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February 2023

## Apportionments for 2022 close at 89.22%

By Jessica Brodie

With its treasurer calling it a demonstration of “great faith” in a year filled with uncertainty, the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church closed its books with 89.22 percent of apportionments paid.

That translates to almost \$15 million of the \$16.7 million conference budget paid by local churches in the UMCSC.

While the number is down from last year’s 91.67 percent, it is up from 2020’s performance and generally on par with giving across the last two decades (see sidebar).

“Our churches have endured the hardship of the pandemic and the upheaval of our denomination but continue to give generously in support of the mission and ministry of the South Carolina Conference,” said Beth Westbury,

the UMCSC’s treasurer and director of administrative services. “While total giving is not quite where it normally is, I believe the churches have responded with great faith to support the hands and feet at work outside their local community. I am thankful for all of our churches and their leadership.”

See “Apportionments,” Page 13

## Churches contemplate discernment as March 1 deadline approaches

By Jessica Brodie

Some United Methodist churches in South Carolina are contemplating separating from the denomination this month after conference leaders announced a Local Church Discernment Process.

The process was released in the January *Advocate*, via email and through district superintendents in all 12 districts of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

In essence, it permits any church to engage in a discernment process about leaving the UMC if their members believe the denomination has not upheld its stated doctrine on issues of human sexuality.

There are a number of steps the church must follow in order to comply with this process, including completing an intentional, 30-day discernment process; satisfying financial obligations, including all unpaid apportionment giving and unpaid salary and benefits due to clergy; satisfying or transferring of debts and other legal liabilities of the local church; full communication about all of this from the church council to the district superintendent; and a vote taken before March 1 that indicates two-thirds of professing church members present agree to formally declare the church can no longer continue to function as a UMC.

See “Discernment,” Page 10

## One big ministry

Hartsville Cooperative Parish pools gifts from four churches for collective good



Photo by Jessica Brodie

Dr. Reginald Lee (right), supervising pastor of the four churches in the Hartsville Cooperative Parish, gathers with parish leadership. “We really have a lot in common,” said Jeanette Lunn of St. John UMC. “When we got together we realized we’re not so different.”

By Jessica Brodie

HARTSVILLE—Imagine a church with multiple sites, all connected. At one site, there’s someone with a powerful gift for music, and another with a gift for organizing. At another site, there’s someone with powerful preaching skills, and at another, lots of space, plus a few people with outstanding technology gifts.

Then imagine all of these sites joining together, sharing their talents, gifts, financial resources and building space—one big church

with limitless possibilities.

That’s the grand vision behind the Hartsville Cooperative Parish, and two years in, the ministry experiment is thriving, its leaders and members invigorated with the plethora of creative ways to reach and love others in the name of Jesus Christ.

“This is a laboratory, basically,” said Dr. Reginald Lee, supervising pastor of the four churches comprising the Hartsville Coopera-

See “Hartsville Cooperative Parish,” Page 11

## ‘A lifeline’

Prison music ministry thriving as Methodists, others seek to help

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—Many faithful people draw deep, unspeakable comfort and inspiration from the freedom that hymns and other Christian music provide. It’s no different for followers of Christ who are behind bars, at least in one correctional institution in Columbia.

At Manning Correctional Institution, a thriving music ministry is rapidly growing under the care and direction of two brothers in Christ, Chaplain Charles Echols and inmate Alonzo Jeter.

“We play keyboards, guitars, drums—it’s enough for a full band and everything,” Jeter tells the *Advocate* over the phone from his chaplain’s office, where the two describe the

scene that occurs three days a week, when men of all races and ages gather for Bible study and worship there within the prison.

The chaplain and volunteers from local churches come to lead worship, with many of the men incarcerated providing their own testimonies—how they came to Christ, perhaps how they turned from him only to find him once more there in a cell, how some of them came to know him for the very first time because they were introduced to him there at Manning Correctional by a fellow inmate.

Jeter serves as the director and leader of the music ministry under Echols’ supervision, and he feels both honored and invigorated to serve in the role. Jeter had been part of the music

ministry at Tyger River Correctional in Enoree under the supervision of United Methodist deacon the Rev. Traci Bennett. When he transferred to Manning and discovered the minimum-security prison’s music ministry was on pause because of COVID-19, he wanted to help start things up again.

Today, there are about 14 incarcerated men who serve as part of the all-inmate music ministry led by Jeter. They practice about four times a week and play mostly by ear on largely old, used and donated equipment. Bible studies are Wednesday and Friday evenings, with a worship service Thursday evening, and music is a big

See “Prison Music Ministry,” Page 12



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# 'Fulfilled in Christ'

## Derwin Gray to keynote men's retreat slated for Feb. 25 in Lexington

By Jessica Brodie

LEXINGTON—How can you, as a man following Jesus, remain fulfilled in Christ?

That's the topic of this year's men's spiritual retreat, hosted by the Men N Ministry of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and featuring speaker Dr. Derwin L. Gray.

The conference retreat is slated for Feb. 25 at Mount Horeb UMC, Lexington.

Gray is the co-founder and pastor of Transformation Church, a multiethnic, multigenerational, mission-shaped community church. After serving five years in the NFL with the Indianapolis Colts, Gray followed God's lead to become an itinerant speaker and then lead pastor of Transformation Church in Upstate South Carolina. Gray holds a Master of Divinity degree from Southern Evangelical Seminary and is also a husband, father and author.

"This is the perfect opportunity for men from all over the state of South Carolina to come together to grow in their relationship with God," said Marvin Horton, South Carolina's Men N Ministry president.

Horton urged men to register now for the 2023 Men N Ministry conference, as it "will be here before we know it."

In addition to a powerful word from Gray, the conference will also feature worship with Mount Horeb's worship team and a number of breakout sessions designed to help make participants the men God has called them to be.

Lunch will be provided, and there will be a coffee truck on site with free coffee available from 7:30-10 a.m.

The day prior, men will also have the opportunity for two fun gatherings. A golf tournament will be held Friday, Feb. 24, at The Spur at Northwoods, Columbia, and an oyster roast will be held at Mount



Gray



Photo by Matt Brodie

Men pray at 2020's men's spiritual retreat, also held at Mount Horeb.

Horeb at 6 p.m. that evening. The oyster roast is \$10 but free for those attending the golf tournament. The golf tournament is \$80/person, with all proceeds going to support Men N Ministry to help South Carolina men become better fathers, brothers and Christians. A meal will be provided.

"Please consider coming out and supporting the Men N Ministry team," Horton said. "Have some Christian fun and maybe even have a good round of golf. First place trophies will be awarded. Just send your team players' names to Kenny Bingham at [kbingham42@yahoo.com](mailto:kbingham42@yahoo.com), or call 843-246-8398 for more information."

Registration for the spiritual retreat on Feb. 25 is \$65.

Register at [menministrysc.org](http://menministrysc.org), where you can also sign up for the men's weekly devotional email.

Ministry tables at the event are also available, as are sponsorships. Email [mjhcont@gmail.com](mailto:mjhcont@gmail.com) for more information.

## Bishops ask church court for clarification on GC2024

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church is petitioning the denomination's top court for clarification on its recent decision regarding the General Conference that will be held in 2024.

The church's court, known as the Judicial Council, ruled last month in Judicial Council Decision 1451 that the General Conference session to be held in 2024 is the postponed 2020 General Conference.

While the COB appreciates the clarity and guidance on that issue, the bishops feel that the decision has generated a number of other questions that arise from the language of the decision, and the COB therefore petitioned the Judicial Council for clarification of the decision on four limited questions.

The bishops made the decision to seek clarification during a special session of the COB meeting held via Zoom on Friday, Jan. 6.

Here are the four questions on which the bishops are seeking clarification:

1) Question for Clarification No. 1: If an annual conference has vacancies in its General Conference delegation due to death, resignation, or otherwise, does JCD 1451 allow an annual conference to hold elections to fill the

vacancies that have not already been filled by its reserve delegates?

2) Question for Clarification No. 2: If a person was elected as a lay or clergy delegate for the postponed 2020 General Conference and that person's status as a lay or clergy person has changed since election by the annual conference, do Paras. 34-36 of the 2016 *Book of Discipline* require that the delegate be declared ineligible to serve as a delegate in the status as elected and thereby creating a vacancy to be filled by the election of a new lay or clergy delegate if there is no reserve delegate to fill the vacancy?

3) Question for Clarification No. 3: In regard to delegates who were elected from two previous annual conferences for the postponed 2020 General Conference that have since merged, a) which delegates previously elected are eligible to serve at the postponed 2020 General Conference; and b) if the merged annual conference is entitled to fewer delegates, what is the process under the *Discipline* for determining who among those previously elected is eligible to serve, including the date for determination of the delegates?

4) Question for Clarification No. 4: Based on the holding in JCD 1451, is the Commis-

sion on the General Conference required to schedule and make arrangements pursuant to Para. 511.4 for a session of the General Conference to occur in the quadrennium after the adjournment of the postponed 2020 General Conference in 2024 and before December 31, 2027?

The bishops asked for an expedited hearing in the matter. It has been granted.

"Our request for clarification is to simply ask for specific clarification so that our work, both in the annual conferences and the general church, can function with uniformity and alignment. Our work in these specific areas needs to be conducted in a manner that is consistent across the church," said COB President Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton of New York Area.

In another matter, the COB voted last month during the Dec. 21, 2022 meeting to request a declaratory decision regarding Para. 413 of the 2016 *Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church.

The requested decision pertains to how Council of Bishops holds its individual members accountable for their work, both as general superintendents and as presidents and residents in episcopal areas.



Photo from a video screen-grab

### Support and love for new Bishop Dease

St. Andrew By-the-Sea UMC, Hilton Head, hosted a sending forth service at 4 p.m. Dec. 18 for newly elected Bishop Robin Dease, former pastor there who became resident bishop of the North Georgia Annual Conference of the UMC Jan. 1. A number of pastors and other friends turned out to speak and support Dease, including Jackie Jenkins, the Rev. Susan Leonard, Dr. Reggie Lee and Bishop Holston. To view the service, go to <https://tinyurl.com/robindease-sendingforth>

## Appreciation ads available to thank church admins

This spring, you have the opportunity to recognize administrative professionals in your church with appreciation ads.

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

Three sizes are available (all 5.088" wide):  
 • Small (1" tall): \$38  
 • Medium (2" tall): \$76  
 • Large (4" tall): \$152

Email text to [atrussell@umcsc.org](mailto:atrussell@umcsc.org) or send to 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203.

The deadline for the April edition of the *Advocate* is March 10.





Chevalier McKnight and Charles Blain help.



Inmates organize lunches to distribute.



Volunteers help get the lunches ready.

Photos courtesy of the Rev. Edward McKnight

# Incarcerated men at Lee Correctional blessed with Christmas lunch

BISHOPVILLE—Churches contributed more than 1,000 Christmas lunches for incarcerated men at Lee Correctional Institution.

The lunches were distributed at 10 a.m. Dec. 16, feeding 1,080 inmates.

This year, the lunches had to come from a Licensed Caterer or Business, which caused organizers to rethink logistics and the receiving of meals. While there were at least 22 churches that wanted to assist, because of the new rules and regulations, they were not able to do so.

With the help of Kairos, Bethesda-Cades United Methodist Church (the Rev. Shawn Chestnut), Faith UMC (the

Rev. Edward McKnight), St. Paul (the Rev. Bette Hedden), Jeremiah and Kennedyville UMC (the Rev. Norma Bartelle), Ministries on the Move (Pastor Paula Morris) and Apostle Charles and Wanda Logan Ministries, the lunch project was a success.

These churches and ministries funded licensed caterers or businesses that were able to prepare the donated lunches for the men at Lee.

“I want to thank the Rev. Terry Fleming and Mrs. Angela Bethea who encouraged me to continue with this project,” said McKnight, pastor of Faith UMC and senior chaplain of Lee Correctional Institution.

“With the passing of my brother, the late Rev. Jerold McKnight of Asbury UMC, I contemplated not feeding the inmates this year. It was a success, and although the guidelines have changed, we will continue to move forward in the coming years.”

McKnight asks churches who wish to be involved to begin saving funds for a caterer and preparing for a lunch distribution on Dec. 15, 2023.

*McKnight dedicates this article to the memory of his brother, the Rev. Jerold Dekover McKnight, who was the inspiration and the fortitude of the prison ministry.*

## Bethlehem partners with elementary school for annual food drive

Each year Bethlehem United Methodist Church in Pamplico has a drive to gather food of all kinds to support their Blessing Box at Hannah Hardware. And each year the congregation brings in bag after bag of food and puts it at the altar.

“Our church’s response to the community’s need is heartwarming,” said pastor the Rev. Jeanie Swanson. “Bethlehem is a very giving church.”

This year, something extra-wonderful happened, she said.

Last year, local teacher and church member Debbie McAlister’s 5K class at Scranton Elementary School had a canned food drive, which they donated to Bethlehem’s

collection.

“It was a wonderful gift, food given from the hearts of children to those in need,” Swanson said. “We were so grateful for their contribution.”

This year, that single donation turned into a school-wide project.

Once the Scranton Elementary canned food drive was complete and added to the church’s collection, Bethlehem found itself blessed with more than 1,500 pounds of food.

“I’m so proud of my class and school,” McAlister said. “We hope this will help many.”

Without a doubt it will, as Bethlehem is now looking for ways to expand its distribution to those with need.



The food drive was able to donate more than 1,500 pounds of food.

## Nominees sought for 2023 Annual Conference awards

### Deadline is April 3

It’s time to nominate outstanding clergy and laity in the conference for awards to be presented at the 2023 South Carolina Annual Conference.

Awards to be given are the Bishop’s Five Star Award, the Denman Evangelism Award, the Barbara Boultinghouse Bridge Builder award, the Michael C. Watson Volunteer in Mission Award and the Joseph Benjamin Bethea Distinguished Service Award.

#### Bishop’s Five Star Award

The purpose of the Bishop’s Five Star Award is to provide an incentive for churches to embrace new ministries each year geared toward growth and outreach. The award enables small and large churches to receive recognition. Criteria include:

- 1) An increase in Sunday school attendance and/or enhancement of Christian Education ministry;
- 2) A “new work” that impacts growth;
- 3) Members received by profession of faith or rededication, one for every 100 members;
- 4) Emphasis on youth ministries that demonstrate growth; and
- 5) All apportionments paid in full for 2022, or a 25 percent increase in apportionment payments compared to 2021.

Recognition will be given to the pastor and one layperson at a breakfast during Annual Conference. The award is sponsored by the Board of Evangelism.

#### Denman Evangelism Award

The Denman Evangelism Award, established in 1980 by The Foundation for Evangelism, honors pastors and laypersons for responsible evangelism in the local church.

In 1981, the national award was introduced to annual conferences to choose a clergy person, a layperson and youth each year. The Denman Evangelism Award honors people who are effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ. This can involve speaking, personal witnessing, inspiring the church to be involved in evangelism, etc. This person may or may not have the best statistical record and may be from any size church. Nominees’ lifestyles bring honor to Christ, the church and works in ways that are in keeping with the United Methodist history and traditions. The award is sponsored by The Foundation for Evangelism.

#### Barbara Boultinghouse Bridge Builder Award

The Barbara Boultinghouse Bridge Builder Award, named after a UMC deaconess, is given to a person or organization in the South Carolina Conference who has built bridges of understanding by promoting equity and inclusiveness without regard to race, gender, age, handicap or economic condition. The award is sponsored by the Commission on Religion and Race.

#### Michael C. Watson Volunteer in Mission Award

The Michael C. Watson Volunteer in Mission Award recognizes clergy and laypersons who exemplify extraordinary volunteer mission service within the South Carolina Conference. The award is sponsored by the Board of Global Ministries.

#### Joseph Benjamin Bethea Distinguished Service Award

The Joseph Benjamin Bethea Distinguished Service Award is presented to a person who has performed outstanding service in working for racial justice. Laity or clergy of the S.C. conference are eligible if she or he has shown a strong commitment to Christian social justice for at least five years (unless the individual is a youth). Specific efforts toward elimination of racism and/or building inclusiveness and/or empowerment of persons considered a minority (racially or ethnically)

is a criterion, as is Christian character and servanthood. The award is sponsored by the Commission on Religion and Race.

All nominations must be submitted by email. Forms for nominations can be downloaded at [umcsc.org/awards](http://umcsc.org/awards).

Nominations for any of the above awards must be emailed to [dseals@umcsc.org](mailto:dseals@umcsc.org) by April 3.

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# Viewpoints



## Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

### A deeper connection

Right now, some churches in the South Carolina conference are in a time of discernment as they decide whether they want to remain a part of The United Methodist Church. Some of these churches I know about, and some I've heard rumors about; my heart goes out to them. Deciding a huge shift, perhaps the hugest shift in a local church's history, is no small thing. Whether or not we feel a church should be in discernment about denominational affiliation doesn't actually matter. What matters is that this church is attempting to listen to what God wants them to do in order to be fruitful in ministry, and we need to respect that.

Discernment is the time of prayerful contemplation when we listen not only with our ears and our hearts, but also with what the Holy Spirit living within us is trying to say—what God is trying to say. For some of us, we hear God audibly; for others of us, we struggle to understand what God is trying to tell us. For that reason, it's important that we respect and allow a period of graceful privacy to those churches who are discerning right now whether or not they want "United Methodist" in their name.

I've been the editor of this newspaper for 12 years. Before I took the helm of the *Advocate*, I was a journalist for a number of years, running a weekly newspaper in Western North Carolina. While I attended and was active in my local UMC there, I didn't know all the politics or even the entire scope of the connection. But when I came to the *Advocate*, I learned quickly what a beautiful thing it is to be in connection as United Methodists.

We use that term a lot, the "connection," and to me, it speaks to the ties we all have as God's people. United Methodists are connected with each other and can do more together. Indeed, we do achieve more together. But truthfully, God's people need no denominations for this to happen. The connection we have in the Holy Spirit is far more powerful. Yet I still love the connection we as United Methodists have. I have witnessed it do so many powerful, beautiful things in the name of the Lord, from Imagine No Malaria or Stop Hunger Now to international and local mission projects through United Methodist Volunteers in Mission.

I have come to understand disaffiliation isn't just about where a church stands on the issue of homosexuality. It's deeper than that and, for many, has to do with obedience to church law via the *Book of Discipline* and other things. One of the most heartfelt statements I've heard in a long time appears on Page 21 of this edition. Matt Lacey, director of UVMIM-Southeastern Jurisdiction, had been getting pushback by some for having "United Methodist" in the name of the organization. In response, Lacey urged people to remember an important truth: the work we do as God's people transcends difference.

Noting that UVMIM will remain open to anyone in the jurisdiction regardless of denomination, he said, "Mission can be a place where people with differing opinions can come together and bridge the divide, to work together despite differences and to see God moving throughout the world. I've seen it myself—mission is that powerful. God is that powerful. But we have to be willing to give each other a chance."

The *Advocate* wholeheartedly agrees. I am convinced the connection will remain strong regardless of the words "United Methodist" because our connection is rooted in Christ. Whatever those churches discerning disaffiliation decide, we're all still part of the same Christian family. I imagine when the dust settles we'll all still be supporting important ministries in South Carolina like Epworth Children's Home, Alston Wilkes Society or Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry.

So let's offer grace and privacy to these discerning churches during this time. My prayer is that we all listen to whatever God is telling us to do and heed that call, whatever it may be.



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

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Editor: Jessica Brodie, jbrodie@umcsc.org  
Assistant Editor: Allison K. Trussell, atrussell@umcsc.org  
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## Bishop's Corner

by Bishop L. Jonathan Holston

### One more thing

*"What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."—Romans 8:31-39 (NIV)*

In South Carolina, the people called Methodist have been seeking a more excellent way for over a decade. God has blessed us over these years, and we are grateful recipients of God's abundant grace and mercy. Even as the toxicity of our polarization seeks to overwhelm us, I am confident that the Lord has more for us.

Paul is convinced, and so, too, should we be, that neither the present nor the future will overcome us. In all these things, we are more than conquerors.

Through Christ, we can do and be so much more than what the world would lead us to believe.

Through Christ, we can find courage and confidence. My friends, I believe God is still calling us to dream big dreams. God is calling us to even more grand visions. God is calling on us in South Carolina to trust him and believe.

If in fact God is for us, then there is nothing that can stand against us.

God is standing up for you and me. What gets in our way is our unwillingness to follow the way. Often, we make idols of things in our lives, even idols of the church itself, and this steers us astray.

However, we must prioritize making space for God to work in our own hearts, minds and souls. Making space doesn't mean being empty, but we need to get rid

of all the stuff that's in the way so God can work. We've got to put God first in our thoughts, in our decisions and in our lives. Jesus intercedes for us. The hard work is already done.

We only need to make space for God to work, to reveal to us how we can get in on one more thing for the sake of Christ.

Hope in God is sturdy and secure. Rev. Charles Spurgeon described it this way, namely, "We are too prone to engrave our trials in marble and write our blessings in sand."

Together over this last decade, we have faced natural disasters, violence, racism, pandemic, economic hardships, civil divisiveness, uncertainty and more. But in spite of all the circumstances of despair, we have leaned with hope on the promise that God is for us. We can't forget what God has already done for us.

God is moving and God has moved us. God is moving us now. He's moving each one of us into a new season, and God is indeed in this place, doing a new thing, reminding us and expecting us to be grateful for all that God has been doing for us.

God has blessed us in the past yet, God doesn't want us to become stuck. Stuck in what was; stuck in the glory of what used to be; stuck in the memory of how things were; stuck in all that we felt comfortable in being.

Having the God-sized dream of a better future, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. recognized the power of faith, namely, "With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope."

And friends, there is still more hewing to be done. I am confident that the Lord has more for us than we can imagine for ourselves.

So many times we can't even open our hearts and minds to receive the new things from God. The new things, the new experiences, the new glory will be like nothing that you have ever seen before. It's because we're not sure what it's going to look like – we haven't experienced it before. We're going into this uncharted territory. It is scary. Our church is at a crossroads, and it is scary. We don't know what's going to happen next.

But guess what? That's the opportunity. If in fact God is for us, then there is nothing that can stand against us.

My friends, we are more than conquerors. God promises us this. Even in the difficult times, God says, "I will be with you. You can count on this."

## Correction

In the column, "A New Year Like Fresh Cement" (January *Advocate*), by the Rev. Steve Brown, we accidentally ran the wrong photo of Brown next to his name.

The photo should have been the one here, at left.

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



Brown

## Letters Policy

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



## Final rounds

Bravo, bravo, Jessica. Your editorial in the January *Advocate* finally cut through all of the fence riding, soft slipper rhetoric about The United Methodist Church and stepped directly on the feelings of thousands of church members who are sick of the fight.

Sadly, this is exactly what the incomers set out to do, and they carried out their campaign perfectly. Over many years, they slowly directed their like-minded people into positions of power and leadership within the Methodist Church with the goal of bringing the traditionalists to their weary knees. Rather than start their own denomination and write their own rules, they chose to ruin one already in existence with unending pressure and constant debate over the rules they pledged to uphold when they joined the church.

There is no longer any doubt that the UMC is destined to dissolve. The fight is in the final rounds, and I, too, choose Christ.

Bill Barnier, member  
St. Paul's UMC, Ridgeland

## Please reconsider

Regarding the process for disaffiliation from the UMCSC, I am very angry with the message this process brings to traditional believers in the UMC. Bishop Holston and Cabinet, how dare you postpone your decision only to release it the week of Christmas? You succeeded in destroying the joy and hope of the Advent season. And then, how dare you devise a process that is virtually impossible both in time frame and financial feasibility for any of the churches?

Traditional believing churches have been asked to wait patiently on you to decide what the process would be. I guess we are being asked to turn the other cheek as you slap us from both directions. Even Jesus got angry and cleared the temple. Why? The money changers were unjustly charging God's people for sacrificial animals. I don't see any difference in what you are doing and what the money changers were doing.

Why are we being persecuted by our own denomination? When we became United Methodist, we signed over our church properties, in trust, to the UMCSC to protect us from lawsuits and to protect the biblical principles we believe in. The UMC has become so inclusive of worldly beliefs that it has gone far away from what God's Word calls Christians to be. We are called to be a "separate" people, not like the world.

I take offense when I am forced to accept issues I know are biblically wrong (Scripture), have always been wrong (Tradition) and will always be wrong (Experience). If we don't take a stand against this, then we are accepting it, and that is wrong (Reason). If we are willing to change or accept the removal of any part of Scripture, then we are in grave danger of losing Scripture that guarantees our salvation (Revelation 22:18-19).

I feel like this process is a slap in the face for all the churches that wish to remain true to Scripture. We are being disciplined for the UMC's failure to uphold the discipline.

Also, why is our process different from the other states? Why are we not allowed to use Para. 2553? Bishop, you say it is not ethical for traditional churches to use Para. 2553 because the *Discipline* has not changed. Is it ethical for the *Discipline* not to be enforced? Is it ethical to force traditional churches to declare wanting to close (Para. 2549) when that is not what we want or intend to do?

We only want to continue preaching and teaching God's Word in the context of the Bible as we have always done. Unfortunately, we don't feel like we can do that and remain UM.

Please reconsider your process. In the words of Moses, "Pharaoh, let my people go!"  
Rev. Randy Calcutt, pastor  
Tabernacle and St. Paul Charge

## Discernment between what?

### A missing option

The January *Advocate* described a newly adopted process offered by South Carolina



## Lee Road helps Lutheran food pantry

The people of Lee Road UMC, Taylors, in the Greenville District, did a "reverse Advent calendar" to donate needed food items to the Lutheran Church of Our Savior Food Pantry, located on Wade Hampton Boulevard in Taylors. Lee Road is now regularly sending volunteers over to help the LCOS Food Pantry each week in a new partnership arranged by the two church pastors, the Rev. Rusty Godfrey (Lee Road) and the Rev. Beth Costlow (LCOS). The two churches are about one mile apart. Pictured above, some of the "Bridge Kids" of Lee Road volunteer to help Debbie Gant, missions chairperson, sort the donated food items.

Conference leaders whereby churches can discern whether to separate or stay with the UMC while encouraging all to remain patient and in prayer, and trust in the Lord.

This "discernment" process assumes a binary choice of "stay in or leave" set of options. However, there is another option that most United Methodists seem to have never heard of. It is called the Christmas Covenant.

The ministry-focused goal of the Christmas Covenant is to establish "regional equity in the structures of the church for missional effectiveness while sustaining connectional unity." This possible option sees faithful discipleship in missional unity amidst diversity as opposed to dissolution. Yet, unexplainably, it receives very little publicity.

Stemming from the 2019 Special General Conference, most United Methodists understand that their options are either along the lines of the "Traditional Plan" or that of the "One Church Plan."

Here are some relevant facts:

At the 2019 Special General Conference, the Traditional Plan carried over the One Church Plan with a slim majority. The vote reflected differences between U.S. and non-U.S. international perspectives. A vote analysis indicated that American delegates were more than 70-30 against the Traditional Plan; however, it prevailed with heavy non-U.S. support.

The One-Church plan would have provided conferences, churches and pastors the flexibility to uniquely reach their missional goals while keeping the connectional nature of the whole UMC.

Now, however, the international central conferences, including Africa, the Philippines and others, in part as a way to bridge the international and regional differences, have presented this "Christmas Covenant."

The covenant is a set of legislative and constitutional amendments that include several petitions that are on the docket for the 2024 General Conference. The petitions provide for changing "central conferences" to "regional conferences," and creating a U.S. Regional Conference. The regional conferences would have the authority to adapt the *Book of Discipline* to meet the missional needs of each region. It is similar to, but an improvement over, the One-Church plan of 2019.

The Christmas Covenant is endorsed by the UMC Connectional Table, the United Women in Faith, several annual and jurisdictional conferences and other groups that promote unity and equity for all persons.

While being patient and in prayer, those who truly want "to discern" will want to research this non-binary Christmas Covenant path for themselves in order to be fully informed before engaging in making such a momentous decision. A good starting point is [www.christmascovenant.com](http://www.christmascovenant.com) or [www.asktheumc.org](http://www.asktheumc.org).

Further, the *Advocate* and other UMC news sources will want to publicize this op-

tion in depth beyond the prevailing "stay or go" mindset.

Richard Cottingham, member  
St. Mark UMC, Seneca

## Acceptance

In every community there are many churches and denominations. Each church has its own beliefs and worship customs. We are thankful we have the right to worship and freedom of religion. There are extremes in all faiths.

Each person has a right to believe in Christ in their perspective, to interpret the Bible and to experience the miracles of grace. The United Methodist Church continues to believe the Bible is the Word of God, there are miracles in the Bible and Jesus is God.

What is sad and wrong is when a Christian challenges the faith of another Christian as if one person is right and another wrong.

I am a liberal and a progressive. I have been baptized and converted to Jesus Christ. I believe Jesus wants unity and to love all neighbors. We will all be together in eternal life.

There are many churches and faiths a person can join. Go and find what you want and leave the United Methodist church if you must. Love Christ and your neighbor in the way that brings you peace. Christ believed that love was the answer. John 3:16.

Rev. John Culp, retired  
West Columbia

## The future of The United Methodist Church

As we consider the future of The United Methodist Church, we need to pray for God's guidance. Some congregations have decided to separate from the present form and polity and have formed the Global Methodist Church. Their decision is based on several different opinions: interpretations of Scripture, control of congregations, centralization of bureaucracy and, most publicized, the issue of homosexuality. Regardless of personal belief, we are all in this dilemma together.

There have been many developments and changes since the church began, with differing opinions and ideas about Jesus, about church set-up and leadership and about worship. And the world is certainly different than in Jesus's time and when the church began.

But God and the teachings of Jesus have not changed. Christians still accept that the most important commandments are to love God and neighbor. Jesus taught love and acceptance, not division and judgment. Is that not also the teaching of The United Methodist Church? The many programs and missions of our UMC, I feel, reflect that teaching.

A unified effort can accomplish much more than acting alone. In the local church, for example, we can join with other churches to make life better for people everywhere, more so than what we could do alone. (UMCOR is a good example.) There is strength in

unity.

So, on the question of the future of our church and The United Methodist Church, we must be diligent in praying for God's guidance.

Carolyn Hamby, member  
Liberty Hill UMC Greer

## Why now?

This is not a letter for or against changing our Disciplinary language. This is not a letter for or against disaffiliation. It is a letter pondering the logic of disaffiliation now.

I am baffled by the number of churches seeking disaffiliation. Nothing has changed. General Conference is more than a year away. Ironically, as conservative churches disaffiliate, the likelihood of the language changing increases. By leaving, they are potentially precipitating the very action they oppose.

What happens if the language doesn't change? What will those who have rushed to disaffiliate do then?

My father used to caution against buying a car in its first model year. "Let them work out the kinks," he'd say. If you disaffiliate now, what are you going to join? Might it not be better to wait and let a new denomination "work out the kinks" before joining?

For the sake of argument, what if the vote to change the language of the *Discipline* in 2024 passes? What would be the effect of St. Anywhere UMC? What would change? Nothing! The same congregation who cares for each other would gather to worship God together, listen to their beloved choir and hear a sermon preached by the same pastor who was there the week before.

"But, Jeremy, our *Book of Discipline* would have changed." Actually, no. Changes to the *Discipline* do not take effect until Jan. 1 of the following year.

"We might suddenly be overrun by members of the LGBTQ community!" Really? Do you think that after more than 30 years of publicly squabbling over this issue that merely changing our language is going to convey a change in attitude and acceptance? Several in the LGBTQ community told me they do not think a change in our language will indicate a change in attitudes, and they won't be visiting a UMC any time soon, no matter what happens at GC2024.

"I just can't stand the thought of a gay wedding in our sanctuary!" The *Discipline* gives the sole discretion concerning weddings to the pastor, including heterosexual unions. Should the language change, I would hope a wise pastor would consider the prevailing sentiment in the congregation and make appropriate decisions.

"What if we get a gay pastor?" What are the odds of that happening? Supposing we continue to ordain elders as we have the last three years (about nine a year) and that an average number are gay (say, seven percent). Your odds in 2055 would be about one in 37. Most people only experience about 20 pastors in their lifetime. So a child born in 2025 would have to live almost two lifetimes to have a gay pastor in South Carolina. Furthermore, as the bishops and cabinets of the past have been very careful in making cross-racial appointments, I think they would ponder long and hard before appointing a gay pastor to a particular church.

Can we, as good Methodists, apply some reason and experience in addition to Scripture and tradition?

Rev. Jeremy L. Howell, pastor  
St. Paul UMC, Spartanburg

## Has Wofford gone too woke?

God sent his holy Son to us in the form of man for the salvation of humanity. Billions of Christians around the world acknowledge God's son as the divine savior.

However, some academicians seem intent on disputing this Christian doctrine. In a recent religion class at Wofford College, students were required to participate in a spiritually offensive discussion of an article asserting that Jesus Christ was a homosexual.

The article, "Take Back Jesus: The Queer

See "Letters," Page 6



# LETTERS: Readers sound off on disaffiliation, wokeness

From Page 5

Christ Arises for the Good of All," by Rev. Kittridge Cherry, is composed of three pages of biased disinformation that has no scientific, no historical and no theological evidence that Jesus was homosexual.

With only one religion course required for a Wofford degree, such a blasphemous choice crosses the line of propriety for offering a student such an option without pre-requisite courses in Old and New Testament history.

Challenging college students to discuss controversial issues from different perspectives is definitely appropriate for their intellectual development. And there are dozens of other contentious issues in religion that are more relevant for robust debate. Does this article not suggest academic overreach for a religion professor to offer such unsubstantiated questioning of 2,000 years of Christian orthodoxy?

To place such earthly characteristics on Jesus Christ shows contempt for God's judgement and should be insulting to Christian believers. It is disappointing to see religion professors be given pedagogical authority to conduct an undergraduate course that borders on bigotry and heresy in questioning centuries of accepted religious dogma.

Is the religion department more focused on provocative secularism than on teaching students biblical history and theology?

The Wofford administration's response to these objections, as well as to the previous alumni protests of the English Department's statement that the Wofford community was guilty of systemic racism, was that the faculty has "academic freedom of expression." At the same time, balanced discussion to allow real critical thinking in many courses is minimal.

Racial tropes are taboo at Wofford, yet sacrilegious portrayals of enduring Christian tenets appear acceptable. Is there a double standard of tolerance existing at Wofford?

The deeper questions are: Is God pleased with these teachings at Wofford? Do standards for dignity and respect matter anymore in academia? Are the college's administrators and

the trustees tone deaf to parents and alumni concerns about such radical courses being taught at a Christian, Methodist-affiliated Wofford College?

Carroll Player, DDS, member  
Central UMC, Florence

## Changes needed

The January issue of the *Advocate* published the guidelines for the process by which local churches could disaffiliate/leave/exit The United Methodist Church. I publicly applaud the issuance of the process steps and appreciate the work, effort, prayer and time that Bishop Holston and conference leaders put into this process.

However, after much careful prayer and research into what other annual conferences in our UMC connection are doing, I am compelled to be critical of parts of this process.

First, the 10 percent "tithe" of appraised value is too high and will be a severe financial hurdle for small/medium size churches. The amount needs to be reduced or even waived for financially pressed small/medium size membership churches. Other annual conferences (Western Pennsylvania, Susquehanna, etc.) that originally set their "exit tithes" at 10 percent or higher have now dropped those to as low as 1 or 2 percent, and some have eliminated it altogether. No local church that believes the connection is broken and that theologically disagrees with where the connectional denomination is headed should be prevented from being free to leave. Money should not be the determining factor.

Forcing these local churches to remain in a connection they no longer support, and with which they disagree, is really a form of forced indentured servitude and does not reflect a "gracious exit" principle.

Second, the unpaid apportionment amount needs to be capped at no more than two years' worth of apportionments, with the same rationale as the aforementioned "tithe."

Third, the unpaid salary/benefits due to clergy needs to be capped at the day the local church officially leaves and not extended beyond that date. As written, this is not clarified.

Disaffiliating local churches should not be forced to pay for clergy services they no longer receive.

Fourth, the proportional share of unfunded liabilities needs to be clarified and based on the very latest Wespath figures and not statistics from previous years. Other annual conferences have discovered the "old" stats have placed a much higher financial burden on disaffiliating local churches than more recent stats.

I would respectfully suggest that conference leaders take into consideration these proposed changes as a way of bringing a more "gracious exit" principle into this period of separation and disaffiliation.

Whether we all think alike theologically or not, we are all still Christians and Methodists at heart. Penalizing one another economically is not the way to address our differences. Setting up punitive and burdensome financial hurdles to disaffiliation/separation only creates hard feelings and does nothing to help the process.

We can (and will!) still "be the church" even if we walk down different theological pathways. God bless.

Rev. Tim Reeves, retired  
Summerville

## Do what Christ did

Reading the latest from the Bishop and the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church on disaffiliation, I have the following to state:

I would encourage the Bishop and DSs to do what Jesus did in John 6 starting with verse 66: "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (KJV).

When disciples wanted to stop following Jesus, Jesus just let them go, issued no penalties as they left. If the powers that be of The United Methodist Church say they follow Jesus and represent Jesus, why don't they do exactly what Jesus did in a similar situation? In Christ's name.

Jay Schaefer, certified lay speaker  
Union UMC, Hemingway



## Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Cy Rogers

### Lost sheep

In trying to understand Jesus, three of the most important stories we have that give us insight into who Jesus was are the stories of the Lost Coin, the Lost Son and the Lost Sheep. These three best convey the message of who God is.

In typical Jesus fashion, the format is simple: something valuable is lost, an unwavering search follows, that which was lost is found and, because it is found, a celebration is warranted.

So let me focus on the Lost Sheep. If you remember, the shepherd, on realizing that a sheep is lost, leaves the 99 behind, then stubbornly searches for it until he finds it, brings it home and then calls for a celebration. The problem is resolved, the shepherd has done his or her job and the flock is together again, including Democrats, Republicans, independents, progressives, traditionalists, all 100 intact. What a powerful story! The point is the loss of even one wayward sheep is unacceptable, unthinkable to God.

On the other hand, The United Methodist Church has been losing one or two sheep a year, for almost 50 years, and now we only have half the flock left. It's a clear example of "acceptable losses" and poor shepherding.

This term, "acceptable losses," simply stated, assures us that these losses, considering all things, are acceptable. Of course, it is the preferred excuse of poor shepherding, and it works well to explain the loss of tanks and territory and whatever. That is, until we ask the question, but what if that "whatever" was your friend, your spouse, your child?

If you get the point, then you "get" Jesus. This story of Jesus is radical, according to God. There are no "acceptable losses," regard-

less of who they are.

Now another question: Do the leaders of our church, on either the left or the right, "get" this story? And if they don't get this story, how much do they really get about Jesus or God?

And now the church is dividing again. How many sheep will we lose this time? Are these "acceptable losses" the result of poor shepherding? Are they something we can celebrate? And yet, many are celebrating.

Interestingly, in Luke's version of this story, it tells us the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus; what were they hoping to hear? On the other hand, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were criticizing Jesus for eating with these "acceptable losses." Did these church leaders and experts not get what Jesus was saying? It troubles me. When was the last time our leaders, our bishops, sat down to eat with people who didn't agree with them?

And, again, according to Jesus, if you really are a good shepherd, which one of you, if you get it, would not leave behind the 99 and go seek the lost sheep?

This point is that for years I have watched our leaders, at annual conference, be led by a minister with a shepherd's crook. I get it about shepherding. But do they? How can you celebrate or excuse the shepherding when, year after year, you lose sheep?

Finally, I love how this story ends. I paraphrase: I tell you that, in the same way, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one shepherd who "gets" this story, over the 99 righteous persons who keep losing sheep!

Rogers pastors John Wesley and Sandy Springs UMCs, Anderson.



## Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Amiri Hooker

### The Black church may not have a dog in this fight

Recently, I went to a gathering of Florence County's state legislative delegation. As I sat in my seat, a very present, tiny, older White woman came and sat beside me. During the gathering time, I came to find out this lady was the mayor of a local township in our community and a member of a local small United Methodist church, and she discovered I was a United Methodist pastor.

After finding out I was a UMC pastor the question came that I have been getting some version of more and more: How is your church doing with this mess coming from the conference and all this disaffiliation stuff?

I responded out of my tiredness of the day: "As a Black church, we don't really have a dog in this fight. We are not going anywhere."

After seeing her response, I went on to try to explain. Many Black churches don't see the issues of homosexual inclusion as the main focus issues of our ministry and discipleship mission at this juncture. The main issues facing the Black church are racism, the rise of White Christian nationalism, the increase of poverty and the degeneration of the Black church as the center of the Black community.

The Black church, the oldest institution and pillar of the Black community, has historically dictated the community's stance on homosexuality: either you don't talk about it, or you condemn it. Yet the presence of gays and lesbians in Black churches is common. And the fact that they often hold leadership positions in their congregations is the worst-kept secret in Black America.

While many Black pastors condemn gays and lesbians from the pulpit, the choir lofts behind them often are filled with gay singers and musicians. Some male pastors themselves have been entangled in scandals involving alleged affairs with men. Even persons who are in the closet serve on trustee boards, serve in the ministry and serve in

every capacity in the church.

When you find yourself in a sinking rowboat, you don't spend your time worrying about the color and type of flag on the boat. You are more concerned about the hole in the bottom. The hole that many of our young families are falling through has to do more with issues of the pandemic of poverty, pre-existing health conditions and discipleship disconnect than issues of LGBTQ.

The primary issues in the Black church continue to be much like the issues the community raised during the legislative meeting in Florence I attended: issues like schools, housing, food deserts, infrastructure, justice, and community unity. As Romans 14:5 says, "One person judges one day to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind" (CSB). I believe in Romans 14; Paul deals with the issue of "disputable matters" between Christians. These are issues where the Bible does not give distinct, obvious guidance.

Now Paul applies that same teaching to the observance of holidays. Some Bible teachers suggest that Roman Christians were still following cultural religious ideas, which included a belief that some days were lucky, while others were not.

This brings me to wonder if this year, in celebrating Black History Month holidays, we should come to an understanding to stop worrying about the lesser issues of faith and community. Instead, perhaps we should center on what is necessary as we seek to live lovingly and justly as servants of Jesus Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, being a compassionate presence and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel.

Hooker pastors Wesley Chapel UMC, Lake City.





## Guest Commentary

by Michael Cheatham

### What about grace?

**A**t the special session of General Conference in 2019 in St. Louis, delegates upheld the provisions of the *Book of Discipline* as they relate to human sexuality and ordination standards and affirmed the traditional plan of organization. Delegates also passed a new paragraph (Para. 2553) giving local churches that disagreed with the wording to exit The United Methodist Church. That paragraph gives progressives a pathway to separation. It expires at the end of December 2023.

In the months that followed General Conference, representatives from all sides of the debate (traditionalists, centrists and progressives) met. The result of these discussions was “The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation.” This document was supported by all involved in its design and legislation for its implementation was developed for General Conference 2020. But with the multiple postponements of GC2020, the “Protocol” with its graceful exit provisions has yet to be considered.

As time dragged on, and General Conference postponed until 2024, traditional Methodists became frustrated. The Global Methodist Church launched ahead of schedule, and many traditional churches began separating from The United Methodist Church using Para. 2553. Progressives and centrists, seeing this exit, withdrew their support of the Protocol. With no guidance from General Conference possible, bishops developed their own plans for separation. These plans varied from conference to conference, some with punitive financial provisions, others with an abundance of grace.

Bishop Jonathan Holston of South Carolina was correct in his interpretation of Para. 2553 as it applies to the South Carolina Annual Conference. Since the South Carolina Annual Conference agreed with the language of the *Book of Discipline* as it relates to human sexuality and ordination standards, the provisions of Para. 2553 did not apply to churches in South Carolina. We were an island within The United Methodist Church with no way for local churches to follow their convictions.

With the delegate elections in 2019, and the recent jurisdictional conferences in 2022, it is obvious that the possibility exists that the language in the *Book of Discipline* will change when General Conference finally meets in Charlotte in 2024. That possibility has spurred many traditional churches to seek separation, even in South Carolina, even without a clear path.

After months of waiting, Bishop Holston and the conference trustees released a conference plan of separation. In this “Christmas Surprise,” churches will be required to pay to the annual conference 10 percent of the value of their property and other tangible assets (it seems offensive to call this a “tithe”), two and a half years of apportionments and its apportioned share of unfunded pension liabilities. These costs increase with other requirements: a commercial appraisal, a sexual liability insurance policy and legal fees related to the transfer of its property.

What’s missing from this plan? Reconcili-

ation and grace. The plan put forward by the conference trustees is without grace. It also fails to provide space for local churches to reconcile with the annual conference for shared ministries like Epworth Children’s Home.

Grace is the unmerited favor of God. But the grace we need is one step below. We need the unmerited favor of friends and neighbors, and especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. We’re a society that wants what it wants, when it wants it and the way it wants it. And heaven help anyone who gets in our way. We may live in a “civilized” society, but we’ve become a not very “civil” society.

Where is the grace anymore?

The answer should be “in the church.” It ought to be, but the church is becoming reflective of what society is instead of what it should be. Churches can be pretty uncivil places. “Peace on earth ... goodwill to men?” We wonder: Whatever happened to grace? We need to rediscover grace.

The story of Christmas is, at its heart, a story of grace. The coming of Jesus Christ into our world some 2,000 years ago is an affirmation of God’s unmerited favor to us. Scripture is clear. Titus 2:11-14 says, “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘no’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (NIV).

The spirit of Christmas is grace. Grace works best when given away. Our world will be a more grace-filled society if we in the church, who have received God’s marvelous grace in Christ Jesus, will take it as our mission to begin giving it away. It will make a difference in every one of our lives.

Many small churches will be unable to meet the requirements of this plan for separation without going into debt. These are local congregations that built their churches, have been a part of them for generations and maintained them with care and love. Many of these churches were built and paid for by generations of family. Many have families buried in their cemeteries. Many of them have limited resources, and as a matter of conscience and a desire to be faithful to Scripture, may be forced to walk away from their beloved churches full of memories.

The conference will undoubtedly take a hit to its budget if there is a huge wave of separations, as well as those conference ministries supported by apportionments: Spartanburg Methodist College, Senior College Scholarships, Methodist Homes Residents’ Assistance, Campus Ministry, Black College Fund and Africa University.

Bishop Holston and the conference trustees need to re-examine this plan and insert some grace.

*Cheatham is pastor of Zoar and Faith UMCs, Greer.*



## Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Tim Burleson

### Are you listening? My musing on the split

**I** was born and raised Southern Baptist. My Dad was a bi-vocational Baptist pastor in the western region of the Carolinas. I was an award-winning RA, or Royal Ambassador, the missions awareness group for boys and young men. I had 13 years of perfect attendance. Count ‘em, there were 12 additions hung upon my perfect attendance badge.

Friends and cousins would kindly ask me if I truly desired to be in vocational ministry. Their concern: I was picking a low-paying professional career in order to follow my dad’s footsteps. After adolescent years of discernment and many who affirmed my ministry gifts, I sensed, felt and was drawn into my own calling to ministry.

Southern Baptists have a two-step procedure into ordained ministry. The first step is licensing. This is a misnomer, as one is licensed to do nothing but submit to long-term examination of gifts, further sifting of the soul and observation by ordained clergy to determine fitness and evidence of call.

It is during this licensing period that a candidate pursues appropriate education. I completed an undergraduate degree in liberal arts, as I was advised this major is preferred by divinity schools. I was concerned I was not “Baptist enough” as my degree came from a well-regarded state university. My concerns were laid to rest when Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary offered admission. At one time, Southeastern was an esteemed divinity school.

After a four-year period of observation, experience and training, the Baptist Powers That Be judged me fit for ordination. On August 8, 1978, hands of ordination were laid upon me in Raleigh, North Carolina, by the church I was serving as associate pastor. (In Baptist tradition, local churches ordain ministers, not the denomination.) One year later, I graduated from divinity school with the first of two master’s degrees I have earned. I qualified for the second master’s degree some years later.

I was Southern Baptist to my Lottie Moon/Annie Armstrong-loving, cooperative-program-supporting core. A high school and college classmate once called me “Mr. Southern Baptist.” I took this as a compliment.

Then one day I was Southern Baptist no more.

Why? There are three reasons. First, I went through a period in my 30s when my faith, my theology and my church quit working. An existential crisis would be a good way of describing it. I had run aground spiritually. I needed a fundamental change and a reconstruction of my faith, summoned by grace to get my boat re-floated.

Second, I went through a divorce. Southern Baptists were and still are allergic to divorced clergy. They kicked me to the curb. I was no longer worthy. One Southern Baptist leader told me bluntly, “You need to find another career.” Great. I was a single father

of two teens and one of only five fathers in North Carolina at the time to receive child support. I had no job and, for a time, depended upon welfare checks and food stamps to feed my kids and myself. Southern Baptists dumped me with only “thoughts and prayers.”

Third, around this time Southern Baptists went through a purge. Anyone thought to be “liberal” was sent packing. My wonderful divinity school lost most of its teachers. They were replaced by “godly men” who believed and taught the right things.

Writing now, I have observed the self-destruction of the Southern Baptist Convention. One of the convention’s astonished leaders has referred to this sex abuse scandal as an “apocalypse.” Of the hundreds of Baptist ministers implicated, accused or convicted, three were part of the leadership of “The Purge.” The very same purge that sent me scrambling to feed my children, that said I was not worthy to serve and ruined the careers of mentors, friends and colleagues. The saying “absolute power corrupts absolutely” is painfully correct.

I spent 15 years as a sports chaplain. My son said “Dad, God isn’t through with you yet.” (Out of the mouth of babes.) These days I am serving in The United Methodist Church. I am beyond thankful for United Methodists taking me off the street and giving me the opportunity to utilize the gifts of my calling.

However, for me the horror of The Purge has returned. The United Methodist Church is going through its own breaking of fellowship. I am flashing back 40 years with memories, bad dreams and fears of the horror attacking another faith group I am connected to. (Thanks be to Abba Father, I have an excellent support system helping me work through the pain and frustration.)

I am writing this essay as a “word to the wise” to the Methodist family. When Southern Baptists split some 40 years ago, the split was over power. I know this, as I was involved in the split as a local pastor. The group that propagated the “Conservative Resurgence,” as history recalls it, wanted power. They plotted more than 12 years to get power. This group blamed the resurgence on “liberals taking over the convention.” It was not. I was there. The scandal that has created the current Southern Baptist earthquake had its genesis in the power-grabbing free-for-all called “The Takeover.” (That quote about absolute power rears up again.)

A conversation over beignets and cafe au laits in 1967 has led to the chaos and lack of accountability in the Southern Baptist Convention, my spiritual birthplace, when power superseded grace.

To the Global Methodist Church, I offer my blessings and good wishes. However, I have a question: Are you listening?

*Burleson pastors the Nichols Charge in the Marion District.*

### Love and suds

Jeremiah UMC, Hemingway, pastored by the Rev. Norma D. Bartelle, donated 40 units of laundry detergent to a local women shelter for Christmas.



### Love in action

The CIA—Christians in Action—at Wesley UMC, Ladson, sponsored a collection drive of socks, gloves and hats during the Christmas holidays. Members donated these items to local schools in the area.





## Guest Commentary

by Dr. Reginald E. Lee

### A birthday letter to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

**D**ear Martin, happy 94th birthday. On Aug. 28, 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, you cast a vision for a more egalitarian society. Coincidentally, I was born on the 4th of May in 1963. It was this vision of a more inclusive, egalitarian and socially accepting world that has captivated this nation ever since.

So many notables spoke before you that day, but history was building to a crescendo, and all of your rhetorical and spiritual gifts came flowing through. And just for a moment, the world seemed like a more hopeful place. Your wife, Coretta, said, "At that moment it seemed as if the Kingdom of God appeared. But it only lasted for a moment."

We have been chasing the dream ever since. There have been moments of bright sunshine and deep despair. In my last letter to you, I told you about the first inauguration of Barack Obama. It was a beacon of hope, and we did get the Affordable Care Act passed, which has helped millions to access the health care system in America. For that we are grateful. Yet Black, Brown and poor people of all colors still have morbidity rates higher than our affluent White brothers and sisters.

The dream that you shared in 1963 always finds itself pushing against the darkness created in the boardrooms of nationalism, racism and economic inequality. Our cities in urban America, though often headed by Black mayors and city councils, still show signs of blight while we build lavish downtown corridors for commerce and tourism. Just blocks away, you find communities ravaged by drugs, violence and hopelessness.

Gentrification has become the oppressors' answer for urban decay. Communities that once flourished fell into decay, in part because of redlining and the lack of real urban planning that included good jobs for non-skilled workers.

Yet, Martin, there are glimmers of hope and, again, your city of Atlanta is the epicenter of keeping your dream alive. When I wrote to you, the Rev. Raphael Warnock, whom I mentioned in my last letter, is pastoring your home church of Ebenezer Baptist. Well, because he was filling a vacated seat for the Senate, he had to run again in 2022. In the general election he won but not with the necessary margin of victory, so he was forced into a runoff with the Republican nominee Herschel Walker, a former standout running back. The people of Atlanta saw right through the plan to run two Black people against each other.

Walker was not selected for his acumen or his experience. Let's just say, they saw a chance to use him to advance the ultra-conservative, anti-affirmative action agenda of those who would like to take us back to 1963. In your "I Have A Dream Speech," you said that you looked forward to the day when humans would not be judged by the color of their skin but the content of their character. Well, Blacks, Whites, Latinos and others looked closely at the characters of Sen. Warnock and football great Herschel Walker and decided Warnock's character and sincerity were the way to go. After a long night of waiting for results, Warnock was elected to a full term as the Democratic senator from Georgia.

Martin, people stood in long lines and rain, they mailed in ballots and the race was won on the character of the two men. Of his mother, now in her 90s, a "preacher's wife and former sharecropper," Warnock said, "Who would have thought that a Black woman from Georgia who used to pick cotton would be able to use her hands to pick her son for the U.S. Senate?"

This, my brother, is progress; this is an

unfolding of the dream you preached about.

As a graduate of Boston University School of Theology, you were shaped by many United Methodists, including Alan Knight Chalmers and your dissertation adviser, L. Harold DeWolf. So we consider you a part of the Methodist movement in America. Dr. William B. McClain explained to his students at Wesley Seminary that much of your systematic theology of freedom came from the teaching of Dr. DeWolf. What kind of meeting must be going on in heaven: DeWolf, Chalmers, McClain, theologian Howard Thurman and you—that's a debate for all eternity.

Another Methodist connection has given us a glimmer of hope. The United Methodist Church has been in a heated debate about human sexuality for more than 30 years. This debate arose while the issue of race, class and gender equality faded into the background. Because of COVID-19, we missed the 2020 General Conference. But our Judicial Council, pressured by bishops who wanted to retire, authorized our jurisdictions to hold episcopal elections in November 2022. Living and serving in South Carolina, we are a part of the Southeastern Jurisdiction that also includes all of Georgia. We went off to the conference with an officially endorsed candidate. However, for the first time we had a majority of progressive delegates who were pushing for the "beloved community" that you referred to in 1968.

Two endorsed candidates were elected, a White male and female. Early in the proceedings, a write-in candidate from South Carolina was presented. Like the Senate race in Georgia, both candidates from South Carolina were Black. Both had similar training and backgrounds in ministry. The difference here was their dream for The United Methodist Church's future. After a very powerful speech about her dream for an inclusive church to include color and human sexuality, she did the noble thing and withdrew her name from consideration. Yet, the winds of history were blowing from the Palmetto State to Lake Junaluska, and on Thursday morning delegates began to vote with vigor for Dr. Robin Dease. Martin, on the 25th ballot on Thursday Nov. 3, 2022, at about 6 p.m., she was elected a bishop of the church.

Bishop Robin Dease has been installed as the resident bishop of the North Georgia Conference, which includes all of Metro Atlanta. In her sermon, she mentioned your dream for the nation. She titled her sermon, "I Dream A Church." It was in some ways a glimmer of the dream you preached in 1968.

Bobby McClain wrote to Robin Dease more than seven years ago and told her he believed that she would one day be elected a bishop in the church. He reminded her that "Black folk don't elect bishops." I saw it with my own eyes: White people heard you that day, and their children's children elected a Black girl who was born in Brooklyn, New York, and raised in Bennettsville, South Carolina, to be a bishop in The United Methodist Church.

Is it still a struggle to see the dream realized? You bet it is, but after 230-plus years of Methodism in South Carolina, a Black woman has been elected from the Palmetto State. "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."

By the way, Woodie White, now a retired bishop living in North Georgia, was a part of the installation for Bishop Dease.

So, just as Bishop White would close his letters to you, I say in affirmation, happy birthday, my elder brother. "We shall overcome!"

*Lee is lead pastor of the Hartsville Cooperative Parish in Darlington.*



### Hartsville clergy partner for district-wide outreach

The clergy of the Hartsville District gathered on Saturday, Dec. 17, at St Paul UMC, Camden, for an "Ugly Christmas Sweater Brunch." The gathering afforded an opportunity to look beyond the self this Christmas season and participate in an outreach program together as clergy sisters and brothers. Clergy members chose to help the Rev. Eddie Thomas and his ministry, Good Samaritans for All People. Thomas is a retired United Methodist pastor who completed his preaching career but is still serving as supply and filling in where needed within the district. Clergy filled his truck with toys, bikes and scooters for the event Good Samaritans for All People sponsored the following Tuesday, where people were allowed to shop for what they needed.

## Jericho Walk brings church together in prayer, spirit, health

NESMITH—Friendship-Nesmith United Methodist Church has a new mantra: "Friendship United Methodist Church, where friendship has a new meaning. Faith, hope and love, but the greatest we share is love." Saturday, Jan. 7, was an indication of the amount of love shown by members and well wishers from other churches and communities based on the vast number of people who showed up.

The Prayer and Health and Welfare ministries came together upon a recommendation from the pastor, the Rev. E.W. Frierson, to promote a healthy lifestyle both physically and spiritually by walking around the church seven times symbolizing the "Jericho Walk," an intentional God-led prayer walk in honor of the Israelites' walk in Joshua 6:15.

The goals of the walk included unleashing the power of the Lord and lifting up the name of Jesus, strengthening relationships and growing together as a church and community.

The community of Nesmith has a long rich history of faith, hope, love and lots of prayer when it came to education, for example. Education was at the forefront. As a result, a Rosenwald school was built to accommodate the African-American students in the community through much prayer. Even though the Rosenwald schools are no longer in existence, the remnants are still prevalent through the evidence of prayer.

"I thank God for the Jericho Walk with family and friends. It was awesome in Christ Jesus," said Kisha Graham Pressley, a member of the church.

"As we walked, we prayed, not complaining about our problems," the Rev. Frierson said.

The morning began with all members and friends joining hands in a circle. Sammie Pressley, chairperson of the prayer ministry, opened with a devotion, followed



The Jericho Walk was held at Friendship UMC Jan. 7.

by prayers of Thanksgiving and concerns for the new year from each person assembled.

Frierson offered a prayer before the walk began. Many said they loved seeing the older adults enjoying the fellowship, even though some were not able to walk the entire time.

When the walk was over, everyone gathered in the vestibule to wonderful treats provided by the church's United Women of Faith.

There were many who commented the following Sunday about how powerful the event was, leaving no doubt about the power of God.

"The Jericho Walk represents growing opportunities for us in our relationship with the Lord," Frierson concluded. "God already knows that we can overcome obstacles in his strength. But one thing is for sure: God never puts a wall of Jericho in our life to defeat us."

## Around the Districts

### Columbia District

**Columbia College, Columbia**, celebrated the grand opening of the college's new tennis courts Jan. 21. Men's and Women's Tennis Coach Mark Carnes and Tom Bogart, president of the college, welcomed attendees and opened the courts for friendly competition.

### Walterboro District

An All Saints Day program was held at **Bethel UMC, Smoaks**, Sunday, Nov. 6, to commemorate its dearly departed. First Lady Elaine Harley presided over the program with Pastor Walter Harley stating the meaning of All Saints Day followed by his message. During the program members called aloud the names of love ones and others who have gone before us followed by the pastor's prayer. We will always keep the memories of our love ones close at heart and pray that God keeps us, the living, close to him.



# Ebenezer's drive-through food giveaway blesses community

BENNETTSVILLE—As an ongoing outreach project, Ebenezer United Methodist Church on Bounty Acres Road shares food, smiles, Bible verses and tracts with others in the community.

In an effort to help ease hunger, Ebenezer members collect food items within the church and from food manufacturers to make boxes and bags for food distributions like the one held Dec. 10.

Members had such a good time doing this ongoing project. This time, the church gave away more than 100 bags and shared the good news that Jesus loves and cares for them. They said they met some of the nicest people from all denominations and all walks of life and just had fun doing this event.

They also found comfort and fellowship from other UMCs, like a few ladies from Christ UMC in Bennettsville. A few of their members wanted to see how Ebenezer did their drive-through event and were happy to receive the children's tracts to read to their very own grandchildren.

In the past, the ladies of Ebenezer provided a meal of chicken bog, green beans, rolls, tea and desserts. After, boxes and bags of canned goods and staples were passed out along with fresh fruit and in-season vegetables. Donations locally and from the conference Hunger Grant Fund help pay for these larger food giveaways. This time, however, Ebenezer opted for a drive-through. The church received cans of soup from Campbell Soup Company, and a few shared how happy they were to get the soups since they had just gotten over the flu.

Shut-ins and those recently discharged from the hospital had bags left at their doors. Members said the response was over-



The church gave away more than 100 bags of food.

whelming and humbling. Some persons wrote thank you cards to express their gratitude for the event.

Area food kitchens worked hard to help, like the one run by Roger and Ann Griggs called the Community Kitchen in Bennettsville. Members from Hebron and Ebenezer and other local churches volunteered to cook and make plates through their feeding program.

"I am very fortunate to serve the people at Hebron and Ebenezer UMCs for all their giving and acts of kindness done behind the scenes," said Rev. Juanita Raber, pastor of Tatum Parish. "They are very hard working and talented and have put all that to good use."

Raber said Pastor Marvin Karn and his family were long-time members at Hebron and left to become a part-time local pastor, where he serves at upper Ebenezer UMC and Bethel on Hwy. 9 in Bennettsville. These two churches have a joint monthly food giveaway, which has been a huge success.

# Greenwood Methodists planning missionary trip to Africa University

Plans are in an advanced stage for a missionary trip to Zimbabwe this July, according to the Rev. Thessa Smith, pastor of Trinity and Harris United Methodist churches.

One of the highlights of the trip will be a visit to Africa University, the pride of United Methodists. Africa University has a simple mission: to train future pastors and leaders to lead their people with grace and truth.

Smith, who will lead worship service in the Kwang Lim Chapel (a gift from South Korean Methodists), said she has yet to grasp the significance of sharing the gospel with Africa's emerging leaders.

The trip takes 14 days including flights. The group will also visit Great Zimbabwe, a city built of hand-chiseled stonework, the last of its kind outside Egypt on the African continent. Archeologists are puzzled as to how such massive stone works could have been brought together without machinery.

Dr. Kenneth Mufuka, a retired Lander University professor who has been asked to be the group's tour guide, has a unique experience. In his earlier life, he was asked by the Zimbabwe government to rewrite the story of Great Zimbabwe and to lead Prince Charles of Britain, now King Charles III, on a tour.

While Mufuka looks at a letter of warm appreciation from Prince Charles, he cannot hold his laughter. He is not sure whether Prince Charles knew that, prior to his visit, Mufuka had been whisked away by the Commonwealth Office to study under the guidance of the great curators at London Museum on how to handle royal visitors.

After a month of lessons, tours and seminars, the examination consisted of only one question: "What is an accident?"

The answer revealed the genius of the British: "An accident is an event for which one was not prepared. Therefore, the more preparation one makes, the less accidents there will be."

With that education, Mufuka returned to Zimbabwe to prepare for Prince Charles's visit.

The group will also visit Victoria Falls, one of the seven natural wonders of the world with a place on the United Nations Heritage protected list, during the trip.

Those interested in the trip, set for July 7-20, can contact Mufuka at 864-993-1918 or mufukakken@gmail.com. The price is \$4,500/person.



## Deacon's Corner

Rev. Kathy James

### Getting to know Kathy

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. Kathy James.

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

James: From a very young age, I felt called by God. I just didn't feel called to preach and pastor. I went to seminary with a questioning heart, learned about the ministry of Christian education and understood that I was called to teach and equip. That's when I began my diaconal journey.

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

James: My primary responsibility as director of church relations at Epworth Children's Home is to help churches develop and implement foster care support ministry. I preach and meet with committees and connect churches with the needs of foster families and other Epworth clients. So I serve as a bridge between the church and community, rather than as the leader of a congregation.

#### 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?

James: The advice I received early in my ministry was centered on the words of Jesus, to be "wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove." I am blessed beyond measure when churches answer the call to be the hands and feet and heart of Christ for foster families who are already doing that for the children in their care.

#### In a format replicating Dr. Brenè Brown's Unlocking Us "Rapid Fire Questions," let's

#### get to know a bit more about Rev. James.

Q. Fill in the blank: Vulnerability is:  
A. Being honest about who I am and what I can and can't do.

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. Breathe. And pray, "Holy Spirit, breathe on me."

Q. What is something that people often get wrong about you?  
A. People tend to underestimate how introverted I actually am.

Q. What's the last show that you binged and loved?  
A. "Vera," a British crime drama.

Q. What is a film that you really love?  
A. "The Sound of Music."

Q. What is a concert you will never forget?  
A. The first concert I ever attended was my freshman year in college. It was UB40. The second was Amy Grant.

Q. What's your favorite meal?  
A. Thanksgiving turkey and gravy, dressing, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, with green beans and roasted Brussel sprouts.

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

Q. Give us a snapshot of an ordinary moment in your life that brings you great joy.  
A. My hobby is making greeting cards. When I finish a card that turned out better than I expected, it brings me joy.

Q. What is the one thing you are deeply grateful for right now?  
A. It's impossible to name one thing! I am deeply grateful my parents, brother and sister all alive and in good health. I am grateful for the covenant of clergy in South Carolina and for the opportunity to know so many fine Christian leaders among them.



## United Women in Faith

by Kathy Roys

### Clean water for schoolchildren

South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith members, along with other United Women in Faith conferences in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, have heard the concerns from our sisters in the Mississippi Conference about the lack of clean water in many communities in Jackson, Mississippi. There is a shortage of potable water because of a major breakdown of the infrastructure in the local municipal water systems.

Jackson, the capital of Mississippi, has been struggling for several years to maintain adequate water pressure to provide safe water for its residents. Last August to September, the area was hit by heavy rainfalls that resulted in major flooding, which made matters much worse. Residents have been forced to boil water or purchase bottled water for daily use. The water coming from the taps remains brown and muddy-looking, even though the local government tells people it is safe to use. Schools have been forced to put covers over all water fountains to prevent children from drinking the foul water.

The week before Christmas, Jackson was affected by the below-freezing temperatures that spread across the nation. This led to many already-fragile water pipes breaking and reducing water pressure that much more to very low levels, which can cause contamination of the water.

The federal government has recently gotten involved in this crisis, but it will take time and much effort to remedy the existing situation.

The Mississippi Conference United Women in Faith has been providing bottled water to school children on a regular basis

since last fall. The other conferences in the Southeastern Jurisdiction learned of this situation during a September Zoom meeting of Charter for Racial Justice committees from each of the conferences.

As a sisterhood of faith and action, our response has been to help provide clean water for these children by sending monetary donations for the purchase of bottled water. The donations are being sent to the Jackson Bethlehem Center Inc., which is coordinating getting the water to the local schools. Bethlehem Center Inc. is a national mission institution of United Women in Faith and provides child daycare, a preschool program to help prepare children to enter kindergarten and summer camp for school-aged children.

South Carolina United Women in Faith local church units and circles can have treasurers send their donations through our regular channels, and all the combined collection will be sent to the Bethlehem Center Inc. by our Conference UWF treasurer. The deadline to send a donation is February 14, 2023.

Everyone else is also welcome to make donations to this important project. Your donations can be given to your local UWF unit or checks can be mailed to Bethlehem Center, Inc., 920 N. Blair St., Jackson, MS 39202. Please note is it for schoolchildren's water. Show some love to these children this Valentine's Day!

Note: On June 24, we will be hosting an online event addressing water issues faced by minority communities in South Carolina.

Roys is South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith vice president.



# DISCERNMENT: A pathway to exit for some churches

From Page 1

If all of this happens, the matter will go before Annual Conference members this June, when they will vote whether to close the local church and transfer its assets to a new entity.

As the process explains, “A simple major-

ity vote in favor of the resolution is the final step before the local church separates from The United Methodist Church, maintaining its property.”

You can read the full process in the January *Advocate* or online at <https://www.umcsc.org/discern>.

The process was developed by the Trust-

ees of the Annual Conference and the Extended Cabinet, which noted it was needed because there was no other pathway to exit the denomination for churches that agree with the existing human sexuality language in the *UMC Book of Discipline*. (Currently, the *Discipline* states that, while persons of homosexual orientation are persons of sacred worth who need the ministry and guidance of the church, the UMC “does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”)

While the 2019 General Conference added Para. 2553 to the *Discipline*, it only applies to those churches that disagree with the *Discipline's* current language on human sexuality.

To date, a number of churches have indicated they plan to engage in the Local Church Discernment Process, while many have also indicated they do not plan to do so. Several letters to the editor (see Page 5-6) have criticized what letter-writers believe are overly stringent requirements to leave, and one church member on social media shared that her small church could not afford to settle their financial obligations in order to comply with the process. Others believe the process is fair, while still others think no churches should consider leaving the UMC, particularly before the matter is considered at the 2024 General Conference.

The *Advocate* will continue its coverage in the March edition and actively seeks input from churches on the matter.

## Alabama-West Florida also plans alternative exit path while North Georgia hits pause

In addition to South Carolina's new alternative exit path, the Local Church Discernment Process, another annual conference is also introducing an alternative.

While the Alabama-West Florida Conference has been using Para. 2553 in the *Book of Discipline* for disaffiliations, it also is making plans to use Para. 2549 for church exits after the other provision expires at the end of the year.

Para. 2553 enables churches to leave for reasons of conscience related to the denomination's policies on homosexuality, though the South Carolina Conference has determined member churches inquiring about disaffiliation do not qualify for this pathway because they do not profess to disagree with the *Book of Discipline's* homosexuality provisions nor how the conference is interpreting them.

South Carolina's Local Church Discernment Process is grounded in Para. 2549 of the *Discipline*, typically used when a local church is closed because it no longer serves the purpose for which it was organized.

However, Alabama-West Florida Conference Bishop David Graves is asking churches to postpone any vote on separation from the denomination until after the 2024 General Conference.

“In these times of misinformation, assumptions, and fear mongering, we will have factual information following the 2024 General Conference to make prayerful and strategic decisions,” Graves wrote to the conference Jan. 3 (read his email at <https://tinyurl.com/awf-graves-letter>).

Meanwhile, the North Georgia Conference, which is largest United Methodist conference in the U.S., has put a hold on allowing congregations to disaffiliate from the denomination.

In a statement, conference leaders said they arrived at the decision because so much misinformation was being spread that they couldn't trust the validity of congregational votes.

Read United Methodist News' full article by Heather Hahn on North Georgia's decision at <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/north-georgia-hits-pause-on-disaffiliations>.

## Is your church discerning separation?

In the spirit of covering the current state of The United Methodist Church, including any churches that wish to separate from the UMC, the *Advocate* asks: Is your church currently discerning whether it will continue in ministry within the UMC or separate from the denomination via the newly released Local Church Discernment Process?

In order to do a fair and balanced article reporting on this, the *Advocate* needs your input to do so accurately. If your church is discerning separation and/or currently exploring the Local Church Discernment Process, please reach out to our editor, Jessica Brodie, at [jbrodie@umcsc.org](mailto:jbrodie@umcsc.org) or at *Advocate*, 4908 Colonial Dr., Columbia, SC 29203.

The article is planned for the March edition, after the discernment process has ended. The deadline for this article is Feb. 15.

We also invite you to share the results of your church vote when it takes place. The deadline for the April edition is March 10.

The *Advocate's* mission is to connect United Methodists by independently reporting relevant news, engaging readers, providing a forum for dialogue and sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We help give voice to churches and individuals in every corner of the state, with a commitment to excellent journalism and making sure all viewpoints are heard in a Christian and prayerful manner.

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### Performance brings nativity to life

To remind all of the real reason for the Christmas season, Wesley UMC, Ladson, performed “The Christmas Nativity” Dec. 18 in the sanctuary. The cast consisted of 15 church members along with their pastor, Dr. Carlton J. McClam Sr., who played the Messenger Angel. Through narration and song, the cast members' performances displayed their untapped talents and remained spiritual and uplifting from beginning to end. The Nativity Story, also known as the Christmas story or the Nativity of Jesus, is a story that tells the conception and birth of Jesus Christ. Throughout the many centuries of Christianity, the Christmas story has developed into a yearly tradition and is central to the celebration of Christmas in the Christian faith.





# HARTSVILLE COOPERATIVE PARISH: Working together

From Page 1

tive Parish: St. John UMC, Lamar; Wesley Chapel, Hartsville; New Providence UMC, Darlington; and Tabernacle UMC, Hartsville. “We’re not afraid to try new things. It’s literally taking the gloves off, learning as a parish, using all our conference resources.”

The Hartsville Cooperative Parish started two years ago after former Hartsville District superintendent Dr. Robin Dease—now bishop of the North Georgia Conference—recognized several needs in her district. First was the shortage of elders to serve local churches, and second was a need to pair younger pastors with more seasoned pastors to help them grow. That, plus the fact that some of the churches in the district were struggling financially, prompted her to appoint Lee as supervising pastor.

Theirs is not a new way of doing ministry, with successful models up and down the eastern seaboard, including many in Baltimore and New York, though it’s perhaps one of the only such group in South Carolina so far. Nor is it designated only for rural or struggling churches, either.

It is, however, a creative way of pooling resources, gifts and graces among several local churches for effective community ministry.

As parish leader Michael Woodham of St. John UMC, who’s known as the parish’s technological guru, says, “It’s like one church with many campuses.”

Parish leader Linda Gilliard of Wesley Chapel agrees with the analogy. “One church may not have the finances alone,” Gilliard said. “With all the churches coming together, we can do more.”

Not only do the churches pool resources—money, gifts and people—but they also have been the grateful recipient of a number of grants to help them accomplish much together. Lee said grants from the Conference Office of Congregational Development and from the Hartsville District, plus support from Bishop Gary Rivas and Lyttleton Street UMC, Camden, have made a huge differ-



Hartsville District Superintendent Tellely Gadson (left) gathers with Hartsville Cooperative Parish pastors, from left, the Rev. Lyndon Alexander, the Rev. Melissa Williams and Dr. Reggie Lee.

ence in the impact they have been able to make so far, and they are working hard to be self-sustaining in three years. Without such support, their strides would not have been possible, he said.

“It’s very hard to do ministry without money,” Lee said.

For example, in the beginning they started holding joint Unity Sunday gatherings where everyone took turns visiting each church. Each church took a month and held a get-together with powerful speakers, which motivated people to come back again and again. At the peak of COVID-19, they partnered with Care South and held a mobile van vaccination clinic, and they recently held a joint vacation Bible school that drew more than 100 adults and children across the community. Last Easter, each church sponsored members of a family with six or seven children that one volunteer transports to church each Sunday, purchasing new clothes for the kids,



Hartsville Cooperative Parish members gather with a collective they took up for needy kids in the community, one of many projects they’ve accomplished together as a four-church team.

gift cards for the parents and supplying a full Easter meal for all. They offer grief ministries and a joint Bible study. During the holidays, Wesley Chapel hosted a Blue Christmas, New Providence hosted Christmas Day service with a multicultural baptism and St. John hosted Watch Night.

“Our foundation is the congregations themselves,” said Paulette Lunn, a parish leader from St. John. “Without them saying, ‘We’re going to work together,’ it wouldn’t work.”

Roberta Balthrop, leader from New Providence, agreed. “It’s unified us, and we’ve continued working on maintaining that unity.”

Recently they added two associate pastors to their team: the Rev. Melissa Williams, who was a certified lay minister and now is a licensed local pastor, as well as the Rev. Lyndon Alexander, who will be helping to cultivate new relationships with youth and young adults. Lee said it has been helpful to

have one elder shared among the parish, as that ministerial salary is one of the biggest costs in a church.

“It softens the blow when it’s spread across three or four churches, and then more can be used for ministry,” Lee said.

Lee said what is especially exciting about their ministry is that it’s diverse, not only in race but in age. For instance, Williams is Caucasian, and many of the churches are predominantly African American. Alexander is 30 years old, while Lee is approaching age 60. Many of the laity preach services, bringing what Williams said are outstanding, excellent, biblically based sermons that rival ones she’s heard from longtime pastors. They’re hoping to bring in some Latino leadership, too, as the community has a strong Hispanic population.

“Ministry is about working together to meet the needs of the people, and I’ve learned that whatever you want in the congregation, you must show that on the platform leading worship,” Lee said. “It’s saying we’re open for different people to be part of our ministry.”

And it’s working. Balthrop said at New Providence, their congregation has doubled after the pandemic dip, with people coming back not just in spurts but every single Sunday.

The others churches are seeing similar growth and excitement.

“The glue started to pull us together,” said Theresa Bess, a parish leader from Wesley Chapel. “We needed all that, plus the congregations, to build the foundation, and we started to learn together.”

Future dreams include a way to house people in need, as well as provide after-school care. They are actively raising funds to make that happen. In late February, lay and clergy leaders plan to go to Atlanta for an invitation-only church growth seminar, and they hope to bring free new ideas back that they can implement here in South Carolina.

“It’s an exciting time,” Lee said.

For more about exploring a cooperative parish, email Lee at rlee@umcsc.org.

## Cumberland United Methodist Men build ramps and relationships

By Dr. Martin L Quick

The Bible is filled with references to building relationships. Philippians 2:3 says, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

In line with that, Cumberland United Methodist Church, Florence, has a mission to help build, restore and improve the lives of God’s people in many ways both inside and outside the church through nurture, witness and outreach.

The Cumberland United Methodist Men embody both references: building relationships and building ramps. They partner with Lighthouse Ministries, which provides funding for materials for people who qualify for the program, and the Cumberland United Methodist Men provide the labor and build the ramps.

People contact the church or Lighthouse Ministries to see if they qualify, and the men build the ramps to make more entrances accessible for people with disabilities.

“We are paying it forward with another day of ministry for the Cumberland United Methodist Men to build ramps and relationships,” said Milton Phillips, the president of the Cumberland United Methodist Men.



Men build ramps for people in need.

Photo by Milton Phillips

## UMCSC pastor inspired after mental soundness event

By the Rev. Juanita Raber

I recently accepted an invitation to an event hosted by a friend, Pearl Gillis, of Laurinburg, North Carolina. She pastors City of Refuge International Outreach Ministry in Maxton, North Carolina.

Gillis said the Lord showed her their work is a head-to-toe ministry, and the name of the outreach ministry should be called The Elijah Project. Now her desire is for the outreach to go global. In an effort to seek partners for the effort, and because many are seeking spiritual, mental and physical help in this time we live, she and others hosted an event Nov. 21 titled “Keeping Yourself Mentally Sound.”

Claireana Gillis hosted the event, held at Harley’s Event Center. A recent graduate from Full Sail University in Florida with a mass media and communications degree, Claireana does podcasts and is known to many as MzPacman-TV, or “PacPac.”

Residents of both North and South Carolina attended the event and enjoyed the special storytelling and entertainment. Azur Bostick highlighted business views and how to keep your mind sharp. Nattie “BOSSLady” Ridgeway presented on having the mental stability to be an entrepreneur and motivational speaker. Artist and Broadway singer Trejah Bostick sang from her Aretha Franklin tour. Sharon Armstrong from the Scotland County Domestic Violence Center shared about their important work and need for continued support. The emcee was Shavona Bolden, a praise and worship leader at City of Refuge.

All enjoyed food and fellowship, games and door prizes, all in a connectional ministry and outreach setting.

Raber pastors the Tatum Parish.

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# PRISON MUSIC MINISTRY: A 'lifeline' for many

From Page 1

part of each of these.

"A lot of the guys come out specifically for the music," said Jeter, who also sings and plays piano with the band. "There's not only a spiritual connection but a rehabilitative thing they have, and they're using the church and music as a place to just release."

"You see a lot of tears in the audience, a lot of dazed faces as services go on, because it's really causing them to think."

Jeter said he can relate, and he uses the music himself in those ways both to release and go deep in spiritual contemplation.

"It also gives me a platform where I can speak and share some of my experiences," Jeter said. "I try to relate to the guys because I really do relate. A lot of places they've been, I've been, too. I've been through a lot in my life, and if not for my belief in Jesus, I don't know where I'd be."

Echols said about 12 to 15 percent of the general prison population attends Christian services each week, and every week or two they get new transfers in. Some come to the services to get to know Christ, and some come because they're curious.

"If you think of a large program-size church on a Sunday morning, you have a real spectrum from infants in Christ to mature," Echols explained. "Some come in to check it out who may or may not be with the Lord."

And many stay, he said, for they come to understand the life-saving truth of the Gospel.

All who are incarcerated are permitted to participate in religious study groups and worship services per South Carolina Department of Corrections policy, Echols said. The services he and Jeter coordinates are ecumenical Christian. A Roman Catholic group has also started at Manning on Friday mornings.

"Our Christian leadership often goes back (to the wards) and pokes people, saying, 'Hey, come tonight,'" Echols said.

Their goal is to help the gatherings get bigger and bigger, and they know their music ministry helps with that.

Echols says Christian faith is a life raft, especially behind bars.

"We get two kinds of inmates—inmates who get here and realize, 'Yep, I made a mistake' and make sure it never happens again, and the other set are committed to continuing a crime-related life," Echols said. "For the first set, our church is a major support piece, spiritual and socially. A lot of inmates

“  
**To be able to graft in with the Christian population is a lifeline.**

—Chaplain Charles Echols on importance of faith behind bars both spiritually and socially

are here on drug charges, and the Christian population makes a difference. You can hang out with the Christians instead. Who you hang out with determines your walk with life.”

Jeter says he knows that personally. While he grew up with Jesus in his home, he said he fell away because he “got impatient” waiting on God to provide and “failed to trust God.” Now, he’s committed to staying strong, patient and trusting as a man of God.

“I feel it’s important to share with others so they can experience it, too,” Jeter said. “These are my bunkmates. When you’re living in the ward with everything going on around you, drugs and things, it’s so important just to see you can still stand firm, maintain, be respected and respect others.”

“A Christian is not a weak person. A lot of people in the prison have that misconstrued. I’m forgiving, but I’m never weak.”

Echols said many men are indeed like the prodigal son from Luke 11:15-32, when that son “came to his senses” and returned home.

“A lot of guys do that here—it’s a shakeup, they’re at a crossroads, asking, ‘Do I continue or make a positive change?’ But it’s hard,” Echols said. “To be able to graft in with the Christian population is a lifeline.”

Echols and Jeter are currently reaching out to partner churches and hoping to get new equipment or funds to purchase equipment to help their ministry be as high-quality as possible.

United Methodist churches and individuals in South Carolina are among those who are seeking to help.

Echols said anyone who wants to donate items or funds can reach out to him at 803-935-6081 or Echols.Charles@doc.sc.gov for a current list of needs and the specific form needed to donate the items properly per the SCDCC.

Those who wish to help can visit their Manning Chaplaincy page on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/20604OPGJSLZ>



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# APPORTIONMENTS: Cont'd

From Page 1

Apportionment monies cover clergy salaries, congregational development, campus ministries and other items in the conference budget, as well as global efforts such as the Africa University fund. In addition, churches gave nearly \$250,000 in "extra-mile" giving for United Methodist colleges and homes.

Of the 958 churches that pay apportionments, Westbury reported 773 paid 100 percent of their apportionments.

The Orangeburg District again saw

the highest percentage of apportionments paid, with a collection percentage of 98.23 percent. Columbia District came in second place at 96.16 percent, and Spartanburg District came in third at 94.23 percent.

Collection has begun for 2023 apportionments; the budget for 2023 is \$15.6 million. The Conference Council on Finance and Administration has been working hard to reduce apportionments in hopes that more churches will participate and reach 100 percent. The 2024 budget is being drafted now and goes before the conference for approval in June.

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- 2021 91.7%
- 2020 87.0%
- 2019 90.0%
- 2018 90.9%
- 2017 92.3%
- 2016 92.0%
- 2015 91.1%
- 2014 89.5%
- 2013 89.7%
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## Epworth Children's Home

### A strong year

Epworth's children enjoyed the first "normal" Christmas season since COVID-19 arrived in South Carolina.

The children and youth were able to participate in shopping trips provided by generous donors. Visitors were able to attend the Christmas pageant at Epworth Memorial United Methodist Church. Churches, businesses and individuals provided presents specifically selected for each person on campus, and Santa Claus made sure every child had a wonderful Christmas Eve and morning.

After Christmas, until school began in January, there were campus activities and off-campus excursions that kept residents and staff entertained and engaged in fun-filled activities. There was even the excitement of a water pipe bursting in the fire prevention sprinkling system in the Independent Living building on the Trenholm Road campus. Staff reacted quickly to find a warm and dry space in another cottage while the pipes were repaired and the cottage restored to good order. Even with that commotion and inconvenience, one resident, as he moved his belongings to a new space, was heard to exclaim, "This is the best Christmas ever!"

As 2022 ended and 2023 began, the annual process of closing the books on year 2022 started. It is evident that financially and programmatically the past year was a strong

one for Epworth and for the people Epworth serves. This was the 126th year Epworth has served children who need help becoming successful adults.

The "Every Child is a Miracle" campaign wrapped up in June with a total of more than \$8 million being raised. The campaign goal was \$7 million with a stretch goal of \$10 million. After COVID began its time in South Carolina and our churches closed for regular worship, the "every church" part of the campaign had to be changed, and many congregations and individuals did not have an opportunity to participate. However, the campaign was a great success, and Epworth's trustees and staff are thankful for the generosity of donors in this state and beyond.

The campaign was approved by the South Carolina Annual Conference to support four main elements. The first was to create groundbreaking new programs under the umbrella of the Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing. The programs created or expanded under this umbrella focus on expanding Epworth's footprint into areas beyond the South Carolina midlands and establishing Centers of Excellence in every region of South Carolina.

The second element of the campaign focused on the purchase of a second campus. A second campus was purchased compris-

ing 19 acres and 14 buildings. It is a beautiful campus and currently houses The Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing and several Centers of Excellence.

The third element of the campaign focused on increasing Epworth's permanent endowment. A strong endowment produces service array stability and long-term sustainability during uncertain times. Epworth, because of a healthy endowment, does not refuse services to children and families because of their inability to pay for those services.

The fourth component of the campaign was a tithe to foreign missions to children and youth. The tithe will go to Fairfield Children's Home and Old Mutare Mission in Zimbabwe and to strengthen the relationship between Fairfield and Africa University. This will be a life-changing gift for Old Mutare and to the people served by Fairfield Children's Home.

As 2023 begins to roll through the weeks, additional sites and programs continue to open and grow across the conference. Prevention and remedial services are rendered to people who before now had little to no access to these services. Congregations are becoming missional outposts to children and families who need assistance in establishing a positive pattern of productive living.

—Dr. John Holler



### A true celebration

First UMC, Cheraw, held their annual Shepherd's Child Party Dec. 16 and provided Christmas for 52 children. Some members of the congregation took a name or two and bought their selected child presents. The other members donated money, and the shoppers purchased their gifts. Mount Olivet UMC donated money and cakes for the refreshments. All said the smiles on the children's faces were a delight to see. Each family also received a flannel throw and a \$25 gift card.



by the Rev. Jonathan Harris

## Clergy Care

### Managing your energy, not just your time

Imagine this scenario: A reporter from a local newspaper calls you at 3 p.m. to ask you a few questions about your church's upcoming activities for a story he's doing. My guess is that this would be a pretty easy conversation for you. You are alert and able to name very quickly and clearly the key events that are coming up in the life of your church.

Now imagine that instead of 3 p.m., you receive that same call at 3 a.m. How quickly and clearly can you name the church's upcoming activities? Do you even get that far, or do you angrily tell the reporter he should know not to call you at that time of night and hang up on him? If you are a really heavy sleeper (like me!), then maybe you never even hear your phone ring at all. The point? When things happen matters.

If you don't believe me, then consider these facts: Anesthesiologists have an "adverse event" about 1 percent of the time at 9 a.m. At 4 p.m., the rate rises to more than 4 percent. That's a 300 percent increase, just based on the time of day!

Endoscopists detect polyps at a lower rate as the day progresses. Every hour produces a 5 percent reduction in detection.

While all hours of the day are equal in length, they are not equal in energy. Research shows that most people have between three and five hours of peak energy a day (what Carey Nieuwhof calls your "Green Zone"). That's it! The remaining hours of each day are either medium energy (what he calls your "Yellow Zone") or low energy ("Red Zone").

A complete game changer for my life and ministry was identifying my "Green Zone" (roughly 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.), my "Yellow Zone" (roughly 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.), and my "Red Zone" (roughly 7 p.m. until 7:30 a.m. the next day).

Why was this a game changer? Because I discovered that I was often working against the natural rhythm of how God wired me rather than with it. I would come to the church office each morning during my precious few, highly energized hours, and what would I do? Check and respond to emails. Return phone calls. By the time I got around to the most important things (if I got around to them at all), I was already well into my Yellow Zone, or even my Red Zone. This made me less productive, and less productivity meant working longer hours and having less time and energy to invest in my family.

Before you read the rest of this article, I invite you to list in a calendar where you think your Green, Yellow and Red Zones are.

Once you have done that, make a list of your top two or three priorities. When it comes to ministry, my personal list looks like this:

- Worship/preaching: This is my greatest point of contact

with the most people each week, and it shapes the rest of the life of the church.

- Lay leadership (and staff) development: Leadership development multiplies my impact through the impact those leaders go on to have on others.
- Children/youth/outreach: A church that doesn't do these things will eventually cease to exist.

Other stuff that doesn't crack my top three: pastoral care, administration, emails, texts and phone calls

Grab a notepad and take a few minutes to make your own list. Keep in mind, it does not need to look like my list. These are your priorities.

OK, here's where the magic happens. Take your priorities (the things about life, family and ministry that are most important to you) and pre-schedule these into your Green Zone. Take the other things you need to do and pre-schedule those into your Yellow Zone (and if necessary, your Red Zone).

Again, your calendar does not need to look like mine. In fact, it shouldn't! The point is that God has wired you a certain way. Rather than working against the way God has made you, you can pre-schedule the most important things (including your family) to fall during those times when your energy and focus are at their highest. In doing so, you end up being at your best for those things (and people) that are most important.

Now, I want to address a few objections you might have to re-structuring your life and ministry around your energy:

"It sounds nice to be able to pre-schedule all of this, but life never goes exactly according to plan. There will always be unexpected surprises like funerals, hospitalizations, and personal appointments. This all seems too rigid and unrealistic."

You are correct that everything will not go according to plan. However, it is easier to adjust to those surprises if you already have a plan in place (being proactive) rather than sitting back and waiting for the surprises to come (being reactive). If someone dies on a Monday afternoon and the family wants to do the funeral on Thursday morning, having a calendar that is built around self-awareness of my energy patterns and priorities allows me to more easily adjust to the surprise and still accomplish my priorities. By having a plan, I might spend some Yellow Zone time on Tuesday afternoon on sermon preparation, for instance, since I know I won't be able to spend Thursday morning on sermon preparation like I normally do. It is easier to make minor adjustments to an existing plan that I know works for me than to throw plans together on the fly in the middle of a pastoral care emergency.

"It's great that your calendar is so flexible, but I don't get to choose how I spend my time and energy. There are too many

meetings and other responsibilities that I cannot move."

It can often feel like we do not get to choose how we spend our time. You might have a senior pastor or Staff-Parish Relations Committee who have expectations about when certain tasks like meetings, office hours and pastoral care should happen. Additionally, you might have family activities like kids' rehearsals or sports that have a set time. I get that.

However, you might be surprised how open a senior pastor or SPRC might be if you had a conversation with them about how much more effective you could be in ministry if you shifted your office hours, when you do pastoral care and when you are in meetings to times that better align with your natural energy flow. You might not get what you ask for, but it is a conversation that is worth having.

Additionally, if you are feeling worn out by all the commitments your children and family have, remember that those are commitments you have chosen to have. If those commitments are causing you to feel exhausted and overwhelmed, it is within your power to choose to cut back on those activities and commitments.

"OK, I've talked to my senior pastor and SPRC, and they won't give me any flexibility. I've cut back on my family's commitments, but there are still 10 hours per week of activities that cannot be moved."

There will be some expectations and commitments that are beyond your control. If you have 10 hours of commitments each week that you are truly powerless to schedule, guess what? You still have 158 hours left in the week that you are in control of! Suppose there are even 40 hours per week of commitments that simply cannot be changed. You still have 128 hours per week that you are in control of and can pre-schedule to align those hours with your energy and priorities.

Again, I cannot emphasize enough how gaining self-awareness of my natural energy flow and aligning my priorities has benefitted my life and ministry. It has allowed me the time and energy to coach my son's baseball team, take our four children to appointments (during my Yellow and Red zones) and remain energized for ministry. My prayer is that this framework will help you gain self-awareness about your energy rhythm, align your priorities with that rhythm and give you the language to have meaningful conversations with other pastors, church staff and church members.

Harris pastors Mount Zion UMC in Central. This article, along with other support tools for clergy, can be found at [www.umcsc/ClergyCare.org](http://www.umcsc/ClergyCare.org). For questions on how to implement these ideas into your life and ministry, contact Harris at [jdharis@umcsc.org](mailto:jdharis@umcsc.org).





## Guest Commentary

by Hugh McCown

### My story

If you are as concerned as I about the alarming news published over the past few years—that the number of professing Christians in America is on the decline—you must read my story to find out why it’s happening and what can be done to reverse this trend.

The Bible tells us in the Great Commission that we are to go and make disciples (a disciple is a “learner” and a “doer”) and teach them what to believe (we think of this as being grounded in the faith) and how to put these teachings into our daily living. I learned this later in life.

Dallas Willard in his book, “The Great Omission,” says, “For at least several decades the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian” and “I do not know of a denomination or local church in existence that has as its goal to teach its people to do everything Jesus said. I’m not talking about a whim or a wish, but a plan.”

Dinesh D’Souza in his book, “What’s So Great About Christianity,” says, “We live in a religiously illiterate society in which the Bible is rarely taught.” He also says, “The problem is not that our young people know too much about Christianity, but that they know too little” and “Many people in America and the West cannot name five of the Ten Commandments or recognize Genesis as the first book of the Bible.” He adds, “One in 10 Americans apparently believes that Joan of Arc was Noah’s wife.”

My story begins in the mid-20th century. Life was good if you lived in America. Our country was at its zenith. As a teenager, I was enjoying the good life and beginning to think about the future. One Sunday morning while sitting in a church pew (I assume before the worship service had begun) I can remember two questions suddenly popping up: What is sin, and after conversion, what is the rest of the story?

Fast forwarding, my next big step in life was going off to college so I could learn a trade and be able to buy that house on a hill. I wasn’t in college very long before I discovered two new words: agnostic and atheist. I thought everyone knew there was a God. It was like being punched in the face.

We now move from the 1950s to the 1960s. After my schooling was over and I had fulfilled my military obligation, I landed a job with a very large corporation. The job entailed a three-year training program, and then possibly a good opportunity of landing a good job in management. There were 12,000 employees at this location all making good money (before the North American Free Trade Agreement).

While I was at this location, I was fortunate in getting cheap lodging, sharing a fully furnished home with four other engineers all working for the same company. In the evenings we had round-table discussions. There was a presidential election under way—we discussed politics; we discussed religion. Our group included a Catholic from Cincinnati, Baptists from Georgia and South Carolina, an agnostic from Kentucky and an athe-

ist from Illinois. The three of us who were professing Christians were ill-prepared. We were unprepared to defend our faith. I left those two lost men not being able to share the good news. To this day I wonder about their fate.

Twenty years later, the 1980s, I got my big picture, part of what I had been wondering about as a teenager, those two questions. This event took place at Lake Junaluska, a mountain retreat. The theme for the weekend was “Stewardship.” The featured speaker was pastor Hilbert Burger, and he did a wonderful job. I returned home with the big picture.

What did the big picture look like? If you had a chart on the wall, the horizontal line would be time, the vertical line would be maturity. He used a metaphor that compared our physical lives with our spiritual lives beginning with being “born again.” We start our spiritual lives as baby Christians, then children, then teenagers and hopefully, finally, spiritually mature Christians.

This final part of my story is bizarre. Some 30 years later after unsuccessfully trying to sign up for a class I named Christianity 101 (what do Christians believe and how do they live), I found that class. One day as I sat with some friends bemoaning the fact that I had been unable to get the answers to questions I had been seeking since a teenager, the group unanimously agreed to start that class. We would begin in January 1990. We had a slight problem—no material and no teacher. The pastor turned us down as the teacher but allowed us to have the class if we would add “a review” as a prefix to the name. We agreed and were off and running. I discovered the study material in my basement (a Methodist confirmation book written in the 1950s). I ended up being the teacher but I do not recall how that happened; I was not qualified.

After a very exciting 13-week class, I knew I had taken a giant step forward in my quest to become “grounded in the faith.” During those weeks I had gotten the knowledge I had been seeking for a very, very long time. One of the biggest shocks I encountered was while preparing for the lesson on “Sin and Forgiveness.” I discovered forgiveness is an obligation, not an option. There were many more discoveries before the 13 weeks were over.

Having gained this knowledge about Christian discipleship, I wasn’t about to put this information on the shelf. I spent the next 20 plus years teaching “A Review of Basic Christianity” in any church that would allow me to come in.

In conclusion, this story is not about me but about my Christian faith. This story contains both good news and bad news. The good news is that I am now a Christian disciple. The bad news? I’m an experienced teacher, and I believe that to be my spiritual gift, but I’m sitting on the bench. The last five or six churches I have called on have no need for my services.

McCown can be reached at 864-277-7311 or [hugh@mccownco.com](mailto:hugh@mccownco.com).



## Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Joseph Abram Jr.

### In my dream, words matter

My son has a way of using old clichés to make serious points. For instance, when an individual’s intentions or responses to a situation are questionable or unexplainable, he says, “Flip the script!” Instead of applying one’s query to another’s reaction or response, it probably would be better to exchange places, hypothetically, and see what your reaction or response would be in a similar situation.

The night after Christmas, before the dawning of a new day, I had a dream. Like most of my dreams, I don’t remember all the details, only the highlights.

In my dream, I was with a gathering of men, just off a street, in a vacant lot between two buildings in an unknown town. I appeared to be the oldest of the group that had assembled. The one who was the dominant speaker or leader was a newperson of sort, either television or a writer. The group’s contributions consisted of giggles, laughs and encouragement for more talk.

During the conversation, the talk shifted to the subject of clergy, and most was not complimentary but rather disparaging. The group responses grew in intensity, while mine was nonexistent. It seemed that the group finally realized that a voice that had been relatively quiet was now silent altogether, as the group slowly moved away from me, lowering their voices and glancing in my direction.

It became obvious that my response (or lack thereof) was a cooling presence, and there was need for more or new fuel to stir the flames.

So, disparaging me, personally, became the fuel of choice. The leader suddenly shared what he had heard from another, who also heard from another, that a certain preacher had offered a reason why he felt I was the wrong choice to preach in his church. The group lowered their heads to avoid eye contact as they giggled discreetly as the leader released his hearsay remarks.

As I listened quietly in my dream to the demoralizing remarks and witnessed the

group’s reactions, I felt a surge of heat that would blow the caps of a wood stove gathering in my stomach. The leader continued, “The \_\_\_\_\_ can’t preach” and he doesn’t “know anyone who’ll ask that \_\_\_\_\_ to preach!”

Listening to the demoralizing remarks, I felt what I had experienced before: a fire in my gut that needed to be set free to consume, opened and caring hands that desired to be clenched, a loving smile being washed away by brining tears, a volcano in my throat waiting to spew its lava on the perpetrators and anyone near.

But this time, even in my dream, I vowed that it would be different. This time, I would be “wise as a serpent and humble as a dove.” This time I would flip the script.

I moved between the speaker and his audience and began to recant what I heard also from folks who resoundingly praised the speaker’s accomplishments in his presence and widely shared their displeasures of him during his absence. I took out my negativity’s bag and emptied it on the table in plain view.

Then I saw a change in his countenance. Soon I could see on his face and in his eyes and hear in his voice what I intended for him to see, feel and understand—how I felt when he spoke about me. I knew then it was time to flip the script back, for he no longer needed to imagine.

So I stopped the derange and explained that I had never witnessed any of the things that I heard about him, but rather the opposite from him, and my desire was that he was informed, that words matter. Words can tear down and words can build up, words can injure, and words can heal. The Word, in fact, can save souls and prevent souls from being lost.

I awakened from my dream and gathered paper and pen (and keypad) to encourage you (and me) to choose our words wisely. Even though this was just a dream, let us choose the better words for a better world in 2023.

Happy and prosperous new year, brothers and sisters!



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## Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Joseph D. Kovas

### Jesus running amok in public high schools

God is running amok in public high schools, and 18th century writer and poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge is one of the culprits.

Coleridge is well known for his work “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” In Christian terms, he tells a story of a sinner (the mariner) in need of God’s grace for his heinous crime against the beautiful albatross bird. At the end of the mariner’s tale, he explains to his wedding guest friend he has been charged and commissioned to teach anyone who he finds the “love and reverence to all things that God made and loveth.” As the story goes: “He prayeth best, who loveth best / All things both great and small; / For the dear God who loveth us, / He made and loveth all.” Not only does the mariner proclaim God’s love for us and for all creation, but he also declares he is a missionary.

Coleridge was raised by a vicar in the Church in England. This comes as no surprise when one studies his writings. However, what is shocking is to find out in a society that tries to separate church and state that the church of Jesus Christ is running amok in public high schools where authors like Coleridge and his works are being studied.

Another example comes from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem, “The Village Blacksmith.” Longfellow describes in the poem a village blacksmith who is a faithful worker and father to his children and family. His wife has died, but he does not neglect his duties of taking his family to church each Sunday. As he listens to the parson preach and his daughter as they sing in the choir, “it makes his heart rejoice.” This may inspire a youth who has never been to church to consider, “Would my heart rejoice like this blacksmith if I were in that place called church?” Jesus is evangelizing in the pages of Longfellow in English 3 literature.

But the one author who gets away best with proclaiming Jesus in the public schools is the Rev. Jonathan Edwards. High school students are required to read his sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Edwards, in the spirit of John the Baptist, calls for his listeners to repent, to flee from the wrath to come and to go toward “the doors of mercy wide open” in Christ. High schoolers hear God’s mercy proclaimed in the midst of judgment. Many desks in classrooms become the place where English writers may convert souls for Christ and where their hearts are forever changed.

The English department is not solely responsible for unleashing the King of kings in the classroom. In almost every department, Jesus can be seen causing havoc around the school. Jesus as the Word of God made flesh became incarnate in history. Jesus made such a ruckus in the first century that we still are talking about him today and have to take him into historical consideration when talking about world events. World History discusses in high school classes the development of the church and how Christians have changed the world from the time of Emperor Constantine to Martin Luther’s Reformation. One cannot fully understand this history without first realizing that the historical foundation for world events is rooted on the understanding of Jesus Christ.

After the students leave the history classroom, Jesus continues to pester them throughout their day in math and science. If the student thinks the Enlightenment has given them respite from Jesus in these subjects, beware! People who have influenced our understanding of math and science were

Christians such as Sir Isaac Newton (Newton’s Law of Physics), Robert Boyle (Boyle’s Law), Florence Nightingale (nursing), George Mendel (the father of genetics and an Augustinian monk) and William Thomson (Lord Kelvin and the Kelvin Scale). All of these brilliant mathematicians and scientists all have one thing in common in their biographies. They were Christians who followed and were formed by Jesus.

After realizing the Enlightenment could not shield the high school student from Jesus, they may try to escape during lunch. Lunch becomes a disappointment because they soon discover their friends who they eat with are members of the local United Methodist Youth Fellowship that meets on Sunday nights. Their conversations are about their experience from last weekend’s youth conference.

As the student walks from lunch to their next class, they may think to themselves, “Surely Jesus will not disrupt my Spanish class.” But in Spanish, the topic of the day is on Spanish artists. Among these artists is El Greco. As soon as the student turns to the page in their textbook about El Greco, they find Jesus has shown up again, but this time in artistic style. El Greco was trained as an iconographer early in life and used his skills to craft beautiful pieces of artwork such as “Christ Healing the Blind” and “Christ Carrying the Cross.”

The high schooler walks from Spanish to their final class in a surrendered state, wondering to themselves how will Jesus show up unannounced in their last class? The student looks all around the classroom; Jesus is nowhere in sight. After their search, they sit down for what they think is going to be a Jesus-free class, band. But the band teacher gives out a new piece of sheet music to practice for the upcoming Christmas parade. The title of the music? “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” The composer was a guy by the name of Charles Wesley.

Because phones were permitted at the beginning of class, the student decided to look up this song and composer and that is when it happened. Jesus ambushed the student! They learned about Charles Wesley being an Anglican Priest in the 18th century who helped lead something called the Methodist Movement. They went through the lyrics of the song quickly before sightreading the music.

As the whole class played the song, the words of one lyric were stuck in the student’s mind: “Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness! Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings. Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die, born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth.”

Praise be to God that in a separate church and state society, Jesus is running amok, causing mayhem by using writers, scientist, mathematicians, artists and composers across time to reveal, in the words of Charles Wesley, God’s “love divine all loves excelling” to those who may have never set foot in a church building.

If this is the case, then does this mean we need to stand outside Silver Bluff High School each day waiting to embrace new converts to the faith and give them a church home at St. Paul United Methodist Church?

*Kovas is the pastor of St. Paul UMC in New Ellenton. This article was published in the January 2023 Good News newsletter of St. Paul.*



## Guest Commentary

by Bob Fowler

### Explaining beauty

In my younger days, I enjoyed being a camp counselor at Asbury Hills (then called South Carolina Methodist Camp). We often said the campers usually received more Christian education in one week than they did in one year back home. I am sure there were exceptions.

The camp’s beauty and nature has stayed with me all these years. The mountain chapel has held special meaning. When I asked God if I should I marry the woman I later married, I went there to pray for God’s answer.

All campers experienced a hike in the mountains. We called the popular one “The Loop.” Traditionally the hike started up the hill at the water tower past the Mountain Chapel and around the course ending at the lake. Being different as always, I took my campers the opposite way—the lake first, and ending at the Mountain Chapel. By that time, the campers were tired and quiet. In the chapel, I was able to talk to them. We looked out at the wood cross with the mountains in the background and enjoyed the beauty. I always asked them, “Where does beauty come from?” As always, we decided beauty was a creation of God. He created that feeling of pleasure.

Beauty is commonly described as a feature of objects that makes these objects pleasurable to perceive. Such objects include landscapes, sunsets, humans and works of art. Beauty has a positive aesthetic value, contrasted with ugliness as its negative counterpart.

So how do we encounter God’s beauty? The beauty of God includes many things. It speaks of his glory—everything about him that is dazzling, stunning, magnificent and striking, that fills our heart with delight. It includes how he thinks and feels, what he does and his infinite power and knowledge. The greatest dimension of God’s beauty is his personality—his kindness, mercy, justice, goodness, truth, love and all his excellencies. God’s beauty is displayed in creation, redemption and his leadership over history.

There are three simple tools to encounter God’s beauty: 1) We ask God to help us; 2) We regularly ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see more of Jesus’ beauty; and 3) We ask God to lead us into more of the truth of Jesus (John 16:13–14) and release a greater measure of the spirit of revelation, that we would see Jesus more clearly (Ephesians 1:17–18).

We search out God’s beauty. We study the Scriptures that reveal specific aspects of his beauty, and we look for tokens of it in his creation and science. We usually behold God’s beauty in little glimpses about him as we search for insight through Scripture, creation, science, history and so on—brief

glimpses that bring a spark of inspiration to our heart and mind. A life is not usually transformed by one big insight, but by the accumulative effect of many small insights and glimpses of his beauty over the years.

We praise God. We put into words our admiration of God’s beauty, glory and excellent qualities. We speak out in prayer our admiration and gratitude for the small things that we see about him. We respond to him by speaking or writing what we see with adoration and delight. When we praise him, we sometimes receive a little more insight, inspiration and delight. I am also convinced that encountering the beauty of Jesus is essential to experiencing victory in our lives. God’s desire is that we would more fully experience the wonder of being loved by him and loving him in return.

“For the Beauty of the Earth,” written by Folliot Pierpoint in 1864, praises the beautiful world that we inhabited and the many things he loved. He mentions many aspects of existence for which he is grateful, including the earth and skies, trees and flowers, human love and the “best gift divine.” It is a great reminder of all the beauty that surrounds us and to not take this for granted.

Refrain: “Christ, our Lord, to you we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise.”

“For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies, for the love which from our birth over and around us lies.

“For the wonder of each hour of the day and of the night, hill and vale and tree and flower, sun and moon and stars of light, [Refrain]

“For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child, friends on earth, and friends above, for all gentle thoughts and mild, [Refrain]

“For yourself, best gift divine, to the world so freely given, agent of God’s grand design: peace on earth and joy in heaven. [Refrain]”

This hymn is one of praise. As I was with those campers at camp, I reminded them that the beauty that they were enjoying was one to be praised. God is indeed beauty himself. Beauty is his gift. He wanted us to experience his creation with pleasure. That is God’s personality.

God has blessed us so much, and we need to thank God. In the beginning, God created heaven and earth. His word gave us light. He created man in his image and gave all his creation to man. Beauty is also in man. We can enjoy that and spread that blessing to all mankind, making disciples of our world in love.

Beauty is God.

*Fowler is a member of Shandon United Methodist Church, Columbia.*



### A helping hand

Members of Manning UMC, Manning, pitch in and do some yard work to help some members of their congregation Dec. 20.





## Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Tony Rowell

### The sodden surgeon (Part 4)

*Editor's note: This is a continuation of last month's column, "Appalachian Armageddon" and the final in the series.*

I half expected to find Neptune when I got to the bottom of the trail. It had been raining so long and so hard I was no longer hiking. I was swimming. I had to laugh when I realized that my bikini-clad friends whom I'd left up on the mountain were more appropriately dressed than I was for the current situation. I was weighed down with soaking wet jeans, a drenched backpack and boots filled to the brim with God's bounty, while they were dancing in the rain, free as a bird not weighed down by anything. Ah, to be young and dumb again.

I'd seen a mama and daddy and two young boys sitting on a rock in the rain looking miserable and just a bit lost in my last writing. As I passed them by, I asked the dad how they were doing. He said, "Oh, we're fine, we're just waiting for the rain to stop so we can call for a ride." I didn't think much about that statement at the time, but it was a hint of things to come.

I worked my way up into the woods beyond the parking lot to find a little shelter from the rain and wait for Mary to pick me up, and I didn't give what he said a second thought.

After Mary arrived and I had deposited my muddy carcass in my nice new Ford pickup, I realized the family had vanished. Good, I thought. At least they were out of the rain. I assumed they had been rescued, but you know what they say about assuming.

As it turned out they had made the ill-conceived decision to try and walk home. For those of you who have been up in the Smokey Mountains, you probably know that to walk on the side of a mountain road on a sunny day is not a sign of high intelligence; but to walk on the side of that same road in the pouring rain is, well, dumb or desperate or both. You've got cars and campers and trucks and everything else going around those curves willy-nilly, and the possibility of being knocked off the mountain by an Oldsmobile is greater than you might think.

If any of you had a dad like mine then you know what I'm talking about. My father was a law-abiding, measured man not given to panic or overreaction, but put him behind the wheel of a Rambler station wagon in the Smokey Mountains, and he transformed into a middle-aged Richard Petty with a slight potbelly, a receding hairline and a maniacal look in his eye that scared the wits out of his wife and thrilled his sons no end. When a particularly sharp curve loomed and my mama hollered out "Bill!," her tone was the oddest combination of sheer terror and begrudging admiration I have ever heard.

As Mary and I were driving down the hill towards Townsend, we came across this family strung out on the other side of the road walking, with Dad in front and mom bringing up the rear. Taking in their bedraggled appearance, the pouring rain and the desperate looks on their faces, Mary's maternal juices began to flow; so she pulled over to the side of the road, a daring act in and of itself, and offered them a ride.

While earlier in the day I had been mistaken for a messiah by a few young men wearing flip-flops simply because I carried a trail map, this entire family looked at Mary as if she was the Mother Mary herself. They were so happy and relieved at their rescue and grateful to she who rescued them.

No matter how much Mary and I insisted otherwise, the family refused to come inside the truck and instead they all piled into the back, rain notwithstanding. So with the soggy family behind us and Townsend and

home before us, we commenced.

I'll give the family this much, they were a stalwart crew. Every time I looked back to check on them, they gave me some agonized smiles and a whole host of thumbs up. You see, the rain had not abated one bit, so they were being pelted from every direction pretty good.

When after seven miles we finally arrived at Townsend, we stopped at a little store so they could dry off a bit, and it was then that we found out that they weren't headed for Townsend. They were headed for Walland, another 10 miles or so down the road.

By this time my curiosity got the best of me. So I asked the father where they were from, and he told me they were from Ocala, Florida. To further the conversation I asked him what he did for a living. He said he was an orthopedic surgeon. He then volunteered that he and the family had never been to the Smokey Mountains before. While appreciated, that was one question I didn't need to ask.

Finally I had to ask him how he and his family had gotten in such a pickle, and this is what he told me.

They had arrived the night before at the airport up in Maryville. After they arrived he called an Uber to drive him and his family to the outskirts of Walland and the Airbnb that they had rented.

Everything went south the next morning when he called an Uber to take them to the trailhead of the Schoolhouse Gap Trail. Dad had gotten a little trail map of some sort, and it told him that the Schoolhouse Gap Trail was a breeze. It isn't. Well, one side of the road is, but on the other side of the road it isn't. He and his flatlander family chose the other side of the road. They made it about a mile or so up and turned back around. After a spell they once again arrived at the parking lot only to discover that there is no cell phone reception in the mountains to speak of, and their pickle was born.

It would appear that this poor family had hired a sadistic Uber driver or they had hired a goober driver, but one way or the other they were in a fix.

To bring the story to a close, they all piled in the back of the truck once again and, rain or no, we drove the 10 miles to Walland, where we deposited the whole lot in the nice little Airbnb they had rented.

To borrow a line from the great Tom T. Hall, "Lord, if I judge 'em let me give 'em lots of room." They just didn't know any better.

I've been searching for a meaning, a deep meaning in this story. The Lord had me tell it, so I know it's there. All I can say is this: Beware of the confidence that ignorance brings.

Whether it's heading up the trail in flip-flops and cutoffs with no map and no compass, or heading up that same trail in bikinis and tennis shoes searching for an imaginary sign, or calling an Uber to take you up the mountain with no way back, or quoting heresy as if it were truth, the responsibility to get it right is yours and yours only.

Many folks these days are quoting supposed theologians as if their words are a pathway to truth. Before you venture out on the progressive limb, or the conservative limb for that matter, do your homework. Read the Word of God. Read the Word and listen to the Holy Spirit, not the countless voices of the world.

Take the time to study the map before you head out on the trail.

*Rowell pastors Beulah UMC, Gilbert. He is also the author of "What Would Granny Say? And Other Somewhat Embellished Memories" from the Advocate Press. You can buy it at <https://advocatesc.org/store/books/what-would-granny-say>.*



## View from the Pews

by Bill Barnier

### Because we love

During a recent Reiki clinic in which I was a volunteer practitioner, I had the opportunity to share Reiki with a woman who expressed a feeling of grief for which she sought relief. Her demeanor was cheerful, but it was easy to see the weight of sorrow in her eyes.

As we began her brief session, it became clear to me that her heart energy was depressed. Perhaps she was unwilling to move on with her life out of fear that she would break the spiritual bond she had with whomever she lost. Though our session was brief, I was able to encourage her to rejoice in the love she had that would make her feel such loss. I reminded her that whomever she lost would offer her love and compassion for her grief and may show her that she must also have love and compassion for herself. Without the ability to love, she would not have the ability to grieve. Finally, once she made peace with what happened through the divine love of God, she should simply allow love to return to her heart.

As our time ended she cried tears of joy and thanks for finding a pathway to peace.

Of all the many gifts our creator gives us, perhaps the greatest is the ability to love. There are so many ways we can feel and show love. Once we experience such a joy, it becomes one of the most powerful rewards we humans can share. Yet life often gives us cause to close our hearts, to protect and shield us from pain. It's an internal flight from harm. God understands but makes his love available to us as a salve for healing. We can choose to set aside our grief so his love and mercy can move it to a place of loving, comforting memory.

It's easy to make the claim that we humans are the only creations who have the ability to love, that love resides only in the spirit of sentient beings. Yet we can see the signs of love from our pets, the plants that respond to positive energy and the peace that comes from all things of the universe when they are in balance. Love is also a choice. If we choose to overlook faults in others and ourselves, we open the love window to wisdom. It is through wisdom that we learn that love can help heal everything because it's a gift from our Creator intended to be accompanied by forgiveness.

There are those who would say there can't be love without the counterweight of hate, sorrow and loss. Bad keeps the scales in balance with love. Perhaps that is true. But when love owns the scale, who will come out on top every time? Sure, the dark side of existence has its day. There are so many things in God's universe that we don't understand and that we may fear. We probably won't learn of these things until we move on from this existence.

But God rates love at the top of his list of things he wants us to learn and practice. Setbacks help us learn that his love is healing and cleansing and will always give us peace to move forward on our life journey.

My client moved on from our Reiki session with the resolve to continue to live in peace by changing her grief to love, to accept the lesson that love is such a precious gift it should be shared, not bound up until we run out of precious time.

Peace within makes peace without.

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



## Church Administration

by the Rev. Robert Cox

### From EZRA to ACStats

This month, I share a letter from Beth Westbury, conference treasurer. Basic Church Administration will offer a Zoom class on using the new statistics reporting system on Wednesday, Feb. 1, at 10:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. Go to [www.church-admin.org/registrations](http://www.church-admin.org/registrations) to register for the class and get the link to the class.

Here is the letter:

I am writing to let you know that the statistics website is no longer EZRA. It is ACStats.

While the questions have not changed, the place you go to input the answers has changed. I am summarizing some of the changes, but you will find more information on the conference website at [www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Presentation-New-Local-Church-Statistics-Portal.pdf](http://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Presentation-New-Local-Church-Statistics-Portal.pdf)

Additional resources are at [www.umcsc.org/statistics](http://www.umcsc.org/statistics). Here are some highlights:

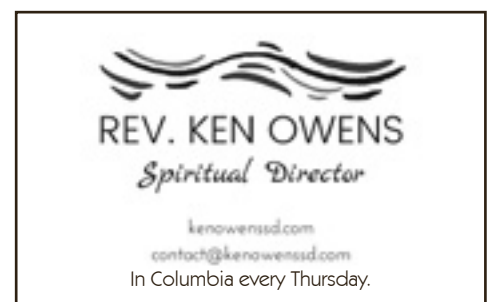
- The new site is [www.stats.gcf.org](http://www.stats.gcf.org)
- The login is the church's General Council on Finance and Administration number

- The initial password is Church123%
- The new website allows more than one user. You do not have to share logins if you do not want to.

The site is still under construction by GCFEA. The screens or features may change from one day to the next. The website is open to the churches to begin logging in so you can get used to the new screens.

Statistics for 2022 must be submitted by Feb. 28, 2023.

If you need assistance, please contact Beth Westbury, 803-726-6741 or [bwestbury@umcsc.org](mailto:bwestbury@umcsc.org), or Heather Nordeoff, 803-724-5753 or [hnordeoff@umcsc.org](mailto:hnordeoff@umcsc.org).



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## Conference Historical Society

by Dr. Roger M. Gramling

### SEJ Archives to move to Emory University

**T**he Archives of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church are being moved from The Heritage Center at Lake Junaluska to Emory University in Atlanta.

The SEJ Commission on Archives and History, which has oversight of the collection and manages The Heritage Center, made the decision during a meeting on Oct. 28, approving the recommendation of its Task Force on Archival Collections to name Emory University as the repository for the official records of the Jurisdiction. The Pitts Theology Library at Emory's Candler School of Theology will have custody of the records and will be responsible for providing professional management and preservation of the records and access to the collection for researchers.

In making its decision, the commission added that if Emory University or the Candler School of Theology ceases to be affiliated with The United Methodist Church, the records will be returned to the Southeastern Jurisdiction or to its successor in The United Methodist Church.

Currently the records of three of the five jurisdictions are held at university repositories: North Central at DePauw University, South Central at Southern Methodist University and Western at the Pacific School of Religion.

The commission's decision to move the jurisdictional archives was based on a number of considerations. A university setting allows for uninterrupted ongoing professional management within the context of a larger facility where opportunities exist for digitalization and online computer access to the collection for researchers. The location of the collection in a metropolitan area such as on the Emory University campus also provides for greater physical access both to researchers and to Candler theology students, many of whom are preparing to serve as clergy in the Southeast.

Onsite research at The Heritage Center has declined with the passage of time while the demand for online access has increased. Added to this is the realization that while Lake Junaluska remains an agency of the Southeastern Jurisdiction, it is no longer considered the "headquarters" of the jurisdiction as it once was. Indeed, there is no obvious "headquarters" of the Southeastern Jurisdiction.

Financial considerations entered into the decision as well. The major source of funding for both The Heritage Center and the SEJ Commission on Archives and History comes from the Southeastern Jurisdiction. While funding remains adequate for the current quadrennium, indications are that funding for the succeeding four years will be significantly reduced, perhaps by as much as 50 percent given the expected decline in giving to the jurisdictional apportionment as more and more churches in the Southeastern Jurisdiction pursue disaffiliation. While The Heritage Center has support from an endowment developed over the years, a spending policy sufficient to meet the expected shortfall would have depleted the endowment in a relatively brief period of time.

The commission was also keenly aware of the difficulty in locating a trained and experienced curator and archivist to succeed the current director of The Heritage Center who is retiring this year after 12 years of service to the center and the commission.

The commission's Task Force on Archival Collections also recommended that the commission identify new locations for collections and other items at The Heritage Center that have been accepted over the years but are not officially part of the SEJ Archives. It was agreed to give Emory University the right of first refusal on such items. Items not desired by Emory will be distributed to other repositories such as annual conference archives or appropriate museums, which already hold related collections.

As a result of this process, some materials relevant to South Carolina local churches have been transferred already to the Conference Archives at Wofford College. A small collection of materials related to the late Bishop James S. Thomas, a South Carolina native and former member of the South Carolina Conference (1866), will be distributed to the Hubert V. Manning Library at Claflin University for its collection.

The Heritage Center was closed to researchers on Dec. 15, to allow for preparing the SEJ Archives and other materials to be transferred to new locations in an orderly fashion. Research inquiries received by The Heritage Center after its closing date will be referred to the most appropriate United Methodist entity or other appropriate source of information.

As a personal note, I had the privilege to serve on the SEJ Commission on Archives and History for nine years, during which time I was involved in many of the decisions relating to the operation of The Heritage Center. I am once again a member of the commission in an ex-officio relationship as president of the SEJ Historical Society. I found the decision to move the SEJ archives and, in effect, to close The Heritage Center to be a painful decision for me personally. Change is inevitable, but rarely easy.

Moving the SEJ archives to a university setting provides possibilities for development, research, access and multiple staff support, which a small operation in a remote location with limited staff and limited funding cannot provide and cannot hope to attract especially in an era of increased technology. Added to all of this is the question of the future of the jurisdictional system itself.

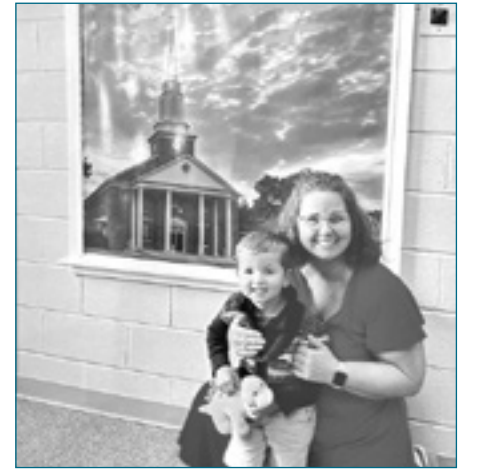
*Gramling currently serves as secretary-treasurer of the Conference Historical Society and is also president of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society.*



Photos courtesy of Zollie Miles

### Cayce opens new archives room

The Archives Committee at Cayce UMC, Cayce, held a drop-in after worship Oct. 2 for the church to explore their new room with a host of materials. Above and below left are scenes from the archives. Below right, Cayce's pastor the Rev. Meg Cook and her son, Jimmy T, gather outside the archives. Cayce turns 110 years old in 2023.



## From the Archives



by Dr. Phillip Stone

### Bishop Joseph B. Bethea

**I**n the summer of 1988, almost 35 years ago this July, Bishop Joseph B. Bethea became the South Carolina Conference's new bishop.

Bishop Bethea's appointment to lead the South Carolina Conference was historic, as he became the first African American to lead the conference since the merger of the state's Black and White Methodist conferences in 1972.

A native of Dillon, Bishop Bethea was the son of a minister in the 1866 Conference. His father died while serving Trinity Church in Camden. Bishop Bethea graduated from Claflin University and Gammon Theological Seminary and served some of his early appointments in South Carolina, at Walhalla and Ninety Six. He then moved to North Carolina and later Virginia, where he served local churches and was a superintendent of three different districts. He also served as director of Black Church Studies and a lecturer in preaching at Duke Divinity School, and as the administrative assistant to the bishop of the North Carolina Conference.

When he was elected on the 12th ballot in 1988, he was only the second Black bishop elected by the Southeastern Jurisdiction. The *Advocate* article announcing his election and appointment to South Carolina noted that the new bishop would make preaching a priority.

Bishop Bethea told delegates he had four loves; God, his family, the church and people. In his first column in the *Advocate* in September 1988, the new bishop emphasized a theme of coming home and giving thanks. He thanked all of those who had helped him become a bishop and those who had welcomed him back to South Carolina. His formal installation was on Sept. 25 at

Shandon UMC, Columbia.

Bishop Bethea's term in South Carolina saw some of the first cross-racial appointments in the conference. He earned a reputation as a unifier, someone who could work with people regardless of race.

On the evening of Nov. 23, 1992, the bishop was stabbed outside of the Methodist Center on Colonial Drive. The stabbing occurred shortly after the death of his wife, Shirley. Bethea made a remarkable recovery from his abdominal wounds, returning to preside over the 1993 and 1994 sessions of the annual conference. His death in March 1995 of an apparent heart attack shocked the conference. More than a thousand mourners from around the Southeast attended his funeral.

"We are richer because he was here, and we are poorer because we will no longer see him in the flesh," said Bishop Woodie White.

A reminder: 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. 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.

*Stone is archivist for the South Carolina Conference and Wofford College. Read his blog at [blogs.wofford.edu/from\\_the\\_archives](https://blogs.wofford.edu/from_the_archives).*



## Did You Know?

The Advocate offers a free one-year subscription to anyone who joins a United Methodist Church in South Carolina. Send us your new members' names and addresses and the name of your church and we'll get them started on becoming more informed about our conference and our church: [advocate@umcsc.org](mailto:advocate@umcsc.org)



## Global Briefs

### Mississippi plans special session for disaffiliations

JACKSON, Miss.—Bishop Sharma Lewis, who began her leadership of the Mississippi Conference on Jan. 1, announced that the conference will take up church disaffiliations during its regular session on June 28 and at a called special session on Dec. 9.

### Local church grants available for outreach

LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C.—The Foundation for Evangelism has opened the 2023 Equipping the Local Church grant cycle. A total of \$350,000 is available for grants of \$5,000 or \$10,000 to small and medium-size congregations, or clusters of churches working together, in a Wesleyan-tradition denomination.

### Church court adds bishops' request to docket

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The Judicial Council has added to its docket a request from the Council of Bishops for clarification on the church court's Decision 1451. The ruling said new delegate elections are not required for the coming General Conference scheduled in 2024. The bishops' request asked for the court to rule on related questions. Briefs are due Feb. 16, and reply briefs are due Feb. 26.

### Faithful United Methodists form worshipping community

CYPRESS, Texas—A growing group of committed United Methodists whose churches disaffiliated has begun to meet in the Cypress Fairbanks area, near Houston. The Cy-Fair United Methodists—as they're tentatively calling themselves—had organizing help from a veteran Texas Conference leader, the Rev. Godfrey Hubert, and now are being led by the Rev. Shuler Sitsch.

### Scholarship for lay women available

NEW YORK—The deadline to apply for the United Women in Faith National Scholarship for lay women is April 18. The scholarships are designed to be used for undergraduate or graduate study or student internships in religion or a related field such as social work. Preference will be given to people affiliated with The United Methodist Church and women involved with UWF. The average scholarship is \$1,000, and the maximum is \$5,000.

### Pro-United Methodist group forms in Africa

NDOLA, Zambia—A group called the United Methodist Africa Forum has announced its launch, saying it is “committed to the unity and future of The United Methodist Church in Africa and around the globe.” Coordinators come from the South Africa, Zambia, Liberia and Mozambique South conferences. The group is planning to meet in South Africa in April.

### Congolese president donates car to Bishop Unda

KINDU, Congo (UM News)—In recognition of The United Methodist Church's work in East Congo, the president of the country gifted a Nissan 4x4 vehicle to Bishop Gabriel Yemba Unda. The vehicle will help with efforts to evangelize in remote areas.

### Retired bishop joins Global Methodist Church

HOUSTON—Former Texas Conference Bishop Scott Jones, who retired on Dec. 31, has withdrawn as a bishop in The United Methodist Church and as a member of the North Texas Conference. He is now a bishop in the Global Methodist Church.

### Burgos Núñez elected as board president

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Newly elected Bishop Héctor A. Burgos Núñez was unanimously voted in as the president of the board of directors for Discipleship Ministries. Burgos Núñez leads the Upper New York Conference. “The work of Discipleship Ministries is crucial as it supports conferences and local congregations in developing world-changing disciples in creative and innovative ways,” he said.

### More than \$2 million in scholarships available

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Every year, the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation awards more than \$2 million in scholarships to students attending the more than 100 United Methodist-related colleges, universities and seminaries. These awards are separate from those offered by the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Applications are open through March 1. Apply at <https://umhef.org/apply>.

### United Methodist theologian dies at age 89

NEW HAVEN, Conn.—The Rev. Thomas Warren Ogletree, a United Methodist theologian, veteran of the U.S. civil rights movement and retired elder in the New York Conference, died Jan. 4 at age 89. Ogletree was part of the committee that drafted the statement “Our Theological Task” in the *Book of Discipline*, The United Methodist Church's policy book. He was dean of Drew University Theological School in Madison, New Jersey, a United Methodist seminary, and later dean of Yale Divinity School. He made national headlines after officiating at the same-sex wedding of his son in defiance of church law. A just resolution was reached in the complaint against Ogletree in 2014, avoiding a church trial.

### North Georgia hits pause on disaffiliations

ATLANTA (UM News)—The largest United Methodist conference in the U.S. announced it is blocking church exits, for now, citing “defamatory” misinformation. The North Georgia Conference decision has been met with both celebration and consternation. Meanwhile, at least two conferences are already exploring other ways for handling church exits.

### Retired bishop joins Global Methodist Church

LIVERPOOL, N.Y.—Former Upper New York Conference Bishop Mark J. Webb, who retired on Dec. 31, has surrendered his credentials as an elder and bishop in The United Methodist Church. He is now an elder in the Global Methodist Church, where he will serve as an active bishop. Bishop Héctor A. Burgos Núñez, who now leads the Upper New York Conference, shared Webb's news and his own vision for the conference.

### United Methodists establish urban schools

HARARE, Zimbabwe—Over the past three years, the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area witnessed the dawn of a new era as The United Methodist Church founded two state-of-the-art private schools in Harare. An international high school for girls is set to open its doors in Mutare early this year.

—Courtesy of United Methodist News Service



by Betty Stalnaker

## Resource Center

### Time for Easter music

Church musicians, it's time to plan your Easter music. Listed below are a few of the titles available in the conference Resource Center. Check our website for many other titles for children, youth and adults, or come by to see, listen and select your musical (appointments only).

#### He Has Overcome

(SBK451) *Composer/Arranger: Parks, Marty.*

Carefully crafted and arranged by Marty Parks to meet the needs of every choir, this Easter musical is the perfect blend of songs and scriptural narration for choirs with limited rehearsal time, or when you need a musical that allows plenty of time for the pastor's Easter message to be delivered alongside an inspiring musical presentation. “He Has Overcome” reverently leads your choir and congregation through the beauty and suffering of Christ's journey to the cross filled with the wonder of his divine love and building to the power and majesty of his glorious resurrection. Adult/22 min/Moderate/SATB. (Word) Listening CD available.

#### Jesus Saves

(SBK446) *Composer/Arranger: Mauldin, Russell/Smith, Sue.*

At Easter, there is one message that rings out louder than any other: “Jesus Saves!” In this brand-new Simple Series Easter musical, your choir will proclaim the good news that Jesus came to save the lost and redeem their lives from sin forever. Adult/23 min./Easy/Unison/2-part. (Brentwood-Benson) Listening CD available.

#### Messiah Overcame

(SBK447) *Composer/Arranger: Harland/Rowsey/Duren/Hammerly/Nitz/Phillips.*

From the triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the victorious resurrection, “Messiah Overcame” is a vivid narrative of the final days of Jesus. The inclusion of much-loved hymns delivers a sense of familiarity to the new anthems included, and the dramatic use of the chorus, “Thank You, Lord,” will lead your congregation to moving worship and celebration. Accessible writing and impressive narration make this a wonderful addition to your Easter Sunday. While he could have saved himself, he heard our cries through the taunting crowd and saved us. Hallelujah, what a savior! The battle has been won, the price has been paid and our messiah has overcome. Adult/25 min/Moderate/SATB. (LifeWay) Listening CD available.

#### No Greater Love

(SBK479=) *Composer/Arranger: Larson, Lloyd.*

“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) In a world where selfish love is the norm, Jesus models a selfless form of love. We cannot journey to the cross and ultimately an empty tomb without being challenged to be models of this form of love. Adult/30 min./Medium/SATB (Lorenz) Listening CD available.

#### Raise A Hallelujah

(SBK452) *Composer/Arranger: Robertson, Nick/Clark, Dave/Rhodes, Gary/Duren, Cliff.*

Lillenas Kids is excited to present this 20-minute Easter musical for kids. This easy-to-perform Easter celebration is filled with top worship songs such and masterfully blended with new songs to tell the Easter story in a straightforward format for kids. This musical is perfect for any church size, as there can be as few as three speaking parts or as many as 12. This adaptable script allows for flexibility with what works best within your ministry, and it gives opportunity to build up leadership in the future singers and speakers of the next generation. Using simple speaker narration, you can involve more kids in the retelling of Jesus's coming, life and resurrection from the grave. Children/22 min/Unison/2-part. (Lillenas Kids) Listening CD available.

#### Shout! Hosanna

(SBK448) *Composer/Arranger: Anderson, Jeff and Dana.*

Three unsuspecting friends find themselves in the middle of an Easter flash mob! But when they start asking what the celebration is all about, they soon discover the Easter story is much more meaningful than they could ever imagine. Children/25 min./Easy/Unison. (Brentwood-Benson) Listening CD available.

#### When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

(SBK481=) *Composer/Arranger: Mauldin, Mussell.*

Tracing the path of Jesus as his earthly ministry culminated in the redemption story, this cantata walks from the triumphant entry in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday through his betrayal, suffering and death on the cross to the miracle of his resurrection. This ready-to-learn and easy-to-sing Easter musical is ideal for the small- to medium-sized church choir to learn quickly. Dove Award-winning writers Sue C. Smith and Lee Black have created several dynamic original songs along with Easter favorites. Adult/30 min./Medium/SATB or SAB (Daywind) Listening CD available.

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

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## Annual Conference now June 4-7

FLORENCE—While plans for Annual Conference 2023 are still being fleshed out, one key change has been announced.

Instead of a five-day session, Annual Conference will be only four days: Sunday, June 4, through Wednesday, June 7.

The theme of Annual Conference 2023 is "Seeking a More Excellent Way:

Breathe and Believe, Hewing Hope."

It is slated to be held at the Florence Center in person, the first in-person session since 2019 in Greenville (pre-pandemic).

Hotels, restaurants and a preliminary agenda can be found on the conference website at <https://www.umcsc.org/ac2023>.

## UMCSC seminar to help prevent embezzlement

The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church is offering local church leaders two opportunities to attend a seminar designed to help them prevent embezzlement, how to spot it and what to do about it.

"Protecting Your Church From Embezzlement" is scheduled twice this spring: March 4: 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m. at Trinity UMC, Bamberg. Register by Feb. 27; and April 15:

10 a.m.-2:30 p.m. at Central UMC, Newberry. Register by April 10.

This seminar (0.5 CEU) is designed for pastors, finance chairs and others responsible for keeping safe the resources God has provided to our local churches. The \$25 registration fee covers all materials and lunch.

There will be no on-site registration.

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

# On Love, Marriage and Tackling the Unexpected

*A testimonial by Sandy Hickey, Resident of The Manor Senior Living*

*Sandy Hickey moved to The Manor with her husband, Ed, in the spring of 2021. This move occurred after years of Sandy being Ed's primary caregiver as he battles Lewy Body Dementia. Lewy Body Dementia is the second most common type of progressive dementia after Alzheimer's Disease. It affects the regions of the brain involved in thinking, memory, and movement (motor control). Sandy is a resident of Independent Living and Ed is a resident of Memory Care.*

### How did you decide a move to The Manor was right for you?

We met with our doctor the day after Ed got out [of the house], and he said, "Sandy, you've done everything you can possibly do for Ed ... it's time." And I said okay, and I prayed really hard about where we were supposed to be. The Manor kept sticking in my head because we had family members who had lived here years and years ago. We knew it was the right thing from day one. I called one Wednesday, and we moved in the very next week. And from then on, I haven't looked back – I haven't wanted to go back, and I pray every day that I'll be here 'til the day the Lord takes me home, because this is where I'm supposed to be.

### Why did you decide to become a resident of The Manor, yourself?

Ed said to our doctor, "The only way I'll go, is if San goes with me ... so I can give her kisses and hugs every day and hold her hand." And I sat there as tears poured out of my face and I said, "You know I will never leave you." For him to know, and this is really important to me, for him to know that I'm here too, and I don't think he's ever felt like I was betraying him or trying to get rid of him or anything because I'll go sit with him as long as I can to make him know that I'm right here too. I tell him all the time, "Ed we're still in this together; we're one. Remember, we've always been one; we're still one."

### How has your life been these past two years as a Manor resident?

I've been learning how to be myself for the first time in 73 years, because I've always been a caregiver for my sisters, or Ed, or our kids. When I was preparing to move in, Michelle (VP of Sales and Admissions) said, "Sandy,

you think you know who you are, but I think when you get here, you're going to find out who you really are" ... and I have. I have learned to let go of the little things that used to bother me about Ed's situation, and now I'm totally at peace. Knowing that Ed's situation is what it is, I cannot harp on that, it's inevitable, but I now have the strength to follow through, and I know he still loves me after all we've been through, all we're going through, whether he's aware or not. And I can still say I love him more today than the day I married him – and that's from when we met at 8 years old to it'll be 54 years married in July.

### How have you used your situation to try to help others?

I told one of our ministers that came to visit me several months ago that God has put me on a special mission field, and it's called 'Here' and it's called 'My Community.' I think that's one reason I get so overly excited to see a new person, because a lot of them come in just like I did – shell shocked – with a total unforeseen situation, and I get excited because I want to tell everybody how wonderful it is here. Everyone you meet has a different story, and you just need to listen. We're here for each other, and a lot of places aren't like that. A lot of places are nice; pretty ... but it doesn't have

the obvious atmosphere of a loving, caring place. If you want to cry, you can find me and you can cry. If you want someone to laugh with you, call me and I'll laugh with you. If

you need a lipstick and it's hard to find, I'll go find it for you. We do things for each other because we're not just neighbors, we're a family. When something happens to one of us, it happens to all of us. We want you to be part of that kind of feeling.

### Any closing thoughts or words?

There's not much more you can say other than my life feels totally complete. I don't worry; I have no concerns, other than hoping Ed can stay upright. Some-

body asked me if something happened to Ed, would I move? No, I would not. I'm here for the duration. Don't let a traumatic situation drive you away. Learn that if you can start out loving and caring for each other when you're whole and young, you can survive when the unexpected happens. And there are people that are here to help you get through that transition. Hopefully, when you learn that, you can share it with other people. And that's what makes up the wonderful, loving community here at The Manor.



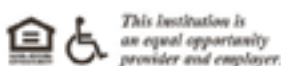
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**Rev. Barrett Thomas Alewine**

GREENWOOD—The Rev. Barrett Thomas Alewine, a retired elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Dec. 15, 2022. His wife, Martha, is the administrative assistant of the Greenwood District.



Alewine

Prior to his retirement in 2014, Rev. Alewine served the O'Neal Street, Belvedere, Northeast and St. Mark, Greenwood, charges. He served the Troy Charge as a retired elder.

Funeral services were held Dec. 28 at Main Street UMC.

Memorials may be made to Troy UMC, 127 Church St., Troy, SC 29848; or to Main Street UMC, 211 Main St. N., Greenwood, SC 29646.

Rev. Alewine is survived by his wife and three daughters.

**Matthew David Baird**

ROCK HILL—Matthew David Baird, husband of the Rev. Heather Baird, died Dec. 21, 2022. Rev. Baird is the pastor of Antioch United Methodist Church.

A memorial service was held Dec. 28 at Greene Funeral Home Northwest Chapel.

Memorials may be made to Antioch UMC, 930 W. Rambo Road, Rock Hill, SC 29730.

Mr. Baird is survived by his wife, son and daughter.

**Lionel K. Barnes**

COLUMBIA—Lionel K. Barnes, former husband of the Rev. Constance Nelson Barnes McLeod, died Jan. 7, 2023. Rev. McLeod is the pastor of New Grace United Methodist Church, St. George.

Funeral services were held Jan. 21 at Bethel UMC, St. Stephen, with burial in the church cemetery.

Mr. Barnes is survived by his mother and daughter.

**Anne Ewing Carroll**

DURHAM, N.C.—Anne Ewing Carroll, wife of the Rev. Jackson "Jack" Carroll, died Dec. 9, 2022. Rev. Carroll is a former member of the South Carolina Conference and is now a member of the Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Dec. 28 at the Few Chapel at Croasdaile Village.

Memorials may be made to Croasdaile Village Benevolence Fund, 2600 Croasdaile Farm Pkwy., Durham, NC 27705; to Duke Memorial UMC Bell Choir, 504 W. Chapel Hill St., Durham, NC 27701; or to Doctors

Without Borders USA, P.O. Box 5030, Hagerstown, MD 21741-5030.

Mrs. Carroll is survived by husband and two daughters.

**Howard Arthur Felder Jr.**

CHARLESTON—Howard Arthur Felder Jr., brother of the Rev. Bill Felder, died Jan. 2, 2023. Rev. Felder is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

A private service will be held by the family.

Mr. Felder is survived by his two sons, daughter and stepson.

**Rev. Roger Charles Goupil**

SWANSEA—The Rev. Roger Charles Goupil, a retired local pastor of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Dec. 31, 2022.



Goupil

Prior to his retirement in 2012, Rev. Goupil served the Shiloh, Sandy Run; Orange Circuit; Beulah, Sandy Run; and Cameron charges.

Funeral services were held Jan. 7 at Mount Hebron UMC, West Columbia.

Rev. Goupil is survived by his wife, Betty, and two daughters.

**Kathryn Geraldine Phillips Graham**

FLORENCE—Kathryn Geraldine "Cherry" Phillips Graham, widow of the Rev. Iverson Graham Jr., died Dec. 25, 2022.

Funeral services were held Dec. 28 at Waters-Powell Funeral Home with burial in the family cemetery next to Friendship Baptist Church, Gresham.

Mrs. Graham is survived by her daughter and son.

**Rev. Mary Lou Morris Kollarik**

STOCKBRIDGE, Ga.—The Rev. Mary Lou Morris Kollarik, sister of Tim Morris and a retired member of the North Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Jan. 4, 2023. Mr. Morris is the husband of the Rev. Hope Avins Morris, pastor of Faith United Methodist Church, Lexington.

A memorial service will held in the spring. An additional graveside service with military honors will be held at Arlington National Cemetery, Washington, D.C.

Memorials may be made to the Kollarik Scholarship for Military Chaplains, Candler School, 1531 Dickey Drive, Atlanta, GA 30322; or to Stockbridge First UMC, 4863 N. Henry Blvd., Stockbridge, GA 30281.

**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.

Rev. Kollarick is survived by her husband, Don, son and daughter.

**Nancy Lewis**

JONESBORO, Tenn.—Nancy Lewis, sister of the Rev. Richard D. Lewis, died Dec. 15, 2022. Rev. Lewis is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church currently service the Lockhart-Wesley Chapel Charge, Lockhart.

A memorial service will be held in the spring.

**Rev. George Franklin Manigo Jr.**

BAMBERG—The Rev. George Franklin Manigo Jr., a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Jan. 8, 2023.



Manigo Jr.

Prior to his retirement in 2001, Rev. Manigo served the Cheraw-Wesley, Seneca-Walhalla, St. Mark-St. Matthew, Clover, Camden-Trinity and Orangeburg-Trinity charges. He also served as the Walterboro District superintendent from 1986 to 1992.

Graveside services were held Jan. 15 at Bamberg Memory Garden Cemetery.

Rev. Manigo is survived by his wife, Rosa, his son and daughter.

**Grace Perry Prater Minick**

SALUDA—Grace Perry Prater Minick, widow of the Rev. James Prater, died Dec. 3, 2022.

Funeral services were held Dec. 8 at St. Paul United Methodist Church with burial in West Travis Park Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to St. Paul UMC, 102 E. Butler Ave., Saluda, SC 29138.

Mrs. Minick is survived by her son and daughter.

**Donald C. Phipps**

LANCASTER—Donald C. "Don" Phipps, widower of the Rev. Fredericka Phipps, died Jan. 7, 2023.

Funeral services were held Jan. 14 at Hopewell UMC.

Memorials may be made to Trinity UMC, 1664 Flat Creek Road, Lancaster, SC 29720.

**Carolinda McClimon Robison**

GREER—Carolinda McClimon Robison, widow of Dr. John Robison, died Dec. 23, 2022.

A private service was held.

Memorials may be made to Memorial United Methodist Church, 201 N. Main St., Greer, SC 29650.

Mrs. Robison is survived by her two sons.

**Rev. Herbert Stephens Jr.**

SPARTANBURG—The Rev. Herbert Stephens Jr., a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Jan. 15, 2023.



Stephens Jr.

Prior to his retirement in 1993, Rev. Stephens served the Whitney, Buffalo, Montgomery Memorial and Greer-Sharon charges.

A graveside service was held Jan. 20 in Sunset Memorial Park.

Memorials may be made to St. Luke UMC, 105 McKay Ave., Spartanburg, SC 29302.

Rev. Stephens is survived by his wife, Ellen P. Stephens, son and daughter.

**Carroll Erwin Summers Jr.**

LAREDO, Texas—Carroll Erwin Summers Jr., brother of Dr. Thomas A. Summers, died Dec. 17, 2022. Dr. Summers is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Dec. 20 at the Joe Jackson North Funeral Chapels.

Memorials may be made to the Carroll E. and Evelyn B. Summers Community Outreach via the Laredo Area Community Foundation, <https://laredofoundation.org> or P.O. Box 450223, Laredo, TX 78045; or to The Bethany House of Laredo, [www.bethanyhouseoflaredo.org](http://www.bethanyhouseoflaredo.org) or 817 Hidalgo St., Laredo, TX 78040.

Mr. Summers is survived by his wife, Evelyn Bruni Summers, daughter and son.

**Patricia Lou Foster Thompson**

GREENWOOD—Patricia "Patty" Lou Foster Thompson, widow of the Rev. Leon Thompson, died Dec. 9, 2022.

A graveside service was held Dec. 12 at Greenwood Memorial Gardens.

Memorials may be made to Hospice and Palliative Care of the Piedmont, 408 W. Alexander Ave., Greenwood, SC 29649; Main Street United Methodist Church, 211 N. Main Street, Greenwood, SC 29646; or to Cambridge UMC, P.O. Box 384, Ninety Six, SC 29666.

**UMVIM-SEJ director speaks out on conflict in UMC**

As rumors and heated debate continue to circulate about denominational affiliation, the director of one critical regional ministry agency has spoken out, urging people to remember that God brings people of all opinions together for the good of his kingdom.

The Rev. Matt Lacey, executive director of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, Southeast Jurisdiction, shared his thoughts on the current conflict in The United Methodist Church in a video available at <https://tinyurl.com/umvimsej-statement>.

UMVIM is the official short-term volunteer sending agency of the UMC. Their work is to equip those in churches to go out into the world to serve with their hands and feet in the name of Jesus.

"I come to you this morning with a heavy heart," Lacey stated in the video. "During the last several weeks, we have received emails, letters and phone calls about the conflict going on in The United Methodist Church and the potential fragmenting of our denomination. Most of these comments have no basis in reality; they're simply rumors. Those are easy to ignore.

"But we've received hurtful comments from those we

know and have been active in our ministry for many years. These are the ones that hurt the most. These are team leaders, team members, donors and other participants who, almost overnight, have dismissed our work in mission simply because there is a 'United Methodist' in our name.

"I want to be clear I don't speak for anybody else except myself and the UMVIM office for the Southeast Jurisdiction. The lies, innuendo, rumors and dog whistles are having a real, negative impact on ministry and will hurt those who are living in the margins of society around the world. I know people are very passionate about these issues; I am myself. But I fear we've become so blinded by our passions that many ministries will suffer, ministries that will be judged simply by their name or denominational affiliation instead of being judged on the work they do out in the world to spread God's love to those in need.

"I hope and still do that mission can be a place where people with differing opinions can come together and bridge the divide, to work together despite differences and to see God moving throughout the world. I've seen it myself—mission is that powerful. God is that powerful. But we have to be willing to give each other a chance.

"UMVIM is going to remain open to anyone who wishes to use our resources in the Southeast Jurisdiction. It doesn't matter if you call yourself United Methodist, Methodist, Wesleyan, Global Methodist or have membership in another denomination. I don't know what the future holds for this ministry, but I do know that God is not going to stop moving, and we won't stop doing our best to follow God.

"To those who wish to move on from our ministry, I thank you for your years of service, your support and your prayers and hope you can find another ministry that is an outlet for you to show God's love. For those who wish to work with us, we welcome you despite where you may find yourself."

Lacey also invited people to a livestreaming event with a question-answer session that was held in December.

To learn more about UMVIM in the SEJ: <https://www.sejumc.org/umvim>.

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**January**

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. 1—Free Zoom class on new statistics reporting system by Basic Church Administration, 10:30 a.m.; 7:30 p.m. <https://church-admin.org/registrations/>

Feb. 2—Groundhog Day

Feb. 3-4—Enrollment days, Spartanburg Methodist College, Spartanburg. <https://www.smcc.edu/admissions/plan-a-visit/enrollment-days/>

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](http://bit.ly/MarionLSM). Deadline: Jan. 3

Feb. 5—Winter Lay Servant Training of the Rock Hill District, Philadelphia UMC, York, \$25. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/rockhillonlineregistration>. Deadline: Jan. 7.

Feb. 5—LSM School, Marion District, Socastee UMC, Myrtle Beach, 2:30-8 p.m. \$30. Register: [bit.ly/MarionLSM](http://bit.ly/MarionLSM). Deadline: Jan. 3

Feb. 7—UWF Social Action Workshop #2, virtual, 7 p.m.

Feb. 7—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 7:30-8:30 p.m.



**Holy night**

Manning UMC, Manning, members participate in a candlelight service on Christmas Eve at the church.

Feb. 9—Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry 2023 Annual Meeting, Grace UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m.-Noon. RSVP required: [asnm-sc@att.net](mailto:asnm-sc@att.net).

Feb. 11—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](http://bit.ly/MarionLSM). Deadline: Jan. 3

Feb. 12—LSM School, Marion District, Socastee UMC, Myrtle Beach, 2:30-8 p.m. \$30. Register: [bit.ly/MarionLSM](http://bit.ly/MarionLSM). Deadline: Jan. 3

Feb. 12—Winter Lay Servant Training of the

Rock Hill District, Philadelphia UMC, York, \$25. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/rockhillonlineregistration>. Deadline: Jan. 7.

Feb. 14—Valentine's Day

Feb. 16—UWF Social Action Workshop #3, virtual, 2 p.m.

Feb. 17-19—Theotokos Confirmation Retreat, Hinton Rural Life Center, Hayesville, N.C. Register: <https://hintontheotokos.org/about-theotokos-1>

Feb. 18—Conference Connectional Ministries meeting

Feb. 20—President's Day

Feb. 22—Ash Wednesday

Feb. 24—2023 S.C. Men N Ministry Golf Tournament, The Spur at Northwoods Golf Course, Columbia, 10 a.m. shotgun start. Register: Kenny Bingham, 843-246-8398 or [kbingham42@yahoo.com](mailto:kbingham42@yahoo.com)

Feb. 24-25—Men N Ministry Retreat, Mount Horeb UMC, Lexington

Feb. 24-26—Theotokos Confirmation Retreat, Hinton Rural Life Center, Hayesville, N.C. Register: <https://hintontheotokos.org/about-theotokos-1>

Feb. 25—UWF Social Action Workshop #4, virtual, 10 a.m.

**March**

*Women's History Month*

March 1—UWF Presidential Scholarship Applications due

March 3-5—Theotokos Confirmation Retreat, Hinton Rural Life Center, Hayesville, N.C. Register: <https://hintontheotokos.org/about-theotokos-1>

March 4—Protecting Your Church from Embezzlement Seminar, Trinity UMC, Bamberg. Register by Feb. 27: <https://www.umcsc.org/protect/>

March 7—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 7:30-8:30 p.m.

March 12—Daylight Savings Time starts

March 17—St. Patrick's Day

March 17-19—Theotokos Confirmation Retreat, Hinton Rural Life Center, Hayesville, N.C. Register: <https://hintontheotokos.org/about-theotokos-1>

March 23—UWF Legacy Fund Day of Giving

**Students encouraged to apply for Advocate's \$1,000 scholarship**

Deadline is March 1 for annual fund

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](mailto:jbrodie@umcsc.org).



Last year's recipient was Susann Breazeale.



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Classified ads are \$19 per inch tall. Web site ads are also available ([www.advocatesc.org](http://www.advocatesc.org)). Deadlines are the 10th of the month for the following month's paper.

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# 'They will know we are Christians by our love'

by the Rev. Adrienne Fink

**Feb. 5**

**Loving as God Loves**

**Lesson Scripture:** 1 John 4:7-21; Ruth 4:9-10

**Background Scripture:** 1 John 4:7-21; Ruth 4

**Key Verse:** "This commandment we have from him: Those who claim to love God ought to love their brother and sister also" (1 John 4:21).

In 1960s Chicago, Father Peter Scholtes needed a song for his youth choir to perform for a series of social justice meetings. Frustrated with the lacking selection, he composed, "They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love," which soon grew into a folk hit for the civil rights movement. Today, this statement remains pertinent to issues within our communities and our denomination.

Do others, within and outside The United Methodist Church, know we are Christians by our love? How do the powerful and the powerless experience our love? How do the oppressors and the oppressed experience our love?

This month's selection of Scripture explores God's love, and by extension, Christian love. This week, our passage describes God's love and how it manifests in our lives. The author of 1 John has a lot to say about God's love: 1) God is love (v. 16); 2) Love is of God (v. 7); 3) Love saves us from our sins (v. 10); 4) Love begins with God, not with people (v. 10); and 5) We know love only because God first loves us (v. 19).

Then, in the final sentences of our passage, the author makes a powerful argument: We cannot love God and hate each other!

As United Methodist congregations vote to disaffiliate over how God loves LGBTQ+ people, I wonder how others see love in our denomination. Do they see love that is of God? Do they see "love" founded in hatred? As the United Methodist family struggles with our identity and shared beliefs, we can and do easily choose love over hate.

Amid the disaffiliations, United Methodists have told lies, encouraged manipulation and vilified our siblings in the name of "God's love." Within our denomination, we have irreconcilable beliefs. So how can we still love each other? Even as we disagree, we can love with God's love. It is not too late to let go of our hate and to share true love with each other.

How do you define Christian love? How have you experienced it within our denomination and your local church? As congregations splinter from the UMC, where do you see God's love? Where do we need to grow in God's love and in Christian love?

**Feb. 12**

**A Parent's Love**

**Lesson Scripture:** 1 Kings 3:16-28

**Background Scripture:** 1 Kings 3:16-28; 1 John 4:7-12

**Key Verse:** "Then the woman whose son was still alive said to the king, 'Please, Your Majesty, give her the living child; please don't kill him,' for she had great love for her son" (1 Kings 3:26).

As we look at this week's passage, let's remember from last week how the author of 1 John explains that as followers of Christ, we must love with God's love. How do we see God's love in the story of King Solomon's visit from two women? These two women hope King Solomon will settle a dispute. They both claim to be the mother of a baby, so who is the true mother?

With God-given wisdom, Solomon declares the baby be cut into two so each woman may have part of it. The lying woman agrees to the terms; the actual mother refuses the terms, telling the king she'd rather

her child be with another woman than be killed. By their answers, Solomon knows the second woman is the true mother. In her, we see God's selfless love.

We see God's love that chooses life over death, even when that choice comes at great sacrifice.

Do others know Christians by our selfless love? How willing are we to be like the second woman in the story, to give up our greatest joys so that others may live? When refugees wait at our borders, who loves them selflessly? When prisoners sit on death row, who loves them selflessly? When our neighbors cannot afford basic necessities like food and medicine, who loves them selflessly?

What are we willing to give up so that others may live?

**Feb. 19**

**True Friendship**

**Lesson Scripture:** 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 19:1-7, 20

**Background Scripture:** 1 Samuel 18:1-4, 19:1-7, 20; 1 John 4:7-21

**Key Verse:** "And Jonathan and David made a covenant together because Jonathan loved David as much as himself" (1 Samuel 18:3).

This week's Scripture passage in 1 Samuel describes the special friendship of David and King Saul's son, Jonathan. Jonathan's life is "bound up" in David's life (CEB translation), and Jonathan devotes himself socially and politically to David. When King Saul tries to kill David in Chapter 19, we see Jonathan love David with God's love in two ways. First, Jonathan protects David by warning him of Saul's intent to kill David. Second, Jonathan advocates for David's life by convincing his father to spare him.

Jonathan uses his own privilege as the king's son to care for David. He chooses life over death, and he convinces King Saul to choose life over death. As Christians, what privileges do we have in our communities and our nation? How do others see us using our privileges? Do we use them in a godly way like Jonathan to protect others and advocate for them? Do we use our privileges selfishly at the expense of others who need our help?

Let's look within our communities, our congregations and our denomination. Decades of arguments about the ordination of LGBTQ+ persons within the UMC have denied LGBTQ+ persons the right to answer their spiritual callings. How can heterosexual and cis-gendered United Methodists advocate for their LGBTQ+ siblings? Our country still suffers from oppressive systems based on gender, race and socioeconomic status. How can Christians who hold power because of their race, gender or money advocate for and protect those who suffer because of their race, gender or socioeconomic status?

When marginalized peoples look at Christians, do they know us by our protecting, advocating love, or do they know us as the ones who oppress, hurt and hate?

**Feb. 26**

**Living for Others**

**Lesson Scripture:** Matthew 16:21-28

**Background Scripture:** Matthew 16:13-28

**Key Verses:** "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them'" (Matthew 16:24-25).

As this month's final installment, Matthew 16 shares a conversation between Jesus and his disciples. After Jesus predicts

his own death and resurrection, he lays out paradoxical choices for his disciples. Do they give up their lives and follow Jesus, thus receiving eternal salvation from Jesus? Do they choose the temporal world over Jesus but ultimately lose their lives?

He posits questions that have difficult answers. Are we willing to be like Jesus and bear our own crosses?

Jesus bears his cross not for his own gain but for humanity's gain. He bears his cross out of his love for every person, out of his desire for every person to be saved from the perils of sin and death and out of his desire for every person to live in his perfect love.

Therefore, if we take up our crosses like Jesus, then we must love and live like Jesus.

This sounds much like our first lesson from 1 John, right?


Those who have the love of God within them love their siblings with the love of God. They will know we are Christians by

our sacrificial love. They will know we are Christians when we choose love even when hate is easier (and hate is usually easier). They will know we are Christians when our love allows others to live. They will know we are Christians when our love protects and advocates.

This week's lesson comes with the beginning of Lent, a time of introspection as followers of Jesus. As we move through the weeks ahead in the journey toward Easter, how can we grow in love? Where are we struggling to love? When are we choosing hate over love? How is God calling us to love?

When the world looks at us and when our siblings look at us, may they know us by our love.

*Fink, a deacon, is a chaplain for Prisma Health Department of Spiritual Care and Education. She also serves on the Columbia District on Ordained Ministry.*



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# First strives to serve in name of Jesus

By Michelle Stallworth

LAURENS—At First United Methodist Church, we strive to become obedient, loving disciples of our lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

Our food ministry is one way we serve our community. We operate a food pantry, staffed by volunteers, that served more than 500 people in 2022.

Also, because of the generous donations from our congregation, we were able to provide a Thanksgiving meal for more than 25 families who came to the food pantry the week before Thanksgiving. We saw some very excited and relieved families accepting the donation of a holiday meal.

We also have a garden on the church property. The garden was developed on a portion of church property that was no longer in use. Members of our church and community work together to plant, cultivate and share the wonderful bounty of vegetables from the garden. The Giving Garden provides fresh vegetables for our food bank, other food pantries in our community and a number of shut-ins and assisted living facilities in the area. Fresh vegetables as part of a healthy diet can help our recipients maintain good health.

Our Backpack Ministry is part of a collaborative effort with several churches. Volunteers sort and pack a weekend supply of food for 60 elementary-age children in our community.

It is a blessing to play a small part in feeding these children who eat at school during the week, but may not have enough food over the weekend.

Finally, we support Family Promise of Laurens by providing meals for families in their emergency shelter.

We are grateful to the community who supports our



Bags of donated foods from a local store help the food pantry and other ministries at First UMC.



Members of American Legion Post #25 bring in canned foods they collected for First UMC's food bank.

church in these efforts by collecting food during the year. We were amazed at the amount of food collected in the last quarter of 2022 by food drives held at schools, the local YMCA and a local grocery store that allowed shoppers to donate a bag of food when shopping.

We are also grateful to the community for supporting our church fundraisers where dollars collected go to support our food missions. There is nothing more fulfilling

than growing our vegetables in the garden and using them in a vegetable soup fundraiser where funds will go back to purchase for the food bank and backpack program.

We have come full circle in our food ministry, and we look forward to much more in 2023.

*Stallworth is a volunteer for the food ministries and leads a women's Bible study at First UMC, Laurens.*

## Native American Ministries

### Catawba language

With all the different foreign languages spoken in our state today, would you be surprised to learn that at one time there were at least 26 different Native dialects spoken in this region alone before European contact? Most of these languages disappeared when a lot of the tribes became extinct for various reasons, either through diseases the Europeans brought here or through wars that occurred.

But even as horrible as those events were, the worst thing occurred after the United States was formed: They made it illegal for the indigenous people to speak their own languages. This began by their creation of Indian boarding schools.

The young children were taken away

from the different tribes and placed in these schools far from home. Then they were forced to learn to speak only English. These things aren't written to make anyone feel guilty about something they had nothing to do with. This is for educational purposes to inform people who had no idea these things happened

Today, the Catawba are taking steps to revive our once-dormant language. We are one of the few fortunate tribes that had folks interested in a dying tribe before they no longer existed. Luckily for the Catawba, we have proven them all wrong. We are still here. And we are working hard to complete a dictionary we have been working on for more than several decades. It has been

especially difficult since we lost many of our elders who remembered some of the language and some of the songs taught to them by their elders.

During this time, we have offered classes to our tribal citizens and started classes for our Headstart children. We recently started working with Castle Heights Middle School in Rock Hill, which began a Catawba group to meet weekly to learn Catawba—a first in the school system.

As the saying goes, "Use it or lose it." We want to make sure our children and our future generations will be able to speak their tribal language. No one should be made to feel less than anyone else for speaking their own language. And that goes for the Catawba, as well.

We are celebrating who we are and standing tall in our culture and language.

—By Bekee Garris, Catawba

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