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December 2023

Bishop kicks off 'District Days' to help cultivate strong souls, strong leaders

By Jessica Brodie

A healthy, strong church can effect change for God's kingdom. But it takes strong church leaders—and strong, Spirit-filled souls—to cultivate a strong church.

To help develop that strength, South Carolina Resident Bishop L. Jonathan Holston is making the rounds to every district in the annual conference to explore "Strengthening

Your Soul to Lead."

Based on "Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry," the book by Dr. Ruth Haley Barton, the bishop's Days in the District began in November and will run until May.

The district days are designed to help people learn to be authentic in their leadership, forge deeper connections

with others, make better decisions and experience greater fulfillment.

All are welcome to attend, from clergy to other church leaders—lay leaders, committee chairs, lay servants, United Women in Faith or United Methodist Men presidents, etc.

See "District Days," Page 15

Dementia-care advocates gather to learn

By Dan O'Mara

LAKE JUNALUSKA, North Carolina—People with dementia and other neurocognitive impairments are typically viewed from a medical perspective—a critical perspective, for sure.

"But when you see people only through the medical lens," retired UMC Bishop Kenneth L. Carder said, "you've got a very narrow focus on the brain—and we are much more than that three-pound organ."

"We need, therefore, to expand the lens through which we view people with neurocognitive impairments, because the medical lens, important as it is, focuses only on symptoms, and the symptoms are all losses, and the losses mean diminishment. And since we live in a culture that tends to value people in terms of capacities, diminished capacities means diminished personhood."

Carder, who served the Nashville and Mississippi areas in a dozen years as an active bishop, knows better than most what it means to live with dementia. His spouse, Linda Carder, died in 2019, a decade after she was diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia—a progressive, incurable and ultimately fatal disease that takes a toll mentally and emotionally, as well as physically. Carder served as her primary care partner throughout their journey with dementia.

His 2019 book, "Ministry with the Forgotten: Dementia Through a Spiritual Lens," has become a must-read for anyone living with dementia and for those who desire to come alongside and walk with those who are serving as care partners.

See "Dementia," Page 14

Clothed with love



Photo by Jessica Brodie

A shopper browses the shoe rack at Stallville Clothes Closet, a free outreach held monthly at the Summerville church.

Stallville Clothes Closet helps neighbors with new ministry

By Jessica Brodie

SUMMERVILLE—Sunlight streams through the wide glass windows of the spacious room as shoppers pick through items, their faces lit with smiles as they chat.

"Oooh, cute!" exclaims one, holding up a dress.

"You should get that!" another tells her.

They giggle, admiring each other's choices. The atmosphere is warm, cozy, like any clothing shop—only this is no regular shop.

It's the Stallville Clothes Closet, a monthly ministry in the fellowship hall at Stallville United Methodist Church, where everything is free, everybody is welcome and the volunteers strive

to make everyone a regular.

Once a month, typically the last Friday from 10 a.m. to noon, a team of volunteers gather to transform the vast space into a sea of high-quality goods, everything from baby to adult clothing as well as housewares and children's toys.

"We really try to make it like a shopping experience," said volunteer Sharon Barr, a member of the church since 2001 who loves helping at the Clothes Closet. Grinning as she heads off to help a shopper, "I have a lady on her third bag. I'm so happy!"

See "Clothes Closet," Page 24

United Women in Faith gather for 51st annual meeting

By Wanda Chandler-Flowers

AIKEN—More than 200 women from across the state gathered at St. John United Methodist Church Oct. 20-21 for the 51st Annual Meeting of the South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith.

All 12 of the state's districts were represented as attendees explored the theme "Unity in Christ." The Scripture for the weekend was Ephesians 4:2-3, "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one

another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (NIV).

With everything that's going on in the world, the theme is fitting, said Kathy Roys, vice president of South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith.

See "United Women in Faith," Page 15

A unique retreat: Sea Islands

By Jana Clack

JOHNS ISLAND—Overlooking the Bohicket Creek, South Carolina Camps & Retreat Ministries Executive Director Arthur Spriggs witnesses a pair of dolphins making their way across the waterway from the dock.

Sightings like this are part of the experience often had at Sea Islands Camp & Retreat Center, Spriggs said.

"Sea Islands is a place set apart, truly a place where heaven meets earth, and God's creation is all around," Spriggs said.

See "Sea Islands," Page 13

Apportionments even with last year

By Jessica Brodie

With a little more than a month until 2023 books close, conference financial leaders are still looking to achieve roughly 90 percent collection of apportionments.

That's the word from Beth Westbury, treasurer and director of administrative services for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, who said Nov. 15 her office had received

See "Apportionments," Page 14

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Dr. Anthony Hodge releases second book: 'Can You Get Better? Sure, You Can'

After the success of his first book, Rock Hill District Superintendent Dr. Anthony Hodge has just released his second book, also geared toward creating positive change in one's life.

Titled "Can You Get Better? Sure, You Can! 14 Approaches Guaranteed To Help You Become A Better You," Hodge's book is billed as a powerful self-help book for individuals who are already experiencing and are ready for a positive change in their lives on an ongoing basis.

His first book, "A Better You: Christian Life Beyond Negative Thinking," was published in 2022.

The target audience for the new book include people who are looking to become more optimistic and are open or looking to establish a strong relationship with a higher power.

"In order for your life to get better, you are personally going to play a vital role in helping it get better," Hodge said. "So you realize that you need to start doing things differently and open yourself to new experiences. You also realize that in order for you to achieve your true potential, you may have to change your relationships and acknowledge that you, as an individual, are worth making changes to so you can achieve greatness in life, which is just a few steps away. If this is all you, then this book is exactly what you need to make those strides and reform yourself in all three forms: physical, mental and spiritual."

The book invites readers to work on themselves, and the author encourages readers to see themselves as their biggest investment, which is worth investing in. The book is a medium by which readers can embrace upcoming change.

Reviewer Tambry Harris said about the book, "The Reverend Dr. Anthony Hodge wants the best for you. His heart and spirit shine through his encouragement in every section of this book. You are given hope for a better life



Hodge

and are able to see what is possible. As you read through the book, you will hear Anthony's voice talking to you as a friend over coffee, inspiring you to invest in yourself and the person you were created to become: You are worth this effort to reach your maximum potential in all aspects of your life: mind, body and spirit. You are capable of transformation using intentional steps

tailored to your growth style. If your learning style is visual, there are visualization activities. If your style is auditory, you are encouraged to listen to a related video or podcast. For kinesthetic learners, you are encouraged to do a specific physical activity. Other times, you are encouraged to read or write something down to process the idea more deeply. If you want to intentionally focus on your mind, body, and spirit, utilize probing questions to consider which actions you need to take to create your own personal growth plan and commit to actions tailored to moving toward a better you, the best you, you are in the right place."

The Rev. Sharon Spann Gamble, who serves as pastor for the New Hope-St. Paul Charge in the Walterboro District, said she appreciates the practicality of the steps Hodge offers.

"Indeed, the steps and approaches Dr. Hodge outlines serve as great resources and tools I have utilized during my spiritual formation and spiritual direction practices," Spann Gamble said. "Prayer is important and vital. All of us at different stages in our lives and our spiritual journey can benefit by engaging in these practices. As indicated, we need to be intentional, removing distractions and focusing only on our rhythm of worship. This allows us to embrace God for opportunities that show his glory. The questions in the book promote positive thinking while focusing on God as we cultivate/nurture our thoughts and actions as we deem to draw nearer to knowing Christ."



She said she especially embraced where readers are asked to "record praying."

"I have recorded myself (rarely) while practicing a sermon," Spann Gamble said. However, I have never thought of recording my prayers. Writing down my prayers days/months later is a testimony to God's active grace when prayers are answered. If we want to seek revelation, there must be personal application, following the steps as outlined as we embrace being a doer of God's word."

In addition to serving as the district superintendent of the Rock Hill District of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, Hodge is a retired U.S. Navy Chaplain and a certified spiritual director. He and his wife, Dr. Sheila Elliott Hodge, are active UMC clergy. He is an advocate for personal transformation. The book can be found on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0CLH7BFTT>.

Broad River Arts Center opens at Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC

The words of Proverbs 16:9 remind us, "The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps."

Today, Virginia Wingard Memorial United Methodist Church is living proof that God's timing is the best timing and nothing will rush the plans God has for his people.

After 10 years of planning and careful renovation, the activity center of Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC is now housing the newly established Broad River Arts Center, a community arts center.

Church pastor the Rev. Beth Faulk and other church and community leaders were on hand for a special dedication celebration Nov. 5, officially cutting the ribbon for the Broad River Arts Center and culminating 10 long years of dreaming, praying, planning and unexpected delays.

The inklings of a performing arts center began in 2013 when then-pastor the Rev. John Culp asked Fletcher Carter, a deacon in the UMC, to present a stewardship play during worship at Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC. The play's focus was about thinking outside the proverbial box and using the gifts God gives.

Dr. Greg Boatwright, Virginia Wingard Memorial's music director, was inspired by the play. He began to think and dream of a Broad River Arts Center that would reach into the community.

Plans began to formulate about what it might look like to renovate the activity center to house such an arts center.

Fast forward 10 years, and renovations finally began during summer 2023.

On Nov. 5, the church celebrated the completion of all the improvements for the space, including new paint, a beautiful staircase, a new state-of-the-art sound booth with hot storage located behind new doors on the landing, a new coat closet with storage under the staircase, rows of theatrical lighting, the placement of a portable stage (thanks to Michael Stroupe, Jim Browning and Neal Asman), improved overall existing lighting with new dimmers, new heavy foyer doors to control street noise, a new pass-through door from the kitchen to access the carpeted dressing room, numerous electrical outlets for the makeup tables, and in the kitchen a new fan to circulate air when people are cooking.

On Dec. 10, the center will host its inaugural concert when the Palmetto Mastersingers will present a concert of Christmas and seasonal songs under the direction of Bruce Hall.

The activity center was the original building for worship until the sanctuary was built at Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC. For 70 years, it has been home to a myriad of purposes including a gymnasium for basketball, a meeting space for various community groups, a space for church meals, a gathering place for Bible studies, special programs, the Daytimers group, leaders of the Alston Wilkes Society, local voting, concerts, and contemporary worship.

The Broad River Arts Center has a seven-member Board of Advisors comprising church members and people related to the arts. It will continue to offer a variety of events throughout the year. The board is planning for two theatrical plays and two musicals each year as well as special speakers, piano concerts and other performing arts shows in order to draw people of all ages to the campus of Virginia Wingard Memorial.

Virginia Wingard Memorial and the arts center extend deep thanks to SEED Architecture, ETI Electrical Engineering, Mashburn Construction Company, DNB Electrical, Gattis Pro Audio, Productions Unlimited Inc, Southern Staircase, Palmetto Decorators and FloorCo Inc. for all the expertise they brought to the table to create this newly renovated, multiuse space. Thanks are also extended to the Building Committee, Ed Abston, Jane Andrews-Nicol, Frank Selman and Ceylle Stroupe who helped make decisions for the renovations to get off the ground. Much appreciation also goes to Jane Andrews-Nicol who has faithfully maintained the lines of communication between everyone involved to ensure that all lists were checked off to completion.

All monies donated to BRAC by members and friends of Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC and given by The Kendall Foundation have helped to cover almost all the costs of the great renovations.

Faulk said the church looks forward to all the ways the Broad River Arts Center will reach out into the community with the light of Christ.



Dr. Greg Boatwright, center, cuts the ribbon to open the new Broad River Arts Center at VWMUMC. With him are church pastor the Rev. Beth Faulk, Ed Abston and others who made the longtime dream possible. Boatwright was also celebrated for his 25 years as music director at the church in addition to BRAC founder.

Viewpoints



Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

Good to gather

I know a lot of people who fiercely believe in and follow Jesus, but they have no desire to be part of a church community. Scarred by mean or judgmental Christians they've encountered and even what many refer to as church trauma, they steer clear.

I always took the urging in Hebrews 10:25—that we should not be “giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching”—as addressing why we should continue going to church even if we don't really want to, as well as encouragement for those persecuted to continue to meet even if it's risky. Gathering together strengthens us and allows the Spirit to move powerfully.

Lately I've been attending a lot more church events, particularly on the conference level. After the pandemic shut things down for so long, particularly in the church, I had the wonderful opportunity to go to the Killingsworth gala recently, and just before we went to press on this edition of the newspaper, I got the chance to be at the Greenwood District Day, featuring wisdom from Bishop Jonathan Holston and other conference leaders. This June we had our first in-person Annual Conference since 2019, and last month I got the chance to gather with United Methodist communicators from all over the nation.

It's been good to get out again, to see people, to gather.

I think that's one of the reasons so much strife, division and isolation are occurring in our church right now—alone we are at our worst. The devil knows this and, like a prowling lion, searches for a way to attack (1 Peter 5:8).

But together, we are mighty in the spirit of the Lord. Together, we can learn and grow in new ways.

I've never been a big fan of meetings, and I get my best work done in solitude. But there is so much good that happens when we intentionally gather. Yes, it's extra work and travel, but it's important. It reminds us we are all together in this kingdom, all united in a common mission despite our differences and quirks.

I'm so glad to know District Days will be happening across the annual conference. Two more are scheduled for this month (see article, Page 1), and I encourage you to attend your district gathering. Even if you don't hold a leadership position in your church, it's good to go, good to work together for a stronger and mightier kingdom of God here on earth.

Even if you're an introvert, go and gather. Even if there's strife, go and gather. Even if you're tired, go and gather. We need this more than we know.

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

Oh, what a night

“At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises: ‘Glory to God in the heavenly heights, peace to all men and women on earth who please him.’ As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherds talked it over. ‘Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us.’ They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were impressed.”—Luke 2:13-18 (MSG)

Amid all we face in our communities and in our own lives, the hope, joy, peace and love of the Advent season await us. In a season when every heart should be happy and light, many of us struggle with burdens that threaten to steal our joy.

The angel's cry of “peace on earth” seems like more of a wish than a blessing. And those who want to sing carols and hear the Christmas story seem so small against the backdrop of a troubled world.

Throughout history, the good news has always been set amid world events as a promise that God works among that which seems small and insignificant to change the world.

My friends, God loves this world and will not give up on it; nor will God give up on us.

It's an audacious claim that the birth of a baby in a small town could possibly matter. But this story is about more than just a baby. It's about the Savior, the light of the world. It's about Emmanuel—God with us. The longing of God's people to experience God's presence long ago is our longing still to experience God's presence today.

On that miraculous night when Christ was born, the angel told the shepherds, “Do not be afraid.” But they were terrified. The angel persisted, saying, “Don't be afraid, for

I bring you good news of great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

And what happened next? The shepherds went. They didn't stop to consider the economic impact of the decision. They didn't take a vote, form a committee or request more information. They hurried off to Bethlehem and found things exactly as the angel had said.

Just as the shepherds experienced on that night long ago, we celebrate what God has already done for us, and we take time to remember that God is moving, God has moved and God is moving us. God is calling us to see and believe, and to tell the story to all whom we meet.

God doesn't want us to become stuck—stuck in what was, stuck in the glory of what used to be or stuck in the memory of how things were. God's desire is for us to be part of the new thing God is doing.

The true gift of the Christmas story resides in the promise that God really is with us and that we are not alone. Wherever God calls us to go, God also accompanies us all the way there.

So no matter the circumstances we face, Advent arrives, calling us back to the manger, back to God's presence and back to the promise that we serve a mighty God who has plans for us. Plans to prosper us and not to harm us. Plans to give us hope and a future.

This year, in this season of Advent, amid the backdrop of a troubled world, we journey with anticipation toward Christmas. Despite all the distractions around us, we focus on the hope that exists because of the birth of the Christ child.

We anticipate the joy of experiencing God's promise fulfilled, and in so doing, our hearts are prepared both to receive the greatest gift and to share it freely with others.

Letters to the Editor

Forever love

One of the most beautiful sacraments in The United Methodist Church is the baptism of children. As we say, “Dearly beloved, baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The parents make a vow to “live before this child a life that becomes the gospel.” The household of faith (church) makes a vow to live that he or she may grow in the knowledge and love of God.

It is so sad when a parent stops loving their child or family member because they are homosexual. This rejection of children of God is being practiced by churches, too.

The sacrament of baptism cannot be changed or denied. This child will always be in the grace and love of Christ.

Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia

The Quietness of God

My soul in peace forever trods
In the quietness of God.
With lowly heart and willing ear
His hushed refrain I've learned to hear.

Thou art not silent, Rock of Heav'n,
Thy breath is loud like tempest fierce.
Thy song to earth Thine hand hath giv'n,
Thy cry eternity hath pierced.

As in storm and wind and rain,



Guest Commentary

by David Bryant

The 'crazy' reason for the season

In the midst of the holiday season, it's easy to get caught up in the decorations, celebrations and festivities, the dinners and parties and pageantry. For many, though, there is little joy. The American Psychological Association says that "38 percent of people surveyed said their stress increased during the holiday season, which can lead to physical illness, depression, anxiety and substance misuse."

Headly stuff, and yet it's equally easy to dwell compulsively on the events immediately surrounding Jesus' birth, the circumstances that faced this improbable family and the extraordinary life to come for this infant. But it's more difficult to ponder the "why" of it all. Why was it even necessary to send Jesus? Was the world and humanity really in that big of a mess? Wasn't there any other solution, any other resolution any other alternative? Any "softer and easier" way?

Further, what does God think of his creation today? Does the evidence indicate any "value added" contribution of Jesus' sacrifice toward realizing any greater effectiveness than the laws, rules and regulations enforcing the commandments had been? Ouch! What does Jesus think? Was it worth it? Would he do it again or something—anything—different?

Is it really solely about our personal salvation and ticket to an afterlife of leisure in spite of our personal choices and selfishness? Are we, as the human condition, any closer to the realization of his kingdom on earth than we were 2,000 years ago? That's the job he left for us when he went to prepare us a place with the Father. How's that going for him? How's it going for us?

Adam Stanley tells us in his video series "Investigating Jesus" that the story of Jesus is not a Bible story. The Bible is the story of Jesus. Jesus is the reason the Bible exists. The Torah was sufficient for Judaism and still is. The story of Jesus is not equal to the stories of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, David and Goliath, Moses or any others in the Bible.

The Bible is a collection of documentations of the movement that began with the resurrection of Jesus and coalesced 300 years after the event of the resurrection took place. Similarly, Wesley tells us that Scripture is "all that is necessary" toward salvation, but salvation is through Jesus Christ, and the intention of Scripture is to guide us toward him.

I recently read, but know not where or from whom, the following: "Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?' Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he

has sent'" (John 6:28–29).

Most of us want to know what we can do to please God. We should be ready to serve him in any way he leads us, but we should not feel that we must offer him our works in order to be acceptable to him. We are made acceptable to him through Christ, and our work is to believe in him. Any service we offer God should be done in faith because we love him, not to be accepted by him. God is not for sale.

In the above Scripture, Jesus' disciples asked him what they could do "to do the works God requires." He gave a very simple answer, telling them all they needed to do was to believe in him. By faith, we should always obey God and follow his lead. Take every opportunity you can to serve God, but always remember that the work you do isn't what makes you acceptable; it is your faith in Jesus Christ.

Obedience. That's the real question, isn't it? But obedience to what, to whom? Jesus gave us the greatest commandments and the new commandment.

With the new commandment came a new covenant, and with the new covenant a new charge, direction and definition of obedience.

What does this have to do with the aforementioned mental health, you may be asking?

Consider the emotionally fragile, the distant, the over-sensitive, those who suffer with the "holiday blues" and unexplained anxiety, dread and despair. What if they don't need compassion, understanding, tolerance, pity and inclusion? What if we have these feelings and conditions as a direct result of "getting it"?

What if our sadness, angst and grief is a function of overwhelmingly compassionate love for Jesus and the despair of our corporate refusal to allow him into his own world?

What if we "get" that just as the greatest commandments are the summation of both the Ten Commandments and the Old Testament, the new commandment is the single sentence summation of the entire story of Jesus Christ, New Testament Scripture and the Bible as a whole?

What if the world could realize the new commandment is the "reason for the season" and Jesus' birth was the means to get us to that end?

I suspect there would be a great sigh of relief from those of us on the emotional, spiritual margins feeling isolated and sad in this "joyous" season.

Bryant is a member of Bethesda United Methodist Church, Easley.



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Steven L. Brown

A tale of two men at Christmas

Bartholomew Farasie burst through the door and into the sanctuary of First Church on Christmas Eve at 5:57 p.m. for the six o'clock service.

The wife of the self-described perfect father of the perfect family was almost knocked over as he let the door swing back behind him after he made his entrance.

Seizing an usher, he told her, "I'd like a seat at the front where everyone can see me—I mean, where my children can see everything."

The family fell into line behind him as he followed the usher to their seating. As he sat down in the pew, he placed his overcoat beside him. One by one the children stepped over their father, clothes pressed and ironed, pants creased and dresses pleated. Last came his wife, slightly stooped over and whose eyes seemed to match the red trim of her dress. She seemed to collapse more than sit as she took her place next to her husband.

As he listened to "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," he thought, "This is great! Everything is falling into place for my perfect Christmas."

His wife had made sure the cards were all sent, the house decorated, the baking finished, the presents all wrapped, and she had even put lights on the house. His Christmas was set with dinner at 7:30 and presents to follow at 8:30. He felt all would be finished by 9 p.m., then he and his wife could slip out to the Holloman's Xmas party, a great opportunity to meet potential clients.

Bartholomew was startled to see the usher standing with the offering plate in her hand. As he reached into his pocket, she began to smile. The smile faded as he pulled out his hanker chief to blow his nose as he passed the plate on. When the choir began to sing "We three kings of orient are, bearing gifts ..." he was congratulating himself on the great deal he had gotten on gifts this year—fruitcakes! He had bought them on sale last year after the holidays were over and had kept them in the refrigerator until he gave them away this year. He had even added a nice form note in a Christmas card prepared by his secretary and, in two days, it was all done.

During the sermon he got a bit sleepy. But wasn't that to be expected after a person worked so hard that day? He heard the Scripture "For unto you is born this day ... (This day? I didn't check the stock reports today. Well, I guess that's okay, the market is closed tomorrow. I wonder how Armour Steel is doing?) ... a Savior, Christ the Lord" (I need to call Phil Lord about that contract. I wonder if there will be time tonight?).

Afterwards, they did indeed sit down to eat at 6:31 p.m. and started opening presents by 7:55 p.m. He was surprised when the children protested their parents leaving for the party, but Bartholomew reminded them that they had their presents to play with and Christmas was also about others.

When they returned around midnight, they prepared quickly for bed. As he pulled up the covers, he heard the church bells chime the hour from downtown. Yet inside was an ache, an itch or a hunger. He couldn't quite name it, but something was missing.

All the cards and the gifts, the meal and the party, the whirlwind of activities and everything present were all there in the Christmas he had made.

What could it be?

Then with a sigh, Bartholomew Farasie rolled over, missed once more the Christ of Christmas, and went off to sleep.

When David Adamson had climbed the stairs to First Church on that same Christmas Eve, he was 20 minutes late. He had stopped to give a co-worker who missed the bus a ride to his family and had gone by the

store one more time. He had been searching everywhere for weeks trying to find the Baby Walk-n-Talk doll that his oldest daughter had wanted, but no one had it. As he struck out yet again, he headed home. When he got there, everyone rushed to get ready. As they ran out the door, they passed the pile of half-addressed Christmas cards waiting on the table.

Now, as he held the door for his wife and family to go inside the sanctuary, the usher directed them up to the balcony and sat them—on the last row. After each one found their place, he slumped down in the pew beside them.

He stared down at his shoes. "Here we are again, Lord," he thought, "Christmas Eve and nothing is ready. I haven't finished the cards so I let down my friends. I forgot to get the flour my wife asked for yesterday so she could finish making the Christmas cookies and disappointed her. I never could find the doll my daughter really wanted and so I failed her. We got here late so now we're up in the balcony on the last row. What a mess I've made. And worse, I let the stress of the holidays get to me and took it out on the people at work by being short-tempered. I feel like such a failure. I let my family down and I let you down, Lord. I've made such a mess of Christmas."

And with that, a tear rolled down his cheek.

As the words of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" reached his ears, David's head snapped up. Hark! something is going on. Pay attention, he thought. His eyes moved to the large nativity scene on the altar. As he looked down, he saw Mary and Joseph. They weren't ready either. Look where they had to have the baby.

He glanced over at the shepherds; they were lowly members of society, not well thought of. And at the wise men, he thought, I read they really got there late, in fact the family had left the stable and was living in a house by the time they got there.

As the sermon began, he listened to the message and hope arose. All those gathered around the baby came as they were, with struggles and fears, doubts and needs. He heard the Scripture, "I bring you tidings of great joy for you (for me, too?) and all people ... that today is born a Savior, Christ the Lord."

And suddenly it became so clear to David: Christmas is not about what I bring or I have but what God gives and I receive. He saw the baby in the manger amidst all the people and realized—they thought they were giving him shelter and gifts and support for his needs, but Christmas is all about God sending Jesus for my help, my support and my needs.

A tear of joy rolled down his cheek.

Later, as they opened the presents, he looked around the room at his children laughing—without the doll—and his wife smiling at him—she loves me, anyway. And after staying up too late playing games together and watching "The Greatest Story Ever Told," he laid down in his bed.

It was then he heard the church bells. And David Adamson rolled over, pulling the covers up to his chin and said, "Thank you, Jesus, for coming for me."

And with that, he had truly received the Christ of Christmas ... and drifted off to sleep.

Brown is the Marion District Superintendent for the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. During the Advent season, Brown likes to amuse himself by writing stories and reflections for the season, often from the parables of Jesus. Thank you for indulging him this holiday season.

LETTERS: Reflections

From Page 4

So is the voice of birds thine own.
Thou sings in life and joy and pain,
Proclaiming righteousness and hope.

Though Thou art not always loud,
Thy voice is heard but all the same.
A gentle hum, a quiet sound,
Thou whispers Thine eternal name.

I'll take these songs Thy breath doth give
And in this quiet always live.

(Excerpted with permission from the author's second published book, "Notes from the Hem," a collection of Christian poetry and prose.)

*Autumn Leigh Waite
Bluffton United Methodist Church, Bluffton*

A completed church celebrates

Partnership between Union UMC, Irmo, and Chitenderano UMC, Zimbabwe, finishes new sanctuary



by Allison Trussell

CHITENDERANO, Zimbabwe—In a service filled with joy and faith, two churches celebrated the dedication of Chitenderano United Methodist Church on Sept. 24.

A week earlier, a United Methodist Volunteers in Mission team of 12 from Union UMC, Irmo, arrived to help finish the church and with preparations.

Another team from Union visited in 2022 to roof the church and had left money to finish the church. The team was invited back for the Sept. 24 dedication. Nine of the members—Victor Caldwell, Chris Elvis, Robin Landers, Chris Lindler, Tim Livingston, Lora McKinney, Jim Miller, Marjorie Rehlander and Allison Trussell—were able to make the return trip. They were joined by the Rev. Faye Jones, Dana McAdams and Scott Rehlander.

The Rev. Honest Sithole and his congregation greeted the team Sept. 16 with hugs, songs and dinner. The team was housed with members of the congregation and treated as part of the family for the week.

The Sept. 17 Sunday service, led by the Union team, offered the Zimbabweans a glimpse into how Americans worship. Jones, the associate pastor at Union, preached on the Holy Spirit and how it lives in each person. The Rehlanders introduced Children's Church to the congregation, and Livingston offered a Sunday school-type lesson on faith. Communion by intinction was offered, and Lindler took great delight in showing the children how to dip their pieces of bread into the juice. The service was a blend of Union's traditional and contemporary services; the Zimbabweans seemed to especially enjoy the song "Days of Elijah."

Following the service and in the week following, the team and the congregation began the final work on the church: painting the interior and exterior, installing 30 new pews and commemorative plaques, and cleaning. The team also brought two computers—one for the church and one for the secondary school—and soccer balls for the primary and secondary schools.

"The finishing of the church was a big dream which has come to realization because the church was too big for local people to finish alone," Sithole said. "Union UMC are good life partners for Chitenderano church."

With monies left by the first team added to their own fundraising efforts, the congregation was able to wire the church, tile the floor and have the altar furniture built and installed before the team arrived. The church in partnership with Home Is Best—a group of those who once worshipped or who had parents and relatives who worshipped at the church but were no longer in the area—raised funds for the labor costs. Families and friends were invited to purchase pieces of furniture as well as pews, and the Union team brought brass plates to be fixed to the items. In addition, the congregation at Union raised money to purchase 20 pews.

"There was symbiosis in whatever we were doing. The tripartite was working as a team and in harmony," Sithole said.

Ground was broken for a new sanctuary for Chitenderano in 2012 after Cyclone Eline hit the area, damaging the old sanctuary's roof. Church leaders feared for the safety of their members. Sithole arrived in 2020 and oversaw work to the gable level. The Rev. Lloyd Nyarota, who grew up nearby and is a close friend of Landers, approached her about a partnership to roof the church. Union UMC enthusiastically agreed and the 2022 team roofed the church and built the altar area.

The labors of so many were celebrated during the Sept. 24 service, which was presided over by Bishop Eben Nhwatiwa, bishop of the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area.

Following a procession from the old sanctuary to the new and the uncovering of a church plaque, Nhwatiwa cut



(Above) Team members paint the interior of the church. (Left) The congregation processes from the old sanctuary to the new one. The Christ candle and banner were created and given by Union UMC. (Below left) Chris Elvis paints the exterior of the church as the sun sets. (Below center left) The Rev. Lloyd Nyarota touches up one of the windows painted by his nephew, Simbarashe Nyarota, who was killed in an auto accident before the windows were completed. (Below center right) Bishop Eben Nhwatiwa offers a word of welcome. (Below right) Rev. Faye Jones prays over the communion elements.



the ribbon and unlocked the door, allowing the congregation and special guests to enter.

Local, district and national leadership offered words of welcome and recognition of special guests in the crowd of more than 400, including the pastors who preceded Sithole and village leaders.

Caldwell, team co-leader, thanked the Zimbabwe leadership for their unwavering support and noted that Irmo is to Columbia as Chitenderano is to Mutare. He also officially presented a banner given to the church by Union's Banner Babes, a group that designs and creates church banners. The congregation of Union made bracelets as an outward symbol of their partnership. Those were handed out during the Sept. 17 service.

Landers thanked the congregation for the love the team had received and Edwrd Mukoyi, church lay leader, for his leadership. A photo album of pictures taken the previous year was then presented to him, with a promise of a Volume 2 that will cover this trip and the dedication.

Landers recalled that in 2022, she and Caldwell asked Sithole to make a wish list and to dream big. On that list, among other things, was a vehicle. Sithole serves three churches on this circuit and travels the distance between them either on foot or by bicycle. The team learned on this trip that the church has raised about \$3,000 toward the vehicle.

Elvis, team co-leader, then stepped forward. "With the help from Union United Methodist Church, let me invite

Rev. Sithole to receive this matching gift to be used for church work."

The service was paused for several minutes as deafening celebrations broke out. Congregants cheered their pastor, ululated, clapped hands, beat drums and shakers, and hugged. After jumping into Nyarota's arms, Sithole broke into song, "Praise God, Alleluia. Praise God, Amen." Team members gleefully joined in with their voices and hugs.

Nhwatiwa extended appreciation to South Carolina Bishop L. Jonathan Holston before beginning his sermon based on Exodus 36:1-7 and addressing the discord currently surrounding the church.

He recalled his parents' struggle to send him to school before the church provided a scholarship for him to have a bright future. For him to be what he is today, he said, is because of The United Methodist Church.

"It is true that challenges come and very big ones, but it does not mean that you can abandon your family because a brother is not cooperating. ... In life, there is not any problem which cannot be solved when people group together."

After the service, the dignitaries, friends and families were invited to lunch. The team from Union left shortly afterward to return to Harare.

"Luke 17:21 says, 'The kingdom of God does not come with observation, nor will they say, 'Here it is!' or 'There it is!' For remember the Kingdom is within you.'

"I see [the kingdom of God] in the people of Chitenderano," Landers said.

Black clergywomen explore Black girl magic and 30 years of organized work

By Dr. Rosetta Ross

MYRTLE BEACH—From Oct. 29 to Nov. 1, African-American clergywomen of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church gathered on the coast for their yearly retreat.

Initiated to provide an opportunity to gather and affirm each other for individual and joint clergy responsibilities that lie ahead, the retreat offers a time of relaxation, relief, fun and self-reflection. In addition to games, movies and sharing, the session explored the theme “#Black Girl Magic: Religious Meaning and the Labor We Perform.” It was led by South Carolina Annual Conference elders; the Rev. Rosetta Ross, professor of religion at Spelman College; and the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith, conference director of Connectional Ministries.

The retreat offered opportunities to take an account of the often unseen emotional and intellectual labor women perform and to consider the meaning of significant milestone experiences in their lives.

This year marks three decades of organized work by the AACW. Begun when there were fewer than a dozen combined African-American women full elders, deacons, provisional and local pastors, today the group’s roll and the annual conference boasts more than 100 Black women clergy.

Long reputed for the greatest percentage of African Americans in any annual conference of the UMC in the continental United States, the number of South Carolina



The retreat offered a time of relaxation, relief, fun and self-reflection.

Black clergywomen is steadily moving toward proportional parity in relation to the number of clergy and the number of churches in the Annual Conference.

The organization began in 1993 when Black clergywomen gathered at Silver Hill UMC, Spartanburg, to develop a means of mutual support. Today, the group assembles annual workshops to enhance members’ skills and retreats for renewal and replenishment. Over the years, workshops and retreats convened at Hilton Head Island, Hickory Knob, Myrtle Beach, The Beaufort Penn Center and Asbury Hills. Meeting facilitators have included a founder of womanist

theology, the late Katie Geneva Cannon; practical theology and pastoral care leader Carolyn McCrary; UMC denominational administrator and development officer Elaine Jenkins; womanist Christian social ethicist Marcia Riggs; anthropologist of religion (now dean of Harvard Divinity School) Marla Frederick; and psychologist doctors among others.

The AACW sponsors an annual celebration and commemoration of Jesus’ Seven Last Words; hosts a yearly annual conference luncheon; celebrates the ordination, commissioning and appointment of every new Black woman elder, provisional and local pastor; recognizes the retirement of conference Black clergywomen; sends observers to General Conference and Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference; and uses its collaborative influence to enhance the functioning, well-being and general advancement of the annual conference and the UMC.

Black clergywomen serve in various arenas across the South Carolina Annual Conference.

“This year’s retreat was life-giving for me, and I believe it was for others as well,” Smith said. “When you consider the place that our denomination is in right now, it gave me great joy to be in a place where the focus was on loving God, loving ourselves and loving and lifting each other up as sisters and colleagues. We sang, we prayed, we cried and, oh, my goodness, did we laugh!”

“The best part is that these women are committed to serving God, their congregations and the communities where they serve.”

Advocate Press to release history of Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry

Just in time for Christmas, the Advocate Press is getting ready to release its next book—this one the 20-year history of Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry.

A fully self-sustaining, not-for-profit organization affiliated with the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry was formed in 2003 by family and friends seeking residential solutions for loved ones with developmental disabilities. Aldersgate’s mission is to provide Christian homes with the highest quality of life and greatest level of independence for adults with special needs.

Today they have four homes across the state and one more under construction. All homes are located near Christian communities for the purpose of giving residents a sense

of God-inspired inclusion and interaction.

Proceeds from book sales benefit Aldersgate as well as the *Advocate*.

The Advocate Press is a small publishing arm that produces nonfiction books and devotionals. To date it has produced 21 books and has several more slated for release soon. The mission of the Advocate Press is to produce books of interest to South Carolina United Methodists on matters of faith and to amplify regional voices and those that advocate for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

To learn more or pre-order the Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry book, go to <https://advocatesc.org/store/books/aldersgate>.

Alston Wilkes Society honors 11, inspires with motivation from The Messengers

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—Supporters of the Alton Wilkes Society headed to Seawell’s Nov. 16 from for 61st annual meeting and awards ceremony of the ministry.

One of The United Methodist Church’s Advance Special Ministries, Alston Wilkes Society was founded in 1962 as a nonprofit organization led by a group of dedicated volunteers working under the direction of the Rev. Eli Alston Wilkes Jr., a Methodist minister who labored as a tireless and devoted worker in helping those less fortunate.

Today, the Alston Wilkes Society provides direct services in North and South Carolina to offenders, former offenders, the homeless, at-risk youth, veterans and their families, helping them get the tools they need to become productive citizens.

During the luncheon, the Alston Wilkes Society recognized top professionals from the fields of law enforcement, corrections, social services, youth services and veterans’ services with a host of service awards, plus heard an inspiring word from *The Messengers*, a motivational speaking group originally formed at South Carolina’s Youth Correctional Facility.

The meeting began with a welcome from Dr. Jay Dowd, AWS board chair, then a prayer from the Rev. Stephen Taylor, immediate past chair, and greetings from S. Anne Walker, AWS president and chief executive officer.

Next came the recognition of award recipients. For the criminal justice awards, Tristan M. Pierce was honored as South Carolina Department of Corrections Olin Sanders Correctional Officer of the Year.

David Thomas Caruso was honored as the Department of Juvenile Justice Hon. James W. Sparks Youth Worker of the Year.

Dejohnta R. Baxter was honored as the South Carolina Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services Mark Hart Probation and Parole Agent of the Year.

Michele Lambright was honored as the South Carolina Department of Social Services Case Management Professional of the Year.

Lasheika S. Vandyke was honored as the U.S. Federal Probation William C. Nau Federal Probation Officer of the Year.

Master Deputy Jacob Alan Smith was honored as the South Carolina Law Enforcement Officers Association Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.

And Trooper Adam D. Piszczatoski was honored as the South Carolina Department of Public Safety South Carolina Law Enforcement Trooper of the Year.

For the Alston Wilkes Society awards, presented by



Four members of the late AWS founder Alston Wilkes were present at this year’s annual meeting and awards ceremony. From left are John Wilkes (Alston Wilkes’ grandson), Amy Wilkes (great granddaughter), Mary Anna Wilkes Spangler (daughter) and Bill Jeffords (grandson).



Andy Broughton (left) and Chris Thompson of *The Messengers* brought an uplifting word about the power of change.



Walker, Monica Holmes was honored as the 2023 AWS Linda J. Allen Employee of the Year.

Loretta McCree was honored as the 2023 AWS Barbara L. Rippy Part-Time Employee of the Year.

Kay Stockbridge was honored as the 2023 AWS Volunteer of the Year.

And David Coleman was honored as the 2023 AWS Parker Evatt Veterans Home Volunteer of the Year.

Next Andy Broughton, founder, and Chris Thompson brought an uplifting message about the power of trust and mentorship in someone’s life. Broughton, who retired after more than 30 years with the Department of Juvenile Justice, has long mentored young men in the program, helping them

understand the power of positive choices and establishing trust. Thompson, his mentee, is today a successful businessman, and together they and other speakers with the group travel the country to share about their past mistakes and how they have been able to turn their lives around through positive friendship and strong communication.

Thompson shared how he was charged with his first crime at age 13, stealing a bicycle. At 15, he was charged with armed robbery and went to the DJJ, when he got to know Broughton and began to thrive under his mentorship.

After he left DJJ, at first he went back to the same community and same people, and started making the same poor choices, soon he began to heed the advice he’d been given.

“I love money and numbers and helping people, and instead of selling drugs, now I get to use my skills in a new way,” Thompson said.

He started a credit restoration company, and today he works hard to help people turn their lives around while imparting the same wisdom he received: Grind hard. Stick to the assignment.

“Today I teach young people you can make money in other ways—you can flip houses like I did without a real estate license, or you can buy stock instead of Jordans and Nikes.”

The event closed with resounding applause and appreciation for the message, as well as for the work AWS does.



Photo courtesy of Jodie Plyler

A weekend of music

Choir members from St. Luke and Tabernacle UMCs in Lancaster attended the 35th Choir Music Weekend at Lake Junaluska Oct. 13-15. The three-day event gave several hundred choir members from across the Southeast the opportunity to learn eight new anthems. The event concluded with a worship service for the community, during which the new anthems were sung. It was an opportunity to learn new music and meet new friends.

Centenary 'Pumpkin Church' transforms with prayer

By the Rev. Elizabeth "BJ" Stewart

CONWAY—A new addition was apparent in the Centenary United Methodist Church Pumpkin Patch this year: prayer pumpkins.

For many years the church has been affectionately called "The Pumpkin Church" by those living in its proximity. But pastor the Rev. Dennis Devorick asked worshippers to consider the depth of our existence—what is it that we are known for besides pumpkins?

With those words in mind, and having read an article about a mom placing a prayer pumpkin on the kitchen table for the family to place prayer needs for each other on, it seemed to be a perfect move. And so a few short days later, Prayer Pumpkin Number One was placed on the table in the patch.

As people approached to purchase their pumpkins, they were introduced to the prayer pumpkin and asked if they would like to add the name of someone in need of prayer. We explained that on Sunday the pumpkin would be moved to the altar in church where all a prayer would be offered for those people. The response was overwhelming.

Over the course of the pumpkin patch a total of six pumpkins were displayed, with names placed on them and prayed over during worship. It was interesting to see the faces of the people—the attitudes changing from disinterest to concern, joy, compassion and stories. Young and old placed names on the pumpkins. Minutes after placing the



Above are the church's prayer pumpkins.

second one out, a person purchased several of the smaller, perfectly shaped white and orange pumpkins. While she was paying, I explained the purpose of the pumpkins. The person's eyes filled with tears. She picked up the pen and wrote several names. And she set the pen down, she pointed to where the writing was and said, "This is the most important thing." And then pointing to the pumpkins purchased, she added, "So much more than all of these."

It had been an experience—young children asking if they can put a friend's name, a grandparent's name, a brother or sister's name on the pumpkin. College students

mentioning a struggling student and picking up the pen and putting that name there. "Can I put more than one name?" Tears, smiles and thank-yous for this opportunity. Early in the weeks of the Pumpkin Patch, a college student remarked to a friend that a classmate had been in an accident that morning and no one knew how he was doing. She placed his name on the pumpkin. A week later, said student was there, spotted his name and smiled, saying, "That was for me."

Prayers were offered for ministries of other churches, for "we pray for your ministries and you pray for ours." Prayers were offered for illness, injury, unspoken needs, teachers, clergy. One prayer was for a Roman Catholic priest celebrating his 90th birthday and still serving the Lord in as an active parish priest. More than a thousand names, as well as missions, countries and the world, were remembered in prayer.

Yes, we may be known as "The Pumpkin Church," but more so now as the "Prayer Pumpkin Church," reaching the community as a witness of being a praying church and bringing hope and comfort to a world in great need.

The Praying Pumpkin Church will continue with fervent prayer for love, compassion, forgiveness and hope and peace.

Stewart is a retired UMC pastor attending Centenary UMC, Conway.

SEJ Black Methodists for Church Renewal meet in Charlotte

By the Rev. Kevin "Rev Kev" Kosh Jr.

The Southeastern Jurisdiction Black Methodist for Church Renewal gathered for its 54th annual meeting in Charlotte Oct. 25-28.

The theme was "Knowing Our Psalms, to Fuel Our Passion, to Work Our Plan," drawing from Jeremiah 29:11. The SEJ-BMCR gathering focused on how during the transition and uncertainty of The United Methodist Church because of disaffiliation, the Black church can still boldly proclaim that there still is hope and a future.

Gammon Theological Seminary had the incredible opportunity to be a part of this year's BMCR conference. Attendees left the conference inspired and filled with hope for the future of the Black church.

The conference featured powerful worship sessions that moved hearts and souls and created an atmosphere of spiritual renewal and connection. Through passionate preaching and heartfelt prayers, participants were reminded of the rich heritage



The theme was "Knowing Our Psalms, to Fuel Our Passion, to Work Our Plan."

and resilience of the Black church, stirring a renewed sense of purpose and devotion.

The conference was not just about worship but about putting faith in action and being affirmed that our time under God is now. This year's SEJBMCR conference also sparked rich dialogue and discussions on

important social justice issues that the Black church faces today.

Thought-provoking workshops and panel discussions delved into racial equality, economic empowerment, criminal reform, community development, mental health and maternal health. Participants engaged

in meaningful conversations, sharing their experiences, perspectives and ideas for creating positive change within their churches and communities.

The conference infused a renewed sense of mission and commitment to pursuing justice, equality and compassion, empowering attendees to be catalysts for transformation in their respective congregations.

Many said it was empowering to see various Black Methodist organizations such as The Black College Fund, Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century and Gammon Theological Seminary all come together in a collaborative effort to create and support intergenerational leaders and prophetic problem solvers for the local church and beyond.

As the future of the UMC shifts, there is still hope.

Kosh is a Gammon alumnus and director and strategist for the National Network of Young Adults.

South Carolina hosts United Methodist Association of Communicators

By Jessica Brodie

CHARLESTON—South Carolina hosted more than 100 United Methodist communicators this fall, all gathering in the Holy City for the first post-pandemic meeting of the United Methodist Association of Communicators.

From journalists and social media marketers to public relations experts and photographers, UMAC members came together Oct. 22-25 to embrace the theme "Salt and Light," addressing everything from artificial intelligence to planning for the next General Conference. Speakers included Sabrina Joy Stevens, Eric Seiberling, James Lee, Rev. Matt Rawle and Dan Krause, and worship was led by South Carolina Resident Bishop L. Jonathan Holston and Council of Bishops President Thomas J. Bickerton.

The meeting kicked off with a special worship service at both Bethel and Old Bethel United Methodist churches, historic mainstays of the Charleston community. Dating back to 1797, Old Bethel is the third oldest church building in Charleston, and both churches are on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Rev. David Washington and the Rev. Susan Leonard co-led a historical presentation, "If These Walls Could Speak," about the two churches. The service began at Old Bethel, pastored by Washington. Partway through the service, as all sang "Blessed Assurance," worshippers crossed the street and concluded the service at Bethel UMC, also called "New Bethel."

Washington and Leonard shared how Methodism in Charleston was loosely organized and didn't have much of a following until Francis Asbury arrived in 1785 and found little pockets of Methodists meeting together. He gathered with them to strengthen and organize them.

Initially, both Black and White people worshipped together, and people of that time held Methodists in contempt because of this, Washington and Leonard shared. People



The Rev. David Washington and the Rev. Susan Leonard co-led a historical presentation on Bethel and Old Bethel. would padlock the doors of the church to prevent them from gathering, and they moved to smaller gatherings in people's houses.

Eventually they built the first church, called Old Bethel; plans were drawn up in 1797, and the church was completed in 1808. Later, they built the "new" Bethel church in 1856. The old building was later rolled across the street on rocks and placed in its current location.

During the Civil War, the only operating church in the city was Bethel, with Old Bethel alongside, and they opened their doors to the entire Methodist population of Charleston.

Washington and Leonard shared how, this year, the Bethel and Old Bethel church families came together for a massive Juneteenth worship experience to praise the name of the Lord. They also hosted joint Lenten lunches to show the church that though people might look and be different, we all serve the same God.

In his sermon for the morning, Holston preached on "Making a Lasting Impression," lifting up the motto of the Palmetto State: *Dum spiro spero*, "While I breathe, I hope."

"This is a place of hope," Holston said to applause.

We are living in a strange world, Holston said, and communication is the lifeblood of what we say and how we share. But it's a competitive world, one that encourages personal gain at the expense of faith and hope.

"The old rules are being rewritten, things are changing that we never thought would change, and we must ask in all this: Who are we?"

Whatever happens, we must remember to stay fixed on God, Holston said.

"We're here to shine the light, not be hidden under something. We are people who are salt and light, people who bring flavor and light up the world. We are called to get people to follow the light," Holston said.

In midst of hurt and devastation, we are called to bring hope and to shine the light—not hide it under a bushel.

Also at the meeting, the annual Awards Banquet celebrated outstanding work by United Methodist communicators across the nation.

The group announced its 2023 Hall of Fame inductees, the Rev. Kathy Noble and Shirley Struchen, and its Communicator of the Year, Sara Hamdorff of Discipleship Ministries.

Are you a church communicator?

Are you a communicator in a local United Methodist church? Whether you help as paid staff or a volunteer, the *Advocate* is gathering a list of names and emails of those who do communications in local churches so we can call on you when we are seeking stories or have news or resources we think will help you. Please email or text Advocate Editor Jessica Brodie at jbrodie@umcsc.org or 803-807-0018.

New website, new leadership model for S.C. Reconciling Ministries Network

By Jessica Brodie

A South Carolina group that works to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and others in The United Methodist Church now has a new website and a new leadership model.

South Carolina Reconciling Ministries Network has shifted to a team-led structure, with a council of 12 comprising half laity and half clergy.

It also has a new website found at <https://www.scrmn.org>.

Lynn Shirley, one of the council members, said the difficulties of the pandemic forced them to take a new look

at their former leadership model, which put much of the burden of hard work on one person.

“We brainstormed and decided to relaunch as a leadership model with up to 12 council members who meet and make decisions and leadership goals as a unit, not primarily through a president,” he said.

As part of this, they decided they also needed a website, as well as a clear understanding of their mission goals. New bylaws were adopted in June 2022.

Shirley said they are hoping to ensure the group has geographical diversity across the state. He said of the 12 council members, only two identify as LGBTQ+, indicating

the strong support among their allies.

The group primarily focuses on advocacy and education.

According to their website, SCRNM comprises almost 1,000 persons, the vast majority in connection with the UMC in South Carolina, both clergy and laity.

“Our purpose is to support, encourage and defend the rights of LGBTQ persons to be in full communion with their local congregations and the UMC in general,” the website states. “We do this through engagement with other SCRNM participants, through connection and conversation with those in the UMC not in full support of our passion and though holy listening to the opinions of all.”

Clergy gather to explore ‘Strengthening of Your Soul to Lead’

By Jessica Brodie

LEXINGTON—Clergy from across the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Churches headed to Lexington UMC Nov. 16 for an in-person gathering to explore “Strengthening of Your Soul to Lead.”

Organized by the Order of Elders, Order of Deacons and the Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members, the event featured Dr. Ruth Haley Barton, spiritual director and author of numerous books and resources on the spiritual life including “Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry,” “Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation,” “Pursuing God’s Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups” and “Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest: From Sabbath to Sabbatical and Back Again.” She is also the host of the “Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership” podcast where, in conversation with other leaders, she regularly explores how we can forge a stronger connection between our souls and our leadership.

Event leaders included Bishop L. Jonathan Holston; the Rev. Morris Waymer, chairperson of the Board of Ordained Ministry, the Rev. Brenda Washington, chairperson of the Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate



Clergy listen as wisdom is shared.



Dr. Ruth Haley Barton speaks.

Members; the Rev. Meg Jiunnies, chairperson of the Order of Deacons; and the Rev. Mary Johnson, chairperson of the Order of Elders.

After a prayer by Jiunnies and a welcome from Lexington UMC’s senior pastor, the Rev. Mack McDowell, Holston greeted all and noted that strengthening our souls is critical in the church.

“If there’s one thing we should protect with all we can, it’s the essence of who we are and whose we are,” Holston said.

He said that when the church loses its soul, it becomes a shell of itself, but when

we’re all strengthened, then God’s church throughout the whole world is strengthened.

Barton opened by encouraging all to participate in a gathering prayer designed to help us get in touch with our soul, that place where God is present with us. She noted that in Matthew 16:26, Jesus asked, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (NIV).

She said when we lose our credit card, we immediately stop everything to find it, or take measures to fix the situation before it

becomes a problem. But many of us have a difficult time understanding when we have lost our soul, or are in danger of slipping.

“We need the same urgency around losing souls as when we lose our credit card,” she said—stop everything, retrace your steps, seek, and take measures to correct. “This is one of the most critical aspects of what we need to be paying attention to right now.”

She spent the day helping clergy assess where they are in soul-wellness, learning how to honestly reflect and assess from a place of grace and truth, not shame.

UMC bishops to call special session of General Conference in 2026

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Council of Bishops plans to call a special session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church in 2026 for the delegates to strategize and work toward bringing about the next vital expression of United Methodism.

The bishops made the decision to call the special session during their recent meeting at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, last week. The specific call for the special session, including details about the agenda, date and other logistics will be unveiled early in the new year. Under Para. 14 of *The Book of Discipline* and in line with Article II of the Constitution, the bishops have the authority to call “a special session of the General Conference, possessing the authority and exercising all the powers of the General Conference.”

“A special session of General Conference in 2026 would allow the church to see our work as having two important next steps, the first being the regular session of the General Conference in 2024, and the second to make continued progress in 2026,” the bishops agreed. “Affirming the call for a special session in 2026 for missional purposes would give the whole church a clearer sense of our path going forward.”

Early in the year at the May meeting in Chicago, the bishops responded to the Judicial Council Decision 1472 regarding an additional regular General Conference between 2024-2027 by approving a resolution to propose a five-day General Conference in May 2026 that would focus on reestablishing connection, lament and healing, celebration, recasting the mission and vision for The United Methodist Church.

However, in November the Judicial Council reversed its decision ruling in Memorandum 1485 declaring that “the regular session of General Conference that is to be convened following the upcoming 2024 regular session, would be held four years thereafter, in 2028.”

Hence, the COB’s decision to call a special session of the General Conference in 2026 would not be in conflict with the Judicial Council decision, which was concerned with regular sessions of the General Conference.



First surgery at Hospital Bethesda

Healing Guatemala’s Hospital Bethesda has had its first surgery utilizing general anesthesia. On Sept. 25, Dr. Pablo Fernando Cifuentes performed a breast mass excision biopsy under the general anesthesia administered by Dr. Andrea Eloisa Garcia Noriega. The procedure was successful. Although the surgery was a simple one, it had a huge meaning to Bethesda. Now, because of their new hospital license and with the use of general anesthesia, they can help more patients. For more on Healing Guatemala, email rhyeemt@gmail.com or write P.O. Box 1835, Duluth, GA 30096.

Church court reverses call for extra GC

By Heather Hahn

Excerpted courtesy of UMNews

Reversing part of an earlier decision, The United Methodist Church’s highest court revoked its call for an additional regular session of General Conference between 2025 and 2027.

However, the Judicial Council maintained its earlier ruling that no new delegates be elected to the coming General Conference, except under very limited circumstances.

The next regular session of General Conference, originally planned for May 2020, is now scheduled for April 23-May 3, 2024, in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In Memorandum 1485, the Judicial Council ruled—with italics and bolding for emphasis—“the regular session of General

Conference that is to be convened following the upcoming 2024 regular session, would be held four years thereafter, in 2028.”

With the memorandum released Nov. 2, the church court modified its earlier determination in Decision 1472 related to the scheduling of General Conference after the 2024 session. The modification to the decision comes as the Judicial Council and other UMC leaders are contending with delays in General Conference unseen in the nearly 240-year history of the denomination and its predecessors.

The UMC constitution in the *Book of Discipline’s* Para. 14 says the assembly—whose decisions affect the entire denomination—“shall meet once in four years . . .” But COVID threw off that quadrennial schedule.



Helping with love

Indian Branch United Methodist Church’s ladies group recently collected items for their local nursing home. They delivered the items to them on Halloween. Pictured here are Rae Carroway, Becky Bryant, Letha Larymore, Gail Odom and Odean Ralley.

Photo courtesy of Odean Ralley

Support group for children's and youth ministry organizes in Columbia area

"When two or three gather in my name, I am there among them."—Matthew 18:20

A support group for children's and youth ministry workers has organized in the Midlands, following in the steps of work done by two leaders in the Upstate.

Cari Treece had been a member of the Greenville Children/Youth Ministry Support Group, invited by Ruth Hughes and Anne Shelton when Treece started her role as the director of Christian education at St. Matthew United Methodist Church, Greenville.

The gatherings, filled with new ideas and uplifting moments, persisted even during the COVID era through Zoom. The support group arose out of the Discipleship group of

Connectional Ministries.

When Treece relocated to Columbia in November 2022 to serve as the Director of Children and Family Ministries at Shandon UMC, she missed the support of the group locally.

This spring, she connected with Leila Barwick, the new Director of Children and Family Ministries at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Columbia. During a discussion about the church's database, Treece mentioned her support group in Greenville.

Treece and Barwick decided to establish a similar group for the Midlands area, scheduling the inaugural meeting for July 31.

"Leila and I compiled a list of churches

in our area and reached out to all of them," Treece said. "The first meeting, held at Trinity on a Monday morning, saw a modest turnout of four people, including Leila and myself, but it was still an informative and uplifting experience. During that initial gathering, we discussed various topics on our minds and concluded that Thursdays would be a more suitable day to meet. We scheduled a second meeting for October at a local restaurant for coffee and breakfast, and this time, we had eight attendees."

The theme of the second meeting was Advent. Each participant shared what their church was doing during the Advent season. They documented all the ideas in a Google doc, which they shared with everyone,

including those who couldn't attend.

"The essence of our group is organic—we may have a planned topic, but we're also open to letting the Spirit move and discussing our challenges, seeking advice from fellow disciples in ministry," she said.

The group comprises individuals from various denominations—Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, United Methodist and non-denominational—breaking down the walls of local churches to unite in the common goal of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Treece said anyone who works or volunteers in Children's and Youth Ministry is encouraged to join the group. Reach out at ctreece@shandonumc.org.

'One'-themed Revolution to feature Reggie Dabbs, Sons the Band

Reggie Dabbs and Sons the Band will headline the conference's annual youth Revolution event next month, and registration is going on now.

Revolution 2024 is set for Jan. 26-28 at the Township Auditorium in Columbia.

"We pray that you will join us and allow your young people to have a powerful, life-changing event of worship and spiritual growth," organizers with the Revolution Design Team said.

Registration is \$75 per person and includes a free T-shirt for all who register before Dec. 31.

The theme of this year's Revolution is "One," drawing from Ephesians 4:2-6: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (NIV).

The speaker, Reggie Dabbs, is quickly becoming an in-demand speaker. He helps teenagers meet their problems head-on and overcome them, addressing family, relevant topics that impact teenagers and adults alike and emphasizing the importance of making honorable choices and being



Reggie Dabbs is the speaker.

accountable. Most of all, Dabbs drives home the fact that "you can never change your past, but you can change your future." Learn more about Dabbs at <https://reggiedabbsonline.com>.

Sons the Band is the confluence of Jordan Colle and Steve Davis, whose sound centers on heavy guitars, gospel piano and gritty, soaring vocals, creating a sonic quilt that threatens to rattle the heart and surround you with an anthemic



Sons the Band will lead music.

melody you can't help but sing along with. With influences like Coldplay and The Killers, the American rock 'n' roll storytelling duo have done their best to carve out a niche within the worship landscape. Learn more at <https://www.sonstheband.com>.

For more information about the event, or to register, visit <https://scmyp.org/revolution>.

Advent Scuffletown trunk-or-treat partnership becomes great outreach

By Mike Jeter

SIMPSONVILLE—In an evening filled with Halloween fun and community spirit, Advent United Methodist Church Scuffletown and Rudolph Gordon School's Parent-Teacher Association joined forces to host an extraordinary Trunk or Treat event Oct. 26.

The event, held at Rudolph Gordon School, witnessed an incredible turnout with a whopping 2,500 attendees.

The collaboration between Advent UMC Scuffletown and Rudolph Gordon School PTA created an unforgettable experience for families and community members alike. More than 30 creatively decorated trunks lined the side parking lot, offering a safe and enjoyable environment for children to indulge in trick-or-treating delights.

Children and parents alike were treated to

a wide variety of activities, including several bounce houses for all ages, face painting, hayrides, food trucks, and Rudolph Gordon's Book Fair. The evening filled with live music provided by Advent Scuffletown's worship team, setting a spooktacular tone for the evening.

Ryan Adams, who is part of Advent UMC Scuffletown's worship team, said, "It was fantastic seeing Advent UMC Scuffletown and the Rudolph Gordon PTA come together for an unforgettable night for the community. It was a prime example of the tremendous opportunity that exists to reach people in the Scuffletown area."

Mike Jeter, Advent UMC Scuffletown campus pastor, expressed his delight at the overwhelming response.

"We are thrilled to see the community

come together in such large numbers to celebrate in a safe and enjoyable environment," Jeter said. "The collaboration between Advent Scuffletown and Rudolph Gordon School's PTA has truly made this evening successful beyond our wildest expectations. We are so grateful for the support of our volunteers and community."

Dr. Sheryl McGaha, a member of Advent Scuffletown and Rudolph Gordon's PTA, said, "Trunk or Treat was an amazing outreach to Rudolph Gordon School and our community. It was the highlight during the Craze Raise fundraiser at school. Many children are still talking about all the fun that was had. Advent Scuffletown members were blessed to be a part of such a wonderful community event. We can't wait for next year!"

Heather Jones, Advent UMC Scuffletown's children minister and associate director of student ministries, said, "It was so awesome to see our community come out in such sweeping wave of support for Rudolph Gor-

don. Advent Scuffletown was excited to be a part of such a wonderful event and sharing our witness with the community."

Rudolph Gordon School PTA President Brittaney Pitts-Gause thanked Advent Scuffletown and all the people and vendors who hosted trunks for the kids or helped in any way.

"Our families had an amazing time and are still talking about it," Pitts-Gause said. "We would absolutely love to partner in the future."

The Trunk or Treat event served as a beautiful example of what can be achieved when communities come together with a shared vision of serving their community. Both Advent UMC Scuffletown and Rudolph Gordon School PTA extend their heartfelt gratitude to everyone who attended, volunteered and sponsored the event, making it a memorable occasion for all.

Jeter is campus pastor for Advent UMC.



Help the Advocate with a Year-End Tax-Deductible Gift

It's not going to be easy getting through these next few years as a denomination, and a number of ministries across the connection will undoubtedly face financial challenges. The *Advocate* is no different. While we are an independent newspaper, we do receive a substantial amount of revenue—about a third of our operating budget—from conference apportionments. Like other ministries, we're doing our best to keep expenses down and come up with innovative ways to drive up income.

One huge way you can help the *Advocate* in this time is with a **tax-deductible donation** to our nonprofit 501(c)(3) ministry.

Give at advocatesc.org/donate

Or mail a check to Advocate, 4908 Colonial Dr., Columbia, SC 29203



The event, held at the school, drew 2,500 attendees.



Children and parents alike were treated to a wide variety of activities.



The church is now debt free.

St. Paul UMC celebrates with mortgage-burning service

CAMDEN—St. Paul United Methodist Church rejoiced in a momentous event Sunday, Oct. 29, during their 10 a.m. worship service.

The congregation marked the significant occasion of becoming a church free of debt with a mortgage-burning service.

Notable clergy, including South Carolina Resident Bishop L. Jonathan Holston and several esteemed pastors actively participated in the service, including Hartsville District Superintendent the Rev. Telley Gadson, as well as the Rev. Lillian Washington, the Rev. Franklin Garrett (former pastor) and

the current pastor, Dr. James P. Smith.

Holston delivered a powerful and inspiring message, uplifting the spirits of all attendees. The celebration was further adorned with a beautiful praise dance to the song “Way Maker” performed by the children and youth.

Following the service, attendees gathered for fellowship and a catered meal. The joyful occasion emphasized gratitude and abundant blessings.

“To God be the glory,” echoed the sentiments of the congregation as they celebrated this remarkable milestone.



Making the rounds

The Rev. Arthur Holt, author of two books published by the Advocate Press, has been busy recently accepting a number of invitations to speak about his books in local churches and for Sunday school classes. Holt authored “People of My Journey” and “What I Have Come to Believe.” Recently he completed his sixth speaking engagement. To date he has spoken at Central UMC, Spartanburg; Bethel UMC, Spartanburg; St. James UMC, Spartanburg; Inman UMC, Inman; Union UMC, Irmo; and the Sunday School Class of Main Street UMC, Bedford, Virginia. Another study is being planned for the spring. A retired pastor who now lives in Boiling Springs, Holt said he is honored and absolutely loves having the chance to speak with local churches about his books and urges anyone interested to contact him at aholt50@charter.net. To learn more about his books, find them on Amazon or at <https://advocatepress.org/books>.



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Hannibal-Felder

Masons help Clark UMC

The International Free and Acceptance Modern Masons Inc. and Order of the Eastern Star Sumter District 7 visited with Clark UMC, Oswego, Sunday, Oct. 29, during Clark’s fifth Sunday service and presented the church with a generous donation. Here, church pastor the Rev. Sarah Johnson gathers with the group.

Frierson helps with Children’s Miracle Network

On Oct. 18-20, Community Broadcasters Inc. of Florence teamed up with McLeod Children’s Miracle Network to host a radiothon, and a Florence District United Methodist pastor pitched in to help as a co-host.

The Rev. Ernest W. Frierson, of the Friendship UMC, Nesmith, served as co-host along with the program director, Josiellia Williams of Almighty 105.1.

The radiothon has been held at the children’s hospital for several years to raise money for different areas of the hospital to include the neonatal intensive care unit, the pediatric care unit and other areas.

Many volunteers from the area assisted with the radiothon, from staffing the phones to co-hosting the event.

“I was very humbled to have been asked to serve as co-host,” Frierson said. “I have been a part of this event in years past, but this year seemed to be quite different. I had



Frierson (right) with Josiellia Williams.

the pleasure of being the servant leader of an area church where a family attended whose child was being treated. I witnessed firsthand the love and care shown to the family while their child was being treated the first two days of the radiothon.”

Expressions of love and support were given to the entire staff from so many families who were interviewed during the three days of the radiothon.

Tailgating for Christ

The members and friends of Allen Chapel UMC, Spartanburg, did things a little different on the fourth Sunday in October. They took their worship service outside of the four walls and gathered in the parking lot for a Tailgate Celebration. Attendees wore apparel representing favorite teams and set up tables full of food along with smokers and grills. The Rev. Andre Gary commended all for making the occasion so special. “We are living in a day and time when it’s good to do a new thing, a different thing, especially when it’s in the name of praising the Lord!” he said. Doing a different thing worked out great for Allen’s congregation on this beautiful, warm and sunny fall Sunday.



Around the Districts

Columbia District

Congratulations to the Rev. John and Kay Jordan on the birth of their granddaughter. Elizabeth Louise Rogers was born Oct. 31 to Charlie and Ashton Jordan Rogers. Rev. Jordan is the pastor of Trinity UMC, West Columbia.

Washington Street UMC, Columbia, will host its annual choral production, “Sing-Along Messiah,” for the first time since the pandemic on Monday, Dec. 11, at 7 p.m. in the sanctuary. The only sing-along version of Handel’s Messiah in the Midlands, the event is free and open to the public. The service lasts approximately an hour. The “Sing-Along Messiah” will feature an orchestra of talented local musicians through the dedication and hard work of Columbia’s own Dick Goodwin. The program will again be led by long-time conductor Dr. Lillian Quackenbush. Reserve a seat by going to www.wsmethodist.org/sam and clicking on the “reserve seats now” button.

Also, the church partnered with Richland County Senior Resources to host a “Drive ‘n’ Drop supply drive Nov. 16-17. Community members were encouraged to drop off non-perishable foods, toiletries and household items to support local seniors in need.

Columbia College, Columbia, welcomed 10 guest speakers to Spears Concert Hall to shard TEDx talks emphasizing the importance of “Staying Connected” on Nov. 3. TEDx-Columbia College SC is a local, independently organized event curated by the college’s TEDx team.



Photos courtesy of Rev. Rusty Godfrey

Funding ALS research

On Nov. 15, a joyous time was shared with the Rev. David and Donna Surretts at their Waynesville, North Carolina, home to celebrate David’s 65th birthday and to present him with a check for \$4,550 raised for ALS Research. Rev. Rusty Godfrey of Lee Road UMC, Taylors, presented the check on behalf of Lee Road UMC, Wesley UMC (Hartsville District) and Harris UMC (Greenwood District), which partnered to raise money for two ALS entities Surretts selected. “The Surretts continue to spread the love of Christ to all they meet and have made such a profound impact on all the communities they have served,” Godfrey said. A private donation raised the final amount to \$5,000, which was evenly split between the ALS North Carolina Association and the Atrium Health Foundation/ALS Clinic Endowment Fund. Above, Godfrey presents Surretts with the check. At left, from left, Sandy Davis (back), Donna Surretts, Joan Davis, Godfrey, Joyce McKenzie and the Rev. Surretts gather for a smile.



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**THE REV. DR. RON ROBINSON, PERKINS-PROTHRO
CHAPLAIN AND PROFESSOR OF RELIGION, AND HIS
PEACE AND CONFLICT CLASS.**

“We have challenging conversations, and we role play, becoming different people with real backgrounds and stories. I want our students to not just think about these issues, but also attempt to feel what the people in areas of conflict feel.” - Robinson



WHY DID STUDENTS TAKE THE CLASS?

“I knew it was tied to current events, and I wanted to be more informed.”

“To be exposed to new and different perspectives.”

“Because I heard Rev. Ron was great, and I wanted to take one of his classes.”

Where
thought leads. To peace from conflict.

SEA ISLANDS: From Rural Mission to retreats

From Page 1

From the Spanish moss-covered trees to the sounds of seagulls overhead, Sea Islands is also now becoming a rustic experience for all ages.

For decades, the site served as Rural Mission, a United Methodist ministry that worked tirelessly to improve the lives of impoverished island people, repairing their homes and educating their children. But funding issues forces the ministry to close its doors.

Then in May 2019, Camps & Retreat Ministries—another ministry of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church—bought the property, hoping to make a way for the ministry to live out its mission across the state.

Since 2019, work projects at Sea Islands have gone on behind the scenes. Transforming the former Rural Mission location into a true retreat center brought with it many challenges given the geographic location, the

property's age and the onset of a global pandemic. Throughout the past four years, challenges have been overcome largely because of the support of Camps & Retreat donors, apportionment dollars and grants awarded and designated toward the restoration of the property.

But now, significant repairs to the property's buildings—including roofing, plumbing and electric—have been made, creating a safe space for groups to enjoy the coast and fellowship with one another.

Four years later, Sea Islands is moving into its third year of welcoming groups for youth and adult retreats, scouting adventures and mission trips on Johns Island.

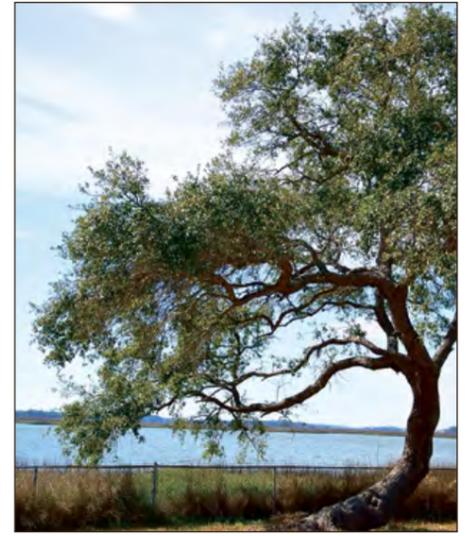
Many groups who had relationships with Rural Mission continue to use Sea Islands as their home base for outreach mission trips within Lowcountry communities. Its locale and capacity make it an ideal location for groups who travel around the island for work projects or to enjoy recreational activities.

“What Sea Islands offers that contrasts our well-established Asbury Hills camp and retreat center is an unplugged, blank canvas in a beautiful location where groups can build a unique experience that supports their spiritual needs,” Spriggs said.

At Sea Islands, groups have lodging, designated meeting and dining spaces and access to a commercial kitchen alongside access to activities, which are in close proximity to the camp.

S.C. Camps & Retreat Ministries now operates three properties in South Carolina: the mountains at Asbury Hills, the lake at Camp Providence and on the coast at Sea Islands.

To learn more about retreats at Sea Islands, email retreat@asburyhills.org, call 864-836-3711 or visit <https://sccarm.org>.



For decades, the site served as Rural Mission, a United Methodist ministry that worked tirelessly to improve the lives of impoverished island people.

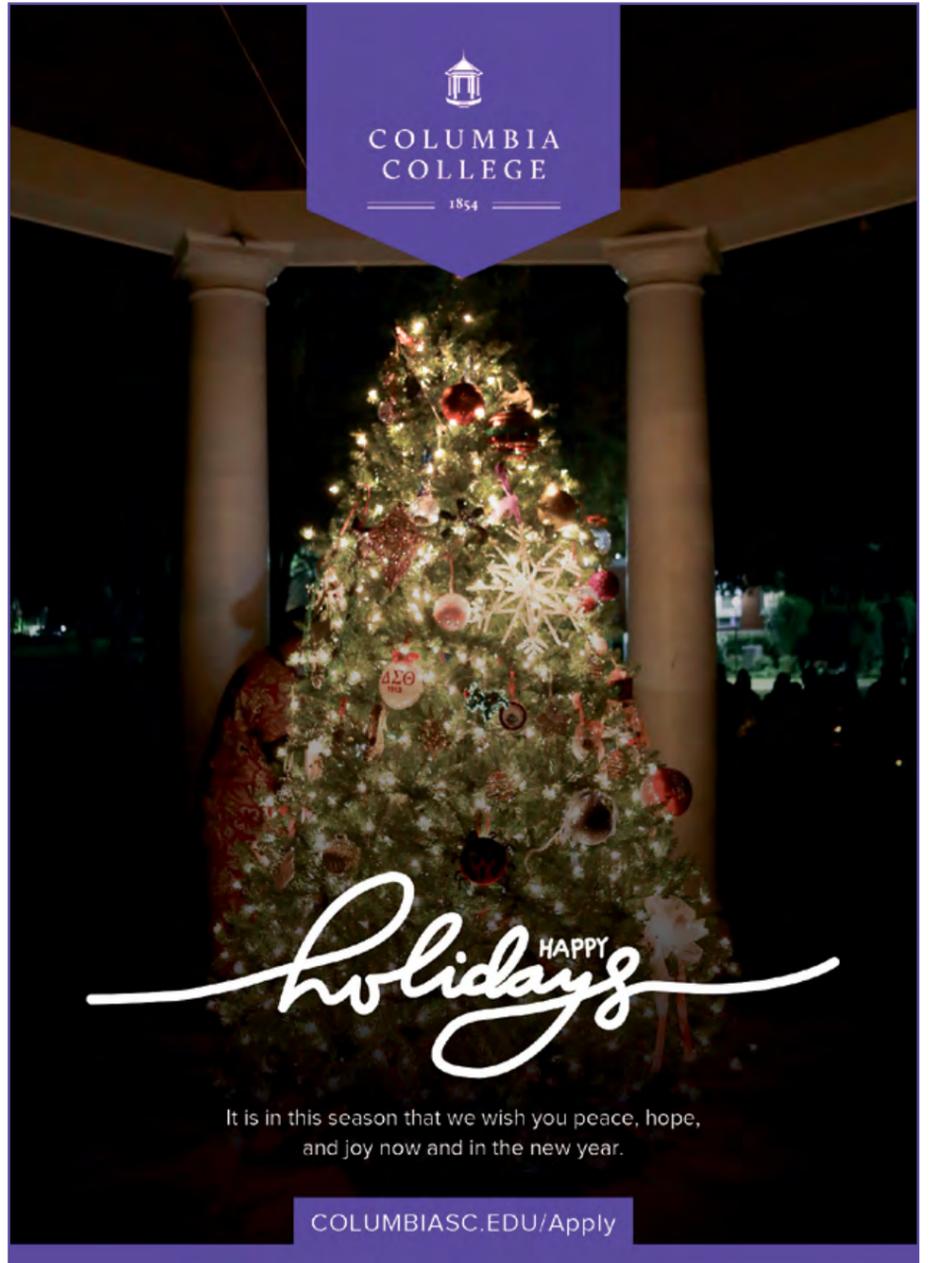
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The Rev. Bryan Pigford said they are starting a network of churches in South Carolina.



Retired Bishop Kenneth L. Carder said we need to examine where we see God's presence and power when we are relating to people with dementia.



Retired Bishop Lawson Bryan shares his experiences with respite care.

Photos by Dan O'Mara

DEMENTIA: S.C. now building a network for the ministry

From Page 1

Carder was among 20 faith and community leaders who shared experiences from lives lived with dementia during a three-day "foundational event" organized by the Dementia Care Ministry Network. With the theme "Creating Hope: Nurturing Christian Community Through Dementia Care," about 60 United Methodists gathered Nov. 14-16 at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina. A dozen of the attendees, including Carder, represented ministries from South Carolina.

This newly formed network represents a collaboration among United Methodist laity, clergy and agencies who recognize the growing number of creative local church ministries with individuals and families who are living with dementia. Their goal: To connect existing ministries and inspire additional initiatives in more local churches so as to create a movement of caring ministry within the United Methodist Church and beyond.

"When Linda talked about her fear of the progression of dementia," Carder recalled, "one of her fears was, 'I'll forget who I am; I'll lose my personhood.' And in our culture, we even talk that way: 'They're only a shell of a person.' 'They're not the person they used to be.'"

"I want us to broaden the lens through which we view people living with dementia to the lens of grace—a much broader lens—because that's what we in faith communities offer uniquely. We offer a different way of viewing people, and we offer a different way of accepting people.

"What is grace? Grace is God's presence and power. Where do we see God's presence and power at work when we are relating to people living with dementia? What is God up to? What's God doing here? I know when Linda was diagnosed with her frontotemporal dementia, I began to ask that question."

And since God is all around us, grace is all around us—broadening the lens so that we're not seeing people only through their symptoms, through their losses.

"We're seeing them as part of this ongoing work and presence of God, the God of grace," Carder said. "And therefore there is always hope. There is always love. There is always something generative in this context because God is universally present."

For the Rev. Bryan Pigford, pastor of Cokesbury United Methodist Church in North Charleston, it wasn't the first time he had heard Carder's take on ministry with people living with dementia.

"Bishop Carder was my Methodism professor in seminary, and then I took his Dementia Ministries class," said Pigford, who is leading a team of South Carolina lay and clergy in developing a dementia care support network within the conference. "One of the most valuable lessons I learned in that class is how important our ministry of presence is—to simply be present."

"I'm in my third appointment now, and in every appointment that I've served, dementia has been prevalent—whether we want to recognize it or not and recognize it as a growing edge of our ministry. So we're looking to start a network of local churches within the South Carolina Conference that

can provide respite care, that can provide caregiver support, that can provide the education our clergy and laity need to be able to engage with our church members who have dementia.

"We are really in the infancy of this, and we've gotten a lot of good ideas while we're here. We're looking forward to seeing where God leads us from here."

Dr. Fayron Epps, director of community and research engagement at the Woodruff School of Nursing at Emory University, is the founder of ALTER, the only nurse-led dementia friendly congregation program, which partners with African-American faith communities to provide them with the necessary tools and resources needed to support families facing dementia.

Denial has long been part of the culture in her community, she said, even in her own family.

"We all know that dementia does not discriminate—race, age or gender," Dr. Epps said. "But in the Black community, we weren't talking about it. We weren't doing anything about it."

"I was reading the Alzheimer's Association Facts and Figures, and I saw how this disease was disproportionately impacting some communities. And I said, 'No, that's not right. This is a lie because how am I, a nurse for so many years, a member of one of these communities that they are talking about—and even I have no clue?'"

Retired Bishop Lawson Bryan, during his time as pastor of First UMC in Montgomery, Alabama, helped foster and grow what is now a thriving Respite Care Ministry that

serves as a template for how local churches can engage with their community.

Bryan reminded those in attendance at Lake Junaluska of the importance of ministry with those living with dementia not just on the individuals, but on their communities, as well.

"Are you aware you're on the leading edge of addressing a major social need?" he asked. "That this is getting out on the edge and helping society in a way that it is not being helped. Are you aware that whatever you're doing in dementia care ministry, you are demonstrating that caring is actually discipleship, that it takes everything Jesus talked about—healing the sick and raising the dead and cleansing the lepers and casting out demons—and puts it on the street, and we see it happen."

"And then are you aware—in addition to being on the leading edge, in addition to demonstrating caring is discipleship—are you aware that you are engaged in asset-based community development? When the church helps the community achieve something it has needed to do but didn't know how to do, then the church becomes an asset. So are you aware that all of that is happening in your life already?"

Interested in learning more about where God is leading South Carolina United Methodists in ministry with those living with dementia? Contact Pigford at bwpigford@umcsc.org.

O'Mara is communications director for the South Carolina Conference of the UMC.

Georgia elementary school named for bishop's mother

ATHENS, Georgia—Alps Road Elementary has been renamed in honor of long-time educator Bettye Henderson Holston.

Holston is the mother of South Carolina United Methodist Resident Bishop L. Jonathan Holston.

At the renaming celebration held Nov. 3, Bettye Hen-

derson Holston cut the ribbon at the school. She was one of the first Black teachers in Athens.

Friends and colleagues were on hand to celebrate.

APPORTIONMENTS: Funds support UMCSC ministries

From Page 1

72.03 percent of 2023 apportionments, compared to 71.97 percent for 2022. This is

on a total budgeted goal for 2023 of \$15.6 million.

"We are about even with last year," Westbury said, noting the conference finished

2022 at 89.22 percent. "I think we can reach 90 percent."

Apportionment funds support the ministries and missions of the annual conference, from campus ministries and congregational development to, partially, this newspaper.

As of Nov. 15, Westbury said, the Columbia District is leading the conference's districts in percentage collected with 79.8 percent. The Walterboro District is in second place, with 76.36 percent, and the Hartsville District is in third with 74.81 percent.

"We have great churches that are motivated to do mission and ministry in this state and beyond," Westbury added. "This is always evident in the way they respond to disasters with gifts to UMCOR and the way they support Epworth. I have faith they will support the ministry areas supported by our apportionments."

She said that, on a personal note, she is asking churches that are considering sepa-

ration in 2024 to pay their 2023 apportionments in 2023.

"My motives are entirely selfish. If they pay in 2023, the payment can be handled within our normal routines. If it is paid as part of the separation fee, I have to do more work. So, as a Christmas gift to me, I ask they pay in 2023," Westbury said.

Thursday, Jan. 11, 2024, is the last day to pay apportionments. Payments must be in the treasurer's office by 4 p.m. that day. If the church is paying electronically through Vanco, the payment must be initiated by 3 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2024 to allow time for payments in process to clear and for staff to prepare for the 2024 year. The treasurer's office strongly encourages churches to make all apportionment payments using Vanco because of the recent mail delivery problems it has experienced. Information about paying by Vanco can be found at <https://www.umcsc.org/apportionments>.

The 2024 budget is \$13.2 million.



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UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH: Inspiration, wisdom and mission

From Page 1

The Rev. Telley Gadson, cabinet representative for United Women in Faith, kicked the weekend off by addressing the executive team with a powerful message. She reminded everyone that although these may be challenging times, they must not forget who their provider is.

“These are the worst of times, but these are also the best of times,” Gadson said.

Executive team member Azilee Dickey said the inspirational message brought tears to her eyes.

“She literally had me in tears because times might be tough but God provides,” Dickey said, noting Gadson’s message was on point and much needed.

Gadson continued by saying she has no problem saying she doesn’t know if she doesn’t know, but she will work to find out. She reminded everyone that “we still have to love people, even when we don’t like them.”

To be Christians, the Book of Matthew says, Christians must make disciples for Jesus Christ.

Each year the program book is dedicated to a special individual. This year was no different. This year’s program book was dedicated in memory of Imogene Steele. Steele served as president of the group from 2003-2006 and passed away three days prior to this year’s meeting. The women paused as they reflected on the work of Steele. Some even discussed seeing the smile on her face as she strolled into last year’s meeting in Myrtle Beach.

St. John’s United Women in Faith president Connie Shade and pastor Dr. Tim McClendon welcomed the group to their church. Shade encouraged everyone to enjoy Aiken’s sites.

A self-proclaimed former shy person who often keeps the crowd laughing, Sue Owens took the stage and said there is a need for South Carolina United Women in Faith to be in attendance at the group’s Southeastern Jurisdiction meeting in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in April 2024. The SEJ Nominations Committee has nominated two from South Carolina to be officers on the leadership team for the next quadrennium: Azilee Dickey as vice president and Betty Void as chair of the Committee on Nominations. The SCCUWF Nominations Committee has submitted Kimberly Graham as a nominee for the National Board and Marcella Forrest and Debra Schooler for Program Advisory Group. Elections for SEJ Leadership Team, National Board and PAG will be held at the



The Rev. Shirley Gordon speaks on “Give Me Your Eyes.”



The United Women in Faith honored the late Imogene Steele, former president of the group, who passed away days before this year’s event. Here, Steele gathers at last year’s annual meeting. From left are current and former presidents Cathy Ford, Clarice Blakely, Linda DuRant, Steele and Marlene Spencer with Sally Vonner, general secretary and CEO of United Women in Faith.

April meeting.

Owens continued by making the room laugh one minute but being serious the next, while she collected dollar bills with a “G” for God, a “J” for Jesus and the jurisdiction and an “L” for legacy. She noted the money will be delivered to the meeting. G and J funds and other moneys will be given to mission giving at the event. L funds will be given at the celebration banquet that Saturday night. Checks made out to

SEJ Leadership Team UMW will go to Mission Giving.

Owens stunned the crowd by announcing that after 32 years of serving (in some capacity) on the SCCUWF Executive Committee, she would be retiring from that committee after the SEJ event. She will still be available for speaking engagements and for leading Mission studies. She thanked everyone for their support over the years. She headed to her seat after blowing her train whistle designating that the Chattanooga Choo Choo was heading out soon.

The speakers for the weekend were from the Orangeburg District. Orangeburg District Superintendent the Rev. Ken Nelson served as the guest speaker on Friday evening. Nelson stated that although these may be difficult times, they must continue to do the great things they are doing.

On Saturday, the Rev. Shirley Gordon of the Wesley Foundation Orangeburg delivered a message titled “Give Me Your Eyes.” Gordon reminded the crowd God tells people to love one another more than they love themselves. The backdrop to her message was the Brandon Heath Song “Give Me Your Eyes.” In the song, the writer asks God to give him his eyes for just one second so he can see what he’s been missing. Like the apostle Paul, the songwriter asks for compassion, patience, humbleness and gentleness.

Gordon said many times people are so busy they don’t see what others are dealing with. Everyone needs that patience, humbleness, compassion and gentleness the songwriter speaks of.

Barbara Simpson, president of the Orangeburg District United Women in Faith, had much praise for the weekend.

“The 51st Annual Conference was a blessing, simply observing the youthful praise dance team, Oaks of Righteousness of Edisto Fork United Methodist Church, express a message from God, to the song ‘My World Needs You’ by Kirk Franklin,” Simpson said. “Without speaking a word, just flowing in spirit, I got chills, and there wasn’t a dry eye in the place when I looked around. We, the United Women in Faith, really share this moment of unity in God’s presence with one another.”

After the installation of officers, the United Women in Faith left St. John UMC, heading home in many different directions but with one purpose: unity in Christ.

Chandler-Flowers is the SCCUWF communications coordinator. For more pictures go to <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjB1BAM>

DISTRICT DAYS: Florence and Greenville days set for December

From Page 1

“The journey toward becoming an effective leader does not begin by leading someone else anywhere,” Holston said. “It is learning how to move from striving to thriving, allowing ourselves to be transformed and guided by the Holy Spirit, and only then can we lead others toward deeper connection with God.”

Holston said developing effective leaders, both clergy and laity, is one of the conference’s four stated priorities.

“We began our conversation around ‘Strengthening Your Soul to Lead’ with key lay leaders from across the conference in October, and continued it in November with our clergy during the Fall Clergy Orders Gathering. Taking this important and timely discussion into the districts reinforces what we know to be true now more than ever—that strong congregations begin with strong lay leaders.”

Registration is required, and churches are encouraged to bring a team of leaders.

The bishop’s district days began in the Greenwood District Nov. 18. Held at Central United Methodist Church, Newberry, the event featured teaching from Holston along with Connectional Ministries Director the Rev. Millie Nelson Smith, Congregational Specialist the Rev. Jim Arant, and Greenwood District Superintendent Dr. Stephen Love.



The Rev. Millie Nelson Smith shares about the conference’s four priorities.



Bishop L. Jonathan Holston leads the room in singing “We’re Marching to Zion.”



Greenwood DS Dr. Stephen Love offers a centering thought for the crowd.



Tables discuss questions surrounding shared leadership responsibilities.

Photos by Jessica Brodie

The morning started with a centering thought, brought by Love and inspired by Exodus 18:17-18, when Moses was told by his father-in-law, Jethro, to share his workload.

Holston began by leading the room in singing “We’re Marching to Zion,” then he lifted up Jesus’s words in Matthew 16:26, “What good will it be for someone to gain

the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (NIV).

He encouraged churches to use what they already have, intentionally teaming up laity with clergy to do what is needed.

Often in the church, Holston said, “We claim we need more and more. But what we have is what we have. The question remains,

“How are we going to use what we have to do what God is calling us to do?”

When laity and clergy work together, a difference is made, Holston said.

Smith lifted up the conference’s four priorities—developing clergy and lay leaders, engaging our communities, connecting with and growing disciples, and measuring current realities and evaluating missional

possibilities—noting laity play a huge role in carrying out what pastors begin. Both must work together.

“One cannot do it without the other,” she said.

Arant led group discussions that tied into what Jethro told Moses in Exodus 18: You can’t do it alone. Tables gathered to discuss and then come up with answers to three questions: 1) With expectations of pastors at a high level, the danger is for them to get burned out. What can Jethro’s suggestion do for pastors? 2) How can leadership be shared between laity and clergy? 3) What hinders sharing leadership between lay and clergy?

The gathering closed with a Service of Communion.

December will feature two district days: Dec. 2 in the Florence District at Central UMC, Florence, from 9:45 a.m. to noon and Dec. 9 in the Greenville District at Lee Road UMC, Taylors, from 9:30 a.m. to noon.

See <https://www.umcsc.org/districtdays> for January to May district days and their locations, as well as to register.

Limitless youth help UWF support Stand at the Crossroads

AIKEN—St. John's United Methodist Church and its United Women in Faith hosted the annual statewide conference of the United Women in Faith Oct. 19-21, with the theme "Unity in Christ."

One of the special activities during the conference was to provide gifts to a local

charity serving women and children. As the conference was in Aiken, the statewide Limitless youth groups chose Stand at the Crossroads for gifting.

Stand at the Crossroads is a Christian-based residential community in Aiken for women in transition.

Director Debbie Lamb and her staff shared the agency's work during the conference.

Lamb received donations and gift cards from Limitless to further her efforts.

Stand at the Crossroads is also a mission partner with St. John's UMC.



Lamb shows her deep appreciation.

Hibben to host 'Gift Hope Charleston' to help community

MOUNT PLEASANT—Hibben United Methodist Church will host what they hope will be an exciting and heartwarming event this month.

Called Gift Hope Charleston 2023, it will be held Dec. 9 at Hibben UMC.

Gift Hope Charleston 2023 is a unique and impactful holiday event organized by the community in collaboration with Hibben. The event brings together the spirit of giving and the joy

of the season, and organizers said it's an event that aligns with the values and mission of The United Methodist Church.

This event is not just about shopping for gifts but about sharing hope, love and joy with those less fortunate. Gift options range from \$5 to \$50 and support a range of local nonprofit organizations. Attendees can make donations in the name of loved ones, giving the gift of hope to someone in need while spreading the warmth of the holiday season.

"We believe this event exemplifies the spirit of community and the commitment to making a positive impact on society, values that are at the heart of The United Methodist Church," said Amanda Moore, children's and communications director at Hibben. "Gift Hope Charleston is not just a shopping event but a movement to create a more compassionate and caring world."

Find more information at <https://hibbenumc.org>.

Native American Ministries

Great Spirit

By LaShella Kirkland

"The Indian loves to worship. From birth to death, he revered his surroundings. He considered himself born in the luxurious lap of Mother Earth, and no place was to him humble. There was nothing between him and the Big Holy, Wakan Tanka. The contact was immediate and personal, and the blessings of Wakan Tanka



Kirkland

flowed over the Indian like rain showered from the sky. Wakan Tanka was not aloof, apart, and ever seeking to quell evil forces. He did not punish the animals, and the birds, and likewise, he did not punish man. He was not a punishing God. For there was never a question as to the supremacy of an evil power over and above the power of Good. There was but one ruling power, and that was Good."—Chief Luther Standing Bear, Teton Sioux, born in 1868

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Growing up in Camden as a child, I heard God called by many names: Father, Holy Spirit, Jehovah, Yahweh, God, Allah, The Almighty. None of these names were confusing to me. However, as someone who is also Indigenous, I could not understand why someone would think our names for God could refer to anyone else other than the Great I Am.

Many of our oral traditions and stories talk about the Great Flood or the Man Who Walked on Water, born of a virgin, who came to save us all. Language barriers, policies and discrimination all led to centuries of confusion and misunderstandings, some of which continue today.

As Indigenous Peoples, our beliefs about God and what we call him are as diverse as our languages, traditions and geographical locations. But the commonality we share is the belief in a Creator God, who made the

world and everything in it and upon it. We honor him and express our faith through prayers, songs, dances, respect and honor for the land, the sun, the plants and the animals and for each other. As I walk through the woods, I see the brilliance in the changing colors of the leaves and know that there is no greater artist than him, and no separation

between the "supernatural world" and the "real world." The Spirit exists in everything.

Here are some of the names used for God: Wakan Tanka, Kitchi Manito, Manitou, Great Spirit or Creator, Great Mystery and Grandfather. Wakan Tanka is known as the power of sacredness that lives in everything, thereby making every living creature holy and great. The word is a Lakota word. Before conversion to Christianity, whether unwillingly or willingly, the phrase loosely referred to a sacred Spirit or Spirits, whose ways are beyond human understanding. Eventually, this also led to the phrase Great Mystery.

Manitou, according to the Abenaki and the Cree Peoples, was interpreted as the Great Spirit, the Creator of all things, and the Giver of Life and the Divine. Grandfather is used a lot; however, it's not because we envision a man with a long white or gray beard, but as a symbol of deep reverence and respect as we would towards an elder or an ancestor.

"Oh Great Spirit, let me learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock."—Chief Yellowhawk

Kirkland is a member of the South Carolina Conference Native American Committee and is the Native American Representative training coordinator. She is a member of Lytleton Street UMC, Camden.



by Debra Schooler

United Women in Faith

We are Limitless!

Limitless is a group of God-seeking youth who want to serve God and form relationships with other youth in our state. Our mission is to provide young ladies opportunities to build relationships through worship and service.

The United Women in Faith are proud of the young ladies who want to be a part of the UWF by forming and being a part of the Limitless youth. The youth who participate are normally 14-18, with young ladies older than 18 serving as mentors. Samoria Sessions and I co-mentor this group, and we are finally growing and attracting more youth to participate. We also are lucky to have some adults who come to our meetings to support us and fellowship with the girls.

We have two meetings a year, outside of Mission u time, when we get together. At our meetings, we start with a devotion or speaker and then we play games, fellowship, recruit new members and participate in a mission project. We met in July at Washington Street United Methodist Church in Columbia. We recruited three youth to join our group, and two of the young ladies went to Mission u in July. We collected some canned goods and money that we donated to Washington Street's soup cellar. Our youth leader for Washington Street, Sarah-Kate, led us in some fun games, and we had a great time of fellowship while we enjoyed a pizza lunch.

In July, we attended Mission u at Spartanburg Methodist College in Spartanburg. We had a record 16 youth attend, and this group bonded, shared and learned together. They also stayed up very late fellowshiping together. We hope to have more youth next year, and we have already contacted some fun new leaders to help us work with the youth.

We are planning an offsite mission project and opportunities for leadership training for our youth next year at Mission u.

We will meet on Dec. 2 at St. Paul's UMC in Camden for our Christmas party. Our mission project will be bringing toys to children who will be spending the Christmas holiday in the hospital. We will start at 10 a.m., and we plan to have some games, some Christmas surprises and lots of opportunities to fellowship with each other.

We need your help! Can you recruit the youth in your church to join us and get involved? Can you bring them to our Christmas party?

Our Limitless youth come from all over the state, and we would like to start a Limitless group in each district. We have a combined group with Columbia and Hartsville districts, with a few from the Upstate. We want more. We need everyone's help in keeping our youth involved in our United Women in Faith groups, and we need to energize the youth to take over for us "seasoned" ladies.

Remember, the youth are our future, and we need to invest our time and energy in developing future leaders for our UWF. It is up to us to get them excited and committed.

We are currently working on social media sites that the youth can visit and participate with their friends. Also, we are working with our national United Women in Faith office to add Limitless training and resources for our youth to access and use for their groups.

Please contact us for more information at Youth123@gmail.com. We are happy to share, and we want to see you in December.

Schooler is the Limitless co-mentor for South Carolina Conference UWF.

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Photo courtesy of the Rev. Meredith M. Dark

Working together

Logan Walters, prospective Eagle Scout with Troop 891, pulled the Cemetery Committee of Socastee UMC together with his fellow Boy Scouts and church volunteers to clean headstones in the church cemetery. It was a day of fun and fellowship where all who gathered chose headstones to clean. Many of the stones were more legible after the cleaning process. In order to clean headstones, two buckets of water—one for soap water and one for clean water—were needed along with a soft bristle brush and cleaner. Socastee UMC has more than 400 people buried in their church cemetery. Here, Logan joins Doug Vining, a Socastee member who charts Troop 891 with Post 40 of The American Legion, and the headstone cleaning volunteers.

Landers receives Nick Elliott Award

By Allison Trussell

COLUMBIA—South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission awarded its 2023 Nick Elliott Award to Robin Landers during its Nov. 7 meeting at Grace United Methodist Church. Landers, a member of Union UMC, Irmo, and a leader of more than 10 international mission trips to Zimbabwe and Costa Rica, was surprised by the award.

“This means even more since I knew Nick and learned what I know about mission from him,” she said. “He emphasized that relationships are the most important aspects of mission work.”

She hopes she has walked in his footsteps.

The award is given annually to someone who demonstrates exceptional commitment to the goal of serving God through missions. Elliott was an elder in the South Carolina Conference and led the UVMIM-Southeastern Jurisdiction from 1999-2009.

“Robin’s leadership always creates teams

that have a heart for service for others and a focus on being present and developing relationships with the people with whom the mission is in service through shared faith,” wrote Marjorie Rehlander in nominating Landers. Rehlander has been on teams led by Landers to Costa Rica and most recently Zimbabwe. The nomination letters all mentioned Landers’ love of the culture of the country she was serving. Every team she leads is taught a few words of the native language as well as customs of the people.

The Rev. Lloyd Nyarota, a member of the Zimbabwe Conference serving St. John’s United-Anglican Church in Alberta, Canada, has known Landers for about 20 years and praised her broad-scoped leadership: “(Her) teams have been involved in supporting orphanages, churches, schools, hospitals and villages. ... Robin has also connected many South Carolinians to Africa University, where they have come into direct contact with their

apportionment gifts.”

She was praised for her influence in the resurgence of international missions at Union UMC. It was also noted she reaches across the conference for team members and is a sower of seeds for new mission team leaders.

“This interest in developing me for future mission leadership meant the world to me,” said Chris Elvis, co-leader of the 2023 Zimbabwe team. “It allowed me to gain the confidence and assurance I needed to further my knowledge of what it takes to lead a team.”

Elvis and Allison Trussell, member of multiple teams, wrote in their nominations about the spiritual foundation of Landers’ leadership. Each team she leads has a team Scripture carried throughout the planning and mission. “Nightly team devotions and reflection time allow the team to reflect on work that was completed, the people touched and where God has been in the work,” Trussell wrote.



Landers with her award.

“Robin has taught me how to bring faith and wisdom to my actions and thoughts in unexpected moments through her mission work,” Rehlander wrote.



Photos courtesy of Amanda Moore

A grand success

Hibben Pumpkin Patch is celebrating this month after reaching the remarkable achievement of ranking second in the country for pumpkin sales. Each year, two tractor-trailer loads of pumpkins and gourds arrive in Mount Pleasant. It has become a cherished tradition for families and friends to enjoy during the season. Many customers say they return year after year and appreciate that proceeds benefit the community. In the last 23 years, the patch has raised more than \$1 million, giving more than \$250,000 back to the Lowcountry. This year alone, it raised \$91,000 and is on track to give out more than \$30,000. They said they are grateful to all the volunteers and the University School of the Lowcountry for their daily support of patch functions. Above left, Jason Kreutner (center), University School of the Lowcountry headmaster, helps students and church volunteers unload the first truck of pumpkins at Hibben in September. Above right, Barrett Moore helps unload pumpkins at Hibben.



Photo courtesy of Joyce R. Saylor

Special honors

At the recent Homecoming service for Calvary UMC, Swansea, the Calvary United Women in Faith recognized two people. Receiving the 2023 Woman of the Year award was Tammy Bedwell. Bedwell, pictured at left, is active in the children’s ministries at Calvary UMC, including VBS, and is a dedicated nursery volunteer. Calvary UWF Treasurer Carol Lloyd (right) presented the award. Also that day, the 2023 Special Mission Recognition was presented to Harvey Williams by Calvary UWF President Joyce Saylor for his dedication to raising funds for the United Methodist Men’s “Kids in Need of Christmas” ministry, which provides gifts for local children and youth.



Love for all God’s creatures

Members of the Animal Ministry Team at Stallville UMC, Summerville, helped organize a drive-through Blessing of the Animals Oct. 1. An active ministry for eight years, the Animal Ministry Team knows how important pets are to people, and they see it as a kind and compassionate way to reach others. “You reach people on a level other ministries can’t. For some people pets are their only link in society, their family,” says Kathy Belsky, part of the team. “Everyone has the need to be needed, and pets sometimes give them their reason to get up in the morning.” The team gives out prayer blankets and angels.

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Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Joseph Abram Jr.

Remembering Leon Sistrunk, our 'go-to guy'

Friday, Oct. 20, was like any other day, except late afternoon word came that Orangeburg's infamous plumber, electrician, handyman, friend, St. Stephen United Methodist Church member and "go-to guy" was in distress, and emergency assistance had been summoned.

Our world was sent reeling, especially mine, since I have had the pleasure of sharing the last 13 years with his only sister, Jo Ann. The sun rose and sat on Leon in the minds of his sister and brothers, elders Carl (Mavis) and Bernard (Margie) McPherson, who thought Leon Sistrunk had the answers and would graciously share both it and his time with a phone call no matter the hour.

Emergency personnel didn't give the answer we desired; God had spoken. Amen!

He had 60 years of marriage with Judy Darby Sistrunk, aka "Mrs. Judy," and was a doting father of four daughters, four sons and grands and great-grands galore. Plus he had 80 years in the land of the living—a full life of service to family, friends, church and community. That, while being serenaded by those you love along the way, is all one can expect on this journey until the Master pronounces "well done!"

I was asked to provide the Prayer of Comfort for the services, maybe because I needed it desperately and could relate to their needs. I wore my gift of Western boots that Leon had given me—long before I was his brother-in-law, just his pastor and friend—to honor him.

For him I leave this short poetic expression:

When A Godly Life Ends

Some Folks just pass through life
Facing the usual pain and strife
Some just live for themselves
Never thinking of anyone else

Some concentrate on filling their own pocket
Always seeking to get on every charity docket
Some, the only child they see is their own
And the only place that matters is their home

Thank God there are others, who as they travel each day
Don't think it robbery to go out of their way,
Encouraging everyone to be morally strong
And lovingly pointing it out when they are walking wrong

Those that know them, not only hear good talk
But also (from Leon) get lessons on how to walk
There is no doubt that one has lost a trusty friend
When such a godly life comes to an end.

Abram, a retired pastor, lives in St. Matthews.



Life Together in the UMCSC

by the Rev. Geneva Stafford

'Continue in the work that God has called you to do'

Editor's note: Through "Life Together in the UMCSC," South Carolina United Methodists share what The United Methodist Church has meant in their lives.

Forty years ago, I married the love of my life and decided to join The United Methodist Church because he was United Methodist. I was originally African Methodist Episcopal. This wonderful church that I joined had a lot of energy, had a lot of things going on, and I was excited to be there.

I found out that a lot of the doctrine from the AME church was the same as The United Methodist Church and started to grow in grace at this church and loved the fact that this is a connectional church.

One of the devastating things that happened in my life was when my husband passed away nine years ago. I called my district superintendent, and she talked with me for a few minutes. After that, while I was still standing over my husband's bed, the bishop called and gave his condolences and had an opportunity to talk with me. I found that to be so profound and so wonderful, because I needed all the help I could muster at that particular time.

The Rev. Robin Dease came to my house the day my husband passed away. She was there 30 minutes after I got home from the hospital just to hug and just to sit and talk with me. When I tell you this church is a connectional church, I mean that in all sincerity.

And so, I want all of you to just consider where you've been in this ministry, where you've been in your walk, how God has blessed you with people in your corner and people that would walk and talk with you.

When I look back over it, those people have always been in my corner. They have always been a group of people that I could talk to and walk with. So I am very grateful for these days that God has allowed me to be a part of their ministry as well as them being a part of my ministry.

We want to make sure that we continue to live out God's call in our lives, and it just happens to be in this wonderful connection, this wonderful denomination that God has allowed us to be a part of.

I say to anybody and everybody: Continue in the work that God has called you to do and know that we are making a difference all over the world, not just in the United States, but all over the world. We're making a difference, and we're making sure that people know what it is to be transformed, what it is to love God, what it is to be a part of the kingdom.

I'm excited about these United Methodist churches because I'm looking forward to what God will continue to do in all of us that are faithful to the call.

Stafford is the pastor of Francis Burns United Methodist Church in Columbia. Watch her "Life Together" video and others by South Carolina United Methodists at <http://umcsc.org/together>

Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Mickey Fisher

Dealing with loss

Dealing with loss is on the agenda for every human being. For some it strikes early in life; for others it comes with advancing years. But there is no escaping it. For most of us it is not a one-time thing, but a reality experienced repeatedly.

Maturity of life and faith involves much more than the passing of the years. It means growing in our capacity to understand and cope with life's tragic dimensions. Grief and sorrow are built into our human situation. Faith and trust in God paired with a caring spirit and loving relationships enable us to claim a measure of peace and self-worth in spite of the loss that we all experience. There is a name for that gift of grace. It is called saintliness!

Anyone can, and most people do, appear saintly at times. But true saintliness is not a sometimes thing. It cannot exist in brief fits and spurts. It cannot function as emergence apparel, something we put on for special occasions.

It functions as an interior attitude or it does not function. It is a way of perceiving life and reality that plays a major role in shaping our responses to the world about us.

One morning several weeks ago, my caregiver asked, "What is that fire truck doing outside?"

I walked out on the porch, and sure enough, there was a fire truck parked just below my driveway.

There was no one in the truck, but the engine was running. I said to myself, "Something must be going on with Chris."

That was the first of three times Jan had to call EMS to get Chris up after he had fallen. A couple of weeks earlier, he had flipped his car and injured his foot. Thinking the injury to be nothing serious, he went on back to work the next day. This was the beginning of the end for Chris. The infection from the foot injury spread throughout his body and finally took his life.

That history was traumatic for Jan. His friends at work supplied him with pain-killing drugs, to which he quickly became addicted. The addiction and the infection led to repeated trips to the hospital and ultimately to his death.

Jan was torn by her love for Chris, by her concern regarding his addiction and by actions of the friends who supplied his drugs.

No one could have done more to care for Chris than Jan did during their marriage and especially during the weeks of his dying process. She would be puzzled by any suggestion of saintliness, but her caring for Chris qualifies her for that rank.

A day or so ago I was checking the mailbox just as she drove in her driveway and went to her mailbox. We chatted briefly. She was coming in from a visit with her daughter whose husband had recently died following an extended illness.

For someone who has been hit by two major losses, Jan is holding up extremely well. She is quite a lady! I feel fortunate to count her as a friend.

What are friends for? Certainly not to enable us in destructive behavior, but to encourage us in celebrating God's gifts of life and hope.

Fisher, a retired pastor, lives in Spartanburg.



Photo and article excerpt courtesy of Heather Hahn UMNews

LGBTQ advocates plan for new day in church

United Methodist clergy and lay members pray outside the Charlotte Convention Center in Charlotte, N.C., on Oct. 13 for the General Conference that will take place in its halls in about six months. The United Methodist Queer Clergy Caucus organized the prayer session for the denomination's top lawmaking assembly during the Reconciling Ministries Network Convocation in Charlotte. The Rev. Austin Adkinson, pastor of Light of the Hill United Methodist Church in Puyallup, Wash., leads the prayer. The prayer session was part of the Reconciling Ministries Network's 2023 Convocation held Oct. 13-15 gathering at First United Methodist Church in Charlotte. More than 280 people who gathered in person alongside about 100 online for worship, communion, baptism remembrance and Bible study for the advocacy group that champions equality of LGBTQ people in the life of the church. The advocates also used the time to look back as Reconciling Ministries Network kicked off its 40th anniversary celebration and look forward to the coming General Conference, scheduled to take place just blocks away on April 23-May 3. Read the full story at <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/lgbtq-advocates-plan-for-new-day-in-church>.



Guest Commentary

by Bob Fowler

Missions and the Jesus Nut

With 113 churches leaving the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, it is time to explore how to adjust. It is in two types of missions: church's mission and God's mission.

There is no purer motive for a church than to want its pews filled with people who hunger for God. After all, the primary purpose of the church is to reach the masses with the saving message of Christ, "not desiring any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

However, a biblical mandate for church growth is probably best associated with Jesus' commission for his church to go and "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). Not only does God want persons to be saved, but he wants them to be disciplined into spiritually mature believers who will carry on his ministry—and it requires the environment of the church to do this. There, the believer is taught the word, has the guidance and correction of spiritual authority and, through worship and fellowship, will develop spiritual virtues, including a deeper love for God and others. Consequently, the Lord not only wants people to get saved, but he also wants them joined to a local body of believers, just as they were in the early church.

I believe that God wants all our churches to grow in his glory. As South Carolina United Methodists, it is our mission now to grow our membership back to where it was before disaffiliation. I can tell you no matter what the membership of any of our churches is, no church has ever met its potential. If there is just one soul in the community that has not accepted being part of a church community, the potential has not been reached. If there are needs financially of any church, there is no better way to remove that issue than having more members in our congregation making pledges to support the work of God. This is just math.

A desire for a growing church is one thing, but experiencing it is another. Despite the great emphasis of the American church growth movement, with scores of how-to books, tapes and seminars, most churches are still not growing. Perhaps the reason for this lies with misdirected priorities—"getting the cart before the horse." First, we must remember Jesus is the one who builds his church, not us. There are numerous philosophies and methods of church growth being circulated today, but Jesus must always be at the center. Pastors and leaders need to use caution lest they find themselves trying to substitute man's wisdom and methodology in the place of the Lord.

The philosophy has always been that "the seeds for growth are in the fruit." In other words, it is a fact of nature that within the fruit of each species (such as apples, peaches or grapes) there are seeds that will yield the offspring of future harvests. Similarly, the character of spiritual fruit in the church bears spiritual seed that contributes toward the harvest of souls.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Spiritual fruit is the loving, sweet personality of Jesus that warms the heart. Therefore, development of the spiritual character of the church contributes toward church growth.

The statistical traits of a growing congregation, each of which can be related to spiritual fruit and a mature relationship

with Christ are as follows:

- Love, a genuine care for other people;
- Commitment, a deep sense of direction and purpose;
- Openness, to new people and new ideas;
- Unity, respect for and harmony with the team;
- Flexibility, willingness to make changes when needed; and
- Vision, an attitude and expectancy for growth.

It is believed the best way to develop is in the environment of a condensed subgroup, sometimes referred to as a "cell." The smaller climate enables people to get to know each other and develop relationship bonds, something that's not very easy in a larger setting. And in the smaller group, everyone can be used in their gift or a special role of service. Sunday school classes or other specific groups for youth, men or women fulfill the need for such cell groups. Other churches use the concept of home groups, where small gatherings meet for fellowship and ministry. It is a truth that for a church to grow larger, it must also grow smaller at the same time.

The Institute for American Church Growth interviewed 10,000 church attenders to learn how they came into their church. The percentage of people interviewed had the following reasons: 2 percent because of a special need; 3 percent just walked in; 6 percent because of the pastor's influence; 1 percent in response to visitation from the church; 5 percent interest in Sunday School; 0.5 percent in response to a special crusade; 3 percent because of interest in a particular program. Yet 79 percent came because of the influence of a friend or relative.

In my opinion, the most neglected or poorly accomplished mission of the church is evangelism. The Bible commands the body of believers to evangelize: "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age'" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Therefore, it is a sin of omission not to engage in the task of making disciples by evangelism.

In the aviation industry there is a nut called the Jesus Nut. It is the nut at the top of the rotating blades of the helicopter that keeps the blades from coming off. The military named this part the Jesus Nut because if it ever comes off, the only thing one can do is pray to Jesus.

You see, in a community the church is the Jesus Nut. It keeps the community spirituality from coming loose.

Church is the nut that holds all of us together. It is a charge of the church to be the Jesus Nut. By growing our church family, this can be more realized.

So let's grow more in the mission God wants us to. We will never reach our potential, but we can work toward it. It is time to adjust. God is asking us to be a Jesus Nut. It can become our growth.

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



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Randy Smith

Israel reflections

Offer some critically important biblical and theological points for contemporary Christians to keep in mind always, but never more urgently than in this present time.

First, Old Testament Israel was the national identity of the Covenant People of God, "chosen" to be a missionary people, who were intended to be the means of God's "light" shining on all the other nations of the earth, a means of God's "salvation," beautifully envisioned in Isaiah 11:9 reaching to "the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

Second, the modern nation-state of Israel (which is officially a secular democracy per <https://www.learnreligions.com>) is just that: a modern nation-state without any sense of mission in the world other than that of survival. This is on account of the circumstances of its creation in the late 1940s through the displacement of hundreds of thousands of other peoples from their homes and lands—others who, generations later, are still displaced and thus hateful toward Israel because of this.

Third, it is centrally important that contemporary Christians not confuse biblical Israel with modern Israel. Such confusion is nonetheless rampant on account of now generations of grossly misguided teaching in the church. Such teaching has arisen out of a fervent apocalyptic mindset, which has tried to read certain of the Scriptures of the Old Testament (often in conjunction with a colorful reading of the Book of Revelation) under the rubric of something called "Bible Prophecy." This leads to the conclusion that the establishment of modern Israel is a near immediate precursor event to the urgently sought for Second Coming of Christ.

Fourth, the only thing biblical Israel and the modern state of Israel have in common at all, however, is geography.

Fifth, some of the most important, and most seriously neglected, passages in the New Testament are Romans chapters 9-11. In these chapters, Paul agonizes over the present status of his own people, the Jews, vis-a-vis God, given their widespread rejection of Christ as the Messiah (their "stumbling" mentioned in Romans 11:11).

Sixth, Paul concludes, however, that the Jews (collectively, "Israel") are forever the Covenant (chosen) People of God, and that, as such, "all Israel (πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ) will be saved ... for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:26-29).

This seemingly unambiguous affirmation troubles some Christians, who point to Paul's words in Romans 9:6b-8, where he makes some distinction between the physi-

cal and spiritual descendants of Abraham. Some Christians want to insist that only the latter group constitute the Israel that will be saved. Note, however, that Paul himself ultimately appears to leave all such considerations aside, overwhelmed as he is by the "mystery" (v. 25) of the whole situation, saying finally that just how God is going to work it all out is "unsearchable ... and ... inscrutable" (Romans 11:33).

Seventh, of greatest importance is that we do not find in the New Testament any vision of Israel's ultimately being "saved" tied to the Jewish people re-inhabiting something like the geographical boundaries of the ancient kingdom of David and Solomon.

In fact, from Jesus, Paul and the Revelation of John, we learn something entirely different. Jesus foretells the destruction of the Temple (Matthew 24:1-2) and of Jerusalem as a whole (Luke 19:41-44). John's Gospel has Jesus saying of himself that his own risen body will, in fact, become the new Temple of God in the world (John 2:19-21).

Paul beautifully elaborates on this understanding in Ephesians 2:19-22, describing how Gentiles and Jews (i.e., the whole human race), essentially through the church, are being built together into a "holy Temple in the Lord."

Finally, the crowning (and supremely hopeful) reference to Jerusalem is the vision in Revelation 21:2 of "the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."

Eighth, "Jerusalem" is, therefore, of ultimate importance to God, but not as or in a geographical place. It is finally the city in a spiritual sense—that way of life-together—that conforms perfectly to the way of life-together God has always desired for the whole of God's human and non-human creation.

As such, it is fit once again for God to come and make God's "home among mortals" (Revelation 21:3). This Jerusalem will be the fulfillment of the vision of Isaiah 2:2-5 and of Habakkuk 2:14, which is summed up in the idea that its river will flow over all the earth as the "water of life," and that it will also be where the "tree of life" will grow, the leaves of which will be for the "healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:1-2).

It is this healing that is God's desire and plan for the life of the world, and not our warring over a place on the map in perpetuity.

Smith is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and lives in Travelers Rest.

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Rev. Peggy Jean Garland

CENTRAL—The Rev. Peggy Jean Garland, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and pastor of the Liberty-Zion Charge, Liberty, died Nov. 4, 2023.



Garland

Prior to her retirement in 2018, Rev. Garland served the Bethel, Iva, Bethel-Rehama, Duncan Memorial-St. Mark, Francis Asbury and Lawrence Chapel charges. She has served the Liberty-Zion Charge since 2018.

Funeral services were held Nov. 19 at Francis Asbury UMC, Greenville.

Rev. Garland is survived by her son and daughter.

Rev. Allen Eugene Long

PACOLET—The Rev. Allen Eugene Long, a retired elder of South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Oct. 27, 2023.



Long

Prior to his retirement in 1998, Rev. Long served the Pisgah-Pine Grove, Greer-Faith, Lee Road, Cherokee Place, Seneca-St. Mark, Trinity-Bamberg, Winnsboro-First, Inman, Fairmont-Gravely Memorial and Platt Springs charges. He also served Asbury, Gaffney, Charge as a retired elder.

A graveside service was held Nov. 1 at Greenlawn Memorial Gardens-Spartanburg.

Memorials may be made to Pine Mountain Settlement School, 36 Highway 510, Bledsoe, KY 40810; or to the Michael J. Fox Foundation, P.O. Box 5014, Hagerstown,

MD 21741.

Rev. Long is survived by his wife, Jean Long, three daughters and son.

Rev. Alan Nathan Quarles

EDGEFIELD—The Rev. Alan Nathan Quarles, a retired local pastor of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Nov. 8, 2023.



Quarles

Prior to his retirement in 2021, Rev. Quarles served the Oak Hill, Lockhart-Wesley Chapel and St. John-Warrentville charges.

Graveside services were held Nov. 11 at Antioch Baptist Church Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to Warrentville UMC, 120 Timmerman St., Warrentville, SC 29851; or to St. John UMC, P.O. Box 38, Graniteville, SC 29829,

Rev. Quarles is survived by his mother.

Timothy Leroy Rivers

LAMAR—Timothy Leroy Rivers, brother of the Rev. M. Loretta Cooper, died Nov. 13, 2023. Rev. Cooper is the pastor of the Sandy Grove-Mount Elon Charge, Jefferson.

A memorial service was held Nov. 20 at Barbara J. Hines Memorial Chapel.

Rev. Myrna Kay Westfall

AMANDA, Ohio—The Rev. Myrna Kay Westfall, a retired local pastor of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Sept. 25, 2023.



Westfall

Prior to her

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.

Hospice of Central Ohio, 1585 E. Main St., Lancaster, OH 43130.

Rev. Westfall is survived by her husband, Paul Westfall, two sons and daughter.

Kenneth R. Westley Sr.

WALLINGTON, N.J.—Kenneth R. Westley Sr., stepbrother of Sharome Henry, died Oct. 23, 2023. Mr. Henry is the executive assistant in the conference's Clergy Services; his wife, Stephanie, is the insurance specialist in the conference Health Benefits office.

Funeral services were held Oct. 30 at the Ferguson-Rayam Funeral Home.

retirement in 2014, Rev. Westfall served the New Market-Tabernacle Charge.

A memorial service was held Oct. 29 at Lancaster Campground Event Center, Lancaster, Ohio. Memorials may be made to



Preparing for the coming Light of the World

Lexington UMC, Lexington, invites all to experience their Advent Spiral Walk on Winter Solstice, Thursday, Dec. 21, from 5:30-7:30 p.m. The event is held in Wesley Hall (the gym), and parking is available in the shared lot off Fort Street. The Advent Spiral Walk is a drop-in event with four reflection stations and ending with the spiral walk. The stations are all accessible for those with mobility supports. Additionally, there is an alternative finger labyrinth for those for whom the spiral path is too narrow to accommodate their supports. Please note the lighting for this event is intentionally very low.

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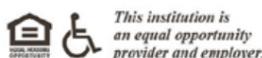
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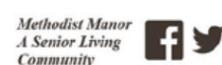
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Archives and History holds fall meeting

The Conference Historical Society and Conference Commission on Archives and History gathered for their fall meeting Oct. 21 at Spartanburg Methodist College's Davis Chapel. Dr. Tim Drum, SMC chaplain, and Dr. Phillip Stone, conference archivist, were program presenters. The Revs. Meredith Dark, Joseph Kovas and Roger Gramling were re-elected at the meeting to serve as president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer of the Conference Historical Society. Above, from left, Gramling, Kovas and Dark share a smile with Luther Rickenbaker, chair of the Conference Commission on Archives and History. Below at left is Drum, while at right is Stone.



From the Archives

by Dr. Phillip Stone

Bishop Roy Clark

South Carolina Methodists anticipated they would be welcoming a new bishop in the summer of 1980. Bishop Edward L. Tullis had served the normal two quadrennia in Columbia, and the Jurisdictional Conference sent the Kentucky native to the Tennessee Conference. In his place, the Jurisdiction sent newly elected Bishop Roy C. Clark.

Born in Mobile, Alabama, in 1920, Roy Clark grew up in parsonages in Mississippi, where his father was a pastor. He graduated from Millsaps College and Yale Divinity School and served appointments in Mississippi. At age 33, he had become pastor of Capitol Street Church in Jackson, where he served for ten years. In 1963, he moved to Memphis, serving St. John's Church, and in 1967, he began a 13-year pastorate at Nashville's West End United Methodist Church. He became a member of the Tennessee Conference and represented that conference at General and Jurisdictional Conference.

In 1980, the Southeastern Jurisdiction elected Clark to the episcopacy on the 16th ballot. He was the only minister elected that year who had not been a district superintendent and the only one who was not a conference nominee. Several other candidates that year, including Joseph Bethea, were elected in subsequent years. The Clarks took up their responsibilities in Columbia in September 1980, and the bishop was formally installed in a service in October at Washington Street Church.

Clark noted in one article that he was not the South Carolina bishop, but was the United Methodist bishop assigned to South Carolina, and was already learning to balance his responsibilities to both South Carolina and to the General Church. In 1982, Clark hosted the Council of Bishops for a weeklong meeting. They were unable to meet as hoped in Charleston for lack of a facility to accommodate them, so they had to meet at Lake Junaluska. Clark was determined to bring them to South Carolina, however, so the bishops came to Spartanburg for a day, where they met at Bethel Church.

Arriving only eight years after the merger

of the 1785 and 1866 conferences, Clark had to continue efforts to bring about a more intentional merger. In 1984, he issued a pastoral letter outlining plans for more dialogue between White and Black Methodists, many of whom had few relationships outside of conference and district work. The letter also outlined plans for consultation regarding cross-racial pastoral appointments in future years.

Clark also faced concerns from some lay Methodists about perceived liberalism in the denomination as a whole. One newspaper article talked about a meeting he had with a Union County church that had complained about some of the church's stands on social issues. Clark responded that "liberal and conservative are not Kingdom categories," and that regarding the Bible, "Interpretations disagree, but our dialogue centers around the Bible."

The issues Clark faced in dealing with some of the laity show that some things don't change very much.

As he prepared to retire in 1988, in an interview with the *Advocate*, Clark noted that part of his mission in South Carolina had been to foster a sense of community. He noted that part of that was continuing the "journey of inclusiveness that we began at merger." Another part was trying to connect the local church to the annual conference, so that local church members saw themselves as part of a larger denominational mission.

Clark, who spent his entire ministry in the local church, admitted that it took him a while to adjust to his new role as a bishop, whereas he expected his successor, Bishop Joseph Bethea, who had been a district superintendent and an assistant to a bishop, would know the questions to ask.

The Clarks returned to Nashville, where he served as a bishop in residence at West End Church, did some teaching at Vanderbilt and lived until 2014.

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



Conference Historical Society

by Dr. Roger M. Gramling

'We haven't always agreed'

I have no intention of minimizing the current crisis in our United Methodist Church family over disaffiliations related to issues of human sexuality—a crisis which in many of our annual conferences has reached catastrophic proportions in the loss of churches and to a lesser degree in the loss of clergy. But I am reminded that across our history there have been differences of opinion and, to a lesser degree, differences of doctrine in the church that have resulted in division and schism. One most memorably occurred in 1844 when the Methodist Episcopal Church was literally divided in two over the issue of slavery as indeed the entire nation would be some 16 years later.

Historically, the schisms within our church have centered around issues of governance including episcopal authority, lay representation and administrative practice; slavery, racial equality and justice; and, to a lesser degree, issues related to holiness and Christian perfection.

Even before Methodism in America was organized into a separate church, while it was still largely under the direct influence of John Wesley, differences arose over the authority to administer the sacraments. As Anglican priests returned to England or fled to Canada during the American Revolution, Francis Asbury remained, for all practical purposes, Mr. Wesley's sole representative in America. While pressure upon Asbury mounted to provide the sacraments for the American Methodists, he continued to insist, as did Wesley, that only ordained preachers were permitted to administer the sacraments. What Methodist seminary student has not heard of the Fluvanna Conference at Brokenback Church, Fluvanna County, Virginia, in 1779, at which the preachers from the Southern stations openly defied both Wesley and Asbury on this issue, constituting themselves into a separate church with a Presbyterian order? This separatist action was reversed a year later, and the Southern preachers agreed to desist from administering the sacraments for one year, asking Asbury to plead their case to Wesley. A year later, in 1781, 39 preachers signed a resolution disavowing separation.

However, the issue remained a divisive one. It was not addressed until the Christmas Conference of 1784 when Methodism in America was organized into a church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, under the direction and supervision of Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, whom Wesley named as "superintendents," to be assisted by ordained elders and deacons. The pressing need for clergy to administer the sacraments led to

the ordination by Coke and Asbury of 12 preachers as elders and 14 as deacons. As only elders were permitted to celebrate the sacraments, their role soon evolved into the practice of the "presiding elder," thus traveling a wider circuit to celebrate the sacraments and, in time, to offer oversight and leadership and to conduct certain church business. Thus was the "sacramental controversy" resolved.

However disagreements and differences would continue to plague the new church in the years to come, resulting in schisms and the proliferation of new Methodist church bodies. For example, both the Church of the United Brethren in Christ organized in 1800 and the Evangelical Association organized in 1803 resulted from Asbury's opposition to a "two language" church and his encouragement to form separate churches for German-speaking Methodists. Asbury was convinced that the usage of the German language would soon die out in America. It did not. Both churches eventually united to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1946, merging 20 years later with the Methodist Church to form The United Methodist Church.

Among those included in the list of Methodist bodies formed as a result of disagreements and differences are the Methodist Protestant Church (1830), the Canada Methodist Episcopal Church (1828), the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church (1813), the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1816), the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Zion (1821), the Wesleyan Methodist Connection (1843), the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (1846), the Congregational Methodist Episcopal Church (1852), the Free Methodist Church (1860), the Southern Methodist Church (1940) and the Church of the Nazarene (1908).

While this list is not exhaustive, it is a reminder that indeed we have not always agreed, that differences and disagreements do arise, and that, sadly, there are times when the church fractures as a result.

What is hopeful in all of this is that among the churches listed above both the Methodist Protestant Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, reunited with the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1939 to form the Methodist Church. And, the "German speaking" Methodists and the "English speaking" Methodists came together in 1968.

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

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November

Native American Heritage Month

Nov. 23—Thanksgiving Day

Nov. 23—24th Annual Community Thanksgiving Dinner, Hudson's Seafood House on the Docks, Hilton Head, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC is a co-sponsor. <https://communitythanksgiving.com>

Nov. 23-24—United Methodist Center closed.

Nov. 26—Reign of Christ Sunday

December

Dec. 1—World AIDS Day

Dec. 1-3—30th Annual "The Living Christmas Story" drive-through nativity, Union UMC, Irmo, 6:30-9 p.m. <https://sites.google.com/view/thelivingchristmasstory>

Dec. 2—UWF Limitless Event, virtual, 10 a.m.

Dec. 2—"Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership," Bishop's Day in the Florence District, Central UMC, Florence, 9:45 a.m.-Noon. Registration: <https://www.umcsc.org/districtdays>

Dec. 3—150th Anniversary Homecoming Celebration, Lebanon UMC, Newberry, 11 a.m.

Dec. 5—UMVIM, Grace UMC, Columbia, 6:30 p.m.



Photo courtesy of Sarah Fletcher

Lessons and carols

Trenholm Road UMC, Columbia, will host a "Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols" Sunday, Dec. 17, at 8:45 a.m. and 11 a.m. Attendees are invited to immerse in the beauty of traditional carols and Scripture readings as all celebrate this holy season. This service of lessons and carols, sung by the Sanctuary Choir and accompanied by strings, originated in 1918 at King's College, Cambridge, and has since become a cherished Christmas tradition worldwide. Trenholm Road is located at 3401 Trenholm Road, Columbia. All are welcome.

Dec. 9—"Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership," Bishop's Day in the Greenville District, Lee Road UMC, Taylors, 9:30 a.m.-Noon. Registration: <https://www.umcsc.org/districtdays>

Dec. 9—Gift Hope Charleston, Hibben UMC, Mount Pleasant. <https://hibbenumc.org>

Dec. 10—157th Anniversary, John Wesley

UMC, Greenville. Bishop Holston, guest preacher.

Dec. 11—Sing-Along Messiah, Washington Street UMC, Columbia, 7 p.m.

Dec. 16—"100 Voices of Christmas," St. Mark UMC and Lee Road UMC, Taylors, 5 p.m.

Dec. 17—"Sounds of the Season," St. An-

drew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head, 10 a.m.

Dec. 17—Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, Trenholm Road UMC, Columbia, 8:45 a.m. and 11 a.m.

Dec. 21—Winter Solstice

Dec. 21—The Longest Night Service, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head, 6 p.m.

Dec. 22-26—UMC Center closed

Dec. 24—Christmas Eve

Dec. 24—Christmas Eve Extravaganza featuring Asley Fabian, Ethan Vincent, Kyle Lane, Todd Smith and Amanda Gibson, Trinity UMC, Charleston, 11:15 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.

Dec. 24—Children's Christmas Pageant, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head, 10 a.m.

Dec. 24—Christmas Eve candlelight service, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head Island, 4:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Dec. 25—Christmas Day

Dec. 26-Jan. 1—Kwanzaa

Dec. 31—New Year's Eve/Watch Night

Dec. 31—Christmas Hymn Sing service, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head, 10 a.m.

Calvary UMC to host 2023 nativity exhibition

SWANSEA—Calvary United Methodist Church members and their pastor, the Rev. Donna Lollis, extend an invitation for all to come celebrate the Christ child at their 2023 Nativity Exhibition.

The exhibition is slated for Saturday, Dec. 9 from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday, Dec. 10, from 3-6 p.m.

Admission is free. Hundreds of nativities from around the

world will be on display. Children must be accompanied by an adult. A Santa's Gift Shop sponsored by the Calvary United Women in Faith will be open for holiday shopping.

The church is located at 1130 Calvary Church Road, Swansea, SC 29160.

Displayed nativities will range in design from classic to modern, antique to present-day, traditional to whimsical and

collector items to recycled materials. All will be beautifully displayed throughout the church and fellowship building. Foremost, they all focus on the true meaning of Christmas.

Enjoy a cup of hot beverage while you visit with friends and neighbors.

For more information: calvary_ogumc@comporium.net or 803-568-9712.

Union presents 'The Living Christmas Story'

IRMO—Union United Methodist Church is preparing to host the full production of their long-standing tradition, the 30th annual drive-through living nativity, "The Living Christmas Story."

This event will take place Friday through Sunday, Dec. 1-3, 2023 from 6:30-9 p.m. each night.

For 30 years now, the Union UMC parking lot has been transformed into the city of Bethlehem as the "greatest story ever told"—a drive-through reenactment 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 includes live animals that become the town of Bethlehem. Villagers, a blacksmith, the innkeeper, Herod's Court, the marketplace and many more scenes come alive as visitors drive through and experience the night Christ came.

Often described as beautiful and moving, "The Living Christmas Story" is an experience that many thousands of spectators have witnessed, which is more than 160,392

visitors over the last 29 years.

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by the Rev. Walter E. Strawther

Ready, set, rejoice

Dec. 3

Hesitant to Rejoice

Lesson Scripture: Luke 1:5-23

Background Scripture: Luke 1

Key Verses: “He will bring many Israelites back to the Lord their God. He will go forth before the Lord, equipped with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will turn the hearts of fathers back to their children, and he will turn the disobedient to righteous patterns of thinking. He will make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:16-17).

Zechariah is fulfilling his priestly duties when the angel Gabriel appears before him. Gabriel brings a message of great joy to Zechariah, a message that is almost too good to be true. Gabriel declares that Zechariah’s wife, Elizabeth, will give birth to a baby boy and they are to name him John. Under “normal” circumstances, this would be great news, but Elizabeth has been barren and is by human estimation past the age of bearing children. Furthermore, Gabriel tells Zechariah that his son will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth (v. 15). By the power of the Holy Spirit, John will lead a revival of righteousness among the Israelites. Speaking with the spirit and power of Elijah, John will lead the people to turn from disobedience to a pattern of right thinking and acting in preparation for the coming of the Lord.

Zechariah being a priest would have been aware of the promises of God to provide a Messiah, and the news that his son would play a role in the coming of the Messiah should have brought him great joy. However, Zechariah is aware of the biological limitations that conflict with the message that Gabriel brings. Zechariah asks, “How can I be sure of this?” (v. 18). His hesitation to rejoice in the news Gabriel brings results in Zechariah losing his voice. He completes his duty and returns home unable to speak.

As we are getting ready for Christmas and the birth of Jesus Christ, we consider what John’s birth announcement means for those of us who are also waiting on the Messiah. As we go about our daily lives attempting to fulfill our duty as followers of Jesus Christ, are we listening and attuned to messages of great joy? Are we hesitant to rejoice and instead ask questions leading us to silence?

Dec. 10

Willing to Rejoice

Lesson Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

Background Scripture: Luke 2

Key Verses: “Nothing is impossible for God.’ Then Mary said, ‘I am the Lord’s servant. Let it be with me just as you have said.’ Then the angel left her” (Luke 1:37-38).

Jesus and John are linked in many ways, not the least of which is the role of the angel Gabriel in announcing their births to their prospective parents. Both Elizabeth and Mary are unlikely candidates to give birth, Elizabeth because of her old age and Mary because of her youth. Similar to Zechariah, Mary initially questions Gabriel when he tells her she will give birth to a son. However, unlike Zechariah, Mary accepts Gabriel’s message by declaring herself to be a servant of God willing to do whatever God requires of her. Her willingness to embrace the role of an unwed mother stands in stark contrast to Zechariah’s hesitation to embrace John’s birth. We are reminded that John’s birth will be greeted with rejoicing and celebration while Jesus will be born with little celebra-

tion or fanfare. Scripture doesn’t provide any details, but we can imagine that Mary faces ridicule as a supposed virgin who begins to show signs of pregnancy. Even with the prospect of public backlash, Mary joyfully receives Gabriel’s message.

We would like to think that if an angel showed up out of the blue, we would be prepared to receive the message from God with rejoicing. However, we like Zechariah and Mary would be filled with questions and initially seek some clarification. It is possible that Luke shares the annunciations of John’s and Jesus’s births in order to challenge us to hold to our faith while seeking understanding of God’s will for our lives. Mary has more reason to object and find fault with this miraculous birth announcement, but she rejoices.

How do we live out our faith in God in the face of possible public rebuke? Discuss any other comparisons and contrasts between Zechariah and Mary. What can we learn about our response to God as we consider Zechariah and Mary?

Dec. 17

Rejoicing Together

Lesson Scripture: Luke 1:24-25, 39-45

Background Scripture: Luke 1, 3

Key Verse: “Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her” (Luke 1:45).

As we continue to get ready to rejoice the birth of Jesus on Christmas morning, Luke continues with the themes of preparing to rejoice and rejoicing in the waiting. Luke continues to highlight the connection between John and Jesus, but also comments on the relationship between their mothers, Elizabeth and Mary. As a continuation from last Sunday’s lesson, we see Mary’s continued eagerness to be obedient to God’s will. After learning that her relative Elizabeth is six months pregnant, Mary hurries to Elizabeth’s home. As the two women greet each other, Elizabeth’s son leaps within her womb and she begins to declare blessings over Mary under the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are invited to see the power of the Holy Spirit to lead us to rejoicing as we continue actively waiting to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. We are reminded that we are connected to one another by the power of God the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth has lived a life of disgrace because of her inability to have a child, and Mary can’t wait to get there to help her celebrate the removal of this disgrace. Mary, an unwed mother, is not shunned by her elderly relative for having a baby out of wedlock but instead has blessings proclaimed over her and her baby. God the Holy Spirit moves within Elizabeth, making it possible for her to recognize Mary’s pregnancy as a fulfillment of God’s promise to both her and Mary as well as to the people of Israel for the sake of all creation.

How can we reflect the spirit of Elizabeth and Mary as we prepare to rejoice Christmas morning? What are the implications for intergenerational relationships based on this interaction between Mary and Elizabeth?

Dec. 24

Rejoice with Singing

Lesson Scripture: Luke 1:46-55

Background Scripture: Luke 4

Key Verse: “He shows mercy to everyone, from one generation to the next, who honors him as God” (Luke 1:50).

Mary responds to her relative’s declara-

tion of blessing with a song of her own. Mary sings to God of the joy she feels because of what God is going to do through the son she now carries. She declares that from now on everyone will call her highly favored. Mary declares the upside-down gospel that strengthens the weak but scatters the arrogant and proud. She proclaims a gospel that lifts up the lowly but brings down those who sit on powerful thrones. She claims a gospel that fills the hungry with good things but sends the rich away empty-handed. Hers is a song of unbridled joy that comes from knowing that God will keep God’s promises to all generations.

As we gather this Christmas Eve, we notice that Mary sings this song of joy even though Jesus has yet to be born. As we gather for cantatas and live nativities, we are reminded that we sing the songs of promise even as the powerful sit in their places of power and the hungry and homeless crowd our streets. We join Mary in believing that this Jesus who is to be born has already started righting the wrongs of this world and we can joyously join him in this mission.

In the spirit of Mary’s joy, we are invited to have Jesus be born in us as we rejoice in singing but also knowing that when the music stops the work begins.

Mary has yet to experience the joys and pains of having a relationship with Jesus but is already committed to living into this relationship. She gives us an example of true Christmas spirit. Her joy flows from her understanding of what Jesus’ birth will mean for all creation. God’s mercy is extended to all.

How does singing help us prepare for Christmas? How does Mary’s song compare or contrast with the Christmas spirit of our modern times?

Dec. 31

Rejoicing in Peace

Lesson Scripture: Luke 1:67-80

Background Scripture: Luke 2:14, 29-38, 11:1-13

Key Verses: “Because of our God’s deep compassion, the dawn from heaven

will break upon us, to give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide us on the path of peace” (Luke 1:78-79).

We are a week into the Christmas season, and are well aware that those who do not follow the Christian calendar will say that Christmas is over. Even so, it may seem odd that the editors of this Sunday school series have chosen to go back before Jesus’s birth to focus on the birth of Zechariah’s son, John. More specifically, Luke focuses on Zechariah’s response to John’s birth.

God is true to God’s word, and Zechariah is able to speak again after being silent through Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John. The first words out of Zechariah’s mouth are words of prophecy as empowered by God the Holy Spirit. Zechariah rejoices in the holiness and righteousness that God is offering through Jesus our Savior. Zechariah prophesies the role his son John will play in preparing the way for Jesus as a prophet of the Most High. He is able to see his child grow into the role that God has assigned for him and rejoice.

Zechariah may have been hesitant to rejoice, but when he got the opportunity, he did not waste it. He breaks out into song that is reminiscent of Mary’s song. He foretells Jesus’s coming and the implications of his birth, life, death and resurrection. Perhaps the editors want to emphasize that even if we were hesitant to celebrate Christmas morning, it is still not too late.

As we contemplate Jesus’s birth, we are reminded of his second coming. As we continue to celebrate Christmas, we are invited to bring our doubts and fears because God the Holy Spirit will take our concerns and give us a song.

Are there concerns that keep you from receiving the peace that God is offering in Jesus Christ? How can we keep the spirit of Christmas going in a world that has reverted back to business as usual?

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



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CLOTHES CLOSET: 'I've seen miracles happen in here'

From Page 1

Everywhere you look, volunteers and shoppers mill about, teasing each other or chatting lightly. One volunteer pushes an older man in a wheelchair as he browses the household items. Everyone knows each other's names, and volunteers often set aside special items for regulars—like the dress pants they found last week for Mr. Bennett. He's been looking for some in his size, 44x30, for months.

"He's so excited," says Trudy Easton with a smile, motioning as he shops. "He comes

every month, and we finally found some in his size."

Easton, outreach coordinator for church, said the Clothes Closet grew out of a project the church did with the Epworth Lowcountry Foster Care Program. Members maintained a resource room for them, where foster families could come to get needed supplies. But soon they realized the surrounding community needed clothing and other items, too. During Lent, the church did a Bible study, Rick Warren's "40 Days in the Word," and the study encouraged groups to pick a ministry to adopt and participate in.

Kathy Belsky and her husband Rod, were among those who participated, and they decided to select the Clothes Closet, which had recently started through Easton's efforts.

With the extra volunteer help, not to mention their passion and excitement, "It's just flourished," Belsky said.

"I've seen miracles happen in here," said volunteer Suzanne Randall. "The second month we were open, a lady came in. Looking through, she found some things, picked out three or four items, then asked, 'How much?'"

Randall told her everything was free. "She looked at me and just started crying," Randall said, her face lighting with the memory. "You feel like you're actually helping people."

Fellow volunteer Sherry Rebeck nods. "That's what surprises people the most—we say 'take it all! The look on their face is like, seriously?'"

Donations are collected throughout the month and packed into a storage room, and on Thursdays, volunteers gather to sort the items so the volume does not become overwhelming. Then the day before the closet, they gather to bring all the items out, set up tables, sort everything by size, and get ready for the next morning.

A table greets shoppers, where they collect names and information and get to know those who come. Easton said many come directly from the food bank at nearby Knightsville UMC, a sister church that steers clients to the Clothes Closet after they get

free food items.

"We get a great turnout—15 families per month on average, like one lady who has six kids, a husband and wife, a mom and her daughter," Easton said. "It's turned out to be a marvelous ministry and really goes beyond the walls of the church."

They try to make the atmosphere feel homey and comfortable for the shoppers, and each month they add special touches, such as a full-length mirror or a chair so people can try on shoes.

"We want people not to be in a rush to leave, to stay and shop," Easton said.

Randall agrees. "We try to make it a nice experience for people."

Stallville pastor the Rev. Rob Rabenstein said he truly appreciates what his congregation is doing. He came to Stallville in July and loves seeing his church reach out to others in the name of Jesus.

"The need is out there, and every month we seem to touch more of the neighborhood," Rabenstein said. "This is a wonderful way to do what we need to do."

"It's about being a presence in the community and loving your neighbor—there's no theology here."

Rod Belsky agreed. "It's our way of reaching out to the community. That's what Jesus wants us to do."

For more on Stallville's Clothes Closet, visit <http://www.stallvilleumc.org/> or connect on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/StallvilleUMC>.

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Volunteer Rod Belsky says the ministry is the church's way of reaching out to the community. "That's what Jesus wants us to do."

Photo by Jessica Brodie

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