commandment.’”

If Jesus is indeed the image of the invisible God, we’d do well to listen up when he tells us what the most important commandments are. You can practically see the giant neon sign flashing “PAY ATTENTION” when Jesus begins speaking. It is hardly a novel thing to say loving God and neighbor is the bedrock of our discipleship. Yet, as with most things, it is easier said than done.

The last few years of schism have reminded United Methodists of this fact time and time again. The commandment to love is an exceedingly difficult lesson to learn, especially in the midst of disagreement. As author Jayson D. Bradley once said, “Love is Ph.D.-level Christianity.”

Thankfully, we are not only given this commandment, but also its exemplar. In Jesus’s life and ministry, we see love lived out in its fullest expression. Medieval theologian Peter Abelard once wrote that this example was an essential component of our salvation. We are shown such a great demonstration of love in Jesus’s life, death and resurrection that we are transformed by the realization of the depths of God’s love. Jesus came to proclaim love and to show us what

love looks like. Jesus shows us that love is not an abstract idea to be debated but a concrete way of living life. There is no greater task as a disciple of the God who is love (1 John 4:8). And to echo last week’s lesson, we are promised that although “no one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us” (1 John 4:12).

The invisible God that Jesus first revealed to us through his life of love is continually revealed when we love one another. How might knowing that love is truly our greatest calling impact your relationships with God and neighbor?

Dec. 15
Filled with joy

Lesson Scripture: Luke 1:46-55
Background Scripture: 2 Peter 1:21
Key Verses: Luke 1:47, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

The last few lessons have focused on what God has done for us, and now we turn to the response that God’s action evokes in us. Mary’s hymn of praise has been aptly named the Magnificat in church tradition, for Mary’s words act as a magnifying glass. Her words bring the work of God into focus so that we might remember what grounds our joy. We discover the source of our joy is the constant, unwavering compassion of God. To remind us of this truth, Mary plays with the concept of time.

First, Mary looks back. Christians have long noted that her hymn echoes the words of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 when she was blessed with her son Samuel. Mary has in mind all that God has already done for God’s people, the ways in which God has already been faithful. This enables her to look forward. When she is singing, Jesus is not yet born, yet she can speak of God’s deliverance and salvation as already accomplished. God “has brought down the powerful, and lifted up the lowly, he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:52-53). Because Mary knows of what God has done in the past, she knows what God will do through her child. She is joyful because the God who has always been gracious continues to be gracious.

And just as she looks backwards and forwards, we can, too. We can look back to the ways in which God has blessed us and brought us through strife, and we can trust that God will continue to do so.

During this Advent season, let us ponder how God continues to be gracious to us. How has God walked with you? How might you continue to walk with God?

Dec. 22
The word of God

Lesson Scripture: John 1:1-18
Background Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7
Key Verse: John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

If John’s prologue has ever come across as confusing or abstract, you are in good company. The claim that John makes—that the eternal Word lived among us as one of us—took centuries of the theological debate to resolve. In the year 451, Christians gathered at a town called Chalcedon to settle a theological dispute and to formulate the doctrine of Jesus’s full divinity and humanity. If Jesus had been born this year, in 2024, that means that our Council of Chalcedon would not take place until the year 2475! In other words, what we have considered together these last few weeks is a profoundly disruptive claim. It took centuries for Christians to find the words to describe the mystery

of God’s incarnation, and even to this day we can find ourselves confounded by the wondrous reality that the transcendent God dwelt with us.

And yet for how confounding, how confusing, how transcendental this all is, John and his peers could not help but write about it. They saw what God did, and it changed their lives forever. They saw “his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son,” and the experience they had left an indelible mark on their souls (John 1:14).

I believe we return to the Christmas story for the same reason. This mysterious and wonderful event escapes our full comprehension, but we return to it because we have been marked by its truth. God has left an indelible mark on each of us, and so we return to this story to remind ourselves of what God has done for us and of the Word that has been spoken into each one of us.

What mark has God left on your life? What does it mean for you to return to this mystery each year?

Dec. 29
Salvation is for everyone

Lesson Scripture: Luke 2:25-35
Background Scripture: Acts 10
Key Verse: Luke 2:30-31, “For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.”

This text conveys a message that many of us have heard time and time again in our churches: Salvation is for everyone. Innumerable books and sermons have been written on this very subject by innumerable

authors, John Wesley being among them. In his sermon “On Free Grace,” for example, he wrote, “The grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is free in all, and free for all.” The salvation that Jesus offers crosses every barrier that humanity places within itself.

Simeon foresees this and prophesies that the barrier between Jew and Gentile will be torn down as Jesus radically extends grace to all. As our background text shows, however, it took quite a while for the church to live into this reality. It took divine revelation and church councils for the church to follow in the footsteps of its Savior.

At first, this aspect of Jesus’s ministry might seem irrelevant to our modern context. The issue of Gentile inclusion in the community of faith is hardly a hot button issue today. Thanks be to God that we have made great strides in that regard!

Yet even as barriers have come down, others remain. Jesus’s radical offer of salvation to all is a call for us, as his disciples, to tear down every barrier that would divide us and impede the proclamation of that salvation to all.

I am deeply grateful to be a part of a denomination that commits itself to tearing down barriers in the life of the church, yet there is always another stranger to welcome in, another group to be embraced.

Who might God be calling you to embrace? What barriers does God seek for you to tear down?

Byars is associate pastor at Mount Hebron United Methodist Church, West Columbia.

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SEPARATION PROCESS ENDS: ‘Contradicts clear intent’

From Page 1

the 2025 Annual Conference gathering.

However, they noted requests for declaratory decisions on the constitutionality of the use of Para. 2549 were on the fall docket of the UMC Judicial Council and could affect the continued use of Para. 2549 as a means for separation.

The Judicial Council did indeed rule the use of Para. 2549 to be unconstitutional, so now the process is no longer an option.

Since 2022, the South Carolina Conference has approved the separation of 225 churches from the conference—a total of about 23.4 percent—using Para. 2549. In June 2023, 113 of the 958 churches separated from the denomination, and in June 2024, 112 additional churches separated. The list of 2023 and 2024 separating churches can be found at <https://advocatesc.org/separation>.

In their decision, the court noted that using Para. 2549 for separations “contradicts the clear intent of Para. 2549 by taking

members and properties from the United Methodist Church and continuing religious activities as a new entity no longer a part of the United Methodist denomination.” They said using Para. 2549 in this way “is another failed attempt to circumvent the trust clause, a hallmark of United Methodist polity.”

The court noted another provision in the *Book of Discipline*, Para. 2553, did allow congregations to disaffiliate from the UMC and take property, though that paragraph expired at the end of last year, and this year’s General Conference further removed it from the *Discipline*. In essence, the court said, churches can’t use Para. 2549 as an alternate way to exit and take property with them.

“The congregation cannot now use Para.

2549.3(b) to accomplish what was allowed in Para. 2553. It is clear that Para. 2549.3(b) was not intended to be used this way; if it could, then there would not have been a need for Para. 2553,” the court further clarified.

South Carolina’s Fairley and Bullion noted anyone with questions can call 803-735-8771 or email inquiries@umcsc.org.

“We invite all South Carolina United Methodists to join us in focusing our prayers, our time and our energy on our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” they added in their statement. “Join us in seeing the possibilities and living the promise—in sharing the grace, the love and the peace of Jesus Christ among God’s people.”

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