

South Carolina United Methodist Advocate

CONNECTING METHODISTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA SINCE 1837



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February 2025

Churches close year paying 90.24 percent of 2024 budget

By Jessica Brodie

In spite of a decreased number of churches and a fall marked both by natural disasters and a divisive election, South Carolina United Methodist churches exceeded 90 percent in their collection percentage on

2024 apportionments.

Churches paid \$12.6 million, or 90.24 percent of the nearly \$14 million budgeted for 2024. They exceeded the 2023 collection percentage, which was 88.82 percent.

Beth Westbury, treasurer and director

of administrative services for the South Carolina Conference of the UMC, said the results are skewed by apportionment payments made by churches that separated in both 2023 and 2024. She noted the combined apportionments paid by 2023 and 2024

separating churches represents 24 percent of the total amount collected, and the remaining churches paid 76 percent of the amount collected in 2024.

See "90.24 Percent," Page 14

Clothes for the taking

After strife in Haiti grounds planes, women seek other groups to help share 'pillowcase clothes' with kids in need

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—They've been making the pillowcase dresses so long no one can quite remember when they started. As for how many they've made, it's anyone's guess.

"When we got to 6,000 dresses, we quit counting," June Suddeth, the organizer and leader of the group, says with a laugh.

The evidence of their labor fills her cozy house—boxes and bins of cheerful prints, artfully sewn with ribbons and colorful buttons, alongside their other labor of love, pillowcase shorts and matching tops, so the boys can have something to wear as well. In the sewing room, there's space for several to sit and craft, while in the laundry room, clothes line one large table and spill over into boxes next to and beneath it.

See "Clothes," Page 13



Photo by Kelly Gottheiner

One of the kids in Manning UMC's robotics program works on a portion of the youth group's competition project.

Robotics program becomes new youth pull for Lowcountry church

By Jessica Brodie

MANNING—A love for LEGOs has turned into a fruitful ministry for one Lowcountry church, bringing new members to their youth group and an exciting and innovative way to share values of

Christian fellowship with young people.

John Enrietto spent his career as a mechanical engineer, and when he moved from Indiana to Manning, his neighbors quickly invited him to Manning United Methodist Church. One day, while chatting

with church youth ministries leader Kelly Gottheiner, the pair began discussing a program called FIRST, something Enrietto had worked with before.

See "Robotics," Page 12

Simpsonville 'getting back on track' despite lawsuit

By Jessica Brodie

SIMPSONVILLE—A group attempting to leave the denomination without its church going through the proper legal channels is slated to appear in Greenville County court late this month.

Meanwhile, a portion of the church wishing to remain United Methodist has been organizing afresh, with plans to resume weekly worship

as soon as possible.

Simpsonville United Methodist Church, The Methodist Church of Simpsonville and former United Methodist elder the Rev. Michael Smith are being sued by the denomination for fraudulent deed filing and unlawful occupation of the church parsonage and property owned by the UMC, among other things.

The lawsuit was filed Nov. 5 in Greenville

County Common Pleas Courts (see <https://www2.greenvillecounty.org/SCJD/PublicIndex>) seeking declaratory judgment and adjudication in the matter pursuant to *The Book of Discipline* of the United Methodist Church and the provisions adopted regarding church separation by the South Carolina Conference of the UMC.

See "Simpsonville," Page 14

'Rise Up': Scouts, men to gather for joint event at Journey UMC

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—South Carolina men are seeking to revitalize their spirit and their collective ministry, gathering late this month for their annual spiritual retreat.

On Feb. 21-22, United Methodist men of all ages will head to Journey Church for "Rise Up! Rise Up! Steps of a Good Man," a theme taken from Psalm 37:23-25, which shares how the Lord strengthens the steps of

those who walk with him.

"If you have never been to our Men N Ministry annual conference or you have been many times, with our lineup of speakers you will be spiritually filled as never before," said Kenny Bingham, president of the South Carolina Conference United Methodist Men.

See "Rise Up," Page 14



Hours/Location

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Submissions

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

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

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The *Advocate* strives to produce error-free news reports. When mistakes occur, it is our policy to correct them as soon as they are brought to our attention. To request a correction, call Jessica Brodie at 803-786-9486, ext. 338 or 803-807-0018, or email jbrodie@advocatesc.org. In the event of errors in advertisements, the *Advocate* will be responsible only for the space occupied by the actual error. The publisher assumes no financial responsibility for omissions.

Back Issues

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

Letters Policy

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

Advocate to hold listening sessions across S.C. to gauge readers' needs

The *Advocate* newspaper will hold community listening sessions in every district in South Carolina this year to gauge the needs and interests of its readers.

The community listening sessions will enable *Advocate* staff and board members to better understand the news needs of the people of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. The sessions will be part of a wider effort combining surveying, focus groups, interviews and events so the *Advocate* can deliver relevant and reliable news and information so people can make important decisions and participate fully in making disciples

of Jesus Christ. All are welcome.

"The *Advocate* needs to gain financial self-sustainability to endure for the next 200 years," said *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie. "In this process, we are conducting a full brand refresh, rebuilding our website and assessing our mission, vision and core values. We also need to gain more subscribers, donors and advertisers, so it is imperative we try to pull in new and younger South Carolina United Methodists to keep our readership alive. We thought it best to start with surveying what our readers want to know by going directly to them through our districts."

Community listening session dates are as follows; all sessions 6:30-8:30 p.m.:

- Feb. 24: Columbia, at Mount Hebron UMC, West Columbia
- Feb. 25: Rock Hill
- March 25: Greenwood
- April 29: Anderson
- May 15: Spartanburg
- June 24: Greenville
- July 15: Florence, Lake City UMC, Lake City
- Aug. 26: Hartsville
- Sept. 30: Marion
- Oct. 28: Orangeburg
- Nov. 17: Charleston
- Dec. 1: Walterboro

Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer leaders gather 12 interested churches sought for grant assistance

The Leadership Team for a new South Carolina Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer ministry held their first meeting last month at the South Carolina United Methodist Conference Office.

Designed to help South Carolina's United Methodist churches become more fruitful in ministry with children, the ministry 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 its Portico online learning system.

The 2024-2025 Grant Leadership Team, which is responsible for overseeing the grant, consists of clergy and laity: the Rev. Meg Sweeney Cook, Toni Strawther, Dawn Fairley, Kim Bryant, Carrie Treece, Johanna Meyers, the Rev. Michael Jarrell, the Rev. Christopher Greene, the Rev. Suzanne Walker, Briana Brooks, the Rev. Nona Woodle, Toni Taylor, Evan Barker and the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith.

The group met Jan. 16 to focus on developing relationships, planning, setting expectations and evaluating the first year of the grant implementation.

They are seeking 12 churches that want this grant opportunity to increase the number of children participating in worship, increase the ways children participate in worship and create a culture of belonging for all children.

Taylor said key aspects of the program are as follows:

- **Leadership Development:** The five-year grant will support training for pastors, lay leaders and children from 12 churches initially, with 12 more added each year, reaching a total of 60 churches and potentially 500 children;
- **Messy Church Partnership:** Provides a model of hospitality and creativity to intergenerational worship experiences within the church family and unchurched families in communities. Messy Church USA brings a model of hospitality and creativity to intergenerational wor-



Photo by Jessica Brodie

Toni Taylor shares thoughts at the group's first meeting.

ship experiences both within a church family and unchurched families in communities.

- **Intergenerational Focus:** The program will emphasize creating worship experiences that involve all generations, fostering belonging and inclusivity, where everyone feels they belong. Churches will be provided training in communication and the arts to enhance children's confidence and engagement in worship and prayer.

- **Narrative 4** will train the participants to lead the gift of story exchange. Stories are narratives that can be used to convey knowledge, perpetuate tradition and build common belief. Story exchange encourages the participants to deepen their engagement with narratives, exercise curiosity, extend empathy and internalize wisdom. Engaging in this practice allows all participants to forge a deeper connection with each other.

For questions, contact Toni Taylor at ttaylor@umcsc.org or Nona Woodle at nmwoodle@umcsc.org, or visit <http://umcsc.org/children> for the latest information.

Jeremiah Teams hold first meetings to help transform conference

By Dan O'Mara

The South Carolina Conference's four new Jeremiah Teams—tasked with helping transform how the conference is structured, how it operates and how it aligns with "Our 4 Priorities"—began their work in January with a series of team meetings centered on prayer, organization and planning next steps.

Bishop Leonard Fairley late last year appointed 34 lay and clergy leaders from across the conference to the Jeremiah Teams:

The Missional Priorities Team is evaluating the effectiveness of 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. (Those priorities are developing leaders, engaging communities, connecting with and growing disciples, and measuring and evaluating current realities and missional possibilities.)

The Black Church and Ethnic Ministries Strategy Team is working to 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.

The District Alignment Team is reviewing district lines and recommending 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 in their communities.

The Conference Staff Alignment Team is examining the best ways to align conference staff with 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.

Fairley met with each team during their initial gatherings, thanking them for helping the conference explore this "prime opportunity to reset" and encouraging them to be "brutally honest about where we are and where God is leading us."

Fairley has asked the teams to report out of each meeting to ensure transparency and keep the clergy and laity of the conference informed of their work.

Because the schedule of the first round of meetings crossed into the final week of January, the Jeremiah Teams' first reports will appear in the March *Advocate*.

Jeremiah Team members

Missional Priorities Team

- 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)

Black Church & Ethnic Ministries Strategy Team

- 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)

District Alignment Team

- 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)

Conference Staff Alignment Team

- 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)

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

Mission possible: Small community joins forces to feed the hungry

By Fay S. Sprouse, Ph.D.

Ware Shoals United Methodist Church is the home base for a community food bank in Ware Shoals, a small town of about 2,500 residents.

In the beginning, donations from members enabled the church to provide an emergency box of food to families from time to time. However, 2024 proved to be a year of growth and a designation by Greenwood, Abbeville and Laurens counties as an official food bank site.

Becoming an official site includes monthly deliveries of fruits, vegetables and meat from the county as well as a refrigerator and freezer for storage. This additional support enables volunteers to provide nutritionally balanced meals for the families served. The food bank is open two days per month and serves an average of 150 families who live in Ware Shoals. This mission has been blessed by God with support from the community and other churches.

The interdenominational support has been overwhelming. Harmony United Methodist, Calvary Baptist, First Baptist and Dunn Creek Baptist churches provide donations and monetary support as well as volunteers. Sally Brown, site coordinator, volunteers countless hours of her time to this work of heart. From buying, sorting and organizing to packing bags and making home deliveries to those without transportation, she ensures a smooth and efficient operation. Ware Shoals' Pastor Bill Rogers donates time as well as a portion of his salary to this mission.

In addition to support from local churches, the community support is strong. Students from the primary, middle and high schools participate in service-learning projects to generate donations to the food bank.

Thousands of cans and other nonperishable goods are donated each year. Local civic clubs provide monetary support from time to time.

The Sundowner Riders, a local motorcycle club, holds an annual event to support the food bank. Recently, seven



The Sundowner Riders gather with Sally Brown, Ware Shoals site coordinator.

somewhat burly "Santa bikers" arrived in trucks loaded with food and a check for \$700. The club is known for its generous support of those in need.

Great things happen when churches and community entities join together in a common goal. God is working



Above, Sundowner Riders President Tommy Amick shares a smile with Sally Brown.



Sundowner Riders Treasurer Danny Balentine brings food into the church.

in and among us to grow and bless this mission—mission possible!

Sprouse is a member of Ware Shoals UMC and church musician for Ware Shoals and Harmony UMCs.

Marvin's Kids Ministry brings Christmas joy to Oconee County families

Each year in July, members of St. Mark United Methodist Church in Seneca begin donating new toys to grow the inventory that will become an impressive Secret Santa Shop in December.

On Dec. 14, St. Mark served nearly 50 families and 140 children (ages infant through 18) in need by providing gifts, food and clothing through its unique Marvin's Kids Ministry.

Marvin's Kids Ministry was begun in 1979 by the late Marvin Cely, and St. Mark continues it devotedly in his honor. Cely used to say, "Children may be in need, but they still believe in Santa Claus."

The Marvin's Kids Ministry, headed by St. Mark members Sandy James and Nell Hodge, reaches out to Oconee County elementary school counselors in August to help identify families in need. Each family is then visited by a St. Mark congregant to learn more about



Elves help parents shop on Secret Santa Shop day.

the family and what they need most. In December, St. Mark volunteers accompany the families to Walmart, shopping for clothing, shoes and coats for their children.



Linda Skene, Jane Poston and Susan Salis smile with some of the gifts.

Perhaps the most joyful event, however, is the highly organized Secret Santa Shop, which invites parents and guardians to come to the St. Mark Center to shop and select

gifts for their children from the vast array of toys, books and stocking stuffers collected from summer to winter. St. Mark members are asked to purchase two items—one valued at \$20 and one at \$40—based on a child's age and gender. Local businesses contribute items as well. For example, Clemson Family Dentistry donated dozens of new toothbrushes.

On Secret Santa Shop day, St. Mark volunteer "elves" of all ages can be seen scurrying about the St. Mark Center, guiding parents, helping them shop, stuffing stockings, wrapping presents, serving refreshments and generally spreading holiday cheer and Christ's love.

James says, "It's an overwhelming feeling to see the joy that this experience brings to these parents to be able to provide for their children in ways that they didn't think they could."

Trinity's McDaniel organizes community food giveaway in Orangeburg

ORANGEBURG—Trinity United Methodist Church was the spiritual home of a young Jas McDaniel during summers while vacationing with his grandparents, James and Myrtle McDaniel. His grandparents were active in church music and leadership, and the six-year-old boy felt at home with the Rev. Ernest Etheredge and laity. Often he would walk himself to the pulpit and follow Rev. Etheredge to the front door to say goodbye to parishioners and friends.



Throughout the distribution, McDaniel offered to all free hot beverages he brewed in the Fellowship Hall of Trinity. He not only sings as Pr3scott, but he also is a barista and plans to start a company in the near future, Soulfull Brew.

to allocate the food to organizations and families in the Orangeburg area.

On Monday, Dec. 6, The Samaritan House, Paths To Wholeness, Jamison's Pharmacy and several members of the church received and distributed foods. Organizations and families were given meats, vegetables, milks, juices, baby foods, desserts, cereals and grains for multiple meals.

Advancing 20 years, McDaniel is now a singer/songwriter and resides in the community. His kindness and generosity led him to give of his creative talents to help Kimala Hudson. The new owner of the Pee Dee Medical Career Training Center offers scholarships to the economically underserved to receive medical career training.

Hudson's mother, Apostle Joyce Hudson, recognized McDaniel's spirit of generosity and wanted to enable his giving. She allocated a food truck for him to share with his community.

The young entertainer, through guidance from his aunt Dr. Yvette McDaniel, decided

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Viewpoints



Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

Milestone reflections

I had a milestone birthday in January, and this one tugged at me in ways other birthdays haven't: Have I truly been doing "enough"? Have I achieved the things I'd hoped to achieve at this point in my life? Am I living in line with what God would have me do, fulfilling my personal role in bringing about God's kingdom here on earth?

I intended to go camping to celebrate, thinking immersing myself in nature would help me answer some of those questions, but between freezing temperatures and a forecast of rain, that was out the window—as was a hoped-for trip to Europe, something I still haven't been able to check off my bucket list. Instead, my family and I took a trip to Atlanta, where we explored the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Site.

What a trip, and what a balm to the soul, reminding me of what is truly important in life. My teenaged daughter and I peered spellbound at the eternal flame at the King Memorial, a flame that symbolized the enduring legacy of Dr. King's dream for justice, peace and equality for all people. At the historical site, our eyes traced the timeline of Dr. King's childhood and his long and critical work as one of the central figures in the civil rights movement. I listened to speeches he made and glimpsed awards he earned; my heart fluttered and swelled as I pondered such things. Dr. King has been one of my great heroes since I was a young girl, but back then, it always felt like his work had been so long ago. At least in my experience, as a woman growing up in the thriving multicultural community of Miami, Florida, so many of the strides he encouraged seemed as though they'd been realized by the time I came of age.

Yet it wasn't "long ago"—not at all. My mom was just a young girl herself when Dr. King was marching and rallying people all over the nation in the world to join in his call for a "beloved community." And I know his work—our work—for equality and justice still continues.

This is work that doesn't ever go away, does it? We need to keep it in the forefront of our mind still, because even though it seems sometimes like the race has been won and the work is over, it's not. Complacency lulls us into apathy. And apathy does not serve the kingdom of God.

My trip to Atlanta, and to the King Center, reminded me of this.

February is Black History Month, and regardless of whatever race comprises the majority of your church, I encourage you to consider what you can do to honor our nation's Black history this month. How has your life changed because of it? How can you make a difference? How can you connect with others to build a world that reflects the varied hues, cultures and ethnicities of all of God's people?

If you haven't read them yet, I invite you to check out some of the Black history titles available from the *Advocate's* publishing arm, the Advocate Press (see article, Page 7).

Together, we can bring about change that unites us as one in Christ.

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love*, 1963

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."—John 1:5 (NIV)



Bishop's Corner

by Bishop Leonard Fairley

Agape love, 'The Beloved Community' and our current reality

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."—John 3:16-17 (NRSV)

While preparing to write this month's column, three things have topped my prayer list. First, the ongoing work of the Jeremiah Teams that have been tasked with the work of right-sizing our annual conference to fit our current reality. Second, the best way to invite the annual conference to celebrate Black History Month. Third, a focus on love in this Valentine's Day month.

Friends, that is some ambitious ground to attempt covering in one column, but I am going to give it a shot. There are two foundational biblical passages that I like to use to help center my thoughts. I can think of no better foundational scripture to root our work in than John 3:16-17.

As we go about doing the work of right-sizing our annual conference, I pray that we will root our work in the love of Jesus Christ. We do this work with a strong belief that there is nothing greater than God's love, as the apostle Paul reminds us with these words: "But strive for the greater gift. And I will show you a still more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31) and "And now faith, hope, and love abide these three; and the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Now you might be asking, how is the bishop going to fit Black History Month into all of this? During this Black History Month celebration, I can think of no better earthly example of love than the concept of "The Beloved Community." I pray that it will be a concept we consider as we live into the mandate to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

"The Beloved Community" has been defined as a vision of a society where everyone is cared for, free from poverty, hunger and hate. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. popularized "The Beloved Community" during the civil rights movement, emphasizing cooperation, nonviolence and the intrinsic worth of all people.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, to love one another and let that love be our core value and guiding light, in our current reality or any reality, is ambitious work.

Celebrating the unique contributions of all God's children, focusing particularly this month on the unique and vital contributions of Africans Americans, is ambitious work.

However, it becomes possible if we allow God the creator, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to empower, equip and encourage us.

"We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Letters to the Editor

Where is Jesus?

We are living in a society where it is difficult to know what a Christian is. A person says they are a Christian but does not live as one. Christianity has been misrepresented and abused for many reasons.

In the Bible, leaders as Herod and Pilate wanted power, recognition and luxury, unlike Jesus, who made the ultimate sacrifice and lived a life of love and forgiveness. How does a Christian, a follower of Jesus, ignore lies, hate, adultery and retribution?

The disciples were called Christians the first time in Antioch by the pagans because they were followers of Jesus (Acts 11:26). They followed the teachings of Jesus: Love God, love neighbor (Matthew 22:37) and we must obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19).

The old saying asks, "What would Jesus do?" Let's put Jesus back into Christianity and follow his teachings.

*Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia*

Why money won't help

More money cannot help The United Methodist Church.

Churches often envision expensive fixes to remedy a generalized malaise. Perhaps a family life center with a gym will attract families, a luxury bus to transport reluctant and new attenders or another purchased program to tweak our image. Still, after the money is spent, the fundamental relation-

ship to church remains untouched and uninspired.

Genesis theology tells us God has being within himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in loving relationship. Every blessing God gives is out of, for and evidenced in our relationships. God's word to us through the Ten Commandments is about right relationship with God, self, others and all creation. Wholeness, growth and flourishing come only through right relationships. "Right" relationship is holy, loving relationships. More money is powerless to help.

Likewise, what is wrong in the world is evidenced in broken relationships. Sin is anything that hurts or stands between us and God, us and self, us and others, or us and all of creation. We see this played out in personal, communal, societal and universal relationships and their systems. We are broken in a broken world. And again, money cannot help.

Money has nothing to offer the brokenness of our world. Healing and wholeness, blessing and salvation come only through relationships lived out in God's prescribed ways.

It is a hard truth for our culture that operates based on the health and well-being of the golden calf of Wall Street. But empty pews are a witness to the distractions of wealth that have grayed the church. Wealth is a dominant but empty idol inside



4908 Colonial Drive, Suite 207, Columbia, SC 29203
803-786-9486 or 803-726-6743
info@advocatesc.org | www.advocatesc.org

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UMCSC Recipe Swap

Crockpot Loaded Baked Potato Soup

From the kitchen of: *Patty McIntosh, member of Mill Creek United Methodist Church, Columbia*

Ingredients:

- 30 oz. bag frozen hash browns (I use shredded)
- 28 oz. chicken broth
- 10.75 oz. can cream of chicken soup
- 2 tsp. dried, minced onion
- 1 tsp. ground black pepper
- 8 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 4-6 slices of bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 2 c. shredded cheddar cheese

Recipes Wanted

Do you have a favorite recipe? Email news@advocatesc.org, and don't forget to tell us your name, church name and city.

Mix frozen hash browns (no need to thaw), chicken broth, cream of chicken soup, dried minced onion and pepper in Crockpot and cook on low for five hours. Remove lid and stir in cream cheese. Cook another 30 minutes. Serve with bacon and cheddar on top.



Cognitive Connection

by the Rev. Robin Griffeth

Joy in serving

It's most evident when our friends with dementia arrive at respite—the joy that all of us experience together despite this awful disease.

According to one of our volunteers, eyes sparkle as the people walk through the door into our fellowship hall. Caregivers anticipate the much-needed break they will get when they drop off their loved one with dementia at our program. They're relieved knowing they will get some time to themselves while their loved ones receive compassionate care from our trained volunteers.

Our friends with dementia beam with joy as they walk in. While they may not remember the names or faces of the volunteers, they remember that this is a happy place to be. They've grown accustomed to feeling cheerful and safe with us.

And it's possible that the volunteers are the most joyful people of all. They line up by the windows so they can see the cars as they pull into the parking lot, ready with smiles and hugs to greet our participants. They are eager to get the party started.

Yes, being in respite ministry with people who have dementia can be like a party. For four hours we laugh and play, sing and dance and share a meal together. The volunteers sit shoulder-to-shoulder with participants, all of us smiling and so engaged in the activities that it's impossible to tell who has dementia and who doesn't.

As Respite For All founder Daphne Johnston promises, respite is the process of reclaiming joy together. A respite ministry provides caregivers, participants and volunteers the opportunity to take part in authentic friendships, which result in great joy.

We started Woodland United Methodist Church's Memory Connection respite program in October 2024.

Respite means having a break from caregiving so that one can take care of oneself. We began with a handful of volunteers and participants, and, because of the immense demand for dementia-related respite, we have grown so much over the past three months that we now have a waiting list.

When I tell people about ministry of The Memory Connection, the most frequent response I hear is, "Oh! That's wonderful, but it must be sad to work there." I reply that while there are moments of sadness because dementia is a terrible disease, the joy we experience far outweighs anything else. In fact, when I asked our volunteers to write to me about their involvement in the program, the word they used the most often was "joy."

And as they experience joy, our volunteers also grow in discipleship. In addition

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.

to joy, the other fruits of the Spirit develop and ripen in each person. Gentleness, kindness, patience and self-control flourish in our respite volunteers.

These qualities are evident when, for the seventh time, a volunteer responds with a happy smile to a participant's question about when lunch will be served. These qualities are also evident when someone needs to be retaught how to hold a paintbrush or what the rules for Uno are.

"One of the most meaningful activities for me is when we sing hymns as a group. The participants may no longer be able to read the words, but their singing is heartfelt and sincere. And I have learned to have patience when the same song is requested several times in a row," declares a volunteer.

One person said, "I have to use self-control in encouraging participants to do activities themselves instead of doing the activity for them."

Many of our volunteers believe they receive more than they give at respite.

"I know that this ministry has made my day brighter after spending time with the participants," says one.

"I am blessed by this opportunity and am so grateful that God has given me the patience, love and compassion for all involved," says another.

The need for respite care for people with dementia is enormous.

If you feel called to start a ministry program of your own, we hope you'll visit us. You can see what it's like to reclaim joy together.

To schedule a visit, email ministry@comporium.net. We meet Mondays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Griffeth pastors Woodland UMC, Rock Hill.

LETTERS: Sounding off

From Page 4

and outside of the church. Jacques Ellul, a French philosopher, sociologist, lay theologian and professor, argues, "When faith is strong and brotherly love resurgent, money is no problem. Money becomes dominant only when men and women cease to hope or believe. ... Mammon is the power that waits patiently for love to fail" ("Subversion of Christianity").

Money cannot help The United Methodist Church. Only right relationships with God, self, others and all creation can address our deepest needs. The help we need is the love of God that makes loving relationships possible. No money is needed to pursue, sustain or build up such relationships. But relationships are messy, unpredictable, often complicated by sin, take time and effort and are often unrewarding. Money is our insulation against the struggle of relationships. Still, money is a false god that deals death.

Our hope remains the love of God, for us, at work in and among us and through us to the world. Such love can only be known in relationship.

Dr. Cynthia Muncie, pastor St. Andrews UMC, Orangeburg

Unchecked evil

Evil (Satan) continues to raise his ugly head in hatred of everything good. In other words, he hates everything of God, and his dire mission is to ruin it, just like he has done to what was a vibrant, energetic United Methodist church with outstanding missionaries through United Methodist Volunteers In Missions. Satan's lies state it is OK to water down the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that it is not our responsibility to call sin as sin so people might turn from their evil ways and come to know the only true and fulfilling life in Jesus Christ! This fulfilling life is only found in repentance, turning away from sinful ways and follow-

ing our lord and savior Jesus. Satan says go ahead and allow the changing of the *UMC Discipline* and sinful infiltration because you do not want to rock the boat (Revelation 22:17-19).

People of the UMC, it is way past time to rock the sinking boat of the UMC from a sinful death. Wake up! Put away your cowardly ways and take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God! Stand firm against Satan and his evil ways by putting on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:13), then take action! Stop sitting idly by while the king of liars is leading God's children astray.

Shame on you, and woe to you Judicial Council for your dictatorship that does not allow churches to leave after you decimated the Gospel and changed it to reflect worldly views instead of godly laws. Open your blind eyes lest you all face the judgment of God who will not stand for such injustice. We will all stand before God one day, and woe to you who deliberately lead others astray. Sitting idly by is the same as being lukewarm in God's eyes (Revelation 3:15-16). You have us enslaved, like Pharaoh did the Israelites, but God's Day of freedom and justice is coming. Jesus, with a title of "faithful and true," will come riding a white horse. On his robe and thigh is written: King of kings and Lord of lords! (Revelation 19:11-16).

This might seem like a harsh warning from God through me, and it is. God and I love the UMC. I am still a member for now and want all to come to know the fullness of true life that only comes through Jesus and following his word. I want to see our beloved UMVIM missions that flourished for 50-plus years revised in a true ministry that we can wholeheartedly believe in and want to bring others into.

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!" (Revelation 4:8 NIV).

William "Billy" R. Robinson Jr. North UMC, North



Guest Commentary

by Dr. Mark Thompson

And what will be next?

Was anyone really surprised by the Judicial Council's findings? I asked the question a year ago: How can the bishop and the trustees simply choose to totally disregard the *Book of Discipline* and make up their own rules? Well, the answer is simple: They can't. And this is clear evidence of the lack of integrity and leadership skills at the highest level of our church.

Let's do some math: According to the article in the April 2024 *Advocate*, "Trustees: 10% Tithe from 2023 Separating Churches Disbursed," payments to the conference for the 113 churches that separated in 2023 totaled \$17.5 million. That is 10 percent of the value of their real property. So my math says, if that is 10 percent of the value, the 100 percent value of real property was \$175 million. Subtract the \$17.5 million paid back to the conference, and that means the church gave up \$157.5 million worth of property. Read that again: The church gave away \$157.5 million in property.

In the process, they also caused a great deal of division, hurt, anger, disdain and distrust for its leadership in every one of its churches, those that left, those that planned to leave and those that stayed. And no one is being held accountable.

I do wonder, how many of our district superintendents, our subject matter experts on the *Book of Discipline*, stood up and said, "No, we can't do this!" I hope they did, but we never heard about it.

To heap a little more controversy onto this dumpster fire, the conference plans to use some of the fees they received from the churches that left in 2024 to start new churches in the same communities where they just gave churches away! And I am just getting started.

Our former bishop and our board of trustees are responsible for the decision to violate church law. Bishop Holston has relocated to the Alabama-West Florida Conference where, currently, he and the AWF Conference are fielding 44 possible lawsuits from individual churches who are suing the AWF Conference for its mismanagement of their separation process. According to an article in the AL.Com News published June 3, 2024, "United Methodist Split: Alabama Supreme Court Rejects Appeal by 44 Churches Blocked from Leaving," the Alabama Supreme Court rejected the appeal of 44 UMCs that wanted the state to adjudicate the claims of mismanagement by the conference disaffiliation process. The court said that it is a church law matter and must be adjudicated by the denomination. If these 44 churches chose to file a lawsuit, even if the conference wins every lawsuit, the cost of these 44 suits could bankrupt the conference. They would win the battle and lose the war. The same thing has already started in the South Carolina Conference.

Oh, but there is more. According to a Dec. 18, 2024, article by the Associated Press, "Deadly Violence in Nigeria Tied to United Methodist Church Schism Over LGBTQ Policies," the recently reported violence in Taraba stemmed from "a schism in the worldwide United Methodist Church over its decision to repeal LGBTQ bans and the ensuing formation of the new Global Methodist Church by breakaway conservative churches. A United Methodist church member was shot and killed during a confrontation between both factions in Taraba, a state in northeast Nigeria. Homes were set ablaze, claiming the lives of two children, ages 2 and 4, and the overseer of a United Methodist school and nursery. Another 10 church members were reported injured."

I am more convinced than ever that if the "One Church Plan" had been adopted, we would not be in this situation today. The One Church Plan offered a working solution for all constituency groups. It allowed more conservative bishops, conferences, churches and pastors to continue their current practices. It allowed more progressive bishops, conferences, churches and pastors to fully include LGBTQ persons in the life of the church. The plan had no effect on Central Conferences outside the United States who are able to

adapt the *Book of Discipline* to their own mission settings. The One Church Plan would have held the denomination together for the widest ministry with the greatest impact on living out the United Methodist mission: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. But the leadership could not make it happen. Water under the bridge.

So maybe it is time for a reboot of our church. I was taught that if you come to the boss with a problem, you better have a solution. This is my proposal:

First, we need to retire ineffective bishops and elect bishops who are not afraid to make decisions that may upset people or groups or have negative political or financial consequences.

As has happened in other states, we can make this the Carolina Conference, combining North and South together. One bishop, one cabinet.

We can expand the size of the districts by cutting each state into four districts and streamline the administrative paperwork and responsibilities of our DSs.

We can assemble the DSs, active and retired, and charge them with the task of reviewing and streamlining their responsibilities to make systems more efficient and cost-effective. For example, in-person charge conferences could be held on an "as needed" or "requested" basis, as necessary, and otherwise replaced by Zoom conferencing, which would be both efficient and cost-effective.

And few people will like this one, but it must be considered: We can merge smaller churches together. Based on the numbers below, and the fact that South Carolina has 46 counties with 732 UMCs, that is an average of 15.9 churches in every county! Some of these churches are just around the corner from each other, within 10-15 miles. This may have come in handy when communities were more tightly knit and travel was difficult, but times have changed. We need to evolve with the times in the name of resource management. Church consolidation is not a popular concept, but the church is a business, with overhead, pastors and employees to pay.

The conference also faces a shortage of ordained elders to service these churches. In an opinion I wrote for the *Advocate* in August 2023, "Where Have All the Elders Gone?," according to the conference office there were 957 churches and 341 active ordained elders. As I understand it, that leaves 732 churches. As we have no information on how many elders left, I will speculate that 21 chose to leave the UMC, leaving 320. Considering these factors, church consolidation should be on the table.

One more thought regarding consolidation: Churches have a tax-exempt status because the churches are considered an active part of community outreach and support. At least, they were. Some people are proposing the removal of churches' tax-exempt status because many churches simply take care of themselves.

It is time to stop "playing church." If we consolidated churches that are close to each other, we could use that money to enhance the ministry in our communities as well as to recruit new pastors for the conference with real incentives.

Which brings me to my final point: It is time for our leadership to do something to effectively encourage, incentivize and support new blood in the ministry. So far, crickets. It is not enough to wring our hands and complain that there are not enough ordained elders.

I am sure there are others out there that have as good or better ideas than these. I know this is a lot to chew on, but we need to start someplace. I have met several of the pastors in this conference, and I am convinced that we have some very good leaders and very smart people. It is time for those people to stand up and sound off. Stop being part of the problem and start being part of the solution!

Thompson pastors Gilbert UMC, Gilbert.



Guest Commentary

By Ron Gilmer

Can God use you for his work? Really?

This story is not about me. The story may give you a chance to answer the above question. I had the pleasure of being a witness and actually seeing what happened.

Many people, maybe most people, do not like to think they are being used by another person to get what that person wants without much regard for the person being used. But this story may illustrate why being used can be a good thing at times.

My family lived in the little town of Johnston. We lived in a very small trailer parked on my aunt's property. The family had a 1949 Studebaker truck. My dad worked at the Milliken Plant just behind the trailer. He walked to work. Dad's mother lived in Bristol, Virginia. We would travel there at times to visit Grandmother. We traveled via Hwy. 221 up through Marion, Woodlawn, Sevier, North Cove, up by Linville Caverns and onto Bristol. When we made these trips, Dad would always say, "I sure would like to live here." He especially liked the drive through the North Cove area.

Then one day Dad came home with all his tools from Milliken and announced he had quit his job and we were moving. He simply said, "We are moving to North Cove." No, he did not have another job.

Within days, the trailer was hooked up to the Studebaker truck and off to North Cove we went where Dad had rented a space in a new trailer park to park our trailer.

It was getting late and raining as we made our way toward Dad's dream location. I was 6 years old, but I have a very vivid memory of what happened next.

Dad pulled the truck and trailer into a real gas filling station in the country. A man from the gas station greeted us. He was a short man with a big smile. His face was covered with bumps. His name was Bumpy. I sensed the people there really liked Bumpy. Bumpy told Dad he would not be able to get the trailer into the park because of the weather. He suggested that we park the trailer at the gas station for the night.

Dad agreed.

Bumpy came out to the trailer with an extension cord so we could have light. Bumpy later came to the trailer with bologna sandwiches. What hospitality! We later learned that Bumpy was known in the area for these sandwiches. They were called "gasoline sandwiches" because Bumpy pumped gas and then made the sandwiches. The question was what steps did he take between the two.

As a 6-year-old boy, I just took it all in. Many years go by, and at times the actions of Bumpy would come to mind. Was Bumpy being used by God to spread kindness to people? I wonder how many people Bumpy positively affected during his life.

Did Bumpy knowingly feel God was working through him?

I have no idea. It appears to me that he was following someone.

Now, where do we as people come into play? Have we been showing kindness and genuine love to others? Can we still do better? Yes, even us old guys!

This story happened 72 years ago. Bumpy's kind actions are still here.

I wonder: Have we or can we do something positive enough that someone will remember and greatly appreciate us or the effect we may have had on them after all our years on earth?

May God bless all of us!

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

SCADP protests Bowman execution

South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty is speaking out this month against the scheduled execution of Marion Bowman.

On Jan. 3, 2025, the South Carolina Supreme Court issued an execution warrant for Bowman, who is scheduled to be executed on Jan. 31.

"Mr. Bowman is the second person with a wrongful conviction claim to be scheduled for execution in South Carolina in less than six months," said United Methodist pastor the Rev. Hillary Taylor, SCADP's executive director. "What's more, Mr. Bowman's case highlights the flaws in our justice system concerning inadequate, racist legal representation. In short, Mr. Bowman's case shows the inherent discrimination of the death penalty: our justice system does not care that the right person is executed. Any person is an adequate substitute, especially if that person is young, Black, and poor. Our taxpayer dollars would be better spent fixing our state's interrogation practices in-



Marion Bowman is slated for execution by lethal injection Jan. 31.

stead of incarcerating innocent citizens for decades before killing them."

Taylor and others in the SCADP are calling on Gov. Henry McMaster to commute Bowman's sentence to life without the possibility of parole.

The mission of SCADP is to abolish the death penalty and catalyze criminal justice reform in South Carolina.



Seven titles from Advocate Press for Black History Month

February is Black History Month, when the nation recognizes and honors the significant contributions of African Americans to the church and society at large, highlighting achievements in areas like art, music, leadership and writing while also reflecting on the struggles and experiences of the Black community throughout history.

The Advocate's book-publishing arm, the Advocate Press, has a number of titles that can help South Carolina United Methodists reflect on Black history as well as celebrate works by Black United Methodists.

Consider the following:

- "Stories of Racial Awakening (Book 1): Narratives of Changed Hearts and Lives from South Carolina United Methodists," and its companion book, "More Stories of Racial Awakening (Book 2)," both compiled and edited by the Advocate's Jessica Brodie with an introduction by South Carolina's former Resident Bishop L. Jonathan Holston;
- "My Banned Black History Sermons" and "Preaching in the Midst Of: How Black Preaching has Changed in the COVID-19 Pandemic," both by the Rev. Amiri Hooker; and
- "From My Heart to Your Eyes: Poems of Faith and Social Justice," "A Healing Journey: Poems of Faith, Healing, Recovery, and Coping with Grief" and "Loving Hands: A 40-Day Devotional for Caregivers," all by Stephon C. Void, a certified lay servant in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

To purchase the books in paperback or ebook format, visit <https://advocatesc.org/books>.



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Mike Vandiver

Reflections on President Carter

When Donna Vandiver had her 60th birthday in 2004, I arranged a surprise birthday trip to Plains, Georgia, for us to hear President Carter teach Sunday school at their church. President Carter always taught the International Sunday School lesson for the day.

I had studied the student edition and the teacher's edition. His lesson gave evidence that he had done extensive research that included far more than what was in those two books. I was invited by their pastor to offer the morning prayer during the worship service.

After the service, I had arranged for us to treat President and Mrs. Carter to lunch. We had quite a visit with many people coming over to the table to say, "Hi, Jimmy!"

When it came time to end the occasion, President Carter explained they were headed to The National Democratic Convention where he would be speaking. The conversation during our meal was as casual and informative as it could be. We are grateful that the Carters would be so generous with their time.

Several times during the conversation, references were made to the fact that Mrs. Carter grew up as a United Methodist and that they were married at The Plains UMC. They later became members of Plains First Baptist Church but left when that church voted not to allow African Americans to become members. The Carters joined Maranatha Baptist Church, about five miles down the road from where they had been members.

It has always been a small congregation and members share even the maintenance responsibilities. Several members told us that President Carter took his turn cutting the grass on the riding lawnmower while the Secret Service looked on.

Donna and I continue to be so grateful



The Vandivers share a meal with the Carters in 2004.

for having shared this special time with The Carters. On another occasion, I took my good friend Jack Meadors down to Plains. We arrived on a Saturday about lunch time and were having lunch with our friends, the Rev. John Culp and his wife, Peggy. John looked out the restaurant window and said, "Wow, there's President and Mrs. Carter!" We all went out to greet them.

Jack Meadors had taught several courses at Candler School of Theology at Emory after retiring from being a United Methodist bishop in Mississippi. President Carter would come up to Emory and have casual conversations with faculty and Jack had been in some of those gatherings. The two of them had brief conversation that day. However, Jack first spoke with Mrs. Carter, asking how she was feeling following her recent surgery. Mrs. Carter said she was feeling better and proceeded to introduce us to her surgeon, a woman from India, who Mrs. Carter had invited to come to Plains for the weekend. The surgeon and her family were at the church the next morning.

Again, the Carters were just as down to earth in their conversation as they could be!

Vandiver, a retired elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, lives in Anderson.



Humanity Behind Bars

by the Rev. Nichole Middleton

The transformative power of pastoral care in prison

Imagine being in a place where every decision, every movement and every aspect of your life is controlled by someone else.

This is the reality for many inmates, who must deal with the consequences of their actions while navigating the harsh conditions of incarceration. Sharing a cramped space with strangers, living under a strict schedule and losing the freedom to come and go as you please can make one feel less human.

Yet in this challenging environment, there is a beacon of hope—pastoral care. Both within prison walls and after release, pastoral care offers a lifeline to those seeking redemption and comfort. For many inmates who find faith during their incarceration, their new spiritual journey becomes a source of strength during their "valley of the shadow of death" season, drawing on Psalm 23's witness to God's enduring love and mercy during difficult times. They accept the need for consequences for their past actions, but they also believe in the boundless forgiveness that faith provides.

For nearly 16 years, I have lived out my calling inside the fence, in the sacred spaces of incarceration. I preach, teach, pray, administer the sacraments and celebrate milestones like graduations—GED, vocational trades and cognitive behavior program completions—and recreational tournament victories. I facilitate opportunities to worship, pray, fast and observe ritual, traditional and ceremonial meals for the adults in custody under my spiritual care. I talk with them about life, visit them in the hospital and, heartbreakingly, sometimes serve as the only person who knows them at their funerals.

This is not a ministry of convenience; rather, it is my full-time ministry, my daily reality.

The reality of the context of my ministry must remain in my thoughts at all times. When I go behind the fence, I carry keys and OC spray (Oleoresin Capsicum, a type of pepper spray used for protection), and I wear a stab-proof vest for safety, as not all who are contained have been redeemed or are repentant of the wrong that has deemed them unfit to be in society unrestrained. While churches conduct active shooter drills, I prepare for hostage situations, drone attacks and massive fights. For this reason, I am expected to monitor my surroundings while being ready to run toward danger to aid anyone in distress.

My role is a balance of mercy and justice.

I must also guard my heart so that my ministry models that of Jesus. As a pastor, I am called to embody the grace and love of Christ, offering compassion and hope even in the most challenging circumstances. According to United Methodist Church theology, grace is the unmerited favor of God. As pastors, we are entrusted with the responsibility to extend that grace to all, guiding them toward reconciliation and transformation. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, emphasized the importance of grace in three forms: prevenient grace, justifying grace and sanctifying grace, all of which play a role in the spiritual journey of those we serve.

In this context, I am privileged to walk alongside individuals as they confront their pasts and dare to imagine a future. I hear their hopes for reconciliation with estranged families, their struggles to envision life beyond the stigma of incarceration and their fears of returning to a society that too often denies them a second chance.

These conversations shape my understanding of what is truly needed to help returning citizens succeed.

Yet too often, the national conversation on reentry is dominated by voices that lack this lived experience. While well-meaning volunteers and occasional visitors offer valuable contributions, their perspectives can overshadow those of us who are immersed in this work every day. This disconnect leads to programs and policies that fail to address the complexities of reentry and the systemic barriers that returning citizens face.

I do not claim to have all the answers—no one does! But I know this much: Supporting returning citizens requires more than slogans about second chances. It demands dismantling the barriers that keep housing, employment and successful community reintegration out of reach. It demands intentional action to address generational inequities that disproportionately funnel Black, Brown and other marginalized individuals into the criminal justice system.

The urgency of this work cannot be overstated. Efforts to erase the history of slavery and systemic racism threaten to obscure the roots of mass incarceration. National debates on border security and immigration reinforce narratives of exclusion and dehumanization. Meanwhile, the ever-widening economic gap leaves those who are already marginalized—including returning citizens—further behind.

Here in South Carolina, where the weight of our nation's history is deeply felt, we have a unique opportunity to lead. Supporting returning citizens is not about charity; it is about justice. It is about addressing the disparities that persist long after a sentence has been served. It is about creating pathways to stable housing, meaningful employment and genuine community reintegration.

I have seen what is possible when we choose to invest in returning citizens. Men and women find purpose and hope through education, vocational training and faith-based programs. Families are reunited. Communities are enriched by individuals who were once written off as irredeemable. These successes are not rare—they are evidence of what can happen when we believe in the power of transformation.

As a society, we face a choice. We can continue to build higher fences and maintain the status quo, or we can commit to breaking cycles of incarceration and poverty by supporting those who seek to rebuild their lives. This work requires more than occasional involvement—it demands long-term commitment, guided by the voices of those who live this reality every day.

By highlighting the importance of pastoral care, we can help humanize those who have been incarcerated and recognize their need for compassion, guidance and support. In doing so, we can build a more just and empathetic society where forgiveness and redemption are not just concepts but lived realities.

Let us choose redemption, justice and hope. Together, we can create a future where transformation is not just possible—it is inevitable.

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

Two South Carolinians earn certificate of Public Safety Chaplaincy

On Jan. 7, 19 students graduated from Lenoir Rhyne University, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary as the Third Cohort. The students graduated with a certificate of Public Safety Chaplaincy.

The Public Safety Chaplaincy course was 18 months long and started in June 2023. The students covered many subject matters that would assist them in their job as a chaplain with a public safety department.

One of the students that graduated is Pastor James W. Lewis Sr., local pastor of the St. Matthews Charge (Orangeburg District). Lewis is the peer support/chaplain for the South Carolina Firefighters Assistance Support Team and Sandy Run Fire Department (Calhoun County), with more than 40 years in public safety.

Another graduate is Thomas Berry, a member of Washington Street United Methodist Church in Columbia. A retired SLED agent with seven years in service, Berry has a total of 34 years as a law enforcement officer and is a peer support with the South Carolina Law Enforcement Assistance Program.

During the course, teacher assistants helped with the training, and the TAs were part of the other two cohorts. One of the TAs was Pastor Brian Gilmer. Gilmer graduated from Cohort Two in 2020 and is the chaplain with Greenville County Sheriff Office K-9 Unit. He is also the pastor of Travelers Rest UMC in the Greenville District.



A retired SLED agent with seven years in service, Thomas Berry has a total of 34 years as a law enforcement officer.



Pastor Brian Gilmer (left) graduated from Cohort Two in 2020, while Pastor James W. Lewis Sr. graduated this year.

Salkehatchie alum promoted to Rear Admiral of United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps

By the Rev. John Culp

Salkehatchie Summer Service has touched thousands of young people's lives since 1978. There are many stories of these youth who are now in responsible, productive careers.

Beth Lindsey Helm was a youth at Salem United Methodist Church, Greenville, in the 1980s. For seven summers, she attended Salkehatchie Summer Service at Penn Center, St. Helena Island and the Pee Dee camp in Marlboro County. She worked on homes repairing roofs, rotten floors, plumbing and siding in 90-degree temperature. You have to see it, smell it, taste it and feel it to know poverty conditions. She worked on the homes of the destitute and had compassion for these people.

As with many youth, Salkehatchie was a life changing experience for her. Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" Mother Teresa said, "We can do no great things, only small things with great love. Love until it hurts."

Helm earned her Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry from Wofford College

in Spartanburg and her Doctorate of Pharmacy from the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston. She wanted to help others and her country, so she joined the Commissioned Corps of the United States Public Health Service, which works on the front lines of public health. Physicians, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, veterinarians and other professionals fighting diseases conduct research and care for patients in underserved communities across the nation and throughout the world. The head of USPHS is the surgeon general.

Helm served all over the United States from Alaska to Cherokee, North Carolina, to Andrews Federal Prison to Phoenix to Washington, D.C.

And now this Salkehatchie worker was just promoted to Rear Admiral Elizabeth Helm of the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. Only 1 percent of the total force of 6,000 in USPHS achieve this honor.

As minister of Jesus Christ and the mentor of many youth we are thankful for this achievement for her. Loving people is a blessing, and she found her calling.



The Culp—the Rev. John Culp and his wife, Peggy—join Rear Admiral Elizabeth Helm for her pinning ceremony in the Capitol.



United Women in Faith

by Patricia Armstrong

'Faithful Advocacy, Faithful Service'

South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith's Legislative Advocacy Day returns in person March 18 at Epworth Children's Home.

The theme for this year's conference is "Faithful Advocacy; Faithful Service; Transforming Justice and Equity."

Program participants include State Representative Dr. Jermaine Johnson, South Carolina School Improvement Council's Dr. Quantina Hagwood and Vivian Anderson, educator and founder of EveryBlackGirl Inc.

Programs such as LAD provide an opportunity for attendees to interact with people from all walks of life; to become more knowledgeable about social issues affecting women, children and youth; and to become better equipped to bring about the needed changes to address such issues.

United Women in Faith are women with a purpose. We connect and nurture women through Christian spiritual formation, leadership development, creative fellowship and education so they can inspire, influence and impact local and global communities. We work for justice through compassionate service and advocate to change unfair policies (learn more at <https://uwfaith.org>).

The two national UWF priority focus areas are Just Energy for All and ending the school to prison pipeline.

We serve. We advocate. We make a difference. And we hope to see you March 18 at LAD—still believing love in action can change the world.

This conference is open to everyone.

For more information, email healthmin1725@gmail.com.

Armstrong is the SCCUWF social action coordinator.

Bishop Fairley spends time with Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry

COLUMBIA—On Dec. 12, South Carolina's new Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley attended Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry's Board of Trustees meeting, held at Grace United Methodist Church.

ASNM Chair Mike Simpson welcomed Fairley and asked the board members present to introduce themselves. During the meeting, Fairley learned about the six homes ASNM operates in South Carolina. Executive Director Kim Thomas spoke about the residents and their many activities, the desperate need for more housing in the state and the hopes and dreams of ASNM to fulfill this need.

Fairley responded to this need by encouraging the ASNM Board to draw upon the many connections in the UMC, and, in particular, in the South Carolina Conference. Fairley offered his help and support and suggested different avenues to help further the ministry of Aldersgate.

Following the meeting, Fairley met many of the Columbia area residents



Some of the Aldersgate residents gather at a recent social event.

from Stephen's House, Tommy's House and the Columbia Builders Care Home. All enjoyed a barbecue lunch after.



Photos courtesy of Henry Belton

Birthday surprise

On Jan. 19, members, family and friends came together to celebrate a birthday and appreciation day for Shiloh UMC, Lugoff, Lay Servant Murphy Belton. It was a wonderful surprise to Belton. Some family members came from two hours away to be there, including her 92-year-old grandmother. Also in attendance was ShaRome Henry, executive assistant for South Carolina Conference UMC Clergy Services, whom Belton met during recent Lay Servant classes. Belton is a dedicated worker for the Lord and an inspiration and role model for many. Pictured above, Tammy Belton, Mrs. Dubose, Murphy Belton and Julia Belton share a smile at the event. Below, the Rev. Dubose installs new officers: Anthony Nelson, Joyce Seabrook, Murphy Belton and Vera Murphy.



GCORR receives \$1.5M Lilly Grant to empower Hispanic/Latine pastoral leaders, congregations

The General Commission on Religion and Race has received a \$1.5 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. through its National Initiative to Strengthen Hispanic Pastoral Leaders and Congregations. This generous funding will support GCORR's five-year project, Resilient Leadership: Latine Pastoral Development and Capacity Building, which aims to empower Hispanic/Latine pastoral leaders and enhance GCORR's organizational sustainability. The Lilly Endowment initiative seeks to support and strengthen Hispanic pastoral leaders and congregations while expanding the capacity of organizations and networks that support their ministries. In collaboration with El Plan for Hispanic/Latine Ministries of The United Methodist Church, the project will address critical issues such as immigration, racism and economic justice, while supporting Hispanic pastoral leaders and congregations. It focuses on two primary objectives: 1) strengthening organizational infrastructure through board development and financial sustainability; and 2) equipping 40 Hispanic/Latine pastors with the skills to serve as public theologians who advocate for justice

and lead transformative change in their communities. Dr. Giovanni Arroyo, general secretary and CEO of GCORR, expressed the organization's gratitude, noting, "We are grateful for Lilly Endowment's investment in this transformative project. "Through Resilient Leadership, we will empower a new generation of pastoral leaders to engage boldly in the public square and ensure that GCORR and the work of El Plan for Hispanic/Latine Ministries continue leading efforts for racial justice and leadership development in The United Methodist Church and beyond." During the next five years, GCORR will engage in capacity-building activities, such as strategic planning and financial sustainability training, and lead two cohorts of 20 Hispanic/Latine pastors through an 18-month leadership program grounded in anti-racism and intercultural competence. The program, developed in partnership with El Plan for Hispanic/Latine Ministries, will emphasize theological reflection, advocacy and community engagement, equipping leaders to address the pressing needs of their congregations and communities effectively.



Did You Know?

The Advocate offers a free one-year subscription to anyone who joins a United Methodist Church in South Carolina. Email your new members' names and addresses and the name of your church to info@advocatesc.org, and we'll get them started on becoming more informed about our conference and our church.

Epworth Children's Home

New year, same old anxieties?

Every January and February, we are bombarded with ads and media pressure to do better, be better and buy more. We all want to feel optimistic and hopeful about the new year. But the truth is, some of us have yet to recover from last year.

We may be grieving the loss of a loved one or confronting financial or job stress, a troubled relationship or serious illness. Perhaps circumstances haven't allowed us to take good care of ourselves. Many of us also struggle with depression that saps our energy and kills our motivation to do things we used to enjoy. So many things seem out of our control: the weather, politics, traffic and, yes, even our children. We may feel frustrated, off balance, helpless and fearful.

As we struggle, cultural expectations surrounding the new year can feel overstimulating, increasing our anxiety. We get constant reminders of how happy we should be, deepening our loneliness.

Some people try to shut out worrying thoughts and train themselves not to think about them only to find that they are on edge and irritable all the time. Or they worry about everything all at once and cannot calm down enough to sleep or rest their mind. This level of anxiety can damage your relationships, job performance, and physical health.

What can we do?

Counselors at Epworth's Center for Counseling in the Midlands and Upstate say there are some simple steps we can take to keep moderate anxiety from derailing our day. These techniques help quiet our mind and ground us in the present moment. When you are feeling anxious and unable to concentrate on what is in front of you:

- Take a few minutes to identify how you are feeling and where you notice that feeling in your body. Do a quick "five senses check in." Name five things you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can touch, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste. This technique can help bring you fully into the present moment. (The Bible also advises us to calm our minds and ground ourselves in the present in times of worry. For instance, Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God.")
- Take a break when anxiety grips your mind. If you can, take a walk, watch a funny video, read or listen to a podcast.
- Write down what is bothering you and how you feel about it. Place your writing somewhere—in a desk drawer, for instance—to be dealt with later, when you aren't tackling a dozen other tasks. Then set a time to deal with it so it doesn't linger.
- Set measurable and attainable goals. Decide what you want to accomplish and tackle that task head-on, placing all other tasks to the side.

Constant expectations to achieve and produce can be draining. Having a plan, an order to things, can provide a sense of wellbeing. A sensible schedule can be your best friend.

Identify the thing—in your work or personal life—that motivates and energizes you. Let that be your driving force to help you put one foot in front of the other to push through bouts of anxiety. Always keep your eyes on the prize.

If these steps do not go far enough in helping you keep anxiety and depression from seriously affecting your life, Epworth therapists urge you to seek outside help.

In the Midlands or Upstate, our highly trained therapists can offer an objective and compassionate listening ear. Trained in the most effective, research-based methods of child and family mental health care, they walk alongside you as you gain insights about yourself, learn skills for coping with stressors and practice using those skills in real time. In working with children, our counselors help them express and process emotions using play and creative activities. Epworth staff also understand and value the role that faith can play in helping you move forward from a wrenching or destructive emotional state.

At our centers, each counseling session lasts one hour. That's one hour focused just on you and your concerns.

We hope you will never feel embarrassed or afraid to seek help for your mental health. To struggle is human. John 16:33 affirms, "In this world, you will have trouble." But we also know from that same Bible verse that God has mercy on us and wants us to feel at peace.



The mission of Epworth is to serve children, youth and families through caring, safe, Christian communities where hurts are healed, hope is nurtured and faith in God, self and others is developed. That mission extends to everyone who seeks help through Epworth's Centers for Counseling.

Epworth accepts all forms of insurance.

Epworth Center for Counseling-Midlands: 1154 Sunnyside Dr., Columbia, SC 29204, 803-667-4697. Epworth Center for Counseling-Upstate: 108 Anderson Ave., Anderson, SC 29625, 864-642-6555.

ADVOCATE COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS

<p>MIDLANDS – 1ST QUARTER FEBRUARY 24TH – COLUMBIA MT. HEBRON UMC FEBRUARY 25TH – ROCK HILL MARCH 25TH – GREENWOOD</p>	<p>PEE DEE – 3RD QUARTER JULY 15TH – FLORENCE LAKE CITY UMC AUGUST 26TH – HARTSVILLE SEPTEMBER 30TH – MARION</p>
<p>UPSTATE – 2ND QUARTER APRIL 29TH – ANDERSON MAY 15TH – SPARTANBURG JUNE 24TH – GREENVILLE</p>	<p>LOWCOUNTRY – 4TH QUARTER OCTOBER 28TH – ORANGEBURG NOVEMBER 17TH – CHARLESTON DECEMBER 1ST – WALTERBORO</p>


TAKE OUR SURVEY:




Canaan members were able to collect a large number of coats and blankets in November and December, which they were able to supply to the community.

A warm legacy: Canaan holds third annual Coat and Blanket Drive

By Ebony Summers-Fogel

RIDGEVILLE—This year, Canaan United Methodist Church, pastored by Dr. James P. Smith, came together once again for the third annual Coat and Blanket Drive and Giveaway in memory of Pamela T. Daly.

Daly, a lifetime member of the church, lived a life filled with kindness and generosity, and this initiative continues her legacy of serving others with love and compassion.

In the past, Canaan partnered with local organizations to distribute the coats and blankets collected. While this approach allowed members to bless many in need, this year they felt called to take a more personal approach. Instead of relying on partner organizations, they ventured into the community ourselves to deliver these items directly to individuals and families in need on Dec. 28.

This experience was deeply moving, as members were able to meet people where they were and witness firsthand the impact of these gifts, including lunch and snacks.

One of the most beautiful aspects of this year's drive was the incredible effort from volunteers of all ages—ranging



Canaan UMC's pastor Dr. James P. Smith chats with volunteers at the giveaway.

from 12 years old to some of the more seasoned members of the church. Their dedication and teamwork brought warmth and hope to many, reminding all of the power of intergenerational service.

The overwhelming response from the congregation and community enabled Canaan to collect a large number of coats and blankets in November and December. This generosity ensured that those facing the cold had not only warmth but also a reminder that they are loved and cared for.

Canaan members said they are incredibly grateful to everyone who donated, volunteered or prayed for this effort. It is because of their support that the church can continue to honor Daly's memory through this meaningful ministry.

As they look forward to next year, members pray this drive continues to grow and serve even more people in need. As they say, "In memory of Pamela T. Daly, may we always strive to embody her spirit of generosity and compassion while living out The United Methodist Church's vision to be a presence of love, hope and service in the community."

Summers-Fogel is communications coordinator for Canaan UMC.

Ministry grants available through Feb. 1 from Reynolds Ministry Fund

Do you have a great idea to engage your community—but aren't sure how to pay for it?

Grants from the Reynolds Ministry Fund support efforts to reach new people with the message of God's love: missional social enterprise, neighborhood get-togethers, care for vulnerable populations, after-school enrichment for children and youth and more.

In 2024, the fund awarded \$445,000 toward 33 initiatives that address real needs in

communities like yours. This was the vision of the late Royce Reynolds and his wife, Jane, a Greensboro, North Carolina, couple who established the fund in 1998 in partnership with the United Methodist Foundation of Western North Carolina for that area and surrounding regions.

Submit an online application by Feb. 1 at <https://www.umfwnc.org/churches/ministry-grants>. Award decisions will be shared in March.

Native American Ministries

American Indian Boarding Schools: A dark chapter of history

By Kathy Hart

"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister."—Romans 14:13

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."—Matthew 22:39

The popular TV series "1923" features horrific scenes set inside a Native American boarding school from that period. If you found those scenes too difficult to watch, it is even more horrifying to know that they were based on real life, according to C. McCormick and P. Mutuc article from the website Screen Rant, "Yes, 1923's Most Horrifying Scene is Based on Real Life."

Thousands of Native children found themselves living that real life in American Indian boarding schools, a life not of their family's choosing but because of the government's goal of assimilating Native Americans into the ways of the White culture. This was harshly described by Captain R.H. Pratt, army officer and founder of Carlisle Indian school, in his 1892 speech, proclaiming, "Kill the Indian in him and save the man."

The Beginning

Melissa Mejia, reporter for The Indigenous Foundation, wrote in her article "The U.S. History of Native American Boarding Schools" that when U.S. Congress passed the Civilization Fund Act in 1819, it started the process of enforcing the "civilization process," which eventually led to the construction of the federally funded Native American Boarding Schools.

Finding accurate statistics about the number of schools, the number of students and which students died while attending is now impossible because of the schools' inferior record-keeping. A common thread of information is that between 1860 until 1978, Indian boarding schools oper-

ated in most states, excluding South Carolina. Most of these boarding schools were operated and funded by the federal government. A third of them were operated by Christian missionaries, including The United Methodist Church. The philosophy that pervaded the institutionalization of Indian boarding schools was one that saw little to no positive qualities in the indigenous way of life. These boarding schools housed several thousand Native children, Mejia noted, who were removed from their homes to reside in a boarding school far from their tribal homes for the purpose of ridding students of their tribal heritage while they assimilated to the ways of the White culture. Indian names, tribal language, clothing and religious practices were forbidden and punished.

Lone Wolf of the Blackfoot Tribe recounted his firsthand experience in resources provided by <https://www.chinleusd.k12.az.us>: "[Long hair] was the pride of all Indians. The boys, one by one, would break down and cry when they saw their braids thrown on the floor. All of the buckskin clothes had to go and we had to put on the clothes of the White Man. If we thought the days were bad, the nights were much worse. This is when the loneliness set in, for it was when we knew that we were all alone. Many boys ran away from the school because the treatment was so bad, but most of them were caught and brought back by the police."

Although the 1928 U.S. government release of the Meriam Report found these boarding schools grossly inadequate, it wasn't until the 2000s that historians seriously began studying the effects of the policies and actions that destroyed the essential foundations of the lives of American Indian students and left a legacy of intergenerational trauma.

Today

In the 2024 Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report Vol. II, the Assistant Secretary for Indian

Affairs, Bryan Newland, made recommendations that the U.S. Government 1) should issue a formal acknowledgment of its role in adopting a national policy of forced assimilation of Indian children; 2) should formally apologize to the individuals, families and tribes that were harmed by the U.S. policy; and 3) should take measurable steps to provide healing. In addition, Newland announced the publication of updated regulations that implement the Tribal Self-Governance program and align with President Joe Biden's executive order, requiring agencies across the federal government to ensure federal funding for tribes is accessible, flexible and equitable.

On Nov. 2, 2024, at the Gila Crossing Community school in Arizona, President Biden delivered a historic apology on behalf of the United States for the nation's dark past with Indian boarding schools, which sought to wipe out Native people's culture and language.

The United Methodist Church is beginning the process of recognizing their part in this dreadful chapter of American history. In an excerpt from the 2016 Book of Resolutions, "Native People and The United Methodist Church," it resolves that the UMC will build bridges of respect and understanding with Indigenous persons. Our churches must listen and become educated about the history of the relationship between indigenous persons and Christian colonizers in their own geographic location. Through prayer and relationship building, they will celebrate the gifts that Indigenous people bring to the body of Jesus in the world.

With the publishing of The United Methodist Church and Indigenous Boarding Schools in September 2024, it is clear that more study is needed to push further the dual project of remembrance and reconciliation.

Hart is a member of the Native American Committee of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Camps & Retreat Ministries



Asbury Hills has a policy of never turning a camper away because of finances.

Space for all

Camp is just around the corner at Asbury Hills, and we cannot wait to see all the new and returning campers this summer. One of the things we are most thankful for at Asbury Hills is our ability to create experiences that will last a lifetime for campers. Last summer, we had the opportunity to do that for so many campers, but one in particular stands out.

In May 2024, the South Carolina Camps & Retreat staff took a trip up to camp during summer staff training. On the way back, they stopped at everyone's favorite Travelers Rest ice cream shop, Pink Mama's Ice Cream. While getting ice cream, our executive director, Arthur Spriggs, started chatting with a mom and her elementary-aged son who were also getting ice cream and asked them where they were from. They happened to be from Greenville, and they noticed Arthur's Asbury Hills hat and said, "We love Asbury Hills and hike there all the time!"

Arthur responded, "Well, have you ever been to summer camp?" The mom said they could not afford to go to camp. Arthur gave them his card and said, "We never turn anyone away due to their inability to pay. Give us a call. We would love for your son to experience camp, and we can help." The mom took the card enthusiastically and said she would look into it, and Arthur gave the young man a fist bump.

Fast forward to the middle of summer, when we received a letter from the mom that said: "My son was awarded a scholarship to attend camp this week. Today, he returned home and claimed he had had the best time of his life. He rated camp 1 million out of 10. He said that the staff and activities were so much fun. He felt welcomed by everyone and thanked God for his experience. You have no idea how much this adventure has meant to my little boy!"

When our staff left the ice cream shop that day, they had no idea if that little boy would end up coming to camp. The kind gesture from Arthur, that mother's willingness to give her son a new experience and Asbury Hills' policy of never turning a camper away because of finances led to a camper's life being changed at Asbury Hills.

We hope all our campers leave camp rating it 1 million out of 10 and experience an adventure and the love of God. If you would like to know more, visit <https://asburyhills.org> or call 864-298-0125. —Kate Nobles



Photos courtesy of Rev. J. Jeannette' Cooper

Elijah visits Killingsworth

Elijah United Methodist Church's Women of Faith, Kingstree, took their first trip to the Killingsworth Home recently. Thirteen women took a day apart to learn about this important mission. Young and older women went together to carry gifts and to learn. The president, Mrs. Hessie McCollum, held the banner that led the women to desire to know more about the outreach ministry of the South Carolina Annual Conference. They enjoyed fellowship with the staff, residents and each other.



Applications for UMC Church & Society's Ethnic Young Adult internship open

Young justice seekers eager to explore faith and identity while deepening an understanding of justice are invited to apply for The United Methodist Church's Church & Society Ethnic Young Adult program. The program offers a transformative opportunity to engage in meaningful work and advocacy, all while building connections with fellow United Methodists around the world.

Throughout the program, EYAs participate in weekly seminars and devotions that explore justice, spiritual practices and the

ongoing work of advocates and faith leaders, providing a balanced approach to learning and personal spiritual growth.

Interns in this cohort will be provided dorm-style housing in Washington, D.C., within an intentional community of diverse members from the worldwide United Methodist connection.

Program dates are June 2 to July 25; application deadline is March 1. Stipend available. Learn more at <https://tinyurl.com/EYAprogram>.



Gray honored for mission service

Michele Gray, member of Midland Park UMC, North Charleston, received the church's Women of Faith Mission Award for 2024. Gray goes out of her way helping others in time of need. Monthly she makes an afghan for women living at "My Sister's House," a local shelter helping women break the cycle of domestic violence by providing comprehensive support, services and education within and beyond the walls of the shelter. She also donates many hours at a local elementary school helping students. "We are so proud of Michele and thankful for all she does," said Violet Legette. Above left, UWF President Doris Freeman, Emma Smith and Beth Hairfield share a smile with Gray. At right, Gray makes afghans for My Sister's House monthly.

Save the Date Dementia Care Workshop



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:

March 19, 2025
9:30 a.m.-12 p.m.
St. Paul's UMC
1356 Amelia St.
Orangeburg, SC 29115
Register here:



ROBOTICS: Group has attracted new youth to the church

From Page 1

FIRST, For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, is a global organization that enables young people to research, fundraise, design, build and showcase team-based robotics. Enrietto had helped his nephew with a FIRST competition some years ago, and he shared it with Gottheiner.

Gottheiner thought the program would be a good fit for some of the young people at Manning, who enjoyed LEGO-building and other robotic-style hobbies.

"I was talked to Kelly about it, and the next thing you know ..." Enrietto said, laughing as he described how he and the kids began meeting weekly in August, learning about FIRST and an upcoming robotics competition they could enter in nearby Colleton County.

At first it was four middle-school boys—Hunter, Tripp, Jacob and Colton—who were

most enthusiastic about the weekly meetings. But as word spread, other boys and girls joined in.

While the initial four ultimately represented the church at the competition in December, earning the group a Rising Star Award, next year the leaders expect even more kids will participate, and they plan to start meeting this spring to prepare.

"It's been a blessing to add this unique activity, which has brought three new kids to our youth group permanently," Gottheiner said.

"A robot program—that's what the kids see most about it, something to get them involved—but there's a lot more to the program than just programming a robot," Enrietto explained. "At same time, it's also teaching them about STEM and different knowledge technologies, as well as teamwork, patience, problem-solving and presentation work. Half the program is building an actual robot, while the other

half is working on researching and small project presentation, and that's where the kids excel. They don't even realize that's what they're getting into, and by the time they're doing this, they're putting together an actual presentation for complete strangers and interacting with people they never knew."

Enrietto and Gottheiner said the program not only provided a fun way for the kids to interact around a shared interest, but it subtly taught them the value of church connection, including Christlike values such as cooperation and supporting one another. "We teach the kids life skills, which

include sharing, helping others, healthy competition," Enrietto said. "If someone has a problem one day, the other team members step up and it's time to help the other person. They help each other and hold each other up—there's just a lot there."

Not only that, but it's fun.

"The smile on their faces says it all," Enrietto said. "I was amazed at how much they grew. And they did great. They amazed me!"

"It was fun, and all of us enjoyed it," Hunter said.

For more on FIRST, visit <https://www.firstinspires.org>.



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Photos by Kelly Gottheiner

John Enrietto works with the kids on their project, above. Below, one of the boys finesses his work.





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<https://advocatesc.org/store>

CLOTHES: Available to any mission group to transport

From Page 1

On a chilly day in January, two of Suddeth's friends have braved the snow to sew with her, and they ooh and ahh over the bright prints and delicate fabrics.

"I like the happy fabrics," says Margaret Combs, showing off a whimsical dress sporting tiny brown and white chickens, along with a precious little pocket and polka-dotted ribbons at the top. "If they're going to wear a pillowcase, it should be a happy fabric."

Mary Lynn Felsberg tenderly sorts the shorts and matching T-shirts, her pet project. She found cheerful, bright patches on Amazon for a good price, and she irons those onto the shirts so the boys have something fun to wear, too.

"It's so fun to see the pictures of the kids holding the clothes," Felsberg says. "You say, 'Oh, I did that one!' That one little boy was grinning ear to ear, he was so happy."

"That's the reward for us, seeing that smile on the children's faces," Combs agreed.

Suddeth started the project decades ago. A longtime lover of the sewing arts, she wanted something practical, helpful and enjoyable to do after retirement, so she got some church friends together and started making clothing for kids in Haiti, which were regularly transported to the island nation thanks to a local connection. They get donations, then buy materials to craft what are dubbed pillowcase dresses, a relatively easy project that requires little cutting since the shape is already there. They also use curtains and other fabric—whatever they can find. For years, children in orphanages and elsewhere in Haiti received the dresses, and later shorts and tops, much to their delight.

But recent strife in that nation has made delivering the clothing dangerously impossible. Now the Ashland UMC women are reaching out to other mission groups, hoping they will bring the lovingly crafted clothing along with them when they journey to communities in need.

"I don't care who gets them, what denomination, as long as they come get them and bring them to kids in need," Suddeth says, gesturing to the boxes and bins of ready-to-go clothing all around them.

For now, the women continue to gather at Suddeth's home every Wednesday, faithfully sewing the clothing and knowing that somehow, some way, God will provide a path for the clothing to get to the children.

A labor of love

It's not all hard work. In fact, it doesn't look like work at all. The ladies giggle and tease each other, enjoy a homecooked meal, and compare which embellishment will look best on which fabric.

The day the *Advocate* visited, Beverly Stallings wasn't present, but she's usually a key part of the group, and she and Combs share a deep love for the "pretties," the ribbons and other accessories that transform a pillowcase dress from functional to fashion.

Felsberg likes to use the serger mostly, a specialized sewing machine that simultaneously trims and encloses the raw edges of fabric with multiple threads.

"We just sit in there and laugh and carry on, chew the fat," Felsberg says. "It's the highlight of my week, coming over here."

Suddeth grins. "I've adopted all of them," she says, gesturing to the women.

Combs nods, smiling.

"I guess you can say the Lord put June in our path."

Suddeth still remembers the first time she decided to make boy clothing in addition to the pillowcase dresses. She was watching television after a hurricane in Haiti, and she noticed a little boy onscreen.

"He didn't have anything but a T-shirt on, and he kept pulling that T-shirt down, tugging it to cover himself, and I just felt so sorry for him," Suddeth says, the other



Photos by Jessica Brodie

Margaret Combs shows off some of the pillowcase dresses the women have made for children. The dresses are available for any mission group who wishes to bring them to kids in need.

women nodding. "I just know that boy spoke to me, and God told me, 'They've got to have pants.'"

The women also make other needed items from the leftover fabric, such as sanitary napkins. They know the need is great, and they do what they can.

"You can use your talent if you've got a talent," Suddeth says.

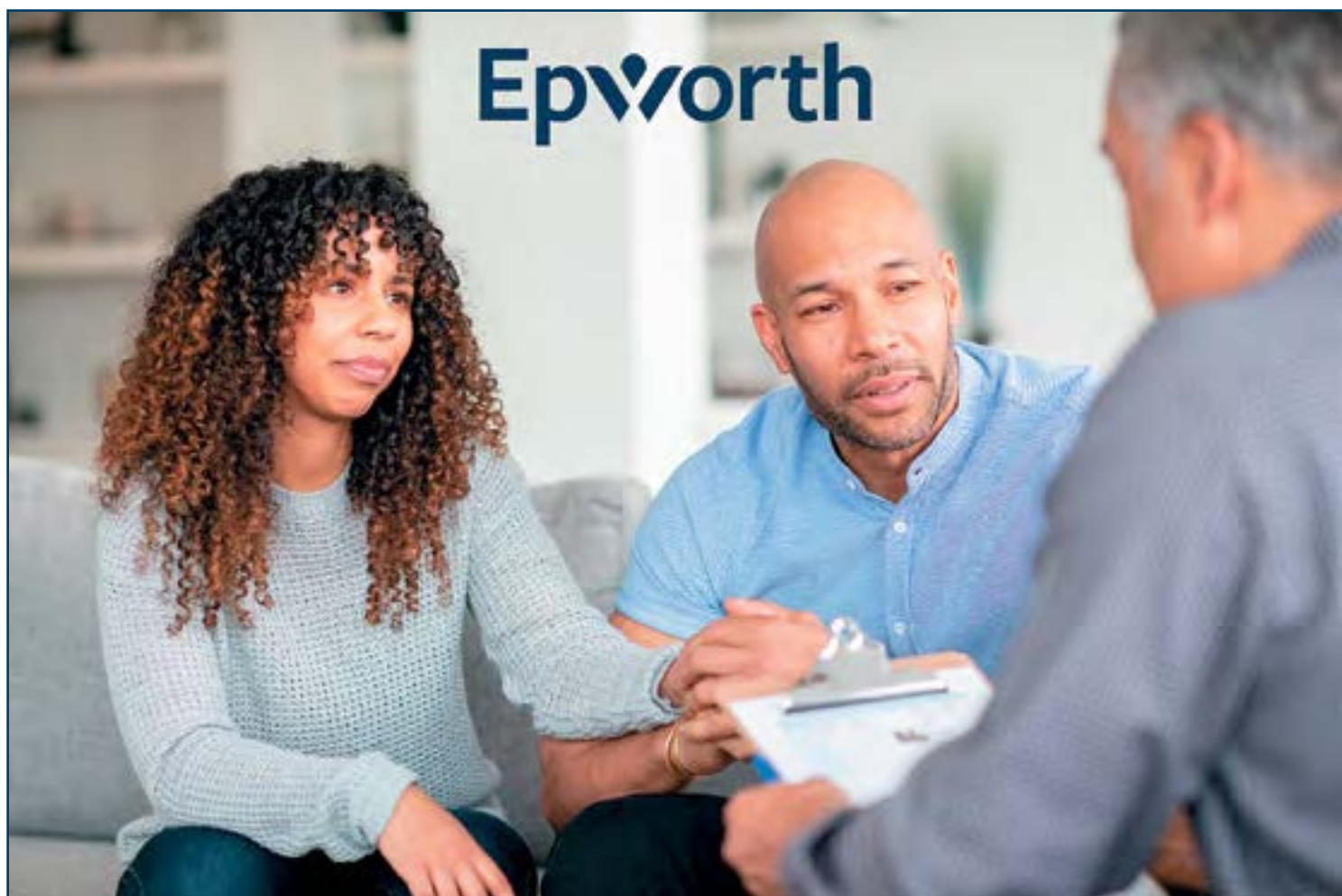
The clothing is available for free to any mission group willing to distribute them. To get in touch with the group, contact Ashland UMC at 803-798-5350 or <https://www.ashlandumc.org>.



They also make shorts and T-shirts.



Mary Lynn Felsberg stitches a fabric.



Epworth Center for Counseling

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 Columbia, SC 29204
 Near Trenholm Road UMC

Upstate
 (864) 642-6555
 108 Anderson Avenue
 Anderson, SC 29625
 Located on the grounds of Trinity UMC

90.24 PERCENT: Members gave much to disaster response

From Page 1

If you remove the amounts paid by churches that separated in 2023, Westbury said, the collection percentage is 80.84 percent.

Still, she said, she continues to be hopeful as South Carolina's new resident bishop, Leonard Fairley, leads the conference in a period of reflection and change.

"Bishop Fairley will position our conference for growth and success," Westbury said.

The Columbia District led the districts in the highest collection percentage at 111 percent. Westbury said the percentage exceeds 100 percent because of the apportionments paid by district churches that separated in 2023 but paid toward 2024 apportionments. The Walterboro District came in second at

99.96 percent, followed by Marion at 94.91 percent. Next came Spartanburg at 92.71 percent, Orangeburg at 92.36 percent and Greenville at 92.18 percent.

The conference saw a decrease in the percentage of churches paying 100 percent, Westbury noted.

In 2023, 80 percent of the churches paid 100 percent, while 76 percent did so in 2024.

Still, church special giving remained strong, with an increase in contributions to the United Methodist Committee on Relief and South Carolina Disaster Response over the prior year.

"This reflects how our congregations are deeply moved by those suffering from natural disasters," Westbury added.

The 2025 conference budget is \$11.7 million.

RISE UP: Men's event will also incorporate scouting weekend

From Page 1

Speakers include new South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley, along with Bishop L. Jonathan Holston, now of the Alabama-West Florida Conference; Steven Scheid, scouting coordinator for the General Commission of UMMen; and Bishop James Swanson, GCUMM general secretary.

"Our theme will become a part of your life for years to come," Bingham said. "Don't miss this opportunity for God to work in your life."

The two-day event will feature a golf tournament that Friday at The Spur at Northwoods Golf Course, a "Cigars and Scriptures" fellowship

event Friday evening, a weekend Scout Jamboree and powerful speaking about important issues and struggles facing men in the church today.

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

The scout program will run concurrently with the men's retreat, with many of the sessions overlapping. For example, the scouts and the men will participate together in a flag raising, as well as share lunch and an intergenerational panel, where all age groups can learn from each other.

Signs up continue, and churches are still welcome to become sponsors.

To learn more or register, visit <https://mennministriysc.org>.



Last year's Cigars and Scriptures" Friday night fellowship event was a chance for fun.

SIMPSONVILLE: Displaced members begin to meet again

From Page 1

According to the lawsuit, Simpsonville UMC has operated under the *Discipline* and its trust clause since its formation. Since 1797, the lawsuit notes, the *Discipline* has contained a denominational trust clause that provides that all property of a United Methodist church is held in trust. While the denomination gave opportunity for churches to leave the UMC, that process has now expired, and Simpsonville UMC took no actions attempting to comply with or undertake to follow this process.

Yet on June 4, 2024, the lawsuit alleges certain leaders of Simpsonville United Methodist Church announced the church had disaffiliated from the UMC. Further, without authority and in violation of the *Book of Discipline*, these leaders of Simpsonville UMC amended its corporate filings and changed the name of the church to The Methodist Church of Simpsonville. On June 6, a resolution was filed with the Greenville County Register of Deed's Office, claiming

the aforesaid deeds were fraudulent. The church's appointed pastor, Smith, surrendered his credentials as a UMC pastor June 3, 2024. Yet Smith continues to occupy the parsonage, the lawsuit alleges, despite the fact that he has surrendered his credentials as a UMC pastor and the property on which the parsonage sits remains owned by Simpsonville UMC.

Defendants filed a motion to dismiss, and the case is on the docket for Greenville Courts Feb. 27.

Even as the lawsuit persists and the non-UMC group occupies the property, a group of United Methodists are pressing on to continue ministry as Simpsonville UMC.

On Jan. 22, the church released a message on its "Simpsonville United Methodist Church" Facebook page announcing the "great news" that it is "getting back on track."

"It has been seven months since the illicit decree of independence by the former pastor and a few members of the church," the page's administrator posted. "Legal

action by the South Carolina United Methodist Conference is underway to undo the wrong and restore Simpsonville United Methodist Church (SUMC) to its rightful place. Legal processes take time. While legal matters are being addressed, plans are being made to restart weekly worship."

The post goes on to announce the Rev. John L. Warren Jr. has been appointed interim pastor of the church. Warren lives near Reidville where he and his wife, Marianne, retired three years ago. He has already begun work attending to pastoral needs in the congregation. The post asks for prayers as Warren begins his work among the displaced flock.

Warren said the congregation is still in the beginning stages of organizing, but encouragement is strong. He's begun visiting church shut-ins, and they're surveying meeting spaces while the legal issues evolve.

"The church ultimately is the people, and we in Simpsonville are still the church, and we'll continue to band together and we'll worship together, and hopefully the courts will return us back home," Warren told the *Advocate*. "We're just trying to be the church, and there are a good number of people who are still Simpsonville UMC folks, and we're going to move forward."

The South Carolina Conference released a statement on the matter, noting the following:

"On June 4, 2024, Simpsonville United Methodist Church leaders announced that

“
We'll continue to band together and we'll worship together, and hopefully the courts will return us back home.

—The Rev.. John L. Warren Jr.

”

they had disaffiliated from The United Methodist Church. As part of this attempted disaffiliation, the church's leaders purported to amend its corporate status with the South Carolina Secretary of State and attempted to change the name of the church.

"These actions violated *The Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church—the collection of rules by which United Methodists have agreed

to govern themselves since the 18th century.

"From the time of its inception, connectionalism has been an integral part of the foundation of The United Methodist Church and *The Book of Discipline* by which the church is governed. *The Book of Discipline* contains a denominational trust clause providing that all property and assets of a United Methodist church are held 'in trust' for the benefit of the entire denomination.

"The actions of the Simpsonville church leaders violate the letter and spirit of connectionalism and *The Book of Discipline*. Conference leaders have called this to the attention of those leaders and have tried for several months to persuade them to rescind their actions, to no avail.

"As a result, the South Carolina Conference has been forced to take the only option available to it—to ask the courts to restore to Simpsonville United Methodist Church the property and assets which have been wrongfully taken."

Smith could not be reached for comment.



SOUTH CAROLINA
METHODIST CONFERENCE
CREDIT UNION

**Credit Union's 69th Annual Meeting to be Held
February 27, 2025, at Epworth Children's Home**

The credit union will hold its 69th annual meeting at Epworth Children's Home on February 27th in the Dining Hall. Lunch will be provided to registered attendees at noon and the business meeting will begin at 1:00 P.M. Door prizes will be given after the business meeting. The annual meeting provides all members the opportunity to hear what is happening at the credit union firsthand and vote on credit union leadership.

If you would like to attend, please contact the credit union by February 24th at 803-691-0037 to reserve your place.



EXPLORE METHODIST-RELATED TITLES FROM THE ADVOCATE PRESS

advocatesc.org/books



Columbia College celebrates 170th anniversary at commencement exercises

COLUMBIA—Columbia College hosted its fall commencement exercises Dec. 17 at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center, where more than 190 undergraduate and graduate students received their degrees.

The event celebrated the outstanding achievements of the Class of 2024 and featured distinguished speakers who inspired both graduates and attendees. This year's commencement was particularly meaningful as the college also marked its 170th anniversary, having been founded on Dec. 21, 1854.

Delivering the keynote address was Scott Garvin, founder and president of Garvin Design Group in Columbia. A native of Aiken, Garvin earned both his bachelor's in design and master's in architecture from Clemson University. With a career rooted in excellence, Garvin began his professional journey in Greenville before establishing his successful architectural firm in 2003. Beyond his professional achievements, Garvin is an active community leader and philanthropist, a devoted Tigers fan, an avid fisherman and a proud father of four accomplished daughters.

In his address, Garvin shared insights from his professional and personal journey, encouraging graduates to embrace challenges and opportunities and to think outside the box.

"Don't allow the perceived boundaries to limit what you can become," he remarked. "Critically evaluate your options now and all during your journey. There are many ways to fulfill your dreams and end up being the best version of yourself."

The ceremony also featured an inspiring speech by the student speaker, Brooke Bruner. Bruner graduated with a perfect 4.0 GPA and earned a Bachelor of Arts in business administration with a concentration in marketing. At the age of 40, she decided to pursue her college education while balancing a full-time job and the responsibilities of raising a family. Her unwavering dedication to academic excellence and community ser-



The commencement exercises reflected the enduring legacy of Columbia College as an institution dedicated to empowering students and fostering a culture of academic excellence, service and leadership.

vice has made her a beacon of inspiration.

In 2020, Bruner launched Devotions 4Teens, a free Bible app for youth that has since been translated into 41 languages and reached more than one million readers worldwide. Her innovative approach to faith-based service and her commitment to uplifting youth and underprivileged children exemplify the values of Columbia College.

"I want to encourage you to make three deliberate, intentional decisions that will alter and change the outcome of your life, three specific things you can decide that will affect your destination: Keep making goals, never forget what's important and live for more," Bruner said.

This year's graduates join a storied tradition of alumni who have gone on to make impactful contributions to their communities and beyond.

Clafin President named 2024 Times and Democrat 'Person of the Year'

ORANGEBURG—The Times and Democrat newspaper has named Clafin University President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack the publication's 2024 Person of the Year.



Warmack

The T&D praised Warmack for spearheading "transformative change at Clafin University with everything from the erection of new buildings to the development of new and innovative majors of study."

"I am honored to receive this award," Warmack said. "You're not in this community 155 years without giving trusted service. I truly see it as a blessing. I do this work because it's God's calling. I never do it for accolades; I never do it for recognition."

Warmack's leadership has produced innovative curriculum development and research, an influx of advanced technology and historic fundraising success. The university continued its streak of impressive national rankings, including a U.S. News & World Report's Top 10 Best Private HBCU for 14 consecutive years, No. 1 HBCU in South Carolina and No. 1 National Liberal Arts University in South Carolina in Social Mobility.

Clafin's noteworthy accomplishments during the year include opening the New Student Center in March, which has become the center of campus and community engagement. Warmack considers the \$44 million, three-story, state-of-the-art facility the university's "new living room." The student center has Orangeburg County's largest

conference center/banquet room with seating for more than 800 guests; a movie theater that seats 172 patrons; first-run movies on a 30-foot screen with Dolby sound and stadium-style seating; an Esports Lab; conference and study rooms; administrative offices; a high-rise terrace; retail shopping; and other features.

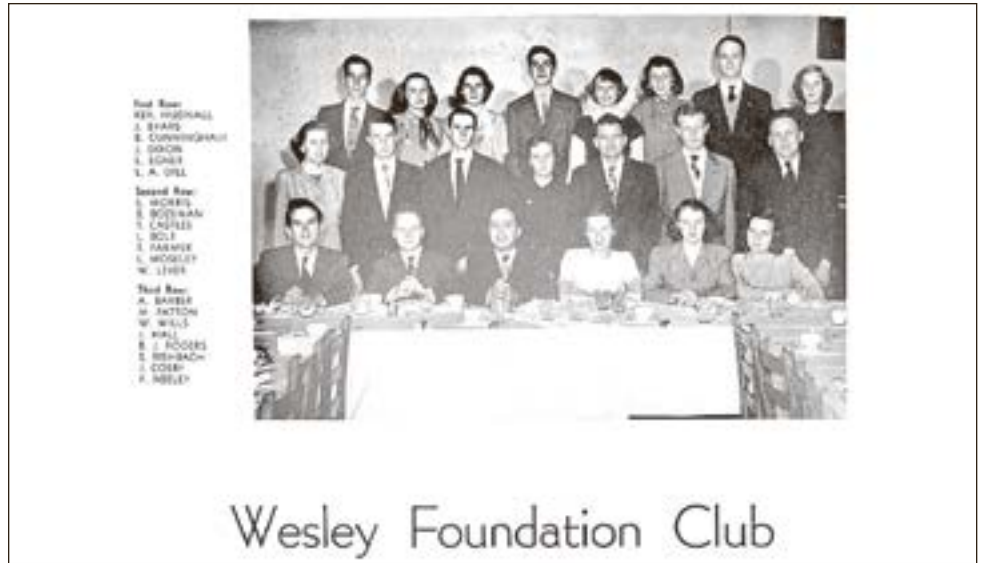
Clafin's SmartHOME—and its focus on helping to mitigate health-care disparities that affect African American and other minority communities—were introduced to the campus community and a national audience during the Fall 2024 semester. The SmartHOME uses home automation technology—including robots—to provide convenience and comfort inside the home. However, it also compiles critical data on the health and wellness of groups and individuals that could impact public health initiatives. The SmartHOME was featured in a South Carolina Educational Television (SCETV) documentary and several national print and digital publications.

Warmack's proudest moment in 2024 may have been in September when Clafin hosted the inaugural HBCU Tech Summit. Tech industry luminaries from Silicon Valley, prominent Capitol Hill legislators, university presidents, students, representatives from agencies, nonprofit organizations and other guests attended the one-day conference to discuss the projected growth and influence of new and existing technology and career opportunities for HBCU students.



Wesley Foundations

by the Rev. Edward McCutcheon



The Rev. Ben Cunningham, pictured in the first row of this 1945 photo, was among those who inspired the author of this month's Wesley Foundation column.

Opportunities for a lifetime

"As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said."—Matthew 4:18-19a

The phrase "lifetime value" is one that has been on my mind for the past few weeks. This fall, our campus ministers began working with a consultant thinking about a sustainable funding model for our Wesley Foundations/Fellowships. As we began putting together our case for support, the question arose, "What is the lifetime value of Wesley?" In other words, how do our Wesley Foundations/Fellowships impact the lives of our students not only in the present, but also into the future?

A few years ago, the question was raised, "When did Furman Wesley begin?" After some research, which included looking through yearbooks in our library, I discovered that Furman Wesley was founded in 1945 when a group of students began meeting at a local Methodist Church here in Greenville. What is interesting however, is that in my research I came across a photo of the 1949 Wesley Foundation Club, as it was called then. In that photo (on this page) we see a young man, Ben Cunningham, who served as president.

When I read this, I was touched. Ben Cunningham went on to be a minister in our South Carolina Annual Conference and served as my pastor at First United Methodist Church in Conway. Cunningham confirmed me as young man at First Church, and as I look back over my own calling and ministry, I count his model of ministry as the foundation for my own.

So what is the lifetime value of our Furman Wesley? Our Furman Wesley Fellowship nurtured the faith of a young man during his time at Furman and gave him space to explore a vocational calling to full-time ministry. He followed that calling to seminary, to the ordained ministry and to Conway, where he nurtured and provided a foundational understanding of ministry. I have been blessed by Ben Cunningham's ministry and for the past 25 years have served as well in the UMC.

But what I find amazing is the realization that 75 years ago, our Furman Wesley nurtured the faith of a young man who

guided me on a life of ministry and 17 years as campus minister of Furman Wesley Fellowship.

What is the lifetime value of our Wesley Foundations/Fellowships? It is stories like this, and countless others of students supported in their faith who go on to give back in their own vocational callings. Because of our campus ministries, there are doctors, lawyers, teachers, professors, counselors, military officers, occupational/vocational therapists and ministers all serving faithfully to bring about a more hope-filled world.

In our Scriptures, there are stories of Jesus calling out, "Follow me!" There are stories of Jesus patiently journeying with his followers to an understanding of true faith. There are the stories of disciples being sent out to spread a message of hope and wholeness. Finally, in Matthew 28:19 we read, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations."

I believe the true beauty of campus ministry is that it is solidly situated between the "follow me" and the "therefore go and make disciples." It is the church's continued act of meeting students where they are and guiding them along their exploration of faith. Our support and donations to campus ministry are not simply gifts to allow for fun and fellowship; rather, our generosity is building on the faithful foundation of students that will impact not only their life, but the lives of the many they encounter.

What is the lifetime value of campus ministry? It is the continued building, year after year and class after class, of the kingdom of God. A gift to our ministries will be the invitation to a student to hear Christ's message of "you are enough." It will be the affirmation of "you belong." It will inspire our students to continue the loving act of disciple-making.

We thank you all for the ways you have and will continue to support our students and ministries.

"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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

McCutcheon is the campus minister of the Furman Wesley Fellowship. If you want to learn more about each individual Wesley Foundation and how to support them, go to <https://linktr.ee/UMCSCWesley>.

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Advocate Press



The program at New Light UMC is funded in part by a congregational development grant.



Community youth ‘come together’ at New Light

New Light United Methodist Church sponsors its “Let’s Come Together” program on the second and fourth Sundays of every month from 5-6:30 p.m.

The purpose of the program is to work with the children and youth of the community regardless of church affiliation.

During the sessions, leaders share Bible stories, talk about making good decisions and how to make friends, work on setting goals and review many other soft skills that students need to become successful teens and adults.

Parents and other adults serve as support persons to assist the students as they work individually and in groups. Prizes and incentives are awarded during some of the sessions. Crafts provide an opportunity for the young people to show their creative side.

The program is being funded in part by a congregational development grant that was awarded to the church in 2023.

Church members supply a full meal to all in attendance.

Wofford offers academic credit for free Chinese language and culture course

By Daniel Brasington

Dr. Yongfang Zhang has been awarded a National Security Agency STARTALK grant of \$137,194.82 to direct Wofford College’s 11th STARTALK Chinese program in June 2025.

The program provides the benefits of learning Chinese—career opportunity, cultural understanding and cognitive health—but this year targets a different student population.

“Previously the program was directed toward middle school and high school students, but this year the emphasis is on providing instruction to high school and college students,” says Zhang, associate professor of Chinese at Wofford.

After joining the Wofford community 14 years ago, she quickly realized the value of bringing STARTALK to the college. She says working with students such as Moses Briggs, a computer science and Chinese double major from Spartanburg, has been the best part.

“Learning a new language can bring frustration, but after a couple of days you can hear the participants singing children songs in Chinese and rushing through

their lunch so that they can practice their introduction speeches,” says Briggs, who has served as a STARTALK counselor for the past two summer sessions. “The chance to build relationships and see friendships blossom has been very special to me.”

Briggs developed his love for the language in middle school, when he had the opportunity to participate in STARTALK. Now Briggs is hoping to pass on his passion for Chinese language and culture to the next generations of STARTALK students.

He also has used his background in computer science to help develop an interactive Chinese learning program through Gather.

“The program allows students to learn interactively as they travel around this digital space, interacting with books, globes or videos, much like if students were traveling around the world,” says Briggs. “Students travel through different rooms while participating in various learning objectives. Once they have finished exploring the room, they must answer a question before advancing to the next.”

STARTALK will run from 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday through Friday, June 2-27, 2025, on the Wofford College campus.



Need a Children’s Sermon?

by the Rev. Meghan Lindsey Sweeney Cook

Black History Month

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: Any Sunday in February, Black History Month

Scripture: Mark 5

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.)

Children’s Sermon:

This month is African-American Heritage Month. The United Methodist Church has a long and at times not so great story of how the institution harmed people of color, Native Americans and women. We are doing better, but we can improve. God cares about how we treat one another and that we love one another.

Today we are going to talk about bondage. Does anyone know what bondage means? (Pause.) It’s a tricky word, but bondage means to be a slave. In the United States, we have a history of enslavement up until Dec. 18, 1865, but it didn’t actually stop until June 14, 1866 (which we celebrate as Juneteenth) of making one group of people, African-American people, to be slaves. 1865 was only 160 years ago, which isn’t very long at all. It sounds long, but it’s not. And some people argue that slavery still exists today. That’s really sad. I think it makes God sad. (Hold space for sad; pause and use the quiet for a moment.)

We know from reading the Bible that God’s stories have a theme of freedom. God sets people free. God wants us to be free from bondage. One of my favorite stories is about a man who was in the tombs, kind of like a cemetery these days. The man was banished to be out there by himself, and he was chained up. He was in bondage. The people of the town didn’t know what to do with him, how to help him or even how to be kind to him.

But then Jesus came to the town. And when he saw the man, Jesus helped. Jesus cast the demons out into a herd of pigs. Je-



sus freed the man from bondage and helped him rejoin the town. This is one of so many stories in the Bible about liberation (that’s the big word for helping people get free). As follower of Jesus, we work to help everyone be free. It’s important to know our history, even the sad or embarrassing parts, so we will always remember that we are called to help all people be free: free from slavery, free from bondage, free from being left out, free from harm.

When I hear that we are called to be people who help folks be free, we work with God to make people free, I think of making sure I include everyone when we play. I think of making sure no one is left out. I think of ideas to make our spaces safer for everyone. (Pause.)

I bet these are things you could do! I bet if you talked to your grownups today, you might think of actions you can do this week.

Let’s pray: Dear God (pause for the kids and congregation to echo). We love you (echo). Help us remember our history (echo) so we will do better every day (echo). Help us to be (echo) people who set folks free (echo). Help us to never leave anyone out (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 at <https://advocatesc.org/books>.

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U.S. News & World Report Ranks Columbia College among best online programs

COLUMBIA—Columbia College has been ranked No. 84 among the 2025 Best Online Bachelor's Programs, No. 180-218 among 2025 Best Online Bachelor's in Business Programs, No. 51 among 2025 Best Online Master's in Criminal Justice Programs and No. 158 among 2025 Best Online Master's in Education Programs by U.S. News & World Report. U.S. News evaluated schools in the Best Online Bachelor's Programs, Best Online Bachelor's in Business Programs, Best Online Master's in Criminal Justice Programs and the Best Online Master's in Education Programs based on a variety of factors, such as student engagement, faculty credentials and services and technologies.

"This recognition by U.S. News & World Report high-

lights Columbia College's commitment to providing high-quality, accessible online education," Columbia College President Dr. John H. Dozier said. "Being ranked for these outstanding programs affirms our dedication to student engagement, exceptional faculty, and innovative services and technologies. We are proud to serve our students with programs that prepare them for success in a competitive world."

In its 13th year, the U.S. News Best Online Programs is designed for individuals looking to complete or further their education. This year's edition evaluates more than 1,600 online bachelor's and master's degree programs using metrics specific to online learning. The rankings only include degree-granting programs offered primarily online by regionally

accredited institutions.

"Access to accurate and up-to-date information about online programs is important for prospective students and professionals as they choose a program that aligns with their educational and career goals," says LaMont Jones, Ed.D., managing editor for education at U.S. News. "By evaluating factors such as student engagement and program quality, Best Online Programs rankings can help students identify which schools offer an exceptional online learning experience."

Prospective students can see how Columbia College compares to other institutions and how the rankings are calculated on <https://www.usnews.com/>.

Last year's scholarship winner, Victoria Freeman, was a rising freshman at SMC; which school will claim this year's recipient?



Applications open through March 1 for Advocate's \$1,000 scholarship

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

The scholarship is for South Carolina United Methodist students for the 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.

Youth delegates sought for Annual Conference

South Carolina Ministries with Young People is seeking high schoolers to be a part of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church's upcoming Annual Conference.

SCMYP's the Annual Conference Youth Delegate program will provide youth delegates a voice and vote at Annual Conference.

The team hopes to identify a couple of youth from each of the conference's 12 districts.

Youth will 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.

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

Church members and pastors are invited to consider high schoolers in their congregations and email info@scmyp.org if they have questions or know someone who might be interested.



REGISTER NOW!

STEPS OF A GOOD MAN

PSALM 37:23-25

2025 MEN N MINISTRY SPIRITUAL RETREAT

Journey UMC, Columbia, Feb. 21-22

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Bishop Fairley, South Carolina Conference

Bishop Holston, North Alabama-West Florida Conference

Steven Scheid, GCUMM Men and Scouting coordinator

Bishop Swanson, GCUMM General Secretary

- Golf tournament Friday
- Cigar & Scriptures Friday
- Spiritual teaching Saturday
- Weekend Scout Jamboree



Small groups help church members connect

Washington Street UMC, Columbia, started small groups several years ago to center around fellowship and a meal. Most meet in the evenings and various members host. The weekday lunchtime group, however, has been meeting at various restaurants once a month and after a year has grown to a healthy 14 members. At each meeting, one member of the group selects the next location. They have convened at breakfast places as well as Asian, Mexican and Greek restaurants in the recent past. Coordinator of the group Lynn Shirley states, "We are never at a loss for conversation, and a number participants remark on how much more completely they know some of their fellow church members now."

**Dr. Anthony Bernarducci:
New artist-in-residency at St. Mark**

SENECA—The music ministry of St. Mark United Methodist Church has created a new Musical Artist Residency program.



Bernarducci

Dr. Anthony Bernarducci, music program director and director of vocal studies for the Department of Performing Arts at Clemson University, has been selected as the first artist-in-residence. Bernarducci will serve in several capacities during the residency, including directing and accompanying the choir, playing piano during worship services, working with the St. Mark choral scholars and composing a new choral anthem for the choir to sing on their performance trip to Spain and Portugal this summer.

"I am thrilled to welcome Dr. Bernarducci to our music ministry and look

forward to all that the choir members and I will learn from him," said Director of Music and Worship Laura Ritter. "I have had several opportunities to work with him over the past few years, and I'm always amazed at the level of singing he inspires from any choir he conducts. Sharing in the collaborative process of commissioning a new work for him to compose will also be exciting and a rewarding experience for the choir."

St. Mark has a long history of excellence and creativity in music. From seasonal concerts with a chamber orchestra during Advent and Lent to recitals by professional area musicians, music is an important part of the life of faith at St. Mark.

"I am thrilled to be a part of the music program at St. Mark United Methodist during this residency," Bernarducci said. "It will be a joy to make music with such dedicated musicians, collaborate with my colleague Laura Ritter and have the opportunity to compose and bring a new piece of music to life"

Advocate to run thank you ads for church administrative professionals, children's ministry staffers

This spring, you have the opportunity to recognize administrative professionals and children's ministry staffers in your church with appreciation ads in the *Advocate*.

April 26 is Administrative Professionals' Day, and churches can celebrate their administrative staff and volunteers through special ads in the *Advocate*.

As well, April is the Month of the Young Child, which is a good time to celebrate the

work children's ministry staffers do with the church's children.

Three sizes are available (all 5 inches wide):

- Small (1 inch tall): \$38
- Medium (2 inches tall): \$76
- Large (4 inches tall): \$152

Email text to atrussell@advocatesc.org or send to 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203; deadline is March 10.

Camden to host third annual Kidney Awareness Health Fair

The Camden community will come together Saturday, March 1, for the third annual Kidney Awareness Health Fair, bringing health awareness to the community one step at a time.

The fair will be held from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at The Price House, 724 Broad St., Camden, featuring guest speakers, music and more. Vendors are welcome, and a clothing drive will be sponsored by the Bertha F. Mills Foundation.

"Bring your lawn chairs and kick back for a time full of activities," said Stephanie Ponds Henry. For more information, email sponds@ymail.com.

Community health fair Feb. 8 in Columbia

Grace, Shady Grove and Salem United Methodist churches in the Columbia District are hosting a free community health fair at Grace UMC, 410 Harbison Blvd., Columbia, SC 29212.

The event is set for Saturday, Feb. 8, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Free resources and bag lunches will be provided, along with free health screenings, DARE officers, fraud protection, vision health, hair health, breast cancer resources, a drawing for door prizes and more. All are welcome.



Photo courtesy of Rosa W. Kennerly-Dance

Hope at New Light

The Rev. Enrique Gordon and members of New Light UMC, in the Orangeburg District, recently received a Hope Fund Grant in the amount of \$40,000. The South Carolina Conference Appointive Cabinet, on behalf of the South Carolina Annual Conference, awarded the grant Dec. 10 to assist the church in funding the repair of the church's roof. Orangeburg District Superintendent Ken Nelson (at center) presented the check to the pastor and trustees Jan. 5 during the morning worship. Gordon (left) and the members of New Light said they are so appreciative to the conference for helping them repair the church so they can continue worship services, ministries with the members and the communities they serve, and to be in mission and ministry with the larger United Methodist Church.

Around the Districts

Marion District

Congratulations to the Rev. J.T. and Kate Brown on the birth of their first child. Margaret Mills Brown was born Jan. 5. Brown is the associate pastor at Belin Memorial UMC, Murrells Inlet.

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Photo courtesy of Harriett Brevard

Christmas cheer in Camden

This past Christmas, the Outreach Ministry at St. Paul UMC, Camden, led by Chairperson Neysa Seward, made a lasting impact on several students at Jackson School, helping to create joyous holiday memories for several families. Their generosity and kindness not only brightened the holidays for the selected students but also spread love and cheer to a few families who needed a little Christmas TLC. Through their thoughtful contributions, they ensured that Christmas would be a season the children will remember for a lifetime. Church leaders offered heartfelt thanks to the ministry for making the holiday season brighter by sharing their spirit of giving within the local church and the broader community. Pictured are Pastor Leatha Brown, Principal Melinda Johnson, Neysa Seward, Raymond Seward, Elizabeth Bradshaw and Jackson School staff.



Historical Society

by Dr. Roger Gramling

Early challenges to episcopal authority: Hammett and O’Kelly

Sixty Methodist preachers gathered at Lovely Lane Meetinghouse in Baltimore, Maryland, on Christmas Eve, Dec. 24, 1784, for what has since been called the “Christmas Conference.” The decision was made to form a new church, a new denomination for Methodists in America.

Wesley had sent a number of directions, including his wish that the new church follow an “episcopal” form of government like the Church of England, meaning a hierarchical system of authority under the direction and supervision of Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, whom Wesley named as superintendents, to be assisted by ordained elders and deacons. The new church was organized under the name the Methodist Episcopal Church. In a few years, the title “bishop” would replace the title “superintendent.”

The need for clergy to administer the sacraments led to the ordination by Coke and Asbury of 12 preachers as elders and 14 as deacons. As only elders were permitted to celebrate the sacraments, the role for some evolved into the practice of the “presiding elder,” traveling a wider circuit to celebrate the sacraments and, in time, to offer oversight and leadership and to conduct certain church business. Thus were the presiding elders added to the hierarchy of the new church becoming in time extensions of the office of bishop.

However, the seeds of future dissent in the Methodist Episcopal Church were sown at the Christmas Conference just as surely as were the seeds of future successes. Dissent has rarely been a stranger in American Methodist circles.

While the episcopal form of church government would prove itself very efficient in assigning the itinerant or “traveling preachers” where and when they were needed, there were those who felt that the bishops were given too much power in the appointment of the preachers and in the selection of the presiding elders. Some claimed that the preachers should have the right to appeal an appointment and that the presiding elders should be elected by the preachers rather than being selected by the bishop.

Challenges to episcopal authority were not long in coming. And it comes as no surprise that the first such challenge arose, where else but from South Carolina. William Hammett, an English Methodist preacher who had pioneered Methodist work in the Caribbean, fell ill and came to Charleston. An eloquent preacher, Hammett gained a following in Charleston who lobbied for his appointment to the Cumberland Street Church. Asbury, claiming the right of the bishop to fix the appointments, would not agree.

Asbury eventually indicated he would appoint Hammett to the Charleston Circuit; however, Hammett began to speak against the appointive system. He resigned his appointment in 1791 and, taking members from the church on Cumberland Street, organized the Primitive Methodist Church. A few Primitive Methodist Societies were organized, but the movement largely ended with Hammett’s death in

1803 and many of his followers returning to the Methodist Episcopal Church.

A more formidable challenge to the appointive authority of the bishop and to Asbury himself arose at the conference of 1792 in the person of James O’Kelly, a prominent figure in North Carolina and Virginia. O’Kelly was a friend of both Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry. Although highly regarded by Asbury and although having served as a presiding elder himself, O’Kelly felt that the appointive power of the bishop was excessive. He offered a resolution that any preacher who “thinks himself injured” by his appointment shall have the right to appeal the appointment to the conference, and, if granted, be given another appointment.

O’Kelly’s abrasiveness and bitterness over the issue largely sealed its fate. The O’Kelly Resolution was soundly defeated. The following day, O’Kelly and several followers withdrew from the conference. In 1793, O’Kelly organized the Republican Methodist Church, which drew members away from the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1801 the name of the church was changed to the Christian Church. Dissent plagued the church, and many of the preachers who had withdrawn with O’Kelly eventually returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church, including one named William McKendree who, in 1808, would be elected as the fourth bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Christian Church was eventually absorbed into other churches.

A note:

In the January column about Old Bethel Church, it was stated that “the White congregation gave ‘Old Bethel’ to the mostly Black congregation on Aug. 27, 1876.” This statement deserves reconsideration. The Rev. J. David Myers writes in his book “Blacks in the History of the Bethel Churches (Methodist) of Charleston” that beginning in 1853, Black members had use of the Old Bethel building, which had served as their historic church home as well. This use developed into possession when the Methodist Episcopal Church claimed the property after the Civil War for the newly organized South Carolina Missionary Conference. Myers writes that the matter was ultimately resolved in 1876 when commissioners of the Northern and Southern churches met at Cape May, New Jersey, to resolve property disputes. The trustees of Bethel accepted the decision of the joint commission assigning possession of the building to the Black congregants of the Methodist Episcopal Church with the stipulation that the building had to be moved. Moving of the building was delayed for several years. However, the move was completed in 1882 and “title to the building was handed over to the trustees of Old Bethel.”

Gramling serves as secretary-treasurer of the Conference Historical Society and is currently the president of the SEJ Historical Society and a member of the SEJ Commission on Archives and History.



From the Archives

by Dr. Phillip Stone

The work of the Black church in South Carolina

For nearly a century, South Carolina Methodists were part of two different denominations and two separate annual conferences, largely based on race.

In the aftermath of emancipation, Black Americans quickly withdrew from White churches and formed new institutions, which they could lead free from White oversight. With the advent of Jim Crow segregation and disfranchisement in the late 1890s, the Black church became one of the few areas where Black South Carolinians could exercise independent leadership. By 1880, the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church—which we call the 1866 Conference—had some 27,000 members and 6,300 preparatory members in 247 churches. Most of these would have been on circuits, because that same report showed only 23 parsonages.

By 1883, the conference was publishing a newspaper, the *Methodist Messenger*, for South Carolina, which would have done for the 1866 Conference what the *Southern Christian Advocate* did for the 1785 Conference. I wonder if there are issues of that paper still in existence somewhere.

The 1880s and 1890s saw continued growth in the conference. By 1897, the statistics noted 52,000 lay members and 154 clergy members of the conference. Growth continued through the early 20th century, and by 1919, 54,000 members worshiped in 389 churches. One history of the conference noted that membership number was the most members the conference ever had.

The 1920s saw the acceleration of an exodus of Black Carolinians out of the state, and that might account for some of the decline in membership from that point on. New opportunities outside the South drew Black people to northern cities, and increased physical threats and denial of political and economic opportunity led many to want to leave. Much of rural South Carolina began to decline in population numbers, a trend that the Great Depression and World War II would only accelerate. By the merger of the Northern and Southern

branches of Methodism in 1939, the 1866 conference counted just 43,000 members at 338 preaching places.

The two conferences had many parallel structures, and the 1866 Conference soon formed a conference women’s organization. The Woman’s Home Missionary Society was organized in 1910, and it raised funds to support the sick, elderly, children, youth and others in financial need. They were active in many local churches and at the conference level. A Foreign Missionary Society was organized a few years later to support mission work overseas. They supported Black missionaries in Liberia, and the conference took pride in being partners in missionary work, not simply recipients.

As the modern civil rights movement began to build, long before it became a topic of conversation in the popular press, the Black church was building institutions and networks that could support the movement. In 1954, just after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (which had its roots in Clarendon County), the conference resolved to commend the Supreme Court, called for its implementation and endorsed the work of the NAACP in leading the cause. Soon, members of Black churches throughout the conference were becoming part of the struggle.

Some, like Trinity in Orangeburg, became something of a community headquarters for the movement.

And the push for civil rights was not just about public education and voting rights—it was in the denomination as well. The creation of the Central Jurisdiction in 1939 was a compromise that was forced on the Black conferences, and by the 1950s, those conferences were raising more strenuous objections to it.

Over the next 15 years, leaders in the 1866 conference worked to end segregation in the church just as they did in the state.

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





by Betty Stalnaker

Resource Center

Easter music available

Church musicians, it's time to plan your Easter music.

Listed below are new titles available in the conference Resource Center. Check our website for many other titles for children, youth and adults, or come by the Resource Center to see, listen and select your musical (appointments only).

Behold Messiah

(SBK500=) Author: Frazier, Michael/Crumpton, Johnathan.

This new easy-to-sing and easy-to-learn 25-minute Easter celebration is adapted especially for the two- to three-part choir by veteran arranger Michael Frazier, along with arrangers Marty Hamby, Phil Nitz, Luke Gambill, Bradley Knight and Phillip Keveren. Your choir and congregation will be encouraged through these powerful songs written by Sue C. Smith, Phil Wickham, Brandon Lake, Jonathan Smith, Lee Black and Charity Gayle. Adult/25 min./Easy/2-3 parts. (Daywind) Listening CD available. Age: YAS.

Calvary's Lamb—A Song, a Sacrifice, a Savior

(SBK501=) Author: McDonald, Mary.

The Passion story is told with consummate skill through words and music. Walk the streets of Jerusalem in the spirited Palm Sunday opening and visit the Upper Room, the Garden of Gethsemane and finally the hill of Golgotha. The closing soars with the hope of the resurrection. Each anthem can be performed separately during Lent and Holy Week or together as a 30-minute cantata with narration. Easily prepared and presented. Adult/30 min./Moderately Easy/SATB. (Jubilate) Listening CD available. Age: YAS

Not My Will, But Yours: Reflections on the Sacrifice Of Christ

(SBK502) Author: Larson, Lloyd.

"Not my will, but yours." These solemn words have echoed through the ages as Jesus embraced the will of Almighty God on the night before his crucifixion. Beginning shortly after the "hosannas" of Palm Sunday and concluding just before the "alleluias" of Easter Sunday, this brief Holy Week work retells the last hours of our Lord's earthly journey to remind us that Christ chose to walk the painful path of a criminal's execution for our redemption. Intended to be a versatile resource suitable for use in Maundy Thursday and/or Good Friday worship services, it is an excellent selection for choirs of any size thanks in part to its beautifully written and supportive piano accompaniment. An optional chamber orchestration by Ed Hogan for flute, clarinet, horn, violin and cello is also available. Finally, for those wishing to expand this work into a complete Easter presentation, a list of complementary Palm Sunday and/or Easter Sunday anthems is also included. Adult/17 min./Medium Easy/SATB. (Lorenz) Age: YAS.

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.umsc.org/resourcecenter>.

A lifesaving gift

Manning UMC, Manning, donated equipment to be used to train Manning High School teachers in CPR in the use of the AED. Christine Derby from the American Heart Association presented the equipment to the school. A demonstration was made by the American Heart Association's community impact director Alfonso Franco. The donation consisted of 10 mannequins, 10 training AEDs, a video and other training resources for teachers. The goal of the program is to train people and hands only CPR in an effort to create a nation of lifesavers, empowering everyone to know the life-saving skills of CPR.

Photo by Kelly Gottheiner



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Global Briefs

Helene recovery continues

ATLANTA—Three hard-hit United Methodist conferences are working with the United Methodist Committee on Relief to assess recovery needs and set up long-term disaster management programs as rebuilding after Hurricane Helene continues. The Western North Carolina, South Carolina and Holston conferences are each receiving grants averaging \$100,000-\$200,000 to begin assessments, which include fact and resource gathering to discover where needs are already being met by government and nonprofit agencies and which communities have not received the help they need.

Ecumenical group welcomes ceasefire agreement

GENEVA—The Rev. Jerry Pillay, the top executive of the World Council of Churches, welcomed the news of a ceasefire agreement reached between Israel and Hamas. "We take joy in the relief that it brings to the families of those who will soon be released, and the hope that it rekindles an end to the catastrophic war in Gaza," Pillay said. The United Methodist Church is a founding member of the ecumenical group.

High court hears case over church control of SMU

AUSTIN, Texas—The Texas Supreme Court heard arguments in the South Central Jurisdictional Conference's nearly six-year legal battle to retain some governance of Southern Methodist University. At issue is whether Southern Methodist University could change its articles of incorporation without the jurisdictional conference's approval.

Origami-dove exhibit fills church sanctuary

ATLANTA—Peachtree Road United Methodist Church, in Atlanta's Buckhead neighborhood, has filled its sanctuary with a special exhibit of 1,300 origami doves as part of its centennial celebration. The church is one of just three U.S. locations and seven worldwide to display the doves, symbolizing peace, created by German artist Michael Pendry.

Conferences explore potential unification

ATLANTA—The North Georgia and South Georgia conferences have officially launched an effort to study and pursue potential unification. Launched under the leadership of Bishop Robin Dease, the effort aims to explore the possibilities and benefits of becoming one annual conference. Dease leads both conferences. The conferences have put together a website for information and updates on the possibility of "One Georgia UMC."

Clinic helps immigrants navigate asylum process

LEXINGTON, Ky.—Neighbors Immigration Clinic is one of few legal resources for Kentucky's growing immigrant community. The clinic—part of the United Methodist Immigrant Law & Justice Network—has begun offering workshops on topics like asylum to engage community partners who also work with immigrants.

New bishop has history with U.S. conference

DES MOINES, Iowa—A recently elected bishop in Africa has spent significant time working in the Iowa Conference and was ordained in the state. The Rev. Ande Ikimun Emmanuel was elected Dec. 7 to lead the Nigeria Episcopal Area. He worked as a counselor at Wesley Woods Camp and Retreat Center in Indianola the summer of 2012. Bishop Julius Trimble performed his ordination.

Congregation reimagines vacation Bible school

CHICORA, Pa.—Chicora United Methodist Church had previously done summer vacation Bible school for a week as part of a shared ministry group with other churches. In 2024, however, due to lack of response and volunteers, the church chose to postpone. Church member Debbie Adams had a vision to do some one-day events during the school year on Mondays when there is a scheduled holiday.

New church launches in South Georgia

BAINBRIDGE, Ga.—South Georgia United Methodists are beginning an exciting new chapter as they launch a new faith community: Christ United Methodist Church. Faithful laity have trusted God to guide them on this journey following their former church's departure from the denomination this past summer.

Local-church grant applications open Jan. 15

LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C.—The Foundation for Evangelism plans to open the 2025 Equipping the Local Church grant cycle on Jan. 15. Up to 50 grants of \$5,000 or \$10,000 are available to small and medium-size churches, or clusters of churches working together, in a Wesleyan-tradition denomination.

New U.S. Congress sees dip in Christians

WASHINGTON—The 119th U.S. Congress has marginally fewer Christians than the 118th, continuing a gradual, decade-long decline. Still, Christians account for 87% of voting members in the newly elected Senate and House of Representatives, far greater than the 62% of U.S. adults overall who identify as Christian. All told, 26 lawmakers identify as members of a Methodist denomination.

Church promotes post-election peace in Mozambique

MAPUTO, Mozambique—United Methodists in Mozambique are asking for prayers and encouraging lawmakers to seek peace as civil unrest in the country continues following general elections in October. Hundreds have died in post-election violence.

Bishops celebrate Moravian sites' recognition

PARIS—The UNESCO World Heritage Committee has recognized four Moravian Church settlements around the globe as "of outstanding universal value to humanity and as such, have been inscribed on the World Heritage List to be protected for future generations to appreciate and enjoy." The United Methodist Church has a full-communion relationship with Moravians. During the 18th century, Moravians influenced Methodism founder John Wesley.

Richard Hays, influential scholar, dies at 76

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The Rev. Richard Hays, a renowned New Testament scholar, United Methodist elder and former dean of United Methodist-related Duke Divinity School known for his influential books on Christian ethics and his change of mind about same-sex marriage, died Jan. 3 from pancreatic cancer. Hays was 76.

—Courtesy of United Methodist News Service

Rev. Billy Bowman Brown

GREER—The Rev. Billy Bowman Brown, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Dec. 1, 2024.



Brown

Prior to his retirement in 1981, Rev. Brown served the Liberty, Tatum-Hebron, Aynor, Little River Circuit and Nichols-Floyd charges. He also served on Conference Council on Ministries and as director of the Clemson Wesley Foundation.

Rev. Brown is survived by his two daughters and son.

Rev. Theodore Cathcart

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—The Rev. Theodore Cathcart, husband of the Rev. Athena Dickey-Cathcart, died Jan. 9, 2025. Rev. Dickey-Cathcart is the pastor of the Rock Hill Central Charge, Rock Hill.

Funeral services were held Jan. 18 at Freedom Temple Ministries, Rock Hill.

Caesar Al Clemons Sr.

COLUMBIA—Caesar Al Clemons Sr., son of Manhines Clemons Sr., died Jan. 5, 2025. Mr. Manhines Clemons provides parking lot security for the Conference office.

Funeral services were held Jan. 11 at St. Paul Baptist Church with burial in Promised Land Cemetery.

Mr. Clemons is survived by his son, daughter and parents.

Stanley Mark Gossard

AIKEN—Stanley Mark Gossard, father of the Rev. Meegian Gossard, died Jan. 9, 2025. Rev. Gossard is the associate pastor of Lexington United Methodist Church, Lexington.

A memorial service was held Jan. 31 at Trinity UMC.

Memorials may be made to Trinity UMC Preschool or to Trinity UMC, 2724 Whiskey Road, Aiken, SC 29803.

Mr. Gossard is survived by his daughter.

Dr. John Wesley Heyward Jr.

ST. LOUIS—Dr. John Wesley Heyward Jr., brother of Dr. Joseph Heyward, died Nov. 28, 2024. Dr. Joe Heyward is a former lay leader of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Dec. 10 at Union Memorial UMC with burial in Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery.

Dr. Heyward is survived by his wife, Dorothy Heyward, and daughter.

Rev. Richard D. Hopper

SPARTANBURG—Rev. Richard D. Hopper, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Dec. 10, 2024.

Prior to his retirement in 2007, Rev. Hopper served the Belton Mill-Mount Bethel, Charleston-John Wesley Associate, Woodside-Holroyd, Asbury Charge, Lake View, Salem-St. Andrews, Epworth, Zoar, Mount Bethel-Porter's Chapel and



Hopper

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.

Wesley Chapel, Lydia, charges.

Funeral services were held Jan. 18 at St. Christopher's Episcopal Church.

Rev. Hopper is survived by his wife, Margaret Hopper, and three daughters.

Fred Harold McDowell

GREENWOOD—Fred Harold McDowell, father of the Rev. Jamie McDowell, died Jan. 10, 2025. Rev. McDowell is the pastor of Double Springs-Rock Springs and Hopewell charges, Westminster.

Funeral services were held Jan. 18 at Immanuel Lutheran Church with burial in Greenwood Memorial Gardens.

Memorials may be made to Mickey McDowell Nursing Fund, c/o Lander University, 320 Stanley Ave., Greenwood, SC 29649; or to Mickey McDowell Nursing Fund, c/o Newberry College, 2100 College St., Newberry, SC 29108.

Mr. McDowell is survived by wife, Betsy M. McDowell, and son.

Sherell Lynette Ravenel

RAVENEL—Sherell Lynette Ravenel, sister to the Rev. Henry Ravenel, died Dec. 12, 2024.

Rev. Ravenel is the pastor of St. James United Methodist Church, Darlington.

Funeral services were held Dec. 17 at St. Paul UMC.

Revé Maddox Richardson

LEXINGTON—Revé Maddox Richardson, mother of the Rev. Kristen Richardson-Frick, died Jan. 18, 2025. Rev. Richardson-Frick is the program officer of the Rural Church Division of the Duke Endowment.

Funeral services were held Jan. 25 at Lexington United Methodist Church.

Memorials may be made to Lexington UMC, 309 E. Main St., Lexington, SC 29072.

Mrs. Richardson is survived by her husband, Ed, and two daughters.

Lee Ann Ussery

ROCK HILL—Lee Ann Ussery, wife of the Rev. David Ussery, died Dec. 18, 2024. Rev. Ussery is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Dec. 18 at Mount Dearborn UMC, Great Falls.

Memorials may be made to Great Falls Referral and Assistance Service Project, 802 Dearborn St., Great Falls, SC 29055.

Mrs. Ussery is survived by her husband, two daughters and parents.

Michael Cunningham Watson Jr.

RALEIGH, N.C.—Michael Cunningham Watson Jr., son of the late Michael Cunningham and Mary Carolyn Tatum Watson, died Dec. 13, 2024. Funeral services were held Dec. 21 at The Willows of Raleigh. A graveside service was held Jan. 18 at South End Cemetery, Bamberg.

Memorials may be made to Volunteers in Medical Missions, 265 S. Cove Road, Seneca, SC 29672; or to United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, c/o Jennifer Parker, 143 Glenbrooke Circle, Columbia, SC 29204.

Mr. Watson is survived by his wife, Tammy.

Livestreaming the service helped out of town guests participate.



Honoring Dr. John W. Heyward Jr.: A community united in grief and celebration

By Dr. Martin Luther Quick

The passing of Dr. John W. Heyward Jr. marked a profound loss for the Cumberland United Methodist Church community and beyond.

A beloved leader, mentor and friend, Heyward's impact resonated deeply within the hearts of many. In light of this, the decision was made to honor his memory through a unique and heartfelt service that allowed participation from near and far.

Mary Bostic, a lifelong member of Cumberland and the sister-in-law of Heyward, approached me with a poignant request. Understanding the challenges faced by family and friends who could not travel to Indiana for the funeral, she asked if it would be possible to livestream the service from the sanctuary. This idea reflected not only the need for accessibility but also the desire for unity among those who loved and cherished Heyward.

With the technological support and dedication of the church community, the livestream was set up, allowing family and friends to gather virtually in the sanctuary. This initiative ensured that, despite physical distances, the spirit of togetherness prevailed. Many who were unable to attend in person, including Heyward's two siblings, were able to participate in the service, feeling the warmth and support of their beloved community surrounding them.

As the service commenced, the sanctuary became a sacred space where memories were shared, and tributes were paid to a life well-lived. The livestream allowed those at home to experience the same heartfelt moments, from eulogies to music that celebrated his legacy. The community's love and support were palpable, bridging the gap between those present and those attending virtually.

The decision to livestream the service not only honored Heyward's memory but also embodied the essence of community—a collective spirit of love, remembrance and support that transcends physical boundaries. In this digital age, technology provided a means to ensure that no one was left behind in the grieving process, allowing everyone to be part of a significant moment.

As the service concluded, the messages of love and support poured in from those who participated online. Many expressed their gratitude for being able to join the celebration of Heyward's life, sharing their own memories and the impact he had on them. In honoring him, the Cumberland community not only celebrated his life but also demonstrated the strength of their bonds—a testament to the love and connection that continues to thrive even in the face of loss.

The decision to livestream the service served as a reminder that while physical presence may be limited, the spirit of community and love knows no bounds.

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January

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
UWF 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. 8—Health Fair 2025 hosted by Grace, Shady Grove and Salem UMCs, Grace UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Feb. 9—Scouting 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. 15-16—LSM School (Rock Hill District), Woodland UMC, Rock Hill, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. (Sat.); 1:30-4:30 p.m. (Sun.),



Photo courtesy of Anthony Simpson

Pitching in

Men of Edisto Fork UMC, Orangeburg, set up for their Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. breakfast, held Jan. 18.

\$30. Contact: Lynne Tyner, kassgrandma16@gmail.com

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.

Feb. 21-23—Hands & Feet Weekend, Asbury Hills, Cleveland. Register: retreat@asburyhills.org

Feb. 21-22—2025 South Carolina Men N Ministry Annual Conference, Journey UMC, Columbia. <https://menministrysc.org>

Feb. 22—Handbell Choir Festival at Shandon UMC, Columbia, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. To register: <https://southcarolinafellowship.org/events>. For more information, email ehuss@shandon-umc.org.

Feb. 22-23—LSM School (Charleston District), Smyrna UMC, Moncks Corner, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. (Sat.), 2-4 p.m. (Sun.), \$30. Contact: layservantscharlestondistrict@gmail.com

Feb. 28—Deadline to register for UWF Legislative Advocacy Day. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/DEC-MBER-2024-MISSION-ECHO.pdf>

March

Women's History Month

March 1—Conference Connectional Ministries meeting, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

March 1—Paths to Wholeness Annual Signature Brunch, Orangeburg County Club, Orangeburg, 10 a.m. <https://www.pathstowholeness.org>

March 1—Third Annual Kidney Awareness Health Fair, The Price House, Camden, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

March 2—Transfiguration Sunday

March 5—Ash Wednesday

March 8—UWF Book Study, Noon

March 9—UMCOR Sunday

March 9—Scouting Sunday (alternate)

March 9—Daylight Saving Time

March 9—Marion District Connectional Ministries, First UMC, Marion, 4-5 p.m.

March 10—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.

March 16—LSM School (Spartanburg District), Beaumont UMC, Spartanburg, 2-5:30 p.m., \$40. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/SPARTANBURG-DISTRICT-LSM-SCHOOL-REGISTRATION-FORM-Spring-2025.pdf>

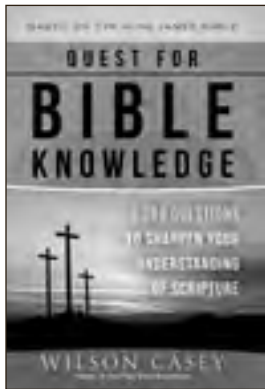
Trinity member authors eighth book

A member of Trinity United Methodist Church, Spartanburg, has released his eighth biblical work as the Trivia Guinness World Record holder.

Wilson Casey has authored "Quest for Bible Knowledge: 1,206 Trivia Questions to Sharpen Your Understanding of Scripture."

Casey notes that people are passionate when it comes to the Lord's word, as the Holy Bible has remained in the top-most rank of best-selling books of all time. He calls his latest release a "fun, informative and entertaining way to see how well you know the Good Book."

Casey compiled 1,206 questions about



the people, history, stories and facts from the Bible. Each page is a separate quiz with six enlightening and fresh questions with multiple-choice answers. In addition, every correct answer includes references to the relevant chapter and verse in Scripture for further study and clarification.

Casey is one of the country's foremost trivia aficionados, with a syndicated newspaper column, an award-winning website and a place in the Guinness Books of World Records for the longest running radio trivia broadcast.

Find the book on Amazon or wherever you purchase books.

Dementia care workshops set for February, March

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

- 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>; and

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



Love with God's Love

by the Rev. Adrienne Fink

Author's note: During the worship services I lead as a chaplain, we end the message time by turning to our neighbors and sharing an encouraging statement connected to the message's theme. Similarly, my commentaries for each week end with an encouraging statement. I invite you to speak that statement to yourself and share it with a neighbor.

Feb. 2
Extreme Love

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 5:38-48

Background Scripture: 1 John 4:7-21

Key Verses: Matthew 5:43-45, "You have heard that it was said, You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven."

Just in time for Valentine's Day, this week's Scripture passage focuses on love. When we look at the original Greek, we find that this passage uses a form of 'agape.' Ancient Greek has several words for love. Eros refers to romantic love. "Philia" refers to brotherly or familial love. "Agape" refers to moral love, or as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. describes in a sermon, "The understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill for all men" ("Loving your Enemies," Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, Nov. 17, 1957).

Agape is the love of God. So, when Jesus tells his listeners to "love your enemies," he's telling them (and us) to love with God's love. Liking is easy. Romantic and brotherly love is easy. Loving with God's love? That's when it gets hard. It gets even harder when we love not just our friends but also our enemies with God's love.

What does it look like to love our enemies with God's love? Begin with how God loves you. How do you experience God's love? Merciful? Steadfast? Compassionate?

Once you name how God loves you, share that same love with your enemies. Share God's love with the ones who hate you, who bully you, who hurt you. To be sure, loving enemies with God's love does not mean that we allow them to continue hurting us; however, it does determine how we respond. Do we hate those who hate us? Do we bully those who bully us? Do we hurt those who hurt us?

As Jesus acknowledges, you may have heard that you should hate your enemies; however, Jesus demands the opposite. We are God's children, so we must love with God's love.

Encouraging statement: Love with God's love. Love your enemies.

Feb. 9
Jesus's Upside-Down Kingdom

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 18:1-5, 10-14

Background Scripture: Revelation 11:15-19

Key Verse: Matthew 18:3 "I assure you that if you don't turn your lives around and become like this little child, you will definitely not enter the kingdom of heaven."

As we look at this week's passage, let's remember what it's like to be a child in an adult's world. The adults hold the power and control. They make the decisions. They determine the rules and the laws. Mean-

while, the children are vulnerable. They rely on adults for their necessities. The power dynamics are always uneven.

In the time of Matthew's Gospel, children were even more vulnerable. N.T. Wright explains that the Ancient Greek language uses the pronoun "it" rather than "he" or "she" to refer to a child. This pronoun usage suggests that a child is not a person. (Matthew for Everyone, Part 2) So, when the disciples ask Jesus who is the greatest, I imagine Jesus's answer shocks them: the vulnerable child, rather than powerful adult, is the greatest.

In American society, the people with the most money, the best connections and the most fame have the most power; thus, they are also the greatest. Whether we look at Hollywood, Silicon Valley or Washington, D.C., we see who holds the power, and we see who does not. Jesus clearly states that those who seek the kingdom of heaven should not seek the greatness of power. Those who seek the kingdom of heaven must seek the greatness of vulnerability.

If we seek the kingdom of heaven, then we must align ourselves with the vulnerable. This includes children but also expands beyond them.

Look at your local community. Who are the most vulnerable to sickness, pain, abuse or suffering? How can you walk beside them, care for them, advocate for them? Perhaps you are the one who is vulnerable. If so, hear the good news that the kingdom of heaven is for you.

Society may reject you, ignore you, or forget you. The kingdom of heaven cannot exist without you.

Encouraging statement: Love with God's love. Love the vulnerable.

Feb. 16
Forgive Like This

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 18:15-35

Background Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11

Key Verses: Matthew 18:21-22, "Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?' Jesus said, 'Not just seven times, but rather as many as seventy-seven times.'"

For this week, I would like to focus on what Jesus does not say in this passage. In my time as a chaplain, I have found that Christian understandings of forgiveness too often expect a victim to remain in an abusive situation in the name of forgiveness. In this passage, Jesus emphasizes the importance of forgiving those who have sinned against you. He doesn't expect his followers to stop at seven or 77 times (or seven times 70, as found in some translations). We should think of his use of "seventy-seven times" as a literary device to show that there is no limit to the number of times we should forgive. However, forgiveness does not require us to endure harm that others cause us. If you are in a relationship in which the other person is harming you, God does not command you to stay. God wants you safe. Forgiveness does not require you to return to the harmful relationship once you have left. When needed, forgiveness can and should come from a safe distance.

Sadly, other Christians may claim that you must remain in a harmful relation-

ship because that is what a "good, forgiving Christian" would do. Please understand that this week's Scripture passage, while it does expect limitless forgiveness, does not expect you to endure limitless harm.

This week's Scripture passage immediately follows last week's passage in Matthew 18. We saw last week that the kingdom of heaven begins with the most vulnerable. So, as we forgive others, we must continue to protect the most vulnerable among us. Within your congregation, how can you practice forgiveness and protect the most vulnerable?

Encouraging statement: Love with God's love. Forgive from afar. Protect the vulnerable.

Feb. 23
What Is in Your Storage Room?

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 6:19-24; Acts 2:42-47

Background Scripture: Psalm 24

Key Verses: Matthew 6:20-21, "Collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

This week's passage from Matthew is one small part of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, in which we see how the Christian community should live. Our larger American society encourages a life focused on gaining wealth. With wealth comes power, prestige and security. The rich seem to have better lives. Yet, Jesus reminds us that such treasures do not last. Instead, we should seek the greater treasure—the eternal, heavenly treasure.

Interestingly, Jesus does not state what

that treasure is; he only tells what that treasure is not: wealth. So we must look beyond these verses to understand heavenly treasure. For the author of Matthew, the kingdom of heaven is not a place meant for the future. The kingdom of heaven is now, and it requires a community that chooses to follow God. The kingdom of heaven exists as the opposite of worldly kingdoms. It loves enemies, protects the vulnerable and forgives unceasingly. Collecting the treasures of the world ultimately hurts the community, particularly the most vulnerable. Collecting the treasures of heaven helps the community as it provides for those who need the most help.

The second passage for this week, Acts 2:42-47, demonstrates what happens when Jesus' followers choose to collect heavenly treasures. One person does not keep the treasures; instead, the treasures belong to the entire community. Those who have share with those who have not. Members of the kingdom of heaven provide for each other. They do not bury the treasure or lock it in a chest. They bring all they have to the community so that it may bless the whole community. Seeking worldly wealth proves selfish because a person grows richer only by taking from others. Seeking heavenly wealth multiplies the treasures and ensures that everyone receives what they need.

Encouraging statement: Love with God's love. Love generously.

Fink is chaplain for the Prisma Health Department of Spiritual Care and Education and is a deacon with the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. She is on the Columbia District Committee on Ordained Ministry.

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Central's Santahatchie helps several homes

Youth and adults of Central United Methodist Church, Spartanburg, held their annual "Santahatchie 2024 Camp" Dec. 27-29.

Like the Summer Salkhatchie Summer Service program, Santahatchie offers Central's members the chance to make life-changing repairs on several homes in the days following Christmas celebrations.

This year, new roofs made several homes livable again, while other homes had a deck replaced and a bathroom remodeled. Mary Burgess Allen coordinated this event.

The next Santahatchie Camp is scheduled for Jan. 1-3, 2026.

Here are scenes:



Volunteers measure wood for proper alignment during Central's annual "Santahatchie 2024 Camp."



Volunteers work on a fence, left, and a roof, right.



One of the homes needed porch repairs.



Above and at left, the teams worked hard but had fun, too.

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