

In this issue.



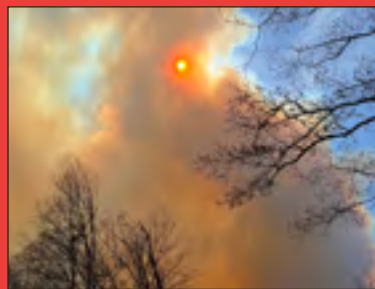
Order of Palmetto awarded

The Rev. Eddie Thomas receives state's highest civilian honor for his 33-year work with Good Samaritans ministry. See Page 2.



Cohort churches selected

The conference has named 12 churches that will launch 'Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer' initiative. See Page 3.



Asbury Hills OK after fire

United Methodist camp and retreat center safe, 'grateful' after 15K acres burn around property. See Page 13.

Visit our new website:



'Give Sight' aids 250 in Guatemala



Photo courtesy of Amy Gustafson

Ten-year-old Etta Price Cochcroft bakes muffins to raise funds for Union's "Give Sight" project. The mission mobilized the congregation.

By Jessica Brodie

IRMO—One Midlands church has made it possible for more than 250 people in Guatemala to see.

Union United Methodist Church launched a "Give Sight" mission campaign Feb. 2 to raise funds for Healing Guatemala's Cataract Camps, held in

April. Healing Guatemala is a medical mission in Guatemala supported by the Columbia District and founded by Dr. Luke Rhyee, a South Carolina pastor in the UMC.

Initially, Union's goal was to raise funds to help 80 people get the cataract surgery they need, said Amy Gustafson, Union's communications

director. But Union has been able to more than triple that goal, and funds continue to roll in.

"Wow! God is good!" Rhyee said, expressing deep appreciation for the enthusiastic response from the congregation.

See "Give Sight," Page 12

Advocate launches new logo, redesign, website

In an effort to reinvigorate the *Advocate*, the newspaper is introducing a more attractive, relevant and interesting logo and design for its print publication this month and will soon roll out a brand-new website with a target launch of May 1.

"We love the bold new look of our logo, which intentionally incorporates the denomination's black-and-red color scheme as a way of signifying our allegiance to The United Methodist Church," *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie said. "We're excited about our fresh new look and hope it will appeal to new and younger audiences as well

our existing readers."

The website will be more interactive and easy to engage with, with a more "newsy feel" overall, Brodie added. The new print design is more streamlined and organized.

An app is also in development and should be released in June.

The efforts are part of the *Advocate's* rebranding campaign, which the newspaper began last year after extensive research.

"We're finding out that many United Methodists in South Carolina still do not know about the *Advocate*,

See "Logo," Page 13

Advocate wins three more journalism awards

The *Advocate* has been honored with three more awards for journalistic excellence from the South Carolina Press Association.

At the SCPA's annual meeting April 4 in Columbia, the 189-year-old newspaper was awarded first place in its associate/individual member division for overall newspaper and magazine publications.

As well, *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie won second place in faith reporting for an article titled "Disciplined Body and Soul" and third place in faith reporting for an article titled "A Church and Then Some" (both from the March 2024 *Advocate*).

About the *Advocate* overall, judges said, the newspaper was "packed with local and state news, features and thoughtful commentary."

"The *Advocate* is a hub for resources, news and information. Really enjoyed the stories, photos and briefs featuring local church events and projects," judges noted. "Very well done publication in a competitive class of entries."

This brings the total to 129 awards the *Advocate* has won since 2010.



Hours & Location
Open Monday through Friday
9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
S.C. United Methodist Conference Center
4908 Colonial Drive, Suite 207
Columbia, SC 29203

Contact Us
803-726-6743
info@advocatesc.org
https://www.advocatesc.org

Accuracy Policy
The *Advocate* strives to produce error-free news reports. When mistakes occur, we will correct them as soon as they are brought to our attention. To request a correction, call the editor at 803-735-8772 or email news@advocatesc.org. In the event of errors in advertisements, the *Advocate* will be responsible only for the space occupied by the actual error. The publisher assumes no financial responsibility for omissions.

Advertising
Display ads, advertorials, sticky notes and inserts can be ordered at 803-726-3105 or sales@advocatesc.org. For classified ads, contact us at 803-726-6743 or classy@advocatesc.org. For more information and our media kit, visit https://www.advocatesc.org/advertise.

Artificial Intelligence Policy
Any uses of AI will start with journalism-centered intentions and will be managed by and accountable to journalists. If we make substantial use of generative AI, we will acknowledge this and explain how we reduce risks with human oversight. We will document and describe the tools with specificity. We will protect our audience's data in accordance with general privacy policies and independently verify every fact. We do not use AI to manipulate photos unless they are for illustration purposes and clearly defined. No personal information from our staff or customers will be entered into AI software.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Subscriptions
The *Advocate* is delivered via U.S. mail monthly. The cost is \$20/year (print and online) and \$10/year (online-only). Church plans are available for \$1/member (online plan, based on average weekly attendance per current UMCSC Journal) or \$10/member (print plan). To start your subscription, visit https://www.advocatesc.org/subscribe, call 803-726-6743 with credit card, or send a check (payable to *Advocate*) to the address above.

Rev. Eddie Thomas awarded Order of Palmetto for longtime work with Good Samaritans ministry

By Jessica Brodie

BISHOPVILLE—South Carolina has awarded its highest civilian honor to a retired United Methodist pastor whose life's work has helped countless stay afloat in difficult seasons.

The Rev. Eddie Thomas, founder of Good Samaritans for All People, was honored March 22 with the Order of the Palmetto before a crowd of people gathered for the ministry's spring giveaway event.

"It gives me a thrill," Thomas shared with the *Advocate* as he carted boxes of new clothing and nonperishable food supplies to give to the community.

A long line of people waited outside the old Bishopville High School that morning for the giveaway to begin as volunteers from five counties worked intently to stack clothing, food, toys and donated household items on tables lining the gym.

Just before the giveaway began, officials invited Thomas to stand before the crowd, first presenting him with a framed proclamation declaring March 22, 2025, as "The Reverend Eddie C. Thomas Jr. Day." Then former House Rep. Will Wheeler presented Thomas with the Order of the Palmetto as Thomas' wife and partner in ministry, Corine, stood at his side.

Wheeler said Thomas is a man who embodies what it means to be a good neighbor



Photo by Jessica Brodie

Thomas (center) receives the award from former Rep. Will Wheeler as Thomas' wife, Corine, looks on.

and our brothers' keepers, epitomizing the lessons Jesus taught in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10).

"We've become an increasingly divided society," Wheeler said, yet in spite of that, Thomas never let his opinions get in the way of helping someone.

"We are all our brothers' keepers, and we are all brothers and sisters," Wheeler said, adding that Thomas embodies this completely.

Thomas started Good Samaritans for All People in 1993 when he was serving the Horry-Georgetown area. When he moved to Marlboro County and then later Lee County, the ministry came, too. In its 32nd year, today Good Samaritans does roughly six giveaways a year, including three furniture giveaways, with help from 26 volunteer members, helping in the 16 poorest counties in the state. They also help 10 schools with supplies, maintain two roads, give out

turkeys during the holidays, assist people in need with Christmas gifts, and more.

"It's a declaration, a promise I made to the Lord when I was in Vietnam," Thomas explained, sharing how he was about to have surgery after being shot in the back and legs when he cried out to the Lord.

"I said if he'd heal me I would serve him in any way I can," Thomas said.

God did indeed heal him, and Thomas kept his word, now completing nearly 50 years as a pastor and more than three decades in service to the community through Good Samaritans. While now he's officially retired as a pastor, he still serves at Mount Prospect UMC, Camden. And even though he plans to turn the reins of Good Samaritans to a new leader at the end of this year, he still plans to be involved helping as he can.

Thomas said receiving the Order of the Palmetto is an

honor, though the day of the presentation, the achievement hadn't quite sunk in.

"It gives me a thrill to know I'm making a difference in my community and surrounding area," he said with a smile.

Presenting him with the "Thomas Day" proclamation, Bishopville Mayor Luke Giddings called Thomas a man "who truly embodies Christ."

Bishopville City Council Member Shirley Hill, joining Giddings for the presentation, agreed, noting the community appreciates Thomas and all he does for the people.

"It takes a man of God to see the needs of the people and respond," Hill said.

Lee County Councilwoman Johnette McCutchen Caughman, who nominated Thomas for the Order of the Palmetto, called him one of a kind.

"It doesn't matter if he doesn't know you. He's going to help. He's there in the good times and the bad times," Caughman said.

Volunteer Mary Yates said the Good Samaritans team is excited to see Thomas get the recognition he deserves.

"We are so proud of him. He works every day, and he does it with pure love."

Fellow pastor the Rev. Rusty Crimm, whose church Lamar UMC helps with Good Samaritans, said Thomas is incredibly deserving of this honor.

"He's one of the most selfless and giving people I know and is intent on making sure that anyone and everyone gets the help that they need."

Men get to work after leadership revitalization event

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—More than 100 men driven to be better, stronger leaders for Jesus gathered April 6 for a leadership revitalization event, aiming to do their part to revive men's ministry after the pandemic and separation caused a slowdown.

Bishop Leonard Fairley urged the men to do their part to get in step with what God wants to do in South Carolina, igniting a fire in their hearts for a reinvigorated ministry that transforms God's church in ways we cannot begin to imagine.

"When you get in step with God, it's when you see new things and new visions and new dreams," Fairley said.

Fairley shared how South Carolina is in need of deep healing after division, and he encouraged the men to understand that working in harmony doesn't mean working in unison.

"You get harmony when different notes are brought together," he explained, sharing that the differences in the church can be helpful instead of harmful. "You have a gift that God can use—let's use it!"

About half the men gathered in person at Ashland United Methodist Church, while the other half joined by Zoom from churches across the state. Together the men prayed, then discussed as a group practical things they can do to make an impact, including service efforts, mentorships, and accountability groups.

Next, Fairley invited the men to name men who helped them, then answer how they have paid that help forward.

"Our only goal is to try to bring people to Christ," said Herman Lightsey, former president of the conference men and now chair of the National Association of Conference Presidents for United Methodist Men. "Our purpose ... is to be inclusive of all men. It's not about where they go to church or if they go to church. We know the importance of reaching men is reaching their family. It's about where they'll spend eternity.

"And we've got a lot of work ahead of us." Lightsey shared how he's never seen men more excited about men's ministry than in the last two years. "Men are ready to go back to work," Lightsey said. "They're tired of arguing."



Photo courtesy of the Rev. Meg Cook

'Lift Every Voice' revival a success

Five churches in the Columbia District hosted a district revival event March 27 that brought together United Methodists for a night of praise, fellowship and worship. Francis Burns United Methodist Church, Columbia, hosted "Lift Every Voice: A Revival of Praise and Purpose," which featured preaching from the Rev. Scott Smoak (Trinity UMC, Blythewood) and leadership from Dr. Sheila Elliott Hodge (Virginia Wingard UMC, Columbia), the Rev. Shay Long (Mill Creek UMC, Columbia) and the Rev. Claire Van Den Berg (Windsor UMC, Columbia), along with many other pastors and laity who attended. Hodge called it "a night of worship, unity and the power of the Holy Spirit."

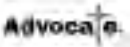




Photo by Dan O'Mara
Toni Taylor (left) and Rev. Nona Woodle look through applications.

UMCSC taps 12 churches to launch children’s initiative

By Dan O'Mara

The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church has launched “Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer” by selecting 12 local churches to participate in the initiative’s first cohort of churches.

The initiative is funded by a \$1.1 million grant from the Lilly Endowment’s Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer Initiative.

The transformative Connecting Children program will engage 60 churches across five years, impacting 500 children and reaching more than 7,000 church members through innovative worship practices.

The initiative employs a cohort model to foster leadership development among clergy and laity, aiming to create a cultural shift in how congregations experience worship. By promoting intergenerational worship practices, storytelling and creative arts, the program seeks to nurture children’s faith while strengthening connections across all generations.

The Connecting Children Leadership Team convened in March to select the first cohort of 12 churches from a pool of 33 applicants.

Two leadership team members whose churches applied to be in the cohort recused themselves from the voting process.

The first cohort of churches represents diverse communities across South Carolina, including urban, rural and suburban areas. Cohort 2025 includes seven African-American churches, two diverse congregations and three predominantly White churches from seven districts: Florence (3), Marion (2), Columbia (2), Walterboro (2), Spartanburg (1), Greenville (1) and Charleston (1).

- Churches selected for Cohort 2025 are as follows:
- Highland Park UMC, Florence
 - Cumberland UMC, Florence
 - Bethel UMC, Kingstree
 - Dacusville UMC, Easley
 - Wesley UMC, Johns Island
 - Dunton UMC, Gaffney
 - Wesley UMC, Columbia
 - Ecumenical Partnership (Grace UMC, Columbia; Virginia Wingard UMC, Columbia; and Christus Victor Lutheran Church)
 - Waters Edge UMC, Beaufort
 - New Grace UMC, St. George
 - The Brook UMC, Myrtle Beach
 - Carolina Forest UMC, Myrtle Beach

The initiative aligns with UMCSC’s priorities by empowering local churches to nurture children’s spiritual growth through vibrant worship experiences that involve all generations. It also leverages partnerships with organizations like Messy Church USA and Narrative 4 to develop creative resources for congregations.

Connectional Ministries Director the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith emphasized the significance of this effort, noting it “allows us to work alongside churches in meaningful ways that deepen relationships with God and one another while equipping children to carry our faith into the future.”

For more information about this initiative or upcoming updates on Cohort 2025 activities, go to <https://www.umcsc.org/children> or contact the Connecting Children Leadership Team directly: Team Leader Toni Taylor at ttaylor@umcsc.org or Congregational Specialist the Rev. Nona Woodle at nmwoodle@umcsc.org.

Annual Conference prep continues

By Jessica Brodie

GREENVILLE—Preparations continue for this year’s Annual Conference, set for June 8-11 at the Greenville Convention Center.

Annual Conference is the denomination’s yearly meeting for this state, responsible for a host of business including passage of the church budget and ordaining clergy. This year, the body will also vote on four amendments to The United Methodist Church constitution.

Materials, including a draft agenda, are posted online at <https://www.umcsc.org/ac2025>.

What are the constitutional amendments?

The four constitutional amendments to the constitution were all passed by the required two-thirds vote at the 2024 General Conference. Because the amendments will change the United Methodist constitution, they require ratification by at least two-thirds of the total voting members of all UMC annual conferences around the world.

Amendments include worldwide regionalization; expanding gender and disability inclusion in church membership; standing against racism and colonialism; and clarifying requirements for clergy-delegate elections. The language of the amendments cannot be changed, and votes will be simple “yes” or “no” votes on four different ballots.

All constitutional amendments can be read in full at <https://www.umcsc.org/ac2025>.

The schedule

Annual Conference is scheduled to start at 2

p.m. Sunday with packet pickup, followed throughout the afternoon by new lay member orientation sessions and the clergy session. The Commissioning, Ordination and Retirement Recognition Service is scheduled for Sunday at 7 p.m., with Bishop Leonard E. Fairley presiding and preaching.

Monday starts with opening worship at 9 a.m., then a full day of business, including the first reading of the 2026 budget, concluding with praise and prayer at 5 p.m. and evening recess at 6 p.m.

Tuesday starts at 9 a.m. with morning praise and prayer, followed by a day of business to include amendment voting and a report by the Ministry Advisory Team on the work of the Jeremiah teams. The memorial service, preached by the Rev. William F. Malambri III, is scheduled for 5 p.m.

Wednesday concludes with a morning praise and prayer, passage of the 2026 budget, church closings and charge line changes, and a sending forth and fixing of the appointments.

Other happenings

Annual Conference includes a number of other happenings included in the special events calendar. These include a stewardship training, a hospitality room hosted by Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry, a meet-the-author hosted by the Advocate Press, the African-American Clergywomen’s Luncheon, a Black Methodists for Church Renewal worship service, a ministers’ spouses’ luncheon and a baseball night. Open Hearts UMC, Greenville will also host a Kids Camp (see article, Page 8).

All who plan to attend Annual Conference are urged to register now via the conference website.

Church in prayer after teen shot in parking lot

By Jessica Brodie

GREENVILLE—A community and church are in mourning this week after the death of a teenager outside St. Mark United Methodist Church in Greenville’s Sans Souci community.

According to the Greenville County Sheriff’s Office, deputies responded after a report of gunshots at 8:19 p.m. Saturday, April 12, to the parking lot of the church, located at 306 N. Franklin Rd. There they found 16-year-old Hans “Jaiden” Thompson with a gunshot wound. Police said Jaiden was transported to the hospital, where he died.

Days later, police arrested two juvenile suspects in the shooting—one a 16-year-old, arrested April 14 and charged with murder, possession of a weapon during the commission of a violent crime, armed robbery, possession of a firearm by a person under 18 and criminal conspiracy. The second, a 15-year-old who was arrested at Travelers Rest High School April 15, faces the same charges.

In his obituary, Jaiden was described as “the kind of guy who could light up a room with his smile and keep it



Jaiden Thompson

bright with his laughter” and “the beloved ring-leader of his family” who loved dirt bikes, video games and hanging out with friends.

He leaves behind his parents, a sister, grandparents and a host of friends.

Police said the suspects and victim allegedly met in the parking lot of St. Mark UMC on Saturday evening around 8 p.m.,

where they shot and robbed the victim before leaving the scene. Through a variety of investigative leads, investigators were able to quickly identify the suspects, who will be housed in the Juvenile Detention Facility in Columbia pending court hearings.

St. Mark UMC is a small church with roughly 58 members pastored by the Rev. Tony Owens. In the church worship service Sunday morning, which was livestreamed on Facebook, Owens asked the congregation to be in prayer for Jaiden’s family after the incident.

Sign me up for the Advocate!

Circle one:

Dr. Mr. Miss Ms. Mrs. Rev.

Name:

Address:

Email:

Church name:

Pastor:

Phone:

District:

☐ PAYMENT: ☐ Check made payable to the Advocate ☐ Cash

☐ Charge credit card #:

Exp.: V-Code:

Name on card:

Card billing address:

(Credit card numbers are destroyed after card is run)

Amount: \$20 New \$35 Two-years

Please make checks payable to **The Advocate** return to **4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203** or subscribe online at **AdvocateSC.org**



Editorial
by Jessica Brodie

The time is now

Many of us, myself included, sometimes live life as if time is in never-ending supply. We mistakenly believe we will have the luxury, when we feel good and ready, to do whatever it is that’s been tugging at our hearts—take that trip to the Holy Land. Make amends with our brother or sister over a long-standing squabble. Surrender fully to the Lord’s leading and do whatever it is God is urging.

Yet we never know when we will breathe our last in this world. And while as Christian believers we know eternity with Jesus awaits us, there are countless stories of people in their last moments expressing regret over things left undone, fences never mended, stories never shared.

There’s an urgency expressed in Scripture we cannot ignore: The time is now. “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work,” Jesus said in John 9:4 (ESV). And in Matthew 24:42, he urged, “Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.” Proverbs 1:32 reminds us that “the complacency of fools destroys them,” while Romans 12:11 urges, “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”

The time is now—not tomorrow. Indeed, tomorrow is not guaranteed. For too long, our church and its people have been distracted from God’s good works by infighting, arguing over petty differences we’ve inflated into colossal issues, instead of uniting as one with God as our head to do God’s good work in the world. We mistakenly believe we have the luxury of time before whatever it is that Jesus alludes to—our final breath, the second coming—arrives, and we fritter away our minutes and cling to old grudges instead of channeling them intentionally into feeding God’s lambs or sharing the Good News far and wide.

Consider what Jesus said, over and over: Love God. Love each other. Believe in me, follow me and obey God’s commands. Serve and forgive others. Go and make disciples. Is this how we’re living our lives? If everything ended tomorrow, would we honestly be able to say, “Yes, Lord, I did what I could for you”?

I appreciate what Bishop Leonard Fairley said recently at a gathering of United Methodist men (*Advocate*, Page 1), urging those gathered to get back on track with where God is moving us. “When you get in step with God, it’s when you see new things and new visions and new dreams,” Fairley said.

So let’s wake up, my friends. Let’s start working together for the good of God’s kingdom. Let’s get busy doing God’s work and stop wasting time on division and narrow, selfish concerns. The time is now.

The hour has come
for you to wake
from sleep
Romans 13:11 (ESV)



Bishop’s Column
by Bishop Leonard Fairley

Holy silence

My Grandma Gladys must have said it at least a million times or more: “Boy, get somewhere and sit still.”

I am old enough now to see the wisdom in her words. Stillness is a gift of time, a gift for reflection, renewal and restoration. If you want to hear what God might be saying, sit still and listen with all your mind, body and soul, letting go of distractions and senseless busyness that blinds the eye and blocks hearing.

Parker J. Palmer says it this way in his book with the long title, “A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life, Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World.”

He writes, “If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit quietly for an hour at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may emerge, and out the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wilderness we seek.”

Silence is holy, leaving room and space for God to speak, and to be heard. In 1 Kings 10, Elijah flees to Mount Horeb in fear, sustained by an angel. God speaks to him not in the earthquake, wind or fire but in a still small voice, restores him and gives him new assignments.

What if God’s new assignment for us as United Methodists in our current reality is found in the still, small voice of the creator? What if God is telling us to get somewhere and sit still while he shows us the path we are to walk?

Be still and know that God is God. Silence can be holy.

In a world that is filled with anxiety and uncertainty, we can use some holy silence—a little time off the grid—to let go of all the chaotic distractions that keep us from seeing and hearing Jesus clearly. I think we can all use a little bit of Grandma Gladys’ wisdom.

I wrote the following poem in memory of my Grandma Gladys. I hope she sees from heaven that I have learned and continue to learn to get somewhere and sit still while the Lord is working.

Silence can be holy.

Letters to the Editor.

Who cares?

While the billionaires are winning and dining on fine food, they are taking chainsaws with smiles to cut the funds for children’s meals in schools, hurting the farmers, firing thousands of needed federal workers and trying to cut social security funds for the elderly. Is this showing compassion, care and love to the least of these? “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is

this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27). It has taken centuries to build our social structure in our great country to care for the needy. Are the leaders today builders or wreckers? Lies and deception are wrong. It appears the people with the chainsaws are wreckers and do not represent Christ’s ways. Jesus was crucified by insensi-

tive leaders. “What is truth?” Pilate asked (John 18:38). “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Corinthians 13:6-7). What the country needs is the love of Christ in the hearts of leaders. Let there be sharing. Rev. John Culp, retired West Columbia

See “Letters,” Page 5

Advocate
SERVING SOUTH CAROLINA UNITED METHODISTS SINCE 1837

4908 Colonial Drive, Suite 207,
Columbia, SC 29203
803-726-6743
info@advocatesc.org
https://www.advocatesc.org

Publisher: South Carolina United Methodist Advocate Board of Trustees
Enid McClam, chairperson; the Rev. Michael Henderson, vice chairperson;
Jeff Wallace, secretary; David Bryant, treasurer;
the Rev. Eleanora Coaxum Ellington; the Rev. Sharon Spann Gamble;
the Rev. Darlene Kelley; Glen T. Levine; Sadie Moss; Licita Rogers;
the Rev. Rebecca Rowell; the Rev. Ed Stallworth III; Diane Wilson;
the Rev. Cameron Levi, ex officio; and the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith, ex officio

Editors emeritus
Maryneal Jones, the Rev. Willie S. Teague, Allison Askins,
Karl F. Davie Burgdorf, Emily L. Cooper

Staff
Editor: Jessica Brodie
jbrodie@advocatesc.org

Assistant Editor: Allison K. Trussell
atrussell@advocatesc.org

Marketing Coordinator: Katy Renfroe
krenfroe@advocatesc.org

The South Carolina United Methodist Advocate (ISSN 1078-8166) continues the Southern Christian Advocate, authorized by the General Conference of 1836. Publication began June 24, 1837. The paper is published monthly by the South Carolina United Methodist Advocate Board of Trustees. We cannot be responsible for unsolicited manuscripts. Please direct all inquiries regarding submissions to the editor, 4908 Colonial Drive, Suite 207, Columbia, SC 29203-6070. Periodicals postage paid at Columbia, S.C. Postmaster: Send address changes to: South Carolina United Methodist Advocate, 4908 Colonial Drive, Suite 207, Columbia, SC 29203.

May 2025 • Volume 189 • No. 5





Commentary
by the Rev. John Jordan

Lessons from the chicken yard

I grew up on a farm in South Georgia. We had cows, pigs and chickens. Usually, there were 15 to 25 chickens. The chickens were in a fenced area surrounding the chicken coop, which we called the chicken yard. With that many chickens in a confined space, there were a lot of droppings. Needless to say, the chicken yard was a messy place.

Our churches have been in a messy place for the past six years. We had two divisive struggles: COVID-19 and separation. Many churches were split over suspending in-person worship and how to manage returning to in-person worship. COVID-19 delayed the 2020 General Conference until 2024. This confused the issue of disaffiliation over the LGBTQ+ issue that we thought would be resolved. Confusion and anger reigned over whether and how churches could separate. Many churches waited until after the General Conference before deciding to separate. The Judicial Council’s decision that churches could not separate under Para. 2549 led to anger and some churches seeking legal action. Many churches experienced deep divides over this issue.

The church has been in a messy place and in some cases is still there.

Lesson One: Life, even church life, can be a messy place.

When we played, the ball would often sail into the chicken yard. Someone went into the chicken yard to retrieve the ball if we wanted to continue the game.

Our churches had to confront some messy situations. Many churches had contentious meetings and decisions to stay or leave The United Methodist Church. These issues had to be addressed so the church could continue its ministry.

Lesson Two: You may have to go into the messy place to continue the game.

My friends who were not used to the chicken yard would carefully tiptoe around, trying not to step in “it.” No matter how careful they were, eventually they stepped in it. They took a long time to retrieve the ball.

I would run into the chicken yard, grab the ball and run out. I did not take long to get the ball and, yes, I stepped in it.

Some churches have tiptoed around the LGBTQ+ issue and other issues, trying to avoid conflict and messiness. Some churches faced these issues head-on, quickly resolving them. Either way, there was some messiness, anger and hurt.

Lesson Three: No matter how hard you try not to, you will step in it.

After stepping in it, my friends would raise their foot and try to hop out of the chicken yard, crying, “Yuck.” They would want soap and water to wash their feet or clean their shoes before getting back to the game. I would just wipe my feet on the grass outside the chicken yard and continue playing.

Our churches are at a point where we can either cry about the mess or wipe off our feet and get on with doing God’s work.

Lesson Four: After stepping in it, wipe your feet off and get back in the game.

The UMC has been in a messy place for the past six years. We had to face conflicts beyond the LGBTQ+ issues. Many underlying conflicts may have arisen during this time, issues we may have tiptoed around for many years. Now is the time to take the lessons from the chicken yard, wipe off the mess and get on with the business of God’s Kingdom.

One lesson from the chicken yard, perhaps the most important, is that the largest and most beautiful daffodils and narcissus grew in the chicken yard. They bloomed all spring and summer. I would pick armfuls for my mother and grandmother. Vases of daffodils and narcissus were in every room in the house. This abundance of flowers grew because there was so much “yuck” in the chicken yard. From the mess of the chicken yard came God’s beauty.

Lesson Five: An abundance of beauty grows from the mess.

From the mess the UMC has been in the past six years, we may become a stronger, more abundant church. Our missions and ministries may be greater than ever because we have been through these messy times.

Jordan pastors Pelion and Sharon UMCs, Pelion.



Advocate survey to help newspaper improve

How can the <i>Advocate</i> understand—and address—your news needs better?	In addition to listening sessions, focus groups and other methods, the <i>Advocate</i> has created a survey it hopes people will take.	“We have a long and thriving history. Established in 1836, we’re the oldest newspaper in Methodism still in existence, and we want to continue to thrive and serve readers long into the future. The answers to this survey will help us do that better.”
The <i>Advocate</i> is working to more broadly understand the wishes and needs of its readers across South Carolina, beginning a full-scale period of market research so it can expand and serve United Methodists better now and in the future.	“Completing the survey helps us better understand who our readers are, why they read the <i>Advocate</i> and how we can improve,” said <i>Advocate</i> Editor Jessica Brodie.	To take the confidential survey, go to https://advocate-s.org/survey .

LETTERS:
From Page 4

Whose voice do you hear?

People of faith who are part of mosques, synagogues and churches will be called to act in critical ways in the coming months.

Elected and unelected political leaders here in the United States have given us plentiful warning that difficult economic times are ahead. Unprecedented tariffs (taxes) are being imposed around the world. Food banks, clothes closets and other agencies that supply basic resources for the economically challenged are already experiencing great needs. Greater demands will surface as people are no longer able to pay their rent, make car payments or even take care of medical costs.

If these difficult times persist, people on higher economic rungs of the ladder will see their savings and other sources of economic security begin to disappear.

The possibility of such times is based on the claim that the United States has been mistreated economically through peace agreements and other negotiated political settlements in the past. As billionaires cry out that they are entitled to more at the expense of the poor, people of faith must listen to a very different voice.

Calling out to us from the pages of biblical history comes a different word. God demands that the foot of the oppressors be lifted from the throats of those who are having to work two and three jobs just to make ends meet. God shouts from the roofs of closed federal agencies where needed assistance for disaster relief had been dispensed, saying “let justice roll down” rather than the silence of promises left unkept.

What must we make of the unlawful deportation of even U.S. citizens who do not fit the desired requirement of being White, male

and middle class?

God’s table of grace says that all are welcomed and that we must provide the care for and welcome all God’s children, especially those with special needs. Asking struggling nations to bend a knee to a nation that covets military and economic dominance is not in accordance with the vision of the voice of John who was given the ability to “see a new heaven and a new earth” where all of God’s people were living in peace with one another. That vision was not made possible through the eyes of dominance and power but through the eyes of a loving Creator.

During the next months, people of faith will have an opportunity to make a powerful witness to their faith. Shall we place our voices and actions behind those of power and wealth or shall we fill grocery bags with food and love? Shall we make sure those who need medical care will receive it or shall we make sure the pockets of the rich are filled to the fullest? Shall we make sure the child living in poverty has access to public education or shall we support the right of those with money to purse their education at whatever the cost?

Whose voice do you hear?
Dr. Michael L. Vandiver, retired
Anderson

Correction.

In the apportionments listing (April *Advocate*), Hampton UMC in the Walterboro District was incorrectly listed with the wrong amount. The listing should have noted the church paid 100 percent.

We apologize for this error and strive to set the record straight.



Commentary
by Paul Gasque

Silent no more

There arise occasionally in the life of each of us difficult issues that call for an honest, genuine, heartfelt decision—significant issues in our culture that need to change. But change is never affected by personal beliefs, but only when compassion and personal commitment lead to action.

I find it easy to be apathetic, complacent or indifferent about certain matters as long they do not affect me. But is this God’s way? Are we as Christians called to remain silent and aloof about a just cause and the very things that matter to the heart of God, hoping for the best? Or should we give voice to our heartfelt convictions by speaking the truth from our hearts? Such significant issues offer no “maybes” or “gray areas” but an unequivocal yes or no.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14 NRSV). Our decision about such matters is either a yes or no to Christ. Any attempt to skirt the issue by walking around, shrinking from or ignoring it, hoping it will go way, is already a decision. So as Christians, who are we living for and who are we trying to please? In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul writes, “Am I now seeking human approval or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10).

Having said this, the issue I am speaking of is the death penalty. As a retired agent with the State Law Enforcement Division, I was for years very much in favor of the death penalty, even having been involved in cases and trials in which the death penalty was an issue. In the latter part of 1991, I felt a compelling need to read and study Scripture, which I began in 1992. As a result, over the years, especially after my call to pastoral ministry, I noticed my attitude changed about some issues that I had previously felt strongly about. Today, I am adamantly opposed to the death penalty for a variety of reasons, primarily from my reading of Scripture.

First, I must choose which gate I am entering through in my relationship with Jesus. The Christian life is never meant to be easy, and my stance on the death penalty has not always been an easy decision to make. How can one read about murder cases and not have compassion and sympathy for the victim’s family? The personal loss, the deep emotional pain and the anger continue for years. These are real struggles. But can a state-sanctioned death for the perpetrator resolve anything?

Secondly, how do we know when God’s rehabilitative and restorative grace has run its course? Is God finished with that individual? The United Methodist Church says, “The death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore and transform all human beings” (UMC Social Principles Para. 164.G).

Thirdly, we read much about the justice of God in Scripture. When one is rightly convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison, has justice not been served? Or must justice continue by rendering evil with evil, which Scripture warns us against (1 Peter 1:9)? Does man’s law supersede God’s law? Does this honor God?

Lastly, there are causes for which we, as Christians, are called to stand firm against, which transcend mere personal beliefs. As the apostle Paul has written, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Romans 12:19).

Gasque is a member of First UMC, Marion.



Commentary
by the Rev. Brad Gray

The Zoom goes on

I should start by saying I am a fan of Zoom. I would argue that five years ago, Zoom became one of the more important innovations in technology. It enabled us to stay connected when we did not know if it was safe to be in person with each other.

At the time, I was teaching a Tuesday night Bible study for my church in Charleston with around a dozen people. So when COVID-19 hit in March 2020, we simply moved to Zoom.

It was so tough at first. My folks, most older than 60, had to learn how to log on, where to position their camera and how to mute and unmute themselves. After a few weeks, everyone had mastered it. Their sense of accomplishment was palpable through the screen each week.

When I moved to my current appointment in Spartanburg, I introduced a Tuesday night Bible study via Zoom. A few brave souls joined me, and off we went. Much like before, the folks that joined me struggled for a few weeks. It would take about 20 minutes before we had everyone’s cameras turned on and the microphones and speakers working. Text messages and phone calls were made to get everyone on the same page, but the people persisted. Eventually it became easier, and again ,the sense of accomplishment around the technology was evident.

For five years now, mostly during the school year, we have gathered together to read the Bible on Tuesday evenings from the comfort of our own homes via Zoom. We have worked through the Minor Prophets and Esther in the Old Testament and through Matthew, John, Acts, Hebrews and James in the New Testament. We are currently working through Luke’s Gospel. It has allowed us to stay connected, as folks can tune in during times of prolonged illness, when they become shut-in or travel or even when they “winter” in the warmer climate of Florida.

Now, most of the time, I teach from my desk at the


parsonage, but every now and then I am at church or teach from a bedroom somewhere while visiting family. A few weeks ago, I taught from an office at a car dealership. While buying a new car, I completely misjudged how long it would take and found myself running up against our usual start time. I had prepared earlier in the day and was ready to teach. As the time approached, I apologized to the salesman and said I would come back the next day to finish signing. As you can imagine, he was not going to let me leave without the new car, so he offered a vacant office and politely closed the door behind him, allowing me to teach the 16th chapter of Luke. My Zoom friends got a big kick out of that. I have to tell you, the parable of the shrewd manager took on a whole new meaning that day.

I have attended so many different gatherings and trainings over the last five years in which the speaker says something like, “If you are like me, I know you are tired of Zoom.” Each time I cringe and want to shout out, “Not me!” I love it. It has allowed me to be connected to folks who I might not get to see on a weekly basis because of health or distance. It has saved me countless hours in which I did not have to drive 40 minutes round trip to the church to teach. I have gotten to teach from the comfort of sweatpants while participants could join me from their couches or their dinner tables. I may have even spied a glass of wine or two being enjoyed while we studied together.

Trust me, I know the value of being physically present with people. That is not going away. But I also know how valuable our Zoom study has been for so many people.

And at least for the foreseeable future, the Zoom will go on.

Gray is pastor of Bethel UMC, Spartanburg.

 **Commentary
by Tom Moore**

A wedding to remember

March 15, 2025, is a day that will be remembered and celebrated for years by many at Trinity United Methodist Church in Spartanburg and beyond. On that date, Trinity held the first same-sex wedding in our sanctuary, which we believe was the first such wedding in a UMC sanctuary in South Carolina.

The ceremony, a beautiful celebratory worship service, filled that sacred space and included a congregational hymn, two pieces by the Trinity Choir, a Sondheim piece, a Scripture reading and prayer by the Rev. Ricky Howell and a homily by the Rev. Sherry Wood. The theme of the entire service was Shalom: peace, wholeness, safety, completeness.

The men who got married have been members at Trinity for years and in a relationship for 10 years. Both have wanted to get married for some time, but they wanted to get married in their church, Trinity. That became possible when our church council unanimously approved a revised wedding policy last summer following action by the UMC General Conference.

Over the weeks, as March 15 approached, this wedding occupied more and more of my thoughts. I know both of these men quite well and consider them good friends. Both grew up in very conservative Christian environments, where each learned that his identity was flawed in ways unacceptable to Christianity. Each has dealt with that and come to accept who he is; each has remained in the church and been very active in it; and they have come to love each other very much.

How amazing it seems that these men have come from their early, sometimes painful, experiences of the church to a place where their marriage can now be conducted in and blessed by a Christian church.

In November last year, we at Trinity concluded our year-long centennial celebration. Since then, our focus has been on the next hundred years.

To begin our second century of Christian witness with this wedding gives me great hope for our future. From my perspective, the example and teachings of Jesus call his followers to radical inclusion.

Using any characteristic of another to demonize or exclude is antithetical to the Gospel.

As we live into our church’s future, may radical inclusion and Shalom be drivers of what we do and how we do it. Shalom: peace, wholeness, safety, completeness.

On March 15, 2025, Trinity UMC, Spartanburg, took a big step toward living that mission.

Moore is chair of the church council at Trinity. These words are his, and he is not speaking on behalf of Trinity UMC or the church council.



Photo courtesy of Sharome Henry

Learning together

Clergy across the South Carolina Conference of the UMC headed to the coast last month for the Bishop’s School of Ministry, held Feb. 4-6. Dr. Lovett Weems was the speaker. Here, Bishop Leonard Fairley leads a session.



Commentary
by Rev. Joseph Abram Jr.

Birds of a feather

Birds of a feather, or likeminded people, will flock or stick together. Fools find a kinship in and with other fools.

Bullies do not often jump on each other; they prefer terrorizing the humble. One of my Achilles’ heels is controlling my anger when I see the humble being victimized while trying his/her best to avoid confrontations. For that reason, my club-going life was cut short when a few of my friends, with hands over my mouth, carried me bodily out of a club one night to prevent me from taking on a gang of bullies. I decided at that moment that that was not the place for me—someone was going to get hurt. There was not any way I could defend the innocent person alone against a mob, at least with bare hands. I chose to stay out of that environment to avoid the temptation.

I watched the nomination process for leaders of our nation, and it seemed as though most had a series of negatives that most people would be confined to prison for less. Some folks were expressing their shock and dismay, as though they did not realize that birds of feather flock together.

Consider: When you have heard a dog barking in your neighborhood, did you ever hear the cats start meowing? Probably not, but it was possible that other dogs were heard barking. Dogs follow dogs. So do human beings of every description follow each other. Some say, “I know what an individual is like, and I am not like that, but I like this about him or her.” Liar! If anyone despises a habitual liar, bigot, rapist, criminal or fraudster, one would not take that individual home to your children, parents or spouse. If we think those deficiencies are OK, then we will embrace that individual. Of course, if we are driven by greed, money or power, we will lock ourselves away in our room while our guests have the run of our houses, blocking out a cry for help from our spouse, grandparents and children.

Maybe we think it will be all right and we can be spared if we can get criminals to molest the neighbor’s family instead. But one thing about criminals—they don’t care who they take advantage of; they are just concerned about themselves. Why do you think our politicians are running scared? It is “Yessir, Master!” or get a whipping and/or their marbles taken away.

I am truly sorry, but Lindsey, Tim and the delegation will not be coming to rescue us, and Jim cannot defend us against the mob alone. It looks like it is just you, me and God.

With Jesus on our team, we are more than conquerors, so do not sweat it. We’ve got this! Just watch God move.

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



Humanity Behind Bars
by Rev. Nichole Middleton

Wrestling with who we were

In prison ministry, we often tell stories of transformation—of individuals who have encountered the love of Christ and emerged as new creations. These testimonies inspire us, reminding us of God’s power to redeem even the most broken of lives.

But there is another side to this story, one that is just as real and just as necessary to acknowledge: Not everyone has had their heart and eyes opened to the love of Christ. Not everyone is ready to change. Some are still wrestling with who they used to be.

A few days ago, I had to write five incident reports. In my 16 years of ministry, I had only written three before that day. Suddenly, in one shift, I more than doubled that number. It was heartbreaking.

I don’t take incident reports lightly. They are not just pieces of paper or bureaucratic checkboxes. They represent moments when someone has engaged in behavior that violates institutional rules or expectations by stepping beyond the communal boundaries of free will and accountability—limits not established to punish, but to protect and correct as acts of care, so that both the individual and the community might flourish. When I write one, I am saying: You broke the rules. When I write one, I am saying: You were given a chance to correct your actions, and yet, the behavior continued.

That day, I struggled deeply. Not because I had to enforce the rules—that was clear. If I did not follow through, I would lose credibility, and credibility is everything in this ministry. No, my heart broke because I had already done so much front-end work to prevent this. I had spoken with them, guided them, corrected them gently and encouraged them to choose another way. And still, they persisted.

As I wrestled with what had happened, I thought about the conversion experience—how and when we, as Christians, come to the point of surrender. For some, there is a defining moment: a tragedy, a failure or a sudden awareness that the path they are on is leading nowhere. For others, it is gradual, a quiet but persistent tug that draws them toward the light of Christ. But for some, the realization never comes, or at least, it has not come yet.

Howard Thurman speaks of the creative encounter: a transformative experience where a person, in the presence of God, comes to know their truest self. It is in this sacred moment that a person recognizes their deep connection to God and the responsibility that comes with it. But not everyone has experienced this encounter. Some are still living with veiled hearts, resisting the truth that would set them free.

I am convinced that what happened with these five was not simply about breaking rules. It was about something deeper. They had not yet recognized that the way they were living—the way they had always lived—was not serving them. They had not yet had their creative encounter, that moment when the weight of their choices compelled them to seek another way. And perhaps, they were not yet ready to.

But I pray.

I pray that the shock of this moment—the moment when their chaplain, who has loved and forgiven and welcomed them, who has modeled the love of Christ, had to take disciplinary action—will plant a seed. I pray that the crack in their hearts, however small, will

widen just enough for the light of Christ to seep in.

As my heart broke that day, I realized that perhaps it needed to break. Not only for the sake of these individuals, but for the sake of my witness. My testimony of the humanity behind bars must not lead others to believe that they can toss out discernment and caution when engaging with the formerly incarcerated. Rather, my testimony is shared to serve as a bridge.

There are those who fear this population, who cannot imagine extending grace because they believe doing so is naive or even dangerous. But the gospel does not call us to blind grace—it calls us to grace with wisdom. Caution is not the enemy of compassion; rather, discernment is the companion of discipleship. As United Methodists, we understand this through our Wesleyan call to do no harm, do good and stay in love with God.

The church cannot abandon its responsibility to those behind bars, nor can it ignore the very real concerns of those who struggle to trust. Both truths must be held in tension:

- Yes, God’s grace is transformative, and lives can and do change.
- Yes, some remain unrepentant, and caution is necessary.

It is in the space between these two realities that our work must be done.

The Bible teaches me that I will not always see the fruit of my labor. Jesus himself used the imagery of farming to describe discipleship:

- Sometimes, my job is to till the soil, preparing hearts for what is to come.
- Sometimes, my job is to plant the seed, speaking truth even when I do not see immediate change.
- Sometimes, my job is to water, nurturing and encouraging those who are beginning to grow.
- And sometimes, I am blessed to see the harvest, to witness a life transformed by the grace of God.

But this work is a process. And it is a process that requires patience.

That day, my heart broke, but maybe it needed to. Maybe it was a reminder that this work is meaningful, even when it is painful. Maybe it was a reminder that redemption does not happen on my timeline but on God’s. And maybe it was a reminder that even when I cannot see the change, the Holy Spirit is still at work.

Not everyone who is incarcerated is ready for redemption. Not everyone who is incarcerated will change. But that does not mean that God has stopped pursuing them. And so, I will keep tilling the soil. I will keep planting seeds. I will keep watering. And I will keep praying that one day, the hardened hearts will soften, the unopened eyes will see, and the ones who once resisted grace will finally embrace it.

I will keep keeping on because redemption is always possible—even for those still wrestling with who they used to be.

Middleton is an elder in the South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, endorsed by the United Methodist Endorsing Agency for prison ministry. She currently serves as a chaplain in the federal prison system, dedicating her work to providing spiritual care, advocating for justice and supporting the transformation and reintegration of incarcerated individuals.

Kids Camp relieves parents’ childcare struggles during AC

By Jessica Brodie

GREENVILLE—Thanks to one Greenville church, parents who need childcare during Annual Conference will have an affordable—and convenient—solution. For the first time in years, Kids Camp will be offered at Annual Conference all day Monday and Tuesday, June 9-10, and half the day Wednesday, June 11. Hosted by the new church start Open Hearts United Methodist Church in Greenville, the church is only four miles away from the convention center, where Annual Conference will be held. The schedule is packed with engaging, kid-friendly activities, such as an outdoor scavenger hunt, Bible story time, tie-dye T-shirt-making, a stepping stone craft, a service project and movie time. Snacks, daily lunch and all program supplies will be provided. “We at Open Hearts UMC are excited to host Kids Camp during Annual Conference this summer,” said Jana Clack, director of discipleship for Open Hearts UMC, noting the church is blessed with qualified staff and volunteers, which made it logistically possible to offer this connectional experience. Clack said the kids will be in a fun, safe, Spirit-led environment, freeing up their caregivers, who will be busy doing the work of Annual Conference. “We are happy to offer this affordable option for folks who are traveling to Greenville with elementary-aged kids, or to locals who need childcare coverage during sessions,” Clack added. The Rev. Meg Cook, pastor of Grace UMC, Columbia, is one of those parents who is thrilled there is a camp option for her two sons. She doesn’t have family nearby who can help with childcare during Annual Conference, so she has had to bring her boys with her to all the sessions the last two years. While the boys have been great and people have been kind, she said it’s been “hard—worth it, but hard.” “I am enormously grateful and extend a huge thank you to Open Hearts UMC for doing this,” Cook said. “The boys are excited, and the schedule looks great.” Space is available for 20 children total, and registration closes May 15 or when slots are filled. Volunteers and staff on site at Open Hearts UMC are Safe Sanctuary-trained and background-checked through Trak-1. Pricing is \$60 for one child, \$110 for two and \$160 for three or more. To review the schedule and sign up, visit <https://www.umcsc.org/kidscamp>. For questions, email jana.clack@openheartsumcsc.org.

John Culp to be awarded honorary Wofford doctorate

A South Carolina United Methodist pastor is being awarded an honorary doctorate from Wofford College. The Board of Trustees and faculty of Wofford College have voted to confer upon the Rev. John Wesley Culp an honorary Doctor of Humanities degree at their commencement exercises, set for 9:30 a.m. Sunday, May 18. The highest honor that Wofford bestows is an honorary degree. In their letter to Culp, they noted they seek to pay tribute to those who are both great and good, who in their



Culp

lives and careers have conspicuously embodied those traits for which a Wofford education stands. “We believe that Wofford College is one of the greatest examples anywhere of liberal arts education at its finest; people like you who have risen to the pinnacle of success help to offer tangible evidence that education is truly transformational and deserves to be recognized,” Wofford President Nayef H. Samhat stated in the letter to him.

NEW

Website

LOADING...

Coming this month!

AdvocateSC.org

Advocate

AdvocateSC.org

Hibben cold shelter keeps neighbors warm

By Amanda Moore

MOUNT PLEASANT—“I blame Carlsen,” jokes the Rev. Katie Brock Lesh, associate pastor at Hibben United Methodist Church. When Hibben UMC’s cold shelter team started planning for the season, there was discussion of moving their opening temperature from 34 degrees to 36 degrees or higher. This tiny change would mean the shelter could be open to guests more nights. “In 2022 and 2023 season, we had only been open about five nights. I wanted to do more and be open more,” team leader and member Carlsen Huey explained. The Mount Pleasant church had already been open 13 nights this season before the January snowstorm hit. Below average overnight temperatures opened the shelter starting Jan. 20. It stayed open four additional nights and two days. The shelter opened again in February for two nights for a season total of 23. Dozens of volunteers stepped up in those frigid five days of January, some staying multiple days and nights to keep the shelter running. “Opening our shelter requires us to step out of our comfort zone and offer someone those things we may take for granted—a warm place to sleep, a warm shower, a warm meal—to people we may not encounter every day,” said Brock Lesh. The doors to Hibben’s Christian Life and Learning Center open when the overnight temperature is below 34 degrees. Guests are offered a bed with fresh linens, fresh towels and a shower, plus a hot meal. A hot breakfast and bagged lunch are served in the morning before guests depart. Opening the shelter for long stretches and full days can be challenging. “On our first night, we exceeded our capacity and we had to work with other shelters to transport guests to a shelter that had room, all while the snow and ice were starting to gather,” Brock Lesh said. “The weather definitely complicated matters since we couldn’t take guests back to where they came from and we had issues with our volunteers unable to get to us. As challenging as it was, our guests were extremely appreciative of having a place to stay. Some of them even lended a hand volunteering to clean up our dining areas and bathrooms.” The shelter is a great resource for people in need but has also been a great way to show how churches can care for the entire community. Many volunteers come from other churches and groups. Huey said it takes about 70 volunteers to run the shelter each night. Bethel UMC, Charleston, sends a cleanup crew each morning so the CLLC can be reset for the two schools Hibben houses. “Converting an overnight shelter to a school facility in a 75-minute window is nothing short of miraculous,” said Polly Graham, team leader. Other congregations prepare dinner to give a break to the kitchen team. The Charleston Port and Seafarers Society lends a hand with transportation. Graham said the team would love to partner with other churches in similar ways. The care provided doesn’t have a religious, denominational or generational boundary. Hibben shelter team leaders



Volunteers pitch in to help.

see the desire to help from the business community and local governments alike. “Trader Joes is our most consistent commercial donor. They send three to five large boxes of food each day. Fields to Families is a nonprofit that gets us a lot of produce,” said Huey. He jokes the meal planning is like being on “Chopped” or “Iron Chef”: “You get a bunch of different things and figure out how to make it a meal.” It’s not cheap to feed 20-60 people two hot meals and a bagged lunch. Huey estimates it would cost about \$35 per guest if he had to buy all the food and ingredients needed each night. “With all the donations we get from church members, the community and stores, it probably costs \$3 per person,” Huey said. Regardless of where they come from, the love volunteers bring is evident. “You can feel a genuine sense of care our volunteers put into every cot that is made, dish that is served, and conversation around the dinner table,” said Brock Lesh. She said guests have told her coming to the shelter feels like coming home because of how welcomed they feel. Hibben started the shelter in 2011 after finding an unhoused woman living on the property. Early team members worked with her to find permanent housing and stability. She later became an involved member and volunteer of Hibben. This first encounter shined a light on a need, even within the affluent town. “The first night the shelter opened its doors, we hosted four guests,” remembers Graham. Other local organizations soon followed. Warming shelters have opened in North Charleston, Summerville and Goose Creek, all offering a safe, warm and grace-filled night for their neighbors. Living in a temperate climate can mean there aren’t many cold nights. But when there are, people need someplace to go. While the need is great, so is the opportunity to respond to God’s call to love others. “I would encourage every church to consider the ways they may be able to open their doors to those in need. Reach out to other churches in the community, make connections within your city and work together to make sure that no one is left out in the cold,” said Brock Lesh. When at the shelter she often recalls Matthew 25 in which Jesus reminds us that whenever we serve the least of these, we are serving Christ. She remembers one guest commenting, “When I walk in here, and see the work you’re doing, I see love and I see Jesus. Thank you.”

Chance encounter leads Grace UWFaith to ‘Tie One On’

By Carol Cranford

COLUMBIA—In August, Grace United Methodist Church’s United Women in Faith held its annual “Name Your Price” indoor yard sale, where all proceeds go to missions. For the first time, we augmented our sale with a women’s boutique, where clothes, jewelry and purses were elegantly displayed in one of our Sunday school classrooms.

I was blessed to spend the morning working in the boutique, where I met Barbara Howse-Diemer. Barbara struck up a conversation with me, and I learned she loved to repurpose vintage jewelry by adding them as pieces to her large



Sandra Love (left) and Barbara Howse-Diemer in action.

floral pin creations. After showing me photos of her gorgeous pins, Barbara told me she also

wove men’s neckties together to form chair seat covers.

Barbara said she was quite successful at selling both her floral pins and chairs at craft shows. Also, she shared that people often asked her to incorporate (often deceased) loved one’s ties into seat covers of their own.

Although weaving neck ties together to form chair seats seemed quite the daunting task, Barbara assured me it was actually quite easy.

As luck would have it, we had a few chairs that had not sold at the yard sale. Barbara readily agreed to my request for her to come to one of our 2025 UWFaith meetings and instruct the women on how to

perform her craft. She gave me one of her cards, and I chuckled because Barbara’s chair-making business was called “Tie One On.”

She arrived at our February meeting armed with several large bags filled to the brim with neckties. After sharing some personal information—about her being a retired dance teacher who has been involved with Leeza’s Care Connection since its conception—she put us to work.

Although her instructions were easy to follow, the task became a challenge. While weaving and tying and turning the chairs upside down and then back up again, we were amazed that Barbara could

complete a chair seat all by herself. In one case, it took three of us working together to finish only one chair!

But oh, how remarkable it was to see the finished products. We were so proud of what we accomplished that we donated two chairs to the church library. Old neckties, which might have ended up stuffed in a closet or left off at the dump or a landfill, had metamorphosed by our hands into pieces that were both functional and lovely.

And none of that would have happened without my chance encounter with Barbara Howse-Diemer—now a new friend—who invited me to join her in “tying one on.”

Lay Servant Ministries

Helping laity grow and serve God in deeper ways

By Lynne Tyner

Are you a leader in your church? Are you looking for something different for spiritual growth?

Lay Servant Ministries is one of the most noteworthy leadership development programs The United Methodist Church connection has developed. It remains one of the most underutilized tools toward equipping and empowering lay servants to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ and then going to create other disciples. We say “make disciples for Christ for the transformation of the world,” but do we have the leadership skills that motivate others to follow Christ and make a difference in the world? Is your growth with Christ stagnant? Are you curious about our history as Methodists?

Lay members of the church are, by history and calling, intended to be active advocates of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every person is called to carry out the Great Commission, and every layperson is called to be missional. The witness of the laity, with their Christ-like examples of everyday living as well as their sharing of their own faith experiences, is the best evangelical tool we have to help others know Christ and to know him more intimately.

As part of this mission, lay servant ministries concentrate on two primary aspects of leadership development within the conference:

1) Developing spiritual leaders. Recognizing that the church is most fruitful when the gifts of all its members are employed in service to Christ, we will encourage the ministry of the laity with both leadership training and spiritual growth opportunities; and

2) Building lay and clergy partnerships. We will offer lay and clergy leaders processes and opportunities to strengthen their partnerships as spiritual leaders so that the gifts of each can be used to build up the whole body of Christ.

Spiritual growth in Lay Servant Ministry classes occurs through a combination of studying Scripture, reflecting on personal experiences, discussing faith with peers, developing leadership skills to serve others within the church community and actively applying learned

concepts to daily life, which ultimately leads to a deeper understanding of one’s faith and a commitment to living out Christian values in their lives.

LSM classes can be used to help you grow your spiritual faith by choosing a class that will fill a gap in your knowledge of a ministry you are currently serving in, one you are asked to serve in or maybe just simply of interest. For example, there is a class on ministry for folks with dementia.

Lay Servant Ministries offers a variety of courses to help laypeople serve in the church and community. These courses include the Basic Course, Advanced Courses and other training opportunities. Determination for which leadership courses you choose is based on what area of ministry you feel you are being called to serve the Lord in.

The areas of ministry or categories are to be a lay servant (who has taken only the Basic Introduction class), certified lay servant (who has taken Basic and one other course within three years), and certified lay speaker (who has taken the six required courses beyond the basic—Heritage, Called to Preach, Leading Worship, Leading Prayer, For the Common Good/Spiritual Gifts and polity, which is understanding the *Book of Discipline*). The next level is certified lay minister.

A certified lay servant gives you pleasure of filling your church’s pulpit when you are asked by your local pastor. To keep that privilege, you need to stay active in your church, community and LSM by taking a class at least every three years.

A certified lay speaker has all the above privileges but also includes churches beyond your home church.

A certified lay minister is “called and equipped to conduct public worship, care for the congregation, assist in program leadership, develop new and existing faith communities, preach the word, lead small groups, or establish community outreach ministries as part of a ministry team with the supervision and support of a clergyperson” (per the 2016 *Book of Discipline*, Para. 68.1).

For more on this ministry, visit <https://www.umesc.org/lsm>.

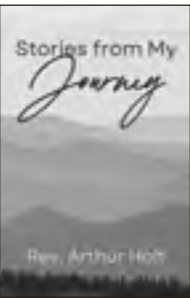
Advocate Press releases two books by Holt, Barnette

The Advocate Press has released two more books this month: “Having Coffee with God,” by Mark Barnette, and “Stories from My Journey,” by the Rev. Arthur Holt.

This brings the total to 35 books produced since 2017 by the Advocate Press, the publishing division of the *Advocate* newspaper.

In “Having Coffee with God,” Barnette explores what it would be like to sit down for a cup of coffee with God: What would God say? How would you react and respond?

In “Stories from My Jour-



ney,” Holt offers his third book of reflections.

Holt spent more than four decades in the ministry as a South Carolina United Methodist pastor, serving people in small towns and big across South Carolina.

Here, he shares about how the stories of his journey shaped him, teaching him important lessons about faith, relationships and the unconditional love of God.

Both books are available from the Advocate Press at <https://www.advocatesc.org/books>.

Stewardship is Discipleship



prayers



presence

June 9 & June 10 at AC2025



gifts



service





LED BY
Ken Sloane

UMC Discipleship Ministries
Director of Stewardship and Generosity

The Conference Council on Finance and Administration is sponsoring this training June 9 & June 10 during lunch at the 2025 Annual Conference



witness



One facet of the Intentional Discipleship System



The focus of this one-hour training is stewardship as part of growing as a disciple. Same training offered both days. No meal served, but you may bring an AC meal plan lunch. Attendance is first come, first served, for up to 100 people.

Bethel Shelters welcomes Cohen as director as Sutton steps down

ROCK HILL—Bethel Shelters will have a leadership change for the first time in 12 years.

The Rev. Emily Sutton, executive director of Bethel Shelters, has announced her resignation effective May 11, following 12 years of dedicated service and transformative leadership.

Alicia Cohen has been named the new executive director of Bethel Shelters.

Under Sutton’s guidance, Bethel Shelters evolved from a seasonal warming center to become the tri-county area’s only year-round emergency shelter for men, while significantly expanding its programs and community impact.

During Sutton’s tenure, Bethel Shelters underwent several major expansions, including a transition to the year-round Bethel Men’s Shelter in 2019, launch of the Bethel Day Shelter Program in 2021, implementation of the Workforce Development Program in 2022 and introduction of the Rapid ReHousing Program in 2024.

“It has been my joy and privilege to lead Bethel Shelters for the past 12 years,” Sutton said. “With the support of our dedicated staff, board members, volunteers, donors and community partners, we have continuously adapted to meet the evolving needs of our community.”

Sutton will continue her calling as a United Methodist pastor while remaining an advocate for those experiencing homelessness in the community.

Cohen started her career at Bethel Shelters as an intern through the Masters of Social Work program at Winthrop University in January 2020.



Sutton



Cohen

After her internship, Bethel Shelters hired Cohen as a part-time case manager.

Upon her graduation from Winthrop with her MSW in May 2022, Cohen became Bethel Shelters’ first full-time employee. She continued her work as the lead case manager until December 2024 when she was named the program director. Cohen also holds a Master of Science in human services with a concentration in community counseling psychology.

Cohen said she is “dedicated to uplifting others and advocating for essential human dignity, including affordable housing access, comprehensive health care, and fair justice reform. Being able to provide the necessary support and tools to promote well-being brings me joy. My professional fulfillment comes from making a tangible difference in direct client interactions or representing their voice to decision-makers.”

Originally from Johns Island, she enjoys spending quality time with family and friends, trying new foods and crafting. Her work is grounded in her deep faith, and she finds these two passages of Scripture foundational: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9) and “Call to me, and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3).

The Board of Directors said Cohen has made invaluable contributions to Bethel Shelters over the years.

“We are excited about this next chapter and look forward to working alongside Alicia for many years to come,” Board Chair Ben Campbell said.

Registration continues for 32 Salkehatchie summer service camps

By Jessica Brodie

Registration continues this month for Salkehatchie Summer Service, which this year features 32 weeklong mission camps.

The camps offer youth and adults the opportunity to engage in meaningful home-repair ministry across South Carolina.

Founded in 1978 by the Rev. John Culp, Salkehatchie brings youth, young adult and adult volunteers together to repair and rebuild homes for people in need, many of them living in poverty situations without the ability to fund the work on their own.

Volunteers must be at least 14 years old, and all adult volunteers must do a background check. Cost is \$250 per volunteer and covers the cost of shingles, building supplies and other materials. Lodging and meals are included.

Registration is open now for the camps, which go directly into communities of chronic poverty and repair

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

the homes of local families there.

Salkehatchie’s main focus is serving God. Over the years, hundreds of homes received new roofs, ramps, flooring, ceilings, bathrooms, kitchens and improvements in accessibility through the hands of youth at Salkehatchie.

Although it began as a South Carolina United Methodist venture, volunteers today are from many denominations and some come from out of state. Salkehatchie’s doors are open to all.

While much of the experience involves home repair, volunteers say Salkehatchie is so much more than this. Days of hard, sweaty work in the South Carolina summer sun are followed by nights of fellowship, reflection, music, worship, team-building and fun.



Photo courtesy of Annie R. Crocker

A time of learning, celebrating and fellowship

The Spartanburg District Lay Servant Ministry members celebrate with a closing ceremony March 30 after completing their 10 hours of training for their spring session. Thirty-one Certified Lay Servants have once again renewed their commitment of service to the UMC through communicating, caring and leading. They continue to pray for God’s blessing upon all his servants as they continue to press forward in an effort to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

James Monroe Mission House celebrates two decades

By Jean Hurt

FOUNTAIN INN—When a small group of concerned citizens banded together to address hunger in 2005, little did they imagine their project would be thriving 20 years later.

Members of Trinity United Methodist Church, inspired by the late Dr. James Monroe and his wife, Mary, set out to help their food-insecure neighbors. At first, they delivered boxes of donated food to families in need. After some months, they established operations in the former parsonage next to the church, where the James Monroe Mission House continues to distribute food and clothing every Monday morning.

The Mission House marked its 20th anniversary April 14 with cupcakes for its clients and an informal lunch for its volunteers.

“We want to celebrate this milestone with our clients,” said Director Kirby Knox, a volunteer. “The need for food assistance never goes away, although our numbers fluctuate. Even during COVID, we were able to continue distributing food to people in need. Today we help about 200 families each week. In essence, this is a celebration of community and of neighbors helping neighbors.”

Clyde and Eleanor Brooks, both now in their 90s, attended the dedication of the Mission House in 2005. Both have served on the organization’s board, Eleanor as chairman, and both continue to volunteer every Monday. Clyde staffs the door, assuring an orderly flow, and Eleanor leads a team that bags nonperishable groceries.

“It’s been a blessing to be part of the Monroe Mission House,” Eleanor said. “And I believe our efforts bless local families and our community.”

Over the years, the Mission House has joined with the Harvest Hope food bank and the food rescue organization Loaves & Fishes. This provides reliable sources of food and allows the mission to purchase needed food at reasonable prices. The Mission House also benefits from local food drives and from individual donations. Its funding comes entirely from sponsoring churches and from donations from organizations, schools, businesses and individuals.

“When we have a need, God provides through the generosity of neighbors,”

Knox said. “It’s beautiful how it works.”

About 30 volunteers help each week, performing such work as sorting, sizing and hanging clothing; packing and distributing the food; helping clients to their cars; and driving, loading and unloading trucks. Over the Mission House’s life, hundreds of people have given their time and talents.

The volunteers shared an informal sandwich lunch on celebration day. Then, it was back to work.

Facts About the James Monroe Mission House

- Established April 5, 2005, by members of Trinity UMC, Fountain Inn, the mission of the James Monroe Mission House is to assist neighbors in need in Greenville and Laurens counties by providing food and clothing.
- Today an ecumenical ministry, it is supported by numerous area churches and is open to all regardless of race, nationality or religion in accordance with Federal law and USDA policy.
- Named in honor of Dr. James Monroe and his wife, Mary, who lived lives of service to others in Fountain Inn and surrounding communities and who had a vision for such a ministry.
- Housed next door to Trinity United Methodist Church in the former church parsonage.
- A member agency of Harvest Hope food bank and Loaves and Fishes food-rescue organization.
- Entirely staffed and led by about 30 community volunteers in a variety of jobs: clothing sorters, hangers and sizers; food packers and distributors; record keepers; truck drivers, loaders and unloaders.
- Depends entirely on financial donations from supporting churches, organizations, businesses, schools and individuals.
- Open every Monday 9 a.m. to noon.
- Helps feed some 200 individuals and families every week.
- Each week clients receive about five bags of food containing frozen meat, cheese or dairy item, bread, fresh produce, canned goods, cereal. Clients may also select five clothing items each week. Seasonally, JMMH distributes blankets and coats.



LSM class members gather for a smile. Above are members of the Basic class. Below left are members of the Forgive What You Can't Forget class. Below right are members of the Polity class.



Columbia District LSM Winter School draws strong attendance

Columbia District Lay Servant Ministry held its annual Winter School on Jan. 17-18 at Trinity United Methodist Church, Blythewood.

More than 50 lay servants and instructors were in attendance this year. The school is held for lay servants to recertify to remain lay servants, lay speakers or lay ministers.

This year was exceptionally great, said Co-Directors Chuck Sovick and Sylvia Harris-Greene, with 16 new lay servants joining the Basic Class.

The school started at 4:30 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 17, followed by dinner, then classes from 6 to 9 p.m. Saturday started with breakfast at 8:30 a.m. and classes from 9 a.m. to noon. Lunch was served and then class resumed from 1 to 4 p.m.

The school offers the following classes with instructors: Basic Course (Kathy Hart), Public Prayer (Chuck Sovick), Polity (Herman Lightsey) and Forgive What You Can't Forget (Marlene Sipes).



Photos courtesy of Rosa Kennerly

New roof at New Light

New Light UMC in the Orangeburg District has completed its roofing project. For many years, they have been patching their roof. Now a new metal roof covers and protects the church. Members extend deep thanks to Orangeburg District Superintendent the Rev. Ken Nelson and the South Carolina Conference for assisting with the project. The new roof will ensure New Light has a safe and dry space in which to worship for years to come. "The roofers did an outstanding job, and we will be forever grateful for being a part of the connection," Rosa Kennerly said.



Photo courtesy of the Rev. Annie Jackson

A helpful boost

Mount Pleasant UMC, Anderson, Church Council and Pastor Annie Jackson receive a Congregational Development Grant from Anderson District Congregational Development representative the Rev. Kevin Lindley. The grant will be used to help develop the church's children's ministry, provide support for outreach ministries in the community through helping the needs of the homeless and provide a safer place for all worshippers. Pictured from left are Jerry Bruce, James Morris, Shane Whitner, Bertha Whitner, Rosa Maxwell, Council Chair Carolyn Jeffrey, Lindley and son, Jackson, William Miller and William Bruce.

Clyburn visits Hartsville Cooperative Parish

By Paulette Lunn

Hartsville District's Cooperative Parish had a historic day recently as Congressman James Enos Clyburn of the United States House of Representatives visited St. John United Methodist Church to speak at our Fifth Sunday Unity Service.



Clyburn

Spearheaded by Wesley Chapel UMC—one of three churches in our parish—Clyburn spoke poetically, biblically and wonderfully about the talents and gifts we have been given by God, encouraging all to use them to uplift God's kingdom, ourselves and the community. He said each man has one talent—the ability to vote.

Representing the South Carolina 6th District since 1993, Clyburn is the only Democrat in South Carolina's congressional delegation and is steeped in the rich tradition of the civil rights movement beginning with the aftermath of the Orangeburg Massacre in 1968. His contributions to the movement resulted in beneficial events in the life of his constituents, community and educational institutions. To have such a storied member of Congress visit our parish was a moment that will be cherished by all present.

Members of St. John, Wesley Chapel and New Providence UMCs participated in Eucharist with the sitting congressman. Officiated by the Rev. Lyndon Alexander II, it was a historic moment in the life of our parish.

Dr. Reginald Lee, the parish's senior servant, and County Councilwoman Joyce Thomas (District #3 and member of Wesley Chapel UMC) presented a proclamation to the congressman in appreciation for all his efforts throughout South Carolina.

As a progressive parish on the move, we felt honored to have this esteemed man of God in our midst.

Recipe Swap • Turtle Poke Cake

From the kitchen of Jack Stevens, member of Trinity United Methodist Church, West Columbia

Ingredients:

- 1 15.25 oz. box devil's food chocolate cake mix
- 1 14 oz. can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 12 oz. jar caramel sundae ice cream topping
- 1 8 oz. container whipped topping, thawed (Cool Whip)
- 1/2 cup pecans, chopped
- 3/4 cup mini semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 1/2 cup mini dark chocolate chips
- 1/2 cup salted caramel ice cream sauce

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. While oven is heating, line 9x13 pan with parchment paper (even disposable pans); this will make serving a lot easier. Bake devil's food cake per package instructions.

While the cake bakes, add the condensed milk and the caramel topping in a medium bowl and stir to combine.

When the cake is finished in the oven, remove. Using the blunt end of a wooden spoon, carefully poke about 60 holes evenly spaced in the surface of the cake (poke to the bottom of the pan). Slowly pour the canned milk and caramel mixture over the holes. Be sure to evenly distribute the mixture until every hole is filled.

Place the cake in the fridge to cool slightly (for about 15 minutes). Remove the cake from the fridge and evenly spread the thawed whipped topping (over the top of the cake. Evenly spread the pecans and chips over the top.

Cover cake and refrigerate two hours (overnight best). Before serving, drizzle cake with salted caramel sauce.

Enjoy!

Do you have a favorite recipe? Share it with the Advocate! Email news@advocatesc.org.



Women of the Bible

On March 9, Mount Elon UMC, Jefferson, celebrated United Methodist Women of Faith with a presentation of the prominent role women played in the Bible. Mount Elon women brought these women to life, telling the story of their perseverance to follow Jesus to the crucifixion and witnessing the resurrection. Loretta Cooper is Mount Elon's pastor.



Dolls represented a person who would get sight.




The congregation presented their dolls at the altar March 2.



Etta packs up muffins she sold to raise needed funds.

Photos courtesy Amy Gustafson



Aldersgate

SPECIAL NEEDS MINISTRY

Providing Homes of Grace and Love

Addressing the Shortage of Homes for Adults with Special Needs

Visit Us in the Hospitality Suite Room 202 During Annual Conference!

AldersgateSNM.org

GIVE SIGHT: Tripled goal

From Page 1

Gustafson said the idea to help was inspired from Union’s 2025 theme, “Living into Hope and Healing,” based on Luke 4:18-19. In that Scripture, Jesus referenced the prophet Isaiah, proclaiming, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (NIV).

Union launched their Give Sight mission Feb. 2, asking the congregation to take part in giving sight to the blind by helping fund cataract surgeries that Rhyee and his team will perform. Healing Guatemala’s Bethesda Hospital covers the cost of the cataract surgery, which is about \$300. Patients are asked to pay \$50 toward the surgery, and the rest is given through donations. Union members “adopted” wooden doll figures throughout the month, which represented a person to whom they would give sight. Families were invited to creatively personalize the doll figure with material, then continue to pray over the person they were helping throughout the event.

On Transfiguration Sunday, March 2, families brought their doll back to church and placed it at the altar, collectively celebrating the fruits of the mission and becoming a visual representation of their brothers and sisters in Christ who will now be able to see.

“There has been an amazing amount of interest, support and drive to be a part of this mission in bringing sight to the blind,” Gustafson said, reflecting on

the outpouring of support. Chris Elvis, chair of Union’s Missions Committee, said missions has always been a passion and priority of his, and he has followed Rhyee and Healing Guatemala for years, witnessing God at work through these cataract camps.

“When the idea of Give Sight was first proposed, I jumped at the opportunity to help,” Elvis said. “It was incredible to see the outpouring of support, prayers and love my Union church family exhibited throughout this campaign.”

Jean How, member of the planning committee, said she loved watching the congregation get excited about the project, and the dolls really helped people understand it was a person they were helping, not an anonymous cause.

“When you sponsored a doll, you felt like you had a personal connection with a real person in Guatemala, a person you could see,” How said. “It got personal. Our excitement grew and grew, and our final goal tripled.”

Ten-year-old Etta Price Cochcroft got so excited about helping that she sold muffins to raise funds for the project.

“I wanted to help the blind because I have Strabismus—I see double—and have to wear glasses to see. I also am so blessed that I have many colors of glasses to help me,” Etta said. “The sad part is the people we are helping don’t have enough money to buy the things they need, including their vision, which makes me really sad. So when I heard about this project, I knew I had to help.”

Etta ended up raising \$501, doubling her goal, and ultimately helped fund cataract surgery for two people.

Tom Goff said he and his wife, Joan, appreciate the way their church tries to genuinely reflect the character of Jesus.

“We remember that Galatians 5:14 tells us, ‘For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command, love your neighbor as yourself,’” he said. “Giving Sight is a way to love people that can’t repay you.”

Rhyee said he is excited about the enthusiasm the project generated.

“I am so happy that our brothers and sisters in Guatemala can regain their sight because of Union’s outpouring of love,” Rhyee said.

To learn more about Healing Guatemala, email rhyeemt@gmail.com, or write Healing Guatemala, P.O. Box 1835, Duluth, GA 30096.

Gustafson contributed to this article.



A child displays one of the Give Sight dolls.



CLAFLIN UNIVERSITY

EARN YOUR DEGREE IN 18 MONTHS

- Accelerated Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree Programs
- In-Class and Online



CU ONLINE

803-535-5573
conedu@claflin.edu

www.claflin.edu
400 Magnolia Street | Orangeburg, S.C. 29115

Asbury Hills safe, ‘grateful’ after fires burn 15K acres nearby

By Jessica Brodie

CLEVELAND—Wildfires near Table Rock State Park in Pickens County prompted a mandatory evacuation of Asbury Hills, the much-beloved Upstate camp of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

The Table Rock and Persimmon



Ridge fires burned more than 15,000 acres in Greenville and Pickens counties and part of North Carolina before rain and active firefighting contained the blaze. Forestry officials said the fire started March 21 after four teens failed to extinguish cigarettes properly while hiking in Table Rock State Park.

Conference Camps and Retreat Ministries Director Arthur Spriggs said 90 firefighters stayed at Asbury Hills while working to extinguish the flames. However, the camp is now safe, and all staff were able to return to Asbury Hills.

Only the back 500 acres of the camp’s property burned—wilderness areas only—and all camp program areas were unharmed.

“We saw how close we could come

Director Arthur Spriggs said 90 firefighters stayed at Asbury Hills while working to extinguish the flames.

Photo courtesy Arthur Spriggs

to losing our beloved camp, and we are thankful for God’s provision and hold our mountains and all of you near to our hearts,” Spriggs said in a release emailed to Camps & Retreat Ministry supporters and friends. “We are beyond grateful for the work of the first responders who protected Asbury Hills and for the answered prayers of rain.”

Crews worked hard to push the fire along the northwest edges of the property, working tirelessly to combat the

blaze and ensure everyone’s safety.

Trails were closed in Asbury Hills as well as Table Rock, Caesars Head, Jones Gap and other impacted areas, and a mandatory statewide burn ban was put in place. Smoke also caused poor air quality, prompting officials to issue a “code purple” alert to be issued for Transylvania County, north of the camp in North Carolina.

As of April 9, all evacuations have been lifted and trails reopened.

NEW LOGO: App coming

From Page 1

even though we’ve been in existence since 1836,” said Katy Renfroe, the *Advocate’s* marketing coordinator.

Renfroe said the newspaper is working hard to change that, rolling out an orchestrated digital marketing campaign in tandem with additional marketing research that includes surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews and listening sessions in every district throughout the state.

The listening sessions began in February and will run through December in every district in South Carolina. Columbia’s session was Feb. 24 at Mount Hebron UMC, West Columbia; Rock Hill’s session was Feb. 25 at St. John’s UMC, Rock Hill; and Greenwood’s session was March 25 at St. Mark’s UMC Rivers Street Campus, Greenwood.

The April session will be April 29 at St. John’s UMC, Anderson, and the May session will be May 15 at Bethel UMC, Spartanburg (both from 6:30-8:30 p.m.). Free pizza will be served at every session, and the meeting will be a townhall-style event where people can learn about the *Advocate* and share ways the newspaper can improve.



Explore SMC during Enrollment Days!

Get Hands-On Help with Your College To-Do List at SMC Enrollment Days.

- Tour campus
- Enjoy free food, free Starbucks, and free SMC swag
- Get help with the new FAFSA
- Meet with Admissions, Advising, Housing, and more!

MAKE YOUR MOVE!



SMCSC.EDU/EnrollmentDays



ONLINE, ON CAMPUS & GRADUATE DEGREES

Where Meaningful Degrees Become Rewarding Careers

When you find a career you love, you make the world a better place. That’s why our degrees cover today’s most important topics within the most desired disciplines. Make a bigger impact at Columbia College. Graduate ready.

BEGIN YOUR FUTURE | COLUMBIASC.EDU



Explore The Outdoors



Make Lifelong Friends



Grow Closer to God

REGISTER TODAY!

150 Asbury Drive Cleveland, SC 864-634-3711 asburyhills.org/summer-camp/

Bethel UWF enjoys busy spring

By Jan Fleming

United Women in Faith at Bethel United Methodist Church, Spartanburg, has had a busy spring. Our unit celebrated Women’s History Month all during March, starting with our United Women in Faith Sunday, with the Rev. Sandra King preaching both services.

We have three circles at Bethel—Lydia, Mary and Susanna. The Lydia Circle volunteered to help one of our local missions, PS I Love You Ministries, by assisting them in switching their closets over for the new season. Lydia Circle is also responsible for our Reading Program. We take pride in our program and have had some great book brunches, as well as visiting authors, including the *Advocate’s* Jessica Brodie and the Rev. Arthur Holt.

Susanna Circle follows a book study format. Their leaders had a connection with Mary Cartledgehayes, the author of “Grace,” a memoir, so they invited her to join us, along with other circles and friends from different churches. We had an evening of laughter, poem reading and a question-answer session with the Rev. Megan Gray, who assisted us and co-led the discussion.

To end the month, we attended Legislative Advocacy Day in Columbia. This event is always an informative way to make our voice and vote count



Mary Cartledgehayes (left), author of “Grace,” a memoir, with Rev. Megan Gray.

for women, children and youth. We heard about four bills that we need to act on immediately.

At Bethel, we love our food fundraisers. Boxed lunches, frozen feasts and Easter sides are a great way to make money for missions, and our members and friends enjoy fellowship after church and filling their freezers. With Easter approaching, the Mary Circle stayed busy baking pound cakes for the spring fundraiser.

If you do not have an active unit at your church, I encourage you to reach out to your district office and find a unit or circle in which you can get involved. You are connecting with a sisterhood of women who share a commitment to mission and spiritual growth and women of faith who put their love into action.

Fleming is the conference mission representative and district vice president.



Photos by Jamie Collins

All proceeds from Shandon’s sale support local charities and missions.

Shandon UMC women host record-breaking sale for missions

COLUMBIA—The United Women of Faith at Shandon United Methodist Church held their fourth annual Clothing and Book Sale on March 14–15, marking the most successful event in its history.

Volunteers transformed the church’s full-size gymnasium into a bustling shopping space, with all proceeds supporting local charities and missions.

“The response from the community was incredible,” said Bobbie Moore, co-chair of the sale. “This kind of support helps us make a real impact right here in the Midlands.”

Items that did not sell were donated to local organizations, including Cooperative Ministry, EMS Closet, Keepin’ It Real, State Street Baptist Church Shoe Ministry and His House.

The sale was previously combined with the church’s annual garage sale but is now held separately because of the large volume of donations and continued growth of the event. The next garage sale is scheduled for Aug. 8-9.

For the past two decades, the sales have raised more than \$700,000, with every penny benefiting nonprofits and mission efforts, most of which serve communities throughout the Midlands.

Epworth Children’s Home.

Lifechanging gifts

George Muller was a preacher who lived in Great Britain in the 19th century. He helped create several orphanages across the country and spent much of his life ministering to the needs of children who were homeless. He not only provided them with shelter, food and security, but he also provided them with love and nurtured their spiritual growth. Muller believed God would always provide for the needs of the children who lived in his orphanages.

A story from Muller’s biography offers a prime example:

“The children are dressed and ready for school. But there is no food for them to eat,’ the housemother of the orphanage informed George Mueller. George asked her to take the 300 children into the dining room and have them sit at the tables. He thanked God for the food and waited. George knew God would provide food for the children as he always did. Within minutes, a baker knocked on the door. “Mr. Mueller,” he said, “last night I could not sleep. Somehow, I knew that you would need bread this morning. I got up and baked three batches for you. I will bring it in.” Soon, there was another knock at the door. It was the milkman. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. The milk would spoil by the time the wheel was fixed. He asked George if he could use some free milk. George smiled as the milkman brought in ten large cans of milk. It was just enough for the 300 thirsty children.”

Muller believed in God’s ability to not only answer his prayers, but also help provide for the care of the children in the orphanages. Muller saw God’s work being done in the thoughtfulness of the baker who baked the extra bread for the children and in the offer of the milkman with the broken cart to give all the milk to Muller for the children. God was working through these generous men to provide for Muller’s needs for the children in his care.

Here at Epworth, we are constantly amazed by and grateful for the giving and generosity of those who support our mission and our work. Like Muller’s baker and milkman, God is working through people to help provide for Epworth’s children and families. Last year, for example, 1,962 volunteers provided the

children and families whom Epworth supports with 6,483 hours of service. This included working in the residence cottages to paint and make repairs; helping with landscaping on the campus; tutoring students in our education center; providing time to help children on-campus celebrate birthdays and other special events; assisting in sorting and organizing supplies and equipment in resource closets for foster and kinship families; and for dozens of other volunteer activities that provide love, sustenance and tangible assistance to those Epworth serves. We are most fortunate to have such a faithful, mindful and generous cadre of volunteers, and we cannot thank them adequately enough for their service to Epworth.

Financial gifts are also an integral act of generosity to Epworth. We are living in often unsettling times, and the level of need at Epworth grows as we extend our services to more children and families across South Carolina who need our programs and initiatives. The quality of life for children in our state is certainly not at the level we want it to be. According to the most recent SCKidsCount report, South Carolina ranks 40th in the nation for the general wellbeing of children.

And statistics from the most recent S.C. Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children 2024 Report indicate that in 2023, 13,796 children under the age of 18 in South Carolina were victims of maltreatment; 210,374 children under the age of 18 in South Carolina lived in poverty, 19.2 percent of the population. The poverty rate for children is higher than the national average of 16.3 percent, and 13,770 children under the age of 18 were classified as homeless in South Carolina, an increase of 13 percent from the previous year. Many of the factors causing such alarming statistics have been a constant presence in the lives of the children and families Epworth serves.

Our work at Epworth is making a huge difference. Today, Epworth is serving more than 400 children, youth and families weekly through programming, and in 2024, we served 1,677 children and families through all our services. As we grow to offer more support and assistance to larger numbers of children and families in South Carolina, we continue to need financial sup-

port. While Epworth receives funding from foundations, nonprofit organizations, government agencies and other sources, individual contributions make a huge difference.

Generosity also helps us provide services in our counseling center to children and families who need therapy and counseling. Our older youth receive life skills training and pathways to higher education and the job market so they will not be homeless and can lead lives of independence and productivity in their communities.

Epworth can provide more assistance to kinship caregivers who care for children in their extended families and to foster parents who need equipment and supplies to provide for the children in their care. We provide a myriad of services and programming statewide to the most vulnerable citizens in our state—those children and families who have experienced some of life’s downturns and traumas.

Last year in 2024, giving to Epworth declined by 10 percent. The number of Epworth’s donors declined by 11 percent.

We are living in a society in which the fabric of our lives often seems to change daily, but one certainty is that we at Epworth are working every day to make life happier, healthier, safer and more secure for children and families across South Carolina.

Winston Churchill once said, “We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.”

Mother Teresa is known for many famous quotes, but one of my favorite reads, “If you can’t feed a hundred people, then just feed one.”

And from 2 Corinthians 9:7, “We should give what we have decided in our hearts to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Thank you for helping us change lives, bring families together, provide resources for safer and more secure lifestyles and give children who have suffered early in their lives a huge chance for new beginnings and happiness.

—Beth Williams, president and CEO of Epworth

A Journey of Healing

Jairo’s transformation from darkness to light

By the Rev. Luke M. Rhyee M.D.

“Thank you for holding on, Jairo.” These words escaped my lips as I stood by the side of the brave 2-year-old, who began to awaken from general anesthesia.

Jairo, a Guatemalan boy born with congenital cataracts in both eyes and suffering from rubella syndrome because of his mother’s infection during pregnancy, faced an uphill battle from the very start. Abandoned by his parents because of his disability and left in an orphanage, Jairo had been confined to a stroller, completely blind and unaware of the vibrant world around him.

Hope shined brightly when Jairo was brought to the Pediatric Ophthalmology Camp at Hospital Bethesda, held in February. After undergoing successful surgeries, Jairo experienced the miracle of sight for the very first time, allowing him to see the light that had previously eluded him.

Hospital Bethesda celebrated the transformation of 11 children through the Pediatric Ophthalmology Camp, including Jairo. With the support of Dr. Donny Suh from the Medical Center University of California-Irvine; Bethesda ophthalmologists, Dr. Marco and Dr. Javier; and Bethesda staff, the camp was a testament to the Lord’s mercy and grace. This collective effort brought forth healing and joy as these precious children experienced the abundant blessings of life anew.

As I witnessed Jairo breathing heavily on the operating table, I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the faithfulness of the Lord. The Lord brought the most vulnerable among us to his bosom, where he embraced and healed them. The once fearful faces of Jairo and the other participants when they arrived at the camp were replaced



Jairo experienced the miracle of sight for the very first time.

with radiant smiles, reflecting the light of hope restored in their lives.

A follow-up check revealed that Jairo’s retinas were not affected by rubella syndrome, a significant relief for all of us. This news was a beacon of hope not only for Jairo but for everyone who has supported him on this journey.

Hospital Bethesda is a missional hospital in Guatemala run by Healing Guatemala, which I founded. Hospital Bethesda is a full-service general hospital offering medical care with excellence at affordable costs, allowing people to see the sign that the Lord remembers and always embraces his people, especially the most vulnerable.

My prayer remains that Jairo and all the children we attended at the camp continue to thrive and experience the blessings of life. May the Lord bless Hospital Bethesda to be a sanctuary for the vulnerable, a place where healing, love and hope flourish. Amen.

Rhyee is an ordained elder with the South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.



Helene relief continues

Clemson UMC, Clemson, and friends from the Anderson District sent two United Methodist Volunteers in Mission teams to Spruce Pine, North Carolina, recently for disaster relief after Hurricane Helene.

Photo courtesy of the Rev. Tommy Wilkes



United Women in Faith by Janice Cockfield Eaddy

Where the money goes

“If you give to others, you will be given a full amount in return. It will be packed down, shaken together and spilling over into your lap. The way you treat others is the way you will be treated” (Luke 6:38 CEV).

As Mother’s Day approaches, I’m reflecting on my mother’s profound influence and the values she instilled in me—values that resonate deeply with my three decades of service to United Women in Faith. This organization has been instrumental in improving the lives of women, children and youth globally, a mission that aligns perfectly with my personal beliefs.

For 30-plus years, I’ve been privileged to witness UWF’s transformative work firsthand. Our organization strategically supports partner organizations—churches, ecumenical groups and grassroots initiatives—through a rigorous grantmaking process overseen by our 25-member board of directors. This ensures the responsible use of donations and allows us to maximize our impact.

Our commitment extends to empowering women and youth in 39 countries, fostering their leadership within their communities and beyond. We maintain strong relationships with National Mission Institutions—predominantly women-founded 19th-century organizations—which continue to provide vital services, including support for vulnerable populations, domestic violence survivors, children

with special needs and crucial child-care, senior care, youth education and safe housing initiatives.

Our international programs focus on capacity building for local and regional women, promoting economic development, and providing educational scholarships. Furthermore, we collaborate with regional missionaries and partners to implement effective women, children and youth empowerment programs. Our ultimate goal remains equipping women and youth with the tools to create lasting, positive change.

United Women in Faith does not fund projects and programs that don’t benefit women, children or youth; don’t comply with our UMC Social Principles; or are administered by discriminatory organizations.

The principles of UWF, rooted in Micah 6:8—to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God—guide our mission. Our Mission Giving program is more than just financial contribution; it’s a powerful expression of our faith, mirroring the compassion taught by Jesus (Luke 6:38).

Every contribution, no matter the size, creates a significant ripple effect, directly impacting the lives of those in need.

As Winston Churchill said, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

Eaddy is SCCUWF treasurer.



Photo courtesy of Stephen and Pat Laird

Lake View hosts students for Habitat build

In March, Lake View UMC in Lake View hosted 20 students and staff from Eastern Connecticut State University. The college students were spending their spring break in town to work on the first of five Habitat for Humanity houses being built in Lake View. The property, where five homes will be built, was donated by Shaquille Leonard and his foundation, the Maniac Foundation. The former NFL linebacker and graduate of Lake View High School works tirelessly to improve the local community.

Leave A Legacy To Change Lives

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





Spring Into Action for Our Veterans

This Memorial Day, **help veterans rebuild and thrive.** Visit us by scanning this QR code with your phone or going to our website:

www.alstonwilkessociety.org



Ministries.

An evening of promise

Mount Hebron UMC, West Columbia, is one of the sponsoring churches for Family Promise of the Midlands. Nine members enjoyed a night out April 10 at the Family Promise Gala at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. In front from left are Mary Nell Trussell (seated), Lexie Chatham, Cathy Neeley (seated), Jan Harmon and Susan Renfroe. In back from left are Gene Trussell, the Rev. Paul Harmon, Pat Lawter and Katy Renfroe.

Photo courtesy of Mary Nell Trussell



Photo by Diane Wilson

Sharing from the mission field

Stephen and Jean Dunlap speak at the April meeting of First Tuesday, a women's fellowship group of Disciples UMC, Greenville. The Dunlaps, who have spent many years serving as missionaries with international Christian organization TMS Global, shared about their experiences. Stephen, who grew up at Disciples and whose parents are longtime members, met and married Jean, the daughter of missionaries. Eventually, the couple and their children were sent to Jordan, where they served for 12 years. The Dunlaps said Jordan allows Christians to worship but not to evangelize. Last June, they returned to the U.S. and now live in Wheaton, Illinois, where Stephen continues to work with Muslims as well as with an older Turkish couple who do not speak English. They are still affiliated with TMS Global.



Souper Bowl of Caring in Jefferson

On Feb. 9, Mount Elon UMC, Jefferson, celebrated the Souper Bowl of Caring on Super Bowl Sunday with football players from local schools. It was an opportunity to share the love of Jesus through fun, faith and fellowship. They hope to continue this tradition yearly.

Native American News.

Buffalo stance

By Guy Burney

The American buffalo/bison is the national mammal of the United States. They can stand up to six feet high at the shoulder and can be as long as 10 feet, not including the tail. They weigh upwards of 1,800 pounds, have a vertical leap of six feet and a horizontal leap of seven feet and can run at speeds approaching 37 mph. Newborns stand up at two minutes old and can run with the herd at seven minutes old.

To the Indigenous people, buffalo are a sacred gift from the Creator for the people. Buffalo had long provided resources that sustained the people physically, culturally and spiritually.

Historian Richard B. Williams noted that the American Indian and the buffalo coexisted in a rare balance between nature and man. The American Indian developed a close, spiritual relationship with the buffalo. The sacred buffalo became an integral part of the religion of the Plains Indian. Furthermore, the diet primarily of the buffalo created a unique psychological relationship. The adage “you are what you eat” was never more applicable than in the symbiotic relationship between the buffalo and the Plains Indian. The Plains Indian culture was intrinsic with the buffalo culture. The two cultures could not be separated without mutual destruction.

Religious ceremonies centered around the buffalo. The Lakota have a Sun Dance meant to honor and to connect with the spirit of the buffalo. The Mandan have a buffalo dance.

White Buffalo Calf Woman is recognized by the Lakota Sioux as an intermediary who gave the people the rituals necessary for communing with the Great Mystery, the Creator God. After giving the people the Seven Sacred Ceremonies and the sacred pipe, White Buffalo Calf Woman departed. As she left, she transformed into her true form of a buffalo. This was the connection to the spirit world. The Seven Sacred Ceremonies were given for the people to abide to ensure a future of harmony, peace and balance. It does not matter what you call the Creator. What matters is that you pray to give thanks for your blessings and trust the guidance from the world of spirit. Many truths

about spirit are told and handed down from generation to generation.

The Pawnee “Making the Sacred Bundle” story tells how the buffalo are responsible for the development of the medicine bag and the sacred objects carried for protection, spiritual strength and guidance.

The Great Bison Belt consisted of 30 to 60 million bison roaming across roughly two-thirds of continental North America. From Alaska to the Gulf of Mexico, from New York (yes, Buffalo Bills fans) to Florida, as far west as Oregon and Washington State. In a previous article, the near complete use of every part of the buffalo was listed. But the buffalo gave back to the land as much as it did to the native population. The buffalo supported the ecological balance of the prairie ecosystem.

When the buffalo graze, they use their lips to sense the grass. This results in chewing or biting above ground level, allowing for a regenerative process not practiced by cattle. Dung fertilizes the soil and spreads seeds. Urine returns nitrogen to the soil. Their grazing patterns prevent the overgrowth of grasses, which could lead to wildfires.

Cows eat using their tongues to wrap around blades of grasses, and then pull the plant into their mouth. This pulls roots or breaks the plant at ground level.

Buffalo also wallow (roll) in grass. This is for thermoregulation of their bodies. It also helps to deal with skin irritation, while dealing with biting insects including ticks and lice. It is also a way to shed and groom. It is basically a dirt bath. Meanwhile, the resulting depression into the grasses support other life. When filled with rainwater, wallows allow groundwater recharge and soil nutrient cycling. This supports aquatic wildlife and serves as water reserves during drought.

By the late 1800s, the buffalo population dwindled to around 300. The 1900s saw conservation and restoration programs. First started by private ranchers (including “Buffalo Bill” Cody, who killed thousands by himself), programs gained support by the federal government. Many native tribes also implemented their own programs on their own lands.

One of the most successful programs today can

be found in Wyoming. The Wind River Tribal Buffalo Initiative is an independent, tribally led nonprofit organization originally involving the Shoshone and Arapahoe nations.

Jason Blades is the executive director. He is the senior manager for the National Wildlife Federation’s Tribal Partnership Program. He sits on the board of directors of the Inter-Tribal Buffalo Council and the board of trustees for the Conservation Lands Foundation. Their goal is to restore conservation buffalo through land repatriation, community revitalization and youth education. Tribal sovereignty and self-determination including the return of lands back to tribal ownership and management. Buffalo would roam as wildlife under tribal law as opposed to being livestock—a return to a holistic way of land use focused on benefiting the local community, as opposed to an individualistic approach tied to historic colonial practices and worldview; a return to tribal lands and communities, diets and ceremonies.

Blades’ initial interest stemmed from a trip his father took him on to East Africa in 1997. There he saw the free roaming African bison. He returned with a vision of the American buffalo/bison. Later dealing with alcohol addiction, he turned to tribal spiritual leaders. Going to ceremony (prayer and sweat lodge), he overcame his addiction while finding a renewed relationship with the buffalo. Like the buffalo, a sweat lodge has 12 ribs in its construction. His problems reflected the cultural problems and the solution paralleled that of the buffalo. Today, 220 buffalo roam at Wind River and 86 tribes are members of the Inter-Tribal Buffalo Council.

In “Lakota Life,” Ron Zeilinger reflects on Tatonka (the Lakota word for buffalo): The buffalo is a symbol of self-sacrifice; it gives until nothing is left. This was imitated by the people in their lives. To be generous and give what you have to others in need, or to honor them, is one of the most highly respected ways of behaving.

Burney is a member of the Native American Committee; Disciples United Methodist Church, Greenville; and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Young Methodists.



Daniels



Partridge



White

Advocate awards three college scholarships to United Methodist students

The *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* has awarded \$1,000 college scholarships to three different United Methodist students for the coming academic year.

Normally, the *Advocate* awards one annual college scholarship to a South Carolina United Methodist student who is planning to enroll or is already enrolled at one of the four United Methodist colleges in South Carolina: Claflin University, Columbia College, Spartanburg Methodist College or Wofford College.

However, this year a donor stepped up to award all three of this year’s applicants with a scholarship.

The recipients are as follows:

- Sarah Daniels, an accounting

major who is a junior at Wofford College, whose home church is Shandon United Methodist Church, Columbia;

- Sarah Grace Partridge, a business (entrepreneurship) and biology double major at Wofford College on a pre-medical track as a rising freshman, whose home church is Clemson UMC, Clemson; and
- Shelby White, a freshman biology and Spanish double major at Wofford College, whose home church is Jericho UMC, Cottageville.

The application process for the Advocate 2026 scholarship has begun, with a deadline of March 1, 2026.

To apply or for more information about the opportunity, visit <https://advocatesc.org/scholarships>.



Wesley Foundations by the Rev. John Sterling Poole



Lopez, bottom right, discipless his classmates in Starbucks.

Making ‘disciplers’

Kevin Lopez, from southern Florida, came to The Citadel three years ago wanting to know more about God but unsure where to find answers. He found the Charleston Wesley Foundation, and God has been working powerfully in his life.

Over the course of the three years, Kevin has reaffirmed his faith, joined a local UMC, discerned a call into vocational ministry and is now beginning the candidacy process. That is a busy three years, and all glory is to God.

The mission of The United Methodist Church is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” What we do in the Charleston Wesley Foundation is make “disciplers.” Not only is Kevin a devout disciple of Christ, but he is now anxious to spread the Gospel and serve his classmates. Every Wednesday, Kevin invites his Citadel classmates to join him at John Wesley UMC’s Wednesday Night Out for a meal and Bible study. Kevin is constantly checking in on students in the Wesley Foundation to ensure that they are navigating the choppy waters of college. Every Monday, Kevin dutifully plays the drums in our Praise Team and helps lead this ministry in worship. Many students know they can call Kevin if they need anything, and many students have sought out Kevin for advice.

God is doing wonderful work through Kevin at The Citadel, but it extends to other areas of his life. Kevin’s immediate and extended family have noticed the change in their son, cousin, stepbrother and nephew. I praise God for the number of times Kevin tells me about how his cousin called him for a theological question or some spiritual advice. This past Christmas, he gave each of his stepsiblings, parents and his stepfather a Study Bible in the hopes that each of them would dive deeper in their faith.

Our mission is to make disciples. However, when we make “disciplers” who transform their families, friends and communities, we expand our ability to minister to the world. Campus ministries across the state are some of the most important ways we can create “disciplers.” By engaging with young adults in a critical and transformational season of life, we can make “disciplers” who can go out into the world after graduation and transform the world. This is the mission, and this is why campus ministries should be supported in your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.

God only know what the Spirit will do through Kevin’s life, and I cannot wait to see how many more disciples are made by this young, passionate “discipler.”

Poole is director of the Charleston Wesley Foundation. To learn more about each Wesley Foundation and how to support, go to <https://linktr.ee/UMCSCWesley>.



Photos by Ryan Holcombe

The kids raised \$1,700 for local missions.

Shandon’s fifth graders host pancake supper to help missions

COLUMBIA—On March 4, the fifth grade Sunday school class at Shandon United Methodist Church hosted a pancake supper to raise funds for local organizations serving those in need.

The event welcomed approximately 250 attendees and featured a menu of more than 1,500 pancakes, 20 pounds of grits and 600 sausage patties.

The supper raised \$1,700, with every dollar going directly to EMS Closet and Homeless No More.

Organizers offer a special thanks to Chef Tim Scott, director of kitchen ministries at Shandon, as well as the guests who attended and the many volunteers who helped make the evening a success.

Interstate Transportation Equipment, Inc.

The South’s Oldest Bus Company
Since 1947

interstatetransportation.com

COLUMBIA, SC
800.726.0779

New and Used Buses
Financing Programs Available

Sunday, May 18th

Advocate Awareness Day

For resources to share with your congregation, please scan the QR code to the right.

Advocate
SERVING SOUTH CAROLINA UNITED METHODISTS SINCE 1957

Young Methodists.

MSN spends break helping hurricane survivors

By the Rev. Jad Taylor

A group of dedicated volunteers from the Methodist Student Network, also known as Columbia Wesley, recently returned from a weeklong spring break mission trip to Spruce Pine, North Carolina, a community still grappling with the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

Partnering with UNC Chapel Hill Wesley, Iglesia Metodista Obispo Francis Asbury of Puerto Rico, and an Emergency Response Team out of Bahama, North Carolina, the volunteers provided much-needed hands-on assistance, sharing in God's hope with the resilient mountain community.

The team focused their efforts on several key projects designed to address immediate needs and contribute to long-term recovery. One crucial task involved splitting tons of firewood from downed trees, ensuring that residents still facing power outages and unreliable heating would have a vital source of warmth.

"It's surprising to me how there are still residents without power," reflected Spencer Stevens. "On one hand, it makes total sense, as so many structures, power lines, sewer lines and other utilities were washed away or damaged at the source during the hurricane, but it surprised me at first because no one is talking about it. After 30 days, the news is no longer going to cover it, even if it is still as bad, or even worse than previously thought."

Stevens and his team were mindful of the community's self-reliance, ensuring each piece of firewood was manageable for even the elderly or young to carry.

Another significant project centered on assisting a local artist whose studio had been inundated with over a foot of mud during the hurricane. Months later, the studio remained unusable. Volunteers tirelessly shoveled literal tons



Volunteers tirelessly shoveled literal tons of mud, meticulously cleaning salvaged artwork and furniture to help a woman reclaim her workspace and a vital community gathering spot.

of mud, meticulously cleaning salvaged artwork and furniture to help the artist reclaim her workspace and a vital community gathering spot.

Andrew Williams, another student on the trip, described the profound impact of this work.

"Although there were many things we found that could not be salvaged, we were able to give the homeowner hope and her workspace back, as well as get rid of the constant reminder of the storm that manifested itself in the mud that invaded her workspace."

Beyond the physical labor, the students also engaged with the community on a personal level. They supported a local after-school elementary literacy program hosted by Spruce Pine United Methodist Church, which plays a crucial role in helping students catch up after missing a significant portion of the school year because of disruptions caused by Hurricane Helene.

Volunteers also contributed

to the long-term preparedness of the host site, Spruce Pine UMC, by building a deck to store disaster relief supplies. This will enable future volunteer groups and the local community to have readily accessible resources in times of need.

Williams emphasized the importance of bearing witness to the ongoing struggles.

"One thing that we were told over and over was to go out and tell what we saw and the stories we heard to other people," Williams said. "Six months after Hurricane Helene, Spruce Pine and the surrounding areas are still recovering from the devastation Helene caused and have not received the support they need. I heard firsthand accounts of the storm and its aftermath and witnessed the destruction it left in its wake. Houses were demolished, lives were lost and whole ecosystems were wiped away by the flood waters."

The trip also provided a space for spiritual reflection

and growth for the students. Sharing moments of prayer with the homeowner, engaging in daily devotions and witnessing the unwavering faith and resilience of the Spruce Pine community left a lasting impact. Many came to see God not as the cause of the disaster, but as present in the helpers and the community's collective strength.

"This trip helped me reflect on my own life and gave me hope about how God can work through people and call people to help those in need," Williams said. "All around the area, churches provided goods and services to those in need, and getting to work beside my fellow peers to take time away from our busy lives to help those in need strengthened my conviction in how service can enact the spirit of Christ in the world. It also helped to illustrate to me the importance of accepting help and the presence of others and how God can provide aid in many different ways to those that need it."



Students spent a week helping.

Stevens echoed this sentiment, recognizing the deeper purpose of their efforts.

"I now recognize that The United Methodist Church, as well as others, are more than what you see at face value," Stevens said. "We go out into the world and serve others, as Jesus would have, without any underlying intention. We go out to serve and support the ministries of our local congregation through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness, wherever they may be."

The mission trip to Spruce Pine served as a powerful reminder of the enduring impact of natural disasters and the vital role of community support and faith-based organizations in the recovery process. Volunteers returned home with a deeper understanding of resilience, the importance of bearing witness and the profound spiritual growth that comes from serving others in times of crisis.

Their experience underscores the ongoing need for attention and aid for communities like Spruce Pine long after the initial storm has passed.

If you are interested in future opportunities to serve with the Methodist Student Network, email jad@columbiawesley.org or call 803-463-6655. We welcome any and all who seek to love God and neighbor together.

Taylor is campus minister for the Methodist Student Network at University of South Carolina.

LOSING YOUR RELIGION OVER PAYROLL?

Give us a call!

We specialize in church and clergy payroll, including:

- Direct Deposit
- Electronic Pay Stubs and W-2s
- Proper clergy compensation reporting on the W-2
- Electronic payroll tax deposits
- Quarterly and annual report filings
- Annual W-2/W-3 forms
- Assistance with back payroll issues



www.forestacrespayroll.com

Contact us to obtain a free quote

Rebecca Neal Tompkins
Certified Payroll Professional
803-767-7880
rtompkins@forestacrespayroll.com



Wellness in Action

Columbia College held a Wellness In Action Festival, a two-day campus event April 4-5 dedicated to energizing and empowering the community around its campus through health, wellness and education. The weekend included a Student Health Ambassador Experience for local students, a 5K Walk/Run/Roll and a Wellness Festival and Vendor Market. The entire event was designed to uplift, educate and promote healthier lifestyles.



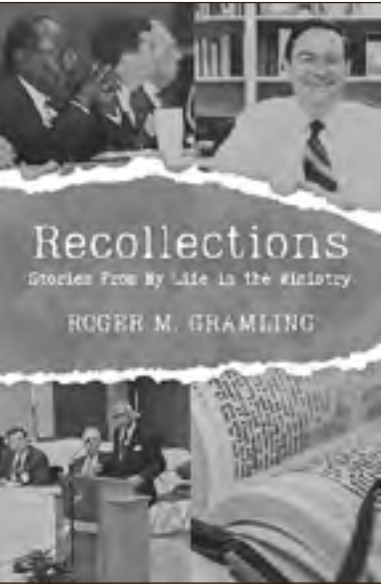
Historical Society
by the Rev. Meredith M. Dark

Reviewing ‘Recollections’ by Roger M. Gramling

In 2024, Dr. Roger M. Gramling’s book, “Recollections: Stories from My Life in the Ministry,” was published by the Advocate Press. To read a work by Gramling is to hear his sincerity, his love for the church and his love of the ministry.

One first notices that the book is dedicated “To that ‘great cloud of witnesses’ that surrounds us.” This is a beautiful way to dedicate a book, especially in our church and in the South Carolina Conference made up of so many who have gone before us in the faith.

The foreword is written by Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey, retired. Bishop McCleskey gives Gramling a glowing review and sets the reader up to enjoy the mind and memories of Gramling stating, “Recollections is the result of Roger’s meticulous record of notes, primary sources, personal relationships and remarkable memory” (p. ix). This one sentence sets the stage for what is



to come and calls those of us who are serving to keep a meticulous record of notes so that one day we can recall our ministry, the lives that have touched ours and the path that our ministry has taken. Gramling’s preface holds gravitas, and I encourage you to read it for yourself. For those of you who serve in the ministry, as laypeople or clergy, I believe you can relate to his heartfelt reference to “Band of Brothers.”

In Chapter 1, “Epworth House Party Friends,” you will meet people such as Bishop Author J. Moore, Dr. and Mrs. Sidney R. Anderson, Miss Margaret Adger Pitts, Asa G. Candler Sr., Asa Jr. and Mrs. Candler, among others. You’ll see places such as Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta; Epworth by the Sea at St. Simon’s Island, Georgia; Briarcliff Farms, and a few other important historical scenes that play

into the story of Georgia Methodism. One of the stories that makes a big impression on me is Bishop Moore’s “House Party” experience. Gramling writes that these parties would take place once or twice a year where Bishop Moore’s “friends and associates from across the years” and those “prominent in the life and work of Georgia Methodism” were free to meet with one another (p. 4). One can only dream of the work we can accomplish if some of the most prominent folks get together in a room with the intention of accomplishing the Lord’s work!

Chapter 2, “Candler Memories,” begins with General Conference of 1972 in Atlanta. The Rev. A. Cecil Williams was slated to preach a contemporary service at First UMC, Atlanta. So much controversy arose that a crowd developed to the point that the service had to be moved to the Atlanta Civic Center. Other people you will meet in this chapter include Bishop William R. Cannon, Bishop Nolan B. Harmon, Bishop John Owen Smith and many more. Bishop’s Smith’s advice, “You have to keep on keeping on”—interpreted by Gramling to mean, “You cannot allow the small things of the world to stop you from pursuing the important and purposeful things of life”—is timely for today (p. 27).

Chapter 3, “Conference Membership and Ordination,” describes a great deal of our history regarding our racial separation. In the beginning of this chapter Gramling describes the feeling of Annual Conference being that of a “homecoming” (p. 36). I hope we can all feel this way given our recent experiences with separation. One needs to read and comprehend this chapter for themselves to understand the Central Jurisdiction and the dissolution thereof.

Chapter 4, “Local Church Appointments,” describes Gramling’s local church appointments. One of the most memorable stories for some readers will be of Gramling’s time at St. John’s UMC in Rock Hill and a trip they took to Myrtle Beach. An 86-year-old member, Mr. Kaylor, was on the trip, and it was his first time seeing the ocean. We have to remember, as pastors, that the actions we take may have monumental impact, such as this one with Mr. Kaylor. Perhaps a trip to the ocean will be someone’s first trip at 86!

Two more chapters and a note about Gramling follow Chapter 4. Suffice it to say that this is a work unmatched. It calls us all to take our work in the church seriously and to consider that our current work builds on the shoulders of those before us and sets a path for those who are to follow us. We must never underestimate the example we set for others.

I heartily recommend this book not just because Dr. Gramling is a friend but because this is an endeavor of love by a colleague that I respect and admire and a work that captures the heart and history of a ministry that we only hope to emulate.

You may find a copy at Annual Conference, Amazon or from the Advocate Press at <https://advocatesc.org/store/books/recollections>.

Dark is the pastor of North Charleston United Methodist Church, North Charleston, and the president of the Conference Historical Society.



From the Archives
by Dr. Phillip Stone

A look at South Carolina Methodists 75 years ago

We often think back to the 1950s as a period of stability and consensus. Looking through the pages of the *Advocate* in the spring of 1950, one can see attempts to maintain the life that South Carolinians knew before World War II. But readers can also see signs of significant changes happening in the state. The movement of Carolinians from rural areas and small towns to cities increased considerably after World War II.

The pages of the *Advocate* show many churches were thriving, but 75 years later, we know some of them wound up taking different paths. An article on May 4, 1950, featured the history of the Lexington Church, as they were celebrating their centennial that year and looking forward to greater service. In that same issue, the *Advocate* noted a successful revival at the Lockhart church. The revival started on Easter Sunday and ran for 10 consecutive days, with five new members joining the church. Duncan Memorial in Spartanburg reported a revival as well the next week. But over the past 75 years, change was hard on many of South Carolina’s mill churches, and many of them, including Lockhart and Duncan Memorial, closed. Other churches, including Galloway Memorial in Greenwood (which later found new life as Aldersgate) and Cherokee Place in Charleston, reported attendance at revivals and receiving new members.

The Women’s Society of Christian Service was planning its annual meeting that May. The society noted that each delegate was responsible for making her own arrangements and that this conference was, in their words, self-entertaining. In the pre-World War II days, when a church or community hosted the conference, they often took care of housing and some meals. Those days seem to have been in the past in 1950. The theme for the meeting, which was held at Shandon Church, was “Lift Thou Thy World, O Christ.”


A few other notes remind us of the ways our ministries are ongoing. A plea to contribute to Epworth Children’s Home on Mother’s Day reminded readers that 268 children were living at Epworth. And the Council of Bishops announced that the Sunday before May 24 would be Aldersgate Sunday, an observance of Methodist history. The bishops noted that it would be appropriate “to stress the place of personal experience in Christian life.”

On May 18, Dr. T. S. Buie published an article about the interdependence of rural and urban life that reflected the changes in South Carolina. He noted that Methodism had its roots in rural America, and that a few generations before, most South Carolina Methodists worshipped in rural churches. His article explained that two-thirds of White clergy in the conference joined churches in small communities, and that half of the lay leadership in city churches in the late 1940s had joined the church in a small town. So even in urbanizing South Carolina, the church had its roots in the state’s smaller communities, where many new city or suburban residents were from. But that growth in some areas of the state also meant those rural churches were starting to struggle. Dr. Buie wondered about ways to support those rural churches, or to help small-town pastors provide opportunities so members didn’t have to leave.

Another issue of the *Advocate* mentioned district conference meetings, usually held about halfway between sessions of Annual Conference. I must confess that I’ve been a lay member of Annual Conference for more than 20 years, and thus would be a member of my district conference, and I have never been to a district conference. One change that is evident from reading older issues of the *Advocate* is that we have often found less cumbersome ways of doing the church’s business, and that perhaps people aren’t as interested in numerous meetings as they once were, but changes do often represent a loss.

The changes we continue to witness in South Carolina are not new. Perhaps one of the more valuable lessons historians can offer is that the things we worry about today have worried the generations that came before us, too.

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



SOUTH CAROLINA
METHODIST CONFERENCE
CREDIT UNION

*Savings * Certificates * Loans*

All SC United Methodist Eligible to Join

800-532-8814 or scmccu.org

Mary Helen Bedenbaugh
EASLEY—Mary Helen Bedenbaugh, widow of the Rev. Eugene Holland Bedenbaugh, died Feb. 11, 2025.
A memorial service was held Feb. 15 in the chapel of Foothills Presbyterian Home with burial in Robinson Memorial Gardens.
Memorials may be made to Concerned Citizens for Animals, P.O. Box 1332, Simpsonville, SC 29681; or to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, 501 St. Jude Place, Memphis, TN 38105.
Mrs. Bedenbaugh is survived by her three daughters.

Harriett H. Daniels
FLETCHER, N.C.—Harriett H. “Bunny” Daniels died March 31, 2025. Mrs. Daniels was the former secretary for the Anderson District.
Funeral services were held May 24 at Central United Methodist Church, Asheville, N.C.
Memorials may be made to Black Mountain Home, 80 Lake Eden Road, Black Mountain, NC 28711; or to Central UMC, 27 Church St., Asheville, NC 28801.
Mrs. Daniels is survived by her husband, Bob, three sons and daughter.

Arthur Fleming
NEW ORLEANS—Arthur Fleming, brother of the Rev. Terry Fleming, died March 22, 2025. Rev. Fleming is the superintendent of the Florence District.
No funeral arrangements were available.

Eartha Lee Goodwin
JOHNS ISLAND—Eartha Lee Goodwin, widow of the Rev. Willis Goodwin, died March 28, 2025.
Funeral services were held April 4 at Wesley United Methodist Church with burial in Bethlehem St James UMC Cemetery.
Mrs. Goodwin is survived by her two sons.

Juanita Lane
SUMTER—Dr. Juanita Lane, sister of the Rev. James C. Lane, died March 12, 2025. Rev. Lane is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.
Funeral services were held March 29 at Mount Zion UMC.
Dr. Lane is survived by her son.

Loriene Roderick
BISHOPVILLE—Loriene Roderick, mother of the Rev. Emma R. Jones, died March 31, 2025. Rev. Jones is the pastor of the Lamar Parish, Lamar.
Funeral services were held April 4 at Ebenezer United Methodist Church with burial in Roderick Cemetery.
Mrs. Roderick is survived by her four daughters and son.

Rev. Alfred Truman Wright
GREENVILLE—The Rev. Alfred Truman Wright, a retired associate member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died April 12, 2025.
Prior to his retirement in 2011, Rev. Wright served the North Greenville and East Greenville charges. Following retirement, he served the St. Paul and Pendleton charges.
Funeral services were held April 19 at Laurel Creek UMC with burial in the church cemetery.
Rev. Wright is survived by his wife, Issie Wright.

Rev. Ellen April Younker
NORTH CHARLESTON—The Rev. Ellen April Younker, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Feb. 27, 2025.
Prior to her retirement in 2010, Rev. Younker served the McClellanville, North Charge, Bethlehem-Prospect Charge, Hood’s Chapel, St. Stephen, Gordon Memorial-Greenbrier, Asbury-St. James, Charleston and South Anderson charges. She also served the Alaska Missionary Conference and was chaplain at the United Methodist Relief Center. Following her retirement, Rev. Younker served Cherokee Place UMC.
Rev. Younker is survived by her three sons.

UWF remembers Graham



Graham

Florence District United Women in Faith took time recently to remember Kimberly Graham, vice president of the conference United Women in Faith and former spiritual growth coordinator for the district.
Graham died Jan. 23.
District UWF leaders lifted up Graham’s evident dedication to uplifting the mission of United Women in Faith.
“Her spirit of service and commitment touched many,” leaders announced. “While serving as spiritual growth coordinator, she was always ready and eager to uplift us in prayer and meditation. Kimberly uplifted Florence District in prayer every morning by sending us prayer and daily readings.”
The women hope to continue to honor her memory through acts of kindness and by continuing to support one another in a shared journey of faith.

Late saint gets tribute

ST. GEORGE—One departed saint inspired a church worship leader to pen a tribute in her honor recently, presenting it to the church during Women’s History Month in March.
Kalibe Pinckney, worship leader at St. Mark United Methodist Church, St. George, was so impacted by his friendship with the late Daisy Dash, who served as his Caring Group Leader, that he felt compelled to offer up a written accolade to her.
“Daisy was well-known for her hearty laughter, open arms, strong faith, joyful service to others and her beautifully inspiring and spirit-filled voice,” Pinckney shared. “She had a zest for life and living, walked five miles daily into her eighties and could be heard singing the songs of Zion as she walked.”
“Ephesians 5:19 reminds us that we should sing and make melody unto the Lord with our hearts, and so she did freely—at churches, weddings, funerals, birthdays, Shady Grove Camp meeting, Woodland High School Baccalaureate, NAACP banquets, senior citizens gatherings and more, including the ARK Race (Alzheimer’s Respite Care Family Support Services) where she annually sung the national anthem.”



Dash (right) and Pinckney

“At a young age, she began her spiritual walk with the Lord at St. Mark Methodist Church where she was converted. ‘If I Can Help Somebody As I Pass Along’ certainly epitomizes the life and legacy of Daisy Dash. She was very active throughout St. George, Dorchester County and South Carolina for her extraordinary and dedicated service.
“To say that she was a faithful church member would be a mild statement as she always volunteered her services and participated in numerous church functions. She was a great choir member, sharing her God-given voice, a dedicated lay servant, an avid Sunday school and Bible study student and a Caring Class leader who was watchful of each member through visitations, phone calls and cards. She was also an active member of the United Methodist Women. For years, she was Communion Service witness along with the pastor to the sick and shut in, thereto blessing each visit with melodious beautiful songs. She loved and supported the youth, provided mentorship and transportation to meetings and events and more. ...
“Daisy’s great love touched and impacted the lives of countless individuals leaving a rich legacy of beautiful memories. This was Daisy Lee Brown Dash!”

Meet the Author/Book Signing

Tuesday, June 10 • 12pm-2pm
Greenville Convention Center
Room 202C
(Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry's Hospitality Room)

Get a chance to meet some of our authors
and have your book autographed!

Advocate Community Listening Sessions

6:30pm-8:30pm

TELL US YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THE ADVOCATE OVER PIZZA!

Upstate – 2nd Quarter

April 29th – Anderson St. John’s UMC

May 15th – Spartanburg Bethel UMC

June 24th – Greenville Open Hearts UMC

Pee Dee – 3rd Quarter

July 15th – Florence Lake City UMC

August 26th – Hartsville First UMC Conway

Lowcountry – 4th Quarter

October 28th – Orangeburg

November 17th – Charleston Stallville UMC

December 1st – Walterboro

RSVP for head count for food to krenfree@advocatesc.org!

20 | May 2025

Advocate

Foundation for Evangelism launches new laity award

LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C.—The Foundation for Evangelism announces the launch of the Laity Evangelism Award, continuing a 45-year tradition of honoring lay persons with exceptional evangelistic ministries that bring people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

Dr. Jack Jackson, president, stated, “As The Foundation for Evangelism enters its 76th year, we give thanks for the group of dedicated laypeople who began the organization and celebrate that training laypersons to share their faith remains one of the three primary grant foci for the foundation’s work. Indeed, much of the foundation’s work these past 75 years has revolved on the central role of laity in evangelism. For this reason the foundation has decided to reimagine its award program to focus on laity while also welcoming recipients from denominations in the wider Wesleyan tradition.”

Nominations for award should be received by denominational regional bodies (annual conference, district, episcopal area, etc.) with one individual selected per area. The award will be presented jointly by the denomination’s regional body and the foundation. As many as 20 awardees from across all denominations will be chosen to receive a \$1,000 grant toward their evangelism ministry.

For more information: <https://foundationforevangelism.org/laity-evangelism-award>.



Photo by Kelly Gottheiner

Souper Bowl of Caring in Manning

Manning UMC, Manning, youth have some fun stacking cans they helped collect for Souper Bowl of Caring, an annual event where communities come together, inspired by the Super Bowl, to tackle hunger locally.

Global Briefs.

In win for faith groups, some refugees must be admitted

WASHINGTON—A federal judge has denied a request by the Trump administration to reconsider a ruling in a lawsuit brought by faith-based refugee resettlement agencies, ordering the government to begin immediately processing and admitting refugees who were conditionally approved before Jan 20. Among the plaintiffs was United Methodist partner Church World Service.

Group condemns Palm Sunday attacks in Gaza, Ukraine

GENEVA—The Rev. Jerry Pillay, top executive of the World Council of Churches, condemned in the strongest terms the Palm Sunday bombing of the Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza — a ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem. Pillay also condemned the Russian missile attack on the Ukrainian city of Sumi, which also occurred on Palm Sunday. This year, both Eastern Orthodox and Western Christians are observing Holy Week and Christ’s resurrection at the same time. This week also marks Passover.

Judge permits immigration arrests in churches

WASHINGTON—A federal judge on April 11 sided with the Trump administration in allowing immigration agents to conduct enforcement operations at houses of worship for now, despite a lawsuit filed by religious groups over the new policy. The interfaith group of plaintiffs includes three United Methodist conferences and the United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race. Despite the setback in a denial of preliminary injunction, the plaintiffs could still press their case. “We are reviewing the decision and assessing our options alongside the other plaintiffs,” Religion and Race told UM News.

Boards hear call to stand on side of the Gospel

ATLANTA—Directors of two of The United Methodist Church’s program agencies, both international in scope, were challenged by their shared leader to strengthen their work in response to suffering intensified by reduction in U.S. federal funds. Neither the United Methodist Boards of Global Ministries nor Higher Education and Ministries receives federal funds. But Roland Fernandes said cutbacks in funding of international and domestic programs are creating a worldwide humanitarian crisis.

Teaching children anti-ableism

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Applications are being accepted to be part of the Growing in Grace: Accessible Worship for All God’s Children program. The training aims to assist local churches, denominational leadership and parachurch organizations in forming children into anti-ableist Christians through worship. Those selected will receive \$750 per year to implement lessons and/or improve accessibility in worship gatherings. Applications received by May 1 will receive priority consideration.

Board reaffirms justice work

TORRANCE, Calif.—Under the guiding theme of “Sacred Resilience, Disciplined Hope,” the board of directors of the UMC’s Board of Church and Society met last month to strengthen its work and affirm the ongoing support of the agency’s mission. “Grounded in our Social Principles, we reaffirmed our commitment to racial equity, environmental justice, immigrant rights, economic dignity, and peace to carry this work back to our churches, conferences, and communities,” said the Rev. Allison Mark, board president.

Two congregations become ‘one family’

KINGSPORT, Tenn.—When two Kingsport congregations, one predominantly white and one predominantly Black, voted unanimously to become one on March 23, the crowd gathered in the sanctuary of Mafair United Methodist Church applauded at length. The joy was laced with some sadness.

Building peace in a dangerously polarized US

LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C.—A United Methodist Peace Conference drew some 200 clergy and laity to discuss breaking down national divisions. Participants heard about the dangers of Christian nationalism and polarization in the U.S.

Home sharing a ‘win-win’ for couple, student

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—When retired pastor the Rev. John Collett and his wife, Rita, heard that students at a nearby college needed summer housing, they stepped up to help. Through the innovative home-sharing platform Nesterly, the Colletts rented a room in their home to a young person who had been attending their church, Belmont United Methodist.

Gathering aims to help Asian American clergy thrive

McLEAN, Va.—A new event aims to celebrate the spiritual heritage of Asian American United Methodist clergy while fostering deeper connections and cultivating innovative leadership within the denomination. The first Southeastern Jurisdiction Asian American Ministers Gathering is scheduled for May 13-15.

—Courtesy of United Methodist News Service

CHECK OUT TWO NEW BOOKS AVAILABLE FROM ADVOCATE PRESS!

CHRISTIAN LIVING

Having coffee with God

WARE BARNETTE

Stories from My Journey

DAVID AFRANJ HADJI

MEMOIR

PURCHASE NOW AT [ADVOCATEPRESS.ORG](https://advocatepress.org)

AdvocatePress

FOLLOW OUR NEW SOCIALS!

@AdvocatePressSC

[f](#) [X](#) [i](#) [in](#) [v](#)

Building Bridges for Ministry Event

Rock Hill District Committee on Connectional Ministries

Saturday, May 3rd
9am–11:30am

Advocate.
SERVING SOUTH CAROLINA SINCE 1857

AdvocatePress

Come see us and meet some of our authors:
Rev. Dr. Ted Goshorn
Suzan Phillips

Woodland UMC • 801 Cherry Road • Rock Hill, SC 29732



Adult Lessons
by the Rev. Arthur Holt

Lessons in the water

May 4
Healing Water
Lesson Scripture: John 5:1-15.
Key Verses: John 5:8-9. **“Jesus said to him, ‘Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.’ Immediately the man was well, and he picked up his mat and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.”**

We hear a lot these days about “anecdotal evidence,” a type of evidence that is based on personal experiences rather than strict scientific tests. My father was convinced that orienting his bed East-West rather than North-South helped him avoid migraine headaches! The belief that healing would be given to the first person to get into the pool after the water was disturbed had little to support it. But these are the kinds of cures that desperate people are often drawn to. Jesus found a huge group of sick, blind and paralyzed people who looked to the pool at Bethsaida as their last hope.

Jesus asked one man who had gone unhealed near that pool for 38 years if he really wanted to be healed. Perhaps the odd phrasing of the question was Jesus’ attempt to get the man to consider a different path forward. Clearly the pool was not working for him! Perhaps the man needed to “turn his eyes upon Jesus.” When he did, he heard Jesus commanding him, “Get up, pick up your mat and walk.” Immediately he was healed.

Someone is sure to say to me that the idea that Jesus can fix what ails us is itself supported primarily by anecdotal evidence. I have to agree; it is hard to quantify the results of our faith. But we have all seen how having loving friends can lift the spirits of a lonely person and bring healing to them, and understanding how Jesus is a friend was a life-shaping bit of knowledge to me back when I was in the church nursery. Sometimes knowing that we want to get well is enough to make us give Jesus a chance in our lives, and his is a solid record of making a difference in our lives.

May 11
Master of the Waters
Lesson Scripture: John 6:16-25
Key Verse: John 6:20. **“He said to them, ‘I Am. Don’t be afraid!’ ”**

Comedian Bill Engvall has a category of humor that he calls “Here’s your sign” for times when someone says something that is obviously true—like a person coming into your house dripping wet but we just have to ask, “Is it raining outside?” Gospel writer John is also saying “Here’s your sign” every time he tells us a story about Jesus and the things that testify to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus walks on water and John tells the story implying, “Here’s another sign for you.” That is the main purpose of this story.

But I think that there is another

reason this story is repeated. Psalm writer King David was amazed to find that no matter where he went, God was already present: “If I make my bed in hell, you are there,” proclaims the amazed psalmist (Psalm 139). Especially when we are in a tight spot—like a storm threatening to sink our ship—we discover that God is there with us and will be with us, regardless of the outcome.

Song writer Horatio Spafford penned the words of the hymn “It Is Well with My Soul” when he was sailing to England to be with his wife after she had survived a shipwreck that killed all four of their daughters. “When peace like a river, attendeth my way / When sorrows like sea billows roll; / Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, / ‘It is well, it is well, with my soul.’”

Jesus has a way of coming to us, breaking all the rules if he has to. We don’t deserve it or perhaps the trouble is of our own making. Still he comes to be with us! He will even break the laws of nature, coming to us walking on the water.

May 18
Rivers of Living Water
Lesson Scripture: John 7:37-46
Key Verse: John 7:37-38. **“All who are thirsty should come to me! All who believe in me should drink! As the scriptures said concerning me, Rivers of living water will flow out from within him.”**

Thirst is one of our greatest desires. At first, we just want a sip of water. Then we imagine a glass full of cold water to quench our thirst. Next comes a time when we cannot think of anything but water, and this is followed by confusion and collapse. Death is the final result of unquenched thirst, and so we can see how powerful Jesus’ claim is: “Rivers of living water will flow out from within him.” Jesus is promising his followers the deepest satisfaction of their greatest inner need.

I’m careful when I am presenting faith to others. I don’t say “Jesus is the answer to everything” like some folks do because there are other deep needs we have, such as food, shelter, clothing and education. If we suffer illnesses because of biochemical deficiencies, those need to be addressed by doctors and pharmaceuticals. But what Jesus offers us is foundational in nature: “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11 NIV). Without Jesus’ underpinnings in our lives, we can be driven to attempt to fill that inner thirst with many unsatisfying things.

The idea that some inner artesian well could be primed by Jesus to flow out from within us would mean that the Spirit would operate within us like a perpetual motion machine without any external energy source. This is far different from laws or philoso-

About the Author

Holt is a retired South Carolina United Methodist pastor living in Boiling Springs. He is also the author of three books from the Advocate Press: his newest as of this month, “Stories from My Journey,” as well as “People of My Journey” and “What I Have Come to Believe.” Find them all at <https://www.advocatesc.org/books>.

phies that we can “put on” like we do clothes or straitjackets to control our external behavior.

Imagine what it would be like to have something like a streaming TV program within our minds to keep us focused on living and loving like Jesus does. “By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.”

May 25
Cleansing Water
Lesson Scripture: John 13:1-11
Key Verse: John 13:7-9. **“Jesus replied, ‘You don’t understand what I’m doing now, but you will understand later.’ ‘No!’ Peter said. ‘You will never wash my feet!’ Jesus replied, ‘Unless I wash you, you won’t have a place with me.’ Simon Peter said, ‘Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!’”**

Biblical archeologist James Fleming believes that John’s telling of Jesus’ last supper indicates that John and Peter were reclining directly across from each other as they dined at their horseshoe-shaped table (triclinium).

Since John, who was in charge of the meal preparation, was seated at Jesus’ right side, Peter must have been located at the place of lowest honor. According to custom, that person had the duty of washing everybody’s feet! But that person apparently had failed to do his duty, and so Jesus took his place.

Perhaps that is why Peter protested so loudly, “You will never wash my feet!”

Washing the disciples’ feet was symbolic of all Jesus was doing through his life, death and resurrection to cleanse them from sins and to empower them as his servants. Jesus replied to Peter that unless he permitted Jesus to wash his feet, Peter would have no part in his saving work. Hearing that, Peter asked for Jesus to give him a full bath!

But the washing of their feet was also Jesus’ way of reminding us that if the Son of God and the King of Kings would become a lowly servant, how much more should we humble descendants of Adam and Eve become servants of one another?

As we get older, our feet seem to get further and further away from our eyes and our hands so that we no longer can see them clearly or reach down easily to wash them.

The image of Jesus washing our feet is a reminder that there are some things we need to allow Jesus to do for us that we cannot do for ourselves, and it is a reminder that our brothers and sisters need us to “wash their feet” so that they will remember all that Jesus has done for them.



Children’s
Sermons
by the Rev.
Meg Cook

Heritage Sunday

Date: Sunday, May 18, Heritage Sunday (third Sunday in May)

Scripture: John 13:31-35
Time Frame: Three minutes (The average attention span of a child is about one year per minute of life. In our setting the youngest at children’s sermon are 3, so we aim for three or maybe five minutes at the most.)

Props: No props, but if you want to add a motion, make a heart with your hands and ask the kids to do that, too, when you talk about God’s love. Use this symbol with your hands when you talk about God’s love. Using our muscles helps us make connections and will help the lesson stick. It might feel silly at first, but it will help engage the children.

Say: Today is Heritage Sunday. According to UMC.org, “Heritage Sunday is observed on the Third Sunday of May (to correspond with Aldersgate Day, May 24). This day calls The United Methodist Church to honor its heritage by committing itself to the continuing call of God known and spread by Charles and John Wesley, along with others the early Methodist movement reached.” That’s a mouthful! What do you think that means? (Pause for responses; receive all ideas with positive responses.)

Say: I think today is a reminder to remember our history as United Methodists and even more that we are called to share God’s love with one another and the world. In John 13:34-35, Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” We, as United Methodists, should be known for our love!

Say: What are some things our church does to show God’s love? (Fill in some things your church does, like a blessing box or feeding the homeless or offering Sunday school for children or church members, visiting the sick and homebound, sending money to support missionaries—not just the pastor but also emphasize things the laity do.)

Say: These are some of the ways our church shows God’s love. I think one of the best ways to honor our heritage is to do some of these things that help us show God’s love. I challenge you and your grownups to do something today that shows God’s love in honor of Heritage Sunday. (If you need to, you can give some ideas like checking on a neighbor, sending a card to a friend, putting canned goods in the blessing box or holding the door for folks after worship.)

Say: I cannot wait to hear what you do! Will you pray with me?

Prayer: Dear God (pause for echo), we love you (echo). Help us to remember (echo) to show your love (echo) because we are (echo) United Methodists (echo). Amen.

Cook, the pastor of Grace United Methodist Church on Harbison in Columbia, 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 at <https://advocatesc.org/books>.

Rock Hill ministry fair is May 3

Ministries and church leaders across the Rock Hill District will gather next month for “Building Bridges for Ministry,” a Districtwide Ministry Fair and Workshop Event.

Hosted by the Rock Hill District Committee on Connectional Ministries, the event is set for Saturday, May 3, from 9-11:30 a.m. at Woodland UMC, Rock Hill.

The morning will feature three sessions as attendees engage in meaningful conversation

as they connect with other leaders across the district.

District and conference ministries are invited to set up a table in the ministry fair to share their work. The idea is for all participants to be able to share ideas, establish friendships and explore ways to join together to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

To sign up or get a table, email rhdist@umcsc.org.



Effecting change
Inspired by what they learned, United Women in Faith members tour the Statehouse after their March Legislative Advocacy Day at Epworth Children's Home.

Photo courtesy of Lexie Chatham

Event Calendar.

April 2025 UWF Columbia Bethlehem Community Center Special Emphasis Month	Training, Trinity UMC, Bennettsville, 2:30-8 p.m. https://www.umcsc.org/event/marion-district-lay-servant-training/2025-05-04/	event/lsm-school-hartsville-district-8/2025-05-17/
April 25—World Malaria Day	May 4—Marion District Connectional Ministries, First UMC, Marion, 4-5 p.m.	May 17—LSM School (Rock Hill), Grace-Lynwood UMC, Lancaster, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. https://www.umcsc.org/event/lsm-school-rock-hill-district-16/
April 25-27—LSM School (Anderson District), First UMC, Easley, 6-9 p.m. (Fri.), 9 a.m.- 2 p.m. (Sat.), 3-7 p.m. (Sun.), \$45. Register: https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Anderson-District-LSM-Registration-Spring-2025.pdf	May 5—Cinco de Mayo	May 18—Heritage Sunday
April 26—UWF Book Study, Noon	May 6—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 6-7 p.m.	May 18—LSM School (Rock Hill), Grace-Lynwood UMC, Lancaster, 2-5:30 p.m. https://www.umcsc.org/event/lsm-school-rock-hill-district-17/
April 26—Carteret Street UMC Great Day of Service, Beaufort.	May 8—Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry board meeting, location TBD, 10:30 a.m. https://aldersgatesnm.org/contact-us	May 19—Marion District Lay Servant Training, Trinity UMC, Bennettsville, 2:30-8 p.m. https://www.umcsc.org/event/marion-district-lay-servant-training/2025-05-18/
April 29—Dementia Care Workshop, S.C. Cognitive Care Ministry, Trinity UMC, Aiken, 9:30 a.m.-Noon. Register: https://tinyurl.com/dementiacare042925	May 9—SMC Enrollment Day for prospective students, https://smcsc.edu/enrollmentdays	May 19—Killingsworth Annual Golf Tournament, Players Club, Columbia, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Register: https://form.jotform.com/lzbcnews/killingsworth-golf-tournament-regis
April 29—Advocate Community Listening Session (Anderson), St. John's UMC, Anderson, 6:30-8:30 p.m.	May 10—SMC Enrollment Day for prospective students, https://smcsc.edu/enrollmentdays	
April 30—An Evening with Jenn Colella, Spears Center for the Arts, Columbia College, Columbia, 7 p.m., \$20. https://www.columbia-asc.edu/colella	May 11—Mother's Day	May 19-23—Carolinas Black Clergy Leadership Retreat, Kingston Plantation, Myrtle Beach. https://www.umcsc.org/mayretreat
May 2025 Asian Pacific Heritage Month and Christian Home Month	May 11—Epworth Children's Home Mother's Day Offering	May 24—LSM School (Hartsville District), St. Mark UMC, Sumter, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. https://www.umcsc.org/event/lsm-school-hartsville-district-8/2025-05-24/
May 1—National Day of Prayer	May 11—Festival of the Christian Home	May 25—Peace with Justice Sunday
May 2—Commencement Ceremony, Columbia College, Columbia.	May 12—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries Meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.	May 26—Memorial Day (United Methodist Conference Center closed)
May 3—"Building Bridges in Ministry" district ministry fair and workshop, Woodland UMC, Rock Hill.	May 15—Advocate Community Listening Session (Spartanburg), Bethel UMC, Spartanburg 6:30-8:30 p.m.	May 29—Ascension Day
May 4—Native American Ministries Sunday	May 17—UWF Come Together Be Together, Zoom, 10 a.m.	
May 4—Marion District Lay Servant	May 17—Early Response Team training, Zion UMC, Anderson, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. https://www.umcsc.org/disaster-response	June 2025
	May 17—LSM School (Hartsville), St. Mark UMC, Sumter, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. https://www.umcsc.org/	June 1—Ascension Sunday
		June 8—Pentecost
		June 8-11—Annual Conference, Greenville Convention Center.

Classifieds.

Church Furnishings

FREE ESTIMATES

NEW

Steeple cleaning service

New Pews • Pew Upholstering • Pew Refinishing • Pulpit Furniture • Carpet • Steeples/Baptistries • Chime Systems • Stained Glass • Classroom Furniture • Office Furniture • Social Hall Furniture • Budget & Project Analysis • Project Management

Nu-Idea

Church Furnishings
Sumter, South Carolina
1-800-922-0424
www.nu-idea.com

"Serving South Carolina's churches since 1921"

Jobs

Director of Children's Ministry
Lexington UMC, Lexington, SC

The Director of Children's Ministry at LUMC is a full-time position in which the following duties are included: providing visionary leadership; working alongside and collaborating with clergy, staff and church leadership to both generate program growth and increase the number of participants; developing effective and exciting program opportunities and activities for children and families; directing a Sunday morning Sunday School ministry, nursery ministry, Children's Church and Sunday evening activities; managing a budget, attending church-related meetings, planning, coordinating and directing various summer programs and integration of the children's participation in worship services and church activities; and serving as liaison between the church and Preschool.

The Director of Children's Ministry at LUMC should have the following qualities: a passion for ministry with children and a deep commitment to faith formation of children; a basic knowledge of child development and an understanding of the importance of providing a safe and nurturing environment for children; the ability to listen to and communicate with people of all ages; and prior experience working with children in an educational or supervisory capacity.

Preference will be given to someone with a college or university degree and possesses an educational background that provides a thorough understanding of Wesleyan theology.

Salary is commensurate with experience.

A 90-day probationary period will be used to allow for the assessment of a good fit for both the children and employee.

Contact Diane Crosby, LUMC Church Administrator at dcrosby@lexumcsc.com.

MOVING??

Send your new address to us!



Lee Road members take a group photo in their Lee Road UMC T-shirts in front of the mural.

**CAROLINA
BLACK CLERGY**
LEADERSHIP RETREAT

**ASCENSION: POWER THROUGH
THE PREACHED WORD**

Monday, May 19–Friday, May 23, 2025

Kingston Plantation | N. Myrtle Beach, SC
A 5-Day Retreat for Christian Faith Leaders
dynamic worship | radical hospitality |
intentional community

www.umcsc.org/mayretreat

SCAN

Lee Road dedicates new mural by local artist

TAYLORS—On Sunday, March 30, Lee Road United Methodist Church proudly dedicated the new public arts mural that was painted on the church by local artist Nick Burns, also known as “Ninja Picasso.”

The mural took about three weeks to complete from start to finish and tells the story of Jesus in several scenes from the gospels. Nick Burns is a native of Simpsonville and credits God with giving him his talent and his mission. The artist puts as a tagline “NJAP” (N* Jah P) on each work of art he does, meaning “Not Just a Painting.”

Burns has pursued art full time since 2018 and has become well known in the Upstate arts community. At the dedication ceremony, Lee Road’s pastor the Rev. Rusty Godfrey



Burns

presented Burns and longtime Lee Road UMC member Max Cromer with framed certificates. Cromer had the vision for the mural on the front wall of “The Bridge” (formerly a gym and now the contemporary worship site) to draw people to Jesus and the church.

The song “De Colores” was performed at the dedication by the children of the church, recognizing the beauty of the colors in the mural.

To view close-up shots of the mural, visit <https://www.leeroadumc.com/mural>.



Members hope the mural will draw people to Jesus and the church.

Epworth

**Mother's Day Offering
Sunday, May 11, 2025**

There is no such thing as too many books.

The Advocate Press can help fill your library with topics ranging from devotions to social issues.

<https://advocatesc.org/store>