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June 2023

UMCSC readies for first in-person AC since before pandemic

By Jessica Brodie

FLORENCE—For the first time since 2019, lay and clergy members of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church will come together in person June 4-7 to pray, worship and conduct the business of the church.

“After four years of isolation and virtual gatherings, we look forward with great anticipation and hope to reuniting in-person

this year for worship and fellowship, and to conduct the business of the Annual Conference,” said South Carolina’s Resident Bishop L. Jonathan Holston. “This will certainly be an opportunity to show our gratitude for how God has been working in the in-between while we have been apart, and it is this hope we bring as we come together in the spirit of remembering God’s purpose for us.”

Here is what to expect:

Sunday’s celebration

Annual Conference kicks off Sunday, June 4, at the Florence Center with packet pick-ups, clergy session, lay member orientation and other matters before one of the more anticipated services of the multiday session—the Commissioning, Ordination and Retirement Recognition Service. Presid-

ed by Holston with guest preacher Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball of the West Virginia Annual Conference, the evening expects to ordain 12 men and women as full elders, ordain one as full deacon, commission five as provisional elders and commission two as provisional deacons. It also will recognize 33 retiring clergy.

See “In-Person AC,” Page 11



Photo courtesy of Cathy Trevino

Packing party

Members of St. Mark and Tranquil UMCs in the Greenwood District gather April 29 for a flood/cleaning bucket packing party to help people impacted from recent disasters. See story, Page 10.

‘Like fresh air’

Revival reignites Lancaster church, community

By Jessica Brodie

LANCASTER—What do you do when the pandemic’s far-reaching effects have claimed a good chunk of your church’s members, you’re struggling with finances and you’re eager for a bold path forward in ministry?

If you’re Hopewell United Methodist Church, you listen to the Holy Spirit—and host a revival that breathes a fresh wind of connection and diversity across your community and congregation.

That’s what happened in the small community of Lancaster in April when an older, mostly White historical congregation decided to bring back a multiday revival service that hadn’t been organized in years.

Hopewell used to be known for its revivals, but the services had paused for some time. This year, organizers decided they needed to embrace a decidedly diverse approach. Not only did they invite dynamic speaker the Rev. Sh’Kur Francis to preach all four nights of the April 16-19 revival, but they also were intentional about inviting everyone in the surrounding community.

What they got was a packed house of attendees that crossed racial, generational and denominational lines. Sixty to 80 people attended each night of all races and ages, from Baptist,

See “Lancaster Revival,” Page 13

Methodists celebrate, lament as legislative session ends

By Jessica Brodie

One group of South Carolina United Methodists is celebrating and one is in a time of deep disappointment as state lawmakers adjourn their 2023 legislative session.

Methodists were speaking up and speaking out about at least two South Carolina bills this legislative session, which began Jan. 10 and adjourned May 11. One bill focused on combatting predatory lending and was championed by a number of Methodists, while the other was an execution secrecy bill that would conceal names of companies providing lethal injections, vehemently opposed by Methodists who are part of a group called South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty.

The predatory lending bill has been carried over to next year’s session, meaning the legislation is still alive, but it will not be acted upon this year.

The execution secrecy bill (SB 120) was passed May 4 by the South Carolina General Assembly, and Gov. Henry McMaster signed the bill into law May 12.

‘State-sponsored murder’

The Rev. Hillary Taylor, a United Methodist pastor who is also the executive director of South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death

Penalty, expressed deep disappointment over the passage of the execution secrecy bill, which will shield the identities of drug companies that provide drugs to be used for executions in South Carolina. Executions in this state have been on pause for more than a decade because drug companies reportedly have refused to sell the drugs to the South Carolina Department of Corrections because they don’t want their companies associated with executions.

The bill will also keep secret the identities of people involved in preparing the execution, including execution team members.

Taylor said the new law indicates our government prioritizes secrecy over transparency.

“Not only does this secrecy law allow the South Carolina Department of Corrections to spend untold amounts of money on lethal injection drugs, it prohibits accountability over the DOC, while also threatening to imprison people for raising alarm about buying black market drugs, using expired and/or contaminated drugs and inflicting stressful and traumatic conditions on DOC employees participating in premeditated, state-sponsored murder,” Taylor said.

See “Legislative Session,” Page 14

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Three UMC faith leaders recognized through ArtFields

LAKE CITY—Three United Methodist faith leaders were recognized during ArtFields 2023 as vital to the Lake City community and participants in the growth and celebration of ArtFields.

ArtFields started in 2013 with a simple goal: to honor the artists of the Southeast with a week's worth of celebration and competition in the heart of a traditional Southern small town.

The competition and exhibition offer more than \$145,000 in cash prizes.

The winners of two People's Choice Awards are determined by the votes of people visiting ArtFields.

A panel of art professionals selects all the other awards, including the contest's \$50,000 Grand prize and the \$25,000 second place award.

Up to 400 works of art were on display in locally owned venues, from renovated 1920s warehouses and professional art spaces such as Jones-Carter Gallery and TRAX Visual Art Center to the library, the history museum, the Ronald E. McNair Life History Center, restaurants, boutiques and other shops.

During ArtFields, what was once one of South Carolina's most prosperous agricultural communities becomes a living art gallery as citizens recognize, celebrate and share the artistic talent of the Southeast.

This year, three United Methodist clergy were honored to be part of the ArtFields magic in the portrait contest.

The theme for models this year was "community religious leaders."



Above, the Rev. William McCown of Lake City United Methodist Church, the Rev. Amiri B. Hooker of Wesley Chapel UMC and the Rev. Ingrid Germaine Graham, St. John UMC, were painted as part of ArtFields. At right, Lyudmila Tomova paints a portrait of Hooker.

Featured in the portraits were the Rev. William McCown of Lake City United Methodist Church, the Rev. Amiri B. Hooker of Wesley Chapel UMC and the Rev. Ingrid Germaine Graham, a local pastor from St. John UMC.

The ArtFields 2023 Portrait Contest first place win went to Lyudmila Tomova, who painted Hooker.

A third-place win went to Joshua Knight, who also created a portrait of Hooker.



Conference offers help for individuals who wish to remain in the UMCSC

For those South Carolina United Methodists who would like to remain with The United Methodist Church but their local church has voted to separate from the denomination, conference leaders have released a set of resources.

"Engaging Possibilities," found at <https://umcsc.org/engage>, is designed to serve as a starting point for those in search of a new place to worship.

Resources include:

- A link to the UMC's Find-A-Church tool, which identifies local UMCs based on a ZIP code or address, or directions on how to get in touch with district offices to find a UMC in your area;
- Tools to begin the process of transferring church membership. You can transfer your membership to a specific church, temporarily to a district or temporarily to the annual conference; and

- Opportunities to learn about "New Expressions of Church" in the South Carolina Conference.

The UMCSC team developing Engaging Possibilities, led by the Rev. James Friday, director of Congregational Development, and the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith, director of Connectional Ministries, will continue to identify needs of those searching for a new church home and additional resources to address those needs.

"Whether you are an individual or a group of people searching for a new church home, we will be there for you during this transitional and prayerfully transformational time," Friday said.

"As you consider your next faithful steps, specific pathways among which you may choose will continue to emerge as the conference, districts and local churches come together to reflect The United Methodist connection at its best."

Want to learn more about the GMC?

For those churches hoping to leave the UMC and are not sure what to do, the Global Methodist Church is hoping they will consider being a part of that denomination.

The Rev. Keith Boyette, transitional connectional officer for the Global Methodist Church, has shared five articles he believes people would find to be very helpful to read to learn more about the GMC.

These articles are as follows:

- "The Local Church in the Global Methodist Church": <https://globalmethodist.org/the-local-church-in-the-global-methodist-church>
- "What We Believe Matters": <https://globalmethodist.org/what-we-believe-matters>
- "Hopes and Aspirations": <https://globalmethodist.org/hopes-and-aspirations>
- "The Spirit of a New Connection": <https://globalmethodist.org/the-spirit-of-a-new-connection>
- "Leaning Into Our Mission": <https://globalmethodist.org/leaning-into-our-mission>

If you are an individual South Carolina United Methodist who would like to remain with The United Methodist Church but your local church has voted to separate from the denomination, we'd love to hear your perspective. Contact Editor Jessica Brodie at jbrodie@umcsc.org or 803-807-0018.

Need more resources for staying in the UMC?

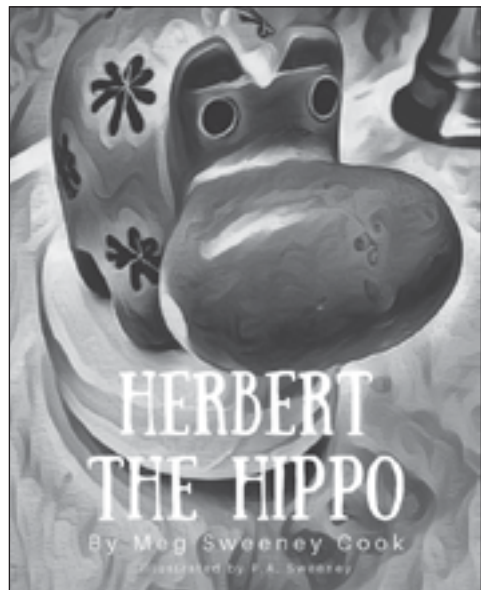
A number of resources abound for churches wanting to "stay UMC" or learn more about what this might look like.

Ask the UMC created a series of frequently asked questions, which they compiled on a webpage titled "Ask The UMC Series: Is The United Methodist Church Really ... ?" Several other resources are also available, including a campaign titled #BeUMC that strives to help people reclaim their United Methodist identity.

Resources include the following:

- Is The United Methodist Church Really ... ? : <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-series-is-the-umc-really>
- BeUMC: <https://www.umc.org/en/who-we-are/our-people/beumc>
- Committed to The UMC: <https://www.umc.org/committed>
- UMC's Discipleship Ministries: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>
- Fresh Expressions, a subset of Discipleship Ministries: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/fresh-expressions>
- Resource UMC: <https://www.resourceumc.org>
- That We May Be One: <https://twmbo.org/>
- Adam Hamilton: A Future with Hope: <https://vimeo.com/734455031>
- Beginning Again, A Guide for Remaining in the UMC: <https://www.umc.org/-/media/umc-media/2023/02/17/21/27/beginning-again-guide-v3.ashx?la=en>

UMCSC pastor Cook releases ‘Herbert the Hippo’ through Advocate Press



The book is for ages 3-5.

The Advocate Press has just released its first children’s book, “Herbert the Hippo.” Designed for preschoolers (ages 3-5), the book is authored by the Rev. Meg Sweeney Cook and illustrated by P.A. Sweeney. Cook pastors Cayce United Methodist Church, Cayce.

Herbert the Hippo is a small pink hippo figurine who was made in South Africa. He’s so small he can fit in the palm of your hand. But even though he’s small, he’s a great big reminder that everyone can make a difference in the world, and everyone is God’s special work of art.

Herbert, a fair-trade figurine the author



Cook pastors Cayce UMC Cayce.

fell in love with at a fair-trade market, has inspired this book. It is the first in a planned series. The book is available at <https://advocatesc.org/store/books/herbert-the-hippo> or on Amazon. “Herbert the Hippo” joins two other books released this spring by the Advocate Press: “People of My Journey,” by the Rev. Arthur Holt, and “A Healing Journey: Poems of Faith, Healing, Recovery, and Coping with Grief,” by Stephon C. Void.

All Advocate Press books are available at <https://advocatesc.org/books>, and most will be available at the Advocate’s table at Annual Conference.



Singing, prayer and praise were big parts of the event.

UMCSC pastor offers reflections as BMCR holds 56th general meeting

By the Rev. Amiri Hooker

South Carolina United Methodists celebrated with Black Methodists for Church Renewal at the caucus’s annual meeting, held April 12-15.

The 56th general meeting of the BMCR was a time of information, insight and inspiration. This year, Black Methodists came together under the theme “Self-Realization: Knowing Our Purpose to Fuel Our Passion to Work Our Plan,” as derived from Jeremiah 29:11.



BMCR met April 12-15.

BMCR met in-person at the Double-Tree by Hilton Hotel and Suites, Pittsburgh Downtown, in Pennsylvania. Attendees came together to see dear friends again, to make new acquaintances and to engage in conversations that assist BMCR with raising up prophetic and spiritual leaders who will be advocates for the unique needs of Black persons in The United Methodist Church.

Dr. Candace Lewis, president and dean of Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, presented on Black United Methodists’ perspectives on the future of the UMC. Lewis noted that The Research Project found 69.9 percent of respondents want to remain affiliated with the UMC. Only 6 percent said they want to disaffiliate and join the Global Methodist Church (3 percent) or another denomination (3 percent).

Bishop Julius C. Trimble, resident bishop of the Indiana Area of the UMC, preached a powerful sermon on “Love and Justice and Breaking Decorum.” In the tradition of Dr. Martin King and others, he encouraged the need to sometime break man’s laws

to respond to God’s higher laws of justice. He noted that he has a personal mission to encourage all people with the love of Jesus Christ to rise to their highest potential.

Also at the meeting, I encouraged attendees to adopt more than nine pieces of legislation as resolutions to go to the 2024 General Conference dealing with issues of race and BMCR concerns.

It was a successful and spirited meeting. From our gathering as a board on Tuesday until the BMCR dinner banquet on Friday, the Holy Ghost continuously provided personal attention to our work and witness. Each one of those moments helped us to recognize, if not realize, more fully our purpose, passion and plan.

As we look forward to our 57th General Meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio, next year, let us use this time to live into the prosperity, hope and future God has destined for BMCR across the globe.



Gatherings, pictured above and below, intentionally target concerns of older adults.



St. James older adults find fellowship, information through Seasoned Saints

St. James United Methodist Church, Laurens, just finished their first year of a newly instituted Older Adult Ministry Initiative appropriately named “Seasoned Saints.” This program was designed to reach out to older adults and give them an opportunity to gather and enjoy fellowship with other believers while addressing their specific needs and challenges.

The program began in October by inviting their local senator, Danny Verdin, to share what serving as a state senator is like being a person of faith. It was attended by 70 community members.

The next meeting, conducted in December, was attended by 85 people, as attendees celebrated Christmas by being entertained by the Fleming Mill Gospel-Bluegrass Band.

Two additional gatherings were conducted in the winter and spring of 2023, averaging 70 individuals.

“It is obvious that this ministry initiative is something which is needed in Laurens, and we are intentionally tailoring our fall/winter meetings to help address older adult challenges like assisted living alternatives, as well as inviting local subject matter experts to share self and health care recommendations,” said the Rev. Clyde Scott, pastor of St James.

“We are excited about the overwhelming success of this new program, which is helping us fulfill our mission to make and nurture disciples of Christ by connecting, growing and serving our members and the greater Laurens community,” he added.

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Viewpoints



Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

No more radio silence

I've had about enough of the doom and gloom, the quarrels about which side is more "like Jesus" or "like John Wesley," the founder of Methodism. We all know what Jesus said about fulfilling the Law and loving others. It's all important. Those of you reading this who are traditionalist or progressive or somewhere in the middle, know all of us are probably a little bit right and a little bit wrong. And one day, Jesus will set things straight.

But until then, we've got a church to build. And every day we get bogged down in the pettiness or the arguments or the hurt feelings or the finger-pointing is a day lost.

Some days it feels like everything is on hold right now as we wait ... for General Conference, for the churches separating to separate, for the proverbial sky to fall.

So let's stop waiting. There's never going to be enough money or a culture super-hungry for the Gospel or a perfectly-in-alignment theological perspective where everyone is in absolute unity. Come on—we're living on Earth right now, not heaven.

What we're tasked to do is share the Gospel. Love others. Even in the midst of strife.

And while we're at it, we need to keep our in-fighting to a minimum lest it distract other new or potential believers from the real message: the saving grace we claim in Christ Jesus.

It's one thing to talk about what's going on in your denominational newspaper. Debate is healthy, and it helps us grow. But it's a whole other thing to press pause on ministry and mission and everything else that breathes life into our churches until everything is settled. It's like we've gone radio-silent. It's high time our churches got loud and proud about communicating what Jesus has to offer this world.

So let's proclaim it, my friends, in all the ways we can. Let's look at our own churches from an outsider's perspective and see what message we're sending. Do we look like a boring congregation where people are asleep in the pews, like a people who just shuffle in for an hour-long Sunday service and shuffle back to our comfortable homes once more? Are we sending more of a ho-hum message than a message that we serve the living, triumphant, eternal God whose grace and love are available to every single soul, no holds barred?

And how do people find us? Do we have a website? Are we on social media (and on more than "just Facebook," which caters to an older audience)? Do we have signs outside that say what time worship is held and encourage all to come? (I visited a church recently that had one time on its website, only to show up and they were meeting an hour earlier. Not good!)

And in those communications do we still have news about our Lenten studies from two months ago, or a picture from our Christmas service, or are we relevant and timely? Are we open to seekers? Do we talk about our ministries and let other people know what we're doing? Do we tell our local newspapers and TV stations or send postcards to neighbors? Or are we perhaps coming across like a little clique of religious insiders who don't really want to open up to the world, or who aren't really doing much with this glorious gift of salvation?

I'm looking around, and I see a lot of churches who are hiding their lights. Maybe they're waiting for General Conference, or too busy discerning their future, or too tired to do God's work *and* communicate about it. I repeat: There's never a "perfect time" to do anything. So let's all step up and get to work spreading the news about the good things Methodists are doing in the world today, about the ways we love each other and care for those in need, about the fact that our doors are open to all and we all kneel in worship to the one who made the stars. It's time.



Bishop's Corner

by Bishop L. Jonathan Holston

Seeking a more excellent way

"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."—Matthew 18:20 (NIV)

When you receive this edition of the *Advocate*, the 2023 session of the South Carolina Annual Conference will soon be under way. Reuniting in-person this year for praise, worship and fellowship will surely be a time of giving thanks to almighty God and celebrating the ways in which we have been seeking and fulfilling God's purpose for the church, especially during our recent years of isolation and virtual gatherings.

This year's theme, "Seeking A More Excellent Way: Breathe and Believe, Hewing Hope," calls us to cling to our faith in Christ as we seek hope in every circumstance. We will come together with hope, remembering who God has called us to be and seeking that which God wants for us.

We welcome Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, the resident bishop of the West Virginia Annual Conference, as preacher for the Service for Commissioning, Ordination and Retirement, and the Rev. Tim Rogers, Marion District superintendent, who will share the message during the Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving.

This year, along with the beloved, familiar aspects of our annual conference session, there will be some exciting, new components. We will have the opportunity to hear from several of our recently ordained and commissioned clergy as they lead times of centering and praise each day, and our South Carolina Men N Ministry

are sponsoring a prayer room that will be open to anyone seeking a quiet space to spend time with God. Special conference offerings will be received, including for the South Carolina Seminary Student Scholarship Fund and the newly established Bishop Joseph B. Bethea Endowed Scholarship at Duke Divinity School.

The hard work of so many people makes this gathering possible. A profound word of gratitude is expressed to the Rev. Terry Fleming and the people and churches of the Florence District, our host district, and to the Rev. Susan Maddox and members of Highland Park UMC, our host church. For many months, this team has worked closely with the Rev. Ken Nelson, conference secretary; the Rev. Mel Arant, assistant conference secretary; and the Committee on the Annual Conference to consider every detail. I am certain that you will join me in saluting the proactive leadership of all of these people who have worked so diligently on our behalf.

As the 2023 Annual Conference session begins, I ask for your prayers that great and marvelous things will happen through the Holy Spirit who guides and sustains us. Pray that our presence in Florence and online will be a living witness to the grace, mercy and love of Jesus Christ to all whom we meet.

Whether you are present at The Florence Center or following along with the livestream at www.umcsc.org, we are grateful for your prayers, presence, participation and commitment to ministry for the sake of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Letters to the Editor

Reductions

The current number of districts in the South Carolina Conference is based on a 51-year-old model (1972) when the number of churches in the conference was greater, the transportation issues were more difficult and the internet communication abilities of the conference and district leadership were non-existent (Resolution 2011).

The South Carolina Conference is projected to have 100 to 125 churches leave and may be more. It is unfair for the remaining faithful churches to bear the burden of high apportionments because of the expenses of having 12 district superintendents, each having a salary of \$107,681 plus expenses. Several conferences have already reduced their districts. The years 2025 and 2026 will be extremely tough financially. No staff was reduced in the 2024 budget.

A motion should be made at the 2023 Annual Conference to reduce the number of districts from 12 districts to 10 districts. Other staff areas to be reduced are the salary of the congregational development director (\$107,681) and the five congregational specialists given the reductions of churches.

The 2023 Annual Conference can make these decisions. The time is now.

*Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia*

Reflections on saintliness

Consider Habakkuk 1:1-4 and 2:2-4 and Mark 1:4-8. Here we have Habakkuk arguing with God and John the Baptist eating grasshoppers while dressed in camel's hair garments and a leather belt. Put those two together—that strikes me as weird!

Tell me, what is spiritually enriching about these two men: one perhaps a mentally unsta-

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LETTERS: Readers sound off on separation process, staying UMC

From Page 4

ble fellow who argues with God; the second one a weirdo out in the desert munching on extra-large grasshoppers and washing them down with wild honey?

I find it difficult to connect these two incidents in the lives of Habakkuk and John the Baptist with nurturing us in saintliness. It strikes me as the kind of strange behavior we might find in the mental health ward at the hospital! Or is that something they may have heard at a prayer meeting?

How can we point to argumentative Habakkuk and weird John as instructors in the life of faith—the life of love, generosity and devotion? I mean, that’s what we are about, isn’t it? To remind folk that the spiritual world is the most real world of all the worlds we know! And all the worlds that may exist beyond our capacity to know, the worlds among the stars and out in the great beyond.

A while back, Bishop Roy Clark asked us in South Carolina Methodism, “What is God calling us to be?” He answered his own question saying: “Our calling is to demonstrate that God still makes saints.”

I don’t think there is any argument about that. That’s our task, our work—to make saints.

Now think of the people who sit near you at church. Do you recognize any saints among them?

Of course, that depends upon one’s definition of sainthood. So let’s think about what makes a saint. The difference between saints and the rest of us could be that saints are better at dealing with routine frustrations and troubling situations.

Of course, there are heroes of faith like Joan of Arc, who was burned at the stake because she would not obey the priest who told her to stop helping the sick and the poor. Can you believe that? Yes, we can believe it because we know that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, even in and on behalf of the church. We mortals are just not equipped to handle absolute authority, authority that cannot be challenged! We can’t even handle absolute love because it excludes all but the original object of love.

The absolute belongs to God, not to us mortals.

We can say to our spouse, “I love you above all others.” But we cannot say, “I love you absolutely.” Love is an inclusive term; absolute is an exclusive term.

The two do not fit well together.

*Rev. Mickey Fisher, retired
Spartanburg*

Why we’re staying UMC

I would like to make our thoughts known concerning the upcoming period of discernment and possible withdrawal from The United Methodist Church.

Sam has been a minister in the South Carolina Conference for most of his life. We married in 1964, so I have been a part of his ministry for nearly 60 years, moving with him to 12 different United Methodist churches. In addition, we are both lifetime Methodists. Sam graduated from Wofford College and then Duke Divinity School, both Methodist institutions.

After his retirement, we decided to return to Cayce UMC, perhaps the happiest of his appointments. He was later given the honor of pastor emeritus. We have expected to remain here and have our funerals at this church.

We have lived through the civil rights era, the merging of the Black and White annual conferences and the merger with the Evangelical United Brethren denomination, at which time the Methodist Church became The United Methodist Church. Through it all, there has been dissension, but not enough to cause a split. Sam and I will not leave the UMC for an

intolerant denomination. If CUMC votes to leave, we will sadly have to find another church.

As far as what it means to be a United Methodist, why I am proud to be one and why I will not leave the UMC:

1. Motto: Open hearts, open minds, open doors. I am happy to be a part of a denomination that is open to all, without exceptions.
2. Wesley Quadrilateral: Scripture, tradition, reason, experience. Scripture is first and the most important.
3. The UMC is biblical (first of all), welcoming to all and missional: local, statewide and worldwide. Cayce UMC supports God’s Helping Hands, feeding the hungry through our blessing box and Project Snack Pack and other local charities. Statewide, the UMC supports Epworth Children’s Home, Killingsworth and more. Worldwide, the UMC supports United Methodist Volunteers in Mission and United Methodist Committee on Relief. These organizations are often first on the ground when a disaster occurs worldwide. Through our connectional denomination, we are much stronger than we would be as an individual local church.
4. The Great Commandment in Luke 10:27 says to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. When asked who is my neighbor, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan.
5. I am proud to be a member of such a church when I am traveling and see the UMC sign of the cross and the flame. I feel at home in any UMC in any state or country.
6. We are going on to perfection, and this debate is a step along the way.

For those reasons, I will remain a member of a UMC. I pray that Cayce UMC will continue to be that church.

*Anne Bonnette Harmon, member
Cayce UMC, Cayce*

Thank you

We want to thank Bishop Holston and the board of trustees for providing a plan, a path and a price to separate from The United Methodist Church. We are a denomination divided by our understanding of Holy Scripture and obedience to the *Book of Discipline*. We want to thank all the conference leaders who have been gracious and helpful in navigating this agreement to separate. There are many churches who have followed all the bishop’s instructions and met the requirements of the agreement to separate.

At Mount Horeb, a 13-member lay Way Forward Committee met for almost a year discerning God’s plan. Two of those members were cradle Methodists whose fathers were UM pastors. The Way Forward Committee recommended unanimously to the administrative council to separate. The administrative council also voted unanimously to separate. Once the agreement to separate was released, Mount Horeb entered a 40-day prayer and discernment process for our membership. We provided information on our website that included videos, provided handouts and hosted three listening sessions where members submitted almost 100 questions by email that were answered. We had a congregational meeting with open mics so members could ask additional questions.

Per the bishop’s requirements, we had to have a super majority vote of members in attendance. We had 1,576 members vote by 97.4 percent to separate from The United Methodist Church. We had members who were shut-ins, in the hospital and out of town who requested to be able to vote by mail or absentee. With regret we informed them that per the agreement to separate instructions, they had to be present to vote. We not only followed the agreement to separate, we’ve also abided by the *Book of Discipline* throughout this process.

Through the years, Mount Horeb has paid 100 percent of apportionments. Much of the separation talk began in 2019 following General Conference. Since 2019, Mount Horeb has given more than \$1.9 million in apportionments and given another \$7.4 million to local and global missions. Mount Horeb has joined separating churches in placing significant funds in escrow to meet the financial obligations for separation.

It is our prayer the voting members of South Carolina Annual Conference bless these congregations who have completed

all the steps of separation by voting yes. It is also our prayer for God to bless The United Methodist Church in South Carolina. We want God to bless Bishop Holston who has been a true shepherd and leader throughout this process.

He is blessing both churches that are separating and staying to be a blessing to the world through the Good News of Jesus Christ.

*Way Forward Team
Mount Horeb UMC
Lexington*



Guest Commentary

by Margaret Comer Baker

The process

My church is in the process of deciding whether to leave the United Methodist denomination or to stay. A Way Forward Task Force was established and has presented research information, which was gathered over several months of deliberation and study. This information has been presented to the congregation and included question and answer sessions as part of the process.

We are now asked to prayerfully consider which direction we believe our church should go and to report this to the task force. This survey of members’ opinions will be included in the report the task force presents to the Board of Stewards. In turn, the Board of Stewards makes the final decision regarding the need for a congregational vote to stay United Methodist or to separate affiliation with the denomination.

This all sounds very straightforward and reasonable. And on the face of it, it is. Thus far, we have had opinions expressed in private conversations and in classroom settings, and we are still a church family that speaks to one another in a civil way—even though this whole endeavor is very personal, emotional and, at the heart of the matter, spiritual.

In fact, these three components of the process are so intertwined they cannot stand alone. Personal involves each of us arriving at our own decision—not what we think others might wish for us to decide, not what our friends or even our family members have decided, but what in the recesses of our souls we feel is the direction needed. When the soul and feelings get in the picture, we are stepping into the dimensions of the emotional and spiritual. This could be dangerous territory for us.

Emotions are easily aroused and misunderstood. They can be expressed in a multitude of ways and interpreted in even more. Tears of sadness may be shed because the Methodist denomination is seen as going in the wrong direction. Or those tears may be because our home church is leaving a denomination that has withstood many challenges and is still doing so. Or it could be as simple as individuals’ emotional attachment to a piece of property and who should claim ownership. It’s confusing.

The spiritual aspect is more difficult. Where is the Spirit leading? Can the Spirit of God lead me in one direction and the person in the pew in front of me in another? Regarding the LGBTQ issue, do we focus on what is called a “sin” and Jesus’ words, “Go and sin no more?” Or do we remember he also said, “He who is without sin, cast the first stone?” And if the process results in a congregational vote, will the Spirit lead me to remain in my church, no matter the vote? Or will I be led to another church if the vote is not what I believe is in line with the Spirit?

So, on examination, this is not so straightforward after all. No matter the outcome of whether a vote is recommended or not recommended by the Board of Stewards, or the results of any vote that might be taken, the personal, emotional and spiritual energies used by the members will have been spent. These costs cannot be recovered.

But hopefully they can prove to be invaluable in that each person will have arrived at a clearer understanding of not only their own position but of the position of others.

Understanding alone, however, does not necessitate agreement. Disagreement may still exist. In fact, it will exist if prayerful discernment is not at the heart of these personal, emotional and spiritual decisions. The issue would remain “us against them.” But when prayerful discernment is applied in this decision making, agreement may still be lacking but battlelines are not drawn. Instead, we can then be truly dedicated to the command to “Love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34 NIV).

And this means the watching world will know us by our love for those who are unlike us and those who disagree with us so that the kingdom of God is on earth as it is in heaven, no matter the place we choose for corporate worship or who sits in the pew in front of us.

Baker is a member of Bethesda United Methodist Church, Easley.

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Photos by Jerry Newlon, a member of the Rock Hill District Connectional Ministry Team
Above, Dr. Anthony Hodge, Rock Hill District superintendent, speaks to those gathered.
Below, many churches shared their ministries and other efforts.



The Rev. Vivian R. Lingard (center) and her churches organized the event to bring awareness to violence.



Pastor Eric prays that a spirit of peace, not violence, transforms the community and the world.



‘Think Outside the Box’

Rock Hill event helps UMCs converse, connect, collaborate

ROCK HILL—The Rock Hill District hosted an event called “Think Outside the Box-C3 Workshops (Converse, Connect and Collaborate)” on April 15 at Mount Holly United Methodist Church.

“I C-You, You C-Me and One More will Make C-3” was the theme for the opening message delivered by Dr. Anthony Hodge.

The district event was planned by the District Connectional Ministries team led by Monica Tilley, convener.

At the outset of his message, Hodge thanked the church’s pastor, the Rev. Wayne Smith, and each member of the District Connectional Ministries team as well everyone else for participating in the event, which proved to be extremely successful.

During Hodge’s message, he referenced a quote from a fellow naval officer, Rear Admiral Dr. Grace Hopper. Admiral Hopper said, “The most dangerous phrase in the English language is, ‘We have always done it this way.’”

Hodge said this quote is in contrast to the purpose of Think Outside the Box-C3 Workshops (Converse, Connect and Collaborate).

Chris Lynch, the district’s congregational specialist, shared that the event was planned as a result of hearing from members of congregations throughout the Rock Hill District where town hall meetings were held in the spring of 2022. He said the C3 event created an opportunity for lay and clergy from across the district to converse around topics of interest.

“We are convinced as a team that the potential exists to build great momentum in our district as churches and ministries col-

laborate to make an impact in our community,” Lynch said, noting the event became a catalyst for such an impact.

One example that helped to build momentum involved Marcia Williams, of Wesley UMC in York. Williams helps facilitate Wesley’s Jeffrey and Minnie Williams Reading Program, which attempts to help children who are not reading on their grade level and underperforming in school. Williams was able to connect with an organization called PATH that is near Wesley. PATH is a crisis assistance center in York that supplies food, financial help for utilities and rent, prescription help, school supplies, new clothes and shoes for children and programs and referrals to social services agencies to help people overcome the crisis situation they are in.

As a result of this newfound connection, the families who are benefitting from the reading program offered at Wesley UMC can now receive additional assistance through PATH.

In addition to the opportunities for participants to Converse, Connect and Collaborate, a number of workshops were offered, including Children’s Ministry Ideas, Young Adult Ministry, Social Media Basics and Digital Discipleship.

Bob James, district lay leader, said the workshop facilitators did a great job.

Crystal Barrs, who represents United Women in Faith, and Lynne Tyner, who represents Lay Servant Ministries on the Connectional Ministries team, also expressed their appreciation.

They said they hope to help facilitate additional events in the future.

Church hosts daylong ‘Stop the Violence Rally’ in Bamberg

It is no secret that violence is overtaking many communities and this nation more than ever before.

In an effort to bring awareness about this dilemma, the Rev. Vivian R. Lingard, pastor of St. Luke and Friendship United Methodist churches in Ehrhardt and Islandton, spearheaded the churches in their first-ever Stop the Violence Rally.

The Stop the Violence Rally was held Saturday, April 29, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the heart of Bamberg. Both churches came together in the Piggly Wiggly shopping center’s parking lot.

The rally was a plea for everyone, regardless of age and race, to recognize the increased violence and the loss of valuable lives in local communities and across the nation.

The event was free and open to all.

Pastors and their churches from surrounding communities, including a church from Georgia, were also encouraged to participate in this event. Each pastor prayed throughout the event. Lingard said it was inspiring to hear pastors pray for youth, communities and the families that have lost loved ones to violence.

St. Luke and Friendship members served the community with a cookout featuring a large variety of barbecue from several grills and all the fixings, all free.

“We must all come to a place where we recognize that life is not ours to take,” Lingard said. “We must get to higher ground, where we have matured enough and respect life enough, to agree to disagree without violence.”

St. Luke and Friendship UMCs said they are looking forward to next year’s Stop the Violence Rally.

Dulce out of the hospital

Dulce, the Guatemalan 10-year-old girl who a number of South Carolina United Methodists have been praying for, has been discharged from the hospital. Dulce, who has Fanconi anemia, had a bone marrow transplant in South Korea thanks to the donations and support of Methodists and others. Dr. Luke Rhyee, a South Carolina UMC elder who now runs a medical mission called Healing Guatemala, came to know Dulce through the ministry, and when he learned a bone marrow transplant could save her life, he enlisted the support of many who chipped in to make it all possible. Dulce and her mother will continue to live in an apartment in South Korea so she can have her outpatient checkups over the next nine months. Then they will return to the rest of their family in Guatemala. Rhyee said bone marrow cells that Dulce got transplanted are growing well. He said that because Dulce’s recovery has been progressing rapidly, Dulce now needs to have only one follow-up check-up a week instead of two. Currently, she is enhancing her recovery by eating and sleeping well and following through with her walking exercises.

Photo courtesy Luke Rhyee



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The National Day of Prayer is an annual day of observance designated by the United States Congress and held on the first Thursday of May.



In addition to a meal of spaghetti and meatballs, attendees prayed for the seven centers of influence in the nation, from government and family to the media.

Canaan-Sand Hill National Day of Prayer supper draws crowd

RIDGEVILLE—On May 4, the Canaan-Sand Hill Charge hosted a National Day of Prayer supper with more than 80 people attending the first-time event.

In addition to a meal of spaghetti and meatballs, attendees prayed for the seven centers of influence in the nation.

“The National Day of Prayer is an annual day of observance designated by the United States Congress and held on the first Thursday of May, when people are asked ‘to turn to God in prayer and meditation,’” said Pamela Goodwine-Glover. “The president is required by law to sign a proclamation each year, encouraging all Americans to pray on this day.”

The Rev. Jerry Harrison led a prayer for government, urging people to “pray for your leaders, as well as the judges in our courts. Ask God to grant them wisdom to act with integrity.”

Canaan Lay Leader Harold Ancrum led a prayer for the military, including perseverance to endure hardship (Isaiah 43:2; Deuteronomy 31:6), wise leaders who inspire respect from those under their command (Romans 13:1) and protection and support for the families these servicepeople have left behind (Romans 1:8-10).

Sand Hill Lay Servant Linda Wilson led a prayer for the media, praying that decision-makers within the media realize they can make a profit by producing uplifting projects (Proverbs 8:10-11) and that Christians in media to find favor and be filled with

creative ideas that bring kingdom principles and life-giving messages to the public (Proverbs 2:1-15).

The Rev. Roosevelt Geddis led a prayer for education, particularly praying for a safe atmosphere conducive to learning, excellence in educators (Exodus 18:20-21) and equal opportunities for every student to achieve their full potential (Philippians 1:9).

Margaret Dizzley led a prayer for business, lifting up a request for the Lord to send impartation of ideas and resources to open principled businesses, especially in areas that need an economic boost (Psalm 132:15) and for Christian workers to display Christlike humility and service to their co-workers (Philippians 2:3).

Walterboro District Superintendent the Rev. Joey McDonald led a prayer for the church, praying it would find a new zeal and commitment to the mission and purpose of Jesus Christ (Matthew 22:37), find unity with and among churches that reveal God’s love to the world (John 17:23) and have integrity, remembering that God’s people look and act differently from the world (1 Peter 2:11; 1 Corinthians 13:6).

Minister Paige Roper led a prayer on family, specifically for unity and love in individual families that reach out in hospitality toward others (Romans 12:9-13) and to establish healthy relationships between parents and children (Malachi 4:5-6).

All said they planned to continue the event next year.



Photos courtesy of the Rev. Gray Stallworth

An ecumenical tradition

First UMC, Laurens, joined with First Baptist Church and First Presbyterian Church for an ecumenical Maundy Thursday service, something they try to do each year. The three churches are right next to each other on West Main Street in Laurens. The Lord’s Supper was celebrated, and First UMC pastor the Rev. Gray Stallworth delivered the sermon. Each year, the churches are joined by the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday Service and on Easter for a sunrise service. “This is a wonderful tradition here in Laurens and a strong message of unity during this special season,” Stallworth said. Above, Stallworth delivers the message. Below, those assisting with the serving of the elements come to the Lord’s Table.



UMCSC boy wins national turkey calling competition

One young member of a United Methodist church in South Carolina is getting attention for his performance at a national turkey calling competition.

Gavin Bryan, 10, and his sister, Kinlee, have been competing at turkey calling competitions for years. Their parents, Jason and Jessica Bryan, are members of Bethel UMC, Ruffin.

This year, Gavin went to the finals—and won. He was recognized May 2 at the Statehouse.

Gavin won the Poult Division for callers aged 10 and younger at the 2023 National Wild Turkey Federation’s Youth Grand National Turkey Calling Championships in February.

Gavin has been calling in competitions since he was 3 years old and has participated



Gavin has been calling in competitions since he was 3 years old.

in the Grand National Poult division for the last five years.

UMC bishops meet, request for 2026 General Conference among other decisions

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The bishops of The United Methodist Church completed their spring meeting May 5 in a gathering awash in the spirit of collegiality and search for the betterment of the worldwide denomination.

The meeting from April 30-May 5 was filled with worship and bookended by the presidential remarks by Council of Bishops President Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, who led the first in-person meeting since 2019.

In his closing sermon, Bickerton reminded the United Methodists, “We are always connected together. We share common burdens, common challenges, common opportunities and common blessings.”

Preaching from Acts 2:42-47, Bickerton told the gathering that when the apostles committed to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers, they were filled with awe, gratitude, generosity and good will. He reminded the bishops that these gifts from God are the foundation for the renewal of today’s church.

The meeting opened Sunday, April 30, with a memorial service that honored members of the COB who had died since the bishops last met in person in 2019. The bishops had been meeting virtually because of COVID-19 restrictions.

On Monday, the bishops formally welcomed colleagues

who had been elected in November 2022 in a service where COB Immediate Past President Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey urged newly minted bishops to help faithful United Methodists to reclaiming their identity.

“Faithful United Methodists are saying this is MY church and we will renew our commitment and reimagine a spirit of United Methodism that has not yet been seen,” she said.

Later during the service, COB President Designate Bishop Tracy S. Malone prayed and anointed the new bishops.

In his presidential address, Bickerton said that in the midst of this massive time of transition, it was time to pivot our work to focus on reclaiming, reviving and renewing The United Methodist Church.

“We are not talking about new wine in old wineskins,” he said. “Rather, it’s like pulling up the carpet to reveal the linoleum and pulling up the linoleum to reveal a beautiful hardwood floor.”

About 100 bishops from Africa, Asia, Europe and North America were in attendance in Chicago during the meeting that included continuing work to fight racism, promote discipleship and strengthen mission strategies in the world-wide denomination. About 20 other bishops attended the meeting virtually through a secure Zoom link, making the meeting

the first-ever COB hybrid meeting.

During the meeting, the bishops received reports and made the following decisions:

- **General Conference 2026:** The bishops responded to the Judicial Council decision regarding an additional General Conference between 2024-2026 by approving a resolution to propose a five-day General Conference in May 2026 that would focus on re-establishing connection, lament and healing, celebration, recasting the mission and vision for The United Methodist Church and considering a more regional governance structure to support the mission and vision of the church for the current and future realities within the world and church.

- **Jurisdictional Conferences:** The bishops approved a motion to call for 2024 Jurisdictional Conferences in the United States to be held July 10-12, 2024. Central Conference sessions outside the United States will be held within one year after the General Conference in 2024 as per the *Book of Discipline*.

The COB is made up of all active and retired bishops of the UMC. The COB next in-person meeting is scheduled for November in North Carolina. To view the videos of the COB meeting, visit <https://www.facebook.com/umcbishops>.



Guest Commentary

by Bill Barnier

Distracted from faith

I'm sure I've written about the advice my high school graduating class received from our Carmelite priest advisor. "Learn, think and question everything," he said. "There are always two answers to everything in life; the right one, and all the others."

These days there seems to be no end to the constant assault upon our health, our freedom, our human rights, even the peace we find in the written history and guidance of Scripture. Evil ones are indeed busy recruiting soldiers for the army of victim culture chaos. Their most effective tools are those which plant seeds of doubt, fatigue, and fear to replace truth, knowledge, and courage. They keep us busy fighting countless battles, so we won't see the larger objective of the war.

As humans we find comfort in habits and routines. We don't do well under constant stresses of unknowns, having to adjust our lives to deal with them so we can return to Spirit and peace. Even the most devoted of Spirit children must constantly refresh our habit of renewing our friendship with our creator. Empty churches and dusty Bibles are exactly what the evil forces want to see. They want all of us to forget God and turn weak, to become weary of the fight. They must be most satisfied when those within our ranks wander away from his truth. Scattered and confused sheep are easier to destroy.

Learned people and scholars are convinced the prophecies in the Bible are coming true, that the end of times may be approaching. In times of weakness or fatigue I, too, feel as though things are moving toward the predicted ending. I grow tired of conflict and descension, of the constant onslaught of bad news about the destruction of peace. As much as I love my creator, I'm not ready to relinquish the wonderful world he has given us. I pray God will see the pure and loving hearts all over the world who practice good, not evil.

I also ask: When is it OK to fight back? Does God want us to confront those who commit crimes against his laws? He told us to turn the other cheek. If someone steals our sandals, we should give him our cloak as well. He tells us to be patient, for he will judge the inequities in our world. He will not betray our trust in him. Yet I ask him often if he's ready to end the madness unfolding. He reminds me that everything will happen in his time according to his plan. I ask if we are to be his warriors against those of evil, and I get no reply.

I hope he has that covered because I don't want to send anyone to his judgment.

One thing is clear. A divided country, church or family cannot ever be as strong as one strongly joined. A microscopic invader, a seed of doubt, a selfish thought or action will be unrelenting in growing to control its' victims. Jesus spoke many times of the need to live beyond our earthly existence and learn to do as he demonstrated. But we must be willing to trust, to be courageous in our dealings with others who would do harm.

Opposing those keeping an earthly score destroying the lessons of the past and turning into the evil soldiers for the destruction of God may require that we remain passive no longer. Our shepherd is in danger, and our pasture is turning brown from the poison of a rising godless victim culture dedicated to a chaotic future, while ignoring the lessons of the past. Then again, that may be his plan.

Spirit must live through us.

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



Guest Commentary

by Deborah Len

God with us always (Part 4 of 6)

Editor's note: This is the next in a series of articles that comprise a faith-based short story by the author.

I searched the kitchen drawers and the table in the hallway and I finally found a card and envelope from Christmas 1990. Hm, has it been that long since I heard from my cousin and his family?

I guess so. What am I doing with my life? Work and eat and sleep and maybe go out with the guys from work. This is only surviving. How can I thrive? Oops, off track again. Let me find some paper and an envelope and dash off a letter about what I have found.

It has taken several weeks, and now I have a reply from Daniel. He said he will be glad to come to town and is even bringing George. George is the youngest of us. He was drafted into the Army in 1971. I always thought he volunteered, as he always wanted to be more adventurous than Daniel or me.

The draft was a real tough time in our country. Personally, I never got called and I was OK with that. When George joined up, troops were slowly trickling back into the U.S. from Vietnam. It was all folks talked about.

As I reread the letter from Daniel, it hit me that was when we "three musketeers," as our parents called us, fell apart. We had such different views of what was right and good and helpful for the family, country and even the world.

I thought studying would help me to make big money, and my future wife and I could live comfortably on the Main Line of Philadelphia.

Well, we all know how that did not work out for me.

Thinking back about George, there were

times when he would actively protest the Vietnam War, and other times, he would volunteer to fold pamphlets and help bring to anyone's attention about how this was not America's job. That summer night when he almost got arrested protesting at the local cemetery about the war popped into my mind. Our uncle was on the police force and broke up the protest before it became out of control and protesters would be removed with force.

I remember the heated discussion at Grandma Dot's house that night. Daniel and I just could not convince George it would all work out and he did not need to go over there to prove a point and maybe get killed doing it. Daniel said, "You are not Jesus!" George just laughed and said, "None of us is."

George really wanted to do what was right. He just seemed to go about it all headstrong and full of bitterness.

Grandma Dot that night just closed her eyes and started singing, "Only trust him, only trust him." Then she prayed out loud, "Please God, forgive these boys as they are young and need your son Jesus to guide them and protect them just like I prayed over their parents years ago before they were mine."

Then she wept.

Sitting at the same table now, thoughts begin to form in my mind. Before they were mine?

Why did Grandma Dot weep about us and our parents? What happened?

What is happening?

(To be continued next month.)

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

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Last chance to register for Salkehatchie

Registration continues for Salkehatchie Summer Service, which resumes this month with 38 weeklong camps after three years of hiatus because of the pandemic.

Founded by the Rev. John Culp, Salkehatchie began as an initiative 45 years ago to give youth, serving alongside adults, a taste of serving God with their own hands and feet by helping poor people in the state with home repair. Still today, the main focus is serving God by repairing the homes for the persons in need of home repair but with no means to pay for it.

Over the years, hundreds of homes received new roofs, ramps, flooring, ceilings, bathrooms, kitchens and improvements in accessibility through the hands of youth at Salkehatchie.

Volunteers must be at least 14 years old, and all adult volunteers must do a background check. Cost is \$250 per volunteer and covers the cost of shingles, building supplies and other materials. Lodging and meals are included.

To register or learn more about the camps, go to www.salkehatchie.org.

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SMC graduates encouraged to take root and grow strong

SPARTANBURG—More than 200 new college graduates are planting their seeds and taking root in the next stage of their lives as they received their diplomas at Spartanburg Methodist College's commencement ceremony May 13.

As they turned their tassels, they were encouraged to establish strong roots by seeking out those who give them peace by commencement speaker Dr. Russell Booker.

"You are about to enter a world full of noise," Booker said. "For you to be rooted like a sturdy oak, I challenge you to learn to tune out the distractions of life and begin to dial the frequency to yourself."

Booker, a long-time educator and CEO of the Spartanburg Academic Movement, turned to his years as an educator to encourage students to face difficult times by turning to their strength and finding peace.

SMC President Scott Cochran echoed the challenges they will face and expressed his confidence in their readiness to



SMC President Scott Cochran addresses the graduates.

meet them.

"Life is full of tests, challenges and pressures," Cochran

said. "We cannot wait for you to show the world what you can do."

"Today is a pivotal point in our lives, and it means so much to us that our supporters are here to witness this achievement," said Joshua Golden of Columbia, the student speaker, and continued with a message to his fellow graduates. "Be loud and proud about this accomplishment."

Golden expressed his gratitude to the faculty, staff and classmates for the guidance and direction they gave him as a first-generation college graduate.

"SMC, thank you for bestowing four of the most unforgettable years of my life."

The 2023 commencement ceremony marked the 112th in the college's history and the third year of its Bachelor's degree program.

Booker left the students with a new challenge: "Be the true Pioneers that you have been called to be."

Columbia College celebrates the accomplishments of 160 graduates

COLUMBIA—Columbia College awarded 160 people diplomas at their commencement ceremony held April 28.

Keynote speaker and Board of Trustees member Rodrick Shiver addressed the graduates and congratulated them on their many accomplishments, sharing, "You have taken the road less traveled, and it has made all the difference. Remember to share your experience at Columbia College in your future workplaces, leadership roles, graduate school classrooms and community service opportunities. This legacy exists and persists through you."

President of Columbia College Tom Bogart said, "Columbia College has been forever changed by the impact of the Class of 2023. Their continuous reach for excellence has propelled the college forward and will surely inspire the classes that follow to do the same. We look forward to cheering these graduates on as they conquer what is next personally, professionally and academically."



Columbia College awarded 160 people diplomas at their commencement held April 28.

Among the graduates was Reikia Polk, an exercise science major who has plans to become a physical therapist. She shared that she had never considered herself an outgoing person, but because of the confidence she gained and the intimate community she

had experienced at Columbia College, she knew she had to share that with incoming students.

When asked how Columbia College had prepared her for life after graduation, Polk shared that Columbia College taught her the

impact of transformational leadership. She was positively influenced by her orientation leaders and mentors within the Office of Admissions, and as a result, she felt compelled to inspire others to do the same.

It is this tradition of stewardship and discernment that makes the community of Columbia College so impactful.

"I immediately felt at home at Columbia College because of the experience I had during orientation made possible by my orientation leader," Polk shared. "I wanted to create this experience for other students, which led to my work with the Office of Admissions and becoming an orientation leader myself."

As of that morning, 160 people were no longer students but alumni of Columbia College.

Their absence will surely be felt, but gratitude abounds as the college welcomes a new class in the fall, inspired and energized by the community they witnessed through the spring Class of 2023.

Greenville children/youth support group thriving as it helps others

The Greenville Children/Youth Ministry Support Group is going strong, and now they are encouraging anyone interested to get involved—even those outside of their district.

Ruth Hughes, a member of Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Greenville, said the beginnings of the group are hazy, but it has been years of great conversation and fun all in support of children and youth leaders.

"I'm pretty sure that it started through my sweet friend Anne Shelton, formerly of Advent UMC in Simpsonville, and others, as Saturday workshops on children's ministry ideas," Hughes said. "That expanded to breakfast meetings at Strossner's bakery, and then when COVID hit, we moved to emails and text messages."

Those in the group are not just United Methodist leaders but come from a variety of ecumenical backgrounds and church responsibilities.

"That just adds to the layers of resources we are able to provide for one another and a deeper perspective of our particular calling," Hughes said.

Mostly, the group is a place to lay down frustrations and celebrate accomplishments.

"I belong to a bunch of online Facebook groups—like 'Children's Pastors Only,' 'Stuff You Can Use: A Youth Ministry Community' or 'Children's Ministry Network'—and they are a great place to garner ideas and share, but they aren't as good as chatting with the children/youth leader down the road, the ones that can not only share an idea but the pieces and parts that go with it."

They now have a Facebook page also:

Greenville UMC District Children's Ministry Leaders.

Hughes said anyone experiencing a bit of "Island Fever" or who would just like some fresh ideas is welcome to join in their group emails; just email her at rhughes@aumcsc.org to request to be added.

Some recent tidbits shared in their group include the following:

Treasure Box Tuesday has a paid subscription and a free version emailed every Tuesday! You can access them at tracismith@substack.com.

Dema Kohen of We Are Kids Min has a resource kit on getting and keeping volunteers. They have released a new magazine for kids called "What's For Dinner?" that comes with some digital extras and a growth chart. Find it at <https://wearekidmin.com/blog/a-new-magazine-for-christian-families>.

An article about the "10 Plagues of Egypt Breakout Room" was featured in the May *Advocate*.

On the Presbyterian front, dates for this year's "re:Create the Arts, Recreation and Worship Conference" are out, and early registration has begun. Learn more at <https://mailchi.mp/ff8cbe007334/arw-2024-registration?e=a9d86e82a8>

Vacation Bible School: If you aren't already, get in touch with area churches and see if you can share supplies and decorations. Also, remember that our conference has a great resource center, and you can actually borrow VBS materials instead of buying them. Consider contacting them at <https://www.umcsc.org/resourcecenter>.

South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith

Attention! Attention!
New Event This Year

Racial and Environmental Justice Online Workshop

Saturday, June 24, 2023
10:00am

We have learned about a water crisis in Jackson, Mississippi, now learn about water concerns for communities of color in **South Carolina.**

Guest speaker will be from the **South Carolina Environmental Law Project.**

Workshop presented by the
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Charter for Racial Justice Committee

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United Women in Faith



Deacon's Corner

Rev. Andy Jones

Getting to know Andy

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. Andy Jones, one of our ordained deacons.

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

Jones: Through my hospital work during seminary and clinical pastoral education, there were many occasions when I knew God had put me in the right place and time for someone in need. The deacon's order allows me to specialize in this ministry, where I feel God constantly calling me.

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

Jones: As a chaplain at St. Francis Hospital in Greenville, my duty is compassionate spiritual care for patients and staff. I also get to lead devotions with staff and participate in blessing occasions such as organ donations. Elders and licensed local pastors are just as essential to pastoral care, of course, but as a deacon, I can focus on hospital and community, reaching beyond church walls and building bridges back to the church.

What 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?

Jones: Deacons fill many forms of ministry roles inside and outside the local church. The most rewarding experience has been the creativity I can have in my ministry. I have had the opportunity to sing hymns with people with Alzheimer's and make

Play-Doh Bible stories with kids, all this while reaching people who don't walk into our church buildings. If you are considering becoming a deacon, embrace these connections we can make with the world.

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

- Q. Fill in the blank. Vulnerability is:
A. The key to empathy.
- 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. Show up. Do good. Detach from results.
- Q. What is something that people often get wrong about you?
A. I'll go with Mark Twain on this: What other people think of you is none of your business.
- Q. What's the last show that you binged and loved?
A. "Andor"
- Q. What is a film that you really love?
A. "Awakenings" or "Seven Samurai"
- Q. What is a concert you will never forget?
A. I once got to spend some time with Peter Buck of REM at a tiny concert in Asheville.
- Q. What's your favorite meal?
A. A good prime rib.
- Q. What's on your nightstand right now?
A. "Polk's Folly," a book about some of my family history.
- Q. Give us a snapshot of an ordinary moment in your life that brings you great joy.
A. Right now, strawberries are ripening in my garden, and I love letting my kids pick and eat them straight from the yard, talking and laughing together. The dogs were running around and having a ball. It was a beautiful day. I savor those moments.
- Q. What is the one thing you are deeply grateful for right now?
A. Game nights with friends and neighbors.

S.C. United Women in Faith to host racial, environmental justice virtual event

The South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith Charter for Racial Justice Committee is offering a new online event in June: "Racial + Environmental Justice."

This 90-minute program will highlight communities of color in South Carolina that are dealing with a toxic water supply. All are invited to hear how the South Carolina Environmental Law Project is addressing this serious issue.

This event will take place June 24 from 10-11:30 a.m.

Registration is available online at <https://umcsc.org/women>.

South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith thanks everyone who so generously contributed to their Water for Jackson, Mississippi Schoolchildren Project earlier this year, as it provided many children safe, clean water to drink.

Greenwood churches pack 100 disaster response buckets

On Saturday, April 29, St. Mark United Methodist Church, Greenwood, joined with Tranquil UMC to host a flood/cleaning bucket packing party.

The Rev. Mike Evans, the Greenwood area Disaster Response Coordinator, showed the group a slideshow of a recent South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission Early Response Team mission to Mississippi after devastating tornadoes that ripped a 150-mile path through the state.

One of the sites they went to was now an empty lot where a church and parsonage had once stood. There was nothing left of the church except for the steps leading up to where the sanctuary had been. On another site they went to the owners' and discovered one of their twin sons had lost their lives. At another site, they helped bury a homeowner's dog.

On that trip, Evans shared, very little could be done to protect homes from further damage as there were no homes left to protect, so they did a lot of care ministry. They helped rescue beloved photographs and other memorabilia, helped homeowners salvage what they could and also helped a woman find her purse where she was keeping all the Social Security cards for her children.

At the April 29 event, St. Mark and Tranquil members packed 100 buckets. Some of these will stay in the district while others will be brought to the conference and others sent on to United Methodist Committee on



Photos courtesy of Cathy Trevino

The Rev. Mike Evans, the Greenwood area Disaster Response Coordinator, shares about a recent ERT mission in Mississippi.

Relief.

Once everyone had seen the slideshow and heard Evans describe the conditions, the group became more motivated to do something to help these people and others like them that ERT helps serve both in South Carolina and beyond. Recent teams have been to Florida, Kentucky, Alabama and Mississippi.

Donations to help with these projects can be made on the conference website. Go to <https://www.umcsc.org/donate> and click on the second button (for individuals to donate for specific ministries).

To become an ERT volunteer, visit <https://www.umcsc.org/disaster-response>.



Courtesy of Rev. Annie R. Crocker

Go forth and serve

A commitment service for the spring session of Lay Servant Ministries was held this spring in the Spartanburg District. Classes were held on three consecutive Sunday afternoons in April. Four classes were offered: Basic, Heritage, Leading Prayer and The Common Good. They sent 26 persons forth to continue in the work of making disciples for Jesus Christ and the transformation of this world. Beaumont UMC, Spartanburg, served as the host.

Native American Ministries

The sacred herbs of indigenous peoples

Tobacco. Sage. Cedar. Sweetgrass. These herbs were given to indigenous people by our Creator. They are used as a way to communicate with Creator, as part of our ceremonies and when we smudge.

Tobacco was given first. It is considered by many First Nations to be the most powerful sacred herb. Many believe it opens the door to allow communication with the spirit world.

Sage was the second sacred herb given to us by Creator. Most commonly used for smudging, sage is believed to be a very potent cleanser of our homes, certain items and our physical bodies. Also considered a powerful antibiotic, sage has been used for generations as an antiseptic. It can also be made into a tea.

Cedar was the third sacred herb given. It can also be used to purify the home, as it is thought to be connected to protection and healing. Because of its healing properties, cedar can be placed in the bath and used as a healing soak.

Sweetgrass was given last, but is by no means less important than the other herbs. It is considered to be directly connected to our Mother Earth. Sweetgrass properties are such that they can be used in healing circles or as a way to promote kindness, peace and purification.

It is important to note that each First Peoples Nation has their own teachings regarding the four sacred herbs. However, all four are equally important to our culture. Each herb has its own place in our history and our beliefs.

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IN-PERSON AC: Reduced budget, separating UMCs among business

From Page 1

The Rev. Mel Arant, assistant conference secretary and coordinator of clergy services, said he is excited that the first opportunity to worship together since 2019 will be about celebrating the ordination, commissioning and retirement of people deeply committed to the UMC's mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

"In this time of uncertainty and division, a service that celebrates the fact that we are part of something larger than ourselves is a powerful way to begin our week together," Arant said.

Arant said he is also excited a representative from the retiring class of clergy will have the opportunity to offer a blessing over the incoming class of ordinands.

Arant called it "a recognition of the continuum of ministry we all have been a part of since the foundation of Christ's church on earth."

Business starts Monday

The business of Annual Conference begins Monday, June 5. After voting orientation and testing and an opening worship service led by Holston, business will start around 10:45 a.m. with the official call to order, greetings and organizational motions.

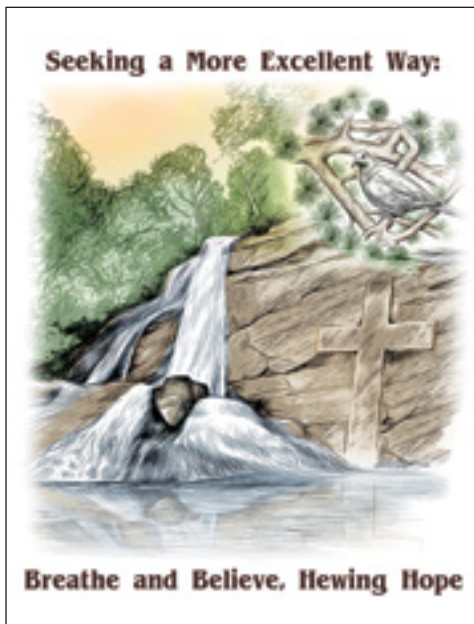
The theme of this 52nd session of Annual Conference is "Seeking A More Excellent Way: Breathe and Believe, Hewing Hope," and Holston said he hopes people will contemplate this theme as they continue to cling to our shared faith in Christ, knowing that God is with us and will never abandon us.

"Please join me in praying that great and marvelous things will happen through the Holy Spirit who guides and sustains us, and that our time in Florence will be a living witness to the grace, mercy and love of Jesus Christ to everyone we encounter," Holston said.

Various committees will present reports, including the committees on standing rules, nominations, and resolutions and appeals. Beyond the resolutions anticipated from churches who voted to separate from the UMC (which will be addressed Tuesday), Annual Conference members will have the chance to hear about six other resolutions at this year's annual conference, plus any that might be introduced from the floor.

Four of these are from South Carolina Reconciling Ministries, an official caucus of the UMC that works for full affirmation of all of God's children, including LGBTQ+ persons, in the church and the world. They are 1) Support for removing all discriminatory policies and harmful language related to sexual orientation from the *Book of Discipline*; 2) Support for the establishment of the government necessary to allow each region to design ministry for its particular contexts and be more effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world; 3) Support for and amplification of the LGBTQIA+ delegates' call to justice and empowerment for the LGBTQIA+ community and for responsibility as United Methodists to do good, do no harm, and stay in love with God; and 4) Expression of respect and gratitude for those who have voluntarily stepped away from positions of leadership as they journey away from membership in the UMC.

The Conference Connectional Ministries' Advocacy area and South Carolina Board of Church and Society is proposing a resolution urging South Carolina United Methodists to prayerfully address gun violence in their local context, including background checks and gun purchase restrictions.



And Wesley Chapel UMC and the Rev. Amiri B. Hooker submitted a resolution calling for South Carolina United Methodists to unequivocally oppose the death penalty.

Also on Monday, the conference Council on Finance and Administration will introduce the first reading of its recommendation of a proposed \$13.2 million budget for 2024. That amount is down 15.4 percent from the \$15.6 million budget for 2023.

The Rev. Mitch Houston, CF&A president, said the recommended budget for 2024 is reduced by \$2.4 million and is estimated to be 13.9 percent of average net funds.

"This significant reduction is to reflect the apportionments estimated to be lost because of our conference's separating churches. The council is recommending in its budget that the General Church apportionments be reduced by 15 percent," Houston said in his written report to annual conference.

Tuesday to address separating churches, more

For many, Tuesday is the most anticipated day of this year's Annual Conference, as it is the day the body is scheduled to address the closure of an as-yet-unknown number of churches who hope to separate from the UMC. These churches went through the conference-authorized Local Church Discernment Process this winter and spring, which is a process that enabled churches to pray, discern and then hold a churchwide vote about leaving the UMC if their members believed the denomination has not upheld its stated doctrine on issues of human sexuality.

According to Dan O'Mara, director of communications, the body will vote Tuesday on "several resolutions that would close local churches that have completed the Local Church Discernment Process and are planning to separate from the UMC."

O'Mara said the trustees of the Annual Conference—the elected body that oversees the fulfillment of the requirements to separate—is scheduled to make its report to the Annual Conference Tuesday. That same day, before making their report, the trustees will make public a list of those separating local churches upon whom Annual Conference members will be voting.

"Until that time, trustees will continue to treat information about local churches participating in the process as confidential," O'Mara said.

To be eligible to have their church vote go before Annual Conference this June, churches had to be in full communication with their district superintendent; complete an intentional, 30-day discernment process; satisfy financial obligations, including all

Disaffiliation updates

Two more churches notified the *Advocate* about their plans regarding the Local Church Discernment Process.

Loris First United Methodist Church, Loris, reported their congregation has voted to separate from the UMC.

And the church council of Bethany UMC, Charleston, voted unanimously to not move forward in the process of discernment. The church will remain in the UMC.

See the full list of churches the *Advocate* has been informed are disaffiliating at <https://advocatesc.org/articles/disaffiliating-umcsc>

unpaid apportionment giving and unpaid salary and benefits due to clergy; and satisfy or transfer of debts and other legal liabilities of the local church.

Then, a churchwide vote had to be taken before March 1 that indicated two-thirds of professing church members present agreed to formally declare the church can no longer continue to function as a UMC.

While the conference has told the *Advocate* it has decided not to release the names or the total number of these churches "to protect the integrity of the Local Church Discernment Process," the *Advocate* has reported on the churches it does know about that have voted to leave. Of the 958 total churches in the conference, at least 55 have indicated they have voted to separate—including four of the nine largest-membership churches in the UMCS (Mount Horeb UMC, Lexington; Chapin UMC, Chapin; Buncombe Street UMC, Greenville; and Covenant UMC, Greer).

Beyond these resolutions to close, several other major items of business are scheduled for Tuesday.

Business is slated to begin that day with a report from the Commission on Equitable Compensation, which is proposing a cost-of-living increase of 6 percent to clergy members' minimum salary in 2024.

"Our aim with this increase is to continue to provide competitive minimum salaries as well as to ensure pastors can pay their bills after the large amount of inflation we saw in 2022," the Rev. Jon Hoin, chair of the CEC, said in their report. "This increase also recognizes that no increase was made in minimum salaries for 2021 and 2022."

Other items scheduled for Tuesday are the Board of Pension & Health Benefits, Conference Connectional Ministries, a report from the General and Jurisdictional Delegation and Committee on Nominations elections.

Tuesday evening will feature a memorial service preached by the Rev. Tim Rogers, Marion District superintendent who is retiring this year. That service will celebrate the lives of those clergy and spouses who passed away over the last year.

Wednesday's finale

Wednesday is the last day of Annual Conference. Business will include voting on the 2024 conference budget, voting on any resolutions before the body, adoption of the consent calendar, resolutions to church

closing and charge line changes (beyond the ones addressed Tuesday), and the announcement of the date and location of the 2024 session of annual conference.

Holston will preach the sending-forth closing service before the fixing of the appointments.

Other happenings

Annual Conference will also feature a number of special events and happenings. Some of these include a dinner for retirees and their families Sunday at 5 p.m.; a health screening for those covered by the conference health plan Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday mornings; a blood drive Monday afternoon; the African American Clergywomen's Luncheon on Monday; a Diakonia Luncheon; a Hood seminary luncheon; and a Gammon seminary dinner Tuesday. See a full list of special events and details at <https://www.umcsc.org/ac2023>.

Also on that website are hotels with special rates, restaurants, information on how to change an elected lay member and more.

What else should lay and clergy members do?

To prepare for the 2023 South Carolina Annual Conference, lay and clergy members are encouraged to go to <https://www.umcsc.org/ac2023> to do a number of things:

- Complete online registration, if they haven't already. Once members have registered, they should keep an eye on their mailbox, as they will soon be receiving their badges and voter IDs in a bright orange envelope;

- Watch the video "An Introduction to VPOLL: Your Tool for Voting at Annual Conference." This 5-minute training tool will introduce members to the electronic voting process. Further voting orientation and testing is scheduled for Monday morning, June 5;

- Review key video reports from the Board of Ordained Ministry, the Council on Finance and Administration, the Board of Pension and Health Benefits, the Commission on Equitable Compensation, the Nominations Committee, Lay Leadership and Connectional Ministries; and

- Review the updated conference agenda and conference packet. This year, there is only one packet, rather than the two packets published in previous years.

Dan O'Mara contributed to this article.

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LANCASTER REVIVAL: All proceeds given to area missions

From Page 1

United Methodist, Presbyterian and African Methodist Episcopal attendees to some without a church home.

“It was like fresh air,” their pastor, the Rev. Renee Garrison, told the *Advocate*.

While offerings were collected every night, all funds were given to local non-profits and ministry organizations, furthering the outward-focused theme of their undertaking.

Francis, a United Methodist pastor who is also the new director of the federally funded organization Lancaster Promise Neighborhood, said he was extraordinarily impressed with the church’s efforts. Not only was it an incredibly diverse, interdenominational revival, but the fact that every penny raised went to others was especially inspiring.

“What I saw was a church trying to find its way out of the pandemic, dealing with loss and death, but instead of focusing on themselves, they’ve turned their eyes to their neighbor and community. I saw people being disciples of the Kingdom and good citizens and neighbors,” Francis said. “That to me was just amazing.”

Garrison has only been Hopewell’s pastor for a year, and she said that’s exactly what endeared her to the people of Hopewell right away: their outward emphasis.

Not only did Hopewell members go out of their way to invite the whole community, fostering a time of refreshment and spiritual renewal deigned to connect brothers and sisters in Christ through meaningful worship, but they contributed to a different group each night, from the musicians’ music ministry to the social services organization HOPE in Lancaster to Lancaster Promise Neighborhood.

“They’re a very missional-focused church,” Garrison said. “It’s like breathing for them, and the youth are involved, too. They were just ready to go.”

Margaret Page is the choir director at Hopewell, and she served on the committee to organize the event, led by Larry Stroud. A retired schoolteacher, Page has been a member of Hopewell for more than 30 years, and she saw firsthand how hard the pandemic hit the church.

“It was such a struggle to get people back in church instead of comfortable at home watching it virtually,” Page said.

Methodist churches were among the last to reopen during COVID, so many members switched to other denominations and



Photo by Mike Ellis, The Greenville News

The Rev. Sh’Kur Francis preached all four nights of the April 16-19 revival to a packed house of attendees that crossed racial, generational and denominational lines.



The revival is just one of the ways Hopewell UMC is getting a fresh breath of Holy Spirit transformation. Here, their pastor, the Rev. Renee Garrison, gathers with recent confirmands.

never returned.

Not only was Hopewell struggling with membership numbers but financial ones, too—and all of this doesn’t even take into consideration the disaffiliation strife the

denomination is experiencing.

Yet not only did Hopewell persist with a revival, but they engaged a dynamic African-American speaker who genuinely appreciated what Hopewell was doing.

“Sh’Kur is a person with a deep, abiding faith, a love for Christ burning in his heart and deep compassion for building coalitions and community. Our church needed his transformative energy,” Page said.

During the revival, Page said, she witnessed the Word brought to life as the Holy Spirit moved powerfully among the people there.

She thinks part of it was the fact that so many different types of people attended.

“I sit back and wonder why the church is the last place to integrate, but it has been,” Page said. “A lot of that is just worship style maybe, but it’s great to have different races and people coming together.”

“We are all God’s children.”

That interracial aspect resonated with Garrison, too. On the last night of the revival, she said, there was an African-American man who attended who grew up in the surrounding community. The church is two miles from his home, yet he’d never stepped foot in Hopewell until the night of the revival.

The man told Garrison he plans to come back, bring his music group and start a relationship with the church.

“Every night we saw that, all these different people coming and participating because they heard this revival wasn’t about the church but about reviving the community,” Francis said.

That is what Christianity is all about at its heart, he said.

Walter McGriff Tillman, an African-American member of St. Paul AME, Lancaster, is one of those who attended the revival. She came one night with a former coworker and said she genuinely appreciated the dynamic preaching and authentic fellowship.

“It was a glorious revival, a glorious occasion with good singing and good preaching,” Tillman said.

Steve Eubanks, Hopewell’s lay leader, said much the same. Eubanks had nothing to do with organizing the revival but simply attended each night—and thoroughly enjoyed it.

“You could feel the Holy Spirit each night,” Eubanks said. “The way things are in our world today, it was refreshing to see that many people come together and worship together. No one was in a hurry to leave, either. People just stood around talking after. We need more of that in the world, where people can come together and speak and communicate.”

“It’s good to know we’re not alone.”



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LEGISLATIVE SESSION: Predatory loans bill carried to 2024

From Page 1

She said of all the execution methods, lethal injection has the highest rate of botched executions, and under the new secrecy law, it will be difficult if not impossible to investigate or demand accountability for botched executions.

“Though execution secrecy has been embraced by our state, SCADP remains committed to fighting this irresponsible and reckless law restarting premeditated, state-sponsored murder in South Carolina. The death penalty will continue to disproportionately affect individuals who are impoverished, have Black and Brown skin, receive inadequate legal representation and suffer from persistent mental health issues,” Taylor added. “Our message remains consistent: If the state of South Carolina wants to create true community safety and healing, our limited taxpayer dollars would be better spent on effective violence prevention programs, including child abuse prevention, mental

“
I believe the involvement of United Methodist clergy and laity played a role in preventing the legislation from being defeated.
”

—The Rev. Bernie Mazyck

health care, treatment for substance use and community violence interrupters. Killing the

36 people who are already behind bars does nothing to make us safer.”

‘Still alive’

Regarding SB 518, titled Unfair Trade Practice Consumer Loans Legislation, this legislation would cap interest rates at 36 percent.

The Rev. Bernie Mazyck, co-convenor of the South Carolina Conference Connectional Ministries Advocacy area and president and CEO of the South Carolina Association for Community Economic Development, said United Methodists and other people of faith played a huge role in keeping the legislation alive. Several members of the Advocacy area attended hearings at the Statehouse on the legislation and encouraged passage of the bill.

Mazyck said that after four hearings by the subcommittee of the Senate Labor Commerce and Industry Committee, with testimonials from both supporters of the legislation and those who oppose the legislation, the subcommittee decided to delay a vote and carry the legislation over until next year.

“That means the legislation is still alive, but it just will not be acted upon this year,” Mazyck said.

The bill, introduced by Lexington Sen. Katrina Shealy, aims to help the poor be protected from lenders who sometime charge wildly high rates. Currently, Mazyck said, the highest interest being charged to someone needing a small-dollar loan in South Carolina—also called a payday loan—is more than 900 percent.

In 2020, South Carolina United Methodists at Annual Conference passed a resolution to combat predatory lending.

“I believe the involvement of United Methodist clergy and laity played a role in preventing the legislation from being defeated,” Mazyck said in celebrating the carry-over.

The South Carolina Legislative Session begins on the second Tuesday of January of each year and typically adjourns on the second Thursday in May. To learn more, visit <https://www.scstatehouse.gov>.

Both/And

UMCSC offers online learning opportunity to build thriving hybrid worship

While the pandemic may be winding down, the need for hybrid ministry will remain into the future. Many churches began streaming worship in 2020, living into a “Great Commission” opportunity. Today, they embrace a both/and approach when engaging in weekly worship and ministry in general, utilizing both in-person and online strategies and opportunities.

Now the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church is offering local churches a BOTH/AND cohort online learning opportunity.

The learning opportunity is designed to help churches take their hybrid ministry to the next level, make it possible for people everywhere to fully worship and discover how online worship can attract people to in-person worship as well.

Over the course of six months—July–November 2023—participants will have the opportunity to learn alongside Jason Moore, who has pioneered work in collaborative worship design and guest readiness, and Dr. George Ashford, lead pastor of Journey United Methodist Church in Columbia and

hybrid ministry practitioner.

Churches will be grouped with others to learn the ins, outs, best practices and best language, including what not to do when it comes to hybrid ministry.

Each session will tackle a specific aspect of worship, and will ultimately cover, among other strategies:

- Why to continue hybrid ministry;
- How to make it more engaging with specific techniques;
- How to build a discipleship pathway; and
- How to measure attendance.

Churches will also get a one-on-one “secret worshiper” consultation with Jason

Moore. In a 90-minute Zoom session, he will both affirm and offer critique on a church’s worship experience. This conversation will focus on the opportunities to reach people at a deeper level both online and in-person.

In the fall, cohort participants will come together for an in-person BOTH/AND learning lab at Journey UMC. This time of fellowship and hands-on learning will further equip the church, while also providing the chance to meet the cohort and leaders.

Total cost is \$1,050 per church with payment plans available. Registration deadline is June 15.

To learn more, visit <https://www.umcsc.org/bothandcohortreg>.

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Conference Historical Society

by the Rev. Meredith M. Dark

'We've Come This Far By Faith' (Part One)

In January of this year, the Southeastern Jurisdiction's Historical Society provided its member organizations copies of a DVD produced in 2013 by the African American Methodist Heritage Center titled, "We've Come This Far By Faith; A History of Black Methodism in the Southeastern Jurisdiction."

This documentary, which is one of a number of resources available from the center, is well worth your time and attention. It provides an excellent program on the history of African Americans in American Methodism. Much of what follows repeats the story told by the documentary.

In November 1784, Thomas Coke arriving from England met Francis Asbury at Barrett's Chapel in Delaware. One month later, The Methodist Episcopal Church in America was organized at Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore at what became known as "the Christmas Conference." One of the decisions of the conference was that no clergy could own slaves. John Wesley had declared that slavery was incompatible with Christian teaching.

African-American males were licensed by Methodists to preach to other African Americans and, in some cases, to mixed congregations. However, African Americans could not be ordained or administer the sacraments of Holy Communion or Baptism. Some of the early African American preachers were Richard Allen, Jacob Toogood of Maryland, Henry Evans of North Carolina, John Stewart of Ohio and Harry Hoosier of Maryland.

There was a growing number of African Americans in the Methodist Societies. However, worship was segregated. African Americans were forced to sit in balconies and take communion separately from White members. White ministers also oversaw the African-American congregations.

In 1787, Richard Allen led a group of African-American worshippers out of St. George's Church in Philadelphia, in time organizing the African Methodist Episcopal Church. A similar movement in New York led to the organization of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Many African Americans were set on achieving justice and equality. In 1794, another group of churchgoers left St. George's Church in Philadelphia and organized the African Zoar Methodist Society in a local butcher shop. Two years later, this group built the Zoar Congregation. African Americans established places where they could meet and worship freely and with dignity.

Of course, there were African Americans who remained a part of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The documentary suggests that perhaps this was for security and economic assistance, to develop their own churches and to help their own people

and perhaps for the lofty ideal of someday belonging to a united multiracial church. The Rev. Horace L. Wallace, a United Methodist Church historian, explains that among reasons why African Americans may have remained in the denomination was the hope that they could change the hearts and habits of their White brothers and sisters.

In 1844, the Methodist Episcopal Church agreed to a "Plan of Separation" over the issue of slavery. The newly formed Methodist Episcopal Church, South became zealous in its missionary efforts to convert slaves to Southern Methodism. By 1849 15 annual conferences in the ME Church, South established plantation missions.

In 1864, as slaves were being freed and the Civil War was imminent, African Americans in the Methodist Episcopal Church petitioned the General Conference to be able to oversee their own churches. Eventually, the petition was approved and African Americans organized the Delaware Conference in July 1864 at John Wesley Church in Philadelphia and later the Washington Conference at Sharpstreet Church in Baltimore on Oct. 31. Effective Nov. 1, the state of Maryland freed 90,000 slaves a year before President Lincoln's Emancipation would become law. Bishop Levi Scott of the ME Church said, "The beginning of this conference is small but it is true. Who can tell what by the blessing of God it may become."

The Northern Methodist Church organized eight African-American Mission Conferences in the four years from 1864 to 1868: Delaware, Washington, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Georgia and North Carolina. These eight mission conferences were given full annual conference status and voting rights at the 1868 General Conference of the ME Church.

Thirteen more conferences would eventually join them: Mississippi, Louisiana, Lexington, Florida, West Texas, Central Alabama, Savannah, Little Rock, East Tennessee, Central Missouri, Upper Mississippi, Atlanta and South Florida.

The conferences were segregated to comply with state laws.

Many African Americans in the South after the Civil War joined the Methodist Episcopal Church or the other Methodist Episcopal denominations (AME, AME Zion).

In 1870, the Christian (Colored) Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) was formed with the assistance of the ME Church, South to accommodate its newly freed African-American membership.

Dark serves as president of the South Carolina Conference Historical Society. She is the pastor of Socastee United Methodist Church.



Happy 101st birthday!

The members of Bethel-Red Bank Charge, Walterboro District, joined with the children of Mother Clottie Major Harley—Toisy Mae, Collie, Christopher, Gloria Ann, Lillie Bell, Rev. Walter and Bernard—to celebrate her 101st birthday recently. She turned 101 on April 6. "May God continue to richly bless you," they shared.



From the Archives

by Dr. Phillip Stone

Bishop William Wallace Duncan

One of South Carolina's contributions to the Methodist episcopacy, William Wallace Duncan, spent much of his life serving the Methodist Church.

When his father, David Duncan, joined the original Wofford College faculty in 1854, the 15-year-old future bishop transferred from Randolph-Macon College. Graduating from Wofford in 1858, Duncan returned to Virginia and entered the Methodist ministry. He served churches in Virginia for 16 years and was also a Confederate chaplain.

Duncan returned to Wofford in January 1876 as professor of mental and moral philosophy, and he took on the additional duty of being the college's financial agent, or chief fundraiser. Over the next 10 years, Duncan traveled throughout South Carolina, speaking to Methodist churches in an attempt to raise the college's endowment. Duncan was active in Methodist circles, representing South Carolina in three successive General Conferences. In 1881, he represented the Methodist Episcopal Church, South at the first Methodist Ecumenical Conference in London. His work on Wofford's behalf brought him increased attention throughout the region, and as a result, the 1886 General Conference elected him a bishop.

His election to the episcopacy meant he had to resign from the Wofford faculty, but it did not end his relationship with the college. He became a member of the Wofford board of trustees, and for the last 19 years of his life, he served as board chair. When the trustees elected Henry Nelson Snyder to be the college's fourth president, Duncan presented Snyder as president of "our" college, with emphasis, Snyder later remembered, on the word "our."

Snyder later wrote of Duncan, "He looked more like a bishop than any other man I have ever known."

In those days, the denomination had more annual conferences than bishops, so the bishops presided over multiple annual conferences each year. They did not always preside over the same conference in consecutive years, either. As such, Bishop Duncan visited a number of different Annual Conferences across the South as bishop, and even had to travel to the far west as he presided over the Oregon Annual Conference six times.

When opening one annual conference, Duncan reportedly said, "I am glad to meet and greet you. I expect to be glad all the time I am with you, and possibly I may be glad when I leave you."

Conferences did not provide residences for the bishops, so Bishop Duncan chose to remain in Spartanburg. Around 1885, he started building a large home midway between the Wofford campus and downtown Spartanburg. When he became a bishop, he altered some of the plans to accommodate many of the large meetings he might expect to host. The house was the first in the city to have inside bathrooms with running water.

Wofford's literary magazine reported in February 1889 that "Bishop Duncan's handsome residence on North Church Street, second lot from the (Central) Methodist Church, is completed. It is of English architecture with coat of arms on front. The Bishop has been spending some time at home."

North Church Street in Spartanburg must have been one of the most Methodist streets in the country in those days, with Central Methodist Church, the Central parsonage, the Spartanburg District parsonage, the bishop's residence and Wofford. You have to feel a little sorry for Central's ministers, with their bishop and presiding elder living on their block. From his home, Bishop Duncan could keep an eye on events at Wofford while he handled his responsibilities to the far-flung conferences he was serving.

The home remained in the bishop's family after his death in 1908. In 1999, it was moved to make way for Spartanburg's Marriott.

The house now sits on a site between the city's Magnolia Cemetery and the Carolinas campus of the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, which has beautifully restored it.

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



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33 to retire at Annual Conference

Emmanuel Bruce Adams
Debra Anne Armstrong
Joe Lee Blackwelder
Isiah Brown
Wallace Michael Burgess
Daniel Walker Chamblee
Lillie Kerns Davis



John Dicks
Frances Debra Dowdle
Elizabeth Burgess Drennen
Rebecca Lewis Forrester
Benjamin Graham
Susan Thurston Henry-Crowe
Lindora Flemming James



Sandra Smith King
Steven Michael King
Joe Nichols Long Jr.
Susan Biggert Maddox
Robert Lee Malachi
Daniel Gilbert O'Connor
Burton Lee Ott



Scott Wayne Petry
William Grover Putnam
Karen Jean Richmond
Timothy Julian Rogers
Deborah Luther Teagan
Charles Eugene Teal
Cheryl Dyke Toother



Arthur Desport Vick Jr.
John Henry Vickers III
Charles Lionel Wilbanks
Michael Leonard Written
Ralph Conrad Young



The *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* congratulates this year's class of retiring pastors. Together, they have served more than 700 years in local churches, universities, agencies and the conference. We wish them well in their future ministries and their time away from the pulpit.

This year's class of retiring pastors was asked to respond to the following questions.

1. Think of one ministry or occasion that makes you smile.
2. What do you plan to do June 30 or slightly after that?
3. How are you planning to continue your ministry after retirement?
4. What's one thing you're glad to leave behind?

Emmanuel Bruce Adams

Journal entry: FE: FL 2003, PE 2004, FE 2008. SC: 2003 Bethel-Oak Grove-Sampit, 2007 Pamplico, 2012 St. Paul (Chesterfield), 2018 Loris First, 2021 Loris First-Zoan.

1. Once a 16-month-old toddler got away from her mother and crawled up and down the aisle as I was preaching. I scooped her up, held her in my arms and continued to preach. The toddler was very happy and everyone else, including myself, were smiling outwardly and inwardly as well.
2. I plan to continue to preach, serving God in whatever capacity and wherever he leads.
3. I am considering going into prison ministry or possibly itinerant evangelism preaching. I am also considering remaining in my current appointments.
4. Paperwork!

Years of Service: 20

Debra Anne Armstrong

Journal entry: FE: PE 2006, FE 2011. SC: 2006 Calhoun Charge, 2011 Shiloh (Chesterfield), 2015 St. Paul (Florence), 2019 Christ (Bennettsville), 10/01/2020 First (Cheraw).

1. There have been many ministries and occasions that have brought a smile to my face. Youth and children's ministries always brought unexpected humor. The occasion that will always be the greatest source of joy and that still makes me smile was baptizing a father and his infant son during worship in my first appointment.

2. After June 30th, the first thing I plan to do is unpack and organize our home in Blythewood.
3. My ministry after retirement will be focused on caring for my family
4. I am beyond overjoyed to leave behind audits, charge conference reports and statistical reports.

Years of Service: 17

Joe Lee Blackwelder

Journal entry: FE: SP 1992, PM 1993, FE 1996. SC: 1992 Troy, 1996 Fews Chapel-Jackson Grove, 1999 Zion, 2005 Windsor, 2007 Trinity, Darlington, 2010 Kingtree, 2016 Cannon's Camp Ground.

1. Clang Buckets for Epworth: the first Sunday of each month, the children pass around large bean cans to collect whatever you have loose. Pennies, nickels, dimes, etc. Been doing this for 26 years. It's always fun.
2. Spending more time with family.
3. Retired supply.
4. About a handful of members. Can't name names to protect the guilty. I will miss a lot of folks that we have had a wonderful relationship with.

Years of Service: 30.75

Isiah Brown

Journal entry: PL: PL 2014. SC: 2014 St. Mary.

Years of Service: 9

Wallace Michael Burgess

Journal entry: FL: LP20 2012, FL 2013. SC: 2012 Not Appointed; 2013 Zion (Lancaster), 2018 Bethel-Armenia.

1. When COVID struck, we were unable to feed the hungry, in house, for Loaves & Fishes on Wednesdays from November to March. So a dedicated group took what little we had and started making meals to hand out to folks on the street. Rather than feeding a few, we fed hundreds! The community saw what we were doing and contributed more than we could have ever imagined. We fed over 2,200 this winter (a record!), along with quilts, socks, coats, socks, etc. Five loaves and two fishes multiplied by God's grace!
2. First, recover. Then teach five grandkids how to fish and enjoy a campfire. Help my wife with her mother who is now living with us (93).
3. I will be available to fill in for other pastors during this time of transition. I also plan to continue my ministry of "Escape to Grace"—to take folks out on to the wilderness a few days to escape the world and focus on what God has planned for them—a healing ministry.
4. Two, maybe three. Charge Conference paperwork, statistical tables and church politics.

Years of Service: 10

Daniel Walker Chamblee

Journal entry: FE: SP 2011, PL 2003, FL 2006, PE 2012, FE

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

2014. SC: 2001 Loris Charge, 2009 Wayne, 2010 Wayne-Bethel, 2017 Bethel-Ebenezer (Simpsonville), 2022 Brown Swamp.

1. Doing mission work in Ecuador, Ghana and with youth at Salkehatchie.
2. Returning to our home area of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.
3. I would love to be a worker bee in my home church and in my community.
4. Nothing. I have enjoyed all my time with the United Methodist Church and will take all those experiences with me.

Years of Service: 22

Lillie Kerns Davis

Journal entry: FE: PL 2010, PE 2014, FE 2016. SC: 2010 Dunton, 2015 Associate, St. Thomas Charge, 2017 Associate, Canaan-Sandhill Charge, 2018 Summerville Parish.

1. I enjoy working with children and youth. I especially enjoy leading, guiding, teaching and learning with them during their confirmation class. To see how much they grew during this time was spiritually rewarding. In addition, working with them during the confirmation classes gave me the validation that I was doing as I was commissioned “to make disciples for Jesus.” I firmly believe that spiritually trained children lead to spiritually oriented adults. Understanding the adage by actor Art Linkletter that states, “Kids say the darndest things.” One occasion that stands out is when the PPR chairperson announced that I would retire and named the person who would take my place. An 8-year-old girl I had comforted a few minutes earlier for being afraid to speak before one of my churches’ congregations stated, “Don’t worry, Rev. Davis, and don’t be sad because I love you. I am going to take your place one day. With this pronouncement, I felt there was still hope for our youths’ future, and with God’s help, I had something to do with it.
2. This time will be a time of rest, relaxation and spiritual renewal. But because I know God is my source of hope, existence and love, I still plan to continue making disciples for Jesus Christ. My retirement is physical, not mental or spiritual, and it does not mean I will stop being about God’s business.
3. A desire of my heart for many years has been to nurture, love and help young women grow and become their authentic selves. I believe this is what God would have me do, and I am ready to step into that role with tranquility and hope. I think that women are one of the most underutilized spiritual resources given by God to humanity. I believe they are a missing part of the puzzle of society. For humanity to become whole, socially, politically, educationally, religiously and most of all spiritually, their presence is necessary for life and humanity to ensure our God’s consciousness and spiritual connection to God.
4. As an educator and minister, I encountered resistance in both fields as a woman and a person of color. I have seen my work for God sabotaged, questioned, stolen and treated without authenticity. I am glad to be able to determine my fate for myself, and with the help of God, I will no longer be affected by the scrutinization of those who think that their station in life should determine my failure or success. For I now know all the roads that I thought were the roads that would lead to failure were the roads that lead to patience, strength, success and to God. They have made me more godly, more spiritual and whole.

Years of Service: 13

John Dicks

Journal entry: FE: OT 1974, FE 1977. SC: 1974 In School, 1976 North Greenville, 1977 Mount Carmel-St. John-St. Luke, 1978 Silver Hill, 1980 Chaplain USAF, 1995 Marion Parish, 2002 New Francis Brown, 2006 Wesley, Columbia, 2015 York-St. James Charge, 2016 Unity, Lugoff.

1. Infant baptism and confirmation bring smiles because they are reminders of precious moments where children and youth are ushered into the faith. Those moments allowed for celebration among the congregation, family and friends. While serving as an Air Force chaplain, it was a joy to provide comfort on the flight line and lead young airmen to Christ.
2. I plan to relax and decompress while spending quality time with family and catch up on reading.
3. After retirement, I plan to reconnect with my home church and travel. I am open for invitations to serve the church and community as needed.
4. Paperwork in general that included preparation for charge conference and submission of statistical data.

Years of Service: 49

Frances Debra Dowdle

Journal entry: AM: PL 1990, AM 1999. SC: 1990 Cherokee Place, 1997 Jamestown, 2000 Goose Creek.

1. The Lord’s Ladle Café at Goose Creek UMC. I will never forget the first day we opened 16 years ago when 11 members of our community walked in the door! When I was told we had guests, I shouted from my office, “We have people!” I have been smiling ever since witnessing the servants who make this happen three times a week with laughter and joy and the people we have met who have dined at our tables.
2. A cruise has already been planned with my family, and I look forward to spending quality time with our grandchildren and great-grands.
3. I will serve in any way needed in the church we attend and the district. I hope to be called upon to fill-in by preachers who need a substitute or a break!
4. Without a doubt, Charge Conference reports!

Years of Service: 33.5

Elizabeth Burgess Drennen

Journal entry: FE: PM 1987, FE 1992. SC: 1987 In School, 1988 LOA, 1989 Eutawville Charge, 1993 Allendale, 1995 LOA, 1996 Greenwood-St. Mark, 1998 Bells Associate, 2004 Associate, Shiloh Station, 2007 Family Leave, 2011 Hopewell-Sharon Charge, 2012 Catawba-El Bethel, 2018 Hickory Grove Charge.

Years of Service: 29

Rebecca Lewis Forrest

Journal entry: FL: FL 2012. SC: 2012 Marlboro Charge, 2014 Tatum Parish, 2015 Wesley Chapel.

1. The baptism of young children and babies.
2. Will be returning to my home in Garden City Beach. My plans are to walk on the beach every day that I am not traveling. I’m looking forward to seeing my grands in Baltimore more than once or twice a year.
3. I am planning to return to being a member of Belin Memorial Choir.
4. The one thing I am very glad to leave behind is the ugly division going on in too many churches.

Years of Service: 11

Benjamin Graham

Journal entry: PL: PL 1999, LP20 2012, PL 2014. SC: 1999 Lake Point, 2006 Mount Zion (Timmonsville), 2010 Jerusalem-St. Luke, 2012 Not Appointed, 2014 St. John, Shiloh, 2019 Mount Beulah (Lake City) (1/2).

Years of Service: 22

Susan Thurston Henry-Crowe

Journal entry: FE: OT 1974, FE 1977. SC: 1974 In School, 1976 Seneca-Friendship, 1978 Arrington-Holroyd, 1980 Arrington, 1982 Shady Grove, 1985 Associate Director CCOM, 1989 Director CCOM, 1991 Dean of Chapel and Religious Life, Emory University, 02/10/2014 General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society.

1. Serving as a pastor in three different appointments (in the 1970s and 80s) always made me smile when upon introduction to the Staff Parish Relations Committee someone would say “You do not look like a pastor.” Each time some months later someone would say something like, “I like you as our pastor.”
2. Enjoy and care for my family, travel, write essays/ possibly a book, read and gather my friends for meals. I will also work on special justice projects on immigration, prison reform, education and other injustices to which I am committed.
3. Taking on some special projects addressing injustice. Development for justice and interfaith work.
4. Working 7 days a weeks.

Years of Service: 49

Lindora Flemming James

Journal entry: PL: PL 2009. SC: 2009 Keneddyville, 2013 Shiloh, Darlington, 2015 Mars Bluff, 2017 Bowers Chapel (1/2).

Years of Service: 13.5

Sandra Smith King

Journal entry: FE: FL 2001, PE 2003, FE 2007. SC: 2001 Epworth (Joanna), 2003 Mount Lebanon-Kinards, 2006 St. John’s Associate (Rock Hill), 2010 Leesville, 2017 Disciples (Greenville).

1. One of my favorite things to do with little children is to take them to the stained glass cross window and pick them up so they can touch the cross. They come in on Sunday mornings and ask me to take them to the cross.
2. I plan to get settled in our last home with no desire to ever move again! Then I plan to sit on the screen porch and relax.
3. I will be active in a local church and hopefully do something with children—teaching Sunday school or volunteering for events.
4. I am glad to leave the administrative part of pastoral ministry behind. While necessary, it was never my passion and caused more headaches than any other area of ministry.

Years of Service: 22

Steven Michael King

Journal entry: FE: SP 1999, PE 2000, FE 2003. SC: 1999 Springdale Kinards Charge, 2003 Mathews, 2006 Antioch, 2008 Catawba-El Bethel, 2010 St. John’s (Batesburg), 2016 Bramlett Owings, 2018 New Hope (Anderson), 2020 Jonesville-New Hope Charge, 2021 North Easley Charge.

1. Having two of my members go into full-time Christian ministry as preachers.
2. Continue restoration of retirement home.
3. I am training to become a spiritual companion (director) and hope to use those skills to help others along their spiritual journey.
4. Charge conference and year end reports.

Years of Service: 24

Joe Nichols Long Jr.

Journal entry: FE: OT 1974, FE 1977. SC: 1974 In School, 1976 Ridge Spring, 1981 Ellore, 1985 Church of the Covenant, 1987 Timmonsville-Salem, 1992 Cokesbury, 2004 First Marion, 09/01/2012 District Superintendent, Rock Hill, 2020 Central (Newberry).

1. My years have been filled with so many smiles from sharing with Kathy Jo in groups, projects and missions; but Salkehatchie stands out. From 1982 to 2019 I directed the Santee Camp. Now I assist Ward Smith. What joy I’ve had sharing Christ’s love through practical home repairs! The youth, adult leaders and families served keep me smiling.
2. Relax, repair our own home and get ready for this year’s Santee Camp.
3. The Lord called me from my beloved Saluda County to serve throughout the South Carolina Conference. I hope to do some good where others gave me a good start in life.
4. Reports.

Years of Service: 49

Susan Biggert Maddox

Journal entry: FE: FL 2015, PE 2017, FE 2019. SC: 2015 Vaucluse-Pentecost, 2017 St. Paul (Saluda), 2021 Highland Park.

1. The annual Halloween Trunk-or-Treat at each appointment I have served has always brought smiles and laughter. It is fun to see otherwise “serious” people dress up in costumes and welcome guests with candy and games. It is a relaxed atmosphere with no agenda other than fun for children and families.
2. Get outside and enjoy being in nature while walking, biking or kayaking.
3. I will enter a season of prayer and listening to hear what God would have me do next. Meanwhile, I will be mindful of the needs around me and respond in the way of Jesus as often as I can.
4. Administrative duties.

Years of Service: 12

Robert Lee Malachi

Journal entry: FE: PL 2000, FL 2006, PE 2007, FE 2010. SC: 2000 Bennettsville Parish, 2009 Jefferson Parish, 2016 Mount Zion (Kingstree), 2019 Bennettsville Charge.

1. The initiation of a Back-to-School Bash in the Jefferson community is one occasion that made me smile.
2. I plan to rest and take a vacation with the family.
3. I plan to work with the Homeless Shelter in my community and support my wife in her ministry.
4. One thing I am glad to leave behind is Charge Conference.

Years of Service: 23

Daniel Gilbert O’Connor

Journal entry: SY 2021, OF 2022 (¢346.2), OR 2023. SC: 10/11/21 Adnah UMC (SY), 2022 Catawba-El Bethel, 2023 Catawba-El Bethel (OR).

Years of Service: 1

Burton Lee Ott

Journal entry: FE: PM 1994, FE 1997. SC: 1994 El Bethel, 1996 Associate, Buncombe Street, 1997 Dials-Shiloh, 2000 Edgefield, 2002 Western North Carolina Conference, 07/01/2003 LOA, 2004 Chesnee Charge, 2008 Trinity-Enoree-Patterson Chapel, 2013 Bethel Ebenezer, 2017 Marion First.

1. One ministry that I look back and smile about is when God blessed Edgefield UMC with a Hispanic mission. God led us in a special prayer/church council worship service held in a century-old wooden church out in the woods miles from town. The Holy Spirit inspired us to commit to increasing our mission budget from \$2,000 to \$20,000 in order to support a couple to lead the mission. God amazed us by providing everything needed to minister to a large group of migrant workers, including a free home for the missionaries.
2. During the first days of my retirement, my wife and I are looking forward to actually getting to live in our home at Lake Junaluska. We’ve had the house for 25 years and for the first time can call it home.
3. I’m praying that God will lead me to where and how he wants me to serve him. I envision continuing to visit and help shut-ins. I’ve learned I have to know my neighbor to best help my neighbor. Also, I plan to serve God’s church. I’m trusting him to show me whether that will be in music, preaching or teaching his word. “Praising my Savior all the day long!”
4. One thing I will be glad to leave behind is meetings. I have attended hundreds of meetings in 30 years and won’t miss them at all. I will greatly miss the fellowship of believers at FUMC Marion. They have been a gift from God and it’s been a joy to be their pastor and friend on the journey together.

Years of Service: 31

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

Wayne Scott Petry

Journal entry: FE: SLP 1983, PM 1984, FE 1987. SC: 1983 Spartanburg-Trinity Associate, 1985 Friendship-Rock Springs, 1987 Starr, 1992 Heath Memorial-Pleasant Grove, 1996 Jonesville-New Hope, 2002 Tabernacle, Lancaster, 2005 New Marker-Tabernacle, 2007 Wesley Chapel, 2009 Zion, Anderson, 07/01/2011 Incapacity Leave.

[Editor's note: The following is from Mrs. Petry]

Thank you for the invitation for Scott to be included in the retirement highlights in the upcoming edition of the *Advocate*.

Scott and I have been married for almost 37 years. From the time we started getting to know each other, he had the desire and plan to preach until the age of 70. But that was not to be. In March 2011, after months of extensive testing he was diagnosed with early onset dementia and placed on medical disability leave from the ministry. After a period of mental and physical decline, in August 2020, we were told his illness had progressed to early onset Alzheimer's. Now, at the age of 66 he will be medically retired from the conference.

We have so many wonderful memories of our active time serving in the ministry across our great state. Scott's greatest gift of serving can be best described as a pastor and not as a preacher. His love was teaching small group Bible studies, presenting nursing home programs and in-home visitation with church family. With all of the technology available today we have been able to keep up with friendships made throughout the years. Our lives may not have followed the path that we set forth back in the day as starry-eyed newlyweds but, we know who holds our hands as we navigate the path that we are on.

Years of Service: 37.5

William Grover Putnam

Journal entry: FD: PD 2001, FD 2008. SC: 2001 Minister of Adult Ministries, Buncombe Street.

Years of Service: 16.5

Karen Jean Richmond

Journal entry: PL 2010, LP20 2018. SC: 2010 Catawba-El Bethel, 2012 Fort Lawn-Van Wyck, 2017 Trinity-Fort Lawn Charge

(1/2), 2018 Not Appointed.

Years of Service: 12.75

Timothy Julian Rogers

Journal entry: FE: PM 1985, FE 1988, SC: 1985 Greeleyville-Lane, 1988 First Hemingway, 1994 Red Bank, 1997 Trinity, Darlington, 2005 Coordinator of Clergy Services, 2012 Mount Hebron, 2015 Marion District Superintendent.

1. The memory of having my daughter, Emily, assist me in serving Christmas Eve communion.
2. Meri Lyn and I will be settling in our new home in Newman, Georgia.
3. I'll see what the Lord brings my way.
4. The tyranny of the calendar and clock!

Years of Service: 38

Deborah Luther Teagan

Journal entry: FE: PM 1989, FE 1993. SC: 1989 In School, 1991 Summerville-Bethany Associate, 1996 LOA, 1996 Southern Illinois, 08/01/1999 North Dakota Annual Conference, 2001 LOA, 06/13/2007 Altus First, Oklahoma Annual Conference, 06/16/2010 Voluntary Leave of Absence.

1. I love every minute I've spent working with confirmation classes during the last 32 years, but especially the ecumenical ones I led at the Army chapels in Stuttgart, Germany. Thinking about those 56 kids (in eight years) makes me smile every time! And I'm still in touch with many of them!
2. My husband and I are retiring in Monument, Colorado. From there we will travel to both new and favorite places.
3. I'll be volunteering at our new UMC church in Colorado Springs and continuing to lead a Zoom Bible study started during Covid-19 with military friends over 10 time zones.
4. My path has been different from most so I don't feel like I'm leaving anything behind ... I'm just starting on a new part the journey.

Years of Service: 18.25

Charles Eugene Teal

Journal entry: PL: SY 2016, PL 2019. SC: 2016 Bethesda (Cheraw), 01/01/2019 Lamar Circuit, 2019 Bethune (PL) (1/2), 01/01/2020 Friendship-Mount Croghan.

1. The first baptism I performed.

2. Continue as supply pastor.

Years of Service: 4

Cheryl Dyke Toothe

Journal entry: FE: PL 2004, PE 2007, FE 2010. SC: 2004 Pageland, 2007 Mount Olivet-Pleasant Grove, 2010 Trenton-McKendree, 03/01/2014 Trenton-McKendree (3/4) and SEJ Association for Native American Ministry (1/4), 12/22/2014 Medical Leave.

1. During my tenure as a pulpit minister, I had the incredible privilege of baptizing my three grandsons. Or "babatize" as my oldest grandson, Cameron, used to say!
2. Take my three grands to the Ark Adventure in Kentucky.
3. I will continue to serve on the Native American Committee as the Native American Missioner. I will also fill in for pastors who are sick or vacationing.
4. Forms!

Years of Service: 19

Arthur Desport Vick Jr.

Journal entry: FL: PL 2006, FL 2014. SC: 2006 East Lancaster Charge, 2010 Wesley Memorial (Chester), 2014 Trio, 02/01/2022 Medical Leave.

Years of Service: 17

John Henry Vickers III

Journal entry: FE: PL 2004, FL 2006, PE 2009, FE 2011. SC: 2004 Lebanon (Fork Shoals), 2006 Trenton-McKendree, 2010 Pisgah (Aynor), 2012 Liberty-Friendship, 2015 First UMC (Cheraw), 01/29/2016 Medical Leave.

1. There are several occasions in ministry that made me smile, but I will share briefly only four. First, I met the parents and grandparents of an infant scheduled for brain surgery and as we prayed over the child we felt the power of the Holy Spirit touch that young girl. The surgeon came and revealed he could not explain what he found during the procedure, but the parents and I simply smiled at each other and thanked both him and God for the outcome. Secondly, I enjoyed deeply working with youth on their spiritual journeys especially through confirmation classes and retreats. It brought great joy to see our young folks commit to the Lord and continue their spiritual journey with our Triune God! On one of our

Lake Junaluska confirmation retreats, I was asked to preside over Holy Communion and to pray an original Great Thanksgiving as I was led by the Spirit. After the worship service was over, many young folks and chaperones conveyed it was their most memorable and meaningful. Thirdly, I enjoyed immensely conducting the weddings of our children. Lastly, I was honored to conduct several dear friends' and family members' funerals. These are but a few highlights of my ministry that brought great joy to me!

2. My plans for retirement are to be as healthy as possible and to live abundantly in the joy of the Lord with my wife, family and friends!
3. I will continue to minister to folks on a one-on-one basis as well as occasionally play guitar and sing with joy.
4. I am glad to leave behind the politics, the lack of staying true to biblical precepts, parsonages that cause illness and the folks that do not really desire to have a pastor fulfill the duties of word, service, sacrament and order.

Years of Service: 19

Charles Lionel Wilbanks

Journal entry: FE: PL 2012, FL 2018, PE 2019, FE 2022. SC: 2012 Upper Richland Charge, 2018 Trinity-New Chapel Charge, 2021 Herbert Memorial.

Years of Service: 11

Michael Leonard Written

Journal entry: FL: SY 2000, FL 2001, PE 2006, FL 2014. SC: 2000 Estill-Black Swamp, 2006 Bells, 2008 Cambridge, 2010 Bethany-Zoar, 2012 Union-Elim Charge, 2016 Bowman Charge.

Years of Service: 22

Ralph Conrad Young

Journal entry: PL: PL 2019. SC: 2019 North Columbia Charge (1/2).

1. When residents from the local community (non-church members) filled in the open time slots for our prayer vigil.
2. I will continue as the local pastor for St. John and Mount Pleasant in Columbia.
3. See above.
4. I will not be leaving anything behind at this point.

Years of Service: 4

The youth of Mount Nebo UMC, Islandton, SC are appreciated.

For the past 26 years, we have hosted a youth retreat day.

This year, because they are so wonderful, we have decided to have a very special youth retreat and take them to Noah's Ark and Creation Museum in Kentucky, June 27-30, 2023.

We appreciate all our youth, and we are sure this experience will help them to fully understand just how "Fearfully and Wonderfully" we are all made.

THE WALTER H. MCKELVEY, SR. SCHOLARSHIP ENDOWMENT FUND

Remembering Dr. McKelvey and his service to the SC Annual Conference and Gammon Theological Seminary as President (1997-2010)

Please give to Dr. McKelvey's Scholarship Fund supporting seminarians at Gammon Theological Seminary. Checks are made payable and mailed to the "SC United Methodist Foundation" referencing "The McKelvey Scholarship Fund", P.O. Box 5087, Columbia, SC 29250.

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"... a driving passion for recruiting prospective seminary students and garnering funds for scholarships to support them." The Reverend Joseph L. Crawford, Sr. former treasurer and president of Gammon Theological Seminary



Photos courtesy of the Rev. Sharon Spann Gamble

A helpful meal

For years, the Outreach/Mission Committee of New Hope UMC, Ridgeville, has been providing dinners to the community, but COVID-19 forced them to pause their efforts. Now, they have started again. Here, members of the group prepare meals to distribute to seniors in the surrounding communities of Ridgeville and Summerville. From left are Cloude Hall, Jean Hamilton and Ann Bell.

Around the Districts

Columbia District

The Reconciling Next team of **Washington Street UMC, Columbia**, hosted an event to celebrate its LGBTQIA+ siblings, friends and allies. "Finding Courage to Speak and Act" featured dinner and two speakers, Dr. Nancy Malcom and Dr. A.J. Ramirez.

Wesley UMC, Columbia, cooked hot meals for the homeless on May 20. The church walked throughout downtown Columbia handing out the hot plates.

Windsor UMC, Columbia, held its Spring Musical Worship Service and Carnival May 21. The carnival featured a petting zoo, crafts, food, games and family fun.

Global Briefs

Church business administration academy offered

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Registration is open for the Academy of Church Business Administration, a two-week educational program for individuals who support administrative leadership in churches and the denomination. Topics include human resources, staff development, property management, communications, strategic planning and financial management. Sessions are scheduled for June 20-30 in Nashville.

Webinar to discuss impact of new immigration laws

ATLANTA—The National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry of The United Methodist Church, in partnership with the United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race and Board of Church and Society, will host a bilingual webinar on May 31 about new state regulations being planned in Texas and Florida that will potentially impact churches serving immigrant communities. The webinar, at noon U.S. Eastern time, can be viewed via ResourceUMC.org and Recursos Metodistas Unidos, ResourceUMC.org's Spanish language platform.

\$5.25 million grants to strengthen faith communities

GARNER, N.C.—The United Methodist Church's North Carolina and Western North Carolina conferences are each getting \$5.25 million in grant money from the Duke Endowment to launch new faith communities and strengthen existing congregations. The funds "will provide vital resources to help the conferences address the challenges posed by recent disaffiliations," according to a press release.

Disciple Bible Study goes digital

WINFIELD, Kan.—The Disciple Bible Study series is going digital with the introduction of an app that will be available Aug. 1, the Richard and Julia Wilke Institute for Discipleship and the United Methodist Publishing House have announced. Two 24-week studies in the Disciple series will be the first offerings on the new BeADisciple Study App, which will give groups access to the curriculum and the complete Common English Bible in text and audio form. Zoom is built into the app for group meetings. Beta groups are being invited to be first adopters and participate in final testing.

Advocating for women at annual conference

INDIANAPOLIS—The Indiana Conference Commission on the Status and Role of Women is sharing with counterpart groups in other conferences how to be an effective presence at annual conference gatherings. Strategies include monitoring, spotlighting women leaders and sponsoring an information table.

Finance agency releases quarterly report

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The General Council on Finance and Administration has released the financial updates on general church apportionment collections through the first quarter of 2023. Apportionments are shares of church giving that support ministries beyond the local church. In total, collections for denomination-wide ministries are up compared to last year.

Agency urges Congress to choose 'grace over greed'

WASHINGTON—In a May 2 Action Alert, the United Methodist Board of Church and Society asked church members to contact their elected representatives, urging the 118th Congress to make decisions that "prioritize grace over greed." Quoting the *Book of Resolutions* (4064), the agency encouraged a "theology of abundance" as Congress approaches policy decisions on immigration, health care, peacebuilding, poverty and climate justice.

Bishop addresses mass shooting

PLANO, Texas—Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr., who oversees the North Texas and Central Texas conferences, issued a statement about the May 6 mass killing in Allen, Texas. Saenz said United Methodists "will not only weep with those who weep but also work to remove the causes" of such tragedies.

United Methodists killed in Congo flooding

KALEHE, Congo—Over 175 people, including 15 United Methodists, died after torrential rains overflowed the Chibira River in South Kivu. One church family lost 13 members.

Suspended bishop moves toward church trial

CHICAGO—The Western Jurisdiction announced that a committee has determined enough evidence exists to bring charges against Bishop Minerva Carcaño to trial. Carcaño has been suspended for more than a year. The news comes as the Council of Bishops, meeting this week, has been hearing conflicting calls on whether to intervene in the case.

Applications due July 11 for Hoover award

NEW YORK—Young women wishing to travel and study can apply for the Theresa Hoover Community Service and Global Citizenship Award. The deadline to submit applications is July 11. Women ages 21 to 35 are eligible, and priority will be given to projects involving climate justice and addressing the criminalization of communities of color. Hoover, who died in 2013, was the first African American to lead the former Women's Division of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries.

Methodist seminary expresses optimism for future

ATLANTA—Despite the Interdenominational Theological Center declaring financial exigency, Gammon Theological Seminary "remains financially solvent and envisions emerging more vital than before," said the Rev. Candace M. Lewis, Gammon president and dean. Gammon, the denomination's only historically Black theological institution, was founded 140 years ago and is the alma mater of more African-American bishops than any other seminary. The ITC houses five seminaries and an ecumenical fellowship.

New caucus supports African bishops, regionalization

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa—A new caucus, the United Methodist Africa Forum, met to affirm the unity of the church, upholding traditional views on human sexuality and reorganizing the denomination into regions.

Leadership body reconsiders restructuring plan

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The Connectional Table, which has stewardship of The United Methodist Church's mission, ministry and resources, is now re-examining its proposed restructuring. The leadership body still plans to submit legislation to the coming General Conference that aims to make the board nimbler and more international, but time is of the essence.

—Courtesy of the United Methodist News Service



Above from left, Tracie Green, SAGE Chair Janelle Mitchell, CASA Director LaBrena Furtick-Aiken, Gail Jarvis, Cynthia Green and Barbara Lebby gather with the items.

SAGE life group delivers for CASA

Five members of SAGE (Spirited Anointed Gifted Eagles) life group at St. Stephen United Methodist Church delivered seven gift baskets to CASA/Family Systems on May 8.

The baskets consisted of towels, wash cloths, ladies and children's flip flops/bedroom shoes, underwear, toiletries, coloring books, crayons, journals and cleaning supplies.

CASA/Family Systems is a private, not-for-profit organization serving Bamberg, Calhoun and Orangeburg counties whose primary focus is providing prevention, advocacy and intervention to individuals and families who have been affected by sexual assault, family violence or child abuse and neglect. The wish list was provided by CASA's director, LaBrena Furtick-Aiken, who introduced the staff and expressed appreciation to the SAGE members who were present.

"The women and children can truly use these supplies from the wish list as they wait for their facility to be completed," Furtick-

Aiken said.

"This was an outpouring of love," said Janelle Mitchell, chairperson of SAGE, as she shared with the group how the ministry operates.

Each year SAGE selects a nonprofit in the community to fulfill its mission to make an impact through education, collaboration and witnessing to make disciples for Jesus Christ. All donations come directly from the members who do not fundraise for these projects.

"It's just one of the many ways we demonstrate our love for Jesus Christ by giving back," Mitchell said.

CASA/Family Systems operates one of the 19 statewide temporary emergency domestic violence shelters, one of the 23 sexual assault and domestic violence programs and one of 17 Child Advocacy Centers.

"It was a heart-warming experience," said Tracie Green, a SAGE member who helped deliver the baskets.

Also in attendance were Cynthia Green, Gail Jarvis and Barbara Lebby.



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Tony Rowell

Grandpa and the blues harp

I can't recall the exact date. The best I can figure, it must have been somewhere around the middle of June back in 1967 or thereabouts. I was 8 years old at the time, spending the summer months down with Granny and Grandpa Tharpe.

As I recall it was a pretty morning. The sky was a beautiful deep blue, almost cobalt, and there were soft cotton-ball clouds floating in it. I remember it like it was yesterday for some reason. I also remember what I was doing at the time. I was standing between my Grandpa and Granny in front of Grant's department store in Panama City, Florida, throwing a world class fit. Eight-year-olds have a gift for such things, you know.

I had plenty of them—fits, I mean. Hysterics were one of my best things. For the most part, I can't remember what set me off, but I do recall the genesis of this particular outburst. Of all things it was a Hohner Blues Harp in the key of E, and it was as shiny as a brand-new penny.

At the time of my ill-tempered outburst, it was displayed in a glass case just inside the front door and a little to the left near the jewelry counter, and I wanted it. I wanted it bad.

For those of you unversed in the subject, a Hohner Blues Harp is a harmonica, or French harp or mouth organ, depending upon the region from which you hail.

I could go into the difference between a chromatic model or diatonic model, but there's no need. If you blow air through the thing, it makes music—check that, sometimes it just makes noise.

My desperate desire for this particular instrument at this particular time in my life stems from a couple of things. In the early summer of 1967, "Branded Man" by Merle Haggard had just hit the charts, and along with that a fella by the name of Charlie McCoy had just released his first album. These days they would call it a CD or MP3 or STP or something like that, but back then it was an album, a black vinyl platter with grooves cut in it for the needle to ride along in. The sound wasn't perfect, but then again, what is?

Charlie McCoy was the best harmonica player to ever come down the pike, bar none, and Merle Haggard, God rest his soul, was created by God above to write and sing country music.

In the summer of 1967, my young heart fell in love with two things: a little blonde girl down the street by the name of Brenda and country music.

I have no idea what ever happen to Brenda, but country music—real country music that is, not today's stuff but the real McCoy—remains a love of mine.

At 8 years of age my fingers were not long enough to wrap around a banjo's neck, much less a guitar's, and I hated taking piano lessons. So I figured, why not get an orchestra that fits in your pocket?

I wanted to learn how to play the harmonica like Charlie, and I needed that Blues Harp to make it happen. I wanted it enough to fight for it, to demand it, to throw myself on the floor for it. After all, I was a budding superstar, and I needed it.

I figured Granny and Grandpa would see the amazing potential within me and just buy it for me. After all, I was their favorite; Granny said so. And on account of that, I figured I deserved it. I was entitled.

But in a shocking turn of events, Grandpa looked down at me with unwavering eyes and a note of finality in his voice and simply said, "No."

At that my ranting and raving began.

It was in the midst of my tirade when I experienced something I had never experienced before, and I vowed to never experience again. My soft-spoken and tender Grandpa spoke harshly to me.

He looked down at his woe-begotten grandson, listened intently to my ever-increasing pity party, and said the following—gently, of course, as was his manner, but with just enough steel in his voice to make me shut my mouth and tremble.

He said: "Son, do you think I owe you something? If you

are thinking that, then you are way off base. If you want that thing, then you will have to earn it."

Six weeks later, three days before I was to head back up to Utica and Mom and Dad, after what seemed like a mountain of chores, I was once again standing in front of Grant's Department Store with Grandpa on another beautiful summer's morning.

He stopped me right before we went into the store, stooped down and gave me the money I had earned to buy that harmonica. He didn't even go inside. He let me buy it all on my own.

I have to tell you, I was the proudest 8-year-old boy in all of the deep South that morning, not because of the brand-new Blues Harp in the key of E that lay in my pocket, but because I had earned it. I had been given the gift of anticipating it, and I did it all by myself.

Now friends, that is how to teach a life lesson.

As Father's Day approaches, I urge you young and you more experienced dads out there to resist the world's misguided teaching and foolish ways. Teach your children the value of hard work, patience, personal achievement and excellence. Let them work for their dreams. If you don't, then you will steal their dreams from them. Dreams are made of anticipation, not immediate gratification.

Fathers, Christ has given you a formidable task—the task of raising godly men and women in an ungodly world. Teach them to have confidence in themselves, in their abilities and their intellect; but over and above that, teach them of Jesus Christ, of his love for them and his pride in them. Give them all the support you can, and then give them the firm foundation of a relationship with Jesus Christ; and they will be blessed beyond measure by you. Happy Father's Day.

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://advocate.org/store/books/what-would-granny-say>.

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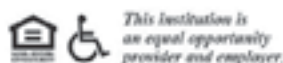
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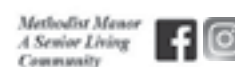


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Judge lifts North Georgia disaffiliation pause

By Heather Hahn

Excerpted with permission of UMNews

A Georgia county judge ruled from the bench that 185 churches in the North Georgia Conference can move forward with The United Methodist Church's disaffiliation process.

Meanwhile, leaders of the Rio Texas Conference filed a lawsuit against 40 churches that are trying to sidestep that process.

At issue in both cases are the requirements of Para. 2553 in The United Methodist Church's *Book of Discipline*.

That provision—passed in 2019 after intensifying denominational strife over LGBTQ inclusion—offers U.S. congregations “a limited right” to exit the denomination with property if they meet certain financial and procedural obligations.

At this point, more than 3,300 congregations have cleared the necessary hurdles to withdraw under Para. 2553. That's about 11 percent of U.S. churches since the provision took effect. The church law will expire at the end of the year.

The suit filed jointly by 185 Georgia churches came after North Georgia Conference leaders paused the disaffiliation process, saying widespread misinformation raised their doubts about the validity of church disaffiliation votes. Previously, the conference had approved 71 church disaffiliations.

But, with Para. 2553 about to sunset, Cobb County Superior Court Judge J. Stephen Schuster said the conference must let the plaintiff churches take the required steps in the church-exit process—starting with a congregational vote.

“I believe that the North Georgia Conference has an affirmative duty to assist them in holding a vote if a church makes a call for a church conference to have that vote,” he said at the end of a daylong hearing May 16. The hearing was streamed on YouTube.

He added that the conference “has an equal right to make sure it's done properly within the contours of the *Book of Discipline*.”

Under church law, a disaffiliating congregation must vote by at least a two-thirds margin for disaffiliation, pay exit fees required by its conference board of trustees and receive the

approval of its annual conference—a regional body consisting of voters from multiple churches.

Schuster acknowledged that it will ultimately be up to the North Georgia Annual Conference voters whether to approve the church disaffiliations.

“Whether the conference gives them an up or down vote is not for the court to decide,” he said.

Schuster also said he saw no signs of bad intent on either side in the case. He welcomed attorneys for both the plaintiff churches and the North Georgia Conference to file additional motions before he renders his final ruling.

In a statement, the North Georgia Conference said that while details of the order are yet to come, conference leaders are exploring possible appeal.

“Leaders of the conference remain committed to handling this matter in a fair, transparent, uniform and good faith manner,” the statement said.

“Most importantly, our focus continues to be on the mission of The United Methodist Church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. That is unchanging. We will update the North Georgia Conference in the days to come.”

Earlier this month, the Columbia County Court granted motions to allow two other congregations—Mann-Mize and Trinity on the Hill United Methodist churches—to hold a vote on disaffiliations. The conference said it would appeal these decisions.

North Georgia plans to hold its next annual conference on June 1-3. Schuster said he would not alter that schedule. If the disaffiliations move forward, the conference could join others across the country in holding a special session to take up disaffiliation resolutions.

More than a thousand miles west, the Rio Texas Conference is dealing with a very different situation.

A couple of weeks ago, the conference approved the disaffiliation of 33 churches.

But now, the Rio Texas Conference board of trustees has filed a suit in Bexar County against 40 churches that have

hired legal counsel to try to circumvent the exit process others have already followed.

Conference leaders stressed that they turned to litigation only as a last resort because the churches refused to engage in the approved separation process.

“It has never been the intent of the conference to profit from disaffiliations,” Kevin Reed, the trustees president, said in a video about the trustees' decision. “Quite the opposite.”

But he added that among the church law's requirements is that departing churches must pay a fair share of their clergy pension liability as well as a share of church giving to help ensure the financial health of the congregations that remain.

The conference has a fiduciary duty to maintain those requirements, and other disaffiliating churches are complying, conference leaders said.

“We remain prayerful that these churches will return to the table and meet their moral obligations to the conference and its member churches,” said Bishop Robert Schnase, who leads the Rio Texas and New Mexico conferences, in a statement.

“This disagreement is with a minority of churches. There are far more United Methodists staying who are invested in The United Methodist Church moving forward.”

So far, U.S. civil courts have largely upheld the denomination's property and disaffiliation policies.

Going back to the 18th century, The United Methodist Church and its predecessors have maintained a trust clause in the *Book of Discipline* that states that all church property is held in trust for the entire denomination. John Wesley, Methodism's founder, established the forerunner to the *Discipline's* current trust clause.

In the past two months, a North Carolina judge and a Florida judge each dismissed cases brought by multiple churches seeking to leave the denomination with property without following those policies.

Both lawsuits also sought to invalidate The United Methodist Church's longtime trust clause.

Read the full article at <https://www.umnews.org>.

Obituaries

Rev. Mary Susan Ashworth

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—The Rev. Mary Susan Ashworth, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died April 7, 2023.



Ashworth

Prior to her retirement in 2018, Rev. Ashworth served Rollins Center, Emory University and the Trinity-Enoree, Blacksburg-St. John, Central Associate, Cross Anchor, and East Lancaster charges. She also served as chaplain of Converse College from 1994-2002.

A memorial service was held May 7 at Central UMC, Spartanburg.

Memorials may be made to Central UMC, 233 N. Church St., Spartanburg, SC 29306.

Rev. Ashworth is survived by her sister and brother.

Donna Rhee Badgley

SUMMERVILLE—Donna Rhee Tumbleston Wheeler Badgley, mother of the Rev. Paige Wheeler, died April 20, 2023. Rev. Wheeler is the pastor of Union United Methodist Church, McBee.

Funeral services were held April 23 at Boone Hill UMC with burial in the church cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Hallie Hill Animal Sanctuary, 5604 New Road, Hollywood, SC 29449.

Mrs. Badgley is survived by her two daughters.

Creola Mae Brown

PHILADELPHIA—Creola Mae Brown, sister of the Rev. Palma Thomas, died May 6, 2023. Rev. Thomas is the pastor of Mount Zion United Methodist Church, Florence.

Funeral services were held May 16 at Ward AME Church with burial in Fernwood Cemetery, Lansdowne, Pennsylvania.

Rev. Gary Bruce Byrd

PEACHTREE CORNERS, Ga.—The Rev. Gary Bruce Byrd, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died April 27, 2023.



Byrd

Prior to his retirement in 2008, Rev. Byrd served In School, Panola, Suber Marshall, Columbia, St. James, Columbia, Belvedere, St. Luke-Zion, Bethesda and Grace-Union charges. Following his retirement, he served the Lockhart-Wesley Chapel and Aldersgate (Inman) charges.

Funeral services were held May 6 at Grace UMC with burial in Rosemont Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Epworth Children's Home, 900 Millwood Ave., Columbia, SC 29205.

Rev. Byrd is survived by his wife, Joyce Byrd, son and daughter.

Bobby Kellet Dill

GREER—Bobby Kellet “Bob” Dill, father of the Rev. Kathy Pryor, died May 4, 2023. Rev. Pryor is the pastor of Philadelphia United Methodist Church, York.

A cryptside service was held May 10 at Woodlawn Memorial Park Mausoleum Chapel of Remembrance.

Mr. Dill is survived by his daughter and two sons.

Lou Maudelle Hughes Finley

MOUNTVILLE—Lou Maudelle Hughes Finley, mother of the Rev. Emil Finley, died May 15, 2023. Rev. Finley is the pastor of Soule Chapel United Methodist Church, Waterloo.

Graveside services were held May 18 at New Prospect Baptist Church Cemetery, followed by a memorial service at Mountville Baptist Church.

Memorials may be made to Connie

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.

Maxwell Children's Ministries, 810 Maxwell Ave., Greenwood, SC 29646; or to Mountville Baptist Church, P.O. Box 484, Mountville, SC 29370.

Mrs. Finley is survived by her three sons and daughter.

Gloria Beatrice James

CANISTEO, N.Y.—Gloria Beatrice James, mother of the Rev. Cheryl Remchuk, died April 20, 2023. Rev. Remchuk pastors Hodges United Methodist Church, Greenwood.

Funeral services were held April 27 at Brown & Powers Funeral Home.

Memorials may be made to Canisteo Wesleyan Church, 25 Greenwood St., Canisteo, NY 14823; or Care First Hospice, 11751 E. Corning Road, Corning, NY 14830.

Mrs. James is survived by her husband, Junior O. James, two daughters and two sons.

Eric Jason Jones

LADSON—Eric Jason Jones, brother of the Rev. Clayton Jones and the Rev. Alfonza Jones, died May 11, 2023. Both Revs. Jones are retired members of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held May 20 at Wesley UMC with burial in Cherry Hill Cemetery.

Irene Jones

LADSON—Irene Jones, mother of the Rev. Clayton Jones and the Rev. Alfonza Jones, died May 14, 2023. Both Revs. Jones are retired members of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held May 20 at Wesley UMC with burial in Cherry Hill Cemetery.

Deborah Ann Joyner

COLUMBIA—Deborah Ann “Debby” Joyner, sister of the Rev. Becky Shirley, died April 30, 2023. Rev. Shirley is the pastor of Washington Street United Methodist Church.

A memorial service was held May 5 at Trenholm Road UMC.

Memorials may be made to Trenholm Road UMC, 3401 Trenholm Road, Columbia, SC 29204.

Ms. Joyner is survived by her mother, and two sisters.

Rachel Merck Massey

WALHALLA—Rachel Merck Massey, mother of the Rev. Ronald Massey, died April 20, 2023. Rev. Massey is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

A memorial service was held April 23 at Chicopee UMC.

Memorials may be made to The Hub Ministries, Cornerstone Lighthouse, 185 Cornerstone Drive, West Union, SC 29696.

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

Marilyn Hope Sheridan

PLYMOUTH, Minn.—Marilyn Hope Sheridan, widow of the Rev. Rutledge Sheridan Jr., died May 10, 2023.

A private service was held May 25 at Heritage Memorial Gardens Mausoleum, Spartanburg.

Mrs. Sheridan is survived by her son and daughter.

Peggy Louise Tabb

HARRISBURG, Pa.—Peggy Louise Tabb, sister of the Rev. Willie Lawson, died April 23, 2023. Rev. Lawson is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of the UMC currently serving Lake Point UMC, Lake City.

Funeral services were held May 2 at Goodwin Memorial Baptist Church with burial in the Blue Ridge Memorial Gardens.

Mrs. Tabb is survived by her son and daughter.

May
Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

May 29—Memorial Day; United Methodist Center closed.

June

June 4-7—Annual Conference, Florence Center, Florence.

June 6—UMVIM Annual Conference Lunch

June 9-10—Stronger Churches Conference, Hood Theological Seminary, Salisbury, North Carolina, \$49. Register: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2023-stronger-churches-conference-tickets-560067245207>

June 10—Strengthening Men for the Ministry fellowship event, New Zion UMC, Smyrna, 9 a.m.

June 14—Flag Day

June 18—Father's Day

June 19—Juneteenth; United Methodist Center closed.

June 24—UWF Charter for Racial & Environmental Justice Event, virtual, 10 a.m. Register: <http://www.umcsc.org/women>



Festive and fun

Bethesda-Cades, Lake City, held its annual Gullie McKnight Black and White Celebration on Sunday, April 24. The Rev. Shawn V. Chestnut is pastor. Here, attendees gather for a smile.

July

July 1—UWF Limitless Event, virtual, 10 a.m.

July 4—Independence Day; United Methodist Center closed.

July 20-22—Mission u, Spartanburg Methodist College, Spartanburg.

August

Aug. 5—Lay Servant Ministries Academy, Washington Street UMC, Columbia, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Aug. 13—Aldersgate Special Needs Sunday

Aug. 20—Safe Sanctuary Training, Anderson District, First UMC, Easley, 2-5 p.m.

September

Sept. 15-Oct. 15: Hispanic Heritage Month
UWF Special Emphasis Month: Killingworth

Sept. 4—Labor Day; UMC Center closed.

Sept. 5—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 9—Connectional Ministries meeting

October

UWF Special Emphasis Month: Bethlehem Center, Spartanburg

Oct. 9—Indigenous Peoples' Day

Oct. 20-21—SCCUWF 51st Annual Meeting, St. John's UMC, Aiken

Oct. 31—Halloween

November 2023

Native American Heritage Month

Nov. 1—All Saints Day

Nov. 5—Daylight Savings Time ends

Nov. 7—Election Day

Nov. 11—Veterans Day

Men to gather in Rock Hill District for fellowship event this month

On June 10, the Rock Hill District men's fellowship, Strengthening Men for the Ministry, will hold a free "Restoration to Transformation" fellowship event with the Western York Charge.

The event will be held at New Zion United Methodist Church, 4050 Black Hwy., Smyrna.

The event is designed to empower ministry through men, and Pastor Trevor Miller will be the speaker. It will

feature music and prayer, a barbecue lunch, and a restored cars, trucks and tractors show.

Display setups will be held from 7-8:30 a.m.; the event starts at 9 a.m. and goes through 1 p.m.



Duffy named 'honoree' at Eagle graduation

Jimmy Duffy gathers with the Eagle Class of 2022. Duffy was recognized by the Indian Waters Boy Scout Council in Columbia as an honoree at their Graduation Ceremony in April. Duffy's church family at First UMC, Cheraw, offered big congratulations to him for this honor.

Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry to host free BBQ lunch Monday at AC

FLORENCE—Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry is hosting a free barbecue lunch during Annual Conference for all attendees on the grounds of one of their homes for special needs individuals: Rick's House.

The lunch will be Monday, June 5, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Attendees can tour the home, which houses four adults with special needs. Aldersgate will share their joy about the three new homes currently being planned that will soon house 12 more residents.

Attendees can see the new construction of Sunshine House and meet current residents and board members to learn why it is so important to create Christian homes for our special needs population.

Lunch will be catered by the award-winning Holt Brothers BBQ.

Rick's House is located on the property of The Manor at 3700 Hamer Circle, Florence, SC 29501.

To attend, RSVP to Kim Thomas at asnm-sc@att.net by June 1.



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The Rich Literature of the Bible

by the Rev. Mary L. Johnson

June 4

Stay in your lane

Lesson Scripture: Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 14; Matthew 5:17-20

Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 28:1-68; Matthew 5:17-26

Key Verse: “Don’t deviate even a bit from any of these words that I’m commanding you right now by following other gods and serving them” (Deuteronomy 28:14).

Purpose: To consider how covenantal law should function in Christian life in the 21st century.

Deuteronomy is a prime example of the Law genre. It helps us think about how covenantal law functions in the Christian life in the 21st century. Our obedience to these laws creates a framework for a society of justice and well-being for all. However, obedience is not a popular word in today’s culture.

I am reminded of the time when a young couple came to me for premarital counseling. The woman was concerned about the word “obey” being a part of the marriage ritual. I was able to put her concern to rest quickly by telling her that obey had been dropped from the official marriage ceremony years before. She was glad to hear that, and I agreed that the removal of the term in the context of marriage was a good thing, given the confusion of the interpretation of the term.

However, “obedience” is not an outdated notion when it comes to our relationship with God. I agree with preacher and author Eugene Peterson who notes that Deuteronomy is full of commands. “A command,” he said, “is a word that calls us to live beyond what we presently understand or feel or want. And within the bounds of God’s way, we are free to live without moral guilt and free to make all kinds of personal choices that enhance our happiness.”

Love is also a key word in the book of Deuteronomy. This love is both God’s character and his command. Deuteronomy presents God in a loyal, committed relationship of love with his people. Moses was presenting his people with a clear-cut choice with no third option. Consequently, the choice is indeed one between life and death, for the blessing is life and the curse is death.

And then there is Jesus, who in Matthew 5:17-20 commented about how his ministry and mission intersected with the divine instructions given in Deuteronomy. Therefore, believers should dare not think that Jesus came to do away with the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them.

Moses and Jesus were talking about the primary decision that defines all that we are: Will I be God’s person, or won’t I? That’s the choice.

June 11

Clearing the way

Lesson Scripture: Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 7:24-35

Background Scripture: Malachi 2:17—3:6; Luke 7:24-35

Key Verses: “Look, I am sending my messenger who will clear the path before me” (Malachi 3:1).

Purpose: To weigh whether promises of future deliverance and visions of a lasting peace are sufficient to help us with the struggles of life now.

Lesson 2, based on a reading from Malachi, takes us into the prophetic genre and helps us weigh whether promises of future deliverance and peace are sufficient to help us with the struggles of life in the here and now. Through the prophets, God offers words of warning against social injustice and trust in worldly powers and human-made gods. Through the prophets, we are offered comfort and encouragement to find strength in God when we suffer.

Although, it has been approximately 80 years since the end of the Babylonian exile this was a difficult period for the Jews. Some of the people wondered if God still loved them, and Malachi assured them that God did. Malachi’s message was not a “Don’t worry; be happy” one. He itemized some of the reasons for the plight of Judah and said a “refining fire” and harsh cleansing were ahead, but his long-range answer was one of hope. He also pointed out that their religious leaders had lost their way. And without good religious leadership, many of the laypeople were behaving in faithless ways as well, cheating one another and making “the covenant of their ancestors impure.”

And then in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus said John the Baptist was the one who fulfilled the Elijah mission prophesied by Malachi. And that, of course, meant that Jesus was the one whose way John came to prepare. His mission was to prepare people for the reign of God. It was Jesus whose arrival made the kingdom of God present.

We must ask ourselves these three questions: One, what messages of warning and hope is God sending the world today? Two, how is God “refining” us? Three, in what ways are promises about future deliverance and lasting peace sufficient to help us with the struggles of life right now?

And then we must acknowledge that the church, as Jesus intended it to be can and should live as if God’s Kingdom has come to earth as it is in heaven. Make it so, Lord.

June 18

Do You See What God Sees?

Lesson Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-10; Ephesians 2:4-7

Background Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Ephesians 2:1-10

Key Verses: “I will put my breath in you, and you will live. I will plant you on your fertile land, and you will know that I am the Lord. I’ve spoken, and I will do it. This is what the Lord says” (Ezekiel 37:14).

Purpose: To look at our lives from God’s perspective, insofar as possible.

During Ezekiel’s lifetime, Judah was in conflict first with Egypt and, later, with Babylon; and he was one of those included in the deportations. The meaning of the vision was a dramatic way of telling the prophet that God was going to restore the life of Israel, a people living without hope in Babylon. God would put them again in their own land.

When God asked Ezekiel “can these [dry] bones live?” Ezekiel responded “Lord God, only you know.” What makes this interesting though, is that we assign human limitations to our God who, in reality, is not limited by the things that restrict us.

When we say God is omniscient, we are being viewed by our creator, who loves us and who wants us to succeed in being God’s people.

Can these bones live? Of course not. But, as we look at them through God’s eyes, we see ligaments bind them together, flesh covers them, and skin seals them tightly. After the bones were reassembled and flesh was put on them, they did not come to life until God gave them breath. With the breath came knowledge: that God is the Lord. The result was a valley full of bodies, but no life in them. Through spiritual eyes we can see God’s spirit heal hopelessness and infuses them so that they rise up—a great army testifying to the power of God!

So what changes might you want to make because of trying to view your life from God’s perspective?

The overall message of Ephesians 2:1-10 is that the dead in sin are given new life through Christ, complements the reading from Ezekiel 37, which also has a dead versus new life theme. They are not identical, however.

Ezekiel’s vision was about the restoration of a particular people, Israel, at a particular point in history. Paul’s explanation is about the spiritual rebirth of individuals, a process not dependent on time, place or ethnicity.

June 25

Sing to God!

Lesson Scripture: Psalm 51; Colossians 3:16-17

Background Scripture: Psalm 51; Colossians 3:16-17

Key Verse: “Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts” (Colossians 3:16).

Purpose: To understand how lyrics and music can be part of our spiritual practice.

The Psalms provide us with the lan-

guage of faith to speak to God during joyful and challenging times. Theologian Walter Brueggemann provides an insightful perspective and a structured overview of the Psalms using the three categories: orientation, disorientation and new orientation. Psalm 51 is a psalm of disorientation (lament).

Psalm 51 is David’s heartfelt prayer of confession and repentance after he was confronted by the prophet Nathan regarding his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah. But his plea for forgiveness would be wasted if there were no gracious forgiver involved. Therefore, in this psalm, we learn about the character of that forgiver, God, where David appeals to God’s mercy, faithful love and compassion.

Psalm 51 recognizes that God desires us to be truthful with ourselves. It also plainly asks God for spiritual cleansing and renewal. It stands as a clear example of how we ought to pray when we have sinned. And if we are honest about our sins, we find that this prayer fits us in the ways that matter. It gives us a vocabulary of confession and a pattern for repentance. It acknowledges that all sin, including that against our neighbor, is ultimately against God.

In Colossians 3:1-17 Paul describes practices followers of Jesus should use to demonstrate their new life in Christ. These spiritual practices include singing “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.” Paul is saying that every action, including singing, should be an act of thanksgiving to God, done for the love of Christ. Singing can be as much a means of spiritual growth as prayer, Bible reading and acts of service.

What have you learned through hymns or other Christian music about God’s will for your life? Have you ever felt a sense of healing during a song or hymn?

Worshiping through song can get you through the roughest times in your life—it shifts your focus from the problem to the problem solver.

Johnson is a retired elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

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