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Grace UMC offers "Taste and See" Messy Church VBS. Page 10.



Mount Zion UMC Women in Faith gather for prayer brunch. Page 9.

Visit our new website:



UMC connection helps pillowcase dresses find new path to children in need

By Jessica Brodie

A story in the *Advocate* helped connect two South Carolina churches in their mission outreach to South America.

Suzanne Jones, a member of Trinity United Methodist Church, York, learned through the February 2025

Advocate about seamstresses at Ashland UMC, Columbia, who have made thousands of pillowcase dresses for children in Haiti over decades until strife in that nation made their mission impossible.

So the Ashland UMC women began reaching out to other mission groups, hoping those groups would take their

lovingly crafted dresses along with them when they journey to communities in need.

"I don't care who gets them, what denomination, as long as they come get them and bring them to kids in need," Ashland sewing group organizer June Suddeth told the *Advocate*.

See "Dresses," Page 12



Volunteers enjoy fellowship as they assemble meals for people experiencing hunger in the Midlands.

Photo by Jessica Brodie

More than a meal

Summer Break Café nourishes Columbia children—and volunteers

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—On a sunny June Tuesday morning, the fellowship hall at Francis Burns United Methodist Church is bustling with activity.

Teens and adults work at various tables peppering the room—some packaging tiny cartons of milk, others

putting food in plastic bags and still others gathering the bags in cardboard boxes for transport.

In the back, a kitchen crew ladles out a meal into individual Styrofoam containers.

Everywhere there is laughter, chit-chat, excitement, camaraderie.

And it's all in the name of Jesus.

This is the Summer Feeding Program at Francis Burns, a thriving operation that is in its 19th year of operation at the thriving Midlands church in the Bendale community. Called "Summer Break Café," the program is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture with the

See "More Than a Meal," Page 12

Longest-serving clergywoman reflects on 49 years of ministry

By the Rev. Rebecca Rowell

This year, The United Methodist Church celebrates 70 years since women were granted full clergy rights and the right to full ordination as elders. And one of this year's retirees is celebrating a milestone of her own.

The Rev. Mary Teasley retired after serving in ministry for 49 years. In addition, she marks another significant achievement as the longest-serving female minister in the South Carolina Annual Conference.

Teasley took time recently to share highlights from her

See "Teasley," Page 13

UMCSC delegation gathers for called SEJ on Georgia merger

By Jessica Brodie

South Carolina's elected lay and clergy delegates will be part of a called virtual session of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference of The United Methodist Church this month to consider merging the North and South Georgia annual conferences.

Twenty-seven South Carolina delegates, led by delegation chairs Jackie Jenkins and the Rev. Ken Nelson, will gather with delegates from across the SEJ Tuesday, Aug. 11, at 7 p.m. to consider whether to approve the unifica-

See "Called SEJ," Page 24



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The *Advocate* maintains copies of back issues for sale for up to one year, as long as the supply lasts. Postage may apply. To research or review articles published more than one year ago, bound copies of the newspaper are available for review at the *Advocate* office, Wofford College in Spartanburg and the South Caroliniana Library in Columbia.

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

Letters and Op-Eds Policy
We welcome letters to the editor and commentary from guest writers who are members of or connected to United Methodist churches in South Carolina. Letters should not exceed 450 words, and commentary should not exceed 800 words. All submissions are subject to editing as needed to meet standards of grammar and style. We will not publish anonymous letters, letters praising or criticizing businesses by name, endorsements of or letters from political candidates, fundraising language or personal attacks. All submissions will be verified; include your name, phone number and church name with city and hometown. Email oped@advocatesc.org.

Obituaries
The *Advocate* prints death notices of clergy and their immediate families and laypersons who have served on conference boards and agencies or who work for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Photographs
Photographs can be submitted to the newspaper for publication. High-resolution digital color images are preferred. Photographs should be in focus and should have proper exposure. People in photographs should be identified with names and ages, and a contact person with a phone number should be included. Email news@advocatesc.org.

Submissions
The *Advocate* encourages readers to submit items of interest to South Carolina United Methodists. There is no charge for running items involving activities or announcements. Items should be submitted as far as possible in advance of the event’s date or the date of requested publication. They appear in the newspaper on a space-available basis. Email news@advocatesc.org.

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Photos by Jessica Brodie

Francis Burns hosts 13th year of Freedom School

For the 13th year, Francis Burns UMC, Columbia, hosted dozens of young scholars for its thriving Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School, enabling rising fourth through ninth graders to become world-changers. The camp was one of more than 100 Freedom Schools held in 100 U.S. cities across 30 states, helping the kids boost literacy and reading skills and engage in dialogue about social justice. 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 43 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. Above left, Carol Singletary addresses the group of scholars. Above center, scholars dance and sing during the Harambee morning gathering. Above right, Nancy Bradshaw Davis reads to the scholars.

Advocate wins three PALMY ad awards from SCPA

The *Advocate* has won three awards in the South Carolina Press Association’s PALMY Advertising Awards. The PALMY awards recognize the Palmetto State’s brightest advertising professionals and advertisers and the impact they have made. The *Advocate*’s Katy Renfro won second place in the Newspaper Promotion contest for the “Share Your News” promotion; third place in the Newspaper Promotion contest for the Media Kit; and third place in the Holiday Contest for the Advocate Press’ “Need a Christmas Gift?” ad.

Applications open through September for Cohort 3 of the Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer initiative

Applications are now open for Cohort 3 of the Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer initiative, inviting South Carolina United Methodist congregations to take a next faithful step in intergenerational ministry. Cohort 3 is open to South Carolina United Methodist churches that feel called to reimagine how children and adults worship and pray together, whether they have a large children’s ministry or only a handful of children and grandchildren in the pews. Churches that are asking how to engage the next generation, honor baptismal vows and build a more connected, intergenerational congregation will find in this cohort a supportive learning community and concrete tools for change. Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer is a Lilly Endowment-funded initiative of the South Carolina Conference designed to help churches move from “children watching worship” to children actively praying, leading and learning alongside adults in the sanctuary. Through training, coaching and shared resources, participating congregations explore practical ways to keep children in worship, deepen prayer practices and strengthen relationships across generations. As many as 12 churches will be selected for Cohort 3, each forming a team of four lay or staff leaders to serve alongside the pastor. Over the course of the cohort, these teams participate in retreats and workshops, set goals for intergenerational worship and prayer and receive coaching as they implement new practices in their own context. Past cohorts have engaged in activities such as children leading Scripture and prayer, family prayer practices and creative storytelling that bring generations together in worship and everyday faith life. The application window for Cohort 3 is open now and will close in September, with a final deadline of Sept. 13. Churches are encouraged to begin identifying their team members, attend an informational Q&A session and submit applications before the deadline so they can be considered for the 2027 cohort year. Additional information, including application materials and Q&A dates, is available at https://www.umcsc.org/children.

Lynch named new director of Ministries with Young People

The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church is creating a full-time Director of Ministries with Young People position, supported by additional programming resources, as part of a renewed commitment to youth and young adult ministry. Chris Lynch, a congregational specialist who has guided youth ministry for the conference for the past 14 years, assumed the role July 1. Lynch will provide focused leadership for ministries with young people throughout the conference while coordinating efforts among local churches, districts and conference partners, including Wesley Foundation ministries on college campuses. “My passion is to be a champion for youth and young adults—to empower them to claim their voice and role within the life of the church,” Lynch said. The new position is part of a series of recommendations from the Missional Priorities Jeremiah Team, formally approved by the Annual Conference June 9 as part of the Connectional Ministries Report. The new structure also includes a Youth and Young Adult Council, appointed by the director, to help guide priorities, develop new initiatives and ensure that young voices are part of the conversation.



Lynch

UMCSC in prayer after woman arrested for stealing \$400K from Mechanicsville UMC

By Jessica Brodie

SUMTER—South Carolina United Methodists are lifting one of their churches in deep prayer after news hit that a member allegedly stole more than \$400,000 from a congregation. On July 6, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division charged Latrise Latrell Seward, 54, of Rembert, with breach of trust with fraudulent intent, value \$10,000 or more, while she was serving as the treasurer of Mechanicsville United

Methodist Church. The arrest warrant notes Seward used her access to the Mechanicsville bank accounts to make unauthorized personal purchases totaling \$402,655.45 between Jan. 1, 2018 and Aug. 29 2025. “During an interview with law enforcement, the defendant admitted to making the unauthorized personal purchases,” the arrest warrant states. SLED noted probable cause was obtained through statements from the defendant and a forensic audit of the

church’s financial records. Seward was booked into the Sumter-Lee Regional Detention Center, and the case will be prosecuted by the Third Circuit Solicitor’s Office. Mechanicsville has 497 members on record, according to the 2025 church statistics, and an average of 90 in worship each week. The church declined to comment, but United Methodists have expressed grief and dismay over the alleged crime that left the church a victim.

New book by UMCSC pastor Bill Evans helps readers find meaningful moments

What if every season of your life—even the painful ones—held the seed of something meaningful? That’s the premise behind a new book from the Advocate Press by pastor, military chaplain, counselor and James Madison University professor William F. Evans.

In “Meaningful Moments,” Evans takes us on an intimate journey through four seasons of a life fully lived, revealing how meaning can be found not just in triumph, but in struggle, loss and the quiet, ordinary moments we so often overlook.

Shaped by decades as a pastor, military chaplain, counselor and professor—and deeply inspired by the wisdom of Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl—Evans offers 40 reflections drawn from his own life, organized across the seasons of childhood, young adulthood, middle age and later life. Each story is a lantern held up to



universal human experience: love and grief, faith and doubt, service and sacrifice, wonder and grace.

This is not a book about an extraordinary life. It is a book that insists your life is extraordinary—if only you have eyes to see it.

With a foreword by renowned Frankl scholar Dr. Alexander Batthyany and an afterword by celebrated

theologian Dr. William H. Willimon, “Meaningful Moments” bridges psychology, spirituality and lived experience into something rare: a book that doesn’t just ask life’s deepest questions, but helps you find the answers in your own story.

The book is available as a paperback and e-book from the *Advocate* directly at <https://store.advocatesc.org/product/meaningful-moments>.

The Advocate Press is the publishing arm of the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* newspaper.

5 Things to Know.

About Windsor UMC, Columbia

The *Advocate* has started a new feature that showcases a different United Methodist church in every district throughout South Carolina with their answers to five questions. This month, get to know Windsor UMC, Columbia, whose pastor is the Rev. Claire Van Den Berg.

1. How does your congregation serve people who may never set foot inside your building?

Our Fall into Faith festival attracts hundreds from the neighborhood as a safe place for families to celebrate on Oct. 31. We also offer a food pantry, Skills for Life and Work, Al-Anon, caroling at Christmas and more.

2. What’s the biggest challenge facing your congregation right now, and how are you addressing it?

Our sanctuary design limits accessibility for persons with mobility issues to be in the choir or access the pulpit, so we are hoping to create accessibility to the pulpit/choir loft level for persons using canes, walkers and/or wheelchairs. Also, we are experiencing a decrease in church attendance and membership, which is being addressed through streamlined and reduced committee structure and remaining with one worship service, both without eliminating essential functions and requirements. We have plans to attend an evangelism workshop in the fall.

3. How has your church navigated the broader changes happening across the United Methodist denomination in recent years?

With love. Windsor is a family, and we welcome anyone belonging to God’s family. We have remained together as loving people of God who embrace the inclusion that Jesus Christ demonstrated. Our United Women in Faith membership comprises women from our church and another church and is open to any woman who wants to join.



Windsor member Kathy Hart engages in a church ministry.

4. What’s one dream or goal your church has for the next five years?

To become a true neighborhood church. We are a church contained in a neighborhood that is ripe for the Word of God. There are many families with children as well as older individual and family units. We hope to offer more children’s services like vacation Bible school, drama camps, music camps, art camps, etc., plus more activities and/or Bible studies for the elderly.

5. What’s one local ministry or outreach effort your church is especially proud of, and what impact has it had?

Our ongoing partnership with District 2 in the Skills For Life and Work Program in providing a safe space for parents of non-English speaking children attending school. Windsorites have volunteered with the program via tutoring, reading with parents and children, providing book bags and Christmas gifts, a food pantry, donating clothing and furniture and other needs as identified. This has provided these families with a safe environment that involves meeting both immediate and long-term needs.

—Submitted by church members Susan Finley and Kathy Hart

Need-to-Know Roundup.

Six key takeaways from this month’s Advocate

- Chris Lynch named new director of Ministries with Young People (Page 2)
- Woman arrested for stealing from Mechanicsville UMC (Page 2)
- Permit obtained for Healing Guatemala’s hospital expansion (Page 7)
- Mount Hebron UMC to celebrate 225 years with 225 acts of service (Page 16)
- Youth Empowerment Conference July 31-Aug. 1 to motivate youth (Page 23)
- Six ERT trainings scheduled for this summer, fall (Page 23)

New book from UMCSC pastor Donigian unpacks Sermon on the Plain

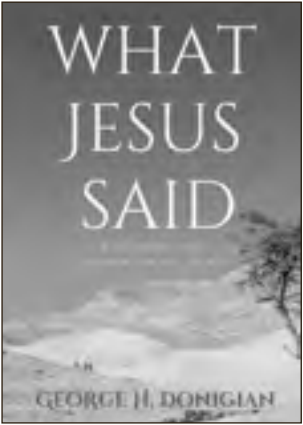
What does it really mean to follow Jesus as a Christian disciple? That’s the question behind a new book by the Rev. George Hovaness Donigian based on the Sermon on the Plain.

Many people understand Christian discipleship as saying the right words, making the right promise or offering the right prayer. But Jesus himself described discipleship differently—as a way of living, a set of everyday practices rooted in love, generosity, forgiveness and service.

In “What Jesus Said: Exploring the Sermon on the Plain,” Donigian guides readers through Luke 6:17-49, Jesus’ foundational teaching on right living. Unlike the more familiar Sermon on the Mount, Luke’s Sermon on the Plain makes no assumptions about the reader’s background in Jewish tradition, making it a remarkably accessible entry point for anyone seeking to understand what Jesus actually asked of his followers.

Chapter by chapter, Donigian unpacks the core actions of discipleship: loving even enemies, giving generously, forgiving freely, withholding judgment, and bearing fruit through service.

Interactive Nexus sections



throughout help readers connect these ancient teachings to the rhythms of their own lives, and a full small group and Sunday school guide makes this an ideal resource for communities of faith ready to go deeper.

The book includes a study guide for small groups and Sunday school classes.

Of the book, United Methodist Bishop Kenneth L. Carder said, “I strongly recommend this insightful and inspiring resource.”

United Methodist Church Judicial Council President Dr. Susan T. Henry-Crowe called it “intellectual artistry,” while Dr. Kevin Watson of Asbury Theological Seminary said the book “will help you grow in your discipleship.”

After serving in the local church, Donigian worked with the United Methodist Publishing House in Nashville, Tennessee, and later at The Upper Room as managing editor of the book department and as publisher-editor of Discipleship Resources. He has authored several books.

The book is available as a paperback and e-book from the Advocate Press directly at <https://store.advocatesc.org/product/what-jesus-said>.

Advocate.

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Editorial
by Jessica Brodie

Press on: the power
of persistent faith

Standing on a roof in Summerton, the heat creeping ever closer to the hundred-degree mark, I found myself looking at the scraps of shingles and roof paper all around me with a wave of discouragement.

I was on that roof as part of a multiperson team for Salkehatchie Summer Service, a mission I've been involved with personally for the past four years, with my husband and our kids joining me to spend a week doing home repairs for people struggling to have safe shelter in our state.

If not for the heat, the work would have been tons of fun. Roofing is something I find surprisingly enjoyable, as you can demolish a rotten surface and then put it back together all in just a couple of days if you have a well motivated team to work with. Even in the heat, I found myself having a good time.

Still, the task was daunting. The roof needed to get down to bare wood in order to be properly fixed. All of those tiny little scraps of paper had to come off, and the heat was getting to me. The shingles weren't so hard, as they came off in big, manageable strips. But the paper tended to flake off. Not only that, but massive roofing nails held the paper down, and I had to take those out, too.

All around me, strong teens and twenty-somethings seemed to have no problem with the task, but my back ached, and my toes were jammed to the front of my sneakers since we worked at a severe incline. It seemed like a project we'd never get finished, yet we hoped to have the work done by 6 p.m., otherwise we'd have to tarp it to keep water from an overnight rain from destroying everything. (Tarping was just as much work.)

Resigned to the seemingly endless task, I edged to the side of the roof and began scraping away slowly, methodically, one column at a time.

What do you know? Before I knew it, we'd scraped half away, and then the whole thing. By sunset, the paper was on and we'd started shingling.

It reminds me of our faith journey. Sometimes we look at an arduous task or a seemingly impossible situation, unable to see the end, and find ourselves filled with despair. Perhaps it's declining membership, or a massive ministry effort, or a financial catastrophe we cannot see our way through.

We have a choice then—decide we can't do it and give up, or trust that God will provide, and press ahead in persistence.

Persistent faith is, of course, the better way. But it's hard. Isn't it? It's hard to trust that God will do what he promised, what we're asking of him, what we desire in his name.

The Bible is filled with stories of people with persistent faith. Moses left Egypt and led the Israelites through the wilderness for 40 years, relying on an unseen God. The Canaanite woman from Matthew 15 kept asking Jesus to heal her daughter despite being ignored and tested. The apostle Paul urged, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9 NIV).

That day in Summerton, the finished roof wasn't the result of one heroic push. It came from a bunch of tired, sweaty people scraping away one column at a time, trusting the end would come even when we couldn't see it. That's what persistent faith looks like—not the absence of discouragement, but the decision to keep scraping anyway.

Whatever roof you're standing on right now, whatever task looms too large to finish, don't look at the whole thing. Just do the next column. God sees the finished work even when all we can see are scraps of paper and stubborn nails.

Press on, friends. The harvest is coming.



Bishop's Column
by Bishop Leonard E. Fairley

Living the promise

I hope that each of you have taken some time away for relaxation, renewal and reflection. During my time of renewal, I spent time giving thanks to the clergy and laity of the South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. My reflections have led me to the understanding that we are much stronger than we think, and we can do all things through Christ Jesus.

I saw you at our recent Annual Conference session. I saw and see in you the possibilities. Ours was not only a time to see the possibilities but to celebrate and live them. It is my firm belief that once possibilities are revealed, we must—as passionate followers of Christ guided by the Holy Spirit are called to—live into them.

In the words of the hymn writer, we daily ask the Lord to take our lives and let them be consecrated to God: Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold, take my moments and my days, take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for you.

It has been truly stated that if your mind can conceive it, and your heart believe it, you can achieve it. If those words are not enough to convince you, read Ephesians 3:20.

I believe there is so much God desires to do

through each of you. In a world filled with despair, God calls us to live into the promise of hope. In a world where division has become the new normal, let us live into the promise that Christ is peace. "In his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility between us" (Ephesians 2:14).

In a world where social media invites us into affinity groups of "us" versus "them," the Scripture invites us to lead lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Lord above all" (Ephesians 4:1-6).

I write these words because, for the next two annual conference seasons, I invite us to start "Living The Promises" with the understanding that "no weapon formed against us shall prosper" (Isaiah 54:17).

I invite us to live together into the promise of "loving boldly, serving joyfully and leading courageously." It's time to live the promises!

Letters to the Editor

Crying time, again

Eleven years ago, the Central Circuit Charge, Allendale-Barnwell, gathered to celebrate our work together in kingdom building. Representations were there of three of the four appointments that I had in 34 years.

The gathering was both my exit from the charge and from pastoral ministry. Leaving those who have often felt as close as family has always been sort of a struggle for me, because I was all-in where I was appointed.

The first two did not provide housing and required a lot of travel to share in their lives and circumstances, but I made the effort for seven and five years,

respectively.

At the gathering, one of the avid supporters of the charge, Brother Thomas L. Williams (now, the Hon. Judge Thomas L. Williams) shared that one of the important things I taught the parishioners was that "it is all right for men to cry." I sanctioned his findings before the event was over; despite the struggle to refrain, I cried (gentlemanly, mind you!). I said to those gathered that day that the tears were not a sign of my goodness or weakness, because I cry when I am glad, happy, mad and sad. I was never much of a shouter, but it is not strange to see some tears when the Spirit moves me.

I am not in the pulpit as much as I once was, but I get more than enough opportunities. I am finding it hard—in fact, harder than ever—to shake the crybaby image. For when I think of the goodness of Jesus and all he has and is still doing in my life, my gratitude flows through. I am acutely aware that I am more than blessed.

Listening to the comments relayed via the news of the nation's top rep's vulgarity about our first Black president, I cried. Then—hearing of the off-color remarks from one of the imposters from the grounds

See "Letters," Page 5

Precious Pet of the Month.

Shadow Kirkland



Shadow Kirkland

This is Shadow. He's a "United Nations" doggie who chose me to be his mommy when he was a month old, May 15, 2015. I had lost my Eskimo Spitz fur baby Kilo when he was 13; Kilo died of kidney failure on April 1, 2015.

I truly believe that before our babies completely cross the rainbow bridge, they first send us another

companion. This is who Kilo sent to me.

—Submitted by LaShella Kirkland,
Native American Committee member and
member of Lyttleton Street UMC, Camden

Do you have a pet who is near and dear to your heart? Share a photo and brief story about your pet and what they mean to you in the *Advocate*, and be sure to include your name and church name with city. Whether your animal friend is furry or has feathers or scales, we welcome your submission. Email news@advocatesc.org.



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803-726-6743
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Editors emeritus
Maryneal Jones, the Rev. Willie S. Teague, Allison Askins,
Karl F. Davie Burgdorf, Emily L. Cooper

Staff
Editor: Jessica Brodie
jbrodie@advocatesc.org
803-735-8772

Assistant Editor: Allison K. Trussell
atrussell@advocatesc.org

Marketing Coordinator: Katy Renfroe
krenfroe@advocatesc.org

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Commentary
by Bryce M. Williams

It’s time for growth

South Carolina and the greater collective, I have a question for you—a question first asked by the Rev. Key during the 2026 Southeastern Jurisdictional Black Methodists for Church Renewal Harambee 2026. What happens now?

Well, I believe I have an answer.

What happens now is we grow. We reflect. We learn. We move. But more importantly, we decide who we are going to become from this moment forward.

This year marked my very first experience attending Harambee, and I can honestly say it was transformational. But there was one thing that sat heavily on me all week.

This year, Harambee was hosted right here in South Carolina, and yet South Carolina was barely in the room.

Read that again.

We had the privilege of hosting one of the most powerful gatherings of Black Methodist youth and young adults in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, and yet

the very state hosting it showed little presence.

That should challenge us. That should make us uncomfortable. That should force us to ask ourselves a hard question: Why are we not showing up for our own future?

Now I absolutely have to pause and give a big shout-out to St. Mark United Methodist Church in Taylors, South Carolina, “the 911.” If my memory serves me correctly, they brought nearly 14 young people, and I want to publicly say thank you. You showed up. You represented. You answered the call.

But South Carolina as a whole, we have work to do. I keep hearing the words of our bishop echoing in my mind from when he first came to South Carolina. He said, “Play time is over.”

And now I hear another question he asked us recently: “South Carolina, do you see it?”

I believe our bishop sees something bigger for this conference.

I believe he sees potential. I believe he sees growth. I believe he sees what South Carolina can become.

And I believe he has planted seeds that are waiting on people willing to water them.

So now I ask you: Do you see it? Do you see what South Carolina could become if we truly invested in young people? Do you see what happens when youth are empowered instead of overlooked? Do you see the possibilities standing in front of us?

Because the reality is this: We are living in a generation where young people are searching for purpose, identity, belonging, faith, leadership and community.

And the church cannot afford to sit still. Play time is over.

So here is my challenge to every church, every district, every pastor, every leader and every person across South Carolina.

When SEJ Harambee 2027 is announced, I challenge South Carolina to bring no less than 250 youth. Not 20. Not 50. Not a handful—250 or more. Let that be the standard.

As I walked around and talked with people from conferences all across the connection, I heard story after story of the incredible work being done in their communities. I saw vision. I saw movement. I saw innovation. I saw youth being poured into intentionally.

And I found myself thinking about the bishop’s words again: “Do you see the possibilities?”

Well, I’m here to say this loudly and unapologetically: I see it. And I refuse to believe South Carolina cannot rise to the occasion.

So here is my final question: Who is ready to build? Who is ready to stop talking and start moving? Who is ready to invest in the next generation? Who is ready to make sure South Carolina is never absent from rooms it should be leading in?

South Carolina, it is our time. The vision is in front of us. The seed has already been planted. Now it is time for growth.

And together, let’s make South Carolina shake.

Williams’ home church is Camden First United Methodist Church, Camden, and he currently attends the Wil-liston Charge, where his mother serves as pastor.

LETTERS

From Page 4

of the People’s House, and not a single denunciation by any of his comrades—I cried.

Then watching “Hope Come Home”—as presidents, Americans of various backgrounds, filed into the Obama Presidential Center and finally my brother and his darling lady, our pride, entered—I could not stop crying.” Lord, no weapon.

After all that we’ve been through, we’re still representing!

*Rev. Joseph Abram Jr., retired
St. Matthews*

A poem: Rescued from the Storm

You pulled me to you ... like gravity ... at no cost to me.

I was floating in space ... with no tow-line, no center ... lost.

Then there you were ... anchoring me to you ... rescuing me from the storm.

You found me ... all tumbled and tangled and tossed.

You called to me ... “Hey ... I know you ... I love you. Come to me.

I’ll gladly show you ... so much above you.

Universe is big ... so easy to be alone ... clinging to your throne. Come to me.

Peace, I’ll give you ... don’t stay on your own.”

Your love captured me, healed me, renewed me, imbued me ...

with love born in me,

Free love, because you love me; just me.

I thought I was nobody till you pulled me, called me, loved me, showed me, towed me ...

granted me life in the family tree.

You pulled me to you ... like gravity ... at no cost to me.

I was floating in space ... with no tow-line, no center ... lost.

Then there you were ... anchoring me to you ... rescuing me from the storm ...

You transformed me ... no longer tumbled, humbled, tangled or tossed.

This poem is reprinted with permission from Clemons’ book of essays and poems, “One Unique Voice.”

*Rev. Robert Clemons, retired elder
Myrtle Beach*

Hero of Love

Happy Birthday to beautiful America (250 years). Do we realize God is old? Thousands and thousands of years, infinity.

Christ lived 2026 years ago. It is amazing to see God’s love continue to come to us. God is still calling us to love (John 3:16).

Salkehatchie Summer Service will be celebrating 50 years of serving, and we had nearly 1,100 participants this sum-

mer. It is amazing how Christ continues to use youth and adult lives to love our neighbor.

St. Francis of Assisi has been called the father of modern missions (1226). He chose a life of poverty and service. St. Francis said, “We can never love our neighbor too much. There is nothing small in the service of God.” St. Francis has inspired millions over the years. Hospitals, schools, churches, books and people carry his name. He is credited with the first nativity scene and the blessings of the animals. He was a hero of love.

Salkehatchie Summer Service continues to serve others just as St. Francis did. God continues to touch the hearts of individuals to love their neighbor. The good news is that Christ will never stop loving into the future.

Who showed us how to love? Who is our hero of love in our lives? It goes back to the eternal love of God in Christ. This past South Carolina Annual Conference prepared 125,000 bags of food for the “least of these.” The United Methodist Church continues to be Christ in the world. Christ is the same loving Christ yesterday, today and tomorrow. “For it is in giving that we receive” (St. Francis). Continue to love.

*Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia*

Voting is an act of faith

At Journey United Methodist Church

in Columbia, congregants are reminded that voting is an act of faith. This message was emphasized prior to and throughout the early voting period and days before the June primary. Further, several candidates were introduced and welcomed and given the opportunity to engage with us after service.

Members of our congregation turned faith into action by registering voters and serving as poll managers on Election Day. This service required hours of training prior to the June primary and hours of working on June 9 to ensure that the election process ran smoothly and professionally.

No matter whether Democrats or Republicans are elected in November, I strongly urge you to practice your faith by volunteering, voting and encouraging others to do likewise.

*Beverly Diane Frierson, member
Journey UMC, Columbia*

A poem: One Created

In God’s greatest creation

Each child his image be

The beating heart springs into action

God’s angels sing a jubilee

And with this soul on blessed occasion

As a garden sown in secrecy

The talents bestowed upon this one loved

Will grow in faithful majesty.

*Dr. Linda Hodgin, member
Ashland UMC, Columbia*

See “Letters,” Page 6



Humanity Behind Bars
by the Rev. Nichole Middleton

The reach of formation

Not long ago, I found myself reflecting on a simple question: Who helped you become who you are? Most of us can answer immediately. A parent. A grandparent. A teacher. A pastor. A coach. Someone who saw something in us before we saw it in ourselves. Rarely do people flourish by accident.

Flourishing is more than success. It is becoming the person God created us to be—discovering our gifts, developing character, learning resilience, and finding meaningful ways to contribute to the world around us.

Almost always, someone helps us get there. Scripture reminds us that faith is formed in community. Timothy was nurtured by the faith of his mother and grandmother before Paul helped shape his ministry. Ruth found guidance in Naomi. Even Jesus formed disciples through relationship, instruction and presence.

Formation has always been God’s way. Scripture tells the story of a God who patiently shapes lives through families, communities, mentors, failures and grace—helping people grow into the fullness of who they were created to be.

Yet we are shaped not only by what is present in our lives, but also by what is absent.

In my ministry, I often encounter people whose lives have taken difficult turns. Their stories are different, but common themes emerge. Many can identify moments when they needed encouragement and received criticism, needed guidance and found confusion, needed belonging and experienced rejection. Many of the adults I serve today are still wrestling with wounds that began long before the choices that brought them to prison.

We often focus on the choices people make but spend less time considering the formation that preceded those choices. The absence of support has consequences. And so does its presence. I have witnessed the impact of a caring adult who consistently shows up. A youth leader who listens. A Sunday school teacher who remembers a name. A mentor who asks difficult questions and stays long enough to hear the answers.

What may seem like a small investment today can alter the trajectory of a life tomorrow. That is the long reach of formation.

Every congregation should ask: Who is helping our young people discover their gifts? Who is teaching them how to navigate disappointment? Who is helping them develop a faith sturdy enough to withstand life’s challenges?

These questions matter because what we do today carries future consequences. The seeds planted now will bear fruit later—whether intentionally cultivated or left unattended.

The church has a unique role in this work. We are called not merely to gather people for worship, but to nurture lives. To create communities where young people are known, valued, challenged and encouraged. To help them imagine a future—a future grounded in faith, purpose and belonging.

Formation is slow work. It rarely makes headlines. Yet few ministries carry greater long-term impact.

What we nurture today becomes the foundation on which future lives are built.

May we never underestimate the power of showing up, investing deeply and walking alongside those who are still becoming. For in doing so, we participate in God’s work of shaping lives—not only for today, but for generations to come.

Middleton is an elder in the South Carolina 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.



Commentary
by the Rev. Joseph Abram Jr.

The righteous judge

I’ve written a few commentaries to the editor in several newspapers over the years in my role as a concerned citizen of this supposedly Great Nation, which titles itself The United States of America. I wrote, as a fellow-heir of the promise of this nation, that “All men (people) were created equal,” even though those who signed it didn’t consider those who look like me as human beings. This was reflective in the laws that were created and applied with the same inequity while proclaiming that “no one is above the law.”

So I write still, asking for fulfilment of that promise, since most intelligent folks know by now, “who and whose we are”—children of the High King, as anyone is who lives his/her life according to the king’s proscription.

The nation’s chief servant and cohorts signed a document recently into law making it a crime to violate that law. The record will show repeatedly the violators of that law are the drafters and signers of it. They are enjoying impunity from breaking their law, while pursuing the innocents for compliance, claiming “no one is above the law.” The air waves and media are reminding us daily that “no is really above the law.” Yet we see the same falsity and lies that are far too common in a supposedly godly nation, while we keep on making noise and doing nothing. “This people keep praising me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me”(Isaiah 29:13-14).

Money, power, greed, etc. seem to be our god of choice, and those who possess them, by any means, are our heroes and heroines.

I’ve joined the voice of those who say that “no one is above the law,” not as a citizen of this rich and powerful nation. It’s a nation that is so powerful that it can depose and choose other nation’s leaders at will. So rich it can buy nations’ obedience and so possessed by greed it leaders will sell out the nation and even their moms, it appears, for an almighty dollar. And so selfish that it will take food from the hungry, separate the elderly from lifesaving care, render parents jobless, unable to care for their families, while political criminals stuff their pockets and their friends’ and call it “balancing the budget.”

I come also saying “no one is above the law”—the law of God! I come as a prophet of the High King, declaring to us that no position, amount of power, skin hue, origin of birth or money (stolen, inherited or earned) will preclude our reckoning before the righteous judge. The laws in the Book of Life are for everyone, for there’s no respect of person. This world, this nation and our children (biological/spiritual) will be blessed or cursed by our words and or deeds. We brought nothing when we came and will carry nothing when we leave. Only things left are what we give away.

Abram is a retired elder living in St. Matthews.



Commentary
by Sandy Thrasher

Grace of welcome

On a recent trip to Scotland with my mom, I expected to be impressed by the scenery, the history and the castles.

I was. What I didn’t expect was to be so deeply moved by the kindness of strangers.

As followers of Christ, we often hear about hospitality. We are called to welcome the stranger, love our neighbor and make room at the table.

We often think about what it means to offer that kind of welcome.

This trip reminded me what it feels like to receive it.

Everywhere we went, people answered our questions, offered directions, shared stories and welcomed us with genuine kindness. We arrived as visitors, but so often we were treated like friends.

Almost everyone I spoke with recognized my Southern accent. Before I had spoken many words, they knew I was from the United States.

That made me wonder: What else did they see?

I found myself hoping they would see more than an American tourist, more than a Southern accent.

I hoped they would encounter someone trying to follow Jesus. A love-your-neighbor kind of Christian. Someone who treats others with kindness, respect and genuine interest.

Our witness begins long before we ever speak about our faith. People experience Christ through the way we listen, serve, encourage and welcome. They experience it through our patience, our compassion and our willingness to see the image of God in every person we meet.

One of the greatest gifts of this journey was being reminded that hospitality is a gift given and received.

Sometimes God teaches us just as much through the grace of being welcomed as through welcoming others.

As United Methodists, we speak often of open hearts, open minds and open doors. During my time in Scotland, I experienced all three.

I returned home grateful for the memories I made with my mom, grateful for the kindness of people an ocean away and grateful for the reminder that every conversation, every smile and every act of hospitality is an opportunity to reflect the love of Christ.

May those who meet us experience more than where we’re from.

May they experience the love of Christ through us.

Thrasher is the co-lay leader for the Anderson District and a member of South Main Chapel and Mercy Center, a United Methodist community in Anderson.

LETTERS

From Page 5

While I Breathe, I Hope

Dum Spiro Spero—while I breathe, I hope.

For nearly two years, I drove across South Carolina to stand outside Sen. Lindsey Graham’s office during Moral Mondays. People often asked me, “Why bother?” Why protest? Why pray for

someone who never seems to change? Why carry symbolic caskets through the streets to bear witness to policies that too often burden the poor; the sick, the elderly and the marginalized?

My answer was always the same: Because the Gospel calls us to love our neighbors enough to tell the truth.

I never marched because I hated Sen. Graham. I marched because I loved the people whose lives were shaped by the decisions made in Washington.

I believed then—and I believe now—that no heart is beyond the reach of God’s grace. We never know what prayer, persistent moral witness and grassroots organizing may accomplish.

Now that Sen. Graham’s earthly journey has ended, my prayers change. I pray that he has found eternal peace in the mercy of God. I pray for comfort for his family, friends, staff and all who mourn.

And I pray for South Carolina and our nation—that we will continue the

work of building a society where every person has access to health care, food, dignity, justice and the freedom to vote.

Death ends a political career. It does not end our moral responsibility.

So we will keep praying. We will keep organizing. We will keep loving. We will keep hoping.

Because faith does not retire when a leader dies. While I breathe, I hope.

Rev. Amiri Hooker, congregational specialist Lake City



Commentary
by Anna S.
Bright

Poison of racism

The story “The Farmer and the Viper” recounts how a man once found a snake frozen on the side of the road. Feeling sorry for it, he picked it up, warmed it, and carried it close to his body.

As soon as the snake regained strength, it bit him. As the poison moved through his body, the man asked, “Why did you bite me after I helped you?”

The snake replied, “You knew what I was when you picked me up.”

Wow! That illustration is something to really think about relentlessly! Racism is like that snake. It may appear as a thought, a joke, a stereotype, a family tradition, a political attitude or a hidden feeling of superiority. Consequently, once it is allowed to live in the heart, it poisons everything it touches.

In 1 John 4:20 we are told, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (ESV). That is not soft language! God does not leave room for hatred dressed up in Sunday clothes. A person cannot sincerely claim to love the Creator while despising someone created in his image.

Ponder the following beliefs about racism, and share them, especially with those who tend to think that racism is OK:

1) Racism is evil because it insults God. Genesis 1:27 reminds us that every human being is made in the image of God. To look down on another person because of skin color, culture or ethnicity is to criticize the handiwork of God himself. It is saying, “Lord, I do not like what You made.” That is perilous ground!

2) Racism destroys the one who carries it. Hatred does not live in the heart “rent-free.” It eats away at peace, joy, wisdom, and compassion. A racist spirit keeps a person suspicious, bitter and spiritually blind. It convinces people they are standing tall, while inwardly they are shrinking.

3) Racism destroys families and friendships. It teaches children to fear people they have never met and reject people they have never known. It divides dinner tables, neighborhoods, churches, schools and workplaces. It can cause lifelong wounds among people who might have loved, helped, learned from and blessed one another.

4) Racism destroys communities and nations. When people are judged by color instead of character, justice becomes crooked, opportunity becomes unequal and trust begins to die. Galatians 3:28 affirms that in Christ, there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. The cross does not give us permission to hate; it commands us to be reconciled.

America, our churches and our communities cannot be healed while hatred is being protected. Racism must not be explained away, laughed off, passed down or preached around. It must be confessed, confronted and crucified. There is no getting around it: racism ultimately will destroy!

If God searched your heart today, would he find love for all his children, or a poison you have learned to call normal?

Bright is a member of Isaiah United Methodist Church, Waltherboro.



Commentary
by Dr. Kim
Strong

Like a thief

Years ago, when we were serving in Greenville, we lived in a nice neighborhood off Augusta Road that we called the home of the “Newlywed and The Nearly Dead.” Most of the homes had a little age on them, much like many of the folks who inhabited them. Some of the homes were purchased by ambitious young homeowners who wanted to be forever in debt by purchasing a home and spending twice the purchase price to have them renovated.

Now that I am officially a retired minister, which is laughable in itself, we live in a nice neighborhood near North Myrtle Beach that has no recently married folks. Our neighborhood is a haven for the nearly dead, close to dead and hard to tell if you are dead folks. We worked for 40-plus years to be able to afford to buy a house in this neighborhood, and now that we have one, age has crept up on us.

Recently one of our neighbors had an ambulance, a firetruck and three police cars parked in front of his house. Paramedics rushed from their vehicles and back several times, and after 20 minutes or so, slumped-shouldered first responders came out of the house and looked downtrodden. They slowly packed their equipment back in their truck and waited beside it.

After 40 minutes or so, the coroner made an appearance, and we found out that what we had feared was true. We had lost our neighbor across the street. He and his wife had migrated south and had found a home on our street. They were nice people who basically kept to themselves. They had a dog, and their dog did not play nicely with other doggies, so we tried to stagger our walks so as not to cause any undue excitement.

Our neighbor ended up in a body bag in the back of a Chrysler van, and just like that, he was gone. Why, we had just seen him working in his yard the day before. He and his wife were quiet people but friendly when spoken to. They warmly welcomed us to the neighborhood when we moved here 26 months ago, and now he has left us in the back of a Chrysler van.

My wife and I were discussing the events of the day later when she said something that made me shut up and think for a few moments. She said, “One day, they will come and get one of us, and we will be left here alone, just like his wife is now.” My reply was, “Not if we die in a hospital,” but my attempt to deflect the truth of the statement did not work for me. She was right.

Our neighbor had no idea when he woke up that morning that he had seen his last sunrise, ate breakfast for the last time, cursed the news for the last time, petted his dog for the last time and was going to take his last breath. I wonder how many things would he have done differently if he had known. Would he have made sure to tell his wife and family he loved them one last time? Would he have spoken to his Lord one last time to make sure everything was good between them? He and his wife were devout Catholics. Perhaps he would have called his priest to thank him for his care and nurture of them over the years.

The truth is none of us know for sure when our last day is coming or when our last day to make amends might be. When will be our last time we can take a moment to hold our spouse’s hand and tell them we love them? We don’t know when the last time to hug our children might be.

If we knew. maybe we wouldn’t sweat the stupid things in life that often easily derail us from enjoying the moments that make like good. Maybe we would understand that it’s those moments, not things, that make life what it is supposed to be.

Jesus often spoke about coming like a thief in the night. We never know when death will come, either. Make sure you are making each day, each moment, the best it can be before the coroner comes for you.

Strong is a retired elder serving Joseph B. Bethea UMC, Myrtle Beach.



Permit obtained for Healing Guatemala’s
Hospital Bethesda expansion

Healing Guatemala is making significant progress on an expansion to its Hospital Bethesda. The ministry recently obtained a construction permit from City Hall and have finalized a contract with a company to supervise construction. They hope to finalize selecting a contractor soon. Founded by South Carolina elder Dr. Luke Rhyee and supported by the South Carolina Conference of the UMC, Hospital Bethesda has reached its maximum capacity. Each day, more than 150-200 outpatients visit Bethesda, and they perform more than 50 surgeries weekly, including ophthalmology surgeries. With the new extension, Bethesda will be able to serve up to four times as many patients and provide subspecialty-level medical service. “Once the contract is signed, we will break ground and begin this exciting new chapter,” said Rhyee, pictured here at left with the permit. The total budget for the expansion is \$2 million. For information on how to help their work, email rhyeemt@gmail.com; write Healing Guatemala, P.O. Box 1835, Duluth, GA 30096; or visit <https://healingguatemala.org>. To help with the effort, visit <https://gofund.me/9d960d8aa>. If sending a check, write “Bethesda extension” in the memo line.



From left are Camden First UMM Vice President George M. Boykin, Man of the Year Damon Singleton, pastor Dr. Norman A. Brown and Camden First UMM President Eric Hodge.

Camden First honors
Damon Singleton as
2026 ‘Man of the Year’

CAMDEN—The United Methodist Men chapter of Camden First United Methodist Church’s congregation is proud to announce Damon Singleton as the recipient of the 2026 “Man of the Year” award.

This honor was presented during the church’s Father’s Day service to recognize his unwavering dedication, tireless work ethic and significant contributions to the upkeep and mission of the church.

A lifelong resident of the area, Singleton is a graduate of the Camden High School Class of 2014, where he was active in football and the Scarlet Regiment Marching Band. Following his education, he gained professional experience with Trane Heating and Cooling in Charlotte and Camden Tire.

Singleton serves as an essential member of the church family. As a trustee, he has become the backbone of their facilities maintenance, consistently stepping up to manage the yard work and addressing maintenance needs of the church property with humility and diligence.

“The United Methodist Men are committed to being the ‘hands and feet’ of this congregation,” said George M. Boykin, UMM vice president.

“We are grateful to have Damon as a vital part of our church,” added Eric Hodge, UMM president.

The award was presented during a special Father’s Day church service. At Camden First, the United Methodist Men chapter is dedicated to fostering a spirit of brotherhood and service within the UMC and the broader Camden community.

‘Worship Without Walls’ brings Dawsey deeper connection

By Rev. Matthew Price

FLORENCE—On May 17, members of Dawsey United Methodist Church gathered for worship in an unusual place: not in the comfy pews of the sanctuary, but in folding chairs beneath the church’s porte cochère.

The service, called “Worship Without Walls,” was intentionally designed to move the congregation beyond the comfort of familiar surroundings and into a deeper awareness of the community God has called them to serve.

Drawing from Matthew 28:16-20 and John Wesley’s famous decision in 1739 to “submit to be more vile” through field preaching, the congregation reflected on what it means to follow Christ beyond the walls of the church building.

Wesley’s decision to preach outdoors was controversial in his day. Many believed worship and preaching belonged exclusively inside consecrated church buildings. Yet Wesley’s

willingness to surrender his own preferences and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit became a defining moment in the Methodist movement.

That same spirit of surrender shaped the worship experience at Dawsey.

Approximately 15 people gathered outdoors to sing, pray, hear Scripture and celebrate Holy Communion. The goal was not simply to change locations but to engage the senses in a new way. Congregants were invited to see the streets, houses, people and neighborhoods around them as their parish, to hear the sounds of the community and to remember that the Gospel is not bound by architecture.

As the congregation sang “How Great Thou Art,” Andrew Peel, a visiting worshiper, remarked after that he had heard 13 different species of birds singing alongside the congregation. Mark McGee, church council chair, shared that the service reminded him of a submission long ago to being

“more vile” and how the Holy Spirit had led him to experience the Gospel in new places and among people he may not have encountered otherwise.

The sermon reminded worshipers that the success of early Methodism was not found in buildings or programs but in a willingness to go where people were and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. Wesley’s realization that “the world is my parish” continues to challenge Methodists still to this day. It is an invitation that says, “The church is not just a building to attend on Sunday, but it is a people to be shaped by the grace of Jesus Christ.”

“Worship Without Walls” was ultimately an invitation to ask difficult questions: Are we willing to leave our comfort zones for the sake of the Gospel? What barriers, traditions or personal comforts do we need to surrender to more faithfully participate in Christ’s mission for us? Will we wait for the lost to find the church, or will we be a church that goes out to find the lost?

The service concluded with Holy Communion and the singing of “Come to the Well,” a fitting reminder that Christ’s invitation extends far beyond sanctuary walls, inviting all to remember the sacrifice of Jesus and experience his grace.

For those gathered at Dawsey on that warm windy morning, worshiping outdoors served as a tangible reminder that the church is not defined by a building. The church is the people of God, sent into the world to make disciples and share the grace of Jesus Christ wherever they are called.

As Wesley discovered nearly three centuries ago, following the Holy Spirit often requires stepping beyond familiar routines and comfortable spaces. For the members of Dawsey, Worship Without Walls served as a reminder that the Gospel was never intended to remain confined within sanctuary walls.

Get uncomfortable. “Be more vile.” The Gospel is worth it.

United Women in Faith.

Unstoppable: Women of faith gather with purpose in Indianapolis

By W. Chandler-Flowers

Assembly is a United Women in Faith event held every four years that brings women together for workshops, town halls and inspiring keynote speakers. Designed as a spiritual gathering, it unites women who are committed to faith, empowerment and making a meaningful difference.

I attended my first UWFaith Assembly in Indianapolis, Indiana. I arrived on a rainy Friday morning, yet the rain did not dampen the spirit of those I encountered throughout the weekend. More than 3,000 women from across the United States gathered for worship, fellowship, workshops and a renewed call to service and action.

To my surprise, one of the first people I saw was our former bishop, Bishop L. Jonathan Holston. We fondly reminisced about his visit to my home church. (One day, I will have to share the story of his police-escorted trip through the small rural community that is home to Asbury of Andrews.)

As I rounded the corner of the convention center, I felt proud to see fellow South Carolinians in attendance. From Betty Swinton and Ann Alexander to Florence District UWFaith President Melissa Epps and the ladies of Friendship United Methodist Church in Nesmith, South Carolina was well represented. As we gathered throughout the weekend, it reminded me that although we come from different communities and backgrounds, we are united as sisters in Christ.

Women from everywhere

One of the most beautiful aspects of Assembly was the diversity of women in attendance. There were young women and seasoned women, women walking independently and women using walkers, women from the South and women from the North. Assembly brought together women from every walk of life and from communities across the United States.

The atmosphere throughout the convention center was filled with warmth, encouragement and purpose. Everywhere you turned, conversations were taking place, friendships were forming and women were inspiring one another to continue the work God has called us to do.

Workshops and learning opportunities

Assembly offered a variety of workshops throughout the weekend. As communications coordinator, I chose to attend the “Effective Communication to Inspire, Influence and Impact” workshop. The session was extremely informative and provided practical guidance on effective communication strategies.

The presenter did an excellent job explaining the dos and don’ts of communication, including UWFaith

branding guidelines and best practices for newsletters and outreach materials. I left the workshop with valuable information that I can apply within our own organization and local units.

In addition to the communications workshop, I attended the interactive “Planting Love Letters” session. Some workshops were designed in a town hall format, while others featured smaller discussion groups of about forty participants. Other sessions welcomed crowds of nearly 500 attendees. No matter the size, each workshop created opportunities for women to learn, share ideas and connect with one another.

Friday’s Community Gathering

Friday afternoon’s Community Gathering was a powerful spiritual experience. The Rev. Stephanie York Arnold spoke passionately about issues taking place throughout the United States and reminded us that, as Christians, we cannot remain silent when people are treated unfairly or viewed as less than others. “We are all God’s people,” she declared.

She challenged us to stand up for what is right and to speak out against injustice wherever we encounter it. Her message encouraged attendees to move beyond comfort and into action.

The service then transitioned into the Commissioning Service for the new class of Deaconesses and Home Missioners within The United Methodist Church. Twenty-two individuals dedicated their lives to service as members of the 2026 class. It was especially meaningful to learn that one of the commissioned individuals was from Washington Street UMC in Columbia.

Witnessing that moment of dedication and commitment was both inspiring and humbling.

Saturday morning inspiration

Saturday morning, our very own Sue Owens appeared on the program during the Community Gathering.

Stacey Abrams and her mother, Rev. Carolyn Abrams, were introduced. Listening to Rev. Carolyn, I gained a deeper understanding of where Stacey Abrams’ determination and passion for service originated. She shared how she and her husband taught their children from an early age that everyone has a responsibility to improve the world around them and help create positive change.

Both Stacey Abrams and her mother reminded attendees that we cannot sit silently on the sidelines while rights and opportunities that previous generations fought for are slowly chipped away. They encouraged us to remain engaged, informed and active within our communities.

One statement especially resonated with me:

“Meet people where they are, but help move them to where they need to be.” Their message was both challenging and empowering.

A moving worship experience

One of the most touching moments of Assembly came during Saturday afternoon’s Mission Giving offering. As the band began singing “Lean on Me,” hundreds of attendees throughout the convention center illuminated the room with their phone in the air.

From the front of the room to the very back, lights swayed side to side in unison. Watching that sea of lights while surrounded by women joined together in worship and purpose was one of the most moving moments of the weekend for me.

The atmosphere in the room was filled with unity, hope and encouragement.

Following the panel discussion, General Secretary Sally Vonner addressed the crowd with a message reminding women of their collective impact and importance. “We matter. We make a difference,” she said.

She spoke about the importance of women investing in their families, churches and communities. She also emphasized that the “she-conomy” is real and that women are not simply responding to the vision—they are helping shape it.

Vonner challenged the more than 300,000 UW-Faith members across the United States to invite at least one new person to join the organization and to consider increasing their giving, even by a small amount. She reminded us that it only takes one person to help create change and that we are called to be the salt of the earth.

Her message left attendees with an important question: What are you going to do?

Looking ahead

As the Assembly came to a close on Sunday and women prepared to return home to communities across the country, attendees were challenged to continue being bold and courageous women of faith.

We were encouraged to invite at least one woman to become part of UWFaith by the end of 2026. I do not know about anyone else, but I left Indianapolis ready to help us reach 500,000 members by the end of 2029.

Make plans now to attend the 2028 Southeastern Jurisdiction gathering in Mobile, Alabama, and the 2030 Assembly in Richmond, Virginia. If this Assembly taught me anything, it is that when women of faith come together with purpose, compassion and determination, we truly are unstoppable.

Chandler-Flowers is the communications coordinator for South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith.

First members recycle plastic bags into sleeping mats

CHERAW—It all started in 2018 after a conference of United Methodist women. Members of a church there talked about their mission of making mats for the homeless.

Inspired, women from First UMC, Cheraw, asked the Columbia women how to make the mats.

Cheraw's women decided to take on this mission. It was a way for them to help the homeless have something to sleep on rather than the ground, as well as help the environment by recycling plastic grocery bags.

They asked their congregation for plastic shopping bags to help them get started, also asking the wood shop at Cheraw High School to make a frame for their loom to weave the mats.

Making the mats involves several steps. It takes between 300 and 400 plastic bags to make one mat. Mats have to be flattened and sorted by color, then folded and cut to make the loops for weaving. Once the loops were made, they are ready to go to the loom for weaving..

The ladies designed the mats to have a cross down the center of each mat. The cross is in a different color from the rest of the mat.

Each mat is unique and made with love.

When weaving of the mat is complete, it is removed from the frame. At this point a crocheted pocket with a cross is added. The pocket holds a poncho, Mylar blanket, Bible, socks, cross and a carrying strap so the mats can be rolled up and carried.

It takes about four to five meetings to complete one mat. The group meets on Tuesday mornings.

The mats are constantly being modified to make them better. The pockets now have a flap to keep the items in the pockets. There have been donations of sewing kits, handmade crosses, plastic eating utensils and playing cards that have made their way into the pockets. Quilts and blankets have been donated that



Martha and Gloria make (above) and then display (below) the sleeping mats.



were rolled up in the mats. There are now two frames. Both have been modi-

fied to make weaving the mats and taking them off the frame more efficient.

In 2018, there were five to seven women who worked on the mats. Each one did a part of the process. When COVID-19 hit, the mission was stopped. One of the original members got it restarted in May 2023.

Currently, there are five members—one man and 4 four women—working on the mats. Periodically, visitors stop in to help. Members from other churches have also come to learn the process of weaving the mats.

The group is very passionate about this mission and sometimes have been able to personally give a mat to a person experiencing homelessness.

For example, a man who had been sleeping near the courthouse in Chesterfield kept moving to stay in the sun to keep warm. One of the church members saw him and delivered a mat to him that contained a quilt rolled up inside the mat. The man was so overwhelmed that he wept and thanked the person profusely.

On another occasion, the daughter of one of the women working on the mats saw an elderly woman living on the streets near her home. She took a mat to the woman and showed her how to use it. The woman, with tears in her eyes, said she now had something to lay on to keep her off the ground. She told her to thank her mother's church group for making the mat for her.

As another example, a man who had lost everything came to the church for help. The minister got one of the mats and presented it to him. The man broke down and cried, overwhelmed by the gift.

To date, approximately 50 mats have been completed and 30 have been given out.

The mats are available at the church for anyone to give to a person experiencing homelessness. For more information, call the church at 843-537-7002.

Dacusville UMC worship celebrates 22 new members

EASLEY—On June 28, Dacusville United Methodist Church gathered for a worship service centered on faith, fellowship and trust.

With the theme “God Will Provide,” the service brought together music, prayer, Scripture and a message of encouragement for six new members who were transferring their membership from recently closed sister church Antioch UMC and 11 other new members. The remaining five new members transferred from Antioch UMC but were unable to attend in person.

The morning opened with welcoming everyone including those joining online, followed by congregational singing, creating a Spirit-filled energy for those in attendance. Worship leaders guided the congregation through hymns and a three-song presentation by Pickens Presbyterian Men's Chorus. This was followed by Scripture readings from Psalm 13, Romans 6:12-23 and Matthew 10:40-42. Prayer for the church, local families and community needs was lifted.

During the message, the Rev. Brian Underwood spoke on a need to shift from a place of asking “How long, Lord?” to a place of emphasizing the importance of trusting God, serving others and living out faith beyond the walls of the church, especially through small acts of kindness. The sermon encouraged worshippers to respond with kindness in daily life.

It was a God moment when all the people were presented to the congregation for membership vows. There were hugs, handshakes and tears in many eyes as members celebrated the



Some of the 22 new members gather for a smile during the service.

fruit God provided.

Many of the new members have connected with the church through their efforts to engage in intergenerational worship by their involvement in the first cohort with the Lily Endowment “Nurturing Children in Worship & Prayer.” Further strengthening the growth was Underwood's participation in the Lights, Cameras, Action clergy cohort last year, where he learned many strategies to grow the local church and implemented them at Dacusville.

The service concluded with a membership liturgy and benediction. The new members were welcomed by the congregation and received a succulent plant with the challenge to grow the plant as all come together to embrace the church's new vision, “Come grow with us!

Everyone was encouraged to invite one new person or family to services next week.



Stronger through prayer
Mount Zion UMC's Women In Faith in Kingstree hosted a Prayer Brunch recently called “Because She Prayed.” The purpose of the event was to strengthen relationships through spiritual connection and a shared meal.

Photo courtesy of Toni Strawther

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Children and adults connected as they used their senses to better understand God’s word. Here are scenes from the VBS.

Grace ‘Taste and See’ Messy Church VBS connects congregation

COLUMBIA—Grace United Methodist Church hosted a “Taste and See” Messy Church vacation Bible school this summer.

Pastor the Rev. Meg Lindsey Sweeney Cook wrote the curriculum and said those who attended had a lot of fun. New families joined for a host of intergenerational activities.

The stations each gave people an opportunity to explore one of their five senses. Generations learned side by side as all discovered that God’s love isn’t just something we see, touch or feel but something we experience together.

“There was laughter, creativity, curiosity, science, worship and plenty of moments that reminded us that everyone has a place and everyone has something to offer,” Cook said. “As Psalm 34:8 invites us,

‘Taste and see that the Lord is good!’”

Week Two invited attendees to slow down and notice God’s care all around us. As they explored Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:25-34, attendees looked at the birds of the air and remembered that God knows our needs and cares for us. Through shared meals, hands-on activities, conversation and worship, children, youth, adults and older adults discovered together what it means to trust God one day at a time.

“There was laughter, creativity, curiosity and moments of wonder as we practiced noticing the gifts God has already placed around us,” Cook said.

Week Three featured a joyful celebration of the fruit of the Spirit. As they explored Galatians 5:22-23, participants of all ages discovered the fruit of the

Spirit isn’t something we achieve on our own; it’s the work of God’s Spirit growing within us. Through hands-on activities, shared meals, conversation, worship and plenty of laughter, attendees experienced what it looks like to grow in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control together.

As Psalm 34:8 reminds us, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” Grace extends a warm thank you to every volunteer, participant and family who made this three-week journey possible.

“We are grateful for a church where generations gather around the same table, learn from one another and grow in faith together,” Cook said. “May the seeds planted this summer continue to bear fruit in the days ahead.”



Photos courtesy of Liz Shaw

Breakfast connects Mount Sinai

Mount Sinai UMC, Anderson, held its annual church breakfast gathering June 28 in the Fellowship Hall, a warm, welcoming time when members of the congregation come together to share a meal and enjoy fellowship before worship. The atmosphere was relaxed and friendly, with people greeting one another, catching up and welcoming visitors. Some special visitors— William Patrick Humphrey and his wife, Doris, originally from Anderson, but now living in Chicago—joined this year. Tables were set with simple breakfast favorites such as eggs, sausage, fresh fruit, oatmeal, pastries, coffee, juice and tea. Volunteers prepared and serve the food, creating a sense of community through shared service. The gathering began with a short prayer of thanks for the meal and the opportunity to be together. Above left, the breakfast serves as a time of fellowship, hospitality and spiritual connection, reminding everyone that the church is not only a place of worship but also a family that supports and cares for one another. Above right, Mrs. Johnny Brown cooks sausage for the gathering.



A patriotic party
Midland Park UMC, North Charleston, held “A Celebration of Faith and Freedom” June 28 for America’s 250th anniversary. A beautiful worship service was followed by a church-wide “picnic” with hot dogs and hamburgers in the family center. Here are scenes.



Photos courtesy of Enid McClam

VBS at St. Mark

St. Mark UMC, Taylors, under the leadership of Dr. Carlton J. McClam Sr., held its vacation Bible school June 1-5. Church members reported “an overwhelming participation” of children, youth and adults from the church and community.



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Escape room connects
The Bennettsville Cheraw Area Cooperative Ministry took a trip to an escape room April 18 hoping to cultivate fellowship and fun among their members. Children and adults from the combined churches worked together to “escape” from a locked room. “Overall, it was a fun and engaging experience that brought everyone together and tested our problem-solving skills in a whole new way,” organizers said.



DRESSES

From Page 1

Jones read the article and was excited at the possibility of bringing Ashland’s dresses on Trinity’s mission efforts in South America. Jones reached out to the Ashland group, and the connection began.

Trinity got a supply of Ashland’s dresses and sent them on a mission to the Amazon along with the school bags they were bringing.

Since that partnership began, they have continued to work together. She told the *Advocate*, “Just today, we mailed school bags, health kits, pillowcase dresses, boys’ pants, shirts and sanitary kits to a group going to Pilau, Peru, this summer. We are excited to work with others who are willing to serve at home to help others far away.”

The partnership between the two churches—one in York, one in Columbia—might never have happened without the connection that binds United Methodists



Above are the York crafters, while at right are the Columbia crafters. Both groups are connecting now in missions.

together. It’s a living example of what the denomination calls “connectionalism”: the belief that no congregation stands alone. Each is part of a larger body working toward a shared mission.

From a sewing circle at Ashland to a mission team at Trinity, and from the pages of the *Advocate* to the villages of the Amazon, the thread running through this story is unmistakably United Methodist.



Hands in South Carolina serve children in Peru—not because the churches knew each other, but because they knew they belonged to each other.

“One of the things I have always loved about being a Methodist was our connection,” Jones said. “If there’s a need, help is on the way. I have seen this throughout South Carolina. I love it!”

MORE THAN A MEAL

From Page 1

South Carolina Department of Education as its administrative body. It provides meals to local students who are 18 years old and younger through 32 sites in the Columbia area, including two rural non-congregate sites, two African Methodist Episcopal churches and more.

“We provide the meals,” explains director Nancy Bradshaw Davis, smiling as she shows off the lively operation, pointing out the stations while greeting the workers.

Sometimes families come to the church to pick up the meals, she said, while others are delivered to locations

in the area. Seven meals go to each child, five days a week, all summer long.

Young people are an active part of the behind-the-scenes help, working in tandem with adults to make the program a success. They say they love working to help their neighbors.

“I think it’s a good opportunity,” said Aaliyah Davis, 18, a member of Francis Burns UMC, as she works to assemble a cardboard box with food. “You never know what somebody’s going through, so to give back is a great service.”

Her coworker and friend Makenzie McCorkle said working at Summer Break Café is her first job, and she re-



Aaliyah Davis and Makenzie McCorkle pack food for distribution, saying the program is a great way to help others.

ally enjoys the program.

“It’s a great opportunity to meet other people and a great way to help others,” she said.

Reginald Mack, a rising 11th grader who is a member of Francis Burns, said he appreciates the way his congregation is involved in the ministry.

“It think it’s very important for us as a church to help,” he said. “These are people we see on a daily basis, and we don’t necessarily know their situation.”

By summer’s end, thousands of meals will have made their way from the fellowship hall to children across the Midlands—each one packed with care by hands young and old. And when school lets out next year, the volunteers at Francis Burns will be ready to do it all over again.

After all, as Jesus said in Mark 6:37, “You feed them.”

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Photo by Matt Brodie

The Rev. Mary Teasley (left) participates in the symbolic Passing of the Ceremony during Annual Conference 2026's ordination and retirement service, where a member of the retiring class (represented by Teasley) places a stole on the shoulders of a member of the incoming class (represented by the Rev. Nona Woodle).

TEASLEY

From Page 1

her ministry, advice for the next generation of female clergy and how she experienced the Triune God throughout her journey.

Teasley served in ministry for 49 years, and the relationships she built with the congregations she served stand out most. Above all, so does her relationship with God.

“The relationships stand out first,” Teasley said. “They’re the big celebrations, the good things, the church anniversaries. But the things that really stick with you are the tough times you endure with the folks.”

It is a reminder of the words in Ecclesiastes: For everything there is a season. Teasley saw that truth lived out in the churches she served.

“The expression is, ‘Every storm runs out of rain.’ The celebrations are wonderful, but the hardest seasons often become the most meaningful because they reveal God’s presence and the willingness of people to step up for one another.”

Leading through crises with individual families also extends to navigating shared crises within a community. Teasley recalls experiencing the events of 9/11 while serving in ministry.

“One of those memorable moments of ministry, of course, was 9/11. How do we get through this? How do we do this? Our charge conference was scheduled for that night, so I called the district superintendent, Susan Ulmer, and said, ‘What do you want to do?’ She said we should go ahead with it; this does not derail the church or the mission of the church. So we gathered in the sanctuary.”

As Teasley recalled, “I remember people’s faces were sort of blank. But it was good to come together, to reflect on the ministry of the past year and to make plans and commitments for moving forward, again recognizing God’s faithfulness.”

Teasley said God’s faithfulness has been a consistent theme throughout her ministry. She also reflected on how the women clergy who came before her provided examples to follow as she navigated her own calling.

“I was ordained a deacon. Of course, back in those days, you were ordained a deacon and then an elder. In 1977, when I was ordained, there were no female bishops. There were no female district superintendents in the Southeastern Jurisdiction. There were maybe a dozen clergywomen in South Carolina. And I remember there were no women in leadership positions.”

She shared how clergywomen persisted in ensuring that women’s voices were represented in leadership alongside their male counterparts.

“When the quadrennial elections for

all the committees and boards of the Annual Conference were held, there were no clergywomen nominated to any committee. But that year the clergywomen got together and came up with a slate of women who could serve on different committees. I remember at Annual Conference it was Susan Henry Crowe who stood at the microphone every time and said, ‘Bishop, I would like to make a substitute nomination from the floor.’”

Teasley said it would take another four years before clergywomen were elected to committees and boards. Nevertheless, they persisted.

That persistence became a hallmark of her own ministry and serves as a reminder that everyone’s voice deserves to be heard.

“Everybody who needs representation deserves a seat at the table. And not just a seat at the table, but a voice. There’s a difference. The Nominating Committee is now very intentional about looking at age, representation, gender and all of those things. They’re asking, ‘Are we sharing the responsibilities across the conference?’ So that’s a huge change.”

Although Teasley has transitioned into part-time ministry as an associate pastor at Advent United Methodist Church, Simpsonville, she reflected on her years in full-time ministry with gratitude.

“It’s been a privilege. You don’t do it by yourself.”

To watch the full video interview with Teasley: <https://go.advocatesc.org/teasley>.



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Young Methodists.

Spartanburg Methodist College launches \$25M ‘Keeping the Promise’ campaign

SPARTANBURG—Spartanburg Methodist College has announced the launch of “Keeping the Promise: The Campaign for Spartanburg Methodist College,” a \$25 million, two-year fundraising initiative to renovate the Walter S. Montgomery Science Building, strengthen student support and improve athletic facilities in ways that advance SMC’s career-focused mission.

For more than a century, SMC has delivered af-

fordable, supportive, career-focused education—what it calls “the way college should be.” The Keeping the Promise campaign is how the college will sustain and strengthen that commitment in the years ahead.

The college enters the public phase, having already raised \$9 million, or 36 percent of its campaign goal.

“Reaching \$9 million before the public launch is a significant vote of confidence in Spartanburg Meth-

odist College,” said Dr. Frank Lee, trustee and chair of the campaign’s quiet phase. “That early support reflects belief in the college’s leadership, its priorities and its future, and it has given this campaign real momentum as we enter the public phase.”

For more information about the “Keeping the Promise” campaign, visit <https://keeping-the-promise.smcsc.edu>.

Young leader answers God’s call in worship crisis at Pleasant Grove

By the Rev. Stacey Newlon

It was 10:07 a.m. on a Sunday in December. Normally, I would have been in the pulpit, but it was the weekend of my son’s college graduation, and I was six hours away. I was overjoyed with happiness for my son—only to be filled with dread when a text came through.

Faithful parishioners were texting: “The preacher is a no-show.”

I was heartsick. The person I had invited was always reliable and kept her commitments. She had also prepared a great sermon for Advent. I felt let down and disappointed. I did not understand how there could have been a mix-up, but that is exactly what happened.

I thought about the worst-case scenario. Would the church members leave without worshipping? Would they be angry that they did not have a preacher? Yet there was nothing I could have done.

About an hour later, I began getting texts and calls saying how God had worked everything out.

Meet Gabriel Corder, a young man who was about to turn 12 later in that month. For the last two years, he has been a steward for the offering, helping to collect our tithes and to lead us in the offertory prayer. Gabe has frequently participated in liturgy and other parts of the worship services, such as playing the trumpet during Christmas. During the first year of my appointment, Gabe was the first one to volunteer to sing. He did a joyful and heartfelt version of “I’ll Fly Away.”

Last December, when the designated worship leader was absent, Gabe asked if he could lead. He did so without hesitation and without worrying if he was good enough. Surely, he felt the prompting of God’s Holy Spirit, and he answered the call. According to Tam Minton, musician, Gabe needed some help finding Isaiah in the Bible, but other than that, he led worship.

“He was an inspiration in the way he handled everything for being so



Gabriel Corder preaches with zero notice.

young. He did the entire service like he had done it his whole life,” said Hazel Rousey.

Charles Rousey added, “We were all just wondering what was going on when it came past the time to start and someone would have to take over. Then Gabe said, ‘I’ll do it.’ He took the bulletin and jumped up there. Everyone was really happy about what he did.”

Gabe has demonstrated faith, passion, excitement and commitment. He showed the entire church what it means to answer God nudges. Gabe is not just a future leader—he is a leader now. Gabe is putting his faith into practice.

What can we learn from this situation? God’s grace occurs even in mix-ups. The youth want to be involved like they were at Annual Conference. Including youth enables us to fulfill the words of Jesus, who said, “Let the little children come to me” (Luke 18:16).

How can we involve children and youth in the life of the church on a frequent basis and not just special Sundays? Nourish them. Encourage them. Invite them to be full participants in the worship, service and fellowship of the church. Above all, love them for who they are: God’s beautiful and gifted children.

I boast in the Lord God who worked everything out and sent us an amazing young man to lead our worship.

Newlon pastors Pleasant Grove UMC, Richburg.



Celebrating students at Salem

Salem UMC, Florence, celebrated and honored their students recently for their academic achievements, especially praising their 2026 high school and college graduates. They offered a very special thank you to the Wilson High School Alumni Association for their monetary gift to help the youth at Salem.



Photos courtesy of Deidre Harley

Spring commencement celebrates Class of 2026 at Columbia College

COLUMBIA—Columbia College celebrated the achievements, resilience and future promise of the Class of 2026 during its Spring Commencement Ceremony May 9 at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. Family members, faculty, staff, trustees, alumni and friends gathered to honor graduates earning undergraduate and graduate degrees across the college’s academic programs.

The ceremony featured an address from Emmy-nominated producer, bestselling author, dance artist and Columbia College alumna Lisa Wheel-

er (class of 1987), currently head of content & trainer/talent operations at Apple Fitness+. Wheeler returned to her alma mater with a message centered on courage, adaptability and trusting one’s own direction in life.

President Dr. John H. Dozier delivered the official charge to the graduates, recognizing the perseverance and purpose that brought students to commencement while emphasizing the enduring mission of the college.

“You’re not only graduating—you’re rising,” Dozier said. “And we are proud of you.”

Boykin speaks at Claflin University’s Spring Baccalaureate Service

The Rev. Tiffany Knowlin Boykin was the guest speaker for Claflin University’s spring Baccalaureate Service held May 8 at 6 p.m. at the James and Dorothy Elmore Chapel.

The Baccalaureate Service is a longstanding tradition at Claflin that serves as a prelude to the commencement convocation, specifically for graduating seniors. This year’s program celebrated and honored the achievements of the spring Class of 2026 through prayers, hymns and words of inspiration and reflection.

Boykin, a native of Marion, earned a Bachelor of Science in chemistry at Columbia College. She continued her education at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology, where she obtained her Master of Divinity. She

received her Master of Urban Policy Studies from The Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University.

During her studies at Georgia State, she worked simultaneously for United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, aiding individuals and groups on mission trips.

Boykin previously served as the pastor of College Place United Methodist Church in Columbia, where she was the first African American and the first female to hold this position. After serving as pastor at the historic Wesley UMC in downtown Columbia, she began this summer as district superintendent of the Walterboro District of the South Carolina Conference of the UMC.

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Little kings and queens

The Bennettsville Charge Finance Committee hosted a Little King and Little Queen Program at the church in March. Here are scenes.

Photos courtesy of Katie Harrington

Young Methodists.



Youth leads church help for Epworth

Collin West, a rising sophomore at Spring Valley High School, recently led a heartfelt fund-raising drive for Epworth through his church, I. DeQuincey Newman UMC, Columbia. Collin took the initiative to speak to his congregation, sharing about Epworth's mission and encouraging others to give. Over the course of several weeks, he faithfully collected donations and recently stopped by Epworth to personally present them to Lisa Fusco, director of development and communication for Epworth. The church said they couldn't be more grateful, lifting up Collin's leadership and compassion and the congregation's generosity.

SCMYP shares youth events lineup

South Carolina Ministries With Young People has announced dates for youth events for the upcoming school year, including a new confirmation retreat slated for February called Koinonia.

From Nov. 20-22, Immerse 2026 is scheduled for Asbury Hills Camp and Retreat Center. Immerse is SCMYP's discipleship retreat designed to offer youth an opportunity to dive deeper in their faith. The Rev. Faye Jones from Union United Methodist Church, Irmo, will be the speaker for the week. Groovy Music, a youth led worship band from Canaan and Sand Hill UMCs, will lead worship as attendees explore the theme "Off-Script" for the week-end. In addition to worship sessions, youth will experience family groups and breakout sessions in a small group format to further dive into the content. The Immerse Design Team includes the Rev. Rachel Headden, the Rev. Brian Humphries, Skipper Brock, the Rev. Katie Brock-Lesh, Joseph Patton, the Rev. Maggie Cantey, the Rev. Emily Kirby and Brauer Kittrell.

From Jan. 29-31, 2027, Revolution is returning for its 18th year of inspiring young people into a life of following Jesus. Revolution will once again be held at the DoubleTree Conference Center in Columbia. Sponsoring church registration will open in August, which offers

churches to commit to attend early as well as take advantage of discounts for registration and event T-shirts. The Revolution Design Team members are Cantey, the Rev. Edward McCutcheon, the Rev. Heather Humphries, the Rev. Rebecca Rowell, Chad Deetz, Heather Jones, Samantha Williams, and Renee Patton. More details will follow in the coming weeks.

New to the lineup this year is Koinonia, the SCMYP Confirmation Retreat planned for Feb. 26-28, 2027. Designed to complement the confirmation process in the local church, Koinonia, as the name would suggest, will focus on the connectional and communal aspects of the confirmation process. Design team members are working to plan a memorable and impactful weekend for confirmands as well as the adults that attend. The Koinonia Design Team members are the Rev. Karen Kluever, the Rev. Antoinette Gaboton-Moss, Mike Jeter, Todd Handell, Stacey Fields and SCMYP Director Chris Lynch. Registration for Kononia will open soon as the team solidifies location and cost for the event.

Called SC, which gathers youth feeling a possible call to ministry, is also on the lineup, though dates and format have not yet been finalized.

For more information on all SCMYP youth events, visit <https://SCMYP.org>.

Wesley UMC awards two graduates with scholarships

LADSON—For the fifth year, Wesley United Methodist Church presented its Hope for the Future Scholarship in memory of Ella Belle Watson.

The scholarship awards this year went to Takaii Stephen Hamilton and Jayda Alyssa Mackey.

Hamilton is a member of Wesley UMC and a graduate of Lucy Garrett Beckham High School, where he earned a 4.0 GPA. A four-year ROTC student, he will attend South Carolina State University and major in engineering. Takaii's teacher says he has an amazing and contagious appreciation for life, and it causes people around him to want to do the same. After college, Takaii plans to enlist in the United States Air Force.

Mackey is a graduate of Summerville High School, where her hard work and eagerness to succeed positioned her as an early graduate. Jayda attributes her high achievements to being raised by both her parents and grandparents. She will enroll in Claflin University and major in biology with aspirations of becoming a nurse practitioner.

Each received \$750.

Wesley UMC thanks the Watson family and Wesley church family and friends for their generosity and continuous support of this scholarship.



Baptisms and transfers

Manning UMC, Manning, celebrated four baptisms and two membership transfers May 24. Three young men were all baptized, plus an adult. As well, two other women became members by switching their church affiliation.

Photo by Kelly Gottheiner



Wesley Foundations by the Rev. John Sterling Poole

Former students, future students

We are at the end of the summer, which means many of us have turned our attention back to school. For the Wesley Foundations and fellowships, this is what we have spent the entire summer praying, preparing and planning for. The end of August is filled with Welcome Week events, Bible studies, tabling on campuses, emails, text messages and more. We do this work because we are excited to reengage returning students, and we look forward to meeting new students.

But as I write this, I am reflecting not on the future students but rather my former students. I have completed four years of campus ministry so far, and I am struck by the alumni that I have been blessed to minister over these past semesters. I have former students who are now police officers, teachers, entrepreneurs, nurses, accountants and serve in our nation's military. There are also plenty who are pursuing further education at law schools, medical schools and other programs. There are three alumni of mine in seminary!

Beyond their career endeavors, many are buying houses, getting married, moving away from South Carolina and more. It is one of the neatest parts of this role to see these students graduate and go off into the world to transform it, and I've been in this role for a short season compared to some of my more experienced colleagues. Some campus ministers in the conference have been serving for more than 10 years, and I can't imagine how many they have sent into the world.

Wesley Foundations and fellowships make disciples of Jesus Christ who go out and transform the world. I see it in my alumni, I see it in the other Wesley Foundations and I can testify to it in my own life experience (both



These students are the most recent graduates from the Charleston Wesley Foundation.

my wife and I are alumni of Charleston Wesley). These alumni go off and do amazing things in workspaces, in homes, in churches and in communities, and this is the transformational work of the Spirit.

So while I am currently reminiscing on my adventures with my former students, I am feeling a stirring in my soul to look toward these future students who are coming this fall. I am eager to go back out on campuses and tell the students that they are not alone, that they are loved and that there is a spiritual home away from home here. It is such a joy to serve these young men and women and to be able to watch God's grace transform them into the disciple they are called to be.

You are also a part of this transformational work. Through your prayer, presence, gifts, service and witness to your nearest campus ministry, you are playing a part in God's work in making these disciples for the transformation of the world.

Thank you for supporting campus ministry, and may we all pray for more exciting news about our future former students.

Poole is director of the Charleston Wesley Foundation. To learn more about each Wesley Foundation: <https://linktree/UMCSCWesley>.

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Wespath

Mount Hebron to celebrate 225 years with 225 acts of service

WEST COLUMBIA—As Mount Hebron United Methodist Church celebrates its 225th anniversary, the congregation is looking beyond its rich history toward a future of faithful service.

“God has been active in this community and throughout the world through the people of Mount Hebron for 225 years,” said pastor Dr. Ann Kovan. “We want to do more than celebrate where we’ve been. We want to look forward with hope by putting our faith into action.”

On Saturday, Aug. 22, the congregation will participate in 225 Acts of Service, an ambitious church-wide day of mission inspired by the anniversary theme, “History. Hope. Hebron.” Rather than simply commemorating the past, members will honor generations of faithful disciples by serving Christ

through service to others.

“Our hope is that every disciple of our church family—and even friends from the wider community—will participate in some way,” Kovan said.

To make that possible, Mount Hebron has developed service opportunities for every age, interest, skill level and ability. According to 225th Anniversary Committee Chair Pat Lawter, projects will take place both throughout the community and on the church campus. Opportunities have also been created for homebound members and others who wish to serve from home, ensuring that everyone can take part.

The projects range from hands-on construction and yard work to preparing meals, writing notes of encouragement, creating cards and crafts, collecting donations, offering hospitality and praying for others.

“This is much more than a volunteer day,” Kovan said. “It is an opportunity to live out our mission to follow Jesus for the transformation of lives. Every prayer offered, every act of kindness, every donation collected, every yard mowed and every encouraging word becomes a witness to the love of Christ.”

Kovan hopes the day will demonstrate that everyone has gifts to offer.

“Whether you are nine or 99, whether you can serve for an entire day or just 30 minutes, whether your gifts involve construction, cooking, creativity, hospitality, prayer or encouragement, there is a place for you to serve.”

Those interested in participating in Mount Hebron’s 225 Acts of Service can learn more and register for projects by visiting <https://mthebronumc.com>.

First Tuesday Circle at Disciples UMC fosters love, sisterhood

By Robin Aleksinas

The First Tuesday Circle—a United Women in Faith group at Disciples United Methodist Church, Greenville—was loosely conceived as an evening women’s fellowship group that met for dinner in someone’s home, at a local restaurant or in the church’s Fellowship Hall.

The name came about because the first Tuesday of the month was the only day we could all agree on to meet given all the other conflicts members had.

The former evening women’s circle had ended, with just two of us meeting regularly, and while we knew Christ is with us where there are two or more gathered, we knew there was a need for fellowship.

We had plenty of weekly Bible studies, weekly book studies and adult Sunday school classes, and we already had a daytime women’s circle.

So we reconceived our purpose. Our First Tuesday mission was—and remains—to foster relationships of love, trust, respect and communication as sisters in Christ, helping us become church friends who knew more about



The circle provides a safe space for women to share.

each other than “hello and goodbye” after Sunday service.

Our circle provides a safe space for women to share themselves with one another, a judgment-free zone where unconditional love abounds. Our group may discuss a book, have a special speaker, focus on a particular topic or just gather together to catch up with each other’s lives. We share requests for prayers, help with church projects or programs and give our “Change for Others” donation each month to our chosen apportionment, Methodist



It provides a chance to truly know each other.

Homes. Additionally, we may give special donations to specific speakers or groups that may need our help.

Over the years we have heard from a variety of guest speakers: Melanie Gordon, DoLoveWalkCollective; Rev. Kathy James and Dawn Salvesson, Epworth Children’s Home and its Foster Care Program; Roland Bergeron, Set Free Alliance; a high school senior project presented by Rayna McKinley on “Comfort & Connection Bags” for the Greenville County Fire Depart-

ment; author Donna Rhodes; Toray Nicolay, Jasmine Road; Don Koonce, director of Ferncreek Creative, “The History of Greenville;” author Donna Bollinger; Daneen Schatzle, Loaves & Fishes; the Rev. Edward McCutcheon, Furman Wesley Fellowship; Susan Midgett, United Ministries of Greenville; Pearlie Harris, educator and humanitarian; and Victoria Novak, executive director of Greenville Literacy and her program graduate Alec Zondra, who is now self-employed with her own catering business and attending Greenville Tech for her culinary degree.

Some of our women have shared their own stories over the years, including Diane Wilson, Karen Green, Vicki Wright, Michele Hall, Sharon Flesch and our very own pastor, the Rev. Narcie Jeter.

Our generous and loving women shine “just enough light for the steps we find ourselves on” each and every month.

They keep showing up in prayer and encouragement and join us at our table in community and fellowship.

I am honored to be part of this community of faith and love.

Resource Center.

New Christmas music available

Church musicians, it’s time to plan your Christmas music. Listed below are new titles available in the conference Resource Center. Check our website for many other titles for children, youth and adults.

Christmas Sing Noel

(SBK512=) Composer/Arranger: Frazier, Michael/Mathews, Dale.

“Christmas Sing Noel” guarantees your choir will experience that easy-to-sing, bigger-than-life sound of the Simple Series. In keeping with the Simple Series format, these unison/2-part arrangements, expertly adapted by Michael Frazier from the original SATB, make this the perfect choice for smaller church choirs or for larger choirs with limited rehearsal time. Adult/27 min./Easy/Unison/2-part. (Brentwood-Benson). Listening CD available.

Glorious Night when Christ was Born

(SBK510=) Composer/Arranger: Mauldin, Russell. This new ready-to-sing Christmas musical delivers a celebratory and worshipful presentation leading your congregation to reflect on the miracle of Jesus’ birth—praising God for the gift of his son. It features songs such as Passion’s “Grace of God with Us” and Chris Tomlin’s “Holy Forever” (Christmas). These songs and more are enriched by new songs of the season and an inspiring narration written by Tony Wood. This new musical is perfect for small to medium-sized choirs or those with limited rehearsal time. Adult/34

min./Moderately Easy/SATB/ Brentwood-Benson). Listening CD available.

Rejoice with Great Joy

(SBK514=) Composer/Arranger: Frazier, Michael/Crumpton, Johnathan.

“Rejoice With Great Joy” is a bright and celebratory Christmas musical from the popular Go Sing Series. It has been arranged especially for two- to three-part vocals. This easy-to-sing and easy-to-learn musical is ideal for smaller ensembles, children’s choirs and church Christmas programs. With narration woven throughout, this musical tells the powerful Christmas story in a fresh, accessible way. It’s designed to be choir-friendly while delivering a meaningful message of joy and promise. Adult/25 min./Easy/2-3 parts (Daywind). Listening CD available.

Star of Promise

(SBK513=) Composer/Arranger: Pethel, Stan. Follow the light to Bethlehem in this captivating 15-minute Christmas musical by Stan Pethel that brings the story of Christ’s birth to life through music, narration and a meaningful visual candle-lighting ceremony. Blending original songs with beloved carols, this flexible work moves seamlessly from joyful praise to tender reflection, from classic to Calypso, offering moments of wonder, hope, love and living light. Simple yet powerful narration guides the journey as the growing light symbolizes God’s promise fulfilled in

the birth of Jesus and the continuing light of Christ in our lives today. Perfect for choirs of all sizes. Adult/15 min./Moderately Easy/SATB (Jubilate). Listening CD available.

What the Herd Heard

(SBK511=) Composer/Arranger: Boe, Gina/Mathews, Dale.

It’s almost Christmastime, and a group of kids has gathered outside their church to set up for the live nativity when suddenly, they discover something un-baa-lievable—the animals can talk! The donkey, sheep, cow and camel have decided that it’s finally time to share their side of the Christmas story. What follows is a hoof stompin’, hay-shakin’, thoroughly moooving retelling of the greatest story ever told—straight from the herd’s mouth! Packed with cleverly written songs, this musical will teach your kids all about the faith-filled journey of the wise men, the angels who urged the shepherds to share the news of great joy, Jesus’ arrival as an innocent baby in a manger and how we are called to go and tell the world about him. Children/33 min./Easy/Unison/2-Part (Brentwood-Benson). Listening CD available.

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 888-678-6272, or visit <https://www.umcsc.org/resourcecenter>.

Ministry fair connects at Church of the Palms

OKATIE—On May 3, Church of the Palms United Methodist Church hosted a lively and successful ministry fair, bringing together education, fellowship and fun in a colorful circus-themed event.

The fair showcased the many ministries and committees that support the church’s mission, including worship, handbells, choir, worship enhancement team, trustees, finance, stewardship, missions, evangelism, hospitality, nurture, spiritual formation, church council and more.

Each ministry featured creative displays with poster boards, handouts and visuals that helped attendees better understand the purpose and responsibilities behind the scenes. Members had the opportunity to visit each booth, ask questions and discover new ways to get involved in the life of the church.

Adding an interactive twist, attendees received “passport” cards at their tables and were encouraged to visit every booth to collect stamps. Those who completed their passports were entered into a drawing for four gift cards at the end of the event, creating excitement and encouraging full participation.

The festive atmosphere was enhanced by a cheerful clown and playful circus décor, including a live



Each ministry featured creative displays.

kazoo band that kept the mood upbeat and joyful. A variety of food was also shared, giving members time to connect and enjoy fellowship together.

The fair proved to be both informative and engaging, helping the congregation gain a deeper appreciation for the many ways the church serves its members and community. It was a joyful reminder that ministry thrives through involvement, connection and shared purpose.

Send us some of your Salkehatchie photos

The *Advocate* is running a spread in the September edition on the many Salkehatchie Summer Service camps held across South Carolina this year. If you attended Salkehatchie and have any photos you’re willing to share, send them to news@advocatesc.org by Aug. 10. Photos should be high-resolution.

Videos sought for Advocate website, app, social media

Do you have any videos of your church or ministry’s concerts, celebrations or other events that you think other South Carolina United Methodists would appreciate? Share it with the *Advocate*. We’d love to help others see what you care about or learn new ways of doing ministry. Email news@advocatesc.org with a link to a video file, or text it to 803-807-0018.

Camps & Retreat Ministries.

An anchor in the current: sacred space at Sea Islands

While the junior and senior high Seaside Camps at Sea Islands have officially concluded for the season, the spiritual momentum generated along the coast remains.

The magic of the Lowcountry shoreline is now available to all youth groups and churches looking for an intentional place to unplug, slow down and connect deeply with God and one another. Campers and leaders say it is an ideal setting for youth to spend quality time with friends in an environment built specifically for faith and fellowship.

Located on the water on Johns Island, this rustic coastal site of South Carolina United Methodist Camps and Retreat Ministries serves as a peaceful sanctuary for Christian growth, community and spiritual renewal.

Campers spent their days trading screen time for classic Lowcountry experiences like crabbing, fishing, riding bikes across the island and kayaking.

The heart of the experience took place away from daily routines. Campers gathered for daily Bible study, worship and small-group devotions under the expansive coastal sky. The setting fostered a genuine, face-to-face community, creating space for youth to anchor their friendships with each other and strengthen their relationship with God without the noise of modern distractions.

Sea Islands is open for youth ministries, church groups and retreat planning. Because the facility is rented to one group at a time, it offers a private, self-contained environment that can be tailored to a variety of spiritual ministry needs. The site features

modest, comfortable accommodations, including updated waterfront bunkhouses that can sleep up to 68 people across four separate bunk rooms. Groups have full access to the dining hall for shared meals, meetings and activities, alongside spacious grounds that allow for tent camping under the stars.

While youth are busy enjoying time with friends and exploring the outdoors, adults and church leaders can utilize the onsite retreat house. This separate three-bedroom house provides a quiet, reflective space for pastoral staff, adult chaperones or ministry leaders to rest, pray and plan for the coming church year.

To learn more, call 864-836-3711, email office@asburyhills.org or visit <https://www.sccarm.org/sea-islands>.

A place to call home: One woman’s journey out of homelessness

By Elizabeth Hiott

ANDERSON—For one Upstate woman, homelessness was not a brief setback. It was an ongoing reality that shaped her days and limited her ability to plan for the future.

For a long time, home was not a place. It was an idea that felt distant and uncertain. Each day brought the same unanswered questions. Where will I sleep tonight? How do I stay safe? What comes next when every step forward feels blocked by another obstacle?

Her circumstances were complex, as they often are. Like many individuals experiencing homelessness, she faced barriers that went beyond housing alone. Paperwork requirements, financial challenges, limited affordable housing options and the emotional toll of instability made progress difficult. The systems designed to help felt overwhelming and hard to navigate alone.

When she connected with South Main Chapel and Mercy Center, the first step was not housing but relationship.

Staff members took time to listen to her story and understand where she was and what stood in her way. Through ongoing case management, she began working one on one with a case manager who helped her break the process into manageable steps. Together, they addressed documentation needs, housing applications and financial barriers while also connecting her to commu-

nity resources that could support her journey.

At South Main Chapel and Mercy Center, casework is not a one-time interaction. It is a steady process built on trust, consistency and accountability. Staff walk alongside individuals over weeks and months, helping them move from crisis toward stability at a pace that reflects real life.

The journey was not quick. Affordable housing options were limited, and progress required patience and persistence. There were setbacks along the way, moments of waiting, and times when hope felt fragile.

But she did not walk through those moments alone. With continued advocacy and support, she stayed engaged in the process and continued taking steps forward.

Eventually, an opportunity became available. When a safe and affordable apartment opened up, South Main Chapel and Mercy Center helped remove some of the final barriers that so often cause people to lose rare housing opportunities. With support in place, she was able to transition successfully into her new home.

Recently, she received the keys to her apartment. The moment was quiet but powerful. More than a roof overhead, the apartment represents safety, dignity and stability. It is a place where she can rest, establish routines and begin focusing on what comes next.

Now housed, she has the opportunity to rebuild her life in ways that were not possible before. She can focus on employment, health and maintaining stability. She can plan beyond the next day and begin creating a sense of normalcy that many of us take for granted.

Stories like hers reflect the heart of South Main Chapel and Mercy Center’s mission. The organization serves individuals and families across the community who are facing poverty, homelessness and crisis. While im-

mediate needs such as food assistance and transportation are essential, the long-term impact of the Mercy Center is rooted in intentional case management and relationship based support.

This is why the organization exists and why its work matters. When people are given time, guidance and someone willing to walk beside them, change becomes possible.

For this woman, the journey is not over. But it now continues from a place she can finally call home.

Advocate.

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Annual Conference.



Photos by Matt Brodie

Home Missioner commissioned

Bishop Leonard Fairley joined Betty Void and Michael Jennings in conducting an Order for Commissioning a Home Missioner. A Home Missioner is a consecrated layman who commits his life to full-time vocational ministry of love, justice and service. Fairley officially commissioned Dr. Leland Gene Spencer IV as a home missioner to the appointed ministry of professor and chair of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of South Carolina on behalf of The United Methodist Church.



New opportunities in change

During the Connectional Ministries report Tuesday morning at Annual Conference, convener Pamela Goodwine-Glover and director the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith shared an update on their work this past year, particularly as the leadership and structural changes passed at the October special session directly impact their office. However, Smith said, "The changes presented opportunities for us." The two shared how the offices of Connectional Ministries and Congregational Development are coming together in the Office of Congregational Excellence. With the help of grants and other outside funding, they are doing much good work across South Carolina, including disaster response and recovery, intergenerational church ministry, Lay Servant Ministries and much more. "God has been blessing us in a season of scarcity; God has continued to provide," Smith said.



O'Mara honored

Jen Rodia of United Methodist Communications awarded Dan O'Mara (center) the Communications Award of Excellence, noting, "Dan embodies the spirit of Christian communications." Here, Bishop Leonard Fairley, right, joins in for the celebration.



Macedonia reunion

Annual Conference also played host to a surprise reunion of four people connected with Macedonia High School, a beloved historic facility that operated for decades in Berkeley County until it was destroyed by fire in 1996. The Revs. Constance Nelson Barnes McLeod and Jerry L Gadsden are graduates of the school. Sue Hagan and Ann Barnette were faculty members and are lay delegates of Moncks Corner UMC, Charleston District. From left are McLeon, Hagan, Gadsden and Barnette.



Pension and Health update

The Board of Pension and Health told Annual Conference they are giving a significant sum to the conference for investment funds, also sharing that rising health care costs mean those covered by conference insurance will see a 13 percent premium increase next year. Most of this is because of inflation, higher than expected catastrophic claims, higher than expected overall claims and a clergy population that is less healthy than the general population.

Better stewards

Annual Conference attendees listen to teaching during stewardship training on Monday at Annual Conference. The training was sponsored by the conference Council on Finance & Administration.



Partners for the children

During Epworth Children's Home's report, the body approved a statement of relationship between the conference and Epworth, which celebrates 130 years of ministry this year.

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Annual Conference.



Willie Jude II (left) and Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack (right) stand with (clockwise from top left) Earline Ulmer, Dr. Crystal Banks, Elaine Harley and Dr. Kenneth Jenkins.



Claflin University celebrates faithful leadership during 2026 Torchbearers Legacy Luncheon

GREENVILLE—Claflin University celebrated faith, servant leadership and community impact during its 2026 Torchbearers Legacy Luncheon Tuesday, June 9, during the 2026 South Carolina United Methodist Church Annual Conference.

The special luncheon, organized by Claflin University Director of Church Relations Rev. Vivian R. Lingard, brought together clergy, alumni, church leaders, supporters and community partners to honor individuals whose lives reflected faithful leadership, quiet service, steadfast commitment and the enduring spirit of lifting others.

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Calvin Alston, a 1979 Claflin graduate and retired district superintendent in the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. Alston encouraged attendees through reflections on leadership, service, faith and perseverance.

During the luncheon, Claflin University presented the 2026 National Torchbearer Award to Dr. Crystal Banks, director of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry’s Black College Fund. Banks was recognized for her distinguished leadership and unwavering commitment to strengthening United Methodist-related historically Black colleges and universities through advocacy, mentorship, partnership, and service.

The university also honored three 2026 Congregational Torchbearers for their faithful leadership and meaningful impact within their congregations and communities: Elaine Harley, Dr. Kenneth Jenkins and Earline Ulmer.

Proceeds of the luncheon were used to support need-based scholarships at Claflin University.



Bravo, South Carolina
Council on Finance & Administration Chair Smith Patterson lifted up the work of his council for their many dedicated hours spent on the budget and other responsibilities for the conference. He also recognized the Walterboro District for leading the conference in the highest apportionment collection percentage last year, bringing in 99.3 percent.



Cognitive care
On Wednesday morning at Annual Conference, the Rev. Bryan Pigford shared about the work of the Cognitive Connection Ministry. He noted that in South Carolina, one in nine adults aged 65 and older are living with some form of dementia. By the time you get to age 85 in South Carolina, that is 56 percent. “Look around this room. Look around your congregations when you are back home. It is in our spaces,” Pigford said. “Right now we are standing in the gap, and churches are uniquely positioned to address these needs.” Pigford lifted up the work of cognitive care ministries around the state that have started since their first workshop in spring 2024. To learn more or get involved, email cognitive@umcsc.org.



A Service to Honor our District Ministries
Just before lunch Tuesday, Bishop Leonard Fairley called the body into a sacred time to honor the Florence and Greenville districts, which are now joining with other districts as the conference shifts from 12 to 10 districts. “We want Florence and Greenville to know we do care,” Fairley said. After all joined in singing “For the Beauty of the Earth,” Florence District Lay Leader Brenda K. Fleming (pictured at right) and Greenville District Lay Leader Chandra Dillard offered expressions of gratitude and thanksgiving for the two districts. Dr. Phillip Stone (pictured at left) led the body in a litany of Thanksgiving for all these districts have done over the years to serve God and create disciples. Bishop Fairley offered a prayer asking a blessing for those who will now worship, work and serve in new districts.



‘Thank you’
The Committee on Episcopacy presented gifts and recognition to Bishop Fairley and his wife, Dawn, and to the bishop’s executive assistant, Lollie Haselden, whom they called “fantastic.”



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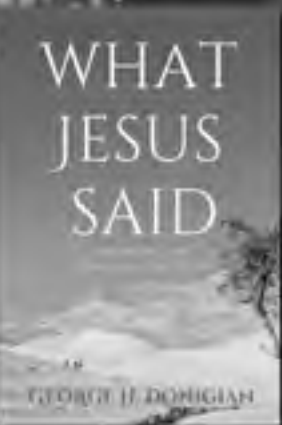
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James L. Drummond Sr.

GREER—James L. Drummond Sr., father of the Rev. James L. Drummond Jr., died June 10, 2026. Rev. Drummond is the pastor of St. Matthew United Methodist Church, Taylors.

Funeral services were held June 16 at Bethel UMC with burial in Hillcrest Memorial Gardens.
Mr. Drummond is survived by his wife, Ruth, three sons and two daughters.

Linda Dingle Gadson

HOLLYWOOD—Linda Dingle Gadson, mother of the Rev. Telley Gadson, died June 29, 2026. Rev. Gadson is the superintendent of the Hartsville District of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Mrs. Gadson worked almost five decades at Rural Mission Inc., formerly located on Johns Island.
Funeral services were held July 6 at Charleston First Assembly with burial in Wesley UMC Cemetery.
Mrs. Gadson is survived by her two sons and daughter.

Charles Reed Inabinet



Inabinet

SURFSIDE BEACH—The Rev. Charles Reed Inabinet, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died July 7, 2026.
Prior to his retirement in 2008, Rev. Inabinet served the Olar, Lando, Aldersgate-India Hook, Cheraw-First, Marion-First and Surfside charges.
A memorial service was held July 9 at Surfside UMC.
Memorials may be made to the Alzheimer’s Foundation of America, <https://alzfdn.org/donate/>.
Rev. Inabinet is survived by his wife, Judi Inabinet, and two sons.

Samuel P. Malachi Jr.

CHERAW—Samuel P. Malachi Jr., brother of the Rev. Robert Malachi, died July 5, 2026. Rev. Malachi is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.
Funeral services were held July 11 at Ebenezer UMC with burial in the church cemetery.

Robert B. Napier



Napier

WATERLOO—Robert B. Napier, a lay pulpit supply, died June 16, 2026.
Mr. Napier served the Mount Carmel, Greenwood, charge for 10 years.
Funeral services were held June 19 at Mount Carmel United Methodist Church, Troy, with burial following the service.
Memorials may be made to the Wounded Warrior Project, P.O. Box 758516, Topeka, KS 66675-8516.
Mr. Napier is survived by his wife, Foy, three daughters and son.

Glenn M. Stockman

CHESAPEAKE, Va.—Glenn M. Stockman, widow of the Rev. Roy McMillan Stockman, died Jan. 1, 2026.
No obituary was available.
Mrs. Stockman is survived by her daughter and two sons.

Louise Rebecca Washington

HARLEYVILLE—Louise Rebecca Washington, sister of the Rev. Jimmy Washington, died June 28, 2026. Rev. Washington is the pastor of Canaan United Methodist Church, Cope.
Funeral services were held July 10 at Greater St. Paul AME Church, Dorchester.
Mrs. Washington is survived by her grandson and six siblings.

Worldwide News.

United Methodists denounce ICE killing

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The United Methodist Immigration Task Force grieves the death of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, whose life was taken during an Immigration and Customs Enforcement operation in Houston’s East End neighborhood. In a statement, the task force denounces “the actions that led to his death and reject any system that treats immigrant lives as disposable.” The task force also called for a full, transparent and independent investigation into his death.

Leadership Gathering moves ahead amid challenges

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—War in the Middle East and the Ebola outbreak in Congo are adding complications to preparations for the Leadership Gathering scheduled in October in Canada. Nevertheless, organizers are pressing forward with the gathering intended to help set a new course for The United Methodist Church. They also are releasing a survey to get more input from youth and young adults.

Leaders drop Asbury from approved seminaries

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The United Methodist Church’s University Senate has removed Asbury Theological Seminary and Northeastern Seminary from its list of schools that can prepare students for ordination. Among the reasons cited in Asbury’s case is disagreement about the United Methodist Social Principles as well as a lack of a full-time United Methodist faculty member teaching required church coursework.

Group advises adding two more United States bishops

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—While recognizing The United Methodist Church’s financial constraints, a denominational leadership body approved a recommendation to increase the number of U.S. bishops in 2028. The recommendation is the result of a new process for bishop distribution approved at the 2024 General Conference.

Conference youth retreats make comeback

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—United Methodist conferences are attracting increasing numbers to their major annual youth retreats. After experiencing a slowdown post-pandemic, more young people from churches of all sizes are coming together to connect socially, emotionally and spiritually. Youth involvement in leadership at these gatherings is considered a key ingredient for success.

Camp property restored to Abenaki Nation

CABOT, Vt.—The original inhabitants of the Covenant Hills camp again have control of the land after decades as a property of The United Methodist Church. The New England Conference transferred the deed to the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation on June 27. The Native Americans plan to host education programs, teach the Abenaki language and traditions such as drum-making there. They will also move their food distribution operation to the campground.

Church cheers birthright citizenship ruling

WASHINGTON—United Methodists expressed gratitude that the U.S. Supreme Court overturned President Trump’s executive order denying birthright citizenship. However, they also lamented that the high court upheld other Trump administration actions targeting even legal immigrants.

Gammon receives key accreditation

ATLANTA—The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges has approved Gammon Theological Seminary for regional accreditation. Founded in 1883, Gammon is the only historically Black United Methodist theological institution in the U.S. “Regional accreditation affirms the quality of our academic programs and the transformative impact of our mission,” said the Rev. Candace M. Lewis, president and chief executive officer of Gammon.

Northeastern Seminary responds to removal

ROCHESTER, N.Y.—Northeastern Seminary, a Free Methodist-affiliated school that is part of Roberts Wesleyan University, released a statement in response to a decision by United Methodist leaders to no longer include it among the denomination’s approved theological schools for clergy training. “While we hoped for a different result, Northeastern Seminary appreciates the fair and transparent process with which the Commission on Theological Education conducted this review and communicated their reasons for the decision,” the statement said. United Methodist leaders also decided to remove Asbury Theological Seminary from the list at the same meeting.

LGBTQ leader retires after pivotal changes

ROME, Ga.—As executive director of Reconciling Ministries Network, Jan Lawrence kept United Methodist advocates organized after the denomination strengthened bans against LGBTQ people and helped lead the way toward removing those longtime bans. Now, the group she has led and the wider United Methodist Church are beginning a new chapter.

Website offers updates on agency unification

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Four agencies of The United Methodist Church working toward unification have launched a website to serve as the central source of information and updates on the proposal. The boards of Discipleship Ministries, Higher Education and Ministry, Global Ministries and United Methodist Communications are proposing to unite into a single connectional ministry agency. UnifyingForImpact.org stems from the agencies’ commitment to be transparent and offer clarity throughout the process.

Courtesy UMNews

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From the Archives
by Dr. Phillip Stone

The Devil’s Advocate

I have been meaning to write something about the not-so-secret, not-so-anonymous publication called the *Devil’s Advocate* for some time. I spotted a folder with a batch of issues recently, and it seemed like a sign that I should write about them this month.

The author and publisher of this underground publication was a minister named Carl Griffith. Born in North Carolina, Griffith attended Spartanburg Methodist and Wofford colleges and served in World War I before graduating from University of South Carolina. He was admitted to the Upper South Carolina Conference and served churches around Columbia and then in the Upcountry.

In 1942, he was appointed to Main Street in Columbia when it was one of the largest churches in the conference. The next year, he was abruptly moved to Gaffney when one of his sons refused to serve in World War II but would not claim conscientious objector status. Despite this, he was elected to Jurisdictional Conference from 1944 to 1960 and General Conference in 1948, 1952, and 1960. He retired from the active ministry in 1964.

It’s not entirely clear when he began writing his satirical newsletter. The earliest ones in the archives collection are undated but appear to be from the early 1960s. It’s likely that there were earlier editions that were more anonymous. All the issues in the collection list the “publisher” as “Groucho Grump (alias RCG)” so it wouldn’t have been hard to know who was responsible. The legend has been that the earliest issues were truly anonymous, that they were mailed from different places around the state to help maintain secrecy. But eventually, people began to figure out who was writing the secret newsletter and offered tidbits of news as well as some money to help pay for postage. The bulk of the newsletters with dates come from the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The challenge to modern readers is that so much of the Devil’s Advocate is written with nicknames, code names and inside references. The jabs at the conference for being modern and corporate come through when he refers to the bishop as the “GM” and district superintendents as “DMs.” Local church ministers are often referred to as “agents” and the church overall—I am presuming the General Conference—gets called “vast concerns.” Annual Conference session was jokingly called “shift session,” presumably because of the shifts in appointments that took place. Wofford got occasional references, as did certain churches. Griffith was not afraid to criticize or poke fun at practices he disliked, taking issue with the lack of consultation that was required by the *Discipline* during the appointment process. That’s just one example.

He did seem to appreciate it when younger clergy advocated for change, even if the older ones resisted.

One possible way to make these more usable and understandable would be for me to digitize the whole set and put them online and invite some of our clergy to help annotate them, providing identifications for the terms that he uses. These annotations would help future researchers really understand the names, places and issues that Griffith was describing.

The *Devil’s Advocate* provides a window into the inner workings of South Carolina Methodism in an era of change, sometimes giving a dissenting view of the overall story.

Stone is archivist for the South Carolina Conference and Wofford College.



Historical Society
by the Rev. Meredith M. Dark

One tiny candle illuminates a thousand

If you have not had the opportunity to see the new film “A Great Awakening,” you may want to find a way to see it.

One place you may view it is on Amazon Prime. The film stars John Paul Sneed as Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Blair as George Whitefield and displays the friendship between these two men. Prior to the film I was unaware of the friendship between Franklin and Whitefield. The film puts thoughts and facts into imagery that explains how Franklin and Whitefield affected one another.

Whitefield knew John and Charles Wesley and other men who were a part of the “Bible Moths,” or “Holy Club,” that became known as “Methodists” at Oxford. While attending class at Oxford and gaining an education, Whitefield worked as a servitor, serving the young men from families of higher economic echelons. The zeal and passion for the Gospel stands out clearly in the film and displays very clearly why Whitefield was so smitten with the Gospel and its messengers.

John and Charles Wesley, William Seward and others were brothers to Whitefield as they took him under their wings. The film outlines that at a younger age, Whitefield had a desire to go into acting. He claimed that preachers put people to sleep. It is obvious that Whitefield used his life’s early training in acting and public speaking to preach and get the message of the Gospel across to others more effectively.

The film also explores a young Franklin whose father, a candlemaker, said Franklin was his tithe to God as his tenth child. Franklin’s claim for not going into the ministry was not unlike Whitefield’s, in that he wanted to write his own sermons instead of reading someone else’s. As providence would have it, Franklin did end up bringing the Gospel message to many people through his friendship with Whitefield and the publication of Whitefield’s works at Franklin’s own print shop.

In his publication, “George Whitefield and Benjamin Franklin: Thoughts on a Peculiar Friendship,” Harry S. Stout describes the unlikely pair also. Franklin identified as a secular humanist and Whitefield identified as an evangelical protestant. Whitefield tried diligently to get Franklin to see the beauty in the “new birth” and in the incarnation of Christ, but Franklin could never fully take on either topic as a firm part of his belief system.

Whitefield preached to crowds numbering in the thousands and tens of thousands! One of his great gifts, per Stout, is that “Whitefield showed that preaching could be both edifying and entertaining.” This is a part of Whitefield’s persona that “A Great Awakening” displays Franklin’s skepticism. Franklin was surprised and overwhelmed with the truth he found in Whitefield’s abilities. The two men personified Proverbs 27:17: “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

Stout notes, “Whether through personal charisma in the case of Whitefield or through the power of the press in the case of Franklin, both knew how to exploit the temper of their times. ... Franklin’s effective use of the newspaper in Pennsylvania politics was a model for Whitefield in his pioneering work with religious magazines and letters to the press. ... Franklin taught Whitefield the power of the popular news sheets and magazines ... Whitefield taught Franklin invaluable lessons in the art of journalistic self-promotion.”

The film displays the depth of their friendship when Franklin’s grandson asks if Whitefield was a part of the Revolution; Franklin replies that Whitefield was the Revolution.

Franklin muses in the film: “I have often, in the course of these sessions, looked at that sun [carved in the chair] behind the president without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting.” Later, Franklin espoused belief that the carving was a rising sun. The film leads one to believe that this is because of the hope Franklin found in his friendship with Whitefield, which further pushed Franklin to encourage prayer and preaching in political settings.

The friendship between Whitefield and Franklin displays that God uses all aspects of our lives for God’s glory: religion and politics, business and faith, deism and Protestantism, etc. I hope you can enjoy exploring this historic brotherhood.

See Stout, Harry S. “George Whitefield and Benjamin Franklin: Thoughts on a Peculiar Friendship.” Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society 103 (1991): 9-23, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.emory.edu/stable/25081033>.

Dark pastors North Charleston United Methodist Church, North Charleston.

Sparrow honored for 50 years of dedicated service



SCRANTON—John Wesley Sparrow Jr. was recently honored for his 50 years of dedicated service as Financial Secretary for the Scranton United Methodist Church. He is well known in the Scranton community for his church involvement and exercise routine.

In addition to his financial duties, Sparrow served on numerous committees and was an active member of the United Methodist Men’s Group. He and his late father attended services regularly, and it was known that their regular (unreserved) pew was the last one on the right back of the church.

For many years he would walk three times a week from his home in Scranton to a pond house his family owned approximately three miles down Highway 52. Along the way he would visit most of the businesses and greet the people by name. Others recognized him while walking and would wave or blow their horns.

Although he moved to the (Methodist) Manor well over a year ago, the small room right of the pulpit, which he always used for church business, is still being referred to as “Wesley’s

office.” It has been so called for decades and probably always will be.

Recently, the church made it official by placing a plaque over the door naming it “Wesley’s Office.”

Wesley has continued in the capacity as Finance Secretary up until recently but now feels it’s time for someone else to assume the responsibilities. However, he still supports the church through his tithes and special offerings.

Sparrow now faithfully attends worship services at the Manor Chapel.



Adult Lessons
by the Rev. Joseph D. Kovas

The joy of the adventures for Christ

Aug. 2
Paul's Adventures in Antioch in Pisidia
Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians
13:13-52
Key Verses: "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 15:52).

The Book of Acts in chapter 13 turns now from Peter's story to focusing again on Paul's story as a new disciple of Christ Jesus. As disciples were worshipping and fasting, God's Holy Spirit summoned the community to "set apart" Paul and Barnabas for the work God has prepared for them to accomplish. The community does so by the act of "laying on of hands"—the formula used in the early church to signify ordination. Paul now begins his long journey of discovering what it means to live out his baptism as a disciple of Christ Jesus (Acts 9:18-19).

Could this story be a wonderful reminder of how God loves to take people like Paul, who were hostile to the church, and claim them for God's kingdom and purpose? Paul, who was Saul, was present at Stephen's stoning (Acts 8:58). Paul is now giving a sermon that is similar to Stephen's sermon.

Perhaps by God's Holy Spirit and God's word, Paul never forgot Stephen's sermon and used it as a template for his preaching on Christ.

The greatest preachers become so because they take the time to listen to how others preach.

Although the Jewish leadership was not pleased with Paul and Barnabas, Paul's preaching by God's Holy Spirit brought the gift of joy to the community and to the Gentile converts who received the light of the gospel, as seen in both Isaiah and Simeon's words: "A light to enlighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of your people Israel" (Isaiah 49:6; Luke 2:23). Although Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet, the community they left behind were blessed and marked with the fruit of God's joy.

The fruits of God's Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) are the hallmarks and signs for Christ's body, the church, as they live their lives for Christ. How will God use us to bring the fruits of God's Spirit to our communities and churches?

Lord, who is the author of our story, empower us to be your witnesses to all for Christ and help us to create by your grace communities where your joy may abide abundantly. Amen.

Aug. 9
Paul's Adventure in Jerusalem
Devotional Reading: Acts 15
Key Verse: "When its members read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation" (Acts 15:31).

Paul's adventure this week has brought him to the historical Jerusalem Council. How did a "no small dissension and debate" conclude with a resolution marked by joy (Acts 15:31)?

Acts 15 serves as a scriptural model for the Wesleyan quadrilateral. James quotes the prophet Amos 9:11-12 to show how the witness of Scripture also bears witness to the Holy Spirit's work among the Gentiles. The pharisees bring to the table the tradition of Moses as reflected in the Torah (Acts 15:5). In the council's conversations, Peter engages the tradition with his experience of the Gentile converts being saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith (Acts 15:9-11). In addition, Paul and Barnabas shared of their experiences among the Gentiles in how they have seen the fulfillment of signs and wonders (Joel 2:28-30). Reason is used both by Peter and James to argue their rationale for why Gentiles are to be included in the church without circumcision (Acts 15:10-11, 19-21). His argument points to God's divine work and is not based on our own power.

The experience of the council was joy. Upon receiving the news of the council's decision in Antioch, the congregation "rejoiced at the exhortation" (Acts 15:32). The nature of this news is bookended with great joy and with rejoicing (Acts 15:3, 31). Although the Jerusalem council began in a spirit of discord, it ended in a spirit of joy and peace from the Holy Spirit.

How can we use the model of the Jerusalem Council as seen through the Wesleyan quadrilateral to cultivate awareness of God's Spirit in our midst that seeks to make all things new?

Lord Jesus Christ, whose kingdom goes as far as the east is from the west, grant us wisdom and courage to practice being attentive to God's Spirit to move us toward joy and peace in our communities and congregations. Amen.

Aug. 16
Paul's Last Adventure in Jerusalem
Devotional Reading: Acts 22:30-23:11
Key Verse: "That night the Lord stood near him and said, 'Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome'" (Acts 23:11).

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. He is also the president of the Conference Historical Society.

Paul's journey has taken him across the Mediterranean world by this point in the Book of Acts. His own journey would be the fulfillment of Jesus' words to the disciples found in the very beginning of Acts: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Paul's journey has brought him from Athens and Ephesus to now back to Jerusalem, where he will prepare to go on to Rome to testify to others the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

While in Jerusalem, Paul leans into Jesus' wisdom of being wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove (Matthew 10:16-17) when he comes face to face with both Roman authorities and the Sanhedrin. Paul first uses this wisdom to state he is a Roman citizen. Therefore, Paul received the rights of a Roman, which also meant having a right to appeal his case all the way to Rome and thus Caesar. But before Paul goes on to Rome, he appears before the Sanhedrin so that the tribune could understand the accusations from the Jewish leadership.

After being inducted into an unsanctioned trial, Paul took notice of the Sadducees and proclaimed he was a Pharisee and was on trial for "the hope of the resurrection."

Not only does Paul make the theological connection between Judaism and the Christian faith, but he also caused the Sanhedrin council to divide to the point where Paul was escorted out by Roman officials for fear Paul would be torn apart in the crossfires of Sadducees, who do not believe in the resurrection (that is why they were sad, you see! Luke was on the verge of a great one liner!), and the Pharisees, who acknowledged the resurrection (v. 8).

God loves to use everything in our lives for the advancement of God's reign in Christ Jesus. For Paul, he discovered this truth with how his Roman citizenship and background as a Pharisee were used for him to go to Rome to proclaim Christ.

Christ prepared Paul for his long journey to Rome, where not only will he continue to preach the gospel, but he will also become a martyr, according to legend and tradition.

Lord, you are the one that will use anything in our lives to bring others to you and to witness your marvelous love to all. Equip us to be your hands and feet in the world even when others do not see you in us. Amen.

Aug. 23
Paul's Last Adventure, Part 1
Devotional Reading: Acts 28:1-18
Key Verse: "The natives showed us unusual kindness" (Acts 28:2a).

Hospitality is a hallmark and virtue in the Christian faith. Publius is one of the many in the Scriptures who demonstrates tremendous hospitality.

On his last adventure, Paul along with the crew and prisoners on a ship

bound for Rome are shipwrecked on the island of Malta. The residents of Malta, according to Acts, showed Paul and others from the shipwreck "unusual kindness" (Acts 28:2). The word for "unusual" translates from the Greek to meaning "extraordinary." The people of Malta kindle fire for the strangers and welcome them to the island. Publius goes a step farther by entertaining his guest for three days.

While hosting his guest, Publius' father fell sick with fever and dysentery. Paul, being a good pastor, went to go visit Publius' father. Paul also healed Publius' father by praying for him and laying his hands on him (v. 8). Paul's actions fulfilled what Jesus shared with his disciples before his crucifixion, "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these" (John 14:12). Soon others were coming to receive healing in Malta.

This is an example of what Sharon Ketcham calls the "reciprocal church." Paul and Publius feed back into one another's ministries.

How can our churches practice hospitality that will become the foundation for us doing greater things and for being a place where others are blessed?

Jesus, who knows the reality of being a stranger and host, equip us to be host to all, and in so doing, make us instruments of your love. Amen.

Aug. 30
Paul's Last Adventure, Part 2
Devotional Readings: Acts 28:19-31
Key Verse: "He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:30-31).

Paul has now reached the end of his journey. The apostle does not stop proclaiming Christ Jesus when he reaches Rome but continues to do so even in house arrest. The last sentence embodies the totality of the message of the Book of Acts—the church proclaiming with boldness and without hindrance the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31).

It is interesting that Luke does not provide an actual death scene to the drama of Acts for Paul. What happened to our adventurer?

Church tradition states Paul died a martyr's death in Rome. Luke seems to hint at this in Acts 20:25 and 38. Although we do not know what happened to Paul, Paul was never the main actor or character in this grand drama. Jesus Christ, by the power of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, was always at the center. Everything recorded was for the encouragement of the early church.

Will Willimon, in his commentary on Acts from the Interpretation series (2010), invites others to see how "you and I live in the continuation of the story of Acts" (p. 192).

Our story is the continuation of the story of Acts, and now we are the ones who are on a great adventure for Christ Jesus.

Lord who summons us to follow you with our whole lives, empower us to live for an adventure greater than ourselves that will bring your name to those who do not know you so they, too, will come to know you and your love.

Amen.

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Happenings.

Event Calendar.

August Aug. 1—Lay Servant Ministries Academy (Train the Trainer), Washington Street UMC, Columbia, 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. \$25.	Aug. 29—ERT Basic Training, Fair Lawn UMC, Columbia, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. \$30. https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/
Aug. 8—ERT Basic Training, Bluffton UMC, Bluffton, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. \$30. https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/	September <i>Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)</i>
Aug. 20—Musical Organ Tour and Hymn Sing, First UMC, Cheraw, 6 p.m.	Sept. 7—Labor Day (United Methodist Center closed)
Aug. 22—ERT Basic Training, New Webster UMC, Wadmalaw Island, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. \$30. https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/	Sept. 12—ERT Basic Training, Wesley Chapel UMC, Lake City, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. \$30. https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/
	Sept. 12—LSM School, Cokesbury UMC, North Charleston, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. \$35. https://tinyurl.com/y47tabrn

Youth Empowerment Conference July 31-Aug. 1 to motivate UMC young people

RIDGEVILLE—Canaan and Sand Hill United Methodist churches are teaming up to host a Youth Empowerment Conference, a two-day gathering designed to be a fun and spirit-filled experience for young people. The event will take place on Friday, July 31, and Saturday, August 1, at Canaan and Sand Hill UMCs. Built around the theme “Lace Up Your Boots: It’s Time to Rise, Let’s Move!” and inspired by Isaiah 60:1, the conference promises a mix of worship, workshops, fellowship, fun and more, aiming to deliver what organizers are

calling a life-changing experience for attendees. Registration costs \$24.99 per person and covers meals on both Friday and Saturday, plus a guaranteed “You Got This!” T-shirt for everyone who signs up. Prospective attendees can register and pay through three separate channels:

- One QR code/link for payment (via Vanco)
- One for individual registration
- One for group registration.

For those traveling in and needing a place to stay, the churches have partnered with

Home2 Suites by Hilton to offer discounted lodging, with a dedicated booking link and QR code provided for making reservations around the event dates. Organizers are encouraging young people not to miss out on the opportunity to connect, grow and be inspired. For individual registrations, go to <https://forms.gle/ax1mn3iumieA9A4f6>. For group registrations, go to <https://forms.gle/zeRfZ31Fk8LAe2tz7>. To pay, go to <https://secure.myvanco.com/L-ZKHE/campaign/C-16F1S>.



Children’s Sermon by the Rev. Meg Cook

Loaves and fishes

Date: Sunday, Aug. 2
Scripture: Matthew 14:13-21
Time frame: 3 minutes (aiming for 3-5 minutes max)
Supplies: A compressed Magic Grow capsule sponge bath toy (available at many dollar stores or online) and a clear bowl of warm water.
Leader preparation: Place the bowl of warm water where the children can easily see it. Keep the capsule dry and hidden until you’re ready to begin. Keep the capsule in your pocket until it’s time to reveal it. Otherwise, the children will want to investigate it before you’re ready!
Children’s sermon:
Do: Welcome the children warmly and invite them to sit down. Hold up the capsule (or dry sponge if you’re doing the Saturday night version, below).
Ask: Can anyone guess what this is? (Pause for answers.) Those are good guesses! It doesn’t look like very much, does it? It’s small flat, and kind of ordinary. I wonder if this little thing could become something bigger? Let’s find out.
Do: Place the capsule or dry sponge into the bowl of warm water. As it begins to expand, in-

vite the children to watch closely.
Say: Look at that! It’s growing! It was already a sponge, but we couldn’t tell by looking at it. Now it’s becoming so much bigger than it first appeared.
Today’s Bible story reminds me of this little sponge.
Jesus had been teaching a huge crowd of people. When it was time to eat, the disciples looked around and saw only five loaves of bread and two fish. They thought, “That’s not enough.” The disciples asked Jesus to send the people away to get food for themselves.
But Jesus said, “You give them something to eat.” The disciples said, “That’s not enough!”
Jesus looked at the very same meal of five loaves and two fish and said, “Bring it here.”
Jesus thanked God for the food, blessed it and shared it with everyone. And there was more than enough! In fact, after everyone had eaten until they were full, there were 12 baskets of leftovers.
Sometimes we look at what we have and think, “It’s not enough.” But Jesus reminds us to bring what we have to God. God can do amazing things with what we of-

fer. When we place what we have in God’s hands, God can make it into more than we imagined. (Hold up the expanded sponge.)
This little sponge looked so small at first. But once it opened up, we could see it was much more than it appeared. God’s love is like that, too. It is always more than enough.
Say: Will you pray with me? Dear God (echo), we love you (echo). Thank you for providing (echo) more than enough (echo). Help us trust you (echo) and share what we have (echo) knowing you are with us (echo). Amen (echo).
Saturday night version:
If you don’t have a compressed sponge, use a dry household sponge instead. Let the children compare it to a sponge that has been soaked in water. It won’t have quite the same surprise, but it still illustrates how something that seems small can become much more.
Cook pastors Grace United Methodist Church, Columbia, and is the author of the Herbert the Hippo series from the Advocate Press, which is available at <https://www.advocatepress.org>.

Six ERT trainings scheduled for this summer, fall

Hurricane season began June 1, and South Carolina United Methodists are encouraged to sign up to be part of the Early Response Team and be ready to help if disaster strikes. Six ERT basic trainings are slated throughout the state this summer and fall and offered by the Disaster Response Ministry of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church:

- Saturday, Aug. 8, at Bluffton UMC, Bluffton
- Saturday, Aug. 22, at New Webster UMC, Wadmalaw Island
- Saturday, Aug. 29, at Fair Lawn UMC, Columbia
- Saturday, Sept. 12, at Wesley Chapel UMC, Lake City
- Saturday, Oct. 10, at Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville
- Saturday, Nov. 7, at Dacusville UMC, Easley

The cost is \$30, and classes run all day from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. “Invite a friend or your local group to join you for a day of learning,” said the Rev. LaTonya Dash, disaster response coordinator. Register at <http://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration>. Complete a background check at <https://tinyurl.com/umcorvv>.



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CALLED SEJ

From Page 1

tion being presented by the One Georgia Taskforce.

Both the North and South Georgia conferences approved the unification at their respective annual conferences this summer. On June 1, the South Georgia Conference approved the unification plan by a vote of 96.6 percent, and on June 18, the North Georgia Conference approved the unification plan by a vote of 96 percent.

Serving as lay and clergy delegates are those most recently elected by their annual conferences—or their alternates. Those delegates were elected in 2019 to serve in the 2020



Photo by Derek Leek

Delegates gathered in person for the last SEJ Conference, held in July 2024. The virtual session in August will vote on one item.

conference, which was postponed to 2024 because of the pandemic.

Jenkins said serving the church as both a delegate and a member of the SEJ and Interjurisdictional Commit-

tees on the Episcopacy is “an absolute pleasure.”

“It’s a blessing serving and working as God’s hands and feet in determining and exploring areas of episcopal leadership as well as missional and ministry needs of the UMC,” she said. “I’m confident in the delegation’s eagerness and commitment to do the work of the church.”

Nelson said much the same.

“The called session of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference is a powerful reminder that God’s mission continues to flourish among the people called United Methodist,” he told the Advocate.

The two conferences have been working on the unification since fall 2024 through prayerful study, engagement, discernment and other diligent work.

Uniting the two conferences is the singular voting purpose of the special session, called by the SEJ College of Bishops. In addition, the session will receive an informational report from the SEJ Committee on Episcopacy related to their work in preparation for the 2028 Jurisdictional Conference.

“The SEJ Conference will receive the formal petition, hear the report of

the College of Bishops and act upon the request in accordance with jurisdictional authority and disciplinary requirements. No other business will be considered,” noted Bishop Connie Shelton, president of the SEJ College of Bishops, in her letter to delegates.

Under the proposal, the Georgia Annual Conference would officially be established Jan. 1, 2027, if approved, with a Service of Worship and Celebration planned for January 2027. The first session of the Georgia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church would be held in Athens in June 2027.

South Carolina’s SEJ Conference Delegation

Clergy Delegates:

Rev. Ken Nelson
Rev. Susan Leonard
Rev. Emily Sutton
Rev. Will Malambri
Rev. Tiffany Knowlin Boykin
Rev. Karen Jones
Rev. Cathy Mitchell
Rev. Fran Elrod
Rev. Connie Barnes McLeod
Rev. Mary Teasley
Rev. Kathryn Hunter
Rev. Elizabeth Murray
Rev. Dr. Stephen Love
Rev. Sara White

Lay Delegates:

Jackie Jenkins
James Salley
Herman Lightsey
Chris Lynch
David Braddon
Betty Void
David Salter
Valerie Brooks-Madden
Marlene Spencer
Lou Jordan
Doug Coffeen
Marvin Horton
Vicki McCartha

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Fire of the Spirit

Salem UMC, Florence, celebrated Pentecost Sunday with many members wearing red to symbolize the flames of the Holy Spirit. Salem members say they’re small in numbers but big in faith.

Photos by Deidre Harley

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