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December 2022

Two S.C. ERT teams help in Florida after Ian

By Billy Robinson
Two South Carolina teams headed to Florida in November to do their part helping in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian. South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission Early Response Teams sent Team Alpha Nov. 6-13 to the Fort Myers, Florida, area. Team Bravo responded from Nov. 13-18.

A Category 4 storm, Hurricane Ian decimated portions of Fort Myers area Sept. 28 with 155 mph winds and waves of floodwaters. Its deadly, destructive path tore across Florida and made it the deadliest hurricane to strike Florida since the 1935 Labor Day Hurricane.

Infrastructure in Florida was so affected that it took more than a month before United Methodist Disaster Response was able to receive and sustain out-of-state ERTs. In the meantime, ERTs in South Carolina responded to the 45 mph remnants of Hurricane Ian locally, making responses from Charleston to Florence, with Charleston and McClellanville receiving the main portions of ERT-requested help.

Team Alpha

Team Alpha stayed at Faith United Methodist Church in the Fort Myers area with 28 volunteers, three ERT disaster response trailers and two skid steers. Volunteers brought flood buckets and a variety of supplies and donations for the survivors and church.

Crews were directed to the worst-hit areas, focusing efforts mainly on mucking and cleaning out flooded homes that received up to seven feet of saltwater throughout.

See “ERTs in Florida,” Page 24

‘You are my family’ SEJ elects UMCSC’s Dease as new bishop



Jackie Jenkins (left) hugs Dr. Robin Dease moments after Dease was announced the winner of Ballot 25—and the third episcopal leader elected at SEJ 2022.

S.C. to keep Holston as bishop through 2024

By Jessica Brodie
LAKE JUNALUSKA, N.C.—It’s official: South Carolina will keep Bishop L. Jonathan Holston as its episcopal leader through 2024, and South Carolina’s Dr. Robin Dease has been elected as one of three new bishops for the denomination.

Hundreds from around the region gathered in-person Friday morning, Nov. 4, for the final session of the 2022 Southeast-

ern Jurisdictional Conference of The United Methodist Church, held Nov. 2-4 at Lake Junaluska Conference & Retreat Center.

It was the first in-person gathering of the SEJ since 2016 and one of five jurisdictional conferences meeting simultaneously across the U.S. that week. In total, delegates elected 13 new U.S. bishops, who take office Jan. 1, with three elected in the SEJ—

See “SEJ,” Page 12-13

Africa University celebrates 30th anniversary

By Dan O’Mara
MUTARE, ZIMBABWE—Africa University’s 30th anniversary celebration was marked by heartwarming memories, stirring music and dazzling fireworks—with a modest dash of Palmetto pride.

The South Carolina Conference’s special relationship with Africa’s only United Methodist-related institution of higher learning reaches back before 1992, when the first class of 40 students began their studies. So, it was only fitting that two dozen South Carolinians made the 8,300-mile trek to Mutare

to share in the joy and help envision an even brighter future for Africa University, its students, and the people of Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole.

See “Africa University,” Page 11

Hoping for 93 percent Conference at 66 percent in apportionments as of Oct. 31 with deadline set at Jan. 12

By Lillian D. Williams
It is officially the home stretch for 2022 apportioned giving in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. Conference Treasurer Beth Westbury has set a goal of collecting 93 percent of the \$16.7 million total budget. As of Oct. 31, the conference was at

66 percent. That means churches have a little beyond the end of the year to pay 27 percent more in order to meet that goal. As of Oct. 31, churches have paid about \$11 million toward the total, which is 1.12 percent less than last year at that time (or \$11.6 million). But that \$11 million is 7.2 percent more than

churches had paid as of Sept. 30, and Westbury is hopeful churches will meet the goal. The Walterboro District continues to claim the title of the highest-paying district within the conference, achieving 75.1 percent in apportionments paid. See “Apportionments,” Page 11

Buncombe Street UMC votes to disaffiliate from UMC ‘when time comes’

By Jessica Brodie
GREENVILLE—One of South Carolina’s largest United Methodist churches has voted to pursue disaffiliation from the denomination when the time comes. It is thought to be the first and only church in the state to do. On Oct. 30, Buncombe Street United Methodist Church, Greenville, held a special church conference presided over by Greenville District Superintendent Rev. Jim Dennis. Those in attendance had the option to vote

either to pursue disaffiliation from The United Methodist Church “when specific requirements are known and approved by the bishop, South Carolina Annual Conference and the South Carolina Annual Conference Board of Trustees,” or vote to remain affiliated with the UMC. The body voted 667-306—more than a two-thirds majority—to pursue disaffiliation. See “Buncombe Street,” Page 11



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The *Advocate* encourages readers to submit for publication 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. Since there is no charge for these items, they appear in the newspaper on a space-available basis. Deadlines are the 10th of each month for the following month's paper.

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Photographs can be submitted to the newspaper for publication. High-resolution digital images are preferred. Photographs should be in focus and should have proper exposure. Color or black and white photographs are accepted. People in photographs should be identified with names and ages, and a contact person with a phone number should be included in the information.

Accuracy Policy

The *Advocate* strives to produce error-free news reports. When mistakes occur, it is our policy to correct them as soon as they are brought to our attention. To request a correction, call Jessica Brodie at 803-786-9486, ext. 338 or 803-807-0018, or email jbrodie@umcsc.org. In the event of errors in advertisements, the *Advocate* will be responsible only for the space occupied by the actual error. The publisher assumes no financial responsibility for omissions.

Back Issues

The *Advocate* maintains copies of back issues for sale for up to one year, as long as the supply lasts. When requesting by mail, back copies are \$2 each, to cover postage and handling. 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.

General Conference 2024 to be held in Charlotte

NASHVILLE—The Commission on the General Conference has announced that the 2024 United Methodist General Conference will be held April 23 to May 3, 2024, at Charlotte Convention Center in Charlotte, North Carolina.

“The commission selected Charlotte as the site that best met our varied needs. We believe that delegates and attendees will be pleased with all the city has to offer,” said Kim Simpson, chair of the Commission on the General Conference. “Charlotte is a part of the Western North Carolina Annual Conference, but due to the shorter time frame for planning, both the Western North Carolina Conference and the North Carolina Annual Conference will co-host the event.”

In making the selection, Simpson said that the commission looked at the suitability and capacity of meeting facilities, availability of adequate space, the proximity of hotel rooms, accessibility and convenience of travel and costs of meeting space, lodging, meals and airfare. Proposals from three cities were considered, but ultimately Charlotte was determined to be the best fit.

Charlotte, known as the Queen City, is the 16th most populous city in the U.S. and a major airline hub for American Airlines. The 600,000-square-foot convention center recently completed a \$126.9 million expansion and is only 7 miles from the Charlotte International Airport and within walking distance of 200 restaurants.

“We are honored to host the 2024 General Conference of The United Methodist Church,” said Bishop Kenneth H. Carter Jr. of the Western

North Carolina Conference. “Our people are hospitable and welcoming, and we trust that the delegates who gather for what promises to be an historic gathering will be blessed by the city of Charlotte and the state of North Carolina and its warmth and beauty.”

“We bathe this gathering in deep prayer while also praying for each delegate who will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we spend time in holy conferencing. It is my prayer that the same spirit will empower and encourage us to see the possibilities and live the promise,” said Bishop Leonard Fairley of the North Carolina Conference. “May you experience the beautiful natural setting of North Carolina, and the amazing hospitality of its people as you do the work of the kingdom always remembering you are beloved of God.”

The last General Conference was set to happen in Minneapolis, Minnesota, until the pandemic made it necessary to postpone the quadrennial legislative event until 2024. At the upcoming conference, the commission will follow appropriate protocols related to COVID-19 to safeguard attendees’ health.

Delegates from Africa, Europe, Asia and the U.S. will attend the 11-day gathering, which is expected to attract about 5,500-7,500 people.

General Conference is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church. It meets at the beginning of each quadrennium to consider revisions to church law, as well as adopt resolutions on current moral, social, public policy and economic issues. It also approves plans and budgets for churchwide programs for the next four years.

Dates released for 2023 Salkehatchie camps

The skill saws and nail guns may be idle for now, but the planning for the 2023 Salkehatchie Summer Service camps is well under way.

Next summer, 38 weeklong camps are re-opening across the state.

With the COVID-19 virus under control, the Salkehatchie Board of Managers has lifted the vaccination requirement.

“We still encourage and recommend vaccinating against COVID-19 and its variants, but it is not required for participation at a 2023 Salkehatchie camp,” said Kathy Hart, board of managers chair.

Salkehatchie Summer Service is an in-state mission opportunity for youth aged 14 and older and adults. Teams repair homes of families needing help.

No previous experience is needed.

“We are so fortunate to have our wonderful churches provide delicious meals for the campers, which helps stretch the weekly camp fee of \$250 per person,” Hart said. “With inflation hitting the building supply market in a major way, we



A volunteer works at a 2022 camp.

use most of the campers’ fees to pay for lumber, shingles, flooring, etc. Camps will still need monetary contributions to make ends meet.”

They are releasing the list of camp dates now to help families, churches and youth directors plan their 2023 summer activities and mission opportunities.

For more information, visit <http://salkehatchie.org>, or contact the Salkehatchie office at 803-691-6606 or salkehatchie@umcsc.org.

2023 Camps and Dates	
June 10-17 2 Rivers (Eastover Area) Baker Creek (McCormick) Chester JET (Johnston, Edgefield, Trenton) Penn Center Piedmont Rivertown (Conway) Sumter Sandriver (Aiken) Winyah Bay (Georgetown)	July 1-8 Lake City Foothills
June 11-16 Creekfront (Murrells Inlet) Lancaster	July 8-15 Bamberg Black Swamp Calhoun County Circuit Rider Edisto Island Fairfield Harvest Moncks Corner Santee
June 17-24 Catawba (Fort Mill) Jenkinsville Laurens County Summerville Union	July 15-22 Columbia Camp Emerald City Lake Murray North Augusta
June 24-July 1 Bishopville Marlboro-Flowers Rock Hill	July 16-21 Newberry
	July 22-29 Clover North Strand

Advocate Press releases two new books ahead of holidays

Two new titles from the Advocate Press are available for purchase just in time for Christmas: “The Sacred Year: A Contemplative Journey through the Liturgical Year,” by Dr. Lyn Pace, and “Prayer Changes Us,” by Dr. Ted Goshorn.

The Advocate Press is the publishing arm of the *Advocate* newspaper. It launched in 2017 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.

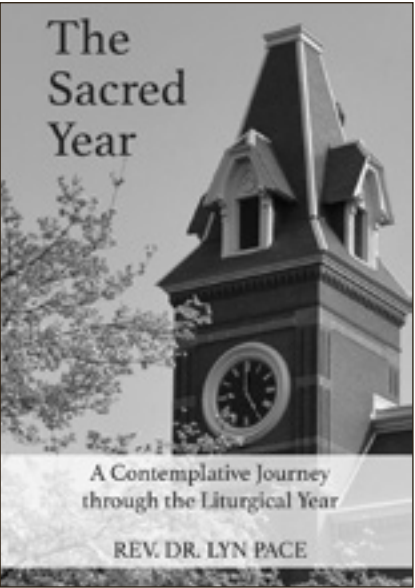
Both books are available at <https://advocatesc.org/books> or on Amazon.

The Sacred Year

In this book, Pace—college chaplain at Oxford College of Emory University, an ordained elder in the South Carolina Conference and a Wofford College graduate—offers a liturgical perspective on time.

We often say things like, “I’m out of time,” “just in time” or “I have no time.” In our fast-paced, earthly world, time often manages us, whether through a clock, a calendar or any number of other ways. But what if there were another way, a more spiritual and sacred way, to consider time?

Pace explores how the Christian liturgical calendar can be another way to keep time—sacred time. Combining the major seasons of the liturgical year with contemplative practices that connect to that season, he invites readers to discover a new way to look at time that helps us



live with deeper intention and connection.

Prayer Changes Us

In this book, Goshorn—an ordained United Methodist elder in the South Georgia Annual Conference—explores how many of us are accustomed to hearing how prayer changes God’s mind or life’s circumstances. But, he asks, what about how prayer changes us?

Answering that question forms the nexus of his book. Through the chapters, Goshorn takes readers on a journey of self-discovery, finding the transformative

impact of regular prayer practice and teaching how to incorporate prayer into the rhythms of life. Part One addresses how to pray, expanding the scope to include styles of prayer like repetition and praying scripture. Part Two focuses on the impact of prayer on the soul, exploring the ways prayer makes us better disciples and brings us deeper in relationship with God.

The book includes helpful resources on establishing a rhythm of prayer, including descriptions and how-to guides on types of prayer, Methodism founder John Wesley’s self-examination questions, and daily guides for praying the Psalms or all of scripture throughout the year. Learn how you can better understand the heart of God through deep, focused, habitual prayer that changes us.

The books are available in paperback and ebook format. Proceeds support the nonprofit newspaper ministry of the *Advocate* newspaper.

Jurisdiction’s Black Methodists group gathers for 53rd annual meeting

By the Rev. Amiri Hooker

Black church leaders gathered in Richmond, Virginia, Oct. 13-15 for the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of Black Methodists for Church Renewal Inc.

Under new and changing leadership, the SEJ-BMCR worked to transform the historic organization into a future-ready movement that sustained historic responsibilities but also helped the organization engage the new/now church.

The mission of BMCR is still to raise up prophetic and spiritual leaders who will be advocates for the unique needs of Black people in The United Methodist Church.

Yet this year SEJ-BMCR has had to come to grasp with the fact that the church is experiencing something new. Grounded in the rich and sustaining history of the Black church in the United States and attentive to liberatory movements formed in faith orientations sometimes transcending church bounds, the intergenerational Black church following the COVID-19 pandemic and the American 1619 tri-pandemic looks different, worships different and serves the community differently.

The 2020 killings of three African Americans—George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, who died at the hands of police, and Ahmaud Arbery, chased and shot to death by two individuals—sparked a national outcry against White supremacy and institutional racism, a protest that has now spread globally.

And this year SEJ-BMCR understood it had to deal with and respond to the energy of emerging Blackness in the Black Church and Black United Methodist Church.

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston of the South Carolina Conference served as the annual meeting’s keynote speaker. Holston detailed past injustices while also highlighting the loyalty of Black church members.

“In 1939, the Methodist Church, North and South, gathered to unite and promptly segregated its Black laity and clergy,” Holston pointed out. “Then in 1968, the Methodist Church gathered to unite with the Evangelical United Brethren Church and integrate, and the Black church was set in a downward spiral of financial disintegration.”

This is why many in the Methodist Church today that are Black wonder now—as The United Methodist Church seeks to gather to separate—if the Black church should be fearful that any decision made will lead to



Photos courtesy of the Rev. Amiri Hooker

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston (above, far left) of the South Carolina Conference served as the annual meeting’s keynote speaker. Below, many teaching sessions rounded out the event.



annihilation of Black expressions in United Methodism. As many, including Holston, have pointed out, “Our extreme loyalty and unrelenting belief that The United Methodist Church has the best interest of its Black constituency at its heart should not be taken for granted.”

The annual meeting asked the annual conferences to support the work of disman-

ling racism by sending an additional \$1,500 per annual conference to provide leadership in those efforts.

The UMC has mounted a denomination wide campaign, “United Against Racism,” that urges its members not only to pray, but to educate themselves and have conversations about the subject and to work actively for civil and human rights. BMCR hopes to

resource this platform to engage in dialogue about this most important work from a BMCR perspective.

With all the reports given and the voting and election of officers done, the highlights of the meeting were the worship services and the “church hall” discussion.

The church hall theme was “A Woke Black Church: Reminiscent, Intergenerational and Resilient.” We spent time probing into the concept for a conversation on intergenerational black church growth and development. With the leadership of the Rev. Albert Shuler (facilitator) and the help of the Rev. Vance Ross, the Rev. Nathalie Nelson, laity Mollie Stewart and Dr. Walter Strawther, we also looked at the question, “Are Black Millennials leaving the Black church in search of a practice that is overtly inclusive of our sexuality, ancestral practices and race, both in who we see or interact with in the congregation, as well as the pictorial representation in worship spaces?”

Dr. Byron Thomas facilitated the second church hall as we focused on what the Black church looks like now into the future from a Pan-Methodist perspective. This time was also supported by panelist Dr. Michael Bowie (UMC clergy), the Rev. Kevin Agee (Christian Methodist Episcopal clergy) and the Rev. Scot Moore (African Methodist Episcopal Zion clergy).

The third church hall was also effectual with leadership by the Rev. James Friday and panelist Bishop James Swanson, resident bishop of the Mississippi Annual Conference; Bishop Sharma Lewis, resident bishop of the Virginia Annual Conference; Albert Weal, United Methodist Men Virginia Conference president; and the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith, South Carolina director of Connectional Ministries. The primary focus was discussing what creating racial healing circles, anti-racist conversations and jurisdictional conference strategies looks like in current realities.

The SEJ-BMCR seems successful even as the numbers from South Carolina were fewer and many of the participants were already looking to the SEJ Conference coming up a few weeks later.

Hank Dozer and the Rev. Amiri B. Hooker were reelected as vice coordinator and coordinator. The work of ministry was performed, and registrants took something home with them that was life-changing and discipleship-affirming.

‘Our love grew in the garden’ Church ministry fosters blossoming love for one couple

It sounds like a Hallmark Movie, but it’s even better. Through the Missions and Outreach Ministry at St. Mark United Methodist Church, Greenville, the Sans Souci Community Garden has become everything to Jake and Fanny.

Fanny has lived in the Sans Souci community for almost 10 years. She loves the community and the garden ministry, noting, “I found my place and my family and friends through the garden.”

Eight years later, a young man named Jake who was looking for a place in Greenville to call home heard about the Sans Souci community through a friend who played in the garden concerts. These concerts are held on the last Sunday of the month during the summer. He also heard from another friend about the movie nights held in the garden.

About two weeks after Jake moved into the community, he went to the garden. Fanny was the first person he met. They instantly made a connection and became friends. They came to the church and took some art classes together. When COVID-19 started to shut everything down in March 2020, they continued to get together and have lunch at the picnic table in the garden.

Two and a half years later, they got married where they met, in the Sans Souci Com-



Jake and Fanny

munity Garden.

“We are so grateful St Mark has provided this outreach for the community,” said Fanny. “Without it, I don’t think that we would have ever met.”

“This is why we do what we do,” said St. Mark’s pastor, the Rev. Michael Maston. “As a community church nestled right in the heart of the Sans Souci community, we are no doubt heavily involved in community outreach. We are blessed to be able to provide a space where we can come together and build bonds and make friendships that last a lifetime, as with Jake and Fanny.”

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Viewpoints



Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

Lasting effects

Have you ever been utterly exhausted and made a really stupid mistake—the kind you’re still having to clean up? I was blessed to be a part of the excellent team of communicators covering the recent Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference at Lake Junaluska Nov. 2-4. It was a Spirit-filled but grueling week filled with nonstop work and not enough sleep. When I got home, I needed to prepare for the workweek ahead, so I threw my laundry in the washing machine—literally, just dumped the entire basket in, added soap, slammed the lid, and pressed start. A half-hour later, I got a big surprise... my laundry was coated with tiny bits of globby white stuff.

Finally I discovered the culprit: I’d accidentally washed an entire thick magazine with my clothes. It took picking out as many globs of pulp as I could, plus five or six more cycles through the washer, to get all those bits mostly out. I only managed to ruin four items of what had been a huge load of laundry, so it wasn’t a total disaster. But let’s just say I’m never dumping laundry in the washer all at once anymore—and never while sleep-deprived.

But it got me thinking about what the apostle Paul was taking about in Galatians 5:9, when he pointed out how a “little yeast works through the whole batch of dough” (NIV). Paul wasn’t happy about the new believers getting so worked up over the circumcision issue, which was that while he’d taught them salvation was God’s gift, some people were believing false teachings that Christians had to endure certain rituals, like getting circumcised, to earn salvation. He was upset the people had been taught soundly but now were being swayed by false teachings, which were dangerous because they spread so quickly, like yeast.

Now that I’m back from SEJ, I’m thinking about the lasting effects. Certainly, I’d love to be free of the lasting effects of the magazine I accidentally washed with my clothes. But what about the things I want to hold onto? Besides the new bishops we elected and the budget, besides the good news that we get to keep Bishop Holston a bit longer, what else can we seize onto, claim as a lasting effect?

For me, I’m heartened by a bit of seemingly small news that occurred at the conference: the creation of a task force to study the impact of racial bias in the episcopal nomination and election process. The task force will study the impact of this bias to reduce the harmful effects in the nomination and selection process for episcopal candidates, also interviewing recent and past candidates to hear of their experiences and solicit their input.

It’s too soon to tell what good will come out of this, but I think it’s a really important thing to explore with transparency the issues that can taint our elections. It speaks well of our process and of our church as a whole. I’m looking forward to learning what they discover.

How about you? What are you holding onto? What are you letting go?

Letters Policy

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



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Bishop’s Corner

by Bishop L. Jonathan Holston

Where there is breath, there is hope

“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”—Psalm 150:6 (NIV)

The 2022 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference held at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, has concluded. Delegates representing 15 annual conferences across the Southeast met at this 22nd session of the SEJ Conference to elect three new bishops, as well as assign all of our bishops to places of leadership. Felecia and I were honored and humbled to receive our assignment from the SEJ Committee on Episcopacy to continue serving in the South Carolina Conference (Columbia Area). We feel blessed to be assigned “back home again” and to continue our efforts to dream God-sized visions with the laity and clergy across this wonderful state.

Let’s keep working together as we seek a more excellent way in mission and ministry.

As we continue journeying together through the 2022-2023 conference year, we are maintaining confidence by “Trusting, Believing and Knowing that God Is with Us.” In spite of the cacophony of voices that tend to distract us, we are choosing to maintain our focus on our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

We endeavor to help congregations make the best decisions that enable them to make disciples. We do this with intention, with determination and with calm clarity. We do not seek out conflict, but during those times when we can’t avoid it, we seek

first to listen before trying to be heard. We seek to understand before trying to be understood.

As people of faith, who profess to follow Jesus Christ, we know that our call is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. With ears open to hearing how God is calling and hearts open to responding to that call, we embrace this opportunity to be a beacon of hope in a hurting world. And in moments when we find ourselves drifting away from our focus, may this question snap us back to the time and space in which God has placed us: When was the last time you led someone to Christ?

As a community of believers, we serve a mighty God who has plans for us—plans to prosper us and not harm us, plans to give us hope and a future. As Christians, we know that the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds. As United Methodists, we know that we are still connected through the love, grace and saving power of Jesus Christ.

It is my hope and prayer that God will enable us to truly be persons of faithfulness, courage, integrity and dedication. For as long as we have breath, we also have hope, so let us embrace the challenge that requires us to go to places we do not yet know—places that God will reveal to us as we walk in joyful obedience.

In the meantime, please know that we’re rejoicing in this wonderful opportunity to continue ministry in South Carolina. So let the journey continue!

Letters to the Editor

‘Friends’

There is a saying, “Don’t talk politics and religion with your friends.” The most disturbing element in the beginning of the separation between the Global Methodists and the United Methodists is the loss of friends.

“Friend more divine than all divinities.”—George Eliot

Many of our best friends in our lifetime have been church friends. After the General Conference in 2024, there will be separations of friendships. There will be hurt feelings. There will be deep decisions of honesty.

“To lose a friend is the greatest of all evils.”—Seneca

The Global Methodists are saying: come join us and leave your friends of many years behind you.

“Even my close friend, whom I trusted, who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”—Psalm 41:9

Did Jesus intend it to be this way? (John 15:13, Matthew 22:37-39). Have we forgotten the apostle Paul’s message on the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22)?

“I have loved my friends as I do virtue, my soul, my God.”—Sir Thomas Brown

“The thread of our life would be dark, Heaven knows! If it were not with friendship and love interwind.”—Thomas More

It is with grief and sadness that a Christian cannot love all people as friends. The Bible tells us it is a sin not to pray for others: “God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you” (1 Samuel 12:23).

Let us pray for our friends.

*Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia*

Today is all I have

Today is the beginning of the future, and today is also the end of the past.

When I think of the past, I wonder why. Some things I understand, and some I do not and never will. When I think of the future, I wonder what. Time is an elusive thing. It slips away from you and one can never get it back. We have no idea how much of it we have left. Everyone has a calling, but we never know how long it will last. Sometimes we know our calling and sometimes not. I want my yesterdays to have had a positive meaning, and I yearn for tomorrow to mean more.



Guest Commentary

by Bob Fowler

Advent and Mary

So often we forget to remember the virgin Mary as an important part of the Advent story of the Christ child. One thing the Book of Luke emphasizes about Mary is how blessed she is. The angel Gabriel tells her twice that she is “favored” by God. In fact, here is how Gabriel says hello to Mary for the first time: “Greetings, you who are highly favored!” (Luke 1:28 NASB). Grace is “unmerited favor.” That is, grace is a blessing we receive even though we do not deserve it. Mary needed grace from God and a savior, just as the rest of us do. Mary herself understood this fact, as she declared in Luke 1:47, “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

Now, a strange, celestial being has shown up and Mary is troubled by it at first. But Gabriel tells Mary not to be afraid and repeats that she has “found favor with God” (Luke 1:30). When Gabriel first tells Mary that she will bear a son, Mary asks how that is even possible. She’s a virgin! Then Gabriel tells Mary that the Holy Spirit will come upon her, and the power of God the Father will overshadow her. And then she will bear the Son.

Mary believes the angel, and submits to the will of God, saying, “May your word to me be fulfilled.” (Luke 1:38).

The virgin Mary, by God’s grace, recognized that she needed the savior. The Bible never says that Mary was anyone but an ordinary human whom God chose to use in an extraordinary way. Mary by all accounts was a teen, and I am sure she looked forward to a full life as teens did then and do now. At the same time, Mary was a sinful human being who needed Jesus Christ as her savior, just like everyone else.

Faith is a personal adherence of human beings to God. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). By faith, one completely submits one’s intellect and will to God. With one’s whole being, one gives one’s assent to God. The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith.

Mary lived, acted and moved always in the ambit of faith. From the visit of Gabriel to the cross, Mary always assented with the same obedience of faith to all revelation, to all the designs of God. Every moment of her life was an invitation to act on her faith.

God can work miracles only as strong and as big as our faith is, and as a fruit of her obedience, Mary in turn deepened her faith. That is why we can truly say that Mary had a pilgrimage of faith and that this pilgrimage climaxed on Calvary.

Now Mary was presented with two dif-

ferent and amazing revelations: first, that she was full of grace, and second, that she was being chosen to receive the greatest invitation a creature had ever received—to become the virgin mother of the Messiah, the Son of God. This conception was to be accomplished by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, a miracle!

It is something impossible for men, but not for God. It was precisely this human impossibility and this divine possibility that called Mary to open totally to the gift of faith—and she believed in her God, a God that could do that kind of miracle, a God that chose His lowliest servant for such a dignified and exalted vocation and mission.

St. Augustine said that “Mary first conceived in her heart by faith and then in her womb.” Mary’s response, “May it be done to me according to your word,” is a sign of her full assent to the will of God, to the revelation received and to her role in this redemptive mission.

Only a heart full of faith like Mary’s can give that kind of assent to such a vocation and to all the unexpected events that would form that reality—a series of events that were far beyond human intelligence or human calculations. Mary devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under him and with him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption.

Mary’s faith did not only sustain her life, but it gave abundant fruit for our redemption since, by her faith, Mary freely and fully cooperated in the work of human salvation. She, being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race. The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith. What a profound thought that is.

How do we in this life fulfill our faith to God? Are we like Mary, questioning not? Do we question everything in our life? Do we also have salvation because of our strong faith? Can we at all be like Mary?

Certainly, Mary is part of the Christmas story of the coming of our savior, the beginning and the end of the beginning. Let us all be as Mary in our faith. That for sure is hard for us but essential to our relationship with God.

Faith is the essential part of our being. We live by it and we will be rewarded for it. Blessings to all.

Fowler is a member of Shandon United Methodist Church, Columbia.

Guest Commentary

Thoughts from the hearing impaired

Editor’s note: The author of this piece has requested anonymity to avoid impinging on anyone’s character or church.

I believe that we (the human race) are losing the participation by our senior members in society because of loss of hearing as we age. Because our hearing is not what the general population is aware of, the population therefore doesn’t make many adjustments in intermingling with the elderly. We assume that they are just old and don’t move around very much and have earned the right to miss or un-attend as they please.

My church has spent several thousand dollars on a sound system, microphones and echo abatement panels to make the sound resonate better or more acoustically pleasing, and I am sure that has helped the quality of acoustics in the sanctuary immensely.

I remember one of my aunts had a severe hearing problem, and hearing aids didn’t help her at all. The three daughters she raised learned how to enunciate every word and perfect proper word form with their lips to help their mother to understand them. They were also to face their mother when they spoke so she could see their lips moving and shaping the words, and they seemed to communicate extremely well with her. Her husband did the same as the daughters. They gave the appearance to all that this was the normal way to cope with the situation.

I note quite a few people nodding their heads as if they understand or agree with what has been said, when in fact they have not understood. They have heard the speech but could not decode the message because the speaker turned his/her head slightly or had his/her lips concealed by his/her hand, a piece of paper or a microphone. The efforts

Today is all I have. So my actions today count for all eternity. Take a tube of toothpaste. Now squeeze all the paste out so we can brush our teeth. Now put all the unused paste back into the tube. Of course you cannot. What you have is the past as to what was in the tube. We can take all that paste and do something with it and learn. We can put some of it on a toothbrush and clean our teeth, or we can disregard it all together. Even though we cannot redo the past, we can use it for shaping the future. These are the things learned, the things we build on. Next time, we will know that we only need a small amount of paste from the toothpaste tube to do what we need. The future is about doing things better, being better.

What will be God’s calling of us for today and tomorrow be? Have we learned to love more, or will we hate more? What has God called us to do with our love and hate?

If today and tomorrow we hate, we have not learned from our past and will surely perish. We then repeat the things that keep us from growing. That would be a life full of nothing to feel good about, a waste of one of God’s creations. If we love more, we have grown from our past and will move more joyfully to the future. On the cross, God has given us grace. God’s Son died so that hate could be removed from us. We can put the past behind us and learn to live as God has called us to do.

God has an eraser, and it is in his nature for us to begin again today and into the future. God gives us that time. For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son that who so ever believeth in him should not perish but have ever lasting life. For God so loved the world—or should

and equipment were a waste money.

I find this everywhere I live and go. The doctors and nurses are even worse; they speak in a low or soft voice and a mask over their mouth, so I must remind them that I’m hard of hearing or I can’t read their lips with their mask on. Bank tellers are also hard to comprehend for the hearing impaired for those same reasons, plus their heads are bowed to keep from making an error. If you don’t have my attention or are not facing me, you may as well be talking to yourself. If I am not hearing the message, I may as well be reading or be somewhere else, It makes me wonder how students cope with this dilemma, as they are least prone to bring it to anyone’s attention and cause them embarrassment among their peers.

I have tried hearing aids, but I could hear the words and all the background noise as well, which is extremely irritating. Audiologists will tell you aids may help, and if they also sell hearing aids, they will help. So who do you believe?

I am 82 years old and love my home church, and I have seen its membership fall to a few each Sunday and about 1.5 times more on Mother’s Day, Easter and maybe Christmas; it’s so sad. I also believe 80 percent of the attendees are hearing impaired somewhat. And there are plenty other churches that are in the same or similar shape or condition.

Help will not be found with louder speakers, organs or bands. It will have to come from people who recognize the aging population is hearing impaired, and the churches will have to find a way to alleviate the problem or ameliorate it.

You would be surprised at the increase of elderly attendees if they could only hear. Why go if you can’t hear the message?

we say, the world can so love God so that we may know love as it was created to be, love for today and the future and have ever lasting life. This is our today and our future. This is the day the Lord has made for us.

Believe it and know it. Share God by showing his love.

The past is history, but time will be our future, even though we do not know how long. God’s future for us is everlasting if we choose.

Bob Fowler, member Shandon UMC, Columbia

A grand sendoff

The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and the General and Jurisdictional Conference delegation take great pride in saluting newly elected Bishop Robin Dease.

She embodies and exemplifies the theological Wesleyan perspective, spirituality and practice that is valuable and needed in the lordship and body of Christ today.

We extend our warmest congratulations and best wishes to Dr. Dease and are confident that, under her leadership, we will work together toward kingdom building, accountability and brotherly/sisterly love for one another.

With great anticipation, we await the celebration and farewell of Bishop Dease.

St. Andrew By-the-Sea United Methodist Church, Hilton Head, where Dr. Dease serves as senior pastor, is organizing this event. This celebration is scheduled for Sunday, Dec. 18, at 4 p.m. at the honoree’s church. Again, we extend our warmest congratulations and best wishes.

Jackie G. Jenkins, chair S.C. 2020 General and Jurisdictional Conference Delegation



Thank you for your service

Dickson Memorial UMC, Townville, held a special dinner Nov. 11 to honor veterans of the church. Here, the veterans gather for a smile.



Presenting the banner from left are Dr. Peter Mageto, vice chancellor of AU; the Rev. Owen Ross, board member of the Fairfield Outreach and Sponsors Association; the Rev. John Holler, president emeritus of Epworth Children's Home; Bishop Jonathan Holston, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference of the UMC; and Felecia Holston, first lady.



Gathered at Fairfield Children's Home are (from left) Dr. Dwaun J. Warmack, president of Claflin University, his wife, LaKisha Warmack, and their daughter, Morgan, as well as Holler and the Holstons.

Bishop and Mrs. Holston honored with Fairfield Fund

In late October, 85 people traveled with Dr. Jim Salley to Zimbabwe, Africa, for the 30th anniversary celebration of Africa University and the installation of Dr. Peter Mageto as the AU vice chancellor.

While in Zimbabwe, many of the people who had gathered for the AU celebration attended a ceremony of hope held at the Old Mutare Mission site, which is located on the same tract of land that Africa University occupies. The Old Mutare Mission comprises a small hospital, a United Methodist church, three schools and Fairfield Children's Home.

During the ceremony at Old Mutare, Bishop L. Jonathan Holston and the Rev. John Holler, recently retired president and CEO of Epworth Children's Home, announced that the Fairfield Fund had been established to support the work of Fairfield Children's Home and other elements of the Old Mutare Mission and to aid in strengthening the ties between the institutions at Old Mutare and Africa University.

It was revealed by Holler, to the surprise and delight of the audience, that the fund was established in honor of Bishop and Mrs. Holston for the work they have done in helping children in the South Carolina Conference have brighter futures. Holler revealed the fund was established with an \$800,000 tithe from the Every Child Is A Miracle financial campaign conducted by the South Carolina Annual Conference. The campaign was for the benefit of Epworth Children's Home's expansion as Epworth establishes new community-based programs in locations across the South Carolina Conference.

The genesis for the Fairfield Fund began several years ago where, during a conversation between Holler and Holston, Holston suggested that the benefits of the campaign could go beyond South Carolina borders.

Discussion then centered around a time during 2001 when Rev. Holler co-led a United Methodist Volunteers in Mission team from Trenholm Road UMC, Columbia, to help build a faculty house at Africa Uni-

versity and to also work at the then-Fairfield Orphanage. The conversation also included talk about how much that mission trip impacted the lives of the team members and how appropriate it would be to return to Old Mutare and fulfill in such a significant way a promise that was made 21 years ago to not forget the children of Zimbabwe.

The income from this fund will enable Fairfield Children's Home to first tend to some issues of deferred maintenance such as roof repairs and essential supply issues. Next, energy and funds will be expended to perfect and implement a long-term care and sustainability plan that will ensure the present and future residents of Fairfield get the best care and educational opportunities available.

Additional children who now have no safe and stable place to live will now have a place to call home. This fund provides a gift of opportunity for many who feel opportunity is beyond their reach.

The Fairfield Fund will be managed by the Board of Trustees of Epworth Children's Home, and grants for expenditures of proceeds from the fund will be designated through a collaborative effort between the leadership at Fairfield Children's Home and the Fairfield Outreach and Sponsors Association Board of Trustees.

The Fairfield Fund will mean new life and expanded ministry opportunities for the Old Mutare Mission. The economy in Zimbabwe is struggling mightily, and resources for child and family welfare are extremely scarce. FOSA and the Zimbabwe UMC have worked diligently to aid in that work, but high unemployment and crushing inflation makes it difficult to make headway.

This gift is a fresh wind in the sails of those who work to surround children and young adults with care and resources. It is a gift of hope from the United Methodists of South Carolina that, in the years to come, will bring new energy and life to a new generation of children and youth and the people who surround them with care.



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Joseph Abram Jr.

The AU pledge: Finishing what was begun

"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet believed."—John 20:29 (KJV).

More than 17 years ago I fell in love with, believed in and supported Africa University and had not seen it. I had heard, read and was convinced that surely God was steeply invested in it, but it took Dr. James H. Salley's dissertation to seal the deal, sight unseen.

In January 2014, it was my opportunity to see the school in which I believed and supported. The trip was made possible by the generosity of one of the United Methodist agencies' head, who suggested that I be given that pleasure because of my commitment and dedication to Africa University, which was well known throughout the connection. My benefactor cited failing health that would not allow such an intensive travel schedule and said he would be honored if I traveled in his stead. Traveling with Bishop and Mrs. L. Jonathan Holston, Dr. Jim Salley and others—both known and unknown—was, in and of itself, a real treat.

We gathered for our first get-acquainted session, which was an overwhelming experience. I noticed immediately that staff and student representatives kept referring to me by name, and even in their thick dialect, I recognized it, plus the warm smiles in my direction. Members of our group would also glance in my direction when my name was mentioned.

I heard things like, "Rev. Abram, you finally came! We were hoping you would come!" and finally, someone said, "Welcome home!"

Then it came my turn to take the mic. When I began to speak, I noticed my face grew warm and realized it was from the tears flowing down my cheeks. We had been forewarned by Dr. Salley that we needed to

learn how to speak through our tears, for this would be a very emotional experience. My commitment was heightened more that day when I saw the great good my little helped to generate through these grateful souls.

Afterward, I returned to my room for the night, but instead of crashing, I took pen and paper and wrote, "A Love Letter To Africa University," which I read the next morning in front of the assemblage at the end of morning devotion in the Kwang Lim Chapel. Later, back at home, it was shared on YouTube for Valentine's Day by the Africa University Development Office, read at Annual Conference, shared at Trinity United Methodist Church, Orangeburg, during the AU Choir Concert, and in Saturation Sunday events in several churches in several states. I plan to include it in my impending book of poems (hopefully soon).

The recent trip to Africa University on Oct. 19 of this year—which was billed as "The Trip of a Lifetime"—marked my fourth.

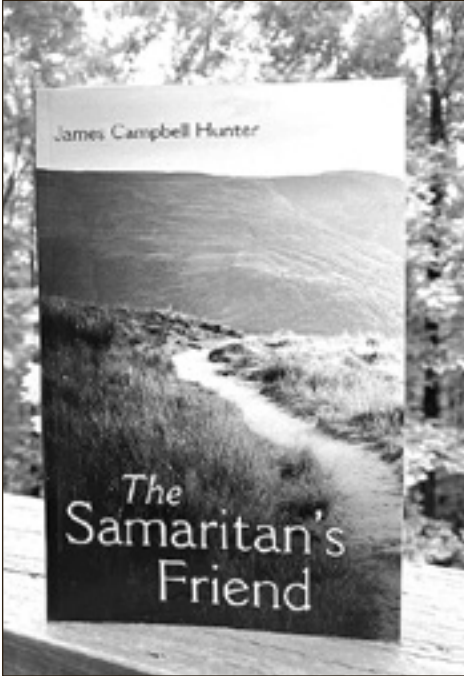
For those of us who were so blessed to have been a part of it, the billing doesn't quite describe what we experienced. We were privileged to celebrate our beloved university's 30th year in existence; witnessed the inauguration of its fifth vice chancellor, the Rev. Peter Mageto; and escorted John Holler of Epworth Children's Home to the Old Mutare Mission Children Home to deliver a gigantic love offering from South Carolina United Methodists.

We rode the river, climbed the mountain (in a cable car), traveled, dined and slept in luxury like the rich and famous.

And finally—and most importantly—we recommitted and rededicated ourselves to this great love story that is Africa University and vowed to finish the work begun.

P.S. Hats off to the trip planners, staff, AU family of supporters and especially to the students who make us proud.

Rev. Hunter releases book



The Rev. Jim Hunter, a retired elder in the South Carolina Annual Conference, has released a new book, "The Samaritan's Friend."

Inspired by Holy Land trips, pilgrimages on Iona and The Camino Frances and a life-long encounter with the radically welcoming Christ, it is an imaginative retelling of the gospel story, with some Celtic spirituality thrown in.

The book is available on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Bookshop and through the publisher at wipfandstock.com



Packing party!

Manning UMC, Manning, held an Operation Christmas Child packing party in late October and packed 120 boxes. The church collected more than 140 boxes in all for the ministry.

A plan, a purpose and a fulfillment

Community Bible Study at First UMC in Hemingway

By Ginger Springs

First United Methodist Church in Hemingway has undergone many transitions since I first joined its membership 49 years ago.

Our close-knit congregation has been consistently made up of members of this community, many of whom were relatives, and very few were not native to this area. We have been richly blessed with members, leaders and ministers who were dedicated in fulfilling God’s purposes in and through its services, youth programs, ladies and men’s groups, music programs and performances, missions and Bible studies.

But sadly, our membership has decreased greatly over the years with only an average attendance of 35 people on Sunday mornings.

However, our hearts for serving God and being mission-minded have not diminished. I’d like to share the following as an example of this strength.

On Wednesdays, many of our ladies from this community have traveled for as many as 14 years to Georgetown to attend a global non-denominational study called Community Bible Study. Some of us were called to be leaders, which meant also traveling to Pawleys Island on Tuesdays for Leaders Council to prepare for the Wednesday meetings.

Others in our community heard about this amazing study and desired to go, too, but were unable to travel the 70- to 80-mile round trip. And many were amazed at the dedication of those who were making these trips to study God’s word every week.

Last fall, God began to reveal a plan for CBS to come to First UMC, Hemingway. Sometimes, I just can’t help sharing about my special, Godly revelations, and this verse from Acts 4:20 exemplifies that. It says, “As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have heard.”

During my morning prayer, meditation and study time, God began to create a very unsettling discontent within my heart. I had just written in my prayer journal for God to help me to know what to do about these questions. But very soon—in fact, right in my next devotional reading—the answers began unfolding. The devotion from “Our Daily Bread” talked about unreached people not being limited to exotic locales, but often living among us. It inspires us to



Almost 90 people began the group, and plans and studies are now under way for them to become an autonomous class.

overcome the barriers in our own communities—someone right in our own neighborhood. And it asked the question, “How might God use you to reach out to others?”

Next, I was in a state of amazement when that day’s title of my “Bible in One Year” study was “Destiny, Defining, Decisions.” I called one of my best friends and prayer partners to help me pray about the possibility of having a CBS group in Hemingway.

It wasn’t even 24 hours before she called back with excitement and shared the following scripture, from Isaiah 43:19: “Behold, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness and streams in the desert. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?”

Hemingway is certainly not a wasteland or an exotic locale, but it is a community along with the surrounding area

that was definitely ready for this in-depth study of God’s word. And God was already preparing hearts and plans for this to happen.

Another remarkable example of God’s provision has been the way our church quickly accepted the request to be the host church for CBS. Our minister, Lou Perez, and district superintendent, Terry Fleming, have been our enthusiastic supporters.

To better meet the needs for our church family activities and for this Bible study, a decision was made to remodel our Fellowship Building. Because of its limited amount of use for many years, it had begun to deteriorate badly. It was an amazing privilege to see the dedicated love for our church and community in the generous donations that were made, as well as the men and women joining in with the workmen to accomplish all that needed to be done. Now we have a welcoming, beautiful building, a place to serve many who will come for various reasons and occasions.

It has been greatly obvious that this was God’s plan for not only meeting the needs of our church family, but also as an outreach mission for our community to study and share God’s word.

Many may have seen hosting a community Bible study as a competition with their own church studies, but CBS is designed to complement the local church congregations. As CBS leaders and members grow in faith and knowledge of God’s word, they have a responsibility to attend, actively support and become better servants in their own churches. The vision of CBS is to see lives transformed through the study of the word of God. And its mission statement is to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ in our communities through this caring, in-depth Bible study.

So all people will be prepared to return to the 22 churches that are represented to better serve them.

One more last amazing example of God’s great plan is that new CBS classes usually begin with 15 to 20 people. But God knew this thirst for his word would bring a historical number of 88 to begin this group. Plans and studies are now under way for them to become an autonomous class.

What great and amazing things our God is doing in and through First UMC, Hemingway.

Oak Grove uses mini grant to start community health collaboration

By Dr. DaNine J. Fleming

RIDGEVILLE—Oak Grove United Methodist Church and the Dorchester Parish have a rich history with more than 100 years of working within the community.

Oak Grove was awarded an Every Day COVID-19 BIPOC mini grant from the South Carolina Christian Action Council to engage the community with a focus on rural marginalized populations in acquiring factual information concerning COVID-19 and healthy living “post COVID.”

Oak Grove UMC developed Creating Community Connections: Health Collaboration and collaborated with three local organizations to maximize the community outreach.

A major goal of the CCC program was to be inclusive of an intergenerational audience to provide pertinent training and factual information that some constituents would otherwise not receive. Oak Grove UMC solicited the partnership of diverse age levels to meet each group where they were and bring everyone together on one accord.

Our strengths continue to be in faith in the community, not wanting to see anyone needlessly suffer, our rich history within the community, community trust as well as the ability to reach those that some may consider unreachable and/or unteachable.

“The community is accustomed to our outreach efforts and trust us. Our goal was to leave no one behind,” said the Rev. Laurie Tomlin, pastor of the Dorchester Parish.

“It was a pleasure creating an opportunity for intergenerational community members to work together in rural communities that spanned the tricounty area to provide factual information about the spread of COVID-19, ways to remain safe while getting back to our “new normal” and incorporating opportunities for edutainment,” said Dr. DaNine J. Fleming, author of the grant and program coordinator.

The intent of the mini grant was to create sustainable community engagement to stop the spread of COVID-19 with safe practices, innovative community engagement and healthy living. Oak Grove UMC partnered with Lambda Nu Zeta Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. (Summerville/Ridgeville), Academic Excellence Academy (college student-owned tutoring company) and F&B Consulting Inc., formerly The Nevaeh Group (diversity, equity and inclusion consulting company). The didactic training enabled participants to work with others through virtual training on the impact of COVID-19 and living during and post COVID; a Post-Pandemic Mental Health Forum; Demystifying COVID-19 and Youth Pillow Talk to provide practical information and the utilization of the information in schools and on college campuses; a COVID-19 Scavenger Hunt; and providing necessary information and personal protective items to families and sustenance during high transmissible times as necessary.

We were also able to provide critical information during the Taking Back Our Village 8th Annual Cops and Kids Back to School Bash.

“It was beneficial, and the students that attended not only enjoyed the program but were able to share the information with students that could not attend,” Sydnei L. Fleming said.

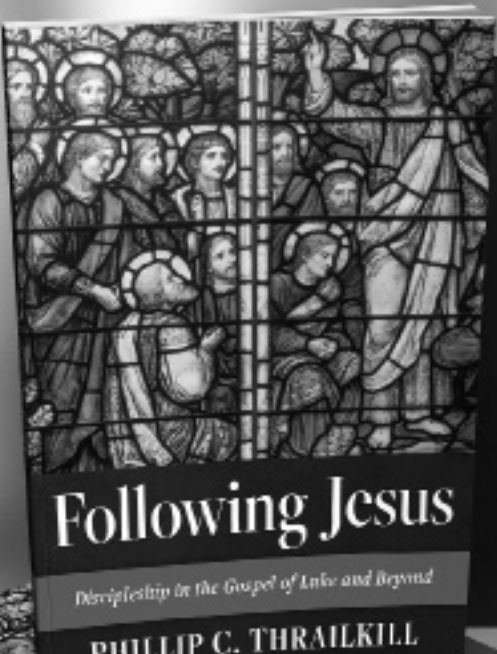
We are grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve the community through innovative efforts and look forward to additional ways for further outreach.

To view the taped forums visit <https://youtu.be/icE6A3ytiqc> or <https://youtu.be/A5Lcr--Jul0>

Following Jesus

Discipleship in the Gospel of Luke and Beyond

PHILLIP C. THRAILKILL



“This is not an easy book, and it’s not meant to be. Thrailkill, in his methodical but accessible style, bridges the gap between scholarship and the life of the church, and reminds us that discipleship is costly. *Following Jesus* explores fifty-one ‘thought units’ in Luke’s Gospel that are pregnant with insights for being a disciple of Jesus and developing disciple makers. This is a gold mine for scholars and a practical lifesaver for those making disciples of Jesus.”

—DARRELL WHITEMAN, founder, Global Development

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Photo courtesy of Wanda Altman

Trinity assembles 75 flood buckets after hurricane

John Bailey, Reed Smith, Kenny Jones and Dick Sweigart (from left) were among a number of people who helped collect and prepare 75 flood buckets in response to a call for help from the annual conference disaster team. Thankful they were spared any misfortune from Hurricane Ian, Trinity UMC, York, went into action when the call went out that the conference supply of flood buckets had been depleted. Jones got the ball rolling with visits to Lowe’s and other businesses in the York area looking seeking material donations. What had initially been thought to be a goal of 25 buckets quickly blossomed with monetary donations from the congregation. With help from the UMYF and other volunteers, 75 flood buckets were put together for transport. These buckets were added to others from the Rock Hill District. As organizers said, they are truly “better together.”



Deacon’s Corner

Rev. Katie Brock

Getting to know Katie

Welcome to the Deacon Corner of the Advocate. We are excited to share with you about the ministry and movement of the Holy Spirit happening in and through the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church’s Order of Deacons.

This month, take a moment to learn about the ministry of the Rev. Katie Brock, a member of the UMCSC Order of Deacons.

What prompted you to become a deacon? Was there anyone or experience in particular that influenced your decision?

Brock: When I was a teenager, I heard God calling me to youth ministry when I was on a retreat at Lake Junaluska. Yet I ran away from that call after serving on my church council at the age of 14 and realized that it wasn’t all pizza and games. God kept nudging me when I was in college, and I knew I wanted to have a career in ministry, but I didn’t see myself in the pulpit all the time, nor did I want to be the one in charge. As I was exploring this call, a mentor, another deacon, taught me about the role of the deacon, and it changed my life. I learned how I could still respond to my call to be set apart for ministry and serve in specific roles. I had many in my life who recognized this call within me before I even thought about ministry.

What are your main responsibilities as a deacon? How do your duties differ from those of an elder or licensed local pastor?

Brock: I see that the ministry of elders and licensed local pastors is to shepherd the flock, to care and give order to their spiritual lives. As a deacon, my primary goal is to be a bridge for the church to the community, as well as the community to our church. Over my years of ministry, I have been blessed to serve with great elders who have understood the role of the deacon and seen the benefits of partnering in ministry together. My personal responsibilities in my current appointment have been to work with our mission team as we prepare for our Cold Shelter, Habitat for Humanity and other mission projects. I also work with our leaders and volunteers as we educate our members—of all ages—to walk in their faith.

What words of advice would you give others who might be interested in becoming a deacon and what do you find to be most rewarding about being a deacon?

Brock: Your calling is unique and sacred. There will be people who try to dissuade you from being a deacon, but hold on and have faith that God will bless your ministry with opportunities that you couldn’t even fathom. And remember that there are many colleagues who will be willing to walk with you in this journey.

In a format replicating Dr. Brenè Brown’s Unlocking Us “Rapid Fire Questions,” let’s get to know a bit more about you.

- Q. Fill in the blank: Vulnerability is: A. Necessary for growth.
- Q. You’re called to do something brave, but your fear is real and stuck in your throat. What’s the first thing you do? A. Talk to my family.
- Q. What is something that people often get wrong about you? A. My age. (Working in youth ministry keeps you young!)
- Q. What’s the last show that you binged and loved? A. Schitt’s Creek
- Q. What is a film that you really love? A. Mary Poppins
- Q. What is a concert you will never forget? A. Backstreet Boys with my best friend.
- Q. What’s your favorite meal? A. My mom’s simple mac n’ cheese.
- Q. What’s on your nightstand right now? A. A few journals and a fan.
- Q. Give us a snapshot of an ordinary moment in your life that brings you great joy. A. Preschool chapel. I enjoy worshipping with these little ones!
- Q. What is the one thing you are deeply grateful for right now? A. Coffee.

Lamar sends off 400+ shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child

LAMAR—More than 400 shoeboxes were dedicated to the service of our Lord and sent on their way to children all over the world through the ministry of “Operation Christmas Child” thanks to the efforts of Lamar United Methodist Church.

The shoeboxes were celebrated during worship Sunday morning, Nov. 13, with about 70 people in attendance.

The joy of collecting the items for next year began on Monday, Nov. 14.

All throughout the year, sister and brother team Paula and Bobby Coker lead the charge along with the Missions Committee, watching for sales and talking to businesses about buying in volume and selling at discounts, searching for deals and steals to ensure that each box is filled with items that will hopefully bring children joy.

Each box this year contained a flashlight, age-appropriate art/school supplies, small toys and stuffed animals, a health kit and toothbrush, as well as an outfit, underwear and socks. Many contained a new pair of shoes. Some received small tools, clotheslines and other items that might benefit their families, as well as kits to build birdhouses and feeders.

Skillful packaging and shrink wrap allows for the boxes to be packed tightly and filled with love. All of the gifts that are collected throughout the year are coordinated and packaged and placed on tables in the basement gathering area for packing.

The whole church is invited to come



Photo courtesy of the Rev. Paula J. Stover

The church donated more than 400 shoeboxes.

to one or more of multiple packing parties where the boxes are prepared during a blessed time of fellowship and thanksgiving for all that the Lord has provided for them to share with those who will receive them.

This is a significant ministry of the church. Those who are not able to shop or pack contribute by putting together the boxes or helping to cover shipping costs.

Organizers said it is a blessing to see God’s people work together doing what all are called to do loving God through loving and caring for neighbors.



United Women in Faith

by Patricia Armstrong

Legislative Advocacy Days: Free and virtual again

Legislative Advocacy Days 2023, “Anchoring Our Action on Our Hope, We Walk by Faith Not by Sight,” will be both free and virtual once again.

Legislative Advocacy Days will be held on various days in February. The 90-minute workshops will feature knowledgeable speakers on a variety of topics of interest and focus of South Carolina’s United Women in Faith.

COVID-19 has changed the ways we live, worship and connect with others. Unfortunately, the pandemic also multiplied the many challenges faced by our most vulnerable brethren. The workshops will increase awareness of relevant issues and provide valuable information on advocacy as well as practical actions that can be taken individually and collectively to address the issues.

There will be a 60-minute presentation followed by a question-and-answer session to address participant questions. The UWF Tech Team will record the four workshops, which will be available for future viewing. Workshop topics will cover healthcare, predatory lending, mass incarceration and just energy.

The workshops are scheduled as follows:

- Wednesday, Feb. 1, 10-11:30 a.m.
- Tuesday, Feb. 7, 7-8:30 p.m.
- Thursday, Feb. 16, 2-3:30 p.m.
- Saturday, Feb. 25, 10-11:30 a.m.

The global UWF continues to focus upon two social justice priorities for this quadrennium: 1) ending mass incarceration and criminalization of communities of color and 2) Just Energy 4 All. Both national campaigns are fully addressed on the uwfaith.org website.

The South Carolina Conference UWF continues to serve boldly as women united in faith believing that love in action can change the world. If you visit our webpage (<https://www.umcsc.org/women>), you will

find a passionate affirmation

Bold action, like faith, takes courage. Our bravery is inspired by God’s love and our powerful commitment to improve the lives of women, children and youth. United Women in Faith works for justice through compassionate service and advocacy to change unfair policies and systems that harm women, children and youth—from racial and gender injustice to economic inequality, climate issues and more.

We seek to connect and nurture women through Christian spiritual formation, leadership development, creative fellowship and education so that they can inspire, influence and impact local and global communities.

United Women of Faith are 8,000+ strong in South Carolina. We can make a legislative difference for our most vulnerable citizens. As God’s children who are charged to love one another, we are singular in seeking JUSTICE. To do so, we must educate ourselves, critically listen and learn, then take appropriate action. As Christians, we believe that “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:13-17) and We are Alive in Christ!

Everyone is invited to participate in Legislative Advocacy Day. More details will be included in December’s Mission Echo.

Register in advance for this meeting at <https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/tZ0uf-GqrTwoH93pzlwYvOsyeu7Aw0I63ifu>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Alternative paper registration should be mailed to registrar Rebecca Eleazer, 5116 Burke Ave., Columbia, SC 29203.

Send her your name, email, district and church name.

Armstrong is the newly elected 2023 Social Action Mission Coordinator for the South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith.



Over the years, this project has brought joy to thousands of children in the community and to the generous church members who have bought the gifts.



The Florence District is trying to reignite its men’s ministry.

Men’s ministry rebuilding in Florence District

By the Rev Amiri Hooker

Men’s ministry is still vital, and men are looking to rebuild the Florence District United Methodist Men and improve men’s ministry in the Pee Dee.

Most men are isolated relationally, and with rumors of the church dividing, men’s ministry is one place where men can fill unified and connected.

Men have been taught by their culture to protect themselves by keeping their relationships within certain “safe” parameters. However, the benefits of authentically connecting with other brothers in Christ far outweigh the risks.

As 1 Corinthians 3:9 says, “For we are called God’s fellow workers.” Our labor must be in alignment with God’s designed plans. To do so will not only assure growth as a model of godliness, but it will also provide men with biblical patterns and priorities that lay the foundation for fruitful church life.

For years I felt like men’s ministry was something the old guys at the church did on Saturday morning, but as I become one of those “old guys,” I see this type of ministry as a calling. This call to men is a call for each one to embrace his identity and responsibility in Christ. For the local church leader, the call involves the unique privilege as well as the assignment to motivate, model and mentor—to build other men of God who will invest in yet other men.

Church male leadership must answer this call, not because it is right or a claim to power or prestige, but because it is the call of God. Men need models of Godly leadership.

As Hebrews 13:7 urges, remember your



Trevor Miller speaks with Florence District men on men’s ministry.

leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Men have valuable time to invest in their local churches, but most are not churchmen, nor have they integrated the needs of the church into their life goals. In the Florence District we have been struggling to do traditional ministry like build ramps for homes that need handicap access. But we are also focusing on rebuilding leadership relationships and working with issues of race and class divide.

During a recent meeting the district men gathering, Trevor Miller—one of the pastors at Mount Horeb UMC, Lexington—came with the goal to answer one simple question: What are three things that every Christian man should know?

The night was well spent with some 40 men, though the representation across the district could have been better.

Native American Ministries

Native Americans and stereotypes

By LaShella Kirkland

I don’t know how many times I have to catch myself, pray, hum a hymn or a rap song, but in my mind, when someone comes up to me and asks, “Are you a real live Indian?” I think: Are you really asking me this?”

“Do you live on the reservation in a teepee?”

No, I live in a house, on the road, in the country.

“Do you speak your language?”

Yes, and yours too.

“I bet you can drink a lot of alcohol.”

Umm, I haven’t tried to.

“Do you get a check and free stuff and benefits?”

I haven’t seen one yet. Do you know where it is?

“How many gods do you have: sky god, corn god, deer god, water god?”

Just the one. The big one!

Exactly what is the definition of stereotype? It’s a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular group; a preconceived set of ideas that individuals apply to groups of people, places and situations. My cultural anthropology professor used to tell her students that there was no difference between an armchair anthropologist and stereotyping; both fail to do the hard work, which involves actual research and study and would rather rely on falsehoods because it’s more comfortable and convenient.

Of course, there are all sorts of stereotypes about different groups and cultures: African Americans are “lazy and more prone to violence.” Southern Whites are “more racist and inbred.” New Yorkers are “rude and arrogant.” The poor and homeless are “just lazy and they want to stay that way.” Jews and money. Mexicans, Italians, Koreans, Chinese, Greeks, women, men, gay, straight, political parties, etc. etc. All one has to do is say “All (fill in the blank) are



Kirkland

(fill in the blank).”

Native Americans are no different. Many of the stereotypes, unfortunately, began with religion and church along with language barriers. Many missionaries, upon seeing Native Americans holding their hands up to the sky, wrongfully assumed we were worshipping the sun rather than giving God

thanks for providing the warmth and light the sun gives us.

We do not worship nature and earth. We respect what the Creator, Grandfather God, has provided for us, and we give him thanks and praises with our prayers. We refer to earth as “mother” as a reminder of the seriousness of that relationship and honor.

Even though the stereotypes presented are the most common ones, the positive stereotypes are just as demeaning. Mascots. I have actually been told that having Native American mascots, themes and dances are a way of “honoring Native American peoples.” Well, did you ask first? Or did you just assume? What do you think would happen if you were to have a mascot painted with Blackface? What would happen if the mascot were painted with features from other groups?

Honoring includes respect. We are as diverse in traditions, taboos, appearances and experiences as any other group, and therefore, one size will not fit all.

Thankfully, we have come a long way and are having more and more hard discussions. It’s worth taking the time to stop and breathe before answering those types of questions.

Yes, honoring includes respect; however, it can also include wisdom and understanding.

Kirkland is the Native American Committee’s Native American Representative training coordinator She is a member of Lyttleton Street United Methodist Church, Camden.



SHARE your STORIES

Send stories, photos, calendar items and ideas to:
advocate@umcsc.org (email preferred)
or 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia SC 29203



Did You Know?

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



Newberry County Sheriff Lee Foster and Newberry Chief of Police Kevin Goodman accept Janna's Blessing Bags to be given to the homeless, needy and underserved population in Newberry County. Also pictured are Janna's mother, Cherrie Longshore, and Harriet Stevenson, the originator of the project.



India Hook member Sylvia Stathopoulos holds her Boston Terrier Bebe as Pastor Michael Walker offers a blessing.



Walker receives the first vaccination from Walmart Pharmacy at the District Clergy Meeting.



Members of Trinity's Silver and Gold senior citizen group pack Janna's Blessing Bags.

Trinity provides Newberry law enforcement with 'blessing bags' for people in need

Trinity United Methodist Church, Newberry, partnered with Royal Neighbors Insurance Company and was able to purchase enough supplies to fill 54 blessing bags for the Newberry Community's homeless, needy and underserved population.

The bags were presented to law enforcement officers, including the sheriff's department and the city police. The officers will carry the bags in their cruisers and hand them out when needed.

The bags were called Janna's Blessing Bags in memory of Deputy Janna Longshore, who lost her battle with cancer in April. Longshore received much joy from helping others and would have loved this project.

Janna's Blessing Bags included items such as a washcloth and soap, deodorant, comb, small first-aid kit, water, socks, granola bars, crackers and apple sauce with plastic utensils, lip balm, wipes, feminine hygiene products, hard candy, and other items.

"One of the four priorities for the S.C. Conference this year is 'engaging our communities,' so this was a very appropriate project and will be a blessing to those in need," said Harriet Stevenson, the originator of the project.

India Hook serves community with lineup of activities, missions

By Kendall Farnum

India Hook United Methodist Church, Rock Hill District, was busy throughout October with community events, church activities and district meetings.

The congregation was pleased to host the District Clergy Gathering with District Superintendent Anthony Hodge. Walmart Pharmacy was onsite to administer flu shots and updated COVID-19 vaccines to interested clergy, constituents and community members.

India Hook was also the location for a District Youth Workers' Meeting and the newly formed District Communications Team.

During worship on Oct. 23, a Community Appreciation Service offered the chance to honor and give thanks for those who serve the community in various ways. Guests included educators, sheriff's deputies, firefighters, County Councilman Brandon Guffey and Congressman Ralph Norman. Later that day, members and their "fur babies" shared time outdoors in God's creation with a "Blessing of the Animals" service.

Other community programs included a blood drive with church volunteers work-

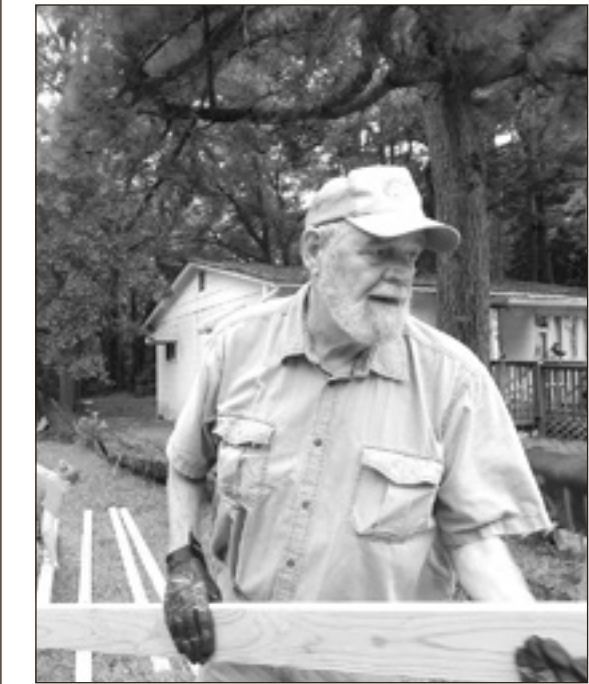
ing throughout the day, a barbecue and bake sale fundraiser in support of missions and a Halloween celebration with fun both indoors and out.

During a typical week, the India Hook facility is used for line dancing, yoga, prayer group, a Painting with Friends group, Bible study, team and leadership meetings, and walking laps, along with two worship services and Sunday school. October also included Stewardship Sunday, Charge Conference and the Lunch Bunch gathering.

Away from the church building, the Missions Team led the way in providing a meal for the Life House Women's Shelter, while the congregation was invited to visit Cherry Place Farm, tour Bethel Shelters and Walk to End Alzheimer's. Artists from the Painting with Friends group displayed and sold their work at a vendor's market in Tega Cay.

The congregation of India Hook UMC said they are grateful to have a beautiful, spacious facility and many opportunities to serve God through the people and property that have been entrusted to the church.

They pray that all people who come to India Hook UMC will encounter God in a meaningful way that uplifts and encourages them.



Photos courtesy of Kathy Beatty

New members help church thrive, serve

Faith UMC, Lexington, welcomed 11 new members on Oct. 23. A small church located on a busy four-lane road leading into Lexington, Faith often draws visitors because of its location. Many visit once or twice and move on, but recently the church has seen an increase in visitors who are seeking a church involved in the community and meeting needs. Faith is a church focused on missions and ministry to the community and seeks to include all in our outreach. As visitors attending Faith, these new members were quickly included in these activities and experienced the joy of service to others. Here, they are pictured doing a number of efforts with the church. Church leaders said it is exciting to be a part of helping these disciples as they grow and begin to transform the world through loving and serving God.

AFRICA UNIVERSITY: ‘Living the dreams of those who came before’

From Page 1

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference, shared a message as part of the week-long festivities, which included the inauguration of Africa University’s fifth vice chancellor, Dr. Peter Mageto.

“Today, we are living the dreams of those who came before,” Holston said, preaching during the Thanksgiving Worship Celebration Service. “Even as we celebrate the past and see the present transformed, the future of Africa University is in the hands of an innovative, compassionate and committed new vice chancellor. Now we begin dreaming of the next 30 years at the ‘The School of Dreams in the Valley of Hope,’ trusting, believing and knowing that God is with us.

“In South Carolina, our state motto translates as, ‘While I breathe, I hope.’ Here in Zimbabwe, in the ‘Valley of Hope,’ we celebrated 30 years of a dream made real. This parallel is not simply a coincidence of wording, it is further evidence that we can do so much more together than we could ever dream of doing apart.”

During the week’s activities, the Rev. John Holler, president emeritus of Epworth Children’s Home in Columbia, shared an \$800,000 gift to the Fairfield Children’s Home at the Old Mutare Mission, which is adjacent to the Africa University campus. Epworth committed 10 percent of funds donated to its \$10 million “Every Child is a Miracle” capital campaign to the Fairfield Children’s Home, in honor of Bishop Holston and Felecia Holston.

“This is a gift of hope for the children of Zimbabwe,” Holler said. “It is an amazing thing to think about what \$800,000 means here in Zimbabwe. Here, that money can do the equivalent of what \$8 million can do back in South Carolina, so this is really life-changing.

“Children are children, young people are young people, Everybody deserves a bright future, and many of the children here never would have a bright future without the generosity of United Methodists in South Carolina. You can see that hope in the eyes of the people here; they have hope for a new life and new opportunities for their children.”

Three South Carolina universities—Claflin, South Carolina State and Clemson—were recognized during the 30th anniversary celebration for their innovative and productive partnerships with Africa University.

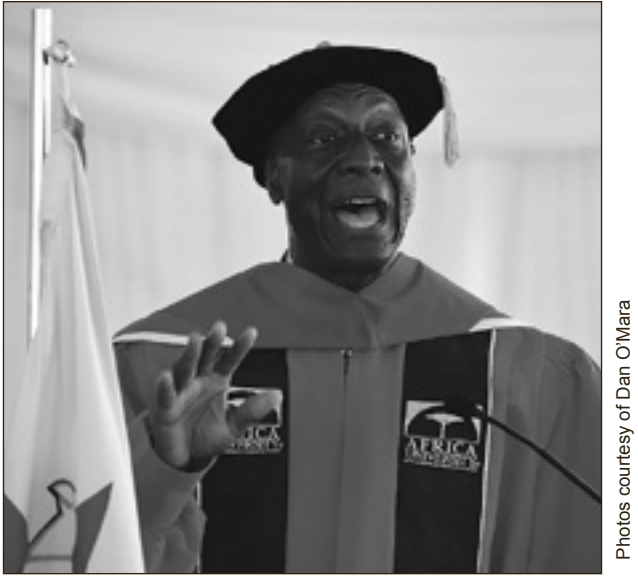
Claflin President Dwaun Warmack and his family participated in the 30th anniversary activities, during which he declared the extension of Claflin’s relationship with Africa University to include both a forthcoming collaboration on student services, as well as the endowment of a scholarship by the Warmack family.

“Together, Africa University and Claflin University will continue to do transformational work to make this world a better place,” Warmack said. “We are looking forward to forging this partnership in years to come, and we know that over the next 30 years, eyes haven’t seen and ears haven’t heard what’s going to happen here at Africa University.

“We don’t get anywhere by ourselves, so the importance of supporting each other in the spirit of educating Black and Brown kids who deserve, but oftentimes do not get, an opportunity. As a historically Black university founded



Bishop Holston preaches in the Kwang Lim Chapel during Africa University’s 30th Anniversary Thanksgiving Worship Celebration Service.



Dr. James Salley, president and CEO of Africa University Inc., speaks during the school’s 30th anniversary celebration.

Photos courtesy of Dan O’Mara



Rev. Elbert Williams presents a gift endowing a third student scholarship at AU.



The Rev. John Holler at Fairfield Children’s Home in Old Mutare, Zimbabwe.

153 years ago, why wouldn’t we support a place like Africa University and put our collective minds together to provide a world-class education for all students.”

The Rev. Elbert Williams, pastor of Ebenezer, John Wesley and Sandy Grove UMCs in Lamar, first visited Africa University with Holston nearly a decade ago. Since then, he has donated a total of \$20,000 to endow two scholarships—one in honor of his late mother, Magnolia Robinson Williams, and the other in honor of his late father, Frank E. Williams Sr.

During the celebration, Williams announced he would be donating \$10,000 more to the school in honor of his brother, the Rev. Frank E. Williams Jr., who died in October.

“When I visited in 2013,” Williams said, “I was motivated by what I saw—by the hunger, by the thirst of the children here wanting to get an education and go back and change their environments.”

James H. Salley, president and CEO of Africa University

(Tennessee) Inc. and associate vice chancellor for institutional advancement, was honored during the celebration with Africa University’s Pioneer Service Award, recognizing more than 30 years of devoted service to the school.

“Africa University does not exist to be an island unto itself,” said Salley, a South Carolina native and longtime member of Edisto Fork UMC in Orangeburg. “We exist to invest in people—students, as well as the local community.

“Societies become great when old men and women plant trees under whose shade they know they will never sit. We thank the people of The United Methodist Church, we thank Bishop Holston, and we thank the South Carolina Conference for being tree-planters.”

To see a video of Africa University’s 30th Anniversary Celebration, visit <https://vimeo.com/765557641>

For more on Africa University, visit <https://www.support-africauniversity.org>

APPORTIONMENTS: Almost 300 churches have paid 100 percent

From Page 1

The next highest-paying district is Orangeburg at 72.6 percent. Greenville remains the lowest paying district at 55.2 percent.

As of Oct. 31, 142 churches of the 958 total apportionment churches had paid none of their apportionments, while 299 churches had paid 100 percent.

Apportionments are a method used to aid missions and giving by supporting national or international programs as well as conference staff and operations. There are four categories of apportionments: international, national, regional and local. International supports programs and ministries outside of the United States. National raises funding for United States General Conference adminis-

trations. Regional aids programs within the southeastern region. Local helps to produce funding for the South Carolina Conference.

Some churches are coming up with creative solutions to reach their apportionment goals, including yard sales, silent auctions, bake sales, fundraising dinners and concerts.

All 2022 payments are due no later than Thursday, Jan. 12, 2023, by 4 p.m. in the

treasurer’s office. Keep in mind that the treasurer’s office is not responsible for delivery inconveniences that arise. Wires can be accepted if necessary. If choosing to pay by Vanco, the payment must be made by 3 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 10.

For more information on apportionments, visit <https://www.umcsc.org/treasurer/>. If you have questions, call 803-786-9486.

BUNCOMBE STREET: ‘We are still called to be the church’

From Page 1

The results are posted on the church website at <https://www.buncombestreetumc.org/about/way-forward-task-force>.

In a statement from the Rev. Brian Gilmer and the pastoral staff of Buncombe Street UMC, the church noted, “During our recent church conference meeting, we worshipped together, prayed together, listened to one another and shared our perspectives with each other. We also took another step in the ongoing conversation about the future of Buncombe Street United Methodist Church.

“Regardless of where we stand on what lies ahead for us as a church, we know that God is with us and that he loves us and calls us to love one another. We also know that our

mission to be and to make disciples of Jesus Christ has not changed. We are still called to be the church.

“Our prayer is that, amid all of the anxiety and the unknown, we don’t lose sight of these truths.”

According to the church website, the vote arose out of the Buncombe Street UMC Way Forward Task Force, which had a goal to create an educational program available to all church members in anticipation of General Conference 2022. When General Conference was rescheduled to 2024, the church council expanded the membership of the Task Force in May 2022. Those added were almost exclusively lay leaders serving on boards and committees of Buncombe Street.

The objective of the Way Forward Task Force was to educate the congregation on the issues facing the UMC as they relate to Buncombe Street and to facilitate a fair and open

discourse so members were informed prior to the special church conference Oct. 30.

In preparation for the special church conference on October 30, the Way Forward Task Force hosted six educational town hall style meetings in Sisk Hall. These meetings were recorded, and the replay is available at <https://www.buncombestreetumc.org/about/way-forward-task-force>.

Annual conferences in the United States are not legally permitted under current church law to disaffiliate from the UMC, per a ruling by the UMC Judicial Council in May 10 (Decision 1444).

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference of the UMC, said Para. 2553 in the *Book of Discipline* exists as a path to disaffiliation for local churches who wish to consider this.

SEJ: Body elects Berlin, Shelton and Dease as bishops

From Page 1

Dease among them. South Carolina’s 32 delegates (16 lay and 16 clergy), plus alternates, volunteers, media and more were present.

“I am thrilled that Bishop Jonathan Holston will be coming back to the South Carolina Annual Conference,” said Barbara Ware. “As a member of the Committee on Episcopacy, it was a long and tedious process where we were asked to make decisions that would impact many people’s lives. I took that role seriously. So I am grateful we were able to get Bishop Holston back to South Carolina. His leadership has been invaluable to both lay and clergy. We are grateful to have the Bishop and Mrs. Holston continue their ministry here.”

Representatives from the SEJ’s 14 annual conferences had a number of tasks before them that week, including electing new episcopal leaders to replace those who had retired and approving the jurisdictional budget. As SEJ began, there were only nine active bishops in the 14-conference jurisdiction, with some bishops serving multiple episcopal areas because of the pandemic-related absence of a General Conference in 2020 and 2021.

Determining the number of bishops to elect—up to a maximum of five—was among the first items of business at SEJ.

Untroubled hearts

On Nov. 1, the day before the session started, delegates had the opportunity to participate in round-robin sessions and hear from the nine episcopal candidates, including the Rev. Ken Nelson, South Carolina’s conference secretary and Orangeburg District superintendent. Nelson had been South Carolina’s episcopal nominee, though he was not elected.

Then, early Wednesday, Nov. 2, people

filled the seats of Stuart Auditorium for a stirring opening worship service preached by Bishop James Swanson with a standing ovation and a call to remain a fearless church even amid anxiety over uncertainty.

Even with all that is going on in the UMC and at this session of the SEJ, Swanson urged, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled, Southeastern Jurisdiction.”

He noted that even the Avengers got worried and wondered if they could defeat Thanos; it is natural to struggle with this.

“So often we get through life by denying what is going on. I’m not going to deny the fear and anxiety that’s in this room right here. But I hear him again: Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

Business began as Swanson called the meeting officially to order at 10:39 a.m., with roll call, setting the bar, adoption of the agenda, and the day’s first major item of business: determining how many bishops to elect.

With overwhelming approval by hand vote, the body agreed with the Committee on Episcopacy’s recommendation to elect three bishops this year instead of the authorized five. The COE cited as their rationale financial responsibility given uncertainty over disaffiliation, noting two bishops would be asked to serve two areas until 2024.

The first ballot, to vote on three episcopal nominees, was taken just before noon.

First elected: Tom Berlin

SEJ saw its first episcopal election for the 2022 session Wednesday afternoon as Tom Berlin, the nominee from the Virginia Conference, was elected on Ballot 4. Berlin received 213 of the 208 required votes, or 61.56 percent of the vote.

Berlin received a standing ovation from the room as he headed to the podium to speak on his election, thanking his wife, members of his church who made an

eight-hour drive to support him, the other delegates for the ways they have formed his faith and helped in his sanctification, and the bishops who have enabled him to serve.

“You all have been such a great blessing to my life and to be elected as bishop is a singular great honor,” Berlin said. With a nod to the message from opening worship that morning, Berlin added, “We can do nothing without Christ and anything with Christ that Christ desires, and there is nothing good I’ve been a part of that I’ve done myself.

“It is oddly humbling to stand before you and accept this special assignment.”

The rest of Wednesday afternoon and evening saw many more ballots as voting grew contentious, with front-runners shifting between Nelson, the Rev. Connie Shelton, the Rev. Edith Gleaves and Dr. Iosmar Alvarez. Several write-in nominees were introduced on Ballot 1 that morning, including Dease, who initially declined the nomination.

Beyond elections, Wednesday’s late-afternoon session also included approval of the budget put forth by SEJ’s Committee on Finance and Administration, presented by Frank Dunnewind. CFA recommended a \$1.5 million budget for the 2021-2024 quadrennium (a reduction of 15.44 percent over the last quadrennium), apportioned to the annual conferences in the SEJ. CFA also recommended the election of David Domisse as treasurer again for 2021-2024.

CFA said the budgeted amount for 2021-2024 is projected to be “sufficient for the ongoing operational costs of the jurisdiction and its committees.”

SEJ also officially approved a name-change for the Red Bird Missionary Conference, which will now be called The Central Appalachian Missionary Conference. The Rev. Karen Stigall presented the proposal to change the name, citing their 100-plus-year history of serving the people of Central

Appalachia, making disciples, providing Christian education, and facilitating fellowship in that region.

The vote passed overwhelmingly.

Second elected: Connie Shelton

SEJ elected Shelton— SEJ Clergywomen nominee, from the Mississippi Conference—as its second bishop late Wednesday just before the session ended for the night.

“There are no words,” a tearful but grinning Shelton told the body. “I will serve you with my whole heart, I will love God and love you, and we will remember what is said at our baptisms: You are initiated into Christ’s holy church; we are incorporated into God’s mighty acts of salvation.

“SEJ, let’s not give up on one another. God is inviting into this new day. May God give us open hearts, open minds and open doors.”

While the SEJ’s newly created Agenda Committee received and reviewed three resolutions brought before the conference, Del Holley reported the committee recommended these resolutions not be considered by the body. Holley said all three violate a jurisdiction rule or process or exceeded the authority set forth by Para. 27 of the *Book of Discipline*.

“As a result of our deliberation, we are not recommending the resolutions be distributed to delegates, published in the (Daily Christian Advocate) or placed on the agenda for consideration,” Holley said.

However, the committee’s recommendation met objection, and the body ultimately voted 222-128 to appeal their decision and allow the resolutions to go before them and be voted upon Thursday.

Helen Ryde, lay delegate in the Western North Carolina Conference, was one of two who spoke urging the body to appeal the

Continued next page



May your
holidays be
merry and
bright.



Where
thought
leads.

Merry Christmas from Wofford College.

Continued from previous page

committee’s decision. She said they are being presented at all the other jurisdictional conferences.

“To not allow us to vote on these resolutions would silence the voices of all these delegates in the Southeastern Jurisdiction,” Ryde said.

Third elected: Robin Dease

Thursday was a long day of close-call voting, and by the early afternoon, the slate dwindled to four, Nelson and Gleaves, as well as two write-in candidates, Dease and Dr. Zachery Beasley from the Mississippi Conference.

It took the entire afternoon and into the evening, but on the 25th ballot of the 2022 session, the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference elected Dease as its third and final bishop.

Dease’s 206 votes put her over the edge in the election, which had been close most of the day as she and South Carolina nominee the Rev. Ken Nelson were closely tied, sometimes with Nelson in the lead and sometimes Dease.

Swallowing back tears, Dease thanked the body for the honor, noting her parents had all joined the Church Triumphant and most of her 13 siblings as well, with those remaining physically incapable of being there.

“But you are my family,” she said to resounding applause. Then, looking to Nelson in the audience, she added, “And Ken is my brother and my friend.”

Throughout her career, whenever she had the opportunity to lead or serve somewhere new, she’d run home to her parents and celebrate the news, whether that was running an account, graduating from seminary, getting appointed to a church, or becoming a district superintendent.

“They’d say, ‘Now don’t go down there and make us shamed,’” Dease said. Looking again to the room standing in her honor, she said, “My commitment to you is: I will never make you shamed.”

Resolutions and a protest

With episcopal elections finished, delegates to the 2022 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference turned their attention to three resolutions, ultimately passing all of them Thursday night even amid much debate and a peaceful protest on the floor.

The three resolutions were “Leading with Integrity,” “Queer Delegates’ Call to Center Justice and Empowerment for LGBTQIA+ People in the UMC” and “Resolution in Support of a U.S. Regional Conference.”

Under presiding Bishop L. Jonathan Holston, the submitters of each resolution were called forward to explain the details so the body could more thoroughly understand what they were voting upon.

“Leading with Integrity,” submitted by Tennessee lay delegate Jim Allen and newly elected Bishop Robin Dease, South Carolina, passed without amendment.

The resolution urges those who intend



Photos by Matt Brodie

Holston and his wife, Felecia, have been assigned to South Carolina until 2024.

to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church to recuse themselves from leadership roles in the UMC in an effort to move forward in fairness and integrity. It also encourages annual conference boards to develop codes of conduct to manage conflicts of interest. After speeches for and against the original resolution, the vote was called and the resolution passed.

“Queer Delegates’ Call to Center Justice and Empowerment for LGBTQIA+ People in the UMC,” submitted by nine queer delegates in the SEJ, passed with one amendment changing a word in the resolution from “commit” to “aspire” in an effort to make the resolution more aspirational for the SEJ and, therefore, legal.

The resolution urges the SEJ to support LGBTQIA+ people, affirm a moratorium on lawsuits and complaints surrounding sexual orientation, not pursue (or resolve in a non-punitive and just manner) complaints against bishops around their sexual orientation or who officiate LGBTQIA+ weddings, and support elections of bishops who uphold this.

Holston ruled the resolution out of order because its language seemed to call the SEJ to violate the *Discipline*.

However, as he prepared to move to the next resolution before the body, a peaceful protest began on the floor. Several submitters and supporters of the resolution stood in solidarity, some standing directly in front of the dais where the bishop sat. One man asked for a rule of law objecting to Holston’s decision, and some threw their credentials onstage and walked out of Stuart Auditorium. Others gathered en masse up front in protest.

Holston called for a short recess. When the session resumed, Florida lay delegate Matt Daly offered an amendment changing a word in the resolution, changing it so the resolution asked the SEJ to “aspire” to this effort instead of asking the SEJ to “commit” to it.

The amendment passed, and then the question was called. The amended resolution passed to much applause.

“Resolution in Support of a U.S. Regional Conference,” submitted by the Rev. Lisa

Yebuah, North Carolina clergy delegate, and Martha E. Stokes, Virginia lay delegate, also passed, though like the others, with much debate. The resolution urged the SEJ to support proposals and expedite processes to help create a regional conference and support the Christmas Covenant and the Connectional Table’s proposals in that vein.

Yebuah said the resolution comes after a realization that “we are incredibly western and U.S.-centric in the way we do our work.”

The hand vote was close, so the question was called by electronic ballot. The resolution passed 203-115.

Task force to study racial bias approved

Next, SEJ Committee on Finance and Administration’s Frank Dunnewind was called to the podium to address what Bishop Ken Carter called the amended “Troxler motion,” which had been referred to CFA the day prior.

That motion, proposed by The Rev. Jeremy Troxler, clergy delegate from the Western North Carolina Conference, would establish a task force to study the impact of racial bias in the episcopal nomination and election process. It would comprise greater than 50 percent representation from under-represented groups, plus interview recent and past episcopal candidates to hear their experiences and solicit their input. The Rev. Esther Rodriguez-Perez, clergy delegate for the Florida Conference, added a friendly amendment recommending an honorarium and travel expense reimbursement go to those on the task force. The amendment was



A young woman weeps as she sings during SEJ Conference 2022.

approved and sent to CFA.

Dunnewind said CFA met the day prior and determined there are funds available in the COE budget line to accommodate the motion with funding through the end of the 2021-2024 quadrennium.

Both Troxler and Rodriguez spoke in support of this response. The vote was called, and the body overwhelmingly approved the amended motion to create the task force.

Assignments

Cheers resounded through Stuart Auditorium after Steve Furr, chair of the SEJ Committee on Episcopacy, announced the assignments Friday morning, which they had worked on until 2 a.m. the night before.

The assignments are as follows and will begin Jan. 1, 2023: Alabama-West Florida: Bishop David Graves; Florida Conference: Bishop Tom Berlin; Holston Conference: Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett; Kentucky and Central Appalachian Missionary Conferences: Bishop Leonard Fairley; Mississippi Conference: Bishop Sharma Lewis; North Alabama Conference: Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett; North Carolina Conference: Bishop Connie Shelton; North Georgia Conference: Bishop Robin Dease; South Carolina Conference: Bishop L. Jonathan Holston; South Georgia Conference: Bishop David Graves; Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference: Bishop Bill McAlilly; Virginia Conference: Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson; and Western North Carolina Conference: Bishop Ken Carter.



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Photo courtesy of Suzy McLean

Blessings abound

St. John's UMC, Blacksburg, blesses shoeboxes for Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child. Pictured from left are Samuel Lacey, the Rev. Richard Andrews, Caroline Moss, Mary Grace Braswell and Leighton Moss.



Guest Commentary

by Deborah Len

Faith overcoming fear

“J-E-R-R-A-M-A-Y-A.”
“No, honey child, that is not correct,” Nana sweetly said.
The sadness on Lucy Mae’s face was heartbreaking. Pastor Mickey had asked Lucy Mae to say a Bible verse before church this Sunday. Pastor Mickey always wanted the children and youth to participate in the services. Each week one child would say a verse that was about his sermon. Since Pastor Mickey was a good planner, they had three weeks to prepare. They had to say the book name and chapter and verse number—and obviously spell the title of the book and recite the verse in front of the whole congregation.
Lucy Mae was feeling so sorry she had raised her hand to be on the list of children to do this. The only thing she was sure of was her fear was making her insides turn to ugly green Jell-O®. She did dislike green Jell-O® the most. Her fear of making a mistake in front of the whole congregation was getting the best of her. She had been wanting to find ways to serve God more. She did not want it to be this way. She did not want this at all.
Her 17-year-old foot stomped the ground.
But her Nana shook her head.
“Now listen here, Lucy Mae. You are a good, smart, young lady, and we are going to practice this until you can do it,” said Nana in her sweet-as-sugar voice.
Lucy Mae smiled because she loved her Nana more than anyone else, ever.
Nana had always been there for Lucy Mae. She was the person who encouraged her the most. Lucy Mae had less than honorable parents, and Nana was her anchor in the deep scary waters of this life. Thirteen years ago, Nana took Lucy Mae in to give her a stable home. At 4 years old, poor Lucy was already battle weary from dealing with what life had dealt her, such as two parents who loved drugs, alcohol and whatever the enemy dangled in front of them more than they loved themselves or poor Lucy Mae. By the time she was 4, her parents had spent more money than they would ever make in four lifetimes, and both were going to jail

for their crimes, one for life and the other for 50 years.
“Inhale through your nose and exhale out of your mouth slowly for a few minutes,” Lucy Mae remembered the counselor teaching her this.
Mrs. Shealy was an excellent counselor to help Lucy Mae to overcome her past life. Mrs. Shealy reminded Lucy Mae monthly to remember the past does not control or define your future. It was OK for Lucy Mae to have hope and high expectations in her future life. Past experiences do not need to limit your future expectations. Mrs. Shealy was a good encourager to Lucy Mae.
Inside her head, Lucy Mae remembered fear and doubt came from the enemy and love and joy and peace came from the Holy Spirit. What a wonderful gift God gave us in his son Jesus and the Holy Spirit. God is great! Now, she thought: to get this Bible verse memorized.
“Jeremiah 29:11.” Yippee! She was on her way. Tears rolled down her sweet face, and she continued. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”
“Wow—I did this! Me, Lucy Mae, the girl without parents, memorized this verse,” she told herself. “No, wait a minute. It does not matter about my past. I have a future in Jesus Christ. That is all that matters forever and ever.”
All the ugly green Jell-O® stuff went away inside of her. She felt her voice get stronger, and she stood taller as she felt those words deep in her heart.
Sunday came, and Lucy Mae took her place and recited the Bible verse. And her Nana and Mrs. Shealy watched and shed tears because they knew she was going to be ok. She was going to face everything and rise.
God’s plans are always greater than any disappointments in our past. Faith in God will always overcome any fear.

Len is a member of Church of the Good Shepherd United Methodist Church, Lancaster.



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Tony Rowell

Flip-flop wanderers

Editor’s note: This is a continuation of last month’s column, “Life (Mere Existence or Tantalizing Tale).”

I left the old bear to his musings and continued on up the mountain. It was an absolutely lovely day. The sun was playing hide and seek behind some clouds every now and again, but on the whole, it was beautiful with just enough sun to bring warmth and enough shade to provide some counter-coolness.
There are times when being on the trail up in the Smokies is enchanting. This was one of those days. After a couple of miles, you start thinking you have the whole world to yourself. Traffic noise is gone with nothing left but the underlying sound the wood offers that is indescribable, a little disconcerting and yet comforting at the same time.
With the old bear out of my nostrils, I was left to enjoy the fragrance of the early autumn hills. The mountain air seems to reach deep inside and refresh my well of peace somehow.
As I continued on my way, I was just beginning to truly appreciate the particular joy that solitude brings when I sensed that something was out of order. I stopped and listened carefully, and in a moment I heard it: the thing that a true hiker hates to hear more than anything else. I heard voices. Not the quiet subdued voice of experience, but the loud obnoxious voice of the young and uninitiated.
There is an interesting phenomenon that takes place in the mountains. Often sound seems to appear and disappear as if by magic. As sound travels across the expanse of a valley and ricochets off of the surrounding mountainsides, sometimes it gets lost in the ether only to return from a different direction. On top of that, sound in the mountains is mysterious, with an eerie reverb added by the many echoes and the many directions from which they come. So it was with the voices that I heard. At first they reverberated through the trees that surrounded me as if they were coming from everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Then they disappeared altogether.
After a moment or two, I chuckled to myself.
“Perhaps prayers are answered,” I said. “Maybe those weren’t voices at all. Maybe they were just audio apparitions of morons past.”
Well, with the beauty of the day and the joy of hiking, I soon forgot those voices and continued making my way up the mountain. I won’t go into the joy of solitude in this writing. Just know it exists and is a treasure when it’s found, and on this day the treasure was mine.
Eventually I made my way to the intersection of the Finley Cane Trail, the Bote Mountain Trail and the West Pronged Trail. There was a nice sign there telling me where I was and that I was at an elevation of about 2,200 feet. As it turns out, I was perched on the ridge of Bote Mountain. By this time in my travels, I was a bit peckish, so I sat down and ate my lunch.
I was finishing up my meal and carefully watching a particularly ominous looking bank of black clouds work its way over the valleys before me when I heard it again. The voices were back and not just in my head this time. This time they were behind me on the trail, and they were confused. It would appear that they were not quite certain of where they were headed.
To say I was surprised at what I saw when I came back out onto the trail would be an understatement. There were five college-age folks arguing over which way they needed to turn. They were dressed in cutoffs and T-shirts, with various colored flip-flops finishing their ensembles. There wasn’t a pack, a canteen or a map amongst them.
I never thought of myself as a messiah before, but they sure looked at me as if I was one. After we talked for a while, I found out that they were looking for backcountry campsite No. 9.
I took out my trusty old map and told them they needed to go 3.7 miles down the Bote Mountain Trail and then turn right on the Anthony Creek Trail. After that, a walk of about one quarter of a mile at the most should do it, and they would be there.
I told them I would be praying for them as they traveled because there was a big old bear wandering around hereabouts. They looked a little startled, so to calm them down I asked them who the slowest runner amongst them was. Four of them pointed to one of them, so I told the four that they had no reason to worry.
After that, I headed down the trail whistling, secure in the knowledge that my newfound friends would get to their destination sooner rather than later.
After they had been gone five or 10 minutes, and I was working my way back down the trail, the rumbling above started. When I paused to take a look back up the trail, a streak of lightning hit the top of the ridge that I had just left. Then a big old raindrop hit me right smack on top of the head, and that starts the next chapter in this journey.
Hopefully I’ll have time to tell you about the bikini-clad travelers and the sodden surgeon I met on the trail next time, but for now that is all the time I have.
Being a preacher, I can usually find an allegory in a Campbell soup commercial, and I have found one in this story.
There are a lot of lost people wandering around on this planet, most of whom are ill-prepared for this life, much less the next. As I worked my way back down the trail that rainy afternoon, I kept asking myself a question.
I wondered if I was as prepared and as confident in my preparations to guide someone to their heavenly home as I had been to guide those misplaced college kids to backcountry campsite number nine.
I didn’t like the answer. How about you?

Rowell pastors Beulah United Methodist Church in Gilbert. He is also the author of “What Would Granny Say? And Other Somewhat Embellished Memories,” an essay and photography collection published by the Advocate Press (you can buy it at <https://advocatesc.org/store/books/what-would-granny-say>).

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Train up a child

Youth talents celebrations for New Life’s Fifth Sunday

By Jacqueline Williams

Walterboro District’s New Life United Methodist Church highlighted several events during its Fifth Sunday service, held Oct. 30. These included a celebration of September/October birthdays, the observance of Game Day when worshippers are encouraged to wear the colors or paraphernalia of their favorite sports team, the culmination of the observance of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and most notably, Youth Day, when the talents of some of the youth members were displayed during the service.

Jasmyne Graham, 6-year-old daughter of Tiffany Doyle, lifted her voice in the classic hymn, “Yes, Jesus Loves Me.” Andrea Washington, daughter of William and Concetta Washington, sang a moving rendition of the gospel favorite, “Take Me to the King.” And Anton Linnen, 6-year-old son of 1st Sgt Antonio and Senovia Linnen, put the proverbial icing on the cake with his solo drumming debut of “O Happy Day.”

Anton began to show an affinity for the drums at an early age, often sitting on the front pew where he could get a clear view of the lead drummer at church, Joe Glover. Both Glover and Robert Crawford, the minister of music, recognized not only Anton’s love of the drums, but also his talent, especially for one so young. His enthusiasm reminded Glover of himself at that age when he used to improvise with cardboard boxes, eventually progressing to a drum in the fifth grade when he joined the Beginners Band.

Over the years, Glover, also active in Lay Servant Ministry, has influenced various



Anton is pictured with a set of electric drums located for him by his mentor, Joe Glover.

young people, including his grandson and Robert Adams Jr., another drummer at New Life. In speaking of his skills, Glover said, “God gave it to me, and I am glad to help somebody else.”

As minister of music, Crawford encourages and fosters the abilities of all ages. In planning the music for the service and with the wholehearted support of the Rev. Angela Ford Nelson, he thought the Fifth Sunday would be a perfect time to showcase the talents of some of the youths.

Their eager response was exciting and refreshing.

Dr. Tom Bogart to depart

Columbia College

COLUMBIA—Columbia College’s president Dr. Tom Bogart will leave at the end of the current academic year, Columbia College Board Chair Ben Rex announced Oct. 27.

Bogart informed the board he would be returning to Cleveland, Ohio, next summer in order to be closer to family and rejoin the faculty of the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University.



Bogart

Rex expressed gratitude for significant accomplishments during Bogart’s tenure.

“Tom has provided outstanding leadership to the college,” Rex said. “Highlights include renewing our accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges for an additional 10 years, increasing student enrollment by more than 25 percent, issuing a new \$16 million bond at an attractive rate, guiding a smooth transition from single-gender to a fully coeducational environment and working with our faculty to secure a \$3.4 million federal grant to support the college’s Alternative Pathways to Education Certification program to train K-12 teachers, among many other achievements.”

Bogart expressed his appreciation to the board and the campus community for a productive and rewarding tenure of service.

“Columbia College is a remarkable place,” Bogart said. “The faculty and staff are exceptional, the students are vibrant and

poised for impact, the alumni are passionate and the trustees show outstanding commitment to the thoughtful growth of this important institution. Mary and I are grateful for the opportunity to serve and are confident that a very bright future awaits the college.

“Only our need to be closer to family compels us to conclude our service to the college.”

Rex said Bogart will remain in service as president throughout the current academic year, and he is dedicated to ensuring an excellent transition.

In collaboration with the board, he has identified initiatives and projects to further strengthen the college in preparation for new leadership.

The co-chairs for the Presidential Search Committee are Trustee Cathy Callaway Adams and Alumna Dr. Vivia Lawton Fowler, class of 1976.

Adams is the retired executive vice president and COO of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta.

Fowler recently retired as president of Wesleyan College, another United Methodist college in Macon, Georgia. She is a United Methodist pastor who also served on the Columbia College faculty for 21 years as a professor of religion.

The Board of Trustees will retain Witt-Kieffer to guide the college in hiring its 21st president.

Youth help Spartanburg District honor Laity Sunday

By Annie R. Crocker

LeDrico McCullough represented the Spartanburg District Lay Servant Ministry during its celebration of Youth Laity Sunday Oct. 16.

He brought the message at his home church, Allen Chapel United Methodist Church, during morning services, and headed also to Beaumont UMC at 3 p.m., where he was the guest speaker. He delivered a message titled “Facing Adversity.”

LeDrico is a senior at Dorman High School, a scholar student and a football player. He talked about some of his

experiences in these areas and gave a perfect scenario of how God has showed up, carried and kept him through many instances of adversity. He shared how if he had not known, believed in and trusted God with his life, his outcome would have been totally different.

LeDrico and his sister Cateria completed the Basic LSM classes during the Spartanburg District’s spring session. They are the youngest lay servants in the Spartanburg District.

Crocker is LSM director for the Spartanburg District.



High school senior LeDrico McCullough speaks during Laity Sunday.



Columbia College hosts Teacher Cadet Day

On Nov. 2, high school students from all over the Midlands gathered on the Columbia College campus for Teacher Cadet College Day. River Bluff High School, Pelion High School, Eau Claire High School, Keenan High School, Camden High School and Columbia High School were in attendance, with 92 students total. As participant and Eau Claire senior Shakeri Jones (pictured at top right) shared, “I plan to teach high school mathematics, so I do think the Teacher Cadet Program and the information I learned today will benefit me and give me tips on how to better prepare for my classroom and my students in the future.”

Revolution to be full weekend in January

Registration for Revolution 2023 is open for United Methodist youth across South Carolina.

This year, organizers have again planned Revolution as a full weekend event. It is set for Jan. 27-29, 2023, in the historic Township Auditorium.

The event speaker is Nathalie Nelson Parker, and Stars Go Dim will return to lead worship. Registration is \$75 per person for the entire weekend. Those who register by Dec. 31 will get a free Revolution T-shirt.

For those interested in leading worship through performance, all auditions must be submitted in video format by Dec. 1.

To register for Revolution: <http://scmyp.org/revolution-registration-2/>

To fill out the audition interest form: <https://tinyurl.com/3kkme97y>

To access the Revolution 2023 Info Packet: <https://tinyurl.com/45cjxts8>

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Photos by Milton Phillips

Cumberland UMC celebrated Breast Cancer Awareness Sunday with inspiration and testimony.



‘Pink The Pews’

Cumberland UMC celebrates Breast Cancer Awareness Sunday

By Monica Sirmans

FLORENCE—“Let every woman hear. I am with you. You are not alone.” That was the key message Sunday, Oct. 16, as Cumberland United Methodist Church celebrated Breast Cancer Awareness Sunday.

The church honored all surviving members of cancer with decorated gifts bags from the Health and Wellness Committee, led by Committee Chair Priscilla Howard. Not only were the surviving members showered with love and joy, but congregation members as well were provided with decorated gift bags containing health and wellness goodies.

Guest speaker Angela Charles of Darlington, a breast cancer survivor herself, spoke, bringing words of faith, strength, courage and belief in God. She filled the room with testimony and a witness of her great faith and unyielding love of the Father.

It was a great day of celebration for all.

Sirmans is Cumberland lay leader.



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A ‘God wink’ day

Dickson Memorial United Women in Faith made special hats recently for women to wear to the Anderson County Disabilities and Special Needs Board Tea Party on November 5 at New Prospect Baptist Church in Anderson. Two churches worked together to make it a very memorable day for these special ladies. The ladies said they are looking forward to another spot of tea together in the future. Dickson Memorial member Terri Martin’s sister, Rhonda (pictured at bottom right), is a client there, and Rhonda came to church Sunday all decked out in her hat to thank everyone. The ladies loved the hats. Here are some photos of the finery.



The service lifted up love, unity in the family and unity in the community, as well as health, strength and peace.

Wesley holds prayers for unity

Wesley United Methodist Church, Ladson, held a Unity Prayer Breakfast Saturday, Nov. 5, at 9 a.m.

The theme was “Where There Is Unity There Is Victory,” with Matthew 18:19-20 as the reference text.

Local pastors and lay servants read Scriptures at the event, and powerful prayers were delivered that lifted up love, unity in the family and unity in the community, as well as health, strength and peace in the community. Organizers said it was a prayer time held among local churches seeking God’s support in trying times.

Dr. Carlton J. McClam Sr. is pastor of Wesley UMC, Ladson.



Free nativity display at Calvary UMC

Calvary UMC, Swansea, will hold its annual nativity exhibition Saturday and Sunday, Dec. 10 and 11. The hours Dec. 10 are 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., and hours Dec. 11 are 3-6 p.m. Free and open to the public, the exhibition will feature more than 500 nativity displays from around the world. It will also feature Santa's Gift Shop, open for holiday shopping, plus coffee and cocoa to enjoy while you shop or explore the nativities. Monies generated from Santa's Gift Shop are used to fund the Calvary United Women in Faith's mission projects.



In recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, St. James United Women in Faith adorned their white with pink.

St. James celebrates 'Women in Pink Program' Oct. 23

SUMTER—St. James United Methodist Church's Women's Day Program was held Sunday, Oct. 23, during worship services. First Lady Diane Nesmith graced the pulpit and shared an inspirational message to the congregation taken from their theme, "Embracing Change, Sharing Grace." She shared a personal testimony about her daughter going through a change in her health and life. She also encouraged members to "let it go," meaning to get rid of all things that limit us. This year marked the 50th Annual District Meeting for the Hartsville District United Women in Faith. Hartsville District Treasurer, Bernice Wright, gave special recognition to women at St. James who completed the self-guided program of remembrance and faith of 50 years united: Valerie Jones, Barbara Porter, Jennifer Adams and Sheibra James. Several women who have served in the UWF for 50 years or more were also recognized: Geneva Bowman, Elizabeth Butler, Zenobia Owens, Lillie White, Marian Ray Willis and President Nancy Wilson. Wright also announced that the newly elected president of the Hartsville District for 2023 is Dr. Tonya Mack. "We brought it home," she said.

Larry Legend to speak to Hartsville Dec. 17 on 'It Takes a Village'

HARTSVILLE—Fishers of Men Ministries will hold an event with Larry Legend titled "It Takes a Village" on Dec. 17 from 2-5 p.m. at the Hartsville Middle School Gym. The event is sponsored by Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church, Bennettsville, and the Kellybell-Sandy Bluff Charge. Fishers of Men is a group of people who believe in the principles and teaching of Jesus Christ. This ministry was formed as a result of the command that Jesus gave in Matthew 4:19, "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people" (NIV). Their mission is to fulfill the command, and their purpose is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in every community to help everyone to live an uplifted life through sharing and giving. The Dec. 17 program is designed to bridge the gap between parents, guardians, families and youths in homes, churches and communities.

Legend has been on tour for the past 21 years from New York to Charleston mentoring youth to overcome negativity in their community. To get involved in Fishers of Men, all are encouraged to join each Thursday at 7 p.m. on a free conference call line (516-893-5823 code: 7660988) for an open dialogue. As organizers said, "The time is now for all, especially those of us who claim membership to the Christian community, to join hands and hearts to impact our communities, counties, state and prayerfully beyond."

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What a treat!

Day school kids at Manning UMC, Manning, got all dressed up for some lighthearted trick or treating fun.



Unity Team gathers for fall retreat

The Unity Team of Lee Road UMC, Taylors, recently held its first annual fall retreat at Pleasant Ridge Park on Hwy. 11. There was plenty of food, live music and games (including Jeopardy! and Bingo, a.k.a. "Bible"). The Rev. Rusty Godfrey, who was newly appointed to Lee Road this year, awarded four members of the church for their extraordinary service above and beyond: Sandy Davis (Unity Team chairperson), Gene Turner (custodian and trustees member), Prudy Cook (worship chairperson) and Gail Bachman (membership care committee chairperson).

Around the Districts

Columbia District

The 11th Annual Benefit Concert, Eddie Huss and Friends, will be held Sunday, Dec. 18, at 5 p.m., in the sanctuary of Shandon UMC, 3407 Devine St. Columbia. Featured on the program will be Bradley Fuller, Debbie Bauer, Annette Matthews and Eddie Huss. The program will consist of music for two pianos, four hands, and two pianos, eight hands. An offering will be taken for the 2023 El Salvador Mission Team from Shandon UMC. Everyone is invited to attend. For more information, go to <https://www.shandon-umc.org>

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All enjoyed plenty of good food.



Julian Ford shares memories with the congregation.



Susan Gladden gave a detailed history.

Sharon UMC bicentennial yields record attendance

By Lavinia Wiley Clement
ABBEVILLE—It was a beautiful autumn day, perfect for the celebration of 200 years of worship for one of Abbeville’s oldest congregations.

On Oct. 23, Sharon United Methodist Church hosted a bicentennial service with a remarkable attendance including former members and past pastors.

Upon arrival, Patricia Cann Randall greeted guests presenting a commemorative ornament of the church, given in love by the Ladies of Sharon. A striking program included a brief history of Sharon and a list of the pastors since 1821. As the church filled with family and friends, a slideshow of past events at Sharon brought back precious memories.

The service began with a greeting by Sharon’s pastor, the Rev. Richard Powell. Powell took the helm of the Sharon-Smyrna charge in June 2021. The Call to Worship of “How Great Thou Art,” with every pew filled, was a joy to hear.

Following opening prayer by the pastor, Susan Gilliam Gladden delivered a well-researched history of Sharon

Church beginning with its origins in 1820. She described how the early congregations worshiped at camp meetings that sometimes lasted for days. A brief history of Methodism and the South Carolina United Methodist Conference was detailed. She concluded by sharing personal memories of growing up at Sharon and honoring family members over the years.

Everyone was invited to share memories and call the names of past members they wished to remember. Many names were called out and stories recounted.

The former pastors in attendance each spoke about their time at Sharon with fondness. The superintendent of the Anderson District, the Rev. Steve Patterson, recalled memories of visiting Sharon as a child. He was a member of Shiloh Methodist Church when the two churches were in the same charge (1950-2005).

Special music included a solo by Stephanie Davis Stanley, who sang “Goodness of God.” George Pullin sang “The Anchor Holds,” a house favorite. The choir sang “Let All the

People Praise Thee” accompanied by Judy Wilson, Sharon’s pianist and director of music. The Rev. Julian Ford, Sharon’s pastor from 1986 to 1990, delivered a thought-provoking sermon titled, “Keeping the First Thing First.” The worship service closed with a congregational hymn, “Thy Word Is a Lamp.”

Powell gave a benediction and offered a blessing over the lunch to follow on the grounds. A bountiful meal was served in the fellowship hall—including a 200th birthday cake for Sharon UMC.

The congregation of Sharon UMC offered deep thanks to the 136 in attendance for joining this celebration of 202 years of worship. A special thanks was shared with those unable to attend who sent well wishes and prayers.

The day was the culmination of months of preparation and hard work by so many. The worship and fellowship we all shared made this remembrance of our past and the promise of our future a true blessing.

We invite everyone to visit again soon.

Kingstree United Methodist Church recognizes 50-year members

Sunday, Oct. 23, was designated as “Firm Foundations and Fascinators Sunday” at Kingstree United Methodist Church.

The main focus was to recognize and honor those members who officially joined Kingstree at least 50 years ago. In that spirit, the congregation was encouraged to dress up for church as they would have done 50 or more years ago—which would include fascinators (or hats) for the ladies.

Josette Jarrett’s children’s sermon and Pastor Katherine Crimm’s morning message both emphasized the firm foundation the longtime church members established for Kingstree. They encouraged younger members to continue that tradition so the future church will also be devoted to creating disciples for Jesus.

Of the approximately 50 eligible members, those who were able to be present for the special recognition service gathered for a photo. Members who were unable to be in attendance were honored virtually and are also loved and valued.



Anne Cantley, 50-plus year member, holds her memento.



Carolyn Williams is another 50-plus year member of KUMC.



Linda Hand models her “fascinator” at the KUMC service.

Pictured during the service in which they received recognition and a gift box from the church were, from left, Jackie Howard, Ann Mims, Linda Reid Hand, Lee Lineberger, Gertha Lou Stackley, Betsy Gordon, Billy Stackley, Calvin Baker, Margie Myers, and Archie Ward.



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Conference Historical Society

by Dr. Roger M. Gramling

Conference Historical Society meets at Claflin

The South Carolina Conference Historical Society met Saturday, Nov. 5, at Claflin University in Orangeburg. The meeting was held in the historic Ministers’ Hall in the library room honoring Justice Ernest A. Finney Jr., a Claflin alumnus who was the first African American to serve as chief justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court.

Ministers’ Hall was built in 1913 and served for many years as the school’s dining hall. The building currently serves as a cultural and performing arts center and in the future will house the library holdings of Justice Finney.

The meeting at Claflin was part of the society’s observance of the 50th anniversary of the 1972 Merger of the South Carolina Conference (1866) and the South Carolina Conference (1785). The 2022 Session of the South Carolina Annual Conference was severely limited in the observance of this significant historic anniversary by the pandemic and the continued need for a virtual session.

During this year, the Conference Historical Society and the Conference Commission on Archives and History have attempted to fill this void in a number of ways. There have been articles and columns in several editions of the *Advocate* during the year. In April, Dr. A.V. Huff Jr., conference historian, spoke to a joint meeting of the Conference Historical Society and Conference Commission at Wofford College on the topic, “Steps to the 1972 Merger.”

The meeting at Claflin University on Nov. 5 continued the observance of this chapter in the history of the now one South Carolina Conference. The meeting was especially celebratory given the election just two days earlier of Dr. Robin Dease to the episcopacy by the Southeastern Jurisdiction Conference. Dease is a Claflin graduate and former Claflin faculty member. She joins three other Claflin alumni elected to the episcopacy: James S. Thomas in 1964, Ernest W. Newman in 1984 and Joseph B. Bethea in 1988.

The society conducted a brief business session under the leadership of the Rev. Meredith M. Dark, the society’s president. The session included financial and membership updates, a report on the society’s newsletter, The Mark, and the society’s current “Historical Trail” project that identifies 40 sites in South Carolina representing the history and influence of Methodist activity across the state.

During a “Time of Remembrance,” three members of the society who died since the last meeting were named and remembered.

Following the business session, the Rev. Larry D. McCutcheon, interim university chaplain, and Marilyn Gibbs Drayton, director of the Hubert V. Manning Library at Claflin, were introduced. A Claflin graduate, McCutcheon has had a long association with the university and its students having served as director of the Orangeburg Wesley Foundation and as pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church in Orangeburg. He is a former superintendent of the Charleston District.

McCutcheon and Drayton shared insights into how religion and education were intertwined in the beginnings and growth of the 1866 Conference and Claflin University and how the two had their origins in the need to serve newly freed African Americans in South Carolina following the Civil War. The South Carolina Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1866 under the leadership of Bishop Osman C. Baker. Two main concerns were literacy and training for ministers of the newly formed conference. Efforts were assisted by the work of the Freedman’s Aid Society organized by the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Centenary Church, organized in 1862 by freed people of color, became a “mother church” to African-American Methodists in Charleston and an early center of conference activity.

The Baker Biblical Institute was organized in 1866 to provide theological education. The Rev. T. Willard Lewis, a missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and Dr. Alonzo Webster, a teacher at the Baker Institute, soon acquired property in Orangeburg with the financial assistance of Lee Claflin, a wealthy manufacturer, and his son, William Claflin, of Boston, Massachusetts. The Baker Institute became a part of the new school at Orangeburg. Claflin University became the flagship of the 1866 South Carolina Conference, and the two are bound together in their history. An agricultural and mechanical land grant college was established as a component of Claflin in 1872, separating to become South Carolina State College in 1896.

In 1884, Dr. Lewis M. Dunton became Claflin’s third and longest serving president. A member of the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, he was pastor at Centenary Church in Charleston at the time of his election. A gifted fundraiser and spokesman for the university, his 38 years as president saw significant growth and development including endowment.

Drayton and McCutcheon noted that Claflin and the 1866 Conference have produced a long list of notable and accomplished leaders. Three Claflin graduates have served their alma mater as president: Dr. John J. Seabrook, Dr. Hubert V. Manning and Dr. Henry N. Tisdale. Robert Charles Bates was the first African American to be certified as an architect. Dr. Leo F. Twiggs, an internationally known artist, was the first African American to receive a doctorate from the University of Georgia. Four graduates, noted earlier, have been elected to the Methodist Episcopacy. William Wilson Cook planned and administered federal buildings as the first African-American architect in the Office of Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury Department. The Rev. I. DeQuincey Newman, a distinguished member of the South Carolina Conference, was a leading civil rights activist and the first African-American state senator elected in South Carolina since Reconstruction. Judge Richard E. Fields of Charleston, a member of Centenary Church, was a prominent lay leader in the South Carolina Conference and a trustee of Claflin University. After a period of service as a municipal judge, he was elected a South Carolina Circuit Court Judge in 1980.

Both the South Carolina Conference (1866) and Claflin University can justly lay claim to a long history of service to the people of South Carolina and beyond through many who have rendered distinguished and exemplary service to the church, the state and the nation.

Gramling serves as secretary-treasurer of the Conference Historical Society and is also president of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society.



From the Archives

by Dr. Phillip Stone

Our connection

The story of American Methodism is one that includes both unity and disunity. The current United Methodist Church is the product of several mergers, including large ones in 1939 and 1968. It also has had divisions in its past, including the separation over slavery in 1844. At other times, segments that have disagreed with the church’s treatment of various groups have departed. Some other Methodist denominations, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church, represent parts of our tradition that left over what they perceived as unequal treatment by members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the early 19th century.

I offer this as a preface that separation and unification are nothing new in our church’s history. Part of what our archives can do is tell the stories of how these changes happened. But another role of the archives is to show us all of the ways we are connected.

The mandate of our conference archives is to collect the permanently valuable records of the annual conference and its agencies and, at the same time, to collect materials about the history of Methodism and Methodists in South Carolina. So, in addition to the conference journals, *Advocates*, records of boards and commissions and closed church records, we also look for books about Methodism, histories of local churches and the papers of various clergy or laity who are connected with Methodism in the state.

Some of what connects us are the documents themselves. We have issues of the *Advocate* back to 1837, and from them we can learn how Methodists struggled over contentious issues. The minutes of the conference, available in print and digitally, tell of the actions of the annual conference over the years. Many of the original handwritten minutes from the 19th century must have traveled around the state with the various secretaries. These minutes show the names of individuals who built the church and who responded to God’s call. They show the care that secretaries took to make sure the records of their work were preserved.

For me, the records are about our stories.

It’s important not to lose sight of the stories that abound in our collections—and these are the things that can be the most rewarding to share. Documents such as these can give our researchers a powerful sense of history. They help us see our connection to the past.

One of my favorite items is a letter to a former bishop that’s an allegorical complaint about the minister being moved—written on toilet tissue. I am sure some clergy could relate to the minister’s reaction. Other favorites are the “Devil’s Advocate,” a satirical underground publication of the 1960s and 1970s. At some point, I’m going to need some help in interpreting all of the inside jokes in those papers. The letters of missionary Mary Belle Winn, a South Carolinian who worked in China from 1923 to 1949, which describe her life and work in the mission field, represent a fascinating look at the church’s overseas work. And a letter describing the life and experiences of a slave named Sancho, who was converted to Methodism by Bishop Asbury, also tells a powerful story of forgiveness.

These stories get to the very heart of our experiences as Methodists in South Carolina.

Speaking of stories, has your church undertaken significant work this year in preserving and interpreting Methodist heritage in your congregation? If so, please consider applying for a Herbert Hucks Award for the Preservation and Interpretation of Methodist history.

The Commission on Archives and History presents the Hucks Awards at Annual Conference each year in the local church, publication and individual category. So if you know of someone who has, over the course of a lifetime, worked in Methodist history beyond the local church, please nominate them for a Hucks Award.

Information can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/2uzx2z7h>.

Applications and nominations are due Feb. 10, 2023.

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

Dr. Bob Heritage,
Music Director for St. John’s UMC Anderson, SC

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Floride Martin Calvert
INMAN—Dr. Floride Martin Calvert, widow of the Rev. Melvin Calvert, died Oct. 30, 2022.
Funeral services were held Nov. 6 at Inman United Methodist Church with burial in Roselawn Memorial Gardens.
Memorials may be made to Inman UMC, 27 Bishop St., Inman, SC 29349.
Mrs. Calvert is survived by her two sons and two daughters.

Mary Poole Cunningham
SUMTER—Mary Poole Cunningham, widow of the Rev. Francis Cunningham died Nov. 10, 2022.
Funeral services were held Nov. 17 at Trinity United Methodist Church. Interment will be held in Springwood Cemetery, Greenville, at a later date.
Memorials may be made to Trinity UMC, 226 W. Liberty St., Sumter, SC 29150; to Covenant Place Hourly Employee Gift Fund, 2825 Carter Road, Sumter, SC 29150; or to Lake Junaluska Assembly, P.O. Box 67, Lake Junaluska, NC 28745.
Mrs. Cunningham is survived by her three daughters.

Joseph C. Dance
NEESES—Joseph C. Dance, husband of Rosa Kennerly-Dance, died Oct. 21, 2022. Mrs. Kennerly-Dance is the director of Lay Servant Ministries of the Orangeburg District.
Funeral services were held Oct. 26 at

New Light United Methodist Church, Orangeburg.
Memorials may be made to the New Light Trustee Fund, 3100 Neeses Hwy., Orangeburg, SC 29115.
Mr. Dance is survived by his wife and daughter.

Matilda B. Gadsden
FLORENCE—Matilda B. Gadsden, mother of the Rev. Jerry Gadsden, died Nov. 7, 2022. Rev. Gadsden is the pastor of St. Paul United Methodist Church, Kingstree.
Funeral services were held Nov. 12 at Bethel UMC, St. Stephen, with burial in the church cemetery.
Mrs. Gadsden is survived by her two daughters and three sons.

Sadie Johnson
CAMDEN—Sadie Johnson, mother of Thelma Hudson, died Oct. 25, 2022. Mrs. Hudson is the director of the Lay Servant Ministries of the Walterboro District.
Funeral services were held Nov. 1 at Good Hope Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church with burial at Wesley Chapel UMC Cemetery.

Annie Mae Byrd Miles
DARLINGTON—Annie Mae Byrd Miles, mother of the Rev. Robin Miles, died Oct. 30, 2022. Rev. Miles is the pastor of Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church, Bennettsville.
Funeral services were held Nov. 4 at St.

Obituary Policy
The *Advocate* prints death notices of clergy and their immediate families and laypersons who have served on conference boards and agencies or who work for the S.C. Conference of The United Methodist Church.
James UMC with burial in Wilds Quarters Cemetery.
Mrs. Miles is survived by her daughter and son.

Irvin Vincent Plowden Sr.
ROCK HILL—Irvin Vincent Plowden Sr., father of the Rev. Irvin Plowden Jr., died Nov. 3, 2022. Rev. Plowden is the pastor of the Cornerstone-Epworth Charge.
Funeral services were held Nov. 8 at St. John's UMC.
Memorials may be made to St. John's UMC, 321 S. Oakland Ave., Rock Hill, SC 29730; or to Winthrop University Foundation, 302 Tillman Hall, Rock Hill, SC 29733.
Mr. Plowden is survived by his wife, Jean Kirby Plowden, two sons and daughter.

Linda Helms Tis
COLUMBIA—Linda Helms Tis, sister of Edith Arant, died Oct. 19, 2022. Mrs. Arant is the wife of the Rev. Athon Arant, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.
Mrs. Tis is survived by her sister and brother.

Betty Wilson McQuay Tysinger
CHARLOTTE, N.C.—Betty Wilson McQuay Tysinger, widow of the Rev. Joe Tysinger, died Oct. 29, 2022.
Funeral services were held Nov. 4 at St. John's United Methodist Church, Fort Mill, followed by a graveside service at Sharon Memorial Park.
Memorials may be made to St. John's UMC, 130 Tom Hall St., Fort Mill, SC 29715; or to Samaritan's Purse, P.O. Box 3000, Boone, NC 28607.
Mrs. Tysinger is survived by her son and two daughters.

Kitty Lee Collin Warren
HARTFORD, Conn.—Kitty Lee Collin Warren, sister of Cathy Trevino, died Oct. 30, 2022. Ms. Trevino is the director of the Lay Servant Ministries of the Greenwood District.
A memorial service was held Nov. 8.
Memorials may be made to TNBC Foundation, P.O. Box 204, Norwood, NJ 07648.
Mrs. Warren is survived by her husband, James C. Warren, and two daughters.

Clarice Janette Wray
OCEAN ISLE BEACH, N.C.—Clarice Janette Wray, sister of the Rev. Mitchell Wray, died Oct. 23, 2022. Rev. Wray is the pastor of the Hopewell-Sharon Charge, Kinards.
A private family service was planned.

Hinton Rural life Center to host Theotokos Confirmation Retreats

In 2023, Theotokos Confirmation Retreats will be offered on five weekends at the Hinton Rural Life Center located in Hayesville, North Carolina.
Hinton Rural life Center is a United Methodist mission outreach and retreat agency of the Southeastern Jurisdiction.
Registration opened Aug. 1, so reserve your spot now.
Dates for Theotokos are as follows: Feb. 17-19, Feb. 24-26, March 3-5, March 17-19 and March 24-26.
For more information about the confirmation retreats, go to the Theotokos website at <https://hintontheotokos.org/about-theotokos-1>.



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Global Briefs

Give Love encourages year-end giving

ATLANTA—Global Ministries, the worldwide mission and development agency of The United Methodist Church, invites churches and individuals to give love, joy, hope and peace through a denomination-wide year-end giving campaign. The United Methodist Committee on Relief, the denomination’s relief arm, is part of Global Ministries.

Civil court reinstates Zimbabwean lay leader

HARARE, Zimbabwe—Justice Owen Tagu, Harare High Court judge, has reinstated Simon Mafunda as lay leader of The United Methodist Church’s Zimbabwe East Conference. After Mafunda was hired by the Wesleyan Covenant Association, the annual conference removed him in December last year by a vote of no confidence. The civil court judge ruled that the vote was unlawful and conducted in a procedurally irregular manner, so Mafunda should be reinstated.

Pastoral letter on bishop’s continued suspension

GENEVA—California-Nevada Conference Bishop Minerva Carcaño remains under suspension although her suspension is being reviewed by the committee on investigation, writes the conference’s Interim Bishop Sally Dyck in a pastoral letter. The committee on investigation is the body that suspended her after jurisdictional leaders did so for 60 days following confidential complaints. “We await their decision and if necessary the College of Bishops will act accordingly, making sure that there is episcopal coverage for the California-Nevada Conference,” Dyck writes. The Western Jurisdiction episcopacy committee reassigned Carcaño to the California-Nevada Conference after bishop elections last week.

Bishop inspires others at mission school

MACHEKE, Zimbabwe—Zimbabwe Area Bishop Eben K. Nhiwatiwa picked up a paint brush to provide inspiration for those he leads. The bishop joined a Volunteers in Mission team from the Baltimore-Washington Conference in painting a new addition at United Methodist Hanwa Mission’s primary school.

Three bishops accused of aiding disaffiliation

HOUSTON—A South Central Jurisdictional Conference delegate asked the jurisdiction’s college of bishops to address the conduct and status of three episcopal leaders he said had provided “promotion and support” to the Global Methodist Church. That new, breakaway denomination has been receiving churches disaffiliating from The United Methodist Church.

Group calls for bishop elections in Africa

MONROVIA, Liberia—The Africa Initiative, a traditionalist advocacy group within The United Methodist Church, is calling for bishop elections to be held in the African central conferences. U.S.-based jurisdictional conferences held bishop elections in November, and the Africa Initiative calls it a “gross injustice” that African central conferences aren’t scheduled to hold such elections until 2024.

Bishop McAlilly takes temporary medical leave

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference Bishop Bill McAlilly plans to take medical leave in November and December to continue his recovery from a car accident this summer. After intense physical therapy and more surgery, he said he expects “to start 2023 in complete wholeness as your bishop.” Retired Bishop Joe Pennel has agreed to be on call as needed.

Church response to water crisis continues

JACKSON, Miss.—The thought of more than 180,000 people without access to one of life’s necessities could have been a cause for hopelessness, but United Methodists in Mississippi were determined to be a shining example of Christian hope. After distributing clean water, churchgoers are advocating elected leaders take action to ensure a safe water supply in the state capital.

New post for Bishop Harvey

MADISON, N. J.—Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey has been named the president of the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History, starting immediately. “She has long been a change maker within the denomination,” said Ashley Boggan, the agency’s top executive. Harvey, of the Louisiana Conference, is the immediate past president of the Council of Bishops.

Applications due for fellow program

ATLANTA—Young people interested in social justice ministries can apply to be a Global Mission Fellow. The first application deadline is Dec. 1 for the US-2 fellows, who serve two-year terms in the U.S. Several current fellows offer their perspectives on the program.

New website coming for UWF

NEW YORK—A new member website will debut in the spring and an e-store site should be up and running by the end of the year, United Women in Faith board members were told at their virtual semiannual meeting Oct. 7-8. The board approved a total operating budget of \$25.8 million for 2023, including more than \$4.1 million in grants and scholarships and more than \$5.5 million for membership programs and resources.

Debate looming on how low budget should go

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The two bodies that develop the denomination-wide budget that goes before General Conference agree that deep cuts are needed. However, disagreements are brewing between the Connectional Table and General Council on Finance and Administration board on what stewardship requires in a time of mounting church disaffiliations.

Former Africa University vice chancellor dies at 82

HARARE, Zimbabwe—Former Africa University vice chancellor Rukudzo J. Murapa is being remembered for his vision, networking and leadershi. He died at age 82 on Oct. 27.

President Biden responds to gun-violence resolution

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—During the inaugural meeting of the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Annual Conference in June, voting members approved a resolution urging lawmakers to implement laws that reduce or prevent gun violence. Bishop Bill McAlilly wrote a letter to federal and state elected officials on behalf of the conference. President Joe Biden responded.

—Courtesy of United Methodist News Service



by Betty Stalnaker

Resource Center

Christmas movies for the children

Do you need Christmas movies for children this December? The following titles are available in the Resource Center. Call and reserve the one that best suits your need.

Bugtime Adventures: Joy to the World (The Story of Christmas) (DVD2722CC) 25 min/2007.

When an angel appears to Mary and explains she’s going to have God’s baby, Mary agrees to do whatever God would have her do. She and Joseph travel to Bethlehem for the census, but when they arrive at the inn, there is no room for them. The innkeeper lets them stay in the stable where they prepare for the greatest event in history—the birth of Christ. Meanwhile, the bugs need to relocate their town of Bugglesville because of a fire. They ride along with Mary and Joseph to search for a new place but find the stable already occupied. They continue their search and eventually wind up back at the stable, where they discover the significance of the new baby. Home use only. Ages 4-9. CC.

Go Look in the Manger/The Candy Maker’s Christmas (DVD1167CC) Author: Mead, David/Strahan, Chris. 2 stories, 30 min. each/2002.

Based on a true story, “Go Look in the Manger” is a wonderful tale of Christmas gone by. To 8-year-old Ricky Meyer, the Christmas of 1966 is a wonderland filled with snowballs and manger scenes. Desperate to impress his teacher and classmates with a memorable show-and-tell, Ricky strikes a deal with his mother that jeopardizes his Christmas. When he plays “King of the Hill” with his best friend, the promise he made to his mother is the last thing on his mind. The promise is broken, and Ricky will have to face the consequences on Christmas. But at church on Christmas Eve, Ricky hears the story of the greatest Christmas gift ever, the gift of Jesus. In “The Candy Makers Christmas: The Witness of the Candy Cane,” the candy maker mixes and stirs and twirls his latest creation. And as he walks into the snowy night, August is certain he has made the perfect Christmas present for the royal family. But an accidental encounter in front of the cathedral teaches August that the only truly perfect Christmas present is the gift of Jesus. CC.

Jacob’s Gift (DVD118CC) Author: Lucado, Max. 30 min./2001.

Young Jacob struggles to choose just the right project for his woodworking class to win a contest. His father’s inn is very busy, and Jacob is pulled away from his woodworking by duties and distractions. In the end, he sacrifices winning the contest to do a kindness for a family with a newborn baby and learns an important lesson about giving. This story is based on the book, “Jacob’s Gift,” by Max Lucado.

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever (DVD1080CC) 60 min./1983/available in VHS format.

Beware the Herdmans! They’re the nastiest, dirtiest kids you could ever meet—and they’ve just decided they belong in this year’s

pageant. But the town thinks they belong in the care of the local police. When the curtain finally goes up, a miracle begins. Age: All.

The Crippled Lamb/Alabaster’s Song (DVD2454CC) Author: Lucado, Max. 2 stories, 24 min each/2001.

“The Crippled Lamb” is based on Max Lucado’s story of Joshua, a little lame lamb who has a chance to honor the Christ child one starry night in Bethlehem. It features the voices of Robby and Jodi Benson. “Alabaster’s Song,” also by Lucado, is the story of an angel teaching a little boy that Christmas is not about the gifts under the tree, but about the gift of Jesus.

The Prince of Peace: A Christmas Story (DVD2721C) 29 min

Relive the Christmas story in a fascinating 3D animation spectacular. See the story unfold as Mary and Joseph are visited by angels while Herod plots to erase any competition to his throne. The birth of Jesus in that Bethlehem stable changed the world, and to this very day, men, women and children kneel to worship the one who is called the Prince of Peace. Recommended for ages 3 to 10. Approximately 29 minutes.

The Savior is Born (DVD23CC) 28 min./2005.

Follow Mary and Joseph on their journey to Bethlehem and celebrate the birth of Jesus. An awe-inspiring musical score and Morgan Freeman’s poignant narration capture all the power and beauty of the very first Christmas. Music by Christ Church. (Grades 1-6.)

Three Christmas Classics (DVD1071CC) 3 stories/18-27 min./available in VHS format.

“Christmas Is” is an animated classic about Benji, a disappointed little boy who must play the second shepherd in the school play again. Disappointment turns to joy when a daydream transports him and his lovable pooch, Waldo, back to the first Christmas. There the second shepherd shares with them the angels’ message—that Jesus is born in Bethlehem. (22:00)

“The City that Forgot about Christmas” is the story of a woodcarver who lived in a village that had forgotten about Christmas. When he teaches the children of the town about the birth of Jesus, the uncaring village is filled with the joy of Christ. This animated favorite features the voices of Sebastian Cabot, Charles Nelson Reilly and Louis Nye. (18:00)

And in “The Stableboy’s Christmas,” this award-winning dramatic special finds 10-year-old Tammy traveling back in time to the first Christmas in Bethlehem and witnessing the little stableboy’s act of unselfish love when he gives the Christ child his pet lamb. Tammy then realizes how sharing presents with others is a way of sharing God’s love at Christmas. (27:00) CC.

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

Leave A Legacy To Change Lives

The South Carolina United Methodist Foundation
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scumf@bellsouth.net

November

- Nov. 19—First Fall Festival, Bethlehem UMC, Hartsville, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
- Nov. 19 or 21—weather dependent; Thanks-giving giveaway, Good Samaritans for All People, Old Bishopville High School Field, 10 a.m.
- Nov. 20—Christ the King Sunday
- Nov. 20—Guest preacher the Rev. Lloyd Nyarota from Zimbabwe at Union UMC, Irmo, 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. ser-vices.
- Nov. 24—Thanksgiving Day
- Nov. 24-25—United Methodist Center closed for Thanksgiving
- Nov. 25—Native American Heritage Day
- Nov. 27—Advent begins

December

- Dec. 2-4—Free 29th annual drive-through living nativity, “The Living Christmas Story.” Union UMC, Irmo, 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- Dec. 3—Limitless (virtual), 10 a.m.
- Dec. 6—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 7:30-8:30 p.m.



Photo courtesy of Paula Kirkland

Quilts presented to veterans

On Sunday, Nov. 6, Bluffton UMC, Bluffton, thanked their veterans for their service with a recognition ceremony and reception. Fifteen patriotic quilts were presented to veterans according to their date of service. These quilts were handmade during the year by a group of 11 women from the church. This group was formed in January and plans to continue to sew until all of the veterans in the church are wrapped in a quilt.

- Dec. 10— Calvary UMC, Swansea, free annual nativity exhibition, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. with more than 500 nativity displays. Gift shop, coffee and cocoa.
- Dec. 17—Larry Legend D.R.E.A.M.S pre-sented by Fishers of Men Ministry, Hartsville Middle School Gym, Harts-ville, 2-5 p.m. 843-623-1140
- Dec. 11— Calvary UMC, Swansea, free an-nual nativity exhibition, 3-6 p.m.
- Dec. 17 or 21—Good Samaritans for All People Christmas giveaway, Old

- Bishopville High School gymnasium, 8:30 a.m.
- Dec. 18—Sendoff celebration and farewell event for newly elected Bishop Robin Dease, 4 p.m., St. Andrew By-the-Sea UMC, Hilton Head.
- Dec. 18—11th Annual Benefit Concert, Eddie Huss and Friends, Shandon UMC, Columbia, 5 p.m. Offering to go to 2023 El Salvador Mission Team. <https://www.shandon-umc.org>

- Dec. 21—Winter Solstice
- Dec. 23-27—United Methodist Center closed for Christmas
- Dec. 24—Christmas Eve
- Dec. 25—Christmas Day
- Dec. 31—Watch Night
- Dec. 31—New Year’s Eve

January

- Jan. 1—New Year’s Day
- Jan. 2—United Methodist Center closed
- Jan. 3—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 7:30-8:30 p.m.
- Jan. 6—Epiphany

Union presents ‘The Living Christmas Story’ in December

IRMO—Union United Methodist Church is prepar-ing to host the full production of “The Living Christ-mas Story,” the 29th annual drive-through living nativity. This event will take place Friday through Sun-day, Dec. 2-4, from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. For more than two decades, the Union park-ing lot has been transformed into the city of Bethlehem for the “greatest story ever told,” a drive-through re-enactment of the way life was more than 2,000 years ago on the night Jesus Christ was born. The presentation features scenes that can be viewed as vehicles travel through the Union parking lot. This is a gift to the community, with no admission fee. “The Living Christmas Story” uses real people

from the Irmo community and live animals, all of whom become the town of Bethlehem. Villagers, a blacksmith, the innkeeper, Herod’s Court, the mar-ketplace and many more scenes come alive as peo-ple drive through and experience the night Christ came to all. Often described as beautiful and moving, “The Liv-ing Christmas Story” is an experience many thou-sands of spectators have witnessed—more than 156,418 visitors over the last 28 years. One person said, “My parents brought me to The Liv-ing Christmas Story each year when I was a child. Now I am bringing my own children. It is one of the best memo-ries I have of Christmas, and I want that for my chil-

dren, too!” Irmo police and church volunteers will be in charge of routing and directing traffic. Carpooling is encouraged, or skip the line altogether and hop on a Union UMC church bus and go through the event. Union buses will leave from the parking lot between Lizards Thicket and O’Reilly’s at St. Andrews Road and Thames Valley Road. Union buses and visitors in institutional vehicles (with logo) will be given immediate access to the event. To learn more about “The Living Christmas Story,” go to <https://sites.google.com/view/thelivingchristmasstory>

Central lifts up women and ministry during September celebration

On Sunday, Sept. 25, at Central United Methodist Church, Newberry, the emphasis was all on the women—and their new name, United Women in Faith. The front of the bulletin that morning explained the new name. Worshippers arriv-ing at the church were greeted by members of UWF who gave them brochures of infor-mation about the organization. Members served as lay leaders, ushers

and children’s sermon leaders. Central’s minister, the Rev. Joe Long, preached a sermon titled “Singing Mary’s Song” about women through the ages, up to the modern day who have been servants of God and ministers to their sisters and brothers. After the final hymn, a new banner hon-oring Central’s Stephen Ministry program was presented to the congregation. Also recognized were persons who had made

banner stands. Most of the banners have been bought with the church’s penny project over the decades. Lastly the closely guarded secret: the name of the special Mission Recognition for 2022. This year the award was given to Hannah Pitts Davis, who was an active member of Central’s Circle 8 and active in other areas of the church and community, along with

husband, Willie. Sadly, she passed away unexpectedly 12 days after receiving this award. The service closed with a benediction pronounced by retired minister the Rev. Ada Charles, also a Circle 7 member. United Women in Faith welcomes all women to the organization, whose ministry focuses chiefly on women, youth and chil-dren of the world.



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by the Rev. Walter Strawther

Dec. 4
Purposefully Productive
Lesson Scripture: Judges 9:1-15
Background Scripture: Judges 9:1-21
Key Verse: “Which do you think is better to have ruling over you...?” (Judges 9:2).

The name Abimelech has at least three possible translations in English: “Father-King,” “My father is king” or “Father of the king.” As we read this passage from Judges, we are inclined to believe that Abimelech would call himself “Father-King.” This conclusion is supported by the fact that Abimelech is willing to kill his brothers in order to become king. Abimelech is able to convince the elders/leaders of Shechem to support his violent takeover of the monarchy. We are left to consider how the quest for power causes people to fail to grasp our dependence on God and our mutual dependence on each other.

However, all doesn’t go according to plan for Abimelech. His brother, Jotham, survives the massacre, ascends Mount Gerizim, the mount of blessing, and shares a parable condemning Abimelech and the leaders who have chosen to follow him. In the parable an olive tree, fig tree and grapevine are all invited to serve as king over the trees, but all three decline because they are too busy being productive to hold sway over all of the other trees. The trees finally ask the bramble or thorn bush to be their king, and because the thorn bush is interested in power and is not busy being productive, it agrees to rule over the trees.

As we prepare to celebrate Jesus’s birth, we are reminded that Jesus, who is the king of kings and lord of lords, doesn’t claim to be the “Father-King” but instead proclaims, “My father is king.” Jesus has absolute authority but uses this authority to bring life, not death. Jesus uses his sovereignty to be purposefully productive, bringing salvation to the world.

In the parable a bush becomes king of the trees. Is this comparison relatable in our world? Why or why not? How does this reading help us prepare to celebrate Jesus’s birth?

Dec. 11
Purposefully Righteous
Lesson Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25
Background Scripture: Matthew 1:1-25
Key Verse: “When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he didn’t have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. Joseph called him Jesus” (Matthew 1:24-25).

Matthew tells the story of Jesus’s birth from Joseph’s perspective. Joseph isn’t aware of the circumstances of Mary’s pregnancy initially. He is intent on maintaining proper relationships and is focused on doing the right thing (ending the engagement) without doing any harm (humiliating Mary).

Maintaining healthy, life-honoring relationships is the essence of living a righteous life, and Joseph gives us a prime example. Joseph serves as an example of someone who has power but doesn’t wield it to the detriment of others or for his personal gain. Are we willing to not exercise power when doing so might bring unnecessary shame or harm to someone else?

Moreover, it could be said that Joseph’s righteousness places him in a position of ridicule and criticism. If Joseph knows that Mary is pregnant and the child is not his, then it is highly likely that in a small village others would have the same knowledge. This makes Joseph’s actions even more courageous. He is willing to do what he knows to be right even at the possibility of being scorned by others. Likewise, he chooses to name his son Jesus knowing that this, too, will raise questions. Joseph is willing to

endure so that Emmanuel, God with us, is born. He fulfills God’s purpose for his life and participates in the salvation of the world.

Joseph’s choice to listen to the angel sent to him by God and immediately take Mary as his wife shows his commitment to both God, Mary and all creation. Matthew’s telling of the virgin birth offers us material to consider during this Advent season. Are we committed to being purposefully righteous? Are we committed to fulfilling the role God has assigned to us to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?

Dec. 18
Purposefully Led
Lesson Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12
Background Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12
Key Verse: “They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him” (Matthew 2:2).

Matthew includes this telling of a visit from magi, wise men, from the East as part of Jesus’s birth story. It is critical to have an understanding of who the magi are if we are to begin to understand the inclusion of this story. Commentators often link the magi to the study of astrology and astronomy. From this frame of reference, the magi’s study of the stars cause them to conclude that a new king has been born. We don’t know for sure, but it is highly likely that their knowledge afforded them top-level positions within their government. As high-ranking officials, their visit would have been designed to create good relations or strengthen an already-existing alliance by paying homage to this newborn king. They follow the star God provides until they reach Jerusalem, and they decide to go to the place where you’d expect to find a newborn king, the palace.

Their palace experience does not go as they expect. Instead of finding a baby king, they encounter King Herod, chief priests and legal experts. The trifecta of confusion has a great deal of knowledge but no understanding. The chief priests and legal experts know where to find the true king but decide to forgo their purpose to stay in the employ of this imposter, King Herod. It is the magi who are purposefully led to go and worship the true king, Jesus.

Matthew tells us the magi are filled with joy, while all Jerusalem is troubled. The magi’s wisdom is further evidenced as they recognize King Herod as a fraud and do not return to him. They recognize that although King Herod may sit on the throne, he is not a true king, and they do not need to follow his instructions.

Do we recognize Jesus as our king? How do we find the balance between obeying the laws, policies and regulations established by our various levels of government with our allegiance to God?

Dec. 25
Purposefully Persistent
Lesson Scripture: Matthew 2:13-15
Background Scripture: Matthew 2:13-23

Merry Christmas, although reading this passage from the gospel according to Matthew may not be giving us Christmas vibes. As Matthew continues to share the events surrounding Jesus’s birth, we are confronted with the persistence of evil. King Herod has been outsmarted by the magi and outmaneuvered by Mary and Joseph. His rage leads him to call for the slaughter of innocent male children up to two years old. Perceived power leads to suffering and misery for an untold number of unsuspecting parents. Their joy is replaced with sorrow as this evil is carried out.

However, God protects Mary, Joseph and Jesus from Herod’s plot. God is as persistent in showing love as the forces of evil are in

creating suffering and sorrow. God constantly shows up in visions and dreams to protect our Savior and provides an answer to the evil of this world. King Herod’s persistent evil dies with him, and there is renewed hope that Mary, Joseph and Jesus can go on living their lives as they had planned. However, another evil arises in Herod’s son, Archelaus. Things are never quite the same again, but God’s persistent love continues to defeat the plans and designs of the wicked.

The story of Christmas, of Jesus’s birth, is a story of disruption to the plans of the evil powers that claim authority in this world. God’s response to evil is to send pure love in the form of God’s son, Jesus Christ. This Christmas, we grieve with those who suffer

from oppression. We do not minimize the pain and suffering that is real and prevalent in this world. While at the same time, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the one who has defeated all of the forces of evil, including sin and death.

This Christmas we find ways to be purposefully persistent in our opposition to evil and oppression anywhere and everywhere. Merry Christmas!

Strawther serves as congregational specialist for the Columbia and Hartsville districts as well as congregational specialist for African-American Ministries. He also serves on the South Carolina Conference Board of Ordained Ministry.

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ERTS IN FLORIDA: Another hurricane hit while ERTs were there

From Page 1

We also placed tarps on the damaged roofs of three homes, plus did some chainsaw work and a lot of skid steer work moving debris.

Massive piles of debris remained up and down most streets, which contained the physical aspects of many homes and lives, including waterlogged photos and precious treasured items destroyed by water and mold.

Mold was a major concern, and we took all needed precautions for our personal safety and the survivors who worked alongside us in several locations.

Another hurricane, the Category 1 Hurricane Nicole, came ashore near Tampa, Florida, on Nov. 13, causing us to leave a day earlier than expected while driving through stormy weather.

Desperate times

One flooded home that we worked on was the home of Pete Crumpacker, located three blocks from the ocean. His home had sustained six-and-a-half feet of saltwater, and nothing had been done with it since the hurricane. It was filled with all his family's possessions plus furniture, appliances—and mold from the floor to the ceiling. Crumpacker, like so many others, had no flood insurance because of the high cost of obtaining it. He had lost a lot, but what could be salvaged, including the structure of his home, was in dire jeopardy because of mold and associated hazards. He needed to get everything out and sprayed soon.

Crumpacker kept flooding us with appreciation for our willingness to help with such a dirty and hazardous undertaking, to which we gave all the glory to God. He began to tell how his wife was so overwhelmed with emotion and sorrow that she could not even go back to their home. She was very depressed



Jerry Pullen, Matthew Brautigam and Josh Riddle move a clothes dryer out of a flooded home at Fort Myers as Don Beatty looks on.

and had a hard time dealing with the entire disaster, which literally almost took their life.

They had decided to ride out the hurricane, which was almost a fatal mistake. He told that as the floodwaters rose in the dark of night, they began to climb onto furniture and then the countertops to stay out of the water. As the floodwaters continued to rise, the refrigerator began to float, and they eventually had to climb onto it to survive. Crumpacker took a hatchet and chopped a hole into the attic so they could keep their heads above the water. As he was chopping a hole into the roof, the water began to subside, and their lives were spared.

Crumpacker had such a wonderful attitude and was always smiling. We commented about his wonderful disposition, and he stated, "I am so thankful to Jesus for sparing our lives and realize that the rest is just material things. When life gives you a lemon, make lemonade."

Team Leader the Rev. Mike Evans tells of another man named Walter Graham, who his

team was sent to help.

"Walter was flooded out and was in dire straits," Evans said. "A company had charged him \$8,000 to remove the furniture out of his home and did not include removing all the cabinets, paneling, Sheetrock, insulation, etc.—mucking it out, which is what we did."

Evans said the man "starting crying tears of joy when he found out our services were free."

"Walter talked of how our ERTs gave him renewed hope amidst a seemingly hopeless situation. He kept thanking everyone, and we once again directed all the praise and glory to God, who equips us, sustains us and is our Lord and redeemer," Evans said.

Team Bravo on their heels

S.C. ERT Team Bravo responded from November 13-18 with 17 volunteers, two ERT trailers and one skid steer. They were still in Florida as of press time.

Their first stop was at Crumpacker's house to tear out around two bathrooms and then on to five other muck-outs of homes, with skid steer work and tarping.



Mounds of debris piles near ocean at Fort Myers, Florida.

As Team Leader Chuck Marshall said, "The people here are so devastated and down in a depressed state. We are so thankful to shine the light of Jesus into their areas of darkness and bring God's hope and love to them. Our teams are working so hard and diligent, and I am so proud of them."

Team Leader the Rev. Stephen Turner added, "Just because it is not still in the mainstream news does not mean that everything is back to normal—far from it for years to come. We need to continue to pray and support the people until it is."

We were blessed this past year with three new heavy-duty ERT trailers and additional ERT equipment from generous donations from across our conference, making this long-distance mission possible as we deployed all the new trailers.

We are still in the process of purchasing some needed supplies. Further donations can be sent to the conference office earmarked to UMVIM ERT.

Robinson is the S.C. UMVIM ERT coordinator.



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