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August 2021

'This I Know'

One-day SEJ unites Tennessee-Western Kentucky conference, hears racism initiatives

By Jessica Brodie

Delegates from across the Southeastern Jurisdiction gathered online July 21 for a one-day special session of jurisdictional conference to handle limited but much-needed business postponed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The SEJ special session looked much different from nor-

mal years, when lay and clergy delegates, bishops and others converge at Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center in the mountains of North Carolina for a multiday gathering filled with worship, business, elections and more. Only a handful of key people gathered in person for the session, and the rest participated with electronic livestream and voting to

handle the two matters placed on the session's agenda.

But a little more than two hours after it began, the session ended with necessary matters resolved, including the formation of the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference.

See "SEJ," Page 12



VBS is back!

Churches across South Carolina were celebrating this summer with the return of vacation Bible school. Some did an at-home version and others did a one-day stint, while still others did as best they could to return to years past. Clockwise from left, Monaghan UMC brought VBS in July to a neighboring adult daycare center, Active Day Greenville. A child prays during "Rocky Railway VBS" at Shandon UMC, Columbia. And a VBS leader at Journey UMC, Columbia, engages with a child during "Champions in Life: Ready, Set, Go with God" in June. For more VBS pictures, see Pages 7-11.

Faith challenge

Woman's kidney disease helps remind her of importance of prayer, lifestyle change

By Jessica Brodie

Two years ago, Stephanie Ponds Henry was living her dream. Newly married to her husband, ShaRome, both worked for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church in the conference office, and both were active members of Good Hope Wesley Chapel UMC in Camden. Life was good.

Then, just three short months later, everything was falling apart.

Henry, who works as a health benefits specialist, had taken advantage of the UMC's free comprehensive health screening, Quest Blueprint for Wellness, at Annual Conference 2019 in Greenville.

See "Faith Challenge," Page 13

Epworth director Holler honored as he transitions to retirement

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—Fifteen years after he took the helm of Epworth Children's Home, the Rev. John Holler is stepping into retirement—but not without some significant honors.

At his retirement celebration June 24, Holler was surprised with not only a packed crowd

of friends, family and Epworth supporters cheering him on toward this new chapter in his life, but also the highest honor bestowed upon a civilian in this state: the Order of the Palmetto.

See "Holler," Page 24

Cox returns to lead credit union as acting president

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—After 14 years away helping other ministries in South Carolina, one United Methodist is returning to his former position at the South Carolina Methodist Conference Credit Union.

Andy Cox, a member of Chapin UMC, Chapin, has been selected by the credit union board to serve as its acting president.

The credit union's former president, the Rev. Rex Wilson, retired in June after 14 years of dedicated service. Cox, who served the credit union begin-

ning in 1998, left in 2007 to serve at Epworth Children's Home, then went to The Oaks retirement community in 2012 becoming chief executive officer in 2015. The Oaks had been a United Methodist-affiliated senior-living home until recently, when long-term financial issues prompted its sale to a for-profit company.

The first part of that sale was completed this spring, and Cox is staying on part-time as CEO and president until that business is concluded, while

See "Credit Union," Page 24

Salk Reboot kicks off 2022 plans after two years off

By Jessica Brodie

WEST COLUMBIA—Salkehatchie leaders and camp directors from across the state gathered at Mount Hebron United Methodist Church July 24 for "Salkehatchie Reboot," a one-day organizing session designed to mobilize fresh energy and roll out new plans.

COVID-19 prompted the cancellation of the summer service camp the past two years, and they plan to spend the next year getting as many people as possible excited about the opportunity to help repair homes in some of South Carolina's most poverty-stricken communities.

Kathy Hart, board chair, spoke about the

tremendous opportunity Salkehatchie gives not only to the people whose homes are worked on, but also the students and adults who volunteer.

The Rev. Millie Nelson Smith, director of Connectional Ministries, also spoke about the

See "Salk Reboot," Page 24



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

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

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Back Issues

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

Five new board members elected to Advocate

Five people have joined the Board of Trustees of the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate*, replacing those whose terms of service had expired.

New members are David Bryant, the Rev. Sharon Spann Gamble, the Rev. Michael Henderson, Licita Rogers and Michelle Sturzenbecker.

Those who rolled off the board are Dyron Anderson, the Rev. Carleatha Benson, Dr. Bill Click, the Rev. Steve King and Dr. Phillip Stone.

Anderson, Benson and Stone had been slated to roll off the board in 2020, but because of the pandemic, stayed on another year in the transition.

Also at its most recent meeting, held June 24, the board elected and reelected several members of its executive committee and established committee assignments. Dr. Christopher Greene was reelected chair, Enid Jenkins elected vice chair and David Bryant elected



Bryant



Gamble



Henderson



Rogers



Sturzenbecker

treasurer. Creg Smith remains as secretary.

The *Advocate's* newspaper ministry has helped connect the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church since its founding in 1836. Its mission is to connect United Methodists by independently reporting relevant news, engaging readers, providing a forum for dialogue and sharing

the gospel of Jesus Christ. The board serves as the publisher of the *Advocate* and offers visionary guidance and hands-on help for the newspaper ministry.

The *Advocate* comprises clergy and laity representatives from across the state with an emphasis on diversity in gender, race, age and other representation. New members are elected in place of those rolling off at Annual Conference.

If anyone is interested in serving on the *Advocate's* board, email advocate@umcsc.org.

COVID cases cancel Asbury Hills camp for week, possibly longer

CLEVELAND—Two positive COVID-19 cases prompted Asbury Hills Camp and Retreat Center to cancel camp scheduled for the week of July 18.

In a press release from the camp, Asbury Hills reported one adult and one minor tested positive for COVID-19.

Camp leaders said they have notified the local health department and have been in contact with the American Camping Association. They will continue to work in compliance with the health department and officials. All families who were scheduled to arrive on July 18 were notified, and all families with campers on property between July 11-18 have also been notified.

Campers scheduled to arrive July 18 will be receiving a full refund. "We hope to make a decision about reopening for future weeks of

camp soon and will be in contact with all who are currently registered for the remainder of the summer," camp leaders said.

Leaders noted all cohorts of campers (groups of campers who share sleeping quarters and meal times) and their designated counselors remain physically distant from other cohorts. When cohorts are in close contact of others on property that are not in their cohort, face coverings are worn.

Campers and their families are symptom-screened before entry to property.

"Our staff have monitored their symptoms and follow proper protocol should they present with any symptoms of COVID-19, as defined by the CDC," camp leaders said.

If parents have questions or concerns, email asburyhills@gmail.com.

What do we do after COVID? Rock Hill District clergy explore steps forward in new reality

Now that we are hopefully seeing the latter stages of COVID-19, clergy and laity are faced with a number of issues, questions and challenges. The issues, questions and challenges all have to do with how clergy and laity will respond to what has occurred as a result of COVID-19.

Like all of the other districts in the annual conference, clergy in the Rock Hill District are wrestling with how to move forward as the body of Christ.

Dr. Anthony Hodge, superintendent of the Rock Hill District, helped to facilitate a five-month clergy discussion on the possibilities that exist for churches on the district.

The beauty of the five-month discussion was that it was led by a team of clergy who volunteered to tackle the concept of moving forward as a post-quarantine church.

In a recent clergy gathering, Hodge along with other clergy extended words of thanks to the presenters who shared their insights on how the church could conceivably move forward.

Presenters were Michael Jarrell, "The Post-Quarantine Church," February; Mallory Forte Nickerson, "Breaking Free from Institutions," March; Joel McMakin, "A New Discipleship Process," April; and Becky Shirley and Dishawn Muldrow, "Practical Models for the New Church," May.

In a slide presentation developed by Shirley and Muldrow, reference was made to Tom Rainer's book, "The Post Quarantine Church." In that book, Rainer points out, "If church leaders and members don't take this opportunity to rethink everything they've been doing, it will indeed be an opportunity wasted. God may be waiting for YOU to write a new story for your church on the blank slate God has provided."

Phrased differently, what thing or things did we learn as we encountered the pandemic that can help us build stronger ministries going forward?



Clergy gather to discuss post-COVID ministry in the Rock Hill District June 3.

As we approach a new conference year, clergy on the Rock Hill District were asked to prayerfully consider how they would utilize what they had been exposed to in those clergy gatherings.

They were reminded in the last presentation, facilitated by Shirley and Muldrow, that, "This journey into a new normal will take courage. In past times of paradigm shifts, the saints who have gone before us could have thrown in the towel, but they didn't. They imagined a church in the future for people they'd never met. Let's be those kinds of saints!"

The rhetorical question, what do we do after COVID-19, was posed.

As Hodge noted, most are aware that churches are encountering some differences

in worship attendance since COVID. Some persons are reluctant to resume in-person worship at this time. Some churches have been impacted financially because of the pandemic.

For any pastor or congregation encountering persons reluctant to return to in-person worship, Hodge said, remember that God blessed us with alternatives to provide worship for everyone. Rather than abandon, utilize what has worked for many to actually expand worship exposure and opportunities to support your community of faith financially.

"We can as a district and annual conference continue to do several things with God's help way beyond COVID-19. If God provided for each of us during our COVID-19 experience, surely God can and will provide for us post-COVID-19," Hodge said.

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Viewpoints



Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

Engaging with those we disagree with

On Twitter, I found myself responding to someone who asked whether anyone out there frequently engages with those they disagree with, and how they navigate this. “I do!” my fingers raced to type. “I run a religious newspaper that tries hard to be balanced and include many perspectives, so this is both a challenge and a blessing. Many of my readers don’t want to read all viewpoints. But I learn a lot from them.”

You might be one of those readers. I can be one of those readers, too. I often don’t think I want to read a perspective from someone who seems to disagree with everything I value. But after 11 years in this position, more than 20 years in journalism and more than four decades on this earth, here’s the biggest truth I’ve learned: I don’t know everything. (Neither do you!) And I can learn a lot from opening my heart and mind to other perspectives.

The pages of the *Advocate* are filled with wonderful articles and photos that show God’s brilliant, compassionate, merciful and exciting work accomplished through South Carolina United Methodists. It’s heartening and inspiring to see God’s people feeding the hungry, clothing those without and sharing the redeeming truth of salvation in the community. Special needs ministry? Prison ministry? Addiction and recovery ministry? We’ve got it. It’s beautiful to read how Methodists are being God’s hands and feet near and far.

But it’s also beautiful to see people on fire for Jesus about issues they care passionately about. Whether these are issues I agree on or not doesn’t matter, for if we look deeply, we realize those writings are ardent. Heartfelt. The writers are fully convicted by the Holy Spirit about whatever it is that they are writing, whether that’s the future of The United Methodist Church or some aspect of social justice.

I applaud these writers for having the courage to write what God has put on their heart and share it with their peers through the pages of this newspaper. Their obedience isn’t always appreciated, but I know God honors it because they are heeding what God is asking them to do. That takes tremendous strength and faith.

When God called Jonah to go prophesy to Nineveh, he ran as fast and far as he could in the other direction. Only after he spent three days in the belly of a whale did he finally capitulate and agree to follow God’s command. Some of us, when God calls us to share an unpopular or controversial opinion, can be a lot like Jonah. We might think, “I didn’t hear God right,” or “I don’t know enough to write on this topic, really,” and tuck it away hoping someone else will do it—or maybe the issue will just magically resolve. We might run away.

But the *Advocate* is a safe space, a place where God is invited consistently and always to move and work and transform. Maybe there’s something God is asking you to read a little more closely this month. Maybe God’s nudging you to start a new ministry, or to change your mind about an issue. Maybe it’s time to open your mind to another perspective—whatever that looks like. The opportunities are endless, and God is always on the move.

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 Advocate, 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203 or e-mailed to advocate@umcsc.org. Deadlines are the 10th of each month.



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Bishop’s Corner

by Bishop L. Jonathan Holston

Making it plain

“With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”—Micah 6:6-8 (NIV)

We’ve been here before. Wondering what God’s plans for us are. Trying to figure out who we are called to be in the community and in the world. Taking our next faithful steps as the future looms ahead.

It is suggested that the prophets of Israel were either criticizing or energizing God’s people. The prophet’s role was one of accountability. Micah has pointed out the selfish and sinful habits the Israelites had developed, and they, in turn, sarcastically question what they should do instead. In a hyperbolic fashion, they offer exaggerated options for sacrifices they could make to restore right relationship with God—thousands of rams, 10,000 rivers of oil and even their firstborn child.

What I have come to know is that confession and repentance is hard and painful work. No one ever feels that they have wronged anyone or done anything that needs an apology until it is brought to their attention. Yet repentance goes beyond confession. To truly repent demands a life changed from the inside out. It asks us to make a 180-degree turn with a resolve to choose God’s way rather than our own. This change takes hard work.

There is much to be learned from butterflies about the importance of challenge and hard work. Author and researcher Susan Laing tells the story in this way:

“A man found a cocoon of a butterfly. One day he saw a small opening in the cocoon. He sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through that little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could and could go no further. So, the man

decided to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of cocoon.

The butterfly then emerged easily. But it had a swollen body, and small shriveled wings. He continued to watch the butterfly, because he expected that, at any moment, the wings would emerge and expand to support the body, which would contract in time. Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It was never able to fly. The man felt a great sadness.

“What he had not understood was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required to get through the tiny opening were nature’s way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon. It had needed to struggle.”

It is in the struggle, after all, that the butterfly gains its strength.

What does strength look like in the life of faith? It’s not about how we restore who we are or who we were, but, instead, how do we become who God needs us to be.

Micah points the Israelites in the right direction to begin this journey of transformation—to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God—but it is up to the people to choose to follow.

As we take our next faithful steps, let’s choose to follow where God is leading. There will be moments of struggle and uncertainty, but if we persevere, we will be ready for the opportunities that are ahead to make disciples and transform our communities.

In the South Carolina Conference, we have developed and approved from the grass roots the Four Priorities that will be our road map for becoming who God needs us to be. Through the work of 1) developing leaders, 2) engaging our communities, 3) connecting with and growing disciples and 4) measuring and evaluating current realities and missional possibilities, we will gain the strength we need for this kingdom-building goal.

When we make space for God to work in our lives to transform us from the inside, there will surely be moments of struggle, but when we emerge, we will be ready to fly.

Letters to the Editor

God’s gift

“Do you want to be healed?” Jesus asked.

Six hundred thousand deaths in the U.S. and 4 million in the world have happened because of COVID-19. Friends, relatives and ministers have died.

The U.S. government is picking up the bill for the current round of vaccinations and has provided billions of dollars to public health departments, community health centers, hospitals and pharmacies to get shots in the arms.

“Jesus sends the twelve disciples to heal” (Matthew 10:1-8).

God called the late Dr. Mike Watson to Haiti, and he provided the tetanus shot to this country. This was the start of Volunteers in Mission. Our church can respond to hurricanes, tornadoes and floods, yet why not medical teams to vaccinate?

“God so loved the world” (John 3:16).

South Carolina is struggling to get COVID-19 shots into residents’ arms. Just 40 percent of eligible S.C. residents were fully inoculated, per DHEC.

Bitter politics and entrenched resistance are a real problem. The vaccines were developed by top medical experts. You cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccines, and the vaccines are up to 95 percent effective.

“People brought the sick to Jesus” (Mark 6:53-56).



Why I'm United Methodist

by the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith

Grace and love

Editor's note: This is the next in a series written by United Methodist individuals across South Carolina about why they have chosen to be a United Methodist.

When I was a little girl, we had to go to church. My grandmother required it, my mama required it and Daddy enforced it. I mean we had to go to church. There was no asking us did we feel like going; we simply knew that we were going. That church was a Methodist Episcopal church that would later in the early 1970s become United Methodist. This is the church that would form my beliefs and my faith as a Christian.

Mama grew up Baptist, so I was exposed to the Baptist Church as a child, as well. Some of the things that I distinctly remember is that my cousins could not participate in Holy Communion once they were 12 years old unless they had professed Christ as their Lord and Savior and been accepted into the church. They were told that they were not worthy.

In my church, we were allowed to participate in Holy Communion. As I matured in faith and understood more, I came to understand that on our own we could never be "good" enough to earn the great sacrifice that Christ made for us, but isn't that just what grace is? Grace is unmerited, undeserved and cannot be earned. It is freely given by God to us.

As I learned more about this United Methodist Church, I came to love the way we worshipped, the way we gave to help the poor, the way we would speak out about injustice in the world and the way education was valued as a way to help all to be able to have opportunities to learn and grow. I loved that we were connected to other United Methodist congregations. Everywhere we went there was a United Method-

Why are you a United Methodist? Share your story with the *Advocate* about why you chose this denomination, whether you are a lifelong United Methodist or brand new. Email advocate@umcsc.org. Deadlines are the 10th of each month.

ist church. I truly came to love the ministry and activities that we participated in during my youth. I have vivid memories of softball games and picnics where all the generations got together, and the love of God was in our hearts. I guess I started to hear a whisper of a call to me during those early years.

That whisper became louder as I started to work in the church as a young adult and saw how I could give back what had been so graciously shared with me—time and love, God's love. Most of all what was shared with me was God's grace. I learned that I was created in the image of God, and I could reflect that image.

Well, it was off to college and seminary for me as I began to respond to God's call in my life. There were no lightning bolts. There were no burning bushes that weren't consumed. There were no loud voices from the clouds. There was a steady glow that grew warmer as I became closer to God. I guess you could say that my heart was warmed, perhaps even strangely.

I am no more or less worthy today than I was as a child, but you and I, we have worth for we are valued so much in the eyes of our God who would give Jesus to die for our sins so that we would not die but have eternal life. That's love! Grace and love—that is why I am United Methodist.

Nelson Smith is director of Connectional Ministries for the South Carolina Conference of the UMC.

LETTERS: Continued

From Page 4

In the Book of Worship, the Healing Service says, "All healing is of God. God gives gifts through medicine." It is the great mystery of God.

I personally believe the vaccination for COVID-19 is an act of God and his grace through science, just as the polio vaccine in 1953 and Dr. Jonas Salk. I personally encourage all ministers to get the vaccination and to recommend it.

"God comforts us in affliction" (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

*Rev. John Culp, retired
Columbia*

A poem: What is your calling?

Lord, you touched my heart and I wanted to learn more.

What do you want from me? Where can I learn and believe?

The answers are found in the Book of Life!

You read, you learn from others who are seeking your love.

Sharing with others and learning can bring us closer to the Lord.

Trust in the Bible, the words to live by.

God wants you to share the good news to others,

Serving and sharing as we are all brothers!

What's your calling?

Serve the Lord!

Share the Lord!

Worship the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

Your life will be complete!

*Margaret Faulkenberry, member
Mount Holly UMC, Rock Hill*

Eternal vigilance

I have recently finished reading William L. Shirer's "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich—A History of Nazi Germany." I had wanted to read it most of my adult life. Retirement has allowed me the time to get to it. It is not a "quick read" or a "short read." My edition, published in 1960 by Simon and Schuster, numbers 1,245 pages.

It is the story of how a few men, Adolf Hitler in particular, rose to absolute power in Germany and came close to destroying western civilization and enslaving the entire world with the aid of their Axis allies.

It is a story of how intimidation, treachery and even violence were used to achieve political ends in a democratic country. It is a story of conspiracy, manipulation, intrigue, deceit, lies, unbridled racism and monstrous criminality on a scale not previously known or even imagined.

It is not fiction. It is not a fantasy. It is a true story that took place in a country of culture and science, a country of technological and engineering achievements. It is a story of how absolute power can slowly but resolutely become absolute tyranny and how absolute tyranny all too quickly becomes absolute terror.

Shirer's "Rise and Fall" should be required reading for every young adult in the United States, especially now that the sons and daughters of the "Greatest Generation" are themselves passing from the scene. It is a story that needs to be known by each succeeding generation. Why? Because the old adage is still true: All that is necessary for evil to triumph is that good people do nothing! In Nazi Germany and in the countries it conquered and enslaved, evil came tragically close to a final and complete triumph.

The U.S. Office of Strategic Services offered the following characteristics of Adolf Hitler in a psychological profile of the Nazi leader: "Never allow the public to cool off; never admit a fault or wrong; never concede that there may be some good in your enemy; never leave room for alternatives; never accept blame; concentrate on one enemy at a time and blame him for everything that goes wrong; people will believe a big lie

sooner than a little one; and if you repeat it frequently enough people will sooner or later believe it."

Hitler would have done well to remember the old German saying, "Lies have short legs." The popular meaning is that lies will carry you for a little while, but sooner or later the truth will overtake you.

Adolf Hitler declared that the Third Reich would last for a thousand years. It lasted just 13 years, but it left a trail of millions of victims including victims of enslavement, torture, murder and extermination on a scale and to a degree which even to this day continues to challenge human comprehension and human conscience.

The quotation most frequently attributed to Thomas Jefferson, "the price of freedom is eternal vigilance," still rings true. Lest we forget! Lest we forget!

*Roger M. Gramling, retired
Columbia*

Remember law enforcement

With the continuing rise in crime all over the country and the terrible attitude toward our law enforcement, it is an appropriate time to remind the South Carolina United Methodist Conference of the resolution that passed in 2018. May God bless our men and women who put their lives on the line every day to protect each of us.

Resolution Supporting, Recognizing and Honoring the Services of Law Enforcement Officers:

Whereas, there are more than 920,000 sworn law enforcement officers now serving in the United States; and

Whereas, a total of 1,531 law enforcement officers died in the line of duty over the past 10 years, an average of three deaths every week or 153 per year.

Whereas, recent statistical ranking has South Carolina 50th out of 51 in having the worst crime rate just ahead of New Mexico and just behind Washington, D.C.

Whereas, law enforcement officers in this state and throughout the nation are routinely called upon to serve and protect their fellow citizens by responding to horrendous events and acting heroically to save the lives of others;

Whereas, it is incumbent upon public officials and the law-abiding public to proactively support our law enforcement officers who regularly face threats of violence and danger, routinely putting their lives in jeopardy to defend others which may potentially result in injury, disability or even death to keep our neighborhoods safe, enforce the rules of law, protect our property and respond in times of crisis;

Whereas, a number of clergy and members of the South Carolina Annual Conference are current or former members of the law enforcement community and have dedicated and are dedicating their lives and wellbeing to their official duties, and are sworn to protect and to serve the citizenry of this state, and,

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the bishop and members of the South Carolina United Methodist Annual Conference, that they declare their support and solidarity with the men and women and their families who serve, or who have served, as law enforcement officers, and in particular to those who reside in the state of South Carolina, for their distinctive service and dedicated efforts, earning our highest respect and deepest gratitude, which must be recognized and honored for their selfless and heroic service and invaluable contribution to upholding justice, enforcing the rule of law and protecting the innocent of South Carolina and the nation.

*Rev. Joseph Robert "Bob" Huggins, retired
Promised Land*

All letters to the editor are welcome.
Email advocate@umcsc.org.
See policy Page 4.



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Barry Allen

God's perfect vision

In the Beatitudes, in Matthew 5:8, Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (KJV).

When we do our best to love God and each other, and we do our best to avoid sin in every area of our lives, we grow in purity of heart. This results in us being able to "see" God moving in and around our lives and ministries. Similarly, if we foster animosity, unforgiveness, hatred and revenge in our hearts, our hearts become more and more impure. This results in us having a feeling that God is distant, and his visibility in our lives and ministries diminishes.

Therefore, as we live our lives as human beings and Christians, we will see God more clearly in our lives and ministries at different times in our lives. Hopefully, as we grow in sanctifying grace, by studying the Scriptures, praying, serving and worshiping, we also grow holier each year and see God more and more clearly as we mature in our faith.

However, God sees everything all the time. He sees our motives, what we ponder in our hearts and minds and everything we do and say.

As I continue preaching and teaching the Bible and Christian doctrine, I frequently talk about God's perfect vision.

The fact that God sees everything is somewhat of a double-edged sword. When we are doing our best to love God and each other,

and live and grow in holiness in every area of our lives, we celebrate and are comforted that God sees all of our obedience, love and purity of heart. Sometimes, God may be the only person, other than yourself, that sees some of the good things you do. We like this. This is good. However, the other side of the coin is that, when our hearts are impure and we are not obedient and loving God and others, God sees all of this also. We may not like this as much. But we all know it's true. God sees everything.

Whether or not God's perfect vision is a good and comforting thing, or a scary and disturbing thing, depends on us. If we are doing our best to love God and each other, and to live obediently and joyfully for God in every area of our lives, God's perfect vision is a wonderful and comforting thing. We celebrate and are happy to know that God sees all the good we do. God sees all of the good we do even if no one else sees it.

Similarly, God also sees any bad we do.

Let's strive to keep God's perfect vision something we can celebrate, and be comforted by, as we strive to live for him in every area of our lives. May we try to do as the psalmist does in Psalm 101:2: "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart" (KJV).

Allen pastors Pinopolis UMC, Pinopolis.

2021 Annual Conference awards honor churches, individuals across S.C.

The South Carolina Annual Conference honored a number of clergy and laity across the state during the conference's annual awards, celebrated online this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Barbara Boultinghouse Bridge Builder

The Rev. Sh'Kur Francis is the recipient of the Barbara Boultinghouse Bridge Builder Award, which is presented by the Commission on Religion and Race to a person or organization in the South



Francis

Carolina Conference who has built bridges of understanding by promoting equity and inclusiveness without regard to race, gender, age, handicap or economic condition.

"Sh'Kur is clearly a young man focused on building bridges that promote racial reconciliation, diversity and inclusion," said the Rev. Chenita Frierson, pastor of Mount Olive and New Hope United Methodist churches in Rock Hill, who nominated Francis. "This 27-year-old black millennial has already pastored three predominately white congregations in our conference.

"Sh'Kur has an incredible amount of energy and always appears to be channeling that energy in building bridges between churches, communities, people and races."

Francis' bridge-building started well before his ministry in the church. While serving as an executive intern for Charleston Mayor John Tecklenburg in 2016, he helped form the Mayor's Clergy Advisory Council. That group of 80-plus leaders from different faith traditions builds relationships and serves as liaison between city leadership and faith communities.

After he was appointed to serve Grace and Lynnwood UMCs, Lancaster, in 2018, Francis helped form the Lancaster County Ministerial Alliance, an organization aimed at racial reconciliation, interfaith dialogue and relationship building.

"When national unrest occurred after George Floyd was murdered in June 2020, Sh'Kur single-handedly organized the Lancaster County Prayer Vigil, in partnership with elected officials, law enforcement and other community leaders," she said. "Clergy from every denomination and race participated in the vigil, including worshipers from a Jewish synagogue and a Muslim mosque."

Since his appointment to New Hope UMC, Anderson, in 2020, which he served until his latest appointment in Main Street UMC, Columbia, Frierson said Francis continued to be "a moderating voice for peace and reconciliation, both personally in his community and virtually on social media."

Harry Denman Evangelism Award—Laity

The Foundation for Evangelism recognizes one layperson in each conference for responsible evangelism in the local church. This year's recipient is Sandy Thrasher, a member of New Hope UMC, Anderson.



Thrasher

Thrasher was nominated by her then-pastor at New Hope, the Rev. Sh'Kur Francis.

"When I first met Sandy in person, the first thing I noted was the positivity she exudes," Francis said. "It was clear to me that she is a bright light in a world that always needs it, and this positivity reflects so well on our church and the kingdom of God."

Francis credits Thrasher with playing a significant role in helping New Hope establish a virtual presence during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in the church's return to in-person services, right about the time Francis arrived there.

"New Hope had an average attendance of 40 people pre-pandemic, and I expected to see around that same number on my first Sunday," he said. "I was shocked when I left the pastor's study that morning to see a line of dozens of people that stretched from the front door of the church to the parking lot. Sandy had spent weeks inviting coworkers, friends, neighbors, family, friends and even strangers to her church to meet her new pastor. New Hope's attendance quadrupled its usual size that morning, and because of her invitation, a few of these families have joined, some are still faithfully attending and many have become frequent visitors."

Marjorie Carithers, chairperson of New Hope's Administrative Council, said the impact of Thrasher's evangelism reaches deep into the Anderson community.

"Sandy's evangelizing efforts in the name of Jesus Christ are unique and far-reaching," she said. "Sandy and her poodle, Maybelline, are local celebrities who volunteer with local nursing homes, assisted living facilities and hospice homes to bring smiles and cheers to those most desperately in need of love and encouragement. Sandy's bold witness and willingness to joyfully plow new ground sets her apart as a leader in the church and a fruitful evangelist for God."

Michael C. Watson Volunteer in Mission Award for Clergy

Sponsored by the Board of Global Ministries, the Michael C. Watson Volunteer in Mission Award is given to clergy and laity who exemplify extraordinary mission service. This year's clergy recipient is the Rev.



Elmore

John Elmore Jr., then pastor of St. Mark UMC, Greenwood, and now at Holly Hill UMC, Holly Hill.

"Rev. John Elmore is committed to service on many levels, giving of his time, talents and energy in amazing ways in the Greenwood District as a member of the Early Response Team," said Dr. Stephen Love, the district's superintendent. "His work and ministry extend far beyond the bounds of the district and South Carolina. He does not look for accolades for his work; rather, he is passionate about serving and helping others as he lives out his faith in Jesus Christ."

Billy Robinson, disaster response coordinator for the South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, cited Elmore's "real passion for doing God's calling to love our neighbor as ourselves" in nominating him.

Watson VIM Award for Laity

This year's lay recipient is Dan Altman, Bethel UMC, Charleston.

"Dan does so much for so many with such energy," said Will Felts, Bethel member and missions chair, who nominated him. "He is afraid to tackle nothing. He's our hero."

During the pandemic, when church staff hours were limited, Altman led a volunteer crew to clean the church restrooms and common areas on a daily basis. He also is a regular volunteer with Bethel's food pantry, including installing at no cost to the church shelving and providing rolling carts; donating water, hand sanitizer and masks for both volunteers and clients; helping deliver bagged lunches to 70 seniors homebound by the pandemic; working with monthly vegetable giveaways, including deliveries to low-income clients; delivering excess pantry food to Trinity UMC's soup kitchen; and more.



Altman

One Matters Discipleship Award

Discipleship Ministries lifts up churches

that have moved from "zeros" or small numbers in professions of faith and baptisms to increased numbers in recent years because of renewed focus on intentional discipleship. Recipient receives \$1,000 to continue their efforts. This year's recipient is Advent UMC, Simpsonville.

"Advent UMC is connecting in phenomenal ways beyond the walls of the church," said the Rev. Jim Dennis, superintendent of the Greenville District, who nominated Advent for the recognition. "People see that and want to be a part of a Christian community that is visible and active seven days a week."

In 2020, Advent held 19 baptisms and received four members by profession of faith.

Bishop's Five-Star Award

Four churches received the Bishop's Five Star Award, which goes to churches who embrace new ministries geared toward growth and outreach. The award enables small and large churches to receive recognition.

The 2021 recipients are as follows: Bethlehem-St. James UMC, Johns Island; Chapin UMC, Chapin; New Hope UMC, Anderson; and New Webster UMC, Wadmalaw Island.

Herbert Hucks Award

Three local churches received the Commission on Archives and History's Herbert Hucks Award this year, which recognizes preservation and interpretation of Methodist history in the local church: Tranquil UMC, Greenwood; Bramlett UMC, Gray Court; and Livingston UMC, Livingston.

Tranquil UMC—pastored by the Rev. Shawn Armstrong until July and now the Rev. John Bolin, with historians and co-authors Harriet Creswell, Joe Langley, JoAnn Purkerson and Martha Vincent—used its bicentennial in 2020 as an opportunity to publish a history of their church and to plan for several celebrations of their church's contributions to Methodism in the Greenwood area. The committee hopes to use the work to create a permanent display on their history.

In Gray Court, Bramlett UMC's historian Judy Riddle has devoted 40 years to preserving and interpreting the history of the church. In 2020, she produced a book covering 240 years of the church's history, a tremendous collection of documents and memories. The church celebrates its history every year and continues to be a resource for other churches in how to preserve and promote history. Rev. John Fahrney is pastor.

And in Livingston, once again, the members of Livingston UMC have spent the year preserving and promoting Methodist history in their congregation. They continue to collect their history each year, adding new materials as they are available. History is very much a part of their ministry. The Rev. Graham Bennett was pastor until July; now the pastor is the Rev. Charles Inglett. Martha Sligh is historian.

T. Dennie Smith Scholarship

Created to effectively carry forward the legacy of the late T. Dennie Smith of Greer, whose will created a trust to assist "any young man or woman ... who intend to devote their lives to ministry in the Methodist Church." This year's recipients are Kile Antone and Laura Geloni.

Antone is a native of Ninety Six and a seminary student at Asbury Theological Seminary. His home church is Kinards UMC, Ninety Six. He has been licensed as a local pastor and has served part-time as pastor of McKendree UMC, Edgefield. He also has served as a



Antone



Geloni

paramedic in Edgefield County.

Geloni is a native of Miami, Florida, and a seminary student at Asbury Theological Seminary. Her home church is Covenant UMC, Greer, where she has taught children, led a small group and Sunday school class, worked with the Evangelism Ministry and served as a lay member to Annual Conference. She is working toward ordination as a deacon in the South Carolina Conference.

Seminary Student Scholarship

The South Carolina Conference Seminary Student Scholarship, established in 1991 to assist students from South Carolina in pursuing a program leading to a first professional degree, was awarded to Grayson Fallaw and Sterling Teunta Harris.

Fallaw is a native of Union and a seminary student at Duke Divinity School. His home church is Grace UMC, Union, where he has served for two years as youth director while in undergraduate school. Fallaw will be starting his student pastor job this summer in Smithfield, North Carolina. He earned a bachelor's in history and Christian education from Presbyterian College.

Harris is a native of Greenville and a seminary student at Gammon Theological Seminary. His home church is St. Mark UMC, Taylors, where he has served as a lay servant for 12 years. Harris attended Claflin University and graduated from North Greenville University. He is a candidate for ordained ministry in the South Carolina Conference and has been licensed as a local pastor.

Bessie Bellamy Parker Scholarship

This award was created by the South Carolina Conference to honor the memory of the Rev. Bessie Bellamy Parker, the first woman ordained in the former 1785 South Carolina Conference. It provides assistance to female students at UMC seminaries or theological schools preparing for ordained pastoral ministry in South Carolina. This year's recipient is Sharon Britz. Britz is a native of South Africa and a seminary student at Gammon Theological Seminary. She is the pastor of Green Pond UMC, Gray Court, and serves the Outreach Area of Conference Connectional Ministries. She has served as a firefighter, a paramedic and a nurse and now serves as chair of the Green Pond Volunteer Fire Department, as a guardian ad litem and more.



Britz

Bishop's Award of Excellence for Scouting

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston joins with the United Methodist Men of South Carolina in recognizing congregations and units within the UMC who extend their ministry to children and youth by creating a faith-based environment for children, youth, their families and their leaders who participate in Girl Scouts of the USA and Boy Scouts of America.

This year's recipient is Trinity UMC, Spartanburg, BSA Cub Scout Pack 22 (the Rev. Neal Woods was pastor until July, and now the Rev. Michelle Cockcroft; Steve Whitaker, scouting ministry coordinator).

It's never too early to start thinking about the 2022 Annual Conference Awards! Nominate a worthy South Carolina United Methodist now at umsc.org/awards.



A 'wild' time

Bells UMC, Abbeville, held their VBS June 13-17 with 88 in attendance. Their theme this year was "Roar: Life is Wild, God is Good."



Trinity holds one-day VBS at Camp Providence

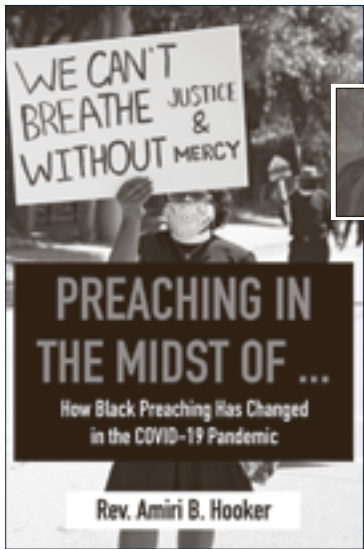
Trinity UMC, Anderson, held a one-day outdoor VBS at Camp Providence on June 12. Family units participated together as they searched for the five lanterns of God's light hanging around the campgrounds. Each lantern had a corresponding tent with an activity to go along with that color's story. Church youth ran the stations. Activities included crafts, music, games and a Snack Shack. From Creation to Jesus' Resurrection, this year's Cokesbury VBS theme (Discovery on Adventure Island) covered great stories and gave plenty of wiggle room for adjusting to whatever comfort level/size/shape/design the churches had to work with. "Rain threatened to dampen our day, but prayer won out (because God is good all the time), and the event was fantastic and dry," said Dawn McLin, Trinity's children's ministry director. "Kids built lighthouses out of food, volcanoes out of clay and memories out of adventure. We saw baby deer, a snake, spiders and a rambunctious lizard, along with beautiful lake views and an ever-changing sky. Camp Providence is an amazing space to hold an event." McLin said the church's teenagers had a blast, too. Trinity's pastor is Roy Mitchell.

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Advertisement for Southern Mutual Church Insurance Company, featuring the company logo and the slogan 'Savings Service Security'.



From left, Audrey, Jalaina and Prophet show their VBS creations.

Cumberland VBS focuses on Jesus as 'Good Shepherd'

By Dr. Deidra R. Bowden

FLORENCE—Not in the church, not in the parking lot and not online—Jesus was not left behind when it came to Cumberland United Methodist Church's 2021 vacation Bible school.

We did not meet within the physical church's walls or even in the parking lot of our church. Instead, this year VBS for Cumberland UMC took place within the homes of church members and neighbors throughout the community. This summer, Jesus met our children right where they were and took an active part in their lives in their dens, their backyards or around their kitchen tables.

VBS was held June 4-18, and participants included children ages 2 to 10 years. Each child received a packet of lessons to reflect the theme for VBS, "The Good Shepherd."

The packet included crafts, snacks and other resources to reinforce the messages about Jesus. The activities embraced the theme and focused on Scriptures such as Matthew 4:19 and Ephesians 6:11. The children were taught that Jesus calls them to be "fishers of men." This is how they will make disciples. They also learned the parts of the Ephesians 6 armor of God and were told to put on the armor of God each day of their lives to do the work of God.

They learned that God loves them, and he does not want them to worry. He will

provide them with everything that they need because he is the good shepherd.

The goal of vacation Bible school was to reach out to the church family, as well as members of the Florence community. We sought to nurture relationships with both groups of people who have felt so isolated during the 2020-2021 pandemic. Our hope is that we have shown the love of God to both children and adults this summer.

The intent was to help participants build their faith through Scripture. We feel that we gave parents and guardians a creative way to talk with their children about Jesus. One little girl asked her parent where she could find this "armor of God," and the parent responded by saying, "It is on you to use in our home, in the church, and everywhere you go." The parent continued by reinforcing what each part of the armor meant. What a great opportunity to bring a Scripture alive.

Seeds of Scripture were planted into the lives of children and parents this summer. We believe these seeds will grow and blossom as families build their faith in God and utilize these Scriptures to enhance their lifestyles.

A video was also created to show the work of the participants and to remind them of their VBS experience.

Dr. Frederick Yeboah is pastor of Cumberland UMC.



'God Bless America'

The Ruffin Circuit churches (Bethel, Tabor and St John) held vacation Bible school June 20-23 with the theme, "God Bless America." They studied family, local, national and Bible heroes. They had "visits" from some Bible heroes, such as Abigail, Daniel and Noah's wife. On the last night they heard about their ultimate hero, Jesus. Attendees enjoyed Pelican Snowcones, homemade ice cream sundaes and homemade milkshakes. They played shaving cream baseball, had a water balloon fight, played on a waterslide and lots more fun.



Rocky Railway comes to Sandy Run

Beulah UMC, Sandy Run, held VBS June 20-24. Their theme was "Rocky Railway," organizers said. "We had a fantastic time learning about all the ways Jesus's power helps pull us through all kinds of situations," said Jen Garrison, secretary at Beulah. They had 33 children sign up from age 3 to 13, with an average of 28 children attending each night. In addition, they had 30 volunteers who helped with decorations, meals, snacks, audio/visual, as crew leaders, as station leaders and more. "It was such a wonderful time of fun and fellowship and, most of all, learning to trust Jesus in all things!" Garrison said.



VBS in Mount Pleasant

Point Hope UMC, Mount Pleasant, is lifting up thanks this summer to Bethany UMC, Summerville, for their generous donation of vacation Bible school decorations. Both churches are hosting kids for the "Knights of North Castle" theme this summer. Pictured at left are Megan Stevens, communications director and assistant to the pastor at Point Hope, and Emily Vick, director of children's ministries.

Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry Sunday is August 8



Since being at Aldersgate, JT is thriving from receiving the attention and care he needs. "The staff are loving and kind," his sister said. "Aldersgate has been great for JT, me and our family."

Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry operates three Christian homes for adults with developmental disabilities. Residents are active in the community and are encouraged to be as independent as possible.

Aldersgate does not receive funds from apportionments. August 8, 2021, is designated as Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry Sunday by the South Carolina Conference.

Your support allows us to care for our residents and homes, as well as plan for the future. Visit aldersgatespecialneedsministry.org to make an online donation.

Churches interested in participating on August 8 should contact Aldersgate at asmn-sc@att.net



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Monaghan takes its VBS on the road to Active Day Greenville

Monaghan United Methodist Church in the Greenville District just completed its most successful and largest vacation Bible school ever, taking the love of Jesus on the road to a neighboring adult day care center located behind the church.

Active Day Greenville currently serves around 50 clients, ranging in age from their 20s to their 90s. Monaghan pastor the Rev. Rusty Godfrey said the idea to serve the clients of Active Day came as an inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

"In the eight years I've been at Monaghan, we've always struggled to get 10 children to attend our small church's VBS, even with advertising in local restaurants and the local Head Start chapter," Godfrey said. "The Holy Spirit informed me that there was a group literally behind our church who needed to hear the good news about Jesus, and I've learned to listen to God's suggestions and trust where he leads us."

The theme this year was "Jesus Is My Superhero" and that Christ empowers believers to be superheroes in their local communities. From July 13-16 each morning, adult learners learned about a special characteristic of superheroes each day: being courageous, giving, helpful and resourceful. They reviewed the gospel stories of the woman with the issue of the blood, the little boy who gave his loaves and fishes, the Good Samaritan and the four friends who lowered the paraplegic man down through the roof for Jesus to heal. In each case, participants learned how Jesus

was showing us what can be accomplished by believers who have faith in Christ.

The VBS also featured several craft-making sessions and games. Before the end of each day, local community heroes were brought in and honored, including Greenville Sheriff's Department Master Deputy J.R. Brown and K-9 officer "Dally," Parker District Fire Marshal Stebo Saylor and Berea educators Angie Lamb and Sandy Curry.

"Our members really enjoyed the time that the church has spent with them," said Donna Webb, one of the assistants at Active Day Greenville. "They loved the Bible study, games, activities and the T-shirts. We hope that (the church will return) again and we appreciate everything the church has done."

In many ways, the VBS this year is a culmination of a vibrant partnership between Monaghan, a historical textile mill church with around 30 active members, and Active Day Greenville. The church delivers food boxes it makes and fresh food from Loaves and Fishes weekly to Active Day. Active Day employees help Monaghan run the "Little Red Store," a church thrift shop that the church owns that is open Saturday mornings, proceeds from which go to the food pantry ministry.

The church membership may be small, but God-sized dreams are being realized in this partnership. There is no doubt in Godfrey's mind about who deserves the credit: "The Holy Spirit deserves all the honor and the glory!"



'We've Got This'

Wesley UMC, Ladson, hosted their 2021 VBS this summer based on the theme, "I've Got This With Jesus."



Photos courtesy of Lisa Fisher

Ninja skills and VBS

Cayce UMC, Cayce, held their VBS every Wednesday in July. The theme was "Ninja Warrior VBS," and kids learned ninja skills to be the hands and feet of Jesus. The evenings started with a tailgate dinner, dance party, story, crafts and games. The ninja skill for June 7, above, was "Quick to Help," like the Good Samaritan. For the craft, they made cards for the church's homebound and packed bags for the church blessing box. They also had an adult Bible study.



The Knights of Hebron

Hebron UMC, Cades, decided to hold weekly vacation Bible school meetings on Wednesday nights for five consecutive weeks this summer instead of a full week of nightly meetings. "We have had a good response and it seems to be a great way to take a lot of the burden off of everyone by doing it all at once," said April Smith, children's program director at Hebron UMC. The Knights of North Castle VBS includes nightly puppet skits with Sparky the Dragon and Armorer Smith; crafts; food; lessons with science experiments; and music. "We are learning each night how to armor up with the armor of God and tying it in with a Bible lesson. We have classes for toddlers up to adults. ... It's been a great experience so far!" Smith said.



Champions at Journey

Journey UMC, Columbia, held its VBS, "Champions in Life: Ready, Set, Go with God!" in late June. Here are scenes.

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'Rocky Railway'

Manning UMC, Manning, held a small and modified VBS June 8-10, lifting up the theme "Rocky Railway" to engage youth. Twelve youth attended.



A 'wonderful week'

Memorial UMC, Greer, welcomed 45 children to its Rocky Railway VBS June 21-24, where children learned to trust Jesus because Jesus' power pulls everyone through! "It was a wonderful week full of fun and exploring through Bible adventures, sing and play express, chew-chew snacks, loco-motion games and imagination station crafts," said Katie Jeter, Memorial UMC's director of children's ministries. "As many adult and youth volunteers as we had children participating helped to make the week a success." The week started with a train ride through the church parking lot under a rainbow, which was a gift from God. The week ended by presenting Rocky Railway lessons and songs during the church's Sunday morning services June 27. "Our children warmed the hearts of our congregation by singing a medley of our VBS songs ending with 'The Old Rugged Cross,'" Jeter said. "This week will stay with us all for a long time to come."



VBS at a church with no kids

Unity UMC, Union, was able to host a Bible school for neighborhood children even though they no longer have any young children on their roll. Bethel UMC youth came to Unity UMC with the Rev. Chad Deetz from Spartanburg each night for a week. Also, after a neighborhood survey and invitations, they provided skits, Bible stories, crafts and playtime for a dozen children in their neighborhood. Church members provided supper each night. They said was a blessing to host.



'Champions in Life'

Trinity UMC, Orangeburg, celebrated its annual VBS program June 14-16. The theme, "Champions in Life: Ready, Set, Go with God" engaged children, teens and adults in Bible study and various fun activities such as music and games. Three sessions set the foundation for studies on character that included famous athletes such as Serena Williams, LeBron James and Naomi Osaka. Featured attractions included Griot daily devotions, Champion Puppet Show emphasizing strengths, and tasty treats from Randolph Italian Ice along with chilled watermelon and delicious meals from the church refreshment team. Culminating activities showcased arts and crafts by participants that depicted the "Champions in Life."



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Pinopolis UMC's VBS focused on the events of the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites as Moses led them out of bondage in Egypt.

Photo courtesy of the Rev. Barry Allen

Pinopolis VBS focuses on Exodus story

PINOPOLIS—Vacation Bible school took place at Pinopolis United Methodist Church in the Charleston District Monday through Thursday, June 21-24, focusing on the events of the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites as Moses led them out of bondage in Egypt.

VBS students and leaders alike were reminded of God's provision, presence, forgiveness, faithfulness, gifts and calling as the life of Moses reminded us that God has great things for each of us to do. And, as the lessons taught, those whom God calls, he also qualifies. As is often said, God doesn't always call the qualified, but he always qualifies the called.

Each evening, 30-35 children from the Pinopolis and nearby Moncks Corner communities headed to VBS at the church. Pastor the Rev. Barry Allen, dressed in historic biblical attire, led the VBS students and leaders in song and dance each evening. Tents set up in Fellowship Hall focused on

different aspects of the Exodus journey, and VBS students made crafts related to the focus of the evening. Church leaders, also dressed in historic biblical attire, taught and helped the students with their crafts in each tent.

Billy Ford, along with the Methodist Men and the Wednesday Women, prepared meals each evening including hot dogs, hamburgers, pizza, grilled cheese sandwiches and a spaghetti dinner.

"The life and vitality of the congregation at Pinopolis UMC, in Pinopolis, was manifested, celebrated and enjoyed during VBS 2021," Allen said. "All those who participated in VBS, as students and as leaders, were reminded that God still calls us, just like he called Moses, to do great things in our lives and for his glory. God continues to call us, like he called Moses, to lead persons out of bondage to sin and into the promised land of the kingdom of heaven, through the good news of the gospel."



Children collected school supplies to help two local elementary schools.



Two churches in Greenville partner for hybrid VBS

St. Paul United Methodist Church and Northside UMC, both in Greenville, partnered this year for a hybrid model "Discovery on Adventure Island" vacation Bible school.

Participants enjoyed song videos and watched a video of the story on a private Facebook Group, then completed their student workbook and craft project that went with the lesson at home each day.

Each evening, they met in person on the front lawn of Northside UMC.

"We discovered how God's light shines on us and how we can shine God's lights of love, trust, faith, joy and hope in the world," said Eugenia Vicars, children's coordinator at St. Paul UMC in Greenville.

Their mission project was collecting school supplies for Legacy Charter Elementary School, which St. Paul UMC supports, and Summit Drive Elementary, which Northside UMC supports.

The offering each evening went toward purchasing gift cards for Epworth Children's Home's new Upstate project. They raised \$225, which was enough to purchase nine gift cards.



'Treasured' VBS draws 800 kids, parents

Mount Horeb UMC, Lexington, held a VBS that was a little different this year. Held June 22-24 with the theme "Treasured: Discovering You're Priceless to God," the church held a VBS family event where the afternoon and evening sessions were made up of families instead of the usual child drop-off event. Organizers said it was a great time for everyone, and they had more than 800 in attendance.



A powerful pull

Shandon UMC, Columbia, welcomed more than 90 children to their 2021 Rocky Railway VBS June 21-25. Participants learned how Jesus' power pulls people through life's ups and downs. They focused on a mission effort of collecting school supplies for the Petersfield Community in North Charleston, and they also packed 100 backpacks full of hygiene supplies (left) for Transitions Homeless Shelter located in Columbia.

Photo courtesy of Heather Corley



Elementary boys (grades 1-5) enjoy treats at the snack station.

Travelers Rest VBS becomes one-day intergenerational event

Travelers Rest United Methodist Church held a one-day intergenerational vacation Bible school Sunday, June 28, using Cokesbury's "Discovery on Adventure Island" curriculum.

Held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., the VBS began with intergenerational worship in the parking lot. They used the first session on creation from Genesis 1.

Worship music was VBS themed, including "Creator of the Universe" and "Here I Am to Worship," and children, youth and adults participated.

Worship as a whole was a combination of VBS Assembly, Bible lessons and music all together. For example, the Rev. Christine Matthews read the Scripture from Genesis 1 while the congregation participated in that reading by doing the wave to remember God made the sea on Day 3. The congregation made the sounds of a bee, a snake, a kitten and a puppy to remember that God made the animals on Day 6.

At the end of each day's reading, the congregation responded with "It's all good!" Matthews then gave a sermon on seeing ourselves and God's world the way God sees us—as all good.

After worship, the congregation had a picnic in the parking lot, either bringing a picnic for their own family or buying tacos from a local restaurant that had set up a table in the parking lot.



Crafts helped bring the lessons to life.

After the picnic, children and volunteers divided into groups to do traditional crafts, science, snacks and recreation stations—all but crafts were held outdoors.

Later in the afternoon in the picnic shelter at the church, the children and volunteers had another assembly/Bible/music time on "The Lost Parables of Luke 15," followed by another round of crafts, science, snacks and recreation stations around this theme.

The church extends many thanks to VBS directors Ashley Gutschow and Sara McAda for making it happen.



An adventure in Mauldin

Mauldin UMC, Mauldin, took a trip to Adventure Island for their VBS. This year, 108 children came through the program and had the opportunity to learn about Jesus. They also had a competition between boys and girls to see who could bring in the most food for the Backpack Ministry. At the end of the week, the girls won the battle, but the church ended up with more than 2,500 items of food and stocked their ministry closet full of food for families at local schools. "We had a fantastic week, and we can't wait for next year," said Maddy Jackson, director of children's ministries.

SEJ: Conferences shared their anti-racism efforts

From Page 1

The new Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference formed from the Tennessee and Memphis annual conferences, which in 2019 had petitioned the SEJ to unite as one. SEJ could not approve this because its 2020 meeting was cancelled because of COVID-19, so the special session enabled the vote to occur and the new conference to form.

'This I know'

The special session began with music and song, then a welcome by Dr. Sam Parkes and Dr. Stephanie Hand. "This I Know" was the conference theme, based on Hymn 191 in The United Methodist Hymnal, "Jesus Loves Me," and Mark 12:28-34 was the scriptural basis for the theme.

Proceedings were led by Bishop James Swanson, resident bishop of the Mississippi Conference of The United Methodist Church, with assistance from South Carolina Resident Bishop L. Jonathan Holston and from Bishop Bill McAlilly, who will lead the newly formed conference.

After Swanson read Mark 12:28-34 for all gathered, a devotional message was brought by Dr. Candace Lewis, new president-dean of Gammon Theological Seminary, and Dr. Edgardo Colón-Emeric, dean of Duke Divinity School. Lewis focused on Jesus's response in Mark 12 to the teacher who'd affirmed Jesus's explanation that the greatest commandment was to love God above all others, and then to love your neighbor as yourself.

"You are not far from the kingdom of God," Jesus told the man in Mark 12:34.

Lewis posed the question: How might Jesus reflect on the actions of the UMC regarding racism in the last 400 years, and particularly the last 16 months? How far (or near) would Jesus say we are to the kingdom

of God based on our efforts to create justice and dismantle racism?

"We have an opportunity to become an anti-racist church, to make things better for future generations," Lewis said. "We have an opportunity to take actions, not just words, to bring about healing, restoration, reparations, and these steps I believe Jesus will look at and assess."

She closed urging all gathered, "Let's become an anti-racist church."

Colón-Emeric followed with his message, which focused on how love comes first.

"Love is the sum of God's law: Thou shalt love. Love is the sum of the prophets' message. Love is the sum of God's revelation. Love is at the heart of what we expect from our clergy," Colón-Emeric said. "In a world where the powers and principalities of systemic racism and atheism enslave us, love sets us free."

All stories are unfinished, Colón-Emeric said, urging people to remember that no one knows how the future of the UMC or the SEJ will unfold. As he noted, "The next chapter may have a big Holy Spirit plot twist."

"But this I know—our story still has blank pages waiting to be filled, and Jesus is still inviting us to write the story with him."

Next, Hand led the body in a prayer asking God to teach us to love first and use us to shine hope into the politics of despair.

New Tennessee-Western Ky. Conference

Swanson called the business portion of the session to order around 10:30, lifting up help he received from Holston and McAlilly, gathered onstage with him, as well as the staff of Lake Junaluska for hosting the event.

GNTV, the media partner for the session, led a practice vote, then SEJ Conference Secretary Anne Travis offered organizing motions. The body voted electronically to approve the organizing motions, which includ-

ed naming moderators, setting the agenda and the bar, authorizing who was to participate, approving business and attendance via electronic voting, and authoring electronic voting on the resolution for the day.

Dr. Jan Love spoke on behalf of Emory's Candler School of Theology, and Gregory Fennes on behalf of Emory.

Then came the presentation of the resolution to unite the Tennessee and Memphis conferences as one conference. Holly Neal, Tennessee Conference lay leader, and Janice McCallen, Memphis Conference lay leader, presented the resolution, reading it together.

The action realigns the boundaries of the two conferences to form one new annual conference known as the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference, with boundaries coextensive with the current Tennessee and Memphis conferences. It authorizes the new Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference to begin operations as a fully unified annual conference on Jan. 1, 2022, all in accordance with a Plan of Union adopted by both conferences at their June 2021 annual conference sessions.

The resolution passed overwhelmingly, 335-3.

"I give thanks to God for this affirmation," McAlilly said after the results were announced.

Red Bird becomes Central Appalachian Missionary Conference

Next came a brief announcement about the name change and new missional realignment of what had been the Red Bird Mission Conference, now renamed the Central Appalachian Missionary Conference. Red Bird leaders realized their work had evolved during their 100 years of existence, and they are no longer only serving the people of Red Bird, but also those in eastern Kentucky and Central Appalachia.

Red Bird has been providing ministries in that region of the Appalachian Mountains since 1921, offering health care and spiritual resources to underserved areas, economic outreach, community housing, education and

more.

They are also launching a new website and developing new office space to better serve the people of that area.

Responding to racism

Holston spoke next along with Hand and Parkes, talking about how our nation not only dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic but also the tragic deaths of three persons of color that brought devastation and pain to so many.

Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed 25-year-old man, was fatally shot in February 2020 while jogging near Brunswick, Georgia. Breonna Taylor, a medical worker, was shot and killed by police officers in March 2020 during a botched raid on her home in Louisville, Kentucky. And in April of this year, Andrew Brown Jr. was killed in his car in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, by sheriff's deputies attempting to serve a warrant for his arrest.

"How have we, as United Methodists across the Southeast, responded?" Holston asked.

Videos then displayed the efforts every conference in the SEJ made to respond with God's love and light in the aftermath of violence and darkness.

South Carolina's video lifted up "Our Response to Racism," which focuses on six distinct responses including district clergy meetings, small group conversations, cross-racial exchanges, a season of jubilee, healing through preaching and accountable honesty in society (learn more at <https://www.umcsc.org/endoracism>).

'God's love comes first'

Swanson lifted up retiring bishops and also the work of Anne Travis, taking a moment off-agenda to celebrate her service as SEJ conference secretary.

He ended the special session with uplifting words of encouragement, reminding the body, "God's love comes first."

He closed the session at 12:10 p.m.

For more on the SEJ, visit www.sejumc.org.

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FAITH CHALLENGE: Praying for a living donor or 'donor swap'

From Page 1

"Then I got a call from Quest saying my creatinine levels were high," Henry said.

A lot of back-and-forth doctor visits, ultrasounds and blood tests later, the bad news was confirmed: Henry had Stage 4 kidney disease.

She couldn't believe it. "I consider myself to have always been in good health," Henry said. "I never had any major issues, never had the flu, pneumonia, anything serious other than maybe a head cold or a stomach virus."

Other than her pregnancy, she'd never even been in the hospital. She only had two issues: high blood pressure, and she'd been a smoker most of her adult life.

At first, she didn't want to accept the news.

"It was hard," Henry said. "And it all happened pretty fast. Basically, one simple routine checkup turned into, 'Oh, by the way, you have Stage 4 kidney disease.' It really came out of nowhere."

The only girl in a family of military and police males, Henry always trained herself to deal with her emotions in a rational way. "I used to think crying was for the weak. But sometimes, you've got to buckle."

Doctors don't know why she has the disease, and her kidneys were not strong enough to biopsy without causing further damage. But they suspect her blood pressure medicine contributed, for it does have the potential to damage other parts of the body, such as the liver and pancreas. Her official diagnosis is "nephritis of the kidney," or severe inflammation. At the time of her diagnosis, she was at 24 percent kidney function. As of her last checkup, she was at 15 percent.

Currently, she is on the national transplant list, and she is working as hard as possible with food, lifestyle and other changes to keep her sodium levels stable and her blood pressure down so she can maintain kidney health as long as possible.

Ponds Henry gets a two-hour iron infusion to help with symptoms caused by her recent Stage 4 kidney disease diagnosis. A member of Good Hope Wesley Chapel UMC, Camden, and an employee of the conference office, Henry is on the transplant list and praying for a living donor.



sible. She's stopped eating fast food and drinking soda, quit smoking and now eats a ton of fresh fruits and vegetables. She's also meditating to keep her stress down. And as a strong woman of faith, she relying heavily on prayer.

"I don't want to be on dialysis, that's my goal, and I will fight to my last breath not to be on it," Henry said.

Right now she's still able to work full-time, but she's exhausted when she comes home. Her husband and daughter pitch in with house duties, grocery shopping, cooking and other tasks. Kidney diseases leaves a person energy-depleted and exhausted, plus causes them to experience muscle spasms, blurred vision and more.

"There are days when I don't feel like doing anything but sleep," Henry said. And the muscle spasms, she said, "Sometimes drop me to my knees, they're so intense."

As she explained, with kidney disease your body pulls nutrients from other parts of your body like your muscles,

which make them contract, much like a charley horse.

"I'm not an athlete, but you'd think I'm in the Olympics because of the number of charley horses I get."

Even walking through the mall with her daughter, she has to stop and take breaks.

For now, Henry is waiting and praying for a donor. While a deceased kidney donor would be acceptable, her doctors have told her a living donor would be ideal. She has a rare blood type—B-positive, which only 8.5 percent of the world has, but she's part of a new program called "Donor Swap," where if someone agrees to donate a kidney for her but they are not a match, the program will match that kidney to someone else and guarantee her a kidney from someone who is a match in return.

A kidney from a living donor has a 98 percent success rate, she said, so that would be the preferred option. Her insurance would cover everything—her donor's surgery and her surgery.

The donor has to be healthy, but it can be from anyone—any gender, race, age, etc. Her husband tried to register to be a donor, but unfortunately his own blood pressure was considered too high to allow him to be a candidate.

For now, Henry is just praying God will send a donor and she'll be able to get a transplant and continue on with life and all the good work God has in store for her.

She's also trying to stay positive and learn what God intends her to get from the experience.

"Instead of why me, I say, 'Why not me?' That's what gives me peace. I'm happy because God is going to use this for something. I have kidney disease because there's something I have to do, and I'm up to whatever he needs me to do because my faith says he's going to get me through this."

To learn more about MUSC Health's Living Donor Program, call 843-792-5097. To register to be a kidney transplant living donor for Henry, visit <https://tinyurl.com/sphdonor>.

Carolinas Black Clergy Leadership Retreat is this month

Clergy in South Carolina, North Carolina and Western North Carolina annual conferences will head to Myrtle Beach this month for the Carolinas Black Clergy Leadership Retreat, set for Aug. 30 to Sept. 3.

With the theme "Crossroads: Where Faith and Innovation Meet," all clergy are invited. It is hosted by all three annual conferences

and will be held at Kingston Plantation on the beach.

Retreat leaders include Bishop L. Jonathan Holston, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference, to speak on "The Next Faithful Step: Strategies for Vitality Today and Beyond"; Dr. Joe Daniels and Dr. Regina Henderson-Moore, to speak on "The

Gift of Innovation"; Rev. James Friday, to speak on "Current Realities and Missional Possibilities"; and Dr. Christopher Brady, to speak on "Re-Frame, Re-Focus, Re-Tool for Resiliency." Organizers said the retreat is an opportunity to get away to a quiet place

to be renewed, reconnected, refreshed and refocused.

Registration is \$150 for clergy and \$50 for a spouse. Virtual registration is \$75. Registration goes through Aug. 16. To register: www.umcsc.org/2021cbclleadershipretreat.

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Honors Program to be named for long-time director

COLUMBIA—One of Columbia College’s most distinguished programs is getting a new name.

The Honors Program, which has provided an enriched academic experience to outstanding students since 1985, is being renamed the John Zubizaretta Honors Program at Columbia College. The change honors the contributions of Dr. John Zubizaretta, affectionally known as Dr. Z, who retired this spring after 32 years as the program’s director.

“Dr. Z helped to shape the Honors



Zubizaretta

Program into the exceptional program that it is today. His vision and leadership, along with his mentorship of other faculty members, have been invaluable to the growth and development of the program,” said Columbia College President Tom Bogart.

“With more than 60 publications, 300 conference presentations and decades of advocacy under his belt, Dr. Z has contributed greatly to the role honors programs play in national and international institutions of higher education. It is only fitting that the Honors

Program at Columbia College bears his name.”

Zubizaretta joined the faculty of Columbia College as a professor of English in 1987. In addition to serving as the director of the Honors Program, he served as a past director of faculty development and former dean of undergraduate studies at the college. He has won numerous national and international teaching awards including the 2010 Carnegie Foundation/CASE U.S. Professor for Baccalaureate Colleges and the 2018 National Collegiate Honors Council’s Sam Schuman Award for Excellence, the organization’s highest recognition for a faculty

member at a four-year college or university. Zubizaretta has also been an active member of the collegiate honors education community, having served as president and a three-term board member of the National Collegiate Honors Council and as president of the Southern Regional Honors Council.

“John has been an incredible mentor to me during my time at Columbia College. He is the consummate teacher-scholar-mentor-leader,” said Associate Professor of Biology Dr. Marlee Marsh, who will be taking over as director of the Honors Program. “He has left huge shoes to fill.”

New trustees elected to Wofford’s board

SPARTANBURG—The South Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church recently elected three new trustees for Wofford College’s Board of Trustees.

The conference held its annual meetings virtually June 6 and 7 and elected Dr. Katherine A. “Katy” Close (Class of 1983) of Stamford, Connecticut, and Pawleys Island; the Hon. Timothy E. “Tim” Madden (Class of 1985) of Greenville; and the Rev. Lisa N. Yebuah (Class of 1999) of Raleigh, North Carolina.

“Wofford College is thrilled to welcome three familiar faces and leaders with a deep commitment to the college to the board of trustees,” said President Nayef Samhat. “We are also appreciative of the service of those who are rotating off the board. They showed tremendous leadership during a time of uncertainty, and their leadership helped the college set new records in enrollment and selectivity.”

The new trustees are filling vacancies caused by the expiration of terms of D. Christian Goodall and Chairman Corry W. Oakes. A third seat is being filled after the October 2020 death of the Rev. John W. Hipp.

Four current trustees were re-elected to new four-year terms: Steven W. Mungo (Class of 1981), the Hon. Costa M. Pleicones (Class of 1965), Joshua S. Whitley (Class of 2005) and Joyce Payne Yette (Class of 1980).

During the trustees’ May meeting, officers were elected for the 2021-22 academic year: Chair Christopher A. P. Carpenter; Vice Chair Stanley E. Porter; and Secretary Hon. Costa M. Pleicones.

Close

A native of Fort Mill, Close is a board-certified internist volunteering at Americares Free Clinics in Stamford, Con-



Close



Madden



Yebuah

necticut, and the Smith Medical Clinic in Pawleys Island. She’s president of Close Medical LLC. She has spent most of her medical career providing services to those with the greatest needs, including serving numerous AIDS patients as a hospitalist at the Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte, North Carolina; being assistant medical director of Hospice in Charlotte and interim director of Hospice of Georgetown County; and as medical director of Smith Medical Center, a free facility she helped to start in Georgetown County. She was recruited by Americares in 2014 to start an Ebola treatment unit in Liberia. She previously served as a member of the Wofford Board of Trustees from 1996-2004.

Madden

A native of Laurens, Madden was a prominent attorney in Greenville for many years, first with Wilkins and Madden, then with Nelson, Mullins, Riley and Scarborough, serving both firms in management and leadership roles. He was elected a family court judge in 2020.

Madden has a broad resume of civic and church leader-

Yebuah

Yebuah is a native of the Charleston area. She currently leads a worshipping site of Edenton Street United Methodist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, that’s known as Southeast Raleigh Table. She was a Bonner Scholar and a member of Blue Key while attending Wofford. She also remained at the college after graduation and served as an admission counselor before enrolling at Duke Divinity School.

She’s deeply invested in the Raleigh community and works alongside organizations engaged in advocacy for affordable housing, a living wage and equity in public education. She currently serves on the Board of Advisors for the Southeast Raleigh YMCA and is a brand ambassador for Lululemon. As an elder in full connection, Yebuah has held many roles within the North Carolina Annual Conference and the broader UMC. In 2020, she began serving as the spiritual director and advisor for inclusion and equity on the North Carolina Annual Conference’s Cabinet.

Wofford College has 31 trustees and follows the wishes of the college’s founder Benjamin Wofford, whose will requires board members to be elected by the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.



New Covenant graduates celebrated

New Covenant United Methodist Church celebrated its proud 2021 graduates recently. Front left are the following: Saniya Mack, graduate of Edisto High School whose plan is to attend Clemson University and later attend medical school to become an orthopedist; Pastor Sheri White; Annaniya Johnson, graduate of Bethune-Bowman High School; and Jalyn Adams, graduate of the High School for Health Professions. Her future plan is to attend OC-TECH to study accounting. In back from left are Aliyah Little, graduate of Claflin University; her future plan is to attend graduate school to become a clinical psychologist. Taylor Simone Smalls, graduate of OC-Tech, said her future plan is to attend the Medical University of South Carolina Pharmacy program. And Darnell Summers Jr., a graduate of OC-Tech/High School for Health Professions, said his future plan is to attend OC-TECH for the Welding Industrial Maintenance Associate Degree Program. New Covenant’s pastor is the Rev. Sheri White.



Times of celebration

Young people from Manning UMC, Manning, have been active lately. On May 14, youth gathered for a Youth Awards Ceremony at the church, dressing up for a time of special celebration (above). The next day, May 15, some of the college students from Manning UMC enjoyed a fellowship outing together, visiting the Riverbanks Zoo (left).





Did You Know?

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



Photos provided by Midas Touch: Linton McCants and Maurice Hunter

Visionary scholars

Mechanicsville United Methodist Church and Higher Education and Campus Ministry celebrated their Visionary Scholars Class of 2021 on Sunday, June 13, on the campus of Mechanicsville UMC. Above, Mechanicsville pastor the Rev. Ernest W. Frierson and First Lady Diann Frierson stand with graduates Ny'Asia Mickens and Chad Temoney, graduates of Lee Central High School. Ny'Asia will attend Morris College in the fall, and Chad will attend Allen University in the fall.



Mr. and Mrs. Barbarnas Sumpter stand in for their son, Barbarnas Sumpter Jr., who graduated from Sumter High School. BJ will attend the University of South Carolina in the fall.



Latrise Lowery stands in for her son Javien O. Lowery-Isaac, who graduated from Sumter High School. Javien will attend the University of South Carolina-Sumter in the fall.



Mechanicsville UMC Higher Education and Campus Ministry members from left are Maurice Hunter, Amanda Slater, Terrence McCants (chair) and Curtis Thomas.



Rising fourth, fifth and sixth graders at Lexington UMC attend Creation Care Camp.

Lexington UMC tries new ways to engage kids during summer

LEXINGTON—Instead of looking at Summer 2021 as a return to normal, Lexington United Methodist Church decided it had an opportunity to try something new and make some exciting changes for their children.

This year, they kicked off the summer with food and ice cream trucks on June 13 to benefit their Snack Sack Program. Members said it was wonderful to have a safe, outdoor congregation-wide event to kick off the summer fun.

In addition to smaller activities, they created Creation Care Camp for their rising fourth, fifth and sixth graders. It was a way to welcome rising fourth graders to their Breakout Ministry and to bridge rising sixth graders into youth group with one last big event. They met June 28 to July 1 in a day-camp setting from 9 a.m. to noon. Pulling from Godly Play, Messy Church and Celebrate Wonder styles of teaching, each day's lesson followed the creation story. The children heard from a different minister each day.

Organizers said it was amazing to watch their minds stretch and grow as they incorporated how faith and science go together. Every day was packed with lessons, crafts and community visitors. Visitors came from Lexington Community Gardens, the South Carolina State Museum StarLab, Carolina Wildlife, Pawmetto Lifeline and Mission Lexington. The students also collected donations for Carolina Wildlife, Pawmetto Lifeline and Mission Lexington, putting their Creation Care into action.



Each day's lesson followed the creation story

Did you know the Bible mentions water 722 times? From July 28-30, culminating with a Splash Day on the 31st, they celebrated many of the stories of the Bible involving water with "Water, Water, Everywhere!" This interactive, intergenerational worship experience helped stories come to life and participants get to have a hands-on experience throughout the service. They also featured Water Mission, out of Charleston, as their mission benefactor.

During all of the events they have kept the safety of not-yet-able-to-be-vaccinated children in mind and taking necessary precautions.

Organizers said by doing this, they have been able to see the return of childhood laughter and joy to their church, which has been the biggest blessing of all.

Higher education help

Swansea Community United Methodist Men have given \$500 scholarships for 11 years. Here, Sammy Fogle, president of the UMM at Swansea, presents checks June 9 to Oscar Alvarez (right) and Luke Furtick (left).

Photo courtesy of Joe Riley



Baptized in Christ

Manning UMC, Manning, celebrated the baptism of one of their youth this spring, welcoming Madison Grace Shirley to their membership.

A time of renewal

Some of the children and youth from Mount Zion UMC, Sumter, had an opportunity May 30 to enjoy some time of food, fellowship and fun and a chance to relax and refresh. "They have had an exhausting, anxious and challenging year after virtual school with so many Zoom classes," said Rev. Gwendolyn White, Mount Zion's pastor. "They shared from their hearts what the pandemic taught them." The children and youth also received small tokens of love.





Cornelius Jones and Doris Piper gather information regarding rental assistance from a housing authority volunteer.



CIA Volunteers: Sheila Duncan, Enid Jenkins, Tonya Thompson, Joyce Bland; background Cornelius Jones and Harry Smalls.

Wesley UMC participates in Root of Soul Juneteenth Festival

LADSON—Wesley United Methodist Church participated in the Root of Soul Juneteenth Festival June 19-20.

Their Christians in Action Ministry introduced festivalgoers to Wesley's mission and ministries and distributed promotional bags containing brochures, door hangers, water and gourmet popcorn.

The day proved fruitful for all.

According to team leader Alfonza Jones, "We were able to spread the word of God to all we met, gain new friends, and acquire knowledge of community offerings that could

be beneficial to our church. We anxiously look forward to next year's event."

The Juneteenth holiday dates back to June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers traveled to Galveston, Texas, to share the news that all slaves were now free men and women per the Emancipation Proclamation.

This came almost two and a half years after the document was originally signed.

Enforcement of the proclamation, however, relied heavily on Union soldiers and Texas, a slave state slow to rightfully follow the law due to the low presence of Union soldiers.

Franklin UMC seeing great strides in health as a church

Glorine Brabham, Faith, Activity and Nutrition coordinator at Franklin United Methodist Church, Denmark, and pastor Sheera Yates have had great success promoting healthy lifestyles among church members with their FAN Program.

Brabham is a retired nurse and labels herself as a "nutrition fanatic." She was immediately interested in FAN and thought it would be a great way to help members manage and reduce the risk of chronic diseases. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, she knew it was even more important that her church members had access to resources to help them maintain healthy eating and physical activity.

To launch FAN, they started a nutrition and health challenge. Brabham encouraged members to try a plant-based diet that includes many fresh fruits and vegetables. She challenged members to walk each day to avoid being sedentary during the lockdown. Members committed to walking between a half mile to five miles per day, and they thought it was quite fun and they felt better both physically and mentally. Brabham used conference calls to check in with members regularly, provide encouragement for exercising and share healthy recipes.

The FAN Committee wanted to ensure members had access to fresh fruits and vegetables in their rural community. They found the "Save the Children" food distribution program, which provided food boxes for church members. Brabham organized food box pickup events at the church and handed out boxes full of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, milk and yogurt. She included bulletins with low-sodium, low-sugar, healthy recipes and Scriptures related to health.

Curtis Tyler Jr. organized all of the Save The Children food box distributions with Brabham. Tyler organized a team of primarily veterans to go to the distribution site, unloading the 18-wheeler not just for



Dr. Clifton Yates, Glorine Brabham and Dr. Gossie Mathis attend Friends and Family Day at Franklin United Methodist Church.

Franklin UMC but all the churches receiving boxes. They also loaded the vehicles for the other churches. Team Franklin did the distribution at Franklin.

"Without those two and Team Franklin, it couldn't have been done," Yates said.

They did distributions from November until the end of May. The distributions averaged every other week but were weekly for two months. They are still sending monthly recipes, healthy eating and living reminders in our monthly newsletter.

Franklin UMC wants to see more churches come together for community betterment. Specifically, they have been working to bring together interracial groups and hold events centered on healthy eating.

This spring, they had a "soup day" with a racially diverse church to share their favorite recipes. Brabham thinks this is a positive next step for their FAN Program, and for Franklin UMC, to "come together as a people, not as a race.... We put [our] ideas together to improve our community."



Photos courtesy of Scarlett Hester

Happy birthday, John Wesley!

On June 27, Bluffton UMC celebrated John Wesley's birthday (a day early). As their pastor, the Rev. Scarlett Hester notes, June 28 was the 318th anniversary of John Wesley's birth. In his honor, Bluffton had a party, complete with cupcakes, candles, games, hamburgers and hotdogs and hymns sung under beautiful blue skies. "It was a magnificent afternoon, so much so that John Wesley stopped by for a visit and to tell us more about his escapades just across the river in Savannah, Georgia," Hester said. Attendees played Bingo, learning odd facts about Mr. Wesley. Did you know his middle name was Benjamin, and that he never used it? As Hester said, it was a party, but it was also a chance to be together, something members have yearned to do for months, longing for the simple joys of sitting at the table and talking with friends, and for the wonder of singing hymns together. "We were a little rusty at first, but soon our voices swelled in praise and hope, and more than one person was seen to wipe away a tear," Hester said. "It was neither fancy nor complicated, but the birthday party brought people together, and gave us hope."



Photos courtesy of Winferd Pendergrass

Giving back to the community

Giving back to the Community through Foresters Financial Grant was a blessing to members of St. Michael UMC, Kingstree. The grant was written by Vernesa Green. The grant helped to provide needed items to residents of Community Residential Care Facilities of the surrounding communities. Thanks goes out to St. Michael United Methodist Church for hosting, Ester Chapter #289 Zeta Amicae (picture Amicae Dorothy Blanding), John Green, Winferd Pendergrass, Clinic Director/Waccamaw Center for Mental Health Sadie Moyd, Roosevelt Peterson and the Rev. Barry McFadden.



All were given the opportunity to offer a prayer for each person as their name was called.

Wightman holds healing services

The United Methodist Women of Wightman United Methodist Church, Prosperity, recently hosted a Healing Prayer Service for the women of the church.

The service consisted of words of welcome, prayers and Scriptures, with a biblical theme of healing for many types of illness including physical, mental, addiction and dementia.

Each lady present was given one or more cards with the name of someone who was in need of prayer. Each card also contained a Scripture verse, which was read aloud as the person's name was mentioned. The card was then placed on the altar, and a candle was lit in that person's honor.

All present were given the opportunity to offer a prayer for each person as their name was called.

The service concluded with prayers for caregivers, who are in need of comfort and strength as they minister to those they serve.

If you would like help in organizing such a service at your church, Wightman UMC urges you to contact them. Email Lynda P. Counts, administrative assistant, at secretary@wightmanumc.org.



Scouting Round-Up

Methodists have been involved with the Boy Scouts of America for more than 100 years. It is a civic youth-serving ministry that builds character, promotes reverence toward individual beliefs, teaches important life skills and provides fun and fellowship for both boys and girls ages 5-21. Summer is a very busy time for BSA units with bridging ceremonies, summer camp and service work. United Methodist churches, as chartered organizations, can benefit from a BSA presence by introducing families to the church, providing a safe and instructive program and receiving support to complete needed projects on church grounds. Rolland G. Fitch II is the conference scouting coordinator. Here are a number of events that BSA units around the conference have participated in. Above, Cub Pack 303, Lyttleton Street UMC in Camden, recently held their crossover ceremony. Each scout crosses a wooden bridge to symbolize crossing into the next level of scouting.



Scouts BSA Troop 750, Stallville United Methodist Men, Summerville, camped out on church grounds before a day of Cheerful Service, painting newly replaced doors on the Fellowship Hall.



Pack 303, along with Pack 316, St John's UMC in Lugoff, attended the Wateree District Cuboree recently. They learned all varieties of skills, including archery and BB safety.



Helping those who are hungry

The congregation of Panola UMC joined with their UMW in a food drive to help support some of the agencies in Greenwood that are helping to feed the hungry. After just a few weeks, four large boxes of food had been collected and donated to the soup kitchen, the food bank, the women of the Pathway House Homeless Shelter, and the Greater Greenwood United Ministries. They are now collecting donations for Native American baskets. "This congregation is such a blessing to their community and to me as their pastor," said the Rev. Cheryl Remchuk.

Blessing area with food



Friendship UMC dedicated their blessing box/pantry box July 12. The blessing box has non-perishable food items for people in need in the community. Attendees of the dedication were asked to bring some non-perishable food items to be placed into the pantry box. The box is located at the corner of Peachtree and Neely Store Roads in Rock Hill. It is a ministry of Friendship UMC.

Epworth Children's Home

Something special

Fifteen years as the president and chief executive officer at Epworth Children's Home has passed quickly, but it seems as if I have been here forever. The truth is that I have been connected to Epworth since my birth, or maybe before that.

My uncle, the Rev. Adlai C. Holler, served on Epworth's Board of Trustees in the 1950s. His father, the Rev. A.E. Holler, helped raise money for the then-Epworth Orphanage during its early days. My father Dr. John Holler was the Epworth doctor for 30 years, and my sisters and I grew up on stories about the children of Epworth. As a pastor in the South Carolina Conference, part of my responsibility was to help support Epworth through Mother's and Work Day offerings.

Later as the executive director of the Carolina Pastoral Counseling Service, based at Trenholm Road United Methodist Church, I and other counselors were able to refer families to Epworth where children and parents could receive some much-needed space and assistance while they worked out their problems. Epworth never argued about cost. If children needed help, they received it.

Fifteen years ago, a few weeks after becoming president, I had a walk one Saturday morning down Epworth's main avenue. I had been there just long enough to see the cracks in Epworth's façade and to realize that Epworth needed a good bit of remedial work in order to carry out and sustain the mission it was commissioned for.

Feelings of self-doubt, fear of the unknown, frustrations of having to go back and work on things that I assumed were already in place and knowing unpopular decisions had to be made in order to put Epworth on secure financial footing caused me to secretly ask, "How can I gracefully get out of this?"

My wife, Vicki, listened patiently to all of my doubts and misgivings for several days. Then one day she said in a most helpful way, "John, why don't you just go there and do what God sent you there to do?"

There it was in plain English. This was not about me. It was not about success and failure or fear of letting people down. It was about serving God in the best way I could with the talents and limitations I had been given.

The past 15 years have been an amazing time with celebrations and frustrations built into this kind work. I have been fortunate to have felt for a number of years during my time of ministerial service that, "For this work, I was created." This time at Epworth has underscored this in a wonderful way.

I thank God, Vicki and all who have served on the Board of Trustees. Also, my gratitude goes to Dr. Ted Walter, who served as interim president for two years before my arrival, and not only held Epworth together, but also began building for Epworth's future. I closely indebted to Epworth's staff members, who in sometimes trying circumstances gave their all and their best. In addition, many thanks go to the Epworth Alumni who rallied and gave back to the place they call "home."

Finally, I thank the children, who taught us new things regularly and made it extremely rewarding as they found hope and joy.

None of this would have been possible without all who support the children and their caretakers with hours of volunteer work, prayer, financial help and job opportunities.

We have laughed, cried, celebrated, grieved and witnessed anger, hurt and hopelessness. However, above all, we have participated in the miracles of renewed hope, forgiveness and successes great and small. In addition, we have seen new life with opportunities for productive living, as well as the joy of individuals seeing themselves as royalty with the gifts and graces to break free from the old cycles of trauma and shame that have kept them captive to the past.

It is true that everyone is a miracle. Sometimes miracles need a little assistance and a helping of patience to be revealed.

—Rev. John Holler



United Methodist Women

by Charm Eaddy

Is gender really important?

Does gender really matter when the person is qualified to work a particular job, smart enough to attend a certain college or knowledgeable enough to lead others, even in a male sport?

Gender bias occurs in many forms, and women are often a product of those actions. This was very evident during the NCAA tournament as women teams walked in their workout facilities to find only a few yoga mats and one rack of dumbbells. The men, on the other hand, had access to a fully staffed weight room with benches, dumbbells and tons of other equipment. This quickly ignited many women and men to speak out on the injustices the women faced and how it made women feel.

Unfortunately, this type of treatment sometimes starts early in life and has the ability to discourage women from certain things. I vividly remember playing football with my classmates in elementary school and the teacher calling my mother to inform her of what I was doing because she thought it was inappropriate. That is why I was so happy to see Sarah Fuller get the opportunity to be the first female to play college football this past December and reduce some gender bias about what females can and cannot do in society.

Discrepancies in male and female employment wages is another form of this double standard. Pro athletes in women's sports often make much less than their male counterparts. Let's compare the salaries of two prominent basketball players from South Carolina. A'ja Wilson, a current WNBA player, will only make a little more than \$70,000 this year, while Ja Morant, an NBA player, makes a whopping \$9,166,800 this year. Now

just reflect and tell me why this makes any sense when they both play the same sport professionally?

This is yet another way "double standards" are displayed. Most professional teams are reluctant to hire females because of the perception that fans have of a woman's ability to coach men. Over the last seven years, Becky Hammon proved women can successfully coach men as she became the first full-time assistant coach for the San Antonio Spurs. Even though she has interviewed for several head coaching jobs, no NBA team has hired her yet. Recently, more women have become officials in professional sports, but none are head coaches.

Gender bias does not just exist in sports, but in the workplace and even schools. Women were often told they could only have certain jobs and could not attend particular schools. Remember when the first female, Shannon Faulkner, enrolled in the Citadel and all the chaos it caused because it was a "boys' school"? That was just the beginning of the fight for gender equality.

Schools are now making a better effort to encourage women to enter science, technology, engineering and mathematics professions more than ever since these careers encourage gender equality. Still today, there are certain professions that are male dominant, and women are viewed differently if they enter those professions.

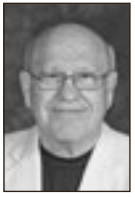
Thankfully, society has begun to provide more opportunities for women in nontraditional roles, but there is still a long way to go to obtain gender equality.

Eaddy is an elected member of the Charter for Racial Justice Committee. Her election to this committee makes her an Executive Committee member for SCCUMW.



Unity UMC starts community garden

Unity UMC, Union, now has a community garden. The garden is a 4- by 6-foot raised bed with two scoops of soil planted with onions, tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, basil and green beans. There is a sign telling people to help themselves “as they have need,” and it would also be appreciated if they could “water and weed.” Bob and Barbara Holley did the work. “We were at the beach and we saw one in a neighborhood church yard,” Barbara said. It was a large square for a community garden, and individual beds were rented out. They thought it would be a really neat idea to do the same for Unity UMC. The community around Unity should be blessed with vegetables any day now. “Pick some basil before you leave,” she said. “It should be coming in.”



Guest Commentary

by Rev. Al Shifflett

Thoughts on UFOlogy

More than 15 million adults have experienced an “Encounter of the Third Kind.” These encounters were formally known as sightings of UFOs, or Unidentified Flying Objects. NASA and our government now refer to such encounters as UAPs, or Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon.

For the longest time, our government denied any such sightings or experiences as a hoax. Anyone who claimed sightings or abductions, like Barney and Betty Hill of New Hampshire (Sept. 19, 1961), were cast as crazy, brought on by the stress of living as a biracial couple in a time of the Civil Rights Movement and Cold War tensions.

Therefore, now the government has finally let the horse out of the barn and admitted that more than 15 million people could not be wrong or crazy—that there must be something to what’s happening in our skies. Even “Sixty Minutes” spent a whole segment on the phenomenon on a recent Sunday.

Ufology, therefore, is not necessarily new. Since 1947 it has been developing with a number of books and treatises published dealing with the connections between UFO phenomena and the Bible. End time prophecy has long talked about the “signs and wonders in the sky” as spoken of in the Bible. The question arises that, with the increased sightings and activities, does this indicate the end is near?

In other words, what are the theological implications of Ufology?

Most discussions about SETI (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) has remained in the domain of hard sciences, but now with space exploration and renewed interest, it’s gone beyond biology, physics and philosophy into theology.

The first implication of Ufology has to deal with life itself, and what the Bible has to say—but not only the Bible but the guiding figures of SETI. SETI asks the question, “Are we alone in the universe?” The scientists behind SETI in their search for life believe anything is possible, under the right circumstances on the right planet.

The Bible, on the other hand, indicates in the very first verse that the vastness of the universe and everything therein was created by God: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Also, the first chapter claims as well that life was created by God on the planet Earth.

However, the Bible does not tell us about life on other planets in the universe—and

this is where theology and Ufology differ. Ufologists and SETI have what they call the “Mediocrity Principle” that earth is not anything special in the universe. The Bible claims otherwise, since man is formed in the image of the creator, and the creator sent his very own son to earth to redeem us from a fallen state of sin.

But that also raises other theological questions. If there is life on other planets, are they in the image of God? And if they do exist, did they sin or did they maintain a higher moral standard? And if they sinned, like we Earthlings, did Christ’s sacrifice cover them, as well? Was it necessary for Christ to visit those planets and be sacrificed all over again for their redemption?

I would argue that SETI and the Ufologists are misleading us to question our faith, especially the sacrificial work of the incarnation of Christ. Until the last century we’ve not thought of the incarnation of Christ as having anything to do with aliens who have large heads and big eyes—dubbed “grays.” Our theology, however, even before ET’s arrival, has never been Earth-centric because we’ve always claimed that Calvary’s work was universal (whosoever believes), throughout the universe!

Also, the Psalms, sacred to Jews and Christians, claim that God has given names to all the stars, and, according to the Jewish Talmud, “God spends his night flying throughout the 18,000 worlds,” and Islam insists that, “All things in the heavens and on the Earth” are Allah’s.

Is it a stretch to say that God names the inhabitants on these stars, as well?

Therefore, in spite of the possibility of life on other planets or moons, the Bible and the Koran imply that human beings are special to God, which brings us back to original creation, in the image of God, i.e., having God-like traits.

When Christ came, he came like a baby, born from a teenage mother, not from a supersonic UFO. And he grew up to look like a human—not with a large head and big eyes—and he died on the cross “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

That “whosoever” covers the vastness of God’s universe and all humans on Earth, plus any “Grays” on foreign planets or moons.

So ET, if you’re out there and if you have sinned, like the Prodigal Son, it’s high time you came home to the father of all creation!

Shifflett pastors St. Paul UMC, Ridgeland.



Guest Commentary

by Rev. John Jordan

Vaccinations as an act of love

Most of us remember getting vaccinated before going to school. I remember going to the health department and getting a shot for smallpox. Many remember eating the sugar cube with the drop of the polio vaccine on it. In recent years we have gotten vaccines for measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis, shingles, chickenpox and other diseases that once were very prevalent. Now many of these once-common and potentially fatal diseases are rather rare.

In the 1980s there arose an anti-vaccine movement. The beginnings of this movement were based on a study published in the British medical journal, *Lancet*, that linked vaccines to autism. Later studies debunked these claims, and it was shown that the research was flawed and invalid. However, this led many parents to begin refusing to vaccinate their children.

Even though the scientific research showed vaccines did not cause autism, the vaccine issue became one of civil liberty. The anti-vaxxers claimed the government could not mandate that they vaccinate their children. Because of this, many diseases, which were diminishing in frequency, were now coming back because there was no longer herd immunity. As fewer children were getting vaccinated, there were more hosts for viruses such as chickenpox to spread.

Now, many of these are childhood diseases many of us may have experienced. I remember two of the most miserable weeks of childhood was when I had chickenpox. However, some people are unable for medical reasons to get vaccinated. For these people, particularly children, a simple childhood disease like chickenpox could be fatal.

I have a niece who adopted a medically fragile child with whom she fell in love when she worked as a nurse at Eggleston Children’s Hospital in Atlanta. Ashley had multiple medical problems and required a kidney transplant at age 2. Because of this and other medical issues, Ashley cannot get any of the routine childhood vaccinations. Since her immune system is so compromised, a simple childhood disease like chickenpox is potentially fatal. If it is even suspected she has been exposed, she has to be admitted to the hospital to receive IV drugs to fight the infection that her body cannot fight.

I tell this because there is another way we, particularly Christians, should look at vaccinations. Vaccinations are not a civil liberty issue but an act of love. By getting vaccinated, we may stop the spread of a disease so children like Ashley or adults who are immunocompromised may live life with a diminished fear of exposure to a potentially fatal disease. I express my love for Ashley and others by getting vaccinated so I may not expose them to a disease.

I write this not just regarding the COVID-19 vaccine but for all vaccines. There are so many diseases that were on the verge of being eradicated because enough people worldwide had been vaccinated. So there was not enough host for the virus to be maintained.

Paul addresses a similar issue in 1 Corinthians 8. In this chapter, he is addressing the issue of meat that has been sacrificed to idols. He states that while he knows that meat sacrificed to idols is permissible to eat, for some who are not as mature in their faith, seeing him eat meat may become a stumbling block to their faith. Since his eating meat may create problems for someone else, Paul states that he would not eat meat. Even though he was at liberty to eat meat, he would not let his liberty cause someone to fall. He would not eat meat because he loved the person who had problems eating meat sacrificed to an idol.

We can demonstrate our love for our neighbor by getting vaccinated and getting our children vaccinated for all diseases. If we do, people like Ashley can live without fear of exposure to a potentially fatal disease.

Let us express our liberty to love.

Jordan pastors Trinity UMC, West Columbia.

Bethel erects prayer cross for community

Christians everywhere rely on daily prayers. As the apostle Paul instructed the people of Philippi, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God” (Philippians 4:6).

Bethel, Peachtree Rock United Methodist Church, located at 811 Peachtree Rock Road, Lexington, has erected a Community Prayer Cross at 191 Bethel Church Road, near the intersection of S.C. Hwy. 6 in Lexington County.

The cross will serve mainly the Edmond and Peachtree Rock area, but is available to anyone from anywhere in the world.

Point your GPS to 191 Bethel Church Road, Lexington, SC 29073, and add a prayer request to the cross. All the supplies are available (pen, prayer card, clip). The church will collect prayer requests each week, and the congregation will pray for your need for four weeks.

You may renew your request as often as you like.

Bethel, Peachtree Rock is a church “Where you can begin again.” The congregation welcomes those who have been away from church for a long time and are now seeking a new start. We also welcome folks who have never had a church home. The church has a small- to medium-sized congregation that is diverse, welcoming and Christ-centered. Pastor is the Rev. Bob Brawn.

For more about Bethel, Peachtree Rock, visit <https://bethelumcpeachtreerock.org>, con-



The church will collect prayer requests each week, and the congregation will pray for your need for four weeks.

nect on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/bethelumcpeachtree>, email bethel-trock@gmail.com or call 803-755-0585.

Tools for the trailers

South Carolina's UMVIM Early Response Team now has three new trailers, but they are \$26,000 short of funds to equip them with the essential tools and equipment needed to do disaster related work, which is so vital in the aftermath of a disaster. ERT Coordinator Billy Robinson said the trailer equipment is very much needed. "In 2021, we have already responded to multiple storm-related local natural disasters in South Carolina and even a multiple tornado outbreak that occurred in Alabama." To learn more: <https://www.umcsc.org/disaster-response>.



Global Briefs

Online worship resources' permission extended

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The United Methodist Publishing House is extending full permission to all churches for use of its copyrighted worship materials through Dec. 31. In this challenging time for churches, the publishing house aims to ensure access to essential worship aids and use of the Common English Bible for online worship and studies.

New leadership for pension agency

GLENVIEW, Ill.—The agency that handles pensions and benefits for The United Methodist Church will be led by Andrew Hendren starting Jan. 3, after the retirement of Barbara Boige grain. Hendren is currently chief legal and governance officer for Wespath.

Agencies sell jointly owned building

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—With reduced staff and more people working from home, two United Methodist agencies have sold their jointly owned building to nearby Vanderbilt University and are moving into shared offices. Discipleship Ministries and the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry are among the general agencies consolidating space.

Anti-racism campaign marks one year

MEMPHIS, Tenn.—The anti-racism work of the UMC is just getting started after the first year of the Dismantling Racism campaign, say bishops and others. Upcoming initiatives include an anti-racism social justice agenda, more educational materials and an Advent devotional series.

Tips for re-entering the mission field

ATLANTA—United Methodist Volunteers in Mission has developed an instructional video for churches and mission teams that are preparing to re-enter the mission field beyond their local communities. Because of varying COVID-19 protocols in different countries, domestic missions are recommended, but opportunities for international trips are available.

Conference assumes management of megachurch

MARIETTA, Ga.—The North Georgia Conference announced that conference trustees are assuming oversight of the assets of Mount Bethel UMC, the largest-membership congregation in the conference. This move comes amid strife over a new pastor's appointment to the church.

Survey: Mainline Protestants outnumber evangelicals

WASHINGTON—White Christian decline in the U.S. has slowed, and white mainline Protestants now outnumber white evangelicals. That's according to a sweeping survey of the U.S. religious landscape by the Public Religion Research Institute.

—Courtesy of the United Methodist News Service



Resource Center

by Betty Stalnaker

New Christmas music

Church musicians, it's time to plan your Christmas music. Listed below are new titles available in the Conference Resource Center. Check our website for many other titles for children, youth and adults.

with "What Christmas Really Means." Adult/33 min./Moderate/SATB. (Brentwood-Benson) Listening CD available.

Christmas Musicals for Children

Hotel Noel

(SBK468=) *Composer/Arranger: Boe, Gina.*

As our story's family begins their journey on Christmas Eve, they find themselves in an epic snowstorm that threatens their safe arrival at Grandma's house. Forced off the road by the storm, they miraculously come across an unexpected "this-didn't-show-up-on-any-GPS-maps" safe harbor—Hotel Noel! With a name like Hotel Noel, full of the promise of holiday festivities and decorations, the kids are severely disappointed as they discover it to be a plain, bland, not-a-decoration-in-sight hotel. Unknown to the family, however, the hotel is staffed by Christmas angels tasked to share the true meaning of Christmas with those in need of hearing their message of hope and salvation. These special, heavenly envoys—Gloria, Gabriel, Michael and Angela—step in to share the origins and meaning of the hotel's name, Noel, explaining that Christmas is more about celebrating the birth of our Savior than about brightly wrapped gifts and shiny holiday decorations. This new Simply WordKidz Musical for a Christmas carries the hallmarks of the series—easy to learn, easy to sing, easy to produce—while featuring fun and powerful new songs of the season along with familiar carols. Children/29 min./Easy/Unison. (Word) Listening CD available.

The South Carolina Conference Resource Center is your connection to DVDs and seasonal musicals. We are here to serve your church family. To reserve resources, call 888-678-6272 or 803-786-9486, or visit www.umcsc.org/resourcecenter.

Christmas Musicals for Adults

The Road to Bethlehem

(SBK469=) *Composer/Arranger: Larson, Lloyd/Hogan, Ed.*

Bethlehem seemed an unlikely destination for the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Messiah. Bethlehem. Why would anyone—especially the creator of the universe—choose a little remote village? But as Scripture records, the road to Bethlehem was the road that ultimately led to God! Lloyd Larson's "The Road to Bethlehem" uses narrative and music to help the listener meditate on the coming of the Messiah and the remarkable possibilities that can occur in seemingly unremarkable places. Kylee Larson's narration offers a fresh and thought-provoking perspective on that journey leading to Jesus' birth. Flexibly conceived for Advent and/or Christmas programming, each individual anthem may be presented during the weeks leading up to Christmas, or the entire work may be performed as a whole in a single worship service. Small and large choirs alike will find the choral writing appealing and versatile. Adult/35 min./SATB. (Lorenz) Listening CD available.

What Christmas Really Means

(SBK453=) *Composer/Arranger: Mauldin, Russell/Smith, Sue.*

At Christmas, it is important to remember what Christmas is really about. The world was in desperate need of a Savior, and Christmas gave us the gift of Jesus. He is the true meaning of Christmas. Align your hearts with the heart of God at Christmas

Farewell, Pastor T

St. Mark UMC, Taylors, held a celebration for their pastor the Rev. Telley Gadson—whom they dubbed Pastor T—June 12. Gadson left the church to become the new Hartsville District superintendent for the UMC.



Photos courtesy of Deborah McGowan



View from the Pews

by Bill Barnier

So what now?

I waited patiently for the cloud cover to clear so I could catch a glimpse of the alignment of Saturn and Jupiter, purported to be a recurrence of the "Star of Bethlehem." What an amazing event to witness, made more unique because it fell on the winter solstice.

What a wonder that celestial events such as these have been recognized and revered for thousands of years, perhaps millions. I'm amazed at the consciousness of humans being directed to the universe, in its vastness and mystery, at a time when earth species still communicated by grunts and hand gestures. Written records in all forms tell of human activities, including the revelation that we are powerless to fully understand the wonders of the universe unfolding around us. We learned to call it heaven, and it belongs entirely to the Holy Spirit. Faith and worship are in our DNA.

While this planetary alignment is wondrous, it occurs to me that the knowledge and understanding of things celestial is just as incredible. The ability to understand the cumulative knowledge of mathematics, quantum physics, astrophysics, celestial dynamics, archaeology, language, etc. is proof that anything is possible if we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us. Entire civilizations were connected with the Holy Spirit in ways we can only speculate about.

For an inquisitor such as I, it's a basket of questions that may have no answers for us to find. While constrained by our earthly existence, the Holy Spirit reserves the final answers for the time when we pass from this world and become present with our Lord God. Yet for a chosen few, the window into the mysteries of our universe, and the peace of ultimate knowledge, is open. Those acclaimed to be prophets, seers, high priests, mediums, sensitives, etc. may be truly gifted

with the ability to interact with what the rest of us cannot. Through the Holy Spirit, anything is possible.

Hollywood has always been rife with productions intended to teach us to fear things and events that are outside of our "normal" narrow view of life. Biblical stories tell us of apparitions, miracles, men of tremendous age, and interactions with angels and demons. If any of these things were to occur today, we would say they were fake or contrived. If Jesus or Moses were to return in the flesh, we would probably dismiss them as delusional. A substantial library of proof exists that substantiates the written claims and beliefs of our ancestors. And proof continues to grow of spiritual things in and around our world, which we dismiss as impossible. Yet we readily accept the power in the rare passing of two planets at the precise moment of the annual winter equinox.

As huge as the known universe appears to be, perhaps more important is the universe within our own spiritual hearts. In both places, the power of the Holy Spirit makes anything possible. As we become more adept at creating tools of knowledge and understanding, we push out the boundaries of the unknown. But in doing so we tend to discard the old foundations which mark our journey forward.

The Holy Spirit has revealed to our human race that we are not alone. From Jesus came the promise that all things would be revealed if we would open our hearts and put aside our prideful and arrogant ways to quest without fear. Yet those fearful leaders killed him.

The alignment of planets and repeat of the Star of Bethlehem should be a reminder of mysteries to be revealed, of possibilities forgotten.

Fear not, for he is with us.



COMING SOON!

The Manor is excited to announce the construction of our Lifestyle Center, which will be our third completed project of 2021. The Lifestyle Center will enrich the lives of our residents: in body, mind, and spirit. The Lifestyle Center features many things, including an area for fitness, with rooms for both group classes and also for exercise equipment. Creative residents can let their imaginations run wild in the new mixed-media Art Studio, and then display their creations in our Art Gallery adjacent to the studio. Residents who wish to kick back and relax can go grab a snack from our concessions stand and catch a movie in our new amphitheater-style movie theater. The Lifestyle Center truly offers something for everyone. We can't wait to show you more as it nears completion!



Call or visit us online today for more information.

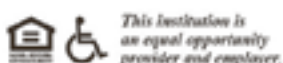
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Florence District UMW president lifts up 'Mothers of Faith' at Wesley Chapel

By Dorothy McClam

LAKE CITY—Wesley Chapel United Methodist Women presented their annual Mother's Day Program May 9, featuring Pernerva S. Thomas as program's speaker.

Thomas serves as the Florence District President of United Methodist Women. Romans 5:1-5 was her focus Scripture, and her message focus was "Mothers of Faith."

"Women are the backbone of the home. Faithful women are the backbone of the church," Thomas said.

She emphasized the importance of prayer, stating that a mother has to pray and she has to be about God's business.

"Mothers of faith lift up others in the Spirit of Christ," she added.

Betsy Graham, president of Wesley Chapel United Methodist Women, said the Mother's Day service was "very inspiring."

"Our speaker was dynamic," Graham said. "Her message spoke volumes to me, to all women and to mothers. I extend a heartfelt thanks to our speaker, Mrs. Pernerva Thomas, for bringing us such a powerful message."



Pernerva Thomas speaks on "Mothers of Faith."

Thomas also emphasized the value of putting God first.

She closed her message with a stirring rendition of "He Touched Me."



Photo courtesy of Bob Barrett

Men give flowers to retirees

In May, the United Methodist Men from Clemson UMC planted flowers at the Downs Retirement Community in Clemson. The event was coordinated by Bill Dowler, a long-time United Methodist Men member.

Men's ministry golf tournament set for February in West Columbia

After a year off because of the COVID-19 pandemic, South Carolina's Men N Ministry will again host its Annual Golf Tournament in 2022.

"As everyone is aware, 2021 was a real time of frustration, sicknesses and any other adjective you can think of. Therefore, our annual conference was moved to virtual

and the golf tournament cancelled," Kenny Bingham, golf tournament chair, said.

Now, plans are going strong for the golf tournament, set for Feb. 25, 2022. It is a fundraiser for the conference men's ministry. The tournament will be held at Indian River Golf Club, West Columbia. Teams will play Captain's Choice,

with range balls before tournament and lunch after with drinks and dessert. The event starts at 11 a.m.

The cost will be \$80 per player. Everyone can purchase mulligans (two per player) at \$5 each. There will be trophies for first place winners. If interested, email kbingham42@yahoo.com or call 843-246-8398.

Obituaries

Shirley Gordon Bines

ROCK HILL—Shirley Gordon Bines, wife of Dr. Lee C. Bines, died July 7, 2021. Dr. Bines is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held July 16 at Robinson Funeral Home Chapel of Remembrance with burial in Grandview Memorial Park-Hollis Lake.

Mrs. Bines is survived by her husband and daughter.

Riddick Richard Blocker Jr.

CHARLESTON—The Rev. Riddick Richard Blocker Jr., a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died June 16, 2021.



Blocker Jr.

Prior to his retirement in 1993, Rev. Blocker served the Main Street (Columbia) Associate, Sharon Circuit, Ben Avon, Greenville-Aldersgate, Greer Memorial, Trinity (Conway), Cherokee Place, Hibben, St. Mark (Greenwood) and Cheraw-First charges.

Funeral services were held June 19 at Bethel UMC with burial in Magnolia Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Roper Hospice, 1483 Tobias Gadson Blvd. Suite 208-A, Charleston, SC 29414.

Rev. Blocker is survived by his wife, Magdalen "Missy" Blocker, and two sons.

Elizabeth F. 'Lib' Bowers

CENTRAL—Elizabeth F. "Lib" Bowers, mother of the Rev. Mike Bowers, died June 14, 2021. Rev. Bowers is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church currently serving as pastor of Jackson Grove UMC, Jonesville.

Funeral services were held June 16 at Grace UMC, Pickens, with burial in The

Hillcrest Memorial Park, Pickens.

Memorials may be made to the Bill G. and Elizabeth F. Bowers Endowed Scholarship Fund, Spartanburg Methodist Church, 1000 Powell Mill Road, Spartanburg, SC 29301; or to Grace UMC, 309 Cedar Rock Street, Pickens, SC 29671.

Mrs. Bowers is survived by her six sons.

John Lee Brisbon

REMBERT—John Lee "Country" Brisbon, father of the Rev. Michael Brisbon, died June 10, 2021. Rev. Brisbon is the pastor of Emmanuel United Methodist Church, Sumter.

Funeral services were held June 17 at Springhill UMC, Rembert.

Mr. Brisbon is survived by his four sons and daughter.

Angela McDuffie Bruce

CHARLESTON—Angela McDuffie Bruce, wife of the Rev. Michael Bruce, died June 9, 2021. Rev. Bruce is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church currently serving as pastor of Lebanon Charge, Ridgeville.

A memorial service was held June 14 at Hibben UMC.

Memorials may be made to the American Head & Neck Society, www.ahnsfoundation.info/donations.

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

Willa Faye Tingen Colvin

FLORENCE—Willa Faye Tingen Colvin, grandmother of the Rev. Josh Colvin, died June 18, 2021. Rev. Colvin is the pastor of Dalzell United Methodist Church, Sumter.

Funeral services were held June 22 in the chapel of Cain Calcutt Funeral Home with burial in the Mount Hope Cemetery.

Mrs. Colvin is survived by her husband, James C. Colvin, and daughter.

James Franklin Hood

SEYMOUR, Tenn.—The Rev. James Frank-

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.

lin Hood, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died July 16, 2021.

Prior to his retirement in 1997, Rev. Hood served Smoaks, Boganville, Liberty-Cherokee Springs, Pamplico, Moncks Corner, Easley-First, Latta-Floyd Dale, Fort Mill-St. John's, Surfside and Bethlehem charges.

A memorial service was held July 22 at Evans Mortuary with burial and graveside service at Oak Grove Cemetery, Rockwood, Tennessee.

Memorials may be made to First UMC, 804 Montvale Station Road, Maryville, TN 37803.

Rev. Hood is survived by his wife, Ralphine May Hood, and son.

Erlene Hodges Jones

HOPKINS—Erlene Hodges Jones, a retired bookkeeper for the United Methodist Center, died June 20, 2021.

Funeral services were held June 23 at Palmer Memorial Chapel, Columbia.

Mrs. Jones is survived by her daughter and son.

Elizabeth McMillan Rose

ORANGEBURG—Elizabeth McMillan Rose, mother of the Rev. Arthur Rose Jr., died June 3, 2021. Rev. Rose is the pastor of the Bamberg Circuit, Bamberg.

Funeral services were held June 18 at



Hood

Simmons Funeral Home and Crematory Chapel.

Mrs. Rose is survived by her two sons and daughter.

Lauren Michael Stewart

APEX, N.C.—Lauren Michael Stewart, granddaughter of Rev. Bobbie and Ron Taylor, died June 24, 2021. Rev. Taylor is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

A memorial service was held July 1 at Apex Funeral Home.

Memorials may be made to the Lauren Stewart Literacy Fund, https://www.gofundme.com/f/the-lauren-stewart-literacy-fund?utm_campaign=p_cp+share-sheet&utm_medium=sms&utm_source=customer, to provide library books to the students of East Garner Elementary School.

David Theodore Templeton

ABBEVILLE—The Rev. David Theodore Templeton, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died June 26, 2021.

Prior to his retirement in 1998, Rev. Templeton served the Clearwater-Carolina Heights, Newberry Circuit, Westminster Charge, Abbeville-Grace, Asbury Charge, Laurens-Central, Pelzer, Galloway Memorial, Berkeley Circuit, Williston, Heath Springs Charge, New Market and Lowell Street charges.

Following his retirement, he served the Ebenezer, Belvedere and Soule Chapel charges.

Graveside services were held June 29 at Oakbrook Memorial Park.

Rev. Templeton is survived by his three daughters.



Templeton

July

July 27—LSM School (Charleston District), Zoom, 6:30-9 p.m. \$20. Constance Wilborn, 843-797-3736 or layservantcharlestondistrict@gmail.com

July 29—LSM School (Charleston District), Zoom, 6:30-9 p.m. \$20. Constance Wilborn, 843-797-3736 or layservantcharlestondistrict@gmail.com

July 31—UMW Virtual Mission u, 10 a.m., 1 p.m.

August

Aug. 1—Voting Rights discussion led by Lynn Teague, Racial Realities and Responses in SC and the United Methodist Church series, Player Hall, Shandon UMC, Columbia, 9:45-10:45 a.m. Streaming live via Zoom, shandon-umc.org/register

Aug. 3—LSM School (Charleston District), Zoom, 6:30-9 p.m. \$20. Constance Wilborn, layservantcharlestondistrict@gmail.com or 843-797-3736

Aug. 5—LSM School (Charleston District), Zoom, 6:30-9 p.m. \$20. Constance Wilborn, layservantcharlestondistrict@gmail.com or 843-797-3736

Aug. 6—Lay Servant Ministries Virtual Worship Service, Zoom, 7-8 p.m.

Aug. 7—UMW Virtual Mission u, 10 a.m., 1 p.m.

Aug. 7—Virtual Lay Servant Academy Session 1, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Aug. 8—Aldersgate Special Needs Sunday

Aug. 8—Virtual Lay Servant Academy Session 2, 2:30-5:30 p.m.



No more mortgage!

Church of the Palms, Okatie, marked July 4 by holding a special Sunday morning mortgage-burning ceremony marking its debt-free status. The church body assembled in the sanctuary between Sunday morning worship services. The Rev. Pete Berntson; Marsha Harrison and Ed Hazlett, representing the latest Building Committee; Bill Unger, chair of the Finance Committee; and Lay Leader Larry Sanders led the congregation in a litany of dedication of the Church of the Palms' Christian Life Center. Church of the Palms broke ground on its \$3 million Christian life center Dec. 18, 2016. The loan for the structure began in March 2019 and was paid in full in June as the congregation marked the 20th anniversary of its charter date. From left are Marsha Harrison, Ed Hazlett, Bill Unger, Larry Sanders and Pastor Pete Berntson.

Aug. 8—Black Lives Matter discussion led by Lawrence Nathaniel, Racial Realities and Responses in SC and the United Methodist Church series, Player Hall, Shandon UMC, Columbia, 9:45-10:45 a.m. Streaming live via Zoom, shandon-umc.org/register

Aug. 14—ERT Basic/Renewal Class, Bethany UMC, Summerville, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>, Contact: Billy Robinson, brpraiseje-sus@aol.com or 803-539-8429.

Aug. 30-Sept. 3—Crossroads: Where Faith and Innovation Meet, Carolinas Black Clergy Leadership Retreat, hosted by North Carolina, Western North Carolina and South Carolina conferences. \$150. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/2021cbcleadershipretreat/>.

September

Sept. 15-Oct. 15: *Hispanic Heritage Month*

Sept. 6—Labor Day; United Methodist Conference Center closed

Labor Day Festival at Beulah celebrates 33 years

SANDY RUN—A 33-year celebration will take place at Beulah United Methodist Church Monday, Sept. 6, when the church hosts its annual Labor Day Festival.

Guests can eat-in or carry out at a cost of \$15 per plate. Tickets are available from a church member, or tickets can be purchased at the door. There will be a choice of chicken or pork barbecue plates, which includes beans, slaw, rice, hash, bread, pickles, tea and lemonade. Serving time is from 10:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m.

Bulk sales will also be available. There will be a bake sale with delicious desserts for people to choose from made by the ladies of the church.

A garage sale will be conducted from 8:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. in the gym with some really good deals. Also, for those who plan to eat in, various musical groups will provide entertainment.

The Labor Day Festival has become a tradition and enjoyed by those living in Sandy Run, as well as surrounding areas. Beulah UMC invites all to come and enjoy a day of Christian fellowship with good food, music and items from the garage sale.



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

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Positions Open

Director of Family Ministries

Bethel UMC, Columbia, is looking for a full-time Director of Family Ministries to help shape and lead a flourishing, comprehensive program for children, youth and families. Position requirements include strong organizational and people skills, creativity, strong written and verbal communication and a basic knowledge of the Bible and theology. For more information, contact Rev. Julie Songer Belman at jdsonger@umcsc.org.

Director of Music/Organist

Clemson United Methodist Church is looking for a full-time Director of Music/Organist. Inquiries or resumes should be sent to cheryl_lee1234@bellsouth.net or garcon538@gmail.com, co-chairs of search committee. Position open until filled.

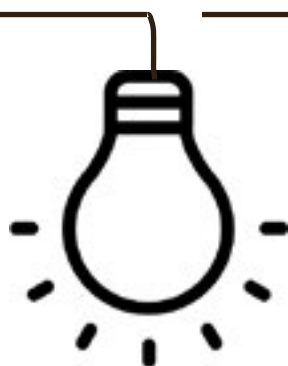
Music Director

Bethel UMC, Columbia, is looking for a part-time Music Director to provide musical guidance and direction to our choir members throughout the liturgical year. Requirements include proven experience, sound musical knowledge, strong leadership and listening skills and a passion for music. For more information, contact Rev. Julie Songer Belman at jdsonger@umcsc.org.

Chancel Choir Director

Stallville UMC, Sumter, is looking for a Chancel Choir Director. Responsibilities include all weekly rehearsals and performances of the choir and the Handbell Choir; selecting and rehearsing music for weekly worship services and special events; playing the piano during services; maintaining equipment; and ordering new music as needed. Salary based on training and experience. Forward resume to Stallville UMC, 255 Stallville Loop, Summerville, SC 29485, ATTN: SPRC/Chancel Choir Director or email to office@stallvilleumc.org.

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Did You Know?

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Tried, tested and true: Job as a model for personal relationship with God

by the Rev. Genova McFadden

Author's note: This Bible study is dedicated to the memory of the Rev. Thomas J. Pearson, Jr., God's servant who modeled Job's steadfast faith.

Aug. 1 Job Worshiped—Not Cursed

Lesson Scripture: Job 1:8-20

Background Scripture: Job 1:1-20; Psalm 3:1-8

Key Verse: Job 1:20 “Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped.

How does one respond to discovering that almost all that s/he treasures has been destroyed? How does one hold onto composure with a loss so great?

In this passage, we see Job's first reaction upon discovering the absolute calamity that has befallen him—the loss of all that he treasures. In response, Job engages in customary mourning rituals. Yet, even with the realization of his great losses, Job turns to that which he knows and relies on: his faith in and reverence for God. Job worshiped—that was the strength of his piety and his devotion to God. In his brokenness, the faithful, pious Job sought an encounter with God.

In my experiences in ministry, as a social worker—and of late as a substitute teacher in the public schools and a volunteer guardian ad litem—I have witnessed the explosive, disruptive behaviors of children and youth dealing with the trauma(s) in their lives. Rather than naming these children as “bad,” I see them as victims of brokenness. Through them, I have learned that the level of misbehavior is an indication of the measure of their suffering—often from neglect, abuse, violence and much more. Many people cannot imagine the circumstances in which these children live.

These situations might be seen through the same lens as we view the tragedies that Job faced. Unlike Job, however, there often is no refuge for these hurting children (and families).

Here, Job met the challenge: He did not curse God as ha'satan predicted. He was indeed the faithful, pious servant that God claimed. Job's resort to the mourning rituals was a symbolic response to loss, and more important, was also an act of faith and reverence. For Job, God is still good and just, and his relationship with God remains intact. How strong is your relationship with God?

Aug. 8 Exemplary Devotion

Lesson Scripture: Job 1:21-22; 2:7-10

Background Scripture: Job 1:21-22; 2:1-10; Psalm 139:19-24

Key Verse: Job 1:21 “He [Job] said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Though he was known as being “the greatest of all the people in the east” (1:3), Job is so fraught with despair, he now feels he might as well be dead. The magnitude of his losses is becoming more apparent. His world has crumbled for reasons he cannot yet fathom. He does not know God's part in his suffering, but he knows God as just and merciful.

So, even with his soul aching, Job still praises and blesses God. David A. Clines, in his “Word Biblical Commentary,” said of this, “Yahweh is blessed not for the giving or for the taking away, but for the totality of what he has been to Job. ... Job is making no global statement of divine causality, but a pious utterance of his sense of how entirely his fate lies in the hands of God.”

Cline argues here that the primary aim of the Book of Job is to “portray how one should behave under suffering.” Clines con-

tinues, “No more sudden or catastrophic suffering could easily be imagined; how should a human being respond? Precisely as Job, without recrimination, self-pity or rejection of reality, and with praise to the Lord of his being. Job is unarguably here set forth as an exemplar of faith in crisis.”

Notice too, that this is the only time Job uses the name Yahweh. Cline asserts that while there is no explanation of why “Yahweh” is used here, “The point is that Job ... behaves and speaks at the crisis moment as if bound by covenant with Yahweh.” For Job in this moment, his relationship with Yahweh remains strong.

In present times, humanity worldwide contends with an historic pandemic that has brought monumental suffering and loss. The question we must answer (with which Job will later wrestle) is: Could we persist in the integrity of our faith during our great suffering?

Aug. 15 When Friends Treat You Like an Enemy

Lesson Scripture: Job 19:1-6, 13-19

Background Scripture: Job 19:1-27; Psalm 43:1-5

Key Verse: Job 19:5-6, “If indeed you magnify yourselves against me, and make my humiliation an argument against me, know then that God has put me in the wrong, and closed his net around me.”

In this passage, in the second cycle of a series of speeches or dialogue with his friends, Job is made the brunt of not only their criticism and condemnation, as they present arguments as to why Job is afflicted with his suffering. Lisa Davidson in the “New Interpreter's Study Bible” explained, “Their lives have been built upon the traditional wisdom of just rewards and punishment.”

Clines states, “Though he has done them no harm, the friends treat Job as an enemy.” Without compassion or understanding, and almost defensively, they contend that Job must have sinned in some way and God is punishing Job for his sinfulness. God does not punish the righteous, they argue, “in the process making themselves Job's moral and intellectual superiors.”

Even so, Job questions their motivation for speaking against him. Unlike the Job in the prologue who implicitly reveres God, Job is now fully aware that, as Davidson said, “it is God who has (unjustifiably) put him in the wrong and not some sin of his own—though he has never used these words.” And further, for whatever reasoning, Job has come to understand “himself as the undeserving object of God's anger and persecution.”

Knowing that God has situated him thus, Job proclaims God has “closed his net around me.” In anger and angst, Job feels his isolation from his world. He is feeling under siege.

Often, friends in their counsel, out of fear (or pride), will sometimes find another person “wrong,” resorting to condemning them as a sinner. They find it easy to disparage another—it takes focus off of their own shortcomings. Frequently, friends fear the same fate may besiege them, so they “distance” themselves from suffering of others.

Can you walk with another in their suffering without blaming, shaming or condemning?

Aug. 22 The Pain of Separation from God

Lesson Scripture: Job 30:16-23

Background Scripture: Job 30:1-31; Psalm 44:5-26

Key Verse: Job 30:16, “And now my soul is poured out within me; days of affliction have taken hold of me.”

It's gotten real for Job! A crisis of the soul

dawns. He is in deep despair; he now blames all his suffering on God, and so he experiences the intense pain of feeling separated from God. Job is broken; and he is broken down—in body and soul, and it is God who has brought him down: “God has loosed my bowstring (30:11) ... He has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes. I cry to you and you do not answer me” (30:19-20).

This is the depth of sorrow and suffering: when relationship with God is broken.

Job's present plight brings to focus a subject that is often shunned, ignored or avoided by Christians—especially those in ministry: What happens when a person experiences a crisis of faith? Some describe a crisis of faith as loss or serious questioning of belief in God, or long-held traditions and doctrines.

It's an uncomfortable conversation at best, and often there is no safe space to explore deep and thoughtful questions, doubts or new and challenging insights and understandings.

The Book of Job, like no other biblical text, raises the question of human suffering and divine justice (“why bad things happen to good people”), and that of theodicy.

Daniel L. Migliore in “Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology,” described it as “the attempt to defend or justify the goodness, providential care, and wisdom of God in the face of horrendous evil in the world, and particularly the suffering of the innocent. Often stated in this form: If God is both perfectly good and all-powerful, why does evil exist?”

Yet Job persists in his lament, laying out the case for his innocence, goodness and unmerited suffering. He confronts, accuses and expresses his anger at God.

Through his words and lamentations, he pursued encounter with God, and thus he stayed in relationship with God.

Aug. 29 Return and Restoration

Lesson Scripture: Job 40:1-5; 41:1-10; 42:1-6

Background Scripture: Job 40:1-42:6; Psalm 13:1-6

Key Verse: Job 42:3, “You said, ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I

did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”

In this passage, Job quotes the Lord's words (38:2) in his surrender to God's power. He owns that he misspoke and misunderstood God's purpose and acts. (Actually, Job never learns of God's acceptance of ha'satan's challenge.) With this confession, Job closes the circle of humility-lament-defiance-humility.

Job's relationship with God is restored.

“The patient Job of the prologue is a model for sufferers. There is, however, another facet of Job,” Clines said. He continues, “But Job does not remain in that attitude of acceptance. Once we move to his poetic speeches, from Chapter 3 onward, we encounter a mind in turmoil, a sense of bitterness and anger, of isolation from God and even persecution by God. Job makes no attempt to suppress his hostility toward God for what has happened to him.”

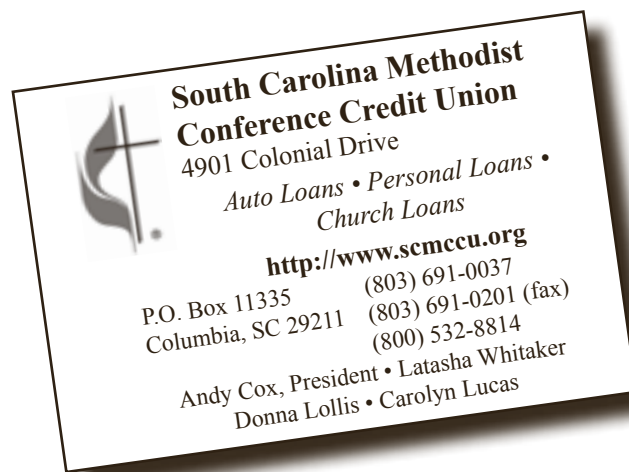
Clines then sums it up: “What makes the protesting Job a model for other sufferers is that he directs himself constantly toward God, whom he regards as the one who is responsible, both immediately and ultimately, for his suffering. It is only because Job insists on response from God that God enters into dialogue with Job. Even though Job's intellectual questions about the justice of his suffering are never adequately answered, he himself in the end is satisfied, as a sufferer, by his encounter with God.

“Viewed as an answer to the problem of suffering, then, the argument of the Book of Job is: By all means let Job the patient be your model so long as that is possible for you; but when equanimity fails, let the grief and anger of Job the impatient direct itself and yourself toward God, for only in encounter with him will the tension of suffering be resolved.”

Is God “big enough” to handle our anger and recriminations?

McFadden, MDiv., MSW, LISW-AP, is a retired elder in the South Carolina Conference United Methodist Church. She is blissfully retired and living in gratitude. She continues serving God's people as a volunteer guardian ad litem. She especially enjoys spending time in her “sanctuary,” outside in the natural world. She is learning to enjoy and take life as it is, and she is free.

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HOLLER: Governor lifts up Holler's 'enormous difference'

From Page 1

Gov. Henry McMaster was on hand to present the Order of the Palmetto to Holler in recognition of his dedicated service to children and the community.

McMaster, who has known Holler for many years as a fraternity brother, said Holler "always stood out and had a big heart" even before he went into the ministry. But between his many years in pastoral ministry, plus the last 15 as a fierce and passionate advocate for children and families through Epworth, Holler has earned his spot among those who make South Carolina—and the world—a better place.

"He's made an enormous difference," McMaster said just before he presented the award to Holler.

The Order of the Palmetto is presented in recognition of a lifetime of extraordinary achievement, service and contributions on a national or statewide scale.

The award was one of a number of ways Epworth honored Holler as they gathered on the lawn at their Trenholm Road campus for a fitting sendoff.

The Rev. Tim Rogers, superintendent of the Marion District of The United Methodist



Photo by Jessica Brodie

"He's made an enormous difference," Gov. McMaster (right) said as he presented the award to Holler (left).

Church, was on hand to bring greetings and warm wishes on behalf of Bishop L. Jonathan Holston and the rest of the Bishop's Cabinet and the annual conference as a whole.

Howard Duvall, of the Columbia City Council, presented Holler with a plaque on behalf of the mayor and stated that June 24, 2021 was officially "John Holler Day."

The Rev. Smoke Kanipe spoke on behalf of the Epworth board, praising Holler's heart for children and announcing their way to

honor him: the creation of the John E. Holler Jr. Endowment Fund to bear Holler's name in perpetuity. As of that day, the fund had already grown to \$28,125 and was continuing to grow—and it was just getting started.

The Rev. Ken Nelson, an Epworth alumnus, brought a word of appreciation about the significant gifts Holler brought not only to the children's home but to the world in the name of Jesus. He shared how Holler took an already thriving ministry and grew it into an even stronger organization, leading Epworth into a bold new future.

Nelson shared a story of how he was sitting with a friend roasting hotdogs and marshmallows around a campfire, and the friend stood to tend the fire. Tending the fire, Nelson said, was an important role, and no small task.

"It takes wisdom to know how many logs to add or take away," Nelson said.

Turning to Holler, Nelson added, "John, you are one who knows how to tend to the fire. ... You not only set Epworth on solid ground, but you made sure its flame was as powerful as it could be."

Holler thanked the crowd for what he called an "amazing afternoon."

He noted that his purpose had always

been to make life better for "folks who started out life with not the best of breaks."

Seeing how generational cycles have broken, and watching children grow up to make profound contributions to society, has been a true blessing, Holler said.

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart for this day," Holler said.

He noted he is excited to pass the leadership baton to Beth Williams, his successor, who he said has the passion, brains and work ethic needed to carry on the important work of Epworth.

Williams helped unveil a portrait of Holler, which was commissioned and will hang at Epworth in honor of Holler's service.

Established in 1895 by what is today the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, Epworth Children's Home was originally named Epworth Orphanage. For more than 120 years, Epworth Children's Home has grown and adapted to the individual needs of children by providing quality care grounded in faith and responsibility. Epworth serves an average of 258 individuals every day, and the number grows each month. Children placed with Epworth foster parents represented the largest growth area this past year.

Basic and renewal training for Early Response Team members set for Aug. 14 in Summerville

Anyone interested in being trained as an Early Response Team member to help with disaster response has an opportunity this month.

On Saturday, Aug. 14, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., an ERT Basic/Renewal Class will be held at Bethany United Methodist Church, located at 118 West 3rd Street South in Summerville.

Fees are \$40 per person, which includes a manual, shirt, cap and badge. There is a \$20 fee

for renewals, which will run from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

To register for either class, go to <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration>. Everyone also needs to do a background check (free) through United Methodist Committee on Relief at <https://app.verifiedvolunteers.com/en/Candidates/Account/Register>. If asked for a code, put in 9x2r4eh.

CREDIT UNION: 'Where've you been, on vacation?' members joke

From Page 1

also serving part-time as acting president of the credit union.

"It feels great," Cox said on his return to the credit union.

Cox started at the credit union just after his son was born. Now, 23 years later, he said he's equal parts delighted and surprised at how much things have changed while still staying foundationally the same.

"It's kind of interesting—in some ways things really haven't



Cox

changed that much," Cox said. "Some things have, but it's interesting to step back in after all that time, and the technology has changed, some products and services have changed, but it's still fulfilling that same role of serving the needs of its members."

He said it's been funny to interact with some of the longtime members of the credit union, who pop in on business, see him, and joke, "Where've you been, on vacation?"

"That's a really good feeling," Cox said.

Credit union Board Chair Jim Bradley said he and the oth-

ers on the board are "really excited" about having Cox back, calling him a "perfect fit" for what they need right now.

"It was like an answer to a prayer," Bradley said. "We're delighted to have Andy back on."

The credit union offers savings; certificate products; car, personal and church loans; and other services to its members across South Carolina. Under Wilson's leadership, the credit union's membership expanded from pastors and conference-affiliated employees to anyone who is a member of any United Methodist church in South Carolina.

To learn more about the credit union, visit <https://www.scmccu.org>.

SALK REBOOT: Partnering with scout troops, youth directors

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phenomenal opportunity Salkehatchie brings to help churches understand the importance of the United Methodist connection.

Volunteers, many of whom are teenagers, are

encouraged to head outside their communities to experience firsthand what it's like to help others in need.

"Jesus gives us the opportunity to reboot," Nelson Smith said, and Salkehatchie does, too, bringing hope to people and an opportu-

nity to touch somebody's life.

In an effort to reach more people about Salkehatchie this year, leaders have launched a presence on social media, with an Instagram (@salkehatchieumcsc), Facebook (@salkehatchieumcsc) and Twitter (@salke-

hatchie1) presence. They will share photos, information, announcements, deadlines and more.

With help from Rolland Fitch, the conference scouting ministries coordinator, they are engaging with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to help every unit know about Salkehatchie and its service opportunities.

Hart said they are also working hard to educate youth directors and pastors about Salkehatchie so they can let youth groups and other church members know about the ministry.

The Rev. John Culp, Salkehatchie founder, closed out the meeting with prayer, remembering those volunteers who died recently. "Life is fragile," Culp reminded all. "Life is precious."

Salkehatchie Summer Service started in 1978 and is a servant ministry throughout South Carolina where youth and adults come together to serve the community. It has grown to more than 40 service camps and more than 2,000 volunteers. Roughly 200 homes are helped each summer, and 6,000 families have received assistance since Salkehatchie began. Volunteers must be 14 years of age or older, complete a background check and pay a registration fee.

Summer 2022 camps, fees and other information is expected to be released early this fall.

Learn more at [Salkehatchie.org](https://www.salkehatchie.org).



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Celebrating 125 Years

Celebrate with us by participating in the virtual birthday party with your church! The birthday party and details can be found on our website.



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