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January 2024

‘What really matters’

Bishop encourages incarcerated men at Lee to hope in God, knowing it’s never too late to start anew



Photo by Edward McKnight

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston brings a word on hope to men incarcerated at Lee Correctional Institute in Bishopville.

By Jessica Brodie

BISHOPVILLE—Men incarcerated at Lee Correctional Institute got a special visit from United Methodist leadership last month as South Carolina’s resident bishop and their district superintendent brought a word of hope in God.

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston and Florence District Superintendent Terry Fleming headed to Lee Dec. 1 on the invitation of Chaplain Edward McKnight, bringing what McKnight

called “a powerful message” about seeking the Lord and focusing on what truly matters: peace and transformation in Christ.

“For the bishop of the South Carolina Conference to come to Lee was a memorial event. The men were ecstatic. There was such a joy and peace exemplified with the men and staff present. The men were asking, ‘When is the bishop coming back?’” McKnight said of Holston and Fleming, noting the

men welcomed them with “open arms” and hope they will come visit again soon. “The message on hope gave the men hope and will forever show them the love of Christ.”

Drawing from Romans 12:9-21, Holston preached on “What Really Matters,” explaining that no matter our past or our present, God sees us and called us to a positive, righteous life with him at our helm.

See “What Really Matters,” Page 14

Bishop’s District Days continue with stops in Florence, Greenville

By Jessica Brodie

South Carolina’s resident bishop continues making his way across the state this month as he travels to each district in the annual conference bringing wisdom on “Strengthen-

ing Your Soul to Lead.”

After the first district day in the Greenwood District Nov. 18, Bishop L. Jonathan Holston headed to the Florence District Dec. 2 and the Greenville District Dec. 9, lifting up

a message about what it takes to strengthen a church through its clergy and lay leaders.

Holston will head to the Charleston District Jan. 20, then to Rock Hill and Hartsville in February (Feb. 3 and 10, respectively).

His message is based on “Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry,” by Dr. Ruth Haley Barton.

See “District Days,” Page 12

‘When we know better, we do better’

Orangeburg Circuit Parish Nursing Healthcare Ministry helps community stay healthy

By Jessica Brodie

Three sister churches in the Orangeburg District are using their passion for health to help their community. And it’s making a difference, transforming lives one blood test and one testimony at a time.

Their efforts started in September 2021, when the Orangeburg Circuit—comprising Bethlehem,

Mount Nebo and St. John United Methodist churches—was struggling to keep meeting safely as a congregation amid the pandemic. Their pastor, the Rev. Lawrence Cantey Jr., had been successfully leading “parking lot services,” and he approached several nurses in the congregation about how they could continue meeting in a healthy way, eventually transitioning the church

back indoors. The nurses are a part of a nursing sorority, Zeta Eta Eta Phi, which is a chapter of the Chi Eta Phi Sorority Inc.

The nurses, along with health-care advocate the Rev. Annie Sistrunk, sprang into action, developing guidelines in tandem with the Centers for Disease Control and the state Department of

See “Nursing Ministry,” Page 15

S.C. General Conference delegation preparing for global gathering

By Dan O’Mara and Jessica Brodie

Members of the South Carolina Conference Delegation have been meeting regularly by Zoom to prepare for the upcoming denomination-wide General Conference, postponed since 2020 because of the pandemic.

General Conference is scheduled for April 23-May 3, 2024, at the Char-

lotte Convention Center in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Delegates have been praying together and discussing logistics for the rapidly approaching gathering of the General Conference, which originally

See “Delegation,” Page 14



Hours/Location

Open Monday through Friday
8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
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Columbia, SC 29203
Deadlines: 10th of each month.

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

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The *Advocate* is delivered to mailboxes via U.S. mail every month prior to the first Sunday of the month. Subscriptions are \$20/year for the print and online version, and \$10/year for the online-only edition. Church plans are available for as low as \$1/member (online version) or \$10/member (print version with 6+ subscribers per church). To start your subscription, visit www.advocatesc.org, call with credit card 803-726-6743 or 803-786-9486, ext. 335, or send a check to Advocate, 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203.

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Back Issues

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

Beyond Our Gates grants \$300K in honor of Linda Gadson

By Jessica Brodie

A community foundation in South Carolina's Lowcountry recently made grants to 16 organizations on the five Sea Islands of Charleston in honor of longtime United Methodist servant-leader Linda Gadson.

Beyond Our Gates Foundation of Kiawah and Seabrook Islands presented \$300,000 in grants to these organizations in Gadson's name.

Brian McDonagh, co-head of Global Investment Banking and co-head of Mergers and Acquisitions for Baird, presented the funds on behalf of Beyond Our Gates and also spoke to Gadson's home church, Wesley United Methodist Church in Hollywood, about why the foundation wanted to help.

McDonagh shared Dec. 3 at Wesley about the inspiration of Gadson, known by many as the Mother Teresa of the Sea Islands, particularly emphasizing how her lifetime of service impacted so many lives in the area.

Gadson was the director of Rural Mission Inc. for more than 45 years until the United Methodist ministry closed its doors. Chartered in 1969 as an interdenominational nonprofit to address spiritual, social, educational, medical and housing needs of rural residents of the Sea Islands, Rural Mission focused for many years on helping the families of migrant farmers, who played a huge part in the area's history and development.

More than a quarter of the island's population lives below the poverty level, and one in every five rural low-income homes is severely substandard.

Rural Mission closed its doors in 2019, and the property is now part of South Carolina United Methodist Camps and Retreat Ministries, today housing retreats and mission groups. But Gadson's work, and her legacy of love through Rural Mission and other ministry efforts, lives on.

McDonagh shared how when he came to know Gadson, he knew that her work saving lives must continue—and that he would be the conduit to achieve it.

In November, McDonagh visited Gadson's Prayer Room to inform her about the grant, as well as bring her flowers for all that she has done and meant not only to Charleston's five Sea Islands and Beyond Our Gates Foundation of Kiawah and Seabrook Islands, but to the world.

"We often talk about giving people who make a difference or an impact 'their flowers,'" Gadson's son, Shaytee Gadson, said in expressing his deep appreciation for the grants as well as the recognition of his mother. "Her indomitable faith instructed her to build and repair homes for housing-insecure Sea Island residents, to feed hungry families who didn't know where their next meal was coming from, to clothe and provide Headstart services for the children of Latino farmworker families, starting back in the 1970s when nearly no one else thought their cause worthy enough to fight for."

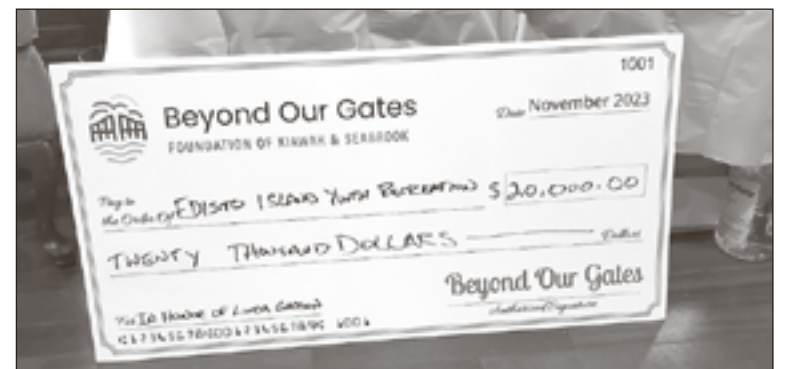
Shaytee Gadson said he is so proud to call her his mama but even prouder of her impact on humanity, and the lives she's touched and saved.



Linda Gadson and Brian McDonagh share a smile at Wesley UMC, Hollywood, where he spoke about the 16 grants in Gadson's honor.



McDonagh gives Gadson flowers.



A youth recreation organization is one of the groups that got a grant.

Salkehatchie regional gatherings slated for January, February

By Jessica Brodie

Servant-hearted teens and adults will have the chance to gather this winter for Salkehatchie regional gatherings.

The gatherings are designed to help people get excited about the summer's upcoming service camps to repair and rebuild homes for people in need across South Carolina.

The first Salkehatchie regional gathering was held Nov. 11 at Trinity United Methodist Church, Conway, and four more are scheduled this winter:

- Midlands: Saturday, Jan. 6, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Mount Hebron UMC, West Columbia
- Rock Hill area: Saturday, Feb. 3, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at St. John's UMC, Fort Mill
- Piedmont/Greenville area: Sunday, Feb. 4, from 1-6 p.m. (location to be announced)
- Greenwood area: Saturday, Feb. 10, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at St Mark's River Street Campus, Greenwood

All are welcome to attend, both those who have participated in a Salkehatchie camp in the past as well as those who never have but are interested in doing so. No registration is required, and attendees are encouraged to bring a friend.

Gatherings will explore Salkehatchie's future plans, time to share meaningful or fun Salkehatchie stories, breakout sessions with camp directors and assistant camp directors about sites and other planning needs for the upcoming year, praise and worship.



Photo by Matt Brodie

Volunteers, joined by a homeowner's son, share a happy moment during the Santee Camp in 2023.

Volunteer opportunities are also available at each gathering to help with setup or takedown, as well as help with worship and facilitating break-out sessions.

Founded in 1978 by the Rev. John Culp, Salkehatchie Summer Service brings youth, young adult and adult volunteers together for a weeklong home repair mission event. Over the years, hundreds of homes have received new roofs, ramps, flooring, ceilings, bathrooms, kitchens and improvements in accessibility thanks to Salkehatchie.

Summer 2023 saw 920 Salkehatchie volunteers participate in camps that ran from June

10 through July 29, ultimately repairing more than 80 homes for families in need.

For 2024, 37 Salkehatchie camps are planned.

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. Campers are accepted from all denominations and geographic locations.

For more information: salkehatchie@umcsc.org, 803-691-6606, or visit <https://salkehatchie.org>.

EXPLORE METHODIST-RELATED TITLES FROM THE ADVOCATE PRESS

advocatesc.org/books

Epworth awarded two grants to expand kinship care

South Carolina is a state where far too many children live in poverty; in potentially abusive situations; in homes where lack of food, safety and security is a constant factor; and where stability of family life is absent.

Under the auspices of the South Carolina Department of Social Services, these children are identified and removed from homes in which they are in potential danger. And while the most common outcome for these children is temporary placement in a foster home, there is a growing trend in South Carolina and in the nation to place as many of these children as possible in what has come to be called “kinship care.”

Kinship care is a foster family type situation in which the primary caregivers are close relatives of the children who have been removed from their homes. There is relative kinship, but also “fictive” kin. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and other close family members offer comprehensive care to children in their families, under the placement and auspices of the South Carolina Department of Social Services. Studies indicate that placing children in the care of relatives results in less trauma and more permanency by offering more familiarity and continuity.

Kinship care also helps children to maintain a sense of cultural bonds and belonging during a time when their lives are in a state of upheaval. A kinship care situation also

offers stronger sibling ties, better behavioral and mental health outcomes, maintenance of family identity and stronger bridges into adulthood (per the United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2022).

As part of its Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing, Epworth Children’s Home has been developing a comprehensive set of new programs and services focused on the evolving needs of children and families in our state for over a decade. Kinship care is an important aspect of this service for Epworth.

In recognition of its ability to develop programs and deliver services to kinship caregivers, the South Carolina Department of Social Services recently awarded Epworth two grants in the amount of \$120,000 each to develop an expanded comprehensive plan and delivery of kinship navigation services to both the Midlands and Pee Dee regions of South Carolina.

This expansion will include hiring two staff members per region whose primary duties will focus upon direct assistance to kinship caregivers, establishing networks of service providers and generally expanding the scope of assistance to family members who have become primary caregivers for children in their families.

Epworth’s partnerships with the United Methodist Conference, individual UMC

congregations in South Carolina and missional outposts in the state to mobilize 230,000 congregants for the provision of services to children and families is a huge part of Epworth’s efforts to bring programs and services to children and families in need all across South Carolina. Kinship care services have become an important part of Epworth’s outreach and assistance programs, and UMC churches all across the state have become integral partners in delivery of kinship care services and programs.

Through a network of UMC congregations all over the state, Epworth has created a platform through which kinship families can be assisted at the community level by United Methodist churches, in both small towns and in cities. Through referrals and community information, the churches reach out to kinship families in their specific community and offer a variety of direct services, from providing their own resource closets, to transportation to doctors’ appointments or meetings that kinship caregivers must attend, to helping families with meals, and in some cases, churches host their own Circle of Parents meetings for kinship families. The churches also act as liaisons with the Epworth campus so that they can help facilitate bringing kinship families from their communities to the Center for Counseling, the Early Education Intervention Center or

to other services Epworth provides on its campuses.

Epworth provides support groups, training sessions and ongoing programmatic education for its church partners, and also connects UMC churches across the state with tangible resources to help them support kinship families who need assistance. Called a “resource closet” and located on Epworth’s campus, there are multiple rooms for kinship caregivers to access tangible items such as clothing, diapers, car seats, furniture and other household goods. Epworth receives large donations throughout the year for the closet and maintains the organization of the closet through volunteer groups. Very often kinship caregivers assume responsibility for children in their family with very little notice, so the ability to acquire such essential equipment and supplies for the children who will be living in their homes is important.

With the award of the two new grants and the funding they will provide, utilizing its extensive experience and expertise working to help and support underserved children and families in South Carolina.

And with the assistance of UMC partners and other collaborators across the state, Epworth will expand its level of help, support and guidance to kinship caregivers for many years to come.

UMC releases 2022 State of the Church Report

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The United Methodist Church has released the 2022 State of the Church Report.

This offering centers on how the people of The United Methodist Church have dug deeper into Wesleyan roots to reclaim, revive and renew their identity as United Methodists. The report is themed around being bound together and is inspired by the excerpt, “A threefold cord is not quickly broken,” from Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NRSV).

“This State of the Church Report is about how, over the past year, The United Methodist Church continued to tap into our long commitment to missions and the collaborative partnerships we have nurtured over decades, to use our influence and connections to provide services that impact lives on just about every continent,” said Judi Kenaston, interim chief connectional ministries officer of the Connectional Table. “Despite pandemic-driven global economic impacts, we have

continued to support educational institutions, disaster relief and other ministries thanks to the dedication and generosity of United Methodists.”

With this in mind, the report responds to the invitation from Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, president of the Council of Bishops, that encourages all United Methodists to be architects of a new future for The United Methodist Church. It is a message extension of the #BeUMC campaign, which celebrates the shared values shared by the people of The United Methodist Church. Celebrating the life-changing, diverse and global nature of the UMC, the report includes related articles and UM News’ “2022 The Year in Photos” slideshow that collectively illustrate how United Methodists are:

- Reclaiming our identity as United Methodists which calls us to faithfully interpret our historic values and priorities

to guide us in the present and into our future;

- Reviving our passion for missions and ministries and paving the way for our United Methodist calling to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world; and
- Renewing our vision of a future UMC that is more just, inclusive, connectional and engaged.

The 2022 report is the result of collaborative partners including the Council of Bishops, the Connectional Table and United Methodist Communications, in coordination with the general agencies and other voices across the connection, to effectively shape messaging to help generate conversation about what it means to be United Methodist.

View this report, as well as past reports, online at <https://www.resourceumc.org/SOTC>.

Local church communicators sought for Advocate resourcing

Are you a communicator in a local United Methodist church? Whether you help as paid staff or a volunteer, the *Advocate* invites you to reach out.

The *Advocate* is gathering a list of names and email addresses of those who do communications in local churches so we can call on you when we are seeking stories or

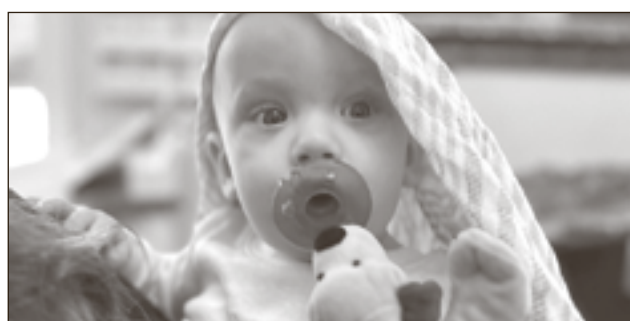
have news or resources we think will help you.

Please email or text *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie at jbrodie@umcsc.org or 803-807-0018.



As it was

Cayce UMC, Cayce, held a “no rehearsal pageant” during worship Dec. 10. Here, the children enjoyed portraying sheep, cattle and other nativity participants.



Photos by Anna Schaefer

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Viewpoints



Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

My hope for the new year

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?”—Isaiah 43:19a (NIV)

“And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.”—Mark 2:22 (NIV)

As I write this, a new year is on the horizon, and my soul stirs in response. Like many of us, I’m hoping and praying 2024 will be a new start, a new chapter in my life, as well as a time of renewal and reset for us in the church. I know God has extraordinary things planned for his church, things so incredibly beautiful and righteous and good we cannot even begin to imagine them. I look forward to discovering these plans and, I hope, playing a part in helping some of them come to fruition.

The last several years have been difficult. From strife in the church over sexuality and how the denomination is handling it to frustration over the long pause between sessions of General Conference, at first things felt like they were on hold. Yet for some, that pause enabled discontentment to fester and explode. Last year, 12 percent of the churches in the South Carolina Conference left The United Methodist Church. This year, a new set of churches is pondering what they wish to do regarding their denominational affiliation. While like last year, the conference is not releasing names or numbers, electing to let these churches discern their path with the grace of privacy, many of us have heard the rumors. We know some are in the discernment process. I am praying for these churches. It’s a difficult thing to experience that shaky ground of exploration. I hope they will choose to remain in the UMC, for I believe our church is better when we can all bring our differences to the table. Our differences truly do make each other better.

My hope for the new year is that we all keep our focus on the main purpose of our existence—our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—no matter what we face as a church.

In Jesus, walls fall. Mountains crumble and rise again, new and glorious. Miracles happen.

Will you join me in prayer that God helps us set arguments and worries and fears and discontentment aside so we can all work together for the glory of his kingdom?

This is my hope for the new year. Amen.

Letters Policy

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



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To inform and connect South Carolina United Methodists by independently reporting relevant news, engaging readers, providing a forum for dialogue and sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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The S.C. United Methodist Advocate (ISSN 1078-8166) continues the Southern Christian Advocate, authorized by the General Conference of 1836. Publication began Annual Conference—July 24, 1837.
The paper is published monthly by the S.C. United Methodist Advocate Trustees. We cannot be responsible for unsolicited manuscripts. Please direct all inquiries regarding commentary submissions to the editor, 4908 Colonial Drive, Suite 207, Columbia, SC 29203-6070. 803-786-9486. Periodicals postage paid at Columbia, S.C.
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Bishop's Corner

by Bishop Jonathan Holston

Fully known, deeply loved

“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’ At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.”—Mark 1:9-14 (NIV)

“I come with joy to meet my Lord, forgiven, loved and free, in awe and wonder to recall his life laid down for me; his life laid down for me.”—United Methodist Hymnal, No. 617

At times, we speed through life—keeping busy, losing track of time, barely ever getting a second to rest—and we miss out on critical opportunities to check in with ourselves. Sometimes we purposely lose our focus, and other times we just kind of fall into preset traps, disguised ever so cleverly as something harmless.

Losing focus looks like falling short of the glory, being far too consumed with something in life that absorbs your time to the point where you’re distracted from God, or experiencing some type of unforeseen rejection that’s blown you off course just a bit. It’s in these moments we least expect that the enemy takes up residence. If we’re not careful, we’ll start to solely identify ourselves by our situation, see ourselves as our sin, or define ourselves by the opinions and thoughts of the idol in our life.

It is important to remember who you are, and yet it is equally important to remember whose you are. It is in these overwhelming moments when we have filled our days with the stuff of life, overlooked our health, compromised our integrity, forgotten how to really love, laid aside our own faith and become “overdue for maintenance” that John the Baptizer calls us into the wilderness to hear a message.

Several years ago my car taught me a life lesson on remembering when the maintenance light began to flash. I kept telling myself that I had plenty of time to have my car serviced, yet I became increasingly overwhelmed and distracted with responsibilities. All the while the maintenance light in the dash continued to flash. I kept going, filling my hours with the stuff of everyday life, until one day the flashing in the dash stopped. It was at that moment that I discovered my car had come to a breaking point—the light in the dash now glared at me, “overdue for maintenance.”

It was at a busy intersection at the height of rush-hour that my car quit. It stopped running. I could not accelerate. Due to the street’s incline, I had enough momentum to slowly creep through the intersection with a tremendous chorus of honking cars—horns from irritated drivers serenading me. I can tell you that my levels of anxiety, embarrassment, frustration, and impatience were off the charts, all the while in my dash these words glared brightly, “overdue for maintenance.”

John the Baptizer is calling us into a wilderness experience, to step away from the temptations and distractions of the day and turn our focus to receive the grace, mercy and love of Christ.

Baptism is God’s gift to us. Our response to God’s prevenient grace and loving action toward us is a life of discipleship.

Some of us were baptized as a child and don’t remember, yet our parents and home congregation made those baptismal commitments on our behalf until we could be confirmed in the faith. Some of us were baptized as adults, and the congregation committed themselves to support us in our Christian growth.

As with Jesus’ baptism, the real importance of our baptism is what happens afterwards. The life we live as baptized, believers and followers of Jesus is what we choose to make of ourselves every single day afterwards. So, this month, we come to remember our baptisms and be thankful.

As people of faith, who, profess to follow Jesus Christ, we know that our hope is to hear how God is calling us, especially when our ears become deaf to life’s contradictions. We need an opportunity to step away, and to refocus our hearts, minds and souls. It’s an indication that our lives are “overdue for maintenance.”

When you know your heart is unguarded, it seems everyone and everything is doing better than you. Before you know it, you start comparing yourself to someone who’s recently engaged, someone who’s married and expecting their first child, someone who just got a new car, someone who just got a huge raise or someone who just graduated with a second or third degree. Perception is skewed, and we’re tempted to lose sight of everything that’s going well in our own lives.

Your relationship with Christ is what’s threatening to that which personifies evil in the world. Remembering who you are and whose you are is having inner security.

Touré Roberts, in his book “Wholeness,” defines “inner security” as a state of unshakable confidence that comes from the foundational knowledge that we are truly loved by God.

It’s composed of an absolutely unconditional, irreversible love that affirms us, celebrates us, and accepts us.

Honing inner security is wholeness in Christ. When we know who we are and whose we are, nobody and nothing can ever redefine that for us. It’s our job to hold fast to that hard truth when everything else is slipping away.

As we cross the threshold between the numinous and the mundane, between the holidays and the everyday, between the world we hope for and the world we live in—let us touch our foreheads and remember that we have been baptized in Christ.

And as we move toward Baptism of the Lord Sunday, let us remember that Jesus was baptized too. He was baptized with us. He was baptized for us. And may the comfort that it gave through all of his trials give us even greater comfort, for we are those baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray: Gracious Lord, We thank you that at the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan, you revealed him as your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Grant that all of us who are baptized into his name may keep the covenant we have made and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior, who with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God in glory, everlasting. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.



Life Together in the UMCSC

by the Rev. Smoke Kanipe

'Living out the spirit of generous orthodoxy'

Editor's note: Through "Life Together in the UMCSC," South Carolina United Methodists share what The United Methodist Church has meant in their lives.

I have been a Methodist all my life. The church that I grew up in had a stained-glass window in the sanctuary with the names of my grandparents on it. My mother was born into that church. She was baptized in that church, confirmed in that church, married in that church and laid to rest in that church.

In that church, we were all like family. A lot of us were related, but even if we weren't related, it felt like family. We loved each other even when we disagreed, as we sometimes did. We loved each other as a church family.

As I grew up, I was able to participate in some of the ministries of the South Carolina Conference. For example, I went to Asbury Hills a long time before it was actually called Asbury Hills. It was just the South Carolina United Methodist Camp. This was in 1969, 1970 and 1971.

Some years after that, I was able to be a counselor at Asbury Hills for two summers, and still today I have a number of friends from my Asbury Hills days—most of them from the days when I was a counselor, but even one or two all the way back to when I was a camper.

As time went by, I was privileged to serve in some of the youth ministry programs that June Willson coordinated for the South Carolina Conference. It was a joy to see youth from all over our state coming together, young people who were very different in many ways racially, socioeconomically,

demographically. They all came together and learned to be brothers and sisters in Christ.

As I think over the DNA that The United Methodist Church has put into me, I think of the words "generous orthodoxy." As I have known Methodists over the years, we have worshiped Jesus and loved our neighbors together.

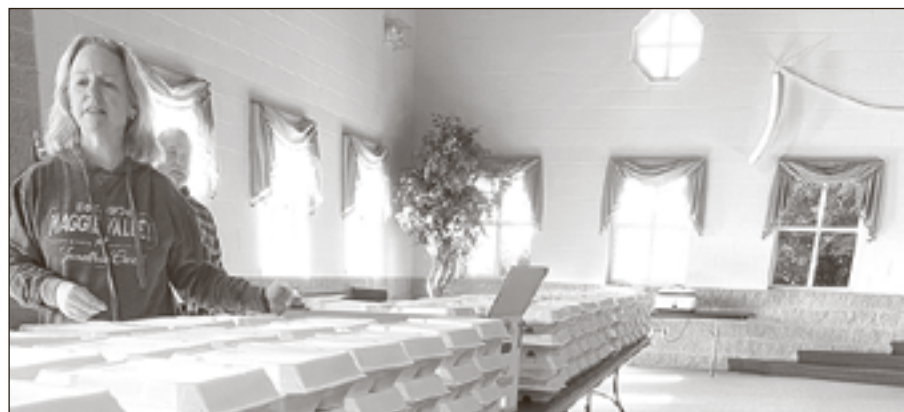
It has been a joy to be a United Methodist pastor for 40 years in our conference, and to try to live out that spirit of generous orthodoxy with all kinds and sorts of people. It has been a joy to see how the ministries of the South Carolina Conference make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

I'm praying for The United Methodist Church in these very difficult days. I'm praying for the South Carolina Conference. I'm praying that we will find ways to live life together—even when it's hard. And sometimes it is.

I am praying those things because I believe that we have a great legacy that has been passed on to us by those who have gone before us.

I'm praying that because I believe we can carry that legacy forward better together than separately. And I'm praying those things because I believe that God has a very good future for the people called United Methodist. I hope you will join me in praying prayers like that.

Kanipe is the senior pastor of Shandon United Methodist Church in Columbia. Watch his "Life Together" video and others by South Carolina United Methodists at <http://umcsc.org/together>



Thanksgiving at Broad Street

For the last 18 years, Broad Street UMC, Clinton, has been offering a community dinner to honor Thanksgiving. This year's annual dinner fed 535 people in the community. Members said God has provided so much for them that they wanted to give back to the community, and what better time than Thanksgiving? With a spike in COVID-19 and flu cases in the community, Broad Street decided it would be best to deliver the meals. They hope next year they can feed more people and bring the community around the table in person once again.



Discernment?

Is your church going through the discernment process? The *Advocate* would love to know. Share at jbrodie@umcsc.org or *Advocate*, 4908 Colonial Dr., Columbia, SC 29203.

Letters to the Editor

Beautiful or ugly

We have been told "never discuss politics or religion with some individuals." In Scripture (Matthew 22:34-46) Jesus is having discussions and questions with the Pharisees and Sadducces. The Sadducces were political and social conservatives and biblical literalists. The Sadducces were probably more dangerous foes of Jesus than the Pharisees. Both groups challenged Jesus and finally crucified him.

The early church continued these questions, and we continue today to have religious differences.

What do you think of Christ? What kind of a Messiah do you want?

There will be a split of The United Methodist Church because of these theological differences in interpretations. It is "ugly" in many church conversations today.

The bottom line is to love God and love neighbor. We believe in the Christ or the ugly argument. Accept the beautiful Christ that loves all.

*Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia*

Coincidence no, irony yes

Coincidence. Webster defines it as "an occurrence together apparently without reason." Irony. Websters defines it as "incongruity between the actual result of a sequence of events and the expected result."

I could not help but notice that a November letter to the editor from the Rev. Arthur Holt preceded and was adjacent to, a letter I penned. You might say Arthur and I have a history. After eight years as our minister here at Memorial, Arthur retired. He would never admit it, but his relationship with me most probably hastened his decision.

I suspect that it was during his time here at Memorial that Arthur's epiphany—his "Aldersgate moment," his "road to Damascus" experience—was nurtured and expanded. Arthur's book, "What I Have Come to Believe," tells of a journey that took him from a young minister with a conservative bent to an older, wiser, more inclusive one. His November letter is proof that he is much wiser today than when he left Memorial. We need more voices of reason during this season of turmoil.

Believe me when I say that for both Arthur and I to have written letters to the editor during the same month on the same topic and for them to end up next to each other was no coincidence. As usual, it was part of God's plan. The irony is not lost on me.

*Ralph Johnson, member
Memorial UMC, Greer*

A poem: There May Have Been a Smile There

There may have been a smile there,
Upon that cursed cross,
When my sins my Lord did bear.
When that bridge His blood repaired
That His sheep might cross,
There may have been a smile there.
Though He pray He might be spared,
He nathless paid the cost,
When my sins my Lord did bear.
In that hour of despair
He held Heaven in His thoughts;
There may have been a smile there.
Through suffering He did declare
His young, eternal love
When my sins my Lord did bear.
In vict'ry did that curtain tear
And death her sting she lost;
There may have been a smile there,
When my sins my Lord did bear.

(Excerpted with permission from the author's second published book, "Notes from the Hem," a collection of Christian poetry and prose.)

*Autumn Leigh Waite
Bluffton UMC, Bluffton*

My family

"I will stay with my family ... whatever."—Ruth 1:16-17 (rough paraphrase)

I was "born and raised" at Main Street Methodist Church in Greenwood, South Carolina. I was 12 years old when the church became United Methodist. I love the word "united," and I think God smiles when he hears that particular word. To think that the word, "united," could be removed from my church sign causes me great sorrow.

I am trying my best to encourage my church family to stay with The United Methodist Church, but that may not happen. As much as I hope and pray that Main Street United Methodist Church will not change our sign, I will stay with my family ... whatever.

I pray all of us will make that same commitment.

*Glenn Williams, lay leader
Main Street UMC, Greenwood*

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and ideas to:

advocate@umcsc.org



Guest Commentary

by David Bryant

What is heaven, really?

My wife and I have participated in several music ministries before and since the COVID-19 pandemic began. During that time, we have sung a great deal about heaven and the dreams of hope for a better day, a better place.

But what is heaven, really?

For a slave in the 1700s, heaven was freedom. It didn't have to be easy, indulgent or relaxing. Just to be free was enough. Mum Bett, an enslaved woman who dared to sue the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for her freedom—and won—declared, “If one minute's freedom had been offered to me, and I had been told I must die at the end of that minute, I would have taken it.”

However, when we ask folks in churches or community groups their idea of heaven, the answers generally land in one of two main themes. The first is isolation, far from the “maddening crowds,” removed from stress, contention and conflict by separation from others. These folk lean toward dreams of islands, wilderness or other remote areas. The other group look for more of what is already possessed. These folk tend toward the idea of mansions rather than simple, comfortable shelter without the bother of maintenance, upkeep, repair—warmth in cold weather, cool in heat, ready water, no leaks, vermin, intruders. They lean into paved streets of gold, not simple tracks free of mud, potholes or dangerous curves.

And, of course, those pearly gates. Can you imagine the exquisite beauty of a gate made entirely of pearls? Can you imagine anything in heaven more useless? The conspicuous extravagance of such a highly decorated yet totally useless object! Why would one need a gate in heaven? Who would need to be kept out by a physical barrier? Why would residents need to be fenced in? It's heaven, for heaven's sake!

I find it interesting—and more than a little telling—that for so many folks, heaven resembles either separation from those we would be obligated to love in order to be there in the first place, or seclusion from the same people in “gated” communities. It's telling in that to be in the presence of God, and to be perfect as Jesus in the perfect presence of God, is precisely what we often refuse to be on earth. This is an act of will—not of omission but commission.

And it's precisely what we deny of ourselves when we deny it to others.

Yet God's very nature is love. God doesn't merely love us—God is love! If we are to obey Jesus, then we must love others as he loves us. Unless, of course, we unconsciously hedge on the idea that he is divine ... that he is somehow “less than God,” somewhat subservient, somewhat inferior.

One of the distinctions of Messianic Judaism is the belief that Jesus was the Messiah but not necessarily God. Isn't that what we are professing, quite unconsciously, when we focus exclusively on Jesus's statement that he did not come to replace the law but then refuse to grapple with the enormity of his declaration as the fulfillment of the law? Isn't that the core of our refusal to place the New Commandment above the second of the Greatest Commandment(s)?

When we profess our belief in him but cling to the law (or worse, selective laws) in refusal to wholly obey him, aren't we dismissing and denying Jesus's very first condition of salvation, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36 ESV)?

If we genuinely see heaven as a place free from the existence of earthly desires—pride, envy, wrath, gluttony, lust, sloth, greed; a place filled with the pervasive and eternal presence of patience, kindness, humility, honor, selflessness, truth, security, trust and perseverance without anger, resentments or evil—why would we steadfastly refuse to follow him here, now?

Think of it simply: Do you even want to live in a place free of intrigue, politics, judgment or gossip? Does your life reflect that?

I know I can never reach perfection in love on this side of the veil, and the only way I can even progress toward that perfection is through the intervention of the Holy Spirit and the intentional exercise of the grace of Jesus.

Yet I also know I have to open my heart. I have to take that step past the threshold of fear, self-interest, prejudice and conformity into the unknown ethos of pure faith.

If not, then my faith is genuinely of no use either to me or to God. If I won't risk it for Jesus, then for whom will I?

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



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Tony Rowell

The blessed table

Those of you who have read my writing before know that when I was a kid, back in the early 1960s, I spent most of my summers down on the Panhandle of Florida with my Granny and Grandpa Tharpe.

For a little boy who loved the outdoors and fishing in particular, I could not have asked for a better place to be or two more loving folks with whom to share that wonderful time of my life. As I have said on several occasions over the years, if you want to blame someone for the bulk of who I have become, you need to look no farther than the corner of Drake Avenue and West Seventeenth Street in Panama City, Florida, to find the culprits.

Granny and Grandpa were great. They taught me how to catch 'em, to clean 'em and to eat 'em. They kindled within me a love for the woods, the swamp in particular, and an inner itch to explore the wilds. They also taught me to watch my language, to love my family and to respect my elders and others with no regard for anything other than the person before me.

We used to spend every Wednesday up in Wewahitchka, Florida—Wewa for short. Wewa sits to the left of Apalachicola and to the right of Panama City, about half way between Port Saint Joe and Bristol, and it has two claims to fame: Genuine Tupelo Honey (everything else is just a pretender) and the Dead Lakes dam. It was a little spillway of a dam that spanned the Chipola River up until 1987, when some paper-pushing bureaucrat over in Tallahassee decided the world would end if it wasn't removed. Please forgive that outburst—I just loved that old dam and hate to see it gone.

From the dam and the banks surrounding it, you could catch everything from shell-cracker to largemouth bass, from bream to channel cats and from warmouth to mullet. It was a great place to fish.

Now, my granny was one of those chosen folks who have the ability to always catch fish. She could catch fish in a dry river bed in the midsummer heat. Today she would be called a fish whisperer. The fish just seemed to love her more than most, and they weren't alone. Her fellow fishermen loved my granny as well, mainly because she loved just about everybody she met and always said “hi,” no matter who you were. On top of that, she would tell you exactly what she thought, no matter who you were. So people never doubted that she loved them, and they always knew exactly where they stood with her, and you have to love a person like that.

Like I said, Granny was a great fisherman because she could always find them, and in turn, we always had fish to bring home.

I will never forget, when I was maybe 6 or 7 years of age, what happened one day after we had caught ourselves a cooler full of fish and were heading back home. Somewhere along the way Granny said something to Grandpa, after which he altered his course just a bit, and we soon found ourselves in the poorest section of Panama City.

As it turned out, Grandpa had a friend who lived down in that section of town.

The man, whose name escapes me, was a mechanic for the Borden Milk Company,

and my grandpa was a driver. Somehow they had hit it off and become friends over the years.

We were going by to drop off some of the fish for this fella's family, and Lord knows he had a lot of mouths to feed. Later, I came to learn that this was a habit of Granny and Grandpa, not just with this family, but with anyone in need.

On this particular occasion, though, we arrived somewhere around six in the evening. Well, supper was already on the stove, so we were invited to dinner, and what a dinner it was. As old Andy would say, “It was lip-smacking good.”

Now I was just a kid, so I didn't understand that the civil rights movement was in full swing in the early sixties. I didn't know of the separate bathrooms or the all-White counters or stuff like that. I didn't know of riots or water cannons or police dogs. I just knew that these folks looked a little different than us and we from them.

I soon learned, however, that our differences aside, man, that woman could cook, and that man could laugh as if his life depended on it, and Granny and Grandpa loved them. So I did the same.

As we sat around the dinner table, I can still hear the laughter and the gentle tinkling of the silverware against the plates. I still hear the shared “Amen” after the blessing. I can still see the picture of Jesus hanging over the mantle—the same one, by the way, that my granny had in her house and the one that now hangs in my office.

I didn't know it at the time, but Granny and Grandpa were radicals. But radicals or not, lessons were being taught and understanding was being born right there at the dinner table.

They were lessons of respect—respect for differences; respect for others.

They were lessons of charity—of giving, not out of abundance, but out of love.

They were lessons of love—love among friends and love within the family that is the body of Christ.

They were also lessons of understanding—that no matter what station we hold in life, we all struggle. We all hurt, and we all need forgiveness and love. We all need Christ, and we all need each other.

I owe quite a debt to Granny and Grandpa and to that unknown mechanic and his family for those lessons. They have held me in good stead over the years.

With that being said, I wish with all my heart that I could invite today's world to return with me to that same blessed dinner table on that long ago Wednesday afternoon.

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these’” (Mark 12:29-31 NIV).

Rowell pastors Beulah United Methodist Church, Gilbert. He is also the author of “What Would Granny Say,” an essay collection from the Advocate Press available at <https://www.advocatesc.org/books>.



Christmas care packages

Manning UMC, Manning, packed 154 boxes for Operation Christmas Child during their packing party recently.

Leave A Legacy To Change Lives

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Guest Commentary

by the Rev. James Ellis Griffith

UMC disaffiliation: Cause or excuse?

In recent months, hundreds of congregations have disaffiliated from The United Methodist Church, and many others are considering disaffiliation in the coming months. Why do they wish to disaffiliate? They give several reasons, but much of what they identify as the cause is the direction in which the UMC has been moving regarding offering graceful acceptance of persons who are LGBTQIA+. That is the latest topic, but earlier topics have led to the present.

The UMC *Discipline* statements regarding “homosexuality” have not changed in decades, but general conferences have been edging toward change regarding “homosexuality” since 1972. And the disaffiliators often point to some recent violations of the rules, in which the violations have not resulted in punishment.

However, the possibility of a General Conference approving 1) same gender marriages in the church; or 2) same gender marriages officiated by UMC clergy anywhere; or 3) ordination of non-celibate homosexuals; or 4) lack of punishment of violators of the current rule is sufficient cause for the disaffiliating congregations to disaffiliate.

(Nota Bene: Ordination of celibate homosexuals has long been approved by the UMC, but I am not aware that that has actually happened anywhere.)

Meanwhile, it seems to me that focusing on the LGBTQIA+ population is the excuse given by the disaffiliating congregations, but not the real cause for leaving the UMC. The real reason/cause, it seems to me, is that the disaffiliates have emerged from a 50-plus-year effort to make the UMC more conservative or, failing that, to withdraw from the UMC.

I graduated from Duke Divinity School in 1967 and had learned there that the Methodist Church (not UMC until 1968) had been among the more “progressive” Protestant denominations for some time. It was clear in 1967 that Methodism was seeking to address racism both inside and outside the church by embracing much of the civil rights movement that was under way at the time.

Almost immediately after graduating from Duke and being appointed in South Carolina as a pastor, I learned of the founding in 1967 of the Good News movement, which described itself as seeking to make Methodism a more conservative denomination, both theologically and culturally. Good News was seeking to have a conservative impact at the 1968 General Conference.

Then the 1968 General Conference approved the merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church denomination creating the UMC. Among the changes was a plan to eliminate the Central Jurisdiction (for all Black Methodists anywhere in the United States) and blend the Black congregations of the UMC into the jurisdictions and annual conferences in which they were located. That was put into place in South Carolina in 1972 and ended the structural segregation that had been a part of American Methodism since the 1939 merger. The Good News movement was not happy. The influence of Good News then waxed and waned over the next decades.

While addressing racism was a controversial issue in the 1960s and in the 1970s, it was notable that *Roe v. Wade* (1973) brought limited conservative criticism to the UMC’s “moderate” stance on abortion. There were at the time no conservative attacks on the statement on abortion in the UMC *Discipline*. The “unofficial” merger of right-wing politics with evangelical conservatism in recent decades has been vocally anti-abortion, but the disaffiliates seem not to mention the issue of abortion.

Good News also questioned various other “women’s rights” issues and sought to sell a more conservative agenda in that regard. Despite those conservative efforts, seminary training for women followed by ordination and pastoral appointments for those women in the UMC has increased considerably decade after decade for 50 years, with nearly half of seminary graduates and nearly half of newly ordained ministers being women in recent years.

Beginning with the General Conference of 1972, efforts were made by progressives to change the restrictions on homosexuals in the UMC *Discipline*.

(As of 2023 the rules have still not been changed.)

As LGBTQIA+ issues were becoming more public, the Confessing Movement was organized in 1994. It was largely a movement of UMC laypersons, but a few clergy were a part of it. The Confessing Movement sought to develop a theology of embracing “orthodox doctrines” and using them as a standard for church membership. The goal of orthodoxy was to make Methodism a more conservative denomination by emphasizing previous “standards” of belief. The Confessing Movement had some marginal success.

With further desire to embrace standards from earlier times, the Wesleyan Covenant Association was founded in 2016. By that time the LGBTQIA+ community was growing, “coming out” publicly and seeking to be accepted. The WCA was initiated and supported by a number of prominent conservative clergy, including a few bishops. WCA had the skills, contacts and energy to become well organized and to recruit UMC clergy like themselves. Rather quickly, the WCA connected with and emerged in a leadership role for Good News and the Confessing Movement.

The WCA used the term “orthodox” for a while and then switched to “traditionalist.” That was appropriate. They apparently did not want to embrace Nicene orthodoxy but wanted to go back far enough in tradition to be able to reject various new developments in theology.

Good News, the Confessing Movement and WCA, along with some conservative political “think tank” allies that had assisted conservative Lutherans, Episcopalians and Presbyterians a few years earlier, managed to use aspects of the special General Conference of 2019 and the COVID-19 related delays in future general conferences to initiate a new conservative denomination, the Global Methodist Church, in 2022. A number of disaffiliating congregations, but not all, have joined the GMC. The Confessing Movement then decided to cease as an organization, since the establishment of the GMC had accomplished its goals.

In their writings, the disaffiliating leaders still embrace the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience as guidelines for doing theology, and they insist on the “primacy of Scripture” in the Quadrilateral, which is accepted throughout the UMC. However, in the matter of LGBTQIA+ issues, they operate as “selective literalists.” As selective literalists, they select parts of the Bible that refer to homosexuality (three in the Old Testament and three in the New Testament—in the New Testament Jesus is silent on the issue) and insist those six verses are “to be taken literally.”

Meanwhile, they do not mention the places where Jesus refers to divorce in the New Testament as “to be taken literally.”

All of that leaves the impression that the disaffiliates are leaving the UMC because of the public emergence of new understandings about the gender identity spectrum. They dismiss the recent medical findings that gender identity and sexual preferences are not chosen by LGBTQIA+ persons but are built into their humanness from the beginning of their lives.

Using LGBTQIA+ persons as the excuse for disaffiliation is really unfair to the LGBTQIA+ people and their “straight” friends. The gender identity spectrum acceptance by the progressive UMC people is being used by the disaffiliates as the excuse given for achieving their long-held conservative beliefs.

As stated earlier, the disaffiliates have emerged from a 50-plus years effort to make the UMC more conservative or, failing that, to withdraw from the UMC, which some have now done and more may yet do.

Sadly, the disaffiliation brings more animosity toward the LGBTQIA+ community, which has been the recipient of unfair animosity from the culture and the church, including the UMC, for far too long already. After all, LGBTQIA+ people and their friends are all also “created in the image of God.”

Griffith is a retired elder in the South Carolina Conference of The UMC.



Photos courtesy of the Rev. George Palmer Hudson

Cooks abound

Goose Creek UMC, Goose Creek, has been engaged in community ministry for many years, including weekly meals offered at the Lord’s Ladle Café and Martha’s Breakfast, opening their doors as a warming center in freezing temperatures and working in partnership with other churches and organizations to touch many other needs in the community. While these efforts continue on a weekly basis throughout the year, the church recently hosted large-scale community holiday meals with a focus of reaching elders, the homeless and those affected by food insecurity. Going against the old adage “too many cooks spoil the stew,” there are many talented volunteers who bring experience and quality to food preparation. People in the church and community continue to support this mission financially and through faithful attendance. In fact, many suggest that they look forward to the social time of being together with old friends and new acquaintances. The members and volunteers are excited to be making a small impact on their community. Goose Creek UMC has a mixed congregation and welcomes all who come.



Guest Commentary

by Dr. Anthony Hodge

It only gets better when you get better

I have never considered myself a superstitious person, but I had to scratch my head when I opened the fortune cookie I received after finishing my meal. This fortune cookie came to me following a celebration for the release of “Can You Get Better? Sure You Can! 14 Approaches Guaranteed to Help You Become a Better You,” which is my latest book.

Not only am I not superstitious, but I also don’t believe in coincidence or happenstance. So you can only imagine the look on my face as I cracked open the fortune cookie and began to read it. Consider these words as if you were the one who opened the fortune cookie and saw these words on that small sheet of paper. The words are: IT only gets better when YOU get better.

In noticing the eight words that make up the phrase attached to the fortune cookie, two of the eight words mentioned are capitalized: IT and YOU.

What is the past or current IT that YOU are dealing with? How is IT affecting YOU emotionally, physically or spiritually? If each of us were to intentionally address the IT (or ITs) in our life, it will invariably help to affect positive change or changes in all aspects of our lives.

Quite honestly, no significant change or changes can be made to the places we find ourselves connected to as clergy or laity if the YOU (or I) part of things is not emphasized. If we want to see transformational changes occurring in our local churches and in the communities surrounding those local churches, we have to be mindful that IT only gets better when YOU (and I) get better.

I pray that each of us would take those eight words to heart as we come to the end of this year and prepare for a new year as sojourners in the faith. Let’s affirm individually and collectively that the IT (or ITs) in our lives will get better because we will, with God’s help. Intentionality and whatever else is useful and needed will help us to experience growth and health in every aspect of our lives.

Hodge is the superintendent for the Rock Hill District of The United Methodist Church. His newest book, “Can You Get Better? Sure You Can!” is available on Amazon.



View from the Pews

by Bill Barnier

Autumn leaves

When working beside trusted and experienced people, we sometimes learn of new ways to see old problems. One of my happiest times is working next to my dear friend and incredible healer who brings years of training and insight to our healing clients. Most often, people come seeking a closure or a method to free themselves of the pain of loss or the trauma of events past. They're simply tired of carrying the burdens with no solution in sight.

One such method of prayer or meditation is to help the client see themselves in a beautiful fall woodland, as a tree next to a gently flowing stream. They are asked to take in the beauty of their peaceful surroundings, to feel whole and full of love and light.

As the tree, the client is asked to feel the weight of all the leaves on their branches, then to compare that weight to the causes of their life distress. As the fall breezes blow those old leaves from their branches, the weight is lifted. Some of those old heavy leaves of problems and worries fall to the earth to change to beautiful soil. Others fall into the stream to be carried away forever. The client is then asked how many of those leaves could they pick up and put back on their branches. Of course, the answer is none. They realize that shedding those old leaves, those past painful memories, allows them to rest and renew for the wonderful spring yet to come.

The power to cleanse is within.

As creatures of the universe, we are expected to experience the weight of life events in order to learn from them. Though we come from a perfect Creator, we are given this life to learn what an imperfect world feels like and what love of each other and our Creator can do to make this life journey beautiful. We have the choice to carry all the old events and traumas and miss the renewal, or just let them fall away and embrace each new minute, hour, day as if it were the first. The Spirit is within.

In Mathew 11:28-30, he tells of Jesus's invitation to all to lay down their burdens and accept his rest. Our world is filling rapidly with people, places and events that heap stress and life-changing events upon God's people. Yet, at the time of our creation, we were given that spark of all knowledge and understanding that we would need. We've simply forgotten the lessons of the past and the power that love unburdened has to heal and cure anything.

We've all heard the expression, "I'm my own worst enemy." We all seem to like to carry burdens and use them as excuses to harvest energy from others so we can horde our own. The capacity to look within for strength and courage to accept the bumps in our life path allows us all to free our souls.

The biggest causes of non-injury death is led by stress, followed by worry, then covered by despair. We were meant to be happy, to learn to love. All media is filled with fear and foreboding that the signs are pointing to a huge change of our planet and all that lives upon it. The best preparation we can make is to trust in our creator and allow the Spirit to see the love in our hearts.

Don't do that which causes worry; don't be burdened by that which you cannot change. Learn to raise your positive energy within so there is no room for anything else.

We are all connected!

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



Guest Commentary

by Hugh McCown

We should not condone

We cannot afford to condone, publicly or privately.

The first "Golden Rule" provides an answer to a very embarrassing dilemma that many Americans find themselves in when they are invited to their niece's lesbian wedding. What is this first Golden Rule? We cannot afford to condone, publicly or privately, what God has condemned.

I learned about the second Golden Rule—do unto others as you would have others do unto you—when I was in grammar school; it was printed on a wooden ruler. The Bible contains more than 50 Scriptures plus one of the Ten Commandments informing us that God condemns sexual immorality. Actually, the first Golden Rule is a basic definition of sin. We should not accept what God does not accept. Do you remember in Christianity 101 where we learned about the three ways to sin? These are word, thought or deed.

Sexual immorality has been around since the beginning of time. What has changed is that in the 21st century, there are some who call themselves Christians but want to change these scriptural laws and legal laws both in civil court and in church law. This view has resulted in the Methodist Church splitting on a national level.

And the way this splitting is taking place is contrary to Scripture. There is more than one Scripture location describing the immoral brother. In 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 it says, "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you."

If we accept the first Golden Rule then we must ask: Is this rule being applied to the huge, church doctrinal issue? This issue is, "Has God changed his mind about two people living in a homosexual lifestyle?"

Some church members apparently believe this to be true and are OK with changing the *Book of Discipline*. This is a cowardly way of wanting to change Scripture without saying so. Some of the members—the majority I hope—are guardians of the church's doctrinal standards and will not allow the *BOD* to be changed. This difference of belief has caused a huge split in the church.

The General Conference in 2019, recognizing this fissure in church belief, approved a provision that allowed congregations to leave the denomination with their property and assets. You would think a registered letter notifying the South Carolina Conference of a church's departure from the conference would be sufficient, but it's not. Apparently, the General Conference does not want any churches leaving and are using the Trust Clause as a weapon to deny departure.

Skipping over the legal aspects of the Trust Clause, when did it come into use (1797) and what was its purpose? Historically, the Trust Clause was never intended to be a yoke holding a congregation within the denomination. The historical record confirms that the trust clause was intended to legitimize, enforce and protect doctrinal standards. In his paper concerning the trust clause, which is the only paper on this subject that thoughtfully covers the Methodist trust clause, Dr. Thomas Oden summarizes true understanding of the Trust Clause as follows:

"The Restrictive Rules have become the central fortress of the United Methodist

constitutional system. Their doctrinal standards are embedded in every trust clause in every local church and in the *Discipline*. The trust clause embedded in the property deed transmission is a legal guarantee in a court of law. The trust clause is not written to protect the conference, but the doctrinal standards, and to protect the conference only insofar as the conference protects the doctrinal standards. The trust clause guarantees the right to use property only to those who are guardians of its doctrinal standards."

I would like to share two examples of what I know has happened or is happening. In the first example, a small church (less than 100 in attendance) held a meeting several weeks ago, and if you summarized the meeting, it appeared they would not be allowed to leave the General Conference because the penalty for leaving was in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. This was a staggering amount of money and appeared to leave the church with two options: remain in the conference or have a padlock placed on the sanctuary's front door. At this time we must ask, "What does God think of this outcome?"

The second example is a larger church, probably three times as large as example one. However the second church is now half as large as it was several months ago because the church voted on separation and the vote was close to 50-50. The ones who refused to revise God's Scripture were the ones that were expelled, and they have had to form a new church. At this time we must ask: What does God think of this outcome?

Another issue the church has been struggling with mightily, in addition to the sexual immorality issue, is abortion. God's answer to abortion can be found in his sixth commandment: Do Not Murder. Another godly response can be found in 1st Corinthians 6:19, when God says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?"

Our bodily temple's construction begins at conception, and growth continues until we are 18, at which time our exterior body is considered mature (physically not spiritually). When we are born again (spiritually), the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within our temple. If you were fortunate enough to attend Stewardship 301, you will remember we were taught that God owns the whole universe and everything in it including our bodies and that we are not owners but only stewards of God's creation.

God does not allow a mother to destroy her little baby's temple.

The purpose of this column is to share with others what I have experienced since my wife brought me into the Methodist Church in the late 1960s and to put on paper how I believe God feels about both of these issues that the church has not been able to agree on: abortion and homosexuality.

In the 1970s, the spotlight appeared to be shining on social issues, civil rights and labor unions. In the 1980s it was abortion, and that issue has never been settled.

I don't know when the spotlight began to shine on the homosexual issue, but that issue split the church and that is a good thing. It needed to be done and it is happening.

McCown is a member of Shiloh UMC, Piedmont.



Helping the community

Old Clio Asbury Charge along with their pastor, the Rev. Sandra Stubbs, gave out turkeys for Thanksgiving. The turkey giveaway was held Nov. 18. The turkeys were donated by County Councilman Dr. Damion Johnson. Pictured are Stubbs and Johnson.

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Two MSN students share how campus ministry encourages their faith and college experience

By the Rev. Tom Wall

COLUMBIA—Two of the students at the Methodist Student Network, which is the Wesley Foundation at the University of South Carolina, are thriving. And they credit MSN with much of the support, love and care they experience during their college years.

Hope Dominique, a USC senior from Wake Forest, North Carolina, loves to run. She began when she was 8 years old, literally following in her mother's footsteps (who also ran in college).

Dominique is on the Gamecock track and cross-country teams where she has become a strong competitor. But it has not been without hard work and dedication. She has had to overcome injury several times. The injuries have tested her faith and offered her a kind of paradigm for living.

Today, she sees adversity as a challenge and an opportunity to grow in life and faith, often not recognizing until later that the obstacle allowed her to grow.

For her, living a Christian life in college has required her to prioritize her time and activities but she finds it "well worth it." She said living a life in service to others, especially the marginalized, is the most authentic expression of her faith.

Growing up in the UMC, she was particularly drawn to the service of others. As the service leader of MSN at USC, Dominique has been able to lead and experience service in a number of ways, from service to one another in student community to being involved in mission and service trips to Ecuador and the Texas-Mexico border.

She plans to enter medical school when she graduates.

"One of my favorite parts about MSN is our focus on acts of service to glorify God and share God's love, grow in our faith and build a sense of community with one another and those we serve," Dominique said. "In Matthew 25, God calls upon us to serve 'the least of these.' From serving our local homeless and food insecure community at Washington Street Soup Cellar to providing



Hope Dominique races in a 5K cross-country competition.

Photo courtesy of Gamecocks Athletics



Malachi Alexander smiles from the press box at Williams-Brice Stadium this fall when he gave the pre-game football invocation.

glasses and medication to patients at our clinics in Ecuador, the service opportunities I have had through MSN have been extremely fulfilling and eye-opening.

"Service work at MSN is more than just boxing up soup cans. We overcome stigmas and stereotypes and connect with our fellow

humans in meaningful ways that make a difference. I have been able to see God in the people we serve. Despite their circumstances, these have been some of the most gracious, kind and patient people I have met. I have been able to grow stronger in my faith."

Likewise, Malachi Alexander, a junior and student leader at MSN at USC, felt called to ministry when he was 9 years old. He told people he wanted to be a preacher. As a kid growing up, you could often find him in the backyard with his cousins and friends "playing church." And, of course, he was the preacher.

At age 12, Alexander became a missionary Baptist at a Camden church and embarked on ministerial training and became a minister at 16. His great-grandmother saw to it that he should take the right steps and had him sitting with the deacons of the church.

Today, he has just completed his examination and has been ordained at his local church, Mount Moriah. Alexander particularly enjoys taking Scripture and crafting it into a message that brings a response for Christ. A formidable event in Alexander's life was the early death of his mother. Through the pain and grief of her death, he has deepened and grown stronger in his faith without bitterness.

Alexander said he understands the challenges in reaching today's generation of young adults.

"They often ask, 'What's in it for me?' They want to see immediate benefits," he observed.

Instead, he believes a key is point out the simple gifts of life that young adults have and to challenge them to find gratefulness and a generous giver.

Commenting on the graying of the church, he said, "Churches need to pay attention to young adults and students because to be the body of Christ today and in the future, the gifts and participation of that generation is needed."

As a leader at MSN, Alexander helps to lead a Bible study and leads in the weekly worship service in a variety of ways, including bringing a witness and preaching. He has also been involved with service activities and the interfaith program.

You will find him involved 24/7 as he also lives at the campus ministry center as the resident manager.



Need a Children's Sermon?

by the Rev. Meghan Lindsey Sweeney Cook

Understanding Epiphany Sunday

Author's note: The following are children's sermon ideas developed as a resource to help churches reach young ones in their congregations. Everyone is free to use these and to modify as needed.

Date: Epiphany Sunday
Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Time frame: Three minutes (The average attention span of a child is about one minute per year of life. In our setting, the youngest at children's sermon are 3 years old, so we aim for three or maybe five minutes at the most.)

Supplies include props to represent:

- Gold: Wrap a box in gold paper.
- Frankincense: Frankincense is crystal or a liquid, and it is an aromatic, so perhaps use a box with holes or google what a "censer" looks like and make something that looks like this.
- Myrrh: Myrrh is a liquid, so a pretty bottle works well for this.

You could also just show pictures of these items. If you plan ahead and wish to be extra fancy, get a small bottle of frankincense so the children can smell the scent. Three drops on a handkerchief are more than enough! It is strong. Engage the senses: Sight, touch and smell.

Children's sermon:

Welcome the children. Get them settled.

Say: Today we are celebrating Epiphany! Epiphany is the day the wise magi/men came to visit baby Jesus. These magi followed a special star God put in the sky to show the world that God's son was here. When the magi came, they brought special gifts to Jesus.

Ask: Does anyone know what gifts? (Welcome their answers. Even if they're incorrect, say something like, "Those are really good

guesses!" If they are correct, compliment the child.)

Say: The gifts were gold (hold up prop or photo), frankincense (hold up prop or photo) and myrrh (hold up prop/photo).

Ask: Did you know that these gifts were not just presents but they were presents with meaning? Each of these gifts tells us something about Jesus.

Gold: Gold in Bible times was valuable just like it is valuable today. Kings had lots of gold. The magi's gift of gold tells us and the world that Jesus is our king.

Frankincense: Frankincense in Bible times and even today was used by priests and people in the church. It was used in religious services and even used for healing the body, especially the skin. The magi's gift of frankincense tells us and the world that Jesus is our priest or pastor. Jesus is our spiritual leader.

Myrrh: Myrrh is a sadder gift (pause). Myrrh in biblical times was used to help preserve bodies after death. It is an embalming fluid. The magi's gift of myrrh tells us and the world that Jesus is a sacrifice. Jesus is our savior through his death on the cross. Jesus's death is significant, meaning we remember and celebrate Jesus's death and especially Jesus's resurrection. Jesus took away the sins of the world.

Say: It's neat that the Bible has so much to teach us. Even when we hear these stories again and again, we learn new things! What a gift.

Prayer:

Ask: Will you pray with me? Dear God, (pause for the children to repeat), we love you (pause). Help us to remember (pause) Jesus is our King, (pause) our pastor (pause) and our savior (pause). Amen.

Cook pastors Cayce United Methodist Church, Cayce.

Revolution set for Jan. 26-28 in Columbia

Registration continues this month for the South Carolina Conference's annual youth Revolution, set for Jan. 26-28 at the Township Auditorium in Columbia.

Reggie Dabbs and Sons the Band will headline.

Registration is \$75 per person and includes a T-shirt for all who register before Dec. 31.

The theme of this year's Revolution is "One," drawing from Ephesians 4:2-6: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (NIV).

For more information about the event, or to register, visit <http://scmypy.org/>



New hope at Good Hope

Good Hope Wesley Chapel UMC, Camden, graduated a new class of confirmands Nov. 19. Here, they share a moment of celebration with their pastor, the Rev. Brenda J. Thomas.



Kaydynn Pendell, in Ralphie's pink bunny suit, waves hello to the parade crowd on behalf of the church.

O'Neal Street UMC wins the day at Newberry Christmas Parade

NEWBERRY—The volunteers of the Feed Thy Neighbor Kitchen, operating out of The O'Neal Street United Methodist Church, have been recognized as the overall winners of the 2023 Newberry Christmas Parade.

Sponsored by the Newberry Jaycees, the parade entertained crowds all along Main Street Dec. 2 and celebrated the classic 1983 movie, "A Christmas Story."

Inspired by the movie, Mary Beth Heath designed the float and dressed her good-natured son, Kaydynn Pendell, in Ralphie's pink bunny suit. Heath also found the classic leg lamp from the movie and added that

to the float along with lay member, James Brunner, stationed proudly in an overstuffed chair as Santa Claus. Dedicated volunteer Tom Szczepanski put the whole thing together, and lots of the faithful volunteers, who make the mission of the feeding program possible, walked alongside the float. They handed out candy with the Rev. Darlene Kelley, of the Mount Pleasant-O'Neal Street Charge and Pastor Kathy Cinnamond of the Sharon-Hopewell Charge.

"It was a marvelous day of joy, celebration and outreach and a great way to start Advent," Kelley said.



The fraternity gave a \$450 donation to Cumberland's youth and children's ministry.

Cumberland hosts Omega Psi Phi Fraternity

By Kimberly Love-Quick

FLORENCE—Cumberland United Methodist Church had the privilege of hosting the Chi Iota chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. for their annual National Achievement Week program. Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. is a Greek-letter organization founded 1911 at Howard University. During National Achievement Week, the fraternity commemorates its founding and recognizes the accomplishments of its members and chapters. It was a proud moment to see the 33 brothers from the Chi Iota chapter wearing their purple fraternity blazers, symbolizing their commitment to scholarship and showcasing their shared values and bond as members of Omega Psi Phi. It was particularly special that four of these brothers are also members of Cumberland, and some younger brothers even attended Cumberland's pre-K school.

Brother Shawn Ellerbee, the fraternity's Basileus, presented a \$450 donation to Cumberland's youth and children's ministry. This donation will support the church's important outreach initiatives for the youth in the community.

Additionally, Brother Heyward Rosemond, a life member of both Cumberland UMC and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, served as the liturgist during the event. His service exemplified the spirit of commitment and dedication that the fraternity encourages.

Cumberland members said they were truly grateful for the opportunity to host the brothers during their Man Up and Chilly Chili Souper Sunday fellowship after the service. It was a joyous occasion, especially considering that Pastor Martin Quick is also a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. This highlighted the strong connection and shared values between the fraternity and the church.

Overall, the visit from Omega Psi Phi Fraternity showcased their commitment to scholarship, service and upliftment. Cumberland was honored to be a part of their National Achievement Week program and looks forward to future collaborations and celebrations of achievement.



Joyful décor

Lamar Parish, comprising Newman Swamp and Zion UMCs in the Hartsville District, showed their holiday spirit, decorating their sanctuaries in festive Christmas decor. Newman Swamp's is at top and Zion's is at bottom. The Rev. Emma R. Jones serves as pastor.

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Benson's Pendleton Charge (Bethel and Central UMCs), along with Mount Zion UMC, Central, and White Oak Springs Baptist Church collaborated for the ministry.

Churches collaborate to feed people at Thanksgiving

PENDLETON—Several weeks before Thanksgiving, the Lord laid it on Pastor Carleatha Benson's heart to "feed those who are hungry" for Thanksgiving.

On Nov. 28, her churches collaborated with others in the area to host a free pre-Thanksgiving meal for anyone who wished to come.

Benson's Pendleton Charge (Bethel and Central UMCs) collaborated with the Rev. Jonathan Harris, pastor of Mount Zion UMC, Central, and the Rev. Russell Oglesby, pastor of White Oak Springs Baptist Church.

Held at Central UMC, the meal included turkey, dressing, sweet potatoes, sweet potato souffle, stuffing, rice, gravy, corn, green beans and more.

"It was truly a bounty for those who

needed it," Benson said.

Members helped feed all who came.

They fed about 150 persons and all were allowed to take a carryout with them.

"What an amazing time it was. Most importantly, it was all of God's children working together, just as it will be in his kingdom," Benson said.

So much was prepared that they had enough food to donate leftovers to the Pickens Shelter of Hope so they could have everything they needed to have a wonderful Thanksgiving meal.

"Truly God is making a difference in the lives of those in the communities we serve," Benson added.

Benson is a retired supply pastor in the Anderson District.



Volunteers fed about 150 persons.



United Women in Faith

by Patricia Armstrong

Legislative Advocacy Days virtual workshops set

If I were asked to use three words to describe United Women in Faith, it would not be easy for there are many words that can be used. The three words I will use at this time are sisterhood, faithful and resilient.

South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith continue to answer the call. We believe love in action can change the world. UWF supports partners providing direct services to women, children, youth and families locally, throughout the country and around the world. Together we've provided back to school backpacks; hosted food drives to support church pantries and school pantries; donated nonperishable items and financial contributions to Harvest Hope; and prepared and delivered hot meals to the elderly, disabled and the unhoused. We provide personal care items that enable young girls to attend school and stock thrift stores and other charitable organizations that provide services free of charge to those who are eligible. We've partnered with free medical clinics to provide needed services and support blessing boxes that include items for pets. We operate "Lil Libraries." UWF provides scholarships for college students and those attending Mission u. We continue to organize and lead Bible study and vacation Bible school, making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The giving of our gifts, time, talent and prayers empowers our missions—Bethlehem Center Columbia, Bethlehem Center Spartanburg, Killingsworth and Wallace Family Life Center—to continue the great work they are doing.

We ask tough questions and take action. As stated in our vision statement, "We face the realities we see in the world, even when they are not the ones we would like to see. However, our goal is not to bear witness simply to harms but also to God's love by acting boldly to change those harms, advocating for a more just world to improve life for women, children and youth."

Every four years we identify a specific focus for our advocacy in addition to our ongoing work for gender and racial justice for the oppressed and dispossessed communities, with special attention to the needs of women, children and youth. Our current justice campaigns are Just Energy 4 All and Ending Mass Incarceration and Criminalization of Communities of Color. For more information visit <https://uwfaith.org>.

You may also be interested in knowing more about the climate justice work being done by Citizens' Climate Lobby, a nonprofit grassroots organization that builds political will for bipartisan climate change solutions through respectful relationships with lawmakers and community outreach.

SCCUWF invites you to Legislative Advocacy Days virtual workshops. The theme is "Many Members, One Body, Answering the Call."

Workshop dates are as follows:

Feb. 8 at 6:30 p.m., Climate Justice

Feb. 15 at 6:30 p.m., Fair Lending

Feb. 24 at 10 a.m., Being the Village, Keeping Kids in School.

Armstrong is the social action coordinator for SCCUWF.

Native American Ministries

Native American Representative Training scheduled

Mark your calendars: The 19th annual Native American Representative Training is slated for Saturday, Feb. 3.

The *United Methodist Book of Discipline*, Para. 654, states that all churches are required to have one person per charge (without regard to race) to be the church's Native American Representative. As such, the Native American Committee trains this person.

The representative is the contact person between their church and the NAC; secures a calendar date to observe Native American Ministries Sunday; encourages awareness and appreciation of Native American history, traditions and spirituality; advocates for inclusion of Native Americans within the conference; provides reports to their church; and assists with the South Carolina Native American Comprehensive Plan.

The training will be held at Main Street United Methodist Church, Columbia.

Registration starts at 9 a.m. and the training starts at 9:30 a.m. Lunch is provided. There is a \$10 non-refundable registration fee. The training will end no later than 3 p.m. NAC T-shirts and polo shirts will also

be available for purchase. T-shirts purchased with registration receive a \$3 discount.

The training features historical information about American Indians, especially the South Carolina American Indians; myths and stereotypes; Native American spirituality; and the mission and function of the NAC. After lunch, an orientation will be offered about a traditional worship service for American Indians that may include drumming, singing and flute playing. There will be a surprise for some participants.

New Native American representatives and anyone interested in the mission and advocacy for Native American Ministries should attend. Cabinet members, UMC staff, district superintendents and pastors are also encouraged to attend. Schoolteachers, who are responsible for Native American social studies standards, should also consider attending to improve historically and culturally accurate information.

If you are planning to attend, contact LaShella Kirkland at 803-374-8243 or LaShellaKirkland@live.com to receive a registration form. Registration deadline is Jan. 22.



SHARE your STORIES

Send stories, photos, calendar items and ideas to:

advocate@umcsc.org (email preferred) or 4908 Colonial Dr., Columbia SC 29203

DISTRICT DAYS: Next one scheduled for Jan. 20 Charleston

From Page 1

At the Florence District Day Dec. 2, Holston reminded those gathered that the church was not built for our pleasure but God's purpose.

"We have gathered here today to re-orient ourselves for the work God has called us uniquely to do," Holston told the crowd. "When you engage leadership, you're engaging people from different perspectives, who have different opportunities, they've seen life in a different way. And so as they have come to see life, they're using all their experiences. When we use all of our experiences to-

gether we are becoming stronger not weaker This is what we are doing when we are engaging and developing our leaders."

Held at Central United Methodist Church, Florence, the event urged laity and clergy in churches to work together to be strong and effective.

Tables gathered to discuss and then come up with answers to three questions:

- 1) With expectations of pastors at a high level, the danger is for them to get burned out. What can Jethro's suggestion to Moses in Exodus 18:17-23 (to delegate work to others) do for pastors?

- 2) How can leadership be shared between laity and clergy?
- 3) What hinders sharing leadership between lay and clergy?

The gathering closed with a Service of Communion.

The Greenville District Day, held at Lee Road UMC, Taylors, Dec. 9, covered much the same. Holston asked the crowd whether they were open to being utilized by the Lord in kingdom work.

"Are we in a place where we are open to hear God's Word through Jesus the Christ, and to know that as we are in this Advent season, that we are prepared to be the people whom God has called us to be, that we are not here to just to placate each other,

but we're here to see what God wants us to do, to see where God wants us to be?" he asked.

He said that as the denomination walks through the process it is in, we must remember we're going to still live in the same communities, shop at the same grocery stores and eat in the same restaurants.

"I want us to remember that we are still the people of God," Holston urged. "And if we are the people of God, then there is still work for us to do, still people to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with, still people who need to hear a word of faith and hope and love and grace and mercy."

See <https://www.umcsc.org/districtdays> for future district days and their locations, as well as to register.

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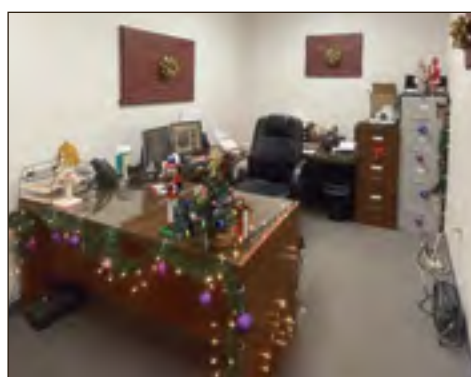
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Spreading some holiday cheer


In the spirit of Christmas joy and festivity, conference center employees got the chance to participate in an office-wide Christmas decorating contest. Staffers were encouraged to decorate their entire office or just their office door, and many people got extra creative with the fun. The staff of the South Carolina Methodist Conference Credit Union served as judges, and the winners were announced at the conference center's annual Christmas party, which took place at Shandon UMC, Columbia, Dec. 13. Stephanie Ponds organized the contest. Winners were Dan O'Mara (first place), Lynn Jenkins (second place) and Doris Seals (third place). Here are pictures of many of the offices.



Here, Bishop L. Jonathan Holston joins the winners and Ponds to celebrate. From left are Holston, Ponds, Seals, Jenkins and O'Mara.



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WHAT REALLY MATTERS: 'Overcome evil by doing good'

From Page 1

As the bishop noted, God understands who we are, and he understands that doing his will is not easy.

Sometimes, God will ask us to do something we do not want to do.

But, Holston said, what really matters is knowing that in spite of everything, God can enable us to walk his path; it's never too late.

Holston lifted up three points in driving home his theme. First, he said, our past matters.

"We need to make peace with God," Holston told the men. "We need to make peace with our past."

He asked the men to examine what they need to let go of to get right with God.

"When you ball up your fist, nothing can get in or out," he said. "You have hope when your past is redeemed."

Second, Holston said, what matters is that we allow God to transform our present and allow change to happen. "When people see you, they need to see you as you are. I can't let what is wrong with me keep me from who God is," Holston said.

He told the men their actions must be different when we are truly following God's will and way.

Finally, Holston said, what matters is understanding our future can and must be redirected.

"When you find yourself thinking and doing the wrong thing, you need to make a U-turn," he said, reminding the men they can overcome evil by doing good.



Holston and Fleming visited Lee Correctional Dec. 1.

"You need to latch on to people who believe that you can have a future," Holston said. "This is what matters most."

He ended by leading the men in singing "His Eye is on the Sparrow," lifting up

the beautiful truth that God sees us all no matter what we're done or where we are currently, whether behind bars or on our knees.

This is what really matters, Holston said. Holston said it is important to remember

people who are behind bars are still valued children of God who need our love and care.

"These inmates, they're still people of God who need to hear a word of faith and hope and love and grace and mercy," Holston said. "There are members of their families living in our communities, and some of them are ostracized. They need to hear a word of faith and hope and love and grace and mercy. We all must open our eyes and look at the fields, as Scripture tells us—they are ripe for harvest. The world is ripe for harvest, is it not?"

McKnight said words cannot express how much the visit of the bishop and district superintendent touched him as chaplain of the men at Lee.

"The men here at Lee felt that they were not forgotten," McKnight said. "I was hearing the Lord say, 'Keep doing what you are doing; your labor is not in vain.' My work was validated and God used the Rev. Terry Fleming and Bishop Holston to let me know that God is pleased. I was reminded of the Scripture verse in 1 Corinthians 15:58: 'Therefore my beloved brethren be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for your labor is not in vain.'"

"Our labor for the Lord is never in vain. To God be the glory."

McKnight also lifted up the reminder by Methodism founder John Wesley to "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can."

McKnight assisted with this article.

DELEGATION: Eight lay and eight clergy will represent S.C.

From Page 1

was scheduled to convene May 5-15, 2020, in Minneapolis. However, it was postponed multiple times because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the travel challenges that have followed in its wake.

They also have been reviewing the significant amount of proposed legislation that will come before the General Conference. Each delegate is assigned to a General Conference committee, and each focuses on proposed legislation that will be handled by their committee.

Delegates have been sharing their research with the full delegation so all can be kept apprised of what they will be considering when they convene in Charlotte.

Delegates were elected at Annual Conference in June 2019. Eight lay and eight clergy delegates, plus alternates, were elected to General Conference. They will join eight more lay and eight more clergy, plus alternates, to represent South Carolina at the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference.

Some of those originally elected are no longer able to serve; for instance, one—Dr. Robin Dease—is now a bishop serving in the North Georgia Annual Conference.

The updated list of delegates is as follows:

General Conference Delegation

Clergy Delegates:

Rev. Ken Nelson
Rev. Keith Hunter

Rev. Susan Leonard
Rev. Emily Sutton
Rev. Will Malambri
Rev. Tiffany Knowlton
Rev. Karen Jones
Rev. Tim Rogers

Lay Delegates:

Jackie Jenkins
James Salley
Michael Cheatham
Herman Lightsey
Chris Lynch
David Braddon
Betty Void
David Salter

Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference Delegation

Clergy Delegates:

Rev. Cathy Mitchell
Rev. Fran Elrod
Rev. Connie Barnes
Rev. Mary Teasley
Rev. Kathryn Hunter
Rev. Elizabeth Murray
Rev. Dr. Stephen Love
Rev. Sara White

Lay Delegates:


Valerie Brooks-Madden
Marlene Spencer
Jennifer Price
Tony Watson
Lou Jordan
Doug Coffeen
Marvin Horton
Vicki McCartha

General Conference is typically held once every four years, with the exception of the special session in February 2019 to address a report from the Commission on a Way Forward on unity amid church strife over differing views on human sexuality. At General Conference, delegates discuss and vote on petitions and resolutions proposed by individuals, conferences and other groups within the UMC, from budgetary concerns to issues such as sexuality, poverty and more.

General Conference, comprised of roughly 1,000 representatives from every conference in the worldwide UMC, is the only body that can set official policy and speak for the denomination. Legislation passed at General Conference results in revisions to the *Book of Discipline* (a book of law) and *Book of Resolutions* (a book of policies on social issues).

Jurisdictional Conference gathers representatives from every conference in the Southeastern Jurisdiction to elect new bishops, approve the budget for the next four years and conduct general business.

Learn more at <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/church-wide/general-conference-2020>.



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<https://advocatesc.org/scholarships>

NURSING MINISTRY: Fostering awareness about wellness

From Page 1

Health and Environmental Control to keep the congregation safe.

Now mobilized, the Orangeburg Circuit Parish Nursing Healthcare Ministry kept their work going, realizing their churches would benefit from ongoing health and wellness education. The committee—Elaine Leonard, Sarah Murph, Evelyn Pauling, Jamie Guinyard, Josephine Edmonds and Sistrunk, who as the self-proclaimed non-nursing person calls herself the “mouthpiece” of the bunch—began organizing Fifth Sunday wellness services.

“We started by making sure everyone had COVID shots, letting them know about hand washing and taking temperatures, using hand sanitizer and masks, keeping the church safe by making sure to sanitize the sanctuaries, and DHEC would come in every time we had a service,” Sistrunk explained.

Evolving over time

That first Fifth Sunday service fell on Halloween, so they combined it with a trunk-or-treat event for the community to add some fun, starting with a brief worship service and then incorporating health experts to speak on various conditions affecting their community.

As the outreach ministry evolved, so did their speakers.

“We had people speak on different ailments and topics so individuals could start paying attention to their health—doctors, nurses, some in person and some via Zoom. The individuals come from within our congregations to give their testimonies about how they survived different ailments, from heart problems to how they made it through harsh times,” Sistrunk said.

One Fifth Sunday Sistrunk offered her own testimony as a kidney disease survivor, a surprise diagnosis that changed every aspect of her life. They also did an enlightening kidney health wellness program that helped attendees understand the importance of doing blood tests, monitoring symptoms and knowing their creatinine level to avoid kidney disease or other kidney-related issues. Especially with the pandemic, Sistrunk explained, a person is at greater risk of dangerous COVID complications when they have underlying health conditions.

“Our parish nursing ministry is awesome,” Sistrunk said. “They are off the chain! These nurses come from all different types of nursing backgrounds, and I am so in awe of these women. The Orangeburg Circuit would not be where we are healthwise without this ministry.”

Leonard said the ministry is her spiritual calling, but what they do is not just about religion.

“We do anything from heart health to domestic violence to end-of-life care,” Leonard said. “We just want to make sure all our congregants have the maximum amount of information they can have to be healthy.”

And it’s not just the circuit, she and Sistrunk noted. The wellness events are for



The Orangeburg Circuit Parish Nursing Healthcare Ministry offers ongoing health and wellness education to their churches and community.



the entire community.

In addition to the Fifth Sunday services, the churches host a back-to-school bash, fall festival and other events, all featuring health components, including handy health kits for people to take home. The fire department and local sheriff’s office come, fostering a better relationship with their neighbors. For their fall festival, the Caw Caw Volunteer Fire Department was there along with their fire chief, as well as Marc Briggman from the Calhoun County Development Department.

One Sunday, a woman, Yolanda Robinson, who is both a breast cancer survivor and a domestic violence survivor spoke, offering her own testimony so others can understand how important it is to be strong in body, mind and spirit so we can be all we can be for the Lord. She also spoke on suicide awareness.

Other services explore issues like mental health, stress, diabetes and more. December’s service focused on end-of-life concerns,

including palliative care and hospice.

“We have to keep ourselves spiritually connected with God in order to receive the healing and blessing we need, in order to be an overcomer,” Sistrunk said. “Being an overcomer is not about lording yourself over anyone but about you realizing, ‘I am important to God and myself, and if I don’t take care of myself first, I can be no good to anyone else.’”

Leonard agreed. “God talks about how our bodies are temples, and we’re to take care of them like we take care of the church,” Leonard said. “If we don’t take care of our bodies, how can we do God’s work?”

She said prayer is important, but work and follow-through are also required. We also need to remember that doctors and nurses are also often sent to help from God, she said.

‘I am a living testimony’
Sistrunk is no stranger to the concept of

being an overcomer, and her personal health journey ties in strongly with the newfound passion she has for helping her sister churches be strong in their health and wellness.

While she had always stayed on top of checking her kidney levels, about five years ago she discovered her creatinine levels had skyrocketed within just six months.

She immediately went to the doctor and got sobering news.

“The doctor said either you get dialysis or get a kidney transplant or you’re going to die,” Sistrunk recalled. “I was close to Stage 4 kidney disease.”

The next week she was able to get into a nephrologist’s office, who changed her medication and helped her get started on other needed health changes, such as seeing a nutritionist.

At first she told no one her story, continuing to minister and pastor as usual even though it was difficult.

Eventually she began to share her story, and now she offers it to others as a way of helping people understand how important it is to know your creatinine levels and be on top of your health, whether diabetes, cholesterol or your general family history.

“When we don’t know our numbers or our family health background, we are our worst enemy,” Sistrunk said. “It’s said when we know better, we do better, and I am a living example of this.”

In five years, she has gone from having almost Stage 4 kidney disease to a low Stage 3, from creatinine levels over 4 to now almost back to normal, to working with an endocrinologist to get from a double-digit A1C glucose blood test to now under 7 and improving daily.

“I am a living testimony to what God can do,” Sistrunk said. “When God says no weapon formed against me shall prosper, what the devil meant for harm I’ll turn for good, I am that living testimony that God can turn all the harm around and put a hedge of protection around me the same way he did for Job.”

A mindset of self-care

That’s what drives Sistrunk and the others who are part of the Orangeburg Circuit Parish Nursing Healthcare Ministry—helping others have that same level of health knowledge so they can be all they can be for God and do God’s kingdom work.

She lifts up the words of Romans 12:1-2, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (NKJV).

Having lost her husband to a massive heart attack, her sister to breast cancer, her mother to pancreatic cancer, and almost lost her son to pancreatitis, “I’ve just seen so much,” she said.

“I want us to be mindful of taking care of ourselves,” Sistrunk said.

SMC launches two new bachelor’s degrees, adds online version of associate degree

SPARTANBURG—Spartanburg Methodist College continues to expand its academic offerings, launching bachelor’s degrees in sport management and professional writing and digital communications in fall 2024.

The SMC Online program is also growing with the addition of a religious studies associate degree.

“These new fields of study will help our students pursue careers in two fast-growing, popular career paths,” said Dr. Curt Laird, provost and executive vice president at SMC. “Combined with our Camak Core professional development program, our graduates get the education and hands-on experience they need to enter the workforce with the skills and confidence to succeed.”

Sport management is an expanding field of study attracting students interested in sports careers. SMC’s Bachelor of Arts in Sport Management will teach the intricacies of the

business of sports, providing the basis for careers in team management, facility oversight, player representation and more. Students will learn the concepts of contracts, event management, liability and risk, and communications in sports.

The sport management degree will be offered both on campus and online.

The unending growth of the digital information landscape has opened numerous opportunities for professionals with writing, digital publishing and online communication skills. The Bachelor of Arts in Professional Writing and Digital Communications opens doors for SMC graduates to be leaders in this expanding career path.

After graduation, students can pursue careers in news and publishing, social media content creation and technical and speech writing. The new degree is an on-campus

program.

More students are pursuing a degree in a non-traditional manner, and SMC is adding another option to its online academic menu. The Associate in Religious Studies is the online equivalent of the college’s current on-campus degree. Providing an online version will give returning, working and other students who can’t attend classes in person the chance to earn their associate degree.

The religious studies program can help graduates find opportunities in missionary work, religious and charitable organizations, local churches and more.

“SMC continues to expand the education opportunities for everyone who wants to earn a degree and improve their career prospects,” Laird said.

“We’re excited to offer these new degrees and provide more pathways to success for our students.”



The four classes offered Nov. 17-18 helped lay servants learn needed information. Pictured are the participants and leaders in each class.



Columbia LSM training draws large participation

The Columbia District Lay Servant Ministry conducted their Fall School recently held Nov. 17-18 at Trinity United Methodist Church, Blythewood.

Four courses were offered: Introduction to the Lay Servant Ministry, Ministry with the Forgotten (Dementia), Polity and Spiritual Gifts.

Trainers for Introduction to the Lay Servant Ministry were Chuck Sovick, LSM Columbia District co-director, and Michael Jennings, Columbia District Lay Leader. Participants included Robert Taylor, Ed Schafer, Paula Ruark,

Linda Lamb, Henry Rogers, Ashley Renolds, Tim Chandler, Dujuan Council, Shelia Pendarvis and David Pendarvis.

Kim Neel served as trainer for Ministry with the Forgotten. Participants included Terry Petersen, Kim Petersen, Sylvia Harris-Greene, Theresea Montgomery, John Waddell, Steve McDonald, Josphine McRant, Clarrisa Munford, Betty Dicks, Carolyn Seabrook, Betty Hillyard, Ginny Hutto and Mellanie Jinnette.

Marlene Sipes served as trainer for Polity. Participants included Brooks Farron, Ross Ruark, Butch Gause, Edward

Griffin, John Fogle, James Munford and Danielle Dubose.

And Kathy Hart served as trainer for Spiritual Gifts. Participants included Calvin Edwards, Al Wactor, Herman Lightsey and Carrie Murray.

The school lasted 10 hours and was successful.

Leaders said they had the largest participation since the pandemic ended.

Chuck Sovick and Sylvia Harris-Greene serve as co-directors for Lay Servant Ministry for the Columbia District of the UMC.



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Photos courtesy of Maude Cooper

As Christians should

Camden First United Women in Faith, Camden, sponsored their annual Thanksgiving Service and Turkey Give-A-Way Nov. 20. The service began at 6 p.m., and then 85 turkeys and sides for a complete dinner were distributed to the community after the service. Camden First pastor the Rev. Gwendolyn T. White delivered the Thanksgiving message. Maude Cooper is the president of the United Women in Faith. The giveaway and service were meant to reflect Romans 12:13, "distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality."

Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Mickey Fisher

Thoughts about aging

Most of us have heard it said that growing old is not for sissies. Let me tell you why that's true.

Every life unfolds not so much as the passing of time as it is the dealing with of key events. Aging is one of those key events, and perhaps the major key event!

Life before and after a certain age is different for each person. Yet each of us is likely to reach a point where the things we used to do and do well we no longer can do.

From an early age we were taught to rely on self, to take care of business, to be self-sufficient. The older we are, the more difficult that becomes. Today we are living longer than earlier generations, but we have not eliminated the unpleasant issues associated with advancing age. Thus, most of us will reach a time when simple things become a challenge: things such as getting out of bed, the quick step, the food we eat, energy, mobility, memory and mood changes. Here are some thoughts about each of these challenges.

Getting out of bed: That's a high-risk activity. One of my neighbors is young, only 74 years of age. A short time ago, while sitting on my front porch, she talked about her husband's difficulty in getting up each morning. Three times recently he fell on the floor while trying to get out of bed. He is a big fellow, so each time she had to call EMS to get him up and into a chair. When she mentioned his falling to their doctor, the doctor said this is not unusual. Getting out of bed requires the use of muscles that are seldom used for other purposes. As we age, we usually add a pound or two. Those extra pounds present a challenge when we wake up, put our feet on the floor and lean forward to get up. Those pounds continue to be a challenge throughout the day, and most likely, throughout one's lifetime. Once we put on the pounds, we rarely take them off!

At 90 years of age, this writer finds himself having to do a "quick step" to maintain balance and keep from falling. Most folk in their eighth and ninth decades find themselves automatically doing a "quick step." It is not a dance step but a "don't let me fall" step. It happens when we turn or reach and our feet can't instantly do what our brain is telling them to do. So we do a quick step in the direction we are about to fall.

About food: We finally reach a point when we can eat our favorite foods without risking heart issues. Guess what? We no longer have an appetite for the foods we once craved.

Energy: Once upon a time we could mow the lawn and plow the garden in the same day. Now it takes two days just to mow the lawn.

Mobility: There was a time when our fanny almost never touched a chair. We were constantly moving from one chore to another. Now we sit like a zombie in our

recliner and ask others to bring us a snack.

Memory: We can give a detailed account of our senior prom, but we can't tell you what we had for breakfast. That's no big deal until we can't remember the names of our grandchildren's children nor the date and time of our next appointment with the doctor.

Mood changes: Of course, the signs of aging we most regret are the mood changes. Once we were pleasant company. We could share a slice of pie, a cup of coffee and laughter with friends. Aging takes that away! At times we become grumpy for no reason. We seldom make a telephone call and almost never write a letter. Our world is shrinking, and we don't really care. Who wants to hang around yapping about nonsense with people we got tired of a long time ago?

My dictionary says a challenge is anything that calls for special effort and dedication. In fact, it might be said that life is a matter of successive challenges and key events, such as graduating with a degree; falling in love; planning a wedding; securing and maintaining a home; welcoming a new child into the family; moving up or down in the workplace; making time for family; considering a job change; enjoying the changing seasons; playing with and laughing with children; relocating to a new community; cultivating friendships; recovering from the loss of a friend; or dealing with a serious illness.

Add to this list the key event or events impacting your life at this time. In other words, what's awaiting you at home or at work?

What does all this mean? It means that we need help! That may be the most difficult part of the aging process for us to embrace. From a very early age, we are taught to stand on our own two feet, to rely on self, to be self-sufficient. When we can no longer do that with confidence, life takes on a different color.

Rather than optimistic bright orange, yellow, blue, red and green, life becomes a dull brown. Or worse, it becomes void of all color. Those who know us can see it in our walk and hear it in our talk.

As the old movie serial reminded us, time marches on. In our youth we gave it little if any thought. Now it clouds much of our thinking. It should not, however, become a lamentation about our faults and failures.

Rather, it should be a joyful expression of gratitude for the light and love that flavor the days and the years.

Ours has been and continues to be a pretty good life.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen and amen.

Fisher, a retired pastor, lives in Spartanburg.



Small churches help in big way

Small churches can have a big impact, and recently, two churches in Pageland rose beyond their small size to help others in a huge way. Zion UMC averages 35-40 people in worship. Through the year they collect money to provide materials to fill Operation Christmas Child boxes. This year in addition to toiletries, toys and other items, members of the church—spearheaded by youth and young adults—made 100 dresses to be included in the boxes. A few men participated by working the irons. Church youth included notes in each box introducing themselves and wishing the recipients a Merry Christmas. Additionally, Zoar UMC—with average attendance between 15-17 people—provided stockings for the Union County (North Carolina) Christmas program. "As pastor of the Zion-Zoar Charge in Pageland, I was overwhelmed by the spirit of both congregations when it came to helping the less fortunate," the Rev. Teri Schell said. "It truly is not the size of the congregation; it's the size of the heart."



Manning men raise funds for church

The Manning United Methodist church men's group, Manning (pictured above), hosted a fundraiser in which they sold Boston butts.



Resource Center

by Betty Stalnaker

Top four DVD resources used in 2023

A special thank you goes to all our Resource Center members. With a church membership, you have access to all resources in the library. We serve United Methodist churches as well as other denominations. The Resource Center is ready to provide you with the Bible study of your choice.

Listed below are the most used resources in 2023. We pray these and other resources have been helpful in your church ministry.

Top four DVD resources used in 2023

(Four tied for third place and nine tied for fourth place)

1. "Luke: Jesus and the Outsiders, Outcasts, and Outlaws"
2. "In the Footsteps of the Savior"
3. Four-way tie:
 - "The Lord's Prayer: The Meaning and Power of the Prayer Jesus Taught"
 - "Before Amen: The Power of a Simple Prayer"
 - "Three Simple Rules: A Conversation with Rueben P. Job"
 - "The Angels of Christmas: Hearing God's Voice in Advent"
4. Nine-way tie:
 - "Almost Christmas: A Wesleyan Advent Experience"
 - "Experiencing Christmas: Christ in the Sights and Sounds of Advent"
 - "Grace: More Than We Deserve, Greater Than We Imagine"
 - "Heaven and Earth: Advent and The Incarnation"
 - "Modern Parables"
 - "Signs and Wonders: A Beginner's Guide to the Miracles of Jesus"
 - "The Chosen: Season 1"
 - "United Methodism 101 Updated Version: A Discovery CD-ROM"
 - "What Does It Mean To Be United Methodist?"

The South Carolina Conference Resource Center is your connection to DVDs and seasonal musicals. We are here to serve your church family. To reserve resources, call 803-735-8798 or visit <https://www.umcsc.org/resourcecenter>.



Photo courtesy of the Rev. Meredith M. Dark

Socastee helps those incarcerated

It is a tradition at Socastee UMC, Myrtle Beach, to send food each year to Georgetown County Detention Center. This year Socastee UMC collected enough food for 225 incarcerated people, plus staff. This is a long-standing tradition at the church that was started by the late Dan Lee. In his memory, members carry on this tradition each year at Thanksgiving. "We thank God for being able to participate in such a meaningful ministry," said pastor the Rev. Meredith M. Dark. Those who carry forth the ministry are Johnny Livingston and his family and Brian Tesseneer. Pictured are Johnny Livingston, Jonah Livingston and Tesseneer.

Global Briefs

Understanding proposed regionalization plan

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The regionalization legislation headed to General Conference takes several steps toward a goal of building connectional unity while making room for customization in each region of the world. In Part 4 of a new series on regionalization, the Rev. Taylor W. Burton Edwards answers questions related to the legislation, including what could be customized by regional conferences and what is not included in the proposal.

Preaching help coming

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Resources, videos and workshops are coming to help pastors improve their preaching. United Methodist Discipleship Ministries is launching the new service in 2024. The Rev. Derek C. Weber, director of preaching ministries at Discipleship Ministries, is heading the Hey Preacher project. It is financed through a grant from the Lilly Endowment.

Call for ceasefire in Middle East

NEW YORK—War takes a disproportionate toll on women, children and youth, and there needs to be a permanent ceasefire in the Middle East, said United Women in Faith in a Dec. 8 statement decrying the war in Gaza. UWF has condemned Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel but urges the Biden Administration and Congress to support lifting the blockade on Gaza, opening unhindered humanitarian access and ending U.S. arm supplies to Israel. The women's group also urges all parties to include women, women's organizations and gender perspectives in peace negotiations.

Conference responds to Tennessee tornadoes

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Tennessee's Dec. 9 tornadoes killed at least six people and caused significant damage, including to Fellowship United Methodist Church in Clarksville and Bellshire United Methodist Church in northern Nashville. The Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference Disaster Response Team is beginning to assess community needs. United Methodists are asked not to self-deploy. Donations to the United Methodist Committee on Relief and Tennessee-Western Kentucky's response are welcome.

Church conventions help heal COVID-19 scars

HARARE, Zimbabwe—Healing Conventions in the Zimbabwe East and West annual conferences brought together thousands of clergy and laity for a time of prayer, worship and spiritual healing. The meetings followed a four-year hiatus of in-person gatherings.

Survey to shed light on child sexual violence

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—United Methodists who experienced childhood sexual violence are encouraged to fill out a confidential survey from Project Children Finland. That organization is seeking to develop and share a better understanding of the problem. "Stopping abuse requires a clear picture of abuse," said Steven Scheid, director of the United Methodist Center for Scouting Ministries, in asking for participation in the survey.

Recovery from 2022 hurricane continuing

ATLANTA—A \$2 million grant from the United Methodist Committee on Relief is assisting recovery from 2022's Hurricane Ian in Florida. The grant to the Florida Conference helps provide long-term recovery to 165 households—nearly 400 individuals—who are among the most vulnerable members of the affected communities, including single parents, those with disabilities, the elderly and recent retirees without community ties.

Reimagining missions work

ATLANTA—Nearly 250 United Methodist mission leaders from 53 U.S. annual conferences gathered to discern ways to reimagine, reinvent and reignite mission work in the U.S. "The church is being led to a new focus on mission and meaning, and it is rewarding and exciting to join in God's mission as the Holy Spirit sweeps us into a new mission age," said Roland Fernandes, top executive of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, during the U.S. Mission Partners Consultation Nov. 28-29.

New Facebook page highlights ecumenical work

WASHINGTON—The ecumenical staff of the Council of Bishops has created the United Methodist Ecumenical and Interfaith Training Facebook group. The group includes a network of United Methodists and ecumenical friends who care about and want to participate in the movement toward visible Christian unity. People interested in joining can visit the Facebook page and request to be part of the group.

Airport exhibit spotlights Indigenous heritage

ATLANTA—Travelers who go through the Atlanta airport have an opportunity during the next year to enjoy artwork by Native American artists. The show, "This Land Calls Us Home: Indigenous Relationships with Southeastern Homelands," features more than 60 pieces and is sponsored by the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries.

An invitation to leave 'peace' candle unlit

ATLANTA—The second candle on the Advent wreath represents peace, and in some traditions is called the "Bethlehem candle." This Advent, the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries is joining with the World Methodist Council and the Methodist Church in Britain in inviting Methodist churches across the world to refrain from lighting the Advent candle on the second Sunday in Advent (Dec. 10) and on subsequent Sundays to "serve as a constant reminder that we stand in solidarity with all who are suffering in the Holy Land."

Church opens housing for young adults

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Connection United Methodist Church has officially opened a recently renovated wing of the church to house Nashville's first mobile housing shelter specifically for young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. Connection is now the fourth church in the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference to host a mobile housing unit, joining City Road Chapel, Bellevue and McKendree.

Retired bishop featured on 'Day 1'

ATLANTA—Retired Bishop William H. Willimon appeared on the "Day 1" radio program on Dec. 10. Willimon, bishop of the North Alabama Conference from 2004 to 2012, is professor of the practice of Christian ministry at Duke Divinity School. He spoke about "Good News: God Is Coming to You" and was interviewed by the Rev. Dalton Rushing. The program is available on the "Day 1" website.

—Courtesy of the United Methodist News Service



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Conference Historical Society

by the Rev. Meredith M. Dark

Historical Society visits SMC

The most recent meeting of the South Carolina Conference Historical Society took place at Davis Mission Chapel on the campus of Spartanburg Methodist College on Saturday Oct. 21.

The Rev. Timothy C. Drum, college chaplain and director of church relations, was instrumental in the meeting taking place at SMC, and as a part of the day's program, Drum offered "Historical Photographs," a presentation prepared by SMC students who have become interested in the SMC Archives Project.

In this project, students selected photographs of the college's past to form a collection for display on the campus in Ellis Hall and in the library. A video was also shown depicting SMC students describing their interest in the project.

Dr. Phillip Stone, conference archivist, provided the day's program, a presentation titled "Reverend Camak Found a College." Stone discussed the vision and perseverance that Dr. David English Camak put into his passionate vision for textile mill workers and their need to be educated. As Stone noted, "Everyone, for various reasons, looked down on the mill workers," but Dr. Camak had a different perspective.

Here are some highlights of Camak's life:

1880: Camak born in Fairfield County to a Methodist family.

1898: Camak enrolled at Wofford. He heard a sermon by Wofford President Henry Nelson Snyder "about the challenges facing the textile workers, and Camak decided then that he felt that to be his calling." He taught Sunday school at Duncan Memorial Methodist Church.

1902: Camak finished senior year at Wofford and was licensed to preach.

1903: In June, Camak graduated from Wofford and was appointed to a five-point charge as junior preacher on the Union Circuit where there were mill churches.

1903: In December, Camak was admitted to the South Carolina Conference as a minister. The bishop sent Camak to Green

Street Church, Union. Camak believed "that the mill workers wanted a chance at an education, and it was the mill system that was denying them that chance. Camak believed that the church had a role to play in helping them get an education, and came up with the idea of a church, mill, school cooperative."

1907: Camak was ordained an elder and sent to the Saluda circuit.

1910: He was appointed financial agent for the Southern Industrial Institute in Charlotte.

1911: He was appointed in Spartanburg to Duncan Memorial and Glendale Churches; Camak was able to combine "Methodism, economic change, and the Spartanburg community" together to assist the mill workers. Camak reached out to Walter S. Montgomery regarding "his idea for a cooperative school where students would work in the mill one week and study the next. Montgomery immediately agreed, "Tell the young folks we'll meet them halfway."

1911: Camak and T. J. Carter began the school; Camak was appointed by Bishop John C. Kilgo to the school where he served until 1924.

1912: In January, the first board meeting was held and included President Snyder and Charles P. Hammond. Camak was named president of the school.

1913: Construction began on original buildings.

Camak's vision to help the mill workers and establish a school is a story of triumph and wonder. History shows us that a calling can materialize into a beautiful ministry that has the power to transform lives.

If we take one lesson from his efforts it is to see how we can love our neighbor as ourselves and not lose heart.

Dark is president of the South Carolina Conference Historical Society and pastor of Socastee United Methodist Church, Myrtle Beach. She is also a member of the executive committee of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society.



From the Archives

by Dr. Phillip Stone

The Local Church Historian

January means a new year for many church officers, and that means that some churches may have a new person in the office of local church historian. So, I hope some of these suggestions will help you figure out what you've actually agreed to do.

You might be thinking you suddenly have to write a history of your church. That's probably not the place to start unless you, unlike most of us, have boundless amounts of time. In truth, your job is a blend of being an archivist and a historian. You're responsible for preserving the church's historical records as well as interpreting them for the congregation.

Section 247.5 of the *Book of Discipline* talks about the duties of the church historian. The *Discipline* strongly recommends that each charge conference "elect a church historian in order to preserve the history of each local church." The *Discipline* says the church historian may be a member of the Church Council and may also hold another office at the same time.

The church historian is responsible for keeping the historical records of the church up-to-date and for the preservation of all local church records and historical materials no longer in current use. Those are the biggest responsibilities. The historian chairs the committee on records and history, if there is one, and provides an annual report on the care of church records and historical materials to the charge conference.

What does it mean to keep the church's records? The *Book of Discipline* makes the local church responsible for its records. The most important records that churches should be keeping include membership records, including baptisms and marriages and the business records of the church, such as the minutes of church council, committees, budgets and audits. Other items, such as the newsletter or worship bulletin, programs from events, photographs, church di-

rectories and even newspaper clippings can be worth keeping. Any insurance policies, contracts or active files should be kept in the church office. Bills, vouchers and giving records are not archival materials and can be safely destroyed after a few years. Many churches may have older records, such as old membership registers or quarterly conference ledgers. These are definitely archival materials and should be maintained.

Church records need to be kept in a secure space that is climate-controlled. Try to keep moisture and bright light away from the materials. A fireproof vault isn't necessary, but it is good if you have one. The main point here is to keep things in a place where they can't inadvertently disappear.

Preserving and collecting records will help you in your other important duty, and that is to promote and interpret church history to the church. Every congregation, no matter its age, has a story to tell, but you have to have the documents that tell those stories. Use your records to make members aware of the work that the church has done in the past. It is a tribute to the saints who have upheld the church, and it may inspire members today to undertake some new mission.

You may also want to ask members of the church to record their own memories of the church. For many of us, our church may be the one thing we're part of for our entire life. Those memories can be written or recorded and could be an interesting project for a group to undertake.

The main responsibility of the church historian is to use your gifts to help the members of your congregation learn more about your church and how it has evolved over the years.

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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Photos courtesy of Sandy Sorrow

An Advent tradition

Latimer Memorial UMC, Belton, members and friends celebrate Advent by hanging Chrismons. The event has been a tradition at Latimer Memorial for almost 50 years. The Chrismons were made by the ladies of the church from patterns provided by the Rev. Franklin Buie's mother in the early 1970s. They serve as a beautiful reminder that God's greatest gift to us is Jesus Christ.

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Rev. J. Peter Belec

PORT HOPE, Ontario—The Rev. J. Peter Belec, a retired member of the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Nov. 29, 2023.



Belec

In his retirement, Rev. Belec served the Eutawville, Berkeley Circuit and Midland Park charges in South Carolina.

Funeral services were held Dec. 2 at First Baptist Church with burial in Union Cemetery.

Rev. Belec is survived by his wife, Margaret "Pat" Belec, daughter and four sons.

Rev. Robert Charles Hopper

SYLVA, N.C.—The Rev. Robert Charles Hopper, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and brother of the Rev. Richard Hopper, died Dec. 7, 2023.



Hopper

Prior to his retirement in 2004, Rev. Hopper served Cherokee Place Associate, Gordon Memorial-Greenbrier and Hopewell charges.

He was the founder of the Charleston Inner-City Ministries and served as the regional director for the South Carolina Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse.

A memorial service will be held at a later date at Sylva First UMC.

Memorials may be made to the Salkehatchie Summer Service, 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203.

Rev. Hopper is survived by his wife, Carolyn Hawkins Hopper, and two sons.

Rosa Mitchell Senn

SPARTANBURG—Rosa Mitchell Senn, widow of the Rev. Conrad Senn, died Nov. 20, 2023.

Funeral services were held Nov. 26 at Floyd's Greenlawn Chapel with burial in Greenlawn Memorial Gardens.

Memorials may be made to Global Outreach, First Presbyterian Church, 512 Old Mount Holly Road, Stanley, NC 28164.

Mrs. Senn is survived by her son and daughter.

Imogene Wilson Steele

LANCASTER—Imogene Wilson Steele, former president of the South Carolina United Methodist Women, died Oct. 17, 2023.

Funeral services were held Oct. 23 at Hopewell United Methodist Church with burial in the church cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Hopewell UMC, 3734 Heyward Hough Road, Lancaster, SC 29720.

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.

Mrs. Steele is survived by her two sons.

Dr. Theodore Holt Walter

COLUMBIA—Dr. Theodore "Ted" Holt Walter, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Nov. 17, 2023.



Walter

Prior to his retirement in 2003, Dr. Walter served the Pacolet Circuit, Golightly, Lugoff-St. John, Mount Holly, Lancaster-St. Luke, Greenville-Aldersgate, Rock Hill-St. John's and Grace charges. He served as superintendent of the Spartanburg and Columbia districts and was the Coordinator of Clergy Services.

A memorial service was held Nov. 21 at Shandon UMC with burial on Nov. 24 at Church of the Holy Apostles Episcopal Cemetery, Barnwell.

Memorials may be made to Shandon UMC, 3407 Devine St., Columbia, SC 29205;

or to Epworth Children's Home, 2900 Millwood Ave., Columbia, SC 29205.

Dr. Walter is survived by his wife, Pegilie, and three sons.

Rev. James Haddon Williams

PROSPERITY—The Rev. James "Jim" Haddon Williams, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Dec. 1, 2023.



Williams

Prior to his retirement in 1998, Rev. Williams served the Lydia-Sandy Springs, Vacluse, Greenwood-Tranquil, Orrville, Prosperity, Jackson, Piedmont-Bethesda and Charleston-Asbury-St James charges. He served the Mount Pleasant and Whitmire-Carlisle charges as a retired elder.

Funeral services were held Dec. 7 at Central UMC, Newberry with burial in Upper Long Cane Cemetery, Abbeville.

Memorials may be made to Central UMC, 1005 College St., Newberry, SC 29108; to the Newberry County Disabilities and Special Needs Board, P.O. Box 856, Newberry, SC 29108; or to the South Carolina Commission for the Blind, 1430 Confederate Ave., Columbia, SC 29201.

Rev. Williams is survived by his four daughters.

Former Judicial Council member Ted Walter remembered as 'remarkable man' who touched lives of many

COLUMBIA—Dr. Theodore Holt Walter, 89, a member of the denomination's Judicial Council, World Methodist Council and other key agencies, passed away peacefully at home on Friday, Nov. 17, 2023.

Walter was born in Florence May 15, 1934, to Ernest Edwin and Irma Holt Walter. He graduated from McClenaghan High School in 1952 and Wofford College in 1956. After graduation, he attended Emory University's Candler School of Theology and graduated with a Master of Divinity in 1959. He was also awarded honorary doctorates from Wofford College and Columbia College.

Walter's ministerial career was spent serving the South Carolina United Methodist Conference (see full obituary above). In addition, he served as superintendent of the Spar-

tanburg and Columbia districts.

Prior to his retirement in 2003, he was coordinator of Clergy Services for the conference. During his retirement, he was interim president of Epworth Children's Home for two years.

A dedicated servant of God and his community, Walter was active in many organizations, including the Columbia College Trustee Board, of which he served as chairman; General Board of Higher Education and Ministry; the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church; and the World Methodist Council.

He was a member of the Columbia Golden K Kiwanis Club.

Walter was a loving husband, father, grandfather, and

great-grandfather. He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Pegilie Price Walter; his sons, Timothy Price Walter Sr. (Wendy Beasley Hull) of Mount Pleasant, Perry Spann Walter (James Ramsay) of Atlanta, Paul Richbourg Walter (Jennifer) of Hilton Head Island, and daughter-in-law Cheryl Kirby Walter of Lake City; grandchildren Ben Walter (Alli Abercrombie) and Grace Burch (Patrick) both of Lake City, Price and Cooper Walter of Mount Pleasant, and Hanna and Celia Walter of Hilton Head Island.

In addition, he is survived by great-grandchildren Jack and Teddy Grace Burch.

Those who loved him said Walter was a truly remarkable man who touched the lives of many people. He will be deeply missed by all who knew him.

Few's Chapel: Honoring the present, remembering the past

GREER—Veteran's Day was a different day at Few's Chapel United Methodist Church, a day that celebrated veterans present and past—as well as those who have passed.

Hayley Proctor, a junior at Blue Ridge High School and member of the church, took on the task of identifying all of the veterans of years past that are interred in the Few's Chapel cemetery. Hayley spent many hours walking through the cemetery and poring through records to locate veterans who served during war and peacetime.

After identifying and marking the location of each grave, a letter was sent to family members of record to join with Few's Chapel's pastor, the Rev. John MacKeil, and members prior to worship to remember and honor those who served our country.

On Veteran's Day Sunday, a large contingent of family members who responded to the invitation walked through the cemetery as Hayley placed an American flag at each headstone and offered a brief prayer of thanks and rest at each gravesite.

The 11 a.m. worship service began with Hayley leading the congregation in the Pledge of Allegiance and reading the names of all past veterans.

After she read the names, all veterans in attendance were invited to stand and be recognized.

Hayley plans to expand her project by

placing wreaths on the headstones each Memorial Day and continue the placement of flags on Veteran's Day.

Hayley is a member of the HOSA Club at Blue Ridge High, serves on the Board of Trustees at Few's Chapel and is instrumental in the monthly collection of food items for Greer Relief's food pantry.



Hayley Proctor, a junior at Blue Ridge High School and member of the church, puts a flag on a grave.



Hayley spent many hours walking through the cemetery and poring through records to locate veterans who served.

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Stories of Faith

by Deborah Len

Andy the concierge

Today! This is my first official day working in the local hotel as the concierge. I have dressed in my black slacks and crisp white shirt. I have attached my name plate. “Andy” in gold letters. I feel like a million bucks. At age 20, I finally did right.

The road to this day was beyond rocky and full of pitfalls. When I was born, my mom did not really want me and my dad was a ... let us say a drunken bum. Mom tried to do her best. Since her parents were less than honorable, she did upgrade. The first 12 years for Andy (I sometimes talk about myself in the third person) were just that—years. Nothing was fun or easy or simple. Andy had a rough go of it since his mom was less than loving, caring or sympathetic. She pretty much left Andy to his own devices. Andy was on his own from the time he could climb on the stool to cook his own eggs in the morning. There is nothing like learning to be your own keeper when your classmates had parents that helped keep them.

This early jump into being 100 percent responsible for my own food and clothes made me angry and withdrawn at first. I was a first-class scrapper. I scrapped and pushed and shoved anyone who got even 5 feet from me. Hurt them before I got hurt. Yes, that is how Andy lived for 12 years.

Because of this isolation, I learned to be an A-1 top notch student. Sure, sometimes my clothes were gray and dingy and I was hungry. But I never missed a day of school. School was my refuge from my otherwise bleak existence. I learned to cook by reading the books in the library. Librarians are so helpful. I learned to do laundry better by hanging out in the grocery store and listening to the other moms talk about what made their clothes whiter and brighter. I listened when people talked, and I learned. I thought of myself as Andy the sponge. I absorbed all I could to make my life simpler and easier. The moment I heard someone say in a grocery store to one of the employees, “Come on, Susan, let’s work smarter, not harder,” my life changed. Smarter! Think before I act!

Remember I said librarians are helpful? Miss Edna was the best. She even got me clothes and shoes from her nephews who had outgrown them. She helped me learn to manage my time so I could get my studies done and help her in the library after classes. The school district even found money to pay me for helping her

and the janitor. I secretly thought they were kind of sweet on each other. When I told them I wanted to be a concierge in a hotel one day, they both smiled and hugged me. It felt weird to be hugged. I did like it. We talked while I reshelved books and swept and mopped. We were a team.

One day, Bob invited me to an event on a Sunday, and I was very nervous to say yes. Oh, heck fire, my mom would not even notice I was not there if I had her breakfast in the microwave for her to heat up. So I put on my best and waited for Bob to pick me up.

I was going to church for the first time ever. It was a special event. They had the young people doing all the parts of the service. A young boy about my age did most of the talking. Bob sat beside me and helped me find the songs and the Bible passages. I listened as the young boy talked about Jesus and how he saved him from a life of drugs and alcohol and being a slave to those demons. Well, I did not have any of those demons. Then I heard the boy say to have Jesus in your heart to be your forever best friend, all you must do is ask Him. Best friend for life! That got to me, and I started to cry. Bob put his arm around me, and he asked me if I wanted to go up to the altar and ask for Jesus to be my friend. I blubbered yes.

That was the dawning of a new life for me. Romans 10:9-10 changed everything about how I thought and acted toward myself and others. I started to connect to myself and be aware of the beauty around me and the people and so much more. The more I let Jesus come out of me, the more I smiled and laughed and had a good time doing the tasks of daily living with a more grateful heart.

With Jesus, all things are possible. It is through him that I got to finish high school and take night classes in hospitality and tourism.

Rule One in hospitality: 10 feet away smile, 5 feet away say a cheerful hello. Now I am The Concierge at our local hotel. The position was created for me by Bob and Edna, as they are the new hotel owners. I told you I always thought they were sweet on each other.

Smiling, I greet our first guest of the day.

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

GCFCA releases video to promote understanding of UMC funding

NASHVILLE—The General Council on Finance and Administration has released a new video “UMC: Journey of a Dollar” to help people understand denominational giving.

The video, part of the ongoing “Data-Driven Discernment: Charting Hope at General Conference” campaign, sheds light on the intricate path a dollar takes once it enters the offering plate, demystifying how it funds essential ministries within The United Methodist Church.

The campaign attempts to empower members and delegates of the UMC with pertinent legal and financial information in preparation for the upcoming General Conference

Building on the success of the initial video, “Strengthening the Episcopal Fund,” the “Journey of a Dollar” installment aims to provide transparency and understanding regarding the financial journey of contributions. It is part of GCFCA’s broader initiative to foster financial stewardship, enhance awareness of legal implications and encourage data-backed decision-making.

“This video is a crucial step in equipping our delegates and members with the knowledge they need for informed decision-making,” said Rev. Moses Kumar, general secretary of GCFCA.

To see the latest video, visit <https://www.gcfca.org/general-conference>.

Happy New Year from



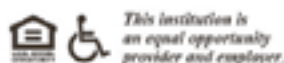
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December

- Dec. 21—Winter Solstice
- Dec. 21—The Longest Night Service, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head, 6 p.m.
- Dec. 22-26—United Methodist Center closed.
- Dec. 24—Christmas Eve
- Dec. 24—Christmas Eve Extravaganza featuring Asley Fabian, Ethan Vincent, Kyle Lane, Todd Smith and Amanda Gibson, Trinity UMC, Charleston, 11:15 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.
- Dec. 24—Children's Christmas Pageant, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head, 10 a.m.
- Dec. 24—Christmas Eve candlelight service, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head, 4:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.
- Dec. 25—Christmas Day
- Dec. 26-Jan. 1—Kwanzaa
- Dec. 31—New Year's Eve/Watch Night
- Dec. 31—Christmas Hymn Sing service,, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head, 10 a.m.
- Dec. 31—Fifth Sunday Wellness Service at St. John UMC, Orangeburg, 10 a.m.,



O Come, Emmanuel

Manning UMC, Manning, held its Christmas Cantata, pictured above, Dec. 10.

on "Preparing for End of Life: Palliative Care, Hospice, Insurance and Banking Information."

January

- Jan. 1—New Year's Day (United Methodist Center closed)

Jan. 5—Twelfth Night

Jan. 6—Epiphany

Jan. 11—Human Trafficking Awareness Day

Jan. 15—Martin Luther King Jr. Day (United

Methodist Center closed)

Jan. 20—"Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership," Bishop's Day in the Charleston District.

Jan. 22—Registration deadline for Native American Representative Training.

Jan. 26-28—Revolution 2024, Township Auditorium, Columbia. <http://scmyp.org/revolution/>

February

UWF Wallace Family Life Center Special Emphasis Month

Feb. 3—"Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership," Bishop's Day in the Rock Hill District.

Feb. 3—19th Annual Native American Representative Training, Main Street UMC, Columbia, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. \$10. To register: contact LaShella Kirkland, 803-374-8243 or LaShellaKirkland@live.com.

Feb.6-8—Bishop's School of Ministry, Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort, Myrtle Beach. <https://www.umcsc.org/cs-bsm/>

Feb. 8—UWF Social Action Workshop #1, Climate Justice, virtual, 6:30 p.m.

Feb. 10—"Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership," Bishop's Day in the Hartsville District.

2024 Equipping the Local Church Grant Cycle begins Jan. 15

The denomination's 2024 Equipping the Local Church Grant Cycle will open Jan. 15. As many as 50 grants of \$5,000 or \$10,000 are available to small- and medium-sized church congregations, or clusters of churches working together, in a Wesleyan-tradition denomination.

The grant is intended to help launch an experiment or initiative to share the Gospel, tell faith stories and invite others into a relationship with Jesus.

Any church or group of churches fitting the criteria may apply. To help clarify the grant criteria and application process, an information session will be held Jan. 25 from 2-3 p.m. You can register for the session at <https://foundationforevangelism.org/grant-seekers>.

Applications open Jan. 15 and will close Feb. 29. For more information, visit <https://foundationforevangelism.org/grant-seekers>.

ERT plans disaster response training in February

Those interested in helping in the aftermath of a disaster are encouraged to participate in training to become a part of the South Carolina Conference's Early Response Team.

Part of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, ERT members are often the first on a scene to help after a tornado, hurricane or other disaster, tarping roofs, cutting trees and helping in other ways.

On Saturday, Feb. 17, St. John's United Methodist Church, Aiken, will host an ERT Basic/Renewal class.

The Basic class will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The fees are \$40 per person, which includes a manual, shirt, cap and badge. There is a \$20 fee for renewals, which will run from 9-1 p.m.

To register for either class, go to <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>.

Everyone also needs to do a background check (free) through United Methodist Committee on Relief at <https://app.verifiedvolunteers.com/en/Candidates/Account/Register>. (If asked for a code then put in 9x2r4eh..)

This background check is mandatory and without it you will not get a badge or be certified. If you have difficulty doing this check, come one hour early and volunteers will help you, but please try to do it yourself first.

St. John's is located at 104 Newberry St., Aiken, SC 29801.

For more information, contact Billy Robinson at brpraisejesus@aol.com or 803-539-8429.

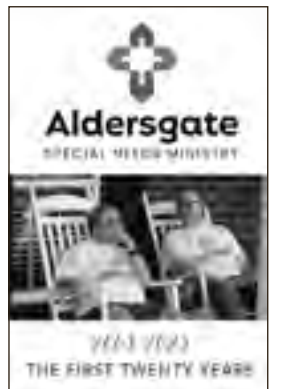
Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry book now available on Advocate website, Amazon

A 20-year history of Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry, a thriving ministry of the South Carolina Conference, is the latest book released from the Advocate Press.

Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry was formed in 2003 by family and friends seeking residential solutions for loved ones with developmental disabilities. Its mission is to provide Christian homes with the highest quality of life and greatest level of independence for adults with special needs. They have four homes across the state and one more under construction.

The Advocate Press is a small publishing arm that produces nonfiction books and devotionals. To date it has produced 21 books and has several more slated for release soon. Proceeds from book sales benefit Aldersgate as well as the *Advocate*.

To buy the book, go to <https://advocatesc.org/store/books/aldersgate> or buy on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0CP7PX34Q>



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Empowering discernment

by the Rev. Cathy Joens

Jan. 7 The Wisdom and Worship of the Magi

Lesson Scripture: Proverbs 2:8-9; Matthew 2:1-12

Background Scripture: Proverbs 2:1-15

Key Verse: Matthew 2:10-11, “When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”

Epiphany comes after the 12 days of Christmas. It means a moment of new understanding. We often relate Epiphany to an epiphany—a manifestation or striking appearance. No matter how one uses the term today, the Magi (Wise Men) saw a great sight and had a moment of new understanding.

They were men of science who studied the stars. They were looking to the stars when they saw the star over Bethlehem. It was something that was unusual and nothing like they had seen before. They followed the star, knowing that this was something special. It was not just their brains working but their spirit was telling them to go and see what great star was signifying.

While they knew where Jerusalem was, they did not know where Bethlehem was, and they stopped to talk with Herod the Great. They told Herod they were looking for the Christ child. This Christ child was news to Herod, and it threatened his kingdom. Of course, in the name of power, he began to plot.

When the Wise Men found Jesus, it was a “no words moment.” They felt God’s truth throughout their very being. They knew that what God had promised had happened. They knew through reading the prophecies, hearing the stories of God and studying the stars and the cosmos. They knew in their gut that Jesus was the Messiah. They were looking at royalty far beyond Herod the Great. They gave the gifts that they had brought for royalty to the Christ child. God told them to leave by another way, so they would not encounter the human king, and they did.

This story makes me wonder: What does our gut/spirit tell us about God and his love for us? How do we seek and stay with our King Jesus? What gets in our way from discerning his plan for our lives?

Jan. 14 The Marks of True Wisdom

Lesson Scripture: Genesis 50:15-21; Proverbs 2:11-12

Background Scripture: Genesis 39:21-23; 50:15-21; Proverbs 2:11-12; 3:1-18

Key Verse: Genesis 50:20, “You planned something bad for me, but God produced something good from it, in

order to save lives of many people, just as he’s doing today.”

It is so hard to see the good in life when everything is going wrong, or when we are hurt or in danger. Joseph’s response to his brothers, after being sold into slavery and separated from his father for many years, is amazing. Would we have his ability to forgive and to let go and be in relationship with them?

Our human nature often looks for justice—our own personally designed justice, which usually makes us right and the other person wrong. Often our kind of justice does not allow for reconciliation and healthy relationship. Joseph offers us an example of the marks of wisdom. He looked at the whole of the situation, not just the part of having been sold. Joseph understood the good of God’s entire plan. Joseph also forgave and let go of the sin against him.

Elvis Presley sang a song titled “Rubbernecking,” which goes, “Stop, look and listen baby, that’s my philosophy... It’s called rubbernecking.” A catchy tune can play in our heads.

Like Joseph, what if we all stopped, looked and listened in the situations around us? Would it make a difference in how we respond to difficult situations or injustices that we experience? If we were able to stop, look and listen all around us, could we see a glimpse of what God wants for us?

Joseph saw very clearly that what the brothers (in a fit of anger and selfishness) meant for evil, God meant to use for good. That is wisdom.

Jan. 21 A Discerning Mind

Lesson Scripture: Proverbs 2:3-5; I Kings 4:1-13

Background Scripture: 2 Samuel 14:1-24; Proverbs 4:1-13

Key Verse: Key Verse: 1 Kings 3:9, “Please give your servant a discerning mind in order to govern your people and to distinguish good from evil, because no one is able to govern this important people of yours without your help.”

Solomon had big shoes to fill. Solomon served a kingdom that was so large not all of its people could be known. It was a lot to inherit and a lot to carry for a young man who felt burdened by his dad’s expertise and reputation. How would he ever measure up?

Have you ever felt in the shadow of someone else and in a place where you cannot measure up? Have you wondered if you would ever measure up to the high standards set before you? In this kingdom, there is no physical temple to go to offer sacrifices. There are pagan shelters throughout, and Solomon chooses one of the pagan shelters to offer his sacrifices. God meets him there in the pagan shelter. It is interesting that God knows our hearts and meets us where

we are. It is there in that shelter that God asks Solomon what he wants. Solomon, so aware of the burden he has as king and so aware of his inadequacies, asks for wisdom.

The classic definition of wisdom is the ability to choose good from evil. Solomon chose wisdom over wealth and long life because he knew no one could lead without God’s help. While Moses was known for the law and David was known for psalms, Solomon was known for having wisdom. He had a discerning spirit and could decide and communicate the truth of God’s will and way. After his encounter with God, he went straight to the Ark of the Covenant and burned offerings in the right place to his God, Yahweh.

God meets us where we are and gifts us, too. What would you ask for if God came and offered anything? Would the gift be one that serves others or self? Wisdom is the ability to wait on God and trust that he will equip us and use us for his plan. We need God in order to lead and serve.

Jan. 28 All Glory to God!

Lesson Scripture: Proverbs 2:6-7; Daniel 2:14-30

Background Scripture: Proverbs 8:1-36; Daniel 1:3-5, 17-21; Daniel 2

Key Verse: Daniel 2:30, “Now this mystery was revealed to me, not because I have more wisdom than any other living person but so that the dream’s meaning might be made known to the king, and so that you might know the thoughts of your own mind.”

Wisdom comes from one place: God. We have seen different forms in these Bible lessons. We have seen the curiosity of the Magi,

the compassion of Joseph and the ability to know right from wrong in Solomon. Daniel offers us a glimpse at his faith that comes through when everything else has failed.

These marks of wisdom remind us of how our faith lives and those of others are multifaceted. Daniel was exiled in Babylon and in communication with the king’s royal officer and chief executioner of Babylonian sages. The sages were considered wise persons and seers. King Nebuchadnezzar was worried about the future and how he could keep the power and control he had won. He wanted the sages to tell him what his dream was and what it meant. When they could not tell the king what he wanted, they were killed.

Bravely, Daniel and his three friends (you know them as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) stated the threat. They appealed to God for help. They sang songs and offered praises to what God had already done and his faithfulness. God gave Daniel the interpretation of the king’s dream. As a reward, Daniel was exalted and given gifts. He was also made ruler over a Babylonian province. Wow! See what God can do. Anything is possible with God when we seek him.

What wisdom do you seek as you read this lesson? Is God calling you to compassion, to make right decisions or to see through the fog of a story? Is he calling you to a deeper faith and curiosity?

Whatever he is calling you to specifically, he is also calling us all to draw near, to listen and to go where he sends us.

Daniel reminds us that God can—and we can through God.

Joens is the congregational specialist for the Anderson and Greenville districts of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.



Showing some Christmas spirit

On Nov. 30, Manning UMC, Manning, participated in the town-wide Christmas parade.



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Dr. Bria Harper and Nadia Ferguson met while serving on the college’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day planning committee. Ferguson was looking for a mentor and found one in Harper while taking her African American Literature course. Since then, they meet regularly and have served together in support of Homecoming, Brown Girls Read and Black Girl Upstate initiatives. Ferguson also drops into Harper’s office and classes whenever she can.

“It’s important to me to be invested in my students,” says Harper. “They know I’m available both in and outside of class. I’ll always make space for them.”



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Where thought leads. To a community of support.