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January 2025

Answering the call



Photo courtesy of Annette Willis

Volunteers serving after Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina enjoy a hot meal provided by Columbia couples Ben and Annette Willis and Al and Barbi Wactor. The longtime friends felt compelled to help after Ben Willis heard a “God call” following the storm. “This is just our maiden voyage,” Willis said, noting they intend to help long-term.

Two couples step up, feeding volunteers and delivering supplies after hurricane

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—Ben Willis was 73 years old when he heard the voice of God speak to him for the first time.

A member of Fair Lawn United Methodist Church, he was sitting in his recliner watching news coverage of the devastation Hurricane Helene brought to the Southeast, and his heart tugged as scenes from Western North Carolina filled the screen.

“Get up out of that chair and go do something!” he distinctly heard God say to him. “Do what you can.”

His wife, Annette, was there next to him, equally overcome with heartache and a desire to help.

The next morning at church, her husband stood up and told his fellow members God had spoken to him, and he knew: We need to do something.

That was the beginning of what has become a long-term food ministry passion for the Willises and their best friends, Al and Barbi Wactor.

And since that day at church, Sept. 29, they haven’t stopped, doing everything they can to serve and honor the Lord by loving his people in the aftermath of the storm.

See “Answering the Call,” Page 24

Bishop names members of new ‘Jeremiah Teams’

By Dan O’Mara

Jeremiah’s recounting of God’s call on his life reminds us that God has an amazing knack for calling ordinary people to do extraordinary things, especially in moments of deep, necessary change, anxiety and uncertainty.

As God says in Jeremiah 1:7, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy,’ for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you” (NRSV).

Bishop Leonard Fairley believes the people of the South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church are living one such moment. That is why he announced in November that he would be forming “Jeremiah Teams” to discern the best way to transform how the conference is structured, how it operates and how it aligns with “Our 4 Priorities,” the conference’s four mission priorities (developing leaders, engaging our communities, connecting with and growing disciples, and measuring and evaluating current realities and missional possibilities).

On Dec. 13, Fairley took another step into that moment by announcing the members of these Jeremiah Teams (see Page 11 for the list).

The volunteers represent a cross-section of the South Carolina Annual Conference.

“After deep, prayerful discernment and consultation with the Ministry Advisory Team, the Extended and Appointive Cabinet, and other leaders, I am happy, hopeful and encouraged to share with you the names of those I have called to service on our new Jeremiah Teams,” Fairley said. “I am completely aware that in naming any team, there will always be questions about who was chosen and who was not. Please know again that much prayer has gone into the membership of each team. We trust that God will provide each team member all the grace and resources needed to conduct their work.”

See “Jeremiah,” Page 11

More than a meal

Port Royal’s 12-year-old food outreach helps thousands with physical, spiritual needs

By Jessica Brodie

PORT ROYAL—For more than a dozen years, Port Royal United Methodist Church has been a quiet refuge in their community, a place where the hungry can get the food they need along with the true bread of life—Jesus.

And every week, more and more people come.

“It’s a wonderful thing,” said Port Royal’s pastor, the Rev. Anne Bridgers. “An older lady told me yesterday, ‘Pastor, I just can’t thank you enough. I go to the grocery store and look at the prices of some of the things I’ve received from the food ministry, and I couldn’t afford to buy this stuff.’ They don’t get that much in supplements. A father told me, ‘I cannot afford to buy juice or drinks for my children—we drink water.’

“With the economy as it has been, we have a lot of need.”

Bridgers’ awareness of that need is where it all started back in 2012,

when she first came to Port Royal. Even though it’s a very small church, Bridgers quickly saw the heart the congregation had for helping others. And when the coordinator for the Lowcountry food rescue and distribution network Second Helpings spoke to Port Royal about becoming a community distribution site, the church didn’t hesitate.

That first month, Bridgers said, 50 people came, lining up in the church parking lot to receive a hefty box of nonperishables and other nutritious food items to feed their families.

Last month, they packed and distributed 1,511 boxes, ultimately feeding 5,058 people, Bridgers said.

“My mind is boggled,” said volunteer Vicki Young. “Every week there are more and more people out there.”

See “More Than a Meal,” Page 12

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Greenville District churches gather for 'Great Thanksgiving'

GREER—This Thanksgiving, a spirit of unity and gratitude was felt deeply as multiple United Methodist churches in the Greenville District came together to celebrate the holiday with a special worship service.

In a time when division can sometimes feel more pronounced than ever, the churches said this gathering was a powerful reminder of the shared faith and community that transcends denominational lines.

The Great Thanksgiving, held at Memorial UMC, Greer, welcomed congregants from Bethel UMC, Disciples UMC and St. Mark UMC. Led by the Revs. David Smith, Narcie Jeter and Redonia Thomas, choirs and members came together to sing hymns of thanksgiving, listen to heartfelt messages and join in prayer.

Many noted one of the most moving moments of the service was the act of sharing in Holy Communion. For many, it was an opportunity to reflect on the true meaning of the holiday—giving thanks not only for material blessings but also for the spiritual richness of community and shared faith. As people came forward, receiving the elements of Christ together served as a powerful symbol that



The gathering was organized by the Rev. David Smith, Memorial UMC, who saw an opportunity to bring people together for a shared worship experience during the holiday season.

Christians are one body, no matter where they come from or what traditions they follow.

The gathering was organized by Smith, senior pastor of Memorial UMC, who saw an opportunity to bring people together for a shared worship experience during the holiday season.

"Thanksgiving is a time for gratitude, but it's also a time to remember we are all part of the

same family in Christ," Smith said. "Coming together in worship and communion today was an expression of that belief—that we are stronger and more blessed when we stand together."

In a world where differences are often highlighted, this Thanksgiving worship service stood out as a celebration of common ground, and one this community intends to carry forth each year.

Men to gather Feb. 21-22 for annual Men N Ministry retreat

COLUMBIA—Men across South Carolina are gearing up for the 2025 Men N Ministry annual spiritual retreat, slated again for Journey Church, a United Methodist church at 1151 Longreen Pkwy., Columbia.

The two-day event—Feb. 21-22—will feature a golf tournament, a "Cigars and Scriptures" evening fellowship event, a weekend Scout Jamboree and powerful speaking centered on the theme "Rise Up! Rise Up! Steps of a Good Man," from Psalm 37:23-25.

South Carolina Conference United Methodist Men President Kenny Bingham said he's excited about the event, which will tackle important issues and struggles facing men in the church today.

South Carolina UMC's Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley will join a host of other speakers at the event.

Every man in South Carolina is invited regardless of age, race or denomination, Bingham said.

The 2024 South Carolina Men N Ministry Golf Tournament will kick off the event the morning of Friday, Feb. 21. Held at The Spur at Northwoods Golf Course, 201 Powell Road, Columbia, there will be a shotgun start at 10 am. Cost is \$90 per player and \$5 Mulligans (two per player). Men will have the opportunity to do practice balls before the tournament, and a meal will be provided. First place trophies will be presented, and all proceeds go to South Carolina Men N Ministry to make better disciples of men in South Carolina.

Then, on Friday night, Journey will host a group discussion, "Cigars



The Rev. Steve Brown engages in a foot washing during last year's men's retreat.

and Scriptures." A popular event at Journey, Cigars and Scriptures meets once a month with different pastors speaking for a time on Scriptures and then everyone discusses what they learned. This year, attendees of the Men N Ministry spiritual retreat will have the opportunity to join the event.

The spiritual retreat will be held at Journey all day Saturday.

More will be released in the February *Advocate*. In the meantime, for more information or to register, visit <https://menministrysc.org>.

Advocate Press publishes two more books

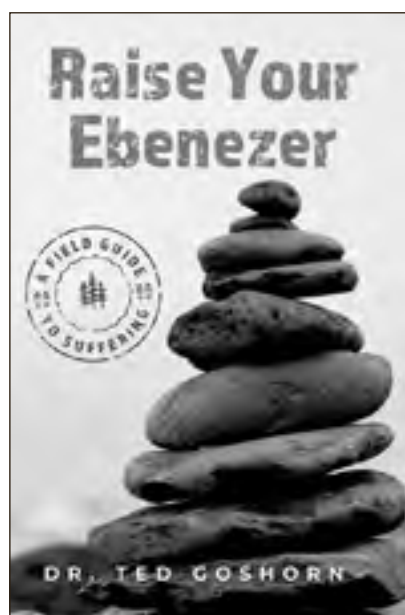
Two more UMCSA books are now available from the Advocate Press: "Recollections: Stories from My Life in the Ministry," by Dr. Roger M. Gramling, and "Raise Your Ebenezer: A Field Guide to Suffering," by Dr. Ted Goshorn.

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

In "Recollections," Gramling offers insightful, humorous and honest reflections from a personal perspective about his long career in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. Gramling entered ordained ministry at the beginning of the most important racial merger in the denomination's history, and he retired on the threshold of the most significant fracturing of the denomination in South Carolina and beyond.

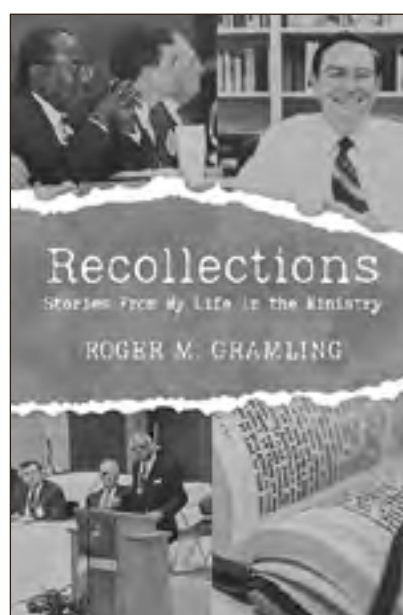
In "Recollections," he shares his memoir of a life serving the church—a ministry that brought him into close contact with unusual, extraordinary individuals who helped shape the denomination in remarkable ways.

Retired UMC Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey said, "Recollections is the result of Roger's



meticulous record of notes, primary sources, personal relationships, and remarkable memory. Persons with history and experience in South Carolina United Methodism over the last half century will find that this memoir contains delightful stories, humor, history, honesty, and the personal perspective of one steeped in love for his church, respect for his colleagues, and appreciation for the role he has been privileged to play in it all."

In "Raise Your Ebenezer," Goshorn offers a new perspective on suffering for those who are walking in times of despair. As he asks, what do we do when suffering seems to grab onto us and not let go? When we might know in our heads the pain will not last forever, but



our hearts and souls have yet to realize this truth?"

"Raise Your Ebenezer" is a deeply personal field guide to suffering that arose out of Goshorn's own wilderness of physical, emotional and financial despair. In Hebrew, the word "ebenezer" means "stone of help," and that's exactly what this book is meant to do—help readers craft their own unique pathway to hope in the midst of difficulty.

A practical, spiritual handbook, every chapter contains a space for readers to log their own "Field Notes" to reflect and better understand how to trust God, how to make sense of the valley of suffering, how to

survive in this wilderness, and ultimately, how to turn toward a future rooted in joy.

United Methodist Bishop David Graves calls it "a gift to all those who are working through their own difficult circumstances," and Dr. Ryan Bonfiglio of The Candler Foundry calls it "a compelling field guide for what it means to cultivate hope, resilience, and authenticity through the most difficult seasons of life."

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



Almost \$2 million was raised through a capital campaign called The Beyond Initiative, and \$1.7 million dollars was raised by selling additional land.



The current phase is being called "Renew, Restore, Refresh." Construction started Sept. 9 and is scheduled to be finished in April

Construction begins on St. Matthew's sanctuary

GREENVILLE—St. Matthew United Methodist Church has started construction to fix a longtime structural problem with its sanctuary building.

An official "sledgehammer ceremony" groundbreaking for the church was held Sunday, Sept. 8, at 11 a.m.

Founded in Greenville in 1955, St. Matthew's current sanctuary was built in 1967. The first service in it was Oct. 15, 1967.

The sanctuary has had a water intrusion problem for more than 50 years. Without this repair, the building would no longer be safe for occupants in the future.

It is a \$3.4 million project. Almost \$2 million was raised through a capital campaign called The Beyond Initiative, and \$1.7 million

dollars was raised by selling additional land. The current phase is being called "Renew, Restore, Refresh."

Construction started Sept. 9 and is scheduled to be finished in April. Mavin Construction is handling the project, and LS3P supported the team with the design of the new façade.

The sledgehammer ceremony took place with church members Mike Shull, Mike Watenbarger, Don Smith, Hugh Edmonds, Clay Little, Kary Mitchell, Eric Mitchell, Claire Winkler and pastor the Rev. Kurt McPherson.

Those participating in the sledgehammer ceremony struck the exterior wall with gold sledgehammers. The exterior wall is a part

of the original building construction. Since then, parts of the exterior wall have deteriorated beyond repair due to water intrusion.

Starting in 2019, Mavin Construction has been helping St. Matthew evaluate the extent of damage to the existing structure while supporting the design and consideration of different materials to replace the façade and protect the structure for future generations.

Balancing the equation between budget, scope and aesthetics was challenging, and the solution being put into place warranted the unique sledgehammering of the existing veneer that has troubled the church for such a long period.

McPherson is the third minister to oversee the Building Committee's project. The

others were the Revs. Steve Brown and Stuart Smith.

"I am very grateful for the past ministers who led St. Matthew to the place where we find ourselves today, actually solving and fixing the structural problems of our sanctuary building," McPherson said. "I am also especially amazed at the level of giving by the congregation. They have truly gone above and beyond with their financial support. I am so very grateful and honored to serve as their pastor."

The sledgehammer ceremony was held after a combined worship service in the Family Life Center at 10:00 am. After the ceremony, a catered lunch was served in the Family Life Center.

Youth delegates sought for Annual Conference

By Jessica Brodie

Do you know a high schooler who would make a good delegate to Annual Conference?

South Carolina Ministries with Young People would love to talk to them—and provide training on how they can be a part of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church's annual gathering.

SCMYP is rolling out a new program to invite youth delegates from every district to have a voice and vote at Annual Conference.

Called the Annual Conference Youth Delegate program, Congregational Specialist Chris Lynch said the idea arose out of a conversation he had with the Revs. Emily Kirby, Maggie Cantey and Katie Brock to bring younger voices to the table and enable them to participate in Annual Conference. They hope to identify a couple of youth from each of the conference's 12 districts.

The youth would participate in a Saturday training in March and April to learn about Annual Conference and how it works, then participate in Annual Conference when it is held June 8-11 in Greenville, sitting together and sharing in the life of the denomination on a larger scale.

"I get annoyed when I hear youth are the 'future' of the church," Lynch said. "It's true, but we treat them as 'when you are ready we'll bring you in,' instead of realizing they're also the church right now. Any way we can create opportunities for them to shape the church is important. I think young people want to be part of shaping the church they are a part of, but often they don't understand how to go about that."

The youth delegates would be in addition to lay delegates named by each local church.

Kirby said the holy conferencing done at Annual Conference is a pivotal time when together we wrestle

with what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, and she thinks young people need to be included in a more active way.

"To exclude the invitation and respect of hearing the voice of our young people, we are not bearing witness to the fullness of the family of God," Kirby said. "I often will remind others the youth of our churches are not only the future of the church—they are the church. With this critical truth it is our responsibility to disciple and lead them into the fullness of the call God has placed on their lives. For many, leadership in various forms within the local church is a part of that call."

Lynch and the others on the team urge church members and pastors to consider high schoolers in their congregations and email info@scmyp.org if they have questions or know someone who might be interested. Participants ideally will be rising high school juniors or seniors or recently graduated from high school.

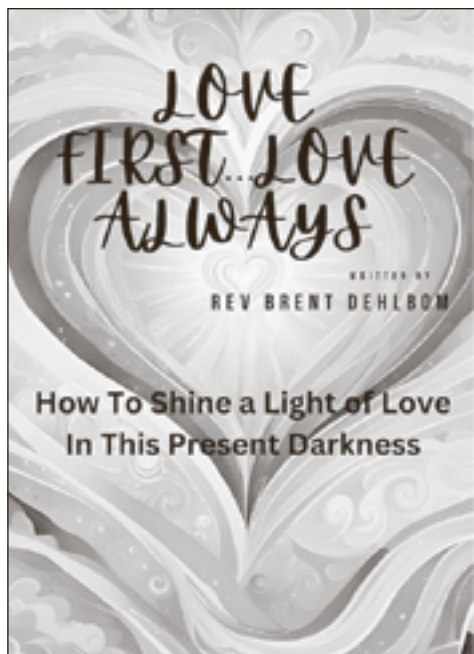
UMCSC pastor releases book on love

The Rev. Brent L. Dehlbom recently published a book on Amazon that became a No. 1 new release in Christian literature.

"I was very surprised," Dehlbom said about the book's success. "It is a simple, straightforward study book, but it deals with something much needed in our world today."

Called "Love First ... Love Always," Dehlbom's book is a guide to living a life centered on compassion, faith and action.

Readers learn how to apply the principle of "loving first" in real-life scenarios, from personal relationships to larger social issues. They also get the chance to engage with reflective questions, exercises and action steps to make love the cornerstone of daily life. There is also practical guidance for incorporating love into your daily life, as well as insightful perspectives on the power of love from a faith-based viewpoint and interactive exercises and action steps to deepen readers' understanding and application of love.



The book is a guide to living a life centered on compassion, faith and action.

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Viewpoints



Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

Responding to God's call

Have you ever heard the voice of God? Some of us hear God audibly. Others feel a firm and unmistakable nudge within, a sense they can't possibly ignore. Some say God talks to them through visions or dreams, while others just know in their heart—what my friend calls our “knower,” the Holy Spirit within us—what God wants us to do.

Rest assured: God is not silent and never has been, and all of us who believe can hear him at some point or another.

The question becomes: What do we do when we hear God's call?

That's what strikes me about so many of the stories in this month's edition of the *Advocate*—the way people respond when they know God calls. Ben Willis (“Answering the Call,” Page 1) knew exactly what he needed to do when he heard, at 73 years old, God speak to him audibly for the first time in his life. He felt compelled to step up and say, “Yes, Lord, here I am. Use me.” Likewise, Anne Bridgers and her team at Port Royal United Methodist Church (“More Than a Meal,” Page 1) heard God telling them what to do when he sent a representative from Second Helpings to talk to them about starting a food ministry at their church. Bishop Leonard Fairley is responding to a word God gave him in implementing our conference's new Jeremiah teams (“Bishop Names Members of New ‘Jeremiah Teams,’” Page 1).

The list goes on and on.

Sometimes, God calls us to do things that are uncomfortable and difficult. Other times, that call feels natural, a perfect next step to what we've already been inching toward.

But one thing we know for certain is that there's really only one answer when we get a word, and that's to say, “Yes.”

Can you imagine if Paul, after Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, went right back to persecuting Jews? Can you imagine if Mary, when visited by Gabriel the Archangel, decided to pass on the opportunity to be the mother of Jesus Christ, our savior? Can you imagine if Peter, told to feed God's sheep and tend his lambs, decided to simply go back to fishing instead?

As we begin a new year, I invite you to take a look at how God might be speaking to you. If you can't hear his voice, listen harder. Might he be speaking into your dreams or sending visions instead, or whispering to you through that deep and secret nudge within your heart? What is God urging you to do right now? And how might you be able to join with other members of the body of Christ, God's church, to fulfill that call?

God has gifted us with an amazing connection that we share with others, the people who are called Methodists. Let's listen to what God is saying and respond—together.

*“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’
And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”
— Isaiah 6:8 (NIV)*



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Bishop's Corner

by Bishop Leonard Fairley

Resolution vs. foundational statement

Instead of making New Year's resolutions, I have decided to try something a little bit different. I have decided to create a foundational statement that will guide me during the gift of this God-given new year.

Foundational statements can be personal statements that help you define your core values. They are statements or quotes of purpose and identity. What are the foundational passages that give meaning to your life?

One foundational statement might be the belief that all life is sacred and created by God in the creator's image. Or if you want to get philosophical, one of the following quotes might suit you:

Victor Frankl—neurologist, psychologist, philosopher and Holocaust survivor—often refers to Friedrich Nietzsche's words: “He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how.” Frankl believed that suffering is given meaning by the way in which we respond to it. He believed the ability to choose one's attitude in any given circumstance is one of the last human freedoms. What will be your “why” in this new year?

Albert Einstein said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world. Knowledge will get you from point A to point B, but imagination will take you everywhere.” During this new year, where on your life journey will you allow holy imagination to take you? How will you let holy imagination define who you are and whose you are? What new things will you allow holy imagination to create in your heart, mind and soul?

This quote is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.” Proclaiming the gospel by example is more virtuous than speaking it. In what ways during this new year will you proclaim the Gospel where your actions will speak louder than your words?

One of my scriptural foundational statements is one I owe to my Grandma Gladys, who would never let me forget it: “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:13 NRSV).

In what ways will you live into the truth that you and every person are fearfully and wonderfully made? What would the new year look like if this were your foundational statement?

I invite you to at least try creating a foundational statement this year instead of making a New Year's resolution. Remember, you can use a quote or create your own.

Happy New Year!

Letters to the Editor

Read

Being able to read is a gift and a lifetime skill. It is a beautiful moment when a teacher teaches a child to read. The foundation of life is an education.

Jesus was a teacher and read the Word of God to the world. “All writing comes by the grace of God” (Emerson).

We need to protect the freedom to read. Parents have the right to control the literature their children read, yet the schools and public libraries are free to have books of their choice. We need inclusive education. “The proper study of mankind is books” (Huxley). “Education is an ongoing journey of self-discovery” (Rinderle, LearningForJustice.org).

Commutation is so open today. We read newspapers, magazines and social media. There are printed lies and truths. What can we believe in the news? “Only the educated are free” (Epictetus).

Many individuals all over the world have been converted to Christ after reading the Bible. The Bible is not a weapon but love and freedom. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth. ... Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Word shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:34-35).

Keep reading.

Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia

beholder. There are normally two sides to the story.

I now present one side of what I perceived as a mistake by The United Methodist Church. The UMC should not have ever allowed any UMC church to disaffiliate. If UMC members had a problem with anything within the UMC, they could simply leave the church and find other ways to worship. This is an individual decision and not a group decision. The havoc this decision caused is still in process. It will be a long time before a new normal will be in place for many churches, including those who were allowed to leave.

The UMC made the decision to correct this mistake by simply stopping disaffiliation. Maybe it should have been done sooner. Now the decision to leave a UMC is back to where it should be. Any member of a church may leave and move on to where they wish to worship. This may cause some havoc in an individual church but probably will be much less divisive. In fact, those members who stay may become more united and more dedicated to “their church.” A good decision by the UMC!

Hopefully, we all learn from our mistakes and do what we can to keep them from happening in the future. Past actions, regardless of the outcome, usually lead to better decisions in the future. Let's move on! Much to do.

Ron Gilmer, member
St. Paul UMC, Ninety Six

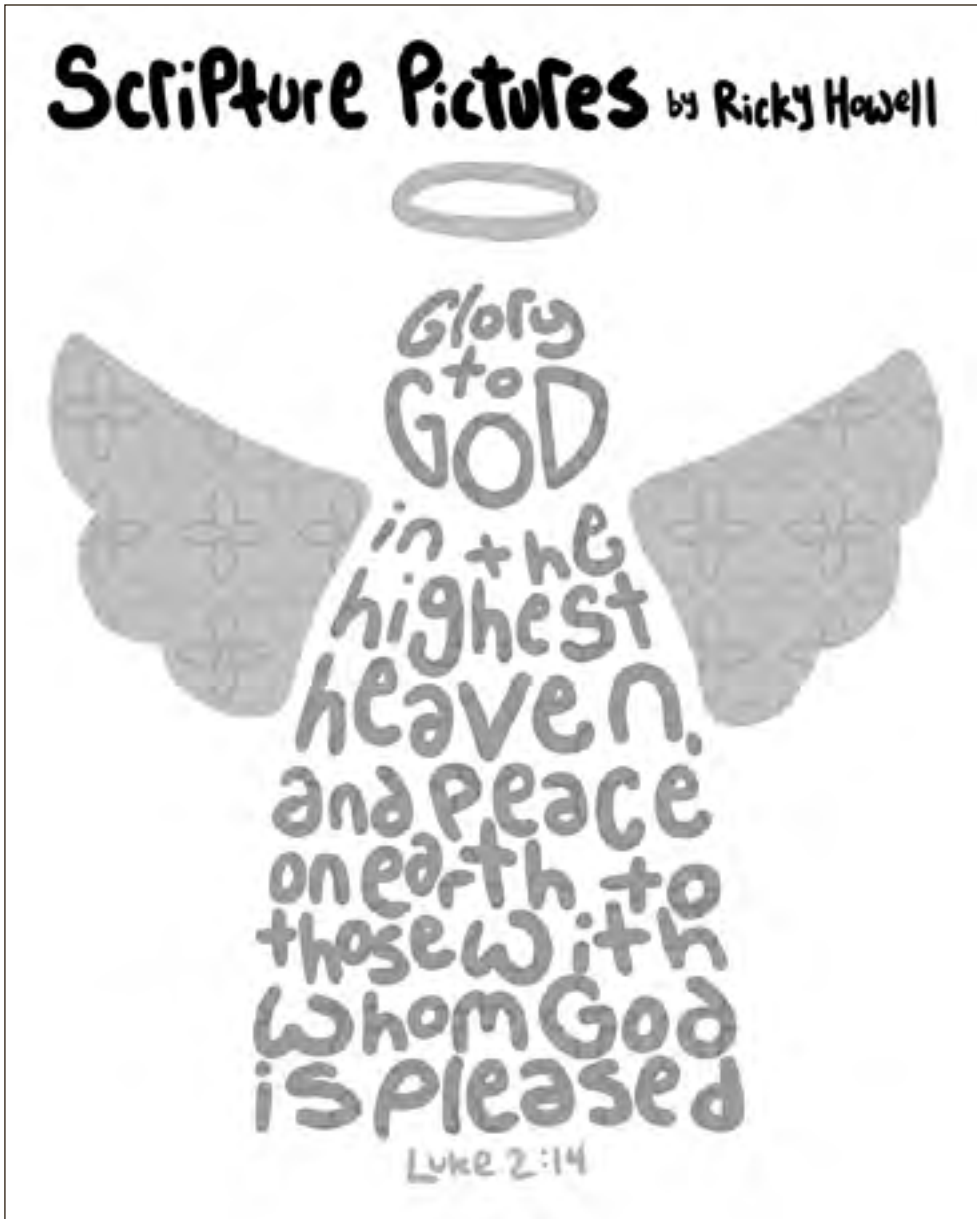
A mistake? Correct it!

All of us may not agree on when a mistake happens. But we may all agree that when an action is perceived as a mistake there should be action taken to correct it as soon as possible. A mistake is usually in the eyes of the

The true hope

I appreciate and always enjoy reading our conference newspaper. In the December 2024

See “Letters,” Page 5



Cognitive Connection

by the Rev. Bryan Pigford

Experts

It was not that long ago that I found myself in an unconventional seminary class in an unusual setting. Bishop Kenneth Carder was giving us instructions about what we could expect once we walked through the waiting doors, and the nervousness I felt I believe was shared by most if not all of my classmates. I was afraid of saying the wrong thing. My anxiety was through the roof about doing something that might cause harm. My ability to sit still and simply be was about to be sorely tested.

We were about to go into a memory care unit at an assisted living facility and interact with the residents, and most if not all of us had no idea what we were doing. Would it not be better for us to leave the care of those living with dementia to the experts?

I suspect those same feelings and thoughts go through the minds of family and friends of those who are living with a dementia diagnosis. As a result of not knowing how to act or what to say and being afraid of doing harm, an unconscious or conscious decision is made that it would be best to keep our distance and leave the care of our loved ones to the experts. This decision is often made also on the corporate as well as the individual level.

Local congregations who have been an integral part of a person's life oftentimes will keep their distance because of the same fears we have as individuals. All of this results in a great harm being done: isolation. What is worse is that isolation has often already started as self-induced because of the stigma that can still surround a dementia diagnosis. Our keeping our distance both individually and collectively just serves to reinforce the idea that they are better off being left alone.

Unfortunately, all these decisions at their root are motivated by fear, and fear-based decisions are not kingdom-revealing ones.

When we were admitted into the memory care unit as a class, expecting to carry good news into the residents, we discovered that the residents were actually there to share good news with us. In the confusion of dementia were still children of God of sacred worth who loved to laugh, sing, visit and worship. Most of all, they loved to love as they were being loved.

In that class we all learned that the main way we could say and do the wrong thing is by not being there to say or do anything. Moreover, we were reminded that when we are intentional about sharing Jesus with others, Jesus is there waiting to meet us in the ones with whom we are sharing.

As United Methodists, we have an op-

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

portunity to live into all of our General Rules of doing no harm, doing good and staying in love with God by engaging both individually and corporately in ministry with our members and neighbors living with dementia. Rather than leaving dementia to the experts, we are realizing that we are indeed the experts in living in community with one another.

We can do no harm by continuing to be in community with our members and neighbors living with dementia. We can do good by engaging with them to continue to use their spiritual gifts for the furthering of God's kingdom. And we can stay in love with God by being reminded that nothing, not even dementia, can rob us of God's image and therefore our sacred worth.

In the past two years, we launched a new ministry in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church called the South Carolina Cognitive Connection Ministry. Our mission is to empower congregations and individuals to become welcoming and inclusive centers of support for individuals with dementia and their caretakers. If you have not participated in one of our dementia care workshops, I encourage you to take the time to do so in the near future. Registration information for our Spartanburg, Surfside and Orangeburg workshops can be found in this edition of the *Advocate*.

When you attend a workshop, you will discover we all have some capacity to be involved in this growing and life-giving ministry. We all are experts, and we all have expertise to share. Come and see!

Pigford is chair of the South Carolina Cognitive Connection Ministry.

LETTERS: Readers sound off

From Page 4

Advocate, I read with interest the comments and thoughts regarding the November election results.

So, I want to share this message that was on the outside sign of a Baptist church in North Charleston: "The elephant and the donkey let you down? Turn to the Lamb!"

Enough said!

*Rev. Cooper Stonestreet, retired
Charleston*

A poem: Blessed Jesus, Thou Art Mine

Blessed Jesus, Thou art mine,
And I am but Thine own;
Nearer than my veins entwined,
Blessed Jesus, Thou art mine.
My breath, it is but Yours, divine,
My heart Thine humble throne;
Blessed Jesus, Thou art mine,
And I am but Thine own.

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

*Autumn Leigh Waite
Bluffton UMC, Bluffton*

College students encouraged to apply for Advocate's 2025 \$1,000 scholarship

Deadline is March 1

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

The scholarship is for South Carolina United Methodist students for the 2025-2026 academic year who are planning to attend or are attending one of the four United Methodist colleges in South Carolina: Claflin University, Columbia College, Spartanburg Methodist College or Wofford College.

Students ideally will have an interest in communications, journalism or business.

Requests for the scholarship are due March 1.

Required are an application with an essay, a college or high school transcript, and a letter from the senior pastor of the applicant's home church or a college chaplain confirming the applicant is a United Methodist and describing their participation.

Learn more and download the application at <https://advocatesc.org/scholarships>. For questions, email jbrodie@advocatesc.org.



UMCSC Recipe Swap

Sue's Cookies

*From the kitchen of: Bobbie Dove,
member of First United Methodist
Church, Winnsboro*

Ingredients:

2 sticks softened butter
1 cup granulated sugar
1 egg, separated (beat egg white before assembling)
2 cups plain flour
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 cup chopped pecans

Cream butter with sugar. Add beaten egg yolk, flour and vanilla. Batter is stiff. Pat on ungreased cookie sheet. Spread beaten egg white over batter. Press

Recipes Wanted

Do you have a favorite recipe? We'd love for you to share it with the *Advocate*! Each month, we hope to feature a new recipe. Email news@advocatesc.org, and don't forget to tell us your name, church name and city.

pecans into batter. Sprinkle sugar over this. Bake one hour at 275 degrees. Cut into squares while hot.

"I make several recipes of this cookie for all church events," Dove says. "They are always a big hit!"



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Steven L. Brown

Could it have happened like this?

Could it have happened like this once, long ago? He stretched his legs as he pushed away from the table. He had almost forgotten to put fresh hay in the stable. It was late, and he rubbed his eyes. He was tired of praying and tired of hoping. He sighed. He had so many questions—questions about how to please God, how does a person really change or how can guilt be removed? He asked the rabbi so many questions that he wore him out!

“Maybe if you become a student of the Torah, you will find what you seek,” the rabbi told him.

Over time the rabbi got excited about the prospect that this young man might become a new scribe or lawyer. He never failed to encourage the young man or help him with his studies. But he never bothered to ask any questions of his own to this teenager that pestered him.

The young man was glad of that because he was afraid. He was afraid he would have to share with the rabbi the guilt that drove him, the shame he sought to escape. He was only 18, but already he felt the choices and troubles of his short life weighing heavy on his conscience every day. The lies, the violence, the shame and the sadness he had brought his family caused a lump in his throat every time they gathered to celebrate Shabbat.

He had been the reason that his parents and younger sister had moved from Joppa to Bethlehem two years ago. His father had managed a successful shipping business there. Now in Bethlehem, he ran an inn. Times had been tough the past two years, a time of emotional and financial adjusting that had not always gone well. At least the recent census had brought a boon to the businesses in Bethlehem—especially to innkeepers. All day long he worked hard, trying to make things up to his family. And all night long he studied and prayed, trying to make things right with God.

He went out into the night, gathering the hay from the back of the stable. He went around and entered in from the front. As he passed the cows and donkey, he was startled to see a young woman and man lying down on the floor. By light of the lamp hanging near the manger they seemed to be sleeping. Quietly he moved to put the fresh hay for the animals.

It was then he saw the baby ... and drew back. There was a baby in the manger! Who was this baby? And what was he doing in a manger? How in the name of heaven does a baby come to be in a feeding trough for animals?

He looked at the baby, whose eyes were open. He seemed to be looking at him. He seemed so peaceful and innocent. The questions in the young man’s mind began to quiet. How he envied that young baby! If only he could be a baby again, starting fresh and new, unstained and unburdened like this little baby before him. If only he could have a second chance, a new beginning with his family—with God. But how could he?

As he turned to go, he looked one more time upon the baby, newly born. What was it about him that stirred his heart so? Why did he capture his attention? Oh, no. More questions!

He shook his head to try to clear his mind. He turned to look once more—“Nicodemus! Nicodemus!” his father yelled to him from the yard. “Come, come, there is more work to be done. There’s no money to be made from those in the barn. The paying customers are in the inn!”

Young Nicodemus left the stable and headed back into the night. Little did he know that he would meet that Christmas babe again ... one night ... in many years to come.

Inspired by Luke 2:4-7.

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

Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Mickey Fisher

The power of touch

The cover photo of the June 22, 2024, National Geographic magazine features Divinia James-Stewart and her three-month-old daughter, Harper. The photo shows very little of the mother and even less of the daughter. The camera is focused on the little girl’s tiny hand. The script reads, “The Power of Touch.”

The dictionary definition of touch is “to come into contact with.” Obviously an embrace is a touch. So is a push.

At times, a touch is just a touch. At other times, a touch is like “the balm of Gilead.” It can “make the wounded whole” and “heal the sin-sick soul.”

There are good touches and not so good touches. A touch can be a kick in the fanny, a slap in the face, a bop in the nose. It can be a fond farewell, a loving embrace, a kiss.

To put the touch on a friend or acquaintance might mean that you borrow money or items of value from him or her. An unusual encounter might be called “a weird touch.”

The power of touch can be much to be desired or much to be dreaded, depending on the history of the relationship or upon unusual circumstances. It can be healing and uplifting or damaging and degrading.

Whether a touch is positive or negative depends upon the motive of the person doing the touching. By far, most touches are benevolent, intended to communicate affirmation and acceptance of the person being addressed or referred to.

Yet some folks seem obsessed with negative attitudes toward others, even family members and friends. In many instances, unwelcomed attitudes and judgments are simply overlooked or discounted. They are accepted as unimportant or inconsequential, not worth consideration.

Though, in some circumstances, one negative expression can discount dozens of positive expressions.

What are we to make of this? It simply means that mom was right when she told us to “guard your tongue.”

Fisher is a retired elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church who lives in Spartanburg.



Photo by Jessica Brodie

A Service of Lessons and Carols

The chancel choir at Mount Hebron UMC, West Columbia, along with the junior choir and instrumentalists, offered the congregation A Service of Lessons and Carols Dec. 8 during the 11 a.m. service. The service was conducted by Tom Brunson, director of music at Mount Hebron for more than 40 years.

Legislative Advocacy Day returns to in-person event at Epworth Children’s Home

After a few years as a Zoom event, United Women in Faith’s annual Legislative Advocacy Day is returning to an in-person event.


Set for Tuesday, March 18, the day will be held at Epworth Children’s Home in Columbia.

The theme is “Faithful Advocacy; Faithful Service; Transforming Justice and Equity.”

Cost is \$35.

Registration is due by Feb. 28.

To register, visit <https://www.umcsc.org/women> and find the form in the December Mission Echo newsletter.






Save The Date

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<p>January 15, 2025 9:30 a.m.-12 p.m. Surfside Beach UMC 800 13th Ave. N. Surfside Beach, SC 29575 Register here:</p> 	<p>February 12, 2025 9:30 a.m.-12 p.m. Silver Hill Memorial UMC 778 John B. White Sr. Blvd. Spartanburg, SC 29306 Register here:</p> 	<p>March 19, 2025 9:30 a.m.-12 p.m. St. Paul’s UMC 1356 Amelia St. Orangeburg, SC 29115 Register here:</p> 
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EXPLORE METHODIST-RELATED TITLES FROM THE ADVOCATE PRESS

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Hand to serve as youth Revolution speaker this month

Dr. Stephanie Moore Hand will be the speaker for Revolution 2025, the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church youth spiritual event.

Set for Jan. 24-26, Revolution will be held at the Township Auditorium in Columbia. The theme is Belong and the guiding verse is Ephesians 2:13.

Hand is known as a dynamic force of transformation and empowerment and has a rich background that includes serving as a conference vitality strategist, as cross-cultural multiethnic consultant and in cross racial appointments for large and mid-sized churches within the Western North Carolina Conference.

Having journeyed through diverse roles, from a former Fortune 500 executive in the airport industry to nonprofit industry leader



Hand

and now a thought and transformative figure in the UMC, Hand offers captivating preaching and a speaking style that resonates deeply with youth and adults.

As a co-author of the acclaimed book "Doing Justice Together," she has earned recognition as a thought leader in Christian leadership; the book is #1 on Amazon's New Christian Leadership book list.

In 2021, she was honored as the recipient of the prestigious Harry Denman Award. The D.R.E.A.M Gospel Choir from Claflin University will serve as the band.

Cost is \$75 per person, which includes a free T-shirt for all who register before Dec. 31, 2024. Register at <http://scmyp.org/revolution-registration-2>.

For questions or more information, email revolution@scmyp.org.



Photo by Dan O'Mara

A youth worker prays with a young person at last year's Revolution. The event is a powerful time of spiritual growth.

Columbia College awarded grant to expand access to teacher education programs

COLUMBIA—Columbia College has received a \$100,000 two-year grant award from Power:Ed, the philanthropy of SC Student Loan Corporation, to support Columbia College's groundbreaking initiative, Pre-Service Access to Support and Success.

This innovative program seeks to tackle South Carolina's teacher shortage by increasing the accessibility and affordability of quality teacher education programs, with a focus on instructional assistants and aspiring educators from underrepresented backgrounds.

The grant will support Columbia College's mission to:

- Reduce degree completion costs: By eliminating financial barriers, the program will make teacher education more affordable, significantly reducing out-of-pocket expenses for future teachers;

- Enhance access for rural communities: The initiative focuses on recruiting from technical schools across the state, especially in 16 rural counties and one urban county. This effort ensures that individuals who have previously faced geographical or financial barriers can now pursue teacher certification; and

- Address racial disparities: Recognizing the challenges people of color face with high-stakes testing, the project will provide targeted support for Praxis Core, Praxis II, and PLT exams. The comprehensive preparation model includes synchronous and asynchronous courses, workshops, and one-on-one guidance.

"Teacher shortages and educational disparities are critical challenges in our state," said Tracy West, dean of the division of education at Columbia College. "This funding will help us build a more diverse and well-prepared teaching workforce, directly benefiting South Carolina's students."

Funding covers test preparation and registration fees for 225 participants, removing a significant financial hurdle for



The program seeks to tackle South Carolina's teacher shortage by increasing the accessibility and affordability of quality teacher education programs.

prospective educators (\$50,850 allocated for Praxis Core preparation and registration, \$42,900 for licensure exam preparation and registration and \$6,250 for need-based scholarships).

Columbia College has signed agreements with seven South Carolina technical schools to establish clear pathways for students transitioning from technical programs to teacher certification. These partnerships ensure that coursework transfers seamlessly, streamlining the path to becoming a certified teacher.

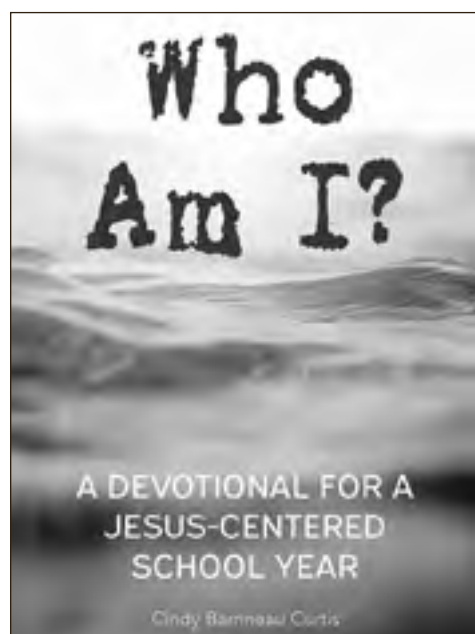
"Power:Ed and S.C. Student Loan are excited to support this pilot program from Columbia College focused on

helping build the teacher candidate pipeline from across S.C.'s rural communities," said Power:Ed Executive Director Claire Gibbons. "This program fulfills a critical gap and strengthens rural economies. We are hopeful it will be transformative for many students and families."

This initiative not only addresses the immediate teacher shortage but also promotes social mobility by opening doors to individuals who previously saw teaching as an unattainable goal.

By increasing the diversity of South Carolina's teaching workforce, Columbia College aims to create a more inclusive and representative educational environment.

Curtis's 'Who Am I' youth ministry micro-course to offered by BeADisciple in February



One South Carolina United Methodist youth minister has created an online micro-course based on her youth devotional book published by the Advocate's book publishing arm, the Advocate Press.

Cindy Curtis, director of youth ministries at St. Andrews Parish United Methodist Church, Charleston, authored "Who Am I? A Devotional for a Jesus-Centered School Year," released in 2021 from the Advocate Press.

Now, she has created a youth ministry course based on the book, which will be taught in a BeADisciple online course in February.

All are welcome to sign up for the course.

The "Who Am I" devotional is targeted to sixth to 12th graders. In the Gospel of John, Jesus clearly tells us who he is—the Great I Am—and helps us to discover who we are in him. But the chaos and rush of the world

sometimes drown out that truth. In this student devotional, which follows the school year from August through May, students from sixth to 12th grade can dive into Jesus's seven "I Am" statements week by week, helping them navigate our identity in Christ as we navigate the academic season. From "I am the true vine" to "I am the way, the truth, and the life," uncover the freedom all have in the risen savior even as we struggle to figure out what God has planned for our life.

Curtis is a master teacher, published author, and motivational speaker whose career spans more than 30 years in education, ministry, writing, and speaking.

For information on the course, visit <https://beadisciple.com/online-christian-courses/youth-ministry/mc136-who-am-i-microcourse>.

For more information on the book, or to purchase it, visit <https://advocatesc.org/store/books/who-am-i-a-devotional-for-a-jesus->

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Columbia College joins Global Partners in Peace initiative

COLUMBIA—Columbia College has joined the inaugural Partners in Peace cohort, an initiative launched by the National Collegiate Honors Council in partnership with the Nobel Peace Center. This program recognizes NCHC member institutions for their efforts in creating, implementing and assessing honors-level curricular and co-curricular projects that highlight the work of Alfred Nobel and Nobel Peace Prize laureates.

Since 1901, the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to individuals and organizations that advance peace, as outlined in Alfred Nobel's will. These efforts include fostering fraternity among nations, reducing standing armies and promoting peace congresses. The Partners in Peace initiative encourages college students to explore the lives and achievements of peace laureates, fostering understanding of the leadership strategies needed to build peaceful communities. Beyond studying these figures, students are challenged to "think globally, act locally" by applying insights from laureates to positively impact their campuses and

communities.

"We are beyond proud that our nationally acclaimed Honors Program—particularly a student-led project addressing health disparities in the 29203 zip code—has received this prestigious recognition," said Dr. John H. Dozier, president of Columbia College. "Our institution has long recognized the profound impact and essential value of the work our students contribute to the local community. Being acknowledged by esteemed organizations such as the Nobel Peace Center and the National Collegiate Honors Council, and being one of only 16 colleges in the nation to be recognized with this honor, underscores the significance of their efforts, and we consider this honor a remarkable milestone."

Dr. Marlee Marsh, director of the Dr. John Zubizarreta Honors Program and professor of biology at Columbia College, received symbolic recognition of the institution's commitment to establish a curricular or co-curricular project during the 59th Annual NCHC Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, Nov. 1.



Columbia College has joined the inaugural Partners in Peace cohort, an initiative launched by the National Collegiate Honors Council in partnership with the Nobel Peace Center.



Need a Children's Sermon?

by the Rev. Meghan Lindsey Sweeney Cook

Baptism of our Lord Sunday

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

Date: Baptism of our Lord Sunday (Jan. 12)

Scripture: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

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

Supplies: Water in a pitcher and a bowl and the baptismal font, a towel and a pre-Sunday conversation with your pastor so they know you're using the baptismal font. They might even want to help with this children's sermon.

Children's sermon:

Welcome the children. If you are gathered around the baptismal font, ask the children if they know what this is. Say: This is the baptismal font. Hmm, font—that sounds like fountain. What do we see in fountains? (Water!) Yes, water. This is where our church pours water into the bowl and then uses the water to baptize folks.

(Pour water into the font or into the bowl you have beside the font.)

In The United Methodist Church, we baptize infants all the way to grownups. We often sprinkle, but we can dunk or dip. United Methodists only baptize once, because baptism is a holy symbol of joining God's family. Once you have been baptized, you are always marked by God's love and grace. You are part of God's great big family. No one can erase or wash off baptism, no matter what. Baptism is super special.

Did you know the other thing we do in a baptism? The congregation (point to the congregation) that's the big people out there, they promise to help the person who is being baptized grow in their faith. We are not alone in our faith journey; we are part of God's family, which includes (your church's name)!

Another way we use the baptismal font is to remember our baptism. This is when you are invited to dip your own finger into the water and make a cross on your head (demonstrate). This is not a re-baptism, because we don't do that, but it is a symbolic reminder that we are part of God's family.



Photo by Steven Kyle Adair, United Methodist Communications

A baptismal font is a container used to hold water during Christian baptisms. This one is from West End United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

Would you like to try?

(Let the kids touch the water. You might have a towel in case it's splashy, and that's OK.) Good job.

Will you dry off and then let's pray?

Prayer: Dear God (Dear God), we love you (echo). Help us (echo) to always remember (echo) that we are part of your family (echo). Amen (echo).

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 on Amazon or at <https://advocatesc.org/books>.



Memorial UMC Children's Ministry organizes donations of 200 lunch boxes and water bottles to be taken to Old Fort UMC.

Memorial kids help North Carolina church help others impacted by hurricane

GREER—Memorial United Methodist Church built a partnership with Old Fort UMC, in Old Fort, North Carolina, to aid in their cleaning and rebuilding efforts after Hurricane Helene devastated their sanctuary and church buildings on its path through Western North Carolina.

Old Fort UMC knew their road ahead would take time, but they also saw the greater needs for help all around them. With the help of Memorial's congregation, they established a goal to collect 200 lunch boxes and reusable water bottles for children in the local elementary schools.

The Children's Ministry of Memorial UMC took on this task as their seasonal mission project and asked for support from their church family to help reach this goal. After several weeks of collection, they met their goal and the donations were delivered to Old Fort UMC to be taken to the schools.

The church said that even in times of tragedy and uncertainty, it's a blessing to see how churches continue to unify and share the love and hope of Christ with others.



The lunchboxes will help North Carolina kids.

Applications now open for new Connecting Children ministry

Local churches in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church now can apply to be part of the first cohort of leaders to participate in the new “Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer” ministry.

The new intergenerational ministry—designed to help churches become more fruitful in ministry with children—is made possible by a \$1.1 million grant from the Lilly Endowment. The conference is collaborating with Messy Church USA, Narrative 4 and the West Virginia Conference UMC via their Portico online learning system.

Churches that wish to apply to be part of the first leadership cohort can do so online at <https://bit.ly/ConnectChildren> or by scanning the QR code with this story.

Deadline to apply is 5 p.m. Jan. 23.

Two online informational sessions are scheduled for Jan. 21 via Zoom—at 11:30 a.m. and at 7 p.m. Find the Zoom links to join these sessions at <https://umcsc.org/children>.

The Connecting Children Ministry involves multiple layers of involvement:

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

- Messy Church: Messy Church is a way of being church that allows all ages to join

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

- Narrative 4 Story Exchange: Narrative 4 offers creative tools to teach compassion and develop strong student leaders in the classroom and community. It will train church leaders in story exchange, a practice that encourages participants to deepen their engagement with narratives, exercise curiosity, extend empathy and internalize wisdom.

This process encourages a deeper connection among participants.

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

To watch a promotional video about the ministry, go to <https://umcsc.org/children>.



A young person demolishes a rotted back room at last year's Salkehatchie.

Salkehatchie gathering to be held during youth Revolution weekend

Calling all Salkehatchie youth participants, as well as youth interested in the service mission: There will be a gathering during Revolution.

Held Saturday, Jan. 25, from 1-5 p.m. at Mount Hebron United Methodist Church, West Columbia, the gathering will feature lunch as well as a time for worship, fellowship and sharing of Salkehatchie experiences.

A nominal cost per person will cover the cost of lunch.

“I look forward to seeing youth at the Salkehatchie gathering so we can share about this life-changing mission opportunity,” said Ward Smith, Salkehatchie board chair.

To register for the Salkehatchie Revolution gathering, go to <https://tinyurl.com/salkehatchie-revolution>.

Jotaka Eaddy delivers keynote at Claflin’s fall 2024 commencement

ORANGEBURG—Jotaka Eaddy, an award-winning strategist, advocate, host and connector who Forbes Magazine described as the “Olivia Pope of Silicon Valley,” delivered the keynote message at Claflin University’s Fall 2024 Commencement Convocation Dec. 13.

Claflin conferred bachelor’s and master’s degrees to nearly 150 graduating scholars. Claflin also honored alumni from the “Silver Class” of 1999 during this year’s commencement.

With more than 20 years of experience in policy, advocacy and movement building, Eaddy is a highly sought-after speaker and strategist whose accomplishments include her trailblazing election as the University of South Carolina’s first Black woman student body president and her groundbreaking work that led to the abolition of the juvenile death penalty in America through the 2005 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roper v. Simmons*. She served as senior advisor to the NAACP, where she led initiatives to expand and defend voting rights through state legislative wins and executive orders, all before her bold and successful transition to the C-suite of Silicon Valley and the private sector.

As the founder and CEO of Full Circle Strategies LLC, Eaddy leads a team of individuals committed to advancing transformative change and global impact for clients seeking to advance policy, ideas, and change. Her clients and work have included advising Oprah Winfrey; OWN Network’s award-winning OWN Your Vote Campaign; advising and managing external strategies to engage diverse communities for global



Eaddy

telecom firms; supporting the expansion of tech policy and platform changes aimed at increasing inclusive tech for some of the world’s largest tech companies and venture firms, advising the launch of Goldman Sachs’ One Million Black Women Initiative which created a historic \$1 billion investment in Black women and leading the historic grassroots marketing campaign for the launch of “The Color Purple Musical Film,” which opened with the second highest Christmas Day release in history, among other projects.

In 2020, Eaddy founded the movement #WinWithBlackWomen, an intergenerational, intersectional group of Black women leaders representing business, sports, movement, politics, entertainment and beyond who come together within their personal capacities to stand united in support of Black women. The network, which has garnered more than 1 billion organic impressions on social media, is credited with making a significant impact on pivotal moments and issues.

She is a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.

SMC to join Appalachian Athletic Conference for 2025-26 season

Continuing the transition to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, Spartanburg Methodist College will become a full member of the Appalachian Athletic Conference beginning with the 2025-26 season.

“We are excited to join the Appalachian Athletic Conference as we begin our journey into NAIA. It will bring an abundance of opportunities for our college, our student-athletes, and our fans,” said Megan Aiello, SMC’s athletic director. “This move represents a transition to a conference that will help raise the profile of SMC and the Upstate.”

The AAC Council of Presidents voted unanimously to approve SMC’s membership during its annual meeting in June.

“The AAC is thrilled with the addition of Spartanburg Methodist College and knows they will bring a level of commitment to athletics and student experiences that matches the current membership of the AAC,” said Commissioner Bill Popp. “They certainly are a great fit for the AAC.”

SMC is transitioning to the NAIA for four-year athletics starting this fall and will play in the Continental Athletic Conference, a collection of the independent schools in the NAIA, for the 2024-25 season.

“As we move to four-year athletics, we are honored to join the AAC and start competing against the incredible teams

and colleges in the conference,” said SMC President Scott Cochran.

Prior to moving to the NAIA this fall, SMC was a Division I member of Region 10 of the National Junior College Athletic Association. The college won numerous regional, divisions, and national titles and was a fixture at many of the NJCAA Division I national tournaments.

Spartanburg Methodist College sponsors 14 varsity sports with 13 competing in the AAC. The Pioneers will compete in the following AAC championship sports: baseball, men’s basketball, women’s basketball, men’s cross country, women’s cross country, men’s golf, women’s golf, men’s soccer, women’s soccer, softball, men’s indoor track and field, women’s indoor track and field, men’s outdoor track and field, women’s outdoor track and field and women’s volleyball. SMC also competes in beach volleyball as the Pioneers will compete in the Sun Conference.

The AAC evolved from the Volunteer State Athletic Conference, an NAIA conference organized in the 1940s and dissolved in the early 1980s when institutions in the eastern part of the state seceded to form the Tennessee Virginia Athletic Conference. The name changed to the Appalachian Athletic Conference in 2001 with the addition of Bluefield College,

Montreat College, Alice Lloyd College, and Union College (now Union Commonwealth University). Today, the AAC is the largest conference in the NAIA with 16 full members in six southeastern states—Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. The conference had 14 affiliate members for the 2023-24 season—Alabama, Florida and West Virginia.

In 2024-25, the full members will be Bluefield University, Brenau University, Bryan College, Columbia College, Columbia International University, Johnson University, Kentucky Christian University, Milligan University, Montreat College, University of Pikeville, Point University, Reinhardt University, SCAD Atlanta, St. Andrews University, Tennessee Wesleyan University, Truett McConnell University and Union Commonwealth University. The affiliate members will be Brewton-Parker College, Carolina University, Georgetown College, Keiser University, Life University, Point University, SCAD Savannah, Southeastern University, St. Thomas University, Talladega University, University of the Cumberlands, Warner University, Webber International University and West Virginia Institute of Technology.

When Spartanburg Methodist College joins for the 2025-26 campaign, the AAC will grow to 17 full members.



A churchwide Thanksgiving meal was a highlight.



The Hope Closet offers extra assistance.



Macaroni and cheese fed 1,000 people.

Hopewell celebrates 225 years with a splash

SIMPSONVILLE—Nov. 17 was a fantastic day of celebration for Hopewell United Methodist Church.

That day, Hopewell celebrated its 225th anniversary with a service of worship, a giving of their “first fruits,” a prayer walk around the footprint of their planned new sanctuary, a churchwide Thanksgiving meal—and an afternoon of macaroni mayhem, feeding more than 1,000 people macaroni and cheese.

Dubbed “First Fruits Sunday,” Hopewell UMC celebrated the conclusion of their capital campaign, which ended with great success a few weeks earlier. For the campaign, the church gathered pledge commitments from their families to support the forthcoming new construction of a new and larger sanctuary. The new sanctuary will be adjacent to the current sanctuary/multipurpose room, which has been in

use since 1995.

“Hopewell’s recent growth has been great, and it can only be attributed to the spirit of Christ that is in the building and the people,” said church member Steven Jackson. “Many comment how friendly the congregation is and are surprised at how this small body can accomplish so much in the name of Jesus.”

Whether Hopewell’s efforts involve supporting local foster families with their foster closet, showing up to homes in need of repair to help families stay together, or feeding more than 1,000 people macaroni and cheese for Thanksgiving through a local food bank, Hopewell strives to make a difference.

The church’s faithful turn out consistently to support the many projects the church offers.



Members take a prayer walk around the footprint of their planned new sanctuary.

Commission on the General Conference forges toward 2028

NASHVILLE—The first meeting of the new Commission on the General Conference took place Nov. 19-21 in Charlotte, North Carolina, where they began the planning process for the 2028 quadrennial event.

Helmed by the Rev. Andy Call, the chair of the Commission on General Conference, and the Rev. Dr. Aleze Fulbright, secretary of the General Conference, and assisted by new Business Manager Sarah Dass, the gathering of members provided time for team building, an overview of the group’s responsibilities, a review of finances, learnings from the 2020/2024 event’s host committee, and planning and strategizing for future sessions.

“Except for a handful of members that filled unexpired roles, we are a new commission that is beautifully diverse and well represents United Methodists worldwide. We have new leadership and members who are passionate about doing things differently to meet the needs of The United Methodist Church in this moment and the years to come,” Call said. “As we assume our roles, we acknowledge the past and fully embrace the opportunities before us to serve the church well.”

“In our initial gathering, it was important that we ensured that all Commission members understand and are committed to our responsibilities as directed by the *Book of Discipline*. This, and the affirming of an updated internal covenant, was accomplished during the orientation,” Fulbright said.

Commission members rallied around having systems in place for transparency,



The new Commission on the General Conference members gather Nov. 19-21 in Charlotte, North Carolina.

internal controls, financial accountability, fiscal responsibility and empowerment of all people. Call emphasized that “the new commission is committed to providing timely and accurate communication, transparency in decision making, evaluation and honing of processes, and ensuring justice and care for all.”

“It was exciting to see the unity even amidst courageous conversations as we celebrate the initial decisions and Commission member support,” Fulbright said. “As we seek to be proactive in strategy and putting in

place sustainable structures, we were successful in taking the faithful steps forward.”

Four committees were formed to facilitate the work of the commission with each establishing initial priorities and objectives and scheduling meetings for the new year: Program Committee, Rules Committee, Connectional Relations Committee and Futuring Committee.

A sampling of desired outcomes relayed by the committees included attention to communications, cultural sensitivities and concerns, training and education, travel

processes, engaging youth, technology needs, environmental accountability, financial stewardship, accessibility, location considerations, continued efforts to decolonize the church’s structure and ensuring efficiencies.

Overall, the commission is seeking to provide a place for holy conferencing that allows the ministry of the UMC to move forward, while also caring for the body, mind and soul of attendees. They desire to create a culture of celebration centering around worship, missional effectiveness and acknowledgement of the many differences that form the UMC as one body while ensuring that people are seen and heard.

“Seeing the energy and passion of the committees as they brainstormed about initiatives and key objectives was inspiring,” Dass said. “They’re already diving into the work set before them.”

Early decisions also included retaining a parliamentarian, renewing technology investments and bringing on administrative contract/part-time support team members.

As the calendar year is nearing its end, as a part of the ratification process, the leadership team is working to release a draft on the language of the proposed constitutional amendments. This document, available in the official languages of The UMC, was to be circulated by Dec. 15 and is intended to be used for educational purposes as annual conferences prepare for voting in 2025.

The next full meeting of the Commission on the General Conference will be held online in May.

Photo by Brenda Smotherman

JEREMIAH TEAMS: Continued

From Page 1

What are Jeremiah Teams?

Jeremiah Teams is Fairley’s plan to develop recommendations in four areas: missional priorities, strategy for the black church and ethnic ministries, district alignment and conference staff alignment.

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

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

The Missional Priorities Jeremiah Team

This team will evaluate the effectiveness of all current ministries and missions to help determine what things are essential for us to live into Our 4 Priorities, including identifying a stop-do list to free us up to reach new people in new places and in new ways.

- Rev. Millie Nelson Smith (leader)
- Rev. Matt Alexander (Orangeburg District)
- Rev. Tiffany Knowlin-Boykin (Columbia District)
- Rev. Megan Gray (Spartanburg District)
- Steve Stone (Greenwood District)
- David Bryant (Anderson District)
- David Salter (Greenwood District)
- Sylvia Harris-Greene (Columbia District)

The Black Church & Ethnic Ministries Strategy Jeremiah Team

This team will create and resource an effective conference strategy for strengthening the Black church and other ethnic ministries, focusing on new things God is calling for in these areas.

- Rev. James Friday (leader)
- Rev. Amiri Hooker (Florence District)
- Rev. Pattie Gordon (Charleston District)
- Rev. George Ashford (Columbia District)
- Rev. Claire Van Den Berg (Columbia District)
- Rev. Tae Park (Marion District)
- Jim Salley (Orangeburg District)
- Stephen Gilchrist (Hartsville District)
- Marlene Spencer (Rock Hill District)

The District Alignment Jeremiah Team

This team will review district lines and recommend a reduction in the number of districts to create a more nimble, cost-effective structure that will allow district superintendents to spend more time as missional strategists with the people in their communities.

- Rev. Cathy Mitchell (leader)
- Rev. Scarlett Hester (Walterboro District)
- Rev. Will Malambri (Marion District)
- Rev. Karen Jones (Greenville District)
- Dan Canada (Columbia District)
- Sandy Shaffer (Greenwood District)
- Bob James (Rock Hill District)
- Chandra Dillard (Greenville District)

The Conference Staff Alignment Jeremiah Team

This team will examine the best ways to align conference staff with our missional priorities and resources, to compensate staff properly for their work and leadership, and to create space for staff to be creative and imaginative in their work.

- Bishop Leonard Fairley (leader)
- Rev. Gracie Singletary (Florence District)
- Rev. Brian Gilmer (Greenville District)
- Rev. Bernie Mazyck (Charleston District)
- Rev. Judy Hames Turner (Orangeburg District)
- Lisa Fusco (Orangeburg District)
- Michael Jennings (Columbia District)
- Betty Void (Columbia District)
- Pamela Goodwine-Glover (Walterboro District)

Prayer needed

Fairley invites South Carolina United Methodists to join him in praying for these leaders as they prepare to begin their work in January.

Fairley offered this prayer:

“Gracious God, we acknowledge with joyful and confident hearts your promise to give us a future with hope. We thank you for always calling forth humble, hungry and willing servant leadership to help us journey toward your preferred future.

“We especially pray now for these Jeremiah Teams. Grant them a double portion of your spirit. We pray that you would grant them holy sight and holy imagination to see the possibilities and live the promises.

“Grant them, we pray, non-anxious, collaborative spirits, fill them with courage to think outside the box. We pray that will do their work not from the old adage of, ‘That’s the way we have always done it,’ but with a holy curiosity and attitude of what may be calling us to do that we have done before.

“These things we ask in the name Jesus Christ, who invites us to do a new thing.

“Amen.”



The students stand with the check from the Spartanburg County Foundation.

Wofford students secure Spartanburg County Foundation grant for Housing360

Early in their first semester at Wofford College, four students—Sydney Heslop, Maura Jackson, Carlee Mason and Grant Owen—were given an assignment by Dr. Alysa Handelsman to get to know Spartanburg and some of its leaders, and the Spartanburg County Foundation seemed like a good place to start.

When they walked in, Troy Hanna, the president and CEO of the Spartanburg County Foundation, just happened to be walking out of a meeting, and the students talked with him for 20 minutes. The time with Hanna made an impression on the Wofford students, but it also made an impression on Hanna, who, along with others from the SCF, surprised the student a few weeks later with a “Just Because” ambush philanthropy grant.

The students were given the grant with the expectation that they identify and donate the money to a local nonprofit.

Because of a relationship Handelsman has with an after-school program, Determined Minds, that USC Upstate and Wofford lead in collaboration with Spartanburg Housing, the students decided to give the grant to Housing360, Spartanburg Housing’s nonprofit affiliate organization. The funds will purchase healthy snacks and other supplies for the Determined Minds afterschool program.

The grant also motivated the class to hold a holiday party for the Determined Minds students and their families that included crafts, activities, pizza and a visit from Santa. Each student also left with a bag of gifts and surprises based on wish-lists they created.

Do you have a heart for MISSION?

Consider one of these mission-oriented titles from the Advocate Press (or give one to a friend):



AdvocateSC.org/Books



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

MORE THAN A MEAL: ‘You pay your electric bill or put food on the table’

From Page 1

Not just a food bank

Port Royal’s food ministry is held Tuesdays and Fridays. Cars line up in the parking lot before 8 a.m. as the volunteers work inside the church, unloading food from Second Helpings trucks, marking barcodes and packing boxes for the people. Some are the sorters, going through the items to make sure everything is high quality before it is distributed. Others work in the back room, gathering the breads and desserts.

“It’s a big operation,” Bridgers said, one that’s taken years to work out, but it’s a tight process today, streamlined for efficiency.

Boxes are taken out, where another crew of volunteers waits, loading the boxes directly into the cars of the recipients.

Bridgers said her job is in the parking lot, serving as pastor, check-in operator and official “listener.” After all, she said, it’s not just a food ministry but an outreach

ministry, and she does her best to reach out to those in need.

“Just yesterday I had one of the cars that pulled in, and the gentleman knows me. He said, ‘Pastor, will you pray for me?’ Absolutely! We talked, he told me his need, and I’m there in that parking lot ministering to people. This is not just a food bank.”

‘Here to serve’

Over the years, word spread, and today Bridgers calls their outreach “unbelievable.” People come not only from the Beaufort area but far beyond, some driving more than an hour away on Tuesdays and Fridays to get the food they need.

Young, who has served as a volunteer for several years, said she was a food ministry recipient when she was a child, and she feels strongly about the call to help others.

“For some, you pay your electric bill or you put food on the table,” Young said. “We’re supposed to be like Jesus, and he would serve, and so we’re here to serve.”

“We know we are doing something to help other people,” Bridgers said. “I tell people always that we are Jesus’s hands and feet. He tells us to feed his sheep, feed his lambs and tend his lambs.”

And that’s what they do.

For even though they’re a very small church, they do their best to live out their mission statement: “We’re small enough to know you and large enough to love you.”



Photos courtesy of Vicki Young

An efficient team of volunteers packs food donated by Second Helpings into boxes, which are then placed directly into the cars of people who come to Port Royal UMC.



Many people drive for more than an hour to get food from Port Royal UMC, and cars start lining up in the parking lot at the church early in the morning.

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'A few of our favorite things'

Augusta Road UMC kicks off holidays with festival of trees, play, cantata, more

PELZER—Augusta Road United Methodist Church kicked off the holiday season with its fifth annual Festival of Trees on Dec. 14.

The exhibit, which was open to the public, featured 27 Christmas trees, each lovingly and beautifully decorated and placed throughout the church narthex, sanctuary, and fellowship hall. Light refreshments were provided.

Harpist Deb Rankin performed traditional Christmas music for the festival.

Among the stylish Christmas trees were an American patriotic tree, a tree with the names of each church member, a special tree featured by the trustees offering youngsters a number of small toys and gadgets, a tree

with more than 250 stamped and hand painted bags containing replicas of John Wesley's famous communion coin, several trees sponsored by various Sunday school classes, trees placed by local businesses, a tree placed by the South Greenville Fire Department, trees that remembered and celebrated the lives of those saints who have passed on before us, trees placed by people who simply love Christmas, and many more.

A plethora of church volunteers, under the direction of Debbie Welborn, helped decorate and place the trees. Welborn's other ministry, Holy Grounds, is an in-house biweekly coffee and breakfast ministry open

to the public that feeds more than 50 community members weekly.

In addition to the Festival of Trees showcase, Christmas festivities at Augusta Road UMC featured a children's Christmas play titled "The Accidental Advent Journey," written by their very own Lindsey Esposito, children and youth coordinator.

Augusta Road also hosted a meaningful Hanging of the Greens Service, and the church's Cantata Service—hosted and conducted by Minister of Music Tom Chambers—was a season sellout. Chambers

will be retiring after more than 40 years of service with Augusta Road UMC.

"As we end this holiday season, we look back upon Advent 2024 in the spirit of Christ and recall that Jesus is the real reason for the season and that our decorations are a tangible reminder of the tree that became the cross of calvary on which Christ offered his life for us," said Augusta Road's pastor, Dr. Shawn Galloway Armstrong.

"We celebrate you, Augusta Road UMC, for your powerful and effective ministry in the Greenville District."



Pictured are a sampling of some of the trees at Augusta Road UMC.

Photos courtesy of Dr. Shawn Armstrong



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Memorial members assemble Thanksgiving meal boxes.

Thanksgiving meal boxes: Continuing the tradition

GREER—More than 30 years ago, the Foundations Sunday school class at Memorial United Methodist Church began a mission of assembling and distributing Thanksgiving meal boxes to families in need within their community.

They started this with the hope of sharing Christ's love with their neighbors and teaching their children to compassionately live out their faith through serving others.

Beginning months in advance, they work diligently to fundraise the cost of each box, collect food items from local grocery stores, organize the packing process and then personally deliver the boxes to homes.

They average anywhere between 60-70 boxes each year, and one year they prepared more than 100 boxes. The boxes cost \$65 each to fully stock with traditional Thanksgiving meal items, but the contents vary year to year depending on what partnering grocery stores have available.

The local elementary schools in Greer help them identify the families in need.

This tradition has grown tremendously over the years, fostering a sense of community spirit and interconnectedness within the Memorial church family and greater community. And now it brings together the support and helping hands of all ages.

The children of the Foundations class members began helping with this tradition when they were very young, and now they have formed their own adult class called the Stepping Stones. They continue to partner with the Foundations class each year and have begun including their own children to help pack and deliver boxes on this special Sunday each year, creating an outreach opportunity for generations to come.

Through the generosity of their congregation and faithful commitment of this class, 66 boxes were packaged and delivered the Sunday before Thanksgiving this year.



From left are the Rev. Wayne Horne (chair), Dr. Roger Gramling (president emeritus), the Rev. Toni White (retiring board member) and the Rev. Bob Vincent (president). White, along with the Rev. Eugene Curry (not pictured), are stepping off the foundation's board.

Board changes at the South Carolina United Methodist Foundation

The South Carolina United Methodist Foundation is saying goodbye to two board members and welcoming two others on their team.

The Rev. John Holler and Art Justice are the two newest foundation board members.

Stepping off the board are the Revs. Toni White and Eugene Curry.

For the past 34 years, the foundation has benefited greatly from the wisdom and leadership of White and Curry. Along with faithfully serving the local church in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, White and Curry served faithfully as at-large board members of the foundation. A sample of their responsibilities included the seminary scholarship selection process and allocating the foundation's annual remaining net income to their institutional members: Claflin University, Columbia College, Epworth Children's

Home, The Manor of the Pee Dee, Spartanburg Methodist College, Wesley Commons, Wofford College, and before closing, The Methodist Oaks. Most of these institutional members use such foundation funding to financially help students and residents.

Holler will serve representing the interest of Epworth Children's Home. He was previously the president and chief executive officer of Epworth and has always been an advocate for children and their families. Justice will serve representing the interest of The Manor of the Pee Dee.

Justice is the chairperson of the board at The Manor of the Pee Dee and is an attorney with the Turner-Padget Law Group in Florence.

"We know that their gifts and graces will serve well the foundation and the missions and ministries we support," said foundation president the Rev. Bob Vincent.

'A letter for Tracey'

Pastor reflects after unexpected loss of 4Real 2nd Chances founder

By the Rev. Darlene L. Kelley

Editor's note: Tracey Wise, a member of O'Neal Street United Methodist Church, Newberry, passed away recently, and her unexpected loss prompted her former pastor to pen this tribute.

Dear Tracey, I'm sorry I didn't write your story while you were still living. We talked about it; I even took some notes. But then the weeks turned to months, and you were gone so suddenly and way too soon.

I thought we had more time. Now it's too late for you to see your picture in the paper; it's too late to show the neighborhood another deep breathing, grace-filled example of God's healing and transforming love.

Everybody at O'Neal Street United Methodist Church was so proud of you. You had so many good friends there, so many people who knew you and loved you and counted on you. How nice to carry copies of the paper around in the van, giving them out and having to ask for more copies because so many people wanted their own.

Your councilwoman and friend, Jackie Holmes, beaming with satisfaction, would have carried a copy of that paper to the City Council and shown it to the mayor. You'd hear Pastor Ed say nice things about you from the pulpit, a copy of the paper with your story prominently displayed in the narthex, everybody in the neighborhood talking and passing that newspaper around. Donations may have landed in the mailbox, inspired by your story; a few generous folks may have opened their hearts and their checkbooks when they read about you.

I wanted to tell folks how far you'd come. I wanted your story to be a witness, a testimony to what God can do when a woman decides to walk in the Spirit. I wanted to let them know the shame and the secrets you were ready to share:

Tracey Wise knows what it feels like to be homeless.

She knows what it's like to walk the streets looking for a safe place to rest, a clean glass of water, something to eat.

Tracey knows what it's like to lay awake in the back of an abandoned building, terrified and alone, praying hard and playing over and over the repeating nightmare of bad decisions and wrong people she walked with to get there.

Tracey knows long days when it was too hot and longer nights when it was too cold, and on those long days and nights, Tracey turned to God.

"If I didn't believe in God, I would have never gotten through." I can still hear your voice, Tracey. I wanted to tell folks all the amazing things you told me about the kind of faith it takes to turn your life around, about how our God is a God of reconciliation and new life, and that with our God all things are possible, even climbing up from homelessness and addiction to a life full of optimism and service.

I wanted to tell folks how impressive you were, working with your friend, Mary Beth, giving out colorful leis and "Jesus Loves Me" stickers, along with encouragement and hugs at the local elementary school on Career Day. I wanted to tell folks how you drove around looking for the least among us, feeding the hungry and reaching out to the lost, blind and forsaken, side by side with Mary Beth, missionaries with a good, hot meal, women working hard to do all they could to rescue and love. I wanted to tell folks your story, how you asked God for a second chance and vowed to help others if you ever got that second chance.

"That's why I wanted to start helping people after I got back on my feet," you said.



The Rev. Ed Stallworth, pastor of O'Neal Street UMC, stands with Tracey Wise, who received the Layperson of the Year Award from Newberry Rotary. Wise died unexpectedly this fall.

"I know what it's like to lose your way and lose a lot of things in the process."

I wanted to tell folks how faithfully you kept that vow, forming bonds and ladling out inexhaustible encouragement. In the world of addiction, the victories don't come around often enough, so it's important to celebrate salvation when you can. I wanted to tell folks what it was like to go to the local Huddle House and celebrate with Tracey Wise. There will be happy voices calling out and hugs before you get seated at a table. Tracey knows one of the cooks, who leaves her station at the grill to wrap her arms around Tracey's neck with the deep affection earned through shared struggle.

"Sally is doing great," Tracey explains to those gathering. "She's one of the folks we've helped at 4Real 2nd Chances. Sally needed just a bit of help getting a job, and now she's been working here for eight months and she loves it. She loves cooking, and she's doing great."

Tracey was a cheerleader for others, a champion for recovery, smiles of hope for the lost and a personal path reflecting the light of Christ for those seeking a way back to family and community and truth. She was a primary source, a firsthand account and the real deal for those who are willing to see that falling to your knees is usually the first step in rising up. Tracey recovered so much and so many of the people she lost, she was now working full time to help others recover.

Modeling Jesus and his lost sheep, Tracey kept the lights on for folks lost in their own wilderness. She called out to them from the edge of the dark forest of risky behavior and demon gin, meth, cocaine, deadly fentanyl, depression and anxiety, illness and trauma and sleeping outside in a ditch. Whatever your stumbling block or drug of choice, Tracey called out and told you to climb in the warm van of compassion to a church that celebrated the lost and the least and knew what the love of neighbor Jesus preaches really looks like when the Word becomes flesh and walks in hungry and lame.

Tracey confessed and apologized and took all the steps that walked the walk to regain trust and reignite mission. Then she gave God the glory and prayed so hard for love to win that her heart burst.

So, I am sorry, Tracey. Sorry I waited until your heart stopped to herald the strength of its love and faith and generosity of spirit.

But I know you have forgiven me because that's the kind of sweet soul you carry to eternity.

With love, Pastor Kelley
Inspired by Luke 15:1-7

Three ERT trainings scheduled for January in South Carolina

Those who wish to be trained—or renew their training—to serve on disaster response teams have three opportunities in January.

On Jan. 18, Central United Methodist Church, Florence, will host a South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission Early Response Team basic and renewal class (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.). On Jan. 25, Clemson UMC, Clemson, will host a South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission Early Response Team basic and renewal class. The class will be held 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. for basic (9 a.m. to noon for renewals). And on Jan. 31, Belin Memorial UMC, Murrells Inlet, will host a basic class from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

To register for either class, visit <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration>.

Cannon's Camp Ground shares its warmth with community

SPARTANBURG—Since Fall 2010, Cannon's Camp Ground United Methodist Church has been hosting a food pantry for the community on the second and fourth Saturdays of every month.

Food is picked up and unloaded during the week before. Volunteers from Crossroads Baptist Church join in to provide this ministry to those who need some extra support. Up to 55 different volunteers participate in this ministry throughout the year.

In late November and early December, the Hannah Circle of the United Women of Faith add "Winter Warmth" to the outreach ministry, providing as many as 150 coats to any family that applies to receive them and to the schools in Spartanburg District Three who request coats for their students.

At the Food Pantry on Nov. 16, 120 members of the community visited Cannon's Camp Ground to receive the offerings, including 56 pumpkin pies homemade by the "Pie Team" of the congregation.



The church's food pantry has been in existence since 2010.



On Nov. 16, 120 people visited Cannon's Camp Ground to receive offerings, including 56 pumpkin pies homemade by the "Pie Team" of the congregation.



Photos courtesy of Ernestine McCaskill

Sandy Grove reaches out

Sandy Grove UMC, Jefferson, has been busy with missions and outreach. Led by Molly Price and Flora White, they have helped the boys' home and nursing home, working with church members collecting items for these projects. Sandy Grove members also collected items for Operation Christmas Child Samaritan Purse thanks to project manager Pat Collins. Sandy Grove, along with Mount Elon, packed 250 shoeboxes this year. Some of the church youth went to the Samaritan Purse Processing Center in Charlotte Nov. 29. Some of the first-timers said it was like "real Santa's helpers at Santa's workshop." They loved being able to help other children.

Native American Ministries

Native American representative training

Mark your calendars: The 20th annual Native American Representative Training is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 1.

Para. 654 of the *United Methodist Book of Discipline* states that all churches are required to have one person per charge (without regard to race) to be the church's Native American representative. As such, the Native American Committee trains this person. The representative is the contact person between their church and the NAC; secures a calendar date to observe Native American Ministries Sunday; encourages awareness and appreciation of Native American history, traditions and spirituality; advocates for inclusion of Native Americans within the conference; provides reports to their church; and assists with the SC Native American Comprehensive Plan.

The training will be held at Columbia United Methodist Church, 1830 Main St., Columbia, SC 29201.

Registration starts at 9 a.m. and the training starts at 9:30 a.m. Lunch is provided. There is a \$10 non-refundable registration fee. If a person does not register, the fee is \$15. The training will end no later than 3 p.m. NAC T-shirts and polo shirts will also be available for purchase. T-shirts purchased with registration receive a \$3 discount.

If you are planning to attend, contact LaShella Kirkland, 803-374-8243 or LaShellaKirkland@live.com, to receive a registration form.

Registration deadline is Jan. 22.

The training features historical information about American Indians, especially the South Carolina American Indians, as well as myths and stereotypes, Native American spirituality and the mission and function of the NAC. After lunch, there will be an orientation into a traditional worship service for American Indians, which may include drumming, singing and flute playing. There will be a surprise for some participants.

Local churches' new Native American representatives and anyone interested in the mission and advocacy for Native American Ministries should attend. The NAC highly encourage Cabinet members, UMC staff, district superintendents and pastors to attend.

The NAC said schoolteachers, who are responsible for Native American Social Studies Standards, should also consider attending to improve historically and culturally accurate information.



Photo by Dr. Luke Rhyee

God-sized dreams

Hospital Bethesda, part of the UMCSA ministry Healing Guatemala, is continuing to grow. Both the dental and ophthalmology clinics are fully booked with appointments until February. Currently, they are praying about three urgent areas to address: a second ophthalmology exam room (estimated cost \$30,000), the expansion of the dental clinic, like the one pictured above (estimated cost \$25,000) and the establishment of a second surgery room (estimated cost \$15,000). A second ophthalmology exam room is needed because of an increase in the number of ophthalmologists on staff. They are praying for the necessary equipment for the exam room and ophthalmology surgery, said Dr. Luke Rhyee, a South Carolina elder who founded Healing Guatemala. In terms of expanding the dental clinic, they will require three new dental units, along with their supporting equipment and furnishings. For questions about donations or how to help Healing Guatemala, email Rhyee at rhyeemt@gmail.com, or write Healing Guatemala, P.O. Box 1835, Duluth, GA 30096.



United Women in Faith

by Kathy Roys

Join the field trip to St. Helena Island Penn Center

The South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith Charter for Racial Justice Committee is continuing our awareness campaign of encroachment on Black settlement communities in South Carolina with the support of a grant from the National United Women in Faith.

We have particularly focused on the Gullah community on St. Helena Island in Beaufort County. This Gullah community is a unique and vital historic community providing many contributions to our overall history in South Carolina.

The Conference Charter for Racial Justice Committee has arrangements for a tour of the Penn Center Museum on St. Helena Island on Feb. 15 at 1 p.m. The Penn Center is a 50-acre historic district comprising 25 historic buildings and structures. The Penn School National Historic Landmark District is the only African-American National Landmark District in South Carolina. The museum tour will take 90 minutes and admission is \$15. There is much history on the grounds to see, so maps of the campus are available in their gift shop for \$5 for self-guided tours.

The CRJ Committee selected February since that is Black History Month. We urge you to invite youth to come see where significant Black history has taken place in our state.

The Conference will pay for their admission fee. We are requesting church youth directors to share information of this trip with their youth.

We are working on adding other activities during this trip and will keep you informed. We suggest touring around St. Helena Island to see other historic structures, visit a local art store, eat at a local restaurant, and get to know the local people. We are encouraging you to make your own discoveries based on your interests. We hope we can all come together at some point and share what we have learned and experienced.

There is also the Reconstruction Era National Park visitors' center in Beaufort that provides information on the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. Free tours are offered at some of the locations. You can find more information on this at <https://www.nps.gov/reer> or call 843-962-0039.

Everyone is responsible for their own transportation and lodging if you decide to stay in Beaufort.

You can contact Kathy Roys at kathy5339@att.net for more information or to express interest in participating.



From left, the Rev. John Holler, Bishop Leonard Fairley and Beth Williams share a smile at Epworth's annual Christmas tree lighting.

Epworth Children's Home

A powerful connection

When Hurricane Helene swept through South Carolina, United Methodist churches stepped up to help Epworth foster families whose homes were damaged by the storm. Again and again, these churches asked, "How can we help?" and "What do they need?" Members tarped roofs and provided food to families knowing they were making these foster homes safer for the precious lives within them.

The powerful, century-long connection between United Methodists and Epworth Children's Home continues to amaze and inspire us daily. We deeply appreciate the individuals and churches who see Epworth as their place to serve so generously and willingly.

The United Methodist Church's contributions of both support and service anchors and makes possible Epworth's work in meeting the great needs of our state's children and families. For instance, United Methodist churches routinely provide office and training space for Epworth across South Carolina. This has proven crucial to our ability to strengthen long-term programs and launch innovative programs to reach children and families through new channels. United Methodist churches encourage financial support of Epworth on Mother's Day and Work Day. In these very real ways, churches walk with Epworth staff alongside the families and children we serve.

The United Methodist Church-Epworth connection shines especially bright in December. Months ago, as we do every year, we invited churches to partner with us in making Christmas with Epworth possible. As they do each year, United Methodist churches, along with other churches, provided gifts for every child in residential care and every single foster child served by Epworth. Watching church members arrive on our campus with smiles on their faces and arms full of presents warmed our hearts and lifted our spirits. Through such loving gestures, United Methodists are saying to Epworth and the children and families we serve, "We are with you. You are not alone."

United Methodist churches also lent us

their church fellowship halls to hold foster care Christmas parties and provided the meals for those events. This allowed our foster families to come together to celebrate the blessed connections that happen when people of faith feel compelled to answer the call of care and service to others.

At our annual campus Christmas tree lighting celebration, our youth and staff were delighted to welcome Bishop Leonard Fairley and his wife, Dawn Fairley. We deeply appreciate the couple's love of children and families and their partnership in our mission. It was a joyful time.

Our connection with The United Methodist Church was also made beautifully clear during the simple and moving Christmas service at the chapel on our campus, where young people who live at Epworth shared their art, their music and the biblical story of Jesus's birth.

The God-given relationship we have with The United Methodist Church enables children to find homes and the support and security they need. It makes it possible for families to receive services that strengthen their bonds and enhance their lives.

The truth is, beyond historic denominational ties, Epworth and The United Methodist Church are connected by love, particularly the love we share for children in need and the individuals and families who provide safe and nurturing homes for these children. We are connected by the mission to love others with all our hearts, souls and minds, and love our neighbors as ourselves. We are connected when we say "yes" to caring for one another.

Your gifts, presence, time and heart mean so much to the children and families we serve, and to the Epworth staff performing difficult work every day. As you have done for 129 years, you—the people and churches that make up The United Methodist Church in South Carolina—made a true difference in 2024.

Thank you!

—Beth Williams, Epworth president and chief executive officer



Photo courtesy of Gail Corn

Blankets for North Carolina

The Rev. Scott Smoak delivered a sermon at Trinity UMC, Blythewood, Nov. 24 on helping others. Trinity's outreach team purchased blankets, and while Smoak delivered his sermon, the team had the blankets prepared for the congregations to complete. They are sending the blankets to North Carolina for flood victims. The team also prepared cleaning buckets for flood victims the day prior.

Camps & Retreat Ministries

Such a joy

Happy New Year, and blessings to all as we surge into 2025.

While we have started a new year, we cannot help but reflect on the many blessings we received at South Carolina Camps & Retreat Ministries in 2024. We are filled with gratitude for how the Lord has provided.

We had a wonderful summer camp season, with more than 1,000 entering our gates throughout the summer. It has been an excellent year for retreats, as more than 100 retreat

groups joined us in 2024 at Asbury Hills, Camp Providence and Sea Islands. What a joy it is to be a place of growth, exploration and rejuvenation for so many.

We were so thankful to have ended the year by hosting the United Methodist youth conference, Immerse. More than 240 youth and volunteers across South Carolina connected at Asbury Hills. It was a powerful weekend of worship, learning and community. We were so glad Bishop Leonard Fairley could join us for the conference and experience Asbury Hills

for the first time. We are fortunate to know how he serves and cares for the youth of The United Methodist Church. Immerse is a beautiful reminder of the importance of rest, worship and fellowship. We cannot wait to host again next year.

Our staff will be resetting the tables in 2025. If you have not explored the beauty of these beautiful camp properties that God has blessed us with, we encourage you to make plans in 2025 to come away and worship outdoors with us.

We can't wait to see you.

'Christmas! Sing of the Wonder'

Greenville Textile Heritage Society Chorale comes to St. Mark United Methodist Church

GREENVILLE—During the Christmas season there are many movies and concerts to help people get into the Christmas spirit. We hear a lot about Christmas traditions and Christmas miracles, and often the birth of Jesus Christ the King is not even mentioned.

The Greenville Textile Heritage Society Chorale reminded people of both the rich heritage and traditions of Greenville and the true meaning of Christmas in their performance at St. Mark United Methodist Church Sunday, Dec. 8.

This year they presented, "Christmas! Sing of the Wonder," arranged by Ted Wilson and written by Janet McMahan-Wilson and Dale Matthews, under the direction of Jonathan Chappell.

Many of the members of the chorale attended Parker High School, and most came from families who worked in the textile mills in Greenville, often for several generations.

According to Kelly L. Odom in the book "Images of America Greenville Textiles," during the 1950s, Greenville was known "as the 'Textile Center of the South.' By 1960 Greenville grew more audacious and started billing itself as the 'Textile Capital of the World.' Greenville carried this title for the next 20 years."

Listening to the music and beautifully blended harmony, one would be surprised to find that formal vocal and music training is not required to be part of the chorale.

Musicians included pianist Anne Linder and cellist Becky Lanford, with narrator Jan Stenhouse. Sound technicians were Paul and Ginger Russell and photographer was Bob Duke.

St. Mark has always been involved in the community of Sans Souci and has welcomed the Greenville Textile Heritage Society Chorale to perform at the church on July 4 and at Christmas since 2015. In addition, they allow use of the gym for community basketball scrimmages and for Coach Brett Fulton to work with young people to practice and have games and tournaments. Several players have signed with colleges and received scholarships because of his work.

The church has allowed artists to establish their studios in the education building and has dedicated a community garden section on the property for Sans Souci residents. The Sans Souci community also holds outside concerts there during the summer.

The Greenville Textile Heritage Society Chorale was established by Judy Edwards (now Judy Compton). Edwards is on sabbatical, and Chappell stepped into her role this year.



"Christmas! Sing of the Wonder" was arranged by Ted Wilson and written by Janet McMahan-Wilson and Dale Matthews, under the direction of Jonathan Chappell.



The chorale is a part of the Greenville Textile Heritage Society, a South Carolina nonprofit that was organized in February 2007 for the purpose of educating the public about the huge impact the textile mills had in Greenville and the Upstate. There were at least 19 mills in the County of Greenville and many supporting businesses that helped Greenville grow and thrive over the years. The work was hard, but families relied on the steady income. The mills provided rental housing, company stores, supported churches and schools in the area and more.

Many of the schools are named after mill owners. In addition, the mill villages had choirs and bands and often had their own baseball, softball and male and female basketball teams. A number of baseball players on mill village teams went on to play in minor and major baseball leagues, one of the most famous being "Shoeless" Joe Jackson.

The Greenville Textile Heritage Society recently completed a park in Greenville recognizing the contribution of the textile mill industry in the community.

St. Mark's pastor is C. Tony Owens.



Photos courtesy of Kelly Gottheiner

'Tis the season

Manning UMC, Manning, has had an active Advent season. In addition to participating in their community parade, they held their Christmas cantata Dec. 8 (pictured above left). The next day, Dec. 9, the United Methodist Men hosted a Christmas banquet at the church (pictured above right).

Your news is wanted for the Advocate. Share the good news that God is doing in your church! Deadline for the February Advocate is Jan. 10.

Email news@advocatesc.org.

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Genora Kennedy, president of New Life's United Women in Faith, was surprised with a birthday cake during the event.



New Life pastor the Rev. Angela Ford Broughton (right) shares a smile with India Fishburne.



Attendees hear about the manners associated with high tea, such as how to sip and hold one's pinky finger.

Photos courtesy of Genora Kennedy

A sip of thanks

New Life UMC's annual tea emphasizes gratitude

WALTERBORO—New Life United Methodist Church, under the Leadership of the Rev. Angela Ford Broughton, celebrated “A Sip of Thanks,” their annual tea sponsored by the church's United Women In Faith, on Sunday, Nov. 17.

Held at 4 p.m. in the church's Fellowship Hall, decorations showcased the colors of fall. The beverage table had a variety of flavors of hot tea and cold tea. The food table was filled with different entrees of food items. As the tea was close to the Thanksgiving holiday, the idea of being thankful was included in the occasion.

Two vibrant young ladies started the tea off with laughter and enthusiasm: Minister Shelia McGruder and our presiding young lady, India Fishburne. Songster Susie Brown offered

a melodious song, and Scriptures were read by Janice Doyle and Virginia Mays. McGruder led prayer.

Tonika Doyle warmly welcomed everyone with leadership from Yolanda K. Fishburne. Jacquelyn Williams demonstrated how to sip a cup of tea properly, including how to hold the cup. As she taught, “Did you know that you should finish a cup of tea with three good sips? Also, did you know that your pinky finger should not be pointing outward as you hold your cup while drinking your tea?” It was a lesson well taught and well learned.

Remarks were given by Consetta Washington, project manager for the tea, and Genora Kennedy, president of New Life United Women in Faith, who thanked everyone for their

presence and their participation.

Broughton gave the blessing of the food and benediction.

The annual tea brings New Life's church family and guests together to help fulfill Christian mission and outreach.

New Life Women in Faith forms a cloud of witnesses to the community about what Jesus has done and is doing for us. Through God's grace and in faith, they stand tall with other women, men and children, united in love to do God's work.

“We support the total nurture, love and maturity in the Lord in our neighbors,” Kennedy shared. “We sing, preach and teach love, truth and peace in all that we do. We stand united in Christ Jesus. May God bless everyone richly as they continue to walk in his grace.”

Major Tiffany McMillan-Pollard speaks at St. James Veteran's Day Program

By Dr. Tonya F. Mack

The Rev. Allen Nesmith and the St. James United Methodist Church family honored veterans on Sunday, Nov. 10, during the morning worship service.

Their own Army Major Tiffany McMillan-Pollard was the honored speaker for the occasion. McMillan-Pollard gave an inspirational message about her journey, service and the support and foundation she received from her family and the church village.

McMillan-Pollard is married to David Pollard, and they have one son, Brayden. She is the daughter of Delores McMillan and the late veteran Dwight McMillan.

The church extended a special thank you to veteran Paul White and his team for spearheading the Veterans Day Program. They salute all veterans and offer deep gratitude for their service.



Church veterans in front from left are Dr. Emanuel Willis, Fred Wade, Fred Jeter, James Porter, Tiffany McMillan-Pollard, Marshalla Dicks Protho, John Willis, James Durant and Sammy Gamble. In back row are Lewis Green, Khali Buckman, Kelvin Buckman, Kelvin Perry and Paul White.



Speaker Major Tiffany McMillan-Pollard delivered an inspirational message during the program.

Murray UMC shines God's light in Summerville community

SUMMERVILLE—On Nov. 23, Murray United Methodist Church hosted the annual Thanksgiving Day Project with four other Summerville churches.

Murray's chairpersons, Sadie Hollings and Jacquelyn Haynes, led the charge and we were able to give out many Thanksgiving Day baskets, which included turkeys and nonperishable goods. These baskets were picked up and delivered to those in need in the community.

Also at Murray, to celebrate season of Advent, church members decorated Murray's Christmas tree led by the Sunday school youth and children.

On Dec. 21, Murray's food pantry is hosting a Community Breakfast from 9-11 a.m. in Fellowship Hall.



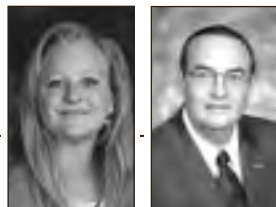
Even the kids got involved with helping others.



Murray youth decorate the church Christmas tree.



Members gave out Thanksgiving baskets to the community.



Historical Society

by the Rev. Meredith Dark and Dr. Roger Gramling

Old Bethel United Methodist Church

The building that is today home to Old Bethel United Methodist Church on Calhoun Street in Charleston is the original wooden structure of what was Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church. The Rev. David Washington currently serves as the pastor of Old Bethel United Methodist Church in the Charleston District. He said Old Bethel touches the heart of what Methodism is.

According to Dr. A. V. Huff, Jr., the conference historian, in 1792 the congregation on Cumberland Street—the first Methodist Society organized in Charleston—purchased a lot on the corner of Pitt and Boundary (now Calhoun) streets for a cemetery for the Methodists. White members were buried at the front of the lot and Black members at the rear. In 1797, at Bishop Francis Asbury's direction, a committee began to raise funds to build a second church, Bethel, on Pitt Street. The first nails were driven into the wooden structure in 1797. The building was occupied and dedicated in 1798.

On Old Bethel's website, there is a copy of a historical plaque erected Oct. 3, 2007, by the MOJA Arts Festival and the City of Charleston. The plaque reads: "Old Bethel United Methodist Church, the third oldest church building surviving in Charleston, had its beginnings on February 14, 1797 as Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church. Bethel was constructed in the gabled meetinghouse style with white clapboards after a design by Francis Asbury. ... The church was built forty feet by sixty feet and was named Bethel, the Hebrew word for the 'house of God.' It stood at the corner of Pitt and Calhoun Streets. Later a pulpit was erected and a sounding board acquired from Scots Presbyterian Church was hung over the pulpit. The simple wooden building included galleries for the slaves, pews at the back of the first floor for seating free black members and white members sat in the front on the first floor."

The interior walls were not plastered until 11 years after the building's dedication. The large increase in Black membership was accommodated by the separate seating.

In 1803, a one-story parsonage was built adjacent to the church, the first Methodist parsonage in South Carolina. It was known as "the yellow coop" and was first occupied by Bishop Asbury in November on his annual visit. The original church building was moved to the rear of the lot in 1851, and a spacious Greek revival structure was completed and dedicated in 1853. At first referred to as "New Bethel," the building is still in use today as Bethel United Methodist Church.

The original church building became the primary place of worship for Black members. Huff has written, that "after the Civil War, when the vast majority of the Black members of Bethel refused to remain a part of the segregated congregation of Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church, South, they worshipped in the 1797 building as a congregation of the newly established South Carolina Missionary Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The White congregation gave 'Old Bethel' to the mostly Black congregation on Aug. 27, 1876. Land was purchased across the street, and, in 1882, it was moved across Calhoun Street to its current location. The classical portico and columns reflect the new status that Black Methodists hoped for in the post-Civil War South before the full backlash of the era of segregation."

According to the plaque placed in 2007, "The original addition of the gabled

portico supported by four fluted Corinthian Columns documents changing styles in ecclesiastical architecture. The pressed metal ceiling and Victorian era furnishings date to the end of the 19th century. The church currently serves a Black congregation, which includes descendants of the 1880 congregation."

According to Huff, the "old Bethel" building is perhaps the oldest United Methodist church building in America south of Baltimore.

Washington strongly believes Methodism would have struggled if it had not been for the efforts of the enslaved during the times of John Wesley. He notes that as pastors, we contextualize Scripture. If we stop and contextualize the time that John Wesley was in the new world and ask, "How did John Wesley get around Georgia and South Carolina?" we come to the conclusion that he likely used the assistance of enslaved men and women to navigate.

Also, a large portion of the funds that were raised to build Old Bethel came from the efforts of enslaved people. Charleston and New Orleans were two unique places when it came to slavery. People could move about but the enslaved were property of someone else. There was a massive dichotomy and mix of people as the country was taking shape.

Some notable attendees of Old Bethel include Septima P. Clark and Morris Brown. Clark was a schoolteacher on Johns Island. History tells us one could not be an employee of the State of South Carolina and a part of the civil rights movement. Clark lost her job, moved to Tennessee and taught African Americans how to pass the poll tax and gain the ability to vote. In Charleston there is the "Septima P. Clark Parkway" and murals depicting her story.

Morris Brown was another figure, and he also has a liberal arts college named after him in Atlanta. Brown had a religious experience in a Methodist context, was later ordained an elder in the AME Church in Philadelphia under the Rev. Richard Allen and returned to Charleston. In her book, "Black Heritage Sites," Nancy Curtis notes upon his return, Brown attended Bethel but left when White leadership approved a hearse house be built over the Black burial space. Brown left Bethel, and African Americans from two Methodist Churches and Bethel formed Hampstead Church, which would later be known as Emanuel AME Church. Later in life, Brown was consecrated a bishop and became the leader of the AME Church when Richard Allen passed away in 1831.

Washington says what means the most to him is the spirit of the church. It is highly likely that Washington is a descendant of enslaved people who heard John Wesley preach at Pon Pon Chapel during his time in South Carolina. Old Bethel UMC and the Methodist movement is not just a church and a denomination; it's about the message of what John Wesley was trying to do many years ago.

Both Old Bethel and Washington stand as byproducts of a movement through our Lord and Savior, and years later the fruits are here to show the tradition. You can plan to attend Old Bethel's 228th church anniversary Feb. 9.

Dark pastors North Charleston UMC. She is president of the conference Historical Society and is a member of the executive committee of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society. Gramling, a retired pastor, serves as president of the SEJ Historical Society.

Brown to present at Granville Hicks Leadership Academy

Dr. Heber Brown III will serve as the guest presenter for the 33rd annual Granville Hicks Leadership Academy for Laity and Clergy.

Set for Jan. 23-24 on the Claflin University Campus in the Claflin Student Center, this year's theme is "Religion, Food, Black Culture and The United Methodist Church."

Brown launched the Black Church Food Security Network, which advances food security and food sovereignty by co-creating Black food ecosystems anchored by nearly 250 Black congregations in partnership with Black farmers and other food justice stakeholders.

The cost is \$125 (\$150 after Jan. 20). Register at <https://alumni.claflin.edu/2025-granville-hicks-lecture-series-->

For more information, contact the Rev. Larry D. McCutcheon, 803-535-5150 or lmccutcheon@claflin.edu.



Dr. Heber Brown III



From the Archives

by Dr. Phillip Stone

Collecting the stories from the archives

When I started writing this column back in 2012, I never really thought it would lead to a book. But some 130 columns later, I realized I had a pretty good collection of stories about our Methodist connection.

So in the fall of 2023, I got all the columns together—either from the hard drive or my email files where I'd sent in the piece for that month—and looked through all of them for themes. I figured out which categories I could fit each one in, whether it was about a person, a place, an organization, whether it was about resources in the archives, or about the history of the conference or of Methodism, or simply advice for local church historians. I figured out which ones were worth revising and putting in a book. I selected about 50 or 60 of the ones I thought would fit within one of those themes and began editing.

In the spring and early summer of 2024, I re-read and lightly edited each column. Some columns, like the four-part series on Charleston or two-part series on some other communities, obviously got combined. Others, where I'd written on the same topic a second time, saw me take portions from both articles. In some cases, the way I write and talk about some subjects has evolved, and this rewrite gave me a chance to update my language here and there.

By early July, I had a manuscript that was ready for others to review, and I shared it with Advocate Editor Jessica Brodie and with conference historian Dr. A.V. Huff, with the request that he write a foreword for it, which he graciously agreed to do. After Brodie's careful editing and review by members of the Advocate Press Committee, the book "From the Vault: Stories You Probably Never Knew about South Carolina Methodism" came out around Thanksgiving.

So why did I want to do this? First, I wanted to offer some help to local church historians and others who have to relate the work of the local church to the larger story of Methodism. I wanted them to have the resources to help keep and tell the history of their local church. A few chapters are about maintaining a history room, and a few are about resources in the archives that anyone



Stone's book was released by the Advocate Press this fall.

can use in telling their own church's story.

Second, I like telling stories. One of the biggest reasons I like writing this column is that I get to share the stories that I come across in the archives every day or week with Methodists all around the state. Putting them in a book might make them a little more permanent. It also lets me remind everyone that history isn't just a collection of names and dates; it's a big story about the past and how we got to where we are today.

Third, I wanted to help strengthen our connection. Methodists have been talking about the connection ever since John Wesley's days. In this season where we have talked so much about separation, remembering how we became United Methodists and how individuals have worked to build that connection seems worth the effort.

Meanwhile, I'm going to get back to researching and writing stories, and maybe in another decade, I'll have enough for the second volume.

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

Rev. Timothy Jacob Bowman

COLUMBIA—The Rev. Timothy Jacob Bowman, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and brother of the Rev. Thomas Bowman, died Nov. 19, 2024. Rev. Thomas Bowman is also a retired elder of the conference.

Prior to his retirement in 2021, Dr. Bowman served the Canaan-Sand Hill, Edisto Fork Parish, West Camden Charge and Old Bethel charges.

Funeral services were held Dec. 5 at the Meeting Place Church of Greater Columbia with burial Dec. 6 at Fort Jackson National Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Gammon Theological Seminary's Student Scholarship Fund, Gammon Theological Seminary, 653 Beckwith St. SW, Atlanta, GA 30314.

Dr. Bowman is survived by his wife, Yvonne Davis Bowman, and three daughters.



Bowman

Rev. David Willard Cox

WALTERBORO—The Rev. David Willard Cox, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Dec. 2, 2024.

Prior to his retirement in 1991, Rev. Cox served the Hendersonville, Ridgeway Circuit, Indian Field, Johnsonville and Ruffin Circuit charges. He served the Adnah-William Charge as a retired elder.

Funeral services were held Dec. 8 at



Cox

Bethel UMC with burial in Greenlawn Memorial Gardens.

Memorials may be made to Epworth Children's Home, 2900 Millwood Ave., Columbia, SC 29205; or to Bethel UMC, 355 Hampton St., Walterboro, SC 29488.

Rev. Cox is survived by his stepdaughter and stepson.

Lee Dean Cox

WALTERBORO—Lee Dean Cox, wife of the Rev. David Willard Cox, died Oct. 30, 2024. Rev. Cox is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Nov. 3 at Bethel UMC with burial in Greenlawn Memorial Gardens.

Mrs. Cox is survived by her husband, son and daughter.

Vicki Vassey Holler

COLUMBIA—Vicki Vassey Holler, wife of the Rev. John E. Holler, died Nov. 25, 2024. Rev. Holler is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Nov. 25 at Trenholm Road UMC with burial in the Lynchburg Presbyterian Church Cemetery, Lynchburg.

Memorials may be made to Epworth Children's Home, P.O. Box 50466, Columbia, SC 29250.

Mrs. Holler is survived by her husband, and two sons.

Sylvia Bobo Jenkins

CLINTON—Sylvia Bobo Jenkins, sister of the Rev. Ken Bobo, died Nov. 17, 2024. Rev. Bobo is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

A memorial service was held Dec. 1 at Can Creek Presbyterian Church, Union.

Memorials may be made to Cane Creek

Obituary Policy

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

Presbyterian Church, 120 Cane Creek Church Road, Union, SC 29379.

Ms. Jenkins is survived by her two brothers.

Doris Evelyn Barham Luther

SPARTANBURG—Doris Evelyn Barham Luther, mother of the Rev. Deborah Luther Teagan and former Glee Club director at Spartanburg Methodist College, died Nov. 23, 2024. Rev. Teagan is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

A memorial service will be held Jan. 18 at St. Paul UMC.

Memorials may be made to the Doris B. Luther Endowed Scholarship Fund at Spartanburg Methodist College, 1000 Powell Mill Road, Spartanburg, SC 29301, Attn: Charles Dalton; or to St. Paul UMC, 1320 Fernwood-Glendale Road, Spartanburg, SC 29307.

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

Evonne Parson Ngouh

YONKERS, N.Y.—Evonne Parson Ngouh, sister of the Rev. Charlie Thomas, died Nov. 18, 2024. Rev. Thomas is the pastor of Unity United Methodist Church, Lugoff.

Funeral services were held Dec. 6 at Mount Pleasant UME Church, Pinewood, with burial in the church cemetery.

Rev. Harvey Ottis Peurifoy

GREENWOOD—The Rev. Harvey Ottis Peurifoy, a retired elder of the South Caro-

lina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Nov. 19, 2024.

Prior to retiring in 1989, Rev. Peurifoy served the Greenwood Circuit, Bethlehem-Cokesbury, Duncan, Allendale, Greenville-Salem and Irmo-Salem charges.

Funeral services were held Nov. 22 at Mount Lebanon UMC with burial in Greenwood Memorial Gardens.

Rev. Peurifoy is survived by his two sons.

Vernice Lou Green Wilson

WALTERBORO—Vernice Lou Green Wilson, mother of the Rev. Lisa Way, died Nov. 27, 2024. Rev. Way is the pastor of the Central Circuit Charge, Allendale.

Funeral services were held Dec. 5 at St. Luke United Methodist Church, Ehrhardt, with burial in Bamberg County Memory Garden, Bamberg.

Mrs. Wilson is survived by daughter and son.



Peurifoy

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Global Briefs

Leadership Gathering design team named

WASHINGTON—Council of Bishops President Tracy S. Malone has named the design team to plan the council's Leadership Gathering that is scheduled for April or May of 2026. The team will design an experience that will bring together episcopal leaders, clergy and laity from across the worldwide connection to engage in collaborative conversations that inspire vision, hope and imagination for the future of The United Methodist Church.

Couple raises \$80K+ for immigrant legal assistance

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Richard and Kathryn Spry are longtime United Methodists and stained-glass artists. Their passion for immigrant rights led them to establish the Chimes for Justice initiative, through which they donate all proceeds from their artwork sales to Tennessee Justice for Our Neighbors. They've raised more than \$80,000 and plan to continue to create, sell and assist individuals and families in need.

Boye-Caulker elected as Sierra Leone bishop

ACCRA, Ghana—West Africa Central Conference delegates elected the Rev. James Boye-Caulker, a district superintendent in Sierra Leone, as a bishop on Dec. 7. He was the second bishop elected during the meeting. Boye-Caulker will lead the Sierra Leone Area, where retired Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr. served since the death of Bishop John K. Yambasu in 2020.

West Africa elects Ande Ikimun Emmanuel as bishop

ACCRA, Ghana—The Rev. Ande Ikimun Emmanuel has been elected as a bishop in The United Methodist Church's West Africa Central Conference. The longtime leader in the Southern Nigeria Conference was the first bishop elected during the Dec. 5-8 gathering. He will serve the Nigeria Episcopal Area, following the resignation of John Wesley Yohanna in July. In his post-election remarks, Emmanuel said that church unity is his top priority.

Fossil fuel-free funds launched

GLENVIEW, Ill.—Two funds have been launched by Wespath for investors who wish to avoid fossil fuel companies and funds associated with conflict-affected areas from their portfolios. The new funds are intended to provide faith-based and values-aligned nonprofit organizations—such as foundations, senior living communities and higher education institutions—with global equity and fixed income investment exposure in ways that align with their values.

Little Rock Nine member set to christen submarine

NEWPORT NEWS, Va.—United Methodist Carlotta Walls LaNier, one of the Little Rock Nine who as teens desegregated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, is scheduled to help christen the U.S. submarine Arkansas (SSN 800) on Dec. 7. In 2018, the U.S. Navy named the six women of the Little Rock Nine as ship sponsors for the Arkansas. LaNier grew up attending White Memorial Methodist Church in a structure built by her great-grandfather. She is a longtime member of Park Hill United Methodist Church in Denver.

Church lawns can make good dog parks

PINCKNEY, Mich.—Sometimes, a church going to the dogs can be a good thing. When Arise Church, a United Methodist congregation, was building a new facility 13 years ago, the congregation used part of the property for a dog park. The park includes a prayer walk path for dogs and their owners.

Storm destroys United Methodist school in Burundi

BUJUMBURA, Burundi—A United Methodist high school suffered extensive damage during recent torrential rains and heavy wind that blew the roofs off two buildings. Thirteen students were injured in the storm. The technical school, named in memory of United Methodist Bishop J. Alfred Ndoricimpa, is the only secondary school in the Rubirizi region, home to around 21,000 people.

Conferences join for Advent devotionals

MACON, Ga.—In a demonstration of unity in action, laity and clergy in the North Georgia and South Georgia conferences have teamed up to share the message of Christ through daily Advent devotionals. The theme of this lay-led effort, appropriately, is unity.

Supporting migrants and refugees

ATLANTA—The United Methodist Board of Global Ministries and United Methodist Committee on Relief will prioritize support for migrants and refugees as the United States faces potential large-scale immigration policy changes, including the likely mass deportation of thousands of migrants, said top executive Roland Fernandes. "Through comprehensive programs spanning global advocacy, church engagement, legal support and practical assistance, Global Ministries and UMCOR will continue to provide hope and support to those most vulnerable in their journey to safety and opportunity," he said in a statement.

Firewood ministry keeps community warm

BELLEFONTE, Pa.—When the Rev. James Jacobs, pastor of Greater Buffalo Run Valley United Methodist Church, asked the congregation for out-of-the-box outreach ideas, one of the most successful has been "Wood for Good." Many people in the area heat their homes with firewood but may not be able to cut their own or afford to buy it. A church team contacted landscapers and tree trimmers to donate any trees they've cut down. It's "the hands and feet of Jesus Christ ... using a chain saw and wood splitter," writes Jacobs.

UMCOR assists vulnerable after Helene

SPRUCE PINE, N.C.—The United Methodist Committee on Relief helps vulnerable people regardless of their race, religion or status. Following Hurricane Helene, some families in Western North Carolina were reluctant to accept help because of their undocumented status. United Methodist volunteers were able to build trust and connect storm victims with the assistance they needed.

Seminary finalizes sale of campus

LOS ANGELES—The Claremont School of Theology has officially finalized the sale of its historic 16.4-acre campus in Claremont, California, marking a pivotal moment in its 138-year history. The sale, which provides \$7.7 million in funds, has been used to significantly reduce the school's debt. The United Methodist seminary is now at Westwood United Methodist Church. The sale follows a protracted legal battle stemming from a restrictive 1957 property agreement with the Claremont Colleges.

—Courtesy of United Methodist News Service



Photo by Kelly Gottheiner

Parade of lights

On Dec. 1, Manning UMC participated in the parade of lights held in Manning, doing their part to reveal the true meaning of Christmas.



by Betty Stalnaker

Resource Center

Top three DVD resources used in 2024

We'd like to extend a special thank you to all our Resource Center members. With a church membership, you have access to all resources in the library. We serve United Methodist churches, as well as other denominations. The Resource Center is ready to provide you with the Bible study of your choice.

Listed below were the most-used resources in 2024. We pray these and other resources have been helpful in your church ministry.

Top three DVD resources used in 2024

(Four tied for second place, 14 tied for third place)

1. "Wrestling with Doubt Finding Faith"
2. "Experiencing Christmas: Christ in the Sights and Sounds of Advent"
"Seven Words: Listening to Christ from the Cross"
"The Third Day: Living the Resurrection"
"Words of Life: Jesus and the Promise of the Ten Commandments Today"
3. "24 Hours That Changed the World"
"Anxious for Nothing: Finding Calm in a Chaotic World"
"Bible Stories for Grown-Ups: Reading Scripture with New Eyes"
"Creed: What Christians Believe and Why"
"Kingdom Politics: Government from God's Perspective"
"Moses: In the Footsteps of the Reluctant Prophet"
"On the Way to Bethlehem: An Advent Study"
"Remember: God's Covenants and the Cross"
"Simon Peter: Flawed but Faithful Disciple"
"The Call: The Life and Message of the Apostle Paul"
"The Chosen: Season 1"
"The Chosen: Season 2"
"The Chosen: Season 3"
"The Christmas Letters: Celebrating Advent with Those Who Told the Story First"

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



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December

- Dec. 19—Christmas Concert, First UMC, Cheraw, 7 p.m.
- Dec. 21—Winter Equinox/First Day of Winter
- Dec. 21—Fourth Annual Advent Spiral Walk, Lexington UMC, Lexington, 5-7 p.m.
- Dec. 24—Christmas Eve
- Dec. 24-26—United Methodist Center closed
- Dec. 25—Christmas Day
- Dec. 26-Jan. 1—Kwanzaa
- Dec. 31—New Year's Eve
- Dec. 31—Watch Night

January

- Jan. 5—Epiphany
- Jan. 12—Baptism of the Lord
- Jan. 12—Human Relations Day
- Jan. 13—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.
- Jan. 15—Dementia Care Workshop, S.C. Cognitive Care Ministry, Surfside UMC, Surfside Beach, 9:30 a.m.-Noon. Register: <https://tinyurl.com/dementia-surfside-beach>
- Jan. 18—Youth Leader Summit, Shackford Hall, Lake Junaluska, N.C., 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Mark Ostreicher, speaker. <https://bit.ly/LJyouthleadersummit>.



Photo by Kelly Gottheiner

A festive time

Members of Manning UMC, Manning, traveled to Mepkin Abbey Nov. 19 to see the Crèche Festival. Here, they gather for a smile.

- Jan. 18—ERT Training, Central UMC, Florence, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>
- Jan. 18—United Women in Faith Local District Officer's Training
- Jan. 20—Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- Jan. 22—Deadline to register for Native American Representative Training.
- Jan. 23-24—33rd Annual Granville Hicks Leadership Academy for Laity and Clergy, Claflin University, Orangeburg. Register at <https://alumni.claflin.edu/2025-granville-hicks-lecture-series-->
- Jan. 24—SMC Enrollment Day, <https://smcsc.edu/enrollmentdays>
- Jan. 24-26—Revolution 2025, Township Auditorium, Columbia. Register: <http://scmyp.org/revolution/>
- Jan. 25—SMC Enrollment Day, <https://smcsc.edu/enrollmentdays>
- Jan. 25—ERT Training, Clemson UMC, Clemson, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>
- Jan. 31—ERT Training, Belin Memorial UMC, Murrells Inlet, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

February
Black History Month and United Women in Faith Wallace Family Life Special Emphasis Month

- Feb. 1—Native American Representative Training, Columbia UMC, Columbia, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., \$10, Register: LaShella Kirkland, 803-374-8243 or LaShella-Kirkland@live.com.
- Feb. 2—Groundhog Day
- Feb. 5—Golden Cross Sunday
- Feb. 12—Dementia Care Workshop, S.C. Cognitive Care Ministry, Silver Hill Memorial UMC, Spartanburg, 9:30 a.m.-Noon. Register: <https://tinyurl.com/dementia-silver-hill>
- Feb. 14—Valentine's Day
- Feb. 14—SMC Enrollment Day for prospective students, <https://smcsc.edu/enrollmentdays>
- Feb. 15—UWF Charter for Racial Justice Field Trip
- Feb. 15—SMC Enrollment Day for prospective students, <https://smcsc.edu/enrollmentdays>
- Feb. 17—Presidents' Day
- Feb. 19—Rock Hill District Clergy Meeting, 10 a.m.-Noon.

SEJ Disaster Academy Jan. 9-12 to help train responders

The Southeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church faced a challenging 2024, with numerous hurricanes, floods, fires, tornadoes and other disasters affecting local communities. These events highlighted the critical need for preparedness, collaboration and effective response strategies.

Because of this, the SEJ Disaster Academy is urging all who are interested to consider attending their training event, the 2025 SEJ Disaster Academy, set for Jan. 9-12 in Fruitland Park, Florida.

This event is intended to strengthen the disaster response network and equip participants with the tools and training needed to meet future challenges head-on.

The SEJ Disaster Academy offers resources and sessions for anyone in disaster recovery, whether a seasoned professional or new to this vital work.

Sessions include "Foundations for Disaster Ministry," "Cultural Sensitivity in Disaster Response," "Connecting Neighbors," "ERT 200" courses, and more.

Scholarships are available, so attendees are urged to indicate on the registration form if they need assistance.

Additionally, there is an option to contribute to the scholarship fund to help others attend.

To register: <https://florida-reg.brtaapp.com/SEJDisasterAcademy>.

More dementia care workshops to be held in 2025

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

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

Retired United Methodist Bishop Ken Carder and South Carolina Department on Aging representative Tori Anderson will share essential information about how to be in ministry with those living with dementia.

The workshops will be held:

- Jan. 15, 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Surfside Beach UMC, 800 13th Ave. N., Surfside Beach, SC 29575; to register: <https://tinyurl.com/dementia-surfside-beach>;
- Feb. 12, 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Silver Hill Memorial UMC, 778 John B. White Sr. Blvd., Spartanburg, SC 29306; to register: <https://tinyurl.com/dementia-silver-hill>;
- March 19, 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. at St. Paul's UMC, Orangeburg; to register: <https://tinyurl.com/dementia-stpauls>.

For more information about the workshops or to get involved, email cognitive@umcsc.org.



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Jesus's beloved community

by the Rev. Cathy Joens

Jan. 5

We have decided to follow Jesus

Devotional Reading: Matthew 28:16-20

Background Text: Luke 3:3-22

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

The words of the key verse come easy as I type them. It is because this verse is at the very heart of who we are and what we have been called to as God's people, Christians. The words are so set in my mind that I can type them by memory. As I write this, memories of sitting with my mom in church and the people who have impacted my faith life come to mind, and I whisper, "Thank you."

So many can say this verse by heart and often forget the call that it places on all our hearts, no matter if you are a layperson or clergy. We forget that Jesus was talking to some scared but hopeful disciples when he said it. "Go and make disciples" is a call and charge for all who follow Jesus. Yet it seems that we have been "doing church" so long that we have forgotten the depth of faith life or the personal nature of the call.

I wonder if we sit with God long enough to hear his son's words, we may feel compelled to "go." It may be that we are scared like the disciples, and so we take the easier and less conflictual route. Maybe we don't feel worthy to tell anyone about Jesus, and so we wait to act. Maybe we are waiting for the world to come to us so that we can show them our pretty churches and the way we do things (a disciple in our own image).

Making disciples is a long game. It was for Jesus while he was on this earth teaching and mentoring; it was for the disciples who learned from the master and still were afraid and doubtful; and it is for us who seek to be faithful with the gifts we are given.

The best part of this passage is, "I will be with you every day until the end of this present age." We don't go alone.

Jan. 12

We are part of a beloved community

Devotional Reading: John 15:9-17

Background Scripture: Acts 2:1-4,14-28,41-47; 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

Key Verse: John 15:15, "You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last."

We all yearn for connection. We are often at our best when we are a part of something bigger than ourselves. These passages are filled with examples of what it looks like to be in a relationship with others. He paints a picture for us of the community.

Community can be a lot of things and found in a lot of places: family, friends, covenant groups, the church. Wherever you find true community you will find love, trust, vulnerability, hope and joy. Jesus has been in community with his disciples for three years. He has taught them, prepared them to share the gospel and given them the tools for obedience to their true purpose. Jesus delivers his farewell speech to his disciples not to scare or scold them, but to prepare them for God's greater purpose. He charges them to be obedient to his purpose. He charges them to bear fruit, and he charges them to love deeply.

Jesus also reminds them that they will be gifted with the Holy Spirit (Jesus will be with them) that empowers them to bear fruit. This is true for us as well. We are, too, God's beloved community created to make a difference in the world around us. We are more than a group of people acquainted with one another. Our connection must be a deep abiding love and respect for one another.

He comes with a desire to work together to bring the harvest home. Our yearning may be more than trying not to be alone, but rather, to be a part of something bigger than ourselves alongside others. The fruit may sweeter and more abundant if we work together as God's beloved community.

What kind of community are you a part of? How does your community bear fruit for God's kingdom? In what ways to do you see the beloved nature of your community?

Jan. 19

We share the Lord's supper

Devotional Reading: Luke 22:14-23

Background Text: John 13

Key Verse: Luke 22:14-15, "When the time came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles joined him. He said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.'"

January is a month where we reflect on the year ahead and move into the new. For many, our way to January came through Thanksgiving and Christmas with lots of family around the table with food and conversation. We yearn for the deep connection that is created around the table. It is the place where we share our day, our dreams

and often our arguments.

We see, in this text, the story of Jesus' last supper together. We can see in our minds' eye the setting in the upper room. Jesus had the room all prepared for the Passover meal. It was a meal integral in the Jewish tradition, and Jesus was excited to share it with his disciples, I think, because Jesus knew of the great sacrifice of life and blood he would offer. In John, not only does Jesus share the Passover meal, but he also washes the disciples' feet and calls them friends.

As United Methodists, we come to an open table where all are welcome to meet Jesus in the taking of the bread and cup. It is a holy time where we share our regrets, our hopes and, yes, possibly our arguments with God. We come to meet Jesus to remember—and not only to remember, but to be with Jesus in the moment we find ourselves.

It is this moment of Jesus's presence, our openness and honesty with him, that makes this a holy time around the table with family.

We are all family in Christ yearning for the holy time, the time we meet with and experience Jesus, around the table. What would you say to Jesus around the table? What would you confess? What would you argue about? How would you savor the time with him?

Jan. 26

We are a priesthood of all believers

Devotional Text: 1 Peter 2:1-10

Background Text: 1 Corinthians 12

Key Verse: 1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. You have become this

people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Today is a day we may take for granted. Many of us have been in the church since we were born. We have heard the name "Jesus" all our lives. We have learned about the cornerstone (Jesus) that God laid for us. We have read the stories of Jesus's life on earth, so it may not be surprising that early Christians brand-new to this new way were surrounded by other religions and the Jewish faith. It may not be surprising that the early Christians were persecuted and ridiculed.

However, it may be surprising to realize we are considered to be chosen, royal and holy. You and I are God's own possession just like the early Christians who laid our path. The question for them in their time is the same question for us in our time: How are we going to respond? How are we going to contribute to the Body of Christ? In what ways, each day, will we adore Christ?

The other response is to take the priesthood as an entitlement. We are meant for much more than that. We are known by Christ, and we are to make Christ known. That is who we are as a priesthood, open hearted to one another and those we have not met yet.

"We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation," for the good of the Gospel. Amen.

Joens is director of church relations for Epworth Children's Home.

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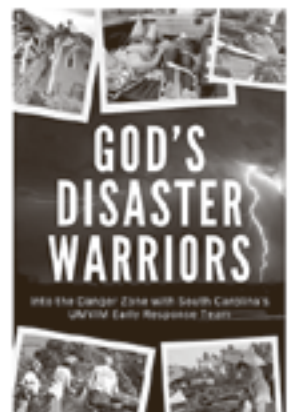
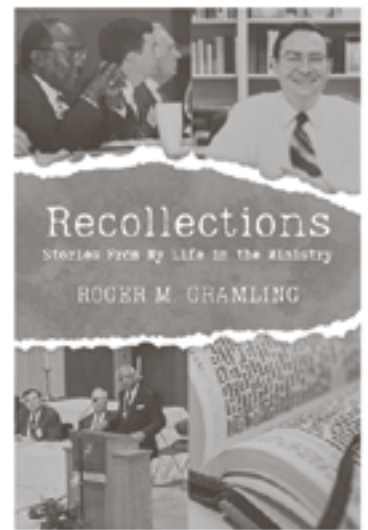


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ANSWERING THE CALL: Outpouring of support for their mission

From Page 1

Not a disaster—an apocalypse

For them, food was the obvious choice. Lifelong friends, Annette and Barbi frequently cook together, and Annette and Barbi's husband, Al, often team up to oversee the annual church banquet, so they are well used to feeding large crowds. As word spread about their call to help, church and community members stepped up with donations. The very next week, Al's friend called to say he'd just been to Canton, North Carolina, where he helped feed a host of volunteers at a donation outpost there, and more help was needed.

"Let's do it!" Annette said to her husband and friends.

Quickly, they organized a trip and the needed supplies—a trailer full of hay, animal food, propane, nonperishable food, blankets, warm clothes and fencing—plus their own cooking materials, and they spent four days at the Western North Carolina Regional Livestock Center in Canton, where they ended up feeding about 80 people three hot meals a day. Most of those they fed were volunteers, both local and from out of state who pitched in to help after the hurricane, including a group from the 101st Airborne Division out of Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Some of the local volunteers had gone through the devastation themselves, yet they were there, serving others in need.

The foursome was staggered by the destruction they saw firsthand.

"It's not a disaster—it's an apocalypse," Ben said, shaking his head as they tried to describe what they'd seen.

Many people are still living in tents, their homes washed away downriver, leaving nothing but dirt and rocks in their place.

"You can't describe it," Annette said, trying her best to recall the devastation. "You can hear people talk, you can see it on TV,



From left are Fair Lawn UMC, Columbia, members Ben and Annette Willis and Al and Barbi Wactor in Newland, North Carolina. The couples feel a call to help feed people and bring supplies after Hurricane Helene, and they are doing their best to respond.

but until you've been there, there's no way to describe it."

They didn't stop with one trip to Western North Carolina. The couples returned Oct. 31 for a day trip to Canton and nearby Cruso, taking more supplies, propane and tools, then returned again the next month to help in Newland, North Carolina, and to nearby Swannanoa, one of the hardest hit places.

On their last trip, Dec. 3-7 to Spruce Pine, North Carolina, they brought supplies and propane, plus fed volunteers at Camp Unity two meals a day.

They plan to go back before Christmas to bring the people bikes and scooters, as well as toys and Christmas stocking items, and then make another longer feeding trip to Spruce Pine in January.

Overwhelming response

The support for their efforts has been overwhelming and humbling, they said,

with help pouring in from neighbors and church members.

Once, when Annette was chatting with a friend at Lizard's Thicket about what they were doing, a stranger overheard the conversation and handed her a hundred-dollar bill to help their efforts. One neighbor wants to purchase their team a camper, and a woman in Winnsboro gave them a trailer to use in their food ministry.

"People we don't even know are helping," Annette said, wiping away tears. "I've driven all the way to Lexington and Chapin to pick up propane heaters."

Whenever they had a need, God has supplied it, they said. While they use their own funds for their personal gas and meals, all the food they've cooked and items they've supplied have come from donations.

Even onsite in North Carolina they've been overwhelmed with assistance. One farmer donated 30 pounds of ground beef.

"They said, 'Here, do something with this,' and we just kind of looked at each other—so we had makeshift sloppy joes!" Annette said, laughing. "It was good and they enjoyed it."

The meals are the fun part—for breakfast, pancakes, eggs, bacon, sausage, ham, and Barbi's famous grits, not to mention biscuits and sausage gravy. Al cooked six Boston butts, and they also did a chicken bog, spiral sliced ham, and hamburger steaks with pinto beans, stewed tomatoes and fried cornbread.

"I think back about all this, and you always hear, 'God doesn't call the equipped; he equips the ones he calls,' and we have been real blessed," Al said. "I feel real

honored to be used by God in this way. I'm retired, and it's something I can do. Not only that, but my faith in humanity has been restored. Everybody has been wanted to help.

"It's overwhelming that in these days and times you see that type of stuff."

'Don't want to stop'

Al's wife, Barbi, said much the same. After the hurricane, she found herself sitting in her recliner at home, comfortable and warm, and it hit her how many people were suffering from the storm.

"It's very difficult to sit and think about someone else suffering—we had to do something," Barbi said. "It was my push to get up."

She said serving in this way, as well as seeing how many others have helped their effort, has been tremendously healing.

"I don't want to stop," Barbi said.

Ben said he feels the same way.

"I just know there's so much more that we can do," Ben said. "This is not something that's ever hit me like this, ever had that kind of impact. God told me to do it, and that's why."

Ben said he hopes telling their story will inspire others to hear God's call and do the same.

Annette agrees. She said the devastation won't be fixed anytime soon.

"This is not short term by any means," Annette said. "We learned yesterday some of the campers being loaned to these volunteer organizations will have to be given back in March, and the camp has to be off their location, but these people aren't going to be self-sufficient by then—many, many people are still in tents and have no place to go."

Ben said last night a panic call came in for wooden pallets after a torrential downpour that flooded tents.

"They were begging people to bring empty, abandoned pallets—things we throw in a fire to build a bonfire with," Ben said, shaking his head. "These people won't be back to normal for a while. For many, there won't ever be a normal. Their property, the farm where they raised their children on, the property lines are still there but it's all washed down the river."

"We look for this to go on indefinitely—as long as we can, as long as there's a need."

Anyone who feels called to help their effort is invited to send funds to Fair Lawn UMC, 9203 Wilson Blvd., Columbia, SC 29203 (note "WNC relief" on the check). To talk with them directly about other ways to help, call Ben at 803-413-7106.

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FRANCIS BURNS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH INVITES YOU TO JOIN US FOR

REACH 2025

EXPANDING YOUR REACH THROUGH EFFECTIVE MINISTRY (MATTHEW 28: 19-20)

Dr. Michael Bowie, Keynote Speaker
 Executive Director Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century

Rev. Geneva Stafford, Host Pastor
 Rev. Frank V. James, Revivalist

FRI JAN 10
 OPENING NIGHT REVIVAL
 6:30 P.M.

SAT JAN 11
 9:30-10:00 A.M. REGISTRATION AND CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST
 10:00-2:30 P.M. WORKSHOPS AND KEYNOTE ADDRESS
 LUNCH PROVIDED

SUN JAN 12
 MORNING WORSHIP AND BLESSING OF MINISTRY VOLUNTEERS
 9:00 A.M.

Pastor and e-Vangelist **Dr. Martin Quick**
 District Superintendent **Rev. Fran Elrod**
 District Superintendent **Rev. Jeffrey Bailey**

QUEST SPEAKERS

WWW.FRANCISBURNSUMC.ORG 5616 FARROW RD. COLUMBIA, SC 29203 803-759-1780