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June 2024

What happened at General Conference?

Body approves 'three Rs'—regionalization, revised Social Principles, removing restrictive language



The Rev. John Kabwit, North Katanga Conference, leads a choir of Congolese delegates in singing at GC2024.



Bishop Robin Dease consecrates a deaconess.



South Carolina's Jackie Jenkins speaks on the plenary floor.

By Jessica Brodie

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—For the first time since 2016, The United Methodist Church has gathered to complete the full business of the church.

Delegates from around the world gathered for General Conference April 23-May 3 at the Charlotte Convention Center. Originally slated for 2020 but postponed multiple times because of the pandemic, this year's outcome was vastly different

from the last time the body gathered.

By the time it ended, the church eliminated a 40-year-old ban on gay clergy, deleted language condemning homosexuality, authorized deacons to preside at the sacraments in their appointments, shifted decision-making about whether to conduct a gay wedding to the clergyperson, issued a heartfelt apology to all who experienced sexual misconduct in the church, took first steps in a new regionalized church structure

and passed a drastically reduced budget for the next quadrennium.

Those are just a handful of the more than 1,000 petitions addressed at the gathering, which featured 10 full days of prayer, worship, debate and legislative action that will ultimately guide The United Methodist Church for the next four years.

Sixteen lay and clergy delegates from South Carolina joined delegates from Africa, Europe, Asia and the U.S. for what

many said was a surprisingly uncontentious experience.

While not everyone agreed with all the changes, most agreed it was time to stop fighting and start focusing afresh on the work of Jesus Christ—together.

“Throughout the weeks of legislative committee work and plenary debate, many persons were able to make their voices

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Conference readies for Annual Conference

By Jessica Brodie

GREENVILLE—On the heels of a historic and groundbreaking General Conference, South Carolina United Methodists are gearing up now for this year's Annual Conference.

Lay and clergy members of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church will head to the Greenville Center June 9-12 to pray, worship and conduct the business of the church.

“As we prepare to gather from all across the conference, I ask for your prayers that great and marvelous things will happen through the Holy Spirit, who guides and sustains us,” said South Carolina's Resident Bishop L. Jonathan Holston. “Pray that our presence in Greenville and across South Carolina in the days that follow will be a living witness of the grace, mercy and love of Jesus Christ to all whom we meet.”

Here is what to expect:

Sunday's celebration

Annual Conference kicks off Sunday, June 9, at the Florence Center with packet pick-ups, clergy session (4:30 p.m.), lay member orientation and

other matters before one of the more anticipated services of the multiday session—the Commissioning, Ordination and Retirement Recognition Service. Presided by Holston with guest preacher Bishop Frank J. Beard of the Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference, the evening expects to ordain six full elders, ordain one full deacon, commission six as provisional elders, commission one as an associate member and transfer in one under Para. 347.2 as a full member with orders recognized as an elder.

It also will recognize approximately 30 retiring clergy.

The Rev. Mel Arant, assistant conference secretary and coordinator of clergy services, said he's excited that Beard will be able to join for the service. Arant said he's attended Annual Conference since he was a child, and it continues to excite him as we get closer.

“This is our opportunity to come together as colleagues and siblings in Christ to worship and celebrate our connectional lives, even as we conduct the necessary business needed to equip local churches to make disciples,” Arant said.

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The *Advocate* encourages readers to submit for publication items of interest to South Carolina United Methodists. There is no charge for running items involving activities or announcements. Items should be submitted as far as possible in advance of the event's date or the date of requested publication. Since there is no charge for these items, they appear in the newspaper on a space-available basis. Deadlines are the 10th of each month for the following month's paper.

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

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Back Issues

The *Advocate* maintains copies of back issues for sale for up to one year, as long as the supply lasts. When requesting by mail, back copies are \$2 each, to cover postage and handling. To research or review articles published more than one year ago, bound copies of the newspaper are available for review at the *Advocate* office, Wofford College in Spartanburg and the South Caroliniana Library in Columbia.

SMC recognized for exemplary affiliation with UMC

SPARTANBURG—Spartanburg Methodist College has been reaffirmed by the University Senate of The United Methodist Church, acknowledging its steadfast commitment to embodying the values and principles of the UMC.

The affirmation marks a significant milestone in SMC's dedication to its church-related identity and mission.

Established more than a century ago, the University Senate has been a pivotal advocate for United Methodist-related educational institutions across the United States and Puerto Rico. Rooted in the legacy of John Wesley's vision for education and the American Methodist tradition of serving society, the Senate sets standards for institutions affiliated with the UMC. The affirmation process meticulously examines how an institution embodies its relationship with the UMC.

While distinct from accreditation, it scrutinizes the institution's ethos, values and practices in alignment with the seven "marks of church relationship" outlined by the Senate.

The University Senate's affirmation of Spartanburg Methodist College underscores its commitment to upholding these values, said Dr. Rick Miller, senior education specialist with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and a University Senate review committee



The University Senate reaffirmed SMC member.

Their report noted SMC's dedication to religious education is evident through its robust curriculum, requiring all degree-seeking students to take a religion course and offering concentrations at both the associate and baccalaureate levels.

"Having benefitted from attending a United Methodist college myself, I know what to look for when I am on campus," Miller said. "After spending a day on campus and benefiting from the gracious hospitality offered me, talking with administrators and faculty, I was certain the University Senate review would have a good outcome."

Integral to SMC's commitment is the pres-

ence of a full-time chaplain and director of church relations, the Rev. Tim Drum. With deep roots in the UMC, Drum is pivotal in fostering religious life on campus. From organizing chapel services and Bible studies to providing spiritual counseling and mentoring students, his presence underscores SMC's dedication to nurturing faith and spirituality.

Moreover, SMC actively engages with the Spartanburg District and the South Carolina Conference of the UMC, ensuring alignment with the broader church community. Drum's inclusion in the college's President's Cabinet underscores the importance of his voice in shaping the college's direction and vision.

"Our relationship with the United Methodist Church, supported by the generous contributions and programming from the South Carolina Conference, reflects our commitment to intertwining knowledge with piety, as Charles Wesley envisioned," Drum said. "I am profoundly grateful for the University Senate's efforts in our reaffirmation process and for their recognition of SMC's crucial role in nurturing young minds."

"Through our collaboration, we're not just educating students but preparing them to be the next generation of leaders who will make a difference in their communities and beyond."

Haselden appointed new UMCSC benefits officer

The Rev. Rett Haselden has been appointed the new benefits officer for the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston appointed Haselden to the position effective June 26.

The Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits recommended Haselden, senior pastor of Grace UMC, Columbia, and the Conference Staff Relations Committee concurred.

Haselden will succeed the Rev. Chris Lollis, who has served as the conference benefits officer since 2018 and will be appointed as superintendent of the Greenwood District at Annual Conference in June.

Haselden was born in Murrells Inlet and is a graduate of the University of South Carolina, from which he earned a bachelor's degree in religious studies.

Being called to ordained ministry, he was ordained as a full elder



Haselden

in 2012 following his 2010 graduation from Duke Divinity School with a Master of Divinity degree.

Before his appointment to Grace UMC in 2019, Haselden served St. John's UMC in Rock Hill as associate pastor from 2010 to 2019.

In addition to Haselden's work in local churches, he has served in many ways, including on the Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits and as its vice chair, on the South Carolina United Methodist Credit Union Supervisory Committee, on the Conference Committee on Resolutions and Appeals and as a conference group candidacy mentor.

On the district level, he has served on the Rock Hill District Committee on Ordained Ministry, including as its chair and vice chair, and on the Rock Hill District Wesley Board.

Haselden is married to Lollie Haselden, and they have two sons, Wyatt, 12, and Thomas, 9. He enjoys kayaking, fishing, weight lifting, cooking and golf.

Advocate awards SMC student Victoria Freeman with scholarship

The *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* has selected Victoria Freeman, a student at Spartanburg Methodist College, as the newspaper's 2024 college scholarship recipient.

Freeman is majoring in environmental science and will receive \$1,000 from the *Advocate* toward her studies at SMC in the 2024-2025 academic year.

The *Advocate's* scholarship is for students who are South Carolina United Methodists and who are planning to enroll or are already enrolled at one of the four United Methodist colleges in South Carolina: Claflin University, Columbia College, Spartanburg Methodist College or Wofford College. The scholarship is available to students with an interest in communications, journalism or business.

Freeman, a member of Little River United Methodist Church, Little River, feels strongly about the role of journalism in ministry as well as its capacity to deliver information globally, shape perspectives and create change, whether on a small or large scale. While her goal is to become a park ranger, she believes communication is integral to environmental stewardship and understands its importance. She has an active YouTube channel and uses it not only to document her experiences but also help create awareness.

As the daughter of UMC pastor the Rev. W. Russell Freeman, she said her life has always been in the public eye, so creating a YouTube channel to document her high school study abroad experience felt like a natural outlet for

sharing her adventures.

"What I did not expect was integrating journalism with ministry, using media to create awareness and inspire change," Freeman said in her essay. "The past few months I have gained an unexpected social media following and I have had the blessing of serving other exchange students and potential exchange students as they learn about the opportunities. I am now also serving future college students as I share my honest and open struggles and successes as a freshman."

The application process for the *Advocate* 2025 scholarship has begun, with a deadline of March 1, 2024.

To apply or for more information: <https://advocatesc.org/scholarships>.

Now on sale: 'Napkin' book by Tyler Strange

A napkin a day. That's the premise of the newest book available from the Advocate Press.

Called "What I Want My Kids (And Me) to Know: Building Better Humans One Napkin at a Time," by the Rev. Tyler Strange, this simultaneously thoughtful and helpful book is now for sale and available.

It is the 26th title from the Advocate Press, a project of the South Carolina United Methodist Advocate that launched in 2017 to produce books of interest to South Carolina United Methodists on matters of faith and to amplify regional voices and those that advocate for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

On his daughter's first day of second grade, Strange, a South Carolina United Methodist pastor, had an idea—write an encouraging note on a napkin and tuck it into her lunchbox.

His daughter loved it, and the "lunchbox

napkin" soon became an invitation to inspire one another to be better humans.

In addition to the napkins, Strange began to write daily reflections for adults geared around similar themes of that day's napkin. Soon, the napkins began to meet adults in the tensions of their lives. His friends also began using the napkins to serve the children in their lives.

Now, his project has turned into a book of 45 "napkin thoughts" to help everyone discover new ways to become better humans.

Take a napkin journey with Strange and see how you, too, can embrace a future of hope, whimsy and much-needed dialogue—all because of a napkin.

The book is available as an ebook and a paperback on Amazon as well as on the *Advocate's* website at <https://advocatesc.org/store/books/napkin>.

Advocate Press to host Meet the Authors event

GREENVILLE—All are welcome to a Meet the Authors/Book Signing event hosted by the Advocate Press at Annual Conference.

Held drop-in style from 12-2 p.m. on Tuesday, June 11, during the lunch break, the event will be held in Room 202A at the Greenville Center.

Attendees will get the chance to meet some of the authors of Advocate Press books, hear from them firsthand about their writing, have a book autographed and more.

Books will also be for sale.

TRUMC makes a difference with Habitat for Humanity

By David Free

COLUMBIA—At one time, faith-based organizations were responsible for building the majority of the Habitat for Humanity Houses in South Carolina. Currently, only around 10 percent of the Habitat houses are built by faith-based organizations.

One driver of this trend is the major increase in housing costs. Since the pandemic, the cost of affordable housing has continued to skyrocket, and currently a Habitat house in South Carolina averages around \$165,000 to build.

Recognizing this problem, Central South Carolina Habitat for Humanity established a Faith Committee to engage faith-based organizations to help reverse this trend. Habitat for Humanity decided to promote a “Faith Build” Habitat house that would be built exclusively by faith-based organizations.

Eastminster Presbyterian, Columbia, jumped on board as the major sponsor for the project, also reaching out to their neighbor, Trenholm Road United Methodist Church, Columbia, who answered the call.

Initially, Carl Cox with Habitat for Humanity made a presentation to the TRUMC United Methodist Men at their annual Fall Feast Dinner. There he laid out all the specific



TRUMC did five days of the onsite work.

details for building a Habitat house. Cox explained that the Habitat homeowners actually purchase their houses with no down payment and a 0 percent interest, 15-year loan, making the mortgage very affordable and typically below 25 percent of the new owner’s take-home pay.

In addition to 50 hours of financial education the homeowner must receive, each partnered family is required to invest 400 hours of sweat equity before they can move into a Habitat house.

Habitat for Humanity does not just give away houses; they help build affordable hous-



Altogether, 80 different volunteers pitched in.

ing. Since 1985, Central SC Habitat helped build more than 280 houses.

After much prayer, especially on how to fund such a large mission project, the TRUMC UMM decided to lead the way by promoting this mission effort to their entire congregation. The UMM held a churchwide oyster roast to raise money and to help bring awareness to this important “Faith Build” Habitat House. In less than a month, more than enough funds were raised at TRUMC by many generous individuals, Sunday school classes and The Foundation of TRUMC to provide their portion of the funding.

This is truly a “community” faith-based mission project. In addition to TRUMC and Eastminster Presbyterian, other churches that helped included Shandon UMC, Columbia; Lexington UMC, Lexington; Shandon Presbyterian, Columbia, the West Metro Alliance of Churches, Westminster Presbyterian, Columbia; and the DeLoache Family Foundation.

TRUMC was responsible for five days of the on-site construction work at the Habitat House located in West Columbia, and some 80 different volunteers collectively worked more than 400 construction service hours to help build the house.

The homeowner, Lucinda, has two children who will be living in the home with her. She has been on-site regularly helping work to get her house completed.

This Habitat House has not only been a great opportunity for TRUMC to give back to the community, but all their missional efforts will surely help change Lucinda and her family’s lives for the better. Lending a helping hand to your neighbor is what life is all about, which echoes what Jesus said: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40 NIV).



Photos by Billy Robinson

A Big Tent Revival

United Methodists were among those who participated in a big-tent revival in Neeses from April 29-May 10 (Monday through Friday each week). Held at 5468 Neeses Hwy. in Neeses, the revival reflected the theme “Come and See,” from John 1:39 and featured evangelists Dr. Ralph Sexton Jr. and Tyler Blue. Many denominations participated. Music groups included 11th Hour, The Shireys, Warren Peay, Just Three, The Browders, Phillips and Banks, Down East Boys and The Chitans. At left are gospel singing group The Browders. At center, the Rev. Nick Fox brings a word as people gather at the altar to renew faith in Christ or give their life to Christ. More than 200 people have given their life to Christ through the revival as of May 9. At right, Dr. Ralph Sexton speaks to the crowd under the big tent.

An unexpected ministry: Churches serving as Tax Aide locations

By Denise Morgan

When we ask about a church’s mission projects or outreach efforts, we expect to hear about vacation Bible school or food banks or disaster relief projects.

But for many Americans, April 15 is an annual disaster. For some one million Americans, AARP provides their relief.

Greenville County has had service in four AARP Tax Aide locations for free tax help for some 10 years and in 2024 opened a fifth one. There are 33 locations statewide in that program. Free tax assistance is also offered at United Way Volunteer Tax Assistance locations. The Tax Aide and VITA programs are funded, in part, by grants from the IRS to the United Way and AARP Foundation respectively. Both programs train and certify IRS volunteers to prepare income tax returns. The VITA program’s focus is low-income residents, while the Tax Aide program’s focus is the elderly, hence its alternate name of Tax Counseling for the Elderly. Both programs are worth considering as outreach efforts in all areas of the state.

Augusta Road United Methodist Church, Piedmo, hosts one of the Tax Aide locations.

The need for these free programs is sometimes obvious. In Greenville County, volunteers saw some taxpayers who had some income but no need to file. Sometimes residents want to file to protect their identities from scammers, or they need to file to get a refund of money withheld in the year.

In some cases, the need isn’t so obvious. This year, we saw a taxpayer on our first day who needed to file returns for the seven years she hadn’t filed. In another case, on

our last day of the season, our volunteers acted as a team to help an elderly couple who hadn’t received a tax form about their pension income. Our volunteer counselor knew their return would be rejected without it and proceeded as far as he could. To get a replacement tax form, they needed to have a neighbor navigate their bank’s phone system to download a copy of the missing form onto their cell phone. The couple returned to a different Tax-Aide location with the replacement on their cell phone and were able to have their tax return completed by the April 15 deadline.

During the pandemic, service was limited by local protocols and a lack of volunteers. When we reopened, we heard that some of our folks had to pay several hundred dollars to have their returns completed.

Besides saving money, AARP surveys indicate that taxpayers who come to us leave with peace of mind after meeting with our counselors. You won’t be surprised to hear our “clients” share their experience with friends so our number of taxpayers grows. You also won’t be surprised to know that so does the need for volunteer counselors.

No one church is likely to undertake a huge project on its own. It makes sense to reach out to neighboring churches and organizations to share information and resources. (Start with an idea of the population to be served in your area by checking out the local geographic statistics published by the IRS, <https://www.irs.gov/statistics/soi-tax-stats-county-data>.)

The number of taxpayers grows every

year, but counselors are harder to find. Tax preparers are mostly retirees with flexible schedules who have preferences about where and how many hours they wish to donate. There are other volunteer tasks besides tax preparation, and no prior experience is required for any of them.

Classes begin usually in December, and service begins the first week in February and ends on April 15. There are several AARP videos that share what the program is like (<https://aarpvolunteer.my.site.com/vtm/s/libraries>—look for the National Recruitment and Outreach tab).

For more information, call 1-888-AARP-NOW or visit <https://aarpfoundation.org/>

Taxaidevolunteer to see where your group can fit in.

To learn more about the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, visit <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/irs-tax-volunteers>.

Having served at two churches that are Tax Aide locations, I’ve seen that some of these taxpayers return to the site as guests or donors just as they return to the senior centers for their activities.

This is a mission that meets the needs of community members to file their taxes and the desires of those willing to be local heroes with really cool shirts.

I’ll happily take your questions at DeeNagrom@yahoo.com.

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Viewpoints



Editorial

by Jessica Brodie

Now what?

When I was young, I longed for the time when I'd be a mother. "One day" loomed large in my mind, like a finish line. Then, I imagined, I'd have achieved financial stability, balanced all the wayward stresses of life and attained the emotional maturity that had eluded me thus far. I'd "have arrived," somehow.

Of course, when I finally reached that mythical finish line, I discovered I hadn't arrived at all. The finish line had changed, evolved, shifted—as had I.

This week, I'm recuperating from General Conference and realizing the same thing. For so long, we've awaited the postponed event as if it would provide all the answers we sought about the issues within our church. "When we finally gather, we'll decide on this issue or that issue," we'd tell ourselves, as if all we needed to do was wait, treading water, and we'd know the next step.

Yet in the middle of all that waiting, time ticked on. Ministry happened. The Gospel came to life. Miracles big and small occurred within our midst.

And now we're on the other side of General Conference, with all of its momentous and historic decisions, and guess what? We still haven't arrived as a church.

We probably never will, either. That's because we, as a church, are imperfect. We're made of human beings, flawed and sinful yet striving to do the right thing. We mess up, make things right, then mess them up again. We think we get it all figured out, then we realize we're wrong and have to start over once more.

It's the nature of life, this striving-forward, never-achieving state of being, isn't it?

Right now across the nation, people are reacting to all the changes and decisions that happened at General Conference. Some are cheering, while others lament.

Yet in the center of it all is Jesus, and the work he gave us to do: Go, tell others about me, make disciples, baptize. Love all and show mercy, kindness, compassion and care in my name. Hold tight to what is holy and righteous and flee the darkness.

If you're holding out, waiting for some finish line when all the issues in life and in the church will be resolved, maybe it's time to stop.

Instead, maybe it's time we all focused less on what we think is right and more on what Jesus told us during his time on earth: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it" (Matthew 16:24-25 NIV).

Let's set down those expectations, those false ideas about how things "should be." Instead, let's work with what we have.

Let's pick up our crosses, set our sights on our risen savior and walk with him, bringing others alongside. Let's focus more on doing his work instead of arguing about things.

There's a whole world out there filled with people who are hungry for the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We've got what they need.

It's time to share it.



Bishop's Corner

by Bishop L. Jonathan Holston

Forward together in mission and ministry

My friends, it was good to be together as United Methodists from around the world after the many delays over these recent years. We have experienced in this place how the strength of our connection is found in our relationships with one another.

Throughout the weeks of legislative committee work and plenary debate, many persons were able to make their voices heard as decisions were made about our future as a denomination.

It is abundantly clear that we are not all of one mind on many things, but the tone and tenor of the dialogue was one of care, concern, compassion and our shared commitment to faith in Jesus Christ as we seek to be who God is calling us to be.

While the work of this General Conference is now complete, the scope and impact are yet to be fully unpacked and processed, especially on matters pertaining to human sexuality.

The conversation will certainly continue in the weeks and months to come. We look forward to the members of our South Carolina delegation sharing more with you upon our return from Charlotte.

Thank you again for your prayers and support during this time of discernment, debate and decision-making.

Thinking back to the Episcopal Address that I had the honor of delivering at the opening of this General Conference, I find the questions I asked you still apply:

Are you ready to live in the light of God's victory already won in Christ?

Are you ready to love your neighbor?

Are you ready for joyful obedience?

Are you ready to be freed?

Are you ready to be the people that God needs for us to be?

Then let's go. Let's move forward together in mission and ministry. Let's continue to live into God's purpose for the people called Methodist in South Carolina.

Grace and peace.

Is your church staying UMC?

Has your church determined it plans to stay in The United Methodist Church? The *Advocate* is compiling a list of churches who are "staying UMC." We invite you to share this with us. Email jbrodie@umcsc.org.

Letters to the Editor

No thinking

John Wesley said that in all matters not effecting salvation, "Think, and let think!"

With all the "wokeness" at the General Conference, there seems to be "no thinking, and not allowing to think."

Churches are abandoning The United Methodist Church like crowds fleeing from the Twin Towers on 9-11. One fourth of the churches have abandoned ship already, and more will go at this year's annual conferences.

And the Annual Conference is making money off of the departure. Churches are being charged ridiculous amounts of money to retain their own assets.

The Trust Clause was intended to protect the local churches from unscrupulous "carpet-baggers" who would exploit financially handicapped churches. They gave their "trust" in the church, and the church has a fiduciary obligation to see that the "past saints" local church is protected from profiteers.

Unfortunately, the profiteers seem to be the church itself. Many churches that are not satisfied with the way the church is heading, and can barely pay their expenses (including apportionments), must now be forced to pay two-and-a-half years' worth of apportionments plus a tenth of their assets to satisfy a "Church Gone Secular." This violates the fiduciary obligation that the church promised the "past saints" to uphold.

The church is violating their contract with the local churches. And when a contract is violated, the courts favor the violated over the violator. This clause contract should be null and void.

The church is acting like the "money-changers" at the Temple. And the Father (sic) and Son (sic) are watching you.

Here is a new prophecy: I see George Sink's and Akim Anastopoulos' running commercials: "If you have been injured in a church breakup accident, call all 6s: 666-6666."

See "Letters," Page 5



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Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Amiri B. Hooker

A case for direct bill forgiveness

As members of the United Methodist community, we are tasked with embodying love, justice and compassion in every aspect of our faith journey. However, we cannot turn a blind eye to the stark reality facing many historic Black churches, integral pillars of our spiritual heritage, which are now in dire need of reboot, repair and revitalization.

It is incumbent upon us to confront this issue directly and take decisive action to support these invaluable institutions, exemplified by the Resolution for Debt Forgiveness for Direct Billing Arrears.

Historic Black churches have long stood as beacons of hope and resilience within African-American communities. From the darkest days of slavery through the struggles of the civil rights movement and beyond, these churches have not only provided spiritual guidance but also served as hubs for social justice, education and empowerment. However, despite their profound significance, many of these churches, particularly here in South Carolina, face daunting challenges.

A primary factor contributing to their decline is the pervasive impact of politics and systemic neglect within larger denominational structures. For far too long, these churches have been marginalized and overlooked, resulting in insufficient funding, limited resources and a dearth of support for clergy serving within their communities.

Moreover, decisions made at past South Carolina Annual Conferences, such as the lifting of direct billing from the apportioned asking without consideration of historic inequities, have only exacerbated the burden on smaller, predominantly Black churches.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has further compounded these challenges. Many churches struggled to adapt to remote worship, leading to dwindling attendance and increased financial strain. As we emerge

from this crisis, it is imperative that we rally behind these churches, providing them with the necessary support and resources to not only survive but thrive.

In response to these pressing challenges, we advocate for a year of Jubilee for South Carolina United Methodist churches, drawing inspiration from Leviticus 25:12. Just as in biblical times, a Jubilee year offers forgiveness and release from debts, affording a fresh start to those burdened by financial strain. We implore the South Carolina Annual Conference to forgive arrears for all United Methodist churches with debts exceeding 121 days, acknowledging that these debts should never have been incurred in the first place.

Furthermore, we must address the systemic inequities that have disproportionately burdened Black churches within our denomination. Wage disparities and economic inequalities have perpetuated cycles of poverty, hindering these churches' ability to thrive. By forgiving debts and addressing the root causes of inequality, we can pave the way for a more just and equitable future for all.

In conclusion, it is our sacred duty as members of the South Carolina United Methodist community to embody love, justice and compassion. By acknowledging and rectifying the historic injustices faced by Black churches and extending a year of Jubilee to burdened churches, we can embark on a journey of healing and reconciliation.

May we be granted the grace and wisdom to heed this call and build a more just and equitable church community for generations to come.

Hooker is the Southeastern Jurisdiction Black Methodists for Church Renewal coordinator and pastor of Wesley Chapel UMC, Lake City.



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Joseph Abram Jr.

When a child

"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways." — 1 Corinthians 13:11 (ESV)

A man had three sons and gave them one toy wind-up train together. The eldest, thinking he should because he was oldest, took possession of the wind-up key. While playing in a wheat field one day, the key was lost, and of course, also the ability to operate the train. The two younger sons would, on occasions, take turns pushing the train around the track while crawling along after it.

Fast forward years later: The second son grows up, marries and is blessed with a son. One of the first toys he gave his son was a toy train, without a key (electric), with all the bells and whistles—railroad crossings lights, tunnels, trestles, bridges, buildings, mountains, rivers, animals, landscape and people. The new father introduced his new son, the sole owner, to his new train, and with it the unfulfilled dream of a father that was cut short by the derelict of an immature older brother.

The young lad was lovingly placed on a high stool, and his father mounted the second stool. Excitement was in the air as the father waited to share this moment with his namesake, and the son eagerly trying to comprehend what looked to be fun, as previous introductions were.

Little did they know the thrill would end so briefly. The father/engineer gently flipped the on-switch, and the creation came alive, as things did as designed all over the model. Only one thing was left: the main attraction.

The engineer, with the rotation of a dial on a massive control board, sent a beautiful train pulling several cars down, around, up and under the tracks. The father looked excited.

But the young child was so overcome that he reached out, grabbed a section of trestle and tore it down before the father could restrain him. Déjà vu! The father reached over, took the child from his perch and stood him on the floor with such rapidity that the mother thought it best she retrieve her baby.

The father vowed not to give the child another train or allow him to drive one until he grew up. The promise was kept. The son, some years later, gave the father a surprise gift in jest and remembrance—a toy (electric) train.

I thought recently; Wouldn't it be nice if we were mature enough to vow that we will not let any politician drive the American train until he/she grows up?

Please note: Age is not an indicator of maturity, nor possessions of intelligence, nor religious affiliation of godliness. As the character Forrest Gump told us succinctly, "Stupid is as stupid does!"

What have you done lately?

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

LETTERS: Readers sound off

From Page 4

While so far the secular courts have been reluctant to rule in church affairs, fiduciary obligations are in the jurisdiction of secular courts. And lawyers are running out of mesothelioma, tobacco/cancer, Round Up and prickly heat clients.

*Rev. Melvin Bell, retired local pastor
Vance*

Surprise, surprise!

As Gomer Pyle used to say, "Surprise, surprise!" No response from the bishop, the conference trustees, Council on Finance and Administration and our other leaders to the issues I raised in "United Methodist Mushrooms" (April *Advocate*).

I do want to thank those who wrote and called confirming my concerns were the same as many of the remaining churches in our conference. I also want to thank Dr. Paul Wood Jr. for his thoughtful comments in the May *Advocate*. I would note that unless I was reading it wrong, not one dime was committed to taking care of the clergy that are staying, or recruiting funds to support those in seminary right now and recruiting funding for those who might consider coming to this conference. As Paul said in his article, the rest of us deserve a voice.

We know that well more than 100 churches are leaving in June and more may be leaving in 2025 depending on how the conference chooses to handle what they call separation. What is the plan?

I understand that we do not know exactly what those amounts will be until Annual Conference in June, but certainly you should have already developed a plan, using percentages of the funds that will be taken in, to go where we will need the support.

And to another issue that Paul raised in his article, to get an accurate assessment of the finances of the churches leaving, how about hiring a forensic accountant to go over their books? And about the property assessment? If they are not already, the conference should be hiring and assigning the companies that do the assessments, not the individual churches. This would be a good way to spend some of that money. But we still hear crickets from the leadership.

Here is an idea; every UMC in the conference withhold their apportionments for the next few months until we are provided with the information that we deserve to have. I bet that would get their attention! You think?

*Rev. Mark Thompson, pastor
Gilbert UMC, Gilbert*



Photos courtesy of Brittany Cooper

Historical site

Mount Seal UMC, Hemingway, is the oldest United Methodist Church in its community. On April 24, it received a historical marker celebrating this. The Rev. Cynthia Williams pastors Mount Seal.



Guest Commentary

by the Rev. Leonard Huggins Jr.

Are you proud of your childhood days?

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”—Hebrews 13:7-8 KJV

I grew up in rural South Carolina. I never once questioned my mama or daddy about going to church. I never once questioned my parents’ or my granddaddy’s income. It was never a discussion.

We ate homemade meals consisting of meat, potatoes, rice or grits, vegetables, a dessert, and water, milk, tea or lemonade (which were not a choice). Everybody ate at the same time and a lot was discussed at the table. We didn’t talk unless told to; hence, we were known as the Silent Generation.

We never touched anything that did not belong to us. If we did, we would pay the price with a behind whipping. We never opened a refrigerator at home or at anyone’s house unless asked to do so. We were taught to respect other people’s property. And we weren’t rewarded for acting improperly.

We grew up during a time when we had to sweep the yard, pull weeds, babysit each other (the older child was in charge) and help with all chores. We by no means were given everything we wanted.

We went outside a lot to play, run with friends, play hide and seek, softball, football, basketball, kickball, shoot marbles and jump rope. We rarely just sat inside.

Before entering first grade we could read, write, add and subtract, know the times table (multiplication) and the ABCs. We were rewarded for doing good. We knew the Lord’s Prayer and the 23rd psalm and had to pray every morning and say grace before eating.

We were taught that every child was not college material, but some were good with their hands. These were sent to trade school in ninth through 12th grade and had a job or started a business after high school. Some were recommended to go into the armed forces.

Bottled water was unheard of. If we had a Coke or Pepsi, it was in a glass bottle, and we didn’t break the bottle when finished. We saved the bottle for the return money. We had to tell our parents where we were going and who we were going with, and we had to be home before dark or 10 p.m. (there were no yard lights).

You learned from your parents instead of disrespecting them and treating them as if they knew absolutely nothing. The elderly

folk would say, “I was born at night but not last night,” or “I will knock you back where you came from.” What they said was law, and you did not question it—and you had better know and respect it!

We watched what we said around our elders and neighbors because we knew if we disrespected any grown-up, we would get a real good behind cutting. It wasn’t called abuse—it was called discipline.

We held the doors for others (ladies and girls) and carried shopping bags into the house. We gave up our seats for an older person without being asked. You didn’t hear swear words on the radio in songs or on TV. “Please,” “excuse me,” “thank you,” “Mr.” and “Mrs.” or “cousin” were part of our daily vocabulary.

The country we live in now is so full of people who hate and disrespect others. All the social etiquette was taught at home and in church about how to act and live.

This is the way many elderly folk grew up.

Are you proud of your childhood days? If so, then you should pass it on to your children and grandchildren.

I will never forget where I came from and only wish children and people nowadays had half the chance at the fun and respect for real life we grew up with. And we were never bored!

Are you proud of your childhood days? If so, then you should pass it on to your neighbors and friends.

Today’s generation is being called “independent thinkers.” Do as I please, with no rules. However, with what they see on TV, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, social media and technology, how can they be independent thinkers? I know that the politically correct thing to say does not make anybody mad, which can lead to an early grave or jailhouse.

But Proverbs 13:24 tells us, “Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children. Those who love their children care enough to discipline them” (NLT).

Are you proud of your childhood days?

As the early church would sing, “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world!”

Until the next time, may God bless you and keep you and may God’s face shine upon you.

Huggins is pastor of Shady Grove United Methodist Church, St. George.



Miracles, Part 4

by Gerald Callahan

Augusta National

Editor’s note: This is part four of a series.

Not all miracles have to be large and life-changing like my journey to meet Alice or my stopping drinking. God also provides gentle guidance.

If you look closely, his influence can be found within seemingly simple things that happen. Next are my stories about where my path in life was gently adjusted in unexpected ways—where I was presented with options, and in choosing each one, I was graced with his influence.

This is a story about the day I played Augusta National. When the national company I worked for transferred me to Savannah, Georgia, I purchased a home at the Wilmington Island Golf Club. Out came my dad’s old clubs and his original 1940s ripped golf bag, and I became a golfer.

My territory included Augusta, Georgia, and one of our employees was a member of the local country club and served as a “green-jacketed” volunteer for the Masters Tournament. Johnny G. was a true southern gentleman, steeped in the tradition and history of this storied event. (To me it was just another golf tournament at another golf course.)

When I arrived at his club to play a practice round with my dad’s old clubs, I sensed something was wrong. After playing his course, we proceeded to have dinner. From where we were sitting, we could see a highly inebriated female club member pouring drink after drink into her body and half dollar after half dollar into the machine in front of her. Finally, she gave up, took her purse and left the area, so I decided to try my luck.

As fate had it, I hit the jackpot, but as the half dollars cascaded into the lower receptacle with a melodic clanging sound, a screaming banshee of a woman came running into the room claiming it was her machine and the money was hers. The commotion caused everyone in the club to focus on the fracas.

I graciously calmed the woman, advising the money was hers, and I apologized for taking “her machine.”

As the dinner progressed, I sensed a thaw in the relationship I was building with Johnny, so I convinced him I could handle whatever it was bothering him. He proceeded to tell me he couldn’t take me to Augusta National the next day with the ragtag equipment I had been using. Johnny said one of the members of his club had died of a heart attack, and his equipment was still in the locker room. He speculated the widow might just want to sell them and asked if I would be interested in buying them.

It was while Johnny was checking and had left that I scored the jackpot mentioned above. While he was gone, the club manager

came by and thanked me again for the manner in which I had defused a potentially volatile situation with the tipsy female member. He told me the lady had finally left and gave me ten dollars to try my luck again.

I hit a second jackpot just as Johnny returned to tell me a \$150 donation to the Heart Association in memory of her husband would buy the almost new set—1963 McGregor Tourney copper inlaid irons, three persimmon Tourney woods and a genuine leather Burton bag. The jackpot was worth \$120, enough to help cover the donation.

What did I shoot? I don’t know. Did I keep the scorecard? No! It wasn’t until years later that I realized the full value of playing Augusta National, the home of the Masters, and pined for some mementoes from the event.

Was this another unconnected event in my life or was it an event that later had a profound effect on my goals and lifestyle?

On returning to my Wilmington Island home, I entered a Wednesday afternoon blitz at our golf course. On the second hole I experienced my first hole-in-one using my newly acquired clubs. This was a thrill you cannot describe. Later I was told that our local golf pro, when he heard about the event, blurted, “Not the guy with the ripped golf bag, the x-ed out golf balls and a set of Sears no-named golf clubs!”

This total experience taught me three things: One, appearance means everything; two, the Southern way to handle unpleasant situations is graciousness and not typical Yankee bombast; and three, membership in an elite country club gave a blue-collar Chicago Irishman instant credibility and status in an upscale marketplace.

Since that time, I have had my second hole-in-one, shot my age at 81 and met some of the nicest folks ever. My next-door neighbor was the dean of the University of South Carolina, Dr. James Kane, a golf-playing Yankee Irishman who introduced me to a society I would never have experienced on my own.

As I gained credibility in my chosen career in marketing, he offered me the opportunity to become an adjunct professor, and I taught a series of evening sales courses for several years. Was this considered a miracle? Maybe not, but it was a predetermined path established by God that I followed, which led me to where I am today.

You are experiencing these types of opportunities. Are you listening to him? (Continued next month.)

Calling himself a Southernized blue-collar Chicago Yankee, Callahan is a member of Union United Methodist Church, Irmo. This piece is excerpted from his book, “His Miracles and Ours,” available on Amazon.

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GC reports provide key updates

By Jessica Brodie

CHARLOTTE—In addition to legislation and worship, General Conference also received a number of key reports from important groups within the church.

The United Women in Faith presentation on April 29 featured a dance skit complete with pompons and dance ribbons that celebrated the many gifts women—and United Women in Faith—bring to the church. Sally Vonner, top executive for United Women in Faith, lifted up the many ways the organization makes an impact, from support for community centers and women's projects to training women leaders.

Vonner was joined onstage by other leaders in the organization who also lifted up the good work of the group. One, Darlene Alfred of Central Texas, shared how important equity and gender parity is in the world and in the church.

Noting that women are 58 percent of the UMC, Alfred asked, "How different would our church be if we were also 58 percent of General Conference?"

Also on April 29, Africa University's report, introduced by South Carolina's Jim Salley, lifted up the work of the United Methodist-related institution founded in 1992.

Calling Africa University "a gift God has given to some of the most underprivileged children in Africa," Salley thanked the body for their love and the way they consistently show up for the 32-year-old Methodist-founded university located in Mutare, Zimbabwe.

CEO and Vice Chancellor Peter Mageto spoke next about how Africa University graduates are growing the church and driving change.

As he noted, they are, "Building a future where Africa's future is fully realized."

Another speaker and Africa University graduate, Betty Kazadi-Musau, shared that the university is "the hope of the continent."

"I am what I am because of the United



Larry McCormack, UJM News

Jim Salley speaks about AU.

Methodist church," Kazadi-Musau said to applause. "I am what I am because of Africa University." Salley called upon all people at General Conference who were graduates of Africa University to stand as the room resounded in ovation.

Pointing at the room, Salley said, "It's been said if you want to determine the relevance, the success, of a university, look at its graduates—you see who they are, where they are and what they are doing."

"As we celebrate 32 years, look around us."

Also that day, United Methodist Men presented on their men's ministry efforts. Bishops James Swanson and Gary Mueller lifted up their new logo as well as their excitement about the ways men's ministry is transcending old models of ministry and fellowship.

"Our focus is having a living relationship with Jesus Christ," Swanson said, noting the Spirit is calling and they are doing their part to answer.

During Week One, the body heard the Laity Address, as well as the Young People's Address, the latter delivered by Alejandra Salemi, Florida Conference, and Senesie T.A. Rogers, Sierra Leone.

Salemi shared how disaffiliation has taken a toll on young people in the church, and it feels much like a divorce.

"Young people are feeling the weight of the emotional, physical and spiritual trauma," she said, urging people to consider whether we are working toward a world that looks less like hell and more like heaven.

AC2024: 'Leading edge of ministry'

From Page 1

"The ordination, commissioning and retirement service is a great example. In it we affirm the gifts and graces of those being commissioned or ordained, and celebrate the ministry and leadership given by those retiring. This service is a reminder to stay 'On the Leading Edge of Ministry,' that God continues to move and work in this ever-changing world.

"Just as God called forth leaders the church needed before, God continues to call leaders to meet the needs of today."

Business starts Monday

The business of Annual Conference begins Monday, June 10. After voting orientation and testing and an opening worship service led by Holston, business will start around 10:15 a.m. with the official call to order, greetings and organizational motions.

The theme of this 53rd session of Annual Conference is "Seeking A More Excellent Way: On the Leading Edge of Ministry." Holston said the theme calls us to live from a posture of faith rather than fear as we follow where Christ is leading.

"We will come together with hope, remembering who God has called us to be and seeking that which God wants for us," Holston said.

Various committees will present reports, including the committees on standing rules, nominations, and resolutions and appeals. Beyond the resolutions anticipated from churches who voted to separate from the UMC (which will be addressed Tuesday), Annual Conference members will have the chance to hear about other resolutions at this year's annual conference.

Also on Monday, the conference Council on Finance and Administration will introduce the first reading of its recommendation of a proposed \$11.7 million budget for 2025. That amount is down 15.4 percent from the \$15.6 million budget for 2023. CF&A noted the significant reduction is to reflect the apportionments estimated to be lost because of the conference's separating churches in 2024.

The recommended budget for 2025 is reduced by almost \$2.3 million and is estimated to be 13.3 percent of average net funds.

However, churches will only be apportioned for a budget of \$10.9 million, as \$800,000 from 2023 separating churches will help offset what churches will need to contribute. The Annual Conference Trustees granted \$2.4 million from the separating church fees to be used to reduce the apportionment burden to the remaining churches. This amount will be applied in installments until used up; the \$800,000 is this year's installment.

"We praise God for our churches and the way they continue to positively respond to the various challenges we face," CF&A said in their written report to annual conference.

Tuesday: Separations and more

Annual Conference is scheduled on Tuesday, June 11, to hear a report from the Trustees of the Annual Conference addressing

the closure of a number of churches whose members have decided to separate from The United Methodist Church and are complying with the conference's established separation process, in accordance with the 2016 *Book of Discipline* of the UMC.

Over the past year, these congregations took part in the conference's Local Church Discernment Process, which provides a way for church members to pray, discern and then hold a churchwide vote about whether they want to leave The United Methodist Church. As part of the process, they must declare that their members believe the denomination has not upheld its doctrine on issues of human sexuality, as stated in the 2016 *Book of Discipline*.

Before delivering their report, trustees will provide to Annual Conference members the names of separating local churches upon whom they will be voting. Until that time, trustees will continue to treat information about local churches participating in the process as confidential.

To be eligible to have their church vote go before Annual Conference this June, churches had to be in full communication with their district superintendent; complete an intentional, 30-day discernment process; satisfy financial obligations, including all unpaid apportionment giving and unpaid salary and benefits due to clergy; and satisfy or transfer of debts and other legal liabilities of the local church. Then, a churchwide vote had to be taken before March 1 that indicated two-thirds of professing church members present agreed to formally declare the church can no longer continue to function as a UMC.

Beyond this, business is slated to begin Tuesday with a report from the Commission on Equitable Compensation, which is proposing a cost-of-living increase of 3.2 percent to clergy members' minimum salary in 2025.

Other items scheduled for Tuesday are the Board of Pension & Health Benefits, Conference Connectional Ministries, a report from the General Conference Delegation and Committee on Nominations elections—including quadrennial officer elections.

Tuesday evening will feature a memorial service preached by the Rev. Sandra Stevens-Poirel, Charleston District superintendent. That service will celebrate the lives of clergy and spouses who died over the last year.

Wednesday's finale

Wednesday is the last day of Annual Conference.

Business will include voting on the 2025 conference budget, adoption of the consent calendar, resolutions to church closing and charge line changes (beyond the ones addressed Tuesday), and the announcement of the date and location of the 2025 session of annual conference.

Holston will preach the sending-forth closing service before the fixing of the appointments.

See a full list of special events, reports and details at <https://www.umcsc.org/ac2024>.

Also on that website are hotels with special rates, restaurants, information on how to change an elected lay member and more.

GENERAL CONFERENCE: Slashed budget among items

From Page 1

heard as decisions were made about our future as a denomination,” said South Carolina’s Resident Bishop, L. Jonathan Holston. “It is abundantly clear that we are not all of one mind on many things, but the tone and tenor of the dialogue was one of care, concern, compassion and our shared commitment to faith in Jesus Christ as we seek to be who God is calling us to be.”

South Carolina’s Delegation Co-Chair Jackie Jenkins said serving as a delegate to General Conference was not only an honor but a humbling responsibility.

“Our worship and praise experiences were uplifting and moving, and the Holy Spirit was evident throughout. All decisions made at General Conference offered us at all levels of the church the challenge to make disciples,” Jenkins said. “I took every opportunity to consider how I could work with others in this vital calling to grow the church. Every issue raised over our two weeks in Charlotte is solved in two ways: evangelizing and discipling the new United Methodist Church. And as Maya Angelou wrote so eloquently, ‘I wouldn’t take nothing for my journey now.’ I am grateful to be among the people called United Methodist.”

Bickerton: ‘We’ve got work to do’

Day One of General Conference kicked off a little after 2 p.m. Tuesday, April 23, with Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton calling for United Methodists worldwide to embrace a future of hope and possibility.

Bickerton, outgoing president of the UMC Council of Bishops, began his message by reading Psalm 46:1-11 before calling upon God for an indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit upon those gathered. Acknowledging the tough season the denomination has experienced, he urged God’s people to move beyond a divided, fractured church to embrace the revival stirring in their midst.

“God is not through with this thing called The United Methodist Church,” Bickerton said to applause.

Instead of further fracture, he urged those gathered to set aside differences and negativity and instead embrace compassion and companionship.

“Do you want to be in this room?” he asked the crowd.

If not, if they’re not willing to move forward, Bickerton said, “Maybe you are in the wrong place.”

“We don’t have time for vendettas and last-gasp jabs,” he said. “Friends, we’ve got work to do. Are you ready to do it?”

He invited all to pray that God’s will be done—not our own.

“The stage is set for us to embark on the next chapter of our life together,” Bickerton preached to a chorus of amens.

Committees and attendees

Week One of General Conference was largely devoted to assessing the 1,000-plus petitions assigned to the body’s 14 legislative committees, each of which had at least one South Carolina delegate assigned: Church and Society 1, Church and Society 2, Church and Society 3, Conferences, Discipleship, Faith and Order, Financial Administration, General Administration, Global Ministries, Higher Education/Superintendency, Independent Commissions, Judicial Administration, Local Church and Ordained Ministry.

By the end of Saturday, Day Five, they had addressed all the petitions, rejecting or approving them to go on to receive a vote by the full body. Any petition approved by a committee must receive a vote in plenary.

Also noteworthy was that—between COVID-19, travel restrictions, deaths, failure to elect reserve delegates and missing passports—not everyone registered for General Conference was actually in attendance. On Day One, out of 862 registered delegates, only 751 were present in person (87 percent).



Photo courtesy of Bill McCartha

Halleluiah!

Inman UMC, Inman, has long boasted a Reconciling Sunday school class and a churchwide reconciling spirit, so there was much their members wanted to say and celebrate after the General Conference. In the end, they decided their sign said it all—this, and maybe amen!

For context, at General Conference 2016, 786 out of 864 were present (91 percent). By Day Six, Diane Brown of the Committee on Credentials reported 765 delegates had been seated (88 percent of the designated number). That 765 comprised 487 from the United States and 278 from central conferences. Brown noted approximately 10 people were still en route from central conferences, leaving 60 who were reportedly “not coming.” Some experienced visa issues while others had medical emergencies.

Brown shared how the process for properly seating delegates for this General Conference began in 2017, but it was rife with a number of issues, from illness to fraud to some conferences not electing delegates.

“We believe this to be a legitimate and properly certified group of delegates,” Brown said of the delegates who had been seated.

Holston preaches episcopal address

South Carolina Resident Bishop L. Jonathan Holston had the honor of delivering the episcopal address Day Two on behalf of the Council of Bishops. Holston brought a word on staying who God needs us to be in spite of the ever-changing noise of this world.

“When things are happening all around us, God uses the church to make a difference,” Holston proclaimed before the crowd of delegates and observers gathered April 24. “The church was never built for our pleasure. The church is built for God’s purpose.”

Holston opened the address with an impassioned prayer calling on God to create a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us as we strive to put love first.

“When the world shouts hate, help us to love,” Holston prayed. “When the past won’t let go, help us to love. When we feel broken, betrayed or rejected, help us to love. Even when it seems impossible or doesn’t make sense, help us to love.”

See larger story, Page 11.

Eurasia churches leave UMC

One of the key early votes that occurred in Week One of General Conference allowed four conferences to leave the connection and form an autonomous Methodist church named “The Christian Methodist Church in Eurasia.”

On April 25, General Conference voted yes—672-67—to let the Eurasia churches leave the UMC. Those conferences are the Central Russia, Eastern Russia and Central Asia, Northwest Russia and Belarus, and Southern Russia Provisional conferences.

Petitions pass

After a sabbath rest on Sunday, General Conference gathered Monday, April 29, for Day Six. With all committee work complete, the body turned their sights on considering the host of petitions before them, many of which were lumped into the consent calendar.

Unlike previous years, a large number of formerly controversial items were overwhelmingly approved via consent calendar over the next several days—including an end to a 40-year-old ban on “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” from being clergy, which passed with a 93 percent “yes.”

Consent calendar items are for legislation that passed overwhelmingly in committee that only requires a majority vote and does not have financial implications. It gathers these items in bulk for approval—or rejection—together.

Other items that passed on consent calendars included a formal public apology to Native Hawaiians for the church’s complicity in the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Monarchy in 1893; protection for the girl child; a Native American Comprehensive Plan for the UMC; mandated anti-racism training in every conference in the United States; making collegiate ministry a priority of the church; and nurturing of relationships with indigenous persons in each conference.

The consent calendar for Day Six included nearly 200 petitions, with nearly 200 on Day 7, more than 60 on Day Eight, and one that passed Day Nine, on Maternal Health: The Church’s Role, advocating support for paid parental leave, discussion of maternal mortality, access to contraception and accessible and affordable healthcare. The rest were either voted down or considered throughout the week with individual ballots.

Changes in Africa

Also on Day Six, GC passed two stand-alone petitions related to Central Conference matters in Africa. One established a Comprehensive Plan for New Episcopal Areas and Bishops in Africa, shifting the total number of bishops in Africa from 13 to 15. The present Congo Central Conference will get one more bishop, as will the present Africa Central Conference.

The other petition established a comprehensive plan for a new central conference and the renaming of central conferences in Africa. Africa central conferences will now increase from three to four conferences. It will also change the names of these conferences.

Congo Central Conference become the “Mid Africa Central Conference.” Part of the present Africa Central Conference becomes the new “East Africa Central Conference.” The other part of the present Africa Central Conference becomes the “Southern Africa Central Conference.” And the West Africa Central Conference (without a name change) consists of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Ginea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

A more inclusive church

The close of General Conference ushered in a far more inclusive church than it had

been at the start. Many of the petitions that passed did so relatively quietly, included as part of consent calendars.

Others passed on the floor with debate and some amendments. See article, Page 10.

Regionalization passes

Not all agree with the more inclusive stance the delegates took. But the passage of worldwide regionalization petitions will temper this if two-thirds of annual conference voters support a regionalization constitutional amendment.

Regionalization is a package of eight different legislative items that would restructure The United Methodist Church so the different geographic regions in the UMC—the United States, Africa, Europe and the Philippines—would all be able to adapt the *Book of Discipline* according to their own context. (For instance, if a region decides it cannot support gay clergy, it can choose not to heed that aspect of the *Discipline*.)

All eight regionalization petitions passed during General Conference, including one creating a U.S. Regional Committee. Because the plan involves a constitutional amendment, ratification of the amendment can only occur if at least two-thirds of annual conference voters support the amendment.

The ratification process begins no later than 30 days after the adjournment of General Conference, which means U.S. annual conferences could begin voting on the amendment in June.

See full article, Page 9.

Reduced budget passes

Another huge change is a significant reduction to the budget. When General Conference last met in 2016, it passed a \$604 million budget for the last quadrennium. This year, the body passed a budget for 2025-2028 that will reflect a 38 to 41 percent cut and will depend on giving rates in 2025 and 2026.

On the final day of General Conference, May 3, delegates overwhelmingly approved a budget with a bottom line that will vary by about \$20 million. Delegates approved a 2025-2028 budget of \$373.4 million if collection rates are at 90 percent or more for the next two years. If giving is below that percentage, the budget bottom line will be \$353.6 million.

When General Council on Finance and Administration’s top executive the Rev. Moses Kumar presented the budget on Day Two, he urged the crowd to consider how we turn this challenge of reducing the budget into an opportunity.

“I believe God is telling us it’s time to do things differently,” Kumar said.

The denomination’s base rate is used to calculate apportionments churchwide. On April 30, delegates passed a new base rate for the UMC’s apportionment formula, shifting from the current base rate of 3.29 percent to a base rate of 2.6 percent for 2025 and 2026. Then, if the apportionment collection rate is 90 percent or higher in those years, the base rate will jump to 2.9 percent for 2027-2028.

Ultimately, annual conferences will be asked to pay lower apportionments compared to what delegates passed in 2016.

The total budget comprises seven different funds: the World Service Fund, Ministerial Education Fund, Black College Fund, Africa University Fund, Episcopal Fund, General Administration Fund and Interdenominational Cooperation Fund.

The final approved budget adds a fifth mission strategy to the church, shifting the UMC from four areas of focus for the next quadrennium to five.

The five areas of focus are as follows: Leading Where God Calls, Making New Disciples in New Places, Overcoming Poverty Together, Seeking Health and Wholeness for All and the Eradication of Racism, White Supremacy, Patriarchy and Colonialism.

Continued, next page

From previous page

Jurisdictions get more say

Jurisdictions across the United States will have more say about the number of bishops they need, thanks to new legislation.

By May 1 of the gathering, the body had rejected one but passed four of the five petitions recommended by the Jurisdictional Study Committee, eliminating the formula for calculating bishops while guaranteeing at least five bishops per jurisdiction.

General Conference 2016 created the JSC to examine the number, boundaries and missional priorities of the jurisdictions. A diverse group, the committee comprises clergy, laity and bishops from all five jurisdictions—including one from South Carolina, the Rev. Susan Leonard. The JSC presented their report to the body April 30, noting they concluded the current jurisdictions and boundaries are appropriate as is, and that the jurisdictions are in the best position to assess their need for numbers of bishops.

Key is their assessment that the formula used for calculating bishops in each jurisdiction no longer is an accurate reflection of leadership needs. What passed:

- Eliminated the formula for calculating bishops in each jurisdiction;
- Established a minimum number of bishops (five) for each jurisdiction;
- Established a process for jurisdictions to request any additional bishops needed; those that believe they need more than five can discern the number they need;
- Established that if a jurisdiction wants more than five bishops, the jurisdiction, not the denomination, will pay for those additional bishop costs; and
- Authorized the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy to receive and act on any requests for additional bishops.

The one item that did not pass pertained to episcopal office costs. General Conference elected not to remove episcopal office expenses of jurisdictional bishops from the Episcopal Fund apportionment but to retain the current practice of apportioning the office expenses of the central conference bishops.

The JSC had wanted annual conferences to pay for these expenses.

U.S. jurisdictions allocated 32 bishops

Also at General Conference, delegates voted 631-65 to approve a plan for how many bishops each United States jurisdiction will have given the new rules passed mandating at least five bishops per jurisdiction.

Kim Ingram, of the Interjurisdictional Committee on the Episcopacy, offered their unanimous recommendation that 32 bishops will serve the jurisdictions for the 2025-2028 quadrennium as follows:

- Southeastern Jurisdiction: 9
- Northeastern Jurisdiction: 6
- North Central Jurisdiction: 6
- South Central Jurisdiction: 6
- Western Jurisdiction: 5

In practicality, this means two bishops would need to transfer to the WJ for 2025-2028 and one would need to transfer to the NEJ. Those bishops transferring to the WJ and NEJ would arise out of a lengthy consultation process with all the bishops about their continuing service. Ingram noted a bishop must consent to a transfer.

The 32 represents a reduction from the 39 active bishops currently serving.

It would mean no elections for new U.S. bishops to replace the currently expected seven retirements. It also would mean reducing bishops by natural attrition.

Two delegates from South Carolina—the Rev. Ken Nelson and Jackie Jenkins—serve on the Interjurisdictional Committee on the Episcopacy.

Deacons can now preside at sacraments in their appointments

In another historic moment, General Conference May 2 passed new legislation granting authority to deacons to preside at

UMC passes regionalization petitions to restructure church into global regions

Next step is ratification by annual conferences

By Jessica Brodie

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—One of the biggest decisions at this year's General Conference will have worldwide impact—if two-thirds of annual conferences agree.

Delegates passed all eight “worldwide regionalization” petitions over several days at General Conference.

Regionalization is a package of legislation that would restructure The United Methodist Church so that the different geographic regions in the denomination—the United States as well as the Africa, Europe and the Philippines—would all be able to adapt the *Book of Discipline* according to their own context.

The regionalization petitions were submitted by The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters and would create regional conferences around the world. In regions with a central conference, the regional conference will replace the central conference. In places without a central conference, a regional conference will be established.

These petitions also would establish the rights, duties, power and privileges of the regional conferences. These petitions give regional conferences legislative powers so they can increase their missional impact in their region.

In addition to the standing committee, the Connectional Table and members of the Christmas Covenant (a group of Central Conference United Methodists) supported the regionalization legislation.

The first four petitions were included in two consent calendars that passed overwhelmingly (646-73 for the first and 618-99 for the second) April 25. (Consent calendar items combine in bulk legislation that passed overwhelmingly in committee that only requires a majority and does not have financial implications.)

Then roughly two hours later, after lengthy debate, delegates passed what Bishop Harald Rückert called “the foundational item”—Worldwide Regionalization Petition 21039, to amend the constitution to create regional conferences on a worldwide basis. That petition passed 586-164 (78 percent of the vote).

This does not mean the constitution has been now changed but rather that it now has the green light to head to annual conferences around the world for their vote on the petition. To be ratified, the amendment will need at least a two-thirds total vote of annual conference lay and clergy voters.

By Day Eight, the body had passed by 593-139 the final Worldwide Regionalization petition, adding the creation of the U.S. Regional Committee.

Lonnie Chafin, a delegate from the Northern Illinois Conference and chair of the Conference's legislative committee, likened it to a committee for the United States that is parallel to the Standing Committee on Central Conferences.

Several spoke for and against the motion.

Jerry Kulah, delegate from the Liberia Conference, said he believes the pathway is unacceptable and amounts to a platform that strengthens the American UMC against the rest of the UMC.

“All you are doing is breaking our hearts and letting us know you don't value our views,” Kulah said.

However, Beth Givens, delegate from the Virginia Conference, said she believes regionalization is our best step forward as a global church.

“I believe that we live in so many different contexts of ministry that we need to have the freedom and the courage to be able to follow Christ faithfully in each of those contexts,” Givens said. “Regionalization is a path forward, the most hopeful path forward I have seen in my 54 years as a United Methodist.”

the sacraments in their ministry settings.

This means deacons can now offer communion and conduct baptisms where they have been appointed to serve, whether that is a church, outreach ministry or mission.

After the vote's passage, many celebrated the change, which should take effect Jan. 1. Many hugged and wept tears of joy.

The Rev. Karen Jones, a deacon in the South Carolina Conference, is one of the delegates who spoke from the floor in favor of the change, sharing a story of how her also-deacon husband had a spiritually moving experience that crystallized why it's so important for deacons to have this authorization.

No elders were available, so her husband was granted the authority to give the sacraments at a memory care unit to a woman who at first called the bread “a cookie.”

Yet when the transformed body of Christ touched her tongue, Jones said, “Her eyes lifted as if scales had fallen off, and she said, ‘I know what this is!’”

Jones urged the body to approve the legislation, “So that we may joyfully be obedient to the Holy Spirit in bringing sacraments to a broken world.”

Read full story on Page 10.

Goodbye Para. 2553, hello 2554

Also during General Conference, del-

egates removed Para. 2553 of the *Book of Discipline*, also known as “the disaffiliation agreement,” after some debate.

While South Carolina has not been using Para. 2553 for disaffiliation, instead using Para. 2549 for churches wishing to separate from the UMC (see <https://www.umcsc.org/discern>), many other annual conferences had been doing so.

For those that had been using 2553, “The season of disaffiliation ends today,” Conferences Committee Chair Lonnie Chafin said.

Debate ensued on both sides of the issue. Jorgen Thaarup, Denmark, spoke in support of the motion.

“We should never have had a paragraph like this. We should have been much more clear that ... splitting the church is a sin.”

Dixie Brewster, Great Plains Conference, spoke against eliminating the pathway for churches to exit.

“We want a way for conservative churches to go peacefully. We will not be disruptive,” Brewster said.

By a vote of 516 to 203, General Conference delegates supported the end of this disaffiliation policy that had been added by the special 2019 General Conference and used by about a quarter of U.S. churches to leave the denomination—more than 7,600 U.S. churches left before it expired at the end of last year.

On its heels, General Conference passed creation of a new paragraph, Para. 2554, that will enable the reentry of disaffiliated churches to the UMC.

“With a spirit of grace, we welcome those churches which have disaffiliated or withdrawn to rejoin The United Methodist Church, the new language reads. “Where applicable, every annual conferences shall have a policy of reaffiliation for the churches seeking to return to the connection.”

The motion was amended by a 386-304 vote to add that each church that reaffiliates must recommit to the trust clause.

The legislation passed 629-96.

From ‘celibacy’ to ‘sexual responsibility’

The final day of General Conference approved new language specifying what clergy are asked to comply with to qualify for ordination.

In their qualifications for ordination, clergy are no longer asked to agree to exercise “fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness” but rather now to exercise “social responsibility and faithful sexual responsibility expressed through fidelity, monogamy, commitment, mutual affection and respect, careful and honest communication, mutual consent, and growth in grace and in the knowledge and love of God.”

Originally, the language had advocated changing “celibacy” to “chastity,” as the committee noted celibacy is a misnomer because it can mean remaining unmarried rather than addressing whether a person has conjugal relations.

Sexual misconduct apology

Also on the final day, General Conference issued a heartfelt apology to all who experienced sexual misconduct in church.

The apology, part of a resolution passed in the last hour of General Conference, comes in the spirit of offering healing for all affected.

The Rev. Gary Graves, secretary of the General Conference, apologized on behalf of the UMC for the way the church can prevent people from being held accountable for sexual misconduct, thus perpetuating harm within local churches and other ministry settings and damaging the UMC connection.

“The United Methodist Church apologizes for the times we allowed our desire to protect the church to outweigh our desire to care for victims and survivors of sexual misconduct,” Graves said, reading the letter from the stage.

“We apologize for the times we have not listened to you, doubted your stories, ignored your wounds and have not tended to your pain. We believe this has contributed to allowing an unsafe culture to exist.”

The denomination's Social Principles maintain that sexual harassment is an exploitation of a power relationship that interferes with the moral mission of the church.

However, many people have been mistreated, abused and assaulted by church leaders, both clergy and lay.

New Council of Bishops President Tracy Smith Malone said the apology provides an opportunity for the church to acknowledge the harm done to survivors and victims of sexual misconduct.

Know that God is God

General Conference ended with a word from Malone, who closed the postponed 2020 General Conference at 6:30 p.m. May 3 by inviting all to walk together and to never grow weary of doing the work of the kingdom.

“As you go forth, tell the world about Jesus,” Malone said. “As you go, tell them about his love. As you go, be love, be joy, be peace, be patient, be kind, be good, be faithful, be gentle, be the body of Christ.”

“As you go, be still and know that God is God, and God can be trusted.”

For more on the 2024 General Conference, see next pages and also visit <https://www.umnews.org>.

General Conference ends bans on gay clergy and gay weddings, eliminates 'incompatible' language regarding homosexuality

Protection added for those who don't wish to perform same-sex weddings

By Jessica Brodie

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—The close of General Conference ushered in a far more inclusive church than it had been at the start, as delegates removed language declaring homosexuality “incompatible with Christian teaching.”

That was just one of the legislative items that passed during the historic and long-postponed General Conference, including striking down a ban against gay clergy and same-sex weddings and proclaiming support for people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Many advocates for this inclusion were celebrating by the end of the 10-day legislative gathering, calling it an opportunity for a new beginning for a church long-plagued by division over the issue.

For those not as enthusiastic about the changes, they celebrate the added protections the denomination passed for any clergy who do not wish to perform same-sex weddings—as well as the possibility that new regionalization measures will enable regions that disagree to maintain their bans on same-sex marriage and LGBTQ ordination even as other regions do not.

Many of the LGBTQ+ inclusion petitions that passed did so relatively quietly, included as part of consent calendars. Consent calendar items are for legislation that passed overwhelmingly in committee that only requires a majority vote and does not have financial implications. It gathers these items in bulk for approval—or rejection—together. The body has the option to remove legislation from the consent calendar, and many of these items they simply chose not to remove.

Others passed on the floor with debate and some amendments. Among the first items, passed April 27, was revised language to the UMC's Social Principles proclaiming support “for the equal rights, liberties, and protections of all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.” This means the UMC believes people should be treated with basic human dignity regardless of whether they are male, female, intersexual, transgender or nonbinary.

The Social Principles are not church law but rather represent the denomination's public stands on important social issues. They are meant to be a guideline.

With the goal to develop a “more globally relevant, theologically founded and succinct” document, a team of 52 United Methodists from around the world drafted the revision, which also received feedback from thousands of United Methodists worldwide.

In addition to affirming the basic human rights of all people, the revised Social Principles passed on April 27 speak out against slavery, torture, genocide and war crimes; reaffirm opposition to the death penalty; deplore war and all other forms of violent conflict; affirm health care as a basic human right; and affirm the dignity, worth and rights of migrants, immigrants and refugees, including displaced and stateless people.

More items passed April 30 remove a ban on annual



The Rev. Jay Williams (right) hugs fellow delegates after the 2024 United Methodist General Conference voted to remove the ban on the ordination of clergy who are “self-avowed practicing homosexuals.”

Photo by Mike DuBose, UJM News

conferences and denominational agencies from giving United Methodist funds to any “gay caucus group” or using funds to “promote the acceptance of homosexuality.” Instead, the provision now says annual conferences and agencies should honor the denomination's commitment not to reject lesbian or gay members.

They also eliminated the requirement that GCFA enforce the ban. Instead, the agency should ensure that church funds do not go to anything that rejects LGBTQ people or limits the response to the HIV epidemic.

They also strike the ban on boards of ordained ministry from considering candidates without evaluating whether they are “self-avowed practicing” gay people, and strike the requirement that bishops rule gay candidates ineligible; erase the mandatory penalty of at least a one-year suspension without pay for clergy found guilty of officiating at same-sex weddings or unions; allow gay clergy in good standing to be appointed across annual conference lines when their bishop can't locate an appointment in their conference; and set a moratorium on judicial proceedings related to the denomination's bans against gay clergy and same-sex weddings. The moratorium will last until General Conference alters it.

May 1 was a huge day for inclusion, as delegates saw the overwhelming passage of three consent calendars that contained a number of critical legislative items, including removing a ban on “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” from being certified as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve in the UMC.

In addition to the ban on gay clergy, the consent calendar also included new provisions that clergy shall not be penalized for performing, or refraining from performing, a same-sex marriage service, and local churches cannot be required to hold or prohibit a same-sex marriage service on property owned by a local church.

During the break, hundreds of delegates and observers

gathered in a circle as they hugged, cried and lifted their voices in hymns such as “Child of God” and “Draw the Circle Wide.”

On May 2, General Conference deleted language condemning homosexuality, voting 523-161 to support a revision of the Social Principles that deleted the phrase “the practice of homosexuality ... is incompatible with Christian teaching.”

Lengthy debate resulted in one modification that affirmed marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith (adult man and adult woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age) into a union of one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community.” The original petition left out the words in parentheses.

It was the final piece in a full-scale overhaul of the denomination's Social Principles, an effort that began in 2012.

The revised Social Principles passed May 2 replace Paras. 161 and 162 in the *Discipline*. Those paragraphs deal with the church's stances on the “Social Community.” Other parts of the newly adopted Social Principles include the rejection of child marriage, the stance against polygamy, the rejection of gambling, opposition to pornography and support for consent in sexual relationships, as well as statements on everything from suicide and divorce to remarriage.

“May this time we have all spent help us all move forward in making disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world,” Bishop David Graves prayed after the vote Thursday.

Next, General Conference passed three petitions pertaining to gay weddings.

The body passed 474-206 legislation removing being gay or performing a gay wedding ceremony from the list of chargeable offenses for pastors. Specifically, the legislation struck “being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies” from the list of chargeable offenses.

This petition becomes effective at the close of the 2024 General Conference and applies retroactively to any pending complaints under the applicable subsections.

The body passed 447-233 legislation regarding pastoral conduct, removing a ban on conducting homosexual unions by ministers or in churches.

Committee Chair Lindsey Freeman said the committee concluded the decision to officiate a gay marriage resides with the authority of the clergyperson.

“It doesn't mandate but rather it allows for discernment of the decision to perform weddings to the clergyperson,” Freeman said.

This petition also becomes effective at the close of the postponed 2020 General Conference.

And the body passed 479-203 adding language to the responsibilities and duties of elders and licensed pastors, noting that clergy cannot be compelled to perform or provide for, or be prohibited from performing, any marriage, union or blessing of any couple—including same-sex couples.

Deacons can now preside at sacraments in their ministry appointments

By Jessica Brodie

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—Deacons can now preside at the sacraments in their appointments without needing explicit permission from their bishop.

In what presiding Bishop David Graves called a “historic moment,” General Conference on May 2 passed new legislation granting authority to deacons to preside at the sacraments in their ministry settings.

This means deacons can now offer Holy Communion and conduct baptisms where they are appointed to serve, whether that is a church, outreach ministry or mission.

Deacons and elders are considered clergy in The United Methodist Church, but deacons are ordained for ministries of word, service, compassion and justice — serving as a bridge between the church and the world. Elders are ordained for ministries of word, sacrament, order and service.

The Rev. Emily Kincaid, secretary of the Ordained Ministry Legislative Committee, who presented the legislation to delegates with the chair, the Rev. Lindsay Freeman, said the change is both necessary and in line with the denomination's mission.

“In 1784, John Wesley founded the



South Carolina's Rev. Karen Jones reacts to the passage of legislation that will allow deacons to preside over Holy Communion.

Photo by Mike DuBose, UJM News

Methodist Movement for this very reason: to extend the sacraments to places where the Church of England was unwilling to offer them,” Kincaid said from the stage. “Deacons often find ourselves in places where the mission of God is being extended outside the local church and where elders are not always present to issue the sacraments.”

She said passage would enable deacons to live into Wesley's belief that the world is truly our parish.

Passing 448-240 with a 65 percent majority, the legislation drew some debate.

The Rev. Karli Pidgeon, Louisiana Confer-

ence, spoke against the change, noting that what deacons do is different from what elders do, and the church needs to further discern how this will impact the entire church.

“It's not a no,” she said. “It's a not now.”

The Rev. Karen Jones, a deacon in the South Carolina Conference, spoke in favor of the change, urging the body to approve the legislation, “so that we may joyfully be obedient to the Holy Spirit in bringing sacraments to a broken world.”

The Rev. Megan Walther, Michigan Conference, also spoke in favor of the passage, sharing, “We elders should not have the monopoly on the sacraments.”

After the vote's passage, many celebrated the historic change, which should take effect Jan. 1. Many hugged and wept tears of joy.

One deacon, the Rev. Gregory Gross of Northern Illinois, was surprised when his delegation — and his episcopal leader, Bishop Dan Schwerin — gathered around him during the break and urged him to offer Holy Communion there in the Charlotte Convention Center.

“I feel grateful to be granted as a deacon the sacramental responsibility to extend the table into the world,” Gross said after presid-

ing over the sacraments. “That is my calling as a deacon — to bridge church and world.”

The Rev. Teresa Edwards of the South Georgia Conference called it “a really, really good, great day indeed.”

“It's hard to express what it means to me to be able to offer the sacraments with a full heart, free and open hands not bound by the former restrictions,” said Edwards, a deacon.

The Rev. Julie Wilson of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, a missionary serving at a community center in North Carolina, said the change is significant for her ministry.

“It means that I don't have to chase after an elder whenever I want to try and offer communion to the folks that I'm in community with,” Wilson said after the vote.

Jones also is overjoyed.

“When I saw the vote come up on the screen, I thought of all of the deacons who have longed to be obedient to their call,” she said. “I thought of all the opportunities for sharing the means of grace that have been missed—and now no opportunity to share this means of grace will be missed.”

Erik Alsgaard, Dan O'Mara and Kelly Roberson contributed to this story.

Holston offers Episcopal Address on becoming 'who God needs us to be'

By Jessica Brodie

CHARLOTTE—Bringing a word on staying who God needs to us be in spite of the ever-changing noise of this world, Bishop L. Jonathan Holston of the South Carolina Annual Conference delivered the Council of Bishops' Episcopal Address to kick off Day 2 of The United Methodist Church's 2020 General Conference.



Holston

in our shortcomings as imperfect humans, we strive for who we want to be—holding before us the vision of God's kingdom built, the hope of Christ fulfilled, as we move toward that vision with courage. All of this because we know that God prevails—the victory has already been won in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

As we walk this path, he urged us to keep our focus on what is important as we tune out noise.

“Friends, this is who God needs for us to be,” Holston said, urging all gathered to continue God's work in the midst of divisive, joyful and sometimes terrible situations.

For as he said, our striving to be who God needs us to be should be the only priority.

Glancing backwards is fine, but our focus must be the future. After all, he said, “There's a reason that rearview mirror is so much smaller than the windshield itself. We are only meant to glance backward. We are meant to fix our gaze ahead, following where Christ leads.”

Where Christ leads is God's kingdom, Holston said, and it's being built among us now. And even though we're uncertain about exactly what this looks like, we must press on, surrendering to God's will in the busy circumstances surrounding us.

“We sometimes fall into thinking that if we have God's peace, then there will be no tension, no conflict, no issues to face,” he said.

But this world will always have tension and conflict. And just as pilots must train to fly in spite of what they face in the sky, “They have to fly the plane, set their bearings and don't lose sight ... There is no room for fear or doubt when the plane is in the air.”

As he brought his address to a close, Holston reminded the body the church must keep one thing clear: “It is about this and only this: How do we become who God needs us to be?”

We do this, he said, by heeding the call of the Lord to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We do this, he said, by embracing disciple-making, peace-making and anti-racism, by building up and not tearing down.

“We embrace the radical, world-transforming love given so freely by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,” Holston said.

And we can do this when we allow God to liberate us, freeing us to live in the light of God's victory already won in Christ.

“Are you ready to be the people that God needs for us to be? Let's go!” Holston proclaimed. “Let's go, let's go, let's go, let's go!”

“When things are happening all around us, God uses the church to make a difference,” Holston proclaimed before the crowd of delegates, observers, volunteers gathered at the Charlotte Convention Center April 24. “The church was never built for our pleasure. The church is built for God's purpose.”

Holston was selected by the Council of Bishops to deliver the address on their behalf. The council comprises 59 bishops presiding over conferences and episcopal areas across the globe, as well as retired bishops.

Holston opened the address with a prayer calling on God to create a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us as we strive to put love first.

“When the world shouts hate, help us to love,” Holston prayed. “When the past won't let go, help us to love. When we feel broken, betrayed or rejected, help us to love. Even when it seems impossible or doesn't make sense, help us to love.”

He shared how so much has happened since an episcopal address was last delivered at General Conference 2016, eight years ago.

Citing wisdom from former United States ambassador and pastor Andrew Young, Holston noted the paradox of our humanity can be described in this way: “We live in the tension of who we are, who we say we are and who we want to be.”

As a lengthy montage displayed examples onscreen, Holston reviewed the changes that have occurred in the church and the world since General Conference last met—the highs and lows, the opportunities and challenges, the tensions as we pivot between the best and the worst of our human nature.

“Since 2016, TikTok launched, Saudi Arabia legalized women driving, the northern white rhino became extinct, Notre Dame burned, ChatGPT was created, elephants are being studied to treat cancer,” Holston said.

The list goes on: Elections. Natural disasters. Terrorist attacks. Good things and bad.

Yet amid what Holston called this “noisy backdrop of world events,” God's people still did what they could to be God's church.

He lifted up numerous examples of this, from baptisms and new churches rising up to powerful mission work done in the name of the Lord to fight trafficking, provide economic opportunity and deliver desperately needed medical care in remote areas.

“We fall short,” Holston said. “Yet even

South Carolinians elected at GC2024

By Jessica Brodie

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—On Days Eight and Nine, General Conference elected more than 175 people to a variety of commissions and councils, including the Commission on the General Conference, the topic of heavy dialogue earlier in the week regarding youth representation.

Several from South Carolina were among those elected. The Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe, an elder from South Carolina, was elected to the Judicial Council and also named chair of that body.

Other South Carolinians elected were Dr. Stephen Love to the General Council on Finance and Administration; Bishop L. Jonathan Holston to the General Commission on United Methodist Men; and South Carolina's Dr. Robin Dease, now bishop of the North Georgia Conference, to the General Board of Church and Society.

In total, the body elected nine people plus alternates to the Judicial Council; four people to the University Senate, an elected body of professionals in higher education that evaluates United Methodist-related schools; 25 people to the Commission on the General Conference, including one youth member; ten people to serve on the board of trustees for the historic John Street United Methodist Church, New York, the oldest Methodist congregation in North America, founded on Oct. 12, 1766; 44 people to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters; 83 people to a host of general boards and agencies; and a new secretary-designate of the General Conference, the Rev. Aleze M. Fulbright, an ordained elder who serves as a superintendent in the Indiana Conference of the UMC.



Shandon blesses global church

The choir from Shandon UMC, Columbia, was invited to sing for the closing worship service on May 3 at the 2024 General Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina. The choir is under the direction of Eddie Huss, minister of music, with Organist and Music Associate Debbie Bauer.

Photo by Paul Jeffrey, UMNews

Vibrant worship critical to GC

By Jessica Brodie

CHARLOTTE—Worship was an important part of General Conference, from Bishop Thomas Bickerton's opening worship on Day One through the closing service on the final day of the gathering.

Each day featured someone new leading the service, with a different Scripture each reflecting a different theme for the day. The overall theme for General Conference was “And Know that I Am God,” drawing from Psalm 46:10, but each day added something to this phrase. For example, Day Two was “In the Hoping ... Know that I Am God,” Day Three was “In the Believing ... Know that I Am God” and Day Four was “In the Trusting ... Know that I Am God.”

Many said one of the more powerful sermons came from Bishop LaTrelle Easterling, who preached on Day Three, which was also known as Thursdays in Black. Thursdays in Black is an initiative of the World Council of Churches that encourages wearing black clothing to call attention to rape and violence against women.

Easterling, herself a domestic violence survivor, shared how the church can often silence victims, making it seem like they are to blame. In her case, the person who urged her to be silent was trying to protect her from being considered “weak,” but even though it was well meaning, it's not how the church



Photo by Mike DuBose, UM News

Bishop Easterling gives the sermon.

should respond.

“We live in a society that blames the victim,” Easterling preached, noting we often ask questions that put the victim on defense: Why did you stay? Why didn't you just leave? What were you wearing? Why were you walking alone?

“Society still blames those who were violated, abused or raped,” Easterling said.

But, she said, speaking to all victims, “You are not to blame.”

She explained that Thursdays in Black celebrates all people who have experienced what she called “heinous acts of abuse and violence.” And to the church, she offered strong wisdom: “See us! Don't ignore us; don't look past us. Stop making us invisible. Speak our names. It's not enough to bandage wounds. We need to speak to the abuse itself.”

Other key happenings at General Conference

By Jessica Brodie

CHARLOTTE—Beyond the top-tier issues, General Conference did a number of other things when it gathered April 23-May 3:

- Consecrated 26 laypersons, including three from central conferences, to a lifetime of service as deaconesses and home missionaries. The consecration occurred during the April 29 worship. North Georgia Bishop Robin Dease, who hails from South Carolina, was among those consecrating.
- Approved a switch from a pension-based system for retired clergy to Compass, a contribution-based plan. While debate ensued on equitable pay and other concerns, Committee Chair Scott Brewer reminded the body the plans are “not set in stone tablets” adding, “We will come back in 2028 for continued adjustment.”
- Gathered April 30 for a silent protest against the violence in Palestine. The peaceful demonstration by students advocating for Palestine in the ongoing conflict echoed demonstrations occurring simultaneously on college campuses across the nation.
- Approved a special new relationship for the UMC thanks to passage of a petition that established full communion with The Episcopal Church in the United States of America. Now the agreement heads to the Episcopal Church for finalization. General Conference Secretary Gary Graves called it “an incredibly significant moment.”
- Authorized the Commission on the General Conference to consider inviting an Indigenous person to offer a proper acknowledgment of land ownership at future gatherings.
- Held a special Earth Day Vigil April 22 by the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement in partnership with United Women in Faith, Global Ministries and the Board of Church and Society.
- Authorized the Commission on General Conference to study and give serious consideration to the addition of increased Spanish language translation at the 2028 GC.
- Authorized the continuation of the Study of Ministry Commission to offer focused study and recommendations on the nature and structure of ministry in the new realities of the church and the world.
- Passed legislation establishing a Central Conference Higher Education Fund.
- Passed legislation amending language on racial justice in Article V of the Constitution to be more direct in both denouncing racism and declaring that the UMC must live as an actively anti-racist institution.
- Commissioned 16 missionaries for service around the world.
- Passed legislation amending language in Article IV of the Constitution to add gender and ability to the groups included for worship service attendance.
- Received a report from the Committee on Ethics regarding a complaint that an individual active in leadership of the Global Methodist Church had remained a UMC clergy person and was at General Conference as a delegate.

The committee reported that, while they considered this highly unethical, they determined they were not able to act to remove that person. However, they advised against this sort of behavior.



Photo by Mike DuBose, UM News

Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton gives the sermon during opening worship for the 2024 United Methodist General Conference in Charlotte, N.C.



Photo by Mike DuBose, UM News

Bishop L. Jonathan Holston gives the episcopal address during the 2024 United Methodist General Conference in Charlotte, N.C.

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Photo by Paul Jeffrey/UM News

South Carolina's the Rev. Susan Leonard (right) and the Rev. Yulia Starodubets, Ukraine-Moldova, participate in a legislative committee at General Conference.



Photo by Larry McCormack, UM News

Pastors, students, laity, and delegates have a silent protest against the violence in Palestine during General Conference.

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Photo by Paul Jeffrey/UM News

Moses Kumar, general secretary and treasurer of the United Methodist General Commission on Finance and Administration, addresses the budget report.



Photo by Mike DuBose, UM News

South Carolina delegates listen as General Conference leaders present a report.



Photo by Paul Jeffrey/UM News

South Carolina delegate Michael Cheatham (background in red) listens as his legislative committee considers actions to be taken at General Conference.

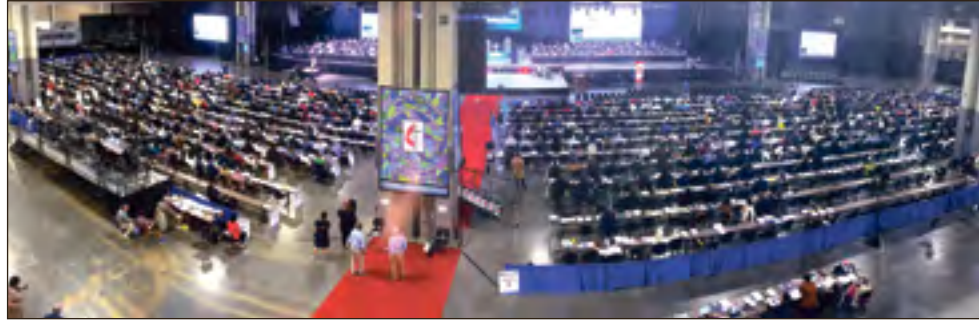


Photo by Larry McCormack, UM News

More than 700 delegates to the 2024 United Methodist General Conference work on church business in Charlotte May 3.

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Paths To Wholeness holds celebratory Signature Brunch

On Saturday, March 4, Paths To Wholeness held its second annual Signature Brunch at the Orangeburg Country Club.

This event was in celebration of its second successful year of providing rehabilitative services to formerly incarcerated women who reside in its transitional home, which they refer to as Bea's House.

The event was well attended by community leaders and supporters of Paths To Wholeness to honor the transformative work provided for women who desire a second chance at becoming productive citizens.

Greetings were given by its Board of Directors Chair Mark Cutler and the Hon. Michael C. Butler, mayor of the City of Orangeburg. Melodious music was rendered by harpist Kim Perkins, with a solo by Dr. Stephanie Hart. Entertainment was provided by the Claflin University Theatre Ensemble, The Touring Company, who performed a skit portraying the significance of diversity that received a standing ovation.

Dr. Minnie Anderson, a retired United Methodist pastor who helped found the ministry, said several people commented about



Attendees are looking forward to next year's annual Signature Brunch.

how they were impacted by the moving testimonial rendered by a former resident of Bea's House, who spoke of how she is now a better person, woman, mother and daughter because of the services she received there.

For more on Paths To Wholeness, visit <https://pathstowholeness.org>, email pathstowholeness2020@gmail.com, call 803-387-8226 or write P.O. Box 1402, Orangeburg, SC 29116.

Canaan UMC welcomes Pender for Native American Ministries Sunday

RIDGEVILLE—On Sunday, April 14, Canaan United Methodist Church opened its doors to a special guest, Tracy Pender from South Carolina UMC Native American Ministries.

The occasion marked Native American Ministries Sunday, a momentous event that resonated deeply with the congregation. He was invited by Canaan's representative for Native American Ministries, Vickie Singleton.

Pender's presence was more than just an opportunity to hear a guest speaker; it was a bridge connecting communities and cultures. With a passion for spreading awareness and appreciation about Native American presence, history, traditions and spirituality, Pender delivered a poignant message that stirred hearts and minds.

Throughout the service, the congregation was enlightened with insights into Native American heritage and spirituality. Pender's words wove a tapestry of understanding, urging attendees to explore and implement awareness of the rich Native American culture. From ancient traditions to contemporary struggles, every aspect was illuminated with reverence and respect.

One of the primary goals of Native American Ministries is to foster a deeper appreciation for the contributions of Native American communities. Through events like Native



From left are Tracy Pender, Victoria Singleton and the Rev. Jeffrey Salley.

American Awareness Sunday, churches like Canaan actively promote dialogue, understanding and solidarity.

Canaan embraced this mission wholeheartedly. By welcoming Pender, they not only fulfilled the objectives of Native American Ministries but also demonstrated their commitment to diversity, inclusion and unity. The congregation left inspired, carrying with them a newfound appreciation for the cultural heritage of Native Americans.

As the message of Native American Ministries continues to spread, Canaan is a shining example of a community dedicated to embracing and celebrating diversity. Through education, dialogue and action, they pave the way for a future where every culture is honored and respected.

Virginia Wingard Memorial reaches out to area's homeless

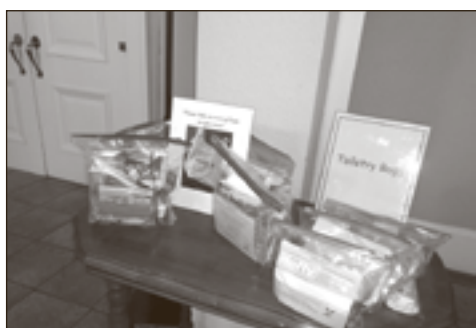
COLUMBIA—Virginia Wingard Memorial United Methodist Church began a new ministry in February to the homeless population in its city.

Church members contribute food and toiletry items, which are placed in gallon Ziploc bags. Members then pick up the bags on Sunday and keep them in their cars to distribute to the homeless they encounter in various locations around the city.

The ministry has been extremely successful, and Virginia Wingard members have been blessed by participating in reaching out in love to those in need.

A list of items needed for homeless food and toiletry bags is made available for all individuals or groups.

In addition to the homeless bag ministry, Virginia Wingard also sponsors a weekly food pantry and a clothes closet on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 1-3 p.m. Items



Church members contribute food and toiletry items, which are placed in gallon Ziploc bags.

donated for the food pantry or clothes closet may be dropped off at the church Monday-Thursday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

If you would like to participate in any of these ministries, contact Debi Young, intergenerational ministries director, at 803-782-0794 or debi@virginiawingardumc.com.



by Betty Swinton

United Women in Faith

Mission u: Drawing closer to God and one another

United Women in Faith Mission u (formerly known as the School of Christian Mission) is one of the many educational programs created annually by the Methodist women in the early 20th century to educate women and inspire them to a sense of mission at home and around the world.

The United Women in Faith remains dedicated to the planning and promotion of this program. Originally this event was created by and for women. However, over the years, the demographic has changed, and now men, children and youth can take advantage of the knowledge shared during our Mission u events.

The main objectives of Mission u are to deepen our faith, foster community and promote healing for individuals, communities and all of God's creation. During Mission u, we grow in the understanding of the mission of the church in our world today as we learn together for the transformation of the world.

The curricula consist of a series of one-hour sessions and can be used in various settings like Sunday school, vacation Bible school or small groups.

It has evolved from an event with studies in three distinctive areas: spiritual growth, geographical areas and social issues. However, in the most recent years, Mission u national, in conjunction with the United Women in Faith, has combined the three areas into one study. We are approaching the event from a spiritual aspect, the kin-dom of God.

Mission u is an in-person event during the summer in a specified location. However because of the effects of the pandemic, the political climate, the economic turmoil and the world of modern technology, confer-

ences find themselves offering Mission u in many different venues to accommodate the participants.

Mission u is now scheduled throughout the year, as an in-person event or as a series of weekend zoom sessions as well as evening sessions.

In 2024, the South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith along with countless other conferences across the United States will offer opportunities for study and fellowship embracing the theme, "The Kin-dom is Among You: Drawing Closer to God and One Another."

We will gather again in-person on the beautiful campus of Spartanburg Methodist College in Spartanburg July 18-20 to share and increase our understanding in the areas of spiritual growth and social issues.

Classes will be offered for adults using the text "Welcome Home," by Neomi Fletcher, and for youth using the text "Cultivating Symbiosis: The Nature of God's Kin-dom," by Nica Sy.

Join us at our 2024 Mission u as we explore what it means to grow closer to God and one another. Share your thoughts and experiences on: Who does Jesus say will inherit the kin-dom? How do we transform ourselves and the communities in ways that bring us closer to the kin-dom and the kin-dom closer to us?

Textbooks can be ordered at <https://uw-faithresources.org>.

For more information, visit <https://www.umcsc.org/women>.

Join us in prayer for Mission u 2024 as we examine Scripture together and join in worship, fellowship and song.

Swinton is interim dean of South Carolina



Photo courtesy of Cheryl Banks-Murdock and the Rev. Lisa Way

Faith and works

The Central Circuit Charge believes faith without works is dead. Each year, the charge gives back to the community. This year as part of its Maundy Service, they collected donations and purchased items to donate to the Cumbee Center to help abused women and children. In the words of pastor the Rev. Lisa Way, "Faith is a gift from God, and the Christian's work is something that God has prepared for us because we have been saved by faith." Pictured are members from New Hope, Simpson and Union UMCs along with Way and Jessica Coach, executive director of the Cumbee Center.



Photos courtesy of Annie R. Crocker

LSM classes offered in Spartanburg

The spring session of Lay Servant Ministry classes for the Spartanburg District was held April 7, 14 and 21 at Beaumont UMC, Spartanburg. Classes offered were Basic, Living Our Beliefs, The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation and The Method of Our Mission. Even though attendance was a bit lower, the attitude of fellowship, learning and serving filled the house.

Pastor shares about pilgrimage to AU

The Rev. Joseph D. Kovas made a presentation to Bethel-Lights, a senior adult ministry at Bethel United Methodist Church, Chester, about his recent trip to Africa.

On Jan. 5, Kovas began his journey with Bishop L. Jonathon Holston, Felicia Holston and 40 other pilgrims. Landing in Johannesburg, South Africa, the group then traveled by airplane and bus to Zimbabwe to tour Africa University.

Kovas explained the history of the university, which is called "the School of Dreams in the Valley of Hope." After spending a few days touring the school and meeting with students, they toured Old Mutare UMC mission, which provides medical assistance to the rural poor of the community, and the Fairfield Children's Home. In addition, the group toured the town of Mutare, which is the fourth largest city in Zimbabwe, and Hilltop United Methodist Church.

The group moved on to Victoria Falls to tour the world's largest waterfall and a day trip to Chobe National Park in Botswana for the experience of a true African safari.

Kovas described some of the wild meats he got to taste and the many animals the group encountered. During the presentation, he displayed items he purchased in Africa, including placemats, cloth, jewelry and figurines. He described the Nelson Mandela presidential shirt, which he was wearing. Several members of the audience were also wearing traditional African clothing for the presentation.

The last stop of the group's tour was in



Kovas shared extensively about his trip.



Johannesburg, South Africa. Kovas spoke about seeing the homes of Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu on Vilakizi Street in Soweto. He told several stories about these leaders and described the period of apartheid and the political upheaval in South Africa's history.

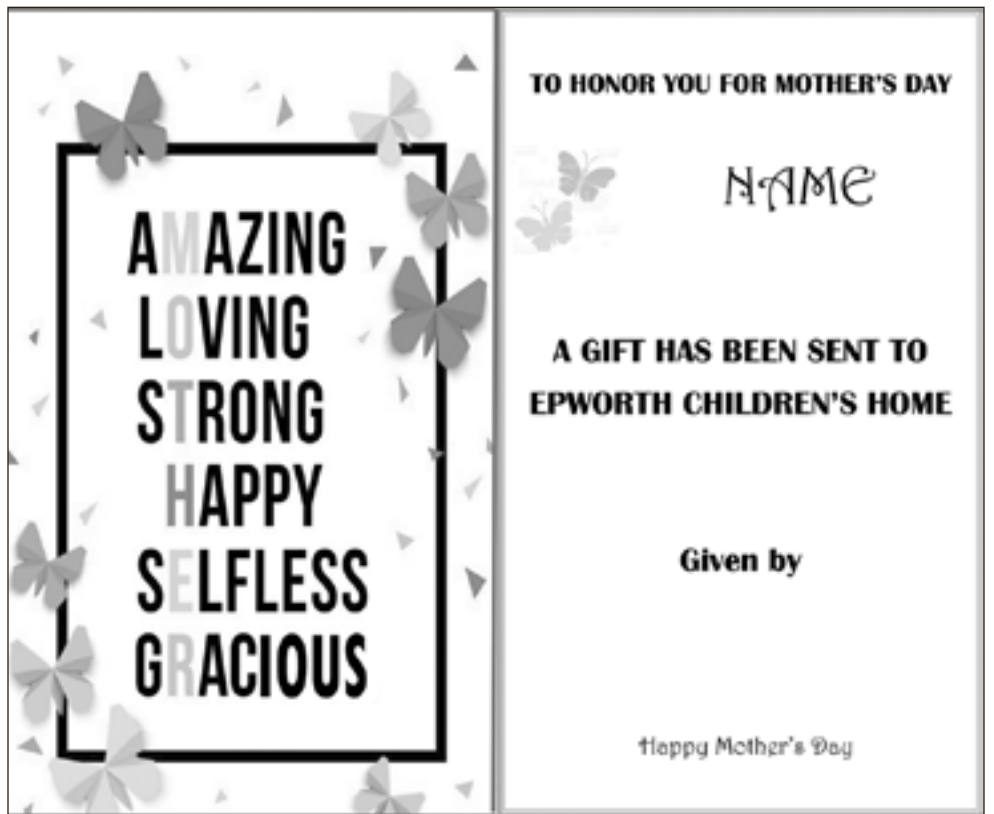
The audience was enlightened by Kovas's talk as he passionately spoke of the missional opportunities he saw, told stories of the many students he met at Africa University and described the Africa University Choir and the many worship services he attended.

Kovas is pastor of St. Paul UMC in New Ellenton. The Rev. Shannon Higgins is pastor of Bethel UMC in Chester.



'We Have the Power'

United Women in Faith at New Francis Brown UMC, Charleston, hosted their Noon Day program March 29. Tomeka Howell, member of New Life Christian Fellowship, was the speaker. Her message, "We have the Power," gave inspiration as she shared how, as disciples of Christ, we have the power to lead, influence and encourage. "He may not come when you want him, but he's always on time," Howell said. "Our God is always there!" UWF president Jacquetta Gethers-Bennett said, "God came in, and showed out" during the service. Gethers-Bennett and the committee worked together to make this program a success.



Courtesy of Freddie Vaughn

Cards for Epworth

In order to raise more money for Epworth Children's Home for Mother's Day, St. Mark UMC, Columbia, offered an opportunity for congregants to make a donation for any lady. With that donation, St. Mark would send them a Mother's Day card stating a donation had been made to Epworth to honor them for Mother's Day. The offer was also to memorialize those who had passed away, and a card was sent to the family. This is the third time St. Mark has done this, and it seems to raise more money as well as being a service to their members for a way to remember a loved one on this special day. Pictured are the front and inside of the card.



Photos courtesy of JoTavia Aaron

Greek Unity Day at New Francis Brown

On April 14, New Francis Brown UMC, Charleston, hosted its first Greek Unity Day, where they invited the National Pan Hellenic Council Charleston Chapter to join them for worship. NPHC, founded in 1930 by Howard University students to spark unity and protect its members, is comprised of the Divine Nine Black Greek letter sororities and fraternities. These local chapters have a long and rich history within the Charleston area promoting scholarship, community service and civic action. The speaker for the day was Dr. Vanessa Smalls-Bryant, also a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. She spoke on unity and working together for the kingdom. Out of the nine organizations, eight were represented and acknowledged during the service. Information on scholarship was also provided. As Kendra Woody-Simmons, president of the NPHC Charleston Chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. and a member of New Francis Brown UMC, stated, "This program was truly a success, and our prayer is to continue to show up in our communities and churches with representation. I already look forward to next year."

Around the Districts

Columbia District

The softball team of **Columbia College, Columbia**, swept Appalachian Athletic Conference foe Montreat College during their final home games to punch their ticket to the AAC Conference Tournament as the #6 seed. The Koalas finish the regular season 24-20 and 16-12 in conference play. The tournament was held in Kingsport, Tennessee, April 30-May 3.

Dr. John H. Dozier, president of **Columbia College, Columbia**, announced the appointment of Mechelle English as the next vice president of Development. English received her master's degree from the college in 2014. She will begin May 13.

Journey UMC, Columbia, held its fourth Mother's Day worship May 12 at Doko Meadows Park Amphitheatre, Blythewood. This year's event featured a significant community element in addition to the worship service. A tent was set up so attendees could meet representatives from various agencies and nonprofits, elected officials and candidates for public office.

Greenville District

Dacusville UMC, Easley, will hold a summer camp for children ages 4-12 June 17-21 and June 24-28 from 7 a.m. until 5:15 p.m. Registration can be for either one or both weeks. The program will use a structured format that combines spiritual direction; biblical education; workshops in science, technology, engineering, art and math; activities; and connection with community agencies such as police and fire departments. The cost is \$75 per week per child. To register, email lunderwood5712@gmail.com.



Photos courtesy of Deidre Harley

A Spirit-filled service

Easter Sunday service began at Salem UMC, Florence, with some of the children and youth celebrating the Resurrection Day with prayer, speeches and songs. The Spirit-filled service ended with the adorning of the church cross with flowers, which were presented to each member in attendance that day.

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Dr. John H. Dozier installed as 21st president of Columbia College

COLUMBIA—On April 20, the Columbia College Board of Trustees welcomed students, faculty, staff, alumni, community members, academic delegates from across the country, and friends and family of the Dozier family to celebrate the installation of Dr. John H. Dozier as the 21st president of Columbia College.

Many brought greetings to the president during the ceremony, including Mayor of Columbia Daniel Rickenmann, President Emeritus of the University of South Carolina Dr. Harris Pastides, and faculty, staff, student and alumni representatives from the college, along with special greetings from his family.

Following the oath of office presented by the provost of Columbia College, Dr. Kristine Barnett, and the installation by chair of the Board of Trustees, Ben Rex, Dozier gave his address to all gathered, sharing words of insight and vision for the historic institution that is rooted in tradition and committed to the future.

Following the investiture ceremony, the inauguration celebration continued with a reception on the R. Wright Spears Mall, overlooking the new open space in the center of campus, as a physical reminder that the best is yet to come for Columbia College and the leadership of Dozier.

“Dr. Dozier is building a culture of unrestrained vision paired with pragmatic strategy,” Rex shared. “His leadership will foster an era of growth and achievement that will transform our campus and broaden our impact. Our trustees are very motivated to support John’s vision, and Columbia College’s future is incredibly bright.”

Dozier draws on more than two decades of experience in leadership positions at various colleges and universities.

As the institute community and equity



Dozier

officer at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, chief diversity officer and senior associate provost at the University of South Carolina and president of Kennedy-King College in Chicago, Dozier has proven leadership skills, complemented by a passion for building caring communities in higher education.

Dozier received his Bachelor of Science in marketing from South Carolina State University and was presented a Distinguished Alumnus Award in 2015. He earned both a Master of Business Administration and a Doctor of Education from DePaul University in Chicago.

Dozier assumed his role as president on July 17, 2023. Since his first day, he has facilitated extensive development on campus. Whether enhancing physical spaces like the center of campus, adding dimension to campus life through a men’s basketball program to launch in Fall 2024, or even filling key roles in leadership like vice president of student affairs and dean of students, Columbia College is undoubtedly moving forward.

Under his leadership, it is clear Columbia College is on the rise.



Celebrating confirmands

On Sunday, April 21, Shandon UMC, Columbia, celebrated the confirmation of 32 sixth graders who professed their faith in Jesus Christ and committed to faithfully participate in the ministries of Shandon with their prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. Pictured are former confirmands, their confirmation mentors, sixth-grade Sunday school teachers and the Rev. Smoke Kanipe.



U.S. Army Major Jeremy Boeh delivers SMC’s commencement address.

SMC graduates encouraged to be resilient, overcome fears to succeed

SPARTANBURG—Spartanburg Methodist College added more than 300 new associate and bachelor’s degree graduates to its list of alums following the 2024 graduation ceremony May 4 at Spartanburg High School.

“There is nothing about life that is easy. A life worth living is hard,” commencement speaker Major Jeremy Boeh told the graduates. “Your success and your survival are dependent on your willingness to be resilient.”

Maj. Boeh, the operations officer for the 479th Chemical Battalion in the U.S. Army, encouraged the students to continue to persevere and build their tribes to help guide their future success.

“There is nothing more powerful than having a team of people who support you,” he said. “You matter. Don’t ever give up. If you ever think you don’t matter, remember all these people here supporting you today.”

Student commencement speaker Hali Gardner echoed Maj. Boeh’s message, telling her classmates they are on the brink of a new chapter because of the unwavering support of those who believed in them. She also reminded them of all they had accomplished.

“We’re all afraid of something; however, we are all capable of working through our fears,” she said. “Think about something you accomplished here at SMC you didn’t think was possible and give yourself a round of applause. The relief on our faces and the joy in our hearts are a testament to all we have overcome.”



The girls learned ways to reach out.



They also wrote letters to senators.

Greenville girls get involved in climate justice

GREENVILLE—The Greenville District United Women in Faith hosted a limitless event for girls 12-18 on Saturday, April 13, at Berea Friendship United Methodist Church.

Six girls participated in the event, which focused on climate justice.

Charlotte Ward, state and local media coordinator for The Citizens Climate Lobby, was the guest speaker. Citizens’ Climate Lobby is an international grassroots environmental group that trains and supports volunteers to build relationships with their elected representatives in order to influence climate policy.

Ward spoke with the girls about what is happening with the climate and how it is changing. She gave them some ideas for ways

they could reach out and help with the issues. Some girls wrote letters to their senators, and some made phone calls asking for support of the Citizens’ Climate Lobby and their initiatives. The event ended with a box lunch for all.

Organizers said they appreciate the chaplains who brought the girls to this event. The girls were also invited to attend the annual conference in Washington, D.C., with Ward, as well as to participate in the South Carolina United Women In Faith Charter for Racial Justice event in June.

Vickie Failor, district president, hopes to make the Limitless event an annual event. She is also hoping to get more young ladies involved in United Women In Faith.



Need a Children’s Sermon?

by the Rev. Meghan Lindsey Sweeney Cook

Samuel’s Call

Author’s note: The following are sermon ideas developed as a resource to help churches reach young ones in their congregations. Everyone is free to use these and to modify as needed.

Date: Sunday, June 2

Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:1-20 (Note: June 2 kicks off what could be a three-week study in the lectionary of the prophet Samuel.)

Time frame: Three minutes (The average attention span of a child is about one year per minute of life. In our setting the youngest at children’s sermon are 3, so we aim for three or maybe five minutes at the most.)

Supplies: Three boxes (not see-through). The boxes need to be sturdy. Also, three different objects that can be shaken in a box will make sound. For example: a handful of silverware (not the fancy stuff!), a stuffy (to be tricky), a bag of dry beans dumped into the box, marbles. You decide what would be fun.

Children’s Sermon:

First, welcome the children. Let everyone get settled.

Say: Today’s Scripture story is about hearing and recognizing God’s voice. In our text, Samuel is a child who lives in the temple with a priest named Eli. When they are both sleeping, the Lord calls Samuel. Samuel thinks it’s Eli and goes running to him. Eli says, “I didn’t call you.” This happens again, and Eli realizes the Lord is speaking to Samuel. Eli tells Samuel the next time he hears God’s voice to say, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” Samuel does as he is told, and God speaks to Samuel. Samuel becomes an im-

portant character in God’s story. Eventually, Samuel anoints David to be king, and David’s family line leads to Jesus.

Say: The key to this story is listening and knowing what we’re hearing. I have a game for us. I have three boxes with items inside, and we’re going to shake the boxes and listen. Then we are going to listen and guess what the object might be.

Do: Shake one box and let the children make guesses. After a few moments open the box with the children and see if they were right. Repeat for each box.

Say: That was a tricky game. Some were easy to guess and others were tricky. Listening can be hard.

Ask: Do you remember who in our Bible story listened? (Samuel, and Eli is correct, too) Did Samuel know right away who was calling him? (No!)

Say: It was good that Samuel had Eli to help him. Did you know the church is a place where we help each other listen for God’s voice? We help one another listen and understand what God is calling us to do. I think that’s really cool.

Pray: Will you pray with me? Dear God (pause for repeat). We love you (pause). Help us to listen for your voice (pause). Help us to know it is you (pause). Amen.

Cook, the pastor of Cayce United Methodist Church, Cayce, is also the author of two children’s books from the Advocate Press: “Herbert the Hippo” and “Herbert the Hippo In the Moment.” Find them on Amazon or at <https://advocatesc.org/books>.



Conference Historical Society

by the Rev. Meredith M. Dark



From the Archives

by Dr. Phillip Stone

Extensive planning marks Belin centennial

Henrietta Huff, Mike Speranzella, and Corinne Hoch are members of Belin Memorial United Methodist Church located in Murrells Inlet. Henrietta has been the head of Belin's Centennial Team, and Mike has taken the torch for 2025. All three members are looking forward to celebrating Belin's Centennial on Jan. 19, 2025.

The church trustees have designated the third Sunday in January as "Belin Heritage Day" to mark the birthday of the Rev. James L. Belin.

Fourteen years ago, the Centennial Team was formed and has been celebrating Belin's history annually ever since. The public is invited to attend any of the church's four worship services—two in the contemporary worship setting, The Harbor, and two in traditional worship. Each service begins at 8:45 a.m. and 11 a.m. The liturgy and music will be chosen in recognition of the centennial. There will be a display to honor the progress which the church has made, a video and fellowship with a catered meal.

Belin's original sanctuary was moved in 1925 from Oatland Plantation. The structure is now home to the Joseph B. Bethea UMC, located at 350 West Perry Road in Myrtle Beach.

The Centennial Team has plans to mark the corners of the original sanctuary by placing bricks where the old footings were, an altar and perhaps a few pews. The Joseph B. Bethea congregation is expected to take part in Belin's historic centennial celebration.

The sanctuary where traditional worship is now held was completed in 1992. A special cross made of brass has been used in many of Belin's historical events. This cross was used in the original sanctuary and was used recently in the 99th anniversary of the church. Also a part of the 99th celebration was a showcase of how Belin fits into world history through displays of tables with photographs of different events that took place throughout the country and world, as well as how these events related back to Belin Memorial Church.

The 2024 Belin Heritage Day took place Jan. 21. At this celebration a historic marker was erected in Murrells Inlet to honor the church and its history. The marker explains that "Belin" was named in honor of the Rev. James L. Belin (1788-1859), one of the first Methodist preachers in the area. He helped found the Waccamaw Neck Mission in 1836 and worked primarily to improve the quality of life for local enslaved people. He willed most of his property to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, including his Cedar Hill Plantation property where Belin Memorial was founded. His nearby home, later relocated, served as a parsonage until the 1960s.

One of the aims of the Centennial Team is to connect the church to the community by dedicating a prayer garden to the community on Belin Heritage Day. There are bronze plaques that have been made with the Beatitudes on them, and quotations from the Bible that can help individuals to have a mental refresh.

Henrietta, Mike and Corinne remember the difficulties of COVID-19 and agree the camellia garden at Belin is a place of beauty where others can find happiness and meaning.

The garden will also feature The Lord's Prayer and the benediction from Micah as well as a memorial plaque in memory of Henrietta's late husband, Phil, who loved to say, "Have a happy day!"

The team is also in the process of applying to become a Camellia Trail Garden, a project of the American Camellia Society. Belin's camellia garden hosts 140 camellias. The hope is that the garden and grounds will continue to provide a source of community for those in Murrells Inlet, as folks can stop by to enjoy a moment by the seawall cross, a stroll through the gardens and a moment of restored peace within themselves and connection to the divine.

Dark serves as president of the Conference Historical Society and is a member of the executive committee of the SEJ Historical Society. She currently pastors Socastee United Methodist Church.



The Parkers marked their Golden Anniversary in April.



The church also celebrated seven new members who were inducted into the prestigious St. Paul UMC Seventy Society.

Histories of the conference

With nearly 240 years of history in South Carolina Methodism, it's not surprising that several writers have published books about the conference. It may be more noteworthy to consider how few have actually been written.

Three older works put much of their emphasis on Methodism in the Palmetto State in the 19th century. That's mostly because one, "The History of Methodism in South Carolina," appeared in 1883, and the other, "Early Methodism in the Carolinas," published in 1897. These two books are not especially light reads.

The first, by Rev. A. M. Shipp, Wofford's former president and a clergy member of the conference, is 648 pages long, and the second, by Rev. Abel M. Chreitzberg, is 364 pages. Both books are heavy on biography, with short sketches of ministers and quotes from their journals. Each also goes into lots of detail about the organization of circuits and the proceedings of annual conferences and circuit quarterly conferences.

The strength of both of these books is in the sheer volume of data they have amassed. The weakness is that, except for the sub-headings in Chreitzberg's book, they lack any index. That makes it a little hard to find information about particular circuits or individuals.

More importantly, though they contain a lot of data, they don't always tell stories, and they definitely don't tell a lot of stories of average Methodists. These types of books often try to avoid controversy, and of course, they are largely about the White church and reflect the attitudes of post-Civil War White South Carolinians. Any mention of Black Methodism is largely through the eyes of the missionaries to the enslaved persons.

The third of these three older books, the "History of South Carolina Methodism," was published in 1952 by the Rev. Albert D. Betts. It is also a fairly involved recitation of year-to-year events at annual conferences, to the point of reprinting the appointments and summarizing the actions. That can be useful as it can keep a researcher from having to review the entire conference journal. But

it doesn't make for interesting reading. It's more than 500 pages, though it does have a rudimentary index. Betts also covers the post-Civil War and early 20th century years and does talk about women's work.

A more recent book fills in some of the gaps in these earlier histories. "Steps Along the Way," by the Rev. Warren M. Jenkins, is a history of the 1866 South Carolina Conference and the growth of African-American Methodism in the state. Published in 1967, it has some of the same qualities as the Betts book in that it recounts a lot of the action at conference. Jenkins' book, because it looks at subjects ignored by the White conference histories, is especially valuable for researchers who are looking at Black church history. "Passionate Journeys," by the Rev. John W. Curry, was published in 1980, and it covers the history of the 1866 Conference as the merger with the 1785 Conference took place. It has a lot of lists, but it also has some interesting narrative history.

Other published histories cover some of our conference institutions, including the *Advocate* and the United Methodist Women (now United Women in Faith), and of course many of our local churches have fine histories. One of the more recent overall histories of the conference was prepared by our current conference historian, Dr. A.V. Huff Jr. It is a much more modern history, and it was published as part of the 1985 edition of "United Methodist Ministers in South Carolina." It is a much more readable narrative, and unlike some of the earlier works, it focuses on events that affected all Methodists rather than the leaders alone.

For researchers looking for a good overview of the state's Methodist heritage, this would be a good place to start.

Before the 250th anniversary of Methodism in South Carolina in 2035, I hope someone will write a new, more comprehensive and complete story of Methodism in our state.

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

St. Paul celebrates 156 years of proclaiming the Gospel

CAMDEN—St. Paul United Methodist Church, nestled in the heart of the Knights Hill Community, commemorated 156 years of spreading the gospel during its regular 10 a.m. service April 21.

The congregation worshipped under the theme "Speak To Us, Holy Spirit: Let Us Always Remember and Never Forget," reflecting on the enduring legacy of faith and service.

Dr. James P. Smith, pastor, delivered an inspiring morning message that was a testament to the church's rich heritage and unwavering commitment to spreading the gospel. Lawrence Williams III eloquently recounted the church's

rich history, tracing its origin back to its inaugural meeting in 1868 and highlighting the many milestones that shaped the present church.

A momentous occasion unfolded as seven new members were inducted into the prestigious St. Paul UMC Seventy Society, an esteemed group of individuals who have reached the age of 70. With a membership count of 69, each addition to this society symbolizes the enduring strength and vitality of the congregation.

The congregation also rejoiced in the enduring love and commitment of Mr. and Mrs. Isaiah Parker, who celebrated their golden anniversary in April. Their milestone served

as a reminder of the enduring bonds fostered within the church community.

Following the service, members and guests were treated to a sumptuous meal served in the fellowship hall.

As the congregation reflected on the journey of the past 156 years, one sentiment echoed throughout the sanctuary: "To God be the glory!"

Indeed, St. Paul stands as a beacon of faith, service and community ready to embark on the next chapter of its cherished history with unwavering dedication as it remains "the church in the heart of the community, with the community at heart."

29 to retire at Annual Conference

Ben Lincoln Barnett
Edna Reece Bowers
Norman Aaron Brown
Sonia Ely Brum
Fred Vance Buchanan Jr.
Kenneth Neal Carter



Christopher William Cox
James Dickerson Dennis Jr.
Daniel Kaye Fortney
Robert E. Harper
William Neal Harper
Leonard Huggins Jr.



Maye Emma Malachi
William Timothy McClendon
Whittaker Vernon Middleton
Debra Louise Pisor
Kathy Dill Pryor
Nancy Creswell Reed



Anthony Scott Rowell
Robert Leonard Shuler
Thomas Ray Sims
Annie Hair Sistrunk
Cynthia Ann Smith
Edward Jay Stiltz



Kelli Waters Taylor
Pernerva Singleton Washington Thomas
Redonia McKnight Thomas
David Owens Ussery
Sara Ann White



The *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* congratulates this year's class of retiring pastors. Together, they have served more than 650 years in local churches, universities, agencies and the conference. We wish them well in their future ministries and their time away from the pulpit.

This year's class of retiring pastors was asked to respond to the following questions.

1. Think of one ministry or occasion that makes you smile.
2. What do you plan to do June 30 or slightly after that?
3. How are you planning to continue your ministry after retirement?
4. What's one thing you're glad to leave behind?

Ben Lincoln Barnett

Journal entry: FE: FL 1986, PM 1988, FE 1990. SC: 1987 Charleston-Bethel Associate, 1989 Bath-Clearwater, 1993 India Hook, 1999 First, Easley, 2003 First, Conway, 2006 Pendleton, 2013 Bethel, Walterboro, 2018 Bethel, Spartanburg, 2020 Wrightman (Prosperity).

1. While serving communion at the chancel rail, I heard a strange sucking noise, and turning around, I saw a 5-year-old red-headed boy with his head cranked back and his tongue curled up inside the glass cup, trying to get every last drop of juice, followed immediately by a sharp jab to his ribs by his embarrassed mom.
2. Decompress after an exhausting move and 40 years of active ministry, spending lazy days on my fishing boat, traveling with my wife, and spending more time with the grandkids.
3. Attending and supporting a church of our choosing, sitting in the pew with my wife and worshipping the Lord from the other side of the chancel rail.
4. Wearing masks and keeping a safe distance from others while at church during Covid-19.

Years of Service: 37

Edna Reece Bowers

Journal entry: PL: SY 2018, PL 2020. SC: 2018 Marlboro Circuit (SY) (1/2), 2020 Marlboro Circuit (1/2), 2022 Grace-Pelzer (1/2)

Years of Service: 4

Norman Aaron Brown

Journal entry: FE: PM 1982, FE 1986. SC: 1980 North Orangeburg Charge, 1980 Asbury-Clio, 1982 Bennettsville Circuit, 1984 Seneca Circuit, 1986 Silver Hill, 1990 West Camden Charge, 2001 John Wesley, 2004 New Light, 2014 Springtown.

Years of Service: 42

Sonia Ely Brum

Journal entry: FE: OE 01/01/2004, FE 2006. SC: 01/01/2004 Coordinator of Hispanic Ministry, 2006 Connectional Ministries Congregational Specialist and Hispanic Coordinator, 2012 New Church Start – West Columbia Hispanic Ministry Mission Congregation (1/2), 2013 Director of Racial and Ethnic Ministries, GBGM, 2016 Manager of US Missionaries – Missionary Services of GBGM.

1. I had opportunity to smile on many occasions on my ministry journey, however being part of a multicultural ministry has been a blessing. Working at Global Ministries has been a great joy with many smiles as I interact with staff and missionaries from different cultural, social and nationalities backgrounds. I identify with them as a former missionary, serving in different countries and as an immigrant. All of that with challenges but many opportunities to serve differently. I feel blessed in my ministry journey.
2. Continue living the life in its fullness and having more time to be with family and my grandchildren. I would like to spend time with my 93-year-old mother while she still is active.

3. Pastoral assignment may end, but ministry is a life commitment. I am planning to serve as a volunteer in ministry with areas that are having less attention in the churches such as old adults and spiritual formation. I am also continue doing translation and interpretation as I need some income to supplement my retirement incomes.
4. I will be glad to be out of many zoom meetings and as I am working from home from the last 3 years. I would like to spend more time outside and enjoy nature.

Years of Service: 20.5

Fred Vance Buchanan Jr.

Journal entry: FE: FL 1993, SP 1995, PM 1997, FE 1999. SC: 1993 North Easley Charge, 1998 Augusta Road, 2000 Church of the Good Shepherd, 2004 Bells-Smyrna, 2006 Rehoboth-Bethel, 2008 Indian Field, 2011 Epting Memorial-Lebanon Charge, 2015 Barnwell Charge, 2020 St. Paul's (Orangeburg).

1. Salkehatchie summer services watching young teenagers catch on to life changing things while using hammers, saws, paintbrushes and other tools. I remember a group of young 14-year-olds from Hilton Head who had probably never had to pick their own socks up off the floor. Each evening we debriefed with stories of giant cockroaches and other dirt. The next year they returned with excitement, their own tools, and money which I was unaware of. I was leading a paint and patch job when a couple of the kids asked if they could completely remodel the kitchen, which

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

I informed them that we did not have the budget for it. One of the kids called an informal meeting under the tree in the yard and in a few minutes, they came to me with money, resulting in a much-needed kitchen rehab.

2. Beekeeping, gardening, woodworking, astronomy, grandkids, some travel. Propping my feet up on the front deck and staring at the Soco Mountain Range, Balsam Mountain, Ogker Knob and the Little Cove Knob.
3. Fill in for absent ministers, might even do some retired supply sometime. ERT: gives me a chance to work with people who have a heart and soul to help someone else. Salkehatchie: reenergizes me by hanging out with some of the best of youth.
4. The bureaucratic paperwork. Need I say more?

Years of Service: 35

Kenneth Neal Carter

Journal entry: FE: PL 1990, SP 1998, PM 2000, FE 2002. SC: 1990 Chesterfield Parish, 1993 Mount Joshua-Shiloh, 1997 Wateree Charge, 1999 Unity (Lugoff), 2007 Mechanicsville, 2015 New Life, 2021 St. Stephen.

Years of Service: 34

Christopher William Cox

Journal entry: HL: PM (OC) 1989, FE 1991, Honorable Location 12/31/2006. SC: 1989 Trinity, 1991 Ruby, 1992 LOA, 1994 Buncombe Street Pastoral Counseling Center, 12/31/2006 Honorable Location.

Years of Service: 20.5

James Dickerson Dennis Jr.

Journal entry: FE: OT 1982, FE 1984. SC: 1982 Hardeeville Charge, 1985 Grace Associate (Charleston), 1988 India Hook, 1993 Gramling, 1997 Trinity (Bamberg), 2004 Main Street (Greenwood), 2010 Grace, 2019 Greenville District Superintendent.

1. Salkehatchie.
2. A motorcycle trip to a place with no cell service.
3. I think I'm all used up! No plans.
4. Meetings.

Years of Service: 42

Daniel Kaye Fortney

Journal entry: OM: OM 2016 (¶346.1). SC: 2016 Sharon-Smyrna, 2021 Latimer Memorial.

1. I loved to teach young adult Bible studies.
2. I plan to take a week's vacation.
3. I am planning to work at a nonprofit organization.
4. I am glad to leave behind being on call 24/7.

Years of Service: 8

Robert E. Harper

Journal entry: PL: SY 2016, FL 2017, PL 2022. SC: 2016 Antioch-New El Bethel (SY), 2017 Knightsville, 2022 Stallsville (1/4).

Years of Service: 7

William Neal Harper

Journal entry: FE: PM 1988, FE 1995. SC: In School, 1990 Warrenville-Pentecost, 1991 In School, 1992 Kingstree Circuit, 1994 Spartanburg-Trinity Associate, 1996 Blacksburg Charge, 09/01/1999 Simpsonville Associate, 2001 Pisgah, Aynor, 2003 Pamplico, 2007 Trinity-Honea Path, 2012 North Easley Charge, 2015 St. Paul's, Orangeburg, 2018 St. James, Spartanburg, 2020 Medical Leave.

1. A ministry: Being involved with the start of a food pantry program in the Ministerial Association in Honea Path and discussing steps to file and incorporate as a treasurer of the group. Buoyed by the joyful spirit of friends working together to operate it and of working side by side with committed volunteers from many church-

es wanting to help people. Occasion: On one of our unforgettable anniversary dates at a favorite marina restaurant, Tracy and I witnessed a situation where ceiling tiles collapsed, and a possum fell on a set table near us, about ten minutes after the customers had departed. The waiter had taken pictures of the wine bottle label and the guests ordering it. People around us, and we ourselves, couldn't stop laughing about it. We watched the manager and others figure out how to catch it for it had gotten under the table and they brought a big white bucket.

2. Celebrate with gratitude to God and for the family legacy of ministry I have been a part of from birth, that I shared with my brother, and that continues with our daughter's effective ministry. I'll mark the occasion by enjoying a nice seafood platter with my helpmate and partner, and turn my undivided attention to finding the best opportunity to work with a low stress, part-time job I like, to cover expenses and meet new people.
3. There are many things that will be missed after this time, but we will worship and serve with Meredith at Socastee UMC and enjoy this time in our lives without worry. I am hoping to find new opportunities to serve, and to be linked to friends who have also dedicated their lives to the ministry of Christ. I am interested in using the ministerial trainings in a new way with troubled youth and helping people manage their finances.
4. Gossip, hurtful acts in the church, Sunday pressure, travel logs, boxes and moving.

Years of Service: 34

Leonard Huggins Jr.

Journal entry: FE: OT 1980, FE 1985. SC: 1979 North Charge, 1980 Rowesville Parish, 1981 In School, 1982 Pendleton Charge, 1985 Thompson Centennial, 09/01/1986 Bennettsville Parish, 1990 Bamberg Parish, 1995 Friendship Kingstree, 2005 New Covenant, Bowman, 2013 Johns Island Parish, 2018 St. George Parish, 2021 Shady Grove.

1. When one church decides to buy a parsonage and pay cash for it and build a new church. We raised \$500,000 in two years.
2. Thank the Lord for 44-year journey and go on a vacation.
3. Supply a church if asked to do so. Or continue newspaper writing ministries or a church consultant.
4. Promises not kept.

Years of Service: 45

Maye Emma Malachi

Journal entry: PL: PL 2013. SC: 2013 Jefferson Parish Associate, 2017 Wesley Chapel (Chesterfield) (1/2), 2021 Level Green (1/2).

Years of Service: 11

William Timothy McClendon

Journal entry: FE: OT 1977, FE 1980. SC: 1977 In School, 1979 Mount Olivet-Pleasant Grove, 1984 New Market, 1986 Wesley Chapel, 1993 First, Cheraw, 1997 St. John's, Rock Hill, 2006 Columbia District Superintendent, 2014 St. John's, Aiken.

1. Baptisms, weddings, Holy Communion, lives changed by Jesus, and hope imparted have made me smile through the years. Dear friends and colleagues among laity and clergy have made the journey a joy!
2. On June 30, I plan to go on a vacation for a long, long time! I especially want the freedom to sleep in any day that I want, and go camping and wading as I fish for trout on Helton Creek in Ashe County, NC.
3. I'll continue mostly as a volunteer, a fill-in preacher, or help with visitation!
4. Three things: *Book of Discipline* questions, "well-intentioned dragons" who mean well, but suck the life out of you, and weekly sermons. I love all three things, but every day or week dealing with the *Discipline*, passive-aggressive people and sermon prep is a lot! I'm done, and look

forward to retirement!

Years of Service: 47

Whittaker Vernon Middleton

Journal entry: FE: PL 1998, SP 1999, PM 2002, FE 2009. SC: 1998 Canaan (Cope) (3/4), 2012 Jerusalem-St. Luke (SY), 2012 Vice President for Advancement, Claflin University, 2013 Silas (SY), 2020 Silas (3/4).

1. The occasion that is most memorable to me was an event which brought laughter to the entire congregation during the anniversary of one of our choirs. On this occasion, the choir was marching around the inside of the church and the script called for them to end the procession by marching back on the stage and ending the march. However, rather than ending the march on the stage, one of the choir members marched completely out of the church and had to be escorted back inside to complete the march.
2. Upon retirement, I plan to continue serving a church in a part-time capacity. In this capacity, it is my hope that I will have the opportunity to do some traveling abroad, to places like Africa University in Zimbabwe. If the opportunity presents itself, I would also like to do some additional international traveling.
3. Upon retirement, I plan to continue serving a church in the conference and to do all that I can to share the good news of Jesus Christ both nationally and internationally.
4. The one thing I am glad to leave behind during retirement is the amount of traveling that I have had to do during my tenure as a pastor. On one appointment I had to commute over 150 miles each Sunday which also required my wife and I to wake up at 6:00 a.m. to arrive on time at our first church. I will certainly not miss getting up early on Sunday mornings, as I hope to attend worship service in a church closer to my home.

Years of Service: 26

Debra Louise Pisor

Journal entry: FD: OD 06/15/2016, FD 07/01/2019 (transferred to SC). SC: 06/15/2016 Director of Children's Ministry, Victor (Greer), 2019 Victor Associate (Greer) (1/2).

1. Neighborhood block parties with hotdogs and cookies and all of the area organizations present with the music playing and the police and firemen dancing with the kids (and adults too).
2. Resting, biking and swimming and celebrating another birthday with family!
3. Leading retreats.
4. Paperwork!

Years of Service: 5

Kathy Dill Pryor

Journal entry: PL: PL 2020, FL 2021. SC: 2020 First Associate (Clover), 2021 Philadelphia (York) (1/2).

Years of Service: 4

Nancy Cresswell Reed

Journal entry: FL: FL 2014. SC: 2014 St. John's Associate (Aiken), 2019 Lewis Chapel (Sumter), 2021 Landrum.

1. It is not one thing but it is one type of ministry, the ministry of sharing people's daily lives with them. Walking along, even if only for a few years or even for less time, with others as they cope with the ups and downs of their life and helping them recognize how their faith has helped them and how they in turn can share their faith story.
2. As I return to my home in Aiken, I am looking forward to working in my yard and rediscovering the joy of digging in the dirt and seeing things grow. With more time, I look forward to spending time with family and friends.
3. Just as I used my first career of social work in my ministry, I will continue to serve as retired supply and look forward to how God will use me and the congregation

where I will serve. After a time, I know that I will seek some volunteer opportunities, but I do not have anything specific in mind.

4. Moving. While meeting new people has been a blessing, I hope this is my last move!

Years of Service: 15

Anthony Scott Rowell

Journal entry: FE: SP 1993, PM 1997, FE 2000. SC: 1993 Clinton, 1997 Bethany-Zoar Charge, 2002 Epting Memorial, 2007 Windsor, 2013 Beulah (Gilbert).

1. Leading UVMIMSC and taking mission teams out of the country has to be one of the most spiritually satisfying things I have done in my life. The wonderful way a missionary is treated, not as a tourist, but as one of the family always surprises and delights me. When on the mission field, I become the person with whom I am most comfortable. He smiles a lot.
2. I plan on wondering what it is I am supposed to be doing with myself.
3. I hope to continue leading international mission teams, and should a congregation be crazy enough to ask me to come and preach for a Sunday or two, that would be fun.
4. I will be happy to leave that 31-year-old dusty and rusty timeclock from which I last clocked into work on June 3, 1993 never to clock out again until June 30, 2024. Can I get a Hallelujah?

Years of Service: 30.75

Robert Leonard Shuler

Journal entry: FE: PL 1985, PM 1994, FE 1998. SC: 1985 Red Root, 1989 Sykes Savannah, 1994 Tatum Charge, 1998 Rock Hill South Charge, 08/01/2002 Wesley (Pinopolis), 2006 Bethesda (Cades), 2014 New Light, 2016 York-St. James Charge, 05/01/2023 Medical Leave.

1. While pastoring Wesley UMC in Moncks Corner: It was a joy to see the expressions on the children's faces after completing their confirmation classes.
2. Take a deep breath, exhale and enjoy my life.
3. I plan to continue to tell others about the goodness of Jesus and all that he made available to men by becoming a ransom for us paying a debt we could not pay. I plan to do this with every opportunity I get.
4. The charge conferences.

Years of Service: 38

Thomas Ray Sims

Journal entry: PL: PL 2005. SC: 2005 Bamberg Circuit, 2017 New Beginning (Norway) (1/2).

Years of Service: 19

Annie Hair Sistrunk

Journal entry: FE: PE 2009, FE 2011. SC: 2009 Rowesville Parish, 2012 Oro, 2017 Mechanicsville, 2021 Medical Leave.

1. Throughout my years of pastoring one ministry that has always made me smile was watching the youth and young adults take leadership in their church. Some of them became lay servants or reignited ministries for young adults. I am really proud of their continued endeavors in these ministries. I constantly see updates on Facebook of events happening in their perspective churches and I pray for their increase in leadership.
2. My plans are to continue spending time with family, traveling, writing, reading and supporting our conference and clergy as needed.
3. I will continue working with the Orangeburg Circuit ministries and Rev. Lawrence Canty, especially the parish nursing and health care ministry. I will be working within the Orangeburg and Calhoun counties as a certified community health worker.
4. The one thing I might miss is paperwork.

Years of Service: 15

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Cynthia A. Smith

Journal entry: FL: FL 2020, SC; 2020 Shiloh (Marion).

1. There are so many. When I would do a Children's Moment during worship, the children always made me smile. You never knew what they might say, but that was the best part of it all.
2. Rest and relax and enjoy my condo at the beach.
3. Yes, I will seek God's will and be open to opportunities for ministry.
4. I love interacting with my church people, but I will be glad to leave the paperwork behind.

Years of Service: 4

Edward Jay Stiltz

Journal entry: FL: PL 1991, SP 1992, FL 1994, NA 2007, PL 2013, FL 2021. SC: 1991 St. John, 1992 Rowesville, 1997 Ruffin Circuit, 2003 Jefferson, 2005 Tabernacle-Dawsey, 2007 Not Appointed, 2013 Target-Gerizim Charge (3/4), 2021 St. Mark (Charleston).

1. I preached a Children's Sermon one Sunday, asking the children what they thought God looked like. I expected to hear responses like "He has a long white beard" or "He glows" or "He sits on a great big throne." One little boy raised his hand and I acknowledged him. He loudly said, "He looks like you!" I did indeed smile (with more than a few tears in my eyes), and I was immediately humbled.
2. I plan to be in worship. I do not know whether it will be sitting in the pew or possibly serving as a retired supply pastor.
3. It is my desire to serve a United Methodist church or charge that needs a pastor, but can only afford a retired pastor (as long as the Lord allows). If there is no pastor position open, I plan to be active in the ministry of any church I attend. As I compose and perform Christian music, I would

love to be involved in music ministry in some capacity.

4. It will be nice to not have quite so many mandatory meetings!

Years of Service: 26

Kelli Waters Taylor

Journal entry: FE: PM 1991, FE 1994. SC: 1991 Joanna-Epworth, 1997 Chaplain, Spartanburg Methodist College, 1999 Church of the Good Shepherd, 2000 Chaplain, Spartanburg Methodist College, 2002 Associate, Union, Irmo, 2003 Trinity, Greenville, 2007 Chester Circuit, 06/18/2007 Director of Communications, GBCS, 12/01/2007 Family Leave, 2008 Cherokee Place, 2010 Boone Hill, 2015 Vice President for Campus Ministry and Community Engagement, Methodist University, Fayetteville, NC, & 2023 Cameron UMC (1/4).

1. Teaching, especially teaching persons thirsty for greater knowledge and understanding of Scripture and theology. I recall a particular Christian Believer course at Union UMC (Irmo) of nearly 30 congregation members studying together for two hours every week. Our faith journeys are forever intertwined because of that time spent in the Bible. I smile even now when I think about that experience. This, and seeing infants I have baptized grown up and serving the Lord.
2. Vacation with my husband! (And you can be sure we will be stopping at Wofford to watch our #96 Terrier at summer football practice.)
3. I will continue to serve in church-related higher education, serve on conference committees and fill pulpits as needed, and mentor those discerning a call to ministry.
4. The demands of local church ministry on my family—ministry gives so much to the clergy's family (for which they and I are grateful!) and it takes a lot from them, too. I look forward to giving more back to my family in the years ahead for the sacrifices they have made for ministry through the

years.
Years of Service: 32

**Pernerva Singleton
Washington Thomas**

Journal entry: PL: PL 2022. SC: 2022 St. Paul-Elliott (1/2).

1. One thing that comes to mind that I praise and thank God for is that we have various age groups of young people in our congregation, and they are beginning to serve and to take part in the services during our service and as we serve God.
2. I plan to sit back, relax and enjoy and see our children use their gifts and graces and see how much they have grown in Christ since I've been their leader. God placed me there. I accept them as my family. We're not just church members, but we are there as a church family, growing together, learning together, attending workshops together, making decisions together.
3. I will give 100 percent of my time to the church and the community, so that we can grow together and learn about one another in the community and attend events that are offered.

Years of Service: 2

Redonia McKnight Thomas

Journal entry: FE: LP20 2010, PL 09/01/2010, PE 2012, FE 2014. SC: 2010 Not Appointed, 09/01/2010 New Harmony-Robinson Chapel-Union Charge, 2012 Cheraw Parish, 2016 South Greenville.

1. The children's ministry always made me smile. Easter speeches, Christmas cantatas, children choirs always brought me joy. In my Confirmation classes I saw genuine excitement and enthusiasm with the children. They came each week motivated to engage in the activities and fully participate in Scripture reading and memorizations. I smile even now because on the last day I gave an invitation and their faces lit up as they raised their hands to give their heart to Jesus and to be a part of the fam-

- ily of God.
2. In the first few months following June 30, I plan to work on getting my home together while I take in a few rounds of golf with my husband each week. I plan to get plenty R&R as I begin writing and exploring opportunities for missions at home and abroad.
 3. Mission ministry has been in my heart since my teens. I believe that God is leading me to do further ministry in this area. I also have a topic I am contemplating doing some research and writing on. I do plan to make myself available to help my fellow clergy in the pulpit as needs arise.
 4. The intense preparation for Charge Conference takes a lot of energy and effort; it takes a lot of preparation and coordination. Although it is a very informative piece of work and is necessary for review and planning, I think this will be one thing I am glad to leave behind.

Years of Service: 13.75

David Owens Ussery

Journal entry: PL: PL 2012. SC: 2012 Mount Dearborn-Heath Chapel.

Years of Service: 12

Sara Ann White

Journal entry: FE: OT 1979, FE 1984. SC: 1979 In School, 1980 Jefferson Charge, 1982 Springfield Charge, 1986 Dunean, 1989 Mountain View-Slater, 1990 Bethel Associate, 1993 First-Isle of Palms, 2001 John Wesley, 2006 Rock Hill Superintendent, 09/01/2012 Director of Congregational Development, 2019 Hibben.

1. Ministry makes me smile. I've often described it as the best "job" in the world and I've felt fortunate to be able to spend vocational hours in fulfilling a calling that above all else wanted people to know that God claims not on what we deserve but on what God desires.

Years of Service: 45

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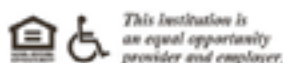
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Shiloh offers \$35K for hole-in-one

The Shiloh United Methodist Men's Club in Piedmont is sponsoring its 16th annual Shiloh Golf Tournament June 29 at Saluda Valley Country Club in Williamston.

Tee time is 1 p.m. There is a \$35,000 prize for a hole-in-one on a specified hole insured through Hole-In-One International. Fees are \$60 per person or \$240 for a foursome.

Ladies and youth players are welcome.

A hamburger/hot dog dinner with all the trimmings and desserts by the Shiloh ladies are part of the registration fee.

Businesses and churches can sponsor a hole for \$100. Proceeds from the tournament go to help with local needs for individuals, families and organizations in the area.

Everyone interested in a great day of golf is invited to contact Joe Dunlap for an entry form.

He can be reached at 864-423-9084 or joedunlap92@gmail.com.

Entry deadline is June 15.



Photos courtesy of the Rev. Brian Underwood

Loving those in prison

Antioch and Dacusville United Methodist churches have been reaching out to Perry Correctional Institute through the Men's Kairos #45 ministry. Many servants including the youth baked 140 dozen cookies. Also, 14 families sponsored a meal during the weekend. In addition, many people signed up for a 72-hour prayer vigil that covered the weekend. The Rev. Brian Underwood served on the clergy team during the weekend. "It was amazing to see the outpouring of love and support for these men here," Underwood said. Pictured, the youth bake cookies, and the United Women in Faith bake and package the cookies for delivery.



Celebrating Black history and African ethnicity: Reflecting on Wesley Chapel's Cultural Celebration

By Dr. Dorothy McClam

LAKE CITY—African-American churches have a vital role in celebrating Black history throughout the year, not just in February. It's crucial for churches to honor and take seriously the history and heritage of African Americans.

As we gear up for the summer months and the upcoming conference year, Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church's pastor and members are reminded of the fantastic Black history celebrations they had during February. With the release of a new book by church pastor the Rev. Amiri Hooker, "My Banned Black History Sermons," as well as an inspiring sermon series and a delightful taste of African service and celebration, many in the church have realized that these celebrations should not be limited to one month but continue throughout the year.

African-American churches should take the lead in educating their congregation on the importance of Black history and the contributions African Americans have made.

All churches must find it crucial to prepare for Juneteenth and celebrate African-American heritage, acknowledging the significant effort put forth for Black history programs.

To commemorate Black History Month, Wesley Chapel UMC embarked on a journey of exploration and celebration, delving into the rich tapestry of African history and heritage. Led by Hooker, the church embarked on a sermon series titled "My Black Christian History: Before the Chains," followed by a vibrant celebration event.

The sermon series consisted of four insightful messages, each exploring different facets of African presence and influence in Christian history. "Roots of Faith" delved into the early foundations of faith in African history, drawing parallels with the biblical narrative of Abraham's journey of faith. "Wisdom of Ethiopia" examined the historical and biblical significance of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon, emphasizing the wisdom and contributions of African civilizations. "Philip African Evangelism" delved into the story of the Ethiopian eunuch and highlighted the early spread of Christianity in Africa through disciples like him. And "African Church Fathers" explored the lives and contributions of early African church fathers, such as Augustine of Hippo and Athanasius, in shaping Christian theology.

Each sermon served as a reminder of the profound impact of African heritage on the development and spread of Christianity, challenging misconceptions and celebrating the often-overlooked contributions of African ancestors.

Following the conclusion of the sermon series, Wesley Chapel UMC hosted a vibrant celebration event, "A Taste of Africa," Feb. 25. Organized by the United Women in Faith, the event aimed to further immerse the congregation in African culture and cuisine. The event featured a diverse array of delicious dishes, lovingly prepared by members of the congregation. From East African Ethiopian soul food collard greens to African-American sweet potato bread, attendees savored a culinary journey through African flavors and traditions. Baked chicken with mango sauce, baked chicken with onions, green peppers and mushrooms, along with East African tea, added a delightful touch to the menu.

Reflecting on the event, Betsy Graham, UWF president, expressed her joy at the overwhelming positive response from attendees. She emphasized the importance of fostering fellowship, cultural awareness, and appreciation within the church community.

Graham envisions making "A Taste of Africa" an annual tradition, further deepening the congregation's connection to African heritage.

Wesley Chapel UMC's commemoration of Black History Month was a testament to the church's commitment to celebrating diversity, honoring heritage and fostering unity. Through the sermon series and celebration event, the congregation embarked on a meaningful journey of discovery, embracing the richness of African history and ethnicity. As we continue to reflect on this enlightening experience, may all the churches in our connection be inspired to celebrate and uplift the contributions of African ancestors in our collective journey of faith and justice.

McClam is communications chair for United Women of Faith.

Obituaries

Rev. Nicholas Scott Elliott

SIMPSONVILLE—The Rev. Nicholas Scott Elliott, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died April 21, 2024.

Prior to his retirement in 2009, Rev. Elliott served the Marshall Memorial, Sandy Springs-Zion, Piedmont, Harris, Herbert Memorial, Leesville and St. John's-Lugoff charges. From 1999 until his retirement, he was the executive director of Southeastern Jurisdiction United Methodist Volunteers in Mission.

A memorial service will be held May 17 at Thomas McAfee Funeral Home, Southeast.

Memorials may be made to the South Carolina United Methodist Volunteers in Mission at <https://www.umcsc.org/umvim/> or c/o Nick Elliott Memorial Fund, 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203 (make checks payable to SC Conference Office); or to Southeast Jurisdiction UMVIM, c/o Nick Elliott Memorial Fund, P.O. Box 276, Birmingham, AL 35201.

Rev. Elliott is survived by his wife, Judy Elliott, daughter and son.



Elliott

Farr, widow of the Rev. Wesley Farr, died May 4, 2024.

A memorial service will be held May 25 at Lyman Methodist Church.

Memorials may be made to Lyman Methodist Church General Fund, 106 Grace Road, Lyman, SC 29365.

Mrs. Kinnett-Farr is survived by her son.

Nancy Louise Smith Johnson

COLUMBIA—Nancy Louise Smith Johnson, widow of the Rev. Richard Johnson, died April 10, 2024.

A graveside service was held April 17 at Greenlawn Memorial Gardens, Spartanburg.

Memorials may be made to the Alzheimer's Association, <https://alzfdn.org/donate> or to the Alzheimer's Foundation of America, 322 Eighth Ave., 16th Floor, New York, NY 1001.

Mrs. Johnson is survived by her daughter.

Jenny L. Peterson Wilburn

MIRAMAR, Fla.—Jenny L. Peterson Wilburn, sister of the Rev. Shirley Gordon, died April 29, 2024. Rev. Gordon is the campus minister, Orangeburg Wesley Foundation, Orangeburg. Her husband, Rev. Enrique Gordon, is the pastor of New Light United Methodist Church, Orangeburg.

Funeral services were held May 4 at St. Michael UMC, Kingstree, with burial in the church cemetery.

Mrs. Wilburn is survived by her husband, Roy Wilburn, daughter and parents.

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.

Rev. Daniel Thomas Reynolds

LITTLE RIVER—The Rev. Daniel Thomas Reynolds, a retired associate member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died April 18, 2024.

Prior to his retirement in 2006, Rev. Reynolds served the Lamar Circuit, Heath Springs, Kings Mountain-St. Paul, Herbert Memorial, Loris and St. Paul charges.



Reynolds

James Evans Snyder

CHARLESTON—James "Jimmy" Evans Snyder, father of Susan Wood, died April 21, 2024. Mrs. Wood is the wife of the Rev. Mike Wood, pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church, Charleston, and Ebenezer UMC, Moncks Corner.

Funeral services were held April 27 at the J. Henry Stuhr West Ashley Chapel.

Mr. Snyder is survived by his wife, Margaret Jane Snyder, and daughter.

Gary Michael Waln

LEXINGTON—Gary Michael Waln, father of Aubrie Bundrick, died April 21, 2024. Mrs. Bundrick is the wife of the Rev. Kenneth Bundrick, pastor of Trinity-New Chapel Charge, Newberry.

A memorial service will be held at a later date.

Mr. Waln is survived by his two daughters.

Rev. Philip Nicholas Watry

SUMTER—The Rev. Philip Nicholas Watry, a retired elder of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died April 28, 2024.

Prior to his retirement in 2008, Rev. Watry served the Greenville-McBee, Faith-Concord, Swansea Charge, Pacolet-White Stone, Jackson, New Market-Tabernacle and Indian Field charges. He served New Market-Tabernacle, Indian Branch-Twitty and Indian Branch-Epworth as a retired elder.

Funeral services were held May 3 at Aldersgate UMC with burial in the Wells Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to McLeod Hospice House, 1203 E. Cheves St., Florence, SC 29506.

Rev. Watry is survived by his wife, Betty Ann Truett Watry, daughter and two sons.



Watry

Mildred Louise Wilson

Kinnett-Farr

LYMAN—Mildred Louise Wilson Kinnett-

May

Asian Pacific Heritage Month
Christian Home Month

May 16—"Helping from the Sidelines" Session 4, facilitated by Dr. Gerard Love, St. Andrew By-The-Sea UMC, Hilton Head Island, 7 p.m. standrewbythesea@gmail.com

May 17-18—LSM School (Columbia District), Union UMC, Irmo, 4:30-9 p.m. (Fri.); 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. (Sat.) \$35. <https://www.umcsc.org/wp-content/uploads/COLUMBIA-LSM-SCHOOL-Spring-2024.pdf>

May 18—Armed Forces Day

May 18—"Strengthening the Soul of Our Leadership," Bishop's Day in the Walterboro District, Sand Hill UMC, Ridgeville, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

May 18—UWF Come Together Be Together hosted by Florence District, virtual, 9:30 a.m.

May 18—ERT Disaster Response Training, North UMC, North, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Register: <https://www.umcsc.org/ert-registration/>

May 19—Pentecost

May 19—Heritage Sunday

May 20-24—Carolinas Black Clergy Leadership Retreat, Myrtle Beach. <https://www.umcsc.org/cbcretreat/>

May 24—Aldersgate Day

May 26—Trinity Sunday and Peace with Justice Sunday

May 27—Memorial Day (United Methodist Center closed)

May 28—Dementia 101 Workshop, Cokesbury UMC, North Charleston. Register: <https://tinyurl.com/yts3dec8>



Photo courtesy of Freddie Vaughn

Movie night at St. Mark

St. Mark UMC, Columbia, held a movie night at their church on Saturday, May 4, showing "The Lion King." Members passed out 160 popcorn packets with an invitation to the surrounding community. They also invited kids through Logan Elementary, with whom the church often works, as well as throughout the Earlewood Community. St. Mark had free hot dogs and popcorn. Because of weather, the movie had to move indoors to the sanctuary. They said the response for this initial effort was good, as several fathers, mothers and grandmothers came with their kids. They plan to do more events like this in the future, including an outdoor movie after Daylight Savings Time ends.

June

June 1—Kidney Awareness Health Fair and Celebration hosted by Stephanie Ponds Henry, The Price House, Camden, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

June 9-12—Annual Conference, Greenville Convention Center, Greenville

June 11—S.C. Reconciling breakfast, Fourth Presbyterian Church, Greenville, 7:45 a.m. <http://scrmn.org>

June 11—Advocate Press Book Signing/ Meet the Author, Annual Conference Room 202B, Greenville, Noon-2 p.m.

June 14—Flag Day

June 16—Father's Day

June 16—Organ recital, organist Debbie Bauer, Shandon UMC, Columbia, 4 p.m.

June 17-21—Summer Camp for children ages 4-12, Dacusville UMC, Easley, 7 a.m.-5 p.m. \$75. Register: lunderwood5712@gmail.com.

June 19—Juneteenth (United Methodist Center closed)

June 20—Summer Solstice/First Day of Summer

June 22—UWF Charter for Racial + Envi-

ronmental Justice Event, virtual, 10 a.m.

June 24-28—Summer Camp for children ages 4-12, Dacusville UMC, Easley, 7 a.m.-5 p.m. \$75. Register: lunderwood5712@gmail.com.

June 29—16th Annual Shiloh Golf Tournament sponsored by Shiloh UMC Men's Club, Piedmont, Saluda Valley Country Club, Williamston. \$60/person or \$240/foursome. Contact Joe Dunlap for more information, 864-423-9084 or jundunlap92@gmail.com.

June 30—Wellness Sunday focusing on men's health, sponsored by Parish Nursing Ministry, Bethlehem UMC, Orangeburg, 10 a.m.

July

July 4—Independence Day (United Methodist Center closed)

July 6—UWF Limitless Event, 10 a.m.

July 8—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m. <https://www.umcsc.org/event/district-connectional-ministries-meeting/2024-07-08/>

July 10-12—Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference, Lake Junaluska, North Carolina.

July 18-20—UWF Mission u, Spartanburg Methodist College, Spartanburg

July 22—Killingsworth Annual Golf Tournament, Windermere Gold Club, Blythewood. Register: <https://www.killingsworth.org/golf-tournament>

August

Aug. 3—Lay Servant Academy (Train the Trainer), Washington Street UMC, Columbia, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.



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Deadlines are the 10th of the month
for the following month's paper.

Positions Open

Accounts Payable Clerk/Building Receptionist

The SC Conference is seeking a person to serve as Accounts Payable Clerk/Building Receptionist. It is a part-time position working 8:30 am – 4:30 pm Monday-Wednesday at the United Methodist Center in Columbia. You can find more information on the Conference website at <https://www.umcsc.org/accounts-payable-clerk-receptionist/>.

Organist/Pianist

Mill Creek UMC is searching for an organist/pianist. Responsibilities include traditional worship services as well as choir practice; special services throughout the year including funerals, weddings, cantatas, etc.; as well as other assigned duties. Salary commensurate with experience. Please send resumes to the church at 1041 Old Garners Ferry Road, Columbia, SC 29209-9406 or email to Rev. Shay Long, sllong@umcsc.org.
Deadline is July 1.

Positions Open

Program Director India Hook United Methodist Church, Rock Hill

India Hook UMC, Rock Hill is searching for a part-time Program Director. The position will report to the pastor and SPPRC chair. Hours are flexible. Pay will be commensurate with education, experience, demonstrated skill level, and training.

The right person will assume a leadership role within the congregation and develop, promote, and coordinate educational and recreational programs and activities for adults, youth and children. In addition, the position will develop and ensure delivery of dynamic, meaningful, and nurturing programs for people of all ages, including youth and children. Programs and activities are to include Sunday School, children's sermon, various night and holiday engagements, trips, and vacation Bible school. At least two years of experience in a church-based or human development organization working as a Program Director and/or working to develop programs for all age groups is preferable as is a degree in childhood or human organizational development or Christian education. A combination of education and/or experience will be considered.

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by the Rev. Mary L. Johnson

For a greater purpose

June 2

Work: More than a paycheck

Focal Passages: Proverbs 10:4-5; 12:11, 14, 24; 13:11; 14:23; 16:3, 26; 18:9; 21:25; 22:29; 24:27; 28:19

Background Texts: Genesis 2:4-25; Proverbs 8:22-30; 31:10-31

Key Verse: “Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will succeed” (Proverbs 16:3).

Purpose: To understand Proverbs’ classic wisdom teaching on the value and meaning of work.

The Book of Proverbs is called wisdom literature and reveals the reflections of people struggling with eternal issues. Proverbs also deal with topics such as: What is the meaning of work? The pursuit of wisdom isn’t a hobby. In seeking wisdom, we gain the understanding to live within vital relationships.

Wisdom is understanding God’s intent in creation and human life. The fruits of living a life grounded in the pursuit of wisdom include being attentive to faith and being compassionate, honorable, confident, wise, disciplined, humble and respectful to God. Seeking understanding, immersing ourselves in nature, as well as reflecting on daily life experiences can be greatly enjoyable.

Although the proverbs or sayings contained in this book were written centuries ago and we no longer live in an agrarian culture, some things are basic and unchanging. We should not only work for ourselves but for the sake of the community.

The passages in this lesson encourage us to view work from a biblical standpoint regarding the nature of work and its importance to society. If we were created with a divine purpose in mind, then our daily labor is part of the larger work we are called to do. Living into that perspective may enable our jobs to be less stressful and more fulfilling.

True value is gained slowly through hard work rather than through shortcuts. Our labor isn’t done alone but in connection with God. As opposed to being self-serving, we carry out our labor in ways pleasing to God—that which will respect relationships and promote prosperity for all. Failure to do this results in injustice and oppression.

Working and serving move us to ask the simple question: What is the relationship between my job and my calling, and how do I discern the difference? Is it to make money or to make a difference? Is it going to be about me and what I can gain, or is it going to be about God and how I can serve?

June 9

What gain?

Focal Passages: Ecclesiastes 2:18-26; 3:9-15; 4:4-8

Background Texts: Ecclesiastes 2:18-26; 3:9-15; 4:4-8; 5:13-20; 6:1-9; 9:7-12

Key Verse: “There’s nothing better for human beings than to eat, drink and experience pleasure in their hard work. I also saw that this is from God’s hand—who can eat and find enjoyment otherwise?” (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25).

Purpose: To discern how work can enhance life without overwhelming it.

While Proverbs sounds like a father lecturing a child, Ecclesiastes sounds like an old man looking back on his life and wondering if it was all worth it. The tone of the book is set at the beginning—by emphatically emphasizing that everything is pointless—referring to the frustrating, unpredictable and sometimes unpleasant aspects of life. The author of Ecclesiastes, identified as the “Teacher,” invites us to ask: How does my understanding of God, and my faith, give life meaning and purpose?

The underlying theme behind the verses in this lesson encourages you to consider your motivations for working. Your work should be grounded in relationships with others. There should be cooperation instead of competition. The Lord gives the gifts of wisdom, knowledge and joy, which are necessary for meaningful labor.

Part of spiritual maturity lies in acknowledging there may not be clear-cut answers to questions, and the answers we do discover may lead to more questions. Looking clearly and fearlessly at life and its contradictions is challenging. The underlying message is that those who accept that challenge may ultimately grow in their understanding and faith. Exploring the meaning and nature of work is a practical way of beginning this process.

When a person is so focused on the pleasure of having an abundance of things, they become restless. When wealth is taken away, it is a foretelling of what death will take away. No matter how much we accumulate, death assures us we’ll leave this world in the state in which we entered—naked. We are born dependent upon God; affirming this vulnerability frees us from hoarding things and allows us to delight in divine gifts.

The Teacher’s advice to us includes: Do everything we can to help God’s kingdom come; understand and accept our limitations; enjoy simple gifts; focus on today’s pleasures, not tomorrow’s problems; accept God’s grace; prioritize loving relationships; and live and love with all our might.

June 16

The work God gives us

Focal Passages: Genesis 1:26-31; 2:4-8, 15-20

Background Text: Genesis 1-2

Key Verse: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground.’ ... The Lord God took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it” (Genesis 1:28; 2:15).

Purpose: To embrace God’s vision of work for humanity.

While both creation stories (Genesis 1 and 2) have different characteristics, they share the central theme that we were created for an intimate relationship with our Creator and entrusted with special labor activities because of it. The fact that we have two distinct accounts reflects that God’s act of creating couldn’t be confined to just one viewpoint. While science offers various theories about the “when,” “what” and “how” of Creation, the Bible reveals the “who” as well as the “why” (the spiritual perspective), which ultimately provide a backdrop from which to understand Jesus’s mission and message.

Regardless of the jobs we have, it must somehow relate back to helping shape the world God created and enhance the well-being of creation. Whether our work is in the fields, an office or a living room, we were each created to be in partnership with the Creator. Living out that partnership provides a growing sense of fulfillment for us even if it is sometimes messy.

While all creatures depend on God, only humans are depicted as having the divine breath blown gently into their nostrils. The Creator’s spirit infuses our being. Although we may categorize humans according to race, it’s not specified in the creation narrative (or elsewhere in the Bible) and thus not an issue. The only distinction mentioned is by gender. The underlying message is radical equality. Because we are created in the image of the Creator, we can join in with

God in the continuing development of the world.

How have the jobs you’ve held contributed to enriching the world? This week, look for one way you can join God in adding to the beauty of this world. It might be in your job or any other area of your daily life. In addition to discovering what we like doing and what our talents are, work ultimately pushes us to ask, What is my purpose in life?

June 23

A tale of two bosses

Focal Passage: Exodus 35:30-36:7

Background Texts: Exodus 5:4-5, 13, 17-18; 7:16; 8:1; 14:1-14; 39:32, 43; 40:33-35

Key Verse: “Let Bezalel, Oholiab and every other skilled worker whom the Lord has given skill, ability and knowledge for the work of building the sanctuary do all that the Lord has commanded” (Exodus 36:1).

Purpose: To explore the intersection of work, service and worship.

In a small church group, people were talking about the challenges of holding onto Christian values while still being successful in the workplace. One middle-aged man confessed, “I’ve spent my whole life climbing the corporate ladder. When I got to the top and looked around, it struck me. I had put my ladder against the wrong building.”

Your experience may not mirror this man’s; however, how we relate to our jobs calls each of us to reflect on the place of work in our lives. With the advent of innovative technology, including instant information and ever-available email and messaging, climbing the ladder may feel like a 24/7 job. One way to ensure our ladder is properly placed is to broaden our understanding of work.

The passages for this lesson take us on a quick trip through the Book of Exodus. As we hear the story of the Israelites’ liberation from Egyptian oppression, we will see clear connections with our modern understanding of work. Do we choose to serve Pharaoh or God? The qualities of our lives are determined by which master we choose to serve.

The only way Pharaoh dealt with the Israelites was to remind them that they were valued only by what they produced and not by who they were. They were resources for the king’s agenda. Unfortunately, they carried this mindset with them into the wilderness. Therefore, Yahweh had to be revealed as a king who could empathize with them and love them for who they were. The Book of Exodus ends with the Israelites celebrating their new relationship with the liberating Yahweh.

As you serve this week, answer these questions to gain broader understanding of work: How do we help ourselves and others to escape the pharaohs in today’s workplaces? How can we ensure that our work serves God? How do the problems we see in church and society stem from us forgetting who we are?

June 30

The Christian work of coaching

Focal Passage: Ephesians 4:11-16

Background Text: Ephesians 4:1-5:2

Key Verse: “His purpose was to equip God’s

people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God’s Son. God’s goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Purpose: To consider how we can help build and unify the community of faith.

Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians provides a glimpse into the beginnings of the early church and the issues it faced. His insights are just as relevant to us today. He directs us in the important task of growing together as the body of Christ in an environment where it would be easy to lapse into disagreement and fragmentation. The fact that he was a prisoner while writing this suggests that being worthy is different in God’s eyes than in society. Worthiness is based on how people respond to grace—God’s grace overcomes human differences.

Local faith communities, like other groups where people gather, will always face challenges that could result in broken relationships and divided congregations. Perhaps we can speak a word that helps others see the larger picture. While maintaining our personal opinions on issues, we can still become an advocate for listening to the opinions of others. This strong, grace-filled work of God’s people is essential, especially in divisive times.

Spiritual maturity comes only through hard work with other believers equally committed to growth. Paul compared the way a person lived before faith and the way they should live in the redeemed community of faith. A mind renewed by the Spirit will be a life characterized by “justice” and “holiness,” to build up the body of Christ instead of shattering it.

Viewing work from a faith perspective, ultimately, breaks down the modern tendency to compartmentalize our lives. If we are called to serve and worship God, then we do so with our whole life. We honor God equally at home, in the office, on vacation, wherever, whenever, however.

As a result of this week’s lesson, begin to look for signs of spiritual growth in yourself, in others and in your congregation. God invites us into a partnership of redeeming, reconciling and recreating the world. This gives our lives direction and purpose. Be willing to change your lifestyle and attitudes. Don’t give in to the world. Celebrate growing together as a close community.

Johnson is a retired elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Are you interested in being one of the Advocate’s Bible lesson writers? Let us know. Email jbrodie@umcsc.org.

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