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Church gets creative in clearing parsonage overgrowth. See Page 3.

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# A faithful step



Photo courtesy of Advent UMC

Advent UMC's Nick Smith, director of contemporary worship, sings during a service with other church vocalists. Smith said they released their studio album as a reminder that they can trust in God despite the difficulties they have endured.

## Band releases studio album as gift to Advent, community

By Jessica Brodie

SIMPSONVILLE—One church's praise band has released an album that is not only helping the congregation reach out to the community but is also creating a greater sense of community in-house.

Advent United Methodist Church has had a contemporary worship band since the early 2000s, and over the years it has grown immensely. Today it includes roughly 35 people, including

eight vocalists and a host of musicians, and they work hard to glorify the Lord through song. They cover popular contemporary Christian songs, most heard on local Christian radio stations, making the songs their own through their unique style.

Nick Smith, director of contemporary worship, said the idea to release an album began percolating after people would come up to them after worship and say they liked Advent's version better than the version they

heard on the radio. Smith, along with Advent's Director of Communications Scott Rouse, began exploring what it would look like to record a studio album as an Easter gift to their church. Rouse hoped the album would be both a showcase tool for the church and an outreach tool, helping people know there's a church in their community doing bold and godly things in a contemporary worship setting.

See "A Faithful Step," Page 13

## First same-sex wedding held in a South Carolina UMC

By Jessica Brodie

SPARTANBURG—South Carolina pastors officiated the first same-sex wedding in a United Methodist church this spring. And for new spouses Shannon Creighton and Ben Chumley, they're now feeling both loved by their church family and "complete."

Chumley, director of music at Trinity UMC, Spartanburg, and Creighton, Trinity missions chair who works in education technology, were married at Trinity March 15, which was their 10-year dating anniversary.

"I feel more complete, like I can now fully participate in my church," Chumley told the *Advocate*, noting that he's helped with hundreds of weddings in his role at the church. "Now to be able to participate in that myself is both fulfilling and full circle."

The wedding came less than a year after the denomination's General Conference removed long-

See "First Same-Sex Wedding," Page 24

## New church start hopes to build community in growing coastal area

By Jessica Brodie

CAROLINA FOREST—For years, the unincorporated community called Carolina Forest, in Horry County, has been growing. Located halfway between Conway and Myrtle Beach, what started as 22 squares miles of timber property now houses 50,000 people, many transients, though most are putting down roots and staying.

The Rev. Tyler Strange describes Carolina Forest as a "growing collection of neighborhoods trying to find its identity as a community." Anchored by the 6.5-mile Carolina Forest Boulevard,

the area is home to five elementary schools, three middle schools and one high school. They're exactly the kind of community that needs a United Methodist presence, he said.

Now, thanks to Strange and a core group of people on his launch team, they're getting one.

Since July 2024, Strange has been appointed there, working to develop Carolina Forest United Methodist Church as a new church start hoping to share the love of Jesus within that community.

Strange started by getting

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Deadlines are the 10th of each month for the following month's paper (except July paper due June 6).

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# Church helps pay funeral expenses after sudden illness claims young member

By Jessica Brodie

MANNING—When tragedy strikes, it often brings opportunity—and for Christians, that opportunity is to love each other in godly, transformative ways that point to the agape love found in Jesus.

That’s precisely what happened in Manning this summer when a church lost one of its youngest, Isaac Thomas Parker, to a devastating and sudden illness. In response, the congregation and community stepped up in Christian love, ultimately paying for the boy’s funeral expenses in entirety.

Eight-year-old Isaac Thomas Parker had started attending Manning United Methodist Church in January with his uncle, 19-year-old Garek Parker. Quickly, Isaac’s sweet smile and vibrant personality caught the heart of his pastor, the Rev. David McManus, along with the rest of the congregation. New to town, Parker and his nephew began attending church regularly, with Isaac participating in Manning UMC’s “Road Trip” vacation Bible school in early June.

But after the joy, laughter and learning of that week, Isaac suddenly took ill and passed away June 7 from a respiratory illness, McManus said.

Isaac’s death hit hard, McManus said, describing the boy as a sincere, sweet

child with a genuine desire to learn about faith and a gaze that made a person feel like they were his best friend. Isaac loved to read and wanted to be an astronaut.



Isaac

“I found out before the funeral that when he died early Saturday morning, he still had his vacation Bible school nametag in his pocket,” McManus said, acknowledging the deep pain of Isaac’s loss. “We’re all heartbroken. I felt like had a bowling ball in my chest for about three weeks.”

The family texted McManus in the early hours of the emergency, and McManus went to the hospital to be with them. In the aftermath, he felt the overwhelming urge to ask if they would need help meeting Isaac’s funeral expenses. With their permission, he and Manning’s youth director Kelly Gottheiner quickly put the word out to the congregation and surrounding community seeking donations toward the expenses.

The response was overwhelming, McManus and Gottheiner said, and the Parker family was able to lay their beloved boy to rest without bearing the burden of any funeral expenses. McManus said people immediately stepped up to help. The funeral home donated their services, and local businesses and individuals contributed. The casket supplier and other funeral suppliers reduced their costs, as well.

“Between that and money we raised, there was zero cost for the family,” McManus said. “It was just a beautiful thing to watch these people wrap around him and his uncle and his family.”

“He was a bright light,” Gottheiner said. “We are heartbroken, but what this community has done in the wake of his loss has been nothing short of extraordinary.”

McManus said losing Isaac has been hard on the church. Isaac’s favorite color was purple, so they put a purple ribbon on the pew where he normally sat as a way to remember and honor the boy. Isaac’s uncle still comes to church, as have Isaac’s mother and her boyfriend and Isaac’s grandmother, and the church is embracing the family in congregational love and support. Having a chance to help with expenses and minister to Isaac’s family was a way they could put their love into action.

“The opportunity to minister to his family was very healing for them,” McManus said.

Gottheiner agreed, and she said that healing points to God foremost.

“This town showed up for a little boy and his family in their time of greatest need,” Gottheiner said. “It’s a reminder of the love and strength we have when we come together in Christ. We’re hoping Isaac’s family is able to find some peace in coming to church and can feel God’s love through our care.”

## Advocate wins two SCPA advertising awards

The *Advocate* newspaper has won two South Carolina Press Association PALMY Advertising Awards.

The SCPA PALMY Advertising Awards recognize the Palmetto State’s brightest advertising professionals and advertisers as well as the impact they have made.

In the open division, the *Advocate* won first place for its 2025 awareness video, which was produced by Matt Brodie. “Good variety of voices used with a clear call to action,” judges said. “Thoughtful scripting and editing with clean audio and video.”

Also in the open division, *Advocate* Marketing Coordinator Katy Renfroe won second place for Newspaper Promotion for her Year-End Donation Drive ad for the newspaper.

These two awards add to the more than 150 awards the *Advocate* has won for journalistic excellence, including two this spring for writing and one for overall publication excellence.

## Francis Burns’ 12th Freedom School hosts 33 scholars for reading, world changing

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—Francis Burns United Methodist Church hosted its 12th Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School this summer, enabling rising fourth through ninth graders to boost literacy and reading skills, engage in dialogue about social justice and become world-changing critical thinkers.

The camp, which ran June 16-July 25, welcomed 33 students—called scholars—this year as one of more than 100 Freedom Schools held in 100 U.S. cities across 30 states.

Francis Burns also hosted a special visit June 25 from Dr. Starsky Wilson, president and chief executive officer of Children’s Defense Fund and its action council. Wilson saw the program in action, speaking with parents as well as students, servant leader interns and administrative staff to learn more about the specific needs of the community.

Wilson told the *Advocate* he was excited to be in South Carolina, as the CDF’s founder, Marian Wright Edelman, hails from Bennettsville. He said he was particularly honored to see the Francis Burns Freedom School and hear from their participants.

“This congregation has clearly decided children are a priority. It’s a sense of clear,



Photo by Jessica Brodie

Dr. Starsky Wilson (right), president and chief executive officer of Children’s Defense Fund, talks about community issues with servant leader interns during his trip to Francis Burns UMC, Columbia.

discerned call for their congregation,” Wilson said, lifting up how the church’s theology for children’s well-being is both inspiring and impactful.

Wilson said it’s important for him to travel to Freedom School sites so he can hear firsthand from community members about the unique needs they have. In his line of work, children’s health and welfare are always a priority for people in Washington, but there’s a mismatch versus what he hears from Freedom School participants. When he gets into communities, he hears over and over that advocacy work doesn’t adequately address violence or the need for good education.

“It’s very clear—when you ask parents about their kids,

they always talk about the schools. Public education is still the big thing,” he said.

He brought those same questions that night to parents: What are your challenges? What are your needs?

Freedom School is held for six weeks every weekday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., throughout June and July. Most of the day is spent reading and discussing books and their themes in-depth. The scholars also take field trips, host speakers on important topics and do service projects.

To learn more about Freedom School, visit https://www.childrensdefense.org/our-work/cdf-freedom-schools.

For more on Freedom School at Francis Burns, email info@francisburns.org.



# UMC connection enables church to get donated organ



Photo by David Salter

Out of the sorrow of a church closure came a gift to a church that needed a new organ, exemplifying connectionism.

By David W. Salter

LANGLEY—The United Methodist Church is a connectional church. One of the blessings of being a part of a denomination that is connectional is that churches, districts and conferences help one another throughout the denomination.

The seed of that connection bore fruit through the donation of an organ, which was moved from one now-closed church to a church in need.

Belvedere UMC, Belvedere, closed because of declining membership and attendance. However, its Johannus digital organ was still there—and still functioning at 20 years of age.

Meanwhile Langley UMC, a thriving

and active church, had a 50-plus-year-old analog Baldwin, an organ that had served them well over the years but had a few issues.

The Conference Board of Trustees agreed to donate Belvedere’s organ to Langley, and now Langley has a beautiful and much-improved instrument through which they can provide music on Sunday mornings.

But the story didn’t stop there. Langley discovered the age of the external speakers caused some deterioration of the speaker cones, the connection once again came through. A post to Facebook prompted a call from a fellow (anonymous) United Methodist organist who had six speaker cabinets he was willing to donate. That call came in

less than five minutes after the post on social media.

Both the donation from the Conference Board of Trustees and the donation by this individual fellow United Methodist are perfect examples of the connectional church. The congregation at Langley is very pleased, and all it cost them was the cost of having the organ moved from the closed Belvedere UMC to the Langley UMC.

Out of the sorrow of a church closure came a wonderful gift to a church that needed this stimulus at this time. That is connection!

*Salter is the co-director of Lay Servant Ministries and organist at Warrenville UMC, Warrenville, and Langley UMC.*

# Goats help Aldersgate UMC be better stewards of parsonage yard



The goats cleared the church’s overgrowth—and brought people together.

GREENVILLE—At Aldersgate UMC, stewardship isn’t just about buildings—it’s about caring for the spaces where ministry and community grow.

So when the parsonage backyard was overtaken by brush and weeds, the trustees saw more than a maintenance problem. They saw a chance to get creative.

Mowers couldn’t handle it. Volunteer efforts ran into busy schedules, sore backs and poison ivy. Then someone half-joked at a meeting, “What about goats?” The idea stuck.

It turns out that goats are expert landscapers. With a quick call to Gotcha Goats, a local goat-scaping crew, the plan was in motion.

Soon, 10 four-legged team members were hard

at work. They cleared the overgrowth—and brought people together. Folks stopped by to check their progress, take pictures and enjoy the fun.

One trustee summed it up: “I’ve never seen a pastor so happy to have goats in the backyard.”

But this wasn’t just about landscaping—it was about shared action, creative stewardship and the reminder that ministry grows in all kinds of unexpected ways ... even on four hooves.

As the Rev. Amanda Richardson put it with a grin, “Ministry often means thinking outside the box—and this gives new meaning to ‘scapegoat.’”

The goats have gone home, but the story keeps growing.



O’Neal Street United Methodist Church opened its doors not just as a place of worship but as a lifeline.

Photo by the Rev. Ed Stallworth

# O’Neal Street Cooling Center offers relief during heatwave

NEWBERRY—As temperatures soared into dangerous triple digits this summer, O’Neal Street United Methodist Church opened its doors not just as a place of worship but as a lifeline.

The church transformed its fellowship hall into a daytime cooling center, offering cold drinks, snacks and a safe place to rest for anyone in need. But the effort went far beyond fans and air conditioning. People from across Newberry County and beyond brought food, gave donations and showed up to help. Churches throughout Newberry offered supplies and support, and individuals came with compassion and a willingness to serve.

“It all started with a phone call,” said Pastor Ed Stallworth. “Mary Beth Heath, who runs our Feed Thy Neighbor Kitchen, and Lewis Lee, our lay leader, called me and said, ‘This is what we’re going to do.’” I was reluctant because I didn’t even know how to begin the process. But Mary Beth said, ‘Don’t worry; we got this.’ And they did.”

From there, the support poured in. Professionals who work in mental health, benefits assistance and

housing advocacy came by to offer resources. Community members brought meals, cold drinks and words of encouragement. The space became not only a cooling center but a hub of compassion and connection.

“We are a very small church, but we have eternal-sized dreams,” Stallworth said. “We are part of a larger community that looks out for one another. I am proud to be their pastor.”

The cooling center is just one part of the church’s ongoing mission. Every Saturday, O’Neal Street UMC serves a hot lunch through its Feed Thy Neighbor Kitchen. The church also houses a food pantry and a clothes closet for anyone in need. When the weather turns dangerously cold, it becomes an overnight warming center.

“We are not doing this alone,” Stallworth said. “We have friends in this work. Other churches, community partners and folks from every walk of life are stepping up to make sure no one is forgotten.”

Whether in the extreme heat of summer or the bitter cold of winter, O’Neal Street UMC remains a place where needs are met, people are cared for and hope is shared.

# UMCSC announces last day to pay 2025 apportionments

The last day to pay apportionments for 2025 is Thursday, Jan. 15, 2026. The payment must be in the treasurer’s office by 4 p.m. The postmark is not the deciding factor, and the treasurer’s office is not responsible for delivery delays regardless of which carrier is used.

The treasurer’s office can accept wires if necessary, but remember that wires are expensive to send and receive. If paying by Vanco, the payment needs to be initiated by 3 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 14.

For more information, contact the treasurer’s office at 803-786-9486.

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Editorial  
by Jessica Brodie

Building up the house

Folding laundry the other day, I noticed a slogan on one of my husband’s athletic garments: Protect this house. It reminded me of words the Rev. Joe Long shared a couple of weeks ago when my entire family—me, my husband, our four teens and my step-daughter’s boyfriend—served at Salkehatchie Summer Service.

It was our third year serving together in this phenomenal home repair ministry, and during the opening devotional, Long talked about how when we are rebuilding the homes of other people in need, it’s important work. But we must remember the more important work is that which God is doing within our souls.

Our bodies are the temple for our souls, the house for the Holy Spirit within us. And when we are engaged in ministry and connected with other Christians in the work of Jesus Christ, we are also building our own “houses.” We build those houses through compassion, faith, mercy and other good and godly values that are cultivated and strengthened when we become stronger and more mature Christians.

Reflecting on his words, it occurred to me that it’s exactly what we need to be doing as a church as well.

The Bible tells us in Colossians 1:18 that we are the body, and Christ is our head. We, the church, are therefore like a house ruled by Jesus—he’s the true head of the house, both the house as the collective church and our individual houses, which protect our souls. When we strengthen ourselves together—when we grow as a church, become better leaders and disciples and hearers and doers of God’s word—our house is strengthened. We the church, both individually and collectively, are strengthened, built up, made ready.

Sometimes churches get caught up in the ceremony of the worship service. We get caught up in doing community events and church gatherings and all these wonderful things that are very good for relationship-building and spreading the word to others.

But all of that good work falls short if we’re not working on our souls and helping others to do so, also—if we are not also engaging in excellent studies and intentional prayer and other work that helps us deepen and mature in our faith walk. I think that’s why the church is sometimes called the hospital for the hurting, for it is where we all can find our ultimate cure: Jesus Christ. Jesus solves every problem.

For those of us who are already Christ followers, it’s not just about going to church and being a part of a church. It’s about the work we do once we are in the house, not only to share the good news with others but to deepen our own understanding about what it means to walk with Jesus and to know God on every level.

The week we spent at Salkehatchie enabled my family to join with other people and provide a new roof, flooring, ceiling, and other important aspects of a home for people in need. The real work, however, was the work that occurred in our individual houses—in our souls and the souls of the homeowners and other community members who we connected with.

As a church, let us remember that as we enter this new season in our mission and vision as a denomination.



Bishop’s Column  
by Bishop Leonard R. Fairley

‘This I believe!’

Based on the NPR series of the same name is the bestselling book, “This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women.” The book features essays written from thoughts that begin with the words, “This I believe ...”

Considering this premise in the middle of so much political, social, religious and economic chaos, polarization and anxiety prompted me to reflect: What do I believe?

My initial thoughts ran through these simple but profound words from other practitioners of the more excellent ways of love, peace and justice:

“No darkness lasts forever. And even there, there are stars.”—Ursula K. Le Guin

“Truth crushed to earth will rise again.”—Words of William Cullen Bryant, used so eloquently by Martin Luther King Jr.

This I believe: Love will always win, and hope is stronger than despair. Good will always triumph over evil, and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is always the possibility of healing, reconciliation, redemption and salvation. Could it be that our current reality is the birth pains of God’s new thing striving to be born?

The question, then, is whether we have the courage and the will to be spiritual midwives that help

deliver God’s justice, love and peace into being. Do we really desire for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven?

This I believe: In Jesus Christ, there is something wonderful and amazing waiting to burst forth in the middle of all our darkness.

I believe in new beginnings as John O’Donohue writes about them in his book of blessings, “To Bless the Space Between Us”:

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,  
where your thoughts never think to wander,  
this beginning has been quietly forming,  
waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time, it has watched your desire,  
feeling the emptiness growing inside you,  
noticing how you willed yourself on,  
still unable to leave what you had outgrown ...  
Though your destination is not yet clear  
you can trust the promise of this opening;  
unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning  
that is at one with your life’s desire.

*(Selected verses from the blessing, “For a New Beginning,” by John O’Donohue)*

Corrections.

In the list of appointments (July *Advocate*), there were a few errors:

Mary Snowden (RL) was left out of the Florence District’s list of retirees in our printing.

Dr. Lyn Pace should have been listed as Assistant Dean of Religious Life at Duke University Chapel. That appointment started Jan. 1, 2025.

Michael Cunningham Walker

should have an ad interim retirement date of Sept. 30, 2024, not Feb. 30, 2024.

We apologize for these errors and, as always, strive to set the record straight.

Letters to the Editor.

My last Annual Conference

Last week I attended my last Annual Conference since I am retiring from the South Carolina Annual Conference staff. I have spent 32 years as full-time and the last four as part-time staff (congregational specialist 1989-2025). It has come time to enter a new season of my ministry journey (real retirement). Annual Conference 2025 was a bittersweet time for me—bitter because I will miss my work with local congregations and sweet because I need to work on my golf and pickleball games.

Thank you, South Carolina Conference, for letting me have such meaningful ministry for so many years. Thank you to every congregation who opened your churches to me and let me be part of your congregation’s life story. You opened your hearts to me, and it has been a great privilege to be in your midst. I have made

so many friends, and they have a been a source of blessing to me.

As I move on I pray for The United Methodist Church, its mission and ministry now and in the future.

Rev. Jim Arant, retired  
Cleveland, Georgia

Social activism procedures  
for clergy

I just received a copy of the letter from the conference chancellor titled “Social Activism Procedures for Clergy.” I am appalled.

The Old Testament is replete with examples of the prophetic witness against ruling authorities without advance notice to the priests, kings, etc. against whom the prophets spoke. Jesus our Lord, savior and guide repeatedly spoke and acted against injustice and oppression without advance notice to the oppressors or anyone else.

Our denomination from Wesley on has engaged in protests. Did Brother John inform his bishop in advance of his preaching to the coal miners?

I am certain, because I participated in the civil rights struggle before and after ordination, that participants never informed the conference in advance of our participation in the sit-ins, marches and other actions that brought change to our beloved Southland. My dear deceased brothers Fred Reese and Eben Taylor certainly did not inform bishop or district superintendent when they participated in the March on Washington. In fact, the one time that I did seek the advice of the DS, he advised the following: “Just don’t tell me about it.” Neither did the editor of the *Advocate* clear editorials and other actions with

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LETTERS:

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bishop or cabinet in advance during that time.

I never was asked, nor would I have assented to inform the conference in advance when I wrote letters and participated in demonstrations about the Confederate Flag flying above the Statehouse dome, or against South Carolina’s practice of the death penalty. Nor did I or would I ever have informed on other participants. To ask or require clergy to do so violates the brother/sisterhood of clergy and the bond of confidentiality between clergy and laity.

In addition to being a drastic overreach of the authority of the conference and potentially an illegal attempt to limit protests (despite the disclaimer in item 3), informing the conference of protests and informing on other clergy or laity could expose the conference to legal action. As citizens of the United States and UMC clergy, we must be responsible for our own actions and are prohibited from informing on other clergy or lay confidences unless we judge that the lives of others are immediately and clearly affected.

I for one will not obey this drastic overreach. The “letter” should be withdrawn with apologies.

Rev. Wiley Cooper, retired  
Asheville, North Carolina

**Protesting evil**

This is the time for religious voices to be heard against evil.

The question in the Baptistal Covenant is, “Do you accept the freedom and power of God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? I do.”

The South Carolina United Methodist Conference chancellor wrote “Social Activism Procedure for Clergy” and gave to all active clergy. Social activism goes back to our founder John Wesley when he preached in the coal fields of England against the treatment of prisoners and the social ills. The United Methodist Church has a history of clergy protest-

ing. There is a historic picture of the Rev. Fred Reese, United Methodist minister, holding hands with Coretta Scott King singing “We Shall Overcome.”

Dr. McKay Brabham, editor of the *Advocate*, was arrested at the 1970 General Conference in a demonstration over discrimination. Dr. Charles Johnson, a student at Claflin University, was arrested with fellow students protesting for civil rights in the 1960s. Bishop Jack Meadors and the Rev. Tom Summers were arrested in Washington D.C. protesting the Iraq War. Bishop Roy Clark joined hundreds of ministers at the Savannah River Nuclear Plant when the Council of Bishops wrote the Pastoral Letter on Nuclear Weapons. Bishop Lawrence McCleskey with Black leaders led the march down Main Street Columbia against the Confederate flag on the state capital.

Dr. Martin Luther King wrote his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” in response to a public statement by eight religious leaders in Birmingham, Alabama, who criticized his involvement in demonstrations against segregation. The letter is a powerful defense of the Civil Rights Movement and a call for justice and equality.

Bishop Paul Hardin Jr. was a United Methodist minister in Birmingham who Dr. King was writing to. Bishop Hardin became the bishop of South Carolina and was a powerful leader for the merger and Civil Rights Movement. He was converted. Bishop Hardin put strong prophets on his cabinet (Eben Taylor, McKay Brabham, Hawley Lynn and good Black ministers). White and Black ministers and laity protested the social opinions at this time.

Dr. Rolls May wrote about a protester in the Vietnam War. The protester said he was part of a great truth and a movement beyond his individual self. He was absorbed by a great movement. Being a part of a protest crowd is a type of religious experience. If you never march against gun violence, police brutality, death penalty,

women’s rights, Confederate flag, Vietnam war, LGBTQ treatment or immigrants, you have missed a holy moment with God in a painful society.

A statistic revealed that 89 percent of mainline clergy have never taken part in a protest march. We may be no Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Gandhi, but we are called by God to fight evil and sin. This is why the UMC’s action in social concerns and justice is important. Silence is useless.

Jesus was arrested. Paul was arrested. The apostles were arrested. Christians were persecuted. It takes courage to preach against evil. It takes courage to protest against evil. Let’s be thankful for the brave Christians in our history.

The Baptismal Covenant asks us, “Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of the world, and repent of your sin? I do.”

Rev. John Culp, retired  
West Columbia

**Actions speak loudest**

When I was a teenager, I loved playing high school basketball. It may have been my favorite part of life at the time. We had a coach who was a science teacher who wanted to coach basketball. He did not have a strong background in basketball X and O. He was a good person who loved us. We were fortunate that he had a strong faith and a Christian lifestyle. He showed this through his actions toward us every day.

During one summer, he invited the team to a seafood dinner at the local fish camp. If we accepted the invitation, we had to attend a revival service at his Baptist church in a nearby town. The visiting speaker was Bones McKinney, head basketball coach at Wake Forest University. Coach McKinney was known by everyone in North Carolina. To me, this was a big deal. Coach McKinney was going to eat with us at the fish camp, and we would get to speak with him.

Going was a no-brainer to me. Meeting Bones McKinney would be a super treat. I went. I can still remember the church service after all these years. I can still see Bones McKinney

in the pulpit preaching to us—a lasting impression.

The real learning here is that our basketball coach was simply walking the walk of what a Christian should do. He was not afraid to show love. He was not afraid to show that God was very important in his life. He was leading us young boys in the way he wanted us to go in faith.

Many years later, I talked about Coach Woody often in my Sunday school classes. I used his many actions as a model for all of us to follow. After 65-plus years, I cannot tell you one thing Coach Woody said to us. I can tell you many things he did in his Christian walk with us. I believe that holds for all Christians today.

Our Christian actions every day speak much louder than the words we say. We never know how a Christian action can have a positive effect on another person. This is a challenge all United Methodists should accept!

Ron Gilmer, member  
St. Paul UMC, Ninety Six

**All created in God’s image**

I am a retired pastor of a predominately gay church in a small town in South Carolina. When I retired, my partner and I wanted to look for a more local church where we could worship and serve together.

The area we live in is very abundant in churches of all denominations as well as many non-denominational churches. I sent an email to five different churches in our area, and in my email, I told the church that I was gay and that I and my partner were looking for a church. We wanted a church that would help us grow, challenge us and allow us to serve. The churches I emailed were all different denominations and community churches.

Out of five churches, only one church told us we would be welcomed as fellow believers and we would be able to serve God with them. That church was Travelers Rest United Methodist Church. My partner and I have been members for four years now, and we are both very actively involved in service.

In addressing the topic of experiencing a season of la-

ment over the church separations, it is a topic very close to my heart. I lament the divisions, anger and even fear that has been displayed by both sides of the LGBTQIA+ issue. I am brokenhearted by the comments that are made that cause me and other LGBTQIA+ to feel as if we are the enemy or as if we are the cause of the separations. I am a lay delegate for our church and I listened to the conversations surrounding the inclusion resolution. It was difficult to hear some comments such as, “We do not need to keep pushing this stuff on the people called Methodist in South Carolina” (July 2025 *Advocate*) and that “the resolution will further divide people.”

We (the gay community) are not trying to push an agenda. There is no ulterior motive for us to want to “infiltrate” UMC churches or any other churches. My partner and I were simply looking to serve God with other disciples of Christ and to grow spiritually. I believe that there is harm being done by choosing rules/regulations over developing relationships in the body of Christ. There are a lot of LGBTQIA+ who have given up on God because of church abuse. They have chosen to live for themselves instead of God because they feel as if there is not another option.

I not only lament the church divisions in the UMC denomination, but also in the church as a whole. We, as the church, have gotten away from the original gospel of Jesus Christ—loving God with all our being and loving our neighbor as ourself. My prayer for the UMC denomination and for the whole body of Christ is that we would see that we are all created in God’s image and his desire is for us to live our lives as Jesus did—with love, compassion, kindness and grace to all.

Teresa Hrab, member  
Travelers Rest UMC,  
Travelers Rest

Reflection topic for September Advocate

How is my church modeling mercy? Share with the *Advocate* at [oped@advocatesc.org](mailto:oped@advocatesc.org) (include church name/city).





Humanity Behind Bars  
by Rev. Nichole Middleton

As we forgive

“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

These words, spoken by Christ and given to his disciples as a model for prayer, have echoed through centuries and sanctuaries. They roll off our tongues with ease—sometimes too much ease. We say them week after week, perhaps without pausing to consider the weight they carry. Yet nestled within this line is a radical call to grace, one that demands something of us: that our own forgiveness be linked to how we forgive others.

It is a bold prayer. Not just a request for forgiveness—it is a covenant. A promise to extend to others the same mercy we ask of God. A mirror. A reckoning.

When I pray this line, I sometimes wonder: What if God took me at my word? What if I were forgiven only to the extent that I forgive? Would I be free? Or still bound by grudges, resentment and wounds I have refused to release?

The truth is, forgiveness is hard. Especially when harm runs deep, when the offense repeats or when no apology is offered. But the prayer does not say, “Forgive those who apologize” or “those who make it right.” It simply says, “Those who trespass against us.” It requires nothing of them and everything of us.

Still, we struggle. We cling to the ledger, rehearse the wrongs and cast others as unworthy. In doing so, we extend the very judgment we hope never falls on us.

In ministry with those who are incarcerated, I see this tension daily. People who have trespassed—sometimes terribly—often speak of the crushing weight of being remembered only by their worst moment. They are no longer a name but a number. No longer a sibling but a sentence. Our systems rarely speak the language of mercy. And too often, neither do we.

But the gospel tells a different story. It is the story of a Savior who, while hanging on a cross—wounded, mocked and abandoned—prayed for those who placed him there. “Father, forgive them.” He did not wait for remorse or reform. He simply forgave.

This is not a call to forget, nor is it permission for harm to continue unchecked. Forgiveness is not about denying the wound; it is about refusing to let the wound define us—or the other. It is the holy refusal to live tethered to pain. It is the bold decision to place justice in God’s hands, not our own.

John Wesley believed that God’s grace is both justifying and sanctifying—that we are made right with God not only in a moment of confession, but through a lifetime of becoming. Forgiveness is not a single act, but a spiritual discipline. A daily surrender. A way we are shaped into the likeness of Christ.

To forgive is to believe in resurrection. To trust that even the most broken can be made whole. That even we, in our failings, are not beyond the reach of love.

So when we pray, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive,” may it not be a rote recitation, but a radical intention. And may we trust that in forgiving, we are not excusing—we are choosing freedom.

For in the kingdom of God, no one is only their trespass. Not even us.

*Middleton is an elder in the South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, endorsed by the United Methodist Endorsing Agency for prison ministry. She serves as a chaplain in the federal prison system, dedicating her work to providing spiritual care, advocating for justice and supporting the transformation and reintegration of incarcerated individuals.*



Commentary  
by Dr. Kim Strong

Told not to come

I pastor a wonderful group of people at Joseph B. Bethea United Methodist Church, Myrtle Beach, a church started in the early 1990s that was intentionally multiracial.

Much thought and prayer went into this new church start. The church has gone through some highs and lows, like every other UMC has. During the lowest of the lows, they decided they were not going to fold and would survive, trusting on God to see them through it.

We begin our worship service each Sunday by proclaiming we are a church founded on diversity and growing in love—a true DEI church! We have people of all shades, ethnic origins, sexual persuasions and walks of life. When I look out on my congregation each Sunday, I imagine in my mind that this is what heaven will be like. Not African American, not Euro American, nor all English speaking, just a bunch of people who love the Lord and work hard every day to love their neighbors.

While other churches were eagerly seeking to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church, our church intentionally reached out to those who didn’t want to leave the church. While other churches were decimated by membership and financial losses, our little church had a 50 percent church membership growth. We open our doors to everyone and let the world around us know it.

As we live in the little cocoon we are lovingly part of, sometimes we get reminded that others don’t see the world, and each other, as we do. One Sunday a couple of months ago, I was met upon my arrival at church by a young man named Carlos. He was standing alone in front of the church and looked like he might be in need.

I asked him if we could help him, and he said no, he was there to worship. I said, “I am, too. Welcome to our church.”

He joined my wife and me in the sanctuary and immediately started helping to open the shutters. He wanted to hand out bulletins and even was the acolyte. He told me he and his parents had recently moved to Myrtle Beach, and they had attended a United Methodist church in Columbia prior to moving here. He told me he was a tutor and helps students with math.

What he said next saddened me. He said he had attended another church near us, and after going there just one week, a few people in the church told him he would be happier going to church somewhere else. They even gave him the card of another church as a way of telling him you aren’t welcome here.

I tried to think of reasons why a church would tell someone to leave and go some-

where else on a first visit. I’m not going to name the church, but it was one of those churches that had a big pond inside it where they try to drown new converts to keep them from backsliding into hell. Perhaps they thought he was gay? Maybe he said the wrong thing to the wrong person? Maybe he wasn’t dressed like them?

As we closed the church after service, one of my members informed me Carlos had been told to leave his previous church because he was “on the spectrum.” Really? I was reminded that some folks, maybe most folks, are uncomfortable when they are around people who are different. Carlos is an outgoing, smart guy. A math savant. A guy I could have used in high school algebra class. Yet they gave him a card and said goodbye.

We feel like God brought Carlos to us because we truly practice open hearts, open minds and open doors. He brought cookies and pound cakes from Ecuador to church to share his second week. He has a dream, a vision, of feeding the hungry people in our area. He’s there every time the door opens and supplies the local food pantry with nonperishable food. We all should be on that spectrum.

We heard a second story about a single woman who attended that church and who sat with the minister’s wife. After the service, the minister told her she would be better off in another church. After a brief inquisition, she was deemed to be unworthy.

While the former United Methodist churches who have left retreated into a sect of similarity, we have truly opened our doors to everyone. And God is blessing us. There is an old saying that God doesn’t like ugly.

I heard Sen. Ralph Warnock from Georgia say on a late-night talk show that he is a Matthew 25 Christian. As he spoke of doing unto the least among us, the audience began to cheer and applaud. While the world celebrates and Congress rewards the richest of the rich, God still blesses those who care for the least among us.

Instead of telling you not to come, that you aren’t welcome, you are welcome here. Come on in!

*Strong pastors Joseph B. Bethea United Methodist Church, Myrtle Beach*

Do you have a commentary you’d like to share with the *Advocate*? Email to [oped@advocatesc.org](mailto:oped@advocatesc.org) (include church name/city). Word count maximum: 600.

ministries; and church founders, youth leaders, music ministers or community advocates.

They are casting a wide net because this project only works if it is equitable, accurate and inclusive. Their intention is to ensure no one is left out—especially those whose stories may have been overlooked in the past.

Email your submission by Aug. 18 to [abhooker@umcsc.org](mailto:abhooker@umcsc.org); put “Jeremiah History Project” in the subject line.

Submissions sought by Aug. 18 for history on people who made a difference in racial/ethnic ministries in the UMCSC

The Jeremiah Black Church & Ethnic Ministries Strategy Team is seeking help identifying people who have made an impact on Black, Indigenous and People of Color congregations in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

This Jeremiah Team is tasked to discover and develop strategies to strengthen Black and Ethnic United Methodist Churches and ministries in South Carolina. The team is compiling a comprehensive history of the Black United Methodist church in South Carolina, with particular attention to ministry among persons of BIPOC heritage. Their goal is to create a living, breathing document that honors the diverse and powerful legacy of African-American, Native-American, Hispanic and Asian-American clergy, lay leaders and ministries that have shaped the church here.

If you know of a person—past or present—who has made a significant impact on the life of the UMC in South Carolina, the team invites you to submit a brief biography (250–500 words), statement of identity or description of their ministry and contributions.

This could include clergy and deacons (active, retired or deceased); lay leaders and local pastors; district superintendents; conference lay leaders; pioneers in Hispanic/Latino, Native-American and Asian-American



Commentary  
by the Rev. Tommy Wilkes

An open letter to United Methodists

I hope you are well and that your churches are embracing the ministry before us. I am writing this letter to challenge all of us to do our best.

I realize some of our churches are suffering more than others with new configurations of membership, new configurations of finances and staff and hurt feelings from the unfortunate separation of loved ones who’ve chosen to leave our beloved denomination, but I want to encourage you to look forward.

As the disciples were standing around at the Ascension of Christ, looking at Jesus’ feet and watching him rise into the clouds, the angels asked, “Why are you still standing around just gazing?”

People, that is our question today. Now is not the time for us United Methodists to be standing around, helplessly gazing above and unfocused.

Now is the time for us to put our hands to the plow and get to work. We have fields ripe for harvest, but the laborers are few. Now is when we must think outside our boxes and explore new ways of doing ministry, worship, service and mission. I implore you: Find the work of Christ before you, and get to it. Please stop making excuses for your plight and pray that God will give you the strength and power of the Holy Spirit just to do the work before you.

Our message as United Methodists is clear: Love all people in the name of Jesus Christ. We have the best message for the world, that “God loves you, and we know this because of the life of Jesus.” Lift him up and get to work.

For those churches struggling financially and in need of good pastoral leadership, stop waiting around for the district superintendent or the bishop to fix your problems. They have their work to do, and so do you. Step up to support your pastors in leading your United Methodist congregation. If pastoral leadership in your congregation is latent, step up with Jesus and lead the church as he calls you. You do not have to wait for the pastor, the DS or

the Council of Bishops to tell you how to invite people to experience and live out the love of Jesus. You, yourselves, have been charged to go in the name of Jesus Christ and fulfill the great commission. The job is more than any of us can do alone, clergy or laity, but thankfully, we are not alone. God is with us.

If you are a lay pastor, retired pastor or lay speaker, we need you. There are churches right now that have no pastors or have very little in the way of pastoral leadership. Please talk to your district superintendent and be ready to volunteer to help lead, preach, teach and do missions. Every community has places that are crying out for support, love, acceptance and financial stability.

Be useful! Volunteer and stop whining! If you are jealous of the church next to you, do better in your own church.

If you no longer want to be United Methodist, please move on and find a place to live and grow and serve. If you do not understand who we are as United Methodists, study up. There are good resources available through Cokesbury. If you do not understand why accepting all people, including those who are LGBTQIA, is what it means to be a Christian, then study, pray and wake up to the Gospel message. There are many resources available through Cokesbury and organizations that support education and information about this, including Reconciling Ministries Network and so many others. We are in a world that needs grace and love.

As Jesus loved us, love the people of the world. All the people of the world.

Blessings to each of you. I love The United Methodist Church, and I am so thankful for the grace and mercy I have witnessed in my life through this faithful denomination. May we continue to do the good work of thinking with the minds God gave us, loving God and one another with all our hearts and serving with all our might as the hands and feet of Christ.

Wilkes pastors Clemson UMC, Clemson.



Commentary  
by the Rev. Clayton Childers

All about yes or no

The whole Bible is about saying “yes” or “no,” and the gift of God is the freedom to choose. We are all given freedom to turn our hearts and minds toward God or to turn away. That is what the Bible tells us.

As Adam and Eve are created, they are clearly created with one purpose—to be in a loving relationship with the one who molded them from the clay of the earth and breathed into them the miracle of life. This isn’t about physical beings; it’s about you and me. And we are the ones who meet the serpent in the tree and decide to say “no” to God. We are the ones who turn away from the good and holy gift of God’s love. It’s us!

I’ve been there. I know what it’s like to be right with God. And I know what it is like to turn my back on God; to be one with God and to push God away. To say “yes” or to say “no.”

That’s who God is to me. That is how I see God in this holy book. God is alive, a living presence, refusing to give up. The Bible is not a dry book of bygone stories about people long ago. This book is a holy record about the eternally loving nature of God and our God-given capacity to say yes and no. It is about you and me and freedom and love and a God who refuses to quit loving despite it all. God never gives up on love, and the Bible is all about the ability of love to melt away our hardness of heart and change us from the inside out.

Just as the Bible starts in a mythical garden with a seductive serpent speaking from a forbidden tree wooing us away from the God, the Bible finds its climax in God’s own Son, hanging on a cursed tree wooing us back to God. Wooing us with perfect love, sacrificial love, arms open wide, beaten and rejected, cursed on and spit upon, mocked and humiliated. Yet still inviting, still waiting and hoping, refusing to quit. This is not a myth but a flesh and blood savior, truly human and truly divine. God with us! And God is in Christ on the cross speaking to us all: “There is nothing you can do to me to make me stop loving you. There is nothing you can do to me to make me stop loving you” (from professor Dr. George Schweitzer, University of Tennessee). You can reject me forever, but I will never give up. My steadfast love endures forever. It is eternal. This is what true love is.

And this is how much I love you. Come to me. Don’t turn away. Turn back! Turn back! And I will walk with you and you with me. I will abide in you and you in me.

God’s eternal invitation is made real in human flesh. A love that refuses to give up and will not die.

Childers is an elder who is a member of the South Carolina Conference. In retirement he has taken a church appointment at Silverbrook United Methodist Church in Lorton, Virginia.



Photo courtesy of Freddie Vaughn

**St. Mark gifts items as they close**  
After 83 years, St. Mark UMC, Columbia, has closed its doors. Members feel the church is like a stone thrown in water whose many ripples have affected so many others, both then and now. As a mission oriented church, at their closing the church gifted all of their physical items to Shiloh UMC, Washington Street UMC, Epworth and the Methodist Student Network. Through their auspices, St. Mark’s efforts will live on.

Resource Center.

More Bible study resources

Great new Bible resources are now available:

**A Jesus-Shaped Life**  
(DVD3002=) Author: Harper, Lisa. 7 sessions, 16-38 min/study guide/bk/2025.

When many of us hear the word theology, we conjure up visions of stuffy old guys in dark clothing scratching a pen across paper (or maybe a quill across parchment!) and assume it’s not for us. But at its most basic, theology is just words (logos) about God (theos). It’s conversations about the most important part of our lives—our good, loving, and grace-filled God. With her signature style and humor, bestselling Bible teacher Lisa Harper invites you into seven life-changing conversations about the God we so love. CC. Age: YAS.

**The Bible With and Without Jesus**  
(DVD2999B=) Author: Levine, Amy-Jill/Brettler, Marc Zvi. 6 sessions, 10-12 min/leader’s guide/participant guide/2025.

In this Bible study based on their book, Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler take readers on a guided tour of the most popular Hebrew Bible passages quoted in the New Testament to show what the texts meant in their original contexts and then how Jews and Chris-

tians, over time, understood those same texts. Comparing various interpretations—historical, literary and theological—of each ancient text, they offer deeper understandings of the original narratives and their many afterlives. They show how the text speaks to different generations under changed circumstances, illuminating the Bible’s ongoing significance. CC. Age: YAS.

**We Believe: How the Nicene Creed Can Deepen Your Faith**  
(DVD2998CH=) Author: Carpenter, Michael. 6 sessions, 9 min each/leader’s guide/bk/2025.

We believe in one God. Discover how the ancient Nicene Creed can transform your spiritual journey. Personal anecdotes and practical insights guide you to a profound connection with God. Dive into six chapters covering the Nicene Creed sequentially that unpack the essence of it, enriching readers’ faith and deepening their understanding of Christian beliefs. CC. Age: YAS.

*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>.*





Commentary  
by Linda Kemp

## Let’s refocus our attention

There are some people who have the opinion that members of The United Methodist Church should be called to action given recent political events. I couldn’t help but respond because I believe it is my duty, not only as an active UMC member, but also as a U.S. citizen who loves her country.

Let’s take a closer look at some of the issues:

**Tariffs:** What most people don’t realize is that tariffs are one of the oldest forms of taxation. In the days of our Founding Fathers, tariffs were imposed to raise revenue and to protect domestic industries from foreign competition. Fast forward to the World War II era; following the war, the U.S. lowered its tariffs more than its trading partners did to aid in the economic rebuilding of our allies and former enemies. Today, more than 80 years later, our tariffs have remained lower than that of other countries. Fair trade practices not only benefit our economy, but also boost American businesses.

**Illegal immigration:** The key word here is “illegal.” Our laws are clear regarding immigration, and yet hundreds of thousands have been permitted to enter the U.S. illegally, bringing their children with them. Yet no one seems to be willing to point out that fact. Parents who knowingly commit a crime with their children should be held accountable. Period. It’s no different if a parent robs a bank and then runs from the police with a child in tow. Illegal immigrants who have traveled through treacherous conditions with their children to cross the border have endangered themselves and their children in the same way, not to mention the act of entering the country illegally. And what about the people, children included, who are brought into the country to be sold? Yes, the conditions of the El Salvadoran prisons are horrific, but what about the people who are the victims of human trafficking? What about the drugs that are being smuggled in? Also, what about the deplorable conditions that some children are living in right here in the U.S.?

There are so many domestic issues happening that need attention—homelessness, our public education system, young people committing suicide at an alarming rate and bullying, just to name a few. There is a young girl in Greenville County who is now confined to a wheelchair and requires 24-hour care following a failed suicide attempt after being bullied at school. There are many protests happening about so many things and people who are outraged by the actions of our leaders and injustices; where is the outrage over these issues? Where is the outrage over the children who are neglected and abused?

Our youth are in crisis, and it would be great if they could find some refuge at their local churches. However, so many churches today are nothing more than a business with social circles that certain people fit into while the ones who need Jesus the most do not. I would imagine there are some individuals, adults and teens alike, who see church as another group that won’t accept them as they are.

The late pastor Adrian Rogers once said that Christians spend more time praying for sick saints than for sinners, and I couldn’t agree more.

Yes, we have leaders who are flawed and don’t always make decisions that everyone agrees with. After all, they are only human. But the Bible says we are to put our trust in Christ, not our leaders. The Bible also says we are to pray for our leaders. That doesn’t mean we have to support them in everything they do, but regardless of who our leaders are, as Christians we must model for non-believers in how to respond.

We should also model how to respect our leaders. When I see people being openly disrespectful to our leaders and police officers during protests and on social media, I can’t help but wonder what kind of an example those people are setting for our youth. How can we expect our youth to respect their teachers, parents and elders when that is the example being set?

That being said, my plea is for this call to action: that we come together as Christians to model Christian behavior. Rather than use Bible verses to further a one-sided narrative, let’s take action and be the hands and feet of Christ by checking on our neighbors, loved ones, friends and coworkers.

Let’s seek out the lost and lonely, young and old, and carry out what we have been commissioned to do, which is to share the Good News of Christ.

Let’s shift our attention to Christ and let our lights shine in what may be a dark and lonely world to some.

*Kemp is a member of Few’s Chapel United Methodist Church, Greer.*



Commentary  
by Michael F. Hughes Jr.

## We are called to a better way

Ours are deeply divisive times—socially, politically, spiritually. Our church isn’t immune. LGBTQ+ identity and DEI activism expose tensions that strain faith and test discipleship. Congregations fracture, and longtime members leave in sorrow and frustration. New members won’t come through—or even to—our doors.

The church is to be our refuge, but it struggles to remain relevant, welcoming and faithful. Race, class and denomination still strain, but society frames the new debates as binary absolutes: one can only fully affirm or condemn. No questions can be asked, nor can there be middle ground. Such framing is false and deeply harmful, forcing believers into ideological corners, chaining us to absolutes and compelling churches to choose worldly sides.

We the church are called to a better way—faith. We must seek truth through prayer, Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This verse doesn’t erase our differences; it enlightens them in Christ. He is our foundation and values not our worldly identity, which comes from self-categorization. He values us as belonging—first to God, then to one another.

God is broader than our understanding. Scripture says, “male and female God created them” (Genesis 1:27 CEB). Binary. Man’s words and interpretation. Ancient Jewish tradition—the Talmud—recognized gender-complexity beyond binary long before modern biology confirmed it possible. The Bible continues the binary into Genesis 6, but God’s creation includes species that defy binary gender. Faith must make room for mysteries we cannot explain, for if we reduce our faith to only what we can explain, we reduce God to our image.

God is eternal. To grow in faith, we must question long-held truths. Not all are timeless. Some came from incomplete knowledge, cultural assumptions or the need for power. When they distort or limit grace, we must question them—not out of rebellion, but reverence. We are called to prayer and discernment—beginning with humility, where necessary, followed by the strength to unlearn.

We must acknowledge the pain of those holding to traditional teachings. Today’s shifts don’t feel like healing; they feel like compromise. They weren’t invited into the conversation or taught that doubt can lead to deeper faith. They were taught that certainty and tradition are absolute. They feel betrayed, silenced and dismissed.

Both sides are hurting. Both must be heard. We must listen and we must lead.

Progressives come wounded, asking for a place, for dignity and safety. Traditionalists seek to remain faithful to their convictions. One cries out to be seen; the other, not to be forgotten. Both act on what they’ve been taught is God’s truth. Each uses Scripture as a weapon.

But we must not. As church leaders and faithful disciples, we cannot stand with either side for worldly reasons. We must stand with Christ—for his reasons. He calls us to love without fear and lead without compromise.

We must not let society or politics define the Gospel, nor allow tradition to replace it. Our pulpits must not be platforms for activism or avoidance. We must not pick sides in a culture war but remain obedient to Christ.

1 Corinthians 12 teaches that the Spirit gifts each believer for the body’s good. Leadership is not our right; it is a gift and responsibility. We must be grounded in calling, character and fruit, not in identity or politics. Our question is not, “Who are you?” but “What has the Spirit gifted you—and how will you use it to serve?”

Identity doesn’t save us and Scripture doesn’t ask us to affirm it or to compromise our convictions. Christ demands that we affirm souls and act in love.

Christ, while crucified, extended grace to the thief—not for his culture, race or class—and called common men to serve as apostles. He did not elevate himself above sinners. As such, we should not elevate people based on anger, pain or pressure. We are equals. Christ asks for our availability, and we should allow people to serve by their gifts, readiness and faithfulness.

We must be:

- Rooted in prayer with open hearts and discerning minds
- Grounded in Scripture—not just its certain words and verses, but its entirety
- Guided by the call, gifts and fruits of the Spirit
- Obedient as God’s children, not divided by man’s preferences

Most flocks live not at the poles of debate but in the middle—tired of noise, longing for clarity, seeking truth. When we fail to guard them from division, they mistake the world’s clamor for God’s voice. We must guide them toward still waters, toward unity, not by softening truth but by making it visible through love and grace.

Slogans and stances will not save the churches. We must be shepherds with courage and compassion, living in earnest service to God. We must anoint their heads, lead and protect them with rod and staff and interpose ourselves between them and danger—whether from wolves or wolves in sheep’s clothing.

We must not lead to appease or lead to divide. We must lead to serve.

All who belong to him make up the body of Christ regardless of story, status or struggle. Our unity is not in identity categorization or consensus—but in Christ alone.

Let us move forward not by elevating special interests, but by honoring God’s interest in every soul. Let us lead with humility, listen with grace and serve with the Spirit’s power for the glory of God and the healing of his church.

*Hughes is a member of North United Methodist Church, North.*



**Women and Jesus**  
The United Women in Faith of Mount Elon UMC, Jefferson, gave a portrayal of the significant role women played at the crucifixion of Jesus. Their presentation was offered on Easter Sunday, April 20. Linda Cokley is the Mount Elon UWF president.

Photo courtesy of Linda Blackmon

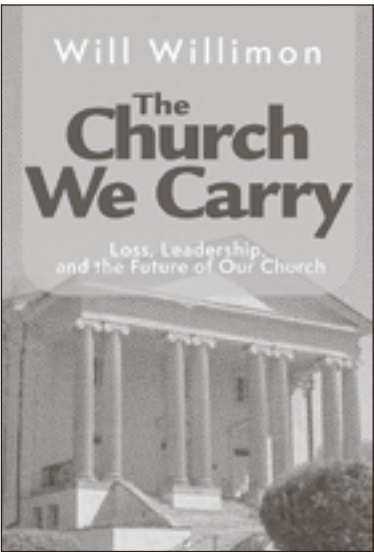


# New Willimon book explores disaffiliation of Buncombe Street

When he preached at the 175th anniversary of his home church, Bishop Will Willimon had no idea that a group was secretly working to remove the congregation from the denomination that birthed it.

The 2023 disaffiliation of Buncombe Street United Methodist Church from the denomination was a historic moment for United Methodism in South Carolina also instructive and revealing for American church leaders. At least that’s the way Will Willimon sees it. In his new book, “The Church We Carry: Loss, Leadership, and the Future of Our Church,” published this month by Abingdon Press, Willimon tells the story of the disaffiliation of South Carolina Methodism’s historic, second-largest congregation.

In the introduction, Willimon describes the book as, “a memoir, a letter from a jilted lover, an exposé of a church fight, an account of what I learned about the disaffiliation of my well-remembered home congregation, an ecclesial whodunit, a reflection upon the major dynamics within mainline Protestantism today,



and an invitation to pastors, lay leaders and members of today’s church to learn from what once happened at my home church as they figure out how to be the church that we bear into the future.”

“‘The Church We Carry’ is in part, memoir, in which I show my gratitude for how a large, urban Methodist congregation made me a Christian and then helped sense my call to preach,” Willimon said. “It’s also an account of how a determined small group of laity, unintentionally aided by their cautious clergy, convinced a

significant segment of the congregation that their future lay outside United Methodism.”

Willimon spent more than a year interviewing more than 200 laity and clergy, mostly from the congregation, including denominational officials. He also viewed all of the sermons preached at Buncombe Street church during this period, watched the online congregational meetings and read the transcripts of board meetings. Comparing Buncombe Street’s disaffiliation with a number of similar South Carolina congregations that disaffiliated or stayed UMC, he reconstructs the events that led this historic church, founded after a visit by Bishop Francis Asbury, to lead disaffiliations in South Carolina United Methodism.

“I try to depict and account for the multiple stresses and strains that enabled a small group of members to talk a majority of the congregation into leaving the denomination they had generously supported and benefited from over the



Willimon

years,” he said. “This is my home church and a major reason for writing the book are the painful, sometimes angry, testimonies I heard from many friends who felt ostracized by process that led to the vote. Many of them helped to begin Open Hearts UMC. I tell the story of that new congregation too.”

“I hope it will be clear that this book has relevance beyond those of us who love Buncombe Street,” Willimon said. “One reviewer has called my book ‘the only sociological/theological/organizational account we have of a momentous time in American Christianity.’ My intention is to set the Buncombe Street’s disaffiliation in the context of American politics, social tensions, denominational declension, theological/ethical arguments and the continuing work of Jesus Christ with his church.”

Admitting that the story he tells is conflicted, one that some may not want to be told, he said, “The loss of a third of

United Methodism’s churches (Buncombe Street being among the most prominent) is a cautionary tale for today’s church leaders. I try to be fair to the parties involved, but more than anything, I try to tell the truth. There was much misinformation and misrepresentation and the response of denominational leadership was inadequate. Many loyal United Methodists were damaged. The congregation made some unfortunate decisions that should have been challenged by those in the ministry of oversight. However, it’s also a story of Christ’s redemptive work among people who are determined to live through and to recover after what went down at my home church.”

Among the places where “The Church We Carry” will be the subject of discussions and presentations this fall at Furman University on Sept. 8 (10:30 a.m. to noon), Wofford College on Sept. 16 (10:30 a.m. to noon), The Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, on Sept. 28, and Washington Street UMC, Columbia, on Nov. 9 (before and after services).

# UMCSC to host leadership convocation Sept. 8–10

COLUMBIA—Clergy and invited laity leaders will head to the Midlands in September for a multi-day leadership convocation designed to help them better understand and implement the denomination’s mission and vision.

Called “Leadership Convocation: Lights, Camera, Action!”, the free event is set for Sept. 8-10 and will feature Bishop Leonard Fairley along with a host of

prophetic preachers, teachers and leaders.

Journey United Methodist Church will host the event for the South Carolina Conference of the UMC, and scholarships will be available.

With a goal of helping leaders reclaim the UMC mission and revive the church, the leadership convocation draws from Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:47 while embracing a “lights, camera, action” theme.

The “lights” aspect will teach leaders how to shine the gospel clearly and widely. The “camera” aspect will help leaders focus the vision and frame the mission for maximum impact. And the “action” aspect will help leaders move strategically and boldly.

For more information, email Dr. George Ashford at [gaashford@umcsc.org](mailto:gaashford@umcsc.org) or the Rev. James Friday at [jlfriday@umcsc.org](mailto:jlfriday@umcsc.org).

# Filings continue in UMCSC property lawsuit

By Jessica Brodie

Filings continue in a petition to the South Carolina Supreme Court from 10 churches seeking to leave The United Methodist Church yet keep their church property.

On April 14, attorneys for the churches seeking to leave filed a petition in the state Supreme Court asking the case be brought under the court’s original jurisdiction. Titled The Methodist Church of Simpsonville, et al. v. The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, et al., the other churches in the lawsuit are Jackson Grove Methodist Church, Calhoun Falls Methodist Church, Good Shepherd Methodist Church, Trinity Methodist Church of Lancaster, Aldersgate Methodist Church, Boiling Springs Methodist Church, Fort Lawn Methodist Church, Panola Methodist Church and Dickson Methodist Church (all have removed “United” from their name).

On June 4, the South Carolina Conference of the UMC submitted its return, opposing the original jurisdiction request and asking the Supreme Court to assign all of the cases to a single trial judge.

On June 23, attorneys for The Methodist Church of Simpsonville, et al. filed a reply, reiterating a desire for the Supreme Court to weigh in on the matter.

No oral arguments have been set, and the case is awaiting the court’s consideration as of press time.

The issue stems from some churches wishing to leave the UMC over theological differences surrounding human sexuality. Currently, there is no longer a pathway through the denomination for churches to depart, so some churches are simply disaffiliating and amending their corporate filings—then being sued.

See June 2025 *Advocate* article for more information: <https://advocatesc.org/articles/churches-sue>.

# Advocate to offer opportunities to appreciate pastors, music ministers

This fall, you have the opportunity to recognize your pastor and your church’s music ministry with appreciation ads.

In October, the *Advocate* will run pastor appreciation ads in honor of Clergy Appreciation Month in October. Churches can celebrate their pastor through special ads in the *Advocate*.

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

Email text to [atrussell@advocatesc.org](mailto:atrussell@advocatesc.org).  
Deadline for pastor appreciation ads is Sept. 10.

In November, churches can celebrate their music director, choir or praise band as they are gearing up for the Christmas season with cantatas and other special musical events.

- As with the above, three sizes are available (all 5.088” wide):
- Small (1” tall): \$38
  - Medium (2” tall): \$76
  - Large (4” tall): \$152

Email text to [atrussell@advocatesc.org](mailto:atrussell@advocatesc.org).  
Deadline for the music ministry ads is Oct. 10.

Churches will be billed for the ads unless otherwise noted.

# Free class to help prepare for charge conference

Basic Church Administration will offer a free Zoom class on preparing for the 2025 charge conference on Tuesday, Aug. 19, at 7:30 p.m.

Charge conference is the annual business meeting of the local charge, which is presided over by the district superintendent or an elder representative. The class will

cover the reports that are required, with special emphasis on the report of the Finance Committee on internal finance controls and the report of the Board of Trustees.

This class is for anyone who needs help, especially for new pastors and laity who may be in their first year of service in a particular area.

All members of the Finance Committee and the Board of Trustees are encouraged to attend.

The class is free, but registration is required: <https://church-admin.org/registrations>. For more information, contact the Rev. Robert Cox at [rlcox@umcsc.org](mailto:rlcox@umcsc.org) or call 864-554-2008.



# Annual Conference.

# See the Possibilities:



Dr. Jim Salley reports on the ongoing good news happening at Africa University, a United Methodist university in Zimbabwe started with the help of South Carolina and other annual Conferences in the denomination. "Africa University is the school of dreams in the valley of hope," Jim Salley said, noting he'd just returned from a trip to Zimbabwe for AU's commencement ceremonies, which saw 620 students graduation. It was the university's 31st graduation ceremony. "Thank you for what you have done and what you are doing," Salley said.



Kim Thomas shares the history of Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry during Monday's session at Annual Conference. Thomas lifted up the tremendous growth of the ministry, which went from three houses for people with autism and intellectual disabilities to seven homes today.

*There was so much that happened at this year's Annual Conference that we couldn't fit it all in last month's edition. Here are some more scenes from the gathering, held June 8-11 in Greenville. Photos by Matt Brodie.*



The Rev. Millie Nelson Smith lifts up the various ways Connectional Ministries works to connect churches and people across the conferences, including the new Connecting Children cohort, campus ministries, disaster response, advocacy and more.



Bishop Leonard Fairley dons the Hub City Spartanburgers hamburger hat gifted to him by Annual Conference's Youth Delegation, who were called onstage to be recognized on the final day of Annual Conference. The youth are high school-aged kids from around South Carolina. They had both voice and vote at the conference and were there in addition to the lay delegates named by each local church.



The Rev. Jerry Gadsden makes an amendment to increase the budgeted amount for Spartanburg Methodist College to \$250,000, what the college received last year. Gadsden, chair of the board for SMC, said the Annual Conference is the institution's largest donor, and funds help operating costs, chaplaincy programs, student emergency needs and more. Gadsden shared that 94 percent of SMC students come from South Carolina, 64 percent are eligible for a Federal Pell Grant, which helps students at or below the poverty level, and 60 percent are first-generation graduates. The amendment failed 361-357. The next day, CF&A Chair Smith Patterson reminded the body they can help institutions like SMC through the Extra Mile Initiative, and that SMC is a direct recipient of those funds. People can directly send money through their church or personally to the conference treasurer's office.

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Annual Conference approved two changes to Standing Rules, one to SR46 (adding the conference secretary to the list of members of the conference's Ministry Advisory Team) and one to SR50 (reducing the size of the Board of Pension and Health Benefits from 18 to 12, comprising one-third laymen, one-third laywomen and one-third clergy).



# Annual Conference.

# the Promise of a Seed



Wofford President Nayef H. Samhat gives a report showcasing all four South Carolina United Methodist-Related Colleges and Universities: Wofford as well as Claflin University, Columbia College and Spartanburg Methodist College. “We remain committed to United Methodist principles of education, social justice and service to humankind,” Samhat said.”



The Conference Board of Pension & Health Benefits reviewed their changes for the coming year, which impact clergy, deacons, lay employees of the conference and others under conference insurance. Those covered will see an increase in health care costs for this year, going up roughly \$100/month in 2026. They also reminded the body they voted to forgive \$3.4 million in unpaid direct billing costs for 90 churches. Currently, there are 29 in arrears this year for a total of approximately \$160,000; 20 of these had their direct bills forgiven in 2024, and of that 20, five have paid nothing toward their bill.



Michael Jennings, conference co-lay leader with Betty Void, gives the report of the Lay Leader Monday, sharing the various ways they work throughout the conference, including Lay Servant Ministries, United Women in Faith, MenNMinistry, youth and other ways they work to engage and equip laity across the Annual Conference.



Episcopacy report J. Jeannette Cooper (above), chair of the Committee on Episcopacy, presents a welcome gift to Dawn Fairley, wife of Bishop Leonard Fairley.



The Advocate's booth at Annual Conference drew a crowd this year not only for its resources (books, newspapers, etc.) but also for some fun and fellowship. Attendees got the chance to don boas, hats and bright sunglasses and pose for pictures in the Advocate's Photo Booth.



Annual Conference members had the chance to participate in Holy Communion services every business day of the gathering. Two of the services were held in the early morning before business resumed. Here, the Rev. Antoinette Gaboton-Moss offers the sacrament on Tuesday morning.



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**Winter Youth Retreat**

**Jan. 16-19, 2026**

**MLK Weekend**

**Speaker: Chris Singleton**

Chris Singleton, inspirational speaker and former pro athlete, shares a moving story of resilience and faith after the loss of his mother in the Emanuel AME Church shooting. His message of forgiveness, unity and unshakable faith is unforgettable.

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# NEW CHURCH:

From Page 1

to know people there, gathering with groups from First UMC, Conway—Carolina Forest’s anchor church—and mobilizing a core team who are invested in being part of a new congregation.

At first they met in neighborhood clubhouses and coffee shops, with 17 or 18 people gathered at tables to form community, talk about Scripture, share communion and pray together. Later they tried outdoor spaces. Finding space to meet has been a challenge, and no place has been just right. Clubhouses are expensive to rent, and the outdoor spaces make it difficult to accommodate people with disabilities, not to mention a lack of restrooms.

But now the nascent congregation is setting its sights on building their future home, while seeking a consistent space to gather in the meantime.

“It’s hard work—you’ve got to keep working in the garden,” Strange said. “But this is possible.”

### A team effort

Strange and his family—wife Lauren and daughters Ava Grace and Ellie Hope—are teaming up with people in the community who share their vision.

Tiara Harms, whose longtime military family has settled in Carolina Forest after moving 16 times in 22 years, is one of those people. Harms grew up in the UMC, and when her family moved to Carolina Forest, they immediately looked online to find the nearest UMC.

To their dismay, there wasn’t one. As Strange explained, there are a number of UMCs in the vicinity, but there is no

UMC presence specifically in the Carolina Forest Boulevard community.

When Harms connected with Strange, she was immediately excited about helping to start a church from its beginnings, right in their neighborhood.

“This is the answer to a prayer,” Harms said, noting it’s been great for her child to get to know their new church through relationships and not the “liturgy, pomp, circumstance and ritual that comes later.”

Harms said those relationships have blossomed quickly. When the area was impacted by wildfires in early March and many had to evacuate, several opened their homes to each other, even without really knowing them well. Today she’ll often get texts from other Carolina Forest UMC friends inviting everyone for impromptu pool time.

“We need a building, but we know that wherever two or more gather, he is there, and we are a church,” Harms said. “We know the building will happen, but in the meantime we are a church.”

She said it’s liberating to be in the early stage of church building, with a clean slate so they can build the ministries they want instead of having to regroup, deconstruct and rebuild.

Strange said that’s been a great experience for him, too. Often, he said, we forget that Methodism’s founder John Wesley went to where the people were; he didn’t wait for a building.

“South Carolina is one of top five fastest-growing states, and the Grand Strand is one of the fastest growing in the state. Yet we still send pastors to



The Rev. Tyler Strange (center) engages with his community at a coffeshop.

buildings, not to people,” Strange said. “We’ve got to change that because that’s not who Jesus was and not who we are called to be.”

Instead, he said, the church needs to work on being adaptive, creative and flexible, building new churches out of communities. Sometimes it’s hard work, and you don’t know what you’re doing. But as Strange said, “If we sit and wait for Moses to come down from the mountain with instructions, it’s not going to happen.”

### Tending the soil

The team is using Jeremiah 29 and some of its land-tending themes as a vision, focusing on learning the “soil” of Carolina Forest to guide their work.

“If you’re going to have a beautiful garden, you’ve got to get dirt under your fingernails,” Strange explained.

He hopes the church they are starting will become a much needed “third space” in the community, a place beyond where people live and work where they can gather regularly to do life together. As an unincorporated locale, many who live there build their identity around their neighborhoods, he said;

there is no big designated community event to pull people together.

The church can do that, he said. In December, they hosted a “Christmas in the Forest” event, which drew roughly 60 people. At Easter, they hosted a gathering on their property, inviting people to paint “resurrection rocks” to share messages of Christian hope and inspiration with others. From January to Easter, they saw their numbers double from 16 to 32.

The next step is to put together their version of a dream center on their property. They’re working to raise funds to construct a building while still forming community through regular meetings and connecting people.

“We are where we are today because of the UMC connection in South Carolina,” Strange said. “As we are reminded in Jeremiah 29, we believe the community should thrive where we are. We believe this will happen as we bring people together in the way of Jesus.”

To learn more Carolina Forest UMC, connect on Facebook or Instagram @theforestumc or sign up for their e-newsletter at <https://tinyurl.com/carolinaforestumc>.



## We’re Counting On You

**August 10th is Aldersgate Special Needs Sunday.**

Your donations and prayers on this designated Sunday help build homes for adults with special needs. And, by God’s grace, your support also brings peace to aging parents and caregivers.

The need for homes in South Carolina is great. Do your part on August 10th and in the days to come to support this vital ministry.



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# A FAITHFUL STEP:

From Page 1

That’s exactly what happened. Titled “Faithfulness Through Generations,” the album features Advent’s entire worship team—all eight vocalists, plus much of the band. Smith noted that when many worship bands record studio albums, they often use studio musicians, but they wanted this album to be “an Advent project.” All the instruments feature Advent musicians, including a violinist on two songs. There are six songs, all covers, and all featuring what Smith calls a “contemporary, Southern rock, gospely vibe.”

Most importantly, though, Smith said it’s designed to be an album of hope and inspiration reminding people—especially those at Advent—that they can trust in God.

That’s particularly important given the difficulties Advent has been through in the last few years, Smith noted, from a devastating fire in 2017 to the pandemic and then a process of discernment over separation. No matter what they went through, he said, God has been there, and God has been faithful.

“We titled it ‘Faithfulness Through Generations’ for a reason,” Smith told the *Advocate*. “Yes, we’ve been through a tough time; yes, it’s been hard ... and because of, that we wanted a good reminder that God is faithful to be with us through a lot of past experiences, he’ll be faithful through this moment and he’ll be faithful in the future.”

Rouse agreed. “I think of all Advent has been through, between the fire and COVID and discernment, and it really shows the resiliency of the congregation,” Rouse said. “It’s just a small part of what the church as a whole could do better. We can really go out and be a shining light.”

The album has garnered a huge response both in the church and community. They recorded it in a short period of time, over six hours two nights in a row. Smith said it was a fun experience with “really good energy in the studio.” The end result exceeded their expectations.

While there are no concrete plans to do a follow-up album, Smith hopes this will happen, and he’d love to see the band produce a couple of original songs on their own in place of some of the covers. In October, they are planning to host a Faithfulness Through Generations live event at the church. They also had the chance to perform live at Annual Conference in June and will lead worship in September at the conference’s Leadership Convocation.



The album is a nod to the challenges Advent has experienced—a fire, COVID, a period of discernment—while pointing to hope.

Smith said he appreciates what recording the album has done for the band, not only from a relationship perspective but for their ministry reach.

“Worship ministry often doesn’t get beyond the four walls of the church, but this has allowed us to get beyond the four walls,” he said. “You can listen to this anywhere.”

“Faithfulness Through Generations” is on Spotify, iTunes, Amazon Music, YouTube and anywhere else music is available.

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**Cruisin’ at Disciples**  
Disciples UMC, Greenville, reprised its adult fellowship event June 21 with a program titles “Cruisin’ through the Decades: Music from the 50s to the 80s.” Lisa Walden organized the event, which included solo and group performances and dancing. Many dressed up in attire from the various decades. One artist, Betsy Carpenter, brought her paintings of famous celebrities throughout the years, from Elvis to Elton John. Above are scenes from the festivities.

Photos courtesy of Diane Wilson



**New Light hosts ‘Road Trip’ VBS**  
New Light held its annual vacation Bible school June 17-19 from 6-8 p.m., this year using the “Road Trip” literature. Children and adults traveled with Abraham and Sarah, the Israelites as they took the scenic route, and Elizabeth as she celebrated her family reunion, learning about the Bible as they went. More than 75 people were in attendance each day as all learned through science. music, crafts and recreation. Meals were served daily that were sponsored by members of the church.

Photos courtesy of Rosa Kennerly-Dance

# Recipe Swap.

## Jezebel Sauce

From the kitchen of the Rev. Michael Henderson, retired South Carolina United Methodist pastor living in Florence.

**Ingredients:**  
8 oz. apple jelly  
8 oz. pineapple preserves  
8 oz. prepared horseradish (preferably from the refrigerator section, not on the shelf by condiments)  
1 T prepared mustard  
1 tsp. ground black pepper

1/4 tsp. red chili flakes

**Directions:**  
Mix everything together and store in an airtight jar. Chill for eight hours in the refrigerator before serving. Serve on crackers with cream cheese or on anything slightly bland.

Do you have a favorite recipe? Share it with the Advocate! Email news@advocatesc.org.



The youth ministry is thriving.



Missions are a huge part of Advent’s identity.



Men took a spiritual retreat.

## Advent UMC today, post lament

By Jane Lanford Smith

Following Pentecost and Annual Conference, I am pondering the state of my own congregation, Advent United Methodist Church in Simpsonville, post-COVID and post discernment.

I imagine many of your pastors preached on Acts 2 for Pentecost. Our pastor, the Rev. Russell Freeman, did too. He emphasized verse 1: “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.”

I have been thinking about the current state of my church. Like many churches, we were not fully re-engaged post COVID when our church council voted to enter into discernment. The question: Would we as a congregation leave The United Methodist Church or would we stay?

Our vote was held on Feb. 4, 2024. We chose to stay in the UMC by a very slim simple majority. The following week, a number of the members of our church family, many who are close friends, launched a Global Methodist church plant. We wish them well with their endeavor. After all, another church body seeking to bring people to Christ is always a good thing. After a season of grieving—discernment does not leave either side with winners, and we all lost a great deal—Advent UMC is moving forward.

Since then, we have seen growth in many of our ministries. People have continued to visit us and many have joined us. Programming that had dissipated has been revived, and new programming has been introduced. United Methodist Men and United Women of Faith have experienced large numbers for events in the last 16 months. Both groups had successful and

meaningful retreats, and we offered an Adult Vacation Bible School with singer/storyteller Ed Kilbourne. Life groups have re-imagined themselves, and many people have jumped in to volunteer in children’s and youth ministry and guest services.

Our children and youth offered an amazing Christmas Pageant, and we started a children’s choir. Our music ministry is flourishing for both traditional and contemporary worship, and our handbell choir and brass ensemble are making wonderful musical offerings. Our mission opportunities—like our Harvest Hope team and Backpack Blessings Ministry, which address food insecurity in the Greenville area—are thriving and effectively serving our neighbors. March Mission Madness, our Great Day of Serving, sent many out for a day of building ramps, cleaning, painting, feeding and countless other tasks for those in our community needing assistance.

We are in the process of visioning what our future looks like. We are not fully recovered, but there is an energy present every time the doors are opened and in every ministry with which we engage the world.

Today, we are a grateful people. We are focused on coming together in one place, alongside all other people of Christ in our community, conference and our world.

May your congregation be blessed, may your people follow Christ’s lead and that of the Holy Spirit in serving God’s beloved ones, and may you find his joy and peace in all you do.

Smith is a member of Advent UMC, Simpsonville.

## VBS takes Mount Seal on ‘Road Trip’

HEMINGWAY—From June 18-20, children and adults from all over the community embarked on an exciting journey at Mount Seal United Methodist Church through a vacation Bible school program called “Road Trip: On the Go with God.”

This year’s VBS promised to be an unforgettable adventure filled with fun, learning and spiritual growth.

The theme was designed to take children and adults on a metaphorical road trip, exploring various biblical stories and teachings that emphasize the importance of faith, trust and companionship with God. Each day, the adults and kids “trav-



The program was designed to help the church form relationships.

eled” to different destinations, learning valuable lessons and engaging in activities that reinforce the day’s theme.

Day 1 featured Abraham and Sarah (focus: trusting God). Day

2 featured the Israelites taking “the scenic route (focus: trusting God’s guidance). Day 3 featured Paul (focus: encouragement in ministry). And Day 4 brought a real-life road trip—to the International African American Museum and Mother Emanuel AME Church.

During the week, participants engaged in crafts, games and storytelling, all intended to reinforce the daily themes and foster an engaging approach to faith-based learning. The program was designed to provide a supportive environment where both adults and children can develop spiritually and form enduring relationships.



**A double dose of George**  
On June 29, Kingtree UMC, Kingtree, warmly welcomed Dr. George Howle back, recognizing his years of dedicated service and spiritual leadership. Howle’s return marks a new chapter for the church, as he brings renewed vision and deep connections to the community. Using 2 Kings 2 as the topic, his sermon, “A Double Dose of Your Spirit,” detailed the progression of spiritual leadership from Elijah to Elisha. Howle noted it was inspired by his returning to KUMC after leaving 25 years ago, giving the church a “double dose of George.” Howle also shared that the Cabinet had voted unanimously to advance a Hope Fund grant of \$126,000 to help KUMC and the community.



## Generosity and friendly rivalry bring renewed spirit to Bethel UMC

SMOAKS—A season of generosity and spirited community involvement has breathed new life into Bethel United Methodist Church, marked by heart-felt donations and a milestone victory in a beloved church fundraiser under the leadership of Rev. Walter Harley.

During the 2025 fiscal year, the church sanctuary received thoughtful gifts that enriched both its worship space and fellowship. Members Devarn and Tony Simmons graciously donated new candle holders, adding a warm and reverent glow to the sanctuary’s altar. Meanwhile, longtime members Shirley and James Bryant blessed the congregation with a new baptismal basin and matching water pitcher, signifying renewal and grace in every baptism to come.

Perhaps the most talked-about event, however, was this year’s Women vs. Men fundraiser challenge, an annual tradition filled with good-natured competition and an unwavering commitment to ministry support. For the first time in more than five years, the men emerged victorious, to much surprise and celebration among the congregation. Both teams raised impressive funds, with the combined effort showcasing the power of playful rivalry for a good cause.

Adding to the church’s transformation was the installation of a brand-new audiovisual system in both



The grant is presented to the church finance chair. From left are Marvin Brown, James Bryant, Shirley Bryant and Harley.

the sanctuary and the fellowship hall. This major upgrade was made possible through the diligent grant-writing efforts of Shirley Bryant, whose vision and determination ensured the church keeps pace with the needs of a modern, connected congregation.

Each of these contributions reflects the heart and spirit of BUMC—a place where together, these gifts and community milestones reflect the vibrant and faithful spirit of the church family.

It’s a testament to what’s possible when hearts and hands unite in mission.



**Moore takes helm at Aldersgate UMC**  
Aldersgate UMC, Sumter, celebrated its first cross-cultural/cross-racial appointment this summer with the installation of their new pastor, Dr. Regina Moore. Here, Moore receives a blessing during the service.



Photo courtesy of JoTavia McPherson

**Active and fun**  
New Francis Brown UMC, Charleston, has been enjoying much activity lately. Women's Day 2025 was hosted by the United Women in Faith. Under the leadership of Sis. Jacquette Gethers-Bennett, the worship experience was top tier and featured a theme of equality, empowerment and solidarity. Women were encouraged to wear hats. For Valentine's Day, the young adults of New Francis Brown sponsored a day of love. This event was their second Valentine's Brunch for senior members of New Francis Brown and Cokesbury churches. All who came enjoyed the food, games and fellowship. In January, the United Methodist Men hosted NFL Sunday. The chairmen, Rodell Fletcher and Vernon A. Pryor, invited all to represent their favorite team. Of course this was a competition, and the members did not disappoint. Through their fundraising efforts, the men were able to complete special projects for the church's fellowship hall.

## Stations of the Cross help Tranquil members better understand Christ’s sacrifice

During Lent, Tranquil United Methodist Church, Greenwood, offered a Stations of the Cross experience where members were invited to embark on a journey of the 14 sites Jesus visited on his way to the crucifixion, and ultimately, his resurrection.

When he was crucified, Jesus traveled the Via Doloroso, “the way of suffering,” in Jerusalem while carrying the cross. After his death, pilgrims to Jerusalem historically were eager to visit those sites as a way to understand his experience and sacrifice. Today, it

is no longer easy or even possible to visit some of those sites, so many churches create replicas of these places to help better connect people with the Lord. Tranquil members said they received much meaning from the experience.

## Lexington UMC marks 175th anniversary

LEXINGTON—Lexington United Methodist Church celebrates 175 years of faith and community in 2025, tracing its origins to early Methodist circuit riders and frontier preaching.

From humble beginnings in an old log structure with five members in 1850, the church grew steadily alongside the town. The log building was replaced in 1875 with a wooden structure, followed in 1910 by a brick sanctuary to serve a growing congregation. A fourth Gothic-style sanctuary was completed in 1949 and dedicated during the church’s centennial in 1950.

Throughout its history, LUMC has been shaped by spiritual growth, resilient leadership and community outreach. It weathered the Civil War, economic depressions and a tornado in 1994, each time emerging stronger. Major expansions in the 1960s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s added new education buildings, a larger sanctuary, community-centered spaces and

a Ministry Center. LUMC has embraced mission work, supporting groups like Mission Lexington, Salkehatchie and Habitat for Humanity. The church has been blessed with strong leaders over the years who have guided long-range planning and social outreach.

LUMC continues a dynamic ministry that includes youth programs, choirs, Bible studies and worship innovations.

The church will host a special 175th anniversary celebration Sept. 7 featuring a worship service at 10 a.m., followed by a luncheon that includes entertainment and informational displays. Committees are planning campaigns leading up to this event, celebrating its heritage and envisioning future growth. Consider visiting LUMC this summer and especially Sept. 7 to join this church family in carrying its legacy of worship, service and community into the future. For luncheon tickets, call 803-359-6838.



Photos courtesy of Ernestine McCaskill

**A fun and successful VBS**  
Sandy Grove UMC, Jefferson, held VBS June 18-20. The Rev. Marion Loretta Cooper taught the adult class, while children and youth were taught by Lloyd and Angela Harris and Pat Collins. Lessons for the week were from the Book of Romans. Friday's class ended with a fellowship meal hosted by Pam Hough and Roberta Walker with volunteers. Without the assistance of volunteers throughout the week, this event could not have been possible. The event ended with the children going to Neptune Island Water Park on Saturday in Hartsville South. Fun was had by all.



Photo courtesy of Ernestine McCaskill

**‘Loved and appreciated’**  
Sandy Grove UMC, Jefferson, celebrated Father’s Day with a morning message from Lay Servant Lloyd Harris. Then the fathers were all given gifts of love from UWF President Peggy Hood, Outreach Chair Flora White and Children’s Chair Pat Collins. They also received special gifts from Wanda Walker, who moved away years ago but always remembers to bless her home church. Nath Taylor prepared a steak and potatoes lunch, and salad and dessert were donated by a few of the women.



Photo courtesy of Kelly Gottheiner

**For furry friends**  
Manning UMC, Manning, collected an offering from the children of the church during vacation Bible school. They collected \$569.70 for Second Chance Animal Shelter. Here, members present a check to the shelter director.



## Memorial youth complete inspiring Ground Zero Week of Service

GREER—The youth of Memorial United Methodist Church have once again demonstrated that meaningful mission work doesn't require traveling far from home.

In its second year, the church's "Ground Zero Week of Service" invited students to roll up their sleeves and serve right here in their own community—and the results were both inspiring and impactful.

Ground Zero was launched last summer as a way to help students recognize the needs of their neighbors and actively respond with compassion, time and energy. This year's week of service was met with even greater enthusiasm, drawing not only youth from Memorial UMC but also students from the wider Greer community who had heard about last year's success and wanted to be part of something meaningful.

The week kicked off with a "Fill the Bus" canned food drive. Church members responded generously, filling the bus with donated non-perishable goods. On Day Two, the youth loaded the bus and



Ground Zero launched last summer as a way to help students recognize needs and actively respond.

took the donations—a staggering 1,075 pounds of food—to MANNA Food Bank in Asheville, North Carolina. Manna continues to face high demand as they assist families still recovering from hurricane-related hardships, and the youth were moved to see firsthand how their efforts would meet very real needs.

Students also visited the Ronald McDonald House in Greenville with carts full of donations, where they toured



The group partnered with Mobile Meals of Spartanburg and delivered two full routes of meals to homebound residents across the county. The church plans to expand Ground Zero week in the years to come.

the facility and learned about the organization's mission to support families with critically ill or injured children. Their time there sparked meaningful conversations among the group about the importance of comfort, community and small acts of kindness during times of crisis.

Back in town on Wednesday, the group partnered with Mobile Meals of Spartanburg and delivered two full routes of meals to homebound resi-

dents across the county. For many youth, the experience was deeply personal. Making face-to-face connections with neighbors in need brought the mission of Ground Zero Week full circle, reminding them that serving others doesn't always look dramatic, but it always makes a difference.

"This week showed our students that you don't have to go far to serve God and love people," said Lainey Hannon, director of spiritual develop-

ment and youth ministries. "When we talk about 'missions,' it's easy to think of distant places. But Ground Zero Week helps our students open their eyes to what's right around them, and that changes everything."

The project has become a beloved part of the church's summer calendar. With even more youth participating this year, including many from outside the congregation, and overwhelming support from church members, it's clear Ground Zero is building momentum and shaping hearts.

Tawny Johnson, director of outreach, spent the week with the youth and witnessed their hearts in action.

"They didn't just serve people. They met people. They listened. And they learned what it means to show up with open hands and hearts, right where they are," Johnson said.

Memorial UMC plans to continue and expand Ground Zero Week in the years to come, hoping that as more youth participate, more lives—both inside and outside the church—will be transformed.

## Registration open for golf tourney benefiting Africa University

ORANGEBURG— For the 11th consecutive year, friends of Africa University from South Carolina and surrounding states are signing up to sponsor and play golf in support of Africa University—a private, Pan-African and United Methodist-related institution located in Zimbabwe, Southern Africa.

This year, the one-day charity event has a new name—Wespath-Bishop Leonard Fairley Golf Invitational—but the venue, vibe and cause that drives engagement remain the same.

As a kickoff to the tournament weekend, attendees are invited to the Sunday morning service (Sept. 28) and post-worship luncheon at Edisto Fork UMC, a his-

toric United Methodist congregation in Orangeburg and the home church of James H. Salley, president and chief executive officer of Africa University (Tennessee) Inc.

The tournament, scheduled for Sept. 29 at the Orangeburg Country Club, accommodates 28 four-person teams.

As in previous years, golfers, sponsors and friends enjoy a day of friendly competition and fellowship while investing in student scholarships and evolving needs at Africa University.

The 2024 tournament, held Aug. 26, provided support to assist Africa University students and help the

South Carolina Conference meet its annual apportionment commitment. All 12 UMCSA districts invested and fielded teams in the tournament.

"Bishop Fairley is all in—and so are we," Salley said. This tournament is ministry in motion."

There are multiple ways you can support the Bishop Leonard Fairley Golf Invitational Benefiting Africa University. You can enter a four-person team (\$500) or as a single registrant (\$125) or become a sponsor.

Register for the tournament or learn more about sponsorship opportunities at <https://golf.africau.org>.

For questions: [audevoffice@africau.org](mailto:audevoffice@africau.org) or 615-340-7438.



### Beds for kids

On Saturday, May 31, Johnny Crouch, David Alderman, Jim Sandlin and Art Justice of Central UMC, Florence, took a 10-hour trip to North Carolina to deliver 26 beds. The effort was a part of Central's Beds Ministry, which Justice started a decade ago to construct beds for children in need after he was inspired by reading about a similar ministry in Adam Hamilton's "Final Words from the Cross." Including the North Carolina beds, the Beds Ministry at Central has provided more than 780 beds since 2015. "It's all about fulfilling Central UMC's mission statement, 'Follow Jesus. Love God. Love Neighbor.' The response of children (and their parents) when they get a bed of their own is priceless," Justice said. "Every time we have a hurdle in the way, whether it is donations of lumber or supplies, financial support or even the weather for an upcoming build-day, I don't have to worry, because every hurdle is gone when the time arrives. We could not have provided over 800 beds in the last 10 years unless the Holy Spirit was at work in this ministry. All the glory is to God."



Photos courtesy of Art Justice



## Lifelong United Methodist honored with Singletary community award

Fact Forward presented the Carol Singletary Community Impact Award to a woman whose resilience and tenacity set her apart as a beacon of change and hope: Darnell Byrd McPherson.



Byrd McPherson

Byrd McPherson is a leader, advocate and mentor whose lifelong commitment to uplifting youth and strengthening communities inspires many. Byrd McPherson grew up in John Wesley United Methodist Church, Lamar, where she still maintains her membership. She also attends New Francis Brown UMC, Charleston.

The award noted she embodies the spirit of this award through championing youth with passion and advocacy; forging cross-sector partnerships to create sustainable, community-rooted solutions;

devoting herself to education and mentorship for young people; and upholding justice and equity in her work.

With more than 30 years as a Head Start director and since 2008 as the executive director of Darlington

County First Steps, she has been a tireless advocate for early childhood development, school readiness and equitable access to resources. In 2015, under her leadership, Darlington County First Steps began a transformative partnership with Fact Forward to address the high rates of teen pregnancy in the region. Her dedication remains central to this work.

She continuously challenges those around her to evaluate the community's well-being through the lens of its youngest members.



## Tommy’s House residents find friendship, freedom

By Daly Ward

On a quiet street in a Columbia neighborhood, the sturdy walls of a charming brick house cannot contain the peals of laughter spilling from inside the home.

Four young men sit in a generous family room, engrossed in a good, old-fashioned staring contest, straining to be the very last contestant to break into a smile.

Levi caves first, almost immediately. He skips the grin and goes straight to a full belly laugh. Tom’s and Josh’s eyes give them away; they aren’t far behind. Robert is the winner, but only by a snicker.

The quartet roars as the fun continues.

This is friendship, life and companionship for Tom, Levi, Josh and Robert. They are joyful, full-time residents of Tommy’s House, a home for adults with special needs operated by Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry, an agency of the South Carolina Conference for 22 years.

Aldersgate may be the best-kept secret in the conference. It was incubated out of a decades-long critical shortage of residential alternatives for adults with special needs in South Carolina. Hundreds of vulnerable citizens had no choice except to live at home with elderly caregivers, often an aging parent. The frail were caring for the handicapped.

In the early 2000s, a group of determined parents, accompanied by equally resolute United Methodist clergy, captured the attention of then-Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey and his wife, Margaret. The McCleskeys came to the South Carolina Conference already aware of the need and passionate about United Methodists playing a role in alleviating the residential short-

age. As a result, a board of trustees was formed, and in 2003, Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry was officially welcomed into the conference.

Tommy’s House is the fourth of seven houses acquired, modified, staffed and operated by Aldersgate. It was dedicated on Sept. 13, 2023, with Aldersgate past-chair the Rev. Stephen Taylor leading the ceremony.

The home is named in memory of the younger brother of beloved Aldersgate trustee emeritus, the Rev. Milton McGuirt. Tommy McGuirt had profound special needs, but far more noteworthy was the exceptional bond between Tommy and his older brother, Milton. Tommy inspired Milton’s career in ministry as well as his lifelong passion for helping others, especially the disabled.

When he was born, Tommy McGuirt was not expected to live into his teenage years. His full, 64-year life is further evidence that God is in control and amplifies the urgency of Aldersgate’s role in providing for those who outlive their caregivers. The Rev. McGuirt died in June 2024. He and his wife, Betty Moss, an Aldersgate trustee emeritus, were tireless supporters of the ministry.

When asked what he liked best about living at Tommy’s House, Levi didn’t hesitate: “I love having my own room, going to the zoo, Fireflies games and hamburgers for lunch and dinner!”

For Levi’s guardian, the opportunity for him to become a part of a nurturing Aldersgate home was an answer to many prayers: “Levi has developed emotionally and improved physically. He loves the many social activities, and he loves life.”

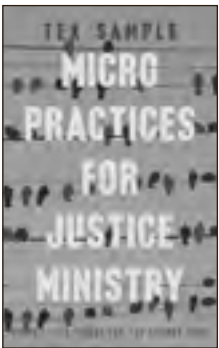
Learn more at <https://aldersgatesnm.org>.

## UMCSC pastor featured in book on justice ministry

One South Carolina United Methodist pastor is featured in a new book by Tex Sample, “Micro Practices for Justice Ministry: Doing Little Things for the Common Good.”

The Rev. John Culp, retired, was featured a number of times in the book. In a section titled “Network Spirituality,” he shared how he experiences “mystical moments” when he engages in justice work and helps others do the same. In another section, “Selling Ideas and Working with Angels,” Culp shares how working with Black patients at Grady Hospital in Atlanta transformed him, and he ultimate founded Salkehatchie Summer Service and engaged in other efforts, like building a well for a community on the continent of Africa, from the ideas that percolated then.

Sample’s book is available on Amazon and from other major book retailers.



## Hartsville Cooperative Parish health fair offers different approach to worship

By Paulette Lunn

HARTSVILLE—The Hartsville Cooperative Parish—comprising St. John, Wesley Chapel and New Providence United Methodist churches—took a different approach to a worship service recently.

Physical and spiritual needs of the congregation and the surrounding communities were met in a faith-filled service that also served as a health and wellness fair. With St. John UMC having a fully equipped gym, and the parish making connections within and without the community by partnering with health-care organizations, this special Sunday service provided ample opportunity to promote well-being and accessible health information.

The fair was spearheaded by Associate Pastor Lyndon Alexander II, who wanted to show the strength of a cooperative parish by its outreach and nurturing missions. Alexander chose to inform and invest in the community by showing the power of resources that will serve to help tackle various health issues.

St. John has a fitness ministry every Saturday. Classes are taught by certified training instructors who provide workout opportunities for anyone in the community for a small donation fee. Seeing the success of this ministry, Alexander saw a perfect opportunity



Spearheaded by the Rev. Lyndon Alexander II, the service provided an opportunity to promote well-being and accessible health information.

to introduce wellness as an everyday issue, and not just a once-a-week affair.

With the assistance of in-house nurse practitioner Dr. Patrycia LaNelle Streater-McFadden, Alexander was able to collaborate with and contact many vendors. Despite her limited attendance on Sundays because of her own health issues, Streater-McFadden’s impact in the community continues to be far-reaching.

The strength of a cooperative parish is embedded within its congregation. The purpose of the fair was to continue education and awareness of health issues and preventative care. From

diabetes and hypertension screenings to women and men’s care, participants included an OBGYN doctor, Care South Mobile Unit nurses, fitness trainers, healthy food ideas and recipes, a mental health specialist and much more.

After fulfilling our spiritual needs in the sanctuary, the congregation traveled next door to the multipurpose building for an outpouring of guidance, support and love through health concerns and fostering renewal in body strength and appearance.

This event, held on a fifth Sunday, was well attended and is appropriate for any Sunday for a combined spiritual and wellness experience. It honors 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, which states, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

At the “heartwarming” Hartsville District Cooperative Parish, this is our goal, our trust and our foundation.

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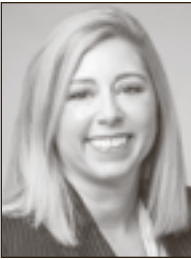
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Epworth News  
by Beth Williams

SNAP benefits can help

Epworth received a grant from the National Council on Aging to help adults aged 60 and older and individuals with disabilities apply for SNAP benefits (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps).

SNAP provides monthly support to help those with limited income buy the nutritious food they need to stay healthy. The amount you receive may depend on your household income from all sources, such as money you get from a job, Social Security, SSI or interest, as well as how many people live in your household.

You may be eligible if you have limited income or resources or if you face high medical or living expenses.

Why apply? It's easy and convenient. It saves money on groceries every month, And it ensures access to healthy, essential food.

If this service can benefit you or someone you know, contact Epworth to schedule an appointment with a family advocate to determine eligibility. With your family advocate, you will complete your SNAP application together; your family advocate will guide you every step of the way. You will also attend an interview with the SNAP office, which will be scheduled after your application is submitted.

For more information, contact Christina Ward, Epworth's SNAP coordinator, at 803-254-1306 or [cward@epworthsc.org](mailto:cward@epworthsc.org).

Williams is the CEO of Epworth.

Port Royal's Taco Tuesday shares love with community

By the Rev. Ann Bridgers

BEAUFORT—Every summer, Port Royal United Methodist Church prepares their famous taco lunch for the visiting Salkehatchie youth as part of their summer service program.

These youth travel statewide and provide volunteer labor working on houses in various communities. They are in the Beaufort area for one week in June.

Port Royal UMC has been hosting them for lunch on Tuesday of their work week for the last 30 years. The local Taco Bell restaurant in Beaufort generously donates much of the food, with Port Royal UMC donating the rest.

These youth are always excited to be with us and, boy, can they put away some tacos! This year we served close to 85 youth together with their adult sponsors. What a wonderful partnership we have: the youth's devotion by extending God's love through helping the community and our church's devotion by extending God's love to this wonderful group through food and fellowship.

A special thank you goes to our volunteers, who decorated, prepared, served, cleaned and provided



This year, the church served roughly 85 youth.

goodie bags, as well as to the Salkehatchie youth for all they do to improve the living conditions for many in the community.

We feel honored to have this recognition and always work hard to make this event meaningful to the group every year.

*Bridgers pastors Port Royal UMC, Beaufort.*



**'Looking at Mass Incarceration'**

Columbia District United Women in Faith sisters gathered at Epworth Children's Home May 24 for a workshop on racial justice titled "Looking at Mass Incarceration." Dr. Nichole Middleton was the keynote speaker, joined by Killingsworth Director Susan Sirmons and a resident of Killingsworth. Here, attendees gather for a smile.

Photo courtesy of Carrie Murray and Lexie Chatham

Cognitive Connections.

South Carolina blessed with four state dementia care specialists

By Jennifer Brewton

Learning that you or a loved one has dementia is never in someone's life plan. As South Carolina's older adult population grows, so does the prevalence of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. While this is never a diagnosis anyone wishes to receive, through advocacy and planning, South Carolina has resources available to help navigate a diagnosis of dementia.

"What is most important to remember is that the list of things someone living with dementia can do is always longer than the list of what they can't do," Tori Anderson, the state's first dementia care specialist, shared in her monthly Dementia 101: The Basics webinar.

In August 2022, the South Carolina Department on Aging piloted the state's first dementia care specialist position utilizing funds from a two-year Public Health Workforce Grant provided by the Administration for Community Living.

Anderson learned about the position from a friend in the social work field.

"It was perfect timing," Anderson said. "I was at a point I wanted to make a career change, and this lined up with my passion of helping others through a dementia diagnosis."

Anderson had been the caregiver for both of her parents 10 years prior.

"If I had known then what I know

now, I would have done many things differently," she said. "But now I'm in a position to help others make more informed decisions."

As the first DCS, Anderson conducted a needs assessment of statewide services to ensure the DCS program would complement, not compete, with other services available in the state. She reached more than 3,000 people with education offerings and conducted more than 200 individual care consultations.

Because of the success of the pilot program, the SCDOA submitted a budget request in 2023 to expand the program statewide to serve the 10 regions as outlined by the Area Agencies on Aging regions in the budget year 2025.

Advocacy by the Alzheimer's Association and its volunteer advocates helped to keep the request at the forefront of the legislators' minds.

The second DCS, Amy Rushing, was hired in January 2025. She is housed at the Hartsville Public Library. She serves six counties: Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Marion, Marlboro and Chesterfield. Rushing previously worked as a special education teacher for more than 10 years and, before that, in outreach roles within the region.

"I'm a Pee Dee girl," Rushing said. "I know the community and am familiar with the need for support."

In May 2025, Sophia Paul, an Orangeburg native, was hired to serve

the Lower Savannah Region of Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun and Orangeburg counties. Having most recently worked as a community health worker, Paul was a perfect fit because of her experience and her familiarity with the region. Paul is housed in the Orangeburg Community Resource Center, Orangeburg.

"I'm thrilled to be in this role and make an impact on the services in my community," Paul said.

Melissa Dalton was hired in June 2025 to serve the Catawba Region of York, Chester, Lancaster and Union counties. Her office is located at the Carnegie Union Library, Union.

"I can't tell you how excited I am for this opportunity," Dalton said. "When I read the job posting, I felt it was made for me."

Dalton was one of the first volunteers-turned-employees at Memory Matters based out of Hilton Head, where she supported families with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias for 13 years.

While each of the dementia care specialists has a different background, their unique perspectives bring the perfect mix to this program.

For more information on the DCS program, visit <https://aging.sc.gov/dementia>.

*Brewton is with the South Carolina Department of Aging.*



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# Young Methodists.

## SMC to offer Bachelor of Science in exercise science

SPARTANBURG—Spartanburg Methodist College will offer a Bachelor of Science in exercise science in the fall of 2026. This will be the college’s first bachelor of science degree.

“As we continue to expand our four-year degree offerings, science degrees were an inevitable growth area,” said Dr. Curt Laird, provost and executive vice president at SMC. “Exercise science has been highly requested when we’ve studied what new programs

potential students would like to see us offer.”

The exercise science degree will teach students about how the body works and how to make it work better. They will learn how to help people get fit, heal better and stay healthy, leading to careers in several fields.

Students will study numerous exercise-related fields, including physiology, kinesiology, health promotion and more. Graduates will have the skills to

pursue careers as personal trainers, athletic trainers, fitness instructors, physical therapy assistants, corporate wellness specialists and more.

Combined with SMC’s unique Camak Core program, which provides students with mandatory professional development and workplace skills, students will graduate with the knowledge and training needed in their profession and the skills and understanding of how to be a professional.

## Exploring intergenerational faith: Two book studies, one vision

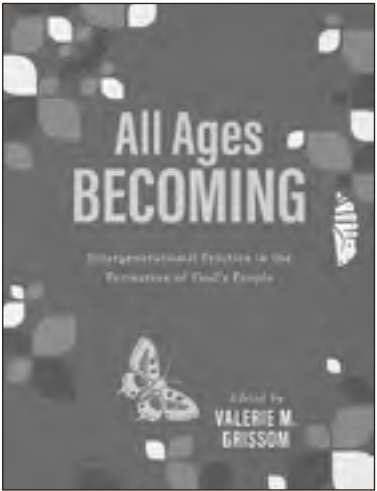
By Toni Taylor

As part of the Lilly Endowment grant, “Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer,” organizers are launching a dual book study for Cohort 2025.

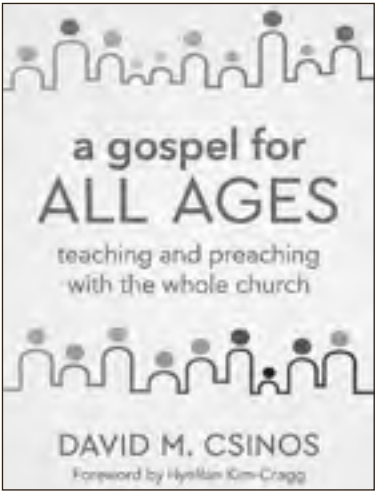
The study will feature “All Ages Becoming: Intergenerational Practice in the Formation of God’s People,” edited by Valerie Grissom, and “A Gospel for All Ages: Teaching and Preaching with the Whole Church,” by David M. Csinos.

These two books, read and discussed together, offer a rich foundation for deepening the understanding and practice of intergenerational worship and prayer.

“All Ages Becoming” is a practical handbook for ministers, caregivers and leaders seeking to bridge generational



divides in faith communities. It blends theological foundations with real-life models and actionable steps for creating ministries that nurture faith across all ages. Each chapter includes reflection questions and stories from diverse church



contexts, making it an accessible and inspiring resource for those new to intergenerational ministry as well as seasoned practitioners.

“A Gospel for All Ages” focuses on how preaching and teaching can include and in-

spire everyone, from children to elders. Csinos addresses the challenge of generational silos in churches and provides practical strategies for connecting the gospel to all ages. The book is structured with reflection questions and exercises, making it ideal for group study and discussion. It encourages congregations to see intergenerational ministry as a shared responsibility and a path toward spiritual formation for all.

Under the umbrella of “The Nurturing Children in Worship and Prayer” initiative, funded by the Lilly Endowment, Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer supports efforts to fully engage children in worship and prayer practices. The book studies are a direct

response to the grant’s goals, which include strengthening worship and prayer and building inclusive communities. Each session will include time for discussion, reflection and planning how to implement new ideas in our own context, in line with the grant’s emphasis on practical, sustainable change increasing the number of children and the ways children engage in worship.

The Rev. Nona Woodle wrote and shared both book study guides on Portico.

If your church is interested in learning more, visit <http://www.umcsc.org/children> or email [ttaylor@umcsc.org](mailto:ttaylor@umcsc.org) or [nmwoodle@umcsc.org](mailto:nmwoodle@umcsc.org).

*Taylor is the grant administrator for Connecting Children.*

## Camps & Retreat Ministries.

### The transformation of camp

If you’ve ever been to camp—whether as a camper or staff—you know how much fun and energy it takes. Days are packed with adventure and joy.

At Asbury Hills, that means creek hikes, climbing the rock wall and alpine tower, canoeing, worshipping at the mountain chapel and spending a night under the stars at Home in the Woods. Down at Sea Islands, it’s sunset dolphin cruises, beach days, aquarium visits in Charleston and peaceful moments under the Angel Oak tree. And don’t forget overnight fun at Camp Providence—lake tubing, dock splashing and classic campfire cookouts.

For our summer staff, each week brings fresh joy and new challenges. By Friday, they may be worn

out, but they’re ready to do it all again. Every Friday, after campers head home, our team gathers to share God-sightings—powerful moments where they saw God moving in the lives of campers. These moments remind us why we do what we do and how deeply God is working through camp.

Here’s just one story a summer staff member recently shared:

“I had an all-girl group of elementary schoolers, ages 6 to 10. With such a wide age range, we had our share of challenges. On Thursday, after a tough day at Sky Ranche, I walked back with a girl we had struggled to connect with all week. She asked about her leftover money from the camp store. I told her it

would go toward the camper scholarship fund—helping kids whose families couldn’t afford camp. She was quiet the rest of the way back. Then on Friday morning, all the girls gathered around us. They told us they were donating the rest of their store money to the scholarship fund. They said they’d had a great week and wanted other kids to have that same chance to experience camp.”

What an incredible testimony! Even during a tough week, these campers felt God’s love through their counselors and turned that into generosity.

It’s a beautiful picture of the transformation that happens at camp—where fun meets faith, and God begins to shape future leaders.

## Called SC to help youth who are discerning a call to the ministry

WEST COLUMBIA—Youth discerning a call to ministry are invited to Called SC, a day of exploration designed specifically for youth ages 13-18 to explore and discern God’s call on their life.

The retreat will be held Sept. 20 from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Mount Hebron United Methodist Church.

Participants will join pastors and leaders from all over the South Carolina Conference as well as other young

people who are also exploring God’s call to ministry.

Attendees will discover different types of ministry; learn about the United Methodist ordination process and ministry next steps; share stories with other youth and adults; receive guidance and prayers from adult mentors, both laity and clergy, already living a life of service to our Lord; and have fun and praising God with new friends.

Even if they are not sure whether God is calling them to be a vocational minister, youth are welcome to come and explore God’s call.

The total cost for the retreat is \$10

per participant and includes lunch. Register by Sept. 17. Refunds are not available.

To register: <http://scmyp.org/calledsc>.

### Youth ministers to connect via Refuel

Ask any seasoned leader, and they’ll tell you: Youth ministry can be incredibly fun—and incredibly hard.

That’s why we South Carolina Methodist Youth Program leaders are launching Refuel, a monthly Zoom gathering for youth workers.

Each month, beginning Aug. 18, SCMYP will host a Zoom conversation for youth leaders in South Carolina to connect, share and inspire one another.

The monthly link for the Zoom meeting will be shared on the SCMYP Leaders Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3427168747526267>.



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### Historical Society by the Rev. Joseph Kovas

## Why we remember

In churches and congregations across the country, there is a wall or section dedicated to the history and story of how God has worked throughout the ages and gathered a group of people called Christians. We may be familiar with this part of the church because of the pastors who served our churches in yesteryear. Congregations display in their halls the “old preachers” who ministered to their communities by leading worship services; officiating weddings, baptisms and funerals; and equipping the saints for the work of ministry in the world for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The congregation of First United Methodist Church, Cheraw, where I serve, has a beautiful history wall dedicated to telling the story of how God has worked through spiritual giants of the faith who ministered to the people called Methodist in the community. According to “Twentieth Century Sketches,” published by the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (1914), pastors the Rev. Pierce F. Kilgo and the Rev. Washington Lafayette Wait served the community of Cheraw in their history.

Kilgo came from a pastor’s family. His father and son, the Rev. James T. Kilgo and the Rev. Pierce R. Kilgo, served as pastors in South Carolina for many years, with his father being described as one of the “most faithful members of the South Carolina Conference.” Kilgo’s biography states that it was a “mystery” as to how his father, a poor preacher, could afford to send his child to receive formal education at Wofford College in their day. This mystery was viewed as an “inspiration to every father who desires to educate his children, but who may be tempted to neglect it on account of small income.” Kilgo served the Cheraw Station in 1893.

Wait has a very different story. Wait was educated by his mother, who was an educator. He was sent to Cokesbury Conference School, which prepared him to enter Wofford College, and graduated with the class of 1871. He studied to be a lawyer, was admitted to the bar and practiced for 13 years. According to his biography, “Men soon learned to trust his wisdom as a lawyer and his judgment as a man. But God had nobler work for our friend and brother.”

Wait left his law practice and entered the ministry after accepting his unmistakable call to preach. He was licensed to preach in 1887 and served churches across South Carolina. He served the Cheraw station between 1902-1904.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the unsung heroes mentioned in these two men’s biographies—Mrs. Nettie Bethea Kilgo and Mrs. Jane Wofford Wait. Mrs. Kilgo was described as “a faithful helpmeet and delightful companion,” and Mrs. Wait had a “sweet Christian influence” that sanctified their home life. Her “heroic devotion” gave strength to Rev. Wait’s arduous work as a itinerate pastor. Perhaps we need another wall in our churches for the history of all of the pastor’s spouses who have endured the trials and tribulations of ministry in the past.

Why do we take time to remember those who have come before us? Though these pastors and families have long since departed this earth, they made a spiritual and physical impact in the lives of the people whom they served. Their stories and their lives point us to remember the words of Hebrews 12:1-2: “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (NKJV).

Their lives point us to Jesus, who died for us while we were yet sinners, thus proving God’s love toward us (Romans 5:8). We remember not so that we can have halls and walls that collect dust, but we remember because their stories brought our fathers and mothers to the Christian faith, serve as an inspiration for us to endure our own race and and invite us into the story of salvation of Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Kovas is vice president of the South Carolina United Methodist Conference Historical Society and serves as the senior pastor of First UMC, Cheraw.*



### From the Archives by Dr. Phillip Stone

## Bishop Nolan Harmon

Nolan B. Harmon only served as the bishop of the South Carolina Conference for four years, but in his long life, he left a significant mark on the denomination as a whole.

Born in 1892 in Meridian, Mississippi, Harmon graduated in 1914 from Millsaps College. He attended some of the first classes at Emory’s Candler School of Theology. In 1918, he was ordained an elder to become an army chaplain and in 1919 was received into the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. His autobiography recounts the somewhat unusual nature of his ordination, which happened outside of a session of an Annual Conference. He earned a master’s degree from Princeton in 1920.

Harmon served for some 20 years in the Baltimore Conference, leading congregations in Maryland and Virginia in the 1920s and 1930s. He served as editor of the Baltimore Southern Methodist for five years. In 1930, 1934 and 1938, he was a delegate to the ME Church South’s General Conference and was a delegate to the uniting conference in 1939.

In 1940, he was chosen as the book editor of The Methodist Church and led the church’s publishing arm for the next 16 years. He edited the *Book of Discipline* after each General

Conference, and in the 1950s, he was the general editor of the “Interpreter’s Bible,” a resource that many clergy and seminary students no doubt have found invaluable. As book editor, he also edited the journal *Religion in Life*.

Harmon was a delegate to the 1940 through 1956 General and SEJ conferences from Virginia. He received votes in 1952 for bishop, and in 1956, he was elected a bishop and assigned to the Charlotte Area. Until 1960, the South Carolina Conference shared a bishop with Western North Carolina, and thus Bishop Harmon became South Carolina’s bishop as well. In 1960, the SEJ created the Columbia Area, and thus the conference received a new bishop.

Harmon’s views on race were complicated. He defended the jurisdictional system, writing in one piece in the *Advocate* that it wasn’t about race, but about protecting the southern minority in the church. There’s a lot to unpack there, but suffice it to say he didn’t seem as concerned about the Black southern minority in the church. In 1961, the death of the bishop in Alabama led the College of Bishops to assign Bishop Harmon to oversee the North Alabama Conference for a time. It was in that capacity that Harmon signed “A Call for

Unity” with seven other Alabama clergy leaders in which they called Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s protest campaign “unwise and untimely.” The letter resulted in King’s famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail” which was addressed to Bishop Harmon and his colleagues.

Harmon didn’t really appreciate the letter, though he did acknowledge King in his autobiography 20 years later as a brave man who was fighting “ages of evil.” In another instance, Bishop Harmon denounced Gov. George Wallace’s stand in the schoolhouse door, reading a protest during a session of Annual Conference. Still, Harmon disapproved of much of the activism of the Civil Rights Movement, preferring judicial action instead.

Following his retirement in 1964, Bishop Harmon edited the *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, still a valuable resource on church history, and helped edit the 1964 Methodist hymnal. He joined the Emory faculty, teaching courses in church history and polity in the seminary for 25 more years.

Bishop Harmon died in 1993, just shy of his 101st birthday.

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

## Jordan UMC to celebrate 165 years with Jubilee Homecoming this fall

MANNING—The congregation of Jordan United Methodist Church is holding a Jubilee Homecoming Celebration this fall to commemorate its 165 years of existence.

Slated for Sunday, Oct. 12, beginning with a worship service at 10:30 a.m., the sermon will be delivered by Bishop Leonard E. Fairley, the resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

The service will be followed by fellowship and a meal at the church, located at 1063 Jordan Church Road.

Event planners encourage the public to attend and especially any former pastors, members and their families.

“Our church family is very pleased to welcome Bishop Fairley to Jordan UMC’s Jubilee,” said June Brailsford, Jordan UMC lay leader. “We look forward to hearing his message, seeing familiar faces as well as meeting new friends. So bring your memories, pictures, etc. and join us.”

Dating back to at least 1860 as part of the Manning Circuit, the congregation of the Jordan Charge gathered to worship in this area of Clarendon County for many decades. In 1876, Joseph Sprott donated the land for the first church building. After the size of the congregation outgrew the original structure, a larger building was erected in 1910, which later burned down from a



In 1876, Joseph Sprott donated land for the first building.

lightning strike.

The current church was constructed in 1944, mostly by the hands of the members of the congregation at the time. The high winds of Hurricane Hugo in 1989 toppled the church’s steeple, which was then replaced in 2014. Presently Jordan UMC is part of the Jordan Charge, which also includes Bethlehem UMC.

Jordan’s vision is as follows: “Believing that God reached out to us with love and forgiveness, we seek to grow together in faith through worship, study, service and celebration, to the end that we embody Christ’s compassion and holiness.”



Richard E. Arries

SIMPSONVILLE—Richard E. Arries, father of the Rev. Chris Arries and the Rev. Suzy Sullivan, died July 1, 2025. Rev. Arries is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. Rev. Sullivan is the pastor of the Grace-Pelzer Charge, Williamston.

A memorial service was held July 5 in the chapel of the McDougald Funeral Home, with burial in the M.J. “Dolly” Cooper Veterans Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Harvest Anglican Church, 1636 Bethel Road, Simpsonville, SC 29681.

Mr. Arries is survived by his wife, Pamela Dost Arries, son and daughter.

Sadie Mae “Ness” Nelson Alston

NORTH CHARLESTON—Sadie Mae “Ness” Nelson Alston, sister of the Rev. Connie McLeod, died June 8, 2025. Rev. McLeod is the pastor of New Grace United Methodist Church, St. George; her husband, the Rev. Jacob McLeod, is pastor of New Hope UMC, Hartsville.

Funeral services were held June 17 at Christ Temple A Kingdom Church with burial in Bethel UMC Cemetery, St. Stephen.

Benjamin Edward Brown

WEST COLUMBIA—Benjamin Edward Brown, husband of Cindy Brown, died July 3, 2025. Mrs. Brown spent several months working at the conference center as part of the disaster response team following Hurricane Helene.

Funeral services were held July 13 at Shives Funeral Home, Columbia.

Memorials may be made to the American Heart Association, <https://www.heart.org>.

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

Charles Lindburg Gamble

FORT PIERCE, Fla.—Charles Lindburg Gamble, father of the Rev. Arthur Gamble, died June 21, 2025. Rev. Gamble is the pastor of Springtown United Methodist Church, Smoaks.

Funeral services were held July 5 at Bass Temple Church of God in Christ.

Mr. Gamble is survived by his four sons and five daughters.

Rev. Anthony Nickolas Gavalas



Gavalas

ATHENS, Ga.—Dr. Anthony Nickolas Gavalas, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died June 20, 2025.

Prior to his retirement in 2002, Rev. Gavalas served the McClellanville, Stallsville, Bluffton, Friendship-Catawba, Lancaster-St.

Luke, Grace, Lake City and Lawrence Chapel charges.

Funeral services were held June 24 at Chapelwood UMC with burial in Grace UMC Cemetery, Union.

Dr. Gavalas is survived by his two sons and three daughters.

Rev. Franklin David Hartsell



Hartsell

CLEMSON—The Rev. Franklin David Hartsell, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died June 20, 2025.

Prior to his retirement in 1997, Rev. Hartsell served the Utica-Fairview Associate, Seneca Circuit, Bethesda-Beulah, Laurel Bay, Bells,

Little River and Lawrence Chapel charges. He also spent 18 years under the Division of Chaplains from 1964-1982.

A memorial service was held June 25 at

Lawrence Chapel UMC, Central.

Memorials may be made to the children’s ministry or music ministry at Lawrence Chapel UMC, 2101 Six Mile Hwy., Central, SC 29630-9488.

Rev. Hartsell is survived by his wife, Joyce Hartsell, two sons and daughter.

Eleanor Adkins Haton

GREER—Eleanor Adkins Haton, widow of the Rev. Donald S. Haton, died July 8, 2025.

A memorial service was held July 12 at Grace United Methodist Church.

Memorials may be made to Grace UMC, 627 Taylor Road, Greer, SC 29651.

Mrs. Haton is survived by her daughter.

Rev. Keith Hunter



Hunter

KINGSTREE—The Rev. Keith Hunter, a member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and pastor of Mount Zion UMC, died June 25, 2025.

During his ministry, Rev. Hunter served the Lake Point, Greeleyville Parish, Anderson Circuit, York-

St. James, Wesley (Ladson), Wesley (Yonges Island), Camden First and Mount Zion (Kingstree) charges.

Funeral services were held July 1 at Mount Zion UMC, Kingstree.

Rev. Hunter is survived by his wife, Yolanda Hunter, two sons and two daughters.

Cecile Yvonne Caskey

Thackston

SUMTER—Cecile Yvonne Caskey Thackston, wife of the Rev. Regi Thackston, died June 15, 2025. Rev. Thackston is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Memorial services were held June 19 at Trinity UMC. Inurnment will be held at a later date in the Trenholm Road UMC Columbarium.

Memorials may be made to Sumter United Ministries, P.O. Box 1017, Sumter, SC 29151; or to Trinity UMC, 226 W. Liberty St., Sumter, SC 29150.

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

Lovis Thompson Thomas

HARTSVILLE—Lovis Thompson Thomas, widow of the Rev. Theodore Thomas Jr., died July 12, 2025.

Funeral services were held July 19 at Centenary United Methodist Church with burial in Darlington Memory Gardens.

Lisa McAlister Thompson

CLINTON—Lisa McAlister Thompson, wife of the Rev. Gregory W. Thompson, died June 30, 2025. Rev. Thompson is pastor of Central United Methodist Church.

A memorial service was held July 12 at Providence ARP Church.

Memorials may be made to VIA Health Partners, P.O. Box 178, Clinton, SC 29325.

Mrs. Thompson is survived by her husband.

Gail Hamby Wilson

MOUNT PLEASANT—Gail Hamby Wilson, wife of the Rev. Harlan Wilson, died June 16, 2025. Rev. Wilson is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held July 18 at John Wesley UMC, Charleston.

Memorials may be made to East Cooper Meals on Wheels, P.O. Box 583, Mount Pleasant, SC 29465; or to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, 501 St. Jude Place, Memphis, TN 38105.

Mrs. Wilson is survived by her husband and daughter.

Worldwide News.

Conference gives update on flood response

RUIDOSO, N.M.—The New Mexico Conference is responding to the needs in Ruidoso, a community dealing with floods after last year’s wildfires. All the homes in a trailer park were condemned. Alli Newsom has a video update featuring the Rev. Ross Whiteaker, Albuquerque District superintendent and the conference’s co-provost. She also offers ways United Methodists can help.

What Scouts ruling means for United Methodists

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The Boy Scouts of America’s bankruptcy reorganization plan has survived its first appellate challenge. The denomination’s General Council on Finance and Administration has provided a brief overview of what that means, and what might be next.

Zimbabwe church provides ‘lifeline’ for seniors

MUTARE, Zimbabwe—The United Methodist Hilltop Circuit has rolled out special ministries to get older members involved in church life. The outreach includes a transportation ministry, special worship services and monthly home visits.

What church says about candidate endorsements

WASHINGTON—In a July 7 federal court filing, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service said houses of worship can endorse political candidates without risking their tax-exempt status. In response, the United Methodist Board of Church and Society clarified that the Social Principles encourage churches to speak out boldly on social issues but not affiliate with any political party.

One AIDS kit left: What bishop witnessed

BO, Sierra Leone—Florida Conference Bishop Tom Berlin recently visited Mercy United Methodist Hospital in Sierra Leone, where he witnessed the real-world impact of potential U.S. aid cuts. The hospital had just a single AIDS test kit on its shelf. He is urging people to call their U.S. senators, who are preparing to vote on the future of USAID, the United States Agency for International Development, and possible cuts to PEPFAR, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. The U.S. Senate has moved forward a bill that, so far, spares PEPFAR but continues deep cuts to foreign aid.

Giving Methodist women their due

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—A new book aims to bring Southern Methodist women and their social justice work to the forefront. “Southern Methodist Women and Social Justice: Interracial Activism in the Long Twentieth Century” features profiles of Mary McLeod Bethune, Bishops Leontine T.C. Kelly, Charlene Kammerer and six others.

Church lets pollinator field bloom

LAWRENCEBURG, Ky.—For years, the 1.5-acre field behind Lawrenceburg United Methodist Church was kept tidy with regular mowing. But it wasn’t serving much purpose beyond looking neat. Church member Carol Stewart led the way to the congregation planting a field designed for bees, butterflies and birds.

Social Principles handbook now available

WASHINGTON—The United Methodist Social Principles stand in the Wesleyan tradition of moral witness and ethical action. Last year’s General Conference approved a new slate of Social Principles intended to be more concise, globally relevant and theologically grounded. The United Methodist Board of Church and Society and Cokesbury have teamed up to produce a handbook of the new Social Principles that’s now available for purchase.

Tropical storm inundates N.C. church

ALAMANCE COUNTY, N.C.—Tropical Storm Chantal has left a trail of destruction in North Carolina, with Saxapahaw United Methodist Church and its preschool among the hardest hit. The church building was flooded by the storm July 7. Now the church and rural community are picking up the pieces. The North Carolina Conference also is taking financial donations for its storm response.

Conference denounces ‘Alligator Alcatraz’

LAKELAND, Fla.—The Florida Conference has issued a statement raising alarm about the immigrant detention center that officials are calling “Alligator Alcatraz.” The center was erected in eight days on land prone to flooding to detain undocumented people for potential deportation. “Leaders and members of The Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church do not support this facility in purpose, design, funding, or location,” the conference said. “We do support a clear path to the process for legal immigration and a reduction in criminal activity.”

Courtesy UMNews





Adult Lessons

by the Rev. Joseph D. Kovas

Faith as a living tradition

Aug. 3

The Living Tradition of Do No Harm

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:12-26

Key Verse: Corinthians 11:17

St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians seeks to address divisions in the early church through exhortation of unity and love as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Victor Paul Furnish and David Hay observed in their introductions to 1 Corinthians that the congregation in Corinth was predominately Gentile and contained a mixture of both Jewish and Greek Christians gathered in house churches across the community. The diversity of the house churches also contained people from different social and economic backgrounds as well. This created a wonderful opportunity for Paul to invite the early Christians to reflect and respond together with the tradition of the Lord’s Supper.

Christians in Corinth rushed to eat the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper before others had the opportunity to join the meal. The abuse of the meal gave Paul to opportunity to teach on Jesus’ Last Supper (vv. 11:23-26). Paul calls their attention to the first Last Supper and how Jesus invites us to do these things “in remembrance of me” (vv. 24,25). The Last Supper is more than a meal that remembers the historical events of Jesus’ betrayal and arrest. It is a sacrament that reveals God’s grace working inwardly that calls us to remember how Jesus’ life, death and resurrection atoned for our sins and brought us into newness of life (Romans 6:4). Wesley called the Last Supper a “Means of Grace” and urged the early Methodists to not only practice taking it together, but to follow a simple rule: Do no harm (General Rules of the United Societies).

One of the my favorite aspects theologically in The United Methodist Church is the concept of the Open Table that is found in our communion liturgy. At the Lord’s Supper, we are invited to receive God’s grace, and this invitation belongs to all. How can the Lord’s Supper invite us to practice unity amongst diversity in such a way to extend Christ’s love to other?

Lord who presides over our communion tables, may the remembrance of the Last Supper inspire our hearts to receive your grace and love and to seek unity in our community

Aug. 10

The Living Tradition of Doing Good

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 12:7

Paul’s letter this week continues to build upon the opening verses of his letter that calls for unity among the diverse believers in Corinth who are “to be saints together with all those who are in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2).

One issue of concern in the Corinthian churches was the use of spiritual gifts. Gifts such as speaking in tongues were being elevated among those who wished to boast on their own spirituality. However, the posture of Paul’s letter is best summed up with his earlier words: “Knowledge puffs up but love builds up (1 Corinthians 8:1). Every gift comes first from the Holy Spirit with the mission and purpose of the “common good” for the whole community. This becomes the grounds for Paul to describe the beautiful imagery of our community being the body of Christ where all our gifts are united in one body and one spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).

I am reminded today of the famous story Mark Twain once wrote, “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.” The main character of the story had a bullfrog by the name of Daniel Webster. He made a bet that his frog could outjump anyone’s bullfrog. However, in his boasting, someone else took Daniel Webster and filled him with lead to stop him from winning the bet. By the time he realized his frog was full of lead, the winner of the bet was long gone. It would seem Mark Twain’s character demonstrates what happens when we let our boasting get ahead of ourselves. Each spiritual gift from God is not given for us to boast in our own selves but to be used to seek the common good with one another in our community as Christians. The early Methodists would call this the second simple rule of “Doing Good.”

How can our individual gifts be used together to seek together the common good of each other and our wider community?

Jesus, who gives us a diversity of gifts from your Holy Spirit, humble us to seek the beauty of one another’s gifts

About the Author

Kovas is an ordained elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and serves as the senior pastor of First UMC, Cheraw.

Aug. 17

The Living Tradition of Love

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 13

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 13:13

and help us to use our gifts together for the common good of your kingdom. Amen.

When I was a college student, I served for a summer as a Student in Missions worker for the UMC. I was appointed to serve at Rural Mission, which was a nonprofit organization on Johns Island that sought to love the people of the Sea Island communities through acts of love, service and compassion. Several of their ministries included a home repair ministry for low-income families, a school for migrant families in the summertime, a firewood ministry in the wintertime and a plethora of people committed to being prayer warriors. I will never forget the sign on the highway leading into Rural Mission. The sign had the Scripture passage, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it onto me” (Matthew 25:40). The central message was to share God’s love with all on the Sea Islands.

St. Paul’s central message to the Corinthians was God’s love. The posture we are to take in as Christians is love, not boastfulness or arrogance as was seen in the Corinthian community. Paul stresses the point: Though the Corinthians may have beautiful gifts and can do extraordinary things with them, if their spiritual gifts are not rooted in the love of the Lord their God as revealed in Jesus Christ, then they are nothing and they gain nothing (vv. 2-3). One day prophecies shall fade, knowledge will cease and tongues will end, but the one thing that shall remain forever as a legacy is love.

Salkehatchie Summer Service seeks to live into a living tradition of love. Salkehatchie was founded in 1978 as a ministry to repair the homes for low income families and has grown to having annual camps throughout the summer in South Carolina. One director of a Salkehatchie camp makes it a point each year to emphasize that the focus of Salkehatchie is not just to repair homes for families, but be an invitation to share Jesus’ love with others and to receive God’s love from others as well. Hammers, boards, plaster, shingles and underpinning will fade one day, but the love of God that

is shared during a week of Salkehatchie shall not fade but endure as a living tradition and legacy for generations to come.

How can we embody a living tradition of love in our day to day lives and together as a community of faith?

Lord Jesus Christ, who is love divine incarnate and whose outstretched arms of love on the hard wood of the cross witness to us your love, may you guide us as we seek a more excellent way in loving one another just as you have loved us. Amen.

Aug. 24

The Living Tradition of the Resurrection

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-28

Key Verse: 1 Cor. 15:3-4

The focus on the living tradition of the resurrection is Paul’s focus in today’s reading.

In the beginning of chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, Paul responds to people in the community who were boasting about their faith. Paul reminds the community, “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthian 1:18). It would seem Paul invites those who have forgotten about the foundation of their faith to remember the way of salvation comes not from glory, but from death on a cross. Paul’s teaching on the resurrection becomes a pastoral invitation for the diverse members of Greek and Jewish Christians in Corinth to remember the same foundation that unites them in their faith.

In chapter 15, Paul also witnesses to how resurrection impacts our lives. Through his experience, Paul shared with the community how Christ died for our sins and rose again in accordance with the scriptural accounts of the Gospels. Jesus not only rose from the grave, but also appeared to a multitude of people after his resurrection. Paul with humility acknowledged Christ appeared to him—a person who violently persecuted the church and who was forever changed by the grace of the Lord Jesus. The living tradition of the resurrection matters to St. Paul because without Jesus’ resurrection, he would not have come to know Jesus who loved him and died for him and his sins (Galatians 2:20-21).

2025 marks the 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed. The Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 formed a statement that would help Christians to acknowledge their faith together as revealed in the Scriptures. Christians around the world over the centuries have recited the Nicene Creed not only to remember the historical foundation for their faith but also to remind them of their faith as seen in the word of a hymn, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus Christ and his

righteousness.”

How can the living tradition of the resurrection unite our communities of faith to share the good’s news of Christ Jesus with others?

Jesus, who is the life and the resurrection, may your Holy Spirit unite us tougher to seek unity in our communities that is built first in you. Amen.

Aug. 31

The Living Tradition of the Body

Devotional Readings: 1 Corinthians 15:29-58

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 1:51-52

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians not only concludes with teaching on the nature of Christ’s resurrection, but also a theological teaching on the nature of our bodies and creation in relationship to Jesus’ resurrection in our lives. There were questions about the nature of what will happen to someone’s physical body after they die on earth and what will happen when Christ returns. Paul states in observing the nature of our physical and spiritual bodies that this is a mystery (1 Corinthians 15:51). The concept of the Greek word for “mystery” was best described by writer Marilyn Brown Oden as something that is known and that is continuously being revealed. Mystery is not knowing anything but a continuous invitation to knowing something more deeply. The nature of our bodies in the resurrection may not be fully known, but the Scriptures as revealed in Jesus Christ show us our bodies are a part of the continuous work of Jesus’ resurrection that makes all things new as a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The nature of our bodies in the resurrection points us to the concept of our mission. Our bodies were declared “good” from the beginning of creation and were thus made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Through sin, the image of God’s love in our bodies was distorted, but in Jesus Christ who is the “last Adam,” the image of God is restored and renewed in us and in our own physical and spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15:45-49). What we believe about our bodies in the resurrection may also impact the way we live out our faith.

If we affirm a theology that restores our bodies, then we also affirm our bodies and all creation witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. How can we cultivate an awareness of God’s love in ourselves and our communities that seeks to witness to others God’s love in the work of all creation?

Lord Jesus, who became incarnate and redeems our bodies and the earth from the grave, help us to seek your goodness and love in one another and be stewards of your creation that witnesses to the fullness of your glory. Amen.



# Happenings.

## Event Calendar.

**August**  
Aug. 1-2—Youth Empowerment Conference, Canaan and Sand Hill UMCs, Ridgeville, 6 p.m. (Fri.); 9 a.m. (Sat.) \$24.88. Register: <https://tinyurl.com/lace-up-your-boots>

Aug. 2—Lay Servant Academy (Train the Trainer), Washington Street UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Aug. 5—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 6-7 p.m.

Aug. 10—Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry Sunday

Aug. 18—REFUEL, a monthly Zoom gathering for youth workers. Info: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/3427168747526267/>

Aug. 19—Preparing for 2025 Charge Conference Zoom class by Basic Church Administration, 7:30, free. Register: <https://church-admin.org/registrations>.

Aug. 22-24—LSM School (Walterboro District), Zoom and Bethel UMC, Walterboro, \$25. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Walterboro-District-Lay-School-August-2025-final-rev.pdf>

Aug. 26—Advocate Community Listening Session, Hartsville District, at Lyttleton Street UMC, Camden, 6:30-8:30 p.m. RSVP to [krenfroe@advocatesc.org](mailto:krenfroe@advocatesc.org).

**September**  
**Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)**  
**UWF Killingsworth Special Emphasis Month**  
Sept. 1—Labor Day (UMC Conference Center closed)

Sept. 1—Registration opens for UWF Assembly 2026. <http://uwfaith.org/assembly>

Sept. 2—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 6-7 p.m.

Sept. 6-7—LSM School (Charleston District), Cokesbury UMC, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. (Sat.); 2:30-5 p.m. (Sun.), \$30. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Charleston-District-2025-Fall-1-Session-Registration-Form.pdf>

Sept. 7—LSM School (Greenwood District) Session 1, Broad Street UMC, Clinton, 2-7 p.m., \$35. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Greenwood-District-Registration-Form-for-Fall-2025-classes-PDF.pdf>

Sept. 8—Bishop Will Willimon, “The Church We Carry: Loss, Leadership and the Future of Our Church,” Furman University, Greenville, 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Sept. 8—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.

Sept. 8-10—UMCSC Leadership Convocation, Journey UMC, Columbia. For information: [gaashford@umcsc.org](mailto:gaashford@umcsc.org) or [jlfriday@umcsc.org](mailto:jlfriday@umcsc.org).

Sept. 13—Connectional Ministries, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Sept. 14—Epworth Children’s Home Work Day Offering

Sept. 14—Grandparent’s Day

Sept. 14—LSM School (Greenwood District) Session 2, Broad Street UMC, Clinton, 2-7 p.m., \$35. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Greenwood-District-Registration-Form-for-Fall-2025-classes-PDF.pdf>

Sept. 16—Bishop Will Willimon, “The Church We Carry: Loss, Leadership and the Future of Our Church,” Wofford College, Spartanburg, 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Sept. 20—LSM School (Rock Hill District) Session 1, St. John’s UMC, Rock Hill, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., \$30. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Rock-Hill-District-Lay-School-Fall-2025.pdf>

Sept. 20—Columbia District United Women in Faith Annual Meeting featuring the Rev. Fadetra H. Boyd. Francis Burns UMC, Columbia. \$15. 9:30 a.m. Register in advance: [tiffphillips2014@yahoo.com](mailto:tiffphillips2014@yahoo.com) or 803-543-9405.

Sept. 21—Youth Service Fund Sunday

Sept. 22—Autumnal Equinox

Sept. 27—LSM School (Rock Hill District) Session 2, St. John’s UMC, Rock Hill, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., \$30. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Rock-Hill-District-Lay-School-Fall-2025.pdf>

Sept. 29—Wespath-Bishop Leonard Fairley Golf Invitation benefiting Africa University, Orangeburg Country Club. Info: <https://support.africaau.org>.



### Children’s Lessons by the Rev. Meg Cook

## Faith and stars

Date: Sunday, Aug. 10  
Scripture: Genesis 15:1-6, Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16  
Time Frame: Three minutes (The average attention span of a child is about one year per minute of life. In our setting the youngest at children’s sermon are 3, so we aim for three or maybe five minutes at the most.)  
Supplies: A sheet of star stickers (bonus if they’re glow in the dark) or simply a paper cut-out star if you want it simpler—or if it’s Saturday night and you don’t have time to shop!. Have at least one sticker or star for each participant.  
Children’s Sermon:  
Do: Welcome the children warmly, invite them to sit down and hold up the star stickers or cut out star.  
Ask: What is this shape? (Pause for response.) Yes, it’s a star! Where do we see stars? (Pause.) Yes, we see them in the night sky? Are there a lot of stars or just a few? (Pause.) You’re so

smart; there are lots of stars. More stars than we humans can count!  
A long time ago, there was a man named Abram. You might recognize him as Father Abraham, but he starts off as Abram. God made Abram a promise. God told Abram that he would have a huge family—more children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren than the stars in the sky. That’s a lot of people!  
Now, could Abram see all those family members right then? (Pause for answers.) No! But Abram trusted God’s promise, even though he couldn’t see it yet. That’s what we call faith.  
In the Bible, Hebrews 11:1 tells us, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” What does that mean?  
I think it means that even though we can’t see all the stars like in the daytime, or when there’s a cloudy night sky, we know the stars are still there.

(Reflectively say) The stars are still there. Hmm. (If you have glow-in-the-dark stars or star stickers, hold one up.) See this little star? You might only see one right now, but God’s promise to Abram was for so many stars it would be impossible to count! A big promise represented in a little star.  
Say: Sometimes we don’t see right away how God is working in our lives. But we can trust God, just like Abram did. We can have faith that God loves us and has good plans for us, even if we can’t see everything yet. I’m going to give you a star to remind you that God loves you. You tell me where you would like me to stick it—on your shirt or on the back of your hand. (Point to your own chest and hand as you say this, then go ahead and hand out the stickers if you have them.)  
Say: You are each so loved, and I trust the good plans God has for each of us. Let’s pray. Dear God (echo), thank you for your promises (echo). Help us trust you (echo) even when we can’t see (echo). We love you (echo). Amen (echo).  
*Cook, the pastor of Grace United Methodist Church, Columbia, is the author of two children’s books from the Advocate Press: “Herbert the Hippo” and “Herbert the Hippo In the Moment.” Find them at <https://advocatesc.org/books>.*

# Classifieds.

## Jobs

**Coordinator of Youth Ministries**  
**Carteret St. United Methodist Church, Beaufort**

The coordinator is a part-time position, reporting to the senior pastor. The coordinator is an active member of this congregation and is responsible for developing a program of spiritual growth opportunities for junior high school- and senior high school-aged youth. Responsibilities include—and are not limited to—planning and executing regular Sunday evening Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF) programs based in Scripture and age appropriate; managing fundraising and budget for youth activities; working to integrate youth into congregational projects, programs and worship; and accompanying youth to UMC South Carolina Conference activities such as Revolution, Asbury Hill events and other programs. Youth Ministry experience, computer literacy and social media skills required, as is a criminal background check. For inquiries, complete job description and salary information, please contact Chuck Calhoon, chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee at [chuck.calhoon80@gmail.com](mailto:chuck.calhoon80@gmail.com)

**Disaster Recovery Case Managers**

The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church is looking to hire **Disaster Recovery Case Managers** to work in the following areas: Edgefield, Saluda, and Orangeburg.

The Disaster Recovery Case Manager provides direct support to individuals and families impacted by federally declared disasters. This role involves assessing survivor needs, developing recovery plans, coordinating services, and advocating for resources to support full, long-term recovery. The position requires compassion, organization, and a commitment to walk alongside survivors with dignity and care.

Requirements: A bachelor’s degree in social work, human services, or related field preferred with a minimum of two years experience in case management, disaster response or social services; strong organizational and communication skills; ability to work independently and in a mobile/field-based setting; demonstrated cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed care experience; familiarity with the structure and mission of The United Methodist Church is a plus; and valid driver’s license and reliable transportation.

To apply: email a resume and cover letter to Rev. Millie Nelson Smith at [mnelsonsmith@umcsc.org](mailto:mnelsonsmith@umcsc.org).

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Shannon Creighton (left) and Ben Chumley celebrate after their wedding March 15 at Trinity UMC, Spartanburg.

Photo courtesy of Creighton and Chumley



## FIRST SAME-SEX WEDDING:

From Page 1

standing language from its *Book of Discipline* stating “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching,” removed bans against officiating at same-sex weddings and removed the ban on the ordination of clergy who are “self-avowed practicing homosexuals.”

South Carolina UMC elders the Revs. Ricky Howell and Sherry M. Wood officiated the ceremony, which featured a crowd of roughly 250 well-wishers including church and church choir members, family and friends. Some of those friends had experienced much hurt in the past by their own rejection from churches, and the couple said for many of them, it was their first time setting foot in a church in years. Creighton and Chumley said they hoped these friends would understand the church is a place for kindness, hope and mercy.

Chumley said he and Creighton had talked about marriage many times over the years. But as people deeply committed to their faith, they wanted to get married in their own church, so they waited.

“As somebody who grew up in church, and church is big part of my life and my job, it was important that this be a religious ceremony,” Chumley said. “It was important to us that it be in our community with our church family.”

Creighton said their church was excited when General Conference struck down the homosexuality bans last year, and their church council voted unanimously to accept those decisions. He said when they submitted their application for marriage at that meeting, there were cheers.

Getting married in their own church was incredibly fulfilling, Creighton said. He noted even those he thought were conflicted about same-sex marriage came to the wedding and congratulated them.

“It was beautiful,” he said, calling the event “not only a celebration of us but a celebration of our church.”

The ceremony incorporated a number of religious elements, including singing from the entire chancel choir, five acolytes, a homily, Scripture readings and a hymn, “Make Me a Channel

of Your Peace.” They based the service on Micah, noting the theme was the traditional definition of shalom, meaning peace, completeness, wholeness and unity. Instead of a registry, donations were collected to support two local charities, Total Ministries in Spartanburg, a food bank and financial services nonprofit, and Piedmont Care, which provides HIV and AIDS care, prevention and advocacy.

Howell said co-officiating the wedding was an honor, as throughout his 20 years in full-time ministry he’s had plenty of time to lament what he calls “the heartbreaking reality” that the church and other faith communities have often told people in the LGBTQ+ community they don’t belong there, that God doesn’t want them in a church setting.

“It’s been a tremendous privilege to stand alongside Ben and Shannon and help offer a response that I believe is more faithful to God’s heart and more reflective of the movement of the Holy Spirit: ‘Yes! This is who you are! Yes! This is who God made you to be! Yes! You are beloved and valued and beautiful in God’s eyes and in the eyes of this Body of Christ!’” Howell said.

Wood said much the same.

“It’s hard to describe the breadth of feelings I experienced while officiating the wedding of my two dear friends. Of course, I felt ecstatic for Ben and Shannon and thrilled to bear witness to their inspiring relationship that, in every instance, has been a force for good in this world,” Wood said. “But alongside that, I felt the overwhelming joy that comes from being swept up in the healing current of justice.”

Wood said she has never seen a congregation more jubilant and never been more proud to call herself United Methodist.

“Finally, after such a long and arduous fight—a Service of Christian Marriage in the South Carolina UMC that truly embodied the inclusion modeled by Jesus in the Gospels,” Wood said.

Now, Creighton and Chumley are settling into married life with their dog.

Creighton said he never wanted them to be “the face of the fight,” but if their wedding in a UMC can inspire other churches or couples to take that step, he’s happy.

“I hope this inspires people to feel like they’re more part of their church families, not there just to serve but to be able to live out their lives fully,” Creighton said.

An advertisement for retreat groups. At the top, there are three logos: a tree for Camp Providence, a palm tree for Sea Islands, and a circle with a cross for Asbury Hills. Below the logos is a large image of a wooden dock extending into a body of water with a large cross in the background. The text reads: "NOW BOOKING RETREAT GROUPS!", "JOIN US AT CAMP PROVIDENCE, SEA ISLANDS & ASBURY HILLS!", and "CONTACT US! WWW.SCCARM.ORG (864)-836-3711".

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## Epworth Work Day Offering

Sunday,  
September 14, 2025

Give online at  
epworthsc.org



Photo courtesy of Peggy Hood

### Sandy Grove Women’s Day

The Sandy Grove United Women in Faith, Jefferson, celebrated their annual Women’s Day May 25. Women wore white to show honor for their role. Pastor Marion L. Cooper presides.