

2026 SGAUMC Annual Conference Report



FROM LAY DELEGATES
LYNN & BILL HAGAN

Summary

We were a part of 400 United Methodists who gathered at Vineville United Methodist Church in Macon, GA, May 31st through June 2nd, for the 2026 South Georgia Annual Conference session. Under the leadership of Bishop Robin Dease, we met under the theme of “Unto the Least of These” to worship, conference, discern, and celebrate.

In a historic moment, on Monday afternoon, the South Georgia Annual Conference voted by a margin of 96.6% to affirm the Georgia Unification Plan. The North Georgia Conference meets 6/18 – 6/20 to vote on this proposal.

In other business, the conference elected the South Georgia Delegation to the 2028 General and Jurisdictional Conferences. The General Conference will be held May 8–18, 2028, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference will meet in July of 2028, at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina.

Some History

We attended our first South Georgia Annual Conference in June of 2023, several months after the season of our discontent ended and the season of “where are we going?” began.

Most of us attendees from the various churches walked around like survivors of a very bad storm, and true enough, we were. A little dazed, a little confused, a little sad, but all of us at the conference were very thankful to God. And hopeful. Together. Where we belonged. With people who believe that Jesus loves all of us. Everyone. All means all.

As you recall, our church had lost a large portion of our attending members. Many

of them were leaders in our church. And many of them were our most generous financial supporters. But we had some special people who took the reins – Bill Daniel came in as Council Chair and led us like a war-time Prime Minister; Bill Simmons took over the Staff-Parish Committee with a no-nonsense approach and gradually found the right people for the right positions, including Stephen Grantham as the calming force as our interim Senior Pastor, and Jared Wilson as our Much-More-Than-Expected Music Minister, who brought us enthusiastic talent and drive and creativity and positivity. And the need for a new roof and a new organ. Beth Parr filled the role of Director of Children's Ministries, and Julie Vann came out of retirement to lead the Missions Committee with minimal resources. And always there was Meg – unbelievably vilified as the lone defender of our "Remnant" during the so-called discernment process – wise and courageous and steadfast. And short.

With God's guidance and help, we were off and running. Instead of counting on several large donations to keep our church solvent, many, many givers gave smaller donations, and God sent us new members, many of them young, and many of them tall, that joined our congregation as if they had been with us all along and fully embraced our call to embrace and serve everyone. All means all.

And, thank the Lord, Josh Roberts became our Senior Pastor in January.

So where is this Annual Conference report, and our church, going?

Annual Conferences

Our Annual Conference staff does an amazing amount of preparation, and led by our Bishop, they hold us together, unite us, and make it possible for us to focus on our mission to Make Disciples.

Three of the four conferences we've attended have been powerful experiences: the first meeting for the "survivors," the third meeting for the vote to affirm the change of language to the Discipline in which it is laid out, in no uncertain terms, that the United Methodist Church gives full membership opportunities to EVERYONE. ALL. And the recent meeting – getting to the point – in which we voted to unite with the North Georgia Annual Conference to form a One-Georgia UMC Conference.

Since the proposal two years ago, our Conference Staff, and the numerous committees they organized, met with similar committees from the North Georgia Conference for 1 ½ years to iron out details, some of them that will be revisable as the union goes forward. And if the North Conference votes next week to go forward, the new Georgia Annual Conference will begin operation in January of

2027. Cool.

But what was so moving in this conference was the powerful messages of the speakers and the reception of the crowd of delegates. From the opening message given by Bishop Dease through the closing remarks from our conference Lay Leader, Scott Cleaveland, from Wesley Monumental UMC in Savannah, all of the messages rang true, from Bishop Dease's "Is there enough?" — and there is! — to Scott's challenge that "A world such as this needs a church such as ours." And a sense of humor from these and all our speakers. A wonderful UMC thing.

Lastly

A wise lady once told me this after our bad season:

Life will be good again.

I think we have this idea that a "good" life looks a lot like our old one, the one before the unexpected upended everything.

That's not the good I'm talking about. The good I'm referring to is not getting our life from before back, but, instead, life anew.

Life may never be the same after experiencing the unexpected. But it can be beautiful. It can be full of people, perhaps different people than you envisioned. And it can be full of love.

God doesn't necessarily just take our broken pieces and put them back together. I think, oftentimes, God works by adding in new ones. And the result is something different than what we started with. It has familiarity, yes. It has traces of what was. The darker shades remain in this sculpture. But God adds in new vibrant hues, full of new experiences and people, and new purposes, too.

God helps us to rebuild our lives while also rebuilding us in the process. The result is an ever-evolving, harsh and lovely and good creation.

There can be a good life, a new life on the other side of the unexpected.

Thank God for that. That's real life.

Post-Lastly

This conference was a coming-full-circle moment for us. And would be for many of you.

It might be well for us, as a church going forward, to simply heed a translation of Paul's advice to the Philippian church that Karen Daniel shared with me:

Greetings,
Grace be with you.
I thank God for you.
Hold fast to the Gospels.
Stop being stupid.
Timothy says hi.

-Paul

But our church has come so far since that first annual conference, and hopefully, we've paid attention along the way. We don't cut corners in carrying out our call to make disciples . . . we do whatever God calls us to do to "love people into the Kingdom of God" . . . we invite them, we seek them, we meet them, we share with them, we affirm them . . . we love them. And if whatever we're doing isn't working, we ask God for a new plan and we get going.

It will be good for us to remember the wise observation from James Joyce, referenced by C.S. Lewis:

"Sometimes the long way round is the shortest way home."

-Lynn and Bill Heagan

Addendum/Update

In the North Georgia Conference session, meeting June 18–20, 2026, delegates voted on two resolutions:
Resolution #1 - Approval of the Plan of Union for the Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church and
Resolution #2 - Appointing Joint Distributing Committee. The resolutions were approved by 96% of the delegates.

The next step will be for the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference to convene a special virtual session in August 2026 to consider the unification of the North and South Georgia Annual Conferences to form the Georgia Annual Conference. Only after approval by the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference will unification be authorized to move forward. Should this approval occur, delegates from both conferences will meet in September of 2026 for a called session of the Georgia Annual Conference to vote on budgets and leadership for 2027. Starting in January of 2027, Isle of Hope UMC, and the clergy serving IOHUMC, will officially become part of the Georgia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. In June of 2027, lay and clergy representatives from our congregation will meet with representatives from other congregations from around the state in Athens, GA, for the first session of the newly formed Georgia Annual Conference.