



## New Year's Prayer

**“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”**

— Jeremiah 29:11

This verse is a beautiful reminder of God's faithfulness and His good plans for our lives, filling us with hope as we step into the year ahead.

Heavenly Father,

As the dawn of a new year breaks, we come before You with hearts full of gratitude for the gift of life and the blessings You have bestowed upon us. Thank You for guiding us through the challenges and joys of the past year.

As we step into this new chapter, we ask for Your presence to light our path. Grant us wisdom to make choices that honor You, courage to face the uncertainties ahead and strength to persevere through trials. May we find peace in Your promises and trust in Your unfailing love.

Lord, bless our families, friends, and communities. Help us to build bridges of understanding, offer kindness freely, and be a source of encouragement to those in need. Teach us to be good stewards of the time, talents and opportunities You have given us.

In this year ahead, may we seek Your will in all we do. Shape our hearts to reflect Your compassion, our minds to seek Your truth, and our hands to do Your work. Fill our days with hope, joy, and purpose and may we always walk in Your grace.

We entrust this new year to You, trusting that Your plans for us are good and filled with hope. Guide us, bless us and keep us as we journey forward.

In Jesus' name, we pray,

Amen.

## Heifer International Living Gift Market:



Members and visitors had the opportunity to purchase symbolic animals for gifts to family and friends at Washington Street's Living Gift Market on Sundays December 8 and 15.

Some 52.6 million households have been helped since Heifer International began in 1944. Heifer International works globally with projects in 19 countries across four continents.

Thank you for your generous gifts. More than \$4,000 in animals and shares of animals will be sent to Heifer International to be used for the Heifer project Food for the Future in Ecuador.

This project works with 30,000 farming families to improve economic, social, and environmental outcomes. In partnership with local communities, Heifer works to strengthen value chains—steps which transform a product or service from idea to reality. This provides rural farmers, often women and Indigenous populations, with sustainable living incomes.

The program has established schools to teach best practices for farming and scaling up agricultural businesses. This project was chosen because of the ties Washington Street has with people in Ecuador from sending mission teams there for the past several years. Thank you to Elaine Ferraro, Mary Lide, Andrea McAtee, Ute Wachsmann-Linnan, and Chip Williams for assisting at the market.



**WASHINGTON STREET**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Connections

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January 2025



## Six Things to Know about Larry Hembree

1. Larry Hembree has made the theater his life. He has directed more than 200 plays and acted in more than 100. Now, in retirement, he is devoting hundreds of volunteer hours to drama at Washington Street. He was also one of the founders of a company for youths of all abilities and their families. It has produced one show, "When the Trees Sing" at our church. And, now, it will be brought under the church's legal umbrella, which will allow donations to be tax-deductible. There will be a newly formed advisory committee, which will select a new name for the program. The whole program will be inclusive, Larry said. He said he is excited to be producing "Annie Jr." next spring and "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" next Christmas.
2. Inclusivity is important to Larry who said he grew up an "underdog." He was small, he was gay and he never hid it. Sometimes, because of his size and "artsy demeanor," he was bullied at school. It didn't take him long to figure out how he would deal with all this; it was by developing a sense of humor. He finally found his tribe when he started participating in Greenwood Community Theatre. His first play, when he was in the seventh grade, was an original production of "The Little Prince." He played the lamplighter. "It was time to make myself known," Larry said, adding that within 10 minutes he knew he was in the right place.
3. In high school he started performing at the nearby Abbeville Opera House. Among his roles were Linus in "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" and Renfield in "Dracula," for which he won a best supporting actor award. He continued to do a lot of acting, but when his parents dropped him off at Clemson, as a college freshman, the last thing they said was, "Don't get involved in the theater." He majored in industrial management to appease his parents, but after a semester, he changed his major to English, with a minor in drama. He went on to earn a master's degree in directing and acting from the University of Georgia.
4. Larry has been with his husband Joe Hudson for 24 years; they married in April of 2015 at the box office of Trustus Theatre, where Larry was executive director. The box office manager was the officiant. There were no guests. Joe grew up taking organ lessons, and he wanted to join a church that had a pipe organ. When Larry visited Washington Street and heard the choir, he said our church had great music. Within a week, choir director Arletta Raley emailed Larry and asked him to join the choir. Both Larry and Joe sang in the choir under Arletta and under Angela Powers. Larry said one thing he likes about Washington Street is we get things done. "I've been in so many churches where it's all 'yack, yack' and nothing gets done," he said.
5. When he was a teenager, Larry taught himself to do tricks using Hula Hoops. He did this at Greenwood parks, where he also borrowed the Hula Hoops. Wham-O, which developed and sold Hula Hoops, held contests around the nation. Contestants were required to do five specific tricks and a freestyle. Larry's dad drove him to these contests and he "won a lot," he said. When he retired in 2022, Larry delighted the guests at his retirement party with a Hula Hoop performance.
6. Larry grew up in a conservative Presbyterian church, but he never "bought into" predestination, he said. When he was 35, he made a trip to India to visit the ashram of the avatar Meher Baba. Larry said he wanted to get over his religious upbringing and that happened "the second I stepped on Indian soil." He realized the world is a big place. "It broadened my idea of God," he said.



# CELEBRATIONS

## The girls in Mary's Maidens worked hard at the December meeting creating shooting stars.

The star decorations were mailed to the homebound members of the church. Other activities this year have been planting pansies near the parking lot entrance to the church, Trick-or-Treating for UNICEF after a worship service collecting \$336.40, and baking cheese thins for the UWF bake sale. Mary's Maidens is a United Women in Faith circle for girls in the first through fifth grade. We meet once a month September through May.



## Cookie decorating and caroling

On a Saturday early in December, the youths gathered with Sara Wilcox to decorate cookies for some of our homebound members. The next afternoon, the youths delivered them to four families and sang Christmas carols. Many thanks to Pato Aravena and Sara Wilcox!



We had such a good time that we are hoping that this could become a churchwide event with teams of all ages going to different parts of the city. If you are interested in helping to make this happen, please let Kathy know.

## The Theater of Inclusion



WSUMC is excited to announce a formal partnership with a theatre of inclusion (TOI), making it an official program of the church. The pilot organization presented "When the Trees Sing," an original musical, this past spring in Christ Chapel. Washington Street member Larry Hembree, part of the leadership team said, "I am very grateful for this collaboration as it affords us more space, access to more participants and volunteers, as well as more stable future. This is yet another example of the richness of Washington Street in our ongoing efforts to create opportunities for all facets of our community."

The inclusion theatre is looking for Washington Street members to serve on an advisory committee beginning in January, charged with giving advice and support in a number of areas including programming and development. The group will meet a maximum of six times per year. If interested or to answers to questions, email Hembree at larryhembree1@gmail.com.

### Make a Donation

Also, tax deductible donations can be made to the new theatre of inclusion by mailing a check to P.O. Box 2583, Columbia SC, 29202 or by going to [wsmethodist.org/giving](http://wsmethodist.org/giving) and choosing the "theatre of inclusion"

### TOI Values:

- Believe everyone harbors an artist inside them and has a story to tell
- Value the uniqueness in everyone
- Honor the process of creating art, the product is secondary
- Know experiencing the power and beauty of uniqueness and inclusion creates a better world
- Acknowledge that we are limitless
- Understand that our work must focus on removing labels
- Agree that having fun unleashes the creative spirit

### TOI Mission:

Embracing and respecting the uniqueness of all people, our theatre creates artistic opportunities for young artists and families.

## Sunday School Updates

### Grace Class: 3rd floor

Grace Class will have a topic of choice from class members. Topics may cover themes such as love, hope and/or certain scripture and devotionals.

### Dawsey Class: 2nd floor

During January and February, our teachers will select an article from Christian Century magazine and distribute it to the class for discussion on Sunday. The class is located on the second floor, near the Children's Library. Class members who join from home use FreeConferenceCall and should call in between 9:50 and 10am The call-in number is (701) 802-5115. The access code is 7252934.

### Paul Harmon Class: 3rd floor

The Paul Harmon Class will have John Adams teaching in January.

### Solomon's Porch: 1st floor

Solomon's Porch will begin a study on the Gospel of Mark. We will use The Gospel of Mark: A Beginner's Guide to the Good News by Amy-Jill Levine as our guide.

## Advocacy 101 Training



January 6, 2025 @ 6pm

### Threatt Hall

Join us for Advocacy 101 Training! This event is an opportunity to learn how we can follow Christ's call to love our neighbors through advocacy. Topics include how a bill becomes a law in SC, where to find legislative information, and how to engage with State Legislators and key leaders. A light supper begins at 5:30pm, followed by the presentation at 6pm. Scan the QR code above or email Rev. Alston at [aflippert@umcsc.org](mailto:aflippert@umcsc.org) to register and learn more!

## Children's Nativity



What a blessing to see the children and youths enact the Nativity on Sunday, Dec. 8. As director Andrea



McAtee said, there was "just enough chaos" to remind us of the blessing of leading in

worship. To the parents, we say a big thank you for sharing your children. To the congregation, we say thank you for being supportive and welcoming. To Andrea and all those who helped with set-up, costuming and other tasks, we say thank you and we can't wait for next year!



## Welcome new members!

Ben and Katie McKenzie and their daughter, Brantley



Walter Dean



## Christmas Wrap Up



This Advent season was filled with incredible WSUMC gifts, from the joyful Sing-Along Messiah to the breathtaking Cantata.



Scan the QR code to view a photo collection of these memorable moments.



### WSUMC Calendar

There's lots of exciting things happening at the church in January. Visit our website to view our calendar of events at [wsmethodist.org/events/](http://wsmethodist.org/events/) to learn more.