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February 2024

2023 apportionments close at 88.8%

By Jessica Brodie

The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church closed its books for 2023 with 88.8 percent of apportionments paid—only a slight dip from last year’s

performance at 89.2 percent.

That translates to \$14.6 million of the \$16.4 million conference budget paid by local churches in the UMCSC.

This amount includes apportionment funds paid by the

113 churches who separated from the UMC in June.

“I greatly appreciate the confidence our churches have

See “2023 Apportionments,” Page 11

His hands and feet

ERT helps after severe storms, tornadoes impact region



ERT volunteer Chuck Marshall surveys damage to a home before a crew steps in to help.

Photo by Billy Robinson

By Billy Robinson

A swath of severe storms and tornados Jan. 9 prompted much-needed help from South Carolina’s United Methodist Volunteers in Mission Early Response Team.

The weather left downed trees, damaged homes and

other destruction in various parts of the state.

On the evening of Jan. 9, the Rev. Mike Evans led a combination team of ERT and Edgefield volunteer firefighters to cut a tree away and tarp the roof of a home in Edgefield.

See “ERT,” Page 14

SEJ to consider 13 to 10 reduction in episcopal areas

South Carolina not affected

By Dan O’Mara

The Committee on the Episcopacy of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church is recommending a reduction in the number of episcopal areas within the jurisdiction to 10 from the current 13.

This is a significant change in the SEJ’s organization and leadership structure.

The committee also is recommending that no episcopal elections be held during this year’s SEJ Conference.

Delegates to the 2024 SEJ Conference, who are scheduled to meet July 10-12 in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, must approve both recommendations before they can go into effect.

The SEJ Committee on the Episcopacy and the SEJ College of Bishops—which also has endorsed the recommendations—met Jan. 3-4 in Charleston. They discussed and acted on a report on episcopal leadership and episcopal area alignment, receiving input from representatives of each annual conference and each bishop about the future needs for episcopal leadership in the SEJ.

The recommendation not to have episcopal elections in 2024 “is a prayerful response to the impact of disaffiliations in our areas,” the committee said in a letter to SEJ delegates dated Jan. 8.

Read the full letter at <http://tinyurl.com/sej-letter>.

In essence, the changes involve combining three formerly separate episcopal areas—Alabama-West Florida, North Alabama and South Georgia—into one big episcopal area, as well

See “SEJ,” Page 12

Paths to Wholeness transitional home helps formerly incarcerated women transform

By Jessica Brodie

ORANGEBURG—Decades ago, Dr. Minnie Anderson shouldered a dark burden—since her wedding day, she had been a victim of domestic abuse.

While today a retired United Methodist

local pastor, back then she was a military wife with three young children and terrified to leave. Every day was a nightmare.

Anderson’s neighbor also carried the same burden. But one day, when the neighbor’s abusive husband discovered their

teenaged daughter was pregnant and began to savagely beat the girl, the neighbor had enough. She found his handgun and killed her abusive husband—then went to jail.

While the charges were eventually dismissed, this was the 1970s, and Anderson’s

neighbor was incarcerated for a while as the legal process unfolded. Anderson stayed in contact with her neighbor, praying for her and trying to support her.

See “Paths to Wholeness,” Page 24

Forgiven to Forgive

This Lent, Mount Zion UMC takes on medical debt payoff campaign to help neighbors

By Jessica Brodie

CENTRAL—A United Methodist church in South Carolina’s Upstate is doing its part this Lent to abolish \$1 million in medical debt in Pickens, Oconee and Greenville counties.

Mount Zion United Methodist Church is partnering with RIP Medical Debt for “Forgiven to Forgive,” a campaign that takes donated funds and purchases medical debt in bulk, freeing people from the financial and emo-

tional hardships that accompany massive, unpaid health bills.

“Lent is a season when we are remembering and then celebrating how we are forgiven, not just our medical bills but our sins, and I think about this being a living parable,” said Mount Zion pastor the Rev. Jonathan Harris. “If you want people to understand the forgiveness of God, then what better way than this?”

See “Forgiven to Forgive,” Page 11

Shepherd’s Fund helps retired clergy with medical expenses

By Jessica Brodie

Imagine you’re a retired pastor living on a limited budget when you get hit with an unexpected medical expense.

For many people, this can quickly become a huge problem. Even those who planned

decently for retirement might struggle to afford hearing aids, home health assistance, dental work or other surprise care needs. Insurance only goes so far.

Now, an opportunity called The Shepherd’s Fund is helping retired or disabled pastors, their

spouses, or widows with a limited income and who have health issues for which they can’t afford treatment—or the financial impact it may have on their ability to provide for themselves.

See “Shepherd’s Fund,” Page 11



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MSN students make travel bags at Catholic Charities for migrant bus trips.



Students refill water barrels with Eddie Canalas of the South Texas Human Rights Center.

MSN students learn firsthand while helping migrants at Texas-Mexico border

By the Rev. Tom Wall

“Why are you making such a dangerous journey to come to the United States?” we asked many of the migrants whom we met and served at the Texas-Mexico border.

We got the same two or three answers: “I want a better life for my family.” “I am afraid for our safety. There is too much violence in my community.” “There are no jobs, and I need to feed my family.”

Who of us would not identify those as legitimate reasons to migrate? Would we not do the same for our families?

Unfortunately, the United States’ immigration system is broken, and of thousands of migrants seeking asylum, only a fraction will qualify under the strict definition of asylum.

The Methodist Student Network (Wesley Foundation) from the University of South Carolina traveled to McAllen and Brownsville, Texas, in early January to see, hear, serve and accompany migrants who had crossed over legally into Texas, as well as migrants who waited on the bridge over the Rio Grande and in one of the several encampments in Matamoros, Mexico, for a court date or hearing.

Some become impatient waiting and swim the river, braving swift currents and razor wire on the U.S. side of the river. There is a sense of urgency, chaos and desperation among the migrants. They are living without a country, as most sold everything they had to raise the money to pay a “coyote” for passage. And the crisis at the border and political dysfunction in Washington has made having a future in the U.S. even more difficult. But they also have hope and faith as they wait.

We brought and gave out supplies such as diapers, formula, socks and pain reliever at a migrant encampment of about 300 people beside the Rio Grande. Pastor David, a Methodist pastor in Matamoros, met us the next day at the camp to talk more about the migrants and the ministry he and his church offers. Sometimes his kitchen will be filled to overflowing with migrants he invites to his home for a meal.

I asked Pastor David if he knew those he invited. He said he knew they were children of God and in need.

We spent time with Eddie Canalas, who directs the South Texas Human Rights Center in Falfurrias, Texas. This small town, about 70 miles from the border, is in the middle of ranch land. Some migrants travel through the many ranches trying to avoid detection. Each year, many die of dehydration and heat exhaustion. Canalas’ group has placed water barrels in various locations on the ranches and along secondary roads for the migrants. It has saved many lives. Our group spent the day with Canalas learning about the immigration crisis and refilling many of the water barrels around the county. Canalas told us the U.S. has only tried enforcement at the border to deal with immigration. He claims that just adding more border patrol and building more fences will not work. He calls for “regularization.” That means allowing people to come in to work and to return home, and having them register to do so. Many just want to make money to send or take home.

And there is a severe labor shortage in the U.S., he noted. Canalas greatly blames the crisis on racism (most of the migrants at the Texas-Mexico border come from Venezuela, Haiti and other Latin American countries) and greed—people wanting cheap illegal labor for maximum profit.

The South Texas Human Rights Center also tries to identify those who have died in journey through the ranches and to let their loved ones know. They also seek to reunite families who have been separated at the border in the Immigration, Customs, Enforcement facilities or during the journey.

We met a Venezuelan woman and her son at Catholic Charities Humanitarian Respite Center in McAllen, where we spent several days. Several hundred refugees come through the center each day to be assisted in traveling to their sponsors in another part of the U.S. The woman and her 10-year-old son had been traveling with her nephews, ages 21 to 2, but her nephews had been separated from her at

the ICE center and she did not know where they were anymore. She was traveling to her family in Chicago who had sent money for bus tickets. She had no option to wait or try to find her nephews.

Our students made many walks of accompaniment with migrants in downtown McAllen. We accompanied them to the bus station, money exchange, clothing store and telephone store—anywhere services were needed. We took them to doctors and pharmacies. Most of us knew a little broken Spanish but no Creole, but we all discovered “Google Translate.”

Many of the migrants shared their stories of leaving their homes and making the perilous journey.

Meeting a migrant, accompanying them, hearing of their sufferings and seeing their smiles with hopefulness puts a different face on the crisis. It’s no longer “us” and “them.” It is just one human family all created in God’s image. And as the song goes, “There but for fortune go you and I.”

As one of our MSN students, Abby, reflected, “I felt I learned so much more by talking with people and hearing their stories than I ever learned about immigration in school or on the news. There was something more impactful by actually seeing for myself and questioning people about their lived experience.”

Our biblical story (as well as the U.S. story) revolves around migration. From Adam and Eve’s forced migration out of Eden, to Joseph’s human-trafficked migration to Egypt at the hands of his jealous brothers, to his brothers’ and father’s reunion in Egypt because of a famine-forced migration from Palestine, migration is a centralizing theme. Joseph and Mary migrated to Egypt with baby Jesus under Herod’s death threat.

And the “greatest migration” is noted in Philippians as “Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God” who “empties himself” and migrates to be in “human form” in dangerous first-century Palestine.

Our histories are the stories of migration. Migration has made us who we are.

Resolutions to Annual Conference due March 15

By the Rev. Steve Simoneaux

Are you thinking about submitting a resolution for the South Carolina Annual Conference in June?

All resolutions must be turned in no later than March 15 to be considered by this year’s annual conference.

I’ve had the privilege of chairing the Committee on Resolutions and Appeals for the past eight years. While some years have been easier than others, one thing I’ve learned is that we have passionate lay members and clergy within our great conference. For those who feel led to turn that passion into resolutions, I lift up a few reminders as we approach the March 15 deadline.

The Committee on Resolutions and Appeals to the Annual Conference is governed by Standing Rule 70 of the annual conference. I encourage you to read over the entire rule before submitting your resolution. Below are just a few highlights.

One, per SR 70, resolutions may only be submitted by “any clergy

member(s), any elected lay member(s), or any organization affiliated with the annual conference.” Be careful who signs the resolution.

Two, per SR 70, “Resolutions delivered to the conference secretary no later than March 15 of each conference year shall be published in the Pre-Conference Journal.” Any resolutions received after the deadline will be referred to the following year’s conference. Please get your resolutions submitted on time to the conference secretary.

Three, per SR 70, “The committee shall act on the resolution as offered and shall not offer its own amendments.” Please note that the committee cannot be responsible for editing or amending your resolutions. We are charged to act on exactly what is presented to us.

New to resolutions? There are several online resources that will help you format all of your “Whereas” and “Therefore be resolved” statements. If you have specific questions please reach out to me via email at steve@clemsonwesley.org. Be sure to get those resolutions submitted to the conference secretary at conferencesecretary@umcsc.org by March 15.

Men to gather Feb. 24 for annual Men N Ministry retreat

COLUMBIA—The 2024 Men N Ministry spiritual retreat will offer not only a new location but powerful speaking, golf and an opportunity for a new style of men’s fellowship, Cigars and Scriptures.

The event will be held Friday and Saturday, Feb. 23-24, at Journey Church, a United Methodist church at 1151 Longreen Pkwy., Columbia.

The 2024 South Carolina Men N Ministry Golf Tournament will kick off the event the morning of Friday, Feb. 23. Held at The Spur at Northwoods Golf Course, 201 Powell Rd. Columbia, there will be a shotgun start at 10 am. Cost is \$80 per player and \$5 Mulligans (two per player). Men will have the opportunity to do practice balls before the tournament, and a meal will be provided. First place trophies will be presented, and all proceeds go to South Carolina Men N Ministry to make better men in South Carolina.

Then, on Friday night, Journey will host a group discussion, “Cigars and Scriptures,” with shrimp and grits around a firepit from 6-8:30 p.m. Led by Ty Williams of Journey Church, Cigars and Scriptures meets once a month with different pastors speaking for a time on Scriptures and then everyone discusses what they learned. This year, attendees of the Men N Ministry spiritual retreat



Men enjoy a session at a past Men N Ministry retreat. This year’s retreat will be held at Journey Church.

will have the opportunity to join the event. “It’s a different concept but well worth trying, so we will be meeting Friday night,” said South Carolina Conference United Methodist Men President Kenny Bingham. “Along with the discussion, there will be shrimp and grits. Well, maybe we just got your attention. Yes, good Southern shrimp and grits. Everything will outside around a couple of fire pits. There is also a non-smok-

ing section, so don’t let that stop you. I’m one that is willing to give almost anything a chance to get men involved in their families, churches and making them better Christians. Say amen.” This year’s theme is “Act Like a Man,” drawing from 1 Corinthians 13:11. The spiritual retreat will be Saturday, Feb. 24. Registration will be from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. Several speakers will speak on this

year’s theme, including the Rev. Percival Reeves of Sanctuary Church, Charlotte; Dr. Rosario Picardo of Mosaic Church, Beavercreek, Ohio; the Rev. Trevor Miller, Mount Horeb Church, Lexington; and the Rev. Steven Brown, Marion District superintendent for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. South Carolina UMC’s Resident Bishop L. Johnathan Holston will highlight the event.

“This year as we move to Journey Church we are expecting an exciting day with new ideas, a new venue but always with God as our focus,” Bingham said. “This is the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, but we are trying to make the men, all men of South Carolina, better fathers, brothers and uncles.”

Bingham said every man in South Carolina is invited no matter their religion or non-religion status. “We chose this theme as we feel it is time we act like real men. Please consider making this day the day you make a difference in your home, your job and your church. We will be looking for you at Journey Church Feb. 24,” Bingham said. For more information or to register: <https://mennministrysc.org> or 843-246-8398.

‘My Banned Black History Sermons’ is latest title from Advocate Press

A new book from the Advocate Press is coming in time for Black History Month. Called “My Banned Black History Sermons,” the book from the Rev. Amiri Hooker features a number of sermons that were rejected from a sermon website because they didn’t align with the site’s view’s about biblical history. Some of the sermons



Hooker

maintain that Jesus was Black and came from Africa. “As someone with 30 years of preaching experience, 20 of those years ordained in The United Methodist Church, I believe the concept of a Black Jesus is not out of line with Scripture,” Hooker wrote in the book’s preface. “In the midst of the current climate marked by the surge in White Christian nationalism and evangelical divisiveness, I sense that it’s an ideal time to explore the concepts surrounding a cultural perspective of Jesus as Black. “This is also a prime time for all faith groups to be

exposed to Black history sermons that speak to relevant theologies of the post COVID-19 world.” The foreword to the book was penned by Dr. Vance P. Ross, senior pastor of the historic Central United Methodist Church, Atlanta, as well as former director of annual conference relationships for Discipleship Ministries and first-ever deputy general secretary for Discipleship Ministries. The book is being prepared now for publication and will be available at <https://advocatepress.org/books> and on Amazon.

Livestreamed orientation to help prepare General Conference delegates

NASHVILLE—Delegates to the upcoming General Conference will have the opportunity to prepare through a livestreamed orientation and briefing Feb. 29 and March 1. In preparation for the postponed 2020 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, United Methodist Communications and the Secretary of the General Conference will co-host the orientation, which takes place from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Eastern both days.

The times were chosen to make the event accessible to the largest number of delegates possible. The United Methodist News team will lead the two-day online event, which aims to help prepare General Conference delegates for the meeting of The United Methodist Church’s legislative body April 23 to May 3 at Charlotte Convention Center in Charlotte. The webcast will be available in English, French, Portuguese and American Sign Language, with translation of additional segments posted following the event.

Viewers will be able to submit questions to presenters throughout the event. “This event aims to be a resource to inform delegates about what to expect at the global legislative gathering by bringing together presenters who are well-versed on a wide range of topics,” said Tim Tanton, United Methodist Communications’ chief news officer. “Delegations or groups of delegates might want to gather in a central location to watch, and perhaps plan additional time together before or after the programs.” Topics to be covered during the orientation include an overview of the General Conference, encompassing the basics of the legislative process, voting and parliamentary procedure; information about the Charlotte area; resources for engaging in positive dialogue; tips for first-time delegates; information on issues, proposals and action items that will be considered by the legislative body and more. “We look forward to sharing updates with delegates and our media partners as

we prepare to gather in Charlotte,” said Rev. Gary W. Graves, secretary of the General Conference. An on-demand recording will be made available for viewing after the completion of the event to accommodate delegates unable to tune in live because of time zones or schedule conflicts. More specific details about the orientation will be shared directly with delegates via email. Delegates with questions can email newsdesk@umcom.org or general-

conference@umcgc.org. General Conference is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church, which typically meets once every four years. The conference can revise church law, as well as adopt resolutions on current moral, social, public policy and economic issues. It also approves plans and budgets for church-wide programs. For more information on General Conference, visit <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/general-conference-2020>.

Salkehatchie regional gatherings continue

People across the state will have the chance to participate in three Salkehatchie Summer Service regional gatherings this month. The gatherings are as follows: • Rock Hill area: Saturday, Feb. 3, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at St. John’s UMC, Fort Mill; • Piedmont/Greenville area: Sunday, Feb. 4, from 1-6 p.m. (location to be announced); and • Greenwood area: Saturday, Feb. 10, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at St Mark’s River Street Campus, Greenwood. All are welcome to attend, both those who have participated in a Salkehatchie camp in the past as well as those who never have but are interested in doing so. No registration is required, and attendees are encouraged to bring a friend. Gatherings will explore Salkehatchie’s future plans, time to share meaningful or fun Salkehatchie stories, breakout sessions with camp directors and assistant camp directors about sites and other planning needs for the upcoming year, praise and worship. Volunteers must be at least 14 years old. For more information, email salkehatchie@umcsc.org, call 803-691-6606 or visit <https://salkehatchie.org>.

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Viewpoints



Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

Tighter ministry

Our jurisdiction might be getting smaller—but this is not a bad thing. For those who need a refresher on our denominational organization, The United Methodist Church in the United States is organized into jurisdictions—regions of the country. South Carolina is part of the Southeastern Jurisdiction, and as the Page 1 article “SEJ to Consider 13 to 10 Reduction in Episcopal Areas” explains, disaffiliation within the SEJ is prompting some changes.

In November 2022, the SEJ voted to go from 14 episcopal areas in the Southeastern Jurisdiction to 13 starting in January 2023. Now, if delegates to SEJ Conference approve when they gather July 10-12, the SEJ will shift to just 10 episcopal areas. No new bishops would be elected this session if so, and as one bishop is retiring—Bishop Bill McAlilly—this means the remaining 10 bishops would be assigned among the 10 episcopal areas.

(The proposal would combine the Alabama-West Florida, North Alabama and South Georgia conferences into one area and would combine the Holston Conference into one area with the Central Appalachian Missionary and Kentucky Conference. South Carolina would remain as-is under the proposal, as would the rest of the conferences.)

The proposal is coming from the SEJ Committee on Episcopacy and is supported by the SEJ College of Bishops. In their Jan. 8 letter summarizing the proposal, they noted their recommendation to elect no new bishops comes “in consideration of the conversations around the connection and a prayerful response to the impact of disaffiliations in our areas.”

The *Advocate* thinks this is a good idea.

The United Methodist Church is in a time of change. While change can be scary, it can also be magnificent, ushering in a season of tremendous growth that enables the Holy Spirit to soar with vibrant power among God’s people. Yes, some churches are leaving. Yes, finances are getting tighter. Some things might end, while a great number of things will likely begin.

It’s logical and necessary that we make changes and streamline our organizational systems as we adapt and align ourselves with our new reality.

God provides for God’s people, and things truly will work out exactly as God intends. And we can trust that whatever it is God intends will be absolutely, irrepressibly wonderful.

We serve a mighty God, and we humans cannot get in the way of God’s plan and purpose. There is nothing we can do that will mess up what God wants to do in the world through the UMC.

So let’s embrace the coming changes with open hearts and minds, ready and excited for whatever it is that God is doing.

As Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3:8, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (NIV).

Amen. Thanks be to God.



Bishop’s Corner

by Bishop L. Jonathan Holston

Made for this

“But there’s also this, it’s not too late—God’s personal message!—Come back to me and really mean it! Come fasting and weeping, sorry for your sins! Change your life, not just your clothes. Come back to God, your God. And here’s why: God is kind and merciful. He takes a deep breath, puts up with a lot, this most patient God, extravagant in love, always ready to cancel catastrophe. Who knows? Maybe he’ll do it now, maybe he’ll turn around and show pity. Maybe, when all’s said and done, they’ll be blessings full and robust for your God!”—Joel 2:12-14 (The Message)

As we prepare to embark this month upon our Lenten journey, we do so in the midst of a world that is in need of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The 24-hour news cycle means that we either hear about one crisis after another or, on a “slow news day,” we hear about the same crisis over and over and over again.

The mantra of relentless attack has crept into our conversations, teaching us to never back down, that the fight is never over and the only answer to any question is to destroy, even if destruction of one means the destruction of many and the obliteration of sanity and hope. As hateful words escalate, one wonders what will happen next.

In the midst of trying times, we are called during Lent to a time of self-examination and reflection. Through Lent, we are invited to be so curious about God’s purpose for our lives that we grow in closer harmony with the Almighty. Lent is a time for us to focus on our relationship with God and to take stock of our own spiritual condition.

Ron McClung in the devotional column, “Positive Perspective,” shared this story: “In a tattoo shop on a street in Kowloon, Hong Kong, Norman Vincent Peale saw this statement: ‘Born to lose.’ Staring at those words, he realized this was one of the slogans a customer could have tattooed on their body. Astounded, Peale entered the shop and asked, ‘Does anyone actually have

‘Born to lose’ tattooed on their body?’ ‘Yes, some,’ the tattoo artist answered. But then tapping his head, he spoke quietly in halting English, ‘Before tattoo on chest, tattoo on mind.’”

Friends, when we’re left to our own devices, it is easy to stumble into attitudes that make us think and feel defeated. Yet, if we follow the direction of the Holy Spirit, we can live in confidence that God’s Spirit will accomplish good things in us.

In this Lenten season, the question of self-examination and reflection resounds for us. Are we living lives that shine God’s light into the world? How are we practicing the means of grace through works of piety and works of mercy that point to the saving grace of Jesus Christ in our lives? Are we doing our part, in our own circle of influence, to speak words of hope and act in ways that build up rather than tear down?

During this season of Lent, may we be freed for joyful obedience. Leaning in to listen more carefully to God with trust and hope beyond the confines of the moment. Free from our own desires; free from the pain and incompleteness of the world.

Free us for joyful obedience, God, for there is no other joy than what we find when our lives lean in closer towards you. That’s what John Wesley meant when he shared with us the “means of grace.” It’s being free to give of my time, talent, gifts, service and witness to build up a community that honors God. Thriving together to discover God’s purpose in our lives.

What we are made to do is called purpose. God’s purpose for us is to bring him glory. Everyone brings God glory in a different way. God’s greatest desire is for us to have a relationship with him through Jesus Christ.

Indeed, Lent is a time to focus on our relationship with God as well as to take stock of our spiritual condition, growing in clarity of God’s purpose for us as we seek to be freed for joyful obedience and “maybe, when it’s all said and done, they’ll be blessings full and robust for your God.”

You’re made for this! May it be so.



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Letters to the Editor

‘We Are Alike in Christ’s Eyes’

“I note the obvious differences between each sort and type, but we are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike.”—From “Human Family” by Maya Angelou

We are all part of the human family. We laugh, cry, hurt, heal, love, hate, live and die. As Christians, we are all God’s children. These churches that are leaving the United Methodist Church cannot get away from humanity and all its struggles. We are in life together and we need to realize this.

At Christmas Eve Holy Communion service, these words were said: “All are welcome to the Lord’s Table. Let us confess our sins. In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven.”

We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike. All are loved by Jesus.

Rev. John Culp, retired
Columbia

See “Letters,” Page 5

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. Deadlines are the 10th of each month.



Guest Commentary

by David Bryant

Barabbas and the Christmas Challenge

I took the “Book of Luke challenge” in 2023 and read one chapter a day through December, ending on Christmas Eve. My motivation was that my Bible study had pretty much rested in daily Scripture devotions and daily readings from Vanderbilt Divinity Library’s Revised Common Lectionary. The start-to-finish reading provided much food for thought and spurred cross-referencing other passages.

I found myself inordinately interested in the story of Barabbas and launched into more detailed study. The whole idea of a cultlike following of a known insurrectionist spoke directly to the current geopolitical, national, denominational and local experience in my home church. I wanted to know more.

Barabbas is only mentioned in Scripture immediately preceding the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. He appears, however, in all four gospels and also is alluded to in the Book of Acts. While descriptions differ, it’s safe to describe Barabbas as a “domestic terrorist” willing to use violence to accomplish his ends of freeing the Jewish people from Roman rule. Somewhat of a cult hero with a strong following, it is believed that many in the crowd were there specifically to plead for Barabbas in the traditional granting of parole to one individual condemned to death and didn’t refrain from rioting or violence toward their goal.

The tradition of granting one parole occurred yearly during Passover. Pilate apparently sees an opportunity to release Jesus with a flogging following neither himself nor Herod finding sufficient evidence to convict. The Pharisees, however, don’t want Jesus released. The people in attendance are primarily there to plead for Barabbas and have no desire to displease the Pharisees. The Pharisees circulate among the crowd influencing them to choose Barabbas. Thus, they thwart Pilate’s plan to free Jesus while simultaneously absolving himself by having them choose which prisoner to release. You can’t make this stuff up!

What tactics might the Pharisees have used to sway the people to choose Barabbas over Jesus as they moved through the crowd? Did they pander to people’s greed for wealth, property and dominance? Did they appeal to people’s lust for power and control? Did they appeal to people’s prejudice of a local over an outsider? Hmmm, sounds familiar. Did they stick to the facts—which would have been complex and complicated—or did they use lies and distortions, intrigue and deception? What about that powerful tool found in emotionally manipulating others ... fearmongering? What about the impulsive and visceral appeal of a good insurrection? To quote from the classic film “Young Frankenstein,” “A riot is a very ugly thing. I think it’s time we had one!”

The people chose Barabbas. Remember, only a week ago these people were cheering and calling upon Jesus to save them. Did the Pharisees’ appeals relieve the people of those uncomfortable conditions of dying, hating their families and giving up their possessions ... all for a Messiah who was nothing like the Messiah they expected or wanted?

In his Crossway.org article, “We Are Barabbas,” Dave Furman posits that Jesus died for Barabbas just as he did for us in that he died for us while we were still sinners. Yet, while we may all be Barabbas, it is of greater importance to acknowledge we are the individuals in the crowd. We who would rather have our character defects, prejudices and spiritual rationalizations endorsed rather than follow Jesus. Led astray by attractive affirmations, self-serving scriptural interpretations and fear. We who would rather presume to be born again without dying of self. We who would much rather hang on fulfilled scriptural quotes than invest in a relationship with Scripture that results in a relationship with God himself. We who would much rather express statements of “Love; but ...” rather than just love without judgment and let Jesus be the judge. We who steadfastly refuse to actually follow Jesus and his teachings while claiming his grace. All the while silently and guilelessly screaming “Crucify him!” rather than to be reborn in the love that is God. The love that fulfills, and is the only thing that fulfills, the Law.

Yes, we continue to choose Barabbas ... us, you, me ... and much like the “foolish crowd” in Myra Welch’s poem, we “can never quite understand the worth of a soul and the change that is wrought by the touch of the Master’s hand” when, all the while, our hands push away rather than embrace.

What will the new United Methodist Church choose? The South Carolina Conference? Your home church? You? I hope in embracing the incarnation of Jesus Christ in 2024 we all choose love while getting our sandals filthy in the dust of discipleship and soaked with the faith required to step into the Jordan before it parts.

I hope we will all choose to follow Jesus from birth to the cross and beyond with reckless abandonment to loving others.

Bryant is a member of Bethesda United Methodist Church, Easley.



Life Together in the UMCSC

by the Rev. Morris Waymer

‘The UMC has poured so many things into me’

Editor’s note: Through “Life Together in the UMCSC,” South Carolina United Methodists share what The United Methodist Church has meant in their lives.

Growing up in The United Methodist Church in Orangeburg, I was baptized at New Light United Methodist Church, and it was my foundation. I thought after I was baptized as an infant, “OK, all you need to do is just sit in the pew, maybe sing in the children’s choir.”

Little did I realize that God’s Holy Spirit was working, pouring into me things that I didn’t even know were happening early on in my life. There was a calling to ministry, but I ran from that call. I ran because I thought I was going to be a physical therapist—and look at me now, an ordained minister in The United Methodist Church.

Since I’ve been a United Methodist minister, I have experienced profound love and grace in all that I do because so many people poured into me. Two examples of how this has been lived out:

When my best friend, colleague, and brother William Wrighten died, I got to see firsthand how the connection in The United Methodist Church really works. We had to worship at Bethany UMC, our sister church, but the love, hospitality, connection and generosity poured into that family so that we could have a wonderful worship service for our brother.

While I’m serving as pastor of New Francis Brown UMC in North Charleston, I’m working with the Rev. Bryan Pigford, the pastor at Cokesbury United Methodist Church. We’re working on building relationships between our two churches—one historically Black, one historically White. We’re already walking together in ministry through community worship services, fellowship meals, pulpit swaps and a community food bank. Both churches are working together to show the love of Christ to people.

This is why I am a United Methodist. This is why I love to pour back into people—because The United Methodist Church has poured so many things into me. Now I’m looking forward to pouring that same energy, grace and love into other people who need to know Jesus Christ as his or her personal savior, people who need to know that we as a church, The United Methodist Church, love all people.

This is why I’m a United Methodist. This is why I love what I do. This is why I serve God with all my heart. This is why I have built great relationships with colleagues throughout our state—relationships that will last a lifetime.

Waymer is the pastor of New Francis Brown UMC in Charleston. Watch his “Life Together” video and others by South Carolina United Methodists at <http://umcsc.org/life-together>

Local church communicators sought for Advocate resourcing

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.

The *Advocate* is gathering a list of names and email addresses of those who do communications in local churches so we can call on you when we are seeking stories or have news or resources we think will help you.

Please email or text *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie at jbrodie@umcsc.org or 803-807-0018.

LETTERS: Readers sound off

From Page 4

A new world

Where are we as a species headed?

On Sunday evening, July 10, 2023, the CBS television program “Sixty Minutes” reported that artificial intelligence can compute thousands of times faster than the human brain. The program presented remarkable and disturbing information regarding AI:

1. AI calculates thousands of times faster than the human mind;
2. AI composed a poem that expressed original thoughts and human feelings;
3. In an exercise revealing creative thought AI provided “the next word” needed to complete a thought;
4. AI showed evidence of high-level value judgments; and
5. AI can write computer codes.

The big question: how will AI and humanity coexist? The program suggested that after we humans have moved far ahead of where we are today, we may be able to survive in a world dominated by AI.

A disturbing prospect? Can we keep AI under wraps until we have reached a higher

level of development?

A more disturbing question: Can we survive as No. 2 after being the top dog for such a long time?

It appears that we as a species are at the cusp of a whole different type of existence. Is it possible to buy time for preparation? Are we capable of making the adjustment?

*The Rev. Mickey Fisher, retired
Spartanburg*

A poem: Behold The Weeping Jesus

Behold the weeping Jesus
Whose tears salt the earth;
The King sent to redeem us,
Behold the weeping Jesus.
He ignores not our seasons
Of life and death and birth;
Behold the weeping Jesus
Whose tears salt the earth.

(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*



Eleven-year-old girl completes Lay Servant basic

The Rev. Brian Underwood gives a certificate to Annabelle Mowbray, age 11, as her parents Tom and Rosetta stand behind her. Annabelle, a member of Dacusville UMC, Easley, completed Lay Servant Ministries’ Adult Basic training in November in the Greenville District. She is not the youngest person to have ever completed Adult Basic in the conference. But as Ken More, LSM Director for the Greenville District, said, “It is certainly an accomplishment to be noted.” Annabelle preached for Underwood Dec. 31. “It’s certainly an example that the youth are not the church of tomorrow but are the church of today,” Moore said.

Cecil Williams South Carolina Civil Rights Museum to get larger home in refurbished historic site

By Jessica Brodie
ORANGEBURG—South Carolina’s first and only civil rights museum is getting a new home, one that will enable it to triple and possibly quadruple its size and, potentially, its collection.

The Cecil Williams South Carolina Civil Rights Museum was founded in 2019 by Cecil Williams, his wife, Barbara, and his sister Brenda. An Orangeburg native, Williams started photographing the cultural and social changes in his state at the age of 9 and today owns the largest collection of images reflecting racial change in America. The museum collection features his photography as well as artifacts, documents and other items that help tell the story of the civil rights movement in South Carolina from 1950-1970.

Much of this story occurred in United Methodist churches.

Williams is also the director of historic preservation at United Methodist-affiliated Claflin University, and Claflin students were instrumental in digitizing the film for the museum’s collection.

Currently, the museum is located on Lake Drive in Orangeburg in his former residence and photography studio. He lives next door.



The interior of the museum, from the website virtual tour: <https://www.cecilwilliams.com>.

“We are well aware that museums cost millions,” Williams told the *Advocate*, but given his extensive collection they decided to open it anyway.

The museum is small but acclaimed. Visitors can see, read and interact with events and people who endured life under segregation, as well as learn about history often not contained in books. Nearly 500 photographs adorn the walls of the museum, and the

museum is currently digitizing an estimated collection of approximately 600,000 images.

Photographs covering not only the civil rights movement era but also African-American history, culture and heritage.

Now the museum is getting a much bigger building and a new location. In the fall, the City of Orangeburg and Orangeburg County entered into an agreement to enable the museum to move the civil rights

museum to a historical location: the old theatre and soda shop on Boulevard Street. The move will occur following a refurbishment and is part of the area’s Orangeburg Railroad Corner redevelopment.

The new site is across from the historic South Carolina State University.

“It will be three to four times bigger than it currently is,” Williams said, noting the renovations are expected to begin around April, and the museum will open by the end of 2025.

“Presently we have 3,000 square feet, and we’ll go to anywhere from 10,400 to 14,000 square feet,” Williams said, depending on the funds raised.

Currently, the museum is open upon appointment. There is no charge, and it operates on donations.

Williams encourages all people interested in South Carolina’s civil rights history to visit.

“Museums help to build character,” he said. “It helps us remember whose shoulders we stand on for the advances we have today.”

For more about the museum, including the collection and how to visit, go to <https://www.cecilwilliams.com>.

God’s Abundance For All People thriving thanks to connection

By the Rev. Darlene L. Kelley
NEWBERRY—Connection is a big word for United Methodists, and its message and intention resonant differently depending on the situation.

Recently I learned that a beloved, old friend in New York was recovering from a stroke at Lennox Hill Hospital. Too far away to visit personally, I made one phone call on Thursday afternoon, and a United Methodist pastor was praying with my friend in the hospital on Friday. Connection keeps us linked like toy soldiers, arm in arm and at the ready, when a friend calls looking for pastoral care, a family needs food or a homeless veteran needs shelter.

At O’Neal Street United Methodist Church, connection has made all those and many other weekly miracles possible.

God’s Abundance For All People is an ecumenical food pantry housed at the church.

Since its opening two years ago, community connection has been paramount to the mission’s success. Given that it distributes an average of 70 pantry boxes per week, it would not operate at all without the connections the ministry has been blessed to forge.

Although the need for resources is constant, God’s Abundance For All People has benefitted from tremendous community support, and several local churches from various denominations have all given generously with gifts of manpower as well as monetary donations.

Without volunteers, no mission functions. As the apostle Paul wrote to a church consumed with power struggles and ego, “We are God’s servants, working together” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Paul’s words speak to us now, and we are doing our best to live his message here in Newberry.



Photo courtesy of the Rev. Darlene Kelley
Pastor Kathy Cinnamond (center) delivers a donation to Tracey Wise of 4 Real 2nd Chances and Mary Beth Heath of The Feed Thy Neighbor Kitchen, ministries housed at O’Neal Street UMC.

Christmas at Lee again brings Christmas meal to incarcerated men

BISHOPVILLE—Christmas at Lee, an annual event that feeds men incarcerated at Lee Correctional Institute, was another success this year. More than 1,000 residents were fed this year.

Participants who helped included Cumberland United Methodist Church (the Rev. Martin Quick); Bethesda UMC (the Rev. Shawn Chestnut); Faith UMC (the Rev. Edward R. McKnight); Mount Seal (the Rev. Cynthia Williams); Kenndyville UMC, Scotts Barbeque and Jeremiah UMC (the Rev. Norma Bartelle); Lake City Circuit (the Rev. Mark Mitchell), St. Paul UMC, Wisacky, and Warren Chapel UMC (the Rev. Evelyn Fulmore); Kairos Ministries; Church on the Move (Pastor Paula Morris); Great Commission Church (Pastor Derick Fort) Alice Drive Baptist Church (Dr. Clay Smith); and Zion, Steward Chapel and New Hope UMCs in Charleston (Rev. Lee and Cheryl Johnson).

The men were incredibly touched and overjoyed and experienced a beautiful lunch from different churches and caterers.

The Rev. Edward McKnight, senior chaplain of Lee Correctional Institute and pastor of Faith and St. Mary UMCs, said his goal is to include more churches in Christmas at Lee within the conference.

“Jesus stated that as we visit those in prison, we are visiting him. My version is that as you feed those in prison, you are feeding Jesus,” McKnight said.

South Carolina Resident Bishop L. Jonathan Holston ministered on the subject, “What Really Matters!” One of the things that really matters is when we are not selfish and are selfless.



Volunteers from many churches (above) helped with this year’s ministry.

As he said, “What really matters is that we are empathetic and have a desire to love those who may need our love. ... What really matters is that that we represent Christ and his model.”

What really matters, McKnight added, is that we make



The men at Lee were incredibly touched by the thoughtfulness displayed by volunteers, above.

disciples for the transformation of the world. What really matters is that we please God.

“I want to thank all who gave and all who had a desire to give this year. May God bless you and keep you,” McKnight said.



Gadsden preaches.



The church broke ground Dec. 10.



Many church members attended.

St. Paul in Kingstree breaks ground on new parsonage

KINGSTREE—On Sunday, Dec. 10, the congregation of St. Paul United Methodist Church gathered on-site to break ground for a new parsonage.

It was an exciting day for the church. The crowd gathered to sing, “What a fellowship, what a joy divine” as they prayed and blessed the ground to the glory of God.

The Rev. Jerry Louis Gadsden, pastor, led the congregation through this historic event. The congregation has been without a parsonage since October 2015. Then, in April 2021, 4.1 acres of land were purchased from the great-granddaughter of the late Pringle Lee Jr.

Lee was born Oct. 6, 1872, and died in October 1957. He became a member of St. Paul Church after it was established in 1876. He owned 125 acres of property on Hwy. 527 in the St. Paul community.

Alex R. Alston Sr., and Elouise Scott, grandchildren of Lee, along with the trustees, shoveled the dirt for this ceremony. Alston shared some interesting stories about his late grandfather.



The congregation has been without a parsonage since October 2015.

All said it is a great day in the life of St. Paul and in its community.

Red Door Homes of Florence and the South Carolina Methodist Conference Credit Union is assisting the church in the building of this parsonage.

The parsonage is expected to be completed in July.

St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC to host poverty simulation event

HILTON HEAD ISLAND—St. Andrew By-The-Sea United Methodist Church is teaming up with United Way of the Lowcountry and Beaufort-Jasper Economic Opportunity Commission to offer members of the community a free poverty simulation event.

The event will be held Saturday, Feb. 24, from 12-3 p.m. at 20 Pope Ave., Hilton Head Island, in the church’s Celebra-

tion Center.

The poverty simulation is a learning tool created to help people understand the realities of poverty. During the three-hour simulation, participants role-play a month in the life of low-income families to help understand their real-life daily challenges. The ultimate mission of each of these families is to have food, shelter and other basic needs on a

limited income.

Space is limited, and online general registration began Jan. 21.

Registration is going on through Feb. 12. Register at <https://uwlowcountry.charityproud.org/EventRegistration/Index/14655>

For more about the church, visit <https://hhiumc.com>.

ACT LIKE
A MAN

REGISTER TODAY



When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
1 Corinthians 13:11

Golf tournament Friday @ 10
Cigars & Scriptures Friday 6-8:30
Saturday MenNMinistry conference
ALL WELCOME

JOURNEY CHURCH

FEB. 23-24, 2024 Columbia



MenNMinistrySC.org

Event Speakers:

Dr. Percival Reeves
Sanctuary Church, Charlotte

Dr Rosario Picardo
Mosaic Church, Beavercreek, OH

Rev Trevor Miller
Mt. Horeb Church, Lexington, SC

Rev Steve Brown
Marion District Superintendent



So many different groups of people in the church contributed.



Franklin and Orange Grove United Methodist churches had a fruitful 2023, and they are committed to serving boldly in 2024.



Franklin UMC hosted mobile primary care four days in 2023.

Franklin, Orange Grove UMCs serve boldly

By the Rev. Sheera Yates

DENMARK—Franklin and Orange Grove United Methodist churches have had a fruitful 2023, and they are committed to serving boldly in 2024.

Franklin UMC partnered with Clemson Rural Health/MUSC Orangeburg to offer mobile primary care on June 13, Aug. 22, Oct. 10 and Nov. 28. Offered from 9 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. at the church, the care offered included acute care (cold, sore throat, pink eye, etc.); health care management (diabetes, hypertension, etc.); wellness physicals; vaccinations; wellness and health education services; HIV/Hepatitis C testing; and contraceptive consultations.

Clemson Rural Health is an organizing framework for statewide health service delivery and prevention efforts housed in the College of Behavioral, Social and Health Sciences. Franklin is expecting a telehealth cart to be placed in the church that will be made available for the community to receive care with the assistance of Franklin's certified medical professionals assisting patients with connections and requests from the Clemson Rural Health professionals as needed.

During the mobile health unit visits, OCAB (Orangeburg, Calhoun, Allendale and Bamberg) Community Action Agency offered enrollment for Head Start and Early Head Start, plus parenting information and information about other programs offered through OCAB.

Palmetto AIDS Life Support Services was also present on the Nov. 28 visit offering free HIV testing, information and support. The South Carolina Christian Action Council presented information about their offerings and brought PALSS with them on that day as follow up for World AIDS Day, when Dr. Regina Moore of South Carolina Christian Action Council served as guest speaker on Nov. 26 in preparation for World AIDS Day on Dec. 1. Moore reminded all of their responsibilities for themselves and others. Franklin thanks Hercules Rice, Administrative Council chair, for his dedication for everything including opening and securing the church.



Palmetto AIDS Life Support Services was also present on the Nov. 28 visit offering free HIV testing, information and support.

Franklin celebrated its first One Night Revival since the start of the pandemic on Thursday, Aug. 10. Evangelism Chair Essie Steward organized the revival. Guest speaker was the Rev. Adrienne Cobbs-Stokes of Buckhead UMC, Ruffin, and Hickory Hill UMC, Smoaks.

Franklin celebrated Halloween with its first Trunk or Treat. It was an idea United Women in Faith President Sharron Steedley brought to fruition with Sister Linda Brown and the church veterans immediately after the church's Friends and Family Day, Oct. 29. Friends and Family Day was co-chaired by Jackie Brown and Curtis Tyler with Essie Steward, Ogretta Tyler and Linda Brown assisting. The Rev. Larry McCutcheon, chaplain at Claflin University, was the guest speaker. Franklin honored its veterans and their families with a beautiful service organized by Brown. The veterans received gift bags that were cherished.

Franklin had its first Community Thanksgiving Service and Dinner on the Saturday before Thanksgiving, Nov. 18. It was a success and was the idea of Essie

Steward. She received support from Linda Brown, Shirley Vanterpool, Bonnie Bennett and Glorine Brabham, among others. The guest speaker was Jonathan Harley from St. Mark UMC, North.

Franklin also had a Community Holiday Celebration with food, fun and fellowship on Saturday, Dec. 16.

Franklin also held Voorhees University Day Sunday, Jan. 28, 2024, at 9:30 a.m. with Voorhees President Dr. Ronnie Hopkins as the guest speaker. Franklin has been working with Voorhees, including family food distributions and the like, with the assistance of Voorhees Community Liaison and Franklin's CUIC Chair Dr. Thelma Sojourner and Curtis Tyler.

Orange Grove UMC has been extremely busy as well. Orange Grove's One Day Revival was Sunday, Aug. 20, with McCutcheon as the guest speaker.

Orange Grove's Lay Leader and PPRC Chair Leonard Rivers participated in the One in Christ Community Dinner Oct. 3 in Orangeburg in an effort to address discrimination, inequalities and disparities.

Orange Grove celebrated its 163rd church anniversary Oct. 22 with the Rev. Mack McClam reminding all why they are here and still serving. McClam blessed the church and encouraged members and friends to keep serving.

Orange Grove has a dynamic youth and young adult program with Bridget Williams keeping the younger generations motivated. Orange Grove celebrated Halloween with Trunk or Treat with tables and the fellowship hall beautifully decorated including balloons by Devin Sapp and bags of treats from various organizations.

Orange Grove's veterans were honored with a brief service and gift bags that were appreciated .

On Saturday, Nov. 18, Orange Grove celebrated its seniors and community with Brunch and Bingo. Orange Grove youth, young adults, men and women were in attendance serving. They cooked, fried, grilled, decorated, shared, laughed and loved as required by God. They did no harm, did good and attended God's ordinances. Former pastor Bobby Gordon also celebrated.

Orange Grove had its Christmas Fellowship Dinner Sunday, Dec. 17. The church was beautifully decorated with a Hanging of the Greens service written by Sister Carolyn Grimes and Sister Nadine McMillan. Youth presented a Christmas program.

On Saturday, Jan. 20, 2024, at noon, Orange Grove's Dr. Kedralyn L. Folk offered a webinar on artificial intelligence, and on Jan. 21, Orange Grove had Youth/Student Sunday at 11 a.m. with the Rev. Shirley Gordon of the WOO (Wesley of Orangeburg) as the guest speaker.

The service was followed by Faith, Food, Friends and Football Tailgating hosted by the Orange Grove Children and Youth from 12:30-2:30 p.m.

Both churches also recognize the importance of mental health and wholeness and support the community by offering AS+K to Save A Life Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper training virtually resuming in February.

Yates pastors the churches.



Prayer garden beginnings

Fourteen months after its groundbreaking, the prayer garden at Republican UMC, McCormick, is becoming a reality. The prayer garden was the vision of member Nan Goff. The committee worked with her trying to create her vision. After two years, a lot of revisions, working with the terrain and guidance from a contractor, the concrete has been poured. There are many steps to go, but the vision is becoming a reality. The Rev. Susan Galasso pastors the church.



Sandy Grove UMC remembered the reason for the season and shared the gift of Jesus Christ all over the world as well as at home.



Sandy Grove honors Christ through prayerful service projects

By Pat Collins

During the Christmas season, Sandy Grove United Methodist Church, Jefferson, enjoyed the reason for the season. In honor of Jesus Christ, church members participated in Samaritans Purse Operation Christmas Child. They were blessed to be able to prepare 239 shoeboxes with the help of their sister church, Mount Elon. They had help from everyone from the children to their pastor, the Rev. Loretta Cooper. After the boxes were stuffed with all kinds of gifts—such as toys, socks, toothbrushes, soap and wash cloths—the boxes were packed and prayed over. They were then dropped off at the First Baptist Church in Kershaw, where they were prayed over again. Then, 16 people from the church went to the shoebox processing center in Charlotte. At the processing center, they completed the

packing process and prepared more than 85,000 boxes to ship to more than 10 countries all over the world. Every few hours during the process, worked stopped and the boxes were prayed over. Also during the Christmas season, Sandy Grove visited the boys home (thanks to coordination from Mission chairperson Molly Price) and the nursing home (thanks to coordination from Outreach chairperson Flora White). They also exchanged gifts and fruit bags with the church's entire membership, always praying over every process. All in all, Sandy Grove UMC remembered the reason for the season and shared the gift of Jesus Christ all over the world as well as at home. Remember: Prayer changes things.

Collins is project coordinator for the church.



Photos courtesy of Deborah C. Calhoun

Love through service

Emmanuel UMC, Sumter, was the host site for a Day of Service Event for the Sumter Adult Education Program. Emmanuel is the home of the city's official soup kitchen, where Jean Dillon is the coordinator. Above, Emmanuel pastor the Rev. James Moses Smith and his wife, Grace (at center), stand with Deborah C. Calhoun (far left), a staff member teaching English for Speakers of other Languages and SPRC chair, and Dr. Vanessa Smith-Canty (right), the adult education director. Below, the staff of the Sumter Adult Education Program gather for a smile.



Epworth Children's Home

Offering help and support

It's that time of year in early winter when we often make New Year's resolutions and decide the things in our lives we need to change and the improvements we can make in the way we live. Sometimes we stick to these resolutions; sometimes we have forgotten them by the first of spring. But the important thing is that we as human beings evaluate our lives, our behaviors and our desires for the future, and we think about changes we can make to achieve some of these goals. This self-evaluation is a healthy thing. Fred Rogers, who we remember as the wise, gentle friend on the PBS series "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," was also an ordained minister, and perhaps he said it best in his statement that "There is no normal life that is perfect, free of pain or some level of need for improvement. It's the very recognizing and wrestling with our problems that can be the impetus for our growth." Making resolutions to improve our physical health is often a standard plan, whether we have a desire to lose weight, eat more healthy meals, get more exercise or pay more attention to our physical wellbeing in general. However, too often, we forget how important it is to also make a plan for taking care of our mental and emotional health, as well. In fact, looking after our mental health is vitally important to maintaining our overall health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explain how mental health affects most aspects of our life including our emotional, psychological and social well-being, stating that "It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices." "Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood." At Epworth Children's Home, we are particularly attuned to the importance of maintaining good mental health and to helping to find solutions when mental health challenges are present in the children and families we serve. People think of Epworth as a place where children are given a safe place to live, where they depend on healthy food to eat, physical care and affection and support from Epworth's staff. This is true, of course, but Epworth is also focused on the mental health of all the children and families we serve. We have seen the strong, organic connection between physical wellbeing and healthy, stable emotional and mental health. Often children and family members come to Epworth with histories of abuse, neglect, dysfunctionality in the home and other factors that have affected their mental and emotional health. We have developed programs and services that focus on providing the security, understanding and knowledge that can lead to restoring a better outlook on life, and eventually, the attainment of better emotional and mental health. One of the most significant of Epworth's expansion areas is the Center for Counseling. Epworth had a counseling program for decades for its residents and their families, but the staff recognized a great need to offer child and family counseling to a much larger population across South Carolina. The counseling center was created to serve the general public, as well as referrals from state agencies and other children's services organizations, foster and adoptive families, private physicians, public schools, colleges and universities, churches and nonprofit entities that serve children and families. Through assessment, individual therapy, family therapy, group therapy, substance abuse education, psychological testing, psychiatric services, parenting education and support groups and other rehabilitative services, the Center for Counseling provides strong mental health counseling that covers a broad spectrum of children, youth and family needs. With the establishment of the Center for Counseling, Epworth brings a strong array of new and expanded programs and services related to the mental health needs of children, youth and families to a much wider service area across the entire state. We at Epworth are proud of our work in addressing the mental and emotional health of those we serve, as well as others who are referred to the Center for Counseling for help and support. We are also mindful of the strong connections between the center and Epworth's other programs that help children and families with their mental and emotional health, including the Family Care Center, our foster family initiative, our Center for Independent Living and our Homebuilders program. Louisa May Alcott, whose novels we have loved since childhood, directly expressed a goal for all of us as we seek good mental and emotional health. She said, "I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship." And of course, words of Scripture provide a source of solace, wisdom and inspiration as we all face challenges in our lives. This passage from the Book of John is particularly fitting: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27 NIV).

—Epworth staff

Around the Districts

Florence District

St. Paul UMC, Kingstree, prepared more than 600 meals for its annual Christmas giveaway. The meals were delivered to people in need across Williamsburg County.

Marion District

Asbury UMC, Clio, hosted Shot Day Nov. 14. The church hosted nurses, who administered both flu shots and the new COVID-19 vaccine.

Leave A Legacy To Change Lives

The South Carolina United Methodist Foundation
P. O. Box 5087, Columbia, SC 29250-5087
scumf@bellsouth.net

Columbia Bethlehem Center

Thanks, Dr. Whitney Williams

“With an upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.”—Psalms 78:72

The Columbia Bethlehem Community Center entered the new year with an upright heart and lifted hands of gratitude. This past year, we have seen both our donations and participation increase. Our participation numbers have doubled since 2022 with an average of 40 kids attending our monthly gatherings. We are continuing to offer resources and opportunities to our community through our partnership with Columbia Housing Authority.

None of our success would be possible without the support of the United Women in Faith throughout South Carolina.

In addition to their donations and financial contributions, there has been one woman—Dr. Whitney Williams—who has gone above and beyond to ensure our success through her leadership. That one woman has been a champion for United Women of Faith, a leader for her colleagues on Columbia Bethlehem Community Center’s board and an advocate for the families in the communities we serve. Williams is a specialized HIV pharmacist by day and a wife, mom and community advocate by night. A dedicated member of Francis Burns United Methodist Church in Columbia, Williams holds a special place in the CBCC’s heart because of the various roles she’s served over the past decade.

From serving as an after-school volunteer, board member, executive director and most recently board chair, Dr. Williams continuously commits to the success of the organization. This past December she completed her two-year term as chair. One of the last initiatives she led was “Adopt a Family this Christmas.” Through this initiative we were able to give gifts out to children in addition to gifting parents with Bags of Love. These Bags of Love were filled with food, toiletries and household supplies. Because of this, we were able to bring smiles to so many families and make the Christmas holiday a little lighter for several families.

This article is written to show our appreciation and admiration for Williams’ commitment, courage, compassion and leadership.

This year, Columbia Bethlehem Community Center will hold several events for the community. All ages are welcome, and food will be served:

- Friendship Day, Saturday, Feb. 17, 12-4 p.m.
- Kites at the Star, Saturday, April 13, 12-4 p.m.
- Mommies Day at the Movies, Saturday, May 11, 12-4 p.m.
- CBCC is located at 308 McRae St., Columbia.

To learn more about our new leadership and our upcoming events please visit our website, <https://www.columbiabethlehemcc.org>, or connect on Facebook at CBCCServes.



The center has a number of community activities planned this year.



The church gave away hams and turkeys to its neighbors.



The annual Adopt-a-Family Christmas ministry was held in December.

St. Stephen UMC reflects on fulfillment of call to serve

“The greatest among you will be your servant.”—Matthew 5:16 (NIV)

ORANGEBURG—As the St. Stephen UMC family reflects on 2023, they can give God the glory and praise for the blessings that they were able to bestow to the families in Orangeburg this past year.

Located at 4500 North Road, the church has become a beacon of light for their community and the surrounding areas and hopes to be so in years to come.

Brother Michael P. Jarvis, chairperson of Outreach Ministry, has thoroughly enjoyed working with the families in the communities over the years. Jarvis had enormous support from the Men’s Ministry, Life Groups Ministries (Age-Level Ministries) and members of the church to make all of these efforts a success.

The ministry did much work in 2023. In August, a Back to School Bash was held at the church. Even though there was inclement weather, it did not stop the activities that were planned. There were games and food for all the children. The ministry provided back-to-school items as well as clear backpacks for the children.

Another annual event was the Ham and Turkey Giveaway. It was held in November. Traditionally, the members would supply turkeys and hams. This year, however, Outreach Ministry partnered with a nonprofit organization called Everybody Eats under the direction of Dr. Ansari Muhammad. The organization provided 100 turkeys. Outreach, Life Groups, members and other organizations provided the hams and produce that made the Thanksgiving dinner complete. Everybody Eats volunteers and members of St. Stephen UMC blessed more than 100 families through this event.

Finally, the annual Adopt-a-Family Christmas ministry was held in December.

Church Life Groups adopted a family or families. After receiving the family’s wish list, members of the groups made sure that as many items on the list as possible were provided to seven families. Outreach provided the “big ticket” items such as bicycles, TVs and more. This event was also supported by the golf organization, Orangeburg Homeboys Golf Outing. A program was held as the families came out to receive their gifts and shared gratitude for the support of the church. The program included the Children’s Choir of the church as well as songstress Debetta Smith of Orangeburg.

“The Outreach Ministry of Saint Stephen UMC was active in reaching out to the community once again in 2023,” Pastor Kenneth Carter said. “It was both a blessing and a privilege to help others in their times of need. We feel that helping the ‘least of these’ is part of fulfilling our obligations as believers and the church. Many families were helped during the season of Thanksgiving by the giving of turkeys, hams and various kinds of vegetables. Also, during the Christmas season, many families that were selected by the Outreach Ministry, members of Life Groups and members of the church were blessed with an abundance of gifts for the families.”

Carter said God has blessed St. Stephen for many years to give to the community.

“We believe because we give in these times, God keeps on blessing us to do so,” Carter said.

“We thank and praise God for his blessing to us and to others.”

Jarvis thanked the Outreach Committee, Everybody Eats, Life Groups, church members and friends for their continued support as they serve those that God calls them to serve.

“We are looking forward to even bigger blessings in 2024,” Jarvis said.

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Deadline: March 10, 2024

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SOUTH CAROLINA
METHODIST CONFERENCE
CREDIT UNION

Credit Union’s 68th Annual Meeting to be Held February 26, 2024, at Epworth Children’s Home

The credit union will hold its 68th annual meeting at Epworth Children’s Home on February 26th in the Dining Hall. Lunch will be provided to registered attendees at noon and the business meeting will begin at 1:00 P.M. Door prizes will be given after the business meeting. The annual meeting provides all members the opportunity to hear what is happening at the credit union firsthand and vote on credit union leadership.

If you would like to attend, please contact the credit union by February 16th at 803-691-0037 to reserve your place.

2023 APPORTIONMENTS: Orangeburg District leads

From Page 1

shown in the mission and ministry of the conference,” said Beth Westbury, the UMC-SC’s treasurer and director of administrative services. “We remain faithful in our efforts to develop our church leaders, engage our communities, and grow disciples. We could not do this without our churches and their dedicated support. I give a heartfelt thank you to each one.”

Apportionment monies cover clergy salaries, congregational development, campus ministries and other items in the conference budget, as well as global efforts such as the Africa University fund.

In addition, churches gave about \$203,000 in “extra-mile” giving for United Methodist colleges and homes.

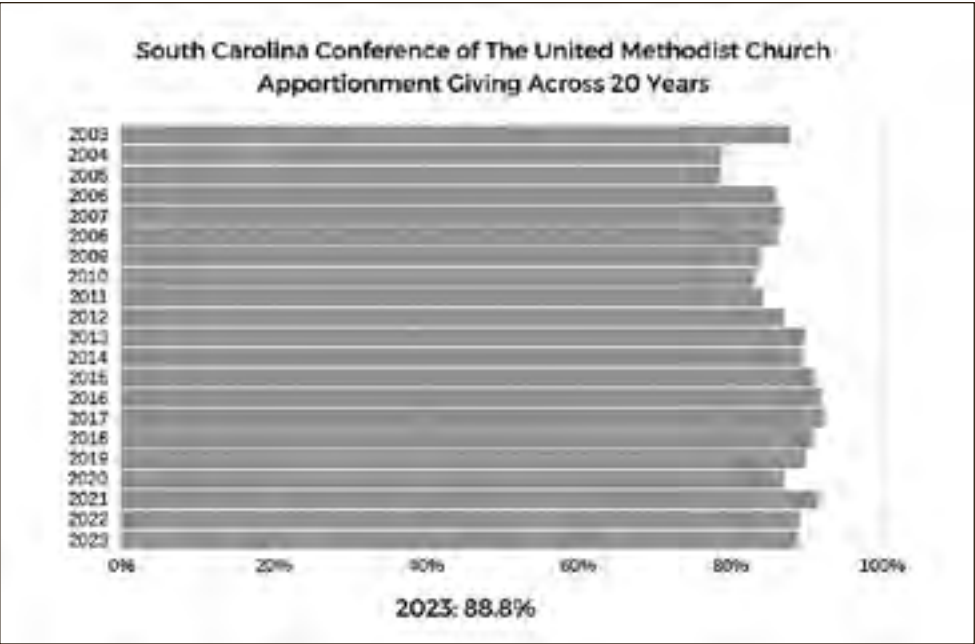
Of the 953 churches that paid apportion-

ments in 2023, 760 paid 100 percent of their apportionments; 56 churches paid \$0.

The Orangeburg District again saw the highest percentage of apportionments paid, with a collection percentage of 98.9 percent. Charleston District came in second place at 93.8 percent, and Columbia District came in third at 93.1 percent.

Collection has begun for 2024 apportionments; the budget for 2024 is \$13.2 million.

The 2025 budget is being drafted now and goes before the conference for approval in June. UMCSC financial leaders said in the fall they expect a leaner budget for the conference for 2025, given the churches that separated in 2023 and in anticipation of more separating churches in 2024. They have urged ministries to prepare by reducing their own budgets.



SHEPHERD’S FUND: 24 grants given to S.C. retirees last year

From Page 1

Started in 2016 thanks to an anonymous donor who was part of the South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church, The Shepherd’s Fund strives to heed the charge in 1 Timothy 5:17, which notes, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (NIV).

While initially the fund was only available to people in the South Georgia Conference, they have since expanded to South Carolina and every other conference in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, plus Louisiana, West Virginia and Arkansas.

The Rev. Chris Lollis, pensions and health benefits officer for the South Carolina Conference of the UMC, is partnering with Derek W. McAleer, recently retired treasurer and benefits officer for the South Georgia Conference, to get the word out to South Carolina retired clergy that funds are available for all, regardless of need. McAleer helps retirees know about the fund.

“This is not a hoax; it’s legitimate,” Lollis said, noting care

grants of up to \$10,000 are available every 12 months and people are encouraged to apply. “I find a lot of folks didn’t plan well for retirement, and there’s more money available than you might think.”

They also assist retirees from several seminaries and retired clergy from the African Methodist Episcopal denomination.

McAleer said the fund will start serving retirees from the Global Methodist Church this year.

McAleer said that in 2023, The Shepherd’s Fund was able to give out 883 grants totaling just less than \$8.5 million in care. Their goal for 2024 is 1,000 grants, about \$10 million in care.

They started granting funds to South Carolina in 2022, offering nine grants. In 2023, they gave 24 grants to South Carolina retirees.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity for our retired clergy people, some of whom are truly in need,” Lollis said. “Sometimes they have to decide whether to pay a bill or eat.”

According to The Shepherd’s Fund, many pastors serve

small churches and do not have substantial salaries. Often they work second jobs to supplement their income. As a result, they often are not able to set aside an appropriate sum of money for retirement, and when a medical crisis occurs, this puts them in a financial crisis as well.

A retired pastor and his or her spouse can qualify for a one-time grant up to \$10,000 each or \$20,000 total. They may reapply in subsequent years, every 12 months, especially if they have a chronic ongoing medical condition.

Grants may also be given to disabled pastors and their spouses; widows of pastors; and retired/disabled pastors who are legal custodians for their adult children that may have a disability from childhood. Grants may also be given to retired/disabled pastors that are legal custodians for their grandchildren who have a medical crisis or disability, regardless of age.

To apply for a grant, go to <https://www.theshepherdsfund.org/> and click on “Our Process.” Fund administrators will coordinate with the retiree’s conference benefits, alumni or denominational contact.

FORGIVEN TO FORGIVE: Goal to pay off \$1 million in debt

From Page 1

The idea for Forgiven to Forgive started this past summer, when Mount Zion member Benji Cumbie texted Harris a news story podcast about a church in North Carolina that had helped forgive millions of dollars in medical debts in its community.

“My initial thought was, ‘I bet that’s a huge church that has lots of money!’ But it wasn’t,” Harris said. “In fact, the church was about the size of Mount Zion.”

Mount Zion, while very active in missions and ministry in its community, is a relatively small church in South Carolina’s Upstate, averaging 60-65 people on Sundays.

The North Carolina church in the news story was able to accomplish this debt payoff through a partnership with RIP Medical Debt, a nonprofit organization that purchases medical debts in bulk from hospitals and other medical providers at a deeply discounted price, primarily targeting people at poverty level. This bulk discount stretches the donated funds a lot farther, costing just pennies on the dollar, Harris explained.

Fascinated, Harris texted Cumbie to see if he thought Mount Zion could do something similar. “The momentum just built from there,” he said.

With the church’s Missions and Evangelism Committee, headed by David and Beth McWilliams, they developed a campaign called Forgiven to Forgive, with the idea that the church would do all it could during the season of Lent to donate to this fund and help pay off medical debt for people in the tri-county area.

Harris said it’s obviously a Christlike thing to do, but theologically it also honors the essence of Jubilee found in Scripture (Leviticus 25:1-13, Numbers 36:4) that every so often there is a reset when debts are forgiven.



From left, Mount Zion members Mac McWilliams, Beth McWilliams and Benji Cumbie strategize about the Forgiven to Forgive medical debt payoff campaign, which runs from Ash Wednesday to Easter.

After all, medical debt is a huge problem for many people. Statistics from Urban Institute indicate South Carolina ranks second-worst in the nation for highest medical debt.

The McWilliamses said the program is an opportunity for Mount Zion to reach out in Christian love to others in need, which is at the very heart of the church’s mission.

“Our belief is that the church does not exist only inside the church walls but is and should be an integral part of the needs of the people within the community,” they told the *Advocate*. “As stated in Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 22:39, we are told to love our neighbors as ourselves. This means we should treat others with kindness, respect and compassion. Being able to assist those in need is a way to show love in our community.”

Cumbie said the church’s motto is “Making disciples who share the love of Christ” and helping neighbors with medical debt is a great way to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

“If we want to make a difference in this world and in our community, then we need to do the work of Jesus,” Cumbie said. “If you

have ever had debt hanging over you, then you know what a burden it is. I can’t think of many better ways to show the love of Christ than by helping forgive our neighbors of their debt.”

Harris shared how when he was in seminary, his oldest child was born, and they experienced a time of deep humility.

“The only reason we could afford the cost of his delivery was that we were so poor that we qualified for Medicaid,” Harris said.

Harris personally knows others who faced similar hardships.

“I know of at least one cancer survivor in the church who faced huge medical bills while trying to raise a family, send kids to college and undergo treatments for that terrible disease,” Harris said. “To be able to forgive debts in the name of Christ for people like that sounds a lot like God’s kingdom coming and God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven.”

While the campaign officially begins on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 14, people can already start donating toward the church’s goal of \$1

million. They hope all people in their church and community, as well as others across the state, will consider helping the effort. Not only can individuals donate, but they are organizing group efforts too, such as a fundraiser night at a local restaurant.

“This is really something we don’t want to take on ourselves but include as many people as possible, ultimately helping all our neighbors,” Harris said. “As the pastor of this church, I keep coming back to the idea of making disciples who share the love of Christ. It’s one thing to say you love someone. It’s another thing to show them you love them by wiping away their debts and saying, ‘I care about you so much that I am going to sacrifice something significant so that you can experience forgiveness.’ Is that not what Jesus says to each of us?”

Cumbie agreed. “Christ has forgiven us, so we know God has called us to forgive others, he said. “During the Lent and Easter seasons, we feel like it is important to help our friends and neighbors experience forgiveness.”

All are welcome to contribute to Mount Zion’s Forgiven to Forgive campaign through RIP Medical Debt. Scan the QR code on this page or go to <https://www.ripmedicaldebt.org/campaign/forgiven-to-forgive>.

Harris also encourages other United Methodist churches to prayerfully consider whether they are being led to partner with a group like RIP Medical Debt to help people in debt in their communities.

Learn more about starting a campaign at <https://ripmedicaldebt.org/campaigns> (or scan QR code at right).



SEJ: ‘Our best thinking about how we can move forward’

From Page 1

as combining the Holston Conference into the same episcopal area as the Central Appalachian Missionary and Kentucky Conference.

The rest of the conferences—including South Carolina Conference—will remain as-is under the proposal.

An episcopal area in The United Methodist Church is presided over by a resident bishop and can include one or more annual conferences. For example, Holston is the resident bishop of the Columbia Area, which comprises only the South Carolina Conference, while Bishop Leonard Fairley is the resident bishop of the Louisville Area, which includes both the Kentucky Conference and the Central Appalachian Missionary Conference.

Currently, 11 resident bishops are assigned within the Southeastern Jurisdiction. Bishop Bill McAlilly, resident bishop of the

Nashville Area, which includes the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference, will retire under mandatory retirement effective Aug. 31.

That will leave 10 active bishops available for assignment within the Southeastern Jurisdiction.

“After detailed analysis, robust discussion, prayer and discernment,” the Committee on the Episcopacy’s letter reads, the committee recommends the following 10 episcopal areas for the 2024-2028 quadrennium (to be effective Sept. 1, 2024, if SEJ delegates approve):

- Alabama-West Florida/North Alabama South Georgia Area
- Central Appalachian Missionary/Holston/Kentucky Area
- Florida Area
- Mississippi Area
- North Carolina Area
- North Georgia Area
- South Carolina Area

- Tennessee-Western Kentucky Area
- Virginia Area
- Western North Carolina Area

“We know that these recommendations will require additional conversation among delegates so that delegates can be prepared to vote on them in July,” the committee said in its letter. “We have asked heads of delegations to work with the SEJ Committee on the Episcopacy on providing resources related to these recommendations.

“Additionally, we recognize that every jurisdiction within The United Methodist Church is having similar conversations, and we commit to continued collaboration as we journey together into God’s preferred future for our Connection.

“We strongly encourage delegates to keep these recommendations in prayer as we prepare to gather for our General Conference in April and for our Jurisdictional Conference in July.”

Thoughts from South Carolina’s delegates

The Committee on the Episcopacy is composed of two General Conference delegates from each annual conference in the jurisdiction, typically the first-elected lay delegate and the first-elected clergy delegate. Its responsibilities, as spelled out in the *Book of Discipline*, are to “review the work of the bishops, pass on their character and official administration, and report to the jurisdictional conference its findings for such action as the conference may deem appropriate” and to recommend assignments of bishops to their respective areas.

South Carolina’s representatives on the committee are Jackie Jenkins, the first-elected lay delegate to General Conference and a member of St. Mark UMC in St. George; and the Rev. Ken Nelson, the first-elected clergy delegate to General Conference and superintendent of the Orangeburg District.

“These recommendations represent

our best thinking about how we can move forward in this particular season of our jurisdictional life together,” Nelson said. “In recommending that we not elect any bishops this year, we acknowledge the fluidity in many of our local churches and annual conferences. And shifting to 10 episcopal areas would enable us to better align ourselves with God’s mission of redeeming and transforming the whole world.”

Jenkins, who also serves as head of the South Carolina delegation, said that being a part of holy conferencing and the collaborative work was “quite a growing experience” and “equally gratifying, knowing that we were doing God’s work.”

South Carolina Resident Bishop L. Jonathan Holston said the South Carolina Conference was honored to host this group of lay and clergy leaders in Charleston in early January.


“I greatly appreciate the members of the Committee on the Episcopacy for their prayerful consideration of our next steps together across the Southeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church,” he said. “I am especially grateful for the faithfulness they have exhibited during our consultations on this and other matters as we prepare for the upcoming General Conference, Jurisdictional Conference and our individual annual conferences.”

Nelson and others see the recommendations as a step forward from years of uncertainty into a future with hope.

“It is a fact: We are not what we used to be, but in God’s grace, we are not yet what we shall be,” Nelson said. “We remain a people of hope. We believe that the Southeastern Jurisdiction remains fertile soil for making disciples of Jesus Christ and that God is not done with us yet.”

For more on the SEJ, visit <https://www.sejumc.org>.

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Jenkins



Nelson

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and chair of the department

JOHN WETMORE

Junior computer science major
from St. Petersburg, Florida

*“If you take Dr. Garrett’s classes, you have to be willing
to think and problem solve.”*

When Garrett was contacted by a Wofford graduate about someone to create a digital tool for his business, Garrett immediately thought of Wetmore. When Wetmore needed advice about the contract work, he looked to Garrett. The two connected in class and have now formed a mentoring bond. Garrett sees his role as that of a shop teacher helping students learn to use tools safely. Wetmore values Garrett’s commitment to his students.



Where
thought
leads.

To problem solving.

ERT: Teams worked fast to stay ahead of another storm

From Page 1

On Jan. 10, the Rev. John Elmore, the Rev. Fred and Clara Buchanan and Don and Kathy Beatty completed ERT damage assessments in Bamberg to lay the foundation for a full-scale response Jan. 11.

On Jan. 11, two ERT teams with two ERT trailers and access to a skid steer responded to the Town of Bamberg where an EF-2 tornado wreaked havoc through much of downtown.

A large focus was placed on tarping a damaged portion of roof on top of Main Street United Methodist Church. The effort required the building of a structure to support a tarp and use of a high-ranging bucket truck, provided by my son William Robinson, who was in Bamberg working on downed power lines with his company NorthStar Utilities.

Volunteers spread throughout Bamberg into three other teams doing chainsaw work on downed trees, removing debris from storm-damaged homes and yards and tarping damaged roofs, all while witnessing and encouraging survivors in the name of Jesus Christ.

At least six homes and families were helped. ERT responders included Evans, the Buchanans, the Beattys, Bill Turner, Danny McKeown, Darrel Briggs, Mark Honge, the Rev. Cynthia Williams, the Rev. Sheera Yates, Dan Dowbridge and Monica Tilley. Others assisting were South Carolina UMC Orangeburg District Superintendent the Rev. Ken Nelson; Mike Baldwin of Bamberg, who used his skid steer to help; Dan O'Mara; Jayne Schaefer; Nancy Goff; and Bud Parker.

Also on Jan. 11, a third team—comprising Chuck Marshall, Phil Griswold, Ward Smith, Felix Vazquez, Trudy Robinson and myself—responded with an ERT trailer to the Orangeburg County towns of Santee and Bowman.

At each location, we were faced with daunting, dangerous situations where 30- to 50-foot sections of tin roofs had been ripped off mobile homes, exposing the homes to the weather and rain. Our team had to cut strips in the partially attached tin roofs that were laying on the ground, then

The next ERT Basic Training Class is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 17 at 9 a.m. at St. John's UMC, Aiken, for all who would like to join the ERT ministry. Contact Billy Robinson for information at 803-539-8429 or brpraisejesus@aol.com.

hoist them up by hand and ropes back onto the roof truss while taking care not to fall through into the home or off the damaged structural members. We then placed duct tape over the sharp edges and completely tarped the homes over the replaced tin roofs.

This daunting task took us all day and into the night. At both locations families were still living out of the severely damaged structures and had all of their furniture and possessions inside.

In Bowman a man came up to my wife, Trudy, and stated how amazed he was that total strangers from all across South Carolina who had no affiliation with the homeowners would give of their time, finances and physical efforts in taking on such dangerous tasks to help others in dire need. Many people had passed by to look and take photos, but no one else had stopped to help in any way, the man said.

"I want to be a part of a true ministry like yours that goes beyond the church walls and directly into the danger zones to help others in dire need," the man told her. "This is the church in action as I have never seen it before."

All three teams worked especially hard to get all the disaster work completed Jan. 11 as additional severe storms and more soaking rain were predicted for the next day.

Teams were able to finish all known emergent needs.

We thank our Lord and savior Jesus Christ for the honor and privilege of serving in this wonderful, exciting and extremely fulfilling ministry of care, love and devotion to helping others in dire need.

Robinson is coordinator of S.C. UMVIM ERT.



Above, some homes lost a roof in the storm. Below, volunteers tarp a damaged home.



This photo shows the damage in Edgefield.



Above and below, ERT members work on damaged homes.



Photos by Billy Robinson, Mike Evans, and Dan Dowbridge.



Guest Commentary

by Donna Polk Fisher

The Circle of Grace

As I sit in my chair on this Sabbath morning of New Year’s Eve, 2023, watching the sun rise over the mountains and valley, I find my heart “strangely warmed” once more. For you see, I have just reread the article I carefully cut from the November issue of the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate*, “Son of a Sharecropper Goes Home,” by the Rev. Joseph Abram Jr.

It was just such a morning in early November after my husband and I had completed our prolonged transition from North Georgia to Lake Junaluska, North Carolina. Earlier that week, I had placed my very first copy of the *Advocate* sent to our new address on the table beside my chair.

Truth be told, I was somewhat apprehensive about picking it up. For the entire month of October, it seemed, my friendship feed had brought nothing but mourning, loss, disappointment and despair, as so many of my friends are clergy and lay members of all ages going through the tectonic shock waves of our church splitting apart. They had mirrored my own emotions following the most recent closure of General Conference that brought no closure at all to the sore festering in The United Methodist Church—a church my father taught me to love on his knee.

And then my eyes lit on a topic near to my heart and my family, “Son of a Sharecropper Goes Home.” For it was on a farm with sharecroppers that I first learned, over one summer when I was 5, that the South’s economic system was unjust. It took only five days of getting up at dawn, riding the drag to the tobacco barn with John’s kids and handing tobacco all day until 5 p.m., with only one hour off for lunch. When my grandfather handed me a crisp \$5 bill for my week’s work, my kindergarten math just did not add up to enough to support anyone’s family, even counting the number in John’s family who were working.

To my surprise, as I continued to read this amazing story about the missions of Africa University, I realized that the church homecoming the author was describing was also a homecoming of my spiritual brother. For as this place had been a crucible for the Rev. Joseph Abram Jr., it was also a chrysalis of sorts for me, bringing back full circle this South Carolina UMC preacher’s kid, growing up during this earlier era of wholesale seismic change of civil rights.

For in 1970, Bishop Paul Hardin appointed my father, the Rev. Charles Polk, to be superintendent of the Marion District, and he became the district superintendent of my mother’s extended family, the J.M. Bests of Galivants Ferry.

There was much irony in this timing, as he had become in his first appointment as a Duke Seminary graduate the new minister of the charge in 1944 that included Sandy Plain UMC, on a site donated by my mother’s grandfather.

Here he met and married the president of the Methodist Youth Fellowship, Hattie Best, by then a sophomore at Columbia College.

Here some 26 years later, they were now living in the district parsonage, right next to the First UMC in Marion.

My mother details in her memoir, “Out of My Life and Reflections,” the climate during that time: “Skill and endless negotiations were the order of the day. ... Things at times were explosive.” Literally and figuratively, I might add.

My mother was so excited about my father’s new position that she rushed home to exclaim, “Mama, are you proud of Charles for being appointed a district superinten-



This pen and ink drawing of First UMC, Marion, shows the church in which the author’s mother grew up.

dent?”

My grandmother quickly turned to my mother “with a decided emphasis and with a look of less than pleasure” and said, “Yes, but I didn’t want him to be our DS!”

This is merely one example of the complications in family dynamics that grew from the historic vote in 1972 when the South Carolina Conference adopted the merger of the Black and White conferences. My mother includes in her book a letter she wrote to my grandmother describing an incredible, euphoric worship service she experienced when she first visited one of the Black congregations in the Marion District.

As a new graduate from Columbia College, I experienced much the same when I visited with my father a dynamic, spirit-filled celebration that was my first such experience. I could easily now understand why such a church community was eager to stay all Sunday afternoon, joyous in worship, while in every church we served, my father kept his watch in the pulpit to ensure the Methodists could beat the Baptists to the best restaurant in town.

My grandmother wasn’t the only family member to express displeasure over my parents’ stand on civil rights. But over the decades, many grew in their understanding of what the Holy Spirit was leading our UMC to become. Even today, our family is still represented by active members of this very church.

And that brings me, more than 50 years later, to why this powerful story of homecoming found my heart “strangely warmed.”

Because in that moment of euphoria I experienced in the rendering of that special day, I felt the presence of God. I felt the Holy Spirit, hovering, surrounding, sending a clear message that the mourning, loss, disappointment and despair so many of us have recently endured are but preparation for the greatest news of all.

How it made my soul soar to witness such grace-filled Christian hospitality when my soul brother, Rev. Abram, “found himself whispering to [his] maker, ‘Thank you, Lord, that the tears that the bishop, I, and others shed at Annual Conference were not for First United Methodist Church of Marion.’”

I say to that, “Amen, Brother Abram, I know at least two saints above who are dancing with glee that this is indeed the church that God has envisioned for us all.”

And to the current leadership, pastoral and lay, plus all the members of the congregation who, with arms wide open, ensured a sharecropper’s son felt at home at First UMC in Marion, all I can say is, “You have my eternal gratitude; you have expanded the circle of grace.”

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



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Lawrence “Larry” Stocker

The uses of AI within the church today

The use of artificial intelligence for our churches today, like so many other aides, involves exploring how artificial intelligence can be integrated into various aspects of church life and ministry.

Enhancing worship services: AI can be used to improve the quality of worship services. For example, AI-powered projectors or screens could display lyrics and scripture passages, adjusting in real-time to the pace of the service. AI-driven sound systems can optimize acoustics based on the number of attendees and the layout of the church.

Personalized pastoral care: AI can assist pastors in providing more personalized care to their congregation. Through data analysis, AI can help identify patterns in the needs and concerns of church members, enabling pastors to tailor their pastoral care more effectively.

Streamlining administrative tasks: AI can take over many administrative tasks, such as scheduling, managing church databases and even assisting in financial management. This can free up church staff to focus on more personal aspects of ministry.

Enhanced outreach and evangelism: AI can analyze data to identify the most effective methods of outreach and evangelism within a community. It can also help in creating targeted social media campaigns and other digital evangelism strategies.

Educational tools for faith learning: AI-driven educational tools can be used for Sunday school, Bible studies and other learning environments. These tools can adapt to the individual learning styles and paces of participants, making learning more effective and engaging.

Support for global missions: AI can assist in translating sermons and educational materials into multiple languages, making it easier for churches to support missions and connect with people globally.

Moral and ethical considerations: There is much importance of using AI in a way that aligns with Christian ethics and values. As long as we emphasize the need to ensure that AI enhances human connection and community within the church rather than replacing it, it can help.

This brief article concludes by acknowledging the potential of AI to significantly benefit churches in various areas, while also reminding readers of the importance of approaching this technology thoughtfully and ethically.

Stocker pastors Salem and Zion United Methodist churches, Dorchester.



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Tony Rowell

An enigma

Love is a fascinating thing, isn’t it? We have no idea from where it comes and no idea where it goes, but we all agree that to be twitterpated is to find nirvana. It’s something that we human beings need to exist. Like breath to the lungs is love to the heart and soul.

I have been privileged to travel the world more than six decades, and I have noted that there are a few constants that circle the globe. The sky is blue, rain is wet, grass is green, sunsets and sunrises will take your breath wherever you might be and people are in love. Whether you are in Times Square or Red Square or Tiananmen Square, you will find couples, men and women, old and young alike, strolling side by side with their hands entwined and their hearts strangely coupled.

Those yet to be blessed with this gift will tell you that love is chemically no different than binging on Hershey bars, but love is more than that. Love is not just a heart thing. True love, God-made love, is a soul thing. It is a spiritual thing, and done right, it is a forever thing.

I started writing this because Valentine’s Day is right around the corner. I always struggle when I know that I need to write about a particular thing. Yes, that’s childish, rebellious and just a little foolish, all of which describe my psyche fairly well. With that being said, in my life I have been blessed with love. I have been blessed with loving and with being loved, and Lord have mercy, I don’t believe that God has given the human race a greater gift than that. Love sustains us, it strengthens us, it separates us from the beasts and it is good.

Love is from God, and in turn, love is an enigma. Love is the thing that all men want to find, but love is elusive and just a little cagey. Love is indefinable; it’s intangible. You can’t comprehend it nor can you lay hold of it. Oh, you can lay hold of your loved one and be delighted, but you can’t hold love. You can’t find love, it must find you. You can’t create it or unearth it, because love is otherworldly. It comes from beyond our realm. It enters our hearts through paths unseen.

It is my nature to question things, and my inclination was to discuss how we as human beings rely on lesser loves, often to the detriment of true godly love. These loves in which we traffic are a shadow of the real thing; a mere counterfeit of the true love of God for mankind, but not today. Today I simply want to thank God for the gifts he gives us, and the greatest of these gifts is his love for us, and as an extension, the love he gives us towards one another.

To that end I want to say thank you to my God above and say a prayer for those who have yet to be blessed with his love. My prayer is that they will offer their hearts to the Lord fully and completely, so that he might fill them to overflowing with his perfect love, and their lives might be complete.

Rowell pastors Beulah United Methodist Church, Gilbert. He is also the author of “What Would Granny Say,” an essay collection from the Advocate Press available on Amazon or at <https://www.advocatesec.org/books>.



Guest Commentary

by Gerald Callahan

Why miracles?

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

Why a story on miracles? What right do I have to assume you, too, are experiencing miracles? It is my belief that miracles are happening to everyone all the time, but we are so busy with our daily routines that we do not listen when God talks to us and tries to lead us in the direction of our salvation. Is Sunday church the only time we slow down enough to hear his message?

This story is about how hard he tries every day and yet, somehow, we fail to hear his call.

We ignore the miracles taking place around us; we do not see the wonder of his presence.

This has been the fate of humanity throughout time. As the Bible points out, Jesus and his disciples were often unable to get the attention of the people as they performed their miracles: walking on water, raising the dead, feeding the masses and curing the sick.

My sole purpose for writing this is to motivate Christians, agnostics and atheists to slow down and recognize how God is speaking to us daily and how we are just too busy to hear his voice.

He has a plan for our existence, yet so many fail to hear him.

When I entered the word "miracle" into my computer's search engine, hundreds of sources were listed. It was interesting to note that about 70 percent referred to various religions and the miracles contained in their texts. In addition, many prominent individuals gave their definition of miracles; the secularists among the group tended to downplay the existence of true miracles while the religious people inclined to accept the examples as messages from and acts of their God.

Wikipedia defines a miracle as an event not explicable by natural or scientific laws. Such an event may be attributed to a supernatural being (a deity), magic, a miracle worker, saint or other religious leaders. The definition further includes any beneficial event that is statistically unlikely but not contrary to the laws of nature and that is just beating the odds. Or, as J.E. Littlewood, a famous British mathematician, put it, "A one-in-a-million commonplace event that happens about once per month for everyone."

Others will say the possibility and probability of miracles equals the possibility and probability of the existence of God.

A true miracle by definition would be a nonnatural phenomenon, leading many rational and scientific thinkers to dismiss them as physically impossible (Thomas Jefferson) or unable to be confirmed (David Hume).

"Coincidences" seem to be one of the most common descriptions given to miracles. The dictionary defines coincidence as a striking occurrence of two or more events happening by mere chance. Now, when I research statistical evidence, I find that as more "events" happen sequentially, the probability of it being a mere coincidence diminishes proportionally. It is my personal belief that as those events multiply, the chance factor morphs from a mere coincidence to a defined and truthful result, a miracle.

When we analyze scientific discoveries or mathematical theories, the conclusions reached are based on a series of events that continue to happen in a predictable sequence. The more systematically these events occur, the quicker the validity of the original hypothesis becomes accepted as truth.

This is my try to reach you.

Jesus opened our eyes to the wonder of miracles during his travels. Yet every day, life is full of miracles from the simplest to the most obvious to the completely inexplicable.

People we meet that influence us.

Events in our lives that lead us in a different direction.

They surround us, and they are of God, not coincidences. As St. Augustine said, "Miracles are not a contradiction of nature. They are only a contradiction of what we know of nature."

Hopefully this will motivate you to revisit those instances when you wondered why something happened the way it did.

Unfortunately, like many of us, you were probably too busy to take the time to analyze the miracles in your life.

Now you have a second chance; stop when something unusual happens and take the time to reflect on whether the message is from him.

He may be trying to give you the opportunity to follow a new and more joyous path.

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



Stories of Faith

by Deborah Len

Grow where you are planted

Bartholomew! Bartholomew ... " It was as if the sun was calling me to wake. The warmth and brightness of this glorious morning beckoned me to climb out of my bedding and greet this majestic day.

I have hope in this day and I pray earnestly for the many more to come. Today I start a new profession. I am going to be ... no, I am a reporter. My job is to report the truth about what is happening in my quadrant of the planet. I will gather information and report it at each regular meeting in my quadrant.

Since the great war, we have been divided up into 50-mile square quadrants. Each quadrant had to find its own food and other resources. As time went on, the quadrants started working together to help each other. My quadrant was close to fresh water that was not tainted by the horrors of a nuclear type bombing. We provided fresh water to two other quadrants, and they provided us with meat and some vegetables. Our quadrant was rich in resources, as our people could paint and weld and make leather goods.

I am very blessed—yes, blessed!—to be able to live in Dumpster No. 5. We have 10 sleeping dumpsters to a row, and the 11th and 12th ones are our bathing and cooking dumpsters. We each take turns on a regular rotating schedule to clean the 12th dumpster.

Personally, I am very proud of our row, as each of us has taken the time to sand and repaint our dumpsters. They each have different flowers or trees painted on them. Mine has been painted to look like an azalea bush. Even though the war took most everything from us, we kept our memories, and we used them to paint our row to look like a woodland scene in what used to be the Appalachian Mountains. The mountains are gone now, and so much more.

Oops, I better get going to the bathhouse and get spiffed up to seek stories of the truth.

Today I will go out and cover about five miles of the quadrant to seek stories of how we as a people of the one true God are finding strength in prayer and companionship to stay alive and keep our hope for a future in these devastating circumstances.

Never had I ever thought we would come to the point of almost destroying ourselves. The ones who are still here are the ones who hunkered down and worked hard and prayed and asked for forgiveness and guidance as the biologic and radiating blasts shook through our world. I remember crying out to God, "Help me to help others!"

After months of just breathing and trying to get my mind to work again, I discovered the ones of us who asked God to help us help others are still alive.

Never will I ever know what others prayed as the blasts fell upon them. I do know the ones who prayed with true repentance and only asked to have God show them how to help others are still here in my quadrant.

Maybe it is that way all over the planet.

This is why I have so much hope for the future of our planet. We were spared and will continue to do God's will. Not our will. Not what we want. We in our quadrant have pledged to help each other to be the best we can be.



Sure, it sounds totally against what the world had known for centuries. We know that. We also know that God is God, and his plan for us is not our plan for us.

Tomorrow we might get more food rations and maybe even fruit. One of the quadrants has decided to try to grow apples. Oh, how I have longed for an apple—sweet and delicious, and the juice runs down your chin.

Peace in my soul comes from God, and my hope is in him and him alone.

Off I go to find more of the truth that God is with us. Thank you to all the Sunday school teachers and preachers who encouraged me to learn Bible passages. Deuteronomy 31:6 was one of my favorites, and now it is my daily guidance: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you or forsake you."

Len is a member of Church of the Good Shepherd United Methodist Church, Lancaster.



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Church Administration

by the Rev. Robert Cox

Help with year-end reporting

Year-end reporting and follow-up can be a daunting task. Local church statistical reports for the year ending Dec. 31, 2023, must be submitted online via AC Stats by Feb. 28, 2024. It is the pastor’s responsibility to see that the report for each church is properly prepared. Church apportionments are determined from line items found in Table 2, so it is imperative that the numbers are both correct and listed in the proper place. Then the Local Church Audit must be submitted to the district superintendent by March 31. This year, Basic Church Administration will offer Zoom training classes for both reports on Tuesday, Feb. 13. At 10:30 a.m., the class will be for pastors and administrators on filing the year-end statistics on the conference’s new AC Stats platform. At 7:30 p.m., the class will be for finance committees and boards of trustees on how to do the local church audit. In most cases, the audit can done within the local church, without having to hire a CPA. The class will focus on how to create an audit team and the steps needed to accomplish an independent audit. Registration is required, and the classes are open to the first 100 registrants. To register, go to <https://church-admin.org/registrations>.

For more information and help in keeping proper membership records, go to www.church-admin.org, or email rlcox@umcsc.org.



View from the Pews

by Bill Barnier

Enough

Her words were clear in her e-message. “Enough,” she wrote. With that one word, delivered with all the emotion and warning of someone who had reached her limit, I instantly realized I had briefly forgotten my daily mantra to not judge. In my earlier message to her I had allowed my arrogance in offering advice about what she should do to be disguised by my love for her. In reality, I forgot my humility and respect for her by assuming it would be OK to voice my unsolicited opinion. She showed me what grace was by acknowledging the love in my message and forgiving the faux pas. Webster defines “enough” as a sufficient number, quantity or amount. Mothers might loosely define the pronoun as, “y’all are fixin’ to find out when enough is enough.” We use the word to refuse more of that heavenly pecan pie at the church potluck, or not. Earlier in my columnist career I wrote a two-part diatribe titled “How Much is Enough?” I wrote of the injustice of megawealthy teleministers who have way more than they possibly need but tell gullible followers there will never be enough to get God’s work done (and still rake off their unnecessary share). Not one comment! There are many versions of a very moving story about a final goodbye, with which many of you may be familiar. Titled “I Wish You Enough,” it’s a moving story of a family tradition which, upon parting, conveys love in the tradition of the Holy Spirit. Search the internet for the full version, but here’s the heart-ripper in it: I wish you enough sun to keep your attitude bright no matter how gray the day may appear. I wish you enough rain to appreciate the sun even more. I wish you enough happiness to keep your spirit alive and everlasting. I wish you enough pain so even the smallest of joys in life may appear bigger. I wish you enough gain to satisfy your wanting. I wish you enough loss to appreciate all you possess. I wish you enough hellos to get you through the final goodbye. Each of us may have a few things in our lives of which we will never have enough—the sounds of great music, the laughter of children, the restoration found in perfect peace, the loving hugs of someone we give our hearts to. At the same time, we may have passed our capacity to endure oppression, greed, deceit, judgement, control, taxation, to name only a few. And each of us has a different location for the line between tolerance and enough. Our creator has placed in our hearts and in our short historical record wise council about how much is enough. He placed in the core of our souls the cup of enough, which we can choose to overfill with things not of God, or with that which is endless in Spirit. There will never be enough lessons in our lives for us to come close to understanding the depth of the love and light of our creator. Yet there is so much that we can share it with everything in his creation without fear that there will not be enough. But make no mistake! Just as parents should strive to instruct their children about enough before making the lesson painful, God, too, has a limit to how much impertinence and disrespect he sees in his children. As mankind continue to turn its back on his light and love it risks the end of his patience and his hope in us—again. His love and light are indeed enough.

Barnier is a member of St. Paul Methodist Church, Ridgeland.

Columbia College Communication program hosts virtual exchange in collaboration with International University of Sarajevo

During the Fall 2023 semester, Columbia College’s Communication Today course hosted a virtual exchange program with the International University of Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Sarajevo students teamed up with Columbia College students to research and present topics related to visual communication in order to understand these effects across cultures. This initiative was led by Columbia College Assistant Professor of Communication Dr. Ahmet Aksoy and International University of Sarajevo Assistant Professor/VACD Program Coordinator Emir Hambo. Throughout the project, the classes compared and contrasted how their cultures advertise to and target their prospective audiences.

Sarajevo student Amer Tanovic said, “We learned a lot about the differences and similarities in the way advertisements approach audiences of different demographics. It was also very fulfilling getting to know students from the USA who I have had the pleasure of working with. We had wonderful conversations about the many things we found similar to each other. Meeting new people is always a privilege, and meeting people with different cultural backgrounds is one of the most important values in the interconnected world we live in today.” “With our society and media industry becoming more global, I found it important to connect students with a culture outside of their own,” Aksoy said. “Also, our digital spaces are flooded with American culture, and I wanted to demonstrate to our students that not all cultures operate under that default culture. Through this exposure, Professor Hambo and I wanted to develop our students’ critical thinking, social, and communication skills across cultures. Through this virtual exchange, we aspired to internationalize our two courses.”

Columbia College student Breanna Harris said, “I have thoroughly enjoyed this experience; the students from Sarajevo are friendly and engaging, and it’s been interesting to work across mindsets and cultures. Moving forward, if I were to do a similar project, I would like to attempt to learn some of the local language to better understand the surrounding culture and the people within it. “Our students are great, but the opportunities they get are limited,” Hambo said. “This exchange offered them the opportunity to exchange ideas, exchange knowledge and exchange cultural backgrounds. Perhaps the most important benefit was the opportunity to get to know each other and build relationships with the potential to go beyond this project.”



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From the Archives

by Dr. Phillip Stone

Bishop James S. Thomas

Bishop James S. Thomas was one of South Carolina’s most significant contributions to The United Methodist Church. His pioneering work helped lead to the end of racial segregation in the church’s hierarchy.

Bishop Thomas was born on April 9, 1919, in Orangeburg. His father, the Rev. James S. Thomas Sr., was a clergyman serving there. Bishop Thomas enrolled at Claflin University, graduating in 1939 with a degree in sociology. He first became an educator, spending a year as a school principal in Florence County. However, he could not ignore his call to the ministry and was ordained deacon and elder in subsequent years.

He attended Gammon Theological Seminary and served the Orangeburg Circuit. He went on to earn a master’s degree at Drew University.

Back in South Carolina, he served two years on the York Circuit and was also a chaplain at South Carolina State College. From the local church, Thomas found a calling in higher education, going on to become a professor at Gammon Seminary. While there, he earned his Ph.D. in sociology and anthropology at Cornell University. During part of his time at Gammon, he served as acting president of the seminary.

In 1953, he took a position as associate general secretary of the Methodist General Board of Education, with responsibilities for assisting and supporting the denomination’s historically Black colleges. He served at the general board for a dozen years, retaining his clergy membership in the South Carolina 1866 Conference.

We sometimes act as though the modern civil rights movement suddenly emerged from thin air in 1954. Nothing could be further from the truth, and many Black Methodist clergy were leaders in the movement to end segregation in our society and in our church.

During the 1950s, many Methodists began to question the bargain that had been negotiated during the 1939 reunification of the northern and southern branches of Methodism, the bargain that relegated African-American Methodists into the segregated Central Jurisdiction. As early as 1952, the General Conference had said that

“there is no place for racial discrimination or segregation in the Methodist Church.” The very existence of the South Carolina Conference (1866) proved these to be empty words, and the conference, in 1955, said as much.

Thomas was at the forefront of the long, slow campaign to dismantle segregation in the church. Though the Central Jurisdiction still existed in 1964, Thomas was elected to the episcopacy by the North Central Jurisdiction, becoming the youngest Methodist bishop at the time of his election. He was assigned to the Iowa Area, one of the largest annual conferences in the denomination, where he served until 1976.

During that 12 years, the merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church created The United Methodist Church, the Central Jurisdiction was abolished, and former African-American conferences throughout the country merged into integrated conferences.

During that 12 years, Thomas became president of the Council of Bishops, served as chair of the Social Principles Study Commission and delivered the principal episcopal address in 1976.

Claflin remained dear to his heart, and he helped the university raise funds on numerous occasions. A long-time trustee, he chaired the board and was inducted into the Claflin hall of fame. He also received honors from colleges across the Midwest, including Ohio Wesleyan, Iowa Wesleyan and DePauw, and in South Carolina, both Claflin and Wofford conferred honorary doctorates on him.

In 1972, he became the first African American to receive an honorary degree from Wofford.

In 1976, he was appointed to the East Ohio Conference, where he served until retirement in 1988.

He continued his ministry as a bishop in residence at Emory and at Clark Atlanta, and continued his work of mentoring and teaching until his death in 2010 at the age of 91.

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



Conference Historical Society

by Dr. Roger M. Gramling

A History of Perseverance For Historical Preservation

Both the Conference Commission on Archives and History and the Conference Historical Society are members of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society. The SEJ Historical Society is today the only jurisdictional historical society in The United Methodist Church.

The SEJ Historical Society has played a significant role in preserving the history of the Southeastern Jurisdiction. For almost 75 years, it has sought to share the larger story as well as the smaller stories of Methodism in the jurisdiction.

It is believed that by 1948 the SEJ Historical Society was organized and active. According to J. Allen Lindsey’s “Chronicles of the SEJ Historical Society,” the organization’s establishment was recorded and reported in the report of the Association of Methodist Historical Societies to the General Conference in 1948. Unfortunately, the earliest available record of minutes or proceedings of the Society date only to June 23, 1954, held at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina. However, it is known that Dr. Edgar H. Nease was the first president, although Dr. Elmer T. Clark was instrumental in its organization.

Nease served a total of eight years as president, 1948-1956.

The 1956 *Book of Discipline*, Para. 1592, clarified the provision for jurisdictional societies in these words: “There may be a Jurisdictional Historical Society in each jurisdiction, auxiliary to the Association of Methodist Historical Societies. The officers, members, duties, and support of each society shall be determined by the Jurisdictional Conference.”

In 1956, funding for the SEJ Historical Society was provided by the Southeastern Jurisdiction in the Jurisdictional Council Budget in the amount of \$1,000. The following year, 1957, the society designated the World Methodist Building at Lake Junaluska as the official depository for the historical records of the jurisdiction.

Both the 1960 and the 1964 *Book of Discipline* continued the permissive provision for a jurisdictional historical society in each jurisdiction as the jurisdictional conference may determine. Then, in 1968, there was a significant change. A new term, “Commission,” was introduced.

In the language of the *Book of Discipline*, the “jurisdictional historical society” became the “jurisdictional commission on archives and history” to be constituted as the Jurisdictional Conference may determine (Para. 1410). The role of the Association of Methodist Historical Societies was succeeded by a new “General Commission on Archives and History.” Thus in 1968, the Southeastern Jurisdiction Methodist Historical Society became the Southeastern Jurisdiction Commission on Archives and History.

From 1968 to 1976 the former SEJ Methodist Historical Society functioned as the SEJ Commission on Archives and History under that new name.

In 1976 the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference directed a reorganization of the structure of jurisdictional agencies.

Under this plan of reorganization the SEJ Commission on Archives and History would become an “agency” of the Jurisdictional Council on Ministries. The commission would have a representative but limited membership.

Those who had been involved over the years with the historical society and later the “society/commission” saw this reorganization as a drastic change. There was much dissatisfaction with the decision and a strong feeling emerged that there still needed to be a group of open membership, which would continue to promote the historical interests of the jurisdiction and provide programs and scholarly presentations about that history.

The commission (formerly the historical society) met July 11-14, 1977, at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi, for a transitional meeting as it was technically no longer authorized to exist. It was noted that funding from the jurisdiction would cease. A decision was made to ask the SEJ Council on Ministries to authorize the re-formation of a Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society.

In fall 1977, the SEJ Council on Ministries recognized the formation of the new Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society as an official group for its area of work. This recognition gave standing to the society in the life of the Jurisdiction.

The newly recognized society met July 11-13, 1978, for its official organizational meeting at Methodist College, Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Persons joining the new society within the next year would be recognized as charter members. Dr. Charles W. Brockwell, a native of South Carolina, was elected president. Thus, a Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society was “reborn” to once again serve as a membership organization open to any who were interested.

At the society’s next meeting held July 9-12, 1979, at Bethune-Cookman College, Daytona Beach, Florida, 75 persons were present.

Today the SEJ Historical Society and the SEJ Commission on Archives and History work together as partners to encourage the preservation and recounting of Methodist history in the Southeastern Jurisdiction. I have the privilege of serving as the current president of the SEJ Historical Society. Other South Carolinians who have previously served in this office are the Rev. Pierce E. Cook Jr., and Dr. A.V. Huff Jr., as well as Dr. Brockwell mentioned above. The motto of the SEJ Historical Society is, “Remove not the ancient landmark which your fathers have set” (Proverbs 22:28).

Gramling serves as secretary-treasurer of the Conference Historical Society. As president of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society, he is an ex-officio member of the SEJ Commission on Archives and History.

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Global Briefs

Heartbreak, hope follow season of church exits
CLYDE, N.C.—The Lewis Center for Church Leadership has released its final report documenting disaffiliations from The United Methodist Church. While a quarter of U.S. churches have left the denomination, new United Methodist faith communities are springing up out of the remnants.

Podcast adding General Conference episodes
MADISON, N.J.—“Un-Tied Methodism,” the podcast produced by the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History, will air two episodes per month through General Conference this April. Doubling the content will allow the show, hosted by the commission’s top executive, Ashley Boggan D., “to examine General Conference topics, including its history, legislation and what’s coming at the 2024 event.” The latest episode is “Multiplying Love: The Wesleyan Vision for a Polarized World.” It features the Rev. Paul Chilcote, renowned John Wesley scholar.

Church connects communities at refugee camp
CHIPINGE, Zimbabwe—Refugees and asylum-seekers of different cultures, ethnicities and languages have established a preaching point and built a new sanctuary at Tongogara Refugee Camp in Zimbabwe. Bishop Eben K. Nhiwatiwa and his cabinet made their first visit to the camp and praised the “evangelism in action.”

Building hope through homes in Haiti
ZIONSVILLE, Ind.—Despite unrest in Haiti, a United Methodist clergy couple’s charitable organization continues to help build homes for members of a rural, mountainous community in the Caribbean nation. Nearly 80 homes have been built in Fondwa so far, and more than 100 additional families are on the waiting list.

Series highlights United Methodist Building history
WASHINGTON—On Jan. 10, 1924, the United Methodist Building officially opened on Capitol Hill. Each month in 2024, as part of its new “On This Day” series, the United Methodist Board of Church and Society will highlight notable days offering glimpses into the momentous 100-year history of the United Methodist Building and the people called Methodists often walking along side ecumenical partners living their faith through social witness.

Wesley Pilgrimage set for 2024
NASHVILLE, Tenn.—A 10-day pilgrimage to explore the early growth of Methodism in England is set for July 27 to Aug. 6. Cost of the trip is \$2,499 and scholarships to reduce the fee by \$700 are available, courtesy of a grant by the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History. Registration is on a first-come, first-served basis, and 36 people is the limit for the trip.

United Methodists help cyclone survivors rebuild
BLANTYRE, Malawi—With a \$50,000 grant from the United Methodist Committee on Relief, The United Methodist Church in Malawi is supporting communities affected by Cyclone Freddy. The March 2023 cyclone killed more than 1,000 people in the country and displaced more than 560,000. The church is providing agricultural training and equipment and helping reconstruct community infrastructure.

Conference focuses on self-care, collaboration
NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century’s Shift Happens 2024 conference aims to inspire, encourage and equip laity, emphasizing the importance of self-care. The Jan. 10-12 gathering at St. Johns Downtown Church in Houston will feature keynote speaker Bishop Marvin Sapp, a renowned preacher and award-winning recording artist, and new Collab Labs, which will allow attendees to collaborate and receive guidance on developing new ministry opportunities. Cost to attend is \$309.

Grants help keep students fed
ATLANTA—Students at seven colleges have access to free or low-cost food and hygiene products thanks to grants from the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. Food insecurity on college campuses is often a hidden problem because students do not want to admit they are in need. The grants were made possible by offerings on Human Relations Day.

Boosting central conference education
GARNER, N.C.—The North Carolina Conference is the first United Methodist annual conference to receive an offering specifically for Professors in Methodism. At its annual conference last year, clergy and laity gave \$7,543 for the fund. The conference also supported the fund as part of its Christmas offering. The Professors in Methodism endowed fund aims to raise \$10 million to provide salary support for professors who will teach Methodist history, theology and polity in central conferences, church regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines. It is part of the Council of Bishops-endorsed initiative to support theological education in central conferences.

Event for young adults exploring ministry
NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry plans to hold Exploration on Feb. 16-18 at the DoubleTree Hotel near Universal Orlando in Florida. Exploration creates sacred space for young adults, ages 18-26, to be in meaningful fellowship, passionate worship, theological reflection and practical workshops as they discern whether God is calling them to ordained United Methodist ministry.

Tennent stepping down as Asbury president
WILMORE, Ky.—Timothy C. Tennent, president of Asbury Theological Seminary, will step down on June 30, the school announced. He will remain at Asbury as professor of world Christianity. Tennent became president in 2009 and led the seminary through its centennial year.

United Methodist church opens in displaced camp
KANANGA, Congo—The atmosphere was festive in the Nkonko camp for internally displaced people as hundreds crowded around a new United Methodist church built by a local missionary couple. Church leaders said the new church is a symbol of hope for thousands of Congolese families living in the camp who were expelled from Angola.

—Courtesy of United Methodist News Service



Resource Center

by Betty Stalnaker

Easter music available

Church musicians, we still have Easter music available for your use. Listed below are new titles available in the South Carolina Conference Resource Center. Check our website for many other titles for children, youth and adults, or come by the Resource Center to see, listen and select your musical (appointments only).

For adults:

Easter ... The Story of Redemption
(SBK492=) Composer/Arranger: Matthews, Dale/Frazier, Michael.
A Simple Series Easter presents a flawless blend of favorite arrangements, including a timeless medley of “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today” and “Christ Is Risen,” modern worship songs “Jesus Messiah” and “Behold the Lamb,” and more, all newly adapted by Michael Frazier for unison/two-part choirs or for choirs with little rehearsal time. Let your church celebrate and give praise this Easter to the one who washes away all sin. This is the story of Jesus, our Messiah, who came to rescue and save. Adult/26 min/Easy/Unison/2-part/(Brentwood Benson) Listening CD available.

My King Is Known by Love
(SBK493=) Composer/Arranger: Smith/Black/Cox/Mauldin/Crumpton.
The Worship Ready Series introduces its latest Easter musical with world-renowned arranger Russell Mauldin. This ready-to-learn and easy-to-sing 35-minute Easter musical is perfect for the small- to medium-sized church choir. Dove Award-winning writers Sue C. Smith, Lee Black and Jason Cox have created dynamic new songs combined with the new Easter favorites, “My King Is Known by Love” (recorded by the Crabb Family), “Messiah Overcame” (recorded by Karen Peck and New River) and “Thank You Jesus for the Blood” (recorded by Charity Gayle). They will bring your Easter season alive as you celebrate our risen Savior and King.
There are two production options for this powerful Easter resource. The first option presents a stirring worshipful presentation by using the Easter musical sequence. This is a worship-ready 30-minute presentation with narration. The second option presents a Holy Week outline if you choose to use this Easter resource throughout the Easter season. Whichever way you decide to retell the Easter story, we pray that your church and community will be blessed and reminded of the love poured out for us at Calvary by the King of Love—Jesus! Adult/30 min/Easy/SATB. (Daywind) Listening CD available.

The Passion Song
(SBK490=) Composer/Arranger: Larson, Lloyd.
Observe and remember the holiest of weeks with this three-anthem suite that captures the many moods of Holy Week in song and spoken word. The opening Palm Sunday prelude sets the tone for what is to come. Using a blend of familiar texts, tunes and original material, the cantata also includes a bonus anthem for Easter Sunday, adding to its overall flexibility. Use each anthem separately during Holy Week or together as a complete cantata. Adult/20 min./Moderate/SATB. (Jubilalte) Listening CD available.

For children:

Light It Up
(SBK491=) Composer/Arranger: Boe, Gina.
Light up your community with the light of God’s love through this new Brentwood Benson Kids Musical, “Light It Up!”, from acclaimed writer and creator Gina Boe. Our bright group of students has just arrived for Bible class, but a couple of things are missing—their teacher and light! With a note and a few wrapped boxes in a dark room, the students begin a unique lesson to discover just how significant light is and has always been, with each box representing a new object and a new Bible verse about light—starting from the very beginning of creation and continuing into Christ passing on the task of spreading his light to the world. With Scripture-based songs and verses quoted throughout, this is the perfect tool for instilling God’s word in the hearts of your young performers, in addition to empowering those in the audience to continue the mission of being a light to everyone around us. Each song brings a new outlook on the ways Christ diminished the darkness when he gave us life through him, plus initiates ways for us to illuminate his love to others. Children/28 min/Easy/Unison/2-part. (Brentwood Benson) Listening CD available.

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



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Rev. Paul McKinney
Ballard Jr.

PAGELAND—The Rev. Paul McKinney Ballard Jr., a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Dec. 28, 2023.

Prior to his retirement in 2011, Rev. Ballard served the Lupo-Ebenezer, Ehrhardt-Pleasant Hill, Bowman Charge, Townville-Dickson Memorial, Kershaw Charge, Antioch, Branchville, Cherokee Springs-Liberty, Kings Mountain Chapel, Sharon-Philadelphia and Zion-Zoar charges. He served the Pine Grove-Epworth and Friendship, Ruby, charges in his retirement.

A graveside service was held Jan. 1 at Greenwood Memorial Gardens. Memorials may be made to Asbury Theological Seminary, Office of Advancement, 204 N. Lexington Ave., Wilmore, KY 40390; to United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, Southeastern Jurisdiction, P.O. Box 276, Birmingham, AL 35201; or to JAARS, P.O. Box 248, Waxhaw, NC 28173. Rev. Ballard is survived by his wife, Anne S. Ballard, daughter and son.



Ballard

Rev. Michael Alec Black

MYRTLE BEACH—The Rev. Michael Alec Black, an honorably located member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Dec. 29, 2023.

Prior to being honorably located, Rev. Black served the Wesley Memorial Associate, Bethune and Stephenson Memorial charges and was appointed director of Public Information at Spartanburg Methodist College. He served the Ebenezer, Longs, Rehoboth, Aynor, charges as an honorably located pastor.

A memorial service was held Jan. 5 at Union UMC with a private burial. Memorials may be made to Epworth Children's Home, P.O. Box 50466, Columbia, SC 29250. Rev. Black is survived by his wife, Nadia Rasheed Black, and his parents.



Black

George L. Cannon
HARTSVILLE—George L. Cannon, husband of the Rev. Willie Mae Cannon, died Jan. 8, 2024. Rev. Cannon is the pastor of the Hopewell-Wesley Chapel Charge, Jefferson. Funeral services were held Jan. 13 at Centenary United Methodist Church with burial in Darlington Memorial Cemetery. Mr. Cannon is survived by his wife and two daughters.

H. Parker Evatt
COLUMBIA—H. Parker Evatt, the first executive director of the Alston Wilkes Society, died Dec. 15, 2023. A memorial service was held Dec. 30 at Virginia Wingard Memorial United Methodist Church. Memorials may be made to the Alston Wilkes Society, 3519 Medical Drive, Columbia, SC 29203; or to the Broad River Arts Center at Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC, 1500 Broad River Road, Columbia, SC 29210. Mr. Evatt is survived by his son and daughter.

Barbara James Frazier
FLORENCE—Barbara James Frazier, sister of David James, died Dec. 29, 2023. Mr. James is the husband of the Rev. Lindora

James, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. Funeral services were held Jan. 6 at Mount Sinai Holiness Church, Florence.

John Clayton Harmon
VANCOUVER, Wash.—John Clayton Harmon, brother of the Rev. Sam Harmon and the Rev. Paul Harmon died Dec. 20, 2023. Both Revs. Harmon are retired members of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. A memorial service will be held at a later date.

Mr. Harmon is survived by his wife, Pam, three sons and three daughters.

Joan Edna Sweetman Jamieson
GREER—Joan Edna Sweetman Jamieson, mother of the Rev. Cathy Jamieson, died Dec. 20, 2023. Rev. Jamieson is the pastor of Grace United Methodist Church, North Augusta. Funeral services were held Dec. 30 at Memorial UMC. Memorials may be made to Memorial UMC, 201 N. Main St., Greer, SC 29650; or to Hospice of the Upstate, 1835 Rogers Road, Anderson, SC 29621. Mrs. Jamieson is survived by her three daughters.

Dr. Spencer Averitt Jordan
MANNING—Dr. Spencer Averitt Jordan, pastor of former United Methodist churches Mount Vernon and Lane, died Jan. 3, 2024. Funeral services were held Jan. 8 at Welton Auditorium with burial at Clarendon Memorial Gardens. Memorials may be made to Mount Vernon Methodist Church, 132 Mount Vernon Road, Greeleyville, SC 29056; or to Lane Methodist Church, P.O. Box 16, Lane, SC 29564. Dr. Jordan is survived by his wife, Kimberly Vosberg Jordan, mother and two sons.

Rev. Marvin Ira Lare
COLUMBIA—The Rev. Marvin Ira Lare, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Dec. 28, 2023. Prior to his retirement in 1995, Rev. Lare served churches in the East Ohio and Texas conferences. In the South Carolina Conference he served as director of the Columbia Urban Center, director of Community Care, in the South Carolina Department of Social Services and as the director of the South Carolina Institute of Poverty and Deprivation. Funeral services were held Jan. 7 at Shandon UMC with a private burial in Elmwood Cemetery. Memorials may be made to the Oliver Gospel Mission, P.O. Box 7697, Columbia, SC 29202; to The Cooperative Ministry, 3821 W. Beltline Blvd., Columbia, SC 29204; or to Sistercare, P.O. Box 1029, Columbia, SC 29202. Rev. Lare is survived by his two daughters and stepson.

Rev. James R. McGee
ORANGEBURG—The Rev. James R. McGee, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Jan. 3, 2024. Prior to his retirement in 2013, Rev. McGee served

James, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. Funeral services were held Jan. 6 at Mount Sinai Holiness Church, Florence.

Rev. Michael Steven Phares
PAGELAND—The Rev. Michael Steven Phares, pastor of the Bethel-Ebenezer Charge, Chesterfield, died Dec. 17, 2023. Funeral services with military honors were held Dec. 22 at the Chapel of Miller-Rivers-Caulder Funeral Home, followed by a private burial. Rev. Phares is survived by his wife, Katherine Phares, two sons and daughter.

Rev. Joseph Arelious Poston
PAMPLICO—The Rev. Joseph Arelious Poston, a retired associate member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Dec. 27, 2023. Prior to his retirement in 1998, Rev. Poston served the Bethesda, Bethesda-Salters, Trio, Jordan, Scranton-St. John and Gilbert charges. In his retirement he served the Mount Vernon and Turbeville charges. Funeral services were held Dec. 30 at Bethlehem UMC with burial in the Prosser Cemetery. Memorials may be made to Bethlehem UMC, 3630 Bay Road, Pamplico, SC 29583; or to McLeod Hospice, 1203 E. Cheves St., Florence, SC 29506. Rev. Poston is survived by his wife, Jo Ann Poston, and three daughters.

Beulah Mae Graham Smith
HUMBLE, Texas—Beulah Mae Graham Smith, sister of the Rev. Benjamin Graham, died Jan. 17, 2024. Rev. Graham is the

Rev. Rufus Lee Wilson
PINEVILLE—The Rev. Rufus Lee Wilson, a retired local pastor of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Jan. 14, 2024. Prior to his retirement in 2011, Rev. Wilson served the Ruffin Parish and Washington charges. Funeral services were held Jan. 22 at Jerusalem UMC, Cross, with burial in Popular Hill Cemetery, Cross. Rev. Wilson is survived by his wife, Alvena Wilson, two sons and four daughters.

Rev. Karen Elizabeth Starr
ROCK HILL—The Rev. Karen Elizabeth Starr, pastor of the Friendship-Heath Memorial Charge died Jan. 8, 2024. Rev. Starr served the Folly Beach, Toxaway, Salem, Asbury Charge, Ben Avon, Belvedere, Tabernacle-Dawsey, Providence and Kingstree charges before being appointed in 2019 to Friendship-Heath Memorial Charge. Memorials may be made to Friendship UMC, 1200 Neely Store Road, Rock Hill, SC 29730.

Mary Carolyn Tatum Watson
BAMBERG—Mary Carolyn Tatum Watson, widow of Dr. Mike Watson, died Dec. 30, 2023. Dr. Watson was one of the founders of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission. Funeral services were held Jan. 13 at Trinity United Methodist Church. Memorials may be made to UMVIM-SC, c/o Jennifer Parker, 143 Glenbrooke Circle, Columbia, SC 29204; or to Trinity UMC, P.O. Box 335, Bamberg, SC 29003. Mrs. Watson is survived by her three sons and three daughters.

Rev. Scott Wayne Petry
SENECA—The Rev. Scott Wayne Petry, an elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Dec. 13, 2023. Rev. Petry served the Spartanburg-Trinity Associate, Friendship-Rock Springs, Starr, Heath Memorial-Pleasant Grove, Jonesville-New Hope, Tabernacle, Lancaster, New Market-Tabernacle, Wesley Chapel and Zion, Anderson, charges. Funeral services were held Dec. 16 at Davenport Funeral Home Chapel with burial in Oconee Memorial Park. Memorials may be made to Prisma Health Hospice of the Foothills, Cottingham Hospice House, ATTN: Foundation Office, 209 Memorial Drive, Seneca, SC 29672. Rev. Petry is survived by his wife, Janice Elaine Grant Petry, and daughter.

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Lare



McGee

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.

the Orange Circuit Charge, Norway and St. Paul (St. Matthews) charges. He was the president of The Methodist Oaks from 2005-2013. He served St. Paul (St. Matthews) as a retired elder. A memorial service was held Jan. 13 at St. Paul UMC, St. Matthews. Rev. McGee is survived by his wife, Marty McGee, and daughter.

Rev. Scott Wayne Petry
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Poston

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Starr

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ERT training
set for Feb. 17

Training will be held this month for those wishing to become a part of the South Carolina Conference's Early Response Team.

Part of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, ERT members are often the first on a scene to help after a disaster, tarping roofs, cutting trees and helping in other ways.

On Saturday, Feb. 17, St. John's United Methodist Church, Aiken, will host an ERT Basic/Renewal class.

The Basic class will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The fees are \$40 per person, which includes a manual, shirt, cap and badge. There is a \$20 fee for renewals, which will run from 9-1 p.m.

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

Everyone also needs to do a background check (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.)

For more information: 803-539-8429 or brpraisejesus@aol.com.



Need a Children’s Sermon?

by the Rev. Meghan Lindsey Sweeney Cook

February Black History Month

Author’s note: The following are children’s 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: Any Sunday in February
Scripture: Matthew 13:34-35 MSG, “All Jesus did that day was tell stories—a long storytelling afternoon. His storytelling fulfilled the prophecy: I will open my mouth and tell stories; I will bring out into the open things hidden since the world’s first day.”
Thesis: God’s book is full of stories that matter, and we also have stories that matter, some that we don’t know. It’s not just a story about Black people but the story of God’s people. This is our story. When it’s Native American month or Women’s History month, the stories matter because they are our stories. Everybody matters to God.
Note: This children’s sermon is for every congregation but was also written in the context of a White congregation that may not have celebrated Black History Month (or Native American History month or Women’s History month).
Time frame: Three minutes (The average attention span of a child is about one minute per year of life. In our setting, the youngest at children’s sermon are 3 years old, so we aim for three or maybe five minutes at the most.)
Supplies: Two plastic cups and a 3-foot-long piece of string or yard. Poke a small hole in the center of the base of each cup. Thread the string through each cup so the mouth of the cup faces away from the knot.

You should end up with a string with a cup at either end, mouth of the cups facing out. You have now made a string telephone.
Also needed: An adult volunteer with a pair of sharp scissors (they’re going to cut the string).
Children’s Sermon:
Welcome the children. Get them settled.
Say: This month is African-American History Month. Our country has officially celebrated February as African-American Month since 1976. However, “It was started in 1926 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson. He chose the month because the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln are in February. Black History Month is an annual observance in the month of February devoted to the study and celebration of the contributions of Black people throughout history” (from Black History Month. UMC Discipleship Ministries website).
Tell the story: Have you ever heard the name Rev. Granville Hicks? Some of you may have heard of the name of the Granville Hicks when we’ve advertised the Granville Hicks Leadership Academy for Laity and Clergy that happens annually at Claflin University. Rev. Hicks was a graduate of Claflin University and is an influential United Methodist pastor. He is a retired clergy and is still alive today. Hicks was instrumental in creating programs to improve race relations, education and leadership development throughout South Carolina. He is one story of many stories of folks who have worked (and continue to work) here in the South Carolina Conference to work for peace,

justice and unity. He wanted to connect Black people and White people and really all people. (Pause.)
Say: One person can make a big difference in helping us get to know folks who are different than ourselves. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “I am convinced that men hate each other because they fear each other. They fear each other because they don’t know each other, and they don’t know each other because they don’t communicate with each other, and they don’t communicate with each other because they are separated from each other.”
Say: Now, I bet some of you are wondering what this string and cups are for. Have you ever played with something like this? (Pause for answers.) This toy is a way to communicate. (Hand one cup to a volunteer who we will call friend.) Let’s try it! Our friend will put the cup on their ear, and I will whisper into the cup. Do you think they will hear? Let’s make a hypothesis, which is the science word for a good guess. Do you think our friend will hear me? (Pause for their ideas.)
Do: Then give it a try; say something simple like, “God loves you!” (Tip: Hold cups so the string is taut between them, as the sound waves will travel better). The friend should have heard your whisper and tell the group. Celebrate the success.
Ask: What would happen if we were not connected? (Pause and think.) Do you think our friend would hear me?
Do: Do the experiment again but have an adult from the congregation cut the string as you start to whisper. Ask the friend on

the hearing side of the cup if they could hear you. They won’t because the cups are not connected.
Say: Hmm, we can only hear when we are connected. As God’s people, we celebrate one another’s stories because each of us is connected as children of God. Each of our stories matter, and that’s one reason we have special months: to highlight stories! I hope this month we learn more stories, especially stories of folks who are different from us.
Pray: Dear God, (pause for the children to repeat), we love you (pause). Help us to connect with all your people (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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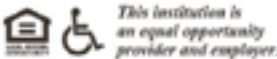


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January

Jan. 26-28—Revolution 2024, Township Auditorium, Columbia. <http://scmyp.org/revolution/>

Jan. 27—Holocaust Remembrance Day

February

Black History Month
UWF Wallace Family Life Center Special Emphasis Month

Feb. 1—National Freedom Day

Feb. 2—Groundhog Day

Feb. 3—“Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership,” Bishop’s Day in the Rock Hill District.

Feb. 3—19th Annual Native American Representative Training, Main Street UMC, Columbia, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. \$10. To register: contact LaShella Kirkland, 803-374-8243 or LaShellaKirkland@live.com.

Feb.6-8—Bishop’s School of Ministry, Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort, Myrtle Beach. <https://www.umcsc.org/cs-bsm/>

Feb. 8—UWF Social Action Workshop #1, virtual, 6:30 p.m.

Feb. 10—“Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership,” Bishop’s Day in the Hartsville District.

Feb. 11—Transfiguration Sunday

Feb. 11—Scouting Sunday

Feb. 14—Ash Wednesday

Feb. 14—Valentine’s Day

Feb. 15—UWF Social Action Workshop #2, virtual, 6:30 p.m.

Feb. 15—“Let’s Talk About Mental Health,” led by Andy Nix, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head Island, 7 p.m.

Feb. 17—ERT Basic/Renewal Class, St. John’s UMC, Aiken, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/er-registration/>

Feb. 17—Friendship Day, Columbia Bethlehem Community Center, Columbia, 12-4 p.m. For more information: Facebook @ CBCCServes.



Columbia College celebrates 283 graduates

On Dec. 15, Columbia College honored 126 undergraduate and 157 graduate students with commencement exercises at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. Families and friends of graduates gathered to commemorate the momentous occasion. Councilwoman Carol Miller served as keynote speaker, offering words of congratulations and encouragement for the future. This was the first commencement ceremony for the president of Columbia College, Dr. John H. Dozier. “This is the day to which every student, parent, supporter and educator look forward,” Dozier said. “We are able to experience the collective relief, joy and nostalgia wrapped into the end of one adventure juxtaposed to the beginning of another. I have loved every minute of watching the December Class of 2023 soar here on campus, and I, alongside many others, anticipate what their future holds.”

Feb. 19—President’s Day

Feb. 23—2024 SC Men N Ministry Golf Tournament, The Spur at Northwoods, Columbia. Register: mennministrysc.org or contact Kenny Bingham, 843-246-8398.

Feb. 23-24—2nd Annual Methodism 101 Retreat, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, \$115. For more info: <https://www.lr.edu/methodism-101>.

Feb. 23-25—Asbury Hills Hands and Feet Service Weekend, Cleveland, \$55 pp. Register: Retreat@asburyhills.org or 864-836-3711.

Feb. 24—“Are You a Man” Men N Ministry Spiritual Retreat, Journey UMC, Columbia.

Feb. 24—UWF Social Action Workshop #3, virtual, 10 a.m.

Feb. 24—Poverty Stimulation Event hosted by St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, United Way of the Lowcountry and Beaufort-Jasper Economic Opportunity Commission, St. Andrew By-The Sea UMC, Hilton Head Island, Noon-3 p.m. Register by Feb. 12: <https://uwlowcountry.charityproud.org/EventRegistration/Index/14655>

Feb. 26—South Carolina Methodist Conference Credit Union 68th Annual Meeting, Epworth Children’s Home, Columbia, Noon. 803-691-0037.

March

Women’s History Month

March 1—World Day of Prayer

March 1—Deadline, 2024 Advocate Scholarship. Download application: <https://advocatesc.org/scholarships>

March 2—“Strengthening the Soul of Our

Leadership,” Bishop’s Day in the Columbia District.

March 2—Second Annual Signature Brunch, Paths to Wholeness, Orangeburg Country Club, 10 a.m. For more information: 803-387-8226 or pathstwholeness2022@gmail.com.

March 10—Scouting Sunday (alternate)

March 10—UMCOR Sunday

March 10—Daylight Saving Time begins

March 15—Deadline for Resolutions to the South Carolina Annual Conference.

March 16—“Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership,” Bishop’s Day in the Anderson District.

March 17—St. Patrick’s Day

March 23—“Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership,” Bishop’s Day in the Marion District.

March 23—UWF Legacy Fund Day of Giving 155th Year

March 24—Passion/Palm Sunday

March 28—Maundy Thursday

March 29—Good Friday (United Methodist Center closed)

March 29—Vernal Equinox/First Day of Spring

March 31—Easter Sunday

April

UWF Columbia Bethlehem Community Center Special Emphasis Month

April 6—“Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership,” Bishop’s Day in the Spartanburg District.

April 6—UWF Spiritual Growth Event hosted by Anderson District, virtual, 10 a.m.

April 13—“Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership,” Bishop’s Day in the Orangeburg District.

April 13—Kites at the Star, Columbia Bethlehem Community Center, Columbia, 12-4 p.m. For more information: Facebook @ CBCCServes.

College students encouraged to apply for Advocate’s 2024 \$1,000 scholarship

Scholarship applications are being accepted now for the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* annual \$1,000 college scholarship.

The scholarship is for South Carolina United Methodist students for the 2024-2025 academic year who are planning to attend or are attending one of the four United Method-

ist colleges in South Carolina: Claflin University, Columbia College, Spartanburg Methodist College or Wofford College. Students ideally will have an interest in communications, journalism or business.

Requests for the scholarship are due March 1.

Required are an application with an essay, a college or high

school transcript, and a letter from the senior pastor of the applicant’s home church or a college chaplain confirming the applicant is a United Methodist and describing participation.

Learn more and download the application at <https://advocatesc.org/scholarships> or email jbrodie@umcsc.org.



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Deadlines are
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for the following month’s paper.

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Lake Junaluska Assembly is seeking a dynamic Director of Development to share in our exciting vision of growth and expansion. Located in Western North Carolina, Lake Junaluska is a conference and retreat center with a mission of being a place of Christian hospitality where lives are transformed through renewal of soul, mind and body. The Director of Development will report directly to the Executive Director/CEO and will play a critical role in helping Lake Junaluska meet its fundraising goals while advancing Lake Junaluska’s strategic direction. Learn more at <https://bit.ly/LJ-director>.

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Prayers of the faithful

by the Rev. Adrienne Fink

Feb. 4
Steadfast Prayer
Lesson Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24
Background Scripture: Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24
Key Verses: 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18, “Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

As Christians, when we think of the basics of Christian life, prayer makes the list. In our vows as United Methodists, we vow to serve God and the church with our prayers (along with presence, gifts, service and witness). As a chaplain, when I ask Christian patients what brings them strength, I hear prayer most often. Prayer is an integral part of the Christian life, of the Christian community, of the Christian relationship with God. This month’s group of Bible lessons focuses on prayer and provides us the chance to explore what it means to pray as faithful followers of Jesus. Because prayer is so familiar to us, we can forget how to approach it seriously or we can let it become an empty routine. Prayer can also seem so daunting, and we become afraid of praying the wrong way. I pray that this month’s lessons renew and grow our lives of prayer as we faithfully follow Christ.

In Paul’s letters to Christian communities, he loves to end his writings with a list of encouraging tips on how to live as a community of Jesus’ faithful followers. For the Christians of Thessalonica, Paul’s full list of advice includes one line about prayer: Pray continually. If we take this advice literally, it seems impossible to follow. We can’t pray always; it’s physically impossible. Plus, if we pray all the time, how are we supposed to do anything else in Paul’s list? I doubt Paul expects his readers to take a literal interpretation. Instead, perhaps Paul means that prayer should be a central part of our individual and communal lives. As we make decisions, as we prioritize our days, as we interact with others, prayer should flow through it all. We don’t have to wait for a certain time or a certain place to pray. Talking with God, i.e., prayer, can and should happen throughout the day.

When do you find yourself praying the most often? What do you most often pray about? Why are these times and topics important to you? What would happen if you added new times and new topics to your typical day?

Feb 11
True Devotion
Lesson Scripture: Matthew 6:1-8
Background Scripture: Isaiah 58; Matthew 6:1-8
Key Verses: Matthew 6:1, 8, “Be careful that you don’t practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. ... Don’t be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask.”

This week’s Scripture passage comes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus compares how to pray with how not to pray. Prayer begins with a relationship with God. Whether we pray communally or individually, it’s about connection with God. If we’re not careful, our prayers can shift, and we begin focusing on impressing others. We try to prove our Christian worth by the words we pray. We turn prayer into a competition, and we forget that prayer is communing with God. We focus so much on our words and what others think of them that we forget to listen for God. Bambi’s mom advised, if you can’t say anything nice, don’t

say anything at all. Similarly, if you can’t pray with humility and reverence in public, then don’t pray in public at all. Instead, take your prayers to a quiet place, one without distractions or an audience. There, you can pray without having to impress others or prove your Christian worth to them. There, you can commune with God, who listens to whatever you need to say and who invites you to listen in return.

What is your “secret place” for prayer, that place that allows you to focus on talking with God or that place where you strongly feel God’s presence?

Feb 18
Pray Like This
Lesson Scripture: Matthew 6:9-13
Background Scripture: Luke 11:2-4; Mark 11:25; Matthew 6:1-18
Key Verse: Matthew 6:10, “Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it’s done in heaven.”

This week picks up where we left off in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Last week’s passage taught that our prayers should not be showy (Matthew 6:1) or empty (v. 7). In this week’s focus passage, Jesus gives his audience a clear example of how to pray with humility and intentionality, what we call “The Lord’s Prayer.” This prayer provides humble words that recognize God’s holy power and that ask for God to provide what we need: help, salvation, forgiveness. Many of us have memorized this prayer using quite formal language full of thees and thous. If we use more familiar words, we find that this prayer is simple yet full. It says all that we need to say: God, we should praise you. Your will should be done. Give us what we need to live, forgive us when we sin, and save us. Amen.

Notice that this prayer focuses on what God does, not on what we do. We don’t pray to impress God, to tell God how we’re awesome followers. Rather, this prayer teaches us to show up humbly, just as we are. This prayer puts us at the feet of Jesus, and it teaches us to seek, trust and obey him.

Do you have moments when you don’t know what or how to pray? Maybe something has disoriented your spirit. Maybe you’re in awe. Maybe you always feel like you don’t know what to say. When we don’t know the words to pray, Jesus has already given us the words. Whether you have this prayer memorized or you’re praying it for the very first time, lean on it. Let it say what you cannot say. Let it draw you closer to God’s spirit.

For many of us who have memorized this prayer, we can easily rush through it, knowing the words but forgetting what they mean. Try praying the Lord’s Prayer slowly and intentionally. What happens when you do?

Feb 25
Prayer in Troubling Times
Lesson Scripture: John 12:20-36
Background Scripture: Mark 8:31-37; 10:32-34; John 12:20-36
Key Verses: John 12:24, 32, “I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. ... When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.”

In our final focus passage for February, we see God pray. At this point in John’s Gospel, Jesus is preparing for his death, his time “to be glorified.” (John 12:23) While explaining the purpose of his death, he cries, “I am deeply troubled!” Then, he prays. He doesn’t pray for deliverance from death; instead, he embraces it. He exclaims,

“Father, glorify your name!” (v. 28).
Living into our call as faithful Christians means that we may have to follow God into scary situations, into places we don’t want to go to do things we’re scared to do. Yet, if we are to pray as Jesus prays, then we pray not for deliverance but for strength to do God’s will. God may lead us into what we fear, where we are truly in danger. In those places, God calls us to pray.
In Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Stride Toward Freedom,” the civil rights leader describes his fear during the Montgomery bus boycott, when he was receiving literal death threats. After one particularly scary threat, he prayed to God in exhaustion. Then, he heard God reply that Dr. King must continue his work for justice and truth and that

God would always be with him.
When we face what terrifies us, God calls us to pray. We speak to God, and God speaks to us. Prayer strengthens us and equips us, even as our fears do not completely disappear. Prayer connects us to God and reminds us that God is with us in the hardest moments of our lives.
How does praying help you when you’re scared? How does prayer encourage you to do God’s will even when it scares you? Is God calling you now to follow in a way that scares you? How can prayer help you?

Fink, a deacon, is chaplain for the Prisma Health Department of Spiritual Care and Education and is on the Columbia District District Committee on Ordained Ministry.

St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC to host free mental health presentation

HILTON HEAD ISLAND—St. Andrew By-The-Sea United Methodist Church will host a presentation, “Let’s Talk about Mental Health,” this month.
Presented by Andy Nix, Cross Christian Counseling Center director and counselor, the presentation will be held at 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 15, at St. Andrew, 20 Pope Ave., Hilton Head Island.
The church’s Health and Welfare Ministry is sponsoring the event.
The program is free to the community, and no reservations are required.
Nix is a licensed professional counselor in South Carolina and Georgia. The program will feature a conversation about mental health and the most common mental health illnesses, including anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.
Attendees will learn how to talk to loved ones about mental health concerns, as well as how to cope with stress.
For more information about St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, visit <https://hhiumc.com>.



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PATHS TO WHOLENESS: Bea’s House can help four women

From Page 1

“She’d call and ask, ‘Minnie, why didn’t I leave?’” Anderson recalled. “I didn’t know what to say; I was speechless. What do you say? It haunted me for years. I thought, ‘What could I have done?’”

Years passed, and Anderson gained the courage to leave her own abuser, eventually making her way to South Carolina. She married the love of her life, Spencer, and went on to pursue a doctorate.

But over the years, the experience of her neighbor and countless women like her continued to stay with Anderson. She thought about all the women incarcerated because of rotten, abusive, desperate circumstances, women forced to turn to illegal means to live, such as sex trafficking or drug smuggling. A deep, God-inspired desire to help these women began to flood Anderson’s soul until it became impossible to ignore. Her vision—to help women turn their lives around after jail or prison and learn how to live in a healthy, godly, righteous way. She envisioned a transitional home, a place where these women could learn, grow and thrive with loving, Christian support.

Anderson’s husband was incredibly supportive. One day, he turned to her. “Why don’t you do it?”

They prayed for guidance. Then one day, in 2020, Anderson awoke and heard God saying: “Paths to Wholeness.”

Immediately, she called four other United Methodist women—her sister, Delores Rock, and others she knew had a heart for this vision: Shirley Hugee, Sadie Jarvis and retired UMC pastor the Rev. Barbara Reid.

They prayed and very quickly developed their plan, filing paperwork to launch a 501(c)(3) nonprofit ministry called Paths to Wholeness.

God’s timing was fast. Just months later, in January 2021, they secured funds, found a house to purchase and began renovating



From left are the women behind the vision: Shirley Hugee, Delores Rock, Sadie Jarvis, the Rev. Barbara Reid and Dr. Minnie Anderson. God gave Anderson a vision of starting a transitional home, a vision that became a reality in 2020.

it. They started meeting with Department of Corrections and other state, county and local officials, planning and cementing partnerships and ultimately laying the full groundwork for the ministry.

The house was ready by June 2022, and it officially opened Sept. 19, 2022—the very same day Anderson’s beloved husband, Spencer, passed away.

Despite her grief, they pressed on, keeping the focus of helping women rehabilitate and reunify back into society after incarceration.

Today, Paths to Wholeness has been operational for more than a year. They have a small two-bedroom house that can accommodate four women called Bea’s House, after Anderson’s mother who often helped abused women. Each bedroom sleeps two, with closets, shelving and bathroom space. Anderson spends most days there along with another worker, and three other women come in the evenings

Referrals come from the Department of Corrections as well as from local and county detention centers across South Carolina. The women who come to Bea’s House come directly from prison or jail. They have strict

guidelines—no sex offenders, and no one with an active drug problem.

“She needs to be someone who really wants to change,” Anderson explained.

Paths to Wholeness works hands-on with these women, helping them learn needed social, emotional, mental, and intellectual skills so they can transition into society.

For example, they offer mentoring and counseling, and volunteers pray with them often. A local bank, Truist, offers a course in financial literacy for the women, and they work to get the women jobs or education, as well as health care and coverage for their prescriptions.

“They come to us with diabetes, hypertension and no medication,” Anderson said. “They come to us with nothing.”

Churches and individuals supply clothing for the women, as well as other needs. They also try to get the women involved in giving back through volunteering in the community. They frequently do group activities, such as attending a live play or musical, cultural opportunities some have never had the opportunity to enjoy.

“When the women come to us they’re broken,” Anderson said. “The stories that we hear—it’s unimaginable.”

Many of the women have been victims of domestic violence, which is Anderson’s

doctoral focus. Others were entrenched in sex trafficking. One woman was 13 years old when her boyfriend put her out on the streets to make money. Change for these women can be extraordinarily difficult and take a long time.

Still, Anderson and others with Paths to Wholeness are determined to help.

“Our goal is to help as many as we can,” she said. “Changing is hard. Our prayer is that we have planted seeds that impact them, and we have seen lives change. We might not see the fruit today, but we’ve planted it.”

The women stay until they are ready to go, which is typically when they have achieved the goals they identified at the start of their time at Bea’s House. For example, one woman they helped had three goals: not go back into drugs and prostitution, get a job and get her son back. The woman was able to accomplish the first two goals before moving back to her home state, where she is actively fulfilling her probation requirements so she can regain custody of her child.

“We know that God has placed us here for a change,” Anderson said.

Paths to Wholeness is funded primarily by individual donations. They received a substantial legislative grant thanks to the efforts of Sen. Katrina Shealy when they first launched, which handled the renovation costs. Now, donations and other support helps them stay operational. The United Women in Faith of Trinity UMC, Orangeburg, have committed to an annual donation, and they hope others will, too.

In the future, Anderson said they are hoping to build another facility, a house that can accommodate not only more women but also their children.

Paths to Wholeness is hosting a brunch March 2 at 10 a.m. at Orangeburg Country Club to raise awareness and funding. For more on the brunch, or to learn how to help Paths to Wholeness, visit <https://pathsto-wholeness.org>, email pathstowholeness2020@gmail.com, call 803-387-8226 or write Paths to Wholeness, P.O. Box 1402, Orangeburg, SC 29116.

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