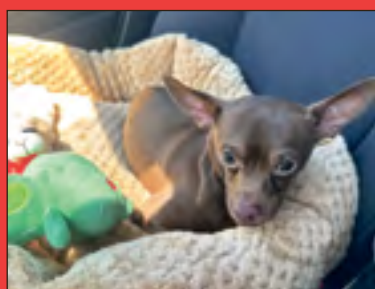


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Orange Grove VBS takes adults, kids on "Trip of a Lifetime." Page 10.



Meet Nugget, September's precious pet of the month. Page 4.



Lay Servant "Train the Trainer" Academy a great success. Page 18.

Visit our website:



Photo courtesy of Zion UMC

Youth and adult volunteers come from the church and all around the community.

Through the graveyard to life

Zion UMC feeds record 280 families in Prosperity

By Jessica Brodie

PROSPERITY—For more than a dozen years, God has been feeding thousands of people through the generous hearts and hands of one congregation.

Three times a year, Zion United Methodist Church hosts a massive Saturday community food distribution it calls the Zion UMC Food Pantry.

They held their most recent event Aug. 15, that day giving out food to more families than ever before—280 families, 59 of them first-time recipients.

The Rev. Joseph James said the effort is a smoothly run, well-orchestrated system led by a relatively small church, with roughly 85 in worship each Sunday.

"In more than 30 years of ministry, I have never seen a congregation this size have such a significant and well-coordinated impact on its local community," James said, noting the event is a wonderful reminder that churches of every size can make an extraordinary difference in the communities they serve.

See "Zion Feeds Families," Page 24

Brookland UMC presses on after ceiling collapse

By Jessica Brodie

WEST COLUMBIA—A Midlands church is reeling after the unexpected collapse of its sanctuary ceiling.

The Rev. Mark Payne said everything was normal at Brookland United Methodist Church on Sunday, July 19, when the congregation gathered for worship. But two days later, Payne got a call that utterly shocked him—the ceiling was in shambles, with huge chunks of drywall, wood and other materials crashing in.

See "Brookland Ceiling," Page 13

Salkehatchie repairs 75+ homes in 49th summer

By Jessica Brodie

More than 75 families now have safe, renovated homes thanks to the 49th summer of Salkehatchie.

Nearly 1,000 volunteers participated in 26 summer camps across South Carolina, with adults working alongside youth ages 14 and older repairing and constructing roofs, decks, ramps, flooring, bathrooms and more.

"Thank you for another fruitful summer at Salkehatchie," said Salkehatchie Board Chair Ward Smith.

See "Salkehatchie," Page 11

Two Georgia conferences combine into one

S.C. delegation among voters approving merger

By Jessica Brodie

The North and South Georgia annual conferences are now one.

South Carolina lay and clergy delegates joined their counterparts across the Southeastern Jurisdiction for a special called jurisdictional conference session held Aug. 11, voting unanimously to approve the unification.

Both the North and South Georgia conferences approved the unification at their respective annual conferences this summer (South Georgia by 96.6 percent and North Georgia by 96 percent), and the request to unify was one they had been working toward since fall 2024 through prayerful

study, engagement, discernment and other diligent work.

The newly formed Georgia Conference will begin operations in January 2027.

"It was a profound celebration to witness the unification of laity and clergy in the noble mission of serving God's people," said South Carolina Delegation Chair Jackie Jenkins.

See "Georgia," Page 12



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

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

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

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

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

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

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Advocate Awareness Sunday Sept. 27 to help churches know more about UMCSC news ministry

Every year, the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* holds its annual Advocate Awareness Sunday, an effort to introduce United Methodists across South Carolina to the newspaper ministry.

The 2026 Advocate Awareness Sunday is Sept. 27 (though churches are welcome to celebrate Advocate Awareness Sunday any Sunday).

The *Advocate* has a number of free resources for churches to share on Advocate Awareness Sunday:

- A brief video
- Speakers
- Subscription flyers
- A “Do You Read the *Advocate*?” blurb to copy/paste into your bulletin
- Two-up bulletin inserts to download,

print and pop right into your Sunday bulletin (5 1/2 x 8 1/2” two-up)

- Talking points for you to read to your church about the *Advocate*

All are available at https://go.advocatesc.org/aad.

“The *Advocate* is a great way to help churches be connectional and know what is going on across the state, but not everyone knows about the *Advocate*,” said Editor Jessica Brodie. “We hope our readers will do what they can to spread the word so our ministry continues.”

Founded as the *Southern Christian Advocate*, the *Advocate* was first commissioned by the General Conference of 1836 to be published in Charleston, one

of three papers authorized by that conference. Highly respected across the denomination, it is currently the oldest newspaper in Methodism and has won more than 150 journalism excellence awards since its founding. Today’s *Advocate* fosters discipleship within South Carolina United Methodism by providing relevant news in various formats to unite all in Christ.

It is independent but receives about one-sixth of its funding from the South Carolina Conference of the UMC. It receives funds from other sources, including subscriptions, ads and donations. It also operates a successful Christian book publishing arm, the Advocate Press.

For more information: jbrodie@advocatesc.org.

Advocate social media ‘news reels’ drive traffic, engagement while lifting up good news of church

Are you on social media? If so, be sure to check out the *Advocate*’s new “news reels.” Editor Jessica Brodie offers short recaps of some of our top stories from the latest editions.

The *Advocate* is on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/advocatesc), Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/advocatesc_news), YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/@advocatesc_news) and TikTok (https://www.tiktok.com/@advocatesc_news), and the content is driving traffic and engagement about the church in South Carolina.

Follow, connect, like and share so all can know the good news happening within the churches and ministries of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.



Boosting Kingstree students

Mount Zion UMC, Kingstree, recently distributed school supplies to children in their community. April Williams, the children and youth ministry coordinator, prepared each bag as a wonderful way to boost student confidence and excitement for the school year ahead. The back-to-school supplies support families in the Kingstree community and connect the community with the church. “Children and youth are an integral part of the church community where they should feel supported, nurtured, loved and belong,” said Williams, pictured here with Ella Alston, Esq.

Photo courtesy of Toni Strawther

Golf tournament to raise funds for AU Sept 28

ORANGEBURG—Registration is going on now for the annual Africa University Wespeth-Sponsored Bishop Leonard Fairley Golf Invitational, set for Sept. 28.

Held at Orangeburg Country Club, proceeds fund scholarships and campus programs that equip Africa University students to lead and serve across Africa.

The United Methodist Church founded Africa University, located in Mutare, Zimbabwe, in 1992 as its first pan-African, private, United Methodist-related institution of higher learning. South Carolina has been one of the university’s key supporters from the beginning, and to further support AU, lay leaders in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church established the annual golf tournament 13 years ago.

Each year, more than 100 golfers from South Carolina and across the nation participate in the tournament.

This year, the tournament will include a weekend lineup of events:

- An invitation-only dinner Friday
 - A meeting of the Board and Advisory Development committees and Wespeth Stakeholders Seminar on Saturday, Sept. 26
 - An energy-packed Africa University Sunday saturation event Sept. 27 in the Orangeburg District, with at least 15 churches hosting Africa University representatives, plus worship and a special luncheon at Edisto Fork UMC, Orangeburg
- “This tournament gives another chance to enjoy supporting one of our

most excellent ministries,” South Carolina Bishop Leonard Fairley said. “It connects us to one another both locally and with our heart for ministry around the world.”

Wespeth is the tournament’s lead sponsor. Orangeburg native James Salley, president and CEO of Africa University (Tennessee) Inc., oversees event planning and delivery.

AU has seen more than 13,000 graduates from more than 30 African nations, all contributing to peace, innovation and development on that continent.

To sponsor the tournament, visit https://go.advocatesc.org/2026au-golf-sponsor.

To register as a player, visit https://golf.africaau.org.

Medicare 101, bingo unite Hickory Hill for fellowship and learning

By Renne W. Brown
SMOAKS—Hickory Hill United Methodist Church’s SeenAgers and Outreach Ministries came together for a wonderful time of learning, connecting, and fellowship centered on Medicare 101 and bingo.

It was a day filled with meaningful conversations, shared experiences, laughter and fun as members strengthened their bonds and enjoyed one another’s company.

Candyce Ravenell educated participants by providing a

clear overview of Medicare, including eligibility requirements, enrollment periods, the different parts of Medicare (Parts A, B, C and D), coverage options and ways to avoid common enrollment mistakes.

Esaunta Buncomb shared about Community Long-Term Care services, explaining how eligible individuals can receive assistance with daily living activities while remaining safely in their homes and communities. Topics included eligibility guidelines, available in-home

services, caregiver support and the application process.

Whether attendees were approaching Medicare eligibility, helping a loved one navigate the system or planning for future long-term care needs, the sessions provided valuable information, practical resources and an opportunity to ask questions and connect with knowledgeable professionals.

The afternoon ended with a lively game of bingo that brought plenty of fun, laughter and smiles to all in attendance.



The event fostered new connections.

5 Things to Know.

About O’Neal Street UMC, Columbia

The Advocate has started a new feature that showcases a different United Methodist church in every district throughout South Carolina with their answers to five questions. This month, get to know O’Neal Street UMC, Newberry, whose pastor is the Rev. Ed Stallworth.

1. What makes your congregation unique compared to other churches in your district?

O’Neal Street UMC is a small church on Sunday mornings, but throughout the week, we are anything but small. We have become a place where the community comes together to serve the community. In fact, our fellowship hall and food pantry see more foot traffic during the week than our sanctuary does on Sunday.

The majority of the people who regularly volunteer through our community ministries are not members of O’Neal Street. They come from other churches, civic organizations, colleges and the surrounding community. We provide a place where people can bring their gifts, their time and their desire to serve and put them to work alongside others.

That is one of the things that makes O’Neal Street special. We are not only a church that serves the community. We are a place where the community comes to serve.

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

It is difficult to choose just one because so much of our community ministry works together to meet the needs of our neighbors.

Saturday is our biggest day. Our Feed Thy Neighbor Kitchen prepares and serves a couple hundred meals each Saturday. GAAP, our food pantry, provides groceries to at least 80 families, and our clothes closet provides clothing to people who need it. About a dozen volunteers make much of this happen each week, and the majority of those volunteers are not members of O’Neal Street.

Our ministry also responds to needs throughout the year. When winter temperatures become dangerously cold, we open our building as an overnight shelter and warming center. During extreme summer heat, we provide a daytime cooling center. In the summer, we open the church for a reading camp for children.

Our community men’s group also holds two chicken stew fundraisers each year, with the proceeds going back into helping people in the community.

We are proud of these ministries because they have grown out of a simple question: What does our community need, and how can we help? Sometimes that means sitting down with one person and helping them look for a job or connect with social services. Other times it means larger ministries like GAAP or Feed Thy Neighbor. Whatever the need, the heart of it is the same. It is about building relationships, knowing our neighbors and being present with one another.

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



Here, people gather at O’Neal Street UMC for the church’s daytime cooling center.

Our biggest challenge is growing our worshiping congregation and developing the next generation who will carry the church and its ministries forward.

We recognize the realities of being a small, older congregation. At the same time, there is a much larger community connected to O’Neal Street through volunteering, outreach and community partnerships. That gives us both a challenge and an opportunity.

We are working to deepen relationships with the people around us while becoming more intentional about reaching our neighborhood. We do not simply want more people in the pews. We want people to discover a community where they can worship, serve, grow and belong.

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

We have tried to navigate the changes in the UMC by embracing what I believe is one of the strengths of our Wesleyan tradition: We have a wide umbrella.

The people at O’Neal Street have always had theological, political and social disagreements with one another. Many of the people here are longtime friends who have no problem voicing their thoughts, but they are also really good at listening to one another. They can disagree and still worship together, serve together, laugh together and care deeply for one another. It truly is a place where people are accepted for who they are, no matter where they are in life.

5. If you could tell the rest of South Carolina one thing about your corner of the state, what would it be?

There is real need in our community, but there is also tremendous generosity. We see people from different churches, civic organizations, colleges and walks of life working beside one another to care for their neighbors. Many have no formal connection to O’Neal Street. They simply see something that needs to be done and show up to help.

Our corner of South Carolina reminds us that a small congregation can help create something much larger than itself. You do not have to have unlimited people or resources to make a difference. Sometimes you simply need to open your doors, build relationships, share what you have and give people a place to serve.

—Submitted by the Rev. Ed Stallworth

Need-to-Know Roundup.

Six key takeaways from this month’s Advocate

- Advocate Awareness Sunday Sept. 27 to help churches know more about the news ministry (Page 2)
- Golf tournament to raise needed funds for Africa University Sept. 28 (Page 2)
- NextGEN Worship: Mechanicsville makes room at table for the next generation (Page 8)
- Friendship UMC celebrates God’s faithful love as they prepare to complete construction (Page 9)
- Columbia College extends Dozier’s contract through 2030 (Page 14)
- Cumberland UMC mission ministry serves 112 through monthly Parking Lot Outreach (Page 17)

Advocate releases third book in children’s series by UMCSC’s Rev. Meg Cook helping kids understand how to overcome hurdles

COLUMBIA—How can kids face—and overcome—hurdles?

That’s the premise behind “Herbert the Hippo and the Hurdle,” the third book in the popular Herbert the Hippo children’s picture book series authored by South Carolina pastor the Rev. Meg Sweeney Cook.

In “Herbert the Hippo and the Hurdle,” Cook explores obstacles through the kid-friendly lens of Herbert, a small pink hippo figurine who was made in South Africa. Herbert may be little, but he knows a great big secret: hurdles aren’t stop signs—they’re chances to grow. With persistence, determination and good old grit, Herbert reminds us that we can do hard things, that our first try doesn’t have to be perfect and that asking for help is always okay.

Cook is an enthusiastic supporter of children and boosting their self-confidence. She has worked with and taught children for more than 25 years in churches, preschools and at Epworth Children’s Home. Meg



is a daughter, a United Methodist Church pastor, a certified Christian educator, a puppeteer, a gluten-free baker, a wife and a mom to two energetic, super-smart boys. She lives with her family in South Carolina and currently pastors Grace United Methodist Church, Columbia.

The book is available as a paperback and e-book from the Advocate Press directly at <https://store.advocatesc.org/product/herbert-the-hippo-and-the-hurdle> or from Amazon and other major book retailers at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1966237146>.

The Advocate Press is the publishing arm of the South Carolina United Methodist Advocate newspaper. Founded in 2017, the mission of the Advocate Press is to produce books of interest to South Carolina United Methodists on matters of faith and to amplify regional voices and those that advocate for the advancement of the kingdom of God. To date it has produced 41 books, available on its website, <https://advocatepress.org>.

Advocate.

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Editorial
by Jessica Brodie

The surprising soul-
comfort of change

Last week my husband and I took our first “empty nest” trip together after our daughter left for college. Driving through the Blue Ridge Mountains, we decided it would be a nice idea to stop by the spot where we had sprinkled my dad’s remains six years ago.

However, while I had pinned the spot on my iPhone map, I never wrote down the exact coordinates, and my phone had updated and somehow lost the pin over the years. Still, we managed to find the trail by memory and began to make our way along the wooded and brambly path. We reached the river and turned right, going up the ridge. I’d wanted to sprinkle his ashes overlooking a river, but not too close that it contaminated the water, so we had a rough idea of where we were going. I even had a picture of the spot where I’d placed a tiny painted rock, there in this picturesque location that I know would’ve made my dad happy.

Yet six years had vastly changed what had seemed like a timeless, unchanging landscape. Between winters and runoff and Hurricane Helene, the spot was familiar, yet not the same. Large rocks and downed logs now blocked the path, and in its place a new path had been blazed. The river, while still breathtakingly beautiful, now boasted massive timber and boulders where none had been before.

It was the same location, yet so much had changed.

Instead of dismay that I had not found the exact location where we had sprinkled my dad’s ashes six long years ago, a deep feeling of comfort arose within me.

For my soul understood what we all know inherently—everything changes. Nothing on this earth is permanent, even nature. While the sun still rises and sets and the mountain still stands, every day brings different terrain. The mountain changes. It’s still beautiful, still peaceful, but it’s different. It’s new. And that’s not a bad thing.

Eventually that mountain, too, will crumble. I imagine one day the sun will no longer rise and set when our Lord and Savior returns and ushers in a new heaven and a new earth.

Only God—Father, Son and Spirit, three in one—remains everlasting, and we who believe in and follow him are everlasting because we are a part of him.

Right now is a time of change in my life. Our youngest daughter has now gone off to college, and other than my stepson who comes over every other weekend, we are empty nesters. Parents are aging, beloved relatives and friends pass away and even our denominational structure is changing. None of this is a bad thing. It’s simply a new opportunity for God’s glory and beauty to shine—a new mode of expression, a new path in the wild.

As I stood there on that altered ridge overlooking the river rushing below, my soul settled anew. Gone was the rock that had marked my father’s remains; gone was the path I stood upon six years ago.

Yet the same God still stood right there with me, holding my hand. And all was well.

“I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6 NIV).



Bishop’s Column
by Bishop Leonard E. Fairley

Listening art or skill

I invite you into a series of what-if questions around listening. Is listening an art or a skill? When was the last time you actually listened with all your senses? Have you ever listened with all your heart, mind and soul?

I think listening is both a skill and an art. Listening has been defined as a skill that involves active processing and reflection. Listening as art requires empathy, humility and the willingness to create sacred space for other voices and all of creation to express themselves without judgment, interruption or initial interruption of their feelings and thoughts. I believe this kind of listening build trust.

Take time to truly listen to another and you might hear the voice of God. I encourage each of us to listen for God’s voice everywhere. We could use a bit more listening these days in our public and political discourse. In a world where the loudest voice seems to get most of the attention, and constant chatter distracts us from recognizing the voice of Jesus, there is need of listening as both art and skill.

What if God’s voice is the still, small voice that speaks as it did to Elijah? God does not speak in the fire, the earthquake or the mighty wind but through a quiet, gentle whisper. A season of holy listening might open ears so that we might hear the voices we need to

hear but have ignored, the voices buried beneath the barrage of words written and heard on social media post, blogs, network cable news and podcasts.

I like the words Marilyn McEntyre uses when she writes, “Listen for God’s voice everywhere. And don’t forget that the Spirit may use the people who annoy you to teach you. Precisely the word we need may come from a sullen 19-year-old with a nose ring, or from the bore who corners you at a party or from an officious neighbor.”

I often ask myself the following questions. Where have I missed hearing the voice of God? Where have I missed God’s voice because I have been distracted? Where have I missed God’s voice by filling up the space with my words instead of God’s word? What if we listened beyond our resistances and prejudices?

What if we practiced the skill and art of listening? It may lead us beyond our assumptions and divisions. It might change our religious, political and public discourse.

Whenever it was my turn to lead preschool chapel as a pastor, I would always tell the kids to put their listening ears on. Let’s put our spiritual listening ears on today, remembering God speaks to us in a million voices and in all creation.

Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

Corrections.

In the article “First Members Recycle Plastic Bags into Sleeping Mats” (August *Advocate*), we should have noted it is the bags (not the mats) that need to be flattened and sorted by color, then folded and cut to make the loops for weaving.

We apologize for this error and, as always, strive to set the record straight.

Letters to the Editor.

A poem: One Unique Breath One unique Breath from God, Breathed into a mold filled with sod, Made into the first human, the fulfillment of God’s goal, God’s art and God’s heart made the human soul.	The gulf between God’s vision and where we are, Greater than that between Earth and the stars, Encourages our souls to be better and to make our paths straighter, Aiming - trying to become pleasing to our Creator.	God simply commanded the Uni- verse into being, Infusing it with preconceived atonement, totally freeing our souls from yet-to-be-committed atrocities—sins. Kneeling in mud, God formed us
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See “Letters,” Page 5

Precious Pet of the Month.

We’ve officially welcomed a new, very furry and utterly adorable member to our extended family—my daughter’s new dog, Nugget! We’re all calling him our “grand-dog,” and he’s truly a little bundle of joy.

Nugget’s currently holding down the fort in Houston, Texas, keeping my daughter company as she navigates an exciting yet challenging new chapter. Moving to a new city and diving into fresh career adventures can be a lot, right? But Nugget has been an absolute superstar, providing her with endless cuddles, playful distractions and that special kind of unconditional love only a pet can give. It’s been so wonderful to see how much comfort and happiness he’s brought into



Nugget

her life during this big transition.

He’s definitely made her new house feel like a warm and loving home!

—Submitted by Linda Blackmon, member of Mount Elon United Methodist Church, Jefferson

Do you have a pet who is near and dear to your heart? Share a photo and brief story about your pet and what they mean to you in the *Advocate*, and be sure to include your name and church name with city.

Whether your animal friend is furry or has feathers or scales, we welcome your submission. Email news@advocatesc.org.



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Humanity
Behind Bars
by the Rev. Nichole
Middleton

The neighbor who teaches us

There is a subtle temptation in the church to believe we are the ones who bring what others lack. The longer I serve as a prison chaplain, however, the more I realize how incomplete that posture can be.

Some of my greatest teachers live behind the fence. They have taught me that good neighboring begins with humility—the willingness to believe there is something to receive from the person standing before us.

When we assume we understand someone because of their circumstances, we stop listening. When we reduce a person to a label, socioeconomic status or criminal conviction, we quietly move from seeing a neighbor to seeing a project. Jesus understood this. When asked, “Who is my neighbor?” He did not provide a list. He told the story of the Good Samaritan and challenged his listeners to reconsider what it means to be a neighbor.

Our churches sincerely want to serve. We create outreach ministries, distribute food, support reentry, build partnerships and advocate for people experiencing hardship.

But good intentions do not automatically produce good neighboring. Sometimes our desire to help moves faster than our willingness to listen.

Before creating a ministry, listen to the people it is intended to serve. Before deciding what a community needs, ask what the community says it needs. Before measuring success by what we provide, ask whether trust is being built. And before assuming the church has the answer, make room for the possibility that our neighbors have something to teach us.

This does not mean abandoning accountability or justice. The people I encounter in prison have caused real harm, and accountability matters. But accountability and dignity are not opposites. A person’s past does not erase the image of God they bear.

The person returning home after incarceration may teach us about restoration. The young person who has stopped attending church may teach us what the church has failed to hear. The community we have been trying to “reach” may teach us that what it really needs is not another program, but a partner.

Perhaps faithful outreach begins when we stop asking only, “What can we do for them?” and start asking, “What can we learn from them? What can we build together?”

That shift changes how we design ministries, who gets invited into the conversation and how we define success.

If your church is rethinking its approach to outreach, advocacy or reentry, begin with three questions: Who are we serving? Have we listened to them? Are we building with them—or simply doing for them?

These questions can transform more than a program. They can transform the relationship between a church and the community it hopes to serve.

The church has an extraordinary opportunity to move beyond good intentions toward more thoughtful, relational and sustainable ministry. That work requires more than compassion. It requires listening, partnership and a willingness to examine whether the ways we serve are actually helping people flourish. Because perhaps the goal is not simply to help our neighbors but to become better neighbors.

Sometimes, the neighbor we thought we came to serve becomes the neighbor who teaches us how to love.

LETTERS

From Page 4
with love,
and said, “Now it begins!”

God didn’t say, “It’s finished!”
The Divine Plan had barely begun.
The Plan that would last thousands of years
till the coming of God’s Son,
The Plan that would take thousands more,
to get us here ... still impure,
God’s Plan may take billions of years to perfect
us for sure.

One unique Breath from God,
Breathed into a mold filled with sod,
So many have said, “Christ is on his way,”
But we’re not anywhere near ready—even
today.

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

Rev. Robert Clemons, retired
Myrtle Beach

Where is your treasure in life?

The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.
The gap between the rich and the poor is
getting wilder. Politicians and CEOs of large
companies are getting richer and controlling
the outcome of elections.

As Christians, we look at the economy
through spiritual eyes. Jesus said to him, “If
you would be perfect, go sell your possessions
and give to the poor, and you will have treasure
in heaven” (Matthew 19:21).

“For where your treasure is; there will your
heart be also” (Matthew 6:21).

One in four children will go to bed hungry
in the world. Cutting the USAID funds has
cost 750,000 lives. Two-thirds of these are
younger than 5 years old. This money was for
medical supplies, food and many other lifesav-
ing resources, such as nets to protect against
malaria. It is predicted 14 million people will
die in the world by the year 2030 because of
lack of aid. The war on poverty in the world is
being ignored. American people are suffering
because of inflation and cutting health resourc-
es. Thousands of federal jobs were cut that
benefited American people (health, education,
weather, HIV, drugs).

All the attention is on the war with Iran, and
this war is making billions of dollars for the
military industries (\$37.5 billion). Former Presi-
dent Eisenhower warned the American people
about the military complex.

It is a fact that you cannot take your wealth
with you when you die. There is no U-Haul
behind the hearse and no saddlebags on the
casket. Who really cares?

The wealthy and powerful are causing much
harm.

“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the
miseries that are coming upon you” (James
5:1). Paul says, “For God loves a cheerful giver”
(2 Corinthians 9:7).

Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia

A poem: Calming peace

Calming peace
restore in me
quiet listening—
let it be.

May none intrude
upon my soul,
for here is where
my blessings hold.

Make my body
resting sure,
weary eyes
can occur.

And then my peace
will freedom be,
found in miracle
arms to sleep, Jesus.

Dr. Linda Hodgin, member
Ashland UMC, Columbia

9/11: A prayer (from my heart to God’s ears)

I was at work, dear Lord, on that horrific
day. I was stunned as our coworkers heard the
news that our land was under siege by terror-
ists or some enemy, unknown to us at the time.
I called my son, Lord, to comfort him and him
to comfort me, and to reassure him that I loved
him, and that whatever happened next, our Lord
would be with us through it all.

But, dear Lord, I could not fathom the de-
struction, or even the hatred behind the de-
struction.

I could not comprehend lives being taken
so suddenly, and when helpers arrived, those
lives were also taken. I know, dear Lord, that
you were there, with each life as it left earth’s
boundaries. I know, dear Lord, that you walked
with them as they ran down stairwells. I know
your hands held onto those as they took their
last breaths of life. I know, dear Lord, that you
did not allow them to face the shadows and
darkness without bringing your light to show
them the way home. I know, dear Lord, that you
did not desert them in their hour of need; that
your presence was there in each room, each
hallway, and that each broken body was healed
and taken to your royal home.

I know, today, dear Lord, that you are still
with us—with those whose loved ones are no
longer on earth, but with you. I know, dear Lord,
that you are still comforting, still healing and still
a very real presence in the lives of those who
remain here on earth since 9/11.

Because you, dear Lord, are still in control of
the world and the entire universe, we can trust
you, depend upon you, lean on you, rejoice with
you, mourn with you, celebrate with you, sing
with you.

And most of all, I know that we can live with
you eternally when we, too, leave this earth to
come home to you.

Dear Lord, today be with those who still re-
main in this earthly realm. Keep us on the path-
way to your home. Give us wisdom, strength and
the means to invite and bring others to you, so
that they too can come home to you when it is
their time. Amen.

Nancy Hunt, member
Bethlehem UMC, Manning



Commentary by Bryce Williams

Come sit awhile: Rediscovering the lost art of the porch

Come sit awhile.

And I mean awhile, because if you've ever sat on a porch with the right people, you already know there is no such thing as a five-minute conversation. You might have only stopped by to say hello, but somehow an hour later you're still sitting there, you've been offered something to eat, you know what's going on with three different families and somebody has brought up a story that happened before you were even born.

That's a porch conversation.

And lately, I've been thinking that we need those conversations again.

When I was younger and lived in Camden, I used to go to my neighbors' house all the time. We would cook, eat together, sit around, talk, laugh and just spend time together. There didn't have to be an occasion. Nobody needed to send out invitations. Nobody had to make a Facebook event. You just went over there.

And let's be clear: when I say we talked, I mean we talked.

Porch conversations can start with, "What are y'all cooking?" and somehow end with somebody telling you what happened at church 15 years ago. There is no agenda. The conversation just goes wherever it decides to go.

Looking back, though, those ordinary moments meant something.

I think about my great-aunt's house, too. She had a sunroom that was almost like her version of a porch. It had sliding glass doors all around it and plants everywhere, and we could sit there and watch the cars go by.

Now, watching cars drive down the road does not exactly sound like premium entertainment. But somehow it was.

We would sit there and talk. A car would pass. We'd talk some more. Another car would pass. And depending on who was sitting in that room, there was probably going to be some commentary about that car, too.

And I miss that. Not necessarily watching random cars go down the road—I can still do that. I miss what those spaces created.

They gave us time. Time to laugh. Time to tell stories. Time to hear things about our families. Time to ask questions. Time to eat together. Time to find out things you probably weren't even trying to find out.

And somewhere in all that talking, faith had a way of showing up, too.

That's something I've started noticing about faith: some of the conversations that stick with you don't happen during a sermon.

Sometimes they happen while somebody is fixing a plate.

Sometimes it's an older person telling you about something they went through and how God brought them through it.

Sometimes it's somebody giving you advice you absolutely did not ask for—but years later you realize they might've had a point.

Don't tell them I said that.

The Bible actually gives us a picture of faith happening in ordinary spaces. Acts 2:46 describes believers spending time to-

gether and sharing meals in their homes. They worshiped together, yes, but they also lived life together.

And I wonder if we've gotten so busy trying to create community that we've forgotten how simple community can be.

Everything doesn't need a committee. Everything doesn't need a program.

And Lord knows everything does not need another Zoom meeting. Sometimes we just need somewhere to sit.

Because somewhere along the way, life got fast.

We text instead of stopping by. We scroll while we're eating. Everybody has somewhere to be, something to do, something to finish or something buzzing in their pocket.

And no, I'm not about to tell you to throw your phone away. Mine isn't going anywhere, either. I'm just wondering whether we've made enough room to actually talk to one another.

Maybe churches need some porch conversations again.

Not another meeting where everybody sits around a table staring at an agenda.

I'm talking about conversations where young people can sit with older people and actually hear their stories. Where older people can hear what's happening in our lives too. Where nobody has to have the perfect answer. Where we can laugh, disagree, eat something good, talk about life and somewhere in the middle of all of it talk about God.

And here's what I've realized:

The porch doesn't even have to be a porch.

For my great-aunt, it was that sunroom with the sliding glass doors and the plants. For somebody else, it might be the kitchen table.

It might be the barbershop.

It might be somebody's living room.

And for church folks, apparently it can be the church parking lot, because we can say we're leaving after service and then stand beside somebody's car talking for another 45 minutes.

You know it's true, I'm PK and was a church baby before that, I know—trust me. But maybe that's what we need to rediscover.

Not the porch itself, but what the porch gave us. Presence. Conversation. Community. A place where faith wasn't always preached at you but sometimes simply shared with you.

So this September, as the weather starts changing and hopefully South Carolina finally decides we've suffered through enough heat, maybe pull up a chair.

Call somebody over. Fix something to eat. Put the phone down for a little while. And just talk.

You never know what you'll learn, what you'll laugh about or where the conversation might go. Just don't say you're only staying five minutes. We both know better. So come sit awhile.

Williams' home church is Camden First United Methodist Church, Camden, and he currently attends the Williston Charge, where his mother serves as pastor.



Commentary by Dr. J. Derrick Cattenhead

A different conversation about awakening

Recently, I found myself exploring a rabbit hole. It began with the story of the Watchers, the Nephilim and the Book of Enoch before moving into conversations about the "Divine Spark." While I do not subscribe to many of the conclusions associated with these ideas, I found myself asking a different question: Why do they resonate with so many people?

The more I reflected, the more I realized the issue is not angels, giants or hidden knowledge. The conversation is about identity. Who are we? Who told us who we are? Whose voice do we trust? Perhaps that is where the church should begin—not by asking whether people are searching, but what they are searching for.

As Christians, we reject the idea that human beings are divine or that salvation comes through secret knowledge. Yet before dismissing these ideas, we should ask why they resonate with so many people. I suspect people are searching for freedom from false identities. They long to believe they are more than their failures, fears and the labels placed upon them.

That question is important to me as a Black pastor serving in South Carolina. I suspect many African Americans in our churches are descendants of enslaved people. For generations, they were told they were less intelligent, less capable, less valuable and less deserving. Entire systems reinforced those lies, and portions of Christianity were sometimes used to support them. Yet when enslaved Africans and their descendants opened the Bible for themselves, they discovered another story. They found Moses confronting Pharaoh, Israel walking out of bondage, prophets speaking truth to power and Jesus proclaiming good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed.

Most importantly, they discovered they were created in the image of God.

That discovery helped build the Black Church. The Black Church did not survive because it convinced people they were worthless sinners. It survived because it reminded people they belonged to God. It proclaimed they were more than what the plantation called them, more than what society labeled them and more than the limitations imposed upon them. The message was not perfection. The message was God-given worth and dignity that no person, institution or system could take away.

That witness still has something to teach the church as we seek to speak hope into a generation wrestling with identity and belonging.

Christianity reminds us that identity is discovered through our

relationship with God and one another. Jesus met people where they were: fishermen, women from all walks of life, the sick, the poor, the rich and marginalized people.

If Jesus walked through our communities today, I imagine he would sit with us at our kitchen tables, listen on our front porches and gather strangers beneath the shade of a big tree. In each encounter, Jesus restored people to community and helped them find their voices. That understanding of community remains one of Christianity's greatest strengths.

John Wesley spoke of God's grace already at work in our lives. Howard Thurman explored faith for people whose backs were against the wall. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us that faith must shape personal transformation and social responsibility, while Jarena Lee demonstrated what it meant to answer God's call even when others tried to silence her voice. Their witness reminds us the body of Christ is enriched when we listen to one another's stories.

The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church is becoming increasingly diverse, and I believe that diversity is a gift rather than a problem to solve. Different communities ask different questions because of different stories and experiences. Instead of fearing those differences, we should welcome them as opportunities to deepen our understanding of the gospel and one another.

In the end, I am less interested in debating theories about hidden knowledge or ancient conspiracies than I am in asking what makes them attractive. I believe people are searching for what the church needs to revisit: we are created by God, loved by God and called by God. We are more than our failures, fears and society's labels.

Perhaps that is the conversation we need in this season. Not a conversation about secret knowledge, but about sacred worth. Not a conversation about hidden bloodlines, but about the image of God. Not a conversation about escaping our humanity, but about embracing who God created us to be.

That is my appeal to our conference. Let us become a people willing to listen rather than label, willing to understand rather than assume and willing to recognize the image of God in one another before focusing on the differences that separate us.

Making room for one another's stories makes God's grace more evident. That is not a conspiracy. It is the Gospel.

Cattenhead pastors North Orangeburg UMC, Orangeburg.



Commentary
by the Rev. John Jordan

Caregiving rewarding,
but stressful

Taking care of a loved one is one of the greatest expressions of love anyone can make. Caretaking expresses agape love, the love that puts the interest of the other person over self. When we think of caregiving, we most often think of a spouse caring for their partner or an adult child caring for an aging parent. However, caregiving may take many forms.

We usually think of caregiving taking place in the home, but caregiving also takes place in a facility. The family members may not do the hands-on caregiving, but they provide emotional support for their loved ones. They also provide care by attending care team meetings and making sure that the care is carried out. They take on financial responsibility, making sure the bills, especially the insurance, are paid.

Even if one is not with their family members on a day-to-day basis, they still may be a caregiver. They may take on financial responsibilities, allowing the caregiving family members to focus on care. A distance caregiver may come to give care periodically to give the primary caregiver some respite.

We usually think of caregiving as a long-term endeavor, but it may be short-term, such as with someone going through cancer treatment. Also, we consider caregiving to be for a physical condition, but one may be a caregiver for a loved one who is mentally ill or intellectually challenged.

While caregiving is very rewarding, it is also very stressful. Caregiving takes a lot of time—time that is taken away from others. Caregivers may miss events in a child’s growing up because they are caring for a parent. Many caregivers are sandwiched between taking care of aging parents and raising children. Caregiving also takes away time from hobbies and social activities.

Caregiving may also be a financial burden. There are costs for travel, unless the person lives in the home. There are costs for medicines, dietary supplies and other supplies that insurance may not cover. There may be the burden of budgeting for two households.

A caregiver will face many difficult decisions: “How long will the money hold out?” “When will I need to call for hospice or other agency help?” “What is the person’s end of life wishes and can I carry them out?” “When will I know to ask to stop treatment?” These are just a few of the questions and decisions a caregiver must face.

Caregiving may become very isolating. The caregiver may not have time and energy to engage in previous social activities. Instead of attending church, they may view online services or watch on television. They may lose their sense of self. Their identity may become enmeshed with the role and the person they care for. Many caregivers may feel that they are alone.

How can the church respond to the needs of caregivers? The church may want to start a caregiver group. The church may partner with agencies that have expertise to provide support for care givers.

At St John’s United Methodist Church in Lugoff, we have partnered with MUSC hospice to provide a caregiver support group. The caregiver support group meets every second Monday of the month from 2-4 p.m. This is a time for learning, sharing and fellowship with other caregivers.

Some churches may have social hours for caregiver support. Community agencies may offer caregiver support, in some cases for specific situations such as dementia.

Pastors and visitation teams should take time to talk to caregivers when visiting sick and homebound parishioners. A few minutes of time for a caregiver to vent and prayer for the caregiver can go a long way in letting the caregiver know they are not alone.

Caregiving is rewarding but stressful. May we always be aware of caregivers in our congregations and do all we can to support them.

Jordan pastors St. John’s United Methodist Church, Lugoff.



Debbie Felder, Eden Green, Aniyah Murray and Khalia Godfrey bridge the generation gap through laughter, games and back-to-school fun.



New Francis Brown and community members make memories before the school bell rings. The church hopes to hold this event every year.

New Francis Brown’s intergenerational
jamboree unites community, church

On Aug. 1, New Francis Brown United Methodist Church, Charleston, held its first “Intergenerational Back-To-School Jamboree,” which was a huge success.

Highlights included a visit and words of wisdom from City of North Charleston Mayor Reggie Burgess, as well as active interaction between the children and adults of the church and community.

Games, music, entertainment and delicious food all helped make this event memorable. The children were blessed with backpacks filled with school supplies for the upcoming

school year. More than 120 backpacks were distributed. This event supported future leaders and strengthened communication within the community, introducing neighbors to the church to help the congregation grow.

New Francis Brown leaders said they are deeply appreciative of the funds received from the Belin Trust Grant-Intergenerational Ministry, as well as everyone who donated funds and supplies, volunteered their time and came out to support the work of God. They thank God for blessing and leading our congregation during this first jamboree.



Rev. Cindy Shaw and North Charleston Mayor Reggie Burgess work to equip local children for a year of excellence with prayers and support.



Commentary
by Anna S. Bright

When the crowd gets loud, Christ is louder

This being the beginning of the school year, the Lord led me to share another sermonette on bullying and peer pressure, as it has become a very serious problem in schools across this country.

Being a teenager today is not easy. The hallway can feel like a battlefield, the phone can feel like a courtroom and one cruel comment online can become a wound. Bullying and peer pressure are not “little things.” They can bruise the spirit, shake confidence and tempt young people to become someone God has never called them to be.

Romans 12:2 (NIV) speaks clearly: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” The world says, “Fit in.” Christ says, “Stand firm.” The world says, “Get revenge.” Christ says, “Overcome evil with good.” The world says, “Everybody is doing it.” However, Christ says, “Follow me.”

To every teen: You do not have to laugh at wrong just to be accepted. You do not have to join gossip, send obscene pictures, mock the lonely, curse to sound grown or compromise your values to keep friends. First Corinthians 15:33 (ESV) says, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’” If the crowd pulls you away from God, peace, respect and wisdom, that crowd is too expensive!

Let’s be clear: Loving your enemies does not mean giving them permission to abuse you. Jesus said in Matthew 5:44 (ESV), “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

Pray for them, refuse to hate them and do not let bitterness build a home in your heart. Still, healthy boundaries are godly. Tell a trusted adult. Save evidence of online bullying. Block harmful people. Walk away from dangerous conversations. Report threats. Choose friends who protect your future, not pressure your weakness.

Parents, listen before you lecture. Watch for changes in mood, sleep, appetite, grades, friendships or online behavior. Pray with your children, not just for them. Teach them that courage is not fighting every battle; sometimes courage is telling the truth, asking for help and refusing to be shaped by fear. Galatians 6:2 (KJV) says, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Our young people should never carry these burdens alone.

Church, family, school and community, we must create safe spaces where young people can speak without shame. A child who feels heard is less likely to feel hopeless.

Young people, when peer pressure knocks, answer with purpose. When bullying tries to label you, remember God already named you beloved, chosen and valuable. Let your mind be renewed, your heart remain guarded and your walk be guided by Christ.

Don’t let the loudest crowd make you forget the holy calling God whispered over your life, and never leave home without Jesus!

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

NextGEN Worship: Mechanicsville makes room at table

BISHOPVILLE—What happens when a church intentionally makes room for the next generation?

At Mechanicsville United Methodist Church, that question became the beginning of NextGEN Worship.

Born from a desire to bridge the gap between young people and the church, NextGEN Worship was created to provide a space where youth and young adults feel seen, valued and connected to Christ and his church. Too often, younger generations can feel disconnected or unsure of where they fit within the life of the church. Mechanicsville members believed God was calling them to do more than simply invite them through the doors. They wanted to intentionally make room at the table.

Under the vision and leadership of the Rev. Angela Nesbitt Hampton, NextGEN Worship was established as a ministry focused on discipleship, authentic relationships and spiritual growth. While the ministry is geared toward individuals ages 30 and younger, all are welcome to experience NextGEN.

Participants gather every second and fourth Sunday immediately following the morning worship service as they seek to grow together in faith and community. The goal has never been to replace traditional worship but rather to create another pathway for individuals to encounter God, ask questions and grow deeper in their faith journey.

Since its launch on Feb. 9, 2025, NextGEN has become more than a worship service. It has become a community.

They have gathered for Bible studies centered on surrender, forgiveness and spiritual growth. They have shared meals, prayed together during worship nights, created spaces for honest conversations through table talk discussions (“Uncut & Covered”) and encouraged young people to discover they don’t



Participants gather every second and fourth Sunday immediately following the morning worship service as they seek to grow together in faith and community.

have to have everything figured out to pursue God wholeheartedly.

Most importantly, they have witnessed God moving in extraordinary ways. Since beginning this journey, 17 youth and young adults have been baptized, 11 individuals have joined the church and seven have publicly given their lives to Christ. These numbers represent more than statistics. They represent transformed lives, answered prayers and God’s faithfulness at work through his people.

Mechanicsville members said one of the greatest blessings of this ministry has been watching individuals become more comfortable engaging with Scripture, participating in conversations about faith and understanding that church is not simply a place we attend, but a community to which we belong.

NextGEN has reminded members that discipleship is intentional work. Young people are not merely the



Since beginning this journey, 17 youth and young adults have been baptized, 11 individuals have joined the church and seven have publicly given their lives to Christ.

future of the church. They are a vital part of the church right now. When we invest in them, listen to them and walk alongside them, we make space for God to work in remarkable ways.

Although the ministry is still growing, Mechanicsville members said they are grateful for every person who has walked through their doors and every opportunity God has given us to serve. NextGEN continues to evolve as they prayerfully seek where God is leading next.

Their prayer is that every person who encounters this ministry leaves knowing three things: they are loved, they are seen and they belong. They believe God is only beginning the work he has planned for NextGEN Worship, and they look forward with great expectation to what is still to come.

After all, the next generation isn’t waiting to become part of the church. They already are.

Cognitive Care Ministry a way for churches to love neighbors

By the Rev. Rebecca Rowell

Disciples of Jesus Christ within the ecumenical church are called to care for one another. Churches spend time and money growing, promoting and nourishing various ministries. Children, youth and young adult ministries are prioritized as the future of the church.

However, we are also called to care for the older members of our churches—the elderly who came before and often built or helped grow the current church in which disciples today worship and fellowship.

Many churches in our annual conference are answering the call to care for the spiritual needs of older church members. For those who suffer from dementia, churches are discovering new ways to walk alongside individuals and the family members who care for

them. Through the Cognitive Care Ministry of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, congregations have an opportunity to turn compassion into meaningful ministry—creating communities where memory loss is better understood and no one has to face the journey alone.

The mission of Cognitive Care Ministry is both practical and deeply rooted in the church’s call to care for one another: to educate congregations about dementia and other forms of cognitive decline, reduce the stigma that often surrounds memory loss and equip churches to support individuals and their family caregivers.

As South Carolina’s population ages, the need for churches to support the elderly and their families also increases.

Churches enjoy a unique space to help this population of the church and community. Those who are dealing with dementia often are unable to attend regular worship services or events at the church. They are isolated from the church, residing in assisted living facilities or homebound. Their families may also have less time to participate in the life of the church but do not voice their needs. A population is suffering in silence.

Therefore, the Cognitive Care Ministry encourages churches to recognize those challenges and ask an important question: How can we continue to be the church for these individuals and families?

The answer does not have to begin with a large program or a large budget. It can begin with education, awareness and a congregation willing to learn.

Churches across South Carolina are already exploring different approaches. Ministries can include educational seminars, caregiver support, fellowship opportunities, dementia-friendly worship and activities, and respite programs that provide meaningful engagement for adults experiencing memory loss while giving their caregivers valuable time to rest, attend appointments or simply take care of everyday needs.

Education is an important part of this ministry because dementia affects more than memory. When church members understand what a person with cognitive impairment is experiencing, they are better prepared to respond with patience, dignity and grace.

Training opportunities, including “Dementia 101” workshops offered in partnership with organizations such as the South Carolina Department on Aging, can help congregations understand dementia and consider practical ways

their churches can respond. Regional workshops hosted at United Methodist churches also give clergy, church staff, lay leaders and volunteers opportunities to learn from one another and explore what a cognitive care ministry might look like in their own congregation.

Plans are under way to develop an annual conference database of cognitive care ministries in local United Methodist churches here in South Carolina. This resource will help identify congregations already offering dementia-related ministries and make it easier for churches, families and ministry leaders to find programs and connect with one another. There will also be connections to other cognitive care related ministries or opportunities in other non-United Methodist churches and secular programs.

The database can also help churches learn from ministries that are already established. A congregation interested in beginning a caregiver group, respite ministry or educational program will be able to see where similar work is taking place and connect with people who have experience.

Additional information is also coming about cognitive care ministry opportunities throughout South Carolina, including training events, educational resources, workshops, ministry models and ways for churches to become involved.

At its heart, the Cognitive Care Ministry is a ministry of presence alongside one another as the gathered body of Jesus Christ.

If you or your church is involved with a Cognitive Care Ministry of some sort, let us know. Email cognitive@umesc.org.

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Quilts of Valor awarded to veterans at Travelers Rest UMC

By Dave McAda
TRAVELERS REST—The Swamp Rabbit Quilt Guild and Travelers Rest United Methodist Church hosted a Quilts of Valor service Aug. 13.

The service honored seven church members who had served in the Armed Forces. The recipients for this year served a cumulative 68 years in the Army, Air Force and Navy.

The Quilts of Valor Foundation began in 2003 as part of a mother’s dream to wrap quilts made with love around the shoulders of veterans who may be suffering untold memories from their years of service. Today, more than 450,000 quilts have been wrapped around men and women who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Rita Cossio, deployed to Iraq as a 57-year-old reservist, shared her touching story as the keynote speaker. The veteran with 40 years of service told the crowd how a woman she didn’t even know wrote her letters of encouragement on a daily basis while she served in Iraq. Years later, the two were able to meet face to face when this same woman presented a quilt she had made specifically for Cossio and wrapped it around her.

Each quilt is handmade by volunteers and may have anywhere from 50 to 80 hours invested in its piecing, quilting and binding. A label is sewn to the back naming the specific veteran being honored and the volunteers who contributed their time.

During the service, names of each veteran were called. The quilt was held up for display, and then quilters wrapped it around the shoulders of the veteran.

Certificates were then awarded by three-time



In front from left are Dianne Day, Ray Day, Brian Hickman and Kathy Hollifield, and in back are David Robinson, Robert Shewfelt and Cynthia Shoelen.

Purple Heart recipient Kenneth Hinkle, Upstate South Carolina coordinator for the Quilts of Valor Foundation.

The quilts for this year’s service were made by members of the Swamp Rabbit Quilt Guild, an organization of more than 54 members. This group meets twice a month, using the TRUMC facilities for lectures, sewing and fellowship. The group first formed in 2009 and is made up of both church and community members. New members are always welcomed.

When asked about the guild’s activities, President Sandy Bailey said, “It has been an honor, and pleasure, to work with and lead this group of talented ladies for the past two years. However, an even greater privilege has been for our guild to honor local veterans with a quilt through the Quilts of Valor Founda-



Ray Day receives his quilt from Jackie Maurice. Veterans are nominated by family or friends through the Quilts of Valor Foundation and do not have to be members of the church.

tion. Each one is made with much love and care.”

During worship services the previous Sunday, Senior Pastor Brian Gilmer called attention to the seven quilts draped across the altar rail as a part of sharing the beauty of these pieces of art with the entire congregation. He recognized the quilt guild for the 350-plus hours their volunteers put into the project.

Of those being honored this year were a 93-year-old father and his daughter who both served in the army—he served three years and she served 30.

This was the second year for the service to be held at TRUMC. Veterans are nominated by family or friends through the Quilts of Valor Foundation and do not have to be members of the church.

McAda is the TRUMC Lay Leader.

God’s Grace and Mercy

Friendship UMC celebrates God’s faithful love as they prepare to complete construction

Nestled in the rural farming community of Nesmith, Friendship United Methodist Church has long stood as a witness to God’s steadfast love. For more than 160 years, the church has served its neighbors through seasons of blessing and challenge, building a treasured legacy of faith, fellowship and ministry.

Now, the church is poised to complete long-awaited construction on their building.

In June 2021, the congregation received difficult and unexpected news: the church facility was no longer safe and could not continue to meet the congregation’s needs. The news was especially heartbreaking because the beautiful building, constructed only 20 years earlier, appeared sound from the outside.

Inside, however, inspections and engineering reports revealed grave concern. The truss system, which supports the sanctuary roof, had failed. After careful review, engineers confirmed that reconstructing the entire truss system was the only way to provide a safe and secure place of worship.

With faith in God’s unfailing guidance, the congregation came together under the leadership of their pastor, Dr. Ernest W. Frierson. Though the path ahead was uncertain, the mission of worship and ministry continued. Sunday services were held in the Friendship UMC Fellowship Hall and shared through Facebook Live until contractors could begin their work.

As the building came down, hearts were heavy, yet faith remained strong. Through prayer, perseverance and careful planning, the congregation witnessed again that God keeps his promises. Week by week and month by



Members said seeing that beautiful flame go up in its rightful place was amazing.



month, he answered prayers, opened doors and ordered each step of the rebuilding journey.

Through God’s grace and mercy, the pastor, trustees, building committee and finance committee worked faithfully and diligently to move the project forward. With guidance and support



from former District Superintendent the Rev. Terry Fleming, the church developed a plan, secured funding and continued to trust God for the resources and wisdom needed for the work ahead.

When contractors began their work, the congregation entered another

season of faith: worshiping away from their beloved church home. Yet even in that transition, God’s love was made visible through the kindness of neighboring church families.

They give heartfelt thanks to the Rev. Weldon Pressley, pastor of St. Paul UMC in the Morrisville community, and to the St. Paul congregation, who graciously opened their doors and welcomed Friendship each Sunday before their own worship service. Their ushers and members greeted Friendship members with warmth, hospitality and the love of Christ.

They are also deeply grateful to the Rev. Arthur W. Ford, pastor of St. Mark A.M.E. Church, and to the St. Mark congregation, who provided space for celebrations of life when needed. Through these acts of generosity, both church families demonstrated the true spirit of Christian community and the power of God’s love at work among his people.

By God’s grace and mercy, many faithful hands and willing hearts have helped bring this journey to a joyful milestone.

Members said seeing that beautiful flame go up in its rightful place was amazing.

If it is God’s will, the work will be complete in August, and at the end of August, Friendship will have a blessed reentry celebration, a homecoming celebration for its 160th anniversary. They joyfully invite the entire community to join.

“Together, we will give thanks for God’s faithfulness, celebrate his sustaining grace and rejoice in the blessing of returning home. To God be the glory—we are home again!” church leaders said.

They thought about it and acted on it

In spite of small size, Bethel UMC hosts powerful marriage enrichment event

By Dr. Anthony Hodge

Bethel United Methodist Church-Edgemoor, of the Rock Hill South Charge, is proving that big things can come from small packages.

A recent event organized by the Adult-Family Ministries Team of the church helped to illustrate that a church doesn't have to be large numerically to make a big impact in the lives of persons within and beyond the walls of the church.

The church's Anchored In Love Ministry Team—consisting of members of Bethel and friends of Bethel—hosted a marriage enrichment event called “Marriage Emergency Room: When Love Needs Immediate Care.” The event was held Aug. 15 at the Historic Robertson Homestead in Rock Hill.

The emergency room theme gave couples an opportunity to identify relationship wounds/injuries, receive treatment and leave with a prescription for healing.

The keynote speaker was the Rev. Brittany White, and the emergency room area facilitators were Dr. Anthony Hodge, Dr. Sheila Elliott Hodge, the Rev. Mary Johnson, Dr. Martin L. Quick and Kimberly Quick. The



The emergency room theme gave couples an opportunity to identify relationship wounds/injuries, receive treatment and leave with a prescription for healing.

four facilitated sessions were interactive, practical, biblical and resourceful. White opened and concluded the event by offering encouraging and inspiring messages that were very motivational.

The four facilitators also led impactful group sessions on the following topics: Dr. Anthony Hodge (Cardiac Care Unit), Dr. Sheila Elliot Hodge (Loss of

Intimacy Unit), Rev. Mary Johnson (Boundary Trauma Unit) and Dr. Martin Luther Quick and Kimberly Quick (Trauma Recovery Center).

Couples who attended the emergency room event left commenting that they were inspired, encouraged and equipped to move forward in their relationships. Big things can indeed come in small packages, and the members of the Anchored In Love Ministry Team can attest to that.

Anyone interested in connecting with this church outreach ministry initiative can follow Anchored in Love Ministry on Facebook and also through Instagram @anchoredinloverh.

In this one area of ministry, Bethel is showing a possibility for current and future ministry. My hat goes off to the laity and pastoral leadership of this church for engaging in what is evolving into a significant ministry initiative for its community of faith.

Remember, if we can think it, God can help us follow through with the thought process and help us bring that thought process to fruition.

Hodge is Rock Hill District superintendent.

Orange Grove VBS: Unforgettable faith journey

By Raymonda Banks

BAMBERG—Orange Grove United Methodist Church's 2026 vacation Bible school was truly a “Trip of a Lifetime.”

This year's theme transformed the church into an airport where children, youth and adults boarded an unforgettable faith journey. The goal was to remind everyone that following Jesus is the greatest journey we will ever take.

As VBS coordinator, I had the privilege of serving as the “flight attendant” welcoming everyone aboard. Each evening began with a welcome, song and Bible verse, then an activity before you could “board the flight.” Every participant received a passport to record lessons learned throughout the week and a handmade suitcase, created from a shoebox, to collect the crafts and keepsakes from each destination.

Our first destination was the Faith Flight. Through Matthew 14, participants learned that even when life's storms arise, keeping our eyes on Jesus gives us the courage to step out in faith. Children and adults decorated crosses and reflected on



Children, youth and adults participated.

what it means to trust God completely.

On the second evening, we boarded the Love Flight. Centered on 1 John 4, the lesson reminded everyone that God's love is unconditional and that we are called to love one another. Participants decorated wooden hearts and wrote ways they can show Christ's love on a strip of paper, and we connected them and made a love chain.

The final destination was the Prayer Flight. Philippians 4 taught

us to bring every worry and concern to God through prayer. They were told they couldn't carry heavy burdens on this flight because Jesus invites us to give them to him, so each participant wrote prayer requests and placed them in a box before boarding. While on the flight, they made paper airplanes and wrote the words “faith,” “love” and “prayer” on them.

As our final flight landed, we were reminded that although vacation Bible school had come to an end, our faith journey continues every day. The smiles on everyone's faces as they eagerly boarded each flight proved that everyone was excited.

Pastor Sheera Yates and the Orange Grove UMC family is grateful to every participant who boarded our faith journey, as well as those who prepared the meals and helped with decorations and supplies. We were especially blessed to welcome guests from our sister churches. Their fellowship, participation and attendance enriched our flight.

The unity we share as the body of Christ made this “trip of a lifetime” a success.



Photos courtesy of Anthony Simpson



Brothers in Christ

The men of the Orangeburg District held their quarterly meeting at Trinity UMC July 25 at 9 a.m. Here are scenes from their gathering.



Advocate Awareness Day

Sunday, September 27th

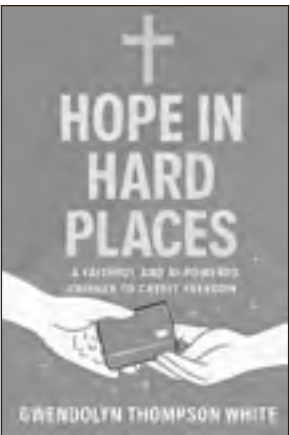
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advocatesc.org/local-events/advocate_awareness_day

UMCSC pastor releases book on financial freedom



Whatever knocked you down financially, your past doesn't have to define your future. That's the word from South Carolina United Methodist pastor and credit coach the Rev. Gwendolyn Thompson White.

White, who pastors Shepherd United Methodist Church, Sumter, released “Hope in Hard Places: A Faithful and AI-Powered Journey to Credit Freedom,” a book designed to show readers how to rebuild their credit step by step with faith, proven strategies and AI tools that do the heavy lifting.

In September, White releases her next book, a book and companion journal titled “Caregiving Is Harder than I Thought: What No One Tells You about Love, Sacrifice, Survival and Grace,” reflecting on her caregiving responsibilities and offering encouragement to other—specifically family—caregivers.

“Hope in Hard Places” is available now on Amazon.

SALKEHATCHIE

From Page 1

Smith said Salkehatchie is grateful for the wonderful support it has received this year.

“Without the support from individuals and churches alike, Salkehatchie would not be the immense success that it is,” Smith added.

Founded in 1978 by the Rev. John Culp, Salkehatchie brings youth, young adult and adult volunteers together to repair and rebuild homes for people

in need, many of them living in poverty situations without the ability to fund the work on their own.

The weeklong mission camps offer youth and adults the opportunity to engage in meaningful home-repair ministry across South Carolina.

Over the years, thousands of homes have received help through the hands of youth and adults serving at Salkehatchie.

In addition to the summer camps, Salkehatchie also hosted two spring camps this year.

This fall, they have three weeks of fall camps available, and registration is now open.

Next year is the 50th anniversary celebration of

Salkehatchie. Save the date for the Salkehatchie Semicentennial, set for Saturday, Aug. 7, 2027.

The event will be a time for those who have been a part of Salkehatchie in any way to come together and share about God’s work over the past 50 years in South Carolina.

“Our prayer is that Salkehatchie will continue to serve homeowners in South Carolina for the next 50 years and continue to bring both youth and adults together and closer to Christ,” Smith said.

For more information about Salkehatchie, or to register for the fall camps or further support the ministry, visit <https://www.salkehatchie.org>.



Photo courtesy of David McElreath

At Sand River Salkehatchie in Aiken, held June 20-27, volunteers installed new vinyl siding, a new deck and replaced the fascia around the home. Site leaders were Bobby Coker, Jeff Snow and David McElreath.



Photo courtesy of Jessica Brodie

Volunteers work at the Santee Camp July 4-11, led by Ward Smith.



Photo courtesy of Jessica Brodie

Matt (left) and Will Brodie work on a ramp at Santee Salkehatchie.

Winyah Bay Salkehatchie Director Robert Harrelson with his wife, children and nephews at the camp this summer. The whole family has a combined 60 years of service.



One family enjoys a combined 60 years of Salkehatchie service

By Caroline Harrelson

In the summer of 1985, a family of five packed up their nine years of belongings and memories and moved from Stone Mountain, Georgia, to Columbia.

Their Salkehatchie story began as they searched for a church. After visiting several, they had one more to visit. One August Sunday, they went to Ashland United Methodist Church. The sermon time sealed it for them—this was the church for them. And to top it all off, the pastor did not preach that day. Instead, Salkehatchie youth gave testimonies of their Salkehatchie weeks in different parts of the state.

With children who were, 7, 10 and 13, these parents realized this is what they wanted for their children, and they joined Ashland without hearing the preacher preach!

About two years later, a member of Ashland asked the oldest daughter if she would go to Salkehatchie in his son’s place who had paid was unable to go. She went to a Salkehatchie camp between Georgetown and Pawley’s Island. Three years later, the second Harrelson daughter went to her first Salkehatchie camp, and three years later the son went to his first.

The two girls also went to the college Salkehatchie camps held in early May so college students could work one before beginning summer jobs.

Now grown, today the son, Robert, has been involved as a Salkehatchie camper for 30 years. He now leads the Winyah Bay Salkehatchie camp in Georgetown and has done so for four years. He and his wife spent their first anniversary working a Salkehatchie camp. She worked at the camp with him until their children were born.

When their children came of age, they each joined their dad at Winyah Bay Salkehatchie. Mom’s church circle began making goodie bags to put on the campers’ pillows midweek every summer.

The middle daughter had two sons. When the oldest turned 14, he followed in his mother’s footsteps and went to Salkehatchie. His younger brother joined him when he turned 14.

This summer at the Winyah Bay Salkehatchie, 10 Harrelsons were involved—Robert Harrelson as camp director, along with his wife; all three of his children (ages 20, 18 and a first-time 14-year-old); Robert’s two nephews, ages 19 and 15, who are members with their parents of Shandon UMC, Columbia; and his parents and his Georgetown uncle cooking one of the nighttime meals.

And it all began that Sunday in 1985 when young Salkehatchie missionaries spoke in a church in Columbia.

Together, the family has more than 60 years of combined service with Salkehatchie.



Photo by Frank Dove

Paul Dove’s tractor sits at a Fairfield jobsite July 11-18.



Photo by Frank Dove

Fairfield campers have a meal.



Salkehatchie Marlboro Flowers, Bennettsville, was held June 20-27 and led by Susan Mikels.

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GEORGIA

From Page 1

“The SEJ Conference exemplifies the Holy Spirit’s influence in guiding us toward the realization that we are stronger together, interdependent, and that hope prevails.”

Former South Carolina Bishop L. Jonathan Holston, now bishop of the Alabama-West Florida and North Alabama conferences, presided over the called session, which was held virtually.

“Wow—wow,” Holston said after the vote of 291-0.

Bishop Robin Dease, episcopal leader for both Georgia conferences,

offered a prayer after the vote.

“Holy God, we give thanks for these delegates who have cast votes to approve unification,” she prayed. “As this decision now becomes a part of our shared story, turn our hearts upon the future you are preparing for us,” she continued. “Make this unification more than just an administrative change, O God, but make it a holy opportunity to deepen our commitment, to widen our welcome and to strengthen our ministries, so that lives might be transformed for your kingdom’s sake.”

The combined conference will have more than 215,000 members.

Scott Cleaveland, South Georgia Conference’s lay leader, and Kim

Powell, North Georgia Conference lay leader, jointly presented the motion to unite to the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference.

After the vote, the SEJ Committee on Episcopacy gave a report on preparation for the 2028 Jurisdictional Conference, which is slated for July 12-15, 2028, at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina. The COE said that the SEJ is

the largest jurisdiction in the United States and is seeking nine bishops in 2028 (compared to six sought in the Northeastern Jurisdiction, seven in the North Central Jurisdiction, seven in the South Central Jurisdiction and five in the Western Jurisdiction).

Given planned retirements, SEJ will be electing five bishops in 2028; four SEJ bishops will continue.



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Former South Carolina Bishop L. Jonathan Holston presides over the called session.



Georgia Bishop Robin Dease, who hails from South Carolina, lifts a prayer after the vote.



SEJ Secretary the Rev. Kathy James, of South Carolina, offers organizing motions.



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BROOKLAND CEILING

From Page 1



Payne said the destruction brought back difficult memories from his time doing search and recovery in the Air Force.

“It was eye-opening to me—I was sitting on a stool Sunday morning, giving my message, and then Tuesday where all those people sat, I’m looking at debris and realizing how blessed we are that this wasn’t 48 hours earlier!” Payne said.

The cause is currently under investigation, and they are waiting now on the structural engineer’s report. Both the fire department and a structural engineer told Payne the collapse was not related to water damage.

“The adjuster from insurance scratched his head and said he’d never seen anything like this,” Payne said.

For now, the congregation is worshipping in their fellowship hall, and they even managed to host vacation Bible school in spite of the collapse. But that, too, is a difficulty—they lost an air conditioning unit in their fellowship hall in mid-August and are awaiting repair quotes on that as of press time.

Payne said the timing of these setbacks has been discouraging, both to him and to the congregation. They had just reintroduced a children’s Sunday school class in July when the ceiling collapsed. They also don’t know right now if they will be able to reuse their hymnals and pew Bibles because everything is covered with fiberglass and debris from the ceiling.

“Right now we’ll continue pressing on, we’ve got plenty of space to worship, but it can really drive a dagger in the heart because we were beginning to move forward and then this happens.”

Many took to social media to express lament, as well as gratitude that the destruction wasn’t worse.

William Wood said God was surely holding the ceiling from falling that Sunday.

“God blessed the people of Brookland Sunday morning, amen. Praying for our church,” he shared.

Robbie Hughes Lynch shared that she grew up at Brookland and was married there.

“This makes me sad,” she posted. “Praise God no one was injured.”

Payne said they are hoping South Carolina United Methodists will lift up

prayers of encouragement for them as they await repairs. There is no word yet on whether insurance will cover the damage.

What was especially hard for Payne was that the destruction brought back memories from his 22 years in the Air Force, where he did search and recovery to retrieve fallen service-members. The work included going into destroyed buildings in Turkey and Afghanistan and removing people.

“I’m not used to seeing that in church. It was devastating, and it triggers you—it brings back some stuff that I witnessed,” Payne said.

Still, he knows God walks with them during this time.

“In Jeremiah 29:10-14, Israel was captive in Babylon, and God said, ‘You’re going to be bigger and better; I know what I have planned for you. It’s not over,’” Payne said.

He and his flock are holding onto that, praying hard and pressing on.



The church counts itself blessed the ceiling didn’t fall 48 hours prior, when they were all in worship in that space.

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Young Methodists.

Columbia College extends Dozier’s contract through 2030

COLUMBIA—The Columbia College Board of Trustees has unanimously approved a four-year extension of President John H. Dozier’s employment agreement, extending his leadership through July 2030.

The board’s action reflects its confidence in the college’s strategic direction and its commitment to leadership continuity as Columbia College continues strengthening its capacity to serve students and communities in an in-



Dozier

creasingly challenging higher education environment.

“Across the country, colleges and universities are navigating unprecedented demographic, financial and public policy challenges,” said Tim Arnold, chair of the Columbia College Board of Trustees.

“The board believes Columbia College is better prepared to meet those challenges because of the strategic foundation that has been established under Dr. Dozier’s leadership.

He has strengthened the institution’s capacity to fulfill its mission, positioned it to adapt to a changing higher education landscape and fostered a culture of accountability, collaboration and innovation that will benefit the college for years to come.”

Since becoming Columbia College’s 21st president in 2023, Dozier has led a comprehensive effort to strengthen the institution’s academic programs, financial foundation, organizational effectiveness and engagement with the Columbia community.

“I am deeply grateful for the confidence the board has placed in me and honored to continue serving Columbia College,” said Dozier. “This extension reflects the dedication of our faculty, staff, students, alumni, trustees, donors and community partners. Together, we have strengthened Columbia College’s capacity to fulfill its mission while remaining grounded in the values that have defined this institution for more than 170 years. I believe our greatest opportunities lie ahead, and I look forward to continuing that work together.”



Photos courtesy of Eugenia Vicars



Snowballs in the summer

St. Paul UMC, Greenville, held its Snowball Mountain Challenge VBS the last week of July. Participants enjoyed a fun week of science projects, crafts, Scripture and Bible story discussions, as well as delicious dinners each night. VBS mission projects included collecting school supplies, and the nightly offering went to purchasing earbuds for the church’s August Pack the Backpack event. They collected enough to purchase 500 earbuds for students.

SMC honors 415 graduates

SPARTANBURG—Spartanburg Methodist College awarded diplomas to 415 students during the spring 115th commencement ceremony at Spartanburg High School, marking the largest graduating class in the college’s history.

Nearly 2,000 family members and friends filled Viking Arena to celebrate the graduates. The college once again recognized its largest bachelor’s degree class this year, with 77 degrees conferred. An additional 338 students received associate degrees, another college record.



Scott Cochran with graduating student speaker Luna Orozco.

Addressing the crowd, SMC President Scott Cochran congratulated the graduates.

“This is a tremendous milestone. You’ve worked hard; you’ve persevered. And when you walk across this stage in a few minutes, it will all have been worth it,” he said.

He then introduced graduating student speaker Luna Orozco. The Greenville native received her Bachelor of Arts in business administration with a concentration in accounting. In April, Orozco won the college’s Apex Showcase, a capstone project presentation that is the culmination of the college’s signature professional development concentration, which is earned by all bachelor’s degree students. As the student speaker, Orozco also received the Yandle Class Leader Award.

“SMC didn’t just give us an education; it gave us a community where we grew into ourselves,” said Orozco in her speech. “Our professors didn’t just teach us; they connected with us. To the graduating class, choose connection; choose compassion. Reach out to your community—not just when you need to, but when they need you.”

The ceremony also included the awarding of SMC’s first honorary degree. Jill Johnson, the college’s long-serving registrar and a 1982 associate degree graduate, received an honorary Bachelor of Arts degree in recognition of 41 years of service to SMC and its students. Johnson completed her bachelor’s and master’s degrees at other institutions because SMC did not award bachelor’s degrees until 2019.

Claflin University celebrates new era of STEM Education

ORANGEBURG—Claflin University’s STEM Agenda is a strategic effort to enhance Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education to

build a future-ready workforce through innovation in both the classroom and research.

The groundbreaking ceremony for

the new Center for Biotechnology and Innovation, held March 20, represents a historic milestone in Claflin’s STEM legacy.

The Center for Biotechnology and Innovation will expand faculty and student research. Students will receive hands-on experience with advanced technology that will transform in-class and online pedagogy. Claflin STEM graduates will be even more prepared for leadership positions in the fast-paced tech industry.

The two-story facility will encompass nearly 32,000 sq. ft. and sit between Magnolia Street and Goff Avenue. A portion of the building’s footprint will cover what was formerly Dunwalton, the official residence of Claflin presidents.

Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack, Claflin’s ninth president, said the groundbreaking ceremony was historic because in 1971–55 years ago—Dunwalton became the official residence for Claflin’s presidents.

“But it was not always the presi-

dent’s home,” Warmack said. “Prior to 1971, the president’s residence was located at the present site of the James S. Thomas Science Center (JST).

However, the president and board of trustees recognized that a new facility was necessary to enable the University to recruit and retain talented STEM students.

That led to the decision to tear down the president’s residence and build the James S. Thomas Science Center and Dunwalton as the new presidential residence.

Claflin was the first historically Black college/university to receive NIST-Construction funding.

The center will be the new home for Claflin’s biotechnology, computer science, computer engineering and cybersecurity programs.

The facility will feature advanced specialized labs for biotechnology, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and robotics, as well as flexible space classrooms, 3D printing, and rapid prototyping.



Buford Street awards five college scholarships to students

GAFFNEY—Five college students have been awarded a scholarship from the Hammett/Coyle Scholarship Fund through Buford Street United Methodist Church.

Buford Street UMC has awarded \$259,785 in scholarships over the past 38 years from both the Hammett and Coyle Scholarship Funds.

The Hammett Scholarship Fund was founded by Dr. Jay Hammett. The Hammett Scholarship is in memory of his late wife, Sara Hammett. The Hammett Scholarships have been awarded each year since May 19, 1988.

The Coyle Scholarship Fund was founded by Thomas Alton Coyle. The Coyle Scholarship is in memory of Mr. Alton Coyle and his wife, Elma Coyle. The Coyle Scholarships have been awarded each year since Dec. 19, 1999.

The scholarship funds have helped with educational expenses of 157 deserving United Methodist young people over the past 38 years.

This year’s 2026 Buford Street United Methodist Church Hammett/Coyle Scholarship recipients are as follows:

- Houston Francis Tyler Crater, Buford Street UMC, York Technical College
- Catherine W. Earp, Buford Street UMC, Gardner-Webb University
- Kendra E. Little, Lyman Methodist Church, Clemson University
- Mary Rebecca Smoke, Buford Street UMC, Clemson University
- Noel C. Wylie, Buford Street UMC, USC Upstate

Recipients received \$1,200 each.



Three of the recipients display their awards.



Photo courtesy of Sheila Parson

Faith proclaimed

Recently, confirmands from Mount Zion UMC, Kingstree, publicly claimed their Christian faith and became official professing members of the church. Pictured from left are Xavion Wallace, Robyn Russell, the Rev. Walter Strawther, Salidine Kinder, Demaun Casey and Paris Casey (not pictured: Olivia Rylynn Chandler).

Connecting Children.

Every generation belongs: Ways to grow

By Toni Norris

Across the South Carolina Conference, congregations are discovering what happens when children, youth and adults stop sitting on separate sidelines of the faith journey and start growing together.

That vision is at the heart of “Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer,” the Conference’s Lilly Endowment-funded initiative, and this summer’s stories from cohort churches show just how far that vision can travel.

At Orange Grove United Methodist Church, vacation Bible school became a “Trip of a Lifetime.” The sanctuary was transformed into an airport, and children, youth and adults boarded together for three flights of faith: a Faith Flight built on Matthew 14, a Love Flight grounded in 1 John 4 and a Prayer Flight drawn from Philippians 4. Every participant, regardless of age, carried a passport and a handmade suitcase to collect what they learned along the way. Pastor Sheera Yates and the Orange Grove family credit the week’s success to the whole body of Christ boarding the journey side by side.

In Columbia, Grace UMC took a different route to the same destination. After Messy Church training, the Rev. Meg Sweeney Cook and her congregation asked a simple question: What if VBS wasn’t just for children? Two years and two Messy Church VBS experiences later—Joy in the Mess and this summer’s Taste and See—Grace has built an intergenerational model rooted in hospitality, creativity, celebration and shared experience. Momentum is building beyond Grace, too: On Aug. 1, Dr. Johannah Myers led Cohort 2 congregations in Messy Church training at Epworth in Columbia, equipping even more churches to try this approach.

These stories are exactly why “Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer” continues to matter. For congregations feeling the strain of disconnected generations or declining children’s participation, this initiative isn’t “one more program”—it’s a way to align worship and discipleship around a shared vision: all generations together, growing in faith in Jesus Christ. Participating churches receive quarterly in-person and online training, access to partner resources like Messy Church USA and Narrative 4, and year-round coaching support.

Mark your calendar for another exciting step in this journey: Dr. Nelson Cowan will be speaking on Oct. 17. Cowan serves as director of the Center for Worship and the Arts at Samford University, and his expertise in designing, planning and evaluating worship experiences made him a natural fit to lead our Q4 quarterly training. He’ll be helping cohort churches think even more intentionally about what it takes to build worship that truly includes every generation. More details coming soon.

For more information, email ttaylor@umcsc.org or nmwoodle@umcsc.org, or visit <https://www.umcsc.org/children>.



Photos courtesy of Dr. Mark E. Thompson



Gilbert connects with middle schoolers

This summer, Gilbert UMC, Gilbert, and our director of outreach ministry, John Nix, partnered with local schools to host an engaging youth program for middle school students, allowing church volunteers to build positive relationships through memorable summer activities. In June, students enjoyed games at the church alongside field trips to the Riverbanks Zoo and a local theater to watch the new Toy Story movie. July featured a water park visit, fishing at a local pond and a back-to-school party where students received free backpacks and essential school supplies. Looking ahead, GUMC plans to nurture these vital connections with the students and their families by providing ongoing guidance and support throughout the school year.

Youth talents wanted for the Advocate

Are you a child, youth or young adult United Methodist with writing or artistic talent? We would love to feature young people’s contributions every month in the *Advocate*.

Whether it’s a church- or faith-related photograph, drawing, painting, essay, poem or story, share your efforts with the *Advocate*, along with your name, age and church name and city.

Email to jbrodie@advocatesc.org or mail to Editor Jessica Brodie, *Advocate*, 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203.

If you’re mailing it and would like your submission returned to you when we’re finished, let us know and we can do so.

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Well done, faithful leader

On July 26 during worship, Grace UMC, Columbia, celebrated the more than 12 years of faithful leadership given by Maxine Drake to the Hungry and Homeless Ministry, a partnership with Trinity Episcopal Cathedral that has connected Grace members with neighbors in need since the early 2000s. The Rev. Meg Cook said through her compassionate leadership, countless people have experienced Christ's love through simple gifts of care, dignity and hope. The congregation also recognized Ruth Fox as she stepped into the lead role after years of serving alongside Maxine and reaffirmed its commitment to support both her and this vital ministry. "We give thanks for God's faithfulness and for all who continue to serve Christ in our neighbors," Cook said. Pictured from left are Cook, Drake and Fox.



'Who Cares for the Children'

First UMC, Marion, welcomed the Rev. Cathy Joens, director of church relations for Epworth, as their guest speaker Aug. 9. Joens (at left) spoke on "Who Cares for the Children," bringing a Scripture reference from Deuteronomy 4:6-9. She emphasized Epworth's goal of serving children and families in critical, lifegiving ways and how local churches' support of Epworth allowed them to accomplish their goal. FUMC is listed among the \$10,000 or More Church Donors in the Epworth publication The Record. Pictured at right with Joens is Betty Anne Sloan, Epworth representative for FUMC.



Photos courtesy of Dianne Edwards

Mount Zion women help House of Hope through 'Extending God's Love Beyond Our Walls' program

FLORENCE—United Women in Faith at Mount Zion United Methodist Church donated clothes and miscellaneous items to the House of Hope in Florence this summer.

On Saturday, June 27, at 11:30 a.m., the women participated in Extending God's Love Beyond Our Walls, donating clothes and miscellaneous items to the Christ centered organization that serves men, women and children facing homelessness or housing insecurity.

"This is what the United Women in Faith are doing—reaching beyond the church walls and beyond Sunday mornings, into the very places where God's children are hurting. Through generous donations of miscellaneous items—clothes, hygiene kits, socks, blankets and more—they are telling the homeless and those in need: 'You are seen. You are loved. You matter,'" said

the Rev. Palma D. Thomas, pastor, and Vera Peterson, UWF chair.

The effort was not just about the items themselves but about the message they carry, tangibly stating: "We care about your dignity." "We want you to be warm." "We want you to keep moving forward."

That is what compassion and love look like in action, Thomas and Peterson said. This is the Gospel in motion, with sleeves rolled up and faith. This is what it means to be the hands and feet of Christ—meeting people where they are, with no conditions or judgment, just love.

"When we gave—even the smallest item—we were part of something much bigger: God's mission to heal, restore and embrace the world. When the church steps outside its doors, the love of Christ steps into the streets," they said.



Pictured are United Methodist women in action for God.

Alston Wilkes Society.

Stronger together: How partnerships create lasting change

The church has long understood that people accomplish more together than they ever could alone. Local congregations partner with one another, with community organizations and with ministries to meet needs that no single church can address by itself.

The same is true in the nonprofit world. At Alston Wilkes Society, we know that lasting change takes more than one organization.

That's why we're partnering with

Pathways Community Center in Rock Hill.

Pathways was created around a simple but powerful idea: bring organizations together under one roof so individuals and families can access the services they need without navigating multiple agencies. By connecting housing, health care, employment, recovery support, financial assistance and other essential resources in one location, Pathways helps people take meaning-

ful steps toward stability. Alston Wilkes Society is honored to be part of that collaborative network.

For many people, rebuilding a life begins with overcoming challenges most of us rarely think about, like replacing a birth certificate, Social Security card or state ID. Without these essential documents, finding employment, securing housing, opening a bank account or accessing health care can be nearly impossible. Through our partnership with Pathways, Alston Wilkes Society helps individuals navigate these obstacles. For those facing significant barriers, these services are often the first step toward lasting stability.

Every organization at Pathways

Community Center brings unique expertise. Just as the Body of Christ is strengthened when churches combine their gifts in service to others, nonprofits are most effective when each contributes its unique strengths toward a common mission. Every identification card secured. Every veteran connected to resources. Every family guided toward stability. Every individual given another chance.

These victories belong to the entire community.

When churches, nonprofits, volunteers and community partners work together, barriers become opportunities, hope becomes tangible and lives are transformed.

That is the power of partnership.

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The South Carolina United Methodist Foundation
P. O. Box 5087, Columbia, SC 29250-5087
scumf@bellsouth.net

Ministries.

Cumberland UMC mission ministry serves 112 through monthly Parking Lot Outreach

FLORENCE—The Mission Ministry of Cumberland United Methodist Church continued its commitment to serving the community in July by participating in its monthly Parking Lot Ministry, distributing 112 care bags to individuals in need.

Each bag was thoughtfully assembled with essential hygiene items, including new washcloths, soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, lotion and socks—everyday necessities that can make a meaningful difference for those experiencing hardship.

The Parking Lot Ministry is a monthly outreach that reflects Cumberland UMC’s mission of putting faith into action by meeting practical needs with compassion and dignity. Through this ongoing effort, church members offer more than supplies; they provide encouragement, kindness and hope to members of the community.

A key component of the ministry’s success is its partnership with neighboring congregations, including Central United Methodist Church and other organizations, whose collaboration helps expand the ministry’s reach and impact. Together, the churches demonstrate the power of working in unity to care for those who are most vulnerable.

“Our mission is to be the hands and feet of Christ,” said church leaders. “Every bag we distribute is a reminder that someone is seen, valued and loved. We are grateful for our partnership with Central UMC and for everyone who supports this ministry.”

Cumberland UMC invites the congregation and the wider community to continue supporting the Mission Ministry through donations, volunteer service and prayer as it seeks to make a lasting difference—one act of kindness at a time. Visit <https://cumberlandumc.org>.



Cumberland partners with neighboring congregations in the ministry.



The electrical renovations are already finished, and the church is in the process of fundraising for plumbing.

Piedmont UMC marks 150 years with Mission House project

Piedmont United Methodist Church is celebrating 150 years of ministry in the community with special monthly events and a major community outreach project.

Piedmont UMC, founded in 1876, is in the process of renovating a former mill house into “The Mission House.” When complete, the space will be a community resource center where people can wash and dry clothes, use men’s and women’s shower facilities, have access to a clothes closet and enjoy meeting space.

“It is a God-sized vision,” said pastor the Rev. Richard W. Waldrep.

Currently, the church serves the community in various ways, including a monthly meal and giving away seasonal items like blankets, hats and gloves. When The Mission House is complete, Waldrep said it will enable the church to do much more.

The electrical renovations are already finished, and the church is in the process of fundraising for plumbing renovations. Currently, the church has raised half the funds needed, and they are hopeful plumbing work can begin soon.

In addition, the church is celebrating their century-and-a-half anniversary with monthly events, all leading up to a grand Homecoming Service slated for Nov. 8.

For questions or information on helping with the effort, call 864-845-6495.

UMCSC assembles Christmas stockings for Haiti children

South Carolina United Methodists will have the chance to help children in Haiti get Christmas stockings through a South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission project.

The Ziplock bag stockings will be filled with hygiene items and a small toy. These stockings will be distributed by the Methodist Church of Haiti to the needy children at Christmas.

The project is open to all, from churches, men’s and women’s groups, Sunday school classes, small/life groups and individuals.

The following should be placed in a one- or two-gallon Ziplock bag:

- 4.6 oz or larger tube of toothpaste
- One medium-sized toothbrush
- One bath-size bar of antibacterial soap (e.g., Dial)
- One washcloth
- One comb (large tooth)
- One toy (something small, e.g., stuffed animal)
- Mints or hard candy

They should also include \$2 for each bag to help cover shipping expenses.

The kits will be collected at the

United Methodist Volunteers in Missions warehouse in Leesville and from there shipped to Haiti.

Make checks out to UMVIM-SC/Christmas Stockings. Check can accompany the stockings or be mailed to Jennifer Parker, Treasurer UMVIM-SC, 143 Glenbrooke Circle, Columbia, SC 29204.

Stockings must be delivered to the UMVIM warehouse by Nov. 3 to ensure they can be delivered in time. The warehouse address is 117 W. Church St., Batesburg, SC 29006.

For questions: 803-603-5067.

Sharing grace, one meal at a time: Grace UMM barbecue

COLUMBIA—On Aug. 15, Grace United Methodist Church celebrated its 14 annual chicken barbecue giveaway, continuing a tradition of serving its neighbors and sharing God’s love. This year, the United Methodist Men gave away 310 barbecue dinners, which is the most yet. Each dinner included a quarter chicken, baked beans, chips and a cookie, prepared and shared as a gift to the community.

The barbecue giveaway reflects three of Grace’s core values: come

alongside, get it done and give it away. Together, these values express Grace’s heart for serving their neighbors, working together and sharing generously with everyone they meet.

“We often call ourselves ‘the little church that could,’ but I think we are the little church that can!” said the Rev. Meg Cook, pastor.

Alongside the men’s barbecue efforts, the United Women of Faith hosted their annual indoor yard sale. The women raised almost \$3,000, with

all proceeds going to support missions in the community and around the world.

Whether it is a barbecue dinner, a

bargain at the yard sale or simply a helping hand, Grace seeks to put faith into action: coming alongside, getting it done and giving it away.



This year, the United Methodist Men of Grace UMC, Columbia, gave away 310 barbecue dinners.



Ministries.



Rev. Sharome Henry gives the devotion.



Attendees learn during the LSM Academy Morning Session.



Toni Norris leads a session.

Lay Servant Ministries hosts successful 2026 Train the Trainer Academy

By David Salter

The South Carolina Conference Lay Servant Ministries hosted its 2026 Lay Servant Academy—Train the Trainer Saturday, Aug. 1, at Washington Street United Methodist Church in Columbia.

Approximately 70 participants from across the conference gathered from 9 a.m. until 3:45 p.m. for a day of learning, fellowship and renewed commitment to equipping leaders for lay servant ministry.

The day began with check-in and a welcoming breakfast coordinated by Cynthia Green-Thompson, a member of the Conference Extended Lay Servant Ministries Team.

Participants were welcomed by David Salter, South Carolina Conference co-director of Lay Servant Ministries, followed by an opening devotion led by the Rev. Sharome Henry, Certified Lay Minister liaison with Clergy Services.

The morning Train the Trainer session was facilitated by Toni Norris, who provided an engaging and interactive learning experience for facilitators representing the conference’s 10 districts. Through discussion, demonstrations and hands-on activities, Norris introduced creative teaching strategies and innovative techniques designed to strengthen local and district lay servant training schools. Her energetic leadership encouraged participants to discover fresh approaches for equipping laity for effective ministry.

Following the morning session, participants enjoyed a delicious catered lunch prepared by Tim Scott and generously sponsored by Southern Mutual Church Insurance Company. During the luncheon, David Salter presented Jim Ellis, executive director of Marketing for Southern Mutual Church Insurance Company, with a certificate of appreciation in recognition of the company’s support of the academy.

The academy was honored by the presence of Bishop Leonard Fairley and his wife, Dawn. Fairley offered words of thanksgiving and hope, expressing his appreciation for the faithful service of the laity throughout the South Carolina Conference. He emphasized the indispensable role of laypersons in fulfilling the mission of the church and encouraged participants to continue developing leaders who will serve Christ in their local congregations and communities.

The luncheon also provided an opportunity to recognize six retiring district directors of Lay Servant Ministries for their faithful leadership and years of dedicated service. Each was presented with a commemorative plaque honoring their contributions. Those recognized included the Rev. Gwendolyn Brown (Anderson District), Mark McGee (Florence District), Kenneth Moore (Greenville District), the Rev. Sharome Henry (Hartsville District), Rose Ford (Marion District) and Thelma Hudson (Walterboro District).

The afternoon featured breakout sessions highlighting several courses offered through the South Carolina Conference Lay Servant Ministries program. Participants attended overview sessions led by experienced instructors, including Basic with Youth Addendum facilitated by Nancy Rivers; Leading Bible Study facilitated by the Rev. Kris Bergmann; United Methodist Heritage facilitated by the Rev. Sheri White, with Bishop Kenneth Carder joining via Zoom to discuss updates found in the new third edition of the course text; Justice in Everyday Life facilitated by the Rev. Alston Lippert; and Forgiving What We Can’t Forget facilitated by Makeiba Lewis.

As the academy concluded, participants departed with renewed enthusiasm, practical teaching ideas and a deeper commitment to strengthening Lay Servant Ministries throughout the South Carolina Conference.

The annual Train the Trainer Academy continues to equip district leaders and instructors with the skills and resources needed to prepare faithful disciples for service, ensuring that lay servant ministries remain a vital part of the conference’s mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Salter is co-director of conference Lay Servant Ministries.

Native American Ministries.

About the impact of Native American Industrial Schools

By Beckee Garris, Catawba

Many people have heard about Native American Boarding Schools. More than likely they actually know the name of these schools: Native American Industrial Schools in the United States.

Natives who attended these schools were taught to become domestic help or learn different trades during their residency there. The schools rented out the children to different wealthy households in the area. Other duties or occupations changed, with some even becoming teachers.

The first industrial school was opened in October 1879 in Carlisle,

Pennsylvania. The last two were opened in Bismarck, North Dakota, in February and December 1908. At one point there were 400 of these industrial schools.

The last federally run Indian Boarding School in the United States was closed in 1996.

The first boarding school was the Carlisle Industrial School. It was founded by Lt. Richard Henry Pratt under the U.S. government’s authorization. Pratt is more famously known for saying, “Kill the Indian, and save the man.” It was based on the so-called idea of civilizing the Natives by making them Christian

and speak only English.

To achieve this goal upon their arrival, the schools forced all the indigenous elements of the children’s culture to be removed. Their hair was cut, and their tribal names were replaced with English names. Their Native clothing was discarded and replaced by uniforms, and the children were forbidden to speak their Native languages. If caught speaking their various tribal languages, severe punishment often resulted. In many cases, it was almost impossible not to speak their Native languages because before arriving at the boarding schools, most did not speak English. It must also be noted that the teachers at the boarding schools spoke both English and another Native languages. This practice of speaking only English was to forcibly indoctrinate the Native children.

In many cases, these children were also forcibly separated from their families, who were by this time living on reservations, so the children were more easily rounded up and taken to boarding schools. It has been recorded that, while attending Carlisle, almost 200 children died from diseases, malnutrition, intentional neglect and other severe causes. Some of these children were buried in unmarked graves.

A federal investigation in 2024 discovered at least 973 children died while at the federally funded Indian boarding schools. However, the exact numbers will never be known because the schools sent many of the children back

home once they became ill.

Recently there have been efforts to return the remains of these children to their tribal relatives. However, because of some being moved from one gravesite to another during construction of a military museum on the site at Carlisle, records have been lost providing the children’s names and tribal affiliation. It is impossible to know who they are and where they came from. Even with grave markers showing the names of some of these children and their tribal affiliations, there were unforeseen complications when they were to be unearthed. In one such case, five distant relatives of a 10-year-old boy went to Carlisle to retrieve this relative’s remains. When the process to unearth him was begun, they unearthed the remains of a 15 year old girl.

Because of this occurrence, the digging was stopped, and she was reinterned in the spot where she was discovered. It is believed she had been placed on top of the young boy. But no further action has been done to resolve the boy’s issue, at this point, given the many legal complications.

This does not mean that no other investigations are in the works to make sure both of these children can be brought home to their families in the future. It just means more time and new identification processes must take place to make this happen. Hopefully it will happen sooner rather than later. It has been far too long for these Native children.

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Ministries.

Obituaries.

Rev. Charles Samuel Branch Sr.



Branch Sr.

SUMMERVILLE—The Rev. Charles Samuel Branch Sr., a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died July 24, 2026.

Prior to his retirement in 2010, Rev. Branch served the Ehrhardt Circuit, Greenwood-Ninety Six, Bennettsville Circuit, Centenary, New Hope-St. Paul, Spartanburg Cooperative Parish, Mount Beulah, Jefferson Parish and Harleyville Parish charges.

Funeral services are pending.

Memorials may be made to Dial-Murray Funeral Home, 300 W. Main St., Moncks Corner, SC 29461.

Rev. Branch is survived by his wife, Minnie Larisa Stokes Branch, daughter and three sons.

Joel Edward Fulmer

BLYTHEWOOD—Joel Edward “Eddie” Fulmer, husband of Tammy Fulmer, died Aug. 17, 2026. Mrs. Fulmer is the assistant to the director of the South Carolina Conference Office of Congregational Excellence.

Funeral services were held Aug. 21 at Fair Lawn United Methodist Church, Columbia, with burial in the church cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Fair Lawn UMC, 9203 Wilson Blvd., Columbia, SC 29203.

Mr. Fulmer is survived by his wife and two sons.

Ruth Bryan Jones

CHARLESTON—Ruth Bryan Jones, widow of the Rev. J. R. Jones Jr. and mother of the Rev. Joel Jones, died Aug. 3, 2026. Rev. Jones is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

A graveside service was held Aug. 22 at Pisgah Methodist Church Cemetery, Aynor.

Memorials may be made to Bethel UMC Prayer Ministry or Bethel UMC Children’s Ministry at 57 Pitt St., Charleston, SC 29401.

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

Brenda Hay Knight

AYNOR—Brenda Hay Knight, wife of the Rev. Richard “Dickie” Knight, died July 28, 2026. Rev. Knight retired from the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held July 31 at Brown Swamp Church, Conway, and on Aug. 1 at First Methodist Church, Harleyville. A private graveside service was held following the Aug. 1 service.

Memorials may be made to Crescent Hospice, 1516 E. Highway 501, Suite 101, Conway, SC 29526.

Mrs. Knight is survived by her husband, son and two daughters.

Eleanor Frances Thrower McPherson

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—Eleanor Frances Thrower McPherson, mother of the Rev. Kurt McPherson, died Aug. 3, 2026. Rev. McPherson is the pastor of St. Matthew United Methodist Church, Greenville.

Funeral services were held Aug. 7 at Watson-King Funeral Home Chapel in Rockingham, North Carolina, with burial in Eastside Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to the North Carolina Zoological Society, <https://www.nczoo.com/forms/honoring-a-loved-one/>.

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

Mattie Bernice Nesmith

LAKE CITY—Mattie Bernice Nesmith, mother of Beverly Cantey, died Aug. 13, 2026. Mrs. Cantey is the wife of the Rev. Lawrence Cantey, pastor of Triune-St. John Charge, Orangeburg.

Funeral services were held Aug. 22 at Bethesda UMC, Cades.

Kay Patterson Powell

ANDERSON—Kay Patterson Powell, wife of the Rev. Richard Powell, died July 17, 2026. Rev. Powell is the pastor of the Bethel-Ruhamah Charge, Iva.

Funeral services were held Aug. 1 at Trinity United Methodist Church, Honea Path.

Memorials may be made to Trinity UMC, 101 S. Main St., Honea Path, SC 29654; Trinity UMC Preschool, 101 S. Main St., Honea Path, SC 29654; or to Patterson Chapel Methodist Church, 27390 Highway 221 N., Enoree, SC 29335.

Mrs. Powell is survived by her husband and two daughters.

Katherine Smalls

HUGER—The Hon. Katherine “Dee Dee” Smalls, sister of Kenneth, Melvin and the late David Stafford, died Aug. 15, 2026. Kenneth Stafford is the husband of the Rev. Virginia Stafford, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. Melvin Stafford is the husband of the Rev. Stephanie Stafford, pastor of Bluff Road UMC, Columbia. David Stafford was the husband of the Rev. Geneva Stafford, pastor of Francis Burns UMC, Columbia.

Funeral services were held Aug. 22 at New Hope Life Center, Huger.



Photos courtesy Eugenia Vicars



Pack the Backpack helps kids

St. Paul UMC, Greenville, held its annual Pack the Backpack event Aug. 9. The church gave away school supplies to children in the community so they would be ready to start school. Morris Jenkins provided free ice cream to everyone, and Whataburger provided backpacks.

Epworth News.

Kinship Navigation program surrounds kinship caregivers with support, love

In your church or community, you probably know someone who is raising a child who is not their own. Kinship caregivers are typically grandparents, close relatives or family friends who courageously step up to raise a child when the child’s parents are unable to do so. Many kinship caregivers have little or no time to prepare when they first take on this responsibility, and some lack infant or child necessities. Adding to their stress, as many as 30 percent of South Carolina grandparents raising their grandchildren live with a disability, according to the South Carolina Department of Social Services. Twenty-six percent live in poverty.

Child welfare researchers have increasingly recognized the immense value of kinship caregivers. They make it possible for children to remain connected to their families, cultures and communities, which research shows greatly improves child wellbeing.

Two years ago, Epworth launched its Kinship Navigation program, which is aimed at giving kinship caregivers the support they need to give the children in their care a stable, safe and loving home. The program served 633 caregivers and 794 children in 2025. Epworth staff and other advocates also successfully lobbied for a change to South Carolina laws that would make it easier for grandparents and relatives to become eligible to be licensed as kinship foster parents.

Throughout the year, Epworth’s Kinship program provides services and goods at no charge to kinship caregivers. The services include one-on-one case management, guidance on legal and financial matters, referrals to other organizations that can

help families, free notary, copying and scanning services, peer support groups and emotional and mental health support. The kinship program provides access to diapers, children’s clothing, food, school supplies and household essentials. The program also hosts monthly recreational get-togethers for kinship caregivers and their children and discussion groups that give kinship caregivers a chance to share their challenges with each other.

According to SCDSS, approximately 6 percent of all the children in South Carolina live in a home with relatives but no birth parent present.

Epworth is working to spread the word about its kinship program and is asking that churches help by telling the kinship caregivers in their congregations that the program is here for them. Many kinship caregivers feel relief when they learn about Epworth’s program because, for the first time, they have an advocate on their side, working diligently to get them the help they need.

Kinship caregivers can call Epworth’s Kinship Help Line to learn more: 888-561-2932.

Another way churches can help the kinship program is to hold diaper drives or supply drives to collect household cleaning and laundry products or new bed linens. Epworth also asks that churches provide occasional Parents Night Out babysitting at their church to help kinship caregivers in their community enjoy a little time to themselves.

If your church is interested in any of these projects, reach out to the Rev. Cathy Joens, Epworth’s director of church relations, at 864-283-1966.

Baptized in Christ
Asbury Memorial UMC, Columbia, celebrated two baptisms July 12. Here, the Rev. Laurie Brandes baptizes one of the two.



UMC’s Advance projects updated

Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church has recently updated its list of Advance projects—individuals, churches and organizations partnering in God’s mission and ministry around the world through the Advance.

The Advance is an official, voluntary, accountable program for designated second-mile giving. It allows individuals, local churches and groups to financially support specific vetted global mission projects, ministries or missionaries, guaranteeing that 100 percent of every gift goes directly to the chosen cause.

The updated list of active Advance projects around the world can be found through this searchable site: <https://gbhem-umc.my.site.com/hemgm/s/active-missions>.

A number of Advance projects have been closed recently. They are as follows: African Rural Institute, Bom Jesus Clinic, Buhlonga Church Building Construction, Christian Leadership for Young Adults, Cote d’Ivoire Undesignated, Creation Care & Renewable Energy (gifts may be sent to 3021951 Environmental Sustainability, where

work to address issues of creation and climate change have been centralized), Estonia Undesignated, Eurasia Church Planting and Mission Projects, Eurasia In Mission Together—Russia and Belarus, Evangelism & Church Planting (Cote d’Ivoire), Imagine No Malaria (gifts may be sent to 3021770 Abundant Health, where work to eradicate infectious diseases has been centralized), Kisangani Mission Station, Liberia Reconstruction Projects, Moscow Seminary-Scholarships and Academic Support, Mwandji Development Mission, Oklahoma University Wesley Fellowship, Publishing Christian Literature, Tsalala Women’s Training Center and Program Department, UMCOR COVID-19 Response (gifts may be sent to 3021770 Abundant Health), United Methodist Leadership and Development in Africa and the Philippines, Rural Women and Young Girls Leadership Empowerment Program, Nyembo Umpungu Mission Projects and Prosthesis Program.

People can also request a list of projects or more information by emailing advance@umcmmission.org.



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Duke Divinity celebrates centennial

DURHAM, N.C.—In 1926, the first graduate professional school of Duke University opened with 23 students and seven faculty. A century later, Duke Divinity School has over 10,000 alumni who have served as preachers, scholars, teachers and leaders in denominations and vocations across the country and around the world. Duke Divinity is one of 13 United Methodist seminaries in the U.S. The school has a Centennial Preaching Series to mark the occasion, starting with its opening convocation on Aug. 28.

Highland Park pastors, conference address suit

DALLAS—Highland Park United Methodist Church’s senior minister and his predecessor both are speaking out about the lawsuit filed by the Horizon Texas Conference. Meanwhile, the conference added more information to its suit about the issues under dispute.

Celebrating 25 years of Native dance, art and friendship

BON AQUA, Tenn.—Participants at the 25th annual Native Moccasins Rock event honored missing and murdered Indigenous relatives, learned about sacred sites and celebrated Native American culture and traditions. Sponsored by the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference, the event attracted Native and non-Native participants seeking to better understand and recover Indigenous skills and stories.

Publisher acquires online journal

DALLAS—Market Square Publishing, publisher of books by United Methodist authors, has acquired United Methodist Insight, a 15-year-old online news-and-views journal covering The United Methodist Church. The transition was announced Aug. 13 by Insight editor and founder Cynthia B. Astle and Market Square Publisher Kevin Slimp.

Conference sues its largest congregation

DALLAS—The Horizon Texas Conference has filed a lawsuit against Highland Park United Methodist Church, arguing changes the megachurch made to its articles of incorporation violate the denomination’s rules for church governance. The conference’s lawsuit says the changes remove both the conference’s oversight and the wider input from the congregation. This is a developing story. UM News will provide updates as available.

Relief reaches hard-hit areas after earthquake

CABANATUAN CITY, Philippines—The United Methodist Church in the Philippines and church partners have provided food, supplies and other support to more than 700 families following a deadly June earthquake and subsequent flooding. Davao Area Bishop Israel M. Painit said pastors and volunteers also have provided spiritual care.

A ‘helping hand’ for detained immigrants

BALDWIN, Mich.—Michigan United Methodists have launched a new ministry, Helping Hands, to reach out to those detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement at the North Lake Processing Center. The Rev. Cherlyn McKanders and members of Covenant Community United Methodist Church visit immigrants being detained and provide prayer, encouragement and funds for calls home on the processing center’s pay phones.

Agencies launch new monitoring dashboard

GLENVIEW, Ill.—The United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women and the General Council on Finance and Administration announce the launch of a new monitoring dashboard designed to track and report data on clergy status, gender and race across the U.S. connection. “This dashboard empowers our denomination with a clear, honest picture of who is serving in ministry and how that reflects, or fails to reflect, the diversity of the church we are called to be,” said the Rev. Stephanie York Arnold of the Status and Role of Women.

Hamilton wins Democratic Senate primary

LEAWOOD, Kan.—The Rev. Adam Hamilton, founding pastor of the largest United Methodist church in the United States, won the Democratic primary for U.S. Senate in Kansas on Aug. 4. For more than three decades, Hamilton has served as senior pastor at Church of the Resurrection in Leawood. He will challenge Republican U.S. Sen. Roger Marshall in November. “My campaign will bring Kansans together around our shared values and common purpose. Lowering costs. Restoring decency. Ending the chaos and corruption in Washington,” Hamilton said in a Facebook post after securing the nomination.

Deacons take God’s work beyond the church

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—United Methodist deacons serve as bridges connecting The United Methodist Church to the world outside the church. You might find them protesting outside of a county jail, working at a food bank or helping former inmates reintegrate into society. This year marks 30 years since the denomination declared deacons to be a distinct, permanent order of ministry.

Church court releases fall docket

NASHVILLE, Tenn. —The Judicial Council, The United Methodist Church’s top court, has released a three-item docket for its Oct. 21-24 online session.

Bishop Rapanut to chair Connectional Table

WASHINGTON—The Council of Bishops has selected Bishop Carlo A. Rapanut to be the next chair of the Connectional Table, a leadership body that coordinates denominational ministries and resources. Rapanut, who leads the Desert Southwest and New Mexico conferences, will assume the role in October. He succeeds North Katanga Area Bishop Mande Muyombo, who has chaired the body since December 2022 and is now president-designate for the Council of Bishops. The Council of Bishops and Connectional Table jointly made the announcement.
Courtesy UMNews



The steeple is lowered onto the enlarged church building in 1991.

Little River celebrates 150 years

By Linda Evans

What began as a small mission church in 1876 has grown to become an active congregation dedicated to making disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world.

Little River United Methodist Church has undergone many changes in the last 150 years, but its continued focus on community outreach has set it apart.

“It’s important to celebrate an anniversary like this,” noted the Rev. Tony Adams, the church’s pastor who is beginning his third year leading the church. Throughout Scripture, he said, “God always calls his people to celebrate the milestones.”

He called the celebration an Ebenezer moment—“a physical or spiritual monument reminding us of where we’ve been and the promises that God continues to make in our lives.”

Planning for the anniversary began in the summer of 2025. A committee of about 20 people, led by lay leader Sue Novotny, focused events that would bring together people from the church’s two traditional and one contemporary services.

“We were excited about the fellowship” that combining the services would bring, “allowing members to talk to and get to know other church members they might not otherwise see,” she said.

Beginning in October with a “big tent event” that made use of tents erected for the church’s annual rummage sale, the committee planned other combined services, a family movie night, a Fat Tuesday pancake dinner with special music and a trivia contest with questions garnered from the church building and adjacent graveyard. The grand finale on Nov. 15 will feature a final combined service with special music and a message by South Carolina UMC Resident Bishop Leonard E. Fairley.

True to the United Methodist slogan, “open hearts, open minds, open doors,” Little River UMC has long been involved in serving the surrounding community.

Through its twice-weekly Dignity Ministry, anyone can come, “no questions asked, to have fellowship, have a meal, wash clothes, take a shower and maybe even get a fresh supply of clothes,” said Adams.

Each Friday night, the church’s Shepherd’s Table ministry serves a hot meal—again, no questions asked.

Many ministries of the church are open to anyone in the community. Those interested in playing bells for services, knitting or crocheting prayer shawls, exercising, line dancing, quilting or creating cards have a place in one of the church’s ongoing groups. Many area families participate in vacation Bible school and Trunk or Treat



Pastor Tony Adams leads Little River UMC into its next 150 years.

each year, and the annual rummage sale attracts thousands of bargain hunters to the campus. Since 1983, when few restaurants opened on Thanksgiving, the church has offered a community Thanksgiving dinner, open to all at no charge.

“The church is known in the community for participation in Good News Club at Waterway Elementary School and sharing the good news of Christ with elementary school children,” said Adams.

The church also provides meeting space for Scouts.

The church was once led by the first female pastor in South Carolina Methodism. The Rev. Bessie Parker was the church’s pastor from 1969-1973. While the church has undergone many changes through the years—becoming Methodist in 1885, and moving from one of eight churches in a circuit served by one pastor to one congregation with its own pastor in 1986—one of the biggest changes occurred when the church added a contemporary service.

“Pastor Paul Wood requested that a few of us become involved in creating a contemporary service,” said longtime member Pat Angelini. “We received training from the conference and from visiting other successful contemporary services in the area.”

When the service began, “We sandwiched ourselves between two traditional services, which entailed dragging all the band equipment back and forth.”

With the construction of a large addition in 2009, the contemporary service found a home of its own in a large multipurpose room with a stage for the band, a large kitchen and audio and visual technology for streaming and projecting videos and lyrics.

“It’s an amazing accomplishment—the grace of God that any institution is around for 150 years—and the fact that we’ve been here 150 years says a lot about the faithfulness of the people of Little River,” Adams said.



Historical Society by the Rev. Joseph D. Kovas

A history of the Sunday school movement

Sunday school has been with the people of The United Methodist Church since the very beginning.

The concept of Sunday school first began in Great Britain toward the end of the 18th century and was embraced by John Wesley as a way to minister to poor children who worked and only received one day off. The early American Methodists also endorsed the usage of Sunday schools. According to John Schisler in his work “Christian Education in Local Methodist Churches” (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), the minutes from the 1790 annual conferences contain the question, “What can be done to instruct poor children (white or black) to read?” The response to the question was “Let us labour, as the heart and soul of one man, to establish Sunday Schools in, or near the place of public worship.”

The establishment of the early Sunday schools was designed not only for religious education purposes, but was also created to educate children in reading and writing. Bishop Francis Asbury fully supported the Sunday school movement and wrote a pastoral letter to the early Methodists encouraging the adoption of Sunday schools for the instruction of children. By 1798, both Asbury and Bishop Thomas Coke advocated in the *Discipline* for religious education among children, noting that half of the human race was under the age of 16 and encouraged Methodists to teach catechism (Russell E. Richey et al, “The Methodist Experience in America,” Nashville: Abingdon Press 2010, 119-120).

The Sunday schools in local Methodist churches were once described as “the church’s nursery of piety” (Ibid., 120). Many churches around the turn of the 20th century began to construct Sunday school wings and buildings for the advancement of Christian education. An example comes from the history of Bethel United Methodist Church in Chester. The Bethel Church School Annex was constructed in 1926. According to the Rev. A. E. Holler, the congregation on the last day of the fundraising campaign needed \$84.07. A gentleman stepped up on the last Sunday of January 1926 and gave \$85 to pay the remaining amount. When this happened, the congregation began to sing “‘Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow’ with as much fervor as ever was heard on land or sea” (Ann Pickens Collins, “Wellsprings of Bethel: Memories of the Church and its People,” Columbia: Collins Publications, 1989, 7).

Bethel UMC celebrates this year the centennial of the Church School Annex. Holler’s prayer for the building was, “May it continue through the years to be a blessing to the youth of Chester, a joy to the community, and all to the glory of God.” As a child of Bethel, Holler’s prayer was lived out in my youth.

In a day and age in which many congregations struggle with how to best use empty rooms that once were used for Christian education, times of remembrance and celebration may provide for new visions for God’s kingdom in our midst. Perhaps the question to ask and pray for is not “how will we fill a certain space again with people?” but rather “how will God summon this empty space to be used in a new way?” The empty space may not be used in the same way it once was, but it may become another source of Christian education and formation in a new way. It may become a food pantry, a free medical clinic or an afterschool program for a local public school.

A child may not necessarily receive religious education in the traditional way, but perhaps in the new spaces, a child or youth will learn by example from our congregations the promise of Matthew 25: When we love the least of these, there we find the Lord.

That is a powerful and holy education.

Kovas is the president of the historical society and serves as the pastor of First United Methodist Church of Cheraw.

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Adult Lessons
by the Rev. Walter E. Strawther

About the Author
Strawther serves on the conference Board of Ordained Ministry and as pastor of Mt. Zion UMC, Kingstree.

Perfect, permanent high priest

Sept. 6
Uniquely Unifying
Lesson Scripture: Hebrews 1:1-14
Background Scripture: Hebrews 1:1-2:4
Key Verse: “The Son is the light of God’s glory and the imprint of God’s being. He maintains everything with his powerful message. After he carried out the cleansing of people from their sins, he sat down at the right side of the highest majesty” (v. 3).

The Book of Hebrews opens with a blast of celebratory, poetic language setting the stage for proclaiming Jesus to be a messenger and representative of God unlike any other. Verses 1-4 offer an overview of how we should view Jesus in contrast to human prophets and divine messengers. Since Jesus participated with God the Father in the creation of all there is, he is to be viewed as having more significance and greater authority than prophets or angels. Both fall short of replicating the brilliance of God the Father. Jesus bears an identical imprint and is an exact representation of God the Father. Jesus joins God the Father in sustaining all creation and is the source of cleansing from inward impurity and sin. Jesus alone is the only prophet and priest who reigns forever because he is one with the Father.

This passage speaks to our two major Christian holidays, Christmas and Easter. We hear the proclamation of Jesus’ birth as the incarnation of a divine deity in human form (verse 6). We hear echoes of Easter in Jesus making or creating a way of purification from our sins on the cross and his triumph over death as he is ascended to the right hand of God the Father (verse 3).

Christians tend to read Hebrews in a manner that demeans and belittles our Jewish roots. We are invited to understand that the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) as equal in importance to our faith as the New Testament. When we read Scripture, any Scripture, in a way that excludes, we fail to hear the true message of Jesus, the one who has the power and authority to bring us together in the unity of love, peace and joy. How can we more intentionally join the author

of Hebrews in celebrating the unifying power of Jesus?

Sept. 13
Confident and Committed
Lesson Scripture: Hebrews 4:14-5:10
Background Scripture: Hebrews 2:1-4:13
Key Verses: “Let’s hold on to the confession since we have a great high priest who passed through the heavens, who is Jesus, God’s Son. Let’s draw near to the throne of favor with confidence so that we can receive mercy and grace when we need help” (v. 14, 16).

The author of Hebrews continues to provide encouragement to strengthen the faith of the original recipients of this message. The author calls this community of believers to stay committed to the new way of life their faith in Jesus Christ has made possible. They are encouraged to remember their lives before and the reality of how God rescued them from the death and destruction of sin. Jesus as the Great High Priest has addressed humanity’s weakness manifested as a lack of confidence or feeling of inadequacy leading to a life of sin. Since Jesus has taken on humanity and not fallen to the temptations of sin, he is both the subject and the object of our confession. There is a sense that not being their authentic selves leads to sin, and Jesus gives them the example and the ability to overcome this weakness.

We join the original recipients in our tendency to concentrate on our weaknesses, and we need to hear the words found in verse 16. In the original context, the Holy Place, the Throne of God, was located within the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest on duty at the time was allowed in the Holy Place to present the blood of sacrifice on behalf of the community. But because of Jesus, we can come confidently before God’s throne seeking mercy and grace. We come with boldness and fearlessness, willing to conceal nothing of who we are before our holy and righteous God.

When we go before God’s throne we may feel like we know what we need, but God has worked out a suitable and well-timed response to our confession that exceeds

our understanding. How do our current worship and ministry opportunities support and encourage this type of committed confidence in Jesus our high priest?

Sept. 20
Hearts and Minds
Lesson Scripture: Hebrews 8:1-13
Background Scripture: Hebrews 7:1-28
Key Verse: “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will place my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people” (v. 10).

Hebrews 8 begins by further clarifying Jesus’ identity as the Great High Priest. The author continues to make distinctions between Jesus’ heavenly office and earthly high priest. Verses 4-6 declare Jesus to be superior to earthly high priest because their ministry is a poor imitation of Jesus’ priestly service. Jesus offers a new covenant with better promises and direct access to the forgiveness and restoration previously offered through the mediation of earthly priests. Jesus’ location at the right hand of the Father removes the need for the imitating earthly priests.

Verses 10-11 summarize this new covenant. God’s law will be located within the believer, no longer limited to the Holy Place and the law will be given to all people, great and small, so that everyone has access. This access means they no longer have an excuse for turning away from God’s instruction and way of life.

A misreading of verse 13 could cause us to fall into the temptation of dismissing Judaism as outdated and obsolete. However, verse 10 reminds us that the new covenant is still with Israel. God is faithful and is not capable of rescinding God’s promises. The newness of this covenant is found in the function of the law and the office of high priest. The sacrifice of animals by imperfect humans had to be repeated time and time again. Over time, because of humanity’s failings the repetition made the sacrifice an external event that did not facilitate behavioral change. This new covenant with a perfect and permanent high priest offers

an internal change of heart and mind.
The salvific work of Jesus Christ evidenced by the empty tomb makes this new covenant a reality and eliminates forever any need for replication. Our sins are forgiven, and we are free to worship the Lord and live in harmony with each other.

Sept. 27
Steady Encouragement
Lesson Scripture: Hebrews 10:19-25
Background Scripture: Hebrews 9:1-10:18
Key Verse: “Don’t stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near” (v. 25).

This section of the Book of Hebrews returns to the purpose of providing encouragement to the intended community of believers. The author returns to familiar themes of Jesus’ superiority to earthly high priests and his role in providing access to God the Father through his blood. Verse 20 offers a slightly different approach to this new way of seeking and receiving forgiveness for sins in the phrase, “new and living way.” The old way focused on the sacrifice of animals, a way that ends in death. This new way culminates in Jesus rising from the dead so that life triumphs over death.

The life of the believer takes on new meaning because of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Verse 23 invites the original recipients of this sermon to have confidence in their confession of faith knowing Jesus is reliable and faithful.

The author closes this section of the sermon by shifting the focus from individual action to communal or corporate action. Verses 24 and 25 emphasize the need for mutual support and care. As we endeavor to live into the new and living way offered through Jesus Christ, we need others to “stir us up” (v. 24, ESV). There will be times when we don’t feel the new and living way and we might be tempted to go back to the old dead way. We don’t know when those times will come: therefore, we are instructed to meet regularly to encourage one another. As the saying goes, “If you stay ready, you don’t have to get ready.”

We are instructed to journey together as we seek to follow Jesus. How well do our churches accomplish the objective of meeting together regularly to stir each other up? Discuss ways we might better encourage one another in our faith in Jesus.



Children’s
Sermon
by the Rev.
Meg Cook

Enough for everyone

Date: Sunday, Sept. 20
Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16
Time frame: 3 minutes (aiming for 3-5 minutes max)
Supplies: One sticker for each child (and a few extras).
Note: This children’s sermon could be more of a skit if you get a volunteer to play the role of a latecomer.
Do: Welcome the children warmly and invite them to sit down. Hold up a sheet of stickers.

Ask with big enthusiasm: Who likes stickers? (Pause.) Say: I brought enough stickers so everyone can have one!

(Hand each child a sticker.) Now imagine one more friend walked into church right now and came down for the children’s sermon. (If you are doing the skit version, have your volunteer come in now.)

Ask: Should they get a sticker, too? (Pause for answers.) I think so, too! Would anyone have to give up their sticker? (Pause; if a child does offer, take the sticker and share the sticker, thank them grandly and then say, “Look, I have more!” If no one offers, say: “No! I brought enough for everyone.”)

Today’s Bible story is about workers in a vineyard. Some workers started early in the morning. Other workers didn’t come until much later in the day. When it was time to be paid, the workers who came late still received enough. Some of the workers who had been there all day said, “That’s not fair!” But Jesus was teaching us something important in this parable. A parable is a story Jesus used to teach us something important. Jesus was teaching that God is generous. God doesn’t run out of love. God doesn’t run out of grace. There is enough for the people who came first. There is enough for the people who came last. Just like there were enough stickers for everyone, God’s love is big enough for everyone.

Ask: Can you think of someone you could be generous with this week? (Pause and affirm answers.) When we share, we remind people what God is like. God is generous.

Say: Will you pray with me?
Prayer: Dear God (echo), we love you (echo). Thank you for your generosity (echo). Help us to share (echo) and know there is enough (echo) because God is generous (echo). Amen (echo).

Cook is the pastor of Grace United Methodist Church, Columbia. She’s also the author of the “Herbert the Hippo” children’s book series available from <https://advocatepress.org>.

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Happenings.

Event Calendar.

August
Aug. 29—Fall ERT Basic Training, Fair Lawn UMC, Columbia, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. \$30. <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

September
Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)
Sept. 5—19th Annual Friends of the Lake 5K Road Race & Walk, Lake Junaluska, N.C. https://lakejunaluska.com/give/annual-fund/friends-of-the-lake-5k/?utm_source=july&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=5k

Sept. 7—Labor Day (United Methodist Center closed)

Sept. 12—Fall ERT Basic Training, Wesley Chapel UMC, Lake City, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. \$30. <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration/>

Sept. 12—LSM School (Charleston District), Cokesbury UMC, North Charleston, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. \$35. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Charleston-District-2026-Fall-1-Session-Registration-Form.pdf>

Sept. 12—LSM School (Rock Hill District), Woodland UMC, Rock Hill, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. \$30. <https://www.umcsc.org/rockhillonlineregistration/>

Sept. 13—LSM School (Charleston District), Cokesbury UMC, North Charleston, 2:30-5 p.m. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Charleston-District-2026-Fall-1-Session-Registration-Form.pdf>

Sept. 13—LSM School (Rock Hill District), Woodland UMC, Rock Hill, 2-5 p.m. <https://www.umcsc.org/rockhillonlineregistration/>

Sept. 14—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.

Sept. 16-18—Granville Hicks Lecture Series, Claflin University, Orangeburg. <https://claflin.edu/ghla>

Sept. 17-20—Smoky Mountain Ukulele Zen Retreat, Lake Junaluska, N.C. <https://bit.ly/LJukulele>

Sept. 18—LSM School (Greenwood District), Zoom, 6:30-8:30 p.m. \$10. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Registration-Form-for-Fall-2026-classes.xlsx-Sheet1-1.pdf>

Sept. 19—LSM School (Greenwood District), Main Street UMC, Greenwood, 8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. \$10. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Registration-Form-for-Fall-2026-classes.xlsx-Sheet1-1.pdf>

Sept. 20—LSM School (Greenwood District), Main Street UMC, 2-5 p.m. \$10. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/Registration-Form-for-Fall-2026-classes.xlsx-Sheet1-1.pdf>

Sept. 22-24—Clergy Connexion (formerly Young Clergy Cohort) Annual Retreat, Asbury Hills Camp and Retreat Center. For information, email mlalexander@umcsc.org or jdtayloriii@umcsc.org

Sept. 25-26—Active Faith Yard Sale, Washington Street UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. (Fri.), 7 a.m.-1 p.m. (Sat.)

October
Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)
Oct. 4—World Communion Sunday

Oct. 4—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-Fall-2026.pdf>

Granville Hicks Leadership Academy set for September

ORANGEBURG—Clergy and laity across South Carolina will head to Claflin University this month for the annual Granville Hicks Leadership Academy.
The academy will be held Sept. 16-18. With the theme “A Time to Build,” this year’s event will bring together pastors, lay leaders, students and community leaders

for three days of worship, leadership development, meaningful dialogue and fellowship.
“We are honored to welcome an outstanding group of speakers, facilitators and panelists who will challenge and inspire us as we consider faithful leadership for the future of the church and our communities,” said Claflin’s chap-

lain Christopher C. Key. “Whether you serve in ministry, lead within your local congregation or simply desire to grow as a Christian leader, we believe this academy will be a meaningful and enriching experience.”
Registration is now open.
To register, visit <https://www.claflin.edu/GHLA>.

UMVIM-SC to hold 50th anniversary party on Oct. 6

This year marks the 50th anniversary of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, a ministry that started in South Carolina and quickly spread throughout the Southeast Jurisdiction and beyond.

To celebrate, UMVIM-SC will hold a 50-year anniversary celebration on Tuesday, Oct 6.

Held at Grace United Methodist Church, Columbia, the event will begin at 6 p.m. and feature a meal and program highlighting the many missions and ministries of UMVIM around the world.

There is no cost to attend.
UMVIM is the official short-term volunteer sending agency of The United Methodist Church. Operating as a grassroots movement since the 1970s, it connects lay and clergy volunteers of all ages with local, national and global service opportunities like construction, disaster relief, medical care and community outreach

To attend, RSVP by Oct. 2 to Cathy Trevino at cathy24@yahoo.com, Jennifer Parker at jpclemsongirl@gmail.com or Jim Smith at smithjames@comporium.net.



Photos by Kelly Gottheiner



Young leaders
Manning UMC, Manning, youth participate in their congregation’s annual Youth Sunday Aug. 2. Children and youth served in all aspects of the service, from the message to music.

Three early response team trainings set for this fall

Three more trainings are scheduled this fall to help South Carolina United Methodists learn how to help after disasters as part of the denomination’s Early Response Team.

The ERT basic trainings are offered by the Disaster Response Ministry of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church:

- Saturday, Sept. 12, at Wesley Chapel UMC, Lake City
 - Saturday, Oct. 10, at Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville
 - Saturday, Nov. 7, at Dacusville UMC, Easley
- The cost is \$30, and classes run all day from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

“Invite a friend or your local group to join you for a day of learning,” said the Rev. LaTonya Dash, disaster response coordinator.

Register for the trainings at <https://www.umcsc.org/ertregistration>.

All who participate must also complete a background check. To do so, visit <https://tinyurl.com/umcorvv>.

Classifieds.

Jobs

Music Director
Lyttleton Street UMC is seeking a **Music Director** to lead and develop the church’s music ministry. Includes conducting chancel choir and bells, directing or overseeing additional age-level choirs, and administering music program. Requires a bachelor’s degree in music or equivalent experience. Salary range

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ZION FEEDS FAMILIES

From Page 1

‘Groceries are expensive’

The Zion UMC Food Pantry is led by Terry Fellers, whom James has dubbed “the General.” Fellers said about 13 years ago, one of the church committees began brainstorming ideas for a congregation-wide outreach program. At that first giveaway, about 40 families came to the church for food, and for the early years, people came into the family life center to pick up donated items.

After COVID, they started a car line, and over the years, the numbers have grown steadily as word has spread and need has increased.

“It’s really started to go up lately—groceries are expensive!” Fellers said.

James agreed, noting the increase is a good snapshot of the area’s financial concern.

“I can tell how bad the economy is by how many people were there,” he said, noting the pantry draws people from all over the area.

Normally they start at 9:30 a.m., but people were already at the church at 7:13 when Fellers pulled into the church parking lot. So they pivoted, starting the distribution early.

James said the line was so long that they ended up winding the cars through the church graveyard.



The day before the pantry, a Food Lion tractor-trailer arrives with the bulk of the food.

“There are all kinds of theological and faith connections I see in this—people weaving their way through the graveyard in order to come to life and to life-giving food,” James said.

Food, toiletries and more

People who come to the Zion UMC Food Pantry receive what Fellers estimates is about \$100 worth of groceries—canned beans and corn, peanut butter, sugar, salt, flour, grits, spaghetti, macaroni, potatoes, eggs, bread, cornbread, lunchmeat and more.



On Friday night, roughly 60 volunteers bag all the items for easy distribution.

Photos courtesy of Zion UMC

Fellers said they try to do something extra at each giveaway, this time giving out fresh beans, tomatoes, cucumbers and squash. The grocery bill alone was \$17,000, all raised by volunteers.

And it’s not only food they distribute. People also receive toiletries, including soap, razor blades, toothpaste and deodorant, all donated by church members or delivered directly from Amazon.

At Christmas they also get a unisex gift to help them, such as towels.

“We’re a very giving church,” Fellers said.

Good evangelism

Fellers said the event is so well organized that it runs easily; everybody knows what to do.

The day before the pantry, a Food Lion tractor-trailer arrives with the bulk of the food, which is then unloaded and combined with other donated food and toiletries the church has received. On Friday night, roughly 60 volunteers bag all the items for easy distribution when the cars come through on Saturday.

James said volunteers are youth and adults and not only come from their church but also from all around the community. In a way it’s good evangelism in making God’s love known, he said—some volunteers are not part of a church, but they join with Zion UMC to do this effort in God’s name.

On Saturday morning, close to 50 volunteers gather to pass out the bags to cars, with some organizing the car line and praying with families, while others collect names and addresses so they can send them a postcard letting them know about future food pantry events.

James personally greets everybody who comes through the line.

“We don’t turn anybody away who comes. We see people who are Black, White, Hispanic, old, young—it is an awesome way to put your hands to the work of Christ for people,” James added.

‘It’s what we do’

Lee Koon, administrative assistant and youth leader at Zion, is one of those who volunteered at the August food pantry, there both Friday and Saturday to help.

“It’s a tradition,” she said. “It’s what we do at Zion, that feeling of everyone coming together for that common goal, that sense of community, that we’re doing some good.”

Fellers said those involved know they are not doing this for Zion but for something much more important.

“We are doing this for Jesus Christ—we are the hands.”

James called the ministry a breathtaking thing.

“I don’t have to direct anybody, I don’t have to inspire them to do it—it is something that is in their DNA.

“I’ve never been a part of a ministry like this, and you can see the impact of it immediately.”

Zion UMC’s next food pantry will be Saturday, Dec. 12. All are welcome. The church address is 80 Zion Circle, Prosperity, SC 29127. Donations are also welcome; call 803-364-3797 or visit <https://zionumc80.org>.



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