

South Carolina United Methodist Advocate

CONNECTING METHODISTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA SINCE 1837



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Conference leaders adopt process enabling churches to discern path

To ensure congregations are equipped to make decisions that enable them to best live into their disciple-making mission, South Carolina Conference leaders have adopted a process through which a local church can discern whether it will continue in ministry within The United Methodist Church or separate from the denomination.

The process, called the Local Church Discernment Pro-

cess, was released Dec. 19 just as the *Advocate* went to press.

The Local Church Discernment Process is designed to help local churches determine whether they can function as a United Methodist church if they firmly believe the denomination has not consistently upheld its stated doctrine on issues of human sexuality. It will provide an opportunity for church members to engage in dialogue, to allow every

voice in the congregation an opportunity to be heard and to discern the congregation's sentiment regarding separation.

The new process is distinct from the disaffiliation pathway created when the 2019 General Conference added Paragraph 2553 to the UMC *Book of Discipline*.

See "Discernment Process," Page 24



Photo courtesy of Dr. Luke Rhyee

Healing Guatemala is hoping to raise \$100,000 this month to save Dulce's life with a bone marrow transplant.

Healing Guatemala hopes to bring 'A New Life for Dulce'

By Jessica Brodie

Healing Guatemala—a United Methodist medical mission in Guatemala that is connected with the South Carolina Conference—is taking a huge leap of faith this winter in the hopes of saving a young girl's life.

Dulce, age 10, is living with a grave disease called fanconi anemia, a rare genetic bone marrow disorder that is a form of aplastic anemia and carries a grim prognosis.

Dr. Luke Rhyee, the South Carolina United Methodist pastor who leads Healing Guatemala, got to know Dulce and her family through Healing Guatemala. The organization is a medical mission and clinic that offers ophthalmology, dental care and basic medical needs, both at the clinic and in rural communities in the Chuisajcaba, Guatemala, region.

Rhyee said someone with fanconi anemia typically dies at an

See "Life for Dulce," Page 12

Hopewell's 'Macaroni Mayhem' gets casseroles to hungry people

By Jessica Brodie

SIMPSONVILLE—How does comfort food help say "Jesus loves you"? Just ask Hopewell United Methodist Church.

Hopewell members gathered, assembled, cooked and donated 160 casseroles of homemade macaroni and cheese all to share the love of Jesus Christ with people in their community at Thanksgiving.

Dubbed "Macaroni Mayhem," the project started last year on a significantly smaller scale. Hopewell UMC often supports the James Monroe Mission House, a ministry of nearby Trinity UMC, Fountain Inn, which feeds and clothes thousands in the Upstate of South Carolina. Hopewell member Steve Jackson heard the nonprofit was giving away turkeys to families in need last Thanksgiving and asked whether they'd like some mac and cheese, too. James Monroe organizers said yes, so Hopewell gathered items and then assembled about 30 casseroles for them.

But when Jackson found out a lot more than 30 families came for help, he decided Hopewell could do better. He challenged his church this Thanksgiving to donate 160 casseroles—and they said yes.

See "Macaroni Mayhem," Page 12

A mission of faith S.C. missionary Althea Belton helps Gulfside Assembly

By Jessica Brodie

One South Carolinian is using her gifts to help a century-old United Methodist retreat in Waveland, Mississippi, survive, thrive and continue to meet the ever-shifting needs of the low-income community around it.

Althea Belton, whose home church is Mount Zion United Methodist Church, Bishopville, is

appointed to Gulfside Assembly as a commissioned missionary of the UMC's General Board of Global Ministries.

A year ago, in January 2022, Belton began work at Gulfside as one of two staffers there, serving as coordinator of local missional engagement. In this role, she focuses on educating and engaging people and communities to help the

underserved, low-income areas of Waveland.

It's not too different in the grand scheme from the work she used to do for the South Carolina Conference of the UMC, serving as a disaster recovery case manager, even though when she first heard about the GBGM missionary oppor-

See "Helping Gulfside," Page 13

Mount Carmel 'Senior Prom' raises \$19K for apportionments

By Lillian D. Williams

CHARLESTON—A simple idea to raise needed funds to pay church apportionments turned into a grand success and a chance for some fun.

Mount Carmel United Methodist Church had been struggling to pay its apportionments, which fund needed programs, salaries and other mission efforts in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

By June, their pastor said, they had not been able to pay anything, and the Rev. Nathan Smalls said he was beginning to get very worried.

That's when one of Mount Carmel's lay servants, Martha Sass, got creative. She gathered a weekly committee to plan a "Senior Prom"—that is, a

See "Senior Prom," Page 24

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Back Issues

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UMCSC delegation chair issues statement after delegation service extended to 2024

The denomination's top court has ruled that new delegate elections are not needed for General Conference 2024 and that delegates will remain the same as those elected to the 2020 General Conference.

The 2020 conference, which had been slated for May 5-15, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was delayed multiple times because of the COVID-19 pandemic and ultimately postponed to April 23 to May 3, 2024, at the Charlotte Convention Center in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In Decision 1451 by The United Methodist Church's Judicial Council, released Dec. 12, the court ruled, "The delegates duly elected to the 2020 General Conference for the 2020-2024 Quadrennium stand as submitted and certified by the annual conference secretaries."

The church court also said these delegates can vote at the jurisdictional and central conferences that follow the next General Conference. Jurisdictional conferences in the U.S. and central conferences in Africa, Europe and the Philippines elect the denomination's bishops.

A full story on this, "Church Court: No New Elections Needed for GC2024," by Heather Hahn, can be found at <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/church-court-no-new-elections-needed-for-gc2024>.

Jackie Jenkins, South Carolina's delegation chair, responded to the news, noting that this delegation's work will continue after a time of

prayer and preparation.

"We serve a God of second chances," Jenkins said. "When I read the ruling from the Judicial Council, the Holy Spirit reminded me that our work is not yet finished."

Jenkins added that the delegation will first "focus our time on prayer and preparation for the work God has for us. We will refresh our knowledge of pending legislation and be confident through the Holy Spirit in discerning God's direction and purpose in all we do. We are guided by God's grace, directed to love one another and live in our beloved community."

Jenkins noted there is much to look forward to this coming year, including much reconnection.

"Our working calendar will be developed and shared as soon as possible. Let us be anchored by Scripture in Hebrews 12:1-2: 'Therefore, since so great a cloud of witnesses surrounds us, let us also lay aside every weight, and the sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.'"

Surrett receives the Silver Antelope Award

The Rev. David C. Surrett is a life-long scouting ambassador and a champion for youth development. Surrett has served for 39 years in the ministry across the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, having served 14 churches across the state. During this time, he remained a faithful servant in scouting and organized and supported scouting units in every church he's served, from 100 to 2,000 members over four decades.

For these and his other many talents, Surrett was awarded the Silver Antelope Award Nov. 12.

Surrett was a registered volunteer in every council across South Carolina throughout his ministry service. An Eagle Scout and an active



Surrett

youth leader, he served as an Order of the Arrow Lodge Chief and as Section Chief. He is active in many levels throughout his council and districts, having served on the council executive board and as a council vice president. Active in the Order of the Arrow, Surrett has served as a lodge advisor, on the Southeast Region OA Committee as chaplain, on the staff for the National Leadership Seminar and the National Lodge Adviser Training Seminar. He also served more than 10 times on staff for the National Order of the Arrow Conference and on the National OA Subcommittee for Recognition, Awards, History and Preservation.

His service has extended to multiple National Scout Jamborees, on the Area 15 NACP

Assessment Team, on the staff for the Area Commissioners College and most recently as the NST 15 Lead for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

For distinguished service across scouting, Surrett received the District Award of Merit, Vigil Honor Member, Centurion Award, OA Distinguished Service Award, God & Service Award, The Silver Beaver Award and the NESA Outstanding Eagle Scout Award.

Surrett said he is most proud of having watched his sons succeed in scouting. Both earned their Eagle Scout rank and received the Vigil Honor in the Order of the Arrow.

The Silver Antelope award is a regional award presented by the Regional Executive Committee for outstanding and distinguished service to youth within one of the service territories.



Seated are Orangeburg County Council Members (from left) Joseph Garvin, Janie Cooper-Smith, Kenneth McCaster and Deloris Frazier. Standing are the Rev. Marie Ray, the Rev. Anthony Day, the Rev. Jimmy Washington, the Rev. Leonard Huggins and Annie Washington.



Canaan trustees gather for a smile: Johnny Thomas, Larry Salley, Virginia Sharperson and Sammie Sprinkle, as well as the Rev. Jimmie Washington, pastor. (Absent: Walter Gidron, Ronald Huggins and Marlon Thomas.)

'Flowing Water' banquet held during Canaan's Homecoming weekend

COPE—Canaan United Methodist Church held an in-person Homecoming weekend celebration Nov. 18-20—its first since the pandemic.

The weekend began with a one-night revival on Friday night. The speaker was Dr. Ephraim Stephens, pastor of Bull Swamp Baptist Church, Orangeburg. He delivered an inspiring message, "God Is." The Bull Swamp Baptist Church Choir provided the music for the evening.

The pastor of Canaan, the Rev. Jimmy Washington, preached a dynamic message for the worship service on Sunday morning followed by a fellowship meal with members, family and friends.

A major highlight for the weekend was the "Flowing Water" Banquet held Saturday afternoon. The theme of the banquet was "Saving Souls Through Living Water."

The purpose was to celebrate the church getting city water and to recognize those

community members and officials instrumental in helping the church with this endeavor.

During the banquet, elected officials, ministers and special guests were recognized and received a special gift tray from the church. The steering committee members for the homecoming festivities were Kayrine Hampton, Beverly Haynes, Linda Huggins and Sandra Sprinkle.



Hampton

The church has been located at the current site for 42 years and has used pump water during this time. Throughout the years, the church has had problems with the pump system. Several people have looked into getting city water at the church over the years. However, this two-year process began after a church member saw an article in the local paper, *The Times & Democrat*, stating that the County of Orangeburg had received a sum of grant money, but they had not yet designated how it would be used.

The member mentioned it to one of Canaan's trustees, Hampton, who took the lead from there by getting a petition signed and sending a letter along with the petition to the Orangeburg County Administrator. In addition, meetings were held with the county administrator, county council, department of public utilities and others.

Canaan was originally approved for a grant for \$89,000. However, the final amount for the water line to be extended from the Town of Cope to Canaan UMC was \$161,565. The county council agreed to cover the total amount.

The church then only needed to pay for the tie-in from the church to the road.

Canaan trustees decided to start a "Water Rally" to help with the expenses for the part the church would need to pay. This was very successful, and the water project was completed with no debt.

On Monday, Sept. 19, Canaan was finally connected to city water. As the church said, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

'Every choice has a consequence'

Gallagher keynotes Alston Wilkes Society's 60th anniversary luncheon

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—Alston Wilkes Society celebrated its diamond anniversary Nov. 17, marking 60 years of rebuilding lives for safer communities in the name of Jesus.

For 60 years, the Alston Wilkes Society—started by the late Methodist minister the Rev. Eli Alston Wilkes—has worked to help provide those most at risk, particularly those recently released from prison, with hope for a brighter future. Today they also provide supportive services to veterans and their families, people with justice system involvement and at-risk youth and adults.

AWS held their anniversary luncheon Nov. 17 at Seawell's Restaurant, recognizing outgoing board chair the Rev. Stephen Taylor and other outgoing board members, as well as honoring a slate of award recipients for service. The new AWS chair is Dr. Jay Dowd.

Among the highlights of the anniversary luncheon was a message from speaker, author and consultant Chuck Gallagher.

Dressed in an orange prison jumpsuit and handcuffs to remind all of his past, Gallagher shared testimony about his own conviction in 1995, when he did time in federal prison for embezzlement.

"Every choice has a consequence," Gallagher shared, describing the day he took 23 steps and entered a new life—behind bars. That day, he said, "I became Prisoner 11642058. I became a nobody."



Photo by Jessica Brodie

"Your history does not create your destiny," Gallagher said.

Gallagher had a wife, two children, service as a music minister in his church and a successful career as a tax partner in an accounting firm when he started to get behind on his bills and stole money from a client's trust. After he was discovered, he lost his license, was convicted and spent time in prison for his crimes. Today he is a convicted felon who

boldly and publicly shares his message about bad choices in the hopes he can inspire people to hold firm to ethics, avoid the slippery slope from unethical to illegal and realize the importance of wise choices.

"Prison sucks," he said. "But it was also the most profound experience of my life."

His experience taught him the truth will always come out, and despite feeling like a horrible human being with no possibility for redemption, he's gone on to own his past and use it for a positive benefit.

Before his prison sentence began, he contemplated ending his life. He was in a hotel room, guilt-ridden over all he'd done.

"I'd failed as a husband, a partner, a daddy," he said.

He started calling psychologists, hoping to find someone to help him, only to get a series of answering machines. Then he dialed one office and got a live person on the phone who'd accidentally picked up the line.

"Son, you've made a terrible mistake, but you are not a mistake. You are not a mistake," the man told Gallagher.

That man, Gallagher says, was an angel who changed his life.

"Your history does not create your destiny," Gallagher told the audience to a standing ovation.

Many honorees

Also a key part of the luncheon was recognition of people whose above-and-beyond service earned them awards.

Honored were Crystal D. Boyd as the William C. Nau Federal Probation Officer of the Year; Rodney Keziah as the Mark Hart Probation and Parole Agent of the Year; Roderick Pam as the James W. Sparks Youth Worker of the Year; Kathy Ellis as the Case Management Professional of the Year; Master Trooper David G. Jones as the South Carolina Law Enforcement Trooper of the Year; and Officer Luke Boling as the South Carolina Law Enforcement Officers' Association Distinguished Officer of the Year.

AWS awards presented by S. Anne Walker, AWS president and CEO, were Tracey Lawson as the Linda J. Allen AWS Employee of the Year; Valerie Moon-Wiser as the Barbara L. Rippey AW Part-Time Employee of the Year; the Lib Gossett Prayer Group of Cedar Shoals Baptist Church as the AWS Parker Evatt Veterans Home Volunteer of the Year; Julian Morris as the 2022 AWS Educational Scholarship Recipient; and Timothy D. Roberts as the Parker Evatt Alston Wilkes Society Volunteer of the Year.

In addition to outgoing chair Taylor, other AWS trustees, past presidents and outgoing board members recognized were Faith Line, Will Batson, Scott Smoak, Ken Makins, Robin Dease and Steven MacDougall.

For more on the Alston Wilkes Society, visit <https://www.alstonwilkessociety.org>.

Registration continues for Men n Ministry spiritual retreat

Men's ministry leaders continue preparations for February's annual spiritual retreat, slated for Saturday, Feb. 25, at Mount Horeb United Methodist Church, Lexington.

With the theme "Full-Filled," the in-person event will feature keynote speaker Dr. Derwin L. Gray. Gray is the co-founder and pastor of Transformation Church, a multiethnic, multigenerational, mission-shaped community church in Indian Land. An author of several books, he is also a former NFL football player with a Master of Divinity degree from Southern Evangelical Seminary.

Registration is going on now for the event, which also features two fellowship opportunities for men: a golf tournament on Friday, Feb. 24, at The Spur at Northwoods, Columbia, and an oyster roast at Mount Horeb at 6 p.m.



The oyster roast is \$10 but free for those attending the golf tournament. The golf tournament is \$80/person. Saturday's retreat starts with check-in at 8 a.m., then

worship at 9 a.m. Breakout teaching sessions, a boxed lunch and afternoon session with communion will round out the day, with the event ending by 3 p.m.

Organizers are also seeking sponsors for the event, and every sponsor church receives a number of tickets for their men to attend the retreat. Major Sponsors are \$600 (new sponsors get 12 registrations; past sponsors get 14 registrations). Local Sponsors are \$300 (five registrations included).

"The support of our sponsor churches and corporate sponsors have help fund Men n Ministry S.C. in critical ways, providing funds so we can offer a high-quality event each year," said Marvin Horton, Men n Ministry president.

To learn more about the retreat or to register or become a sponsor, visit <https://mennministrysc.org>.

Men n Ministry golf tourney set for Feb. 24

COLUMBIA—Love golf and men's ministry? Combine the two at the South Carolina Men n Ministry Golf Tournament Feb. 24 at The Spur at Northwoods Golf Course.

The Spur is located at 201 Powell Road.

The tournament begins with a shotgun start at 10 a.m. Practice balls will be provided before the tournament, as well as a meal. Also included is the Oyster Roast at Mount Horeb United Methodist Church, Lexington, Friday evening.

The cost is \$80 per player, and mulligans are \$5 each with a two-per-player limit.

"This is a very good way for us to sup-

port our Men n Ministry team with all proceeds going to the Men n Ministry budget," said Kenny Bingham, tournament chairman. "The more we have is the more we can do to make our South Carolina men better fathers, brothers, husbands and, most important of all, better Christians. After all, that is the goal of the S.C. Men n Ministry team."

To register for the tournament, email or call Bingham with team member names and pay in-person on tournament day. Call 843-246-8398 or email kbingham42@yahoo.com

"We need names early to get them on

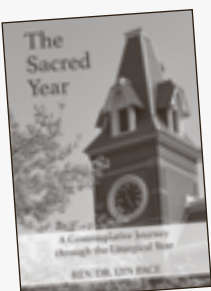
golf carts," Bingham said.

They are hoping for at least 18 teams

from around South Carolina and hopefully many from around the Columbia area.

Two new books from the Advocate Press

The Sacred Year: A Contemplative Journey through the Liturgical Year
By Dr. Lyn Pace, college chaplain at Oxford College of Emory University



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Viewpoints



Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

Be the church—stop fighting about it

As I write this month's editorial, we're a week away from Christmas, and my mind is swirling with stories of "my people"—the people called United Methodists here in South Carolina. From the mac and cheese served up by Hopewell United Methodist, to sweet Dulce in Guatemala needing a bone marrow transplant, to the new exit path established by the conference's Board of Trustees, sometimes it feels like we're all being pulled in a million different directions. We want to do, serve, feed, help, go ... and yet we're also squabbling about theological differences over what Jesus would or wouldn't say or do about gay marriage, gay clergy or gay people.

At Alston Wilkes Society's 60th anniversary luncheon, their keynote speaker was a man who'd learned a ton of life lessons after being convicted of embezzlement and spending time in federal prison for his crimes.

"Every choice has a consequence," Chuck Gallagher shared, describing the day he took 23 steps and entered his new life behind bars.

Whether it's a good choice or a bad choice, or a choice not to do anything at all, none of us gets a free pass to stumble along in life. We choose whether to get out of bed and eat, whether to go to work, whether to go to church and where, and whether to spread the good news about Jesus.

We also have a choice about whether we wish to stay in this denomination or leave.

Personally, I'm tired of it all. I'm tired of fighting about the church, tired of deciding who's right or wrong, tired of letting petty human constraints and arguments get in the way of what's really important to me: being the church.

In the Page 1 article, "Hopewell's 'Macaroni Mayhem' Delivers," the Rev. Don Brown talks about how his congregation tries hard not to focus inward but rather to turn their eyes on helping the community in the name of Christ.

No matter what we choose, what church denomination we worship in, whether we call ourselves "United Methodist" or "Global Methodist" or "Baptist" or "Presbyterian," at the end of the day, we have a far more important title: Child of God. And we have a far bigger responsibility that needs to be claiming our attention: going beyond ourselves to either tell people about Jesus or do good things in Jesus's name.

I choose Christ.

Now, let's be the church and stop fighting about it.

Letters Policy

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Bishop's Corner

by Bishop L. Jonathan Holston

What's love got to do with it?

"So, love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle. Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master; cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality. Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody. Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you; get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. I'll do the judging,' says God. I'll take care of it.' Our scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good" (Romans 12:9-21, The Message).

The beginning of a new year brings about a spirit of ambition in each of us. We are filled with ideas of goals to achieve, and perhaps, after a season of Advent reflection, we may even be more in tune with God's call for our lives.

With eager anticipation, we set out to follow that call, taking the steps to bring the dream God has given us to reality. And yet, something we very quickly realize is this—following God's call is not always easy.

When the path becomes steep, we wonder why God chooses us. We question ourselves exactly as Moses did, asking God, "Who am I that I should go?" We question if we have the stamina. We worry if we have the perseverance. We doubt if we have the gifts or the heart for the work God calls us to do.

Romans 12:9-21 reminds us that on this faith journey there will be challenges along the way.

As Paul writes this letter, he is becoming the best known of the Apostles. Some believed Paul was up to some trick; others feared he would make the new faith about him alone.

Many of us have faced this dilemma. When we undertake a needed change in our lives, from extending the "olive branch" of peace to a former adversary to losing weight or kicking some habit, some friends cheer us on. But there are those who distrust our motives. They exclaim that they liked us better when we were overweight or accuse us of being self-righteous.

Instead of fighting against this sentiment with harsh words, Paul offers a message of humility, patience and love. We are

reminded of what really matters—that love really matters! It is what calls us to a higher level of life. It is genuine, devoted and joyful. Love leads us toward authentic spiritual worship.

What I have discovered is that when I focus on the stuff that really matters, my spiritual journey is easier. When I focus more on doing God's will and less on worrying about what others think they know about me, I learn to live faithfully.

That is the task. What matters most is to live as faithfully as we can.

Mother Teresa said it this way: "Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's Kingdom; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile."

Paul helps us to understand that we should demonstrate that love is more powerful than hate. Love is the more excellent way! To live a transformed life is to have a transformed mind. What matters most is that we truly love; that we become the hope, change and love we seek for the world.

There are some things that scare me, like heights over 10 feet (I'm not your roofer!) or the yellow "gas" icon in my dashboard that flashes only when I'm stuck in traffic.

Yet if we are willing to listen to a gospel message that scares us with its willingness to love, even in the face of adversity, we witness to the scary fact that God did not come in Jesus to make things just a little better or a little more bearable. Listen, God came to do the extraordinary! To turn over the tables; to create a whole new system; to redeem us rather than simply rehabilitate us.

God came to turn us right-side up! To make the crooked places of our lives better. To do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

So the question resounds, "What's love got to do with it?" Everything!

The promise of God speaks to a place deep down inside of us. We desire to believe that there is more to life than meets the eye. We hold on to the hope that despite all appearances, we are worthy of love. Not just any kind of love, but God's agape love. God's unconditional, with no strings attached, kind of love.

God is joined to our ups and downs; hopes and fears—that's love!

God is committed to not giving us more of the same but something more—that's love!

Christ came not to give us more of the life we know, but Christ comes to give us an abundant life. Christ will not stop until we have all been caught-up in God's tremendous love.

What's love got to do with it? Everything, my friends, everything!

Appointment Changes

Bishop Jonathan Holston has announced the following changes of appointment:

Effective Oct. 17, 2022—Greenville District, Slater: Martha Johnson (LP) (1/4)

Effective Nov. 1, 2022—Walterboro District, St. George Parish: Jerry Harrison (RE) (1/2)

Effective Nov. 13, 2022—Orangeburg District, Livingston-Pine Hill: SY (Jim Smyrl)

Effective Dec. 1, 2022—Greenwood District, Zoar: SY (James Evans) (1/4) and Greenwood District, Bethany: SY (Mark English) (1/2)



Guest Commentary

by Glenn Williams

My miracle

I built a house almost single-handedly—a purple house on the corner of Reynolds and Grace. People seemed to be amazed that I painted the house purple! I explained that the reason was “biblical.” I had purchased the lot from Mrs. Lydia Wofford.

I happened to be studying the following passage in the Bible on the morning of the color decision: “A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one who worshiped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened to listen to the things which were spoken by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and stay.’ So she persuaded us” (Acts 16:14-15 WEB).

The house was “precious,” as my wonderful neighbor, Robert, stated. A lady yelled out her car window one morning, “That is the prettiest house I have ever seen! My children love it!” I loved my purple house.

That brings me to the purpose of this story. I experienced the strangest event that has ever happened in my life while working one winter afternoon at the purple house. Before I explain, I must preface this story with the following: I am a Christian, and since my 27th year, I have been a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. God has guided me at my daily request and protected me in some miraculous ways that hindsight now reveals. My wife, Allie, and I prayed the very first day we began laying out the foundation for protection and guidance in building the purple house. God made that house the most comfortable, most fun and most maintenance-free house we have ever lived in.

I love to build. I don’t hunt, fish, play golf, drink or travel much. Building is my hobby. Since my dad hired me one summer when I was 13, to help carpenter Oscar Vines build a storage building behind our house, I have loved the art of building. I was amazed at how I could nail wood together in such a way as to create a structure that would stand a long time. I was hooked.

So I began building this purple house in August. Working alone through the wettest winter on record, I finally dried in around February. It was such a relief, and to celebrate one Saturday afternoon, I decided to clean up the site. I was tired and very careless, and while picking up scrap wood I stepped on a two-inch nail sticking through 5/8 plywood penetrating the sole of my Hoka sneaker. Ouch!

Oh, well ... I had done this before many years ago and was familiar with the feeling of a nail penetrating the ball of my foot. I hollered, but I didn’t panic. After all, I still had tools to put up before I could leave the site. My foot hurt, but I reasoned that it shouldn’t bleed too much before I could get home and let Allie “doctor” on me. I began to feel the squishy spot in my shoe but dared not take it off until I got home.

I finally finished securing and locking my tools and jumped into my truck heading home. I really shouldn’t do Allie this way, I thought as I drove. She’s usually the first responder to my boo-boos, and I have had a few. Thinking, “I can’t wait to get my foot cleaned up with a little Neosporin and a Band-Aid,” I broke the speed limit crossing town.

Knowing Allie was home, and I ran into the house and hollered for her to come fix my foot. I plopped down on the couch, threw my foot over the side, kicked my shoe off and waited for her expression of disgust at the bloody sight.

She came in the living room with that

“here we go again” look on her face, and reached to hold my foot.

“It’s awful, I know!” I said.

But her expression wasn’t her usual. It reminded me of a puppy quizzically turning his head side to side studying a strange bug.

“What am I supposed to see?” she asked.

“My foot! I just had a nail go way up into my foot!”

“I don’t see anything.”

Now, Pastor Phil had introduced me to healing prayer a few years ago. At a seminar in February, he asked for a volunteer to receive a prayer of healing. My hand flew up! Back then I had Achilles heel tendonitis and couldn’t run. Pastor Phil prayed for my heel, but I limped out of the seminar with no change.

But that same night, God woke me up and told me I would run a marathon in December. I felt such joy at that moment I wanted to wake Allie up and tell her, but I wisely decided to wait till morning. The healing came, and I trained and did, in fact, run a marathon that December. So I believe in miraculous healing.

But this? Was I crazy? Did I imagine stepping on a nail?

I discussed it with Allie, who is also my therapist, and we decided to claim a miracle. But I still had doubts, and didn’t sleep much that night replaying the incident over and over in my mind. I knew the feeling of a nail penetrating a good distance into my foot from years before, and the feeling is unforgettable. But where was the blood?

The hole was in my shoe. I found it, and it was the strangest thing—there was the tiniest red sparkling gem on my clean sock. It looked like a very tiny sparkling ruby.

I study the Bible every morning. For years I have made a habit of reading Scripture on my iPad before I do anything else. One morning the following week, I read the story of the raising of Lazarus. Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb. His sisters warned Jesus there would be an awful smell from the decaying body. Lazarus walked out of the tomb.

When Jesus told the people to remove the grave clothes and set him free, I am sure there were no smelly grave clothes. They were as clean as when they had first covered Lazarus.

I knew: Jesus would leave no blood in my sock!

Now, every morning before I begin to build, I raise my hands to the sky and tell God that I love him and praise him. I understand at that moment that God is good all the time. I feel like my soul will fly up to heaven if not weighed down by my earthly body. I tell Jesus I will help him build a house today. Hanging 24-foot-long 2x12 lumber 12 feet in the air is no problem for Jesus! He is very strong.

What to do with my miracle? God woke me up at 2:30 in the morning to write this story. It seems like a silly little miracle story when I am reminded of so much suffering in the world, and great big miracles are happening all the time. I know God is real and active in my life.

So I’ll claim my miracle and testify as to how amazing God is, and how I and Jesus (and Allie) built a purple house, and I will praise God. That’s what I am going to do with my miracle.

Williams is a lifelong member of Main Street United Methodist Church in Greenwood. A retired forestry consultant, he builds houses as a hobby. He is presently enrolled at Lander University as a second-degree student majoring in humanities with a minor in religion.

Letters to the Editor

Grief over Buncombe Street

I read the article about Buncombe Street congregation’s vote to withdraw from The United Methodist Church “when the time comes” with deep grief.

My parents, John and Louise Cooper, joined Buncombe Street under Bryce Herbert just after they married. I was baptized there. As a seminarian I served as minister to youth and students there under Robert DuBose, Harlan Wilson and Olene Civils. Bob DuBose and Robert Carl Griffith officiated at my wedding to Pamela Hughes, who became the mother of my two sons, at Buncombe Street. I remember the joy when Bob DuBose’s dream of a safe place for youth was realized while I was there. I left Buncombe Street only to become pastor of Mount View UMC. Buncombe Street became my “home” again when Trinity Church, where I grew up, became a branch of Buncombe Street a few years ago.

My life, first as a Methodist and then as a United Methodist, is deeply bound to and influenced by Buncombe Street. Now, contrary to her entire history of outreach and inclusion, her membership has voted to leave the UMC with the primary reason being the desire to exclude gay and lesbian Christians, transgendered Christians and those struggling with their sexual identity from full participation in the life of the church, including service as pastor. I’m very sad for Buncombe Street and for the South Carolina Conference.

I also thank God that there are other Greenville United Methodist congregations who recognize and celebrate God’s love for and acceptance of all of God’s children and stand with open arms to receive all followers of Jesus into fellowship.

*Rev. Wiley B. Cooper, retired elder
Asheville, North Carolina*

Big reductions

As a United Methodist minister for 50 years, I have appreciated the connectional United Methodist Church. We have had wonderful leadership on the Council of Ministries on the conference level. I have served under good district superintendents. The UMC structure is so important to the local church.

The hard reality is this will change because of financial resources. The Global Methodists will take churches and finances from the conference. There will be good people terminated. The number of districts will be reduced. The budget will suffer, and the outreach ministries will be no more. The Global Methodist Church will cause these drastic changes. God forgive us.

*Rev. John Culp, retired elder
West Columbia*

Leading with integrity?

The ill-considered “Leading with Integrity” resolution that passed on Nov. 3 by the delegates to the 2022 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference was one of the most divisive and callous decrees that the “progressive” movement in the UMC has ever produced.

The resolution “urges those who intend to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church to recuse themselves from leadership roles in the UMC in an effort to move forward in fairness and integrity.”

One can only imagine the uproar from the progressive crusade if, a few years ago, the “traditionalist” members of the UMC brought forth such a resolution that “urges those who intend to split apart The United Methodist Church to recuse themselves from leadership roles in the UMC in an effort to move forward in fairness and integrity.”

Isn’t it ironic that the progressive movement demands from all of us to be accepting of their view with open doors and open minds? Instead, this falsely labeled “Leading with Integrity” resolution is anything but accepting. It encourages closed doors and it advocates alignment only with those minds that agree with them.

A delegate, speaking for the progressive movement, had the audacity to say that the UMC can no longer “finance the attack on its own institutions from within. ... If you are leaving, God bless you, go with grace, but we will not let you burn the house down on the way out the door.”

Wow! Look at the arrogance that statement displays.

And again, one can hear the backlash if a traditionalist made the same such statement aimed at the progressive movement: “Stop the attack from within. If you are leaving, God bless you, go with grace, but we will not let you burn the house down on the way out the door.”

Sadly, that’s exactly what is happening now. Rather than recuse themselves, those members of the UMC need to let the SJC leadership know that the UMC has no tolerance for such a negative resolution. Every delegate that voted for this resolution and every UMC member that agrees with this resolution should be ashamed. Churches in our Southeastern Jurisdiction should be vocal about the viciousness and malice that this resolution brings to the table and demand that it be revoked.

I can only imagine what the reaction was in heaven to the news that this acrimonious resolution was passed by the SJC: Jesus wept.

*Randy E.Z. Langston, member
Faith UMC, Lexington*



Helping Killingsworth Home

The Rev. Angela Ford Nelson takes a spin on the “runway” at Journey UMC, Columbia, as one of the models in Killingsworth Home’s annual gala and fashion show. Held Dec. 10, the stay-at-home event raised nearly \$9,000 for the home. A United Methodist ministry, Killingsworth is a community residence for women who are emerging from crisis situations. Within the eight-bedroom home located on Pendleton Street in Columbia, women can find shelter and support. The program includes room, board, guidance and support for a nominal fee. For more, visit <https://www.killingsworth.org>.

A church on the move

St. John United Methodist dedicates new church gym

DARLINGTON—On Dec. 3, St. John United Methodist Church, a member of the Hartsville District Cooperative Parish, held a dedication service for their fully equipped gymnasium.

This non-regulation gym of the multipurpose facility at the church needed to become a place where members and the surrounding community could come to work their faith, work out and enjoy fellowship in an atmosphere of praise and devotion.

The vision of former pastor, the Rev. Zachary Dillard, the gym is a place of outreach for wellness in the community. Dillard knew it is imperative to take power as a faith organization to organize and support behavioral change necessary for the mind, spirit and body of God's people.

Dillard returned to his old church family for the dedication and to remind everyone that a healthy body promotes a healthy mind, as it reverberates through the love of God and Christ.

Dillard and a committee of dedicated members researched and wrote a grant that stated the rationale and purpose for a church site that would encompass and embrace the need for physical activity to improve not only body health, but also provide stimulation for much needed mental health awareness. Funded by the James L. Belin Trust of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, the door was opened by supportive grant partners who understood the connection and uplift that a fully equipped gym would provide. Their belief in the foundation that an equipped gym would



The Rev. Zachary Dillard speaks passionately about his vision.

afford gave the necessary motivation to continue with the dream.

Belin funds allowed St. John to create an environment to accommodate more sports activities. Treadmills, stationary bikes, free weights, jump ropes, volleyball, a walking space and basketball goals are some of the equipment and physical activities that the gym is proud to display and use.

The dedication paved the way for the community to be made aware of the facility, as well as celebrate the accomplishment of a vision and its completion.

Dr. Reginald Lee, St. John's current pastor, is a proud advocate for physical and mental health awareness. He sees this as the beginning for a progressive church that is on the move to meet the basics of a community at their point of need.

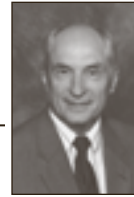
With technology and a fully loaded gym, their next step will be a vision for the congregation and community to have a space that is not only a temple for disciples of Christ, but a respite for those who want and need to feel the strength of God's love.



Committee Members Jeanette Lunn, Donnell Camp, Julius Wingate Jr., the Rev. Zachary Dillard, Larry Bess and Jerome Graham perform the ribbon cutting.



Dr. Reginald Lee, the Rev. Melissa Williams, the Rev. Lyndon Alexander II and the Rev. Zachary Dillard participated in the dedication.



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Steve Brown

A New Year like fresh cement

I stand and watch from behind the gate as the mason works his trowel in the moonlight. He is barely two feet in front of me, just beyond the fence. I strain to see far out into the night, knowing that the cement he works goes on for many, many miles. One can only see several yards ahead to what looks to be a path but the rest seems covered over by the shadows.

"Excuse me," I say, "is there another place for me to walk? I don't want to mess up your work."

"Ye won't be a-messin' anything up," he replies, not looking up, "this here path is for you."

"I see," I say (although I'm not sure I do), "but won't I leave footprints in the cement? And then you'll have to come back again to fix things, to smooth it all over."

"I won't be a-comin' back and I certainly won't be a-fixin' anything," he answers back as he looks up at me. Gesturing with the trowel he says, "Where ye walk, ye walk. What ye do, ye do. What ye say, ye say. And ye can't take anything back or smooth it away. It's as permanent as this cement. It be your life that ye be a-livin'."

I mull over the possibilities in my mind. "Uh, maybe it would be better if you made the path out of sand or something. I mean, I do tend to wander sometimes. You know, make wrong turns, do the wrong things. Cement is so, uh, permanent and all. But sand, well, it can get blown over. I mean, after a good rain or a hard wind, you couldn't even tell where all the mistakes were. It's covered up. Good idea, huh?"

He starts back working on the last piece before the gate, tilting his head to say, "Cement is what the path be made of precisely because it be permanent. Life is about change and choices but there be no undoin' anything or a-coverin' up what ye do or say. Ye can follow the path or ye can walk your own way and wander but there's no denyin' what ye've done and where ye've been. This is the

record. It's your life."

"I know, I know," I whisper under my breath as I nod my head to its truth.

He stops and smiles. "But that be the beauty of it. That's how God made it. Your life, every life, makes a difference and leaves an impression. Ye touch this earth and ye touch the lives of others as ye walk this earth. Your words, your actions, your deeds make a lastin' impression. The key is to follow God's path and walk his way."

"But . . . but . . . but what if I go the wrong way. I can get stuck in the cement and it sets and I can never change, never get back," I counter.

"O, Laddie," he chides, "ye be a-forgettin' about God's grace. No place ye step that binds ye there, the cement never hardens to make ye unmovable or unchangeable. It's God's grease, God's grace. Ye be always free to change direction, take a new step, to walk away and walk forward, to follow and be found. It's God's gift of the present, full of possibilities. Though the past be always fixed and set, it never binds ye back. Ye be always free to change and grow."

As the clock strikes midnight, he finishes. Bending over one last time he writes "2023" with his finger. He stands and puts his hands on his hips, admiring his handiwork. "There," he says looking over at me. "It's all ready for ye. Godspeed."

I swing open the gate, and hesitating, take my first step into the new year.

My prayer for us in this new year of 2023 is that we let the grace and love of God lead us along his way. There is nothing happening around us that can thwart God's grace at work within us. As we seek to walk with him and trust his ways, He will transform us and re-make us into the persons he wants us to be—and that we long to be. Then we will truly have a new year as we experience a renewed life. To God be the glory in 2023.

Brown is senior pastor of St. Mark UMC, Greenwood.

BSOM set for February in Myrtle Beach

Registration continues for the Bishop's School of Ministry, set for Feb. 7-9 at the Sheraton Myrtle Beach. Speakers are Dr. Kimberly Wagner, assistant professor of preaching; Dr. Sheila Elliott Hodge, pastor in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church; and Jason Moore of Midnight Oil Productions.

Cost is \$300 and does not include accommodations. The last day to register for rooms at group rate is Jan. 5 and for the event is Jan. 27.

For information: <https://www.umcsc.org/cs-bsm>.



A witness to hope

While Thanksgiving is not celebrated universally, the concepts of gratitude and thankfulness are shared by many cultures and faiths. The Methodist Student Network (Wesley Foundation) at the University of South Carolina and Carolina Interfaith A to Z held a Thanksgiving dinner shared by USC students from many cultures and religions. The food met halal and kosher standards. Many of the participants shared Scripture or stories around the theme of gratitude, and some offered other sacred writings that inspire them. Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and more joined together. One Muslim student shared that one of her favorite sacred writings is Psalm 23 from the Hebrew scriptures. It brings her great peace. A Buddhist meal time prayer says: "This food is the gift of the whole universe, each morsel is a sacrifice of life. May I be worthy to receive it. May the energy of this food give me the strength to transform my unwholesome qualities into wholesome ones. I am grateful for this food. May I realize the path of awakening for the sake of all beings." In a world so often spitefully and hatefully divided by nationality and religion, attendees said the meal time was a wonderful witness to hope.



Blessing Bags are filled with items like food, bottled water, socks, a small first-aid kit, a toothbrush, toothpaste and ponchos.



Loving our neighbors

Socastee UMC, Myrtle Beach, has been participating in ministries with the Georgetown County Detention Center for a number of years. Each Thanksgiving, SUMC provides a meal to those incarcerated at GCDC. The ministry was started by Dan Lee, a member of SUMC, and the ministry lives on through the efforts of Johnny Livingston. "At SUMC, we are thankful for the spirit of Christ and the love of our neighbor that reigns in so many hearts," said the Rev. Meredith M. Dark. As Jesus said, "I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25:36). Pictured here from left are Jonah Livingston, Brian Tesseneer and Johnny Livingston.

Entertaining angels through Monaghan's Blessing Bag Ministry

The Blessing Bag Ministry is a new outreach at Monaghan United Methodist Church in Greenville, but the Rev. Michael Maston said there is no doubt it compliments their congregation's vision, "Sharing God's Grace by Serving Our Neighbor."

The Lord Jesus has been at the forefront of the whole ministry from the overwhelming interest to the donations, sorting and the packing party.

The adopted Scripture for this ministry comes from Matthew 25:40, "For whatsoever you did for one of the least of these, you also did for me."

Blessing Bags are filled with items like food, bottled water, socks, a small first-aid kit, a toothbrush, toothpaste and ponchos.

There's also a pre-stamped notecard along with a pen that a person can use to reconnect with a family member or loved one. "Our intention is to not only help meet the physical needs but to plant the seed by providing a spiritual resource as well," Maston said. "We are so blessed to be a blessing, and we pray these 'Blessing Bags' packed with love and prayed over will be truly much more of a blessing than money."

"I love the expression on the young child as we paint the picture of what it means to be his hands and feet. It is with a humble heart that we present them before the Lord to ask for his blessing to be upon them."

The congregation prays they may bless others and showcase God's amazing grace.

Calhoun Charge helps Kentucky flood victims

Two rural churches in Calhoun County heard a cry, and answered with great joy.

Calhoun Charge in the Orangeburg District includes Wesley Chapel and Andrew Chapel, both pastored by Dr. Karl Coke. Their hearts are bigger than the flood they heard about, for when they received a plea for help from a friend for the July flood victims in Kentucky, they immediately came to help.

During the flood, more than 40 people were found dead and hundreds of homes and cars were washed away or had to be totally gutted. Floodwaters came during the night and very unexpectedly. Many people lost everything as their mobile homes, furniture and prized possessions floated away. It was a devastating occurrence for many.

The flood was not something on the Calhoun Charge's radar, because they thought people had received help from government agencies and other ministries and had recovered. But when a friend approached the charge for help with food because so many people were still in tents and had nothing, Calhoun Charge members were astonished.

Many were still living in a tent in October in the Appalachian mountains.

After some investigation and questioning of friends in that area, the charge was told these flood victims had basically been abandoned. Government agencies had already left the area. There were so many still suffering, particularly those who lived back in the deep mountains and other rural areas.

The Calhoun Charge gathered blankets, warm clothing, hats, gloves, jackets and canned foods, specifically those that could be heated on a grill or a campfire—not macaroni and cheese or potato flakes, but hearty meals with protein. Another request was made for the silver thermal blankets used in emergency situations. These blankets can



Church members gathered blankets, warm clothing, hats, gloves, jackets and more.

be used in many ways, such as for warmth between their bodies and the ground or as a layer between their bodies and their blankets or sleeping bags.

A deadline was set, Nov. 13, and the gathered boxes, bags of clothing and cases of canned food and bags of miscellaneous toiletries grow. The charge ended up with a van completely full on Nov. 15.

These two rural churches had felt the call and the nudge of the Holy Spirit, and because of this, people in Kentucky's Appalachian Mountains were gifted with women and men's clothing from socks and underwear to jeans, shirts and coats. They also received blankets, sheets, more than 100 silver thermal blankets, hats, gloves, towels and hundreds of cans of food.

After their offering was delivered to the flooded areas, churches were able to carry the clothing and food by four-wheelers into areas still devastated. Many families were helped by the generosity of these congregations.

Wesley celebrates women through program, gifts of turbans

LADSON—The United Women in Faith of Wesley United Methodist Church held a Women's Day Program Sept. 25.

The theme of the program was "Diamonds in the Rough: Seeking Spiritual Beauty to Celebrate the Importance of Women."

The program was a well-attended in-person and virtual event. The message, "Know your Worth" was delivered by the Rev. Geneva Stafford, senior pastor at Francis Burns UMC, Columbia.

As a community outreach project, donations of turbans were requested. This effort resulted in the collection of 135 turbans, which were graciously accepted by two organizations: the MUSC Breast Cancer Center and Lowcountry Hematology and Oncology.

By donating these turbans, Wesley's prayer was that they were able to enhance the feelings of self-confidence and value of someone who is going through the difficult battle of hair loss during cancer treatment. They also fulfill the aim of their mission statement: to inspire and impact their local community.



Wesley women celebrate women with turban collection.





Photo courtesy of Bernice Wright

In recognition of Domestic Violence Month, Mount Moriah United Women in Faith donned white and purple.



Above and below, Cumberland members help My Brother's Keeper.



Sharing the bounty: Cumberland helps through My Brother's Keeper

Cumberland United Methodist Church Mission ministry is involved in several projects this year, including a partnership with My Brother's Keeper of Florence to collect food and essential items for distribution.

My Brother's Keeper is a nonprofit agency that attempts to provide food and essential items to seniors, sick people, shut-ins and homeless people and children.

Cumberland's Mission Ministry visits the organization's site each week, rain or shine, to pick up the food and essential items. Those items are transported to the church for repackaging into individual containers to be sent to various clients.

Volunteers provide packages for distribution to more than 50 families every other week and a site in Hartsville that prepares 22 hot meals daily.

Cumberland members said the ministry has allowed them to connect with various community members who they would not necessarily come into contact with. It is another opportunity to share the gospel with their neighbors, which they said is what Christians are placed on earth to do.

Virginia Wingard food pantry distributes Christmas turkeys, hams

COLUMBIA—The Virginia Wingard Memorial United Methodist Church Food Pantry currently serves approximately 1,500 households living in Richland County and struggling economically to meet the nutritional needs of their family members.

Those who come to VWMUMC's door are in need and represent all walks of life. Some are homeless or in temporary housing; most are unemployed and simply unable to afford food because of current economic conditions. Many clients are single women with children and are at particular risk of poor health because of malnutrition. The food pantry is staffed entirely by volunteers. These volunteers buy and transport food, pack bags, manage the required documentation, load food into vehicles and perform many other tasks throughout the year. Most importantly, volunteers engage the clients—listen to their stories, pray for them as needed and try to meet their needs as best possible with the resources available to us. Each volunteer is motivated as a Christian disciple to a life of service to others, especially to serve those in need.

Clients of any or no faith are served, and food distribution has continued every Tuesday and Wednesday through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recently, the food pantry received a generous gift from The Cheerful Giver Fund of



Food pantry volunteer Jane Andrews-Nicol prepares turkeys and hams for distribution

Central Carolina Community Foundation.

This gift enabled the purchase of Christmas turkeys and hams, which were distributed to families during the month of December.

The food pantry continues to be extremely blessed by the ongoing support of church members, other churches in the area and local community organizations.

Mount Moriah marks Women's Day Nov. 15

MAYESVILLE—Mount Moriah United Methodist Church's Women's Day Program was held Sunday Nov. 15, during their worship service.

The Spoken Word was given by minister Sarah Johnson, a member of the OC3 Pastoral Team. Johnson used Job 22:27-30 for her message, "There Is Power in Your Word." She said the Scripture is a powerful testament to the power of the spoken word when we decree and declare according to God's word.

She chose two women from the Bible to highlight and deliver her message. The first was the Samaritan woman who needed hope. Jesus used his words to lift her instead of condemning her for her sins. After he reconciled her, she told everyone about Jesus and allowed everyone an open invitation to the Messiah. His word gave her hope.

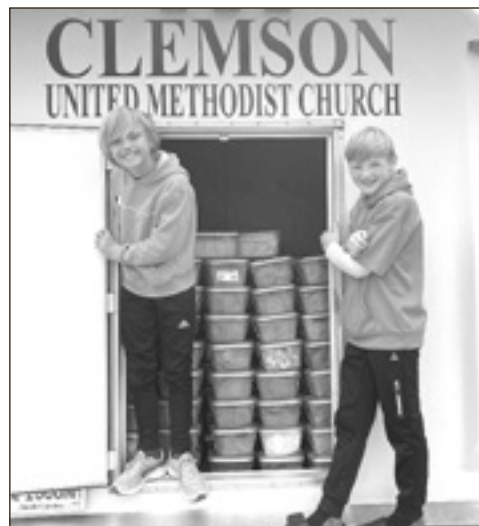
The second was the woman with the issue of blood in need of a healing. She used her words of encouragement to get herself in the presence of Jesus. This happened because of her faith. She said, "If I can just touch the hem of his garment, I will be healed." This proves there is power in the spoken words when we pray, so we must have faith and believe when we speak the words.

As part of this celebration, which was also the 50th annual meeting for the Hartsville District Women in Faith, former UWF president Jacquelyn Sessions gave special recognition and presented certificates to women at Mount Moriah who had dedicated 50 or more years of service to UWF. Those women were Jeanette Alston, Hattie B. Burns, Frances Dean, Dr. Bertha McCants, Annie McQuillar, Lucille Rogers, Bernethea Wilson, Annie Wilson and Bernice M. Wright.

Other faithful people who have supported Mount Moriah UWF received honorable mention certificates presented by Shirley Baker, vice president and program chairperson. These women were Patricia Clark, Shirley Allen, Irene Rose, Ella M. Peterson, Olene Parrott, Shirley Baker, Evelyn Conyers, Henrietta Wilson, Philene Clark, Bertha Mickel and Geraldine Wilson.

A special mission recognition pen was presented to an honorary member, Bessie C. Taylor.

Annie B. Wilson gave final remarks and thanked everyone who participated in the celebration.



Photos courtesy of Amy Rawls

Included in the boxes are crayons, hats, mittens, socks and small toys. Clemson UMC collected items for boys and girls ages 3 and older.

Shoobox gifts bring Christmas joy to children in Dakotas

CLEMSON—Clemson United Methodist Church collected monetary donations, wish list items and shoeboxes recently for the Spirit Lake Shoobox Ministry in North Dakota.

During the week of Thanksgiving, the church was able to mail the boxes to Mike and Libby Flowers, who are the pastor/missionaries of Spirit Lake. They sent a total of 181 boxes and a financial gift of \$250.

The shoobox gifts are given to the children of the reservations of North Dakota, South Dakota and into Minnesota. On the reservation, nearly 70 percent of the children would not get a Christmas gift if not

for the shoobox program.

Included in the boxes are crayons, hats, mittens, socks and small toys. Clemson UMC collected items for boys and girls ages 3 and older.

For more information on how to do a Christmas Shoobox ministry or to connect with Native American Ministries in this region, contact http://spiritlakeministry-center.org/whats_in_a_shoobox.aspx, or visit <https://www.dakotasumc.org/extending-impact/cross-the-dakotas/spirit-lake>.

Clemson UMC thanks volunteers, as well as Amy Rawls, for heading up this project and outreach to the families of Spirit Lake.

Trinity UMC holds 10th annual golf tournament to help local ministries

The men's group of Trinity United Methodist Church in North Myrtle Beach held its annual golf tournament a few weeks ago at the Beachwood Golf Club.

This was the men's group's 10th annual tournament with 39 teams and 156 golfers competing. These golfers and sponsors from area restaurants and businesses raised

money to help the men fulfill their missions throughout the community.

Trinity United Methodist Men support local groups such as the North Myrtle Beach, Atlantic Beach and Horry County police departments and their Shop with a Hero programs. They have cooked meals for the North Myrtle Beach High School's

band and football team. They have also provided donations to the local area council of Boy Scouts of America, the Family Justice Center for victims of domestic violence and to its own scholarship fund for graduating high school seniors.

The golf tournament is one of several opportunities that the men of Trinity serve the community. It has two Boston Butt fundraisers throughout the year, but more importantly, the men get together each month for breakfast, devotion and fellowship. Meetings also feature guest speakers who enlighten the members about current events and new developments.

Guest speakers have included local meteorologist Ed Piotrowski, state Senator

Greg Hembree, North Myrtle Beach City Manager Mike Mahaney and Fellowship of Christian Athletics Field Director Matt Adams, to name a few.

Trinity United Methodist Men meet on the third Sunday of the month at 9:30 a.m. in the fellowship hall. The Rev. Gene Aiken is the senior pastor.



Epworth Children's Home

Making Christmas memories



Epworth students journeyed to Walmart for a shopping spree with the USC football team.



Christmas came early for the children who live at Epworth Children's Home thanks to Patrick DiMarco, The Cason Group and players from the University of South Carolina football team who treated Epworth's children to a pre-Christmas shopping spree.

When DiMarco first experienced Epworth, he was a football player at USC under Coach Steve Spurrier. Each year, Spurrier hosted Thanksgiving dinner at Williams-Brice Stadium where the players and coaches interacted with Epworth's children and youth. This was always a time of joy for the children and players. When DiMarco became a football player in the NFL and a Pro Bowler, he implemented a program called "Shop with the Jocks" to help local youth experience holiday joy. He implemented this program in Buffalo, New York, during his time playing for the Buffalo Bills and in Atlanta while with the Atlanta Falcons.

DiMarco is now a member of Coach Shane Beamer's football staff and serves as the football analyst and assistant director of football relations. He and his family reside in Columbia.

The close relationship between the USC football team waned after Spurrier's departure, but last year the DiMarco family contacted Epworth about bringing the "Shop with the Jocks" program to Epworth. The event was such a magical time for children and players that DiMarco reached out again this year.

So, on the first Thursday of December, fresh off the heels of the Gamecocks' big win against the Clemson Tigers, Epworth students loaded up on buses and journeyed over to a local Walmart for a shopping spree with the USC football team.

One of the young residents at Epworth was so excited when he heard about the trip and hoped that the star quarterback, Spencer Rattler, would be in attendance. Upon arrival, each resident was paired to shop with a USC football player. Much to the young boy's excitement, Rattler was in attendance, and the boy was assigned to shop with him!

Each child filled their shopping cart with treats, candy, gifts and toys. After, the staff at Walmart set up the garden center with tables and chairs, and the children and players enjoyed a pizza dinner catered by Village Idiot Pizza. Some of the children purchased footballs and got the players' autographs. Laughter filled the air as the players socialized with the children and ate pizza together.

Memories were made on this special evening in December, and it is a memory that many of the children will cherish forever. One of the cottage staff members described the excitement and joy she witnessed as they rode back to Epworth on the bus that evening.

"I've never seen the kids so excited," she said. "They could not wait to get back to the campus and to take all of their newly purchased items back to their rooms."

The magic of caring is always transformational, as it was on this special evening.

REV. KEN OWENS
Spiritual Director

kenowenssd.com
contact@kenowenssd.com
In Columbia every Thursday.



Photos by Catherine Page

Broad Street feeds hundreds on Thanksgiving

Broad Street UMC, Clinton, has been serving a community Thanksgiving dinner for 17 years, since 2006, gathering at least 50 volunteers to help serve. All ages help with this event, and Broad Street also invites other churches to be a part of this event as well. This year, because of the ongoing dangers of the pandemic, the church hand-delivered meals to people, taking 500 meals to homes and the homeless on the streets. In years past, they have served up to 800 meals on-site. "For me, it says a lot about the people of Broad Street," said Broad Street's pastor, the Rev. Justin Ritter. "The members saw a need 17 years ago and still see a need to this day. We are putting our faith into action by serving the community, even before we serve our family Thanksgiving meals."

Mount Zion fills 63 flood buckets for disaster response calls

Mount Zion United Methodist Church, Sandy Run, answered a call for help this fall.

When they learned the annual conference's supply of flood buckets had been depleted because of a response to Hurricane Ian, the church started a flood bucket drive for their Mission Sunday Nov. 13. The Rev. John Culp served as a guest speaker that day; Culp founded the Salkehatchie Summer Service ministry.

They set a goal of 53 buckets.

Thanks to the generosity of their members, charge and friends, Mount Zion was able to fill 63 buckets.

"We thank all of you for helping us bring hope to those who are suffering one bucket at a time," said the church's pastor the Rev. Larry Wannamaker.

Jeannette Mack is the church's mission chair.

MT. ZION'S FLOOD BUCKET SUPPLY DRIVE

We are collecting these supplies to enable people to fight the flooding problem of their homes from the storm season.

Helping our Neighbors - One Bucket at a Time!

✓ 5 gallon bucket with reusable lid - 100-150 gal. buckets preferred (avoid plastic)	✓ 7 spades
✓ 2 1/2 gal. buckets - 100-150 gal. buckets preferred (avoid plastic)	✓ 3 watering cans
✓ 100-150 gal. buckets - 100-150 gal. buckets preferred (avoid plastic)	✓ 10 shovels
✓ 100-150 gal. buckets - 100-150 gal. buckets preferred (avoid plastic)	✓ 10 chainsaws - 2 - 10 ft. or 1 - 10 ft. or 1 - 10 ft.
✓ 100-150 gal. buckets - 100-150 gal. buckets preferred (avoid plastic)	✓ 10 roll heavy duty trash bags
✓ 100-150 gal. buckets - 100-150 gal. buckets preferred (avoid plastic)	✓ 100-150 gal. buckets - 100-150 gal. buckets preferred (avoid plastic)
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The church exceeded its goal.

"...we would see Jesus."

John 12:21

Bishop's School of Ministry

Feb. 7-9 | Myrtle Beach

Speakers:
Dr. Kimberly Wagner, Assistant Professor of Preaching
Dr. Sheila Elliott Hodge, Pastor
Mr. Jason Moore, Midnight Oil Productions

Cost: \$300 plus lodging
Register by Jan. 27 (hotel group rate thru Jan. 5)
Info: <https://www.umcsc.org/cs-bsm>



Above, the church collected 30 new coats for a local school. At right, bicycles, headphones, gift cards and clothing were purchased for a family "adopted" for Christmas.



Bluff Road UMC gathers coats for kids, 'adopts' family for Christmas

COLUMBIA—The Bluff Road United Methodist Church congregation, in partnership with Burnside Elementary School, held a winter coat drive.

More than 30 new coats were collected. The coats were presented to the principal of Burnside Elementary School just before the school closed for winter break.

Their partnership this year included a back-to-school supply drive and gift cards for those students who have excelled in academics. Bluff Road offers thanks to Burnside Elementary School for allowing this partnership, stating, "For when one shines, we all shine."

Also, for the sixth year, Bluff Road has adopted a family during the Families Helping Families campaign. They have met their goal of purchasing and wrapping gifts for their assigned family. Gifts this year were bicycles, headphones, gift cards and clothing.



United Women in Faith

by Clarice Blakeney

All hands to the plow

As we enter into our 51st year, it is vitally important that we are all on board. There is this newness in the air, and our focus is on faith, hope, love and sisterhood. Everyone is invited to be an active participant in the goals and purpose of our organization. Your expertise, skills and service are needed as we implement programs, events and activities for United Women in Faith.

It is very rewarding for me to serve as your president for such a time as this. I am elated to work with you to provide missional support for women, children and youth. We must not lose sight of the many marginalized communities who are depending on us to make a difference in their lives.

Please use all resources and information available to be aware of and keep up to date on things happening on all levels: local, district, state and national. You are strongly encouraged to take part in the 2023 calendar events listed below:

2023 calendar

February: Wallace Family Life Center, Special Emphasis Month

Feb. 1: Social Action Workshop 1, 10 a.m. (Virtual)

Feb. 7: Social Action Workshop 2, 7 p.m. (Virtual)

Feb. 16: Social Action Workshop 3, 2 p.m. (Virtual)

Feb. 25: Social Action Workshop 4 10 a.m. (Virtual)

March 1: Presidential Scholarship Applications due

March 23: Legacy Fund Day of Giving, 154th year

March 27-30: Mission Trip, Asheville to Nashville Adventure, North Carolina/Tennessee

April: Columbia Bethlehem Community Center, Special Emphasis month

April 9: Easter: He is Risen!

April 22: Spiritual Growth Event, 10 a.m., Walterboro District UWF host (Virtual)

May 20: Come Together Be Together, 10 a.m., Columbia District UWF host (Virtual)

June 4-7: SC UMC Annual Conference, Florence Center, Florence

June 24: Charter for Racial + Environmental Justice Event, 10 a.m. (Virtual)

July 1: Limitless Event, 10 a.m. (Virtual)

July 20-22: Mission u, Spartanburg Methodist College, Spartanburg

September: Killingsworth Special Emphasis Month

October: Bethlehem Center-Spartanburg, Special Emphasis Month

Oct. 20-21—SCCUWF 51st Annual Meeting, 12:30-3 p.m., St. John's UMC, Aiken

Nov. 11: District Officers Training, 9 a.m., Columbia District UWF host

Dec. 2: Limitless Event, 10 a.m. (Virtual)

Dec. 25: Baby Jesus is born

With your commitment, we will work to enhance and impact the many mission projects all over our state and the world. It is time to put all hands to the plow. Let's get busy by putting our faith, hope and love into action. I am looking forward to a very successful year with you as we work together.

Blakeney is the SCCUWF president.

Bluffton Blessing Bags program blesses church and community

BLUFFTON—During the pandemic shutdown in the spring of 2020, members at Bluffton United Methodist Church contacted local aid agencies to determine how they could help neighbors in need. From that research, the Blessing Bag Program was started as an outreach of the church.

Church members provided funds and a tote was placed outside of the church in which members could donate toiletry and hygiene items.

The first 25 blessing bags were packed in May 2020 and delivered to Self Help in Bluffton. Each bag was packed as a gift from the church to a family in a reusable or recyclable gift bag because everyone, no matter their means, deserves a gift. Each bag contains 15 full-sized hygiene items and a note of encouragement from the church.

Today, the church Missions Committee has expanded the project to include Deep Well on Hilton Head Island. Every month, 60 blessing bags are packed and delivered to the local charitable organizations for distribution. In November, blessing bag No. 1,000 was packed and delivered.

Bluffton UMC is the only group in the community that regularly provides this type of assistance to local neighbors and plans to continue this project on a monthly basis



Photo courtesy of Paula Kirkland

Each bag contains 15 full-sized hygiene items and a note of encouragement.

because they said they know in many homes struggling to secure food, these items may be considered a luxury. Many church members help with this project by shopping, packing, delivering and giving generously so this project can continue to provide neighbors with the dignity of having basic hygiene items.

The church members feel this is one way they can follow the Lord's teachings to help all of his people.



Deacon's Corner

Rev. Adrienne Fink

Getting to know Adrienne

Welcome to the Deacon Corner of the Advocate. We are excited to share with you about the ministry and movement of the Holy Spirit happening in and through the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church's Order of Deacons.

This month, take a moment to learn about the ministry of the Rev. Adrienne Fink, one of our ordained deacons.

What prompted you to become a deacon? Was there anyone or experience in particular that influenced your decision?

Fink: Beginning my junior year of high school, I heard God's call to ministerial leadership, but pastoring a church didn't feel quite right. My college chaplain, the Rev. Ron Robinson, introduced me to the Order of Deacons, which was the fit I was longing for.

What are your main responsibilities as a deacon? How do your duties differ from those of an elder or licensed local pastor?

Fink: I serve as a healthcare chaplain for senior adults at Prisma Health SeniorCare PACE, which provides holistic, centralized care for our participants. While elders and local pastors may also serve as chaplains, my identity as a chaplain comes from my diaconal call to word, service, compassion and justice. Many of our participants would not be able to receive the level of care they need and deserve without our program. My care begins with seeing each participant and staff person as the image of God, regardless of their faith tradition. I proclaim God's persistent and abiding love, offer compassion amid struggles, seek justice within our country's health care shortcomings and serve spiritual needs by meeting my care recipients where they are.

What words of advice would you give others who might be interested in becoming a deacon and what do you find to be most rewarding about being a deacon?

Fink: Explore your spiritual heart. Dia-

conal appointments often overlap with the roles of elders, local pastors, and laity, but the call to the diaconate is unique. When you hear about the call to word, service, compassion and justice, how does your spirit respond? Being a deacon is rewarding for me because God calls me to it. Even when ministry is difficult, knowing God calls me to it encourages me to continue.

In a format replicating Dr. Brenè Brown's Unlocking Us "Rapid Fire Questions," let's get to know a bit more about Rev. Fink.

Q. Fill in the blank: Vulnerability is:
A. Authenticity.

Q. You're called to do something brave, but your fear is real and stuck in your throat. What's the first thing you do?
A. Take a deep breath.

Q. What is something that people often get wrong about you?
A. They think I'm an extrovert.

Q. What's the last show that you binged and loved?
A. Ted Lasso.

Q. What is a film that you really love?
A. Mean Girls.

Q. What is a concert you will never forget?
A. The Brilliance at The Grey Eagle in Asheville.

Q. What's your favorite meal?
A. Chicken Philly cheesesteak.

Q. What's on your nightstand right now?
A. Cough drops.

Q. Give us a snapshot of an ordinary moment in your life that brings you great joy.
A. Sitting down with a cup of coffee and a good book.

Q. What is the one thing you are deeply grateful for right now?
A. Courageous, prophetic voices.

Columbia College celebrates 299 graduates

“There was always something pulling me to Columbia College. I visited a few other schools, but my heart always went back to CC.”

Those were some of the words spoken during Columbia College’s commencement Dec. 9 by graduating senior Zykeria Moultrie, whose family ties run deep in Columbia College history.

Moultrie’s great-great-grandmother was Susie Thomas, who worked for Columbia College from 1919 until 1968. Moultrie is the first of her family to attend Columbia College following her grandmother’s service. When asked what she thinks Susie Thomas would say to her on her graduation day, Moultrie shared that she believes Grandma Susie would be at a loss for words.

“Considering the time that she worked for the college, watching a woman from her own family graduate would have been a dream come true,” Moultrie said. “From the stories I’ve always been told, Susie had a deep, true love for Columbia College, and I believe her words would have been ones of great pride, surprise and gratitude.”

Moultrie and 115 of her fellow graduating seniors joined 183 graduate students of the college as they all were awarded their diplomas the morning of Dec. 9.

Keynote speaker Councilwoman Tina Herbert addressed the graduates and congratulated them on their many accomplishments.

“The Class of 2022 has left a legacy of hard work and diligence amongst tremendous obstacles,” Provost of Columbia College Kristine Barnett said. “They have lovingly been referred to and even referred to themselves as ‘the COVID class.’ We’re not sure where they will go next, but we know that they are equipped and able to meet the challenges and opportunities that await them.”

With tests and finals completed, presentations made and final papers edited and submitted, the graduates will earn a well-deserved rest to enjoy the holiday season. The college looks toward their next steps—starting careers, building families and traveling the world—making use of the foundation they built at Columbia College.



Keynote speaker Councilwoman Tina Herbert addressed the graduates during the college’s commencement Dec. 9.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools reaffirms Clafin accreditation

Clafin University received reaffirmation of accreditation from The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges following a rigorous evaluation of the university’s on-campus and online academic programs.

SACSCOC is the body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the Southern states.

“This reaffirmation of accreditation is the successful

culmination of a process that began in January 2020,” said Clafin President Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack. “This reaffirms that Clafin is fulfilling its mission of providing students access to an exceptional academic, cultural, and spiritual experience that will prepare them to become globally-engaged visionary leaders. Our re-accreditation results from the collective contributions of our world-class faculty, highly skilled

administrators, talented scholars, leal and loyal alumni, and other supporters of this historic university. It also reflects the elevation and transformation we are experiencing at Clafin.”

Clafin last received SACSCOC reaffirmation of accreditation in 2012.

Dr. Zia Hasan, vice president for institutional effectiveness, was chair of the Reaffirmation Steering Committee.

Registration for youth Revolution 2023 weekend going on through Dec. 31

Registration for Revolution is going on now, and organizers are asking people to register by Dec. 13.

The youth spiritual retreat will be held as a full weekend event Jan. 27-29 at the historic Township Auditorium in Columbia.

This year’s speaker is Nathalie Nelson Parker, and Stars Go Dim will return to lead worship.

Registration is \$75 per person for the entire weekend event.

For a list of hotels that offer discounts for Revolution,

or for the Revolution 2023 Info Packet, which includes the schedule, food recommendations and other important information, go to <http://scmyp.org/revolution>

To register, visit <http://scmyp.org/revolution-registration-2>

S.C. United Women in Faith accepting annual college scholarship applications

For the seventh year in a row, South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith are offering their Presidential Scholarship.

The SCCUWF Presidential Scholarship is designed to financially assist young women in reaching their higher education goals.

United Women in Faith said it greatly desires to partner with these future leaders through a \$1,000 scholarship. The scholarship application packet requires a March 1 postmark and can be found on the UWF website at www.umcsc.org/uwf.

The application contains the name and address of the person to whom it should be mailed.

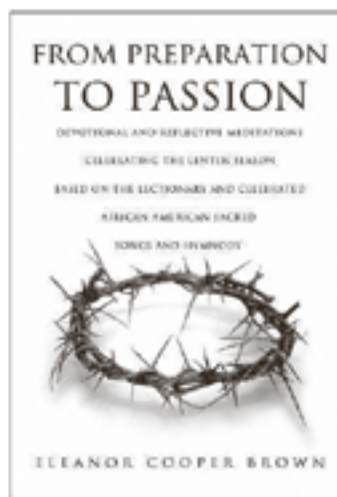
To date, UWF has awarded 20 scholarships. Two were awarded in 2017, six were awarded in 2018, three were awarded in

2019, three were awarded in 2020, two were awarded in 2021 and four were awarded in 2022.

Former recipients have made comments such as, “I am so blessed to receive this scholarship to further my education to help future generations,” “I was ecstatic to learn of this honor” and “I am honored and humbled.”

Others have said, “I am so blessed and grateful to God to be a recipient,” “I am thankful, honored and blessed,” “Thank you for this humongous blessing” and “It is an honor and blessing to be chosen.”

The SCCUWF Scholarship Committee said they eagerly await the time when the applications of some of South Carolina’s brightest and most accomplished young ladies begin to arrive.



From Preparation to Passion is a 40+-Day devotional and journal. The devotional readings are based on daily Lectionary Scripture Readings for Lent, starting with Ash Wednesday. Many of the meditations incorporate the “theology” of African American Sacred Music and Church Hymns.

From Preparation to Passion not only takes the reader on a meditative journey through each day of Lent, but also helps individuals or

groups to journal their way through a daily bible reading regimen. Author

Eleanor Cooper Brown suggests that this enriching resource will propel the reader into a deeper and more Holy passion for Christ as one journeys each day starting at Ash Wednesday and culminating on Monday after Easter.

In 2022 Lent, the pastors of New Light UM Church, Orangeburg, S.C., Rev. Enrique Gordon and Rev.

Shirley Gordon, used the book to produce a daily podcast for their congregation. Another congregation, The Nett in Lilburn, Ga., engaged their staff and congregation in recorded daily devotions during Lent 2021. The links following offer a sample of how these communities engaged in using *From Preparation to Passion*.

[Two Pastors One Roof - New Life UMC - Day 38](#)
[NettLife: The Nett Church \(Nations Experiencing Transformation Together\)](#)

The book is available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

[Order Your Copy Today](#)



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9:00AM to 1:00PM and 3:00PM to 5:00PM

800-532-8814 or scmccu.org

MACARONI MAYHEM: Effort provided about 1,600 meals

From Page 1

This fall, the people of Hopewell gathered more than 600 pounds of food, including noodles, eggs, gallons of milk and cheese, then gathered at the church the Saturday before Thanksgiving to cook the noodles.

It took about five hours to cook all the noodles using big fish cookers. Then after church on Sunday, more than two dozen men, women and children gathered to assemble 13x9-inch casserole dishes with all the ingredients for delicious homemade mac and cheese. Each were frozen, ready to cook, with a note from Hopewell on top providing ingredients, instructions and a note of blessing from Hopewell to each recipient.

“The response was fantastic. We knocked out 160, assembled with lids and a label on top, in two hours,” Jackson said, praising the hard work of everyone at his church who pitched in to help.

Teams took about 100 of the casseroles to James Monroe Mission House that afternoon and delivered the rest the next day.

Each casserole feeds about 10-12 people, ultimately providing about 1,600 meals for hungry people at a time when many feel forgotten.

Jackson said he isn't surprised Hopewell was able to do so much, and next year, they plan to do even more.

“This is a smaller church, but there are amazing people here,” Jackson said. “The atmosphere hits you in the face right when you walk in, and we're doing what we're supposed to do. As our pastor says, it's not 'go, stay at home and tell nobody.' It's 'go scream it from the mountaintop.' A lot of great things are going on here, not just mac and cheese.”

The Rev. Don Brown, Hopewell's pastor, said he's incredibly proud of his congregation for embracing a mission

challenge that was fully laity driven—in fact, he was out of town at a conference when his church assembled the casseroles.

“I love any mission project that forces us to turn ourselves inside out,” Brown said. “We guard greatly here against becoming an 'attractional church.' We don't want to be centered on ourselves because that's the recipe for the death of a church, so we push the phrase 'going beyond the walls and finding ways to minister to folks in new ways.'”

Mac and cheese is definitely a “new way,” Brown said—a nontraditional way of reaching out to others in the name of Jesus, with no possibility of getting anything in return.

“We're either going to missionaries or evangelists, but we're going beyond the walls one way or the other,” Brown said.

For next year, Jackson is hoping to challenge other area churches to do something similar in their community. Anyone who would like more information on the project can contact the church at <http://hopewellumcsimpsonville.com>.



It took about five hours to cook all the noodles using big fish cookers.



Each casserole feeds about 10-12 people, ultimately providing about 1,600 meals for hungry people at a time when many feel forgotten.

LIFE FOR DULCE: A bone marrow transplant is the only treatment

From Page 1

early age if he or she does not get treatment, and the only treatment of the disease is a bone marrow transplant.

However, Guatemala does not have a hospital that can perform a bone marrow transplant for Dulce, so she will need to travel to the United States or South Korea for the procedure—a huge financial undertaking.

Healing Guatemala was able to find a hospital in South Korea, JeonNam National University Hospital in HwaSun, that has agreed to help financially and do the procedure, but the steep cost isn't something they can cover alone, even though the cost of the treatment in South Korea is about a third of that in the United States.

Because Dulce's condition is worsening rapidly, Rhyee and others at Healing Guate-

mala decided it was time for a faith leap.

After all, Rhyee said, “Our Lord is faithful.”

Given this, they are doing whatever they can to raise \$100,000 for Dulce's treatment, starting a GoFundMe campaign and raising funds through other means to help the young girl.

Rhyee visited Dulce recently, and he said her condition looks much worse compared to a month ago, when he saw her last. A kind-hearted girl with a bright smile and excellent math skills, she's hurting intensely.

“Dulce has severe pain in the bones of her back and extremities, and her face looks much darker,” he said.

She lives day-to-day, getting a whole blood transfusion every month.

“Her time does not seem to wait for her,” Rhyee said.

This is why they are beginning the “A New Life for Dulce” project now. All funds will support the cost of treatment and travel expense of Dulce, apart from the support of the hospital performing the procedure.

“We pray that at least by the end of December, Dulce can begin treatment,” Rhyee said.

For more information or to help, visit their page at <https://gofund.me/802224ae> or the Healing Guatemala website at <https://healingguatemala.org>

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HELPING GULFSIDE: 'I had to have faith,' Belton says

From Page 1

nity, she did not see the connection. But after South Carolina Connectional Ministries Director the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith told her about the missionary opening, Belton said, "I prayed, and then I answered the call."

Soon, Belton realized, "I've been doing this work for years now, but God called me to something higher, to expand and to teach me a whole lot."

Today, she's so glad she answered God's call to serve at Gulfside.

"When I got here, woo! There's so much we need and want to do, but I couldn't look at it from a natural eye," Belton said. "I had to have faith."

Gulfside was founded in 1923 by Bishop Robert Elijah Jones to provide spiritual, educational and recreational facilities to African-American people who were denied access elsewhere because of segregation. Over the years, it served as a school, a library and a hub for the civil rights movement. Part of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the UMC, today Gulfside is a faith-based community organization with a goal to expand participation in mission, foster spiritual growth, develop leaders, advance the health and well-being of families and communities and empower women, children and youth.

In 2005, Gulfside experienced a major blow because of Hurricane Katrina, which destroyed all its buildings. Today, it operates out of a former church building. In spite of the loss of their buildings, they do much work for the community and beyond.

For example, they are intensely involved with leadership development for high school seniors and college-age students, helping them become connected with programs like Harambee, do college tours and learn about financial aid and resources to help them achieve their long-term goals. Gulfside is also doing educational training for pastors and church leaders, holding Safe Sanctuary



Belton is helping to start a community garden at Gulfside this spring to provide fresh produce to area residents.

training for clergy and others in the area, providing school uniform vouchers for local students, hosting a Labyrinth Walk, partnering with Discipleship Ministries on a series called "It Takes a Village Church to Raise a Child Parent" and participating in a Gulfside Community Organization comprising community leaders, nonprofits and other organizations. That group's mission is to be an inclusive community of leaders who are intentional in striving to share information and service bringing empowerment, hope and healing to the Hancock County community.

Belton also is actively working with faith-based organizations in developing a "Focus on the Family" initiative, offering services, companionship, encouragement, empowerment, trainings and love to area families.

Since she came to Gulfside, Belton has started two new efforts there. One, a life-

skills training program, will start this spring and will partner with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Hancock County there to help middle- and high-school students understand basic life skills. Financial planning, conflict resolution, family relationship-building, cyber security and more are covered in the program, offered afterschool at their location and all day in the summers.

The other, a community garden, will also start this spring and hopes to provide fresh produce to area residents, donating leftovers to a local food bank.

"This is a food desert here," Belton explained. "But now, anyone will be able to come, there's no fence, and get cucumbers or whatever they need."

A nearby Catholic school helped them build two storage sheds to store their garden

equipment, seeds, fertilizer and more, and after winter break, students will help them build raised garden beds. Kids in the Boys and Girls Club will plant the seedlings, and in the spring, all will transfer the seedlings to the garden beds, where the plants will eventually become much-needed produce for nearby residents, including a number of senior citizens.

This year, 2023, Gulfside will celebrate its centennial, doing a number of programs and initiatives to honor the gifts it has offered since it was started in 1923.

Anyone interested in helping Gulfside and Belton's efforts there can do so using Advance #3022669 via <https://umcmmission.org/missionary-bio/3022669>. She can also be reached for more information by email at abelton@umcmmission.org.

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Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Joseph Abram Jr.

“And he looked up, and said I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes and made him look up: and he was restored and saw every man clearly” (Mark 8:24-25 KJV).

As a child, by this time of the year, my Christmas list would have been prepared. There were opportunities available to get the word out to the one who would deliver.

We could mail it to the local post office, where they promised to get it to the North Pole. Santa made several trips to the country store to pass out goodies and take requests, and there were surprise visits on the farm by St. Nick escorted by my Uncle James, which gave the bearded man the opportunity to recant our misdeeds and failures to adhere to guidelines imposed by parents and area adults

and offer promises of future punishments and forfeiture of Christmas items. If the violation(s) were seen as egregious, the belt came out. So as a result, we were prepared to go into hiding if there were any indications that a visit was imminent.

We always wondered: How did Santa know what we did or did not do or say throughout the year?

Our parents were relatively passive in all of this, except to ask: if a list was not obvious, what did we want, or want Santa to bring us for Christmas? Sometimes, when our lists grew extensively and or expensively, we were reminded of the many children and places that Santa had to serve, and of course, since we didn't want to be selfish, we kept our list reasonable.

My parents and siblings are all gone now (the last brother, Theodore, in August), but I'll probably do as

always—place that little brown bag with fruit assortment, hard candies and Muscat raisins under the tree for me and my lady, like my parents did when I was a child. I also have a wish list and, as always, I hope to keep it reasonable and unselfish that I will deliver to my Santa who has always provided for me at Christmas, Easter and all year long.

Lord, in quietness, I kneel before you with my solitary wish, because I know you have many to bless. I pray that you give us you, and that will be more than enough. What the world, our nation, needs is love. You are love, and with you in our lives, all the other goods would be justice, joy, peace and love among your children.

Then suddenly, I was reminded that you already have. In fact, that is the reason for this season.

Thanks! Please open our eyes so that we might see glimpses of the love you gave to us. Amen.

All I want for Christmas



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Albert Cox

A reply to the controversy and division in the UMC

I grew up in Hemingway Methodist Church. As a child, I attended Sunday school, vacation Bible school and other activities, which I enjoyed very much.

As a youth in high school, I continued to attend and support Sunday school and Sunday worship and joined the choir. And in my junior and senior years, I was president of the Methodist Youth Fellowship.

In the spring of 1953, I accepted Christ as my savior under the ministry of the Rev. Henry Bennett, one of the godliest men I have ever known. He was full of the Holy Spirit, love and compassion. The next year, in the spring of 1954, I accepted God's call to ministry in the Methodist Church, not in another denomination. I had been fighting this call to ministry for several years before I finally surrendered to God's calling. There were godly men and women in Hemingway, and Old Johnsonville Methodist church, where Margie grew up, who were wonderful mentors for Christ.

I graduated from Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, in 1958 and from the Lutheran Southern Seminary in 1970. I served a student appointment for two and half years in Bowen, Kentucky, joining the South Carolina Methodist Annual Conference in 1959. I served in this capacity until I retired in June 1999 after serving Holly Hill United Methodist Church for 15 years. And in retirement I served Greene Street UMC for six years as a retired supply.

I have in all of these years, by the grace of God, sought to please him, accomplish his will and complete the ministry to which I was called to serve in the UMC. God has blessed me and my wife in every charge and church we have served with great attendance and spiritual growth. Long ministries in churches such as Chapin UMC and Holly Hill UMC have been great and wonderful years in God's service.

Now after all these years of ministry in the UMC, we find we are having to make a choice of leaving the church we have loved and served all of our lives. The one defining issue that has brought us to this very difficult moment is the ordination of homosexual ministers and the marriage of same-sex couples.

I find as far as Scripture is concerned, there is not one place in the Holy Bible

where this relationship is approved by God. So why are we who do not agree with this move in the UMC being asked to form our own denomination?

The fact remains that the Scripture opposes a sexual relationship between a woman and a woman or a man and a man (Romans 1). This is not the creation of our righteous and holy God, as some reconciling articles report, but as a result of the sin and fall of man.

God's love and his redemptive grace through Christ makes all the difference in our lives and our relationship with God and others. But again, this is not what the Reconciling Ministries Network proposes, and it celebrates the fact that the LGBTQ persons are a “good expression of God's diverse creation.” This is absolutely false.

But God loves us all and he wants us to experience his redemption through Christ.

Now, to say that our God, who is completely righteous and holy, would create adultery, a person to be homosexual, the greedy or any other sin is totally unacceptable and is to be rejected completely. All of this is a result of the fall of the human race because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden and the rejection of their Creator God to be lord of their lives. Our Holy God, in the garden and throughout our history, has only one plan for the redemption of our sinful lives and that is the shedding of the blood of an innocent life and that is the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul, in the context of determining what foods are clean to eat, came to this conclusion, “Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves” (Romans 14:22), and in 1 Corinthians 3:22, he tells us, “Do not go beyond what is written.”

Now, would it not be wonderful if in the days we are living we could simply go back to reading the Scriptures as they are written, learn from them and live our lives by what they teach us?

This would be the answer to many of the divisions in God's church today. May God help and bless us all to seek his will. Amen!

Cox, a retired UMC pastor, lives in Chapin.



Clergy Care

by the Rev. Jonathan Harris

Moving beyond time off

Imagine this: Your child comes home from school one afternoon, and she is overwhelmed. There was a test in English class that didn't go so well. A biology project is due soon that she's behind on. She is frustrated because she doesn't understand the new algebra concepts her teacher introduced in class today. On top of all this, a recent falling-out with a friend has left her emotionally drained.

As a parent, what do you do to help your struggling, overwhelmed child?

Maybe you take extra time each night to help her study. Maybe you work with her and her teachers to arrange time for one-on-one tutoring or coaching. Maybe you help her develop her time management skills and study habits. Maybe you have her participate (and even participate yourself) in therapy to help her develop the skills to cope with her challenges and build and sustain healthy relationships. Maybe you help her identify what times of day she is at her best energy-wise so she can do her most important work before her brain is already fried at the end of the day.

My guess, though, is that you don't tell her that the solution to her troubles is to just take the next week off from school.

Why do I share this hypothetical scenario? I share it because many pastors continue to deal with stress, overwhelm and feeling as though they are juggling a million different things at a time. Sermons. Pastoral care. Funerals. Administration. Responding to emails, texts, calls and knocks on the office door. If there's time, maybe even a little bit of discipleship.

Oh, and another funeral.

And what is the recommendation we give to pastors when they are feeling ragged from all of that? Exactly what we wouldn't tell our overwhelmed child: Just take some time off. Make sure you're taking a sabbath day each week and using all of your vacation time. Have you ever thought about taking a sabbatical?

Let me be clear: I'm not saying that sabbath is not important. It is. God took a sabbath rest, after all, and instructed us to do the same. Taking sabbath rest should be a given.

Still, as Carey Nieuwhof has pointed out, “Time off won't heal you when the problem is how you spend your time on.”

To put this another way, if the way you do ministry involves constantly running yourself ragged, then the solution is not to take four weeks of vacation instead of just three.

The solution is to intentionally restructure how you do ministry so that you are left feeling energized rather than perpetually exhausted. As Nieuwhof goes on to say, “It's ludicrous to think that a few days off here or a few months off there are going to resolve the issue created by a perpetually overwhelming life. Taking a day off or a vacation as a solution to feeling chronically overwhelmed is about as strategic as telling an alcoholic that he should stop drinking on Thursdays.”

So what might it look like to build the kind of life and ministry that you don't feel the need to escape from? For me this has involved developing an intentional plan for managing my energy (rather than just my time) and aligning my priorities with that particular way God has wired me (more on this in February's *Advocate*). This has also involved using simple technological tools and developing small habits that cut down on distractions and minimize the energy drain of having to make countless decisions every day (more on this in the March *Advocate*).

Our conference's Clergy Care team has put together great resources, including retreats, counseling and spiritual direction. In addition to these resources, we all have the opportunity in this new year to give attention to how we're spending our time “on.” I invite you to consider what things are working for you to make your ministry and life sustainable, rather than needing to retreat from them.

If there are any helpful tools or practices you have found that you would like me to share in future articles and trainings, please send those to me at jdharris@umcsc.org.

You may also contact me if you would like to participate in coaching around developing practices that help you thrive in your life and ministry rather than merely surviving.

Again, sabbath is important. Rest, vacation and retreats are important.

But time off alone will never be the solution to the needs of worn-out pastors if the primary issue is how we're spending our time on.

In this new year, here's to making intentional choices that create the kind of life and ministry that you don't want to escape from!

Harris pastors Mount Zion United Methodist Church, Central. This article, along with other support tools for clergy, can be found at www.umcsc.org/ClergyCare.org.



Musings

by the Rev. Michael Jarrell

Hearing the other person

When I was a teenager, I went to a different church with a different take on Christianity than what I believe now. Their particular perspective stayed with me for a long time, though, and in truth, I had a hard time letting go of it—not because I thought it was right, but because my introduction to Christianity came at such a pivotal time in my life and changed so much of who I was and would become. For years, I would struggle with feelings of guilt and depression created by a warped view of God, the church and human existence.

One thing I remember as illustrating this, at least of the leadership, was this series of ideas: We are right; everyone who isn't us is wrong (and going to hell); end of subject. Asking serious, penetrating questions was beyond frowned upon. Coming up with answers the establishment (meaning the pastor and a few like-minded elders) didn't agree with or care to answer was a good way to find yourself ostracized from the community. Ask enough questions or answer enough the wrong way, and you might well be asked to leave. Curiosity was fine if the conclusions ended up being their conclusions.

Eventually, I found my way to college and later seminary, where asking the question and finding an answer that may or may not be the same as the powers-that-be was more acceptable. Not always liked, but acceptable.

Trip Fuller wrote about a conversation he had with a Benedictine monk who told him, "If you live long enough, you will finally ask a scary enough question to become a real theologian." I started asking myself scary questions, questions considered heresy by many if not most of the people I knew. I learned to read authors the professors disagreed with to find out why they disagreed. Sometimes I agreed with the professor and sometimes the author. Sometimes, I sought out writers I thought I might disagree with and walked through the process alone. Sometimes, I found people to engage in person, conversations that sometimes started uncomfortably but usually ended with a talking partner, even if only for the day.

What was the difference? The difference was hearing the other person, or more specifically, listening to people who disagree with me.

For most of us, the first "wrong" idea we hear sets off a defensive posture in us. We feel the need to protect ourselves by not allowing the "bad ideas" to infect us.

Hearing people is more than listening. It is listening with an open mind and a willingness to understand from the other person's perspective. It doesn't mean you try to change their mind or they are trying to change your mind. It means you are choosing to engage with the other person in a true dialogue—an exchange of words and ideas.

We have a tendency as a society to lose this hearing because we reduce the people who believe them to the ideas they believe. We don't see them as people anymore; we see them as their ideas or the labels that go with those ideas. Hearing other people humanizes them. Once you see the person beyond the ideas, once they are humanized, it is harder to dismiss them out of hand. They have thoughts, feelings, stories, the same as you. They have taken a journey through life and faith as you have. They have had to work through their understanding of God and church and belief as you have.

When you can see this, you can see the person, not just the ideas or perceived ideas.

Hopefully, we can become a people with ears to hear as Jesus says. In becoming hearing people, maybe we can make our families, neighborhoods and communities better places.

Jarrell pastors Adnah United Methodist Church, Rock Hill.

Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Mickey Fisher

Caring and saintliness

Caring" is a word we use often. Sometimes we use it to express love and affection, such as "You know I care about you," and sometimes to express negative feelings such as, "I don't care, I don't give a rip." Caring is a busy word, a word that falls off our tongue fairly often.

"Saintliness" is another story. It is seldom used. We could wipe it out of our vocabulary and never miss it because we very rarely speak of saintliness. Nothing short of a funeral or a good season by the NFL's New Orleans Saints can get us talking about saints and saintliness.

When New Testament writers used the term "saints," they had in mind new converts and those who shared with them in the mission of winning people to Christ. "Saint" was just another name for ordinary Christians! The connection between saints and stained glass had no place in the church until the building of the great cathedrals beginning in the 14th century. The stained glass in today's churches is a modern product.

The sanctuary of a church I once served has a very high ceiling with large windows. A family from New Jersey moved into town and joined the church. The husband, a new retiree, was talented and energetic. His hobby was working with stained glass. He collected discarded glass bottles of various colors, smashed them with a hammer, then took the bright shards of glass and fashioned them into attractive stained-glass designs.

People were fascinated by his work, and the church sponsored workshops so he could teach others to work with stained glass.

He was a serious man of faith and expressed a willingness to replace a portion of one of the sanctuary windows with stained glass featuring the church's logo, "The servant church." With approval by the trustees and administrative board, he did an excellent job. His work launched a desire by the congregation to add stained glass to each remaining window. Over time, that was done.

Unfortunately, a number of factors combined to create special challenges for that congregation. Today it is struggling, but hope springs eternal. The homemade stained-glass windows bear witness to a vibrant past and the possibility of a bright future.

When speaking of "saints," I am not thinking of those honored or memorialized in stained-glass windows. Rather, I am using the term the way it was used in the New Testament. They, the New Testament writ-

ers, described ordinary believers as saints. Thus, in my mind, the term "saint" includes all Christians: people like you and all those with whom you share the joys and struggles of life. A saint is not a "super believer" who ranks above the rest of us. We, us regular everyday Christians, are the saints!

Very likely you have noticed that it is difficult to live with some of us saints. The truth is that some saints are just a pain in the neck. What does that tell us? It says that sainthood does not wipe out our humanity. We remain limited in our capacity to understand and cope with life. Saints are just better at the coping part. We still remain human with all the limitations that come with our humanity.

It is not surprising that saints come in a variety of types. Some are sweet and gentle; some are gruff and demanding. Some come in varied patterns of sweetness and gruffness. Thus, it is impossible to identify saints by outward appearances or by casual relationships because it takes time and exposure for sainthood to become manifest.

Often it happens in times of hardship and challenge. In such circumstances, saintly behavior rises to the front. It has the singular capacity to act in the best interest of the partner rather than to protect or defend the self. Yet sainthood is not self-depreciating. It has a healthy sense of self without a "me first" default mechanism.

Anyone can, and most people do, appear saintly at times, but true saintliness is not a sometime thing. It cannot exist in brief fits and spurts. It cannot function as emergency apparel, something put on for special occasions. It functions as an interior attitude or it does not function. It is a way of perceiving life and reality that plays a major role in shaping our responses to the world about us.

So we ask, "What is the source of saintliness?" There is a profound relationship between saintliness and caring. Which comes first? Is it prior to or the result of a caring spirit? Opinions about that vary. It might be one way for some but another way for others.

Yet it is clear that there can be no saintliness without a caring spirit. They are intertwined. It might be argued that saintliness rises out of a caring spirit. It is difficult to imagine an alternate source.

So we can say that where there is a caring spirit there is the possibility of saintliness. Where there is no caring there can be no saintliness. And where there is caring, saintliness is likely to follow.

Fisher, a retired elder, lives in Spartanburg.

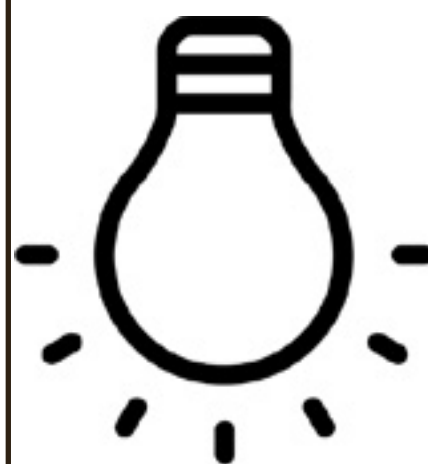


Photo courtesy of the Rev. Kathy Pryor

Hands and feet

The youth of Philadelphia UMC, York, fed the homeless in Gastonia, North Carolina, with the Rice N Beans Organization on Tuesday, Dec. 6. In the rain, in the cold and in the fog, the youth spread cheer and warmth to people in need of hot food. Homeless people were given a hot meal, fresh fruit, brownies, free gloves and hats, rain jackets and other personal items. Fifty-one people were fed. "These youth are the hands and feet of Jesus in a lonely and cold world," the Rev. Kathy Pryor said. "They are amazing!"

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Guest Commentary

by Deborah Len

Anastasia's new truth

Thank goodness I am not like those people," thought Anastasia as she read over the invitation to her 25th high school reunion.

She even loved how she'd changed her name since high school. She never liked Anna. She renamed herself as she decided to climb the corporate ladder. Step by step and rung by rung, she climbed, not really paying much attention to the people who got pushed ever so slightly out of her way. She was going to do this on her own, and nobody was going to help her. She wanted to know she did it her way.

Anastasia had a motto. She came up with it at high school graduation: "I will only trust me and myself and I. All others lie."

Now she read further into the invitation to her reunion. Yes, she was going, and yes, she would enjoy every minute of seeing all her classmates. She did miss some of her gal pals from then. She wondered what had happened to a few of them. She smiled to herself as she got her supper ready that night.

The venue for the reunion was gorgeous, and all the stops had been pulled out for this 25th reunion. There were charcuterie boards at clusters of tables. There were champagne fountains and ice sculptures and beautifully set tables complete with individual salt cellars and beautiful pink Himalayan salt crystals in them. This class had gone out of their way to impress.

As the night progressed, Anastasia realized she was the most successful of all her classmates. She had two cars and two homes and all the things that her corporate CEO

level could get her. She had everything!

A few of her former gal pals came to her as she was sipping a delightful Cabernet Sauvignon. Leslie, Lisa and Teresa had all hung out with Anna in high school. The four of them did well in school, each one helping each other with balancing school-work and after-school activities and jobs. They had been inseparable.

Anastasia started her Porsche and drove away from the reunion feeling very, very, very pleased with herself. She was playing over how Leslie's dress was a knock-off of a style from a few years ago, and Lisa had bags under her eyes, and Teresa was in desperate need of a facial and hair color, and her mind was so occupied she did not see the car parked on the side of the road.

Anastasia blinked and swerved in time to not hit it. She did, however, crash into the embankment.

Anastasia awoke in a strange bed with very rough bed sheets. These could not be her Egyptian-cotton bed sheets. Where on the planet was she?

Lisa, her high school classmate, was leaning over her and asking how she was. Why was Lisa here? Lisa explained she was the on-call emergency-room doctor for this weekend. Leslie's ambulance service was the one on the scene first, and Teresa was going to be her physical therapist for the next six to eight weeks. She had a badly injured leg, and it would take bed rest for a few days and then intense physical therapy to make sure Anastasia would walk well again.

Lisa was very excited for Anastasia, as it was going to be OK. She was going to be

able to keep her leg, as the broken bone would heal and they did not see any reason for any operations.

Crying would not help. Anastasia now had to trust in others for her recovery.

How, oh how, could she have gotten to this point in her life? Less than 24 hours ago, she'd had it all. Now these ladies from her past were going to help her to walk again.

"Nooooooo!" she screamed in her head and then from her mouth.

What was it about Teresa? Every day she would go over the same exercises with Anastasia and never seem tired or frustrated with the slow progress. Anastasia asked her after a few weeks. Teresa lit up even more brightly. "I found Jesus," Teresa said.

Teresa asked if Anastasia would like to know more about Jesus. Anastasia said yes. She'd always thought she had it all. But Teresa, Lisa and Leslie seemed to have something much more.

Teresa shared a Bible verse: "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Anastasia had always been strong and courageous—and she also had been petty and insensitive because she did not truly

have a heart full of Jesus. She realized when you only trust yourself you don't really see others and their personal humanity.

Anastasia had truly been shown the truth. Since the accident she had come to realize God had always been with her; she'd just never let him lead. She always had to have the last word or be first. Her fear of letting go and trusting beyond her own self was truly frightening.

It was a beautiful day as Anastasia walked to her Tesla. She had changed her corporate philosophy and did more philanthropic works. As she let Jesus lead her and she gratefully followed, the fruits from her delightful new tree of life were plentiful. She actually understood that "be fruitful and multiply" could mean more than "have many children."

Anastasia was filled with peace and gratitude. She truly had repented from her self-absorbed ways.

"There are no coincidences, only opportunities to show God to others," thought Anastasia.

Inspired by Deuteronomy 31:6, Galatians 5:22-23 and Luke 3:8.

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

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Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Tony Rowell

Appalachian Armageddon

Editor's note: This is a continuation of last month's column, "Flip-Flop Wanderers."

So where was I? Oh I remember now, I was heading down the Schoolhouse Gap Trail up in the Smoky Mountains desperately trying to outrun an impending thunderstorm and failing miserably. With a raindrop hitting me smack on top of the head while the thunder rolled off towards Townsend.

I have often wondered how weathermen sleep at night. I mean some of this has to be intentional. I had been promised a beautiful day, with no chance of rain, just blue skies with a white puffy cloud here and there, and what did I get? An Appalachian Armageddon is what I got.

Within a few seconds, my peaceful trek through the woods turned to chaos with a brass band above, a river below and a soggy sap who forgot his poncho stuck in the middle. I was able to keep the camera dry, but that was it; even my boots were full of water.

About halfway down the mountain, I decided to seek shelter under the lee of a big poplar that overhung the trail. It didn't offer much protection, but it tried. As I was sitting there on a rock, listening to the rain batter my head and shoulders and questioning my recreational choices, three girls, college-age I would guess, came around the bend just below my position, heading up the mountain. They were soaked to the skin like me, but what caught my attention was the fact that all three were wearing bikinis and tennis shoes—nothing else. They had no backpacks, no canteens, no maps, no gear whatsoever. Just bikinis and tennis shoes.

Now, I have been hiking the Smokies for over 45 years, and I have seen some interesting things up in the mountains. I've seen black bears a-plenty, bobcats, birds of every size and shape, and tree huggers of all ages. But for the life of me, I had never seen three girls wearing nothing but bikinis and tennis shoes.

Once I determined these girls weren't something my waterlogged imagination had cooked up, I asked them where they were going. They hollered back that they were going to Backcountry Campsite Number Nine on the Anthony Creek Trail. Truthfully, I was impressed; at least they knew what trail the campsite was on. That was more information than their flipflop wearing forerunners had to offer when I'd asked them the same question an hour or so before.

Out of curiosity and courtesy, I asked if they knew the way. They told me somebody said there was supposed to be a sign up here somewhere. I had to tell them there wasn't, but to ease their distress, I took out my trusty old trail map and showed them the way. Worried because of the confused expressions on their faces, I gave them the map and once again showed them which way to go. The map was old, anyway. As a matter of fact, the poor thing was more dishrag than map by that time, so it was no big loss.

My suggestion that they turn around and go back to where they started from and try another day fell on deaf ears. Whatever was happening at Backcountry Campsite Number Nine on the Anthony Creek Trail appeared to have some gravity to it. So I bid them farewell, said a prayer for their safe travels and waited for my next adventure. It didn't take long.

Not being firmly convinced that what I had just experienced wasn't a Vienna-sausage-fueled delirium, I recommended to myself that I head on down that mountain just as quickly as my feet could carry me.

So fearing for my mental state and hoping to ward off pneumonia, I stepped out into the torrent once again and headed downstream. The rest of my trek was just endless rain, mud and muck, with a little humiliation thrown in for flavor. I did keep to the shadows the rest of the way down, however, for fear that the odd ephemeral weatherman might see me and gain some sadistic glee from my difficulties.

It isn't often that a hiker relishes the sound of tires on wet pavement, but in this instance I did. As I rounded that final curve, I heard that distinctive sound and my mind said, "Hallelujah! I'm almost home."

Then I looked at my watch and realized I was home 35 minutes early, and the rain showed no signs of stopping.

Now to the best of my recollection, Backwoods Campsite Number Nine on the Anthony Creek Trail had a shelter or two built so the Appalachian Trail hikers could have a nice place to sleep the night. But the parking lot had no such shelters.

I crossed the highway and said hi to a young family, looking all wet and miserable as they sat on a rock, then I walked into the woods seeking shelter.

I found none. I sat down under the lee of a big old Eastern Hemlock tree that offered little protection and didn't even try to improve my situation.

I closed my eyes and dreamed of drier times and waited. I didn't have to wait long. Mary had anticipated my rapid descent and arrived about 10 minutes later. Seldom have I seen a more welcome sight.

As I threw my gear in the bed of the truck and waded into the cab, I noticed the young family on the rock had vanished. In my current state, I had to wonder if they'd been a figment of my overactive imagination, and that starts my next adventure; but that's for another day.

Well, you might be wondering, why in heaven's name did a preacher tell that story? Good question. To begin with, it was one of the oddest hikes I have ever experienced. Starting with the old bear, then the flip-flop wanderers, followed by the bikini-clad college girls and finally the sodden surgeon (who we haven't gotten to yet), it was one weird walk.

But I have noticed a refrain and a reason perhaps that the Lord wanted me to tell you this story. During this hike I had two opportunities to lead seven people to their destination—safely, I pray.

I had my trail map, which I knew by heart, thank goodness. I had my knowledge, and the Lord put me at the right place at the right time.

This might be a stretch, but I wonder how many times you and I have been given such opportunities to lead others to Jesus Christ, and I wonder how often we felt inadequate in our knowledge and perhaps our faith to take the lead.

I know I have.

My takeaway from this story is not unlike my take away from the story of the flip-flop wanderers. It's a call for you and me to increase our knowledge of the Lord by reading and studying his word, so that when a lost wanderer comes around the bend, we can guide them to the top of the mountain where their savior awaits.

Rowell pastors Beulah United Methodist Church in Gilbert. He is also the author of "What Would Granny Say? And Other Somewhat Embellished Memories," an essay and photography collection published by the Advocate Press.

You can buy it at <https://advocatesc.org/store/books/what-would-granny-say>



View from the Pews

by Bill Barnier

Public faith

I take care to not stray into areas of politics in my monthly columns. I don't want to impose my personal views upon anyone for fear of blurring the lines that God placed to separate church from state.

Yet every now and then something strikes me as noteworthy. A fearless act of faith without political spin is becoming rare these days.

During a Fox News interview this fall with South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, the conversation about his personal history became focused on his poor rural upbringing and the importance of spiritual role models in his rise to leadership. At every turn in his life, he said, there was a faithful servant of God offering a view of life through the lessons in the Bible. His connection to God and his church remained solid even as he jumped into the treacherous waters of national politics where it's so easy to succumb to the sins of wealth and power. In a few short years, Scott has earned a reputation for acting with knowledge and reason on issues before Congress. As popular as racism is in today's headlines, Scott has no tolerance for those labels. His popularity and common sense have made him an early mention for our nation's highest office.

Historically it's not unusual to see our presidents and elected officials attend worship services on Sundays. These are certainly pre-planned press opportunities meant to show the citizens the humility of the president before God. We cannot know what's in their hearts, however. Walking into a church and listening to a pastoral message does not a faithful servant make.

During the interview, Scott and the feature reporter strolled through Scott's church discussing the impact of religion on his life and professional actions. Scot was asked if he prayed for guidance when faced with tough decisions. Scott replied that he did,

then without warning, he asked the reporter if he could offer prayer. On international news, in the church Scott grew up in, in the presence of all he held sacred, Scott bowed his head and offered thanks for the many blessings in our lives and for God's grace to help us all make the right decisions about the issues in our world.

Short, honest, sincere and unafraid of any consequence, either personal or professional.

As a fellow universal traveler and a devotee of the power of our creator, I'm slightly less fearful of the calamity in which our nation finds itself. In the tradition of gras roots and rural America, a bright star shines within the darkness of our bastions of leadership. Here is a Christian who humbles himself before God and millions of viewers around the world to ask for help and guidance.

Of course, it would be unwise to just jump upon his political wagon as it were, without the demonstration that he cannot only say the words but live the words as well. His aspirations, still in the formulative stage, will also be guided by factors too numerous to discuss here. I can't help but think of the difference such a leader could make when God's will is in his heart.

The lesson here is certainly that people of faith need to be fearless in demonstrations of God's love and grace. Make a difference where you can. Teach others by sharing the spiritual message, then demonstrate the message so there will be no doubt of the true power of deep faith. If one faithful servant changes one life, just think how millions of truly faithful could change the darkness to light.

The light of the universe can be made more brilliant by its reflection from many.

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



'I do'

Manning UMC, Manning, celebrated a wedding during their worship service Sunday, Dec. 11. Here, the Rev. David McManus Jr. officiates the marriage of Charles and Patricia that day.

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Parading for Jesus

Manning UMC, Manning, youth, plus a couple of adult volunteers, share the light of Christ in their community during the parade in Manning Nov. 27.



Photo courtesy of the Rev. Dr. Martin L. Quick, M. Hamlin and Kim Graham

The sanctuary was adorned with beautiful decorations.

Cumberland UMC prepares for Christmas

By Janie W. McLeod

FLORENCE—On the second Sunday of Advent, Cumberland United Methodist Church continued preparing for the celebration of Jesus's birth.

The sanctuary was adorned with beautiful decorations, including a green wreath and white ribbons by Linda Gillard-Johnson and her daughter, Megerlyn Davis, worship chairperson. As customary, the 12-foot Christmas tree was tastefully decorated with handmade ornaments made by Mattie Gibson and other church members.

Continuing with the tradition of the

past six years, Janie McLeod and family embellished the altar with red poinsettias in memory of their loved one, the Rev. Edward C. McLeod. They also placed poinsettias in memory of the late Rev. McLeod's Sunday School Class (Carry Lawrence, Mable Adams, Roberta Durant, Edneta J. Conner, and in honor of Louise Johnson, Willie Mae Sanders and Lillian Adams).

Cumberland's pastor, Dr. Martin Quick, delivered a dynamic message, "Is He Coming or What?" Attendees said it added the perfect touch to thrust the congregation into the Christmas spirit.

Church training for officers to be offered free in January

Basic Church Administration is offering free Zoom training classes for churches in January.

Membership Secretary Training will be held Jan. 11 at 7:30 p.m. Finance Committee Audit Training will be held Jan. 17 at 7:30 p.m. Finance Secretary Training will be held Jan. 18 at 7:30 p.m. And Trustee Training will be held Jan. 25 at 7:30 p.m.

Pastors and lay leaders are encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to provide training to newly elected officers as well as those who have served for a while as a refresher course. All are free.

To register, go to <https://church-admin.org/registrations>.

Friendship outreach efforts motivate church while helping local community

NESMITH—Friendship-Nesmith United Methodist Church is located in a rural community of Williamsburg County.

Under the leadership of their pastor, the Rev. Ernest W. Frierson, the church has embarked on what they call "a new and gratifying quest."

The Mission and Health and Welfare committees, including other church members, have collaborated efforts in the church's Outreach Ministry, fulfilling the desires and wants of parishioners and community through an effort with My Brother's Keeper Shelter/Distribution Center in Florence.

On Aug. 25, during the initial visit to the My Brother's Keeper Shelter/Distribution Center, Frierson accompanied the Friendship team in the van. They were introduced to minister Marcus Simmons, the CEO of the shelter and center. Simmons gave a grand tour of the facility and spoke about their mission and efforts to feed the homeless. Simmons also introduced them to the friendly staff at the distribution site where

they met Andrea Jackson, who assigned church members their monthly pickups.

However, upon hearing about an opportunity for more frequent pickups, they are now assigned weekly visits through Janice Albert, joining other churches and agencies in the area.

After their first visit, they and their pastor made door to door calls. Each recipient excitedly received their goods and were pleasantly surprised to see the pastor delivering them as well.

The church said the experience has been a blessing for the congregation and community.

In addition, their Health and Welfare Committee ministry is also thriving. Their first ever "Coats for Christmas" ministry was held, and they are also collecting items for the Pee Dee Coalition for Domestic Violence Victims and seeking to identify underprivileged families with small children in the area to be blessed for Christmas.

"We are working and loving the work," said Joanna Latson.



Coming together

Manning UMC, Manning, hosted a Thanksgiving community worship service Nov. 20. The joint service was officiated by the pastors of First Baptist Church, the Presbyterian Church of Manning and Manning UMC.

Around the Districts

Columbia District

Washington Street UMC, Columbia, held a complimentary breakfast for those in need Dec. 3 at the church. The Welcome Table fed about 125 people with scrambled eggs, grits, bacon, pancakes, juice and coffee.

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Leesville UMC from many years ago.



Leesville, today, is still going strong.

Leesville UMC marks 141 years with celebration

Leesville United Methodist Church recently celebrated 141 years of faithful service to the Lord in their community of Batesburg-Leesville.

Leesville's Worship Committee began meeting in July to plan a special Homecoming Oct. 30.

A group of LUMC historians worked many weeks behind the scenes to gather memorabilia to commemorate the church's past, so much so that a Heritage Room was created to showcase it all. Information about the church buildings, former pastors, former members and groups and activities were all featured during this time of celebration.

A combined worship service was planned to include former and present choir members. Their former pastor, the Rev. Dan Bradley, brought the message for this gathering. One hundred seventy-two people were in attendance.

What's a homecoming without a delicious covered dish luncheon? Tables and tables of fried chicken, ham, delicious sides and desserts were enjoyed by all.

The church said it was a day they shall not soon forget as they look forward to another homecoming celebration in the years to come. Meanwhile, they hope to be found faithfully serving him and being the light in Batesburg-Leesville.

From the Archives



by Dr. Phillip Stone

Notes on being a church historian

January means a new year for many church officers and committee members, and perhaps you've agreed, when your committee on lay leadership asked, to serve as the church historian or as a member of the committee on records and history of your congregation.

First of all, congratulations! Welcome to the world of local church history, which can be a very interesting and rewarding experience.

Now: What is your job? In a moment of panic, you might think that you must write a history of your church. That's probably not the place to start, unless you, unlike most of us, have boundless amounts of time.

The church historian's job is twofold. Your responsibilities are first, to preserve the church's existing records and collect the current ones, and second, to promote and interpret history in the local church. That can be both the history of the denomination and of the local church. Whether it's 25 years old or 200 years old, every church a story to tell. But to be able to tell it, you have to have the documents that hold those stories.

Under the *Book of Discipline*, the local church is responsible for its records. That means churches should be keeping their membership records, including baptisms and marriages. The historian should be sure that the church is maintaining its business records, such as the minutes of charge conference and church council, committees, reports, the budget and the audit. Things that are not permanently valuable, such as bills, vouchers and giving records, should not be in the archives or history room. Any insurance policies, contracts or active files should be kept in the church office. Other records, such as the newsletter or worship bulletin, church directories, programs from events, photographs (preferably identified) and even newspaper clippings about the church or its members are worth keeping as part of the church archives.

If you are going to take the time to keep your historical materials, they need to be

preserved. Look for a secure space that is climate-controlled, and try to keep moisture and bright light away from the materials. If you can afford a fire-proof vault, that's even better, but it's not absolutely necessary.

Another duty is to tell your story. Placing items of interest on display is one possibility, but keeping people aware of history, of the work that the church has done in the past is a tribute to the saints who have helped build the church. It may inspire members today to undertake some new mission. You may also want to ask members of the church to record their own memories of the church. For many of us, our church may be the one thing we're part of for our entire life. Doing oral interviews with members can bring life to the stories that are in the paper records.

Be on the lookout for upcoming anniversaries, whether it's of the church's founding, of the construction of your current sanctuary or other building, or of a significant program or event in your church. Those can be great ways to highlight your ministry, or collect new items for your history room.

Speaking of stories, has your church undertaken significant work this year in preserving and interpreting Methodist heritage in your congregation? If so, please consider applying for a Herbert Hucks Award for the Preservation and Interpretation of Methodist history. The Commission on Archives and History presents the Hucks Awards at Annual Conference each year in the local church, publication, and individual category.

So if you know of someone who has, over the course of a lifetime, worked in Methodist history beyond the local church, please nominate them for a Hucks Award. Information can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/2uzx2z7h>.

Applications and nominations are due Feb. 10, 2023.

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



Conference Historical Society

by the Rev. Meredith M. Dark

Almost or altogether Christians

In Albert C. Outler and Richard Heitzenrater's volume "John Wesley's Sermons An Anthology," they write "The Almost Christian" was "reprinted at least 25 times during his lifetime and was the second piece in every edition of his collected Sermons."

Wesley was obviously thinking considerably about those of us who appear to be Christians but are not solid in our walk with Christ.

We must ask ourselves: Are we "almost" or "altogether" Christians? The definitions of each type are far too lengthy to expound upon. The almost Christian is one "who uniformly practices this outward religion with a daily seriousness of behavior—he who uniformly practices this outward religion has the form of godliness." As Wesley says, "There needs but one thing more in order to his being 'almost a Christian,' and that is, sincerity."

An altogether Christian has a sincerity about them, "a real design to serve God, a hearty desire to do his will. It is necessarily implied that a man has a sincere view of pleasing God in all things: in all his conversation, in all his actions; in all he does or leaves undone."

The call to be a Christian, in Wesley's view, is a very high one, so high that he himself misses the mark. There is a self-image of Wesley in his sermon, albeit a harsh one, in which Wesley convicts himself on the premise that he is not an altogether Christian: "Yet my own conscience beareth me witness in the Holy Ghost that all this time I was but 'almost a Christian.'"

It is notable that this sermon was written three years after his Aldersgate experience. Perhaps, in some ways, this is a reflection of himself in the state prior to and following his Aldersgate experience and the way that he feels himself more fully changed and awakened as a result of this religious moment?

The harshness with which Wesley writes is notable. Wesley himself falls short of the mark that he expects of himself. His falling short begs the question: How much shorter of glory are we? He invites all Christians to have the love of God in our hearts and to look to ourselves as "less than nothing." In reading the sermon, Wesley is calling us to true and utter repentance where we throw ourselves at the foot of the cross. The pain, fervor, seriousness and call to action in his words are palpable. There is an earnestness in his words, and we must change the errors of our ways so that we can experience this blessed assurance, which he himself has obtained.

At this turn of the New Year, we are being called to examine our hearts and to ask ourselves if we are "almost" or "altogether" Christians. The hope is for each of us to experience a moment of true justifying grace so that we can move forward using the means of grace in the process of sanctification. May we take Wesley's sermon seriously, and in doing so, may we experience a spiritual awakening where we truly know that Jesus loves us as we function in the world as altogether Christians.

Dark is president of the Conference Historical Society. To learn more about their work or how to get involved, email her at mmdark@umcsc.org.



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Founded in 1836 with our first edition in 1837, the *Advocate* is currently the oldest newspaper in Methodism and one of a very small number of still-thriving print publications (let alone an independent one!). The mission of the *Advocate* is to inform and connect South Carolina United Methodists by independently reporting relevant news, engaging readers, providing a forum for dialogue and sharing the Gospel of Christ. Your support is truly appreciated.



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Resource Center

by Betty Stalnaker

Top 5 DVD resources used in 2022

A special thank you goes to all our Resource Center members. We hope these and other resources have been helpful in your church ministry. As Sunday schools and small groups resume, we are ready to provide you with the Bible study of your choice. Listed below are the most-used resources in 2022 (four tied for third place, eight tied for fourth place and 24 tied for fifth place):

First place

“The Lord’s Prayer: The Meaning and Power of the Prayer Jesus Taught”

Second place

“Witness at the Cross: A Beginner’s Guide to Holy Friday”

Third place

“Anxious for Nothing: Finding Calm in a Chaotic World”
 “Prepare the Way for the Lord: Advent and the Message of John the Baptist”
 “The Call: The Life and Message of the Apostle Paul”
 “The Heart That Grew Three Sizes”


Fourth place

“Confirm Your Faith. Your Commitment. God’s Call.”
 “Elijah: Faith and Fire”
 “Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner’s Guide to Holy Week”
 “Faithful: Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph”
 “Kingdom Men Rising”
 “The Angels of Christmas: Hearing God’s Voice in Advent”
 “The Power of Knowing God”
 “The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life”

Fifth place

“24 Hours That Changed the World”
 “A Different Kind of Christmas”
 “Becoming A Contagious Christian”
 “Called: Hearing and Responding to God’s Voice”
 “Creed: What Christians Believe and Why”
 “Everything You Need”
 “God of Freedom: A Study of Exodus 19-40”
 “Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas”
 “Jesus in Me: Experiencing the Holy Spirit as a Constant Companion”
 “Jesus Revealed”
 “Just Walk Across the Room”
 “Light of the World”
 “Sermon on the Mount”
 “Shaken: Discovering Your True Identity in the Midst of Life’s Storms”
 “Simon Peter: Flawed but Faithful Disciple”
 “The Acts of the Apostles” (Efid Bible Study)
 “The Book of Genesis” (Efid Bible Study)
 “The Book of Revelation” (Efid Bible Study)
 “The Book of Romans” (Efid Bible Study)
 “The Chosen: Season 1”
 “The Mayberry Bible Study Vol. 1”
 “The Pop in Culture Series: The Faith of a Mockingbird”
 “Wesley and His Times”
 “What Does It Mean To Be United Methodist?”

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Global Briefs

Gift of 100 pennies leads to new church

BEAN STATION, Tenn.—Jo Hatfield didn’t have a lot of money. But she was inspired when her pastor, the Rev. Sam Dzobo, preached about his dream of building a church in Zimbabwe. Her gift of two rolls of pennies, valued at \$1, kicked off a six-year campaign by her small Tennessee church to build a new United Methodist church in Dzobo’s hometown.

Church unveils affordable housing plan

COMPTON, Calif.—Crossroads United Methodist Church marked its 30th anniversary by unveiling its vision for “Blake at Crossroads Compton,” an affordable housing complex and worship center. “This is God’s party,” said newly elected Bishop Cedrick D. Bridgeforth, who previously served the congregation.

Bishops announce grant, scholarship recipients

WASHINGTON—The Council of Bishops has announced recipients of the 2023 Local Initiative Grants and six scholarships for those United Methodists who will represent the denomination at the 2023 Parliament of the World’s Religions. The \$1,000 Local Initiative Grants are designed to help annual conference groups create ministry projects that are ecumenical and/or interreligious.

Conference, churches help in power outage

VASS, N.C.—North Carolina Conference Disaster Ministries is working with local churches to help 45,000 residents of Moore County who recently lost electricity after a power plant went out, apparently from vandalism. The conference has distributed generators and brought solar power disaster response trailers to Vass United Methodist Church and Southern Pines United Methodist Church. The loss of power has been particularly concerning because of cold weather.

UMCOR assists displaced families in East Congo

BENI, Congo—Five hundred of “the most vulnerable displaced households” in northeastern Congo recently received food and other assistance from The United Methodist Church. Money from the United Methodist Committee on Relief’s International Disaster Response program helped purchase 38 tons of food for families who have fled insecurity in the region.

Update on lawsuit filed against Florida Conference

LAKELAND, Fla.—Bishop Ken Carter has published an update on a lawsuit filed by 106 churches seeking to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church. He writes that “a number of those churches that originally filed suit have reconsidered, and they no longer wish to be part of that lawsuit.” Instead, he said, these churches plan to follow Paragraph 2553, the disaffiliation provision in The United Methodist Church’s *Book of Discipline*.

National vigil honors gun violence victims

WASHINGTON—The Baltimore-Washington Conference is inviting United Methodists to participate in the 10th annual National Vigil for All Victims of Gun Violence, which will be 7-9 p.m. U.S. Eastern Time Dec. 7 at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church on Capitol Hill in Washington. Participants can also watch on Facebook. The vigil is also endorsed by the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence and the Delaware Coalition Against Gun Violence.

A conversation about words we use and misuse

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—We hear terms such as gaslighting, implicit bias and cultural bias in the news, on social media, perhaps even at church. In the latest episode of the “Get Your Spirit in Shape” podcast, the Rev. Enger Muteteke from the United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race shares how understanding the terms and viewing them through a scriptural lens can help build a culture of belonging in congregations and communities.

Making the best use of church space

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Aging congregations and expensive buildings are challenging many churches, but there is an upside. Church leaders are starting to get innovative about how their real estate is used, and that could be the road to a sustainable future.

New grant to support Hispanic/Latino ministry

ATLANTA—In response to the potential financial impact of church disaffiliations, the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry is offering support to United Methodist annual conferences committed to Hispanic/Latino ministries during this time of transition. The new “acompañamiento” grant will provide up to \$30,000 based on needs, potential and commitment. “We hope this grant will stimulate creative, supportive and strategic ministries in our many Hispanic/Latino communities during this critical time,” said Bishop Sally Dyck, co-chair of the plan’s executive committee.

Church court deals with General Conference delay

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Three United Methodist annual conferences, including one in Africa, have asked the denomination’s highest court to rule on the ramifications of General Conference’s third postponement since the onset of COVID. The Judicial Council also faces more questions about church disaffiliations.

Lack of birth certificate challenges children in rural areas

HARARE, Zimbabwe—Many children in rural areas do not have birth certificates, and obtaining national identification cards can be a challenge. Representatives of five United Methodist-related primary and secondary schools reported an average 44 percent of students lack birth certificates. The United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe is working with local leaders and government departments to help students secure documents.

Germans approve full LGBTQ inclusion

FRANKFURT—The Germany Central Conference, meeting in a special called session Nov. 24-26, approved adapting denomination policy in its area to allow for full LGBTQ inclusion, including as ordained clergy. The German United Methodist Church has formed what it’s calling a Community Federation “for those in the church who want to preserve their traditional view in this respect,” and has guaranteed the federation will be fully integrated into the denomination’s structure in Germany. Bishop Harald Rückert praised the process that led to what he called the “precious gift” of unity among those with different convictions.

—Courtesy of United Methodist News Service

Rev. Theodore Edward Blackwell

HOLLYWOOD—The Rev. Theodore Edward “Ted” Blackwell, a retired local pastor of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Nov. 16, 2022.



Blackwell

Prior to his retirement in 2004, Rev. Blackwell served the Lebanon Charge. Funeral services were held Nov. 19 at Indiantown Presbyterian Church, Hemingway. Memorials may be made to Indiantown Presbyterian Church Cemetery Fund, 4865 Hemingway Hwy., Hemingway, SC 29554. Rev. Blackwell is survived by his two daughters.

Peggy Miller Brown

NORFOLK, Va.—Peggy Miller Brown, mother of the Rev. Steve Brown, died Nov. 23, 2022. Rev. Brown is the pastor of St. Mark United Methodist Church, Greenwood.

A memorial service will be held in the spring.

Lucille James

PHILADELPHIA—Lucille “Check” James, sister of the Rev. Palma Thomas, died Dec. 6, 2022. Rev. Thomas is the pastor of Mount Zion United Methodist Church, Florence.

Funeral services were held Dec. 12 at Ward AME Church with burial Fernwood Cemetery, Lansdowne, Pennsylvania.

Ms. James is survived by her son.

Mae Peace King

SPARTANBURG—Mae Peace King, mother of the Rev. Steven King, died Dec. 3, 2022.

Rev. King is the pastor of the North Easley Charge, Easley. His wife, the Rev. Sandra King, is the pastor of Disciples United Methodist Church, Greenville.

Funeral services were held Dec. 8 at Mount Zion Baptist Church with burial in the church cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Mount Zion Baptist Church, 842 Mount Zion Road, Spartanburg, SC 29303; to Ashlan Village, 415 Brenda Way, Lyman, SC 29365; or to Interim Hospice, 100 Verdae Blvd. Suite 300, Greenville, SC 29607.

Mrs. King is survived by her husband, Arnold Talmadge King, and two sons.

Rev. Donald Russell O’Dell

SPARTANBURG—The Rev. Donald Russell O’Dell, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Dec. 6, 2022.



O’Dell

Prior to his retirement in 1978, Rev. O’Dell served the Whitney, Walnut Grove, Liberty Hill, Shiloh-Zoar, Sumter-St. John, Central Charge, Ben Avon-Glendale and Lexington charges.

Graveside services were held Dec. 11 in Greenlawn Memorial Gardens.

Rev. O’Dell is survived by his wife, Carolyn Grace Seay O’Dell, and three sons.

Jerry Laine Richardson

POMARIA—Jerry Laine Richardson, grandfather of Christopher Richardson, died Nov. 29, 2022. Mr. Christopher Richardson is the husband of the Rev. Amanda Richardson, pastor of the Johnston-Harmony Charge, Johnston.

Funeral services were held Dec. 4 at St. Paul Lutheran Church.

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.

Mr. Richardson is survived by his wife, Carolyn, son and daughter.

Joanne M. Ross

FLORENCE—Joanne M. Ross, sister of Dr. Robert Monson, died Dec. 1, 2022. Dr. Monson is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Dec. 5 at

Stoudenmire-Dowling Funeral Home Chapel with burial in Mount Hope Cemetery.

Ms. Ross is survived by her two sons and two daughters.

Joseph Calhoun Watson Jr.

RIDGE SPRING—Joseph Calhoun Watson Jr., father of the Rev. Joe Cal Watson, died Nov. 8, 2022. Rev. Watson is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

A memorial service was held Nov. 19 at Ridge Spring UMC with burial in Ridge Spring Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203.

Mr. Watson is survived by his daughter and son.

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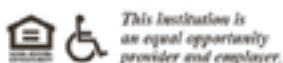
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December

- Dec. 21—Winter Solstice
- Dec. 23-27—United Methodist Center closed for Christmas
- Dec. 24—Christmas Eve
- Dec. 25—Christmas Day
- Dec. 31—Watch Night
- Dec. 31—New Year's Eve
- Dec. 31—Deadline for Revolution 2023 registration

January

- Jan. 1—New Year's Day
- Jan. 2—United Methodist Center closed
- Jan. 3—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 7:30-8:30 p.m.
- Jan. 6—Epiphany
- Jan. 8—Baptism of Jesus
- Jan. 11—Membership Secretary Training by Basic Church Administration, Zoom, 7:30 p.m. Register at <https://church-admin.org/registrations/>
- Jan. 16—Martin Luther King Jr. Day; United Methodist Center closed
- Jan. 17—Finance Committee Audit Training by Basic Church Administration, Zoom, 7:30 p.m. Register at <https://church-admin.org/registrations/>



Photo courtesy of the Rev. Kathy Pryor

'Teach the Children'

The Chancel Choir, youth and children's choirs at Philadelphia UMC, York, performed a Christmas program recently complete with Santa. "Teach the Children" was an evening focused on the real reason for Christmas: the baby Jesus. The children dressed in Christmas pajamas prepared to hear a story from Santa. Santa, played by Linwood Littlejohn, taught the children about the angels, the Christmas star, the evergreens, the shepherds, the color red for the blood that flows through our veins and more. Santa urged all to follow in Christ's footsteps, to go about doing good and to let their little lights shine

- Jan. 18—Finance Secretary Training by Basic Church Administration, Zoom, 7:30 p.m. Register at <https://church-admin.org/registrations/>
- Jan. 21-22—Winter Lay Servant Training of the Rock Hill District, Adnah UMC, Rock Hill, \$25. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/rockhillonlineregistration>. Deadline: Jan. 7.
- Jan. 21-22—Winter Lay Servant Training of the Rock Hill District, Grace-Lynwood UMC, Lancaster, \$25. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/rockhillonlineregistration>. Deadline: Jan. 7.

- ter: <https://www.umcsc.org/rockhillonlineregistration>. Deadline: Jan. 7.
- Jan. 21-22—Winter Lay Servant Training of the Rock Hill District, Sharon UMC, Sharon, \$25. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/rockhillonlineregistration>. Deadline: Jan. 7.
- Jan. 22—Winter Lay Servant Training of the Rock Hill District, Philadelphia UMC, York, \$25. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/rockhillonlineregistration>. Deadline: Jan. 7.
- Jan. 25—Trustee Training by Basic Church Administration, Zoom, 7:30 p.m. Register at <https://church-admin.org/registrations/>
- Jan. 27-29—Revolution 2023, Township Auditorium, Columbia.
- Jan. 29—Winter Lay Servant Training of the Rock Hill District, Philadelphia UMC, York, \$25. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/rockhillonlineregistration>. Deadline: Jan. 7.

February

- Black History Month and UWF Special Emphasis Month: Wallace Family Life Center**
- Feb. 1—UWF Social Action Workshop #1, virtual, 10 a.m.
- Feb. 2—Groundhog Day
- Feb. 4—Aging and Ministry in the 21st Century LSM class, Marion District, Zoom, 9 a.m.-Noon & 2-5 p.m. \$30. Register: bit.ly/MarionLSM. Deadline: Jan. 3

Equipping the Local Church grant application cycle opens Jan. 15

The Foundation for Evangelism will open the 2023 Equipping the Local Church grant cycle Jan. 15. A total of \$350,000 is available for grants of \$5,000 or \$10,000 to small and medium church congregations, or clusters of churches working together, in a Wesleyan-tradition denomination. Small and medium church congregations are those with fewer than 250 participants. During the 2022 Equipping the Local Church Grant Cycle, 31 grants were awarded totaling \$230,000. The Equipping the Local Church grant initiative seeks

to empower pastors and laity in smaller local congregations to dream, take risks and partner with God in the transformation of lives and communities. These grants are made possible through the generosity of donors, friends and partners of The Foundation for Evangelism. The grant is intended to help launch an experiment or initiative to share the Gospel, faith stories and invite others into a relationship with Jesus. Any church or group of churches fitting the criteria may apply. A total of 30 small church and 20 medium church grants will be awarded in the summer of 2023.

To help clarify the grant criteria and application process, an information session will be held on Jan. 26 from 3-5 p.m. Eastern. You can register for the session at FoundationforEvangelism.org/apply-for-grant. Applications will close Feb. 28. The Foundation for Evangelism works globally to educate and invite people into the Christian faith. Grants to pan-Wesleyan/Methodist leaders, churches, seminaries and denominations impact Christian leaders across five continents. To learn more: www.FoundationForEvangelism.org

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

Deadline is March 1 and application is online

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

United Methodist students for the 2023-2024 academic year who are planning to attend or are attending one of the four United Methodist colleges in South Carolina: Claflin University, Columbia College, Spartanburg

Methodist College or Wofford College. Students ideally will have an interest in communications, journalism or business. Requests for the scholarship are due March 1. Required are an application with an essay, a college or high school transcript, and a

letter from the senior pastor of the applicant's home church or a college chaplain confirming the applicant is a United Methodist and describing their participation. Learn more and download the application at <https://advocatesc.org/scholarships>. For questions, email jbrodie@umcsc.org.



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by the Rev. Cathy Joens

Power and belonging

Jan. 1 Children of God through Adoption

Lesson Scripture: Galatians 3:23-4:7
Background Scripture: Galatians 3:19-4:7
Key Verse: “You are all God’s children through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26).

The question is who is in and who is out? Paul reminds us in Galatians 3:26, “We are all God’s children through faith in Christ Jesus.” This is an explosive statement for those who have been raised under the discipline of the law. The law brought requirements such as circumcision to join God’s family. Paul introduced faith in Jesus as the only requirement for joining God’s family. One can only imagine the confusion and the arguments that ensued over who truly belonged to God.

Paul makes some great points for all of us to ponder. We are adopted into God’s family. We are given the opportunity to grow in discipleship and spiritual maturity. He has made a way, regardless of our sin nature, our gender, our life station or our culture.

It is hard not to think about Epworth Children’s Home when we South Carolina United Methodist think about adoption. So many children are displaced and in need of family and security. The work this ministry does through foster care and other services, in order to say “you are beloved and a part of God’s family,” is an amazing witness to what Paul is seeking to say to this new Galatian church. We, as God’s children, share in baptism and are clothed in Christ. God created us in his image. If we are in his image then others are, too (those we don’t know or don’t like or don’t agree with).

God gives his family name, Christian, and he gives his Spirit so that we might come and be a full part of his family, welcoming all regardless of culture and law. God’s love is a love that accepts us and grows us toward maturity. No matter our earthly family or life situation, we are part of his Kingdom.

Where have you encountered God’s love today? In what ways do you struggle with law and grace?

Jan. 8 Grace and Assurance for All

Lesson Scripture: Luke 15:11-32
Background Scripture: Luke 15:11-32
Key Verse: “This son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!” (Luke 15:24).

The parable of the prodigal son is so familiar to those of us in the church that we do not often experience the transforming message it has for us. At first glance, we read about a young son taking for granted his life on the farm. We may even see an irresponsible boy who should know and act better. We then see a father and older son working hard to keep the farm going. The youngest son comes back and repents, and the father throws a party. The oldest son gets jealous and mad.

This parable is part of a series of parables on “the lost”: the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost brother. Who and where are the lost today? Can we see ourselves among the lost?

What if we told this story from the lens of God as father, the church as the oldest son and the fallen and deathbed Christian as the youngest? Now, the story goes, God is working in his kingdom when his child, the Christian, comes to him and says, “I don’t want to follow you anymore.” The child says, “I have my inheritance of eternal life, so I am going to live like I want to.” The father lets him go but always misses him. The people in church wonder where the child has been but have not reached out because they are busy with Wednesday night programming and other programs the church

is doing. One day, the child shows up at a Christmas Eve service. The child sits on the back row disheveled and unrecognizable by everybody but the father. The father stops the service and runs to embrace the child. The church people wonder why the father is giving so much attention to this one person who has never been there. They come to every service and participate in many of the programs. Why stop the Christmas Eve service just because this dirty, disheveled person has come? The father explains, “He was lost and now is found!” (Luke 15:14).

As Bishop Jonathan Holston has asked us, “When was the last time you told someone, who you did not know, about Jesus?”

Jan. 15 In the World, Not of It

Lesson Scripture: John 17:1-24; Ephesians 4:14
Background Scripture: John 17:1-24; Ephesians 4:14

Key Verse: “They don’t belong to this world, just as I don’t belong to this world. Make them holy in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:16-17).

Imagine you are seeing loved ones for the last time. You have walked with through valleys and mountains with these people. You have had the privilege of mentoring and counseling each one, and you have seen them grow into beautiful leaders of faith. What would you say to them? Before you go, what would you want them to know or remember?

In today’s Scripture, Jesus is sitting with his disciples at their last supper. He knows what he must do is near. He reminds them he belongs to the Father and has done the Father’s will. He prays that they would be one—one with God, Christ and the Holy Spirit; one with the message of truth that God has us to share; and one with each other as we share it with the world. He prays that we will stay connected to him and one another in such a way that the world will believe. “The world” means those who do not know Christ or do not have faith. It is the world that threatens to envelope us with its values and demands. He prays that we will be thinking Christians in soul, heart and mind, that we will have discerning spirits for what God loves and share that with the world without compromise.

Jesus’s prayer is a call for all of us to share our faith in all places both dark and light, dirty and clean, hard and easy. John Wesley could have stayed with the Church of England, but he believed that the world was his parish; therefore, he went out to another country. John Wesley did not know the culture, but he still preached the gospel and many came out of the world into God’s wonderful light. John Wesley reminds us that it can be done even in our world today.

In what ways does your faith give you courage to share the gospel in today’s world? Are there pieces of the world you need to let go of in order to be free?

Jan. 22 Controlled by Peace

Lesson Scripture: Colossians 3:12-17
Background Scripture: Colossians 3: 1-17
Key Verse: “The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body” (Colossians 3:15).

I was 11 years old when I became a Christian. I had no idea what it meant to follow God and grow in maturity, but that moment changed the trajectory of my life. God has spent 48 years clothing me in his clothes of virtues and faith. I believe we Methodists call it “sanctification.” All who call themselves Christian have similar sto-

ries about maturing and the clothes of faith we wear.

How do we live in peace with Christ and each other while we are growing and learning in our faith? Paul and Timothy remind us to practice compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. We may not get this right all the time, but we can choose to grow in these areas. He also reminds us we should live in community with one another. Paul instructs us to practice forgiveness, practice gratitude, teach, warn and worship God with songs, hymns and praise. Practicing these can bring us to a place of peace with one another and ourselves. More importantly, these practices (disciplines) bring us to a place of peace with God. We grow in our faith life best connected to God and one another.

Our journey toward peace and maturity is not linear as much as we may want it to be. Our faith life is a series of squiggly lines that runs in all directions. I look back 48 years and realize I am more mature in my faith than I was at 11, and I hope I will have many more years to grow even more mature than I am now.

How about you? Where are you in your faith development? How have you matured toward a more peaceful faith life? What are the virtues and practices you find the hardest to live out?

Jan. 29 A Seat at the Table

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 22:1-14
Background Scripture: Matthew 22:1-14
Key Verse: “Go to the roads on the edge of town and invite everyone you find to the wedding party” (Matthew 22:9).
The parable of the wedding feast is the

last one of three parables that Jesus tells in response to the escalating conflict Jesus has with his opponents. This parable is filled with imagery and symbolism. Let us start with the wedding feast. Who are the players? The king (God), the groom (Jesus, Messiah) and the guests (us).

The king invites a specific group (Jews) to a banquet. Tradition says the invitation is sent out many months ahead, maybe even a year or more. He sends the reminder closer to the time. He prepares an A-list meal. Then he sends out the second invitation to all who will come (Gentiles). This is a great opportunity. Nothing like this has happened before. They were all once on the outside looking in with no way to be a part of the king’s family, but now they are invited to the great A-list meal and festivities.

We may take this for granted today because we, like the Jews, have had a seat at the table now for a long, long time. We have access to God through Christ. We have a church community that connects us to God and each other. I wonder if we would be a no-show to the party if we were invited today. Remember the one person who was not dressed in wedding clothes? While the king invites all of us to the feast, he also expects us to learn his customs (his ways) and to grow in discipleship.

Can someone outside of the Christian faith recognize that you are a follower Christ? While we are all invited to the feast, God also wants us to prepare and share in his goodness so that others will know he is God our creator, sustainer and savior.

Joens, a deacon, is a congregational specialist for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church working with the Anderson and Greenville districts.

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SENIOR PROM: Laity-initiated event raised more than \$19K

From Page 1

prom for senior citizens rather than seniors in high school.

The event, held Aug. 27, netted more than \$19,000, raising enough to pay apportionments and more.

Sass and her committee met weekly to strategize events and activities, planning party games, dancing and more. For example, guests were invited to “Guess the Younger Version” of prom king and queen contestants, with pictures displayed of the contestants during their youth.

In addition to trivia, a vote was taken to determine the winning king and queen. Margie Gadsden won the title of queen, while Isaiah Simmons won the title of king.

“The biggest highlight was that everybody involved worked really hard,” Sass said. “The seniors, they were the ones who made [the

prom] successful.”

With the prom theme, “The strength of a kingdom comes from its king, the strength of a king comes from his queen,” the prom was open to the church and the community beyond. All queens were aged 65 and older; kings had no age requirement.

“Like other churches, we have been struggling to pay our bills this year,” Smalls said. “Not paying the apportionments was not an option, but many of our folks just did not have the funds. We started selling hotdogs after church to generate some funds, but this was a proverbial drop-in-the-bucket to the almost \$19,000 we were required to pay.”

He said he was immensely proud of his church for stepping up and getting creative, as well as all the hard work it took to organize such a fun event.

“This, in my mind, is phenomenal,” Smalls added.



Prom winners were Margie Gadsen and Isiah Simmons.

DISCERNMENT PROCESS: Not intended to encourage exit

From Page 1

In South Carolina, no local church that has inquired about disaffiliation from The United Methodist Church has qualified under this provision, since they do not profess to disagree with the human sexuality language in the *Book of Discipline* or how the South Carolina Conference has interpreted it.

“It has been my hope that the division so present in the rest of the denomination would not affect us in a negative way,” said Bishop L. Jonathan Holston. “But it has become increasingly difficult over time to shield South Carolina United Methodists from these distractions.

“There are a growing number of churches in our conference inquiring about a way to leave the denomination, especially since disaffiliation under Para. 2553 is not available to them. While this is a source of real sadness, I have concluded that providing churches the space for conversation and discernment is a faithful step forward within the provisions of the *Book of Discipline*.”

The Trustees of the Annual Conference and the Extended Cabinet have prayerfully developed the Local Church Discernment Process. Their intentional and meticulous work is not intended to encourage churches to leave the denomination or to remain with The United Methodist Church. Rather, it was designed with the singular goal of en-

suring that churches will be fruitful in their mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

While similar to the disaffiliation process found in Para. 2553, the Local Church Discernment Process is grounded in Para. 2549 of the *Discipline*, which is typically employed when a local church is closed because it no longer serves the purpose for which it was organized. Unlike the disaffiliation process, the Local Church Discernment Process has no long-term “sunset” provision.

The process consists of multiple steps, including but not limited to:

- If the church council of a local church determines that it is in the best interest of the church to allow the congregation to pursue separation, the council must ask the district superintendent to call a church conference;
- Before the church conference takes place, the local church must complete an intentional, 30-day process of discernment to consider whether the congregation can continue to function as a United Methodist church;
- Representatives of the congregation will be assigned the responsibility of ensuring that certain financial obligations—as calculated by conference trustees—are satisfied before the congregation can vote on whether to separate. These payments include: A tithe equal to 10

percent of the appraised value of all church property and liquid assets; all unpaid apportionment giving for the prior year, as well as for the year of closure up to the date of the Annual Conference vote to close the church; an additional 12 months of apportionment giving; all unpaid salary and benefits due to clergy appointed to the church; and a withdrawal liability equal to the church’s proportional share of any unfunded pension obligations.

- Other financial considerations and legal liabilities of the local church—such as the disposition of any debts, loans, leases, endowments, foundations and cemeteries—must be satisfied or transferred to a new entity.
- At the church conference meeting, support of two-thirds of professing church members present and voting is required to formally declare that the church can no longer continue to function as a United Methodist church. This vote must take place by March 1 each year to be considered by Annual Conference members during their regular session the following June.
- Once all terms of separation are satisfied, the members of the Annual Conference must vote on a resolution to close the local church and transfer its

assets to a new entity. A simple majority vote in favor of the resolution is the final step before the local church separates from The United Methodist Church, maintaining its property.

All inquiries about the Local Church Discernment Process must be communicated by the church council to the district superintendent.

Holston continues to implore South Carolina United Methodists to remain patient and focused on what should be the top priority of every local church—our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

“During this time of discernment, I am encouraging everyone to pray for our church and for each other, to trust in the Lord with all your heart and not lean only on your own understanding,” Holston said. “Amid all of the distractions the world casts across our path, let us seek a more excellent way to focus on what matters most—trusting, believing and knowing that God is with us.”

The conference also offered several resources to aid churches in this discernment:

- “Guidelines for Holy Conferencing” (Inspired by John Wesley): <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines-for-Holy-Conferencing.pdf>
- “Courageous Conversations Regarding the Future of the UMC” (Discipleship Ministries): <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/courageous-conversations-regarding-the-future-of-the-umc>
- “What it Means to ‘Be UMC’” (Resource UMC): <https://www.umc.org/-/media/umc-media/2022/06/10/19/37/BeUMC-Discussion-Guide-2>
- “Visioning: What is the Next Step?” (Resource UMC): <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/visioning-what-is-the-next-step>
- “Planning Inspired by the Spirit” (Lewis Center for Church Leadership): <https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/planning-inspired-by-the-spirit/>

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