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May 2024

# Delegates gather for UMC General Conference

By Jessica Brodie

CHARLOTTE—It's here. After multiple postponements because of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent international travel issues, the 2020 United Methodist Church General Conference is gearing up to start just as the *Advocate* releases this edition.

Held April 23-May 3 at the Charlotte Convention Center, the 2024 event is officially called the postponed 2020 General Conference.

Eight hundred sixty-two delegates representing confer-

ences around the world—including 16 delegates from South Carolina—plus alternates will spend 10 days setting policy and direction for the denominational church, as well as handling other important business.

In addition to the delegates, the UMC's 59 bishops will be present and preside at General Conference, though they do not have a vote. Hundreds of other people, many of them volunteers, will serve in a variety of roles, such as greeters, registration officials, marshals, pages, translators, guides, drivers, musicians, technicians, reporters and emergency responders.

In all, the gathering is expected to draw as many as 7,500 people.

Meeting every four years, General Conference is the only entity that speaks for the denomination. *The United Methodist Book of Discipline*, updated every four years, incorporates changes made by General Conference.

The postponed 2020 General Conference theme is "... and know that I am God," from Psalm 46:10.

See "General Conference," Page 10

## Removing the stigma, celebrating the gifts

### Dementia workshop to empower churches through new ministry

By Jessica Brodie

NORTH CHARLESTON—As a pastor, the Rev. Bryan Pigford has seen it over and over again—that deep, almost knee-jerk dread people experience when they hear the word "dementia."

"The fear is palpable," Pigford said. "There's almost a sense of, 'If we ignore it, maybe it doesn't exist.'"

But the truth is that dementia does indeed exist, and it's growing rapidly. More than 122,000 people in South Carolina are currently living with a dementia diagnosis, and that's not including those not yet diagnosed or who may not ever be diagnosed. Beyond that, there are more than 219,000 people caring for them. In the nation as a whole, roughly one in nine Americans aged 65 and older are living with dementia.

See "Dementia," Page 9



Gene Turner puts some finishing touches on the newly installed lighthouse.

Photo courtesy of the Rev. Rusty Godfrey

## Lee Road UMC becomes 'lighthouse congregation'

TAYLORS—On the evening of Thursday, March 21, Lee Road United Methodist Church dedicated an eight-foot lighthouse on their campus in honor of the church's decision to remain United Methodist and to become a "lighthouse congregation."

The Rev. Rusty Godfrey, Lee Road pastor, led the church through a series of five meetings in 2023 with Greenville District Congregational Specialist the Rev. Cathy Joens. Through open discussion, much

prayer and consensus, the church decided that the main course it wanted to chart for its future was to be "welcoming" and "loving" to everyone, and that the best way to achieve this pathway was to remain UMC and intentionally invite everyone into full inclusion into the life of the church.

See "Lee Road," Page 24

## Mount Zion helps pay off \$2.4M in medical debt

By Jessica Brodie

CENTRAL—One church's Lenten project helped abolish \$2.4 million in medical debt.

Inspired by the forgiveness of sins we all experience through Christ, Mount Zion United Methodist Church launched "Forgiven to Forgive," which encouraged members to donate funds so people in Pickens, Oconee and Greenville counties could be liberated from debt.

As detailed in the February *Advocate*, Mount Zion partnered with RIP Medical Debt for the project, which takes donated funds and purchases medical debt in bulk, ultimately freeing people from the financial and emotional hardships that accompany massive, unpaid health bills.

The Rev. Jonathan Harris said the church exceeded its goal of \$21,000, raising \$24,268.35. With that amount, RIP Medical Debt is able to purchase and forgive roughly \$2.4 million of medical bills in those three counties.

"It is exciting to know that a smaller church was able to have such a significant impact on so many people," Harris said.

Harris got the idea from one of Mount Zion's members, Benji Cumbie, who sent him a story about a church in North Carolina that had helped forgive millions of dollars in medical debts in its community through a partnership with RIP Medical Debt. A nonprofit organization, it purchases medical debts in bulk

from hospitals and other medical providers at a deeply discounted price, which stretches the donated funds a lot farther, costing just pennies on the dollar, Harris explained.

The church's Missions and Evangelism Committee, headed by David and Beth McWilliams, loved the idea and developed a church-wide campaign.

The McWilliamses said they were blown away by the amount donated, noting that when they first heard about the idea, they thought the church should strive to raise just \$10,000. But they said Cumbie encouraged them to try for the entire goal of \$21,000 in debt.

See "Mount Zion," Page 24



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The *Advocate* encourages readers to submit for publication items of interest to South Carolina United Methodists. There is no charge for running items involving activities or announcements. Items should be submitted as far as possible in advance of the event's date or the date of requested publication. Since there is no charge for these items, they appear in the newspaper on a space-available basis. Deadlines are the 10th of each month for the following month's paper.

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Photographs can be submitted to the newspaper for publication. High-resolution digital images are preferred. Photographs should be in focus and should have proper exposure. Color or black and white photographs are accepted. People in photographs should be identified with names and ages, and a contact person with a phone number should be included in the information.

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### Back Issues

The *Advocate* maintains copies of back issues for sale for up to one year, as long as the supply lasts. When requesting by mail, back copies are \$2 each, to cover postage and handling. To research or review articles published more than one year ago, bound copies of the newspaper are available for review at the Advocate office, Wofford College in Spartanburg and the South Caroliniana Library in Columbia.

# Marvin Horton honored with Society of John Wesley award

## Fellowship in the society is the highest award given by the United Methodist Men

South Carolina's Marvin Horton has been honored with the Society of John Wesley award, the highest award given by the United Methodist Men.

The Society of John Wesley is a fellowship of individuals committed to the support and expansion of United Methodist Men's ministries.

Fellows in the Society of John Wesley are known by their witness, vision and stewardship that enhance and strengthen the mission and ministry of the church. The society was created by the United Methodist Men Foundation to promote greater awareness of the Christian principles and practices embodied in the church.

Horton said getting the award was a complete surprise to him, and he feels honored and blessed.

"It is a special honor for men's ministry, and it always comes from the fact that in South Carolina we have such an incredible team of people, and we're just blessed with all kinds of leadership," Horton said. "I just feel like I'm part of the team. It's got my name on it, but I just represent a whole large group of people from our conference leadership team."



Horton (left) is congratulated by Bishop L. Jonathan Holston for his fellowship in the Society of John Wesley at the men's retreat Feb. 24.

Established in 1982 by the directors of the United Methodist Men Foundation, the Society of John Wesley is a means of recognizing those who exemplify the characteristics of John Wesley. These characteristics are best seen through service to fellow men and women and commitment to the teachings of the Christian faith.

John Wesley called together such people to form "The Holy Club." These men with

varying talents and skills contributed to the rapid growth and spiritual enrichment of early Methodism.

To become a fellow in the Society of John Wesley, a gift of \$1,000 to the UMM Foundation must be made in their honor. This gift is used by the foundation to support the ministries of the foundation including scouting ministries, men's ministries, men's prayer ministry and evangelism.

Individuals do not need to be United Methodists to join or be recognized.

Horton was recognized at the Men N Ministry spiritual retreat, held Feb. 24 at Journey United Methodist Church, Columbia.

Over the years, 13 South Carolina United Methodist Men have been awarded with this honor: Bill G. Smith (1989), William L. Jones Jr. (1989), Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey (2001), L.W. Smith (2004), Dr. James C. Adams (2004), Clayton Easter (2006), William C. Smith (2007), Dr. Charles L. Johnson Jr. (2009), Javy R. Gwaltney III (2017) Bishop L. Jonathan Holston (2018), Dr. Tim McClendon (2018), Herman Lightsey (2020) and Marvin Horton (2024).

# Newest Advocate Press book by Tyler Strange poised for release

The Advocate Press is poised to release its fourth book this year: "What I Want My Kids (And Me) To Know: Being Better Humans One Napkin at a Time," by the Rev. Tyler Strange.

Strange, a United Methodist elder who pastors Trinity United Methodist Church, Aiken, wrote the book inspired by a daily lunchbox napkin he would write for his daughter. He soon learned the napkins had become an invitation for both of them to inspire one another to be better humans.

In addition to the napkins, he began to write daily reflections for adults geared around similar themes of that day's napkin.

"Not only did the napkins provide avenues for parents, teachers, and other childhood professionals to connect with their children, but the



Strange



napkins began to meet adults in the tensions of their lives," Strange wrote in the book's introduction. "My friends began using the napkins to serve the children in their lives. They became conversation starters and whimsy whipper-uppers."

"What I Want My Kids (And Me) To Know" is the 26th book released from the Advocate Press, the book publishing arm of the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate*. Its mission is to produce books of interest to South Carolina

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

The book is slated for release this month. Watch <https://advocatesc.org/books> for information.

## Advocate Press to host Meet the Author/Book Signing event at Annual Conference

GREENVILLE—The Advocate Press will host a Meet the Author/Book Signing event at Annual Conference.

Held drop-in style from 12-2 p.m. on Tuesday, June 11, during the lunch break, the event will be held tentatively in Room 202B at the Greenville Center.

Attendees will get the chance to meet some of the authors of Advocate Press books, hear from them firsthand about their writing, have a book autographed and more.

Authors slated to be in attendance include the Rev. Tony Rowell, the Rev. Arthur Holt, the Rev. Amiri Hooker, Suzan Phillips, Toni Taylor, the Rev. Meg Cook, Stephon Void, the Rev. John Culp and Dr. Lyn Pace.

Books will also be for sale at the Advocate's booth during Annual Conference, as well as online at <https://advocatesc.org/books>.

The Advocate Press is the publishing arm of the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* newspaper. To date it has produced 25 books, with three more slated for publication before Annual Conference.

# Woodland Prayer Labyrinth reveals an outpouring of Lenten love

By Bob James

What started as a congregation's response to a 40-day Lenten devotional calendar became an elaborate Prayer Labyrinth lined with food filling more than half a basketball court—and then became an outreach to those in need in the Rock Hill area.

This Lenten season, Woodland United Methodist Church, Rock Hill, used a Lenten devotional calendar to provide the congregation a way to observe the 40 days of Lent. Included with the daily Scripture and devotion was a request to set aside each day a food item for use with the church's Blessing Box Pantry. Collections were then brought to the church during Lent, up until Palm Sunday.

Items such as peanut butter, pasta sauce, macaroni and cheese boxes, cereals, apple sauce, canned veggies, pasta and bottled waters were gathered. The outpouring of donated food was much larger than anticipated.

During Passion Week, a larger-than-expected Prayer Labyrinth was built using the donated food items to line the path. The labyrinth was made available for anyone to walk from Maundy Thursday until midday Saturday. Participants prayerfully followed the food-lined path, which led to a large, handmade cross at the center. Once there, the path continued, taking the participant eventually back out of the labyrinth.

On Easter Monday, church members gathered, sorted and organized the food items into boxes. Once finished, they stocked storage shelves with food for the pantry. An additional 21 boxes of food were taken to Pilgrim's Inn, a facility that provides food, resources and holistic care for those in need.

Donated packages of bottled water were also stored for Woodland's once-a-month Sunday to provide for Hunger Outreach, a service that



Participants prayerfully followed the food-lined path, which led to a large, handmade cross at the center.

provides meals to more than 150 families in need throughout the Rock Hill area.

Coupling the personal observance of the Lenten and Easter season with an opportunity to provide for those in need in our community gave those who participated a meaningful experience in spiritual growth.

*James is a lay member of Woodland UMC, Rock Hill.*



Photo courtesy of the Rev. Terry Fleming

**Faith into action in Florence**

Several pastors from across the Florence District gathered Feb. 20 to put faith into action. Pictured above, workers include the Revs. Carsten Bryant, Katherine Crimm, Mike Henderson, Mark Mitchell, Dusty Owens, Ken Phelps, Jeanie Swanson (and husband, Dan), District Superintendent Terry Fleming, and Ward Smith, chairperson of the Salkehatchie Board of Managers, along with laity from around the Manning community.

**Advocate appreciation ads to help celebrate children/youth ministers**

This June, you have the opportunity to celebrate the children and youth ministers in your church with appreciation ads. In June, many churches begin vacation Bible school season, as well as a host of stepped-up children and youth programming during the summer months. Through appreciation ads, you can express your gratitude to these men and women who work so hard to help the young people in your church draw closer to Christ. Three sizes are available (all 5.088" wide): Small (1" tall): \$38 Medium (2" tall): \$76 Large (4" tall): \$152 Email text of ad to atrussell@umcsc.org (she will design the ads), or send information to 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203. The deadline is May 6.

**Bethel, Spartanburg, member releases Christian novel**

A member of Bethel United Methodist Church in Spartanburg has published a contemporary Christian novel. Katherine Butler, a retired elementary school teacher, authored "Wisdom Lives Here." The book centers on Claire James, who moves from Atlanta to a small town in Montana to start over. Claire finds hope and a purpose helping at Haywood House, an assisted living facility, but soon finds trusting God isn't always easy for a head-strong, independent, let's get-it-done kind of woman like herself. "The reality of assisted living touches many of us at some point in our lives and the lives of our family," Butler said. "I wanted to point out a positive side to that time of life. A number of my readers have experienced firsthand the retirement stage of life with parents and have found comfort and joy reading my book." "Wisdom Lives Here" is available in paperback on Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

**Trinity demolishes old fellowship hall to expand reach in community**

By Patricia Schott  
At Trinity United Methodist Church in North Myrtle Beach, they are a living example of their mission statement, "Life in the Son." Together with Pastor Gene Aiken and a growing congregation, Trinity finally decided it was time to demolish the "old," a very worn fellowship hall. With plans approved, they will break ground this June for their bigger, better and much needed Trinity Hall. Building plans reveal that Trinity Hall will have a kitchen, several classrooms, storage areas, two handicap accessible bathrooms and a large gathering space that will easily seat 250 people. Although this sounds like a lot of space, with the ever-increasing global problem of diminishing church attendance and Trinity itself being located in a vacation destination, it cannot come too soon or too big! The classrooms will host numerous day/evening Bible studies, various Trinity groups like the bridge club or the Trinity Crafters, and its Wellness Ministry, which provides local support through organized AA meetings, Weight Watchers meetings, blood pressure screenings and Gamblers Anonymous. The event space that seats up to 250 people will become home to Trinity's ever-growing contemporary worship service as well as providing better support to various missions like Master's Meal and the Armed Services Assistance Program (ASAP).



ASAP volunteers work outside in the rain. The new building will be a big help.



Crews demolish the old fellowship hall so work can begin on the new.

church groups, community organizations and the much-needed community wellness programs. The positivity and growth of "Living Life in the Son" has become infectious since the demolition of the old fellowship hall. Congregational members and community members alike are on board in anticipation of what the new Trinity Hall will bring. As in Acts 2:42 (NIV), "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to prayer." Thanks be to God that Trinity Hall will be a gathering place for those looking for faith and those looking to continually grow their faith through food, fun and fellowship.

Schott is Trinity UMC historian.

Wednesday at noon for anyone needing a hot meal or just some companionship. Trinity believes that taking the time to sit down weekly with members of their community is a good foundation upon which to build a relationship and continue to foster a sense of togetherness. ASAP is another community-wide mission providing aid to veterans and their families. On the last Saturday of each month, more than 50 pre-registered veterans are provided with a large box of food, can shop through tables of free clothing and household items and are provided with devotional information. What is most important, like Master's Meal, ASAP volunteers build a relationship with those in need and help fill a void of loneliness and isolation. One can sense the excitement of what is to come and what Trinity Hall will provide for others. It is Trinity's goal to live their mission statement—to watch people walk through the front door, see them not only grow in faith and help others grow in faith, but to stay for the long run and be connected within the church. Nothing would make them happier than to see Trinity Hall, with bigger and better accommodations, bustling with numerous mission activities, various

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Last year, the surgeon general announced there is a growing epidemic of loneliness and isolation in our nation that needs to be addressed. Trinity UMC has been and continues to do just that. Their Master's Meal hosts a free community meal every

# Viewpoints



## Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

### Staying UMC

As this edition of the *Advocate* goes to press, I am preparing to head to Charlotte to cover the long-awaited General Conference. I was at the 2012, 2016 and 2019 general conferences, and I'm a little nervous about what to expect this time around. Still, I go excited to watch my denomination come together to do God's work and move forward in spite of our many differences.

The United Methodist Church is a denomination I intentionally chose as an adult. I was raised Lutheran, and when I moved to an area that had no Lutheran churches in the vicinity, I went "church shopping" and decided the UMC was the best fit.

Last year, my United Methodist church disaffiliated from the South Carolina Conference, and while I still love them dearly, I've decided over the last year that I need to remain in The United Methodist Church. Recently, we announced the *Advocate* went through a period of discernment and decided to own its allegiance to the UMC (March *Advocate*). I went through my own period of discernment personally and did the same. Like all of us, I don't agree with everything about our denomination. But that's OK, because the things I do agree with far outweigh anything else. So again, I found myself church shopping, this time seeking the right fit in a UMC. And I'm happy to say we've found ourselves at a wonderful place now.

Hindsight is always so clear, and I know we've been in a time of transition as a denomination, but it would have been so helpful to have had a list of churches available to me at the outset of my search. I would have loved to know whether a church had decided to stay in the UMC and would welcome me. While I found all churches I visited extremely welcoming, it was still a strange thing to wonder—is this church also going to disaffiliate? Am I going to have to do this again in another year or two? Frankly, I didn't want that heartbreak again.

That's why I particularly appreciate the story on Page 1 about Lee Road UMC, Taylors, making the decision to become a lighthouse congregation inspired by the movement in the North Carolina Conference. Lee Road wanted to let people know they welcomed anyone who was seeking a UMC whose church had disaffiliated and themselves had decided they were going to stay UMC.

Inspired by this, we've decided to collect our own list in the *Advocate* of any churches who have been through the process of discernment and decided they want to stay UMC, or any churches that have decided not to go through the process at all and plan to stay UMC regardless.

If your church hasn't decided yet, it's OK. Everyone is on their own journey, and it's really important that we do what God is calling us to do. We all know there will be no denominations of heaven, every question will be answered and all of us will be brothers and sisters together in the kingdom of God in heaven.

However, if your church has decided, I invite you to let the *Advocate* know so we can include you on our list of congregations who are staying UMC. Email me at [jbrodie@umcsc.org](mailto:jbrodie@umcsc.org).



## Bishop's Corner

by Bishop L. Jonathan Holston

### Above everything

*"Attention, all! See the marvels of God! He plants flowers and trees all over the earth, bans war from pole to pole, breaks all the weapons across his knee. 'Step out of the traffic! Take a long, loving look at me, your High God, above politics, above everything.' Jacob-wrestling God fights for us, God-of-Angel-Armies protects us."—Psalm 46:8-11 (MSG)*

*"Be still, and know that I am God."—Psalm 46:10 (NIV)*

Three-time national champion coach Dawn Staley, head coach of the University of South Carolina Women's Basketball team, has oft repeated the mantra, "You've got to keep the main thing the main thing." Her unwavering focus on her mission has influenced the perspectives of players, staff and fans alike, evoking their passion and commitment.

There is a story attributed to Peter Drucker that speaks to the important role perspective plays in how we live our lives; namely: "One day a traveler walking along a lane came across three stonemasons working in a quarry. Each was busy cutting a block of stone. Interested to find out what they were working on, he asked the first stonemason what he was doing. He replied, 'I am cutting a stone.' Still no wiser, the traveler turned to the second stonemason and asked him what he was doing. He said, 'I am cutting this block of stone to make sure that it's square and its dimensions are uniform, so that it will fit exactly in its place in a wall.' A bit closer to finding out what the stonemasons were working on but still unclear, the traveler turned to the third stonemason who seemed to be the happiest of the three. When asked what he was doing, the third stonemason replied, 'I am building a cathedral!'

All three were doing the same thing and knew how to do their job. What set the third stonemason apart was that he understood why he was doing what he was doing – he had a clear perspective on the mission. Indeed, this recognition of why we do what we do is important in how we live out our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Do we think of participation in the life of our church as something we have "got" to do, or something we "get" to do? Are you simply serving on an administrative committee and attending meetings each month, or do you see your service as participating in building up the kingdom of God here on earth?

When we pause to reflect on the reality that there are dedicated and committed followers of Christ serving in congregations across the globe, it is an awesome realiza-

tion. As our perspective grows about how many people are part of our mission, we begin to recognize the global landscape, which includes our local community, city, state, nation and world.

While community in a local church is an essential element of our faith, we also share membership in a larger denomination with districts, annual conferences, jurisdictions and a worldwide church body. In fact, we are connected together in ways that bring both challenge and celebration. This special bond is called "the connection." This connectedness allows us to do more together than can be done individually.

As you receive this edition of the *Advocate*, The United Methodist Church is sharing with its global community at the postponed 2020 General Conference session April 23 to May 3. More than 800 delegates (lay and clergy) representing more than 100 annual conferences from around the world will assemble in Charlotte for a time of prayer and planning to guide the UMC for years to come.

The 2020 General Conference theme, "... and know that I am God," is based on Psalm 46 and serves as a focus of our perspective as we strive to fulfill God's purpose for the church. It is an expression of our ministry, which makes space for us to give of our time, talent, gifts, service and witness.

I invite all United Methodists in South Carolina to stand with other United Methodist congregations around the world to pray for 1) the leadership of the General Conference as they organize the work that takes place daily; 2) the delegates who have come from around the world to worship, pray, consider legislation, fellowship and praise God for all that needs to be accomplished in this gathering; 3) the bishops who are faithfully presiding in this time of Christian conferencing; 4) the boards, agencies, translators, volunteers and guests who are tirelessly attending to the details and needs; and 5) the queen city of Charlotte, which serves as the host city, in providing a wonderful experience for all.

With General Conference convening in a city that borders our conference, this will be an opportunity for many South Carolinians to broaden your perspective on the global nature of our denomination as you travel to Charlotte to experience the worship, exhibits, and holy conferencing. While we recognize not every United Methodist from South Carolina will be present in person, we know that all of us can engage in prayer for God's will to shape the future of our church.

This is a time that we can pray diligently and stay alert with our eyes wide open in gratitude.



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803-786-9486 or 803-726-6743  
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## Are you a church communicator?

Are you a communicator in a local United Methodist church? Whether you help as paid staff or a volunteer, the *Advocate* invites you to reach out.

We are gathering a list of names and email addresses of those who do communications in local churches.

Email or text *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie at [jbrodie@umcsc.org](mailto:jbrodie@umcsc.org) or 803-807-0018.

**Is your church staying UMC?**

Has your church determined it plans to stay in The United Methodist Church? The *Advocate* is compiling a list of churches who are “staying UMC.” We invite you to share this with us. Email [jbrodie@umcsc.org](mailto:jbrodie@umcsc.org).

**Correction**

In the article “AC2024: On the Leading Edge of Ministry” (April *Advocate*), the time for the clergy session on Sunday at Annual Conference was in error. The Clergy Session will occur Sunday, June 9, at 4:30 p.m. We strive to set the record straight.

**Early deadline for June paper**

The *Advocate* will go to press early again on the June edition so we can run news in a timely manner about what happened at General Conference, slated for April 23-May 3. The deadline is May 6 for all content. Email [jbrodie@umcsc.org](mailto:jbrodie@umcsc.org).

**Letters to the Editor**

**Sacred versus blasphemy**

The Holy Bible is sacred in that it contains the divine answer to the deepest needs of humanity. It sheds unique light on our path in a dark world, and it sets forth the way to our eternal well-being.

The Holy Bible is timeless since it deals with eternal truths of God’s revelations, truths of yesterday, today and of all the tomorrows that shall be.

The Bible is fundamental for Christian worship and theology. The Bible is holy because it bears witness to Jesus Christ, who alone is Lord.

In Scripture, Jesus’s words state, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:15-16). Sinclair Lewis wrote about his corrupt, power-hungry, narcissistic, womanizing preacher.

Religious snake-oil salesmen have a storied history in America of taking the Bible in vain. (No real value, worthless.) There are blasphemous Bible thumpers today who lack a reverence for God (Matthew 24:23).

False prophets are real today but will not last.

We believe the Holy Bible reveals the Word of God (John 1:1-2,14).

*Rev. John Culp, retired  
West Columbia*

**Camp meetings and circuit riders**

There have been two periods in American history labeled “Great Awakenings.” Each awakening was characterized by a nationwide turn to religion. One was launched by the Presbyterians and featured camp meetings. This was before our highly developed economic systems. We were still in the horse and buggy days and followed the farmer’s calendar.

During late summer, what the farmers called “lay by” time, crops were in the field but not quite ready for harvest, so the farmer “laid by,” waiting for the wheat, corn, cotton and tobacco to ripen for harvesting. During that slow time on the farm, folks headed for the brush arbor and the camp meeting.

Initially they tossed a straw mattress in the wagon or truck. Later the camp meeting took on a life of its own; families staked out spots for tents and makeshift shelters. Camp meeting lasted a week or more with preaching services three times a day. Clergy counted it an honor to be invited to preach. The evening-hour preacher was considered the most prestigious.

Camp meeting time occupied a favored spot on the social calendar. Families flooded the campgrounds. They were said to be “exceedingly civil to strangers: cheerful, easy, and generous.” Two South Carolina meetings continued well into the 20th century. These were gatherings of White families. Black families had their own version of the camp meeting.

*Rev. Mickey Fisher, retired  
Spartanburg*

**A poem: The Word of God**

He pursues the grave with gallantry  
To Satan’s head obtain;  
His robe is red like dripping wine,  
For lifeblood is its stain.  
The Morning Star of Heaven burns  
Too bright to long detain;  
In death He fell but heavenward  
To rise fore’er again.

(Excerpted with permission from the author’s second published book, “Notes from the Hem,” a collection of Christian poetry and prose.)

*Autumn Leigh Waite  
Bluffton UMC, Bluffton*

**Letters Policy**

We welcome letters to the editor. We urge brevity, as succinct writing often produces clarity. Letters should be no more than 450 words. All letters are subject to editing as needed to meet standards of grammar, space and interest. We will not publish anonymous letters, letters praising or criticizing businesses by name, endorsements of or letters from political candidates, fundraising appeals, or letters containing inappropriate language or personal attacks. All letters will be verified, so you must include a name, daytime phone number, church membership and hometown. Letters should be sent to The Advocate, 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203 or e-mailed to [advocate@umcsc.org](mailto:advocate@umcsc.org). Deadlines are the 10th of each month.



*Guest Commentary*

by Dr. Paul A. Wood Jr.

**An internal focus?**

The South Carolina Conference Board of Trustees has announced the receipt of \$17.5 million in onetime income. It came from the 10 percent tithes, which 113 churches paid as they left our conference in 2023 and from their 2023 and 2024 apportionments.

The trustees’ decisions leave critical questions unanswered.

The trustees required the departing churches to give the conference 10 percent of the value of their property and cash; \$17.8 million seems like an unlikely low number for so many churches. Some were small with meager assets, while several were among the largest and wealthiest in the conference. They had million-dollar-plus budgets and cash assets, as well as multimillion dollar facilities, parsonages, buses and media equipment.

Did the conference trustees determine the accuracy of the values which the churches declared for their assets?

I am not suggesting dishonesty. Accountability and accuracy are crucial when couples tally their assets and contributions and prepare for divorce. Our conference is going through multiple divorces. This raises questions about accountability and accuracy.

Additionally, \$3.8 million came from the departing churches’ 2023 and 2024 apportionments. That money will support the conference’s ministries, just as it should. But the trustees put almost half of the \$17.5 million dollars (\$7.8 million) into a new vehicle called the Hope Fund. It will make “direct ministry grants that will be shared through the districts.”

Also, the trustees announced they will distribute another \$2.4 million to the South Carolina Conference Council on Finance and Administration “to ease the financial impact on local churches in coming years’ budgets.”

If one combines the money going into the Hope Fund with the \$2.4 million to be distributed by CF&A, then \$10.2 million dollars will be disbursed to churches and the districts. That appears to mean that most of the funds will go to our local churches.

Members of the 2023 Annual Conference learned that, according to the *United Methodist Book of Discipline*, decisions about the use of trustees’ income rest in the hands of the trustees.

However, the trustees owe the rest of us more transparency. They seem to not feel any obligation to explain their decisions. More questions: How will they use the Hope Fund? Why does CF&A think it necessary to assist local churches with their budgets?

What will the conference do to ensure that the churches use their grants to expand and enhance ministries and not just pay the power bill? Who will hold the grantees accountable?

The trustees should announce the criteria they have set to distribute more than one half of the \$17.8 million. No matter what the *Book of Discipline* states, the rest of us ought to be free to challenge those criteria.

The South Carolina Conference assesses apportionments equitably. We base them on each church’s expenditures. So why does CF&A think it will be necessary to “ease the financial impact on local churches in the coming years’ budgets”? Why does CF&A expect some churches to require supplemental money to pay their apportionments or bills? Such a policy will lead to a slippery slope of dependency.

Also, why does the conference trustees warrant holding “\$2.5 million to cover their operations and legal expenses”? That’s a lot of money. It appears more churches will leave the South Carolina Conference in the months to come. How do the trustees plan to disperse the additional onetime income?

The trustees plan to move only \$1 million into the Conference Congregational Development Fund. Dozens of communities in South Carolina are now left with a weakened, if not non-existent, United Methodist presence. The time is upon us now to start communities of faith in these affected communities. A million dollars is a drop in the mission bucket.

The trustees’ decisions, though still cloudy, show an internal focus. This extra money must expand outreach to the state, especially to people who have not become disciples. Jesus told us to make disciples, not to protect ourselves from stress.

Our district superintendents warrant praise for reducing the number of Cabinet positions. That’s a smart start as the conference adjusts to income reductions that have yet to unfold. Losing churches from the South Carolina Conference is very disappointing. More pain awaits us because the conference’s budget will go through substantial cuts.

Bishop Jonathan Holston, the conference trustees, CF&A and our other leaders need to explain their decisions to us. The trustees ought to communicate their actions and rationale.

And the rest of us deserve a voice.

*Wood is a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of the UMC and resides in the Hartsville District.*



**St. Mark helps Harvest Hope**

In 2023, the Harvest Hope Food Ministry at St. Mark UMC, Taylors, served 2,598 families (7,086 individuals). This year so far, January through March 2024, St. Mark served 715 families (1,787 individuals). Thanks to volunteers, they have great fun and enjoy fellowship while they distribute food to those in need. They have come to know and love so many of the families who drive up on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month. Many say what a blessing it is to serve. Members also save empty egg cartons and donate them to the Food Ministry, as when they get egg donations, the cartons are usually damaged, so they try to transfer the good eggs to clean cartons. Volunteers are always needed, and baskets are located throughout the church for food donations.



## Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Steven L. Brown

### Making of a mother

**M**ay I go now?" the almost-completed mother asked.

"Not yet. There are few essential parts that still need to be added," her maker replied.

"I look pretty good to me," she said, looking into the mirror before her.

"True, you do glow but I have to finish a few things on the inside. Bear with me," he said.

Turning from the mirror, she wondered aloud, "But God, whatever else could a mother need to wash, feed, and clothe little bodies?"

God just smiled and continued working. "What are you doing now?" the curious mother-to-be questioned.

"Tightening your anger valve," God replied. "If this doesn't work, everyone is in trouble."

"And what is that?" she asked.

"This is your bypass mechanism," he answered. "It enables a mother to be taken for granted without breaking down."

"I'm sure I won't need that," she said.

"I'm sure you will," said God.

She watched as he reached for a container marked "patience." He poured in quite a bit.

"Do you really think I need that much patience?" she asked.

"After a week you will know, my child," God said as he turned to stuff in wads and wads of energy.

"All that energy will last me a lifetime, won't it," she declared.

God paused and said, "I figure a day or two. Maybe three. You'll be asking me for a whole lot more than this before you know it."

She shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. "I didn't know there was so much involved in being a mother. Are you sure I can handle the job?"

"Quite sure—but not without my help," he said. "I didn't make you that way."

"Ow! What was that you put in?" she asked, rubbing her chest.

God looked up and said, "I have to put in a little bit of pain. It will allow you to sympa-

thize with your children, to cry for them and feel their hurt. I carry it in my heart, and so will you."

The mother-in-waiting fidgeted while God attached some buttons. A big one was marked "No" and a little one read "Yes."

"Wouldn't it be nicer just to say 'yes' to my children all the time?"

"Definitely not," said God. "Good mothers need to say 'no,' and do it often. But say it with kindness, and they will respect you for it."

She paused and asked, "Have you equipped me with this thing called kindness, Lord?"

"Oh, yes," he said with a smile. "You'll be good at it."

The anxious mother looked up at a shelf in the shop. She saw a Question Answerer, an Advice Giver and a Get-Along-Without-Sleep Machine.

"I'm glad I don't need any of those!" she exclaimed.

"Already put them in," said God.

And then God came toward her with a Let-Go Lever.

"Will I really need that?" she questioned.

"I'm afraid so. It's a vital piece of equipment," God said. "Until this little lever is released, your children will not have room to grow properly, make their own decisions or develop their own personalities."

"I guess you know best," she replied.

"I really do," said God.

God stood back to view his work, then reached for a coat of love and wrapped it around her.

He said, "Wear this at all times."

As she turned to leave, she twirled around saying, "So, what do you think? Am I perfect?"

"No," said God gently, "You are not perfect. You are a mother."

"But that's pretty close."

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

## S.C. Annual Conference set for June 9-12

The 2024 South Carolina Annual Conference will gather June 9-12 at the Greenville Convention Center.

More than 2,100 members from across the state are expected to attend the 53rd Session of the Annual Conference.

The theme is "Seeking a More Excellent Way: On The Leading Edge of Ministry."

Bishop Frank J. Beard, resident bishop of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference, will deliver the sermon for the Service for Commissioning, Ordination and Retirement Recognition, slated for 7 p.m. Sunday, June 9.

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference, will deliver the opening worship sermon on Monday, June 10.

Dr. Sandra Stevens Poirel, superintendent of the Charleston District, will deliver the

sermon for the Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving, set for 5 p.m. Tuesday, June 11.

The event will also feature election of conference officers who hold quadrennial positions and consider a significantly reduced annual conference budget for 2025.

As with last year, additional churches are expected to go before this year's Annual Conference to separate from the UMC. That information is not being shared by the conference in advance. Instead, as with last year's separating churches, the names of the churches seeking to leave the UMC will be presented for a vote at Annual Conference.

All lay and clergy members must register online by May 27 at <https://www.umcsc.org/ac2024-reg>.

Meals will be offered at the convention center for those who wish.



## Miracles, Part 3

by Gerald Callahan

### Journey's end

*Editor's note: This is part three of a series.*

**L**et's return to the church wedding mentioned earlier. I was about to meet Larry's future wife, Alice. As a young lady approached us, I was completely mesmerized by her grace, Southern charm and natural beauty. What in the world could I do? I was overcome with an emotion I had never experienced before—I was immediately in love with the woman I thought was my friend's future wife.

A few seconds later, another charming young lady appeared, and Larry introduced me to "his" Alice. My relief was instantaneous, and I was overcome with a blissful joy. Shortly thereafter Larry and his Alice left, and I was alone with "my" Alice.

Before I knew it, I blurted out, "You are going to think I am crazy when I tell you this, but we are going to get married someday."

Her instant reply was, "You are nuttier than a fruitcake. I don't date sailors or Yankees, so that will never happen!"

I took that as a challenge, and I must admit it took quite a while before it happened. Then God intervened, and the strangest things began to take place.

My plan was to become a Methodist and start attending all the church functions and events in which she was involved. At first this created some tension, as I went to every church function she attended. You might say I stalked her, and if it had been in today's climate I probably would have ended up in jail. Instead, it proved to be an influencing factor in my plan to win her over and ultimately marry her.

Her older brother Larry had been in the Coast Guard and was stationed at a Navy Pier in Chicago, my hometown. A friend of his lived near there, and Larry was invited to his house for Sunday dinners. My future mother-in-law, an active member in church, got to know me, and she paid it forward by asking me if I would like to have Sunday dinner with them. I jumped at the invitation and, through these visits and my time getting to know her parents, I furthered my opportunities to develop a relationship with my Alice.

At the time, her father was recovering from a heart attack. When he learned I was stationed at the Minecraft Base about a mile from their house, he invited me to come by anytime as he was bored stiff and enjoyed having the company. We were both gin rummy and checkers players, and through these visits I developed a great friendship with him.

Needless to say, the unusual circumstances of my journey continued to happen. I had now made the 10th decision that brought me closer to marrying the love of my life.

Then, just when things started turning

positive and we began to casually date, I received orders to report for a six-month tour of duty in Europe. It was during that deployment I decided to ask her to marry me when I returned. My expectations were that she would turn me down, and I would have to end this seemingly impossible quest.

While I was away, I wrote 144 letters and poured my heart out to her. As it turns out, I learned years later that she kept every one of them. They are now stored away in the attic, and I told my son Steven that when he returns from my funeral to find them, the group will have a hilarious time reading how I poured my heart out to Alice. Her four answers were very general, consisting of statements like, "Gee, it was nice you got to visit Rome" and other equally impersonal comments, all leading me to believe my chances of winning her over were slim at best.

When my ship returned to Charleston, she met me at the dock to return my car that she had kept for me while I was away. It was then I told her I had something I wanted to discuss with her, and we decided to drive over to the Battery where we could talk. She indicated during the drive that she had something she wanted to discuss also.

When we arrived, I asked her if she would like to go first. She said no and told me to start the conversation. It was then I took the ring I had bought and asked her to marry me.

I fully expected a no and was totally taken aback when she burst out crying and proceeded to tell me her message had been that we had to end my relentless pursuit of her and no longer see each other.

But before I could reply, she said, "Yes, I will marry you."

On June 11, 2018, we celebrated our 63rd year of marriage. When I look back at the events leading up to this momentous anniversary, I can only thank God for bestowing his blessings on us. For me, this fit the aforementioned definition of a miracle. When you consider the statistical probability of the seemingly random decisions and events that led up to our meeting, it is hard to define it any other way.

St. Augustine said, "Miracles are not a contradiction of nature. They are only a contradiction of what we know of nature." There is no question in my mind that each one of the many decisions I made along the way were predetermined by my savior Jesus Christ. My journey was a miracle. (Continued next month.)

*Calling himself a Southernized blue-collar Chicago Yankee, Callahan is a member of Union UMC, Irmo. This piece is excerpted from his book, "His Miracles and Ours," available on Amazon.*



## Guest Commentary

by Jackie G. Jenkins

### Coming together as a world church to do God's work'

**A**mid preparation for the General Conference, the South Carolina Delegation strongly embraces the charge that awaits us. We look forward to coming together in the Carolina up the street, our sister state, in Charlotte, North Carolina. We are coming as a world church to do God's work as we build the focus of this new season in ministry.

We remain consistent in familiarizing ourselves with legislation, inviting speakers to get a balanced view of the legislation to be acted upon. We will continue daily in prayer and worship.

The South Carolina delegation has maintained connection via Zoom Meetings, and we have availed ourselves of the various webinars, ensuring our knowledge of pertinent updates on General Conference so that we may be the best we can be.

This upcoming General Conference has the potential of being one of the strongest General Conferences experienced, provided the General Conference can do its work efficiently and effectively to avoid a prolonged stalemate.

My premise is grounded in our General Conference's theme: "... and know that I am God," taken from the Scripture Psalm 46:10.

This Scripture gives us peace, clarity and confidence to trust God in all our decisions. Embracing this assurance, we can walk into this gathering time prepared to hear the Holy Spirit speak. God is moving through our bodies, and we are boldly moving forth in God's future.

I desire and hope that everyone in the South Carolina Annual Conference reads, prays and meditates on the passage of Psalm 46 every day that we are at General Conference, from April 23 through May 3.

In so doing, we will decree and declare that the power of Psalm 46 will come alive because the people of South Carolina will have read it thousands and thousands of times over and over. Let the church say amen!

*Jenkins is chair of the South Carolina Delegation.*



## Guest Commentary

by Minister Anna Stevens Bright

### Tune in to Channel GMMW daily

One of our daily routines is to tune in to various channels on the television, radio and Internet. However, some of those stations to which we listen report negative, sad news all day long. Bottom line—they can be very depressing!

In this world of constant adversity, we need to be exposed to good news, things that will lift our spirits and keep us motivated to continue moving on to higher ground. There are times when I have turned on the television, and the entire news segment would be so disheartening that I would just tune out and listen to some of my favorite Gospel songs for uplifting moments.

Nevertheless, there is a station to which we can tune in every day for more than enough good news to hear and share: Channel GMMW—God Will Make a Way.

How do you reach this station? Just pick up the Bible, go from there and have a hallelujah good time. It will guide you to salvation, give you wisdom and advice, give instructions on how to live holy, tell you about a man called Jesus who came to save us from our sins, share good news and much more. One thing about this channel is that Jesus said in Luke 23:9, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (ESV). Once you tune in to Channel GMMW with your whole heart and mind, you will want to tune in every day. Glory be to God!

This walk with the Lord is a daily thing. You can’t put God on the shelf and come back to pick him up only in times of trials. When he answers your prayers, he wants you to tell others about his goodness and his love. When God cleansed the 10 lepers, look at what happened afterwards: “One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well” (Luke 17:15-19 NIV).

As Christians, we must celebrate the Lord and be his witnesses to a lost world so that others can “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8 ESV). We must be that daily light that shines so others can see who Jesus is.

In this anonymously written, profound illustration, “Have You Tasted Jesus?,” ponder the analogy an old preacher uses to show the goodness of the Lord. Focus on the effect of the audience as a whole and the intended audience. God makes a way in this story through one voice for his word to be heard. Please enjoy and share:

“At the University of Chicago Divinity School, each year, they have what is

called ‘Baptist Day.’ On this day, each one is to bring a lunch to be eaten outdoors in a grassy picnic area. Every Baptist Day, the school would invite one of the greatest minds to lecture in the theological education center. One year, they invited Dr. Paul Tillich. Dr. Tillich spoke for two and one-half hours, attempting to prove that the resurrection of Jesus was false. He quoted scholar after scholar and book after book. He concluded that since there was no such thing as the historical resurrection, the religious tradition of the church was groundless, emotional mumbo-jumbo because it was based on a relationship with a risen Jesus who, in fact never rose from the dead in any literal sense. He then asked if there were any questions.

“After about 30 seconds, an old, dark-skinned preacher with a head of short-cropped, woolly white hair stood up in the back of the auditorium. ‘Docta Tillich, I got one question,’ he said, as all eyes turned toward him.

“He reached into his sack lunch, pulled out an apple, and began eating it. ‘Docta Tillich,’ CRUNCH, MUNCH ‘my question is a simple question.’ CRUNCH, MUNCH ‘Now, I ain’t never read them books you read’ CRUNCH, MUNCH ‘and I can’t recite the Scriptures in the original Greek’ CRUNCH, MUNCH ‘I don’t know nothin’ about Niebuhr and Heidegger’ CRUNCH, MUNCH.

“He finished the apple. ‘All I wanna know is: This apple I just ate. Was it bitter or sweet?’

“Dr. Tillich paused for a moment and answered in exemplary scholarly fashion. ‘I cannot possibly answer that question, for I haven’t tasted your apple.’

“The white-haired preacher dropped the core of his apple into his crumpled paper bag, looked up at Dr. Tillich and said calmly, ‘Neither have you tasted my Jesus.’

“The 1,000 plus in attendance could not contain themselves. The auditorium erupted with applause and cheers. Dr. Tillich thanked his audience and promptly left the platform.

“Have you tasted Jesus? ‘Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him’ (Psalm 34:8). If you have, rejoice in the hope of the resurrection that your faith in him brings.”

Are you going to tune in or continue to tune in to Channel GMMW daily? Always abound in the faith, and never leave home without him.

*Bright is a member of Isaiah United Methodist Church, Walterboro. She has recently released a book of 52 weekly devotions, “A Calming Effect,” featuring photographs by her husband, Herman G. Bright. The book is available on Amazon.*



## Q&A

### With UMCSC Lay Leader Barbara Ware

*Editor’s note: Barbara Ware has served as the lay leader for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church for 12 years.*

*Here, the Advocate had a chance to ask seven questions of Ware as she prepares to end her term:*

**Q. What has been one of the most gratifying servings in the Conference Lay Leader role?**

A. As simple as it sounds, meeting people from all over the South Carolina Annual Conference and the Southeastern Jurisdiction. I made some amazing new friends and was blessed to see our lay people engage in mission and ministry in ways that were effective in their communities.

**Q. How would you describe the last 12 years that you served as Conference Lay Leader?**

A. Busy—lots of trips to Columbia; many, many meetings; new friendships formed; numerous conversations with different groups; planning gatherings with Bishop Holston; lots of Zooms; traveling all over the SEJ and to several General Conferences; talking with laity and clergy; Annual Conference meetings; and lastly, having the honor of representing the South Carolina UMC Conference all across the country.

**Q. What has been one of your fondest memories during these last 12 years?**

A. I have a couple, but I think what I will remember the most is the sense of awe I always have when processing in during the ordination service. Ordination is a time when someone is making a commitment that will change their life forever. Sitting on the stage, I can see their expressions during that service, and it has been impressive to witness.

**Q. What was a favorite time you had during these last 12 years?**

A. The Road Shows, as Bishop Holston called them, which were held the first year or so after the bishop came to South Carolina. A group of Extended Cabinet folks and myself rode all over the state and helped the bishop get to know laity and clergy. Just being in those settings allowed me to see how

various parts of our state engage in mission and ministry.

That was amazing, and our churches and districts are doing wonderful acts of kindness and ministry.

**Q. We know you worked with numerous laity groups. What was that like?**

A. I enjoyed collaborating with the United Women in Faith, the United Methodist Men and Lay Servant Ministries. These groups comprise a large part of the laity groups in the South Carolina Annual Conference. For me, it was important to have conversation with them regularly. Engaging with laity and clergy has been a highpoint in my time as CLL. Our churches and groups are making a difference in so many people’s lives. I heard story after story of our local churches making an impact in our state and world.

**Q. Can you tell us about the experience you had working with Bishop Holston?**

A. Serving with Bishop Holston these last 12 years has been a true joy. He is a man of deep faith and has a great sense of humor. He and I have traveled many miles together throughout South Carolina and to many SEJ meetings, so we have shared a lot of stories. He helped me in so many ways when I first started. He was always willing to meet with the laity, and he made sure the laity were “sitting” at the table for all discussions. I know from talking to other SEJ CLLs that they did not have the type of relationship I had with Bishop Holston. I am grateful for his leadership and thankful my path crossed with Bishop Holston and his wife, Felecia. Both will be my forever friends!

**Q. Any last thoughts?**

A. Yes, I would like to thank all the laity and clergy who welcomed me into their churches and meetings over these 12 years. Your generosity and your attention to making me feel included was appreciated. From my first days of growing up in the Varnville UMC to today, I am grateful to God for all the roads he led me down that allowed me to serve as CLL. It has been one of the true honors of my life, and I will be forever grateful to the UMC that I grew up in for their guidance over the years.

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## All invited to join for ‘24 for ‘24’

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston and the South Carolina Conference Delegation to General Conference are inviting all South Carolina United Methodists to join them each evening for “24 for ‘24,” a season of focused, daily prayer for the 24 days leading up to General Conference.

Beginning March 30, Holston and delegation members have shared a video prayer at 8:24 p.m. (a.k.a., 20:24) each evening, praying for the church and specifically for groups of people who have been preparing for General Conference and who will participate and attend.

General Conference is slated for April 23-May 3 in Charlotte (see article, Page 1).

The daily evening prayers will be shared via Facebook (@scumc), Instagram (@umcsc) and X (@umcsc), and by email to all who are signed up to receive conference news emails.

To sign up for the emails, go to <https://www.umcsc.org/mailling-list-signup>.

# Love Thy Neighbor helps many in the community

By Anna Brown with excerpts by Dale Goff

Reprinted courtesy of Union County News

UNION—Love Thy Neighbor started at Grace United Methodist Church, but the work of the many-faceted ministry has stretched to encompass the community.

The ministry's services include tutoring, feeding the homeless and helping lead Union County's senior citizen population in the direction to get meals and health care.

Three representatives of the ministry—Bob Love, Dale Goff and Rebecca Rochester—recently spoke at the Rotary Club of Union.

"If you see something where people are being helped, there is a good chance that the Love Thy Neighbor ministry is involved," Love said.

The ministry began because the members of Grace believed they were not being good neighbors to their neighbors. The church is near to homes in some low-income areas and is not far from Union Housing Authority neighborhoods.

"We had no ministry to those people," Love said. "We also knew there were a lot of homeless people encamped in our area."

The first thing the church did was to host a meal one night a month and encourage the needy and homeless to come. Nine months ago, seven people were served their first meal. When the meal was served in January, 80 people came. Around 25 percent are homeless.

During the recent meal, twenty members from Grace set up the meal, cooked, served and clean-up. Twenty people from various agencies in the community helped serve, including representatives from mental health, the medical field, dental health, and the Lions Club gave vision exams to 40 people. Some need dental and eye care but cannot afford it.

"We typically make twice as many servings as we anticipate how many people will come because the people who are coming are hungry," Love said.

The church has two blessing boxes that are filled with non-perishable food items. One day Love was filling one of the boxes and an older model pickup pulled up. He thought the driver and passenger were coming to get food.

"It was a man and his wife, and they reached into the back of their truck and started getting items out to put in the box," he said. "They were stocking the blessing box. I asked, 'How did you come to put that food in our blessing box here at Grace Church?' The man said, 'We have been hungry. You never know how you can touch someone right around you.'"

Love said Love Thy Neighbor often partners with C4 Ministries next door to help others. During the recent meal, Stephanie Goodale provided surveys to help determine how many people are homeless. She can apply for grants to assist with needs.

There are a lot of children in Union County Schools who are behind in their classes, Love said.

"Part of it is because of situations at home, a lot of it is COVID related," Love said. "When we missed school all those times, kids got behind."

Volunteers were sought who would tutor and tutoring is offered at the Union County Carnegie Library, the Housing Authority, and other areas. Love tutors two fifth graders. Six months ago, they were behind in reading and math. After hard work, they are now at grade level.

There are many areas where someone can volunteer or contribute to Love Thy Neighbor. One area is soft drinks for the homeless. Another is being a tutor.

Goff said one of the reasons the numbers at the neighborhood meal jumped was because of the publicity that was given when C4, Love thy Neighbor and Visions of Hope worked with the Union County Pregnancy Center to open a warming shelter when temperatures dropped in January.

"That created such a unity in our community, and it has been a blessing," Goff said.

Love thy Neighbor engages in an effort to help combat Union County's opioid epidemic.

"Union has been listed No. 1 in per capita call outs in overdoses for opioids, prescription drugs, and the fentanyl issue is a very real and scary problem here, and how we are going to handle this has a community still hasn't really been



Dale Goff says seniors sometimes run out of money to purchase food in the middle of the month.

determined," Goff said.

One step forward is happening through a grant written by Union County Library Director Taylor Atkinson to support "Mental Health First Aid Training." Goff said this is like CPR for connecting and understanding mental health as it relates to substance abuse. It is an 8-hour training course that members of the community can complete. Money is also available for people to go through classes to become trainers.

Also, it is hoped that a task force can be created for those who would like to tackle Union's drug problem.

"We don't want our community known for problems that we have not been able to find solutions for." Sheriff Bailey recently spoke to the Love Thy Neighbor advisory board about the opioid/fentanyl problem and ways the community can come together to help.

Goff said Love Thy Neighbor learned through Robin Rogers, social worker at the library, that senior citizens were running out of money to purchase food in the middle of the month because they were having to spend so much on rent, utilities and medication.

"We went to Tim Black at the Senior Citizen Center in Union County, and he told us there are 5,500 seniors in Union County and only about 225 of those citizens are receiving senior meals, when basically all of them could be if they are homebound and not able to drive," she said.

To help more sign up, it was determined that Catawba Regional Planning Council could send representatives to meet with seniors at local churches and other areas and help them sign up for the program. The services include meals, prescription drugs, pest control, homemaker services and more.

Those who live in close proximity to the senior center in Union can get a hot meal every weekday. Those in the outlying areas receive five frozen meals at the beginning of the week so that they can warm up. Additional food boxes also are given for the weekend.

"As Tim Black at the senior citizen center says, there should be no senior in Union County going hungry," Goff said.

In October, Robin Rodgers and her husband initiated the on-site sign-up effort at Mount Rowell Baptist Church in Lockhart. They were able to assist 25 seniors in the Lockhart community in signing up for senior services with the Catawba assessors. Earlier this month, Carlisle Mayor Mary Ferguson Glenn hosted an on-site senior meal sign-up event at the Carlisle Town Hall with the Catawba Council on Aging. Nearly 50 seniors in the Carlisle area were able to sign up for senior meals as well as other services based on their needs.

A similar event was held at the Union County Housing Authority where 49 seniors were able to apply for the senior services.

Goff said Love thy Neighbor also is involved with the Union County Cancer Service, which Rogers oversees. Rogers is also helping Love thy Neighbor connect to the Union Cancer Alliance. Goff said the cancer rate and the mortality



Bob Love and Phyllis Jennings prepare a Neighborhood Christmas Supper.

rate in Union County is very disproportionate to the rates in the rest of the state, particularly among Black males.

"One thing they are encouraging us to do is to get the word out to any adult, it doesn't have to be a senior, how they can get insurance and how they can get connected to a medical home. We have a phone number; all we have to do is help them call that number and Renee Goode will assess their needs and get them to the right place. No one in Union should be hungry, no senior should be hungry and no person in Union County should have to be without insurance or a medical home. Many people will not go to the doctor because they don't have insurance and they don't know it is available to them."

Rochester and her husband, Bill Rochester, work with the Housing Authority in addition to other ministries of Love Thy Neighbor.

"A lot of those families need extra help, a lot of the children need tutoring," she said. "And we are working jointly with them for a community coat distribution, and we have several other projects through the year."

Some of these projects include a monthly activity to bring children and families together. Love Thy Neighbor works in partnership with Mary Owens, Family Services Director at the Housing Authority. In August of 2023, a Back-to-School Supplies event was held in partnership with the Michael Land Backpack Give Away. Five local barbers provided free haircuts to the youth in preparation for the first day of the new school year. A Back to School Bash brought more than 100 children and adults for the first family day in years at the Michael Land ball field.

An event is now scheduled monthly to bring families together for fellowship including seasonal parties for the youth. The local Clemson Club donated \$300 to provide \$5 Walmart gift cards for the children at Christmas. The Easter Bunny and children's train ride will be on-site for an Easter hunt and party.

"Several other area churches and the library work with the efforts to help those in the housing authority," she said.

Several of the community churches have partnered with Love Thy Neighbor for various missions, including tutoring, assisting the homeless, and Mental Health First Aid interest. New Breed Evangelical Church, Cane Creek Presbyterian, Thomas Chapel AME, Sardis Methodist, and Antioch/New Chapel AME are currently sharing in these efforts.

"We are all in this together," Rebecca Rochester said. "All of us are shooting really good arrows at targets," she said. "What if we all shot our arrows at the same target—our community and improving our community? If we all know about it and we all work together, that's our goal."

*For more information on Love Thy Neighbor, call Grace United Methodist Church at 864-427-1266 or visit the Love Thy Neighbor Facebook page @ Union County SC Love Thy Neighbor Group.*

## Jake Deer to head Columbia College inaugural men's basketball team

COLUMBIA—Jake Deer has been named the first head coach of Columbia College's inaugural men's basketball program set to begin play in 2024-2025.

"Jake is the perfect addition to our team at Columbia College," said Director of Athletics Glen Crawford. "His dedication to his players and the sport of basketball is evidenced through his impressive and dynamic coaching experience. The men who make up our inaugural men's basketball team deserve



Deer

a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I know Coach Deer is the right man for that job."

Deer offered appreciation to President Dozier and to Crawford for the opportunity to start and lead the program.

"I'm excited to get started," Deer said.

Deer, a native of Valley, Alabama, spent the past five seasons (2019-2024) as the head men's basketball coach at a former AAC school, Point University (Georgia) leading the team

to 76 wins over five seasons.

While at Point, Deer increased team wins from eight the year before he came to 17 in his first season while being named AAC Coach of the Year in 2021 and AAC Regular Season Champions. He coached 5 All-Conference first team selections and increased team GPA from 2.0 to 3.25 over his time at Point while also achieving a winning record in 4 of his 5 seasons.

Before heading to Point, Deer served as the associate head men's coach for the University of Texas at Tyler, a NCAA Div. II school, from 2014-2019. He also served as

the assistant men's basketball coach at nearby Francis Marion University in Florence during the 2013-2014 season compiling a 12-15 record with eight conference wins in the tough Peach Belt Conference.

Deer got his start in coaching in 2007 when he began a six-year head coaching stint at Johnson University in Florida (formerly Florida Christian College), a National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA) Div. II school. From 2007-2013, Deer graduated 90 percent of his players, coached nine all-region selections and three second team All-Americans.

## Senior Ministry at St. Paul stays active

CAMDEN—Tuesday mornings are anything but typical for the senior citizens at St. Paul United Methodist Church.

With enthusiasm and determination, more than 30 seniors gather for their weekly exercise class, led by an instructor from Fitness Zone in Lugoff. The Tuesday class, spanning 45 minutes, is not just about physical activity; it's a testament to the vitality and spirit of the community. From chair routines tailored to individual abilities to energetic standing and line dance moves, participants engage in exercises designed to promote health and mobility.

However, the camaraderie doesn't stop there. Following the invigorating workout session, the group transitions into their regular monthly Senior Ministry meeting, held every second Tuesday. Here, amidst laughter and lively conversation, bonds are strengthened over a delightful lunch spread.

"The sense of community and support within our Senior Ministry is truly remarkable," remarked one participant, echoing the sentiments of many. "Not only do we exercise our bodies, but we also nourish our souls through friendship and fellowship."

The Senior Ministry at St. Paul exemplifies the power of staying active and connect-



Mary Brevard, age 94, stays active.

ed, proving that age is no barrier to vitality and engagement.

As they continue to "flex their muscles" both physically and socially, this vibrant group serves as an inspiration to all.



### Awareness in the field

On Friday, March 15, the Speech-Language Pathology faculty and staff at Columbia College hosted SLP Day for prospective and current students as well as alumni to spread awareness about the field and how it continues to impact the community and world. Keynote speakers joined the event to share how they have personally and professionally been impacted by the profession. The event also featured campus tours, lunch and an educational fair where students and visitors could interact with employers and graduate programs.

# DEMENTIA: Bringing about kingdom of God here and now

From Page 1

The percentage skyrockets with age. It's a reality that touches every family, every community and certainly every church.

Instead of fear, however, a group of dementia-care advocates want South Carolina United Methodist churches to embrace the disease as an opportunity for love and ministry, and an opportunity to bring about the kingdom of God here on earth.

On May 28, the conference's South Carolina Cognitive Connection Ministry is hosting a Dementia 101 Workshop at Cokesbury United Methodist Church in North Charleston to help mobilize and educate churches and individuals about ministry with people living with dementia. Slated for 9:30 a.m. to noon, the event will feature informative, practical and inspirational information from United Methodist Bishop Ken Carder and South Carolina Department on Aging Dementia Care Specialist Tori Anderson. The goal is to equip churches to take next steps toward a ministry with people with dementia.

Pigford, who pastors Cokesbury and chairs the Cognitive Connection Ministry, said he's excited about the opportunity this event will have in removing some of the deep-seated stigma around the disease.

"Part of what we're trying to do is let churches know they are already truly equipped to be in ministry with those with dementia," Pigford said. "It's already there in their congregations, and they already have all the tools and know-how they need."

It's just about removing the stigma and opening eyes, he said.

Carder is a leading advocate for dementia ministry across the denomination. His late wife, Linda, developed frontotemporal dementia while he was teaching at Duke Divinity School, and his 2019 book, "Ministry with the Forgotten: Dementia Through a Spiritual Lens," has become a must-read for anyone living with dementia and their caregivers.

Anderson works with the South Carolina Department on Aging's Caregiver and Alzheimer's division to educate and connect people with resources to help them navigate the dementia journey, and she's discovered there is what she calls "a severe void" in the support and information people need.

Now, the church and state are partnering to help faith communities learn how they can help bridge the gap for people living with dementia, ultimately enabling churches to step up and truly make a difference.

### Celebrating the gifts of those with dementia

One of the key goals of the workshop is to help people understand that people don't lose their worth and value when their cognitive abilities change.

Carder said the idea of dementia threatens our very sense of self-worth—particularly the realization that we may lose the awareness of who we are, the memories of our past or even who our loved ones are. After all, we live in a society that puts a high, almost idolatrous value, on our capacities.

"We're a hypercognitive society," Carder explained. "We've bought into the Cartesian notion, 'I think, therefore I am,' so we assume, 'If I cannot think, then I am not.'"

But he noted the Christian community offers an antidote to that—our value, our worth and our identity do not lie in our capacity, but to whom we belong: God.

And we begin to see dementia through the lens of grace.

"Churches offer so much of what is missing in our current society's approach to dementia. We are persons of inherent grace and dignity whatever our capacities or lack of capacities," Carder said.

Pigford said people often miss the gifts that dementia can reveal depending on the person and what stage they are in. He said someone in an early stage of diagnosis might witness about how a dementia diagnosis is not an immediate death sentence, while someone who is more advanced can force us to truly be present in the moment.

"Maybe they won't remember I was there, but in that moment, I am there with them making them feel valued and safe," Pigford said. "We're encountering Christ."

Carder said one of the greatest gifts Linda taught him was expanding his capacity to love without reciprocity. He said he grew more in the fruit of the spirit in the ten years she lived with dementia than in any decade of his life.

"I still have a long way to go, but if there's any great need in our churches, it's for us to love without reciprocity, to expand in our capacity to love," Carder said.

Anderson said that is her key hope—helping people understand how much they can grow and contribute to supporting and uplifting people who are on this diagnosis and caregiver journey.

Carder agreed: "We want congregations to know they have a unique contribution to make in becoming a community of acceptance where the gifts of people living with

dementia are received and celebrated."

### Equipping so we can lead the way

Another important workshop goal is to help equip people with the tools and information they need.

Anderson said she often encounters people who genuinely don't understand dementia, as well as how different its progression can look for each person. While there is no cure yet, there are a lot of interventions that can help, as well as resources.

"I find people say, 'Oh, I didn't realize there were things I could do to reduce the risk, didn't know there were drug therapies or resources for me to take a break from caregiving,'" Anderson said.

Anderson said isolation can be a major factor in worsening the progression of the disease, and churches can play a big role in alleviating that. She said there is a huge gap in dementia care and awareness in rural areas, and churches can aid some of most underserved areas in the state.

Carder agreed, noting that every person's dementia experience is different, but what universally seems to help is surrounding that person with love, grace and support.

"We tend to assume once there's a diagnosis that this person's contributions are over, but many people function very highly for a long period of time, for years," Carder said. "We can't predict the progression, can't generalize."

For example, he listed up the example of Dr. Rebecca Chopp, who was leading the University of Denver when she got her diagnosis. Now five years in, she's just released a book, "Still Me: Accepting Alzheimer's Without Losing Yourself," on how she's been able

to reshape her life for a healthy and vibrant approach to living with Alzheimer's, showing that illness does not define us.

In the UMC, Carder said, we can do the same.

"Often we see our aging denomination as a liability, but it may be an asset," Carder said. "Let's see this as an opportunity to lead the way in responding rather than see it as a liability."

### 'The kingdom of God here and now'

Carder said dementia ministry can bring together powerful resources to make a massive difference in the world, as well as in the church.

"People with dementia don't care whether you're conservative or liberal, Republican or Democrat, or any of the things that can divide us in church," Carder said. "This has the potential of bringing us together, moving us from an abstract faith to a concrete faith, a lived faith."

Pigford said it's important to remember Jesus teaches us the kingdom of God is not just a hopeful future but also a present reality.

"In engaging with our members with dementia, I hope we can get a bigger glimpse of the kingdom of God here and now in our local church communities," Pigford said.

"And that's also exactly how we remove the stigma—by talking about it."

As of press time, 90 people have registered for the workshop, and Cokesbury has the capacity to host 400. They hope to bring the workshop across the state in the future.

To register for the Dementia 101 Workshop, visit <https://tinyurl.com/yts3dec8>. To learn more about the ministry, email [bwpigford@umcsc.org](mailto:bwpigford@umcsc.org).




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# GENERAL CONFERENCE: Key topics up for debate

From Page 1

## Who are South Carolina's delegates?

South Carolina's delegates were elected at Annual Conference in June 2019. Some of those originally elected are no longer able to serve; for instance, one—Dr. Robin Dease—is now a UMC bishop serving in the North Georgia Annual Conference. Others have left the denomination.

The updated list of South Carolina's General Conference delegates is as follows: For clergy, the Revs. Ken Nelson, Keith Hunter, Susan Leonard, Emily Sutton, Will Malambri, Tiffany Knowlin Boykin, Karen Jones and Tim Rogers (alternates the Revs. Cathy Mitchell and Fran Elrod). For laity, Jackie Jenkins, James Salley, Michael Cheatham, Herman Lightsey, Chris Lynch, David Braddon, Betty Void and David Salter (alternates Valerie Brooks-Madden and Marlene Spencer).

Overall, voting delegates are coming from the United States (55.9 percent), Africa (32 percent), the Philippines (6 percent), Europe (4.6 percent) and concordat churches that have close ties to the UMC (1.5 percent), including The Methodist Church of Great Britain, Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas, The Methodist Church of Mexico and The Methodist Church of Puerto Rico.

The percentage of delegates from central conferences (outside the United States) has grown since the start of the millennium, jumping from 16 percent in 2000 to 44 percent in 2020 and increasing costs significantly as a result.

## What will happen at General Conference?

The first week, Tuesday, April 23, through Saturday, April 27, is largely committee work. Every delegate is assigned to one of the 14 General Conference Legislative Committees, from financial administration and ordained ministry to discipleship.

The committees review, sort and refine legislative proposals. Each day of General Conference will begin with worship and adjourn at 6:30 p.m. EDT, except for April 27, the last day of legislative committee work, which adjourns at 9:30 p.m. Sunday, April 28, is a day off for Sabbath rest.

All legislative committees are asked to set aside time for delegates to discuss regionalization and how it will affect the work of their committee. Regionalization is one of the key topics up for consideration at General Conference aimed at shaping the future of the UMC.

That discussion is slated to occur as the first order of business when legislative committees meet on April 25.

The first-week schedule also includes the episcopal address on April 24, delivered by South Carolina Resident Bishop L. Jonathan Holston; the Young People's Address on April 24; and the Laity Address on April 25.

General Conference will open at 2 p.m. on Tuesday, April 23, with a worship celebration that will include Holy Communion. The preacher will be Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton of the New York Episcopal Area, outgoing president of the Council of Bishops.

The second week is devoted to voting on the legislation in plenary sessions.

An evening devotion is slated to end most days of business.

## Who is representing S.C. at General Conference?

### Clergy Delegates:

Rev. Ken Nelson  
Rev. Keith Hunter  
Rev. Susan Leonard  
Rev. Emily Sutton  
Rev. Will Malambri

Rev. Tiffany Knowlin Boykin  
Rev. Karen Jones  
Rev. Tim Rogers

Alternates: Rev. Cathy Mitchell and Rev. Fran Elrod

### Lay Delegates:

Jackie Jenkins  
James Salley  
Michael Cheatham  
Herman Lightsey  
Chris Lynch  
David Braddon  
Betty Void  
David Salter

Alternates: Valerie Brooks-Madden and Marlene Spencer

## What are South Carolina delegates' committee assignments?

South Carolina has 16 delegates, which means there will be one South Carolinian on every committee, and two committees will have two South Carolina delegates. Delegates select their desired committee based on the order of their election.

Committee assignments are as follows:

- Church and Society 1: Rev. Tim Rogers
- Church and Society 2: Jackie Jenkins
- Church and Society 3: Rev. Keith Hunter
- Conferences: Michael Cheatham
- Discipleship: David Salter
- Faith and Order: Rev. Susan Leonard
- Financial Administration: James Salley
- General Administration: David Braddon
- Global Ministries: Rev. Emily Sutton
- Higher Education/Superintendency: Herman Lightsey

Herman Lightsey

- Independent Commissions: Rev. Tiffany Knowlin Boykin
- Judicial Administration: Rev. Will Malambri

- Local Church: Chris Lynch and Rev. Karen Jones
- Ordained Ministry: Rev. Ken Nelson and Betty Void

See article (Page 11) for a breakdown of each committee and what sort of petitions they handle.

## What do the legislative committees do?

The primary sources of legislation are petitions and proposals from churches, annual conferences, agencies and organizations. Petitions must be submitted 230 days before the opening of the conference. Usually about 1,000 petitions are submitted for consideration at a regularly scheduled General Conference.

This year, there are 1,099 total valid petitions going before General Conference.

Petitions are assigned to one of the 14 legislative committees or to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

All proposed legislation is printed in the Advance Daily Christian Advocate, which can be found at <https://www.dailychristianadvocate.org>.

The work of the legislative committees is

open to observers, including media, though space may be limited.

There are three categories of petitions—those that involve changes to the *Book of Discipline*, changes to the *Book of Resolutions* and non-disciplinary, meaning they ask General Conference to take a certain action, such as forming a study group or task force.

In the committees, legislation is debated, refined and recommended whether to go to the full General Conference plenary for a vote. Some petitions come from multiple committees that need to be considered together.

All valid petitions are required to receive a vote in legislative committee. Any petition approved by a legislative committee is required to receive a vote in plenary.

## A key topic: Regionalization

Regionalization is a key topic to be addressed at General Conference. Approved in an Aug. 19 meeting by the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, worldwide regionalism legislation aims to provide equity throughout the regions of the UMC with the intention of decentralizing the influence of the United States on General Conference. Emphasizing the United Methodist theology of connectionalism, it provides for contextualized ministry and mission throughout the church. Eight petitions submitted to General Conference would create Regional Conferences around the world. In regions with a Central Conference, the Regional Conference will replace the Central Conference. In places without a Central Conference, a Regional Conference will be established. These petitions also would establish the rights, duties, power and privileges of the Regional Conferences. These petitions give Regional Conferences legislative powers so that they can be nimble and increase their missional impact in their region. It also includes the creation of the United States Regional Conference, comprising the five jurisdictions. This plan includes the creation of a committee of the General Conference for U.S. regional matters, as well as the Interim Committee on Organization to organize and plan for the establishment and functioning of a new United States Regional Conference. Both the legislative committee and the organizing committee will dissolve at the first Regional Conference of the United States.

This legislation was also supported for submission by the Connectional Table at its July 13 meeting.

## What are the other big issues?

Beyond regionalization, General Conference is expected to address these other major topics among the 1,099 petitions submitted:

- **Reduced General Conference Budget:** The proposed 2025-2028 budget of \$346.7 million is the biggest budget drop in the UMC's history and is a 43 percent reduction from the \$604 million budget approved in 2016. The proposal requires significant cuts to all funds and comes because of a reduction in church net expenditures stemming from disaffiliations as well as churches that closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Full revision to UMC Social Principles:** Submitted by the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, this is the first overhaul to the Social Principles in 50 years and arose out of legislation initiated in 2012 and listening sessions in Africa, Europe, the Philippines and the United States. More than 4,000 United Methodists reviewed and commented on the first Social Principles draft, and the revision now goes before General Conference.

- **Additional bishops in Africa:** While the number of bishops in the United States is expected to reduce (from 46 to 32), Africa might see an increase in the number of its bishops.

- **Full communion with Episcopal Church:** The Council of Bishops is proposing a full-communion agreement between United Methodists and Episcopalians, who share a history and have ties to John Wesley's Church of England. Full communion means each would recognize the other as a partner in the Christian faith, recognizes the validity of each other's baptism and Eucharist, and commits to work together in ministry. They can also share clergy.

- **Disaffiliations and reaffiliations:** More than a quarter of the UMCs in the United States have left the denomination in the last four years. A number of petitions will deal with separating the denomination along theological lines; possibly extending Para. 2553, which allowed churches to leave with property "for reasons of conscience" related to homosexuality if they met certain obligations; and some relating to paths for reaffiliations.

- **Responses to sexual misconduct:** The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women is introducing a resolution calling for an "Apology from General Conference to the Victims/Survivors of Sexual Misconduct in The United Methodist Church." COSROW noted many victims and survivors do not receive an apology from any person with authority in the denomination, yet an apology is often the first step toward healing.

- **Homosexual weddings and clergy:** Currently the *Book of Discipline* prohibits United Methodist clergy from officiating at same-sex marriage or union ceremonies, and prohibits bishops from licensing, commissioning, ordaining, appointing, or consecrating as a bishop anyone who is a "self-avowed practicing homosexual." Some petitions will address these prohibitions.

## How can I find out what's going on at General Conference?

The *Advocate* will be offering full coverage of General Conference, both in its June edition (which comes out early), at <https://advocatesc.org/gc2024>, and on social media (Facebook and X @advocatesc and Instagram @advocatesc\_news).

Also, follow the proceedings on the General Conference website at <http://gc2020.umc.org> or on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) at #UMCGC.

Also, much will be livestreamed: all plenary sessions; worship services; the Episcopal, Laity and Young People's addresses; and other special events.

Information supplemented by a variety of UMC resources, including the helpful "Guide to Postponed 2020 General Conference," the "GC2020 Advance Daily Christian Advocate" and the Delegation Orientation videos (all available for download from <https://www.umcgc.org>), as well as articles from *United Methodist News*.

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# What are the 14 legislative committees?

General Conference has 14 committees, as well as a Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters (pertaining to church regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines). All legislation at General Conference goes to one of 14 committees or the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

All valid petitions are required to receive a vote in legislative committee. All petitions approved by a legislative committee are required to receive a vote in plenary.

Here are the 14 legislative committees and what they handle:

## Church and Society 1

All petitions and resolutions relating to the work and concerns of the General Board of Church and Society and the Social Principles, with the exception of paragraphs in the *Book of Discipline* dealing with “The Nurturing Community” (Para. 161), “The Social Community” (Para. 162) and “The World Community” (Para. 165).

Examples of petitions being considered this year: Climate Change and the Church’s Response, Gambling, Global Debt Crisis: A Call for Jubilee, Opposition to Late Term Abortion

South Carolina committee member: Rev. Tim Rogers

## Church and Society 2

All petitions and resolutions relating to “The Nurturing Community” and “The Social Community” sections of the Social Principles.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: Amend Social Principles-Human Sexuality, Remove Incompatibility Language, Divorce, Remarriage, Abortion, Artificial Intelligence

South Carolina committee member: Jackie Jenkins

## Church and Society 3

All petitions and resolutions relating to “The World Community” of the Social Principles.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: Addressing Israeli Detention of Children, Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, Our Muslim Neighbors, the Abolition of Torture

South Carolina committee member: Rev. Keith Hunter

## Conferences

All petitions and resolutions relating to the composition and activities of general, jurisdictional, annual, provisional, missionary and district conferences, as well as missions — including jurisdictional, annual and district connectional ministries or equivalent.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: Equitable Voting Rights for Deaconesses and Home Missioners, Create Annual Conference Lay Delegate Term Limits, Include British Columbia in the Western Jurisdiction, Providing for Annual Conference Disaffiliation

South Carolina committee member: Michael Cheatham

## Discipleship

All petitions and resolutions relating to the work and concerns of Discipleship Ministries.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: Building a Fully Inclusive Church, Fairer Inclusion of Young People, Prioritizing Young People in the Local Church, Native American Comprehensive Plan

South Carolina committee member: David Salter

## Faith and Order

All petitions relating to the work and concerns of the



Committee on Faith and Order, the Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task, the Ministry of All Christians, and the Meaning of Ordination and Conference Membership.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: Add Nicene Creed to Doctrinal Standards, Mission of the Church, Qualifications for Ordination, “Chastity” Instead of “Celibacy”

South Carolina committee member: Rev. Susan Leonard

## Financial Administration

All petitions and resolutions relating to the work and concerns of the General Council on Finance and Administration, the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (Wespath) and the United Methodist Publishing House. The budget and recommendations prepared by GCFA are submitted to this committee for study and review. When GCFA presents its report to the General Conference for action, the committee presents its recommendations and may propose amendments.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: Authorization to Create a New Insignia, Compass Retirement Plan, Support for Communication Ministry, Trust Clause Nullified

South Carolina committee member: James Salley

## General Administration

All petitions and resolutions relating to the work and concerns of the Connectional Table. The Connectional Table report is submitted to this committee for study and review.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: General Agency Relationships with Formerly United Methodist Bodies, Conflict of Interest in Jurisdictional Nominations, Sustainable and Socially Responsible Investments, Restructuring of Connectional Table Membership

South Carolina committee members: David Braddon

## Global Ministries

All petitions and resolutions relating to the work and concerns of the General Board of Global Ministries.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministries, Seeking Peace in Afghanistan, The Church and the Global HIV/AIDS Pandemic, Missionary Standards

South Carolina committee member: Rev. Emily Sutton

## Higher Education/Superintendency

All petitions and resolutions relating to the work and concerns of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and schools of theology. In addition, the work and concerns of superintendency, the Council of Bishops Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships, including autonomous and affiliated autonomous Methodist churches, affiliated united churches and concordat relationships, and membership or relationship to the World Meth-

odist Council, Councils and Consultations of Churches, and the American Bible Society.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: Reform of Itinerancy, Term Limits for Bishops, Local Discernment of Marriage and Wedding Services, Equally Valuing Lay Seminary Professors

South Carolina committee member: Herman Lightsey

## Independent Commissions

All petitions and resolutions relating to commissions on Archives and History, Communication, Office of Deaconess and Home Missioner, Religion and Race, Status and Role of Women, United Methodist Men and United Women in Faith.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: Racial Justice, Support for Clergywomen, Accessibility Grants to Churches, White Privilege in the United States, Sexual Misconduct within Ministerial Relationships, Mental Health Discrimination in Disability Compensation

South Carolina committee member: Rev. Tiffany Knowlin Boykin

## Judicial Administration

All petitions and resolutions relating to judiciary concerns, including the Judicial Council, investigations, church trials and appeals.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: No Compensation for Judicial Council Members or Alternates, Media Access to Judicial Council Oral Processes-Implementation, When Fair Process Begins in Judicial Complaints, Simplifying a Chargeable Offense

South Carolina committee member: Rev. Will Malambri

## Local Church

All petitions and resolutions relating to the organization of the local church and its membership, programs, boards, councils, commissions and committees. The committee also considers petitions relating to local church property.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: Non-Discrimination Policy for Lay Staff, Immediate Family Definition, Providing Secure Space for Local Church Records, Voting at Church Conferences

South Carolina committee member: Chris Lynch and Rev. Karen Jones

## Ordained Ministry

All petitions and resolutions relating to the work and concerns of ordained ministry.

Examples of petitions being considered this year: License for Pastoral Ministry, Change in Education Requirements for Elders and Deacons, Deacons to Administer the Sacraments, Fair Process for Less-Than-Full-Time Appointments

South Carolina committee member: Rev. Ken Nelson and Betty Void

# Help others know about the Advocate on Advocate Awareness Sunday

Annual day is May 19

This spring, the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* will hold its annual Advocate Awareness Sunday, an effort to introduce United Methodists across South Carolina to the newspaper ministry.

This year’s Advocate Awareness Sunday is May 19.

The *Advocate* has a number of items for churches and others to share, including talking points, bulletin inserts, a video and more.

“The *Advocate* is a great way to help churches be connectional and know what is going on in the denominations across the state, but not everyone knows about the *Advocate*,” said Editor Jessica Brodie. “We hope our readers will do what they can to spread the word so our newspaper continues to

thrive for future generations.”

Founded as the *Southern Christian Advocate*, the *Advocate* was first commissioned by the General Conference of 1836 to be published in Charleston, one of three papers authorized by that conference.

Highly respected across the denomination, it is currently the oldest newspaper in Methodism and has won 126 journalism excellence awards in the last decade.

The *Advocate* is the voice of the people of The United Methodist Church in South Carolina, transparently sharing news of relevance to people of faith around advancing knowledge, spiritual growth and discipleship. Its mission is to inform and connect South Carolina United Methodists by independently reporting relevant news, engag-

ing readers, providing a forum for dialogue and sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Find the video and other resources at [www.advocatesc.org/awarenessday](http://www.advocatesc.org/awarenessday).

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# U.S. Army Major Jeremy Boeh to give SMC commencement speech

SPARTANBURG—Major Jeremy Boeh will lean on his nearly 20 years in the U.S. Army to share a message of resiliency, team building and staying the course as the commencement speaker to the 2024 Spartanburg Methodist College graduating class.

“I’ve had the privilege of knowing Major Boeh for 12 years. His unparalleled passion and drive truly set him apart,” said SMC President Scott Cochran. “Given his distinguished service to our nation and his unwavering commitment to advancing his education, who could be more suited to inspire our graduates with his message?”

Joining the Army as an enlisted soldier in 2005, Boeh served in several capacities with his battalion, including two tours in Iraq.

He worked his way up to staff sergeant before participating in the Army’s Green to Gold program, allowing active-duty enlisted soldiers to earn their degree and a commission as an officer.

He earned a bachelor’s degree from Wofford in 2013 through the program and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Chemical Corps.

“It’s an honor to be asked to provide the commencement speech, and I’m grateful

President Cochran extended the opportunity,” Boeh said. “I look forward to sharing a message of perseverance and overcoming setbacks on life’s journey.”

Boeh is the operations officer for the 479th Chemical Battalion at Fort Totten in New York.

In addition to his degree from Wofford, he also earned a master’s degree in business from Liberty University.

This fall, he will attend the Naval War College.

SMC will host its 2024 Commencement ceremony on Saturday, May 4, at 9 a.m. in Spartanburg High School’s Viking Arena.

More than 300 associate and bachelor’s degree candidates will receive degrees this year.



Boeh

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## EMILY LANG '23

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## Native American Ministries

by LaShella Kirkland

### A slap in the face

**W**earing the “face” of another group of people is never a good look. Whether it’s Blackface, Red Face, Yellow Face, Brown Face, Jew Face, or Arab Face, the whole idea of it is to show disrespect and dishonor, and it is never funny.

Yes, I have been accused of being overly sensitive, politically correct and, of course, the new word, “woke.” No, I know our history, and despite the many attempts to revise history, history is never just about the past. It’s a reflection of how we live in today’s society. I am puzzled, however. We seem to understand how disgusting the displays of Blackface are, yet Red Face parodies are not given the same energy.

Blackface was part of 19th-century minstrel show entertainment. Most of the performers were White and would wear wigs and use shoe polish to darken their faces. These shows were grounded in racist stereotypes and tropes. It was designed not only to shock but also to maintain the biases of the time.

Red Face involves non-Native individuals wearing makeup to “redden” their faces, feathers, or war paint to impersonate Indigenous Americans. It’s incredibly prominent in sporting events, school and team mascots and logos and Halloween, usually in fake headdresses and the so-called “Indian Maiden Princess” outfits. All vulgar displays of misconceptions about Indigenous cultures, which have been frozen in time to the 19th century and, more specifically, Plains Indian Cultures.

I always ask people, if you already know and understand that Blackface caricatures would not fly at this time, then why on earth do you think it’s OK to do Red Face? Usually, I hear crickets or get told it’s an honor.

Hm. If you genuinely want to honor me, then try educating yourself. But unfortunately, it’s all about the numbers: African Americans are about 13-15 percent of the total U.S. population. Native Americans are still only 1-3 percent of the total population in this country. Yes, we must learn the truth about our rich, complicated and uncomfortable truths about American history, which includes the enslavement of African Americans and the killing, displacement and forced assimilation of Native Peoples. The process is so successful today that some people still believe we no longer exist. Our invisibility or our culture is sometimes seen in the visibility of others’ perceptions of entitlement to the land and our very being.

And, no, it’s not fun.

Headdresses are a symbol of honor and respect, and tribal chiefs and warriors earn each feather. Veterans today are gifted these in special ceremonies to honor their services and thus are given the right to wear them appropriately. I would no more wear a full headdress than I would wear military medals. It would be a slap in the faces of those who serve. My regalia is not a costume. Every item on my dress has a specific meaning; however, the outrage does stem from the fact that many of our cultural dances and ceremonies were outlawed. Our children were taken and placed in boarding schools, only to have their braids forcefully cut. Our clothing, which a family member made, was thrown away, and if we spoke our language, we were severely punished.

Thankfully, there have been some changes to policies about mascots, sports team names and logos; nevertheless, the change has been slowly coming. Education and communication are the keys. But, most importantly, be brave enough to ask the hard questions first before assuming you are honoring another group.

*Kirkland is a South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church Native American Committee Board Member and the Native American Representative Training Coordinator and a member of Lyttleton Street UMC, Camden.*

### Survey feedback needed on children’s worship

Connectional Ministries of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church is hoping to learn more about what churches are doing with children’s worship.

Church feedback will help them to identify needs, note best practices and provide resources to support churches in the area of nurturing children as disciples of Jesus Christ.

It should only take about two minutes to complete the survey, titled the Involvement of Children in Worship Services Survey.

To do so, go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XNPLPGV>.

### St. Mark’s singles help neighbors

The Singles Ministry at St. Mark United Methodist Church, Taylors, donated 41 bags of toiletries and scripture cards recently to the Taylors Free Medical Clinic and one extra-large bag to the Carriage House Nursing Home.

Ernest Jefferson thanks all the singles who participated in the Easter service project and for making someone’s day a little brighter.

The Single Adults Ministry meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at

6:30 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall at St. Mark. They enjoy traveling, attending conferences and seeking ways to connect deeply with God and one another.

Their next trips planned are to New York City on April 18-24 and Augusta Riverwalk on May 18.

Single adults are any unmarried adults, which include never married, divorced, widowed, single parents and dating.

For more information: 864-417-6083.



Taught by Olander “Big O” Wilson, the camp ran March 30 to April 3.

### Columbia Bethlehem Community Center helps host acting camp for high schoolers

COLUMBIA—On Saturday, March 30, Olander “Big O” Wilson teamed up with One Columbia for Arts and Culture and Columbia Bethlehem Community Center to host a spring break acting camp for sixth to 12th graders.

The camp ran March 30 to April 3.

Wilson is an actor, director, acting coach and CEO of Olander Wilson Acting Studios. From Lake City, he made the leap to take his talents to New York City post-graduation in 2014.

After starring in numerous commercial projects such as Yahoo Finance, Dr. Pepper and USAA, Wilson is back in South Carolina to help shape future actors, directors and filmmakers.

Kara Simmons, executive director of Columbia Bethlehem Community Center, said she is ecstatic about this program.

“At Columbia Bethlehem Community Center, we pride ourselves in being the link between the community and resources,” Simmons said. “In the past we’ve offered filmmaking camps. However, this collaboration with One Columbia to host Olander

Wilson is both exciting and next level.”

“I know the entertainment business from the audition process, techniques on how to bring your authentic self to your character and how to market your best self for casting directors, producers and agents. There is no other option for me than to pass on everything I have learned in this business to the youth of my home state,” Wilson said.

The one-week master class covered on-camera acting techniques, the business of acting and filmmaking. The program also offered scholars opportunities to learn about performing arts while creating original work.

“The Columbia Bethlehem Community Center has been a great resource for our Columbia citizens,” said One Columbia Executive Director Xavier Blake. “One Columbia is excited to be a part of this partnership, and we look forward to other opportunities to partner with organizations like this that are committed to service.”

Funding for this program was provided by the Columbia Bethlehem Community Center.



### Need a Children’s Sermon?

by the Rev. Meghan Lindsey Sweeney Cook

### Pentecost Sunday

*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: Sunday, May 19, Pentecost

Scripture: Acts 2:1-21

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 bucket or basket filled with red, orange and yellow tissue paper. Cut the tissue into small squares. Then layer the squares red, orange and yellow. Pinch the middle of all three squares together and twist. It will look like a little flame. You will want a bunch of these because you’re going to gently dump the flames out of the bucket or basket onto the children’s heads.

Children’s Sermon:

Say: Today is a very special day in the church. Today is Pentecost! Pentecost means 50 days, 50 days after Easter when God gave the helper to the church, the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come to help us (John 14:15-17). Pentecost is also called the birthday of the church universal, not just our church but the whole big church around the world.

Tell the story: In your own words tell what happened, or use a good children’s Bible like the “Jesus Storybook Bible” to tell the story of Pentecost.

When you get to the part about the tongues of flame resting on the disciples (Acts 2:3) pour the bucket of flames (gently!) on the children. Then continue with the story that the people were filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability (v. 4).

Say: Can you imagine what this story would have felt like? I bet it would have been loud. Were you surprised when I poured the paper flames on your heads? I wonder how surprised the disciples and people were. Wow! What a memorable event. The Holy Spirit our helper came to be among us, and the Holy Spirit is still at work in our hearts and churches today! That’s amazing. It is good to remember the birthday of the church.

Let’s sing “Happy Birthday!” “Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy Birthday, dear church, happy birthday to you!” Hooray! OK, you can take a flame home to remind yourself that the Holy Spirit is always with us.

Pray: Would you pray with me? Dear God (pause for the children to repeat), we love you (pause). Thank you for your gift (pause) of the Holy Spirit (pause). May we remember (pause) you are always with us (pause) to help us (pause). Amen. (pause).

*Cook, the pastor of Cayce United Methodist Church, Cayce, is also the author of two children’s books from the Advocate Press: “Herbert the Hippo” and “Herbert the Hippo In the Moment.” Find them on Amazon or at <https://advocatesc.org/books>.*

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NACP attendees, including men from South Carolina, gather for a smile.

## S.C.'s Lightsey leads gathering of UMMen National Association of Conference Presidents

The National Association of Conference Presidents of the United Methodist Men gathered at the UMM's new location in Nashville, Feb. 27 through March 1.

New officers for the 2024-2028 quadrennial were elected.

South Carolina's Herman Lightsey is the outgoing president and will serve until July 14.

The group began by reaffirming their baptism and sent the men back to the mission fields to be servant leaders by washing each other's feet.

Next they worshipped, trained and elected new officers. The theme was "Transforming Relationships" using Romans 12. Each morning they centered their day with Sunday school.

Lightsey opened the record-setting gathering by welcoming and encouraging the group. He shared how challenges have been met gracefully and successfully.

"We are poised to move NACP into new and growing opportunities for UMM with the United Methodist Church," he said.

The General Commission on UMM is developing new communication tools to better inform and support their mission. Scouting and Men's Ministries are launching new initiatives to resource NACP, UMM and the local church. Recognizing the need to make these readily available, they are working on several projects to offer easy access to information and tools. They are also creating videos to better share information that anyone can access. GCUMM is also

developing a new website with easy navigation, and a new app is in production that will be offering multiple tools for men and the local church.

The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women's General Secretary Dawn Wiggins Hare addressed the gathering, sharing encouragement and support for the UMM and describing the synergy of the two agencies and mutual service opportunities.

Dr. Giovanni Arroyo, general secretary of the General Commission on Religion and Race, led a session on the existing state of relationships in society and opportunities for growth and improvement.

Seminary student Slice Penny led Bible study and also shared a compelling testimony of his road through addiction and recovery.

New officers of the NACP were elected: Mark Dehority, president; Ken Hudgins, vice president; Don Davis, secretary; and Robert Wright and Larry Dozier, co-treasurers.

Sterling Eaton led a training session for conference presidents showing how to organize and connect UMM to the district and local church.

And Director of Scouting Ministry's Steven Scheid explained new opportunities for UMM and Scouting together.

Shepard Churches is a new initiative launching from the Center for Scouting Ministries that will greatly enhance the growth in UMCs.

## Camp Creek helps Simple Faith Ranch with items needed

By Crystal Barrs

Simple Faith Ranch is a Christian farm ministry in Lancaster that helps foster families in the Upstate of South Carolina.

South Carolina has seen a 62 percent decrease in the number of foster families in the last two years. There were 3,040 families in 2021 but only 1,040 families in 2023. Currently, there are 3,461 children in foster care in South Carolina and more than 50 children in foster care in Lancaster County.

Half of these children have been in foster care for more than two years.

The Giving Closet at Simple Faith Ranch supports foster, adoptive, kinship and reunited biological families. Simple Faith Ranch is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and they accept items to help foster families when taking in infants with bottles, diapers, toys, baby strollers and other much needed supplies they might not have on hand.

They also help with children's clothes up to size 12 and some toys.

The United Women in Faith at Camp Creek United Methodist Church, along with their Happy Hookers group, provided The Giving Closet at Simple Faith Ranch with items that were needed. They said helping was an awesome and uplifting experience for all involved with the project to keep supplies needed coming in for these families.



Photo courtesy of Linda Matthews

This is one of the many tables full of their donations.

To learn more about Simple Faith Ranch, visit their website at <https://www.simple-faithranch.org> or check out their Facebook Page at: <https://www.facebook.com/Simple-FaithRanch>.

Barrs is a member of Good Shepherd UMC, Lancaster.

## Epworth Children's Home

### A foster parent support ministry

*"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do."*—Edward Everett Hale

In the face of tremendous challenges to the child welfare system in South Carolina, dedicated people are stepping forward to become foster parents. These individuals live out their faith as they create a safe space in their homes and lives for children who cannot remain with their families.

Foster Parent Appreciation month in May each year gives churches and communities an opportunity to say thank you to foster parents for their dedication and commitment to care for "the least of these." Epworth church partners support our foster families this month by assembling Foster Parent Appreciation Baskets for families around the state. These baskets offer a way for churches to say to foster parents, "We, the church, see you and value what you do. We want you to know that we are here to support you and the children in your care."

For churches, rallying to put these baskets together can be an introduction to the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children in their own communities by supporting foster families.

Studies show that more experienced foster families yield better outcomes for the children in their care. Nationwide, as many as half of newly licensed foster families will quit within the first year, either because they become overwhelmed or because they lack support networks around them. Churches can become part of a foster family's support network by hosting a Parent's Night Out for them, bringing in meals once a week or once a month, providing gift cards for groceries and gas, assembling First Night Bags for newly placed children and numerous other things.

As one local church representative described her church's ministry of providing meals to foster families in their community, "We spell 'care' F-O-O-D!"

Foster care staff at Epworth work diligently to equip and support foster parents. Even so, at times being a foster parent can be overwhelming when it comes to juggling their many responsibilities. Foster parents support and advocate for the children in their care with multiple appointments: therapy sessions, guardian ad litem visits, Department of Social Services visits and visits with biological parents. In addition, they advocate for the children with their schools, navigate children's behaviors rooted in trauma and manage all the regular daily tasks of running a home.

One foster care director said, "When a church brings in meals, it might not seem like a big deal. But it affords the foster parents the opportunity to relax and participate in some self-care that they would not have been able to experience if they had to cook dinner. This small act makes a gigantic impact on the well-being and morale of foster parents, and they are always grateful."

When children, through no fault of their own, are removed from their homes and everything familiar, they experience significant trauma. Many of them arrive at a foster home with few of their own belongings and many tumultuous feelings.

One Epworth care coordinator shares this story of the impact churches can have on children they have never even met.

She said, "We had a family take placement of a 4-year-old boy who was part of a sibling group of five. He was separated from his siblings for the first time and was having a hard adjustment. We took him one of the first night bags prepared by a church, and he was so tickled that someone got him clothes and toys that were just for him. He even named his stuffed animal that came with the bag after his sister. It is always amazing to see how such a small act of kindness can mean the world to someone else."

In South Carolina, there is a need for foster families statewide. For information on becoming a foster parent, visit us at <https://www.epworthchildrenshome.org>.

To find out how your church can develop a foster parent support ministry, speak to your pastor.

## S.C. Reconciling group plans gathering at Annual Conference

The South Carolina Reconciling group will be present at the Annual Conference in two primary ways.

They will host a breakfast on Tuesday morning, June 11, from 7:15-8:30 a.m. The program should start around 7:45 a.m. Fourth Presbyterian (near the Bon Secours Arena in downtown Greenville) will host the event. Their address is 703 E. Washington Street, Greenville, SC 29601. A hot breakfast (optional) will be available for \$15. Details of the program will be released shortly after the General Conference closes on May 3.

A link to register for the breakfast can be found at <https://www.scrmn.org>. The registration webpage has an option for attending the program without taking part in the breakfast.

The South Carolina Reconciling group will also be present in the Vendor/Exhibits area with a hosted SCRMM table. All are invited to stop by and connect.



### Lenten luncheons

Manning UMC, Manning, held Lenten luncheons that began in the beginning of March. Each week featured a new guest speaker, and the meal was provided by one of the circle groups or men's group. The last of the luncheons was held on March 18 featuring Bishop L. Jonathan Holston as guest speaker.

# 'Get Your House in Order'

## Orangeburg Circuit Parish Nurse and Healthcare Ministry presents on Advanced Life Decisions

By the Rev. Annie H. Sistrunk

The Orangeburg Circuit Parish Nurse and Healthcare Ministry has been busy lately with its work to help its church members and community get educated about wellness and health care.

On Dec. 31, they presented their final Wellness Sunday of the year, this one on "Advanced Life Decisions." Although some would think this a morbid discussion, it is one that is very necessary for individuals and their families. What better time to have this conversation than before the beginning of a new year and the opportunity to get our houses in order?

For this event we hosted three presenters knowledgeable about the following concerns: critical care planning, financial planning and final decisions.

Evelyn Pauling—a wife, mother, member of Mount Nebo United Methodist Church and a registered nurse certified in critical care nursing for 37 years—shared her experience collaborating with patients and their families as they process through their critical illnesses and the decisions needed. This information is vital to care planning for family members and ourselves. As she shared, end of life decisions are important because they can ensure whether someone receives health care treatment consistent with their wishes and preferences. Decisions should specify the type of medical care you do or do not want in the event that you are unable to communicate your wishes.

She discussed an Advanced Healthcare Directive (a Living Will, or a Physician's Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment). A person may designate a surrogate power of attorney to make decisions for them if they become unable to do so in the future. If these decisions are not made in advance then the choice of whether to withhold or withdraw life support falls to the next of kin, according to state law.

Some topics to consider when making end-of-life decisions:

- A living will, which is a legal document that outlines your preferences for medical care. It contains legal instructions that guide choices for doctors and caregivers if you are terminally ill, seriously injured, in a coma, in the late stages of dementia, or near the end-of-life. In addition to living wills there are other advance directives families may consider.

- A durable power of attorney, which is designed to remain in effect even if you become ill, or you are in a serious accident rendering you incompetent or incapacitated.

- Do not resuscitate (DNR) and allow natural death, which is a medical order that instructs health-care providers not to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation if a patient's breathing stops or if the patient's



Three presenters spoke on critical care planning, financial planning and final decisions.

heart stops beating.

- Comfort care, which is a type of care that focuses on providing relief from pain and other symptoms to improve the quality of life for patients who have a serious or life-threatening illness. It is often used in conjunction with other medical treatments and can be provided in a hospital, hospice or home setting.

The last two medical care decisions are palliative care and hospice. Palliative care is specialized medical care for people living with serious illnesses, such as cancer or heart failure. Patients in palliative care may receive medical care for their symptoms, along with treatment intended to cure their serious illness. Palliative care is meant to enhance a person's current care by focusing on quality of life for them and their family.

Hospice care is a service for people with serious illnesses who choose not to get (or continue) treatment to cure or control their illness. People may choose to enroll in Hospice care if the treatment is unlikely to be effective or if continuing it has become too burdensome. Hospice aims to provide comfort and peace to help improve quality of life for the person nearing death. It also helps family members cope with their loved one's illness and can also provide support to the family after the person dies, including help with grieving, sometimes called bereavement care.

Our second presenters were Brad and Mary Lucas, agents with Lincoln Heritage, a funeral advantage company that offers insurance coverage for burial and the needs of a family afterwards.

The Lucases spoke about how to take care of our family, noting we should have life insurance, a will and a living trust. Life insurance can help protect our income, pay our mortgage, provide for our children's education, cover debts and handle our final expenses. A will is designed to make our final wishes known on how to disperse your

individual property and can list guardians for minor children. A living trust puts funds in place for future generations.

Our last presenter was the Rev. Montez Haynes, who came with a dual message: funerals and a sermonette titled "Get Your House In Order." Haynes shared how we all need to get our spiritual house in order



## United Women in Faith

by Jan Fleming

### Highlighting Bethel's United Women in Faith

**B**ethel United Women in Faith, Spartanburg, have had a great year and continue to be on the move with mission work every day all year long.

Our approach to leadership positions, titles and meetings has changed in the last few years. We have five circles who all work as a team with all our mission work. Each circle leader is the chair who takes on an event. Their circle is responsible for hosting the entire event each year, some of which include Sunday services, fundraisers and unit dinners. We have planning sessions in place of board meetings, and our end goal is for every circle to participate in everything we do.

Two of my favorite events we have are our Book Brunch and our Vendor Party-Frozen Feast-Bake Sale in the fall. We are proud of our book selection and promoting our UWF Reading Program at our book brunch. We have members who give mini-book reviews. We have had visiting authors such as Advocate Editor Jessica Brodie, the Rev. Arthur Holt and our very own unit member Kathy Butler, who discuss their books, publishing and how they came about their writing their first book.

When our consignment sales started to drop in foot traffic and interest, our Vendor Party, along with our Frozen Feast and Bake Sale, became our largest fundraiser. All are held on the same day. Some of the vendors love the sale as much as we do, and of course, we always serve a delicious lunch. In the last few years, we have raffled off a handmade quilt. Each one has been beautifully made by two of our circle members.

Who doesn't love a homemade poundcake? We found out this mini sale—which we call "Easter Sides" with just three items—brings in quite the mission funds, with the poundcakes being the biggest seller.

Our Boxed Lunch Sale after church has become another small event with church members taking a to-go box or just sitting around after church together to have fellowship time.

Our spring and holiday dinner meetings are a chance for us as a unit to meet the di-

rectors of the agencies to whom we distribute our mission monies, volunteer our time and donate items they request. By inviting staff members, and sometimes the women who are served to join us, we are connecting closer to the mission we are supporting.

Here are just several of the missions we have supported locally and globally, along with our four conference missions: Angels' Charge Ministry, Faith Homes for Women, The Homeless Period Project, Hope Remains Ranch, Miracle Hill Women's Program, PS I Love You, Sidewalk Hope, Spartanburg Soup Kitchen, Sidewalk Hope and St. Luke's Free Medical Clinic.

Our global missions have included Ecuador Missions for a college youth Bethel member, The Heifer Project, Soles for Souls and UMCOR Haiti and Ukraine.

As I look over the past year, I am always amazed at how much ground the women at Bethel cover in Spartanburg and beyond. Our unit has a sense of community and steps up to the plate when and wherever there is a need with heartfelt love. It may be supplying the summer kids at the Bethlehem Center with ice cream or having dinner with women who just are coming out of a tough program and need to feel welcome in a church surrounding.

I love working with my circle sisters in any setting. We truly are a sisterhood acting in faith to tackle the hard work of the world without hesitation.

Fleming is the SCCUWF representative for the Spartanburg Bethlehem Center.



The latest Book Brunch was a great success.



Photo by Jim Patterson, UM News

### Mississippi church services target racism

The Rev. Cynthia Davis (at podium), a retired district superintendent in the Mississippi Conference and executive vice president and director of The Moore-West Center for Applied Theology in Memphis, Tenn., speaks March 2 at Rust College in Holly Springs, Miss., as part of the Mississippi Conference's End Racism for Good campaign. The Rev. Zachary Beasley, pastor of Asbury and Calvin Chapel United Methodist churches in Holly Springs, Miss., welcomed the public to the event and ended it with a benediction.

# Washington Street reflects on its seven women ministers over the years

In 1956, General Conference approved the full ordination of women after voting it down at every General Conference for 100 years.

In honor of Women's History Month, Washington Street United Methodist Church, Columbia, reflected on the seven women ministers who have served there. They asked church members to reflect on what each minister's ministry meant to WSUMC and to them personally.

Here are those reflections.

**The Rev. Becky Shirley, senior pastor, 2021-present**

Lee Smith shared how, in addition to being Christ-centered, a focused listener, a Spirit-filled preacher, a great coach and a relationship builder, Shirley has the gift of being a collaborative problem solver.



Shirley

"This is a trait so needed in these difficult days, whether at a global level or community or denominational or interpersonal level," Smith said. "As united as we may feel at Washington Street, there are always challenges, even for a 221-year-old mother church that's still making disciples for the transformation of the world. It's Becky's gift ... that just might become her most important legacy."

**The Rev. Patricia Parrish, first female senior pastor at WSUMC, 2016-2021**

Nancy Whittle shared how she knew Parrish would be special, but when the church faced two challenging events, she was able to lead them through dark days with hope, grace, kindness



Parrish

and action. First, when the 2019 General Conference voted to keep what Whittle described as harmful LGBTQIA+ language in the Book of Discipline, Parrish stepped up with comfort and compassion.

"There were different opinions and pain for all," Whittle said. "She actively listened to and respected all sides. Her calm and peaceful demeanor and willingness to listen kept peace in the congregation during the discernment process."

Later, when COVID-19 hit, Parrish took quick action to lead in online worship and kept Sunday school classes and small groups going through taping and Zoom.

"I can imagine what a toll these events had on her, yet you would not know it," Whittle said. "She always had a smile and a twinkle in her eyes as she thought about ways to move forward."

**The Rev. Alston Lippert, associate minister for nurture and discipleship development, 2017-present**

Deborah Rowe attributed much of the success of the church's welcoming and caring reputation to Lippert, whom she calls her friend, confidant and pastor.



Lippert

"Every Sunday morning, she is in the hallway ready to give a hug to our membership and to say welcome to our guests," Rowe said. "She continues to emulate Jesus's practice of caring for others by visiting the sick and homebound, providing communion, offering words of encouragement and reminding us of God's presence in our lives even during personal challenges. She brings the words of Christ alive through small group studies and sermons. She stands for Social Justice leading our congregation through difficult conversations and sets an example for standing up for basic human rights for all of God's people."

**The Rev. Susan Culler, director of outreach, 2015-2016**

Andrea McAtee lifted up Culler's "gentle warm spirit" that drew her in during a difficult season in her life.



Culler

"With a quiet voice and kind thoughtful eyes, she drew us to become disciples of Christ," McAtee shared. "She led a class on what it meant to be a Methodist that met for several weeks, and her discussion helped us understand and become more comfortable with making the commitment to become members of the church and for me to publicly confess Jesus Christ as my Savior. Susan did not have a long tenure at our church, but I will be forever grateful that she was there at the right time for us."

**The Rev. Evelyn Middleton, associate pastor, 2008 -2012**

Lynn Shirley praised Middleton, calling her not only gentle, quiet, polite and respectful but also a person who stands up for the marginalized and speaks for those without voices in the room, all without expectation of acknowledgement.



Middleton

"I once heard a sermon where the pastor preached on "bulldog faith" – where you grab hold of what you believe and don't let go," Shirley said. "Rev. Middleton has never been shy about sugar-coating what she had to say from the pulpit. That was always so refreshing. This bulldog metaphor fits Evelyn perfectly; holding on to what she believes and acting on it in all the ways she can."

**The Rev. Diana Westerkam, associate pastor, 1992-2008**

Kimberly McAlister and Eva Nance shared about the powerful and long-lasting influence Westerkam had on their lives and the life of the church, from her meaningful sermons to her eloquent prayers to her challenging Bible studies.



Westerkam

"Diana's wisdom and strength, her loving and gentle ways, her calmness in the face of any chaos, are all hallmarks of her ministry at WS," McAlister and Nance added. "Her impact on our faith journeys is second only to that of our mothers, as she consistently models a life based on Jesus's radical teachings about love, compassion, acceptance and forgiveness."

**The Rev. Toni White, first woman minister appointed to WSUMC, 1977-1981**

Malissa Burnette shared how in 1977 White came to WSUMC as Minister of Education and Outreach and to show boys and girls that, yes, girls can be really good ministers.



White

"She even survived the old ladies scolding her for wearing open-toed shoes beneath her vestments," Burnette said, noting White's gift for speaking the right words at the right moment and her work for equality and social justice.

"I recall her calming presence during a nighttime vigil for the Equal Rights Amendment in the early 1980s when we were threatened with violence," Burnette said. "Toni and I have been connected for over 40 years. I am lucky indeed to call her my friend."



Photos courtesy of the Rev. Narcie Jeter

**The tomb is empty!**

Jesus said in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Disciples UMC, Greenville, certainly lived life abundantly on Easter, tying their events into 2 Corinthians 5:17, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!" Disciples hosted several new creations after Easter worship: baby bunnies, baby piglets, baby ducks, a baby goat and a mama guinea pig and her two babies from EMIT's Farm. Members also flowered Disciples' Living Cross during children's time and proclaimed the risen Christ, and the choir showed out with a mini-Easter cantata that ended with the Hallelujah Chorus. As they see the "resurrection dust" on their cars, Disciples' members also claim the resurrection hope in and through Jesus and that they have new and abundant life in Jesus Christ.



Mays is pictured above (center) with his wife, Virginia, other family members and his pastor, the Rev. Angela Ford Nelson.

**New Life UMC names Church Member of the Year**

By Arlene Ghani

Billy E. Mays was recently bestowed the honor of New Life Church Member of the Year 2023 during the celebration of New Life United Methodist Church's 25th Church Anniversary.

Each year in December members of New Life, located in Walterboro, select an honoree for this award, who is announced during their anniversary celebration in February.

Mays is a member of the trustees, male ensemble, adult choir, prayer ministry and United Methodist Men. Although quiet

and unassuming, he willingly lends a hand whenever and wherever he is needed. His warm smile and raspy voice is a welcome staple at New Life, and his presence is readily noticed through the service he renders at the church and beyond, whether greeting worshipers as they enter or securing the building once they have departed. He is the epitome of "service with a smile."

Although not military, he is a serviceman, serving God, his family, his church and others in any capacity he can.

Ghani is chairperson of New Life's communications ministry.

**Around the Districts**

**Columbia District**

President John H. Dozier has announced the appointment of Sara Snell Whitaker (class of 1999) as the assistant vice president for Alumni Engagement at Columbia College, Columbia.

**Greenville District**

St. Mark UMC, Taylors, and Lee Road UMC, Taylors, combined Easter celebrations. Together they held a Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter sunrise services. They also joined for an Easter mass choir, prayer journals at the altar, Easter speeches, an Easter egg hunt and an Easter party.

## New Grace marks milestone with Wellness Day

ST. GEORGE—New Grace United Methodist Church recently celebrated its 19th anniversary with a dynamic Wellness Day on March 16.

This significant event not only marked a milestone for the church but also provided an opportunity for members of the congregation and the broader community to unite in joyous festivities.

Aligned with the ministry's focus on the dimensions of wellness, the Wellness Day aimed to nurture participants' spiritual, physical, social and mental health.

The day kicked off with registration at 7 a.m., where eager participants gathered to kick off the festivities. At 8 a.m., the event began with an invigorating walk, symbolizing the unity and camaraderie among attendees. Police escorts ensured the safety of all participants along the route, enhancing the overall experience.

Throughout the day, various activities were organized to engage participants and promote overall well-being. One highlight was a dynamic fitness session led by Nyra T. Govan, a recent graduate of Claflin University in human performance and recreation. Govan brought her expertise and passion for

health and fitness to the event, leaving participants feeling energized and invigorated.

The event was further energized by the lively performances of the Lowcountry Scootin' Boots Line Dancers from Walterboro, who had everyone moving and grooving.

As the event progressed, participants were treated to a delightful spread of nutritious snacks and refreshing drinks, including salads, fruits and beverages, to refuel and rejuvenate.

Attendees were later recognized for their participation, with awards given out in various age categories. Door prizes added an element of excitement to the day, while a session of Bible trivia led by Rev. Constance B. McLeod provided spiritual enrichment for all.

Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing gratitude for the opportunity to come together in fellowship and support one another's wellness journeys. Looking ahead, New Grace UMC is already planning their next Wellness Day, scheduled for Sept. 21.

To stay updated on all upcoming events, be sure to follow New Grace UMC on Facebook.



Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing gratitude for the opportunity to come together in fellowship and support one another's wellness journeys



## The Journey to Easter at the Jordan Charge

By Nancy M. Hunt

The journey begins in the middle of the week for the three country churches in Clarendon County: Jordan, Bethlehem and Union United Methodist churches, which comprise the Jordan Charge in Manning.

The people are taking this journey seriously, first with the hanging of the purple banners on the wooden crosses at each church on Feb. 14. Interestingly, it's the same day as another day of love—Valentine's Day. The shadow of the love through the cross overpowers the love of Valentine's Day. While others are celebrating romantic love, the church begins the season of Lent. Ash Wednesday services were held at Jordan UMC in the early evening as the sun was setting in a cold winter sky. The people entering the small sanctuary reflect on their relationship with God. Pastor Leo Roy delivers a powerful message to those in attendance. He places the sign of the cross on forehead or hands, a symbol that ties us to our Lord and savior.

Attendees leave in the darkness of night and return home to officially enter the season of Lent. Some are giving up small rituals or luxuries during this season. Others are adding acts of kindness or spending more time in prayer, scripture and devotional readings as their Lenten gift this year.

Soon March arrives, daylight time changes and bodies and minds adjust accordingly. Spiritual life deepens as members draw closer to the cross, day by day. Spring arrives, reminding all of new life bursting forth around us. Spring, a celebration in itself, is telling all that God is still in

control.

Then Palm Sunday arrives, and before they know it, members are singing hosannas to Christ the King and waving palm branches to welcome the Messiah. It's a joyful time for worshippers. The pianist joyfully plays marching music as hearts are rejoicing and praising God. All are remembering Jesus' triumphal entry, seeing him on a gentle donkey colt as he is riding into Jerusalem. It's a week whose events forever affect all mankind.

Next comes Holy Week as Summerton UMC and the three churches come together for a "Trailblazing Love Revival" like none they have experienced before. On Monday they heard a beautiful message from the Rev. Jennifer Price of Summerton UMC, leading all closer and closer to the cross. She shared God's Scripture in a compassionate and gentle way, touching hearts deeply. On Tuesday they experience Jesus's journey to the cross through music from the Fiddling Fludds of Darlington. A young man from the bluegrass group shared his testimony about how his love for music introduced him to God and how he received the gift of salvation. Many tear-stained faces reflect the presence of God through this young man's words.

On Wednesday night they move step by step to the cross through the powerful and dramatic message from Rev. Leo Roy. Roy shares a musical CD, and the sanctuary is extremely quiet as the words of the song fill the air and settle in attendees' hearts, overflowing with the love of Jesus.

Maundy Thursday worship is at Jordan UMC. The

sister church in Summerton is worshipping in their own sanctuary. At Jordan UMC, it's a dark time at this worship gathering. The foreshadowing of Jesus's death clouds all joy tonight, unlike the beginning of the journey. As the message from Roy proclaims, "It's Starting to Get Dark." Roy speaks of the agony and darkness covering Jesus in the garden as he struggled to fulfill the mission God gave him. He prayed for himself, his disciples and for all of us. The candle lights of Tenebrae are being extinguished, one by one, and darkness is now all around us. The light is leaving the world, and attendees leave with heavy hearts.

Then it's happening—Sunday morning is here! We walk in the darkness of a cold morning worship outdoors. The Jordan UMC steeple and the cross, draped in white, welcome us. All feel different this morning, standing side by side listening to the good news: "He is risen. He is risen, indeed!"

As Roy's good news is shouted in the cool country air, the sun starts to light the skies. Birds are chirping and singing and even dogs are barking in the distance. The light is returning. Even the earth is shouting out the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

We can now see his light shining forth, erasing the darkness that once shrouded us in grief. The Messiah has come and he is risen. We are Easter people, and we returning home and later going to our individual churches to worship with other Easter people.

Yes, he is risen. He is risen indeed!

## Bethel hosts special Holy Week in Chester

CHESTER—Bethel United Methodist Church served as the host church this year for the Chester Community Holy Week Services.

A tradition that began in Chester in 1992, the entire community comes together each year to worship from Monday until Friday each day at noon. More than 15 churches organize to prepare the worship and cook the meals that follow each service.

The worship service is held from 12-12:30 p.m., then worshippers are served lunch from 12:30-1 p.m. The entire experience is designed for those who work and can take an hour lunch break.

As the host church this year, Bethel UMC planned the music for the week and organized the meals. The Chester Ministerial Association planned the worship services around the Beatitudes from the Gospel of Mark. Each day's worship was planned around a different Beatitude. The theme for the week was "The Culture of the Kingdom."

Between 100-150 worshippers attended each day.

The Chester Ministerial Association set a goal of raising \$15,000 this year to create a benevolence fund to help those who find themselves in need. Each day's offering

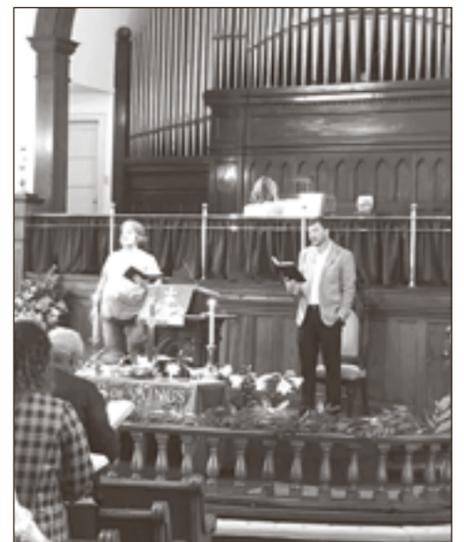


More than 15 churches organize to prepare the worship and cook the meals that follow each service.

went toward this goal of sharing God's love through meeting needs in the community.

On Tuesday of Holy Week, a blood drive was sponsored by Bethel UMC and Chester ARP Church for those who wished to participate. Participating churches during the week were Bethel UMC as host, Ember Church, Chester First Baptist, St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Lowrys Baptist, Calvary Baptist, Wilksburg Baptist, Armenia

Methodist, Purity Presbyterian, Orr's Baptist, Wesley Memorial UMC, Big Calvary Baptist, Chester ARP Church, Faith and Love Christian Center, Trinity Presbyterian, West Chester Baptist, Saluda Street Church of God, New Mount Olivet AME Zion, New Hope Methodist, Capers Chapel Methodist, Woodward Baptist, First Church of the Nazarene, Westside Baptist, Metropolitan AME Zion, St. Mark's Episcopal, Blackstock



The entire experience is designed around those who work and take an hour lunch break.

Baptist and Pleasant Grove Presbyterian Church.

Many remarked that this was truly an amazing week of many denominations worshipping together.

The Rev. Shannon Higgins is pastor of Bethel UMC.



## Conference Historical Society

by Dr. Roger M. Gramling

### The Southern Methodist Church

While the 1939 union of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the Methodist Protestant Church resulted in the formation of the largest Protestant denomination in the United States at the time, there were those in the uniting churches who were not happy with the reunion.

Some African-American members, disillusioned with the racism evident in the establishment of the Central Jurisdiction, left in protest to join other African-American denominations.

There were some members who would withdraw in response to what they perceived as “liberalism” or “modernism” or “socialism” in the united church and in some of its leaders. There were also White members who objected to the presence of African-American members in the newly formed Methodist Church.

As early as 1934, some White members in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, opposed to what they characterized as “modernistic tendencies” in the proposed new church and, fearing the influence of the “northern church,” organized the “Layman’s Organization for the Preservation of the Southern Methodist Church.”

On Jan. 14, 1940, 400 Methodists representing mainly small town and rural congregations met in Columbia, South Carolina, to plan for the continuation of “Southern Methodism.” The result was the formation of the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which held its first session in Turbeville, South Carolina on June 7, 1940, with 700 persons attending.

The ensuing legal issues centered on the ownership and control of church property and the right to the use of the name. Lawsuits were entered. The Pine Grove Church in Turbeville became a test case. Finally, on March 12, 1945, a ruling was issued in federal court by Judge George Bell Timmerman Sr., which held that bishops of the Methodist Church in whose names the suit had been brought were legally the representatives of the newly formed Methodist Church, which controlled church properties and which maintained legal title to the former name.

Having lost court battles, withdrawing congregations and members organized themselves into the Southern Methodist Church. According to the “Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches,” the church “is composed of congregations desirous of continuing in true Biblical Methodism and preserving the fundamental doctrines and beliefs of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.”

This church has had its strongest following in South Carolina and Mississippi. Its headquarters was established in Orangeburg, South Carolina, where it also established a small college, Southern Methodist College, characterized as a four-year Bible college with a Christian liberal arts and ministerial program. Its publishing arm is called Foundry Press.

According to the Yearbook, in 2006 the Southern Methodist Church claimed 6,000 members in 100 local churches. Its local churches are organized into four annual conferences: the Alabama-Florida-Georgia Conference, comprising churches in those states; the South-Western Conference, comprising churches in Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas; the Mid-South Conference, comprising churches in Tennessee and Mississippi; and the Eastern Conference, comprising churches in North Carolina, South Carolina and Maryland.

Forty-four churches are located in South Carolina, the largest number in any state where the Southern Methodist Church is present.

The Rev. Walter R. Pigott, a native of Mississippi, currently serves as president of the church and its General Conference.

*Gramling serves as secretary-treasurer of the Conference Historical Society and is president of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society.*



## From the Archives

by Dr. Phillip Stone

### General Conference 60 years ago

Sixty years ago this month, South Carolina Methodists were paying close attention to the events surrounding General Conference. Sometimes the past does repeat itself! News of the 1964 General Conference dominated the pages of the *Advocate* in May 1964.

The 1964 General Conference met in Pittsburgh, with some 850 delegates in attendance. South Carolina was represented by two delegations, as the Black and White conferences had not yet merged. Fourteen delegates represented the 1785 conference and four represented the 1866 Conference. Bishop Paul Hardin Jr. was there, as were many spouses of the almost all-male delegations. (The 1866 Conference had elected one woman, Beulah Baxley, as a lay delegate.) The *Advocate* noted several other visitors from South Carolina to the conference. The Columbia College Choir, on its spring tour in April and May 1964, sang at one of the morning devotional services as well as at an afternoon preaching service. (The choir sang at a number of Methodist churches on the way to and back from Pittsburgh.)

Issues of unity and division faced the General Conference. The system of segregated annual and jurisdictional conferences was receiving great scrutiny and criticism. Two South Carolina churches submitted petitions to retain the system that had been created in 1939. However, the Methodist Church was in the final stages of negotiating a merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and that church wanted no part of a church that still practiced segregation. After a lengthy debate, the General Conference took the first steps toward dismantling the Central Jurisdiction. It effectively made the moves voluntary, but if all of the annual conferences in the Central Jurisdiction had not moved into the geographic jurisdictions by 1968, it

would take steps to make it mandatory.

The delegates also passed a strong statement against segregation, noting “The Methodist Church is part of the church universal, therefore, all persons without regard to race, color, national origin, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, and be admitted to membership anywhere in this connection.”

Changes in the world also were apparent in Pittsburgh. Bishop Hardin wrote in his column about the Council of Bishops meetings where the central conference and autonomous church bishops reported on the unrest in other parts of the world. The 1960s were seeing many countries in developing parts of the world achieve independence. At the same time, the Methodist Church was beginning to reckon with what it meant to be a worldwide church. At the meeting, the General Conference also approved a new hymnal and a new Book of Worship and increased its world service funding.

A few amusing events made the news. The civic auditorium had a roof that could be rolled open. At one of the evening worship services, the organizers arranged for the roof of the auditorium to roll open during the singing of “How Great Thou Art,” which brought a great reaction from the audience. However, this caused something of an up-draft, making the curtains whip on the stage and the cross begin to sway.

Another note that no doubt caused amusement was that the week after the General Conference, a circus was scheduled to move into the civic arena. The jokes probably wrote themselves.

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

**Leave A Legacy To Change Lives**

The South Carolina United Methodist Foundation  
P. O. Box 5087, Columbia, SC 29250-5087  
[scumf@bellsouth.net](mailto:scumf@bellsouth.net)

Thank your children’s ministry staff  
in the June Advocate

Does your children’s minister go above and beyond what is expected when it comes to cultivating kids in your church? Are you getting ready to kick off your first vacation Bible school in awhile? Or do you just want to give a big “thank you” to the person responsible for tending the youngest of your congregation’s flock?

“We know how important children’s ministry staff and volunteers are to the growth of any church,” said *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie. “This is a great way to express support and show your children’s ministers their work is valued—and how much they mean to you.”

Three sizes are available for the children’s ministry appreciation ad. All are the same width (five inches) but the height varies:

**Small: One inch tall, \$38**  
**Medium: Two inches tall, \$76**  
**Large: Four inches tall, \$152**

To place a children’s ministry appreciation ad in the June edition, email text to [atrussell@umcsc.org](mailto:atrussell@umcsc.org) or send to Advocate, 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203. **Deadline is May 6.**

Churches will be billed for the ads unless otherwise noted. Questions? Call Allison Trussell at 803-726-6743.



### Clyburn, Becerra do roundtable discussion at Columbia College

Columbia College hosted South Carolina Congressman James Clyburn and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra for a roundtable discussion as part of their visit to Columbia March 26. Becerra and Clyburn gathered along with panelists Director of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control Dr. Edward Simmer, Chairman of South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control Seema Shrivastava-Patel, Prisma Health OB/GYN Dr. Nita Thapa, Director of Midlands Healthy Start Kimberly Alston, South Carolina mother and Healthy Start Participant Natifha Cooper and CEO/Director of Pee Dee Healthy Start Madie Robinson. They discussed reproductive rights, family health care accessibility and improving maternal and child health outcomes in rural America.



## Resource Center

by Betty Stalnaker

### New for 2024: Vacation Bible School Kits

New this year are a few vacation Bible school kits:

#### Breaker Rock Beach: Kids Starter Kit (K992VB)

Everything your age-group leaders need for "Breaker Rock Beach VBS" for Grades 1-2, Grades 3-4 and Grades 5-6 Bible teaching plus five rotation station leader guides all in one kit box.

The starter kit packs the teaching essentials for all five rotations and three age groups into one box. Simply deliver each bag to your age-group or rotation station leaders. Order extra leader guides for additional leader guides as needed and activity books for each child.

At Breaker Rock Beach VBS, kids will be challenged as they discover that God's truth never changes, realize everyone needs Jesus and learn to speak the truth in love. Adventure awaits each day as kids explore tide pools, spot orcas, fly kites and watch the mighty waves crash up against the immovable Breaker Rock. Age: eE

#### Camp Firelight Ultimate Starter Kit (K990VB) Author: Cokesbury

Invite kids to put their trust in God. During vacation Bible school, join first-time camp counselor Sam and Lumen, "Lu," the lightning bug puppet, for a summer adventure at Camp Firelight. Campers accompany Counselor Sam and Lu during each assembly session and learn to face their fears while trusting in God. Each day, campers see Counselor Sam face new challenges, from as simple as leading campers on a hike to as intimidating as meeting a new and wise nature expert. With the help of Lu and the Camp Counselor Guidebook, Counselor Sam and the campers explore timeless Bible stories showing how Old and New Testament campers trusted God, faced their fears and went on to do great things in God's name. As campers experience the stories through music, drama and storytelling, games, arts and crafts, science and even snacks, they learn ways to connect with and trust God. And best of all, they understand they can connect with God at VBS, church, home and every area of their lives. This unique program from Cokesbury Kids VBS invites children on an exciting journey where they learn to trust God no matter what situation life brings, know God is always with them and feel confident in sharing the good news of God's love through Jesus Christ. Camp Callout (Theme Verse): "Whenever I'm afraid, I put my trust in you" (Psalm 56:3). Age: PeE.

#### Celebrate the Savior! Starter Kit (K991VB) Author: Concordia

We're having a party—a party to celebrate the savior—and you're invited! "Celebrate the Savior: Jesus Gives Us Joy" is the theme of this VBS program. This traditional VBS format features fun crafts, engaging activities and catchy music to share God's love with children at church in a fun-filled week. Of all the blessings God gives, his son Jesus is the biggest reason to celebrate. Starting with Jesus's birth and concluding with his resurrection, children will learn about Jesus's unending love and forgiveness. Age: PeE.

The South Carolina Conference UMC 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 <https://www.umcsc.org/resourcecenter>.



Photos courtesy of Freddie Vaughn

#### Ms. Gillie's Kids Easter Project

Interfaith ministries are housed in the bottom floor of the education building at St. Mark UMC, North Columbia. They oversee affordable day care in caregiver homes throughout the state. St. Mark "adopted" one of the caregivers, Ms. Gillie. She needs help with extra activities, so church members sponsor it. For Easter, thanks to a generous congregation, St. Mark was able to send many and various educational books to Ms. Gillie and her six daycare kids for Easter (at left). A bubble blowing machine, a basket of plush bunnies and treat bags were included. Also for Easter, St. Mark hosted "Easter in the Prayer Garden." During the Sunday school hour, the children were told the story of the resurrection through the metamorphosis of the butterfly (at right). It started with the chrysalis that morphed into the cocoon and then came the butterfly. A magic hand puppet was used. To carry out the theme, the children made butterflies and worked on a butterfly puzzle.

## Global Briefs

#### Ministry Brands named ministry partner

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The General Council on Finance and Administration has named Ministry Brands, a technology company, as a United Methodist ministry partner. Ministry Brands provides technology and services such as help with online streaming, tailored for religious organizations.

#### Agency shares 2023 highlights

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—United Methodist Communications has released its 2023 Annual Report, which highlights the agency's activities and initiatives supporting The United Methodist Church worldwide. "In 2023, we saw continued change that presented opportunities to celebrate the impact of our ministry," said top executive Dan Krause. He noted the agency's work countering disinformation, sharing messaging that reinforces and celebrates United Methodists' core identity and equipping and training church leaders.

#### Fossil fuels divestment debate returns

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—Should The United Methodist Church divest from fossil fuel companies or hold onto the stocks and pressure the companies to do more to curb global warming? It's a debate that engaged the 2016 General Conference. The different sides will be at it again at the upcoming General Conference in Charlotte.

#### Revised Social Principles and creation care

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The Revised Social Principles coming before General Conference voters this month include increased attention to creation care. "In the new document we are setting ourselves more within the community of all creation to show our interdependence with the earth," said John Hill, the interim top executive of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society.

#### Act of repentance sought for Hawaii's conquest

PEARL CITY, Hawaii—The California-Pacific Conference has submitted legislation to General Conference seeking a formal apology to native Hawaiians for the church's role in the illegal overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1893. The conference shared a video on the legacy of Queen Lili'uokalani and the history that led to this legislation.

#### Church restores hope, mobility to disabled

FIZI, Congo—Shouts of joy rang out across eastern Congo as representatives of The United Methodist Church distributed mobility aids to people living with disabilities. More than 120 people received wheelchairs, canes, crutches and tricycles that will enable them to get around more easily and participate more fully in the life of the church.

#### Delegate handbook, legislation available

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The new, valid petitions, reports and the updated delegate handbook information for General Conference have been published as a 2024 supplement to the Advance Daily Christian Advocate. The supplement and handbook are now available in PDF form in English, French, Portuguese and Kiswahili.

#### United Methodists urged to celebrate 50 days of Easter

WASHINGTON—Council of Bishops President Thomas J. Bickerton encourages United Methodists to join in celebrating the resurrected Christ for the full 50 days of Easter. Easter faith "challenges us to believe that resurrection and new life in Christ is always available and always present for those who believe," Bickerton writes.

#### Judge orders disputed church property returned

NAPERVILLE, Ill.—The Northern Illinois Conference has resumed possession of Naperville Korean United Methodist Church's property after a judge's ruling, the conference announced. Church leaders said the March 21 temporary injunction is a meaningful step in moving forward from a conflict between the conference and a breakaway group that had withdrawn from the disaffiliation process required by the *Book of Discipline* and barred the remaining congregation from entering the church building.

#### Pre-General Conference video resources

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—As The United Methodist Church approaches General Conference, UM News is providing video resources to help people better understand how the legislative assembly works and what legislation is under consideration. The first three videos are now posted with more to come over the next few weeks.

#### Christian Expedition named ministry partner

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The General Council on Finance and Administration has named Christian Expedition, a travel company, as a United Methodist ministry partner. Christian Expedition provides group tours that aim to bring the Bible to life at historic Christian sites worldwide. Educational Opportunities Tours, another travel agency, also continues to be a ministry partner.

#### Working toward a more equitable ID

WASHINGTON—Foundry United Methodist Church has a ministry that helps thousands of D.C. residents a year obtain personal identification documents. Ministry leaders are among those who see digital ID as a more equitable ID for unhoused people, disaster survivors and others who lost their documents for whatever reason.

#### Native Americans share art, faith at General Conference

NEW YORK—Participants at the upcoming General Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, will receive beaded pins crafted by Native American United Methodists. Lay pastor Diana LaRocque made more than 1,000 of the pins for the 2020 legislative assembly, which was delayed until this year. LaRocque died in 2020, but her pins and 5,000 others produced elsewhere remain and will be circulated with help from United Women in Faith.

#### Bishop faced death—and wrote about it

KELLER, Va.—Retired Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker, a learned and independent-minded presence in The United Methodist Church, died March 28 at home in Virginia, after being in hospice care. He was 75. Whitaker led the Florida Conference from 2001 to 2012. Well into retirement and facing terminal illness, he wrote an essay titled "Learning to Die," and it has found many readers.

—Courtesy of the United Methodist News Service

**Rev. Timothy Warren  
Burleson**

LITTLE RIVER—The Rev. Timothy Warren Burleson, a local pastor of the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church currently serving the North Circuit Charge, died March 21, 2024.



Burleson

Prior to his 2023 appointment in North, Rev. Burleson served the West Kershaw, Nichols and Hopewell charges. In addition to his appointments, he served as chaplain for Motor Racing Outreach, AMA Pro Racing and WERA.

A memorial service was held April 13 at Little River UMC.

Rev. Burleson is survived by his wife, Caroline, as well as two sons and a daughter.

**JoAnn Roberts Childers**

KINGSPORT, Tenn.—JoAnn Roberts Childers, mother of the Rev. Clayton Childers, died March 26, 2024. Rev. Childers is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held April 2 at Memphis Funeral Home, Memphis, Tennessee, with burial in Memphis Memory Gardens.

Mrs. Childers is survived by her three sons and daughter.

**Rev. Annette Coker Edwards**

ORANGE CITY, Fla.—The Rev. Annette Coker Edwards, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died March 9, 2024.

Prior to her



Edwards

**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.

retirement in 2001, Rev. Edwards served the McClellanville, Ocean Grove and Bethel Associate charges. She also served Ashley Terrace as chaplain.

A memorial service will be held July 27 at Cokesbury UMC, North Charleston.

Rev. Edwards is survived by her three sons.

**Darlene Cockrell Hucks**

GALIVANTS FERRY—Darlene Cockrell Hucks, widow of the Rev. F. Levon Hucks, died March 13, 2024.

Graveside services were held March 15 at Green Pastures Family Cemetery.

Mrs. Hucks is survived by her two sons

and two daughters.

**Ellie Love Lyell**

SUMMERVILLE—Ellie Love Lyell, granddaughter of the Rev. Jeremy Howell, died March 31, 2024. Rev. Howell is the pastor of St. Paul United Methodist Church, Summerville.

All services were private.

Miss Lyell is survived by her parents, TJ and Katie Lyell, and grandparents.

**Ellen Christine Plemmons  
Stephens**

SPARTANBURG—Ellen Christine Plemmons Stephens, widow of the Rev. Herbert Stephens, died March 26, 2024.

Graveside services were held April 1 in Sunset Memorial Park.

Memorials may be made to St. Luke United Methodist Church, 105 McKay Ave., Spartanburg, SC 29302.

Mrs. Stephens is survived by her son and daughter.

**Quilt ministry branches out**

The quilting ministry at Woodland United Methodist Church, Rock Hill, branched out to do a new community project this year: helping Levine Children's Hospital.

The Rock Hill community is blessed to have Levine Children's Hospital. This award-winning hospital is the largest children's hospital between Atlanta and Washington, D.C.

They specialize in neonatology, cancer, cardiology, gastroenterology, nephrology, orthopedics, pulmonology and urology.

Quilters enjoyed making superhero and princess pillowcases, baby quilts and something new to them, "taggies." Taggies are miniature baby blankets with texture ribbons.

The items were delivered on Feb. 21 along with their hopes and prayers for these children and their families.

The quilters also made Easter wreaths for Woodland homebound members with a goal to brighten their day and help them feel included in the celebration of the holy season.



**A new addition**

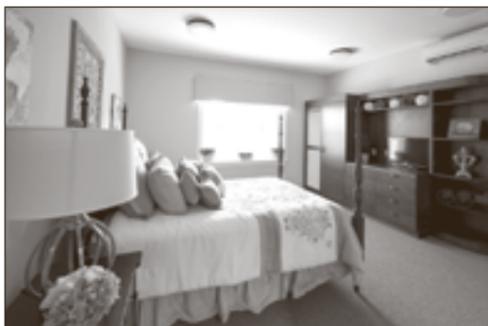
Members of the Manning United Methodist Church choir, Manning, show off the new piano added to their practice room.

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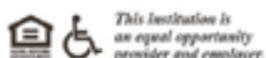
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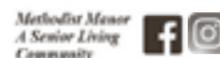
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## April

UWF Columbia Bethlehem Community Center Special Emphasis Month

April 19—Alienated grandparents prayer group (meets first Thursday monthly), Knightsville UMC, Summerville, 7-8:30 p.m. 843-875-2117 or <https://www.knightsvilleumc.org>

April 19-21—UWF SEJ Quadrennial Meeting, Chattanooga, Tennessee

April 21—Festival of God's Creation

April 21—"200 Years of Grace" celebration, Trinity UMC, York, 10:30 a.m. Lunch to follow.

April 21—40th anniversary celebration, I. DeQuincey Newman UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m.

April 22—Earth Day

April 23-May 3—General Conference, Charlotte Convention Center, Charlotte, North Carolina

April 25—World Malaria Day

April 25—"Helping from the Sidelines" Session 1, facilitated by Dr. Gerard Love, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head Island, 7 p.m. [standrewbythesea@gmail.com](mailto:standrewbythesea@gmail.com)

## May

Asian Pacific Heritage Month  
Christian Home Month

May 2—National Day of Prayer

May 2—"Helping from the Sidelines" Session 2, facilitated by Dr. Gerard Love, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head Island, 7 p.m. [standrewbythesea@gmail.com](mailto:standrewbythesea@gmail.com)

May 3—Parents Night Out, Knightsville UMC, Summerville, 6-9 p.m. 843-875-



Photo courtesy of Annie Crocker

### The hunt is on!

The annual Easter Egg Hunt at Beaumont UMC, Spartanburg, was held on Saturday, March 31, beginning at 2 p.m. Bible lessons were taught, then all got a snack and were off to find hundreds of eggs. Members of Beaumont hosted this community wide event.

2117 or <https://www.knightsvilleumc.org>

mation: Facebook @CBCCServes.

May 12—Ascension Sunday

May 12—Mother's Day

May 12—Festival of the Christian Home

May 13—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m. <https://www.umcsc.org/event/district-connectional-ministries-meeting/2024-05-13/>

May 16—"Helping from the Sidelines" Session 4, Dr. Gerard Love, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head Island, 7 p.m. [standrewbythesea@gmail.com](mailto:standrewbythesea@gmail.com)

May 18—Armed Forces Day

May 18—"Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership," Bishop's Day in the

May 4—Spartanburg Methodist College commencement ceremony, Spartanburg High School Arena, 9 a.m.

May 5—Cinco de Mayo

May 5-9—May Salkehatchie, St. Mark UMC River Street campus, Greenwood. [salkehatchie@umcsc.org](mailto:salkehatchie@umcsc.org)

May 9—Ascension Day

May 9—"Helping from the Sidelines" Session 3, Dr. Gerard Love, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head Island, 7 p.m. [standrewbythesea@gmail.com](mailto:standrewbythesea@gmail.com)

May 11—Mommies Day at the Movies, Columbia Bethlehem Community Center, Columbia, 12-4 p.m. For more infor-

Waterboro District, Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

May 18—UWF Come Together Be Together hosted by Florence District, virtual, 9:30 a.m.

May 18—ERT Disaster Response Training, North UMC, North, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ert-registration/>

May 19—Pentecost

May 19—Heritage Sunday

May 20-24—Carolinas Black Clergy Leadership Retreat, Myrtle Beach. <https://www.umcsc.org/cbcretreat/>

May 24—Aldersgate Day

May 26—Trinity Sunday

May 26—Peace with Justice Sunday

May 27—Memorial Day (United Methodist Center closed)

May 28—Dementia 101 Workshop, Cokesbury UMC, North Charleston. Register: <https://tinyurl.com/yts3dec8>

## June

June 1—Kidney Awareness Health Fair and Celebration hosted by Stephanie Ponds Henry, The Price House, Camden, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

June 9-12—Annual Conference, Greenville Convention Center, Greenville

June 11—S.C. Reconciling breakfast, Fourth Presbyterian Church, Greenville, 7:45 a.m. <http://scrmn.org>

June 11—Advocate Press Book Signing/Meet the Author, Annual Conference Room 202B, Greenville, drop-in style from noon-2 p.m.

## ERT training set for May 18 in North

The South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission Early Response Team will hold a disaster response training this month for anyone seeking to help in the aftermath of a disaster.

On Saturday, May 18, there will be an ERT basic class and a renewal class at North United Methodist Church, located at 8301 Salley Road in North.

The basic class costs \$40 and goes from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Cost includes a manual, shirt, cap and badge. The renewal is \$20 and goes from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

They will also have a chainsaw training (\$20) from 9-3, which will qualify for a badge renewal.

To sign up, go to <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration>.

Everyone also needs to do a background check (which is free) through United Methodist Committee on Relief at <https://app.verifiedvolunteers.com/en/Candidates/Account/Register>. If asked for a code then put in 9x2r4eh. You may or may not be asked for it.

This background check is mandatory and without it you will not get a badge or be certified. If you have difficulty doing this check, come an hour early for assistance.

For more information, contact Billy Robinson at [brpraisejesus@aol.com](mailto:brpraisejesus@aol.com) or 803-539-8429.



### A beautiful Easter

Union Methodist Church, Cope, celebrated Easter worship with everyone, including children, helping in the flowering of the cross.

Photo courtesy of Carole Harrison



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Classified ads are \$19 per inch tall. Web site ads are also available ([www.advocatesc.org](http://www.advocatesc.org)).

Deadlines are the 10th of the month for the following month's paper.

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# On common connections and the way to God

by the Rev. Arthur Holt

## May 5 The Way, the Truth, the Life

**Lesson Scripture:** John 14:1-14

**Key Verse:** John 14:6 “Jesus answered, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

“Show me the way” sang the rock group Styx as they searched for a way to keep faith during troubled times. Jesus got this same response when he told the 12 apostles that he was going to return to the Father. “Show us the way; show us the Father,” begged Thomas and Philip. Jesus gave his famous answer that we hear at most funerals, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

Even though we think of this as Jesus talking about the way to heaven, what he is really talking about was the way to know the Father. One of my pastors used a paraphrase of this verse that read, “No one comes to know God as Father except through the Son.” This is a reminder that there are many different understandings of God in our world (and in the Bible) varying from a harsh judge, a distant deity and a loving parent. It is clear here that Jesus knew God as the deeply loving parent and that he desired for his disciples to know God through his eyes.

We in the South have a crude but accurate way of saying that a child looks just like a parent: “That child is the spitting image of his father!” Over the years the reflection in my mirror has slowly morphed to look more like my daddy than it does me. I also have inherited his ability to carry on a conversation with a fence post! If people want to know what my daddy was like, I’m the place to start.

If I really want to know what God is like, my starting point and my ending point is Jesus. He is the “spitting image” of the Father.

## May 12 Our Mission

**Lesson Scripture:** Matthew 28:16-20

**Key Verses:** Matthew 28:19-20 “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

One word in this passage really stands out: “Go!”

Jesus was about to go back to the Father, and so he tells his friends to go make disciples. Previous restrictions are now lifted—

now they are to go to all the nations and not just to the lost sheep of Israel.

There is something about that word “go” that really takes me out of my comfort zone! Go where? Say what? Many feel guilty because they are scared of talking to others about faith. But maybe there is truth to the old adage, “Preach the gospel! Use words when absolutely necessary.” Perhaps what Jesus is saying is that as we go through our daily lives, be thinking of opportunities that give us the chance to show love to others.

A group of knitters at our church made hats, scarves and blankets for homeless people. Salkhatchie workers witness for Christ while using hammers, nails and paint. Sports teams sponsored by churches have brought many people into the community of faith, and a few of those recruits have become pastors. Music is a way that you can proclaim the faith, and many times it is more inspirational than my sermons. And why is it that church members always beat us pastors to the home where there has been a death, and they show up with pies, cakes and hugs?

One of our son’s soccer coaches often repeated this: “It takes no talent to beat the other players to the ball.” He knew that if they would win the race to the ball, they would find many opportunities to score.

Like that coach, Jesus calls us to go—to show up when the opportunities arise. That is where we will find our chance to make disciples.

## May 19 Pentecost Reimagined

**Lesson Scripture:** Acts 11:1-18

**Key Verse:** Acts 11:17 “If God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then who am I? Could I stand in God’s way?”

Paul is the apostle that we usually associate with the church’s mission to the Gentiles. But the fact is that the inclusion of Gentiles into what had been exclusively a Jewish movement was such a breach of Hebrew law that it would have been almost impossible without the involvement of the chief Apostle Peter, and even he got “called on the carpet” by the leaders of the church who accused him, “You went into the home of the uncircumcised and ate with them!”

Peter readily admitted he was guilty of that charge. In fact, he had even told the Gentiles that it was against Hebrew law for him to be in their home. Saying that God had told him in a vision to go there wouldn’t have been an acceptable defense by itself, but when Peter told them that Pentecost Day had been repeated, it was the

perfect defense.

As he said, “If God gave them the same gift [God] gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then who am I? Could I stand in God’s way?”

Peter was accustomed to seeing Jesus find ways around restrictive interpretations of the law so that outsiders could be included, but even he was surprised by the fact that these unclean, uncircumcised, sinful people were deemed acceptable by God just as they were as evidenced by the gift of the Spirit to them. God must have seen the Gentiles as being on equal footing with the Hebrews when it came to being offered salvation. The church “calmed down” and agreed with Peter, and a new day dawned for the church.

I wonder who who might think is unacceptable to God who have acknowledged Jesus as their savior and then been given the Holy Spirit just as we have?

## May 26 Making Connections

**Lesson Scripture:** Acts 17:16-34

**Key Verse:** Acts 17:23 “What you worship as unknown, I now proclaim to you.”

Athens in Paul’s time sounds like an interesting place! In many ways, it sounds like it was a liberal arts academic setting where new ideas were welcomed and discussed openly every day. The multitude of religions indicated by the huge number of idols meant that there had to be a high degree of religious tolerance in Athens, and apparently the people of Hebrew faith were allowed to have a synagogue there. This synagogue was the place for Paul to start talking with his spiritual kinfolk about Christ.

But he also ventured into the mar-

ketplace to interact with the Greek philosophers, and some of these learned men considered Paul to be an amateur who was not up to the challenge of talking with them. But he interested enough of these philosophers that they took him to a meeting of the Areopagus where he was allowed to talk about Jesus.

Writer Luke knew Paul well enough to know that the “flood of idols” in Athens deeply offended Paul, and so it was good that Paul had a few days to cool off before making his presentation. In fact, he even decided to try to make a connection with the philosophers by talking about one of those idols—one that represented an unknown deity.

“It is that unknown God that I want to talk with you about,” said Paul.

In that brief speech, Paul told them that God is the creator of heaven and earth, that God doesn’t live in temples or idols but that we live in God, that all humans have a common ancestor, that God is near to all of us and hopes all will seek God, and that Jesus is the Christ whom God raised from death.

Finding a common connection with one’s audience can prove very helpful.

*Holt, a retired elder, lives in Boiling Springs. He is the author of two books from the Advocate Press, “What I Have Come to Believe” and “People of My Journey,” found at <https://www.advocatesc.org/books>.*

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# LEE ROAD: Inspired by a movement in the N.C. conference

From Page 1

At the end of this process, the church council voted to unanimously support the consensus results of the people in November.

Not only did the church undergo its own unique process to have the necessary discussions, it also designed its own interpretation of what it means to be a "lighthouse congregation" as well as designed its own logo. Church member and visual artist Gene Turner placed Jesus with outstretched welcoming arms in the lantern room with light rays emanating from his person.

The lighthouse congregation movement started in the North Carolina Conference as a way to welcome United Methodists who felt lost after their church voted to disaffiliate and guide them to churches remaining with

the UMC. However, Godfrey cast a wider vision of the lighthouse as being a "universal welcome" to all persons, especially those who have been treated as outcasts.

An invitation postcard distributed by church members embraced "welcoming everyone with full inclusion into the life and mission of our church, regardless of race, age, nationality, sexual orientation, physical ability or any other distinction."

The church website boldly proclaims the message as the core beliefs of the Lee Road UMC as a "lighthouse congregation," including being proudly and intentionally United Methodist; known for open hearts, open minds and open doors; a beacon of love to all people, who deny every semblance of discrimination; reflective of God's love in the heart of their United Methodist community;

a supportive haven of peace and comfort for disaffiliated United Methodists to experience hope and healing; and a passionate and welcoming family.

As they said, "Our light shines because our primary identity is as children of God; we acknowledge that all people are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God; we welcome everyone into full inclusion in the life of our church; and we are servants to our community, the world and the downtrodden."

The lighthouse was ordered by the Board of Trustees from a proprietor in Pennsylvania. It is an eight-foot-tall poly-resin structure with a custom solar beacon. Men of the church prepared the site by pouring a concrete pad and placing decorative stone to make it look like a jetty. Grasses and bushes

were planted as well. Unity Team Chairperson Sandy Davis oversaw the project.

The dedication evening began with pizza and a concert by The Bridge Collective, Lee Road's contemporary worship band. Next, people were invited to move outdoors with congregational candles for a brief program that included prayer, poetry, Scripture readings (John 8:12 "I am the Light of the World") and, finally, a countdown by those assembled with an unveiling of the structure by Mike Lewis, Trustees chair.

As Joyce McKenzie posted on Facebook, "It was wonderful. Thanks to the dedicated hearts and hands."

Others have commented on the "beautiful night," the "familiar and new faces" who attended the event and the labor performed by "hard-working, Jesus-loving men."

# MOUNT ZION: 'A witness to the forgiveness we have in Christ'

From Page 1

Raising more than \$24,000 signified not only the generosity of the community but God's extravagant love, they said.

"As a family who has experienced the hardship of medical debt, we could only imagine what a godsend this would have been for us. We know this debt relief will make monumental changes in many families' lives."

In addition to donations from members, restaurants in their community gave portions of their profits to the campaign for the six weeks of Lent. This provided the opportunity to meet each week for a meal and Bible study focused on forgiveness as well, they said.

"We can only imagine the joy, relief and gratitude that recipients will experience as they receive the notification that they no longer have to worry about how they will pay these debts. We also hope that they will know

the generosity that was given in love was driven by the love that Christ has for us."

Each person whose debts are forgiven will receive a letter from RIP Medical Debt telling them Mount Zion UMC raised the money used to purchase their debt. The letter will include information about the church, providing an opportunity for further connection.

Harris said he wondered at times whether Mount Zion would be able to accomplish the goal. Then an unexpected generosity would occur, from the local restaurant contributions to checks received in the mail from strangers.

"At times, we would go a week or two without receiving anything toward the campaign. But then, each time, there would be a sign of hope, reminding me to keep faith that God would provide. For instance, after one news story, a complete stranger sent the church a check for \$1,000—enough to purchase \$100,000 in medical debt," Harris said.

"Each of these moments was like a wink from God, letting us know that we were doing what God wanted us to do."

Harris said the campaign also reminded him of the value of the United Methodist connection. Several retired UMC pastors made very generous contributions, and two small UMCs, Bethel and Central, collected a special offering big enough to forgive more than \$50,000 in medical bills. The district's Board of Congregational Development also contributed a \$2,000 grant toward the cause.

As Harris said, "At a time when so many churches have raised significant sums of money in order to leave this denomination, it has been so powerful to see disciples from Mount Zion and other United Methodist groups raising money for a different purpose: to not only meet a need, but to witness to the forgiveness we have received in Christ."



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