South Carolina
United Methodist Advocate
CONNECTING METHODISTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA SINCE 1837

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Better together

New Florence districtwide effort brings together youth in The Connection

By Jessica Brodie

FLORENCE—It's said so often it's almost trite: Children are the future.

Yet overlooked in that is a hard reality—these kids are also here, right now. They're in our congregations, week after week, and they desperately need more of what The United Methodist Church does best: the connection.

That's precisely the idea behind a new initiative two pastors in the Florence District are spearheading.

Called "The Connection," the Rev. Carsten A. Bryant and the Rev. Katherine Haselden Crimm, along with the Florence District's Methodist Youth Fellowship Cooperative, are bringing together sixth through 12th graders for fun, food and faith one Sunday afternoon each month.

The location rotates around the district—the February gathering was at Wesley Chapel UMC, Lake City, and March's is at Bethel UMC, Kingstree.

Crimm said seeing the clergy and lay leadership from the district show up with their young people, lead devotion, join in on trivia or play games like milk-jug lacrosse has been like a balm in Gilead.

"Every Sunday churches around the world pray 'let your kingdom come' as they gather in worship. Once a month on a Sunday afternoon we see a glimpse of that kingdom in the Florence District," said Crimm, who pastors Highland Park UMC, Florence. "Watching our young people, Black and White, come together to worship, fellowship and play leaves me overflowing with joy every single time we gather."

Easier when we work together

The Connection got its start last spring, after Bryant and Crimm participated in a meeting led by the

See "The Connection," Page 14

Photo by Dan O'Mara

Kenderius Pauling, of the Claflin University DREAM Gospel Choir, leads worship during Revolution Jan. 24. This year's event drew roughly 900 kids from across South Carolina to the Township Auditorium in Columbia.

Belonging to God

Youth Revolution draws 900 to Columbia for three days of worship, learning

By Jessica Brodie

Roughly 900 teens descended upon the Township Auditorium in Columbia Jan. 24-26 for the conference's annual youth Revolution spiritual retreat.

A life-changing weekend of worship and spiritual growth led by the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and South Carolina Ministries with Young People, Revolution started in 2010 to provide a way for young people in South Carolina to have a powerful encounter with Jesus.

See "Revolution," Page 12

Jeremiah Teams continue work, offer initial reports

By Dan O'Mara

Four Jeremiah Teams—formed to help the South Carolina Conference envision a future in which local United Methodist churches not only survive but thrive—are up and running after beginning their work in January and February.

Bishop Leonard Fairley, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference of The UMC, invited this diverse group of lay and clergy leaders from across the conference to take the lead in developing recommendations in four areas: Missional Priorities, Strategy for the Black Church and Ethnic Ministries, District Alignment and Conference Staff Alignment. They are working to bring proposals for each of these areas to the South Carolina Annual Conference for approval.

Here is a summary of their reports:

Missional Priorities Team

Formed to evaluate the effectiveness of all current ministries and missions, identify what things are essential for us to live into Our 4 Priorities and what we need to stop doing to free us up for more imaginative,

See "Jeremiah Teams," Page 14

Women's trip to Penn Center brings needed Black history education

By Jessica Brodie

A crowd of women from across South Carolina headed to St. Helena Island Feb. 15 for a racial justice field trip for Black History Month.

A number of teens joined the women to explore and learn about the Penn Center, a 50-acre historic district near Beaufort that was founded in 1862 as a school for freed slaves. It was the first school in the South for formerly enslaved West Africans and is one of the most significant African-American institutions in existence today. A historic and cultural institution, the Penn Center is a National Historic Landmark District and comprises two of the four sites in Reconstruction Era National Park. It is nestled in the very heart of Gullah culture and also served as a community center for St. Helena Island. During the civil rights era, it was a retreat for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders of the movement.

Kathy Roys noted the Penn Center group trip arose from the South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith Charter for Racial

See "Penn Center," Page 11

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'See the Possibilities, Live the Promises'

Registration open for Annual Conference June 8-11

By Jessica Brodie

GREENVILLE—Registration is now open for this year's Annual Conference, set for June 8-11 at the Greenville Convention Center.

While many of the details have not yet been released, such as ordination and memorial service preachers or the official conference agenda, leaders for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church urge people to start making plans now.

"We encourage everyone to go ahead and register online and get their rooms," Conference Secretary the Rev. Mel Arant said.

The conference's website (https://www.umcsc.org/ac2025) now has online registration open, along with a list of hotel rooms with discounted group pricing for the gathering.

There is also space for exhibitors to submit an application, people to preorder the conference journal and information on an annual conference Kids Camp, which will be hosted by the new church start Open Hearts UMC in Greenville. Space is available for 20 children in rising first through sixth grades, and registration closes May 15 or when slots are filled.

This year's Annual Conference theme is "See the Possibilities, Live the Promises," which draws from Jeremiah 29:5-7. Those verses reference the word God gave the prophet Jeremiah about thriving and prospering as God's people: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jeremiah 29:5-7 NIV).

It is the first Annual Conference event Bishop Leonard Fairley will conduct for the South Carolina Conference as resident bishop; Fairley took the helm in South Carolina Sept. 1.

While full information about Annual Conference will be released later, and reports expected to be posted sometime in May, one thing South Carolina United Methodists can expect is information from the Bishop Fairley's new Jeremiah Teams. The Jeremiah Teams are four newly created teams tasked with helping transform how the conference is structured, how it operates and how it aligns with the conference's "Our 4 Priorities."

Fairley appointed 34 lay and clergy leaders from across the conference to the four teams, which include the Missional Priorities Team, the Black Church and Ethnic Ministries Strategy Team, the District Alignment Team and the Conference Staff Alignment Team, and the conference will hear reports from them at Annual Conference.

See next month's *Advocate* for more on Annual Conference.

Three 'Spring Salkehatchie' work sessions planned

This March and April, United Methodists will have the chance to gather for their choice of three different weeklong Spring Salkehatchie mission opportunities.

Spring Salkehatchie events will be held in Simpsonville (March 30-April 5), Iva (April 13-18) and Bennettsville (April 21-25).

Youth ages 14 and older will team up with adults to work on homes in that community for people in desperate need of home repairs. Spring Salkehatchie is designed to be like the summer Salkehatchie weeks. Salkehatchie Summer Service, which started in 1978, is a weeklong mission experience that enables teens and adults to repair houses for people in need across South Carolina.

The cost for Spring Salkehatchie is $200 and requires registration. Adults must do a background check.

Online registration for spring and summer camps opens on March 1. To register, go to https://www.salkehatchie.org.

For questions, email salkehatchie@umcsc.org.

Dementia care workshop set for March 19 in Orangeburg, April 29 in Aiken

Churches and individuals interested in a dementia care ministry are invited to join the South Carolina Cognitive Connection Ministry for a Dementia Care Workshop in March and another in April.

The March workshop will be March 19 from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Orangeburg, the workshop will feature a morning of conversation and learning around dementia, which is a topic that affects all congregations.

Retired United Methodist Bishop Ken Carder and South Carolina Department on Aging representative Tori Anderson will share essential information about how to be in ministry with those living with dementia.

To register: https://tinyurl.com/dementia-stpauls.

The April workshop will be held April 29 from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Trinity UMC, Aiken.

To register: https://tinyurl.com/dementiacare042925.

For more information about the workshops or to get involved, email cognitive@umcsc.org.

Advocate continues listening sessions across the state to gauge readers' needs

On the heels of successful February listening sessions in Columbia and Rock Hill, the *Advocate* newspaper is gearing up for a March 25 listening session in Greenwood. Others will be held throughout the year, once a month until December.

The *Advocate* community listening sessions are being held in every district in South Carolina this year to gauge the needs and interests of its readers. They will enable *Advocate* staff and board members to better understand the news needs of the people of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. They are part of a wider effort combining surveying, focus groups, interviews and events so the *Advocate* can deliver relevant and reliable news and information so people can make important decisions and participate fully in making disciples of Jesus Christ.

All are welcome to attend, and pizza will be served.

"The *Advocate* wants to make sure we are meeting our readers where they are in their faith journey and helping people stay informed and inspired about what's happening locally, statewide and globally," said *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie. "In this process, we are asking questions such as, How can we improve? What do you like and dislike about the *Advocate*? What would you like to see more or less of? What can we add? We truly want to hear from people."

The Columbia listening session was held Feb. 24 at Mount Hebron UMC, West Columbia. The Rock Hill session was held Feb. 25 at St. John's UMC, Rock Hill.

The March session is slated for Tuesday, March 25, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at St. Mark's UMC, Greenwood.

Future sessions are as follows (all from 6:30-8:30 p.m.):

- April 29: Anderson
- May 15: Spartanburg
- June 24: Greenville
- July 15: Florence, Lake City UMC, Lake City
- Aug. 26: Hartsville
- Sept. 30: Marion
- Oct. 28: Orangeburg
- Nov. 17: Charleston
- Dec. 1: Walterboro

To RSVP or for more information, email krenfroe@advocatesc.org.

Immigration stories sought for new book

Many of us have immigration stories that may get lost or forgotten over time. We come from interesting places all over the world.

Arlene Andrews, member of Trinity United Methodist Church, Blythewood, and *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie are collecting stories of South Carolina United Methodists who immigrated to the United States in the past 100 years or so. The stories will be shared through a book slated for publication by the Advocate Press, the newspaper's book-publishing division.

If you are interested in sharing your story or know someone affiliated with the UMC in South Carolina who would be interested in this project, contact Arlene Andrews at aandr30528@aol.com.

"Tell us about yourself or an ancestor," Andrews said. "You can share a written story or just talk with one of us, and we'll be glad to write it for your approval. Let's celebrate who we are."

Advocate survey to help newspaper improve

How can the *Advocate* understand—and address—your news needs better?

The *Advocate* is working to more broadly understand the wishes and needs of its readers across South Carolina, beginning a full-scale period of market research so it can expand and serve United Methodists better now and in the future.

In addition to listening sessions, focus groups and other methods, the *Advocate* has created a survey it hopes people will take.

"Completing the survey helps us better understand who our readers are, why they read the *Advocate* and how we can improve," said *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie. "We have a long and thriving history. Established in 1836, we're the oldest newspaper in Methodism still in existence, and we want to continue to thrive and serve readers long into the future. The answers to this survey will help us do that better."

To take the confidential survey, go to https://advocatesc.org/survey.

Eight titles from Advocate Press for Women's History Month

March is Women's History Month, an annual observance to highlight the contributions of women to events in history and contemporary society.

The *Advocate's* book-publishing division, the Advocate Press, has a number of titles that can help South Carolina United Methodists celebrate works by female United Methodists who are authors.

Consider the following:

• "Seriously Seeking God," by Suzan Phillips: In this four-week study, Phillips takes readers deep into the parables in order to hear what new thing Jesus is saying through the parables of the sower, the wedding banquet, the tenants, and the lost (prodigal) son. Out of a contention that God speaks because God is present and active with us in this moment, we will spend a week on an individual parable, listening to it and wrestling with it. What is God revealing to our heart? What word, image, character, human trait or human condition leaps off the page at us? What stays with us throughout the week?

• "Herbert the Hippo" and "Herbert the Hippo In the Moment," by the Rev. Meg Sweeney Cook and illustrated by P.A. Sweeney: In the Advocate Press's children's books, Herbert the Hippo is a small pink hippo figurine who was made in South Africa. He's so small he can fit in the palm of your hand. In the first book, Herbert shares a message about how, even though he's small, he's a great big reminder that everyone can make a difference in the world, and everyone is God's special work of art. In the second book, Herbert explores what it looks like to live fully in the moment.

• "Betrayed with a Kiss: One Pastor's Story of Finding God In the Wake of Sexual Assault and Intimate Partner Violence," by the Rev. Chrisie Reeves-Pendergrass: Raised a "good girl" pastor's daughter in a wholesome Christian environment, Chrisie Reeves-Pendergrass thought the horrors of abusive relationships or sexual assault were things that happened to other people. But quickly she found herself in the midst of an abusive marriage, wedded to a predator who convinced her she was to blame for the rape and degradation she endured. "Betrayed With a Kiss" is the story of how she escaped her marriage, the chaos of post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental anguish that threatened to tear her apart. Her memoir shines light into the spiritual transformation she experienced out of heartbreak and betrayal.

• "Who Am I? A Devotional for a Jesus-Centered School Year," by Cindy Curtis: In this student devotional, which follows the school year from August through May, students from sixth to 12th grade dive into Jesus's seven "I Am" statements week by week, helping them navigate their identity in Christ as they navigate the academic season. From "I am the true vine" to "I am the way, the truth, and the life," students uncover the freedom each of us has in the risen savior even as they struggle to figure out what God has planned for their life. Curtis is youth director at St. Andrews Parish United Methodist Church, Charleston.

• "Walk With Me: Your Spiritual Self-Esteem Journey," by the Rev. Cathy Joens and Toni Taylor: Joens and Taylor take you on a journey to learn what holds you back from sharing your faith confidently and what keeps you from stepping out of the boat to lead. As holy friends, the two explore spiritual esteem, what tears it down and why it matters. They walk with you as you discover a deeper, more authentic relationship with God, self and others. Spiritual esteem is the confidence to absolutely, with conviction, without a doubt, believe in who you are—the same way God believes in you. It gives you the courage to rise above yourself for the sake of others and the Gospel.

• "Feed My Sheep: A 40-Day Devotional to Develop a Heart for Hunger Ministry," by Jessica Brodie: Perfect for a Lenten study, in this 40-day devotional written by the *Advocate's* editor, verses from God's Holy Word are teamed with hunger ministry stories that have appeared in the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* newspaper over the years. Not only does this book lift up the work of United Methodists in South Carolina who provide food for people in need, but it glorifies the message Jesus gave His disciples in John 21:15-17 to feed and otherwise care for others.

• "More Like Jesus: A Devotional Journey," by Jessica Brodie: Also penned by the *Advocate's* editor, this 40-day devotional teams Jesus's words and actions in Scripture with articles that have appeared in the *Advocate* over the years, showcasing what it looks like to be a real-life, modern-day Christ-follower. Also ideal for Lent.

To purchase the books in paperback or ebook format, visit https://advocatesc.org/books.

High school delegates sought for Annual Conference

High schoolers across South Carolina have the opportunity to be a part of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church's upcoming Annual Conference.

South Carolina Ministries with Young People's Annual Conference Youth Delegate program will provide youth delegates a voice and vote at Annual Conference. The team hopes to identify a couple of youth from each of the conference's 12 districts.

Youth will participate in a Saturday training in March and April to learn about Annual Conference and how it works, then participate in Annual Conference when it is held June 8-11 in Greenville, sitting together and sharing in the life of the denomination on a larger scale.

The youth delegates will be in addition to lay delegates named by each local church.

Church members and pastors are invited to consider high schoolers in their congregations and email info@scmyp.org if they have questions or know someone who might be interested.

Salley named Orangeburg Alumni Chapter's 2024 Kappa Man of Year


Salley

The embodiment of what it means to be a member of the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity is "achievement in every field of human endeavor." For those who know the versatile James H. Salley, it's no surprise that he would be named the Orangeburg chapter's Kappa Man of the Year.

Kappa Alpha Psi brothers presented Salley with the honor during a holiday event in Orangeburg Dec. 6.

Since 1973, Salley has been an active supporter of the fraternity's national and Orangeburg chapters.

His classmate from 50 years ago, Melvin Smoak said, "It was a pleasure to recommend someone so deserving." Despite Salley's schedules and commitments, Smoak said, "He always makes time for projects in the community, and he encourages the older and younger brothers to stay involved."

The chapter's polemarch, Antron Williams, expressed how consistent and engaged Salley has been over the years.

"Whatever needs doing, he just steps in and does it, in the chapter and in the community," Williams said.

A 1989 initiate of the Orangeburg Alumni Chapter, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc., Salley has impressed many with his prowess in growing impactful relationships. In addition to his dedication to his home chapter, he is an avid supporter of his alma mater, South Carolina State University, where in 2022 Salley established an endowed scholarship.

Salley is the president and CEO of Africa University (Tennessee) Inc., where he works to inspire the next generation of leaders to excel in their endeavors.

Africa University is a Pan-African higher education ministry of The United Methodist Church. The university opened in 1992 with 40 students from six African countries. It now has an annual enrollment of more than 2,400 students representing 25 African nations.

Dan O'Mara elected chair of United Methodist Association of Communicators


O'Mara

Dan O'Mara, director of communications for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, has been elected as the new chairperson of United Methodist Association of Communicators.

Kristen Caldwell, communications manager for the Oregon-Idaho Conference, has been elected as vice chair.

The two replace the Rev. Todd Rossnagel, who is stepping down as chair and transitioning into the role of chair emeritus, and Dr. Tim Jones, who stepped down as vice chair but will continue to serve on the leadership team.

"Communication is at the heart of any connection, and the United Methodist Connection is no exception," O'Mara said. "Perhaps now more than ever, communicators are called on to do more than simply share information. By leaning into our shared purpose, communicators reinforce the connection and help churches, ministries and the people spread the Gospel in a world hungering for good news. I'm looking to the future of UMAC with hope and genuine excitement."

UMAC is a community of faith that seeks to communicate and carry out the mission of the UMC.

Viewpoints

Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

Come and see

Sometimes, even if you already know the stories and think you understand the pain or the history, it's important to go, learn and see, to walk for your own in the steps of those who walked before you.

That's the lesson I am taking from a recent trip I made to visit Penn Center, on historic St. Helena's Island (see article, Page 1). I'd heard so much of the history about the place, a former longtime school for once-enslaved people, that I assumed I didn't really "need" to go and see. For me, I simply "wanted" to tag along with the large group of United Women in Faith who made a pilgrimage to the site from churches across South Carolina, there to learn together about the history and impact of that place upon this state and its people.

Yet when I arrived, when I stood among the handcrafted items and gazed upon the artwork, when I walked through the rooms and took in the old photographs and carefully documented accounts, my heart rose as the Spirit stirred within me.

These people walked here. They made and changed history here.

And now the duty rests upon my shoulders to share their stories and their passion, to add my eyes and ears to those who stand in witness to the fruits of their labors.

Just like that, I went from "participant" to fully engaged. All it took was making the time to sign up and actually go, something that can get overlooked in the busy lives we all live.

Sometimes, it's necessary to give our time, our fully present selves, to really understand the messages we need to hear. That day, I needed to be at Penn Center, to bask in history and hear the stories of men and women who struggled to be the difference they wished to see in the world.

It's a message Jesus issues to us all, as well. In the Gospel of John, we're told how two disciples, curious about Jesus and his work, asked Jesus where he was staying.

"Come and see," Jesus said (John 1:39 NLT).

Andrew was one of those disciples, and he did indeed come and see. He spent the rest of the day with Jesus, then rushed to find his brother, Simon Peter, stating he'd found the Messiah.

Word spread. The next day, Phillip—from the same hometown as Andrew and possibly someone he knew well—was invited to spend time with Jesus. In turn, he invited his friend, Nathanael. When Nathanael questioned him, Phillip echoed the same thing Jesus said.

"Come and see," he invited Nathanael (John 1:46).

All four of these men came and saw, ultimately becoming disciples of Christ. They could have decided they needed to be out fishing, earning an income for their families. They could have chosen any number of other things instead.

But like Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who sat at Jesus's feet and learned instead of doing her household chores, these men chose the better way.

In going to Penn Center that Saturday, I also chose the better way.

Consider today: What is God calling you to come and see today? What is nudging for your attention and your witness? Who might need your time and attention?

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Bishop's Corner

by Bishop Leonard E. Fairley

Holes in the darkness

The instructions were simple enough: "Please bring a coat and a flashlight." However, my being cold natured, I remembered the coat but forgot the flashlight. I stumbled over the exposed cypress tree roots, barely making it down to the lakeshore and almost missing the sunrise at the Easter sunrise service.

We often miss the light that is Jesus Christ when we are stumbling through the darkness of the wilderness distracted by the tyranny of the urgent, but God always provides light for our darkness and hope for our despair.

"Again, Jesus spoke to them saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of the world'" (John 8:12).

There is a story told about Robert Louis Stevenson, who spent his childhood in Edinburgh, Scotland, in the 1850s. One evening at dusk, with his face pinned to the window, he became fascinated by the lamplighter. He was mesmerized by the lighting of the street's gas lamps that were setting the night ablaze with light. With great excitement he rushed to his father shouting, "Look at that man! He's punching holes in the darkness."

The season of Lent can feel like the dark night of the soul as we journey through the wilderness towards Easter. "Punching holes in the darkness" is what Jesus came into the world to do.

Whatever wilderness darkness is causing you to stumble, may Jesus, the light of the world, guide you through the darkness.

"In him there is no darkness at all; the night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God, shine in my heart, Lord Jesus" (Kathleen Thomerson).

We need not be afraid of the wilderness of Lent because we do not journey without a light to guide us. The journey leads us toward the light of redemption, salvation and reconciliation. The light of Christ is with us no matter the wilderness. It might be Friday, but Sunday is coming!

Letters to the Editor

No home

Immigration is a serious problem in our society today. Let us remember that these people are God's children, too. In the Upper Room devotion each day, Christians all over the world contribute devotions. Christians are worldwide (John 3:16). Let us not label and judge these migrants as evil and enemies. There will be some who break the law. Many of these are innocent migrants trying to escape horrible conditions in their country, such as poverty or death of loved ones. Many of us who have visited the so-called Third World know these conditions.

A minister in tears shared the story of a family from Honduras. His church had given this Christian family a safe sanctuary, and now the family is fearful to go to work or be seen in public. These immigrants are landscapers, construction workers, janitors and farm workers, doing the work no one wants to do. Will your church be a safe sanctuary (Matthew 19:19)?

Jesus and his family fled to Egypt (Matthew 2:13), and in the Old Testament the Israelites were in exile. Migration has always been a part of history. Just look at America.

There are some who want just a White America. We are thankful to have been born in the United States. It is wrong to ignore the Constitution, especially Amendment 14, which is 157 years old. This amendment grants citizenship, equal protection and due process to all people born or naturalized in the United States.

Jesus calls us to love and to promote justice with mercy. Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden" (Matthew 11:28).

Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia

Children in church

Jesus welcomed children. When the disciples tried to hush them and send them away, the Master said, "Let the children come to me … for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:16 ESV).

When I hear a child in a service, I smile. Very seldom does the child's voice drown out the preacher's voice. For me, the child's crying does not disturb the sanctity of the sanctuary. It might distract the preacher a wee bit, but he or she will get over it. If not, that preacher might need to remember the calling that led her/him to the pulpit.

In my judgment, the Lord never calls a pastor to serve adults only. The church is called "the family of God." Families have children who must be welcomed, celebrated and cherished.

In the sanctuary, the mindfulness of being in the presence of God should stir us to reverence, to confession and to thanksgiving. That's true. But it might be cruel to expect a child to sit still and quiet for an hour when they could be running about with other children in the nursery.

See "Letters," Page 5

Letters Policy

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

UMCSC Recipe Swap

Imperial Chicken Roll-Ups

From the kitchen of: Maureen King, member of Bethel United Methodist Church, Spartanburg

Ingredients:
3/4 C butter melted
2 cloves garlic—pressed
1/2 C fine dry bread crumbs
2/3 C grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 C minced fresh parsley
1 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. pepper
Chicken breasts—sliced into thin strips
Juice of 2 lemons
Dash paprika

Combine garlic and butter. Stir well. Combine breadcrumbs, cheese, parsley, salt and pepper. Stir well.

Dip chicken strips in butter mixture and then coat with bread crumb mixture. Fold long side of chicken together, make a roll and secure with toothpick.

Place seam side down in greased 13x9-inch pan.

Sprinkle with lemon juice and paprika.

Bake one hour at 350 degrees.

Recipes Wanted

Do you have a favorite recipe? Email news@advocatesc.org, and don't forget to tell us your name, church name and city.

LETTERS: Sounding off

From Page 4

During my early teens, we lived only two doors from the church. I cannot recall the circumstances, but one Sunday, I took my younger sisters, both younger than age 5 at the time, to an evening service. We sat near the back. There were a good deal younger than I, and they squirmed and giggled. I tried to hush them, but they continued to giggle. Fairly quickly, I marched them right out of the service and back to the house.

Did I overreact? I am sure that I did. I am also sure I was motivated by the conviction that the sanctuary is a place for quiet reverence and communion with God. Does that mean that children should be school-age before attending worship services? No. A resounding, "No!"

I think God is pleased to hear a child in the Sunday service. That child is learning about worship and about reverence. That child is learning that there is something very special about the sanctuary. The child's crying is not the problem—our super sensitivity is the problem.

And so, my question to us all is: Have we created an artificial setting for worship?

Rev. Mickey Fisher, retired
Spartanburg

One last thought

As I responded to questions regarding my column ("And What Will Be Next?", February *Advocate*), I was struck by a question I heard over and over. What does it say about the leadership of The United Methodist Church and the authority of the *Book of Discipline* when, clearly, a law is broken and there are no consequences for those responsible? Did the bishop and the trustees of our conference know what they were doing or were they simply ignorant of the law?

Let's face it, neither response inspires trust and confidence. In the real world, ignorance of the law is not accepted as a defense. As I have mentioned before, I have been doing this for 42 years, with 27 of those years as an Army chaplain. I did not agree with the stance of the church on the issues of homosexuality. When the military gave permission to perform same-sex marriage, I was bound by the *Book of Discipline* and had to refuse to officiate marriages for gay and lesbian couples. Is the current leadership bound by the same rules? I guess the new motto is, "It is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission."

What is the point of having all these rules, regulations and laws if there is no accountability? Is it any wonder that people are leaving not just our church but organized religion? They are tired of the nonsense. I know we are a connectional church, but people want the opportunity to be directly involved in ministry and missions in our own communities—halfway houses, food banks, homeless shelters, providing meals, soup kitchens and so on. Sunday services are not enough. We have become so consumed by the bureaucracy of "doing church" that we have lost the concept of being the church.

I am afraid if we don't change, we will die.

Rev. Mark Thompson, pastor
Gilbert UMC, Gilbert

Cognitive Connection

by the Rev. Alston Lippert

Tips for visiting people with dementia

I have a soft spot in my heart for people who have dementia. My father had Parkinson's disease and the dementia that comes with that, and the parents of two of my childhood friends developed Alzheimer's disease as they aged.

Because of my experiences with dementia, I was eager to take Bishop Kenneth Carder's class about offering pastoral care for people with dementia when I was in seminary. It was a wonderful class, and I learned things that I use in my work as the associate pastor of nurture at Washington Street United Methodist Church. The thing is, no one needs any training to visit someone with dementia; they just have to be willing to let God use them to show divine love to that person and their caregiver.

The main thing to remember when visiting is that this person is a beloved child of God. Even though their mind isn't working like it once did, they still have value and worth. Even though people with dementia can sometimes be hard to talk to, with patience and creativity, you can do it. You just need a heart filled with love and the willingness to join them wherever their mind might be that day.

Since visiting someone with dementia is a daunting prospect for many, I thought I'd share some tips I have found useful:

1. Pictures are great

Showing pictures of the church they attend or the one they grew up in can start conversation. Ask them about their favorite memories of attending, what their favorite hymns are, what their wedding was like or anything they might be reminded of by looking at the picture. You never know what you might learn.

Pictures of family that are around the room also serve to start conversation. You can ask about the people in the family pictures. Even if you don't know the people or they have them mixed up, the conversation serves as a way to get them engaged.

Magazines—especially ones about birds or gardening—are great because they have wonderful pictures. Even for non-verbal people, looking at a magazine together while you point out pretty flowers and birds and talk about them can be a way to connect. A good magazine for this is "Birds and Blooms," but any magazine that has some of these pictures will do.

2. Music triggers memory

Experts say that the last part of our memory to vanish is that associated with music. Many people with dementia like to listen to music

Play music from their youth on your phone. You can pull up songs on YouTube or a streaming service.

Play familiar hymns.

I am always in awe of the effect music has on people. On numerous occasions, I have played an old hymn to someone I was visiting and not only seen their eyes light up in recognition but listened to them as they sang along—even though they were unable to carry on a conversation.

3. Be present where they think they are

Most people with dementia have faulty short-term memory, but sometimes their long-term memory is fine. This can lead to them confusing past and present. If that happens, just go along with wherever the person with dementia leads the conversation. If they tell you they just got back from their high school graduation, ask them how it went, what they wore and who they saw there.

Don't try to bring them back into the present. Those memories are very real for them—so don't shock them by trying to bring them back to the present day. Let them enjoy what they perceive is reality.

When they are talking about the past, pay attention.

You never know when you will learn something amazing about the person that you didn't know.

4. Educate yourself to feel comfortable

There are great books available to make interacting with people who have dementia less intimidating. Two of my favorites are Jolene Brackey's "Creating Moments of Joy," which is full of tips on how to make the life of a person with dementia better and more enjoyable; and Bishop Kenneth Carder's "Ministry with the Forgotten."

Dementia is a disease that isolates the people who have it and their caregivers at the exact time that they need love, companionship and support the most. I hope these tips will encourage you to visit someone you know that has dementia. It'll make their day—and yours.

Lippert is the secretary of the South Carolina Cognitive Connection Ministry's steering team.

The South Carolina Cognitive Connection Ministry is an ecumenical initiative spearheaded by The United Methodist Church. For information on upcoming workshops in your area or to find out how you can get involved, go to the Cognitive Connection Ministry Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/61561413972152 or email cognitive@umcsc.org.

Guest Commentary

by C.J. Haselden

Why I go to church

I think you can be a Christian and have a great relationship and godly walk with Christ without attending a church. But you miss so much by not being with other worshippers and joining in with the singing and prayer concerns and the joys of those we know and others whose names are mentioned at prayer time.

Take this past Sunday for instance, going to church. First, I am blessed to be able to get up and go. My drive is about 11 miles through the country. I'm also thankful that my truck started and thankful for the heater working. Before I even get on the road, I'm blessed in so many ways. I see someone cutting grass on Sunday morning and wonder if it is really that important. I wish I had the nerve to stop and invite them to church or ask them about their relationship with Christ. (They may be more "religious" than I am. I'm sure not to judge.)

Going on down the road, I see a deer standing. Then I pass a stream (we used to call it Spring Run). We used to fish there with my young buddies when we were growing up in that little town of Scranton. My thoughts go back to those boys I went with. Some have really done well for themselves. Some have passed away, and some of us are still here.

I'm early for Sunday school (very rare, but it happens sometimes), and I walk through the cemetery right behind the church. Oh, the memories! Some real saints are buried out there, ones who built our church and ones who built our lives by their faithfulness and dedication.

Then the time comes to actually go into the church. My mind and soul are filled with thoughts before the service begins. I see where the stained-glass windows are so pretty with the sun shining and see they were given in memory of those who've passed away. Some who gave the windows are not with us anymore.

I look up front at the choir loft. I remember such good old hymn singing. So many people come back to my memory. I remember Polly Driggers, Juanita Sparrow and Rauzy Altman singing such beautiful melodies and harmonizing so well. Thoughts come of John Lee, who was not afraid to sing out loud, and Omena Day, with her unique voice on the front row in the choir.

I look at a certain pew where Willie Weatherford's family sat, and I remember his great prayers when called on to pray. He would get out of his pew and kneel on the floor. Frank Borkowitz and John Lee and Uncle Julian and others offering their morning prayers in the congregation also come to my mind.

Seeing Jessie Collins (we called her "Aunt Jessie"), I remember her black Ford Falcon leaving church, starting out with the clutch half in and half out! She taught us in Methodist Youth Fellowship on Sunday nights. Later, she was confined to the nursing home, and I know I was far more blessed to see her than she was to see me.

I can still remember where a lot of people sat. Those who were farmers tried to get a seat at an open window because there was no air conditioning. I remember how the ladies would fix snacks for us at vacation Bible school. It was nothing fancy, as they were busy on the farm or working in town, but we enjoyed it. I think back on all those members and friends we had. Some still come here. Some have passed away.

All these thoughts race through my mind. I know I have been truly blessed to have been raised in this church by my parents, grandparents and members of this church. It was a comfort to be a part of all this. I hope it made a better person of me, and I hope I may have been an inspiration to someone.

Well, it's time for the preacher to start his sermon, so I will listen and realize how fortunate I am to be in church. Some folks are shut-ins and are unable to attend because of health reasons. But I'm sure if you asked them, they would probably say with a smile on their face, "I wish I was able to go to church like I did so many years ago."

Haselden is a lay speaker at Scranton United Methodist Church, Scranton.

Humanity Behind Bars

by the Rev. Nichole Middleton

Dismantling the shackles that bind

In my role as a prison chaplain, I have had the opportunity to witness the enormous capacity for transformation in those who find faith during their season of incarceration. While many view prisoners through the lens of their past actions, I see them as individuals in need of grace, compassion and the opportunity for redemption. Pastoral care is a lifeline for those who feel forgotten, offering not only a sense of purpose in a place often devoid of hope but also a path for spiritual healing.

When I walk behind prison walls, I carry more than just the keys to the institution. I carry the weight of human suffering, broken families and the dreams of individuals who long for reconciliation and a second chance.

Through it all, my ministry is guided by the principles of Wesleyan theology, which stresses grace—not just for the deserving, but for the marginalized and the broken. Wesley's understanding of grace is transformative, extending even to those society deems unworthy of mercy. The unmerited favor of God is available to all, and it is through this grace that inmates are able to heal and envision a future beyond the walls that confine them.

This kind of grace reminds me of the words of Audre Lorde, a poet and activist who said, "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own." Lorde's words resonate because, like many others, she faced being "othered" by society.

As we wrestle with issues like human dignity and justice in the United Methodist Church, especially concerning marginalized groups, Lorde's wisdom calls us to question how we embody mercy and justice. The way we embrace others, especially those who have been cast aside, reflects our commitment to justice for all.

The call to love our neighbors as ourselves is clear in Scripture, yet it is often conditional, especially when dealing with the weak, vulnerable and disenfranchised. In the context of incarceration, we must ask: Are we truly living out this calling? Are we willing to extend mercy to those who society prefers to forget? In the spirit of Christ's love, grace must extend to those whom society has cast to the margins, offering the opportunity for redemption to those who may not seem worthy.

In my work with incarcerated adults, I have seen firsthand the transformative power of pastoral care. Faith provides not just comfort but also a compass, guiding individuals toward a future of dignity and community reintegration. This transformation, however, cannot happen in isolation. Reentry into society is not just about opening the gates; it requires breaking down the systemic barriers that prevent individuals from fully participating in society. Housing, employment and education opportunities are often out of reach, and the stigma of being an "ex-offender" follows them, much like the scars of past sins.

Wesleyan theology teaches that grace is not just a single moment of salvation but an ongoing process of sanctification. For those who have served their time and are seeking a new path, it is our Christian duty to provide not only forgiveness of sins but also the resources necessary for reintegration into society. This means addressing the systemic inequalities that affect marginalized groups, including those returning from incarceration. The struggle for justice is not only about individual acts of kindness but about challenging the societal structures that keep people imprisoned, even after their sentence has been served.

The biblical mandate to care for the "least of these" extends to the incarcerated and marginalized. But we must ask ourselves: Are we truly living out this calling? Mercy and justice are not just ideals; they must be enacted in real, often messy, circumstances. Reconciliation and transformation require more than just compassion; they demand that we actively work to dismantle the societal structures that perpetuate injustice.

The Church's commitment to justice must extend to those who have been incarcerated and marginalized, regardless of their past mistakes or identity. This commitment reflects Christ's love for all humanity—a society where transformation, dignity and grace are accessible to everyone.

To live out our calling as followers of Christ, we must actively support the reintegration of those who have paid their debt to society, offering them grace, opportunities and a pathway to redemption.

As we move toward a more inclusive and just society, we must consider Lorde's words and think about how we can dismantle the shackles that bind not only the bodies of the incarcerated but also the hearts of those who are made to feel "other."

By doing so, we will be fulfilling our divine calling to love our neighbors, extend grace and work toward justice for all.

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 currently serves as a chaplain in the federal prison system, dedicating her work to providing spiritual care, advocating for justice and supporting the transformation and reintegration of incarcerated individuals.

Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Amiri Hooker

When justice becomes a threat: The moral crisis of dismantling DEI

Living in America today requires a keen awareness of history and a steadfast commitment to justice. As an African American deeply rooted in faith, I find myself continually affirming—both subtly and explicitly—that I am a full citizen of this country. The struggles of the past are not relics of history; they are ever-present realities shaping our future.

President Donald Trump's executive orders to dismantle diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives within the federal government—and its grantees and contractors—put long-standing policies and programs against discrimination on the chopping block.

This recent assault on DEI serves as a stark reminder of a larger truth.

Political leaders like President Trump, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Texas Gov. Greg Abbott have launched aggressive campaigns to roll back DEI initiatives across federal agencies, universities and corporations. Their justification? A claim that DEI fosters division rather than unity.

But let's be clear—these actions aren't about promoting harmony; they're about silencing crucial conversations on race, justice, systemic inequality and wealth disparity.

This backlash against DEI is part of a broader movement to erase the hard-won gains of the civil rights movement. The national reckoning sparked by the murder of George Floyd in 2020 has been met not with transformative change but with book bans, attacks on affirmative action and policies designed to suppress discussions of systemic racism.

These actions force us to confront a fundamental moral question: Do we truly believe in justice, fairness and the dignity of all people?

DEI initiatives were never about granting special privileges; they were created to ensure that workplaces, schools and public institutions reflect the full diversity of America. These programs promote equitable hiring practices, inclusive work environments and fair access to education—values that align with the biblical mandate for justice.

The prophet Micah reminds us: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8, NRSVue).

Justice is not a passive ideal; it requires action. DEI initiatives are one way society has sought to act justly, ensuring that opportunity is based on ability and dignity rather than race, gender, disability or economic status.

The elimination of DEI programs does more than undo progress—it weakens the very fabric of innovation and community cohesion. Studies consistently show that diverse teams outperform homogeneous ones, bringing fresh perspectives and strengthening problem-solving.

Organizations that abandon DEI risk losing top talent, particularly among younger generations who prioritize inclusivity. Without DEI, barriers remain unchecked, bias flourishes and inequality deepens.

In education, DEI programs provide historically underrepresented students with the resources they need to succeed. Without these initiatives, the achievement gap widens, making it harder for first-generation college students, low-income students and students of color to access higher education.

A less diverse student body leads to a less diverse workforce—one ill-prepared for an increasingly globalized world.

Beyond education, DEI fosters social cohesion by affirming the biblical truth that all people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). When institutions fail to prioritize inclusion, individuals feel alienated, leading to greater tensions, declining trust and a fractured society.

Despite decades of discussions about inclusivity, many institutions—especially the church—remain deeply segregated. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously lamented that "the most segregated hour in America is 11 o'clock on Sunday morning." Post-COVID-19, the time is 9:30, but this truth remains unchanged. While denominations like The United Methodist Church have long spoken of inclusivity, local congregations often remain divided along racial and cultural lines.

Yet the true calling of the church is not to reflect the status quo—it is to be a prophetic witness to God's justice.

The effort to dismantle DEI is framed as a battle over ideology, but in reality, it is a battle for the soul of our society. Rather than eliminating DEI efforts, we should be asking how to strengthen them—how to ensure they effectively serve all communities and create a more just world.

If America is to move forward, it must reckon with its history and reimagine its future—not as a battleground of competing narratives but as a shared space where all voices are honored and all lives are valued.

The work of justice is never finished; it requires vigilance, courage and moral clarity.

In Matthew 25, Jesus makes it clear that our faithfulness will be measured by how we treat "the least of these." The dismantling of DEI programs is not just a policy issue—it is a direct challenge to our commitment to love our neighbor, seek justice and live out the radical inclusivity of the Gospel.

Our task is not simply to observe history but to shape it—to ensure that the voices of the marginalized are not erased but centered. We must build a society where diversity is not a threat but a source of collective strength.

The question before us is not whether DEI programs should exist, but whether we, as a nation and as people of faith, are willing to stand for justice, equity and the dignity of all.

This is the challenge of our time. Will we rise to meet it?

Hooker is an elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and the congregational specialist for the Florence and Marion districts.

Are you passionate about an issue facing your community, state, nation or world? Consider writing an opinion piece for submission to the Advocate*. All voices are welcome; we strive for fairness and balance. Email news@advocatesc.org.*

Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Joseph Abram Jr.

Be careful what we ask for

"But the people refused to listen to Samuel. 'No!' they said. 'We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.'"—1 Samuel 8:19-20 (NIV)

I read a church marquee sign during the Halloween season that said, "If the devil offers you a treat, it must be a trick." Sometimes God gets tired, I believe, of our lies. Anyone might alter the truth to spare a life or even needless pain in a relationship. However, just to lie for the sake of lying—blatantly lying when there is nothing to lose or gain—is incomprehensible. It is hard to imagine that such a supposedly intelligent and sophisticated nation as America would be so gullible and foolish to look away, proving again that stupid is as stupid does, despite claims of inherent superiority.

The Book of Samuel shares a very interesting story of a people who wanted a king, even though God was their king, because other nations had an earthly king. Samuel, God's appointee, had gotten older, and his godly leadership was in doubt. People forgot God had everything under control. They were warned of the danger of their request, that all the freedoms, properties, status, children's futures, etc., were at risk. Their collective voices were heard and their demand fulfilled, and collectively they would be blessed or suffer under the kingship they desired.

It is as if time has stood still, for I have heard a similar cry and demand in America of late for a king, a king like some other nations—one who will govern and tell us what to do and fight our battles, even if we do not like it. As in the time of old, we have been warned of the ramifications of our demands. Warnings come from all over our great nations and world. Warnings come from notable patriots whose character and commitments to our country are unquestionable, and from those who have firsthand knowledge of the mindset (or lack thereof) of the proposed king, all of which most sane, intelligent people can easily verify and would have thwarted most individuals from consideration to even be a citizen of such a supposedly great nation.

Again, we were warned that crops of progress would be trampled, freedoms would be rescinded, our children's mental and physical possibilities would be limited and vastly reduced, and the nation would be an easy target for renegade nations that prey on divisive and confused nations. A house divided cannot stand, and neither can a nation. It takes a nation's patriots to defend a nation, and not a nation wherein many of its citizenry are disenfranchised. It is asking and expecting too much for anyone to sacrifice one's life to defend a nation in which he/she has been excluded.

I was told as a little child to practice getting under my desk at school because the Russians were coming, but I did not really believe I would witness that in my lifetime, and I certainly did not believe that it would be by invitation, by red-carpet from America's leaders, while they terrorized us and our allies. We were warned, warned that "We had not seen nothing yet!"

For me, despite my lament, there is still hope, that once we have experienced our Sheol, aka Hell, unless we really are sick, we will seek another way. I believe God awaits that decision to transform his wayward people again. In the meantime, remember the story of the potter, how God can make over again those yielding and breaking those who stubbornly resist.

I am betting on God while we fast, pray and fight like our lives and the life of our nation depend upon it, because they do!

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

Photo by Jessica Brodie

Good neighbors

Columbia College representatives joined Bishop Leonard Fairley and staff at the South Carolina United Methodist Conference Center Jan. 29 for a collaborative partnership meeting, sharing dialogue about how the two can better work together to be stronger, better neighbors. Columbia College is located across the street from the UMCSC conference center, and the longtime neighboring entities share an interest in working together to build up and love their surrounding community and its people. "Proximity is important," Fairley (far right) said, noting he grew up in a neighborhood much like the one surrounding the conference center. "We need to be visible and be present." Here, Columbia College President John Dozier (second from right) shares about an upcoming community 5K the college is planning, which the conference also plans to take part in.

Love grows here

A glimpse into Anderson's South Main Chapel and Mercy Center

By Sandy Thrasher

ANDERSON—Tucked away in the heart of Anderson, South Main Chapel and Mercy Center is more than just a church. It is a hub of compassion, service and community, where people from all walks of life come together in faith and fellowship.

Guided by the belief that "we are all God's children," South Main Chapel and Mercy Center has built a mission around serving the underserved and marginalized. Through their outreach efforts, they provide vital services to those in need, including hot meals, transportation assistance, health care access and support for those seeking rehabilitation and housing.

A mission rooted in service

Each week, South Main Chapel and Mercy Center serves breakfast and lunch five days a week, totaling more than 15,600 hot meals annually. On Sundays after worship, the congregation gathers for a meal provided by a rotating group of "compassion partners"—churches, organizations and individuals who prepare and serve lunch.

This cross-denominational support includes Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Episcopalian and United Methodist congregations, as well as independent groups and volunteers who embrace the mission. Their collective efforts reflect the teachings of Luke 14:12-13, where Jesus calls believers to extend their hospitality beyond close friends and family, inviting those who are often overlooked in society.

"What a joy it is to see people from various backgrounds and faith traditions come together to serve," said the Rev. Kurt Stutler, who leads South Main. "It's a beautiful example of God's love in action."

South Main Chapel and Mercy Center has built a mission around serving the underserved and marginalized. Through their outreach efforts, they provide vital services to those in need, including hot meals, transportation assistance, health care access and support for those seeking rehabilitation and housing.

Beyond the table: meeting practical needs

The church's outreach extends well beyond meals.

Over the past year, South Main Chapel and Mercy Center has:

- distributed 8,300 sack lunches to those facing food insecurity;
- provided 5,500 bus tickets to help individuals reach essential services;
- facilitated 1,000 hot showers for people experiencing homelessness; and
- offered 500 Uber rides through their "Ride to Work Anderson" program, which provides 12 weeks of daily transportation for a $5 fee, helping newly employed workers save for their own transportation.

Through the Mercy Center, individuals receive assistance with housing placement, rehabilitation programs, obtaining identification documents and more. An onsite nurse practitioner is available four days a week to provide nonemergency medical care.

A community that laughs, learns and grows together

While meeting basic needs is essential, South Main Chapel and Mercy Center also prioritizes fellowship and spiritual connection. Weekly activities foster a sense of belonging, including Moving on Monday, with a game day led by MawMaw, Stutler's mother, who plays FastTrack with her many unofficially adopted grandchildren; Turn Around Tuesday, with Angela from Alston Wilkes Society's community service; Wisdom Wednesday Craft Day, encouraging creativity and conversation; Thankful Thursday Bible Study, a time for deeper reflection and discussion; and daily chapel, providing spiritual nourishment to all who attend.

An open invitation

South Main Chapel and Mercy Center continues to be a beacon of hope in Anderson, welcoming all who seek connection, support and faith.

"For us, this isn't just about service—it's about relationships," Stutler said. "We break bread together, we pray together and we walk this journey together. Love grows here."

Visitors and volunteers are always welcome to experience firsthand the transformative work happening at South Main.

Learn more at https://southmainmercy.org.

Thrasher is Anderson District lay leader.

South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty protests upcoming Sigmon execution, laments execution of Bowman

South Carolinians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty is speaking out again this month, this time against the scheduled execution of Brad Sigmon.

On Feb. 7, the South Carolina Supreme Court issued an execution warrant for Sigmon, who is scheduled to be executed on March 7.

"Brad Sigmon is not the 'worst of the worst.' He is someone from an impoverished background who was ill-equipped to defend himself in a court of law because of undiagnosed and inherited mental illness," said United Methodist pastor the Rev. Hillary Taylor, SCADP's executive director. "He has not been involved in a single violent incident in his more than twenty years on death row. Because of his maturity and respect, security officers recognize him as a good influence on his fellow prisoners and have trusted him with many responsibilities, including passing out food trays, cleaning, running the laundry, and 'assist[ing] the community with whatever they need.' Executing the man Brad is today because of the tormented and ill man he was would accomplish nothing. It would only deprive the many people who have come to appreciate and rely upon Brad—his family, prisoners, guards and ministers—of his example and aid."

Taylor and others in the SCADP are calling on Gov. Henry McMaster to commute Sigmon's sentence to life.

Sigmon's execution comes after the Jan. 31 execution of Marion Bowman, which SCADP also protested. Bowman was executed for the murder of Kandee Martin.

Taylor said the state made a "grievous mistake" and executed someone with a wrongful conviction claim.

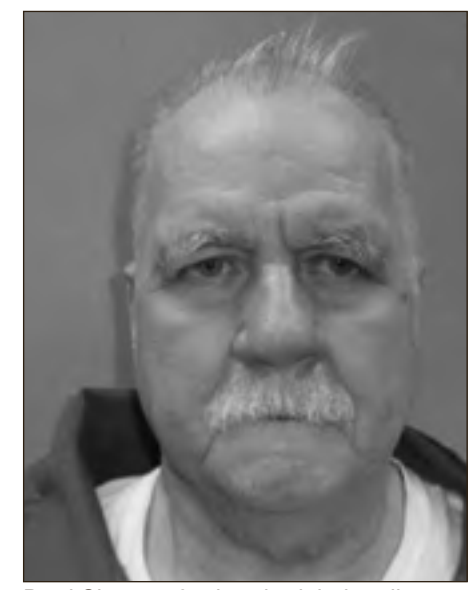


Photo courtesy South Carolina Department of Corrections

Brad Sigmon, 67, is scheduled to die on March 7. Sigmon was convicted of murder in the 2001 deaths of David and Gladys Larke and the kidnapping of their daughter, Rebecca Barbre.

"Even though Marion Bowman maintained his innocence of Kandee Martin's murder consistently for over 20 years, our legal system denied him the ability to tell his story in full throughout the process," Taylor said. "Marion Bowman's case now joins the infamy of George Stinney Jr.'s case, another young Black person with discriminatory and ineffective legal representation convicted of killing a White woman with no forensic evidence because the prosecution prioritized political victory instead of criminal accountability."

The mission of SCADP is to abolish the death penalty and catalyze criminal justice reform in South Carolina.

Most of the quilts go to people who are hurting.

Patterson has made 100 quilts in the last few years.

The church sewing group is called “Sew What.”

One hundred quilts and counting

Augusta Road member shares story behind her church’s sewing ministry

By Dr. Shawn Armstrong

As an elder, I have always thought deeply about the church’s role in teaching our young people how to survive in times of trouble, such as how to coupon to save money, how to cook and how to sew. That is why I was so excited to find out that Augusta Road United Methodist Church, Piedmont, actually had a free weekly sewing group to help beginners learn the craft of sewing.

The instructor of this very relaxed course is Beth Patterson, and she has just finished her 100th quilt. These quilts are beautiful works of art, and since most of the quilts go to people who are hurting in the church and community, it has been such a blessing to see the reactions of those who have been recipients.

This week, I got a chance to sit down with Beth and ask her a few questions:

Me: Beth, when was your first experience with a sewing machine and what was it like?

Beth: The first time I ever sewed on a machine was back in the mid 1970s in home economics. We all had to learn sewing, and I chose to make bib overalls. Well, back then all the girls had long straight hair. Mine was down to my waist. I somehow managed to sew my hair to my pants! After the teacher stopped laughing, she had to cut my hair to get it out. After that, I never sewed again until about five years ago.

Me: LOL, I had a similar experience in middle school home economics class. What was it like when you had the courage to pick up sewing again?

Beth: I got it into my head I was going to learn to quilt. I bought a basic Brother machine at Walmart on sale for $40. I bought a book and some fabric, and soon found out you really cannot learn quilting from a book. While talking to people at church, I found out that many fabric stores give classes. I took a few classes and learned a lot. Since then, I have found websites that offer free tutorials. I have learned most of what I know from them.

Me: How did sewing begin to intersect with your church life?

Beth: There was a lady at our church who used to make prayer blankets for people who had surgery or were seriously ill. She left the church when her husband became a preacher. There was a child in our church who was in the hospital and terribly ill. We were all praying for him. Another member asked me if anyone was making a prayer blanket for him. How she knew I was learning to quilt I will never know. I could not get it out of my head. I called our pastor and asked if I could get reimbursed for the fabric if I made a quilt for the child. I really could not afford the fabric on my own. I worked hard on that quilt, and it was only the third quilt I had ever made. I was amazed at how much it was appreciated. After about the fourth or fifth quilt, the pastor said I did not need to get approval for every quilt. Now I had a budget!

About three years ago I started a sewing group at church named “Sew What.” We meet weekly. We encourage each other, teach each other and share equipment. It is a wonderful group, and I really enjoy not just sewing, but the fellowship as well.

These days I sew every day and have now made more than 100 quilts. I think about 85 to 90 have gone to the church. I really do not keep track. The Lord always lets me know who needs one, and I am so blessed to be able to do this for people.

Me: What is the best advice you could give to people who are interested in sewing or starting a sewing ministry in the church?

Beth: The best advice I could give anyone wanting to make prayer quilts is to pray, a lot. The Lord will tell you who needs a quilt and even what fabric and pattern to use. Listen a lot and be open to what the Lord is telling you to do. Join or form a sewing group. Sew a lot. While I admit that I spend most of my time making quilts, the blessing that I have received far outweighs the effort I put in.

What a blessing to hear such a wonderful story. Beth, we at Augusta Road United Methodist Church celebrate your hard work in ministering to those in need.

We uphold you in prayer as you begin prayer quilt No. 101.

For additional information on how this special ministry runs, call the church office at 864-243-2829.

Photos by Jessica Brodie

Revolution’s Salkehatchie gathering fosters fellowship

Youth gathered Saturday morning, Jan. 25, during Revolution for a Salkehatchie gathering at Mount Hebron UMC, West Columbia. Existing Salkehatchie youth participants, as well as youth interested in the service mission, got together for some fellowship time, games and snacks (at top, and bottom right), as well as a word from Ward Smith. Salkehatchie board chair, about why the mission experience is so important (pictured, bottom left). Online registration for spring and summer camps opens on March 1 register, go to https://www.salkehatchie.org.

Thank your church administrative professionals and children’s ministry staffers with an ad in the April Advocate

In April, you have the opportunity to recognize administrative professionals and children’s ministry staffers in your church with appreciation ads in the *Advocate*.

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

As well, April is the month of the young child, which is a good time to celebrate the work children’s ministry staffers do with the church’s children.

Three sizes are available (all 5 inches wide): Small (1” tall): $38; medium (2” tall): $76; and large (4” tall): $152.

Email text to atrussell@advocatesc.org or send to 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203; deadline is March 10.

Wesley Foundations

by the Rev. John Sterling Poole

Students worship arm in arm.

Wesley Winter Weekend 2025

Every year, the Wesley Foundations/Fellowships in South Carolina gather together for Wesley Winter Weekend. This year, college students from seven different Wesley Foundations/Fellowships and more than 10 colleges/universities across the South Carolina Conference gathered in Asbury Hills to worship God, meet fellow collegiate Christians and have fun. That is great news.

The theme of the weekend was "Questions," which delved into some of the questions Christ asked in the Gospels. Over the course of four sessions, the following questions were explored: What do you want? Do you believe? Has no one condemned you? and Do you love me?

These are not easy questions for anyone to answer, but for college students, these are particularly challenging and important questions. A college student must consistently deal with these critical questions; college is time of struggle and exploration, and these questions sparked terrific conversation between the students in their small groups.

The worship of the weekend was particularly powerful. On Friday night, the students from Furman Wesley Fellowship led worship. Saturday morning was led by Charleston Wesley Foundation. Saturday night and Sunday morning were led by a combined band made up of students from five different campuses. These students offered up their gifts to bring their peers into a deeper relationship with God, and one could easily see the Spirit moving in the hearts of these young men and women.

To close the weekend, we all gathered together to celebrate the Lord's Supper on Sunday morning. More than 120 college students from all over the state, country and world, from different campuses and Wesley Foundations/Fellowship, from different denominational backgrounds (or lack thereof) partook in the Sacrament. This is good news that we must share with all who have ears.

College students love God and want to know God better, and Wesley Foundations/Fellowships are steadfastly serving this critical mission field. Many students became friends over the weekend, and these students would never have met each other had it not been for this opportunity that was made available by Connectional Ministries and the Wesley Foundations/Fellowships.

College is a challenging place. Wesley Winter Weekend 2025 gave students a great weekend away where they could have fun, meet new friends and worship our good God. Amen.

Poole is the director of the Charleston Wesley Foundation (learn more about it at https://www.wesleychs.org). The South Carolina Wesley Foundations/Fellowship are Charleston, Clemson, Coastal, Frances Marion, Furman, Greenwood, Methodist Student Network (University of South Carolina), Orangeburg, Spartanburg and Winthrop. If you know of any student going to college this upcoming fall, please encourage them to connect with a campus ministry. If you want to learn more about each individual Wesley Foundation and how to support them, go to https://linktr.ee/UMCSCWesley.

Last chance to apply for Advocate scholarship

Scholarship applications are being accepted now for the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate's* annual $1,000 college scholarship.

The scholarship is for South Carolina United Methodist students for the 2025-2026 academic year who are planning to attend or are attending one of the four United Methodist colleges in South Carolina: Claflin University, Columbia College, Spartanburg Methodist College or Wofford College.

Requests for the scholarship are due March 1.

Download the application at https://advocatesc.org/scholarships. For questions, email jbrodie@advocatesc.org.

Need a Children's Sermon?

by the Rev. Meghan Lindsey Sweeney Cook

Lent lint

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

Date: Lent (Ash Wednesday is March 5, and Easter is April 20)

Scripture: Isaiah 58:1-12

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

Children's Sermon:

Say: We are getting ready to enter (or we are in) the season of Lent. Lent is the six weeks before Easter. Lent is a funny word, right? It sounds like lint.

(Hold up lint roller or tape.) Have any of you ever seen someone use one of these? This tool, or trick ("trick" meaning the outward-facing tape), gets fuzzies and things that might be stuck to our clothes off our clothes. We don't want to walk around with trash on our clothes.

(Pause; if you want to be silly or tactile, use the lint roller on a few of the kids' clothes if they are willing or have an adult volunteer demonstrate. The adult can intentionally have fuzzies and stuff on their shirt to really show that the lint roller removes stuff.)

And now that we have removed all the fuzzies and trash, we can throw it away! Tada! A fresh start.

I have heard it described that this season, Lent, is kind of like a lint roller for our life. We use this season to get things out of our life that cling to us but aren't helpful. We might get rid of extra stuff like toys or clothes we have outgrown. We can share gently used items with folks in need. We bless others with our abundance and make our homes less cluttered. Sometimes when I clean up my playroom, I find toys I forgot about and get to enjoy again, and that's a fun blessing! We discover things about ourselves we might have forgotten.

We can also use this season called Lent to get rid of attitudes or ways of thinking that aren't good for us. Have you ever had a grumpy bunny day? Where everything is just grumpy and grouchy and no good? (Pause.) Me too.

(Pause reflectively.) Those days happen, and that's life. We are human. Lent reminds us that we will have those days, but we are called not to stay in them for too long. We can pray and ask God to help clean up our attitudes. We pray God illuminates—that's a fancy word for shines light on or highlights, our blessings, the good things in our life. We can pray that God will remove the "lint" from our lives.

When we think about the good things and people in our life it's hard to stay grumpy. I like that reminder. Lent is a helpful season!

Ask: Will you pray with me? Repeat after me: Dear God (echo), we love you (echo). Help us (echo) to let go of what we don't need (echo) and grab hold of (echo) our blessings from you (echo). Amen. (echo).

Cook, the pastor of Grace United Methodist Church on Harbison in Columbia, is also the author of two children's books from the Advocate Press: "Herbert the Hippo" and "Herbert the Hippo In the Moment." Find them on Amazon or at https://advocatesc.org/books.

Epworth Children's Home

True service

Theologians and philosophers have often said that love without action is empty. When we love others, love an ideal or love God, we are motivated to serve. Joshua said just before he led the Israelites into the Promised Land that, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

Joshua was resolute that he would lead his family by teaching them, modeling for them what it means to love God in word and action. By its very definition, the word "serve" means to work or labor on behalf of another. In the world in which we live in the 21st century, we know it takes more than words to serve others who have the deepest needs around us. We know it is hard sometimes to give up our own comfort level to help a family or a child in need of a home and safety, but we also know that through demonstrating love for others, we are also serving God.

Since its inception in 1896, Epworth has existed to serve families, children and youth through actions, programs and outreach endeavors. Epworth began its work in the 19th century serving children of all ages who needed a home—a safe, loving, nurturing place to live and grow. Through the years, while it still maintains its residential services, Epworth has added to its mission, addressing the changing needs of our communities and our state.

Today Epworth serves children who have been separated from their parents and provides assistance and support to family caregivers who may be raising a grandchild, nephew or niece. Epworth operates a strong and growing foster family program that brings children and youth into homes of responsible, caring adults. Epworth offers education for those who never really learned how to be parents but want to provide their children with a responsible, loving home. Epworth negotiates with helping agencies to provide services to families so they can sustain their families and even grow stronger. Through its Center for Counseling, its Center for Independent Living, its Family Care Center, its Foster Family Program and several other programs focused on child and family wellbeing, Epworth is bringing its expertise, experience and service to more children and families in South Carolina than ever before.

These children and families are not alone, and Epworth is not alone in its service to them. Because large numbers of communities of faith across South Carolina serve alongside Epworth, we together make families stronger and healthier. Epworth's partnerships with churches all over our state form a network of direct care and service to children and their families that not only makes life more stable for the families themselves but also makes the communities in which they live stronger and healthier. As Epworth and communities of faith work together in putting our love for God in action, the people we serve together are lifted up because they are cared for and valued.

Every time a local church gives an offering to Epworth, every time a group from a church holds a drive for diapers, clothes, car seats and other essential family necessities, that church is serving alongside an Epworth staff member or staff team serving families in their communities in need. Every time a local church offers space for training or offices, that church walks alongside Epworth to serve. Every time a local church provides a meal for an Epworth staff team, they are serving by offering encouragement and thanksgiving to those who work closely with families in their community. Whenever local faith communities bring resources and agencies in their localities together to serve children and families in need, they are helping Epworth build support networks across South Carolina.

Helen Keller once said, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." The collaborative partnerships between faith communities in our state and Epworth are helping Epworth do so much more in reaching and serving children and families who need our support and help. Churches have helped Epworth broaden and deepen the safety net of services to help others in South Carolina.

Together, Epworth and its faith partners are making a difference. There are families, children and youth who thrive because we are serving together to meet the needs of those around us. Epworth and churches together demonstrate love through their actions and their compassion for others. What better way to live out Joshua's words, "As for me and my house, I will serve the Lord."

—Beth Williams, Epworth president and chief executive officer

PENN CENTER: The trip helped the women learn Black history

From Page 1

Justice Committee, whose awareness campaign of encroachment on Black settlement communities in South Carolina has especially focused on the Gullah community on St. Helena Island in Beaufort County. The committee was hopeful a personal tour of the site would not only help people understand a place where significant Black history has taken place in our state, but also understand why it's important to work to preserve such places.

Dr. Marie M. Gibbs of the Penn Center shared the importance of Penn Center with the women gathered; there were so many they spilled beyond a second room of people as women and youth eagerly listened to her presentation.

Gibbs explained that when the Civil War started, slaveowners fled the island and left their slaves behind to fend for themselves, which effectively emancipated them through abandonment. The freed slaves worked with northern abolitionists and others to raise funds to bring teachers to the island and start a school there. Back then, classes were held in the Brick Church with 80 pupils enrolled. Not long after, they purchased land from Hasting Gantt, a freed man, and a new three-room building became what they called Penn School.

Over the years, private donations mostly supported the school, much of the funds from Quakers and other religious groups. Students at the Penn Center learned skills such as masonry, blacksmithing, mechanics and basket-weaving.

As Gibbs explained, "They did academics in the morning and industries in the afternoon."

At its peak, the school had 600 students. Gibbs's ancestor was educated at the school and later returned to serve as a doctor.

It ceased operating as a school in 1948 and turned into a community agency. It was designated a National Historic Landmark District in 1974.

Lexie Chatham, Columbia District United Women in Faith Social Action coordinator, brought women from Mount Hebron UMC, West Columbia, as well as her Bible study teacher at Brookland UMC, West Columbia, on the Penn Center trip. She said it was an experience she will cherish and not forget.

"Growing up in South Carolina, I didn't read about African-American history in our state even in our South Carolina Department of Education-issued state history book in elementary school," Chatham said. "As I grew older and was exposed to more of that culture, I realized how much I had missed in my failure to learn of that rich culture. Hearing the experiences and backgrounds of my African-American friends and their ancestors opened my eyes to both our commonalities and the ways our cultures had differed. I wanted to learn more as I fell in love with their music, arts and beliefs, and I mourned the hardships they had endured."

Photos by Jessica Brodie

Women check out the netting on this bateau (rowboat), a shallow-draft, flat-bottomed boat used extensively across North America and hand-crafted by people on the island. From left are Lexie Chatham, Jan Harmon, Susan Cline and Kathleen Patella.

Chatham said that every year the South Carolina United Women in Faith hold a social action event to celebrate Black History Month. Last year they read and discussed "So You Want to Talk About Race," by Ijeoma Oluo, and this year they will read and discuss "How to Be An Antiracist," by Ibram X. Kendi. The Penn Center trip was meant to complement the readings.

"Some of us had been before, but most had never been to Penn Center. They left in awe of what they learned and saw there, as well as the fellowship that was shared among even people we met for the first time. Our appreciation for Penn Center and African-American history grew and matured," Chathan added.

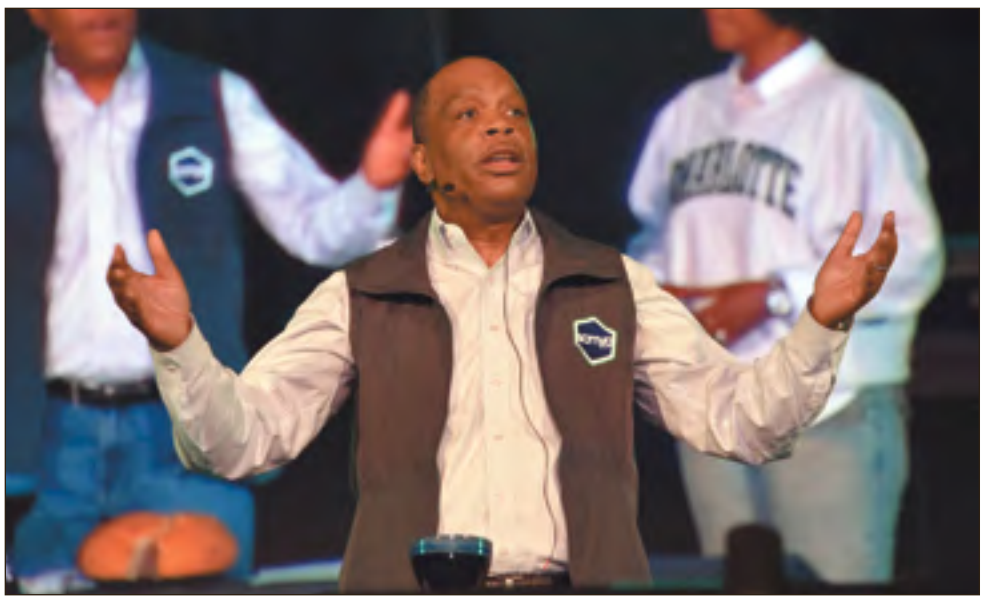
United Women in Faith will continue their educational efforts this month as they gather at Epworth Children's Home in Columbia for Legislative Advocacy Day, an annual event designed to become more knowledgeable about social issues affecting women, children and youth and to become better equipped to bring about the needed changes to address such issues. This year's Legislative Advocacy Day theme will be "Faithful Advocacy; Faithful Service; Transforming Justice and Equity." Program participants include State Representative Dr. Jermaine Johnson, South Carolina School Improvement Council's Dr. Quantina Hagwood and Vivian Anderson, educator and founder of EveryBlackGirl Inc.

To sign up, contact your church's UWF organizer or visit https://www.umcsc.org/women.

A woman checks out some of the artwork on display at the Penn Center.

Women spent much time exploring the art and historical artifacts in the Penn Center museum. Penn Center was a retreat for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders of the movement during the 1960s.

REVOLUTION: A chock-full three days of worship, learning



South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley offers communion to the large crowd.

Jesse Caughman, of Francis Burns UMC, Columbia, leads opening prayer with Chris Lynch.

From Page 1

Fifteen years later, the event is still thriving, responsible for bringing hundreds of youth to Christ and, for some, cementing a call to vocational ministry.

"It was great," Chris Lynch said, summing up the chock-full three days of worship, teaching, preaching and praise filling both the auditorium and those who participated.

Dr. Stephanie Moore Hand served as this year's keynote speaker, sharing a message about what it means to belong to the family of believers. The "Belong" theme for the weekend is based on Ephesians 2:13, which explores how we belong to God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us.

Hand, an author and consultant who serves as a conference vitality strategist and cross-multicultural/multiethnic consultant within the Western North Carolina Conference of the UMC, kicked off the Friday night session with a strong word on godly friends, God's grace and the importance of forgiveness even in the hurt and pain. Drawing from Jesus's parable of the prodigal son, Hand shared how Jesus had a way of pouring into both his "friends and frenemies," ultimately underscoring the powerful message God has for us about his boundless grace and mercy.

"God's grace is sufficient, and his love for us makes us belong to his family," Hand shared as teens listened hard.

As she closed the first session, she posed three questions for all to consider throughout the weekend: Who have you hurt that you need to apologize to? Who hurt you that you have to forgive? And who do you know is hurting who you have to walk alongside?

Punctuating her messages were performances by the Claflin University DREAM Gospel Choir, whose praise songs had the crowd on their feet all weekend.

Lynch said the weekend exceeded his expectations, and he lifted up the Revolution design team that works all year to produce the transformative event.

One of the highlights of the weekend is the call to ministry, which comes toward the end. Those youth feeling a nudge toward a call are encouraged to come forward and receive resources and guidance from leaders.

"I don't remember there ever being a larger response to the call to ministry," Lynch noted, describing how the massive crowd of youth could barely fit onstage together. "It's always cool to see God show up in ways you don't expect."

Bishop Leonard Fairley led communion, and other UMC leaders were on hand to help serve as well as pray with youth who desired.

"It's all just a reminder that the future is still bright in the midst of everything going on in the denomination," Lynch said.

In addition to worship and teaching, plenty of moments of fun were held throughout the weekend, including performances from various youth groups. Union UMC, Irmo's, Leaps of Faith Dance Ministry performed, as did a youth talent praise band and the praise team from Trinity UMC, Blythewood, hitting the stage to give glory to God. Plenty of swag and games rounded out the fun.

For more, see http://scmyp.org/revolution.

Photos by Jessica Brodie and Dan O'Mara

Speaker Dr. Stephanie Moore Hand brings a powerful word during Revolution 2025.

The crowd gets hyped up.

A singer from the Claflin DREAM Gospel Choir lifts praise through song.

Hundreds gather for communion.

Youth have some fun doing the "church clap" dance.

Youth play games in the gym, making new friends while having fun.

Florence District Superintendent the Rev. Terry Fleming teaches.

As Bryant said, "Youth ministry is more fun for the young people when there's more of them."

THE CONNECTION: Youth across the district now gather monthly

From Page 1

the Rev. Maggie Cantey on her work in multichurch, multiracial cooperative youth ministry in the Spartanburg area as well as an analogous experiment in Rock Hill. Inspired, the two hoped to create something similar in the Florence District.

Last fall, Bryant—who pastors Lake City UMC, Lake City—applied for and received a Hope Grant to experiment with The Connection. They kicked off their efforts in August with monthly gatherings throughout the fall.

The gatherings start with games, followed by a free dinner and a short service of music, word and prayer, adapted from the United Methodist Hymnal's "Order for Evening Praise and Prayer."

Bryant said it's been a success, and the youth seem to genuinely enjoy coming together.

"Youth ministry is more fun for the young people when there's more of them and is easier for clergy and laity to do when we work together," Bryant said.

Cultivating 'holy ground'

Attendance has been strong. Their first gathering brought together 57 participants, and one month their attendance neared 90.

Crimm said the gatherings have been heartening, not only because of the chance to see God moving in the hearts of young people, but because it's been evident God's people so desperately need this sort of large-group time together.

"For a people who claim connection, it seems we really did lose grip of one another for a while, Crimm said. "We retreated into ourselves and forgot that God made us to be a part of one body. That one body is called to grow together, to work together, to be nourished together, to enjoy this life in Christ together.

"When we see these young people linked arm in arm as they sing out during our worship, or watch them beeline to that friend they have made from the church across the district, I feel affirmed we are planting seeds and cultivating holy ground."

Bryant agrees.

"Your church's youth and kids are not just 'the church of the future,'" he said. "They're part of your church right now."

Florence District Superintendent the Rev. Terry Fleming said he's enthusiastic about the fruit this new ministry can bear.

"The best, most effective ideas always seem to rise up from the local level," Fleming said. "A small group of pastors in the Florence District recognized a way to reach youth from the variety of congregations in the Florence District.

"For many of the youth and leaders, this is their first time to experience the joy, strength and blessing found in our connection."

Florence youth will gather next March 23 at Bethel UMC, Kingstree, and April 13 at Cumberland UMC, Florence, from 4-6 p.m. For more information, reach out to Bryant at cabryant@umcsc.org, Crimm at khaselden@umcsc.org or the Florence District at fldist@umcsc.org.

JEREMIAH TEAMS: Groups offer update on initial work

From Page 1

creative ways to help us reach new people in new places in new ways, the Missional Priorities Team began its work by identifying the needs of the local church as its first and most important focus—identifying and nurturing the connections between local churches and between local churches and the conference.

The team is led by the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith, who is director of Connectional Ministries.

During conversation about a "stop-do list," team members agreed such an assessment should not be only about money; there may be ministries and missions with little or no associated costs, but which are no longer effective.

Team members reviewed the current structure of Connectional Ministries, including the four ministry areas under which its work is organized—Advocacy, Discipleship, Lay Leadership and Outreach—and the Connectional Ministries budget.

The team next plans to take deeper dives into each ministry area, beginning with the programs within the Advocacy Area.

The Black Church and Ethnic Ministries Strategy Team

Formed to create and resource an effective conference strategy for strengthening the Black church and other ethnic ministries, looking to ensure strong leadership and finding the new thing God is calling us to in this area, the Black Church and Ethnic Ministries Strategy Team, led by the Rev. James Friday, director of congregational development, began its work with a discussion that centered on two major points. Several counties across South Carolina do not have a Black United Methodist church presence, and a few counties have no United Methodist church at all. Friday said the church must adapt to new methodologies for equipping, training, retraining and assessing the effectiveness of clergy in pastoral ministry and of lay leadership.

He said we will work to do this by redefining expectations, supporting creativity and ensuring we have processes for intentional discipleship for spiritual and professional growth and maturity in ministry, so that pastors and lay leadership can more effectively disciple believers while building thriving churches and faith communities.

"We are in a season when it's a prime opportunity to reset," Friday said, "but we have to be willing to do the hard work and be honest."

District Alignment Team

Formed to review district lines and reduce the number of districts to create a more nimble, cost-effective structure that will allow district superintendents to truly be a missional strategist in more places, spend more time in communities and develop new ideas to strengthen our witness and work, the District Alignment Team organized itself into two sub-teams—one (the Map Team) focusing on studying the physical layout of the current 12-district structure, and a second (the Workload Team) to review the duties and workload of the district superintendents and district administrative assistants.

The team is led by the Rev. Cathy Mitchell, superintendent of the Spartanburg District and dean of the Cabinet.

The Map Team is focusing primarily on the demographics and geography of the current districts, paying close attention to particular characteristics of each district, such as the breakdown of churches based on size and ethnicity, and categorizing strengths and challenges of each district.

The Workload Team is working to identify ways to accomplish the work of the district staffs in the most efficient manner possible, including how reducing the number of districts would create a greater workload for those staffing the restructured district offices.

Members are reviewing information from a previous study of the existing district system, looking at the experiences of other conferences that have reduced the number of districts, and consulting with district superintendents and district administrative assistants about their responsibilities.

Conference Staff Alignment Team

This team was formed to align conference staff with our missional priorities and resources, compensate our employees properly for their work and leadership and create more opportunities for staff to be creative and imaginative in their work.

With much excitement for the possibilities that lie ahead, the Conference Staff Alignment Team, led by Bishop Fairley, met to organize and prioritize their work.

The team has enlisted the General Council on Finance and Administration to conduct an audit of conference staff, which included a survey and one-on-one interviews with all conference employees.

That audit has been completed, and the team is reviewing its findings in hopes of developing recommendations related to current work processes and how to make them more efficient.

This work is ongoing and is anticipated to reach completion for consideration by Annual Conference 2026.

Anyone who has questions for Jeremiah Teams is asked to email mat@umcsc.org, and their information will be shared with the team.

Grace UMC team to raise funds, awareness through 'Walk for Water' event

It has been a tradition of Grace United Methodist Church, Charleston, to have a team of walkers participate in the Charleston Walk for Water held at Riverfront Park each year. The walk simulates what it is like for the many women and children who walk three or more miles each day to gather water for their families.

A fundraising event, Walk for Water is hosted by Water Mission, a Christian organization headquartered in North Charleston whose mission is to end the global water crisis.

Millions of people around the world live in communities that do not have clean, safe water for their daily use and rely on gathering water from the same streams and watering holes used by wild animals. Water Mission is working to change that through the installation of water filtration systems and hygiene and sanitation systems in these communities, and they share the gospel with those communities, too. Water Mission responds with their water filtration and sanitation solutions to areas affected by natural disasters and to areas where people are displaced by war and unrest.

The arch over the starting line at a past Walk for Water. Grace UMC participates each year to help Water Mission.

The organization depends on donations and also raises funds by holding events in various locations called the "Walk for Water" to fund their efforts. Their fundraising goal for this year's Charleston Walk for Water is $700,000.

Grace UMC and other Walk for Water participants begin the walk carrying empty buckets following a route that winds from Riverfront Park in North Charleston through the old Navy base to the Water Mission facility and then back to the park. After passing through the Water Mission facility, they dip their buckets in pools of dirty water and then make their way back to the park carrying their full or semi-full buckets, which they empty into pools outfitted with filtration systems after crossing the finish line.

This year's Charleston Walk for Water is scheduled for Saturday, March 29, and Team Grace UMC has set a fundraising goal of $2,500.

Learn how to help Team Grace UMC at https://walkforwater.rallybound.org/2025-walk-for-water/Team/View/202277/Grace-UMC.

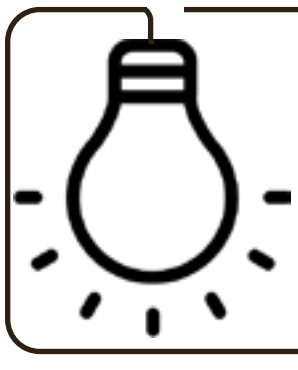
For more information about the work of Water Mission at https://watermission.org.

Fish fry nets $5K for mission

Philadelphia UMC, York, held its semiannual Fish Fry 4 Missions event recently, raising $5,000 for missions. Philadelphia's pastor Rev. Melissa Shortridge said it was a great time of fun and fellowship for the church and community.

Helping Helene recovery

On Jan. 25, Clemson UMC, Clemson, sponsored an Early Response Team disaster training event for the Anderson District. With 28 in attendance, they were led by Kathy Beatty. Clemson UMC is sponsoring two disaster response trips to Spruce Pine, North Carolina (March 7-9 and April 7-9), and the training helped people become ERT members. The trips will be coordinated by the Rev. Tommy Wilkes at the invitation of Spruce Pine UMC in North Carolina and also coordinated through the North Carolina Disaster Relief branch of the UMC. Others desiring to coordinate relief efforts in South Carolina should contact the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith at mnelsonsmith@umcsc.org. For more on the North Carolina trips, contact Wilkes at tommy@clemsonumc.org. "Please do not forget those who are still recovering from Hurricane Helene," Wilkes said.



Did You Know?

The Advocate offers a free one-year subscription to anyone who joins a United Methodist Church in South Carolina. Email your new members' names and addresses and the name of your church to **info@advocatesc.org**, and we'll get them started on becoming more informed about our conference and our church.

United Women in Faith

by Vickie Failor

The United Women in Faith Reading Program

The United Women in Faith's Reading Program is a cherished tradition that brings together members to explore, share and discuss books.

Each district in the South Carolina Conference of United Women in Faith has a secretary of Program Resources, who is the contact person for the district in regard to the Reading Program. I am the conference secretary of Program Resources. You can find my contact information on the United Women of Faith website at https://www.umcsc.org/women.

There's something for everyone. The Reading Program is available for adults, youth and children. The program offers many diverse subjects in the area of education for mission, leadership development, nurturing for community, social action and spiritual growth. *Response*, the official United Women in Faith magazine, and Faith Talks are part of the Reading Program.

The reading program is rewarding. As you read, you can track your progress using the Reading Program Report.

The reading program is a great way to connect with others, too.

You can enrich your experience by doing one or several of these things:

- Share the program with United Women in Faith members and members of the community.
- Help people attain books.
- Connect with local and district groups.
- Start a book club, download books onto an e-reader to share and present book reviews at group meetings.
- Display a progress chart in your church for all who wish to participate, and post displays to encourage book sales.
- Pray. Books often raise concerns about people, countries and issues. Bring these concerns to God during your prayer time at home and at group meetings.
- Advocate for tangible change. Many Reading Program books address issues including climate change, mass incarceration and racism. Organize a task force to address these issues in your community.

How do you find books? The reading program information and book list can be found at the following link: https://uwfaithresources.org/prodlist.cfm?catID=2178

The conference offers an opportunity for a virtual book study. This year the book study will be at noon on the following Saturdays: March 8, March 22, April 5 and April 26. The book study will be on the book "How To Be An Antiracist."

You can register to participate in the book study by going to the following link: https://tinyurl.com/uwf-reading

You can purchase the book from Amazon. By participating in the book study, you can get credit for reading a book in the reading program.

Failor is the conference United Women in Faith Program Resources secretary.

March 23 is United Women in Faith's Legacy Day of Giving

Here are a few ways to get involved:

- Host an in-person celebration: Bring your community together with an inspiring event.
- Organize a virtual celebration: Share stories, engage your network and encourage donations through a vibrant virtual event.
- Spread the word: Harness the power of your social media platforms, conference and district enewsletters and personal networks to share the joy of giving.

Together, we can create a ripple effect of generosity and hope that will echo for generations to come.

We are counting down to an extraordinary day of joy, purpose and shared commitment to making a lasting difference. Thank you for all that you do.

—Crystal Barrs, SCCUWF Legacy Liaison

Camps & Retreat Ministries

Camp is a chance to get away from life's busy schedule and reconnect with God and self.

Let us bring camp to you

Close your eyes, take a deep breath and envision the smell of smoke, the crackle of the fire as marshmallows roast and laughter all around from campers immersed in the experience of camp. Do you wish you could be transported there right now?

You may not be able to teleport there, but Camp Sunday is March 2, and we can bring camp to you.

South Carolina Camps & Retreat Ministries would love to speak to your church about the power of camps and retreats at Asbury Hills, Camp Providence and Sea Islands, or we can send you materials and a video to share with your congregation on March 2.

Many have experienced God at Asbury Hills and know how it impacted your life. We want to share those experiences with everyone.

One story that expresses the power of camp comes from our reservation specialist and former Asbury Hills counselor Katie George.

"I had a camper in 2021, during my first year as a counselor with Senior High Expedition," George shared. "She approached me the first night and told me that she had some stuff going on in her life, was mad at God and hadn't prayed in over a year, and she wasn't going to start now. As the week went on, she began to open up about what she was going through, and we got to discuss her questions about Scripture. By the end of the week, she asked if she could pray for our group.

"I was so in awe of what God had been doing through her that week, and she would later reach out to me about a year later and tell me that she was getting baptized and asked if my co-counselor and I would like to be there because that week of camp pushed her to start to pursue her faith again.

"This story perfectly exemplifies our mission statement: 'Serving all people for Christian birth, growth and renewal.' This was the week I knew why God had called me to camp and would project me to work two more summers and eventually join full-time staff."

God uses camps and retreat ministries in awe-inspiring ways for both campers and staff, transcending the physical space of Asbury Hills. The mission of Asbury Hills of Christian birth, growth and renewal continues to move people past their time within our gates and helps leave the world a better place.

To learn more about us coming to speak at your church or to get materials, call 864-298-0124 or email info@sccarm.org.

—Kate Nobles

Native American Ministries

Native American Ministries Sunday

In accordance with the *United Methodist Book of Discipline*, Para. 825.6, "Historically, Native American Ministries Sunday has been celebrated with an offering, preferably on the Third Sunday of Easter."

This year, that date will be May 4.

The Native American Committee provides speakers for Native American Ministries Sunday, thus, making this date their most requested date for speakers. With a limited number of speakers, this date books sometimes a year in advance, and many provide this special Sunday throughout the entire year. Thus, pastors or Native American representatives simply have to call and set up a date that matches both the church's schedule and the NAC's speakers.

In the *Discipline*, Native American Ministries Sunday is one of the six designated Special Sundays. We are not an outside agency asking to come into your church. We are part of this conference. All offering monies are sent directly to the conference office, with 50 percent remaining in-conference to support the NAC.

The purpose of Native American Ministries Sunday is to provide education about American Indian tradition, culture, spirituality and inclusion in the conference. Even today, American Indians are often questioned if we worship the same God or if we are going to do something "strange" if we come and speak at your church. We address these myths and stereotypes, explore American Indian history, explore Native spirituality and identify the obstacles facing American Indians today. We also provide updates NAC actions including outreach, education and ministry.

If it is your church's first time, we have a set first Sunday message presented by our committee. However, after that first Sunday presentation, we have a number of other Sunday messages, including traditional storytelling as the message, tribal histories, connections between God and Native Americans, Native Americans and Christianity, relationships with nature and more. All of these are free. Honorariums are welcome to offset travel costs.

We also offer Native American drumming, Keepers of the Word, with drumming along with a message. This is the only one that costs since it requires several drummers. The cost is $175 plus mileage ($0.55 per mile) costs for two vehicles. It may include an overnight cost or need depending on the distance. A drumming request can only be made after a church has that set first Sunday message.

All speakers arranged by the NAC are approved by the conference. However, a church may elect to get their own American Indian speaker. If he or she is not a United Methodist pastor or certified lay speaker by this conference, you must obtain permission from your district superintendent for this person to speak.

Let's live by open hearts, open minds and open doors. Schedule a Native American Ministries Sunday for your church. Our primary mission is "to make the invisible visible." Please help us with this mission.

To arrange a Native American Ministries Sunday, contact Z. Tracy Pender, NAC chair, at 803 905-5672 or tracypender@hotmail.com (email preferred).

St. Paul blesses new parsonage with community, church service

KINGSTREE—Feb. 2 was an impressive day in the life of St. Paul United Methodist Church, as church members gathered to bless their new parsonage.

Members of the congregation and others from the community were excited for this day to come. The Rev. Jerry L. Gadsden, pastor, presided.

Florence District Superintendent the Rev. Terry Fleming reminded the people they did not just build a house—they built a home. Fleming gave the homily as well as led the congregation through the blessing and the Lord's Prayer.

Other members of the congregation were present and participated in this worship experience. The Rev. Cynthia Williams, pastor of Mount Seal UMC, Hemingway, led the people in prayer. Paul McKnight, who serves on the Williamsburg County Council and is a member of Bethel UMC, Kingstree, addressed the crowd with a response to Clara Faye Dozier's welcome.

The congregation had been without a parsonage since October 2015. Trustees worked tirelessly and presented the home to everyone in attendance.

Two trees were planted on the property and blessed also. One tree was planted in memory of Pringle Lee Sr. (1872-1957) who originally owned the property. He was a lifelong member of Saint Paul. The other tree was planted in honor/memory of former pastors and members.

St. Paul had been without a parsonage since 2015.

The Rev. Jerry L. Gadsden, pastor, presided.

Members of the congregation and community attended.

Murray UMC enjoys monthlong celebration of Black History Month

By Jamelah Youmans

Murray United Methodist Church, Summerville, celebrated Black History Month in February by encouraging members and guests to wear their African attire every Sunday.

Several members donned their African dresses, blouses and skirts on the first Sunday.

On Superbowl/Sports Sunday, several members also wore their favorite sports team jerseys or T-shirts. On the third Sunday, Murray shared vital information about heart awareness for Red Dress Sunday. After the worship service, they took blood pressure readings of members and showed them how to properly use blood pressure monitors.

On Feb. 15, some of Murray UMC's children, youth and United Women of Faith members took a field trip to the Penn Center on St. Helena Island. There they learned about the Gullah Community and their traditions. One of the highlights was seeing the floor in one of the buildings that was 100 years old. They could even still see some of the white lines marking from where the students played basketball.

The women and young people who attended genuinely enjoyed this experience and learned a lot of information about the Gullah culture.

Murray wrapped up the month of celebration with a Black History Quiz Bowl Feb. 23, where students and adults competed on teams.

Youmans is the Murray UMC communications chair.

Several members donned their African dresses, blouses and skirts on the first Sunday.

A field trip to Penn Center on St. Helena Island was educational for all.

On Superbowl/Sports Sunday, some wore their favorite sports team jerseys or T-shirts.

Photos by Anthony Simpson

Orangeburg men gather for quarterly meeting

United Methodist Men held their quarterly Orangeburg District Meeting Jan. 25, at 9 a.m. The meeting was hosted by the United Methodist Men of North Orangeburg UMC, Orangeburg, with Dr. J. Derrick Cattenhead as pastor. The meeting started with a welcome from Kevin Reid, president of North Orangeburg UMC men, then an opening prayer and blessing of food by David Robinson. After breakfast, praise and worship time was led by the UMM of St. Mark UMC, North (at top), followed by a message from the Rev. Kenneth Middleton (bottom left), pastor of St. Stephen UMC, Orangeburg. Middleton drew from Ecclesiastes 4:10, "If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up" (NIV). Anthony Simpson offered closing remarks, and Middleton dismissed all with a blessing and prayer. At bottom right, District Superintendent Ken Nelson addresses the crowd.

All are invited to the concert, set for Sunday, March 2, at 5 p.m. at the church.

St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC to host organ dedication concert

HILTON HEAD ISLAND—St. Andrew By-The-Sea United Methodist Church will host an organ dedication concert Sunday, March 2, at 5 p.m. at the church, located at 20 Pope Avenue on Hilton Head Island.

There will be a dessert reception following the concert. The event is free to the community.

"We are excited to offer this free event to the community to enjoy the true magnificence of our new Rodgers Infinity 489 organ and pipes in concert," said Joe Kerr, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC Organ Committee chairperson.

Two concert organists, Andrew Atkinson and Dr. David Friddle, will be performing. Atkinson is a multi-talented artist and performer from the Gulf Coast, specializing in improvisation, Romantic music and sacred arrangements. He began studying piano at the age of 5 and later completed his studies with Dr. Robert Holm at the University of South Alabama. Atkinson was a gold medalist at the MMTA College piano competition in 2007 and served as adjudicator for the Alabama Keyboard Festival 2013-2015. He is also an accomplished actor and a member of the Screen Actors Guild and the American Guild of Organists.

Friddle is a man of many talents: author, conductor, composer, organist, designer and accomplished chef. He has two doctorates in music: Juilliard School, 1988 (organ), and the University of Miami, 2006 (choral conducting). Friddle has worked as a church musician in multiple denominations and is the recipient of numerous accolades, awards and grants. His published articles appear in the Choral Journal, the American Choral Review and Journal of Singing. His dissertation "Christus by Franz Liszt" was published by Bärenreiter in 2006, and Lexington Press published both "Choral Treatises and Singing Societies in the Romantic Age" and "Sing Romantic Music Romantically" in September 2022.

For more information, email standrew bythesea@gmail.com.

I. DeQuincey Newman UMC to celebrate Women's Day

COLUMBIA—The United Women in Faith of I. DeQuincey Newman United Methodist Church, along with their Commission on the Status and Role of Women ministry, will celebrate Women's Day Sunday, March 16, during morning worship beginning at 10 a.m.

Sirmons

This year's theme will be "Carrying Our Faith Forward: Leaning and Depending on Jesus." The speaker for this occasion will be Susan Collins Sirmons, executive director of Killingsworth. Sirmons has been involved with Killingsworth for more than 25 years, serving in various capacities including volunteer, weekend support staff, intake coordinator and now executive director.

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit and national mission institution of United Women in Faith, Killingsworth was established to support, empower and advocate for women recovering from life crises in a safe, nurturing Christian environment.

I. DeQuincey Newman UMC is located at 7801 Wilson Blvd., Columbia. The Rev. Frank V. James is pastor.

Recommitment to marriage

On Sunday, Feb. 2, after the last worship service at Clemson UMC, the Rev. Tommy Wilkes held a recommitment of marriage vows for 11 couples. The celebration happened at the end of the "Relationship Series" at Clemson UMC, where the church had explored the themes of "Meet the Parents," "Brothers and Sisters," "Children of God" and then "Love and Marriage." The church said it was a special time to see these couples once again look into their spouse's eyes and recommit to their love and marriage vows and continued fidelity.

St. James UMC in York observes annual Women's Day and Black History Celebration

YORK—On Sunday, Feb. 2, the United Women in Faith at St. James United Methodist Church hosted its annual Women's Day program, a cherished tradition and key fundraising effort supporting the church's mission work.

This year's program also marked the beginning of St. James's Black History Celebration, centering on the theme "Do Justice," inspired by Micah 6:8.

To honor their heritage, women were encouraged to wear African attire, creating a vibrant and meaningful atmosphere.

The guest speaker, Carlo Dawson, delivered what many called an "outstanding portrayal" of Mahalia Jackson. Her interactive, inspirational and engaging presentation challenged all to share the dream, reminding people of the enduring power of faith and justice.

As part of this special occasion, St. James also embraced the moment to fulfill their five channels of mission giving, demonstrating their commitment to undesignated giving. They offered up a gift in memory of Dr. Tim Bowman, beloved brother of their pastor, Dr. Thomas Bowman, as well as a gift in mission honoring the arrival of two new babies, presented to their grandparents Mr. and Mrs. John W. Adams and Mr. and Mrs. Larry Spencer.

A Special Mission Recognition pin was awarded to Marlene Spencer for her outstanding service to the local unit of St. James United Women in Faith.

Through their faith, service, and generosity, St. James continues to be a beacon of light for women, youth and children.

A Special Mission Recognition pin was awarded to Marlene Spencer (back, third from right).

Women wore African attire.

Guest speaker Carlo Dawson delivers.

Global Briefs

Registration open for pilgrimage tour

MADISON, N.J.—A weeklong tour of United Methodist historic sites in the northeast is open for registration. The American Methodist Pilgrimage, with pricing starting at $1,999, will begin Oct. 12 in New York and also visit Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington. "When we visit some of the historical Methodist sites, we better understand how churches and Methodists across these centuries not only grew our denomination but also impacted movements within our nation," said Ashley Boggan, top executive of the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History.

Responding to Los Angeles area fires

PASADENA, Calif.—The disaster response ministries in the California-Nevada and California-Pacific conferences have joined forces to respond to the devastating and deadly fires in southern California. In addition, the Pacific-Northwest Conference is providing volunteers. United Methodists in Colorado, Montana, Mississippi, Texas and Arizona also have provided supplies, financial donations and gift cards.

Liberians march for United Methodist Church

GBARNGA, Liberia—At the opening of the 192nd session of the Liberia Annual Conference, more than a thousand pastors and lay people marched in the streets of Gbarnga to reaffirm their membership in The United Methodist Church and to let everyone know that The United Methodist Church is alive and well in Liberia. Many wore T-shirts that proclaim "Love UMC."

Church leaders flock to quadrennial training

HOUSTON—Nearly 380 U.S. United Methodist leaders attended the quadrennial training event organized by the General Council on Finance and Administration, the denomination's finance and data agency. One particularly well-attended session, "LEADing on Immigration," was presented by the United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race alongside the United Methodist Board of Church and Society.

Bishop serves as chaplain for state senate

ATLANTA—Bishop Robin Dease, who leads the North Georgia and South Georgia conferences, served on Feb. 12 as "Chaplain for the Day" in the Georgia State Senate. She offered a heartfelt message to the state senators and closed in prayer for elected leaders. The same day, North Georgia United Methodists participated in an Advocacy Day at the Georgia State Capitol.

Germany elects Werner Philipp as bishop

WÜRZBURG, Germany—The Germany Central Conference elected the Rev. Werner Philipp, a district superintendent in eastern Germany, as a United Methodist bishop on the seventh ballot on Feb. 13. Philipp will succeed Bishop Harald Rückert. Last year's General Conference elected Philipp to serve on the Commission on the General Conference.

Lawsuit filed to save refugee program

SEATTLE—Church World Service, a ministry partner of The United Methodist Church, is party to a lawsuit challenging the Trump administration's suspension of the U.S. refugee resettlement program and a freeze on refugee funding. Nine individuals join Church World Service in the lawsuit, along with HIAS and Lutheran Community Services Northwest.

Speaker series offers diverse faith experiences

ATLANTA—TheoEd is engaging people in diverse theological conversations across the U.S. The speaker series, operated by Emory University's Candler School of Theology, allows Christians of different ages, races, genders and theological backgrounds to share their personal faith and life reflections. In each city, the series partners with a local congregation or a group of faith-based organizations.

United Methodists join suit against Trump policy

WASHINGTON—United Methodists have joined more than two dozen Christian and Jewish bodies in a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The religious groups are seeking a reversal of the Trump administration policy that allows Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents to carry out raids in houses of worship.

Conference appeals Fifth Avenue church ruling

GARNER, N.C.—The North Carolina Conference has filed an appeal with the North Carolina Supreme Court in the long-running case involving the closure of Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church. On Dec. 31, the North Carolina Court of Appeals reversed a lower court's dismissal of a lawsuit brought by members of Fifth Avenue United Methodist Church after the North Carolina Conference closed the church in 2023.

Church honors its Underground Railroad history

BALTIMORE COUNTY, Md.—On an ordinary Sunday, you'll hear the Rev. Isaiah Redd Sr. preaching to his small congregation of Emmarts United Methodist Church. The church's members discovered it was a safehouse stop on the Underground Railroad after finding artifacts inside the church. Now the church is working to preserve its history and its current ministry.

USAID freeze strikes Africa University

MUTARE, Zimbabwe—At Africa University, programs researching malaria and tuberculosis were halted and staffers on those efforts were no longer getting their paychecks after funding from the United States Agency on International Development was suspended. The freeze had an immediate $1.2 million impact on the United Methodist pan-African university.

Conflict delays Congo Central Conference

KINDU, Congo—The Congo Central Conference, initially scheduled for March 30-April 4 in Kindu, has been postponed because of the security situation prevailing in Goma, in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The new date has not yet been set. The central conference, when it meets, plans to elect three new bishops. In a Feb. 3 letter, Bishop Gabriel Unda, president of the Congo Central Conference College of Bishops, explained that the insecurity in Goma has forced organizers to postpone the event.

—Courtesy of United Methodist News Service

Photo courtesy of Jodie Plyler

Tabernacle's 'Souper Bowl Sunday' helps HOPE

Tabernacle UMC, Lancaster, collected more than 500 food items for "Souper Bowl Sunday" recently. The food will be donated to the local food pantry, HOPE in Lancaster. Tabernacle's pastor is Kendell Healy.

Resource Center

by Betty Stalnaker

Easter music available

If you have not reserved your Lenten Bible study, the Resource Center still has numerous titles available. The resources listed below are new studies for 2025. Check our website for more Easter Bible studies and Easter musicals, too.

Everywhere Is Jerusalem: Experiencing the Holy Then and Now

(DVD2957CL=) Author: Howell, James C. 6 sessions, 12-16 min./leader's guide/bk/2024.

Location matters. Christianity isn't a batch of spiritual thoughts or metaphysical truths. It's a journey of real people with their feet on the ground in real places. Here, Howell takes you on a spiritual pilgrimage to significant places in the ongoing story of the Christian faith. You'll go from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, from the Jordan River to Assisi, and from the Sea of Galilee to Montgomery, Alabama. Along the way, you'll discover the profound connections between biblical stories and the places they happened. You'll see how Christians throughout history have brought their faith to life worldwide in their own cities and communities. And you'll find God calling you to bring your own faith to life right where you are, right now. Part travelogue, part Bible study, this book will take you on a spiritual journey to the places that are most important in our faith, and you'll discover that the most important place of all is the place where you are, right now. CC. Age: YAS.

The Final Days: A Lenten Journey Through the Gospels

(DVD2967EA=) Author: Rawle, Matt. 6 sessions, 7-12 min/leader's guide/bk/2024.

This Lent, ponder the themes of justice, poverty, freedom and love. The four New Testament Gospels aren't the same story, but they offer the same resurrection hope. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John devote most of their story detailing Jesus's last week in Jerusalem, all highlighting his triumphant entry into the city, the suffering and humiliation of the cross and the empty tomb come Sunday morning, but the stories they tell aren't quite the same. Each Gospel offers a different lens through which we understand Jesus's Passion. The DVD features lessons taught in Matt Rawle's entertaining and charismatic style. CC. Age: YAS.

The Message of Jesus: Words that Changed the World

(DVD2970AH=) Author: Hamilton, Adam. 6 sessions, 12-14 min/leader's guide/bk/2024.

A fresh encounter with the words of Jesus, Hamilton walks viewers through the key points of the message of Jesus in six engaging video sessions based on the book. More than three billion people claim to follow Jesus. But aside from a few verses, how many actually know what he taught? In fact, much of what people think Jesus taught he never said. In this six-week study, Hamilton explores six of the most important themes in Jesus's teachings, why they matter and how they speak to us today. The book will explore Jesus's preaching on the Kingdom of God, the Sermon on the Mount, the parables, the "I am" sayings in John and more. Jesus's message is not only life-changing, but world-changing. CC. Age: YAS.

The Promise and Power of Easter: Remembering the Reason for Jesus's Resurrection

(DVD2968EA=) Author: Caine, Christine/Harper, Lisa. 4 sessions, 29-33 min/study guide/2024.

Easter is the most significant event in human history. Join Caine and Harper in a transformative study that goes beyond mere tradition. Walk with them through four weeks of the Lenten season taking in the details of Jesus's life, the agony of his death and the overwhelming joy of his resurrection. Relive Jesus's final earthly steps with a heart full of hope in this four-session study. See the Lord's resurrection with eyes of faith. Celebrate Easter in victory over everything that holds us back in our earthly lives. CC. Age: YAS.

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

Cumberland member marks 75 years in Delta Sigma Theta sorority

At age 94, Lillian Louise Tolbert Adams is celebrating 75 years of commitment to sisterhood, scholarship, service and social action in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. Adams is a member of Cumberland United Methodist Church, Florence.


Adams

The Florence Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta hosted a celebration Oct. 30 to commemorate Adams's lifetime accomplishments.

Adams is a past president of the Florence Alumnae Chapter. Under her leadership, the chapter sponsored the Civil Rights Banquet honoring Fannie Lou Hamer, collaborated with the National Council of Negro Women to help finance construction of the Mary McLeod Bethune monument and obtained life membership in the NAACP.

The program opened with a welcome by the president of the chapter, Shateisha Williams, and culminated with sorors serenading Adams with the Sweetheart Song.

Adams was born Aug. 8, 1929 in Greenwood. She was raised by her father, John S. Tolbert; stepmother, Amanda Herbert Tolbert; and paternal grandmother, Hannah Tolbert. She began her secondary education at Brewer High School.

Even at an early age, she took the road less traveled. After completing ninth grade, she transferred to Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, North Carolina. While her previous classmates graduated in the 11th grade, she completed high school in the 12th grade under the auspices of Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown, who exposed her students to many leaders, including Mary McLeod Bethune and Paul Robeson.

After graduating high school, Adams attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. Although a music lover, starting with piano lessons in elementary school and the violin in high school, she discontinued lessons shortly after her freshman year in college, finding them tedious. She went on to major in English and minor in history and was initiated into the Alpha Beta Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. in December 1949 and served as the financial secretary. She was also a member of the Student Christian Association.

After graduating, Adams began her career in education as an English teacher at Gordon High School in Dillon. This is where she met her future husband, David H. Adams. They were engaged within nine months of meeting, but to her chagrin, her father insisted that she not marry any man that she had not known for at least a year. She promised to wait until Christmas, but they eloped in October. At the end of the school year, with the war veterans returning home to their previous jobs, her husband was transferred to Wilson High School in Florence. She continued to teach at Gordon High School for two more years before taking a two-year sabbatical to have two children, Hannah and David Jr.

Afterward, she resumed teaching English at Lincoln High School in Clio. In order to get a teaching position in Florence, she had to become certified in elementary education, so she completed the Benedict-Allen Elementary Education Program. She was then hired by Florence School District #1 and assigned to Willow Creek Elementary School, where Phillip Brown, her childhood schoolmate, was the principal. While at Willow Creek, she attended South Carolina State College (now university) and earned her master's degree. During this time, she welcomed the birth of her daughter, Debra, and developed her motto, "I have never met a child that I didn't love and that didn't come to eventually love me."

Following desegregation, Adams transferred to Harlee Elementary School. During her tenure, she was best known for saving the life of one of her students who was choking on a jaw breaker lodged in her windpipe and for being the first Black Florence School District #1 Teacher of the Year. At this point, her love and compassion compelled her to strike out in a different direction in order to help children. She enrolled in the University of South Carolina Guidance Program at Francis Marion University, focusing on elementary school guidance counseling. Subsequently, she secured a position at North Vista Elementary School as the guidance counselor. While at North Vista, she touched the lives of many children and continuously demonstrated her love for them by doing all she could to make sure their needs were met.

During her teaching career, she completed graduate work at Atlanta University, North Carolina A&T University and Francis Marion University, to name a few. She retired from the school system after 50 years of service. Even in retirement, she continued to work in Lake City as an elementary school guidance counselor. In addition, she was the grant writer and project director for Learn and Serve.

At an early age, Adams joined Mount Pisgah AME Church in Greenwood, studied a chapter in the Bible nightly with her grandmother and fasted and prayed every Friday. Later, she joined Cumberland UMC under the guiding force of Goldie Martin. While in the Young Adult Class, she was called to be the teacher. Although she felt that she had not been a member long enough to teach, Woodrow Lyde Sr. reminded her that there is no seniority in church. She became the president of the United Methodist Women on the local church level and the Florence District, as well. After the conference merged, she went on to become the first Black president of the Florence District UMW. Through the years, she has stayed faithful to God and Cumberland and served under many pastors, including the Revs. John Boone and Granville Hicks. She was a lay speaker, lay speaker instructor, treasurer of the Cumberland United Federal Credit Union, member of Interest Area #1, and a faithful member of Choir #1.

During the summer, Adams was employed with and led Back-A-Youth, which found jobs for underprivileged youth during the summer months. Since her husband was a member of the American Legion Post #228, she joined the Women's Auxiliary and was elected the first Black state officer of the Women's Auxiliary. She also served as president of Post #228 Women's Auxiliary. Her accolades include being a past president of the Florence Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. and a Golden Life member, life member of the NAACP, life member of the Fisk University Alumni Association, life member of the National Council of Negro Women, life member of Post #228 Women's Auxiliary, listed in Who's Who Among Black Americans, a member of the Retired Educators' Association, an honored Hospice volunteer and a member of the Order of Eastern Stars.

At the age of 94, Adams still teaches Sunday school. Her wisdom as a biblical scholar is like none other.

Rightfully so, her Sunday school class is named in her honor: the Lillian T. Adams Sunday School Class. At the end of the day, she doesn't dwell on past awards and achievements. She simply wants to be known as a Christian woman.

Obituaries

Kimberly Lynn Graham

FLORENCE—Kimberly Lynn Graham, vice president of the South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith and the Florence District spiritual growth coordinator, died Jan. 23, 2025.

A memorial service was held Jan. 30 at Cumberland United Methodist Church.

Ms. Graham is survived by two brothers.

Malinda J. Holroyd

CLEMSON—Malinda J. Holroyd, widow of the Rev. William Thomas Holroyd, died Feb. 1, 2025.

A memorial service was held March 1 in the Chapel of the McDougald Funeral Home.

Memorials may be made to Clemson United Methodist Church, 300 Frontage Road, Clemson, SC 29631.

Mrs. Holroyd is survived by her daughter and five sons.

Rev. James Lewis Hyatt Jr.


Hyatt

GEORGETOWN—The Rev. James Lewis "Padre" Hyatt Jr, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and husband of the Rev. Sandra Stevens-Poirel, died Feb. 5, 2025. Rev. Stevens-Poirel is a retired member of the conference.

Prior to his retirement in 1999, Rev. Hyatt served Lebanon-Kings Chapel, Adnah-Antioch, Pacolet, Duncan Acres, Clinton-Broad Street, Bennettsville-First, Woodland and Columbia-Main Street charges. Following his retirement, he was served the Hopewell (Lakeview), Antioch, Antioch-New Bethel and Midland Park charges.

Obituary Policy

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

Funeral services were held Feb. 8 at Belin Memorial UMC, Murrells Inlet.

Memorials may be made to Belin Memorial UMC, General Fund, P.O. Box 528, Murrells Inlet, SC 29576-0528.

Rev. Hyatt is survived by his wife, two sons, daughter and two stepsons.

David James Sr.

FLORENCE—David James Sr., father of David James III, died Feb. 12, 2025. Mr. James III is the husband of the Rev. Lindora F. James, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Feb. 20 at Wesley UMC.

James Roger Poole

SPARTANBURG—James Roger Poole, father of the Rev. John Sterling Poole, died Jan. 29, 2025. Rev. Poole is the director of the Charleston Wesley Foundation.

A memorial service was held Feb. 8 at Trinity United Methodist Church.

Memorials may be made to SPACE (Spartanburg Area Conservancy), 100 E. Main St., Suite 7B, Spartanburg, SC 29306.

Mr. Poole is survived by his wife, Mary Jane McBee Smith Poole, and two sons.

Gladys Matilda C. Pyatt

LUGOFF—Gladys Matilda C. Pyatt, widow of the Rev. Moses Phillip Pyatt, died Jan. 4, 2025.

Funeral services were held Jan. 10 at St. Matthew UMC, Camden, with burial in the church cemetery.

Memorials may be made to the Alzheimer's Association of South Carolina, https://www.alz/org/sc.

Mrs. Pyatt is survived by her son.

Torionda Kawaun Taylor

GOOSE CREEK—Torionda Kawaun Taylor, son of the Rev. Mae Taylor and brother of the Rev. Marvin Taylor, died Jan. 20, 2025. Rev. Mae Taylor is the pastor of Joshua United Methodist Church, Moncks Corner. The Rev. Marvin Taylor is the pastor of the All Saints Charge, St. Stephen.

Funeral services were held Jan. 31 at Joshua UMC with a private burial in Taylor Cemetery, Garnett.

Mr. Taylor is survived by his three daughters and two sons.

Michael Carlos Washington

SUMMERVILLE—Michael Carlos Washington, son of Sarah W. Bozier, died Jan. 21, 2025. Ms. Bozier is the administrative assistant of the Charleston District.

Funeral services were held Jan. 27 at Wesley United Methodist Church, Ladson, with burial in the Brownsville Cemetery.

Mr. Washington is survived by his four sons and three daughters.

Pauline Estelle Jackson Williams

COLUMBIA—Pauline "Polly" Estelle Jackson Williams, widow of the Rev. Thomas Williams, died Jan. 28, 2025.

Funeral services were held Feb. 10 at Trinity UMC, Blythewood, with burial in Fort Jackson National Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Trinity UMC Endowment, 90 Boney Road, Blythewood, SC 29016; or to Epworth Children's Home, 2900 Millwood Ave., Columbia, SC 29205.

Mrs. Williams is survived by her son and daughter.

Photo courtesy of the Rev. Annie Jackson

Notable figures in Black history

Mount Pleasant UMC, Anderson, celebrated Black History Month in a unique way with their children dressing up and portraying notable Black people throughout history, including Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., football player DeAndre Hopkins and the first Black ballet dancer. Children's coordinators are Shane Whitner (right) and James Whitner, pictured standing with some of the children. A soul food dinner was served after the service.

From the Archives

by Dr. Phillip Stone

Anne Herbert, a South Carolina missionary

One of South Carolina's contributions to the Methodist missions field, Anne Elizabeth Herbert, grew up in a Methodist parsonage and served for many years as a missionary in China. Before women gained full clergy rights in the Methodist Church, the mission field often was the best way for women to undertake recognized and organized professional service in the church. Much of that work would have been in education or health care.

Herbert's work in the mission field combined both areas.

Born in Florence in 1897, Herbert's father was the Rev. Walter I. Herbert, a Wofford graduate and member of the South Carolina Conference, and her mother, Constance Furman Herbert, was a descendant of the founder of Furman University. Herbert's father was serving Central Church in Florence when she was born. Along with her eight siblings, she lived in Newberry, Columbia, Charleston and Sumter, and she graduated from Lander College in 1917. She then taught in the public schools until she entered Scarritt Bible and Training Institute. She then went to Johns Hopkins, where she received a diploma in nursing in 1925.

Her mother was active in the Conference Woman's Missionary Society, serving as conference president for a time. Growing up in a parsonage family, attending two Methodist colleges, participating in conference organizations, and her training in nursing all led Herbert into the mission field.

In 1925, Herbert sailed for Shanghai, where she worked for the next 18 years in the Margaret Williamson Hospital. Along with other American nurses there, she helped start a hospital school of nursing, teaching nursing skills to Chinese women as well as caring for patients in the hospital. She soon became supervisor of nurses. In 1940, she began working for the Women's Division of Christian Service of the newly unified Methodist Church's Board of Missions.

World War II brought an end to Herbert's work in Shanghai. She wrote of sometimes having to retreat into safer quarters. I'm not exactly sure how she got back to the United States from China in 1943, but I bet that's an interesting story. Following World War II and the subsequent Communist revolution, she was not able to return to the mission field in China. She earned a master's in nursing at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland in 1947, and from then until 1960, she lived in Sumter.

Herbert got one final stint at medical mission work in the early 1960s, when she spent three years in Hong Kong. She sailed from California in February 1961. She wrote several letters to the *Advocate* talking about relearning her Mandarin skills, describing Hong Kong and Kowloon, and explaining her work with the Methodist Committee on Overseas Relief. She wrote that some of her work would be with individuals who had a relationship with the Methodist Church in the Shanghai area who had come to Hong Kong after the war. A picture on the front page of the *Advocate* in 1963 showed Herbert with the president of a Chinese Methodist Women's Society of Christian Service who had been born in the hospital in Shanghai while Herbert was working there.

Upon her return from Hong Kong, Herbert retired from the mission field in 1965, first returning to Sumter and later to Spartanburg. The local newspaper carried an article about her life in China after President Nixon's visit there in 1972, and another after she made a trip with other retired missionaries to China when she was in her late 70s. Returning from that trip, which seems to have been the first time she had flown across the Pacific instead of sailing, she remarked that the countries had changed, but not the people. She shared stories of people she saw again who were happy to see her, but also of the church's work in several of those countries.

Herbert moved to the Brooks-Howell Home in Asheville in 1989 and lived there until her death in December 2002 at age 105. The preacher's daughter from South Carolina had lived in three centuries and had traveled to serve God and her church quite a long way from her homes in Florence and Sumter.

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

Historical Society

by Dr. Roger M. Gramling

The German Methodists

As strange as it may seem today, language played a role in the development of American Methodism and led Methodists down separate paths.

In Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, early Methodist preachers encountered settlements of German-speaking people. A traveling companion of Asbury's, Martin Boehm, who was a Mennonite and a Pennsylvanian, would preach to the German-speaking settlers in places where they visited. Another friend and associate of Asbury was an ordained German Reformed Minister in Baltimore, Maryland, named Philip William Otterbein. Otterbein became interested in Methodism and, like Boehm, worked among German-speaking immigrants in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia.

These "societies" followed Methodist doctrine and practice but did not affiliate with the Methodist Episcopal Church. This was mainly because of Asbury's insistence that the newly created Methodist Episcopal Church be an English-speaking church only. Asbury was convinced that the use of German would soon die out in America and was opposed to a two-language church. However, Asbury encouraged Otterbein and Boehm to form a separate church for German-speaking people from among those societies they had organized.

Thus on Sept. 25, 1800, near Frederick, Maryland, Otterbein and Boehm and a small group of preachers affiliated with them organized a church to be known as the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, the name adopted formally in 1821. Its doctrine and polity was copied from that of the Methodist Episcopal Church and a German translation made of the *Discipline* of the Methodist Episcopal Church with whom friendly relations continued.

Work among German-speaking people was also being carried forward by a Methodist named Jacob Albright, also of Pennsylvania. Albright was a farmer and tilemaker who had been born into a Lutheran family but became a Methodist in 1792. In 1796, Albright began to preach, traveling from settlement to settlement and organizing his followers into groups like the Methodist societies. Albright wanted his followers in the Methodist Episcopal Church. He also favored the organization of German-speaking conferences. All of this, as indicated earlier, was opposed by Asbury.

At Kleinfeltersville, Pennsylvania, in November 1803, Albright and his followers met as a council and organized his German-speaking societies into a denomination. The first name adopted was "The Newly Formed Methodist Conference," although the group was also known in its early days as the "Dutch Methodists" and "Albright's German Methodists." Like the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, it adopted Methodist polity and practices, and its first discipline was largely a German translation of the one used by the Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1816, the name of the church was changed to "The Evangelical Association." It, too, enjoyed friendly relations with the Methodist Episcopal Church across the years. Asbury's prediction that the use of the German language in America would quickly disappear did not prove correct. In the years prior to the War Between the States, many German-speaking immigrants settled in America, and both the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Association grew as denominations expanding into Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Michigan.

In 1891 a division occurred within the Evangelical Association between members in the eastern part of the association centered at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who were more English in background, and those in the western part of the association, who were more German in background. This division was healed in 1922 when both groups reunited to form "The Evangelical Church." While naturally some differences in doctrine and polity had inevitably developed between the churches with the passage of time, both the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church considered themselves "Methodist" separated from the Methodist Episcopal Church only by language.

In the next few years, negotiations were begun between the Evangelical Church and the Church of the United Brethren in Christ looking toward a union of the two. Twenty years of negotiations led to a union on Nov. 16, 1946, in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, forming "The Evangelical United Brethren Church." The combined membership of the new church numbered approximately 700,000 at the time of union.

In 1968, the "German Methodists" merged with the Methodist Church to form The United Methodist Church following years of common interests and ecumenical associations and several years of formal discussions about union. The word "United" in the title of the new church was taken from the name of the Evangelical United Brethren Church.

Gramling serves as secretary-treasurer of the Conference Historical Society and is the president of the Southeastern Jurisdiction's Historical Society and a member of the SEJ Commission on Archives and History. His latest book, Recollections: Stories From My Life in the Ministry, is available from the Advocate Press at https://advocatesc.org/store/books/recollections.

February
Black History Month
UWF Wallace Family Life Special Emphasis Month

Feb. 28—Deadline to register for United Women in Faith Legislative Advocacy Day. https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/DECMBER-2024-MISSION-ECHO.pdf

March
Women's History Month

March 1—Conference Connectional Ministries meeting, Journey UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

March 1—Paths to Wholeness Annual Signature Brunch, Orangeburg County Club, Orangeburg, 10 a.m. https://www.pathstowholeness.org

March 1—Third Annual Kidney Awareness Health Fair, The Price House, Camden, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

March 2—Transfiguration Sunday

March 2—Organ Dedication Concert, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head Island, 5 p.m. Free; dessert reception follows the concert.

March 4—Shrove Tuesday

March 5—Ash Wednesday

March 8—UWF Book Study, Noon

March 8—LSM School (Greenville District), Aldersgate UMC, Greenville, 9 a.m.-Noon, $35. Register: https://www.umcsc.org/gvdistlsmregistration/

March 8-9—LSM School Spring II (Charleston District), Cokesbury UMC, Greenville, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. (Sat.), 2:30-5 p.m. (Sun), $30. Register: https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Charleston-District-2025-Spring-II-Session-Registration-Form.pdf

March 9—UMCOR Sunday

March 9—Scouting Sunday (alternate)

March 9—Daylight Saving Time begins

March 9—Marion District Connectional Ministries, First UMC, Marion, 4-5 p.m.

March 10—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.

March 15—LSM School (Greenville District), Aldersgate UMC, Greenville, 9 a.m.-Noon. Register: https://www.umcsc.org/gvdistlsmregistration/

March 16—LSM School (Spartanburg District), Beaumont UMC, Spartanburg, 2-5:30 p.m., $40. Register: https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/SPARTANBURG-DISTRICT-LSM-SCHOOL-REGISTRATION-FORM-Spring-2025.pdf

March 17—St. Patrick's Day

March 17—Marion District Committee on Ordained Ministry, Uncle Charlie's Hut, Marion, 9:30 a.m.-Noon.

March 18—UWF Legislative Advocacy Day, Epworth Children's Home, Columbia, $35. https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/DECMBER-2024-MISSION-ECHO.pdf

March 19—Dementia Care Worship, S.C. Cognitive Care Ministry, St. Paul's UMC, Orangeburg, 9:30 a.m.-Noon. Register: https://tinyurl.com/dementia-care031925

March 21-23—"Journey to Joy: A Special Journey for the Wives of Pastors" Women's Weekend, Lake Junaluska, N.C. More information: lakejunaluska.com/joy or call 800-222-4930.

March 22—UWF 156th Legacy Day of Giving

Photo courtesy of the Rev. Marty Quick

Vessels of memory

During its recent Black History Month celebration, Cumberland UMC, Florence, had the privilege of welcoming Connie Hill, who brought a remarkable collection of items that once belonged to her great-grandmother. Among these artifacts were old school irons, traditional cookware and a vintage lamp that illuminated a time before electricity. Each piece told a story, highlighting the resilience and resourcefulness of those who used them, while the bucket and dipper used for collecting water underscored the importance of community and shared resources in a bygone era. As Hill shared her family's history, it became evident that these items were not just relics of the past but vessels of memory that preserved the legacy of love and perseverance. "Her personal narrative enriched our understanding of Black history, reminding us of the real people behind historical events," said the Rev. Marty Quick. "Mrs. Hill's contributions significantly enhanced our observance, fostering a spirit of unity and reflection as we honor the diverse histories that shape our community and inspire future generations."

March 22—UWF Book Study, Noon

March 22—Bethel UMC, Rock Hill, of the Rock Hill South Charge, will hold a Gospel Explosion, 6 p.m. All are welcome.

March 22-23—LSM School (Orangeburg District), St. Mark UMC, North, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. (Sat.), 3-7 p.m. (Sun.), $35. https://www.umcsc.org/ordistlsmregistration/

March 23—LSM School (Spartanburg District), Beaumont UMC, Spartanburg, 2-5:30 p.m., $40. Register: https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/SPARTANBURG-DISTRICT-LSM-SCHOOL-REGISTRATION-FORM-Spring-2025.pdf

March 23—LSM School (Marion District), Socastee UMC, Myrtle Beach, 2:30-8 p.m. Register: bit.ly/MarionDistLSM

March 23—Harmony UMC, Rock Hill, Family and Friends Day.

March 29—LSM School (Greenville District), Aldersgate UMC, Greenville, 9 a.m.-1:45 p.m. Register: https://www.umcsc.org/gvdistlsmregistration/

March 30—LSM School (Spartanburg District), Beaumont UMC, Spartanburg, 2-5:30 p.m., $40. Register: https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/SPARTANBURG-DISTRICT-LSM-SCHOOL-REGISTRATION-FORM-Spring-2025.pdf

March 30—LSM School (Marion District), Socastee UMC, Myrtle Beach, 2:30-8 p.m. Register: bit.ly/MarionDistLSM

March 30-April 5—Spring Salkehatchie in Simpsonville. $200/person. Registration opens March 1 at https://www.salkehatchie.org.

April
UWF Columbia Bethlehem Community Center Special Emphasis Month

April 3—Gathering of Clergy Orders, Location TBD, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

April 4-5—Wellness in Action Festival, Columbia College, Columbia.

April 4-6—"Journey to Joy: Women of the Cross" Women's Weekend, Lake Junaluska, N.C. More information: lakejunaluska.com/joy or call 800-222-4930.

April 5—Wellness in Action 5K, Columbia College, 8:30-10 a.m.

April 5—Online Team Leader "Refresher" Training, UMVIM, 11 a.m. Register: https://tinyurl.com/umvim-april2025

April 6—LSM School (Greenwood District), St. Paul UMC, Saluda, 2-7 p.m., $35. Register: https://www.umcsc.org/greenwood/greenwood-district-lay-servant-ministries/

April 11—SMC Enrollment Day for prospective students, https://smcsc.edu/enrollmentdays

April 12—UWF Spiritual Growth Event, Zoom, 10 a.m.

April 12—SMC Enrollment Day for prospective students, https://smcsc.edu/enrollmentdays

April 13—Passion/Palm Sunday

April 13—Native American Awareness Sunday

April 13—LSM School (Greenwood District), St. Paul UMC, Saluda, 2-7 p.m., $35. Register: https://www.umcsc.org/greenwood/greenwood-district-lay-servant-ministries/

April 13-18—Spring Salkehatchie, Iva. $200/person. Registration opens March 1: https://www.salkehatchie.org.

Classified Advertisements

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(www.advocatesc.org).

Deadlines are the 10th of the month
for the following month's paper.

Embracing the beatitudes

by the Rev. Darlene L. Kelley

March 2
Despair to Hope

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 5:1-3, Mark 5:25-34
Background Scripture: Matthew 5:1-3, 20-22; Mark 5:25-34
Key Verse: Matthew 5:3, "Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs."

When I was 17 years old, I opened every medicine bottle in the bathroom cabinet and gulped down every pill in those bottles one after the other until I lurched toward the toilet in a violent purge.

At that moment, I felt tormented enough to die but somehow didn't. God's grace is my only explanation and faith in God my greatest source of healing. "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." My wounds weren't physical; they were emotional and spiritual, and they took longer than a moment to heal, but healing is a process for everyone but Jesus.

Jesus heals instantly with a touch.

Found in all three of the synoptic gospels, the story of the hemorrhaging woman is a powerful example of faith and healing. Not only does a woman who has been suffering for a dozen years finally find freedom from disease, but she procures that freedom with a simple touch. A touch of his robe is all it takes, she believes, and that belief inspires action, and the rest is healing history.

Yet this week's study pairs Mark's story with a verse from Matthew's beatitudes, and the pairing shines new light on the situation. Now with the Common English Bible translation, we have the "hopeless" to consider, and I'm reminded of my young self in that bathroom contemplating suicide. Hopeless paints a hellish landscape, but we've all heard that it only takes faith the size of a mustard seed to move mountains, and mountains transform any landscape.

Whether we suffer physically, emotionally or spiritually, we can reach out to Jesus. He heals with a touch.

How has Jesus touched your life? What wounds do you want Jesus to heal for you today?

March 9
Grief to Joy

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 5:4, Luke 7:11-17
Background Scripture: Same
Key Verse: Matthew 5:4, "Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad."

Included in the service of death and resurrection in *The United Methodist Book of Worship,* a reading from the 21st chapter of Revelation provides powerful imagery. The Scripture assures mourners that the "home of God is among mortals," and not only will God "dwell with us," but he will also "wipe every tear" from our eyes, and death and crying "will be no more" (Revelation 21:3-4). The verses are certainly good news, especially for anyone facing death or coping with the loss of a loved one. When we are hurting, we seek comfort, and as the psalmist decries, "In the midst of life, we are in death; from whom can we seek help? Our help is in the name of the Lord" (Book of Common Prayer), When we are hurting, we can turn to God. When we are afraid, we can turn to God. And if we are to believe God's promises, we will recover from our losses even from the great pain and loss of death.

However, there's another key word in the verse that I'm not sure we've examined thoroughly or honestly. "Happy are people who grieve." Though it may manifest differently in different people, grief is a process that takes time and courage.

I confess there have been times in my life that I've run from pain rather than mustered the wisdom and courage to sit with it. We can be quick to medicate our wounds, run very far from them indeed to the point of ignoring them completely, yet our wounds can be our best teachers.

Renowned author and Franciscan priest Richard Rohr teaches that all great spirituality is about letting go. If I don't acknowledge my pain, I can't let it go.

What hurts you today? What are you grieving? How do you surrender your grief to God?

March 16
Pride to Humility

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 5:5; Luke 18:9-14
Background Scripture: Same
Key Verse: Matthew 5:5, "Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth."

This week's key verse reminds me once again of Richard Rohr who writes about the difficulty of "converting" the religious and most "obedient to church formula" in his book, "Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer."

Rohr warns that some church folk mistake symbol for substance and ritual for reality. "They've taken the means for the end and become inoculated from the experience of the real thing. That's called idolatry, when we worship and protect that means."

Think for a moment about your own experience of church. Has the church, or more precisely, any of the folks that make up the church ever hurt you? Have you always felt welcomed at every church you've visited? Have you sometimes worried more about what you were going to wear or what you looked like going to church than the depth of the worship experience? Have you ever felt shamed by the church?

Though we are called to be the body of Christ, we can be our own worst enemies even in church. When we think we are right, we stop listening to one another. When we think it's our way or the highway, we stop working well together. So powerful a force is our own ego that some allow it to drive them to destruction.

In 1993, a biochemistry student at Stanford University named Wendy Northcutt started collecting stories of "dumb deaths in newspaper articles from around the world," and the Darwin Awards were born. Every year, someone puts a gun to their head or something equally as dangerous and dies—on a dare. Indeed, accidental death, the leading cause of death among teenagers, is generally inspired by teens daring one another to the point of peril. We don't want to look like a chicken in front of our friends. It is difficult to escape our egos.

Yet Jesus teaches it is the "humble" who get the big prize. Maybe that's because their humility allows them not only to survive but also to learn a thing or two along the way.

Are you aware of how your ego affects your mood and your decisions? Do you think ego can make it harder for us to surrender to God?

March 23
Ritual to Righteousness

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 5:6; Matthew 15:1-20
Background Scripture: Same
Key Verse: Matthew 5:6, "Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full."

My elementary school was also where all the folks in the neighborhood came to vote, so we had Election Day off. I was cheerfully on my way past the school to the playground when I caught sight of an election worker sitting on the curb rubbing his feet. The soles of his shoes were so thin and worn they were almost gone. He looked pained and exhausted, and the sight of the poor man shocked me enough to stop me in my tracks. I wanted to see if he could get up off the curb.

I was curious to see what he would do next, what fate this poor, exhausted creature could endure, and so I stopped for a bit and watched the man. And he did rise up, and I witnessed what felt to my very young mind like a miracle, a transformation I didn't believe possible. The man rose up and smiled, and shook hands with a man and handed him a slip of paper with great enthusiasm, and then another man and then another. He stood tall and strong and even shouted his candidate's name a few times in between handshakes, smiling and filled with an energy I never believed possible from the man who first caught my eye pained and hunched over on the curb.

Many years later, I realized the man was working for an underdog candidate who won that year's big election. The man on the curb was fighting for someone he believed in, and he and others like him working together gave their man a victory. They were hungry and thirsty for something, and when the votes were counted, they must have felt very satisfied indeed.

I've often thought of that moment in front of my elementary school and what I learned from watching a man rise up from the curb, hungry and thirsty for political change. What would drive me to walk so far and work so hard that I wore out the soles of my shoes? What would inspire me to rise up from exhaustion with energy and joy? What inspires you?

March 30
Empty Worship to Pure Hearts

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 5:8, Mark 7:5-15
Background Scripture: Same
Key Verse: Matthew 5:8, "Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God."

I've known very few saints, but I have been blessed to know a couple of folks who were as good as humanity gets, and one of them is my old friend Henry. Henry and his sister, chained to a radiator by their mother at an early age, didn't get many of the necessities most parents provide, and the abuse and neglect left Henry with some challenges. Yet he never let anything keep him from trying his best, and he never let anyone steal his joy. The true north and firm center of Henry's life was God.

Perhaps his challenges were ultimately a gift that allowed Henry a closer walk with God than most of us can muster. "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3-4). Jesus said it; Henry lived it. Henry didn't have a loving father on earth, but he heard the voice of God our Father and followed it with absolute trust and complete joy.

Henry's friend, Steven, died and Henry and a small gathering of mourners stood at his grave. I opened my *Book of Worship* and read the liturgy and the prayers and folks bowed their heads, and we committed a body to the ground. Yet on this day filled with liturgy perfected through the ages, it is Henry I will always remember. At the conclusion of the service as we turned to leave, Henry remembered one last, important thing that needed to be said.

"Make God laugh, Stevie!" Henry shouted. "Make God laugh!"

How do we come to Jesus like little children? How do we keep pure hearts in a world that can be harsh and threatening?

Kelley pastors Trinity United Methodist Church, West Columbia. She is a member of the Advocate *Board of Trustees.*

Photo courtesy of Freddie Vaughn

St. Mark Souper Bowl helps soup kitchen

St. Mark UMC in the Earlewood Community of Columbia held their annual "Souper Bowl" Sunday Feb. 9. Members supply their soup recipes for a tasting and put donations into a soup pot for the team they want to win the Super Bowl. The big winner in all this is Washington Street UMC's Soup Kitchen, which received St. Mark's total donation of $965.

Camden to host third annual Kidney Awareness Health Fair

The Camden community will come together Saturday, March 1, for the third annual Kidney Awareness Health Fair, bringing health awareness to the community one step at a time.

The fair will be held from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at The Price House, 724 Broad St., Camden, featuring guest speakers, music and more. Vendors are welcome, and a clothing drive will be sponsored by the Bertha F. Mills Foundation.

"Bring your lawn chairs and kick back for a time full of activities," said Stephanie Ponds Henry.

For more information, email sponds@ymail.com.

Photo courtesy of Harriet Stevenson

Going red in Newberry

Trinity UMC, Newberry, recognized American Heart Month with a presentation to the congregation about cardiovascular disease, with an emphasis on stroke. Attendees were given information to take home with them about stroke, high blood pressure and high cholesterol as well as recipes and a stress ball. The presentation was a part of Trinity's Outreach Ministry. Also, many on the congregation wore red on Feb. 9 to observe National Heart Month.

Going strong at 100

Pastor Annie Jackson shares a smile with Mrs. Rosa Lee Patterson, who turned 100 years old August 17. The oldest member of Mount Sinai UMC in the Anderson District, Patterson's family traveled from Chicago, Atlanta, Virginia, North and South Carolina and other places to help celebrate her milestone. She received honorary certificates from Gov. Henry McMaster, South Carolina Congress, the City and County of Anderson and more. "She is a joy to visit and keeps up with her church happenings," Jackson said.