Advocate.
SERVING SOUTH CAROLINA UNITED METHODISTS SINCE 1837

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Columbia churches to build 'Christmas House' for Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry

By Jessica Brodie

Two churches in the Columbia District got inspired through an Advent study to provide a generous gift—a house for special needs adults in the region. Now the rest of the Columbia District is joining in.

Grace United Methodist Church and Virginia Wingard Memorial UMC, Columbia, were working together around the Rev. Mike Slaughter's "Christmas Is Not Your Birthday," which challenges people to reconsider how we celebrate Jesus' birth. As the book asks, instead of spending so much on ourselves, what if we gave more generously to others?

For Grace UMC's pastor, the Rev. Meg Cook, that question had already taken root through another family's remarkable act of generosity. She was inspired by the story of the New family (October *Advocate*), who donated a house to Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry in memory of their son, Benjamin.

See "House," Page 13



Photo by Jessica Brodie

Women lift their voices in song during the United Women in Faith Annual Meeting in Walterboro this fall. See article, Page 2.

No one walks alone

130 Years of Epworth walking alongside South Carolina's families

By the Rev. Rebecca Rowell

Editor's note: As disciples of Jesus, we are called to live in a covenant community with one another, supporting one another in all aspects of life. This holy covenant has been lived out by the mission of Epworth for 130 years now. In this multipart series, we look back at the holy work done through Epworth to change lives for children.

For nearly 130 years, Epworth has responded to the changing needs of South Carolina's children and families. What began as a Methodist orphanage has grown into a statewide ministry grounded in a simple conviction: When people face life's most difficult circumstances, the church is called to walk alongside them. No one walks alone in life.

See "Epworth," Page 12

Ashland aims to erase $2.5 million in medical debt this Advent

By Jessica Brodie

COLUMBIA—One Midlands church is embarking on an Advent journey to help forgive approximately $2.5 million in medical debt in Lexington and Richland counties.

Ashland United Methodist Church is partnering with the nonprofit Undue Medical Debt (formerly RIP Medical Debt) to raise $25,000, which would allow Undue Medical Debt to purchase and erase medical debt owed by their neighbors in the two Midlands counties.

The nonprofit purchases medical debts in bulk

See "Ashland Medical Debt," Page 14

Circuit judge dismisses conference's cases against departing churches

By Jessica Brodie

It's official—Circuit Court Judge Brian M. Gibbons has dismissed 70 of the cases brought by the South Carolina Conference and local United Methodist churches against congregations seeking to separate from the UMC but keep their property.

On Nov. 13, Gibbons issued the order granting defendants' motion to dismiss, which the conference noted was "expected." On Oct. 12, attorneys learned Gibbons intended to issue the order dismissing the cases and had asked

See "Dismisses," Page 14

Advocate.

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Photographs can be submitted to the newspaper for publication. High-resolution digital color images are preferred. Photographs should be in focus and should have proper exposure. People in photographs should be identified with names and ages, and a contact person with a phone number should be included. Email news@advocatesc.org.

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Engaged churches top 2025 as UMCSC pushes year-end giving

By Jessica Brodie

As the year-end financial push ramps up, conference financial leaders are encouraging South Carolina United Methodist churches to pay their apportionments so the church can fund the many missions it does in the name of Jesus.

As of Nov. 17, of the $10.2 million in ministry funding budgeted for 2026, South Carolina United Methodist churches have paid $5.5 million of the total, or 54.46 percent.

"I am excited to report that the churches that remain engaged and not in litigation continue to show improvement," Conference Treasurer Beth Westbury said, noting these churches have contributed 59.41 percent to date (compared to 57.37 percent in 2025).

Westbury also reminded churches that South Carolina Resident Bishop Leonard Fairley is on a quest to have no church at zero percent. To that end, the number of churches in the "zero percent paid" column has dropped from 256 to 236 in the last 30 days.

"At least two churches that were at zero percent had anonymous contributions made to be certain that those two churches would not be at zero come the end of the year," Westbury said. "If other individuals would like to make contributions directly to the conference for the benefit of their church's apportionment, we are happy to help keep their beloved church out of the zero column."

Of the 707 churches total, 203 have already paid 100 percent of their apportionments.

Last month, Westbury projected the conference would reach a 73 percent collection percentage for 2026.

So far, the Walterboro District is leading the others at 70.77 percent collected as of Nov. 17, followed by the Columbia District (65.87 percent), the Rock Hill District (56.7 percent) and the Marion District (56.54 percent).

"It is currently a tight race for third place," she said.

The last day to pay apportionments for 2026 is Thursday, Jan. 14, 2027. The payment must be in the treasurer's office by 4 p.m.

Westbury said the postmark is not the deciding factor and the treasurer's office is not responsible for delivery delays regardless of which carrier is used. The treasurer's office can accept wires if necessary.

If paying by Vanco, the payment needs to be initiated by 3 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 13.



Broughton brings the keynote.



Attendees shine their lights.



President Debra Schooler greets all.

Photos by Jessica Brodie

Show up and shine: United Women in Faith gather

By Jessica Brodie

WALTERBORO—Women from across South Carolina headed to the Lowcountry Oct. 23-24 for the annual meeting of South Carolina Conference United Women in Faith.

Held at New Life United Methodist Church, the event featured worship, updates on the many missions and ministries of the group, a memorial service, a praise dance performance, voting on new officers for the coming year and two uplifting messages, one brought by Dr. Leland Spencer, home missioner, and the other by the Rev. Angela Ford Broughton, pastor of New Life UMC.

With the theme "Speak Up, Show Up, Shine the Light of God," women focused on the many ways we can be light-bearers for the Lord. The theme drew from Proverbs 31:8-9, Psalm 82:3-4 and Matthew 5:14-16, and speakers throughout the event drove home the message with words of inspiration and encouragement.

"Your voice has the power to break chains and drive hope," said Genora Kennedy, president of the New Life unit.

"You are the light," Vice President Jacqueline Carter Session told the crowd that packed the sanctuary, each holding up candles to proclaim this truth. "Let your light shine!"

'Unstoppable'

Broughton drew from Esther 4 in her message, describing how among a remnant of Jews still in exile, God was still speaking up, showing up and shining through his people. She shared how Esther, a Jewish girl, somehow became a queen in the midst of all this. But when a mandate came down from the king to annihilate her people, Esther had a choice "for such a time as this."

As Broughton shared to a chorus of amens, "Whenever the Lord needs something done, he calls upon a united woman in faith to get it done."

Not the organization, she said; "I'm talking about women who have faith in God. He makes a call to one of his daughters, and we get it done."

She said women of faith know how to refuse to put their light under a bushel basket.

"Our abiding faith in God makes us unstoppable," she preached, lifting up women throughout biblical history who did just this, from Abigail to Ruth to the woman with the alabaster box in Luke's Gospel who refused to let other people keep her down.

"We've got to ignore those naysayers, got to ignore the haters, got to ignore those people who say the church is dying," Broughton said to applause.

"The faith the size of a mustard seed is all that is needed to change the atmosphere."

She urged all gathered to remain "unstoppable," to keep stepping up, speaking up, showing up and shining the light of God.

See more pictures of this year's annual meeting at https://go.advocatesc.org/uwf-meeting-2026.

The 2027 United Women in Faith annual meeting will be held in the Anderson District.

5 Things to Know.

St. John and Triune UMCs, Orangeburg

The Advocate *has started a new feature that showcases a different United Methodist church in every district throughout South Carolina with their answers to five questions. This month, get to know two churches on a charge: St. John UMC and Triune UMC, Orangeburg, whose pastor is the Rev. Lawrence Cantey.*

St. John UMC, Orangeburg

1. What's one dream or goal your church has for the next five years?

St. John UMC has several goals that we plan to focus on for the next five years: our transportation ministry, children's church time ministry, breakfast ministry, computer literacy class ministry and hospitality ministry. Our first goal is children's church time. This will allow children in our congregation to be able to enjoy fellowship with children their ages to learn about the Word of God and how much God loves them. This will give them a chance to ask questions in an atmosphere that they can understand and are comfortable in. We will teach them who God is, the word of God, what church is, why we come to church and where you can come to ask questions about God or religion without being judged by anyone. We will provide a nutritious breakfast for them as we worship and learn.

2. How has your church changed over the past 10–20 years?

St. John has experienced changes in membership, leadership, family structures and the needs of our community. Like many churches, we have faced the challenges of changing times, younger generations and members relocating or becoming less active. These changes have encouraged us to look beyond traditional church activities and find new ways to reconnect with members, strengthen fellowship, embrace younger generations and make our ministry more relevant to today's community. Through it all, our faith and commitment to God's purpose remain strong.

3. What's one local ministry or outreach your church is proud of?

Our food pantry ministry allows us to put our faith into action by helping people in our community who may be experiencing food insecurity or financial hardships. Through food and essential groceries, we help ease the burden on families, seniors and individuals who struggle to meet their basic needs. It also offers compassion, encouragement and a reminder that no one has to face difficult times alone. This ministry provides nutritious food throughout the year. The impact goes beyond the groceries we distribute. We are building relationships, restoring hope and showing God's love through service. We believe that feeding the hungry is not just an act of kindness but a responsibility and an important part of our Christian calling. Matthew 25:35. We believe ministry doesn't stop at the church doors. Sometimes the greatest sermon we can preach is a helping hand, a loving heart and a meal for someone in need.



St. John serves beyond its church walls.

4. How does your congregation serve people who may never set foot inside your building?

St. John serves beyond its church walls by showing love through action. We sent invitations to our community and others to fellowship with us at our Orangeburg Circuit Fall Festival and Back to School Bash. We believe being the church means reaching people wherever they are. Through community involvement, prayer, acts of kindness, support for families, youth activities and fellowship opportunities, we strive to make a positive difference in people's lives. We want our neighbors to recognize St. John not only as a place of worship but also as a place of compassion, encouragement, hope and service. Our goal is to live out Matthew 25:35-36 by caring for those in need.

5. What's the biggest challenge facing your congregation right now?

One of our greatest challenges is reconnecting with inactive members, increasing participation and engaging younger generations while maintaining the traditions and spiritual foundation that have carried our church through the years. Like many congregations, we recognize that people and families have changing schedules, priorities and expectations. We are addressing this challenge by encouraging stronger fellowship, creating meaningful activities for children and families, welcoming new people and developing opportunities for members to become more involved. We also recognize the importance of listening to our members and discovering new ways to make everyone feel valued and included. Our desire is not simply to grow in numbers but to grow stronger in faith, unity, service and love. Also letting people know that you care for them as a person first and foremost.

We are a family of believers with a purpose. Our mission is to continue sharing God's love, strengthening families, encouraging our youth, supporting our community and making disciples. Although times change, our commitment to serving God and loving people must remain constant. We understand that the church of tomorrow depends on the seeds we plant today.

—Submitted by Tracy Elaine Conner

Triune UMC, Orangeburg

1. What makes your congregation unique compared to other churches in your district?

Our congregation is unique or different from other congregations in the district by our courage to go beyond a 20-year journey to merge into a vibrant new congregation. We were once two churches part of a three-point charge who saw new possibilities on the horizon. We were determined to prove that we were yet alive, and we still continue to believe that we are on the cusp of God's fresh anointing.

Some may think we merged because of the pandemic's after-effects. Well, we can honestly say that's not how it happened.

Need-to-Know Roundup.

Five key takeaways from this month's Advocate

- United Women in Faith gather for annual meeting in Lowcountry (Page 2).
- Alston Wilkes Society's S. Anne Walker awarded Order of Palmetto (Page 7).
- Summit on the Black Church draws crowd in Columbia (Page 8).
- Cumberland UMC spreads breast cancer awareness (Page 16)
- Two locations to host General Conference 2028 (Page 19)

2. How has your church changed over the past 10–20 years?

Our church changed due to the change of pastors and the pandemic. Before vaccines and sanitizers, we were also experiencing a quarantine or shutdown; therefore each congregation had to have a plan of action. Through the leadership of our South Carolina annual conference, Zoom was introduced to congregations and some even signed up for free conference call lines. With these tools, churches could now conduct meetings, Sunday school and worship services. This change eventually birthed our parish nursing and healthcare ministry. This ministry helped us with our COVID-19 guidance and compliance. We initiated new compliance guidelines for members inside and outside the church. With this ministry we were able to reenter our sanctuary safely, begin holding fifth Sunday health care worship services and invite different health care professionals to provide medical information to our members. Our nurses, all of whom are members of our congregations, make certain to support the other ministries of the church when other events or services happen. They also recruit other nurses and pharmaceutical professionals to provide flu and COVID shots yearly.

3. What's one local ministry or outreach your church is proud of?

Our children and youth ministry has grown extremely well over the past several years. Our children and youth take part in our worship services every week as acolytes, Bible bearers, youth choir members and reading announcements. As this ministry grows, our children and youth take pride in participating in worship. We have been blessed to have one of our youth speak for Children's Day Celebration in June and our Children's Sabbath Worship service last month. We've watched them raise funds to attend Revolution and other outings.

4. What's one dream or goal your church has for the next five years?

We believe our dream or goal will consist of first having a thriving ministry that reaches all generations. Second, a total restoration of our membership. Third, strong leadership with both clergy and lay working hand in hand. Fourth, have our ministries more visible beyond the walls of our congregation. The ministry we currently embody has allowed us to support ministries that work diligently to uplift Orangeburg and Calhoun counties. Last but not least, we wish to see Triune celebrate a growth that is not about how many members we have but how empowered we have grown through God.

5. If you could tell the rest of South Carolina one thing about your corner of the state, what would it be?

Our corner of South Carolina may seem small and rural, but we make a big difference in two counties. We support professions in different areas of the state because members of our congregation worship here where God has endowed them with power. Because of our exploration across the state, you succeed and grow. Because of our prayers, you are covered and blessed. We may not have a grocery store, and some may see a food desert, but we are still able to feed the hungry. There are no department stores, but we are also clothing the naked.

—Submitted by Dannie Mays, Rev. Barbara Reid and Rev. Annie Sistrunk

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Perspectives.



Editorial
by Jessica Brodie

A traffic jam of grace

The slow slog of traffic inched along the roadway. There I idled, stuck, just one car among the masses, frustratingly trapped as we all tried to get to our destinations on a busy Thursday November evening.

I could sense the irritation of the other drivers around me. A car on my left waited and waited for a traffic hole so they could pull out. Someone tried to merge on my right, but the other driver pretended not to notice, closing the gap so the merging car couldn't pull in.

Then something different happened—one driver paused long enough to let someone in the right lane inch ahead of them. All of a sudden, it felt like an infectious disease of kindness suddenly became contagious among us. Someone else paused to let the left-hand car turn in. Another driver let a merging car go. All around me, random acts of roadway mercy broke out. The mood change was almost palpable. I found myself smiling as I watched humanity expand with generosity.

It's silly, I know, but it's one of those small things in life that never fails to bring me joy. And it also reminds me of what we as Christians have the opportunity to do—not just on roadways, but all around us.

I was reminded of this at the United Women in Faith annual meeting recently. There, at New Life United Methodist Church in Walterboro, I watched a sea of women hold up candles, each of our tiny sparks becoming one massive light ... all pointing to the One, the Creator, the God of the universe who first loved us so that we might love (1 John 4:19). I listened as the Rev. Angela Ford Broughton preached on Esther becoming queen "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14) to save her people and be a light in the darkness, and Broughton encouraged all gathered to shine their light without ceasing.

Perhaps you feel like you are surrounded by other believers on a daily basis. Perhaps you believe everyone already knows the story of Jesus Christ's saving grace, and it's just a matter of slogging through life like you're slogging through traffic, just awaiting your final destination.

But here's the thing—believers need encouragement, too. And sprinkled among those who appear to be believers are some who do not know the Good News yet. There are also many who have lost faith or fallen prey to doubt, who battle hopelessness and depression.

That's when your light is especially and so desperately needed to shine into their darkness.

All you have to do is hold up your candle and let the Holy Spirit do the work through you.

As we shift into our season of Advent, let us remember the Light of the World who came to bring us life. Let us help shine that light in all that we do, in every opportunity we have, so that others may see.

Even in something as commonplace as a traffic jam.

Merry Christmas, my friends. Keep shining the light, and God bless you.



Bishop's Column
by Bishop Leonard E. Fairley

All love excelling

The birth of Jesus is no fairy tale. It should never be romanticized, especially in the way our current celebration of his birth seems to do. If for any reason we should forget what it cost God to send Jesus into the world, a simple line in Jim Croce's song "Which Way Are You Going" jolts us back to reality: "Say you love the baby, then you crucify the man."

In the midst of all our inhumanity toward each other and the creation, God comes. The Word becomes flesh, and as Eugene Peterson says, and "moved into the neighborhood."

Jesus comes into the world looking nothing like a king. He comes in the piercing cry of a baby shivering in the night. The salvation of the world born in the middle of the mundane. God's redemption and reconciliation and holiness born in the filth of sheep, to a teenager girl married to a carpenter chosen to raise the Son of God.

How do we respond to such news? How does it such news transform how we live in the world? How does such news transform how we live and treat each other?

When Jesus is born into our neighborhoods, everything changes. When we make room for Jesus in our hearts, we begin to understand the justice of it all. We begin a lifelong journey of understanding—if not fully—the amazing love of God wrapped in swaddling cloth and laying in a manger.

It is not Christmas hymn, but I think the first verse of Charles Wesley's "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" gives a beautiful picture of what God's does on Christmas:

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down;
fix in us thy humble dwelling;
all thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Indeed, love comes down on Christmas Day. May we each open our hearts and let Jesus the newborn king enter. Jesus is as Isaiah describes him in his well-known messianic prophecy: "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Merry Christmas to each of you as you celebrate this amazing news as joy to the world. Indeed, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling."

Letters to the Editor.

Dr. Camak's legacy lives on

I want to thank Dr. Phillip Stone for his wonderful article about Dr. David Camak and the founding of Spartanburg Methodist College (October *Advocate*). It is always good to be reminded of where we came from and, more importantly, why we exist.

Dr. Camak founded the college with a simple but powerful vision: to provide educational opportunities for young people who might not otherwise have the chance to attend college. More than a century later, that mission remains at the heart of who we are.

While much has changed since those early days, our commitment to providing access to higher education has not. Today, any student graduating from a South Carolina high school with a 3.0 GPA or higher can attend SMC tuition-free. Students graduating with a 4.0 GPA or higher receive tuition, books and fees at no cost. These scholarships are a direct reflection of Dr. Camak's belief that a college education should be within reach for students who are willing to work hard.

The college itself has changed significantly. In 2019, we transitioned from a two-year to a four-year institution, and our enrollment has grown from approximately 730 students to 1,200 today. Our campus now encompasses 110 acres, with modern buildings and facilities alongside the four original historic buildings, all of which are still standing and in use today. I think there is something special about that connection between our past and our future.

But growth alone is not our goal. We want our students to leave SMC prepared not just with a degree, but with the skills, confidence and spiritual grounding to build successful careers and meaningful lives.

That commitment led us to develop the Camak Core, an innovative, required 18-credit-hour professional development program that prepares every graduate with the practical skills employers value. I believe it is one of the

See "Letters," Page 5

Precious Pet of the Month.

Waffles



Waffles

"I was homeless nine years ago. Look at me today!" We need to remember all are loved by God. Waffles has meant so much to our family and friends. He never meets a stranger and is kind to everyone.

—Submitted by Deb Orvin, member, Open Hearts UMC, Greenville

Do you have a pet who is near and dear to your heart? Share a photo and brief story about your pet and what they mean to you in the Advocate*, and be sure to include your name and church name with city. Whether your animal friend is furry or has feathers or scales, we welcome your submission. Email news@advocatesc.org.*

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Commentary
by the Rev. Cyrus Rogers

Law over grace

In Jesus' day, there are two things we often overlook about the Pharisees. First, they were not all bad. Some defended Jesus, some supported him and others did everything in their power to stop him. Second, those who opposed him did not always do so openly. Instead, much as we see today, they used religion to argue that Jesus was undermining tradition, confusing the faithful and failing to uphold the law.

They talked about faith, devotion to God and religious duty, but more, they focused on how Jesus was violating established religious rules. He was breaking the law!

It is a subtle strategy: Emphasize the law at the expense of grace.

And it is a strategy some religious institutions still use today. They speak of love and grace, but their attention is fixed on hell and punishment. Their mouths speak of grace, but their hearts remain captive to the law.

We call this legalism—the belief that adherence to rules and regulations is the primary measure of what is right and wrong. Legalists may speak of God's Spirit, love and grace, but what matters most is following the rules.

When the law becomes primary, it changes people. Legalists enforce church rules as though they were Scripture itself. Grace and love take a secondary role. By implication, sinners are no longer primarily those who fail to love their neighbors or extend grace; they are those who break the rules.

In The United Methodist Church, the point is painfully clear. Legalists behave as though Moses himself brought the *Book of Discipline* down from the mountain. Episcopal directives can take on the weight of biblical commandments. Court rulings, rather than love and grace, often determine the direction of the church.

To focus on the sins of those who break the law while neglecting love and grace is like focusing exclusively on the sin of the woman caught in adultery. The woman herself becomes secondary; her sin becomes the central concern. In effect, the seriousness of her sin outweighs the value of her life.

And we have seen this happen in our own church. Through insinuation, accusation and disagreement, departing congregations have been judged, disparaged and shamed. To date, neither side seems willing to offer the forgiveness necessary to begin healing. Reconciliation is never addressed. Both sides speak of spiritual growth, yet both remain caught in a cycle of judgment.

In Matthew 23:23, Jesus rebuked religious leaders for meticulously observing the law while neglecting what mattered more: justice, mercy and faithfulness. Jesus did not dismiss the law. He challenged those who elevated it above compassion.

In a recent writing, The United Methodist Church says its calling extends beyond the courtroom. Yet departing congregations have been required to pay millions of dollars to leave. What message does that send? Are these financial demands intended to recover legitimate obligations, or are they there to punish congregations for leaving or to shame them for their decision? Whatever the stated justification, the church must consider how its actions reflect its professed commitment to grace.

And then we are told that we "remain a people of grace." Really?

Church leaders say they are "continuing to pursue justice faithfully." But what does that mean in practice? Does it mean they are seeking a particular outcome through the legal system? Legalism has a way of making being right more important than being reconciled.

We hear that the church will continue to pursue legal avenues to challenge the judge's decision while remaining focused on making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. But what do these actions communicate? When we look at the church's response, are grace and forgiveness truly at the forefront? Are we demonstrating the love of Christ, or are we allowing the pursuit of legal vindication to overshadow our Christian calling?

The point is this: Jesus offered a different way.

In Mark 9:40 and Luke 9:50, Jesus told his disciples not to stop someone from doing good in his name simply because that person was not part of their immediate circle. "Whoever is not against us is for us," he said.

The message is clear: God's work is not confined to our group, our institution or our understanding of the rules.

Perhaps we should take this lesson to heart. We do not have to agree on everything to recognize God's work in one another. We do not have to share the same denominational affiliation to extend grace, seek reconciliation or acknowledge another congregation's faithfulness to Christ.

After all, the church was never meant to be a courtroom where we compete to prove who is right. It was meant to be a community where we love, forgive, serve and make disciples.

When the law takes precedence over grace, we may win the argument, but we lose sight of Jesus; a church can defend its legal position and still fail to embody the grace it proclaims.

In the end, isn't that what this is all about? Grace and forgiveness.

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

Videos sought for Advocate website, app, social media posts

Do you have any videos of your church or ministry's concerts, celebrations or other events that you think other South Carolina United Methodists would appreciate? Share it with the *Advocate*.

Email news@advocatesc.org with a link to a video file, or text it to 803-807-0018.

LETTERS

From Page 4

most distinctive aspects of an SMC education, and it is fitting that the program bears Dr. Camak's name.

I often think about what Dr. Camak would say if he could walk across our campus today. He would certainly be amazed by how much his little college has grown and changed. But I believe what would make him most proud is seeing students whose lives are being transformed by the opportunity he envisioned so many years ago.

The campus is larger. The degrees are different. The world is certainly different. But the mission remains remarkably the same.

I think Dr. Camak would be very proud of his college today.

W. Scott Cochran, president
Spartanburg Methodist College

No mercy or mercy

Will Tennessee try to kill Christa Pike again? She experienced a blotched execution the first time. Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth wanted to livestream the execution by firing squad of Nidal Malik Hasan. In the hanging days of Jim Crow, there were picnics for the community. One-third of Americans think the government should try a second time to put a convicted criminal to death.

The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church condemns "torture of persons by governments for any purpose and asserts that it violates Christian teachings. We oppose capital punishment and urge its elimination from all criminal codes"(Social Principles).

The United Methodist Church cannot accept retribution or social vengeance as a reason for taking human life. It violates our deepest belief in God as the creator and redeemer of humankind.

"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone" (John 8:3-11).

A life sentence to prison is punishment for the crime. God is the final judge.

Rev. John Culp, retired
West Columbia

A poem: God's Precious Gift

"For God so loved the world"
Can you feel the blessed babe?
Birthed in purpose to save
Through perfect life that he shall live
Our Savior, he'll forever give.

To see and know within our minds
A precious miracle divine
Lying in a manger sweet–
For all the world is his to keep.

This Son of our Great Father thrive
We will see in him a faithful life!
Oh, my baby Jesus, all joy divine,
Resplendent on this soul of mine!

(Quote from Good News Bible, John 3:16)

Dr. Linda Hodgin, member
Ashland UMC, Columbia



Humanity Behind Bars

by the Rev. Nichole Middleton

When a church wants to help

A church leader recently contacted me because his congregation wanted to volunteer in prison ministry. When I asked what they hoped to do, he was not quite sure.

We arranged a meeting with several congregants who were interested in serving. They knew what Scripture says about visiting those in prison. They understood that Jesus identified himself with those who were imprisoned. They wanted to do something with that understanding. They just were not sure what.

I have been getting this question a lot lately. Churches want to help, but sometimes knowing where to begin is the hardest part.

I welcome these conversations. I have had opportunities to sit with congregations, help them identify their gifts and discern where they might focus their efforts. I do not believe every church is called to do the same thing. But I do believe every church has something to bring to the conversation.

Sometimes we need to slow down long enough to figure out what that is.

Good intentions matter, but they are not enough. This, too, is part of our discipleship. Following Jesus calls us to do more than recognize the needs of our neighbors. It calls us to consider how we will respond with the gifts, relationships and resources God has entrusted to us. That takes listening, discernment and a willingness to learn.

I think about this often in the context of incarceration and reentry. For too long, much of the conversation has focused on what the incarcerated person must do to change, prepare for release and successfully return to the community. There is responsibility in that work. But I wonder what happens when we stop talking about restoration as though the burden belongs to one person alone.

As a community of faith, we share that burden.

If we believe Scripture calls us to visit those in prison, what does that mean beyond the visit? What happens when a person comes home? Are we prepared to be part of the community they are returning to? Have we considered what we can offer, what we need to learn and who we might need to partner with to be a welcoming community of faith?

I do not expect a church to have all the answers before it begins. Sometimes the willingness to ask the questions is a faithful first step. Discernment gives us an opportunity to consider not only what we want to do, but how God might be calling us to use what we have been given.

I believe we need more spaces where churches can ask those questions together. Not simply to be handed a program to replicate, but to discern how their faith, gifts and relationships might become part of the work of restoration.

The invitation is not only to visit those in prison. It is to consider what following Jesus asks of us while our neighbors are incarcerated and when they return home from incarceration. This, too, is discipleship.

What might our churches become if we gave as much attention to discerning how we serve as we do to our desire to serve?

Middleton is an elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, endorsed by the United Methodist Endorsing Agency for prison ministry. She serves as a chaplain in the federal prison system.



Commentary

by Anna S. Bright

Ballots are counted; now what?

After a church supper, somebody has to fold the tables, sweep the floor and find the lid that goes with Sister Mary's casserole dish. Funny how many people suddenly remember they have somewhere to be when the broom comes out!

Election Day can be like that. We've watched the returns, talked about who won and who lost and maybe worn out the refresh button. Now who's willing to stay and help with the work?

Micah 6:8 asks, "What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (ESV). That question belongs to every one of us, whether the results made us cheer, cry or turn off the television.

Do justice. Isaiah 1:17 tells us to "learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression." Pay attention to whose concerns get heard and whose get passed over. Attend a city or county council meeting. Ask how public dollars are being spent and who will benefit. Follow decisions at the Statehouse and in Congress. Further, when somebody for whom you voted makes a decision that can harm your neighbors, have the courage to speak up!

Love kindness. First Timothy 2:1-2 urges us to pray for those in authority. Pray for the leaders whose names you marked and the ones whose names you passed over. Ask God to give them wisdom and a heart for the people they serve. Then extend that same kindness to the neighbor who voted differently. You can disagree with that neighbor on Tuesday and still take her a delicious plate of supper on Wednesday.

Walk humbly with God. Humility means listening long enough to hear a concern you may have overlooked. It means admitting when you got something wrong. Before you ask God to straighten out everybody in office, ask him to show you where your own pride is getting in the way. Consequently, ask him to show you what you need to do to help improve your community.

Now, here's a word for those who could have voted and chose to sit it out. Before you complain about what everybody else decided, reckon with what you decided. You had a chance to help shape the outcome. Own that choice, and use your voice now. Learn the issues, show up between elections and cast your ballot the next time! If a barrier kept you from voting, those of us who could get to the polls must care enough to help remove it if made aware.

The polls are closed. After Election Day, if God measured your commitment to your city, county, state and nation by what you did, what would he count?

Bright is a member of Isaiah United Methodist Church, Walterboro.



Commentary

by the Rev. Joseph Abram Jr.

Prayer is the beginning of the matter

The book of James reminds us that faith without works is dead (James 2:17). And in the same vein, I would add, "If our prayer does not move us to action, why should it move God?"

"Crying unto the Lord" is simple enough that most of us can do it, but how many of us will trust that God will make our request possible? I read an article once and have not forgotten the premise: there are two focuses of prayer that are required of us. One is to pray as though God is the only one who can do it, and two, work as though we are the only ones to get it done.

We will not ask God to move the mountains, but rather give us the strength to climb or understanding to go around it. If we believe that God will open the doors, which we have been asking of him, do not sit there watching and waiting. Go over to the doors! The doors could already be unlocked and, while we are sitting here waiting for them to swing open, could be relocked. Waiting on the Lord does not mean sitting passively on our laurels, but rather that we stay in the will or ways of the Lord and not resort to ungodly ways/means to achieve our goals.

Some of us have been crying unto the Lord so strenuously and so long until our voices are almost gone. We wanted him to rush in and rescue us from ourselves, while we kept on doing what we were doing—focusing on ourselves: me, myself and I. Proverbs 29:2 has a warning for any nation that sanctions ungodly leadership and ways. It is also suggested (in my opinion) that we have a duty and obligation to choose wisely, for the fate of the nation depends upon it.

Some are suggesting that the American electorate did just that on Nov. 3, that we did more than cry unto the Lord. We went out and voted.

We can thrive together or suffer together.

"Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool— why die before your time?" (Ecclesiastes 7:17 NIV).

Abram is a retired elder in the South Carolina Conference of the UMC.

Columbia College awarded nearly $2.7M to prepare teachers to support English learners

COLUMBIA—Columbia College has been awarded a $2,693,966 federal grant through the National Professional Development program, a competition announced by the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor.

The award will strengthen the preparation and support of teachers serving English learners in South Carolina, including full tuition coverage for grant-supported coursework.

The five-year project, Collaborative Pathways to English Learner Achievement, will expand opportunities for future and practicing teachers to earn English for Speakers of Other Languages qualifications and strengthen classroom instruction. Project partners include the South Carolina Department of Education and the school districts of Kershaw County, Marlboro County and Lexington County Two.

"This grant removes a financial barrier for students who want to build the skills to support English learners," said Dr. Tracy West, dean of the School of Education at Columbia College. "For our current students, there is no separate application. They can work with their advisor and register for the courses as part of their regular registration process. We want this preparation to be accessible and connected to the classroom experiences they are already having."

The college is recruiting current education students through advising appointments and direct outreach to students completing field experiences.

From legacy to longevity: Black Methodists confront the future at 57th annual meeting of SEJ BMCR

By Rev. Amiri B. Hooker

ARLINGTON, Va. – Some gatherings are called to conduct business. Others become sacred moments when the business of the church confronts the unfinished business of justice, leadership and legacy.

The 57th annual meeting of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of Black Methodists for Church Renewal was both.

Held Nov. 5-7, Arlington, Virginia, under the theme "Our Time Under God Is Now—To Inspire, To Influence and To Impact," grounded in Jeremiah 26:2-3, Black Methodists gathered for worship, fellowship, accountability and prophetic reflection.

It was, in many ways, a Black Methodist family reunion—old friendships renewed, stories shared and generations connected by faith and struggle. Yet beneath the celebration, one question demanded our attention: How do we move from celebrating our legacy to securing our longevity?

Founded in 1968, BMCR emerged because Black Methodists refused to accept denominational unity without racial equity. Our ancestors understood that having a seat at the table meant little without a voice in the decisions. BMCR became an agitating conscience within The United Methodist Church, confronting racism, defending Black congregations and demanding justice.

Nearly six decades later, the question is not simply what BMCR has accomplished, but what BMCR must become.

Thursday's opening keynote by Dr. Ronald Bell Jr. of Asbury UMC in Washington, D.C., challenged participants to consider the kind of leadership today's church and Black communities desperately need. His message reminded us that leadership must be measured not merely by titles, but by courage, conviction and commitment to transformation.

That evening, during Holy Communion at Woodlawn Faith UMC, the Rev. DeLishia Davis of Springfield UMC delivered a fiery challenge to "Stand on Business!" Drawing upon Jeremiah, she called us to hold the line, remain faithful and refuse to surrender before the promise of God's deliverance becomes reality because justice requires endurance and prophetic ministry demands courage.

The Bible studies, led by Dr. Tori Butler, senior pastor of Asbury Town Neck UMC in Maryland, brought perhaps the most uncomfortable and necessary questions. As a granddaughter of the movement, Butler challenged our understanding of exile, identity and generational responsibility. Have we become so comfortable surviving in Babylon that we have forgotten God's promise beyond it? Have we become experts at celebrating yesterday while failing to prepare tomorrow?

Her challenge was unmistakable: We cannot keep telling young people about BMCR's history without giving them the opportunity to write its future.

That concern echoed through the organizational reports, particularly the Young Adult Initiative presented by Dr. John Baldwin II of the North Alabama Conference. This funded initiative seeks to remove barriers, increase participation and bring younger voices into BMCR's leadership.





Held Nov. 5-7, Arlington, Virginia, the event had the theme "Our Time Under God Is Now—To Inspire, To Influence and To Impact."

The question is not whether young adults value justice. The question is whether we are willing to make room for their leadership.

Friday evening's banquet featured Bishop LaTrelle M. Easterling, resident bishop of the Washington/Peninsula-Delaware Episcopal Area, whose message challenged us to look beyond yesterday's victories and prepare for what God is doing next. Bishop Sue Haupert-Johnson of the Virginia Annual Conference also helped shape the gathering through her participation in the opening proceedings.

Saturday's sending-forth message by the Rev. Marcus Singleton, SEJ BMCR Advocacy Chairperson, brought the prophetic challenge home. Drawing from Jeremiah, Singleton warned against rejecting God's messengers simply because their messages disturb our comfort.

And perhaps that is BMCR's greatest challenge. A movement born to confront institutional resistance must never become resistant to change itself.

As we departed Arlington, the question remained: Where will our future leaders and members come from if younger generations are absent from our tables, our conversations and our decisions? The answer demands more than another committee or another annual meeting. It requires intentional mentorship, meaningful investment, courageous advocacy and the willingness to share power.

Our ancestors did not organize BMCR merely to create an institution that could celebrate its history. They built a movement to challenge injustice, protect Black Methodists and transform the church.

Our legacy is too sacred to become a museum. Our mission is too urgent to become a memory. And our future is too important to be left to chance.

The 57th annual meeting reminded us that Black Methodism still possesses prophetic fire. But fire must be passed from generation to generation, or it eventually becomes ashes.

Hooker is a United Methodist elder, congregational specialist with the South Carolina Annual Conference and life member of Black Methodists for Church Renewal.



Photo by Jessica Brodie

AWS's Walker awarded Order of the Palmetto

S. Anne Walker, longtime president and CEO of the United Methodist-founded ministry Alston Wilkes Society, got a big surprise from the governor himself when she was presented Nov. 19 with the Order of the Palmetto, South Carolina's highest honor bestowed upon civilians. Gov. Henry McMaster was at the AWS annual meeting to deliver the keynote address when he urged Walker to join him at the podium, then presented her with the award before the crowd. Walker called it an incredible surprise. "Thank you so very much," she said to a roomful of applause. "I stand on some really big shoulders."

Laughter, fashion and testimony fill Killingsworth's 34th gala

A crowd of Killingsworth supporters headed to Seawell's Nov. 12 for the ministry's 34th annual gala. The evening served as a night of fun and a festive way to raise funds for the United Methodist-founded home for women.

The event featured a silent and live auction, entertainment from Christian comedian Corie Johnson, a Belk Fashion Show, live music, testimonies from residents and a full course meal. Well-known meteorologist Von Gaskin served as mistress of ceremonies, and models included Tonya Benson; Kristen Bridges; *Advocate* Editor Jessica Brodie and her husband, Matt Brodie; Megan Compas; Eloise Conyers; Yvonne Cook; Bishop Leonard Fairley and his wife, Dawn Fairley; Rock Hill District Superintendent Dr. Anthony Hodge; the Rev. Jeri-Katherine Warden Sipes; and Ned Wallace.

"We are so grateful to everyone for blessing us with their attendance and for all they do to support Killingsworth," said Susan Sirmons, Killingsworth executive director.

Killingsworth is a unique community residence for women who are emerging from crisis situations.

Within the eight-bedroom Columbia home, women recovering from addiction, incarceration, mental and emotional problems, violence and assault or family crisis situations can find shelter and support. The residential program includes room, board, guidance and support for a nominal fee. Vocational assistance to the residents is also available.





At top, staff and residents of Killingsworth pose in their evening wear. At bottom, models Bishop Leonard and Dawn Fairley smile during a walk together on the runway.

To learn more about Killingsworth, visit https://killingsworth.org. To see pictures of the models during the fashion show, visit https://go.advocatesc.org/killingsworth2026.



Take me to the water: Registration opens for SpiritShore retreat

When was the last time you gave yourself permission to simply rest? Not to prepare another sermon, lead another meeting, organize another ministry event or respond to another pressing need, but to rest, reconnect and be renewed in the presence of God?

Clergy and laity from across The United Methodist Church and its ecumenical faith communities are invited to do just that at the 2027 SpiritShore Retreat, set May 17–21, 2027, at Kingston Plantation Resort in Myrtle Beach.

For five days and four nights, all will gather by the water to lead, learn and rest. Whether you are a pastor, lay servant, ministry leader, seminarian, bishop or someone simply longing for a deeper connection with God, there is a place for you at SpiritShore. All are welcome.

The 2027 theme, "Take Me to the Water," is inspired by the beloved African-American spiritual and the reassuring promise of Isaiah 43:2: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you" (NIV).

Throughout the week, attendees will explore four spiritual movements: cleansing, restoration, healing and new life. They will remember one's baptism, celebrate God's sustaining grace and open hearts to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

"Imagine beginning your day with dynamic Christian worship and powerful preaching, engaging in inspiring lectures and masterclasses on practical theology, leadership and social holiness, sharing meaningful conversations and enjoying our signature 'Food for the Soul' Luncheon," said convener the Rev. Regina Moore. "And yes, you are bound to reunite with old friends while making wonderful new friends! Some of the most meaningful SpiritShore moments happen around the table, during an unexpected conversation or while sharing laughter with someone you have just met."

There will be opportunities to serve joyfully, deepen relationships and experience intentional Sabbath rest.

Affordable registration options, including early-bird and student rates, are available at https://www.umcsc.org/spiritshore, along with lodging scholarships to help make this experience accessible to more participants.

"Come find your community. Come experience SpiritShore," Moore said.

SC Conference Men's Ministry named first runner-up for SEJ Award

The Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference Presidents annual meeting, comprising men's ministry presidents from 13 conferences across the Southeastern region, was held Oct. 29-31 at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina.

South Carolina Conference United Methodist Men/Men N Ministry President Dyron V. Anderson attended.

Bishop Kenneth Carter, resident bishop of the Western North Carolina Conference of the UMC, was the keynote speaker for the event.

The South Carolina Conference was one of the esteemed finalists being considered for an award presented by the SEJ Jurisdictional President Albert Weal Jr. While South Carolina earned high commendation, by a very narrow margin the South Carolina Conference finished as first runner-up to the Virginia Conference, named the winner.

Weal said both conferences met and exceeded the criteria set for this award, which made the decision extremely competitive. But ultimately it was the conference's size, in terms of membership, that weighted the final decision.

"South Carolina Conference UMM is very honored and humbled by this notable recognition and is extremely thankful for the faithfulness and dedication of the men and people of South Carolina, both laity and clergy, who remain committed to spreading the good news and making disciples for the transformation of the world," Anderson said.



Pictured from left are SEJ Jurisdictional Conference President Albert Weal Jr., WNC Conference Bishop Kenneth Carter and South Carolina Conference United Methodist Men President Dyron V. Anderson.

Summit on the Black Church calls United Methodists to remember, reconnect and transform communities

By Dan O'Mara

The Black church has a powerful history of overcoming adversity, sustaining communities and transforming lives. But its future will depend on whether congregations are willing to move beyond their walls, embrace new possibilities and answer God's call to serve.

That message resonated throughout the 2026 Summit on the Black Church, as clergy and laity of the South Carolina Conference gathered Oct. 29-31 to explore the continuing relevance and transformative potential of Black congregations.

Through preaching, teaching and worship, retreat leaders offered complementary messages rooted in the Black church's spiritual heritage and its enduring commitment to community transformation.

Their collective challenge was clear: Remember where God has brought us, recognize the power of our connections and respond courageously to the needs of today's communities.

Transforming communities begins with relationships

The Rev. Olu Brown, an ordained United Methodist elder, church planter and leadership consultant, challenged participants to reconsider how congregations engage their neighbors.

"Can the Black church still transform communities?" Brown asked. "Of course, the answer is yes."

But transformation, he said, requires intentional relationships, courageous leadership and a willingness to approach ministry differently.

"Growth doesn't start with a program," he said, "it starts with proximity."

Brown outlined three priorities: understanding the communities surrounding churches, making intentional weekly contacts and thinking beyond traditional approaches to ministry.

He encouraged congregations to become familiar with neighborhood schools, businesses, first responders and community leaders. He also recommended using MissionInsite, a demographic resource supported through United Methodist connectional giving, to identify community needs.

Brown challenged clergy and laity to make two to five personal contacts each week, emphasizing that relationships begin with genuine engagement rather than invitations to Sunday worship. He encouraged congregations to dream beyond their present circumstances.

"If your dream doesn't make you uncomfortable," he declared, "it's too small."



Photo by Dan O'Mara

The Rev. Fadetra Harrington Boyd brings a word.

The power of connection

In another message, Brown turned to Acts 4:32-33, describing the early Christian community as united in heart and mind. He identified three essential connections: community, generosity and Jesus Christ.

Brown compared the church's collective strength to the Mississippi River, which begins as a small stream but grows powerful as other rivers flow into it.

"The power of the Black Church is that we're connected," he said.

Mercy and the power of prayer

The Rev. Fadetra Harrington Boyd, pastor of Wesley United Methodist Church in Hollywood, reminded participants that the Black church's strength also flows from generations of faithful intercession.

Preaching from the account of Moses praying for the Israelites after their worship of the golden calf, Boyd proclaimed, "Mercy has the last word."

She described Moses as someone willing to stand between a disobedient people and the consequences of their actions, appealing to God's mercy without dismissing their wrongdoing.

"You can love somebody and still be disappointed," Boyd said. "You can pray for somebody and still hold them accountable."

Connecting the biblical account to the experience of Black Christians, Boyd celebrated the mothers, grandmothers, pastors and faithful ancestors whose prayers sustained generations through hardship and injustice.

"Who are you standing in the gap for?" she asked. "Who needs you to pray instead of criticize?"

Her message reminded worshipers that mercy does not erase failure but offers the possibility of redemption and a new beginning.

Remembering the past, embracing the future

Bishop Leonard Fairley, resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference, brought the summit to a close with a challenge grounded in Deuteronomy 8 and God's command not to forget.

The Black church, he said, must remember the God who sustained generations through bondage, oppression and injustice.

"We have been blessed so that we might be a voice to the voiceless," Fairley declared. "We have been blessed so that we can offer hope in the midst of despair."

He challenged congregations to welcome children and young people, embrace those who may worship differently, and respond to people seeking food, justice, peace and love.

Fairley suggested that the question is not simply whether the Black church remains relevant, but whether its members possess the determination to make a difference.

"Do we have the will to be relevant in our communities?" he asked.

Drawing on Jesus' proclamation in Luke 4, Fairley reminded United Methodists that their calling includes bringing good news to the poor, freedom to the oppressed and hope to a hurting world.

"After the shouting is over," he asked, "and after the hallelujah is over, and after all the prayers are over, what are we going to do?

"Don't let this die here. Now is not the time. ... Come on, South Carolina! Let's do this thing!"

See more photos on the *Advocate* website at https://go.advocatesc.org/summit2026.

African American Clergy Women gather for annual retreat

The South Carolina United Methodist Church African American Clergy Women gathered recently at Francis Burns UMC, Columbia, for their annual retreat, embracing the theme "The Future of H.E.R.–Part 2."

The gathering provided an opportunity for spiritual renewal, leadership development, meaningful fellowship and the strengthening of sisterhood among clergywomen across the South Carolina Conference.

The retreat theme was inspired by a challenge issued by North Georgia Bishop Robin Dease during the AACW Luncheon at the South Carolina Annual Conference. Bishop Dease encouraged each clergywoman, "Do more, love more, mentor more and make a difference in the spaces and places where we serve." Her challenge became the foundation for the retreat, calling participants to embrace their God-given purpose while supporting and empowering one another in ministry.

The retreat featured two engaging sessions designed to equip, encourage and inspire clergy women in their leadership journeys.

Session One, led by Rev. Anna Miller, program chair and retired elder of the Orangeburg District, focused on the essential responsibilities of pastoral leadership. Through meaningful discussions on pastoral care, decorum and crisis intervention, participants explored practical approaches to navigating the challenges of ministry while maintaining compassion, professionalism and spiritual integrity.

Session Two centered on the acronym H.E.R. (Humility, Elevating and Releasing), emphasizing three essential qualities for effective and transformational leadership.

Humility was presented by the host pastor, the



AACW will hold their next gathering on Monday, Dec. 7.

Rev. Geneva Stafford, who shared an insightful discussion titled "The Courage to Lead Without Needing the Crown." Drawing from the biblical story of Esther, she challenged clergywomen to embrace servant leadership, recognizing that true influence is not measured by titles or recognition but by the courage to fulfill God's purpose with humility and grace.

Elevating featured an inspirational message delivered by the Rev. Thessa Smith, AACW Convener from the Greenwood District. Her message encouraged clergywomen to intentionally uplift, affirm and celebrate one another rather than compete for recognition. She reminded participants that when one woman rises, she has an opportunity to help another rise. The message concluded with a powerful declaration and commitment to "Celebrate and elevate our sisters in faith, courage and purpose."

Releasing was presented through an engaging panel discussion featuring Smith along with the Rev. Doris Bright of the Charleston District and the Rev. Mary Johnson, retired elder of the Columbia District. The panel encouraged participants to recognize the importance of releasing limitations, embracing new opportunities, sharing wisdom and empowering the next generation of women in ministry. The discussion reinforced the value of mentorship, collaboration and creating space for others to grow and lead.

Throughout the retreat, participants were encouraged, inspired and spiritually renewed. The gathering strengthened the bonds of sisterhood and reaffirmed the importance of women clergy supporting one another as they continue to serve their churches, communities and the broader United Methodist connection.

The retreat concluded with a renewed commitment to answer Bishop Dease's challenge by doing more, loving more, mentoring more and making a lasting difference in the places and spaces where God has called them to serve.

Participants departed with renewed strength, a deeper sense of sisterhood and greater hope for "The Future of H.E.R."

AACW will hold their next gathering Monday, Dec. 7, . at 10 a.m. at Francis Burns UMC. The Christmas Gathering and Social will provide another opportunity for fellowship, celebration and continued connection. All clergywomen are warmly invited to attend and become part of this growing sisterhood of faith, encouragement and empowerment. For additional information, please contact tgsmith@umcsc.org or jaknox@umcsc.org.



A faith-filled celebration

Mount Moriah UMC, Mayesville, celebrated their 150th year church anniversary and 56th Homecoming celebration Oct. 18. The theme was "Together in Faith, Gathered in God's Love, United as One." It was a great afternoon of celebration and praise. This historic milestone reflected God's enduring faithfulness and the devotion of generations who have sustained thr church's growth and mission. It also invited members to honor the past and move forward toward the future with hope and renewed commitment. The speaker was Hartsville District Superintendent the Rev. Telley Lynette Gadson. Pictured from left are Gadson, the Rev. Emma Jones, Bernice Wright (Homecoming co-chairperson and lay leader), Dyron V. Anderson (lifelong member and South Carolina Conference United Methodist Men president), the Rev. James M. Smith, the Rev. Julius McDowell, the Rev. Debra Anderson-Joe, the Rev. Blondell Miller, the Rev. Jacob McLeod and Mount Morah Senior Pastor the Rev. John Dicks Sr. (Not pictured was Homecoming Co-Chairperson Quanda Alston.)

Annual 'Sing-Along Messiah' set for Dec. 14 at WSUMC

The 2026 performance of "Sing-Along Messiah" will be Monday, Dec. 14, at 7 p.m. at Washington Street United Methodist Church, 1401 Washington St. in downtown Columbia.

Tickets are free but may not be reserved beforehand. Seating is first come, first served, so be sure to arrive early.

Prior to the performance, attendees may view Washington Street's "Crèches Throughout the Ages and World" display in the church's chapel. The crèche display will be open from 5-6:55 p.m.

Held annually since 2002 in Washington Street's historic sanctuary, "Sing-Along Messiah" is a performance of Handel's "Messiah" put on by singers from local church choirs, choral groups and vocal studios. Professional musicians sing the solo parts, and an orchestra accompanies the performance. "Sing-Along Messiah" will once again be conducted by Dr. Lillian Quackenbush, co-founder of the event.

Audience participation is encouraged, with musical scores available, and the event is an opportunity for the wider-Columbia community to come together and sing along with this Christmas classic.

Handel's Messiah, composed by George Frideric Handel in just 24 days during the summer of 1741, has become a timeless masterpiece of choral and orchestral excellence. Premiering in Dublin in 1742, its emotive portrayal of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—particularly the iconic Hallelujah chorus—has solidified it as a holiday season tradition.

Port Royal honors veterans with gratitude, recognition



Port Royal UMC is surrounded by military installations.

BEAUFORT—Port Royal United Methodist Church held a service Nov. 8 celebrating veterans.

"On Behalf of a Grateful Nation" was the title of Pastor Ann Bridgers' sermon. Bridgers and the church worship chair wanted the service to be filled with remembrance of those currently serving as well as those who have served this country bravely.

Port Royal UMC is surrounded by military installations. The Marine Corps Air Station, Parris Island Recruit Depot and the Naval Support Facility/Hospital are all within a stone's throw of the church campus. They also have a National Cemetery in the community. The town also recently broke ground for a state-of-the-art veterans' clinic and support building.

As a result of this special worship service, members of the congregation were asked to bring pictures and military items that their loved ones had to be displayed at the foot of the altar.

Not only does Port Royal UMC have active duty and living veterans as part of its congregation, but also countless veterans who have now gone to their heavenly home who served honorably. Their connection with the military runs deep within the church family. The sanctuary was filled with memories and treasures that honored many.

Bridgers reflected on the phrase "on behalf of a grateful nation," often used when she is asked to officiate at military funeral services. She noted with that gratefulness comes freedom to worship God without fear. Port Royal acknowledges the gratefulness of God to give military members the courage and willingness to serve on the nation's behalf.

Members said they had a wonderful time singing patriotic hymns and reflected on appreciation.






Seashell nativities
Midland Park UMC, North Charleston, held a Seashell Nativity Workshop Nov. 10. Attendees made nativity scenes from seashells, oyster shells, driftwood and other items. The nativities will be on display at their Advent Reimagined Dec. 12 in the Family Center from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Union presents 33rd annual 'The Living Christmas Story'

IRMO—For 33 years, Union United Methodist Church has invited the Irmo community to experience the wonder and joy of Christmas through the presentation of "The Living Christmas Story," a drive-through living nativity, which is returning Dec. 4-6 from 6:30 to 9 p.m. each evening.

What began as a mission to share the story of Jesus with the community has grown into a beloved holiday tradition, bringing together generations of volunteers and hundreds of thousands of visitors. While the production continues to evolve with new faces, fresh ideas and unexpected moments, its purpose remains the same: to share the story of Christ's birth and the joy it brings.

More than just a retelling of the Christmas story, "The Living Christmas Story" is a reflection of the community that brings it to life. Local residents volunteer their time and creativity alongside live animals, to recreate scenes from Bethlehem. As visitors travel through the presentation, they encounter villagers, a blacksmith, the innkeeper, Herod's court, a bustling marketplace and many other scenes that bring the biblical narrative to life.

Over the years, this experience has become part of countless family traditions and personal Christmas memories. Some visitors return year after year, while others come for the first time. For some, it is an opportunity to share the wonder of Jesus' birth with their children; for others, it is a chance to remember loved ones and reconnect with a meaningful tradition. For the past 32 years, more than 167,000 visitors have experienced this special presentation.

As the church celebrates this 33rd presentation, the spirit of the production continues to be rooted in the joy of serving together and sharing the Christmas message with those throughout the Midlands. This year's invitation is simple: come experience the wonder, discover the joy and celebrate the true meaning of Christmas and the hope it brings to us all.

"The Living Christmas Story" is a free gift to the community, with no admission fee required.

Traffic will be guided by church volunteers and the Irmo Police Department when possible. Carpooling is encouraged. Visitors can also avoid the line by riding a Union UMC church bus through the event. Buses will depart from the parking lot between Lizard's Thicket and O'Reilly Auto Parts at the corner of St. Andrews Road and Thames Valley Road. Union buses and institutional vehicles with logos will receive expedited entry.

To learn more about "The Living Christmas Story," visit https://sites.google.com/view/thelivingchristmasstory.




Photos courtesy of the Rev. Athena Dickey-Cathcart

New Hope hosts women's roundtable
On Oct. 18, New Hope UMC, Rock Hill, hosted a women's roundtable about female concerns. Menopause, caretaking, finances and mental health during life cycle changes were all discussed. They also had a heart health display to discuss the importance of heart health.

Burgess honored during citywide Veterans Service

Dr. Adriane McGee Burgess was honored recently by the city of Columbus, Georgia, and Mayor Skip Henderson during the 13th annual Citywide Veterans Service at St. Mary's Road United Methodist Church in Columbus, where she is senior pastor.

Burgess is a member of the South Carolina Conference whose home church is John Wesley UMC in downtown Greenville.

Burgess is also a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force Reserves with 26 years of active duty and reserve service, primarily in cyber operations, air mobility and disaster response. She currently serves as the Individual Manning Augmentee to the 365th Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Group at Nellis AFB, Nevada, commanding four squadrons with more than 400 airmen in the commander's absence.

She preached a message of a renewed calling for veterans and families based on Isaiah 61:1-3.

She noted, "So many people have asked me this week, 'What can we do for veterans?' It's a good question, and the needs are real: housing, mental health, the long road to recovery. We should keep answering that question. But this morning I want to lift a different one. Do you know what veterans can do to change the world?"


Burgess is a member of the South Carolina Conference whose home church is John Wesley UMC in downtown Greenville.

Burgess shared that veterans still have a calling, and that calling goes far beyond one's last military assignment, last civilian position or title.

"It's time to get ready," she preached. "Your last assignment may be over, but your calling is not. The assignment is the one Isaiah gave and Jesus fulfilled: to bring good news, bind up the brokenhearted, set captives free, comfort those who mourn. In shifting times, the world needs people who know how to answer the call."

After her sermon, Mayor Henderson presented her with a city proclamation that Nov. 8 was Lt. Col. Adriane M. Burgess Day for her dedication service in the military and ministry. The mayor was joined by chairs of St. Mary's Road UMC Veterans Ministry Melvin Blackwell and Patricia Liddel to celebrate their pastor.

Isaiah UMC pastor honors veterans and their families

By Anna S. Bright

Former President Barak Obama once said, "Whenever the world makes you cynical, whenever you seek true humility and true selflessness, look to a veteran."

On Sunday, Nov. 8, the Rev. Kathy Brown Anderson, pastor of Isaiah United Methodist Church in Walterboro, took the time to recognize and honor all of the members of her congregation who are veterans, along with their families.

As the congregation arrived on Sunday morning, to everyone's surprise, she had already decorated the church in Veteran's Day array, with a banner of a flag reflecting the 250-year existence of the United States outside near the fellowship hall.

As the veterans entered the sanctuary, they were pinned with a sash and a ribbon, symbolic of the colors of the United States of America. Family members were later pinned and issued a ribbon. During the service, minister Anna Bright read a poem of thanks, "Dear Veterans," to honor the veterans of the church. The heartfelt poem expresses gratitude and respect for those who have served in the military. It acknowledges their sacrifices and the impact of their bravery on the lives of others, emphasizing the importance of honoring their service and remembering their stories.

Prior to Anderson's delivery of the sermon, "Fight with Prayer" (Galatians 5:17), she invited all veterans and their families to come to the altar. The veterans were asked to state the branch of the military in which they served and to share a few comments about their service.

Members of their families also recognized other family members who once belonged to Isaiah but now live in other places, and others who have served and are currently serving. Anderson and Lay Servant Geraldine Bassett shared words of thanks to all of the veterans.

Anderson also decorated a pew and a table with an array of gifts for the veterans and their families. At the close of the service, she invited everyone to come and select a gift of his or her choice. It was a joyous service and was appreciated by all in attendance.

Lay Servant Herman Bright extended special thanks to Anderson for honoring Isaiah's veterans, among others.


Pastor Anderson with veterans and their families.

Across SC.

United Methodist author releases new Christmas book



Jayne Jaudon Ferrer, a member of Bethesda United Methodist Church, Powdersville, has released a new book this fall. Called "Olé in a Manger," it's published by CrossLink Publishing.

Concerned about her church's declining attendance and listless spirit in her small South Carolina town, bookstore owner Myrna Malloy suggests a live nativity as a way to attract potential new members, give something back to the community and energize the congregation at Mountain View Community Church. Dancing on the altar would have met with less resistance. But with the support of Pastor Paul, her two best friends and a local librarian, Myrna plows ahead with her plan to share the timeless tale of Christmas, front and center on Highway 12.

The book can be found on Amazon and other major retailers.





Photos courtesy of Deidre Harley





Flourishing in Florence

Ministry has been flourishing since September at Salem UMC, Florence. The United Women in Faith held their annual Women's Day Celebration with guest speaker Dr. Marva Cannion, who delivered a dynamic message. The service was enhanced by the Women's Day Choir. In October, the United Methodist Men continued their annual tradition of hosting a Fish Fry, offering free dinners to the local community. October also featured the recognition of those who are breast cancer survivors and honored those who lost their lives to breast cancer by wearing pink each Sunday in the month. Here are scenes.

Buckhead UMC celebrates its annual tea worship service

RUFFIN—On Oct. 10, members, guests and visitors gathered at 3 p.m. at Buckhead United Methodist Church for the church's annual Tea Worship Service. The theme for this year's occasion was "The Seven I AMs of Jesus." It was an afternoon filled with worship, creativity, fellowship and the wonderful presence of God.

The purpose of this special service was to bring the Scriptures to life in a meaningful and creative way. Each participant was challenged to present their assigned Scripture in the most creative way possible, with a three-minute time limit to explain its meaning and significance. What unfolded was a beautiful expression of faith using different gifts, talents and presentations to share the powerful words of Jesus.

Dr. Andrietta Barnett served as worship leader, setting the tone for an afternoon of meaningful worship. The welcoming words and introductions to each speaker helped create an atmosphere of warmth, excitement and anticipation as participants shared their presentations.

Lay servants representing various churches throughout the Walterboro District participated, along with participants from other denominations. Their presence reminded all that, although they may worship in different congregations and traditions, they are united through faith in Jesus Christ.

Adding a special touch to the afternoon was a musical selection by Angela Hodges, whose voice blessed and enhanced the worship experience.

They were also honored by the presence of the Rev. Angela Ford Broughton and the Rev. Lamont Hodges, who joined Buckhead for this special occasion.

As the service came to a close, the Rev. Minnie Dickerson, pastor of Buckhead UMC, offered final remarks and blessed the food. Following the worship service, everyone had an opportunity to fellowship, share a meal and enjoy one another's company.

The annual Tea Worship Service was more than a program; it was a celebration of God's Word, the gifts within the body of Christ and the importance of coming together in worship and fellowship.

Organizers said they are grateful to everyone who participated, supported and attended this special occasion.



Lexington United Methodist Men gather for their prayer breakfast Oct. 21.

Lexington UMC men's breakfast grows across denominations

LEXINGTON—Every Wednesday morning, United Methodist Men gather at Lexington United Methodist Church for a 7 a.m. prayer breakfast.

The gathering has grown to include men from other area UMC churches, plus men from St. Stephens Lutheran Church, Lakeside Baptist Church, St Paul's Baptist Church, New Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and Pisgah Lutheran Church.

Lexington's United Methodist Men leader Tim Chandler, with the assistance of Ed Richardson and Don Jones, cooks eggs, grits, biscuits, bacon, sausage and ham, with some fresh fruit, coffee and juice. They open with a prayer circle blessing then meal, then experience about 20 minutes of relative quiet while all feast. They spend 10 minutes on prayer requests, and then one of the men teaches a Bible lesson for 30 minutes, with much discussion.

"The fellowship we share with our diverse group is always delightful, and we are very blessed by the Lord to share in such meaning times with each other," said the Rev. Mack McDowell, senior pastor. "One of our biggest amazements is how the men often come back with other men that they want to have share in our fellowship. Our church is growing, our fellowship is growing, and the Lord is with us. Praise God!"



Preaching innovation

Nine clergy from the South Carolina Conference were among those who gathered recently for the 2026–2027 Preaching Innovation Cohort through United Methodist Discipleship Ministries. The cohort brought together clergy from nine annual conferences to explore new approaches to preaching, learn from leading homiletics scholars and one another, and rediscover the joy of preaching.

Pastor releases Jesus birthday song

One South Carolina elder has recently released a new song he penned titled "Happy Birthday Jesus."

The Rev. Frank James, a retired elder who pastors I. DeQuincey Newman United Methodist Church, Columbia, has written numerous gospel songs and videos since his retirement, with this latest among them.

"Happy Birthday Jesus" is available on many online platforms, including YouTube, Apple Music and more. To find it, simply type "Happy Birthday Jesus Rev. Frank James" into the search bar.

James said the song is uplifting.

"It gives us a reason to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," he said, encouraging people to share it with their church choirs and congregations.

District News.

Columbia District

Columbia College, Columbia, holds a monthly Prayer on the Mall on the first Thursday at 12:15 p.m. to gather and pray together. The event is open to students, faculty, staff and the community.

Lexington UMC, Lexington, held a special worship service Nov. 22 at 9 a.m. at the Icehouse Amphitheater. The service was part of the Magic on Church Street held Nov. 21-22. The two-day Christmas festival featured more than 40 vendors and artisans, food trucks, children's activities and live music and performances.

Orangeburg District

Claflin University, Orangeburg, presented "The Promise," a powerful original play celebrating the courage, sacrifice and contributions of South Carolina's Black patriots during the American Revolution. The performance was held Nov. 15 at the Broad River Arts Center, Columbia.

Leave A Legacy To Change Lives

The South Carolina United Methodist Foundation
P. O. Box 5087, Columbia, SC 29250-5087
scumf@bellsouth.net

EPWORTH

From Page 1

A story was shared at Epworth's 130-year anniversary celebration that a woman visiting Epworth Children's Home recently discovered something remarkable while looking through a collection of historical photographs and memorabilia: a picture of her father.

Taken in the early 1930s, the photograph showed him as a member of Epworth's football team. For the woman, it was more than an old image. It offered a glimpse into a chapter of her father's childhood that she had never experienced herself—a tangible connection to her family's history.

Stories like hers are familiar at Epworth. Children, grandchildren and other descendants of former residents often visit to learn more about relatives who once called the campus home. Their discoveries reveal Epworth's history is not preserved only in buildings, photographs and records. It lives in the stories of generations of South Carolina families that transcend the generations.

Since its founding in 1896, the organization has changed to meet the needs of a changing state through Christian acts. Yet the heart of its mission remains: offering families care, stability and hope when needed most.

When Epworth was established, poverty placed enormous strain on families throughout South Carolina. Children sometimes needed a safe place to live not because their parents had died, but because their families lacked the resources to care for them.

The Methodist community recognized that need and stepped forward.

For women, particularly widows, earning enough to support a family could be extraordinarily difficult. Employment opportunities were limited, and social and economic barriers restricted women's ability to be financially independent. A mother left to raise four or five children could have few options.

For some, placing their children in an orphanage was not a rejection of their responsibilities or their love. It was a painful sacrifice made in the hope that their children could receive opportunities and stability that were otherwise out of reach. It was a desperate decision by a parent who did not have any other choice. She needed support.

That's where the discipleship work of Epworth stepped in to help.

This history is important to understanding Epworth's beginnings. Many of the children who entered its care were not orphans in the traditional sense. They were children whose families were struggling to survive.

The Great Depression intensified those challenges. As unemployment and poverty spread, demand for care increased dramatically. According to organizational recollections, Epworth's enrollment exceeded 300 children during that period. The need was so great that the organization sometimes had to limit how many children it could accept from a single family.

One story from the era illustrates the difficult choices parents faced.

After her husband died, a mother in the Upstate was left to care for seven children. Some of the children had to leave school as early as third or fourth grade to work in a textile mill and help support the household.

Knowing about Epworth through her Methodist connections, the mother wrote to the organization seeking a kitchen job. She hoped to bring her four youngest children with her.

Epworth welcomed her but could accommodate only two of her children. Faced with an impossible decision, she chose her two youngest sons and arranged for them to travel by train to Epworth. Their story, along with the experiences of the siblings who remained behind, was later featured in Epworth's newsletter, The Record.

It is a reminder that the organization's original mission was about more than caring for children who had lost their parents. It was about helping families facing circumstances so difficult that keeping children safe and provided for had become nearly impossible.

As South Carolina changed, so did the needs of the children and families coming to Epworth. In the years following the Depression, children increasingly arrived from challenges beyond poverty. Some had experienced physical abuse, domestic violence, addiction, neglect or the death or absence of a parent. For many, Epworth offered a refuge—a place to receive care and begin rebuilding a sense of security.

The transition from Epworth Orphanage to Epworth Children's Home reflected a broader understanding of the circumstances affecting children. Some had been orphaned by the death of their parents; others were orphaned by circumstance, without the protection and care every child deserves.

The organization continued, adapting as South Carolina's child welfare system evolved. Around 2014 and 2015, the state increasingly prioritized placing younger children with foster families rather than in residential group settings. Epworth responded by developing and expanding its foster care ministry, working particularly through relationships with United Methodist congregations to recruit families willing to open their homes.

Today, foster care is a substantial part of Epworth's statewide work. The change reflects a central principle of the organization: faithfulness to mission sometimes means changing how that mission is carried out.

For Epworth, the work is more than a collection of programs. It is an expression of faith.

The Methodist connection that inspired Epworth's founding remains essential to its work. Support comes through grants, donations and other funding, but local congregations offer something equally important: a community ready to respond when families have immediate needs.

Epworth's programs may look different, but together they form a network of care. Advocacy is an important part of that work. Families facing poverty or trauma often encounter complicated systems and barriers to assistance. In a largely rural state with limited public transportation, simply traveling between services can be difficult.

Epworth works alongside families to navigate available resources, connect with services and find practical solutions. Rather than handing someone a list of phone numbers, staff members seek to help them through the process.

The needs of South Carolina's children and families have changed since 1896. The challenges are different, and the ways of responding have expanded. But the underlying call remains the same: care for those who are vulnerable, an offer of hope when circumstances feel overwhelming and recognition of the dignity and worth of every person.

A daughter discovering her father in an old photograph. Two brothers arriving by train. A mother seeking a better future for her children. A congregation purchasing beds for a family in crisis. A young adult finding a place to begin again. These stories span generations, but they share a common thread.

And the work continues.





HOUSE

From Page 1

Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry is a United Methodist-founded nonprofit with nine homes across the state. Elliott New made the decision to work one additional year rather than retire so their family could make this gift possible.

"Their willingness to make a personal sacrifice for the sake of others left a lasting impression," Cook said.

That story sparked an idea: What if Christmas generosity could help provide a home for adults served by Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry?

Grace had previously donated land for the project, with an easement generously provided by neighboring Christus Victor Lutheran Church. Grace and Virginia Wingard Memorial decided to partner on the effort, which they called The Christmas House.

Now, the idea has expanded to include the rest of the UMC's Columbia District as congregations and partners come together around a shared vision of building a home where adults with special needs can experience community, stability and a place to belong.

"The project is a reminder that the gifts we give do not have to be temporary," Cook said. "A gingerbread house may be decorated and eventually eaten. A Christmas gift may be enjoyed for a season. But a home can provide shelter, relationships and opportunities for people for decades to come."

The Rev. Fran M. Elrod, Columbia District superintendent, said her district has embraced collaboration of ministries as a way to strengthen United Methodist connectionalism and extend the hands and feet of Christ.

"The Aldersgate Special Needs Christmas House is a meaningful way to tangibly act with the love of Christ for a community that can be easily overlooked throughout the year," Elrod said. "The generosity of siblings in Christ, through individual and church giving, has been exciting and hope-filled in a season of receiving God's gift of the Christ child. The outpouring of love will build this home, where families can feel secure and have peace that their loved ones with special needs will be safe and experience abundant life. Everyone is welcome and invited to help build this 'love home'!"

Kim Thomas, executive director of Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry, said she's grateful that Cook and others listened to the Lord and heeded the seed he planted.

"A Christian home for adults with special needs is a gift that will last for many years to come," Thomas said. "It is more than just a gift—it's a legacy that will impact more than a person, but an entire community. We are incredibly grateful for this opportunity."

Cook said they know it's an ambitious undertaking, and they might need longer than one season to raise funds.

"That's okay," Cook said. "Some of the most meaningful gifts require patience, commitment and the willingness to keep showing up long after the decorations come down.

"It may take more than one Christmas to build, but this will be the house that Christmas built."

To learn more about helping the project: mscook@umcsc.org or director@aldersgatesnm.org.







ASHLAND MEDICAL DEBT

From Page 1

hospitals and other medical providers at a deeply discounted price, primarily targeting people at poverty level. This bulk discount stretches donated funds much farther, since the debt can be bought for pennies on the dollar.

Ashland's pastor, the Rev. Jonathan Harris, had done a similar project a few years ago at a previous church he pastored, Mount Zion UMC in Central. Though a small congregation, Mount Zion raised enough money to forgive more than $4.8 million in medical debts.

Harris said an Ashland couple—Kinsey and Doreen Jenkins—heard him share about what Mount Zion was able to do, and they asked Harris what it might take for Ashland to do something similar.

"When Kinsey and Doreen Jenkins reached out to me about what it would take to do a medical debt relief campaign, I was very excited," Harris told the *Advocate*.

He said residents in Lexington and Richland counties currently owe more than $31 million in unpaid medical bills, and he said the Advent debt-relief project is an opportunity to serve their fellow neighbors in a generous and impactful way.

"Kinsey and Doreen lost an adult son a few years ago who needed a great deal of medical care," Harris said. "They know in a personal way that medical bills do not just represent money; they represent people with stories, families, hopes and aspirations."

The Ashland Advent campaign is titled "Hope is on the Way," celebrating the hope of the first Advent, along with the hope their neighbors can experience this Advent as their medical debts are forgiven.

The Jenkinses said many families at Ashland UMC have been faced with illnesses that resulted in significant medical debt, and they noted they and others in their Sunday school class are personally aware of how medical debt can hurt families.

"This awareness of the heavy burden of medical debt has influenced our decision to show our Christian love in this way," Kinsey Jenkins said. "Ashland strives to be a loving, caring congregation, and we feel if Ashland could reach out to families in need in Richland and Lexington counties to eliminate their medical debt, it would be a faith-based gift of love from Ashland to our community."

Harris said his congregation is excited about the opportunity to help people dig out of medical debt, something that can be debilitating for so many.

"As a pastor, one of the most fulfilling parts of ministry is when laypeople come to me with ministry ideas they are passionate about," he said. "This year, we hope to help our neighbors experience forgiveness, compassion, mercy and hope in a powerful way once again."

For every dollar raised, Undue Medical Debt is able to purchase and forgive roughly $100 in medical debts. By raising their goal of $25,000, that translates to around $2.5 million in medical debt relief.

To help Ashland with the debt relief project, go to https://unduemedicaldebt.org/campaign/hope-is-on-the-way.

DISMISSED

From Page 1

defendants to prepare proposed orders for the judge's consideration and signature.

The conference said it intends to appeal the decision.

"The conference and its legal counsel are continuing to review the judge's orders and intend to appeal these rulings, in accordance with South Carolina law," stated a conference press release issued Nov. 13. "Our hope remains to bring these matters before the appellate courts, potentially including the South Carolina Supreme Court, at the earliest appropriate opportunity." (Read the conference's full release at https://go.advocatesc.org/lawsuits-dismissed111326.)

The dismissal order affects the 68 churches included in Exhibit A of the consolidated lawsuit (see below), as well as a separate order dismissing the conference's case against Simpsonville United Methodist Church, The Methodist Church of Simpsonville, and Michael Smith, and one dismissing the case against Duncan Memorial Methodist Church, et al.

(See the orders to dismiss the consolidated churches, Simpsonville and Duncan Memorial at the above link.)

In its release, the South Carolina Conference urged United Methodists to keep their focus on what's truly important, noting, "While this development is disappointing, we remain committed to faithfully stewarding the responsibilities entrusted to us—and we encourage South Carolina United Methodists to stay focused on our unchanging mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

The consolidated case, The South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, et al. v. Aldersgate Methodist Church of Greenwood, et al., originated when defendant churches indicated in writing they planned to separate from the South Carolina Conference of the UMC—mainly over theological differences about human sexuality—but keep their property.

The conference argued the denominational trust clause prohibits churches from leaving the denomination and keeping their property.

Defendants argued the court should not hear the case because it involves internal church matters and religious doctrine, and because the UMC trust clause does not comply with South Carolina law. They also argued the plaintiffs lack legal standing to challenge defendants' actions.

In addition to Simpsonville and Duncan Memorial, the other defendant churches are as follows:

- Aldersgate UMC, Greenwood County
- Andrews Chapel UMC, Clarendon County
- Bellingers Chapel UMC, Allendale County
- Bethel UMC of Bethune, Kershaw County
- Bethlehem UMC of Pamplico, Florence County
- Bethsaida UMC, Florence County
- Beulah UMC, Calhoun County
- Bogansville UMC, Union County
- Boiling Springs UMC, Lexington County
- Brunson UMC, Hampton County
- Calhoun Falls UMC, Abbeville County
- Camp Swamp UMC, Horry County
- Canaan UMC, Cherokee County
- Dickson Memorial UMC, Oconee County
- East Bethel UMC, Calhoun County
- Ebenezer UMC, Abbeville, Abbeville County
- Ebenezer UMC, Bennettsville, Marlboro County
- Emma Gray Memorial UMC, Spartanburg County
- Folly Beach UMC, Charleston County
- Fork Creek UMC, Chesterfield County
- Fort Lawn UMC, Chester County
- Good Shepherd UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County
- Gordon Memorial UMC, Fairfield County
- Grace UMC, Union, Union County
- Greenbrier UMC, Fairfield County
- Hardeeville UMC, Jasper County
- Hopewell UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County
- Jackson Grove UMC, Greenville County
- Jefferson UMC, Chesterfield County
- Livingston UMC, Orangeburg County
- Lupo Memorial UMC, Greenwood County
- Lynchburg UMC, Lee County
- McLeod UMC, Richland County
- Montgomery Memorial UMC, Spartanburg County
- Monticello UMC, Fairfield County
- Mount Zion UMC of Sandy Run, Calhoun County
- Nichols UMC, Marion County
- Panola UMC, Greenwood County
- Paxville UMC, Clarendon County
- Philadelphia UMC of York, York County
- Pinewood UMC, Sumter County
- Pleasant Hill UMC, Bamberg County
- Providence UMC of Holly Hill, Orangeburg County
- Quinby UMC, Florence County
- Rehoboth UMC of Greenwood, Greenwood County
- Republican UMC of McCormick, McCormick County
- Salem UMC of Pageland, Chesterfield County
- Sampit UMC, Georgetown County
- St. James UMC, Laurens, Laurens County
- St. John UMC of Columbia, Richland County
- St. John UMC of Graniteville, Aiken County
- St. Luke UMC, Elliott, Lee County
- St. Luke UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County
- St. Paul UMC, Florence, Florence County
- Summerton UMC, Clarendon County
- Swallow Savannah UMC, Allendale County
- Tabor UMC, Pickens County
- Trinity UMC, Bamberg, Bamberg County
- Trinity UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County
- Trinity UMC, Laurens, Laurens County
- Trinity UMC, Lynchburg, Sumter County
- Trinity UMC, Smoaks, Colleton County
- Union UMC of Cope, Orangeburg County
- Van Wyck UMC, Lancaster County
- Wesley Memorial UMC, Charleston, Charleston County
- West Bethel UMC, Calhoun County
- Zion UMC, Dorchester, Dorchester County
- Zion UMC, Lancaster, Lancaster County

The *Advocate* will report more on any plans for appeal when information is made available.





Clemson UMC provides spaces for affordable housing, mental health

CLEMSON—Clemson United Methodist Church has opened its campus to two new ministries this year: a faith-based counseling center run by Healing Bridges Counseling Center, and the regional offices of Habitat for Humanity of Pickens County, along with a transitional housing apartment for families between homes.

An ecumenical group of Presbyterians (USA), United Methodists, Cooperative Baptists, Lutherans (ELCA), Episcopalians and committed lay members came together to launch the faith-based Healing Bridges Counseling Center for the Clemson, Central and Pendleton communities.

After a few years of discussion, two locations emerged for Healing Bridges to provide this counseling. One of these locations is on the campus of Clemson UMC and the other at the Free Medical Clinic of Clemson.

Once Clemson UMC raised money for the renovations, they were able to provide a space for the center to work out of. Organizers offer thanks to the trustees and the church for caring about mental health and faith-based counseling for all.

Clemson UCM was also able to relocate the Habitat for Humanity for Pickens County regional offices to the Clemson UMC campus. This relocation has been a few years in the making, but this year, they were able to make this happen. They are thankful for Habitat and their shared vision of housing for the least of these.

As part of this ministry, Clemson UMC also created a transitional housing apartment on campus as an outreach for those who are between places to live and trying to resettle in affordable housing.

They have already been able to locate two families in this transitional housing and look forward to helping many more.

For more information on these ministries and more, visit https://www.clemsonumc.org.



Small church, huge love

Centenary UMC is a small historic congregation founded in 1839 and worshipping in the sanctuary built in 1852. Like many rural congregations, attendance is around 16 on any Sunday, but that doesn't diminish the love and generosity of the congregation. The congregation participates in Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child, a ministry to provide children across the world with a Christmas shoebox so that each child receives a gift that represents God's love and grace. The Centenary congregation packed 60 Christmas shoeboxes this year, and following morning worship, packed them into a member's SUV to be taken to the local drop-off. Along with the shoeboxes, Centenary also provides Christmas Gift Bags for seniors in the community. The bags are packed with requested items and other special Christmas goodies.







Photos courtesy of Lillie Fowler

Caring for those with cancer

This fall, a group of crafters from three Walterboro District churches—New Life, Buckhead and Jericho UMCs—made and donated 415 mastectomy pillows to the cancer center in Beaufort. All went out for seafood after. Here are some photos.





Photos courtesy of Susan Culler

Supporting our Navajo neighbors at Christmas

For more than 10 years, members of Whaley Street UMC, Columbia, have collected school supplies, clothing, gifts and toiletries during the year and sent them at Christmas to children living in the Navajo Nation in Arizona. In November, 180 Christmas boxes were sent off to reach churches and groups in the Navajo Nation for Christmas morning. The entire membership of Whaley Street participates and supports this ministry that was begun by Bonnie Moore years ago. These pictures show the Christmas boxes and the volunteers who formed an assembly line to load the boxes into a trailer.





Ministries.





Photos by Annie R. Crocker





Successful LSM training in Spartanburg

For three consecutive Sundays in October, lay servants gathered at Beaumont UMC, Spartanburg, for Lay Servant Ministry training. Six classes were offered, and for the first time in a long time, they had people sign up for and attend every class. Some were small classes, but organizers said all were important and informative. Attendees gained knowledge about leading, caring and communicating as they spent time together. "We praise and thank God for these wonderful people who have pledged their time and energy to being in service to God, his people and The United Methodist Church," said Annie R. Crocker, Spartanburg District director.

Native American Ministries.

Native American Elder Baskets are an important ministry

By Cathy Nelson

The Elder Basket Ministry, fostered by the South Carolina Conference Native American Committee, delivers hundreds of elder baskets each year from Thanksgiving through Valentine's Day.

This vital ministry is coordinated by Keepers of the Word, which collaborates with the Native American Committee and coordinates with the 11 tribes of South Carolina. The local church Native American representatives are vital to this ministry by assisting in promoting elder basket donations at the local church.

Native American representatives lead their churches to prepare elder baskets by collecting canned goods, staples and household products. Monetary donations are also sent to the Conference Native American Committee to prepare baskets of staple food and household supplies. They also assist in planning Native American Ministries Sunday.

The Native American elderly is a demographic is often overlooked and forgotten. Most of the Native American elderly are in the lowest spectrum of income. This is because of a lack of education and job opportunities available during their youth about 50 years ago. The income is as low as the mid-$400 to mid-$500 in Social Security checks for many elderly people, from which rent, utilities, food, transportation and medicine must be paid.

Baskets and supplies provided by churches are delivered from across the state to the tribes by Keepers of the Word, which facilitates delivery.

Native American representatives continue to be pivotal in meeting the needs of our Native American brothers and sisters in Christ.

Keepers of the Word is an intertribal drum team honoring Jesus Christ. We preserve Native American music and collaborate with Native American tribes in South Carolina and beyond. We can be scheduled on Native American Ministries Sunday or church events.

For further information, contact Cathy Nelson at catn@lowcountry.com.

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Cumberland UMC's parking lot ministry spreads love and breast cancer awareness

FLORENCE—Sometimes ministry happens beyond the church walls—in the parking lot, through a simple act of kindness that reminds someone they are loved and remembered.

As part of its ongoing outreach efforts, Cumberland United Methodist Church's Parking Lot Ministry recently distributed 100 breast cancer awareness gift bags filled with socks and a variety of snacks.

Each bag was thoughtfully prepared to offer a little encouragement, comfort and a reminder that the church cares about the community it serves.

Priscilla Howard, chair of the Missions Committee, recognized the importance of making the gift bags reflect Breast Cancer Awareness. Her vision was to create something meaningful that would not only provide practical items but also acknowledge the importance of breast cancer awareness and show support for those whose lives have been touched by the disease.

The initiative reflects Cumberland UMC's commitment to putting faith into action and meeting people where they are. Through these small but intentional gestures, the Parking Lot Ministry continues to demonstrate that ministry is not limited to Sunday morning worship. It is about building relationships, extending compassion and sharing God's love in everyday spaces.

The church believes the community needs more than good intentions—it needs people who are willing to serve. This outreach is a reminder that all have a role to play in making the community stronger. Whether it is offering a word of encouragement, preparing a care package, volunteering time, supporting a neighbor or simply showing up when someone is in need, every act of kindness matters.



The ministry distributed 100 breast cancer awareness gift bags filled with socks and a variety of snacks.



The church challenges its members, neighbors, businesses and community partners to join in making a difference.

One hundred gift bags. One united community. Countless opportunities to make a difference.

Alston Wilkes Society.

AWS earns reaccreditation through 2030

The Alston Wilkes Society has once again earned reaccreditation from the Council on Accreditation, extending its accreditation through April 30, 2030.

This achievement affirms its commitment to compassionate care and responsible stewardship as it helps people across South Carolina rebuild their lives.

For the youth, veterans and individuals returning to their communities after incarceration who turn to AWS, quality services can make a meaningful difference on the path toward stability and independence. Reaccreditation gives those AWS serves, their families and AWS supporters confidence that its work meets nationally recognized standards of care and accountability.

The accreditation process includes a rigorous review of governance, financial management, service delivery, human resources, risk management and continuous quality improvement. In its final report, COA recognized AWS's strong financial stewardship, comprehensive quality improvement practices and robust risk management systems. Reviewers also highlighted investments in technology, infrastructure and staff development, as well as the dedication of its Board of Directors and its partnership with organizational leadership.

At the heart of this achievement are the people who carry out its mission each day. Reviewers praised employees for their professionalism, compassion and commitment to a trauma-informed, person-centered approach. That means recognizing each person's experiences, strengths and needs while providing support that respects their dignity and helps them move forward.

The report also acknowledged the meaningful impact of AWS programs throughout South Carolina. Whether supporting a young person facing difficult circumstances, helping a veteran find greater stability or walking alongside someone rebuilding life after incarceration, AWS employees bring practical assistance and hope to people who need both.

Reaccreditation is also an opportunity to keep improving. AWS will incorporate two minor recommendations related to program planning and evaluation into its ongoing quality improvement efforts, building on the strengths recognized during the review.

This accomplishment belongs to AWS employees, leadership and board members, and to the donors and community partners who make this work possible. Thank you for helping The Alston Wilkes Society continue rebuilding lives for a stronger community.

Young Methodists.

Robotics at church
The Robotics Team from Manning UMC, Manning, has been hard at work on their projects. The team, comprising youth at the church, helps foster a love for LEGOS and robotics while encouraging fellowship in a Christian environment. The team will compete in the spring. Here, a member of the team works on a project with John Enrietto, a retired mechanical engineer who leads the program with help from Kelly Gottheiner.



Photo by Kelly Gottheiner

Youth writing, artistic talents wanted for the Advocate

Are you a child, youth or young adult United Methodist with writing or artistic talent? We would love to feature young people's contributions on an ongoing, monthly basis in the *Advocate*.

Whether it's a church- or faith-related photograph, drawing, painting, essay, poem or story, share your efforts with the *Advocate*, along with your name, age and church name and city.

Email to jbrodie@advocatesc.org or mail to Editor Jessica Brodie, *Advocate*, 4908 Colonial Dr., Columbia, SC 29203.

If you're mailing it and would like your submission returned to you when we're finished, let us know and we can do so.

Panel becomes worship at Methodist Student Network gathering

By S. Jnatel Sims, Esq.

COLUMBIA—On the evening of Oct. 4, I walked into the Carolina Faiths Center at 728 Pickens St., across from the University of South Carolina's Women's Quad. I came prepared to answer questions. I left having worshipped.

The Methodist Student Network gathers there most Sundays at 6 p.m. during the academic year for student-led worship and community, followed by a home-cooked dinner. On this particular Sunday, worship took the shape of a panel discussion on faith in college and faith on the job.

I was honored to be one of the two voices on that panel.

I've sat on other panels in my professional life, and most of them are about information. This one was different. We were asked to share about how God has worked in our lives in front of young people standing at the beginning of both college and career.

Telling our stories was not a lecture. It was testimony. And it was worship.

Our moderator was the Rev. Mary Johnson, a member of Journey United Methodist Church and a retired elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. I shared the panel with Richard Gadsden, a layperson at Wesley UMC in downtown Columbia; he works at the engineering consulting firm AECOM as a senior roadway design engineer. I'm a member of Journey UMC in Columbia, where I serve as a lay shepherd. Professionally, I'm an attorney and the president of Catapult Healthcare Consulting, LLC, a health-care compliance consulting firm.

Two laypeople. Two congregations. Two careers. One Lord. The questions moved in three parts: our faith journeys in college, our faith journeys on the job and one principle we would hand to students to carry with them.

Our conversation rested on Paul's charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:14-17, which was the word that framed the evening.

Faith In College

One question asked what college taught about God that church could not. My answer was simple. College showed me what God's hands and feet look like outside the church building, and it taught me that God will come for the one. I know this because he came for me.

Growing up, I was a church kid, but it wasn't until March 1994, during my senior year, that I gave my life to Christ. It didn't happen at an altar during a church service. It happened in a studio apartment above a typewriter repair shop, across the street from my college campus in Brunswick, Maine. I believe without a doubt that God drew me to himself and arranged every detail of that moment.



The author answers a question.

Part of that arrangement was the roommate and friend he placed beside me. She was from California and I was from Maryland, yet I believe God brought us together in Maine so she could lead me to Christ. More than three decades later, she is still my closest friend.

Another question asked was about balancing academic responsibilities, social life and spiritual life. Gadsden's story offered a genuine and valuable lesson. He told the students he was more focused on his social life in college. High school had come easily to him, so he brought the same approach to college, and it did not work. But he was always a spiritual person. and that gentle guidance helped him to get himself together and go on to graduate. With a smile, he told the students he could tell them exactly what not to do. His honesty reminded them that a rough start is not the end of the story.

Faith on the Job

The second part of the conversation turned to work. Johnson asked whether a person can be successful and still be deeply faithful without compromising either one.

Both Gadsden and I answered yes. Gadsden shared a story about not compromising his integrity when it came time to evaluate an underperforming team member. I shared about not forsaking Godly character in the midst of a season that felt like persecution.

One Principle to Carry

To close, each of us was asked to give the students one faith-and-career principle to carry with them. Mine came straight from Jeremiah 29:11. God knows the plans he has for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, to give you hope and an expected end. Gadsden encouraged the students to stay focused, keep believing and being diligent. If God be for you, who can be against you?

At the Lord's Table

We also celebrated Holy Communion together.

There is something powerful about sharing the Lord's Supper across generations. The students are at the beginning of their journeys, and some of us have been walking this road for decades. At the table, those differences fell away. We were simply God's people, receiving the same grace from the same Lord.

A Word of Thanks

Thank you to the Rev. Jad Taylor for the invitation. Inviting laypeople to speak about their faith in worship is an act of trust. It says the Holy Spirit is at work in offices and job sites, not only in pulpits. I'm also grateful to Ella Stilwell, who was a wonderful host. Most of all, I thank the students. They welcomed strangers into their worship space, listened closely, participated fully in worship and treated our stories with respect.

A special shout-out goes to Triple M Delites (Stacey Tyler, owner) who catered a delicious meal for everyone after service. That meal was a gift from two congregations, namely, Journey UMC, where Dr. George Ashford serves as lead pastor, and Wesley UMC, where the Rev. Ellis White Jr. serves as senior pastor.

Paul could tell Timothy, "You know who taught you," because Timothy had watched faith lived out up close. These students are watching too. One day, they will look back on their college years and remember who taught them: the pastors who welcomed them, the congregations that fed them and the believers who were honest about their own journeys.

If your congregation is looking for a way to invest in young adults, I encourage you to get to know the Methodist Student Network. Pray for these students. Show up for them. Feed them, if you can. As an act of worship, pour into them today so they are ready tomorrow, when their faith is tested in classrooms, boardrooms and job sites of their own.

Sims is a member of Journey UMC in Columbia, where she serves as a lay shepherd. She is the president of Catapult Healthcare Consulting, LLC, a healthcare compliance consulting firm.



Young Methodists.

Wonder: Cohort churches reimagine worship with children

By Toni Norris

Members of Cohorts 1 and 2 of Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer joined congregational leaders from across the Southeastern Jurisdiction at The Wonder Summit: Reimagining Congregational Worship and Prayer with Children.

The summit was held Nov. 4-6.

Western North Carolina Conference Bishop Kenneth Carter kicked the summit off stating this was "an amazing gathering of children's ministry leaders."

Hosted by Lake Junaluska and the Western North Carolina Conference, the summit brought together pastors, worship leaders and children's ministers to explore how children can be active participants in worship rather than observers. That vision closely matches South Carolina's own initiative, which Lilly Endowment also supports. That initiative helps South Carolina congregations welcome children and youth as full participants in worship and guides them in growing as people of prayer and as leaders in the church.

Over three days, participants shared opening and closing intergenerational worship, morning centering prayer, embodied prayer, hands-on workshops and open conversation circles. Each worship services showed ways all ages could worship together as one body. Mitch Marcello of Innovate Imago spoke on shaping a culture of wonder in worship. Dr. Lakisha R. Lockhart of Union Presbyterian Seminary offered a womanist invitation to "sacred play" with children. Elizabeth Christie of Practical Resources for Churches explored the wonder of grace for all at the open table, especially worshipping with neurodivergent children.

For cohort members, the summit was a chance to learn, worship and dream alongside a diverse group of clergy and children's ministers from many different settings. Lockhart taught "Play is Holy, Joy is Persistence and Children are Sacred." Another popular workshop was "Preparing Parents for Worship."

Anyone interested in becoming a cohort church should email ttaylor@umcsc.org.



Each worship services showed ways all ages could worship together as one body.

Students encouraged to apply for Advocate's 2027 $1,000 scholarship

Deadline for applications is March 1

Scholarship applications are being accepted now for the *South Carolina United Methodist Advocate* annual $1,000 college scholarship.

The scholarship is for South Carolina United Methodist students for the 2027-2028 academic year who are planning to attend or are attending one of the four United Methodist colleges in South Carolina: Claflin University, Columbia College, Spartanburg Methodist College or Wofford College.Students ideally will have an interest in communications, journalism or business.

Requests for the scholarship are due March 1.

Required are an application with an essay, a college or high school transcript, and a letter from the senior pastor of the applicant's home church or a college chaplain confirming the applicant is a United Methodist and describing their participation.

Learn more and download the application at https://www.advocatesc.org/about/scholarship_program.

For questions, email jbrodie@advocatesc.org.

Columbia College awarded $1.24M in first-year federal funding for student success

COLUMBIA—Columbia College has been awarded $1,240,577 in first-year funding through the U.S. Department of Education's Title III Strengthening Institutions Program. The award launches a five-year initiative focused on faculty development, student career readiness, classroom modernization and more accessible student support through artificial intelligence and data analytics.

The project, Strengthening Columbia College and Its Students Through AI-Enhanced Learning and Support, will upgrade 29 classrooms over three years, expand campus technology and equip faculty and staff to use AI and new software effectively and responsibly.

The grant will also fund a Center for Teaching and Learning, with a new Dean of Faculty serving as its inaugural director. The center will coordinate orientation, mentoring and ongoing development for full-time and adjunct faculty, providing a dedicated hub for teaching innovation, course design, research and scholarship.

Students will benefit from enhanced first-year experiences on campus and online, expanded academic support and career preparation and financial literacy opportunities. Planned improvements include early-alert tools to identify students who may need assistance, closer integration of advising with the college's student information system and AI-enhanced advising support available around the clock.

Data analytics will help faculty and staff track student progress, respond to emerging needs and evaluate program effectiveness.

The initial award covers Oct. 1, 2026, through Sept. 30, 2027, with a project period extending through September 2031. Future-year funding is subject to federal appropriations, satisfactory progress and performance, required reporting and continued compliance with federal financial and administrative requirements.

This project is supported by the U.S. Department of Education under the Title III, Part A, Strengthening Institutions Program.



Wesley Foundations.

Faith UMC, Greer, shares fellowship, food with Wofford Wesley students

By Joy Holland and Michael Goldston

Even though we are a small congregation, Faith United Methodist Church, Greer, takes time to share God's love in sharing our love with others.

After the district set-up meeting, our pastor, the Rev. Michael Goldston, told us that the Wofford Wesley Foundation needed dinners provided by local congregations at their weekly meetings. Family meals are a gift of our congregation, so we jumped into action to serve the college students with sandwiches and sodas on Sept. 28.

Both the college-student ladies and the group from Faith UMC thoroughly enjoyed the food and fellowship. We joined their prayer service on "Peace," reading from a psalm and sharing our names and our personal places of peace.

"It was thought provoking, yet interesting to hear persons' responses around the table," said Suzanne Hakeem, a member in attendance.

Another member, Mandy Smith, enjoyed her time with the ladies as well.

"They were very appreciative about their meal that we provided. I was very impressed that their class was not mandatory, but on a volunteer basis," she said.

Wesley leader the Rev. Brad Gray writes that Wofford Wesley is a group for United Methodist students to gather at Wofford College to share a meal, a Christian study and a supportive community.

"Our participants come from all over the Southeast and from a variety of Christian denominations," he said.

The Wesley Foundation meets weekly and has monthly lunch gatherings and quarterly social events to share with the larger college community. Wofford Wesley is supported by a variety of United Methodist churches in the Spartanburg District.


Both the college-student ladies and the group from Faith UMC thoroughly enjoyed the food and fellowship.



Faith United Methodist Church is a small congregation in Greer that loves God, bears each other's burdens and spreads God's love in our community.

Looking to get your church involved in supporting United Methodist College Ministry? Contact your district office to find out if there is a Wesley Foundation presence in your district and how you can support them.

Across the UMC.

Africa University board reelects vice chancellor

MUTARE, Zimbabwe—The Rev. Peter Mageto was reelected to lead Africa University for the next five years during the university's fall board meeting. "I see it as an opportunity to continue to transform Africa University to become a leading institution," he said. Board members also celebrated a second grant from the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries that will help resuscitate the pan-African university's farm.

Debate heats up over Highland Park name

DALLAS—After voting to cut ties with The United Methodist Church, Highland Park Methodist is asking the court to stop those who remain United Methodist from using the Highland Park name. Meanwhile, the Highland Park United Methodist congregation is moving locations to the campus of Southern Methodist University.

Rev. Hamilton goes to Washington

WASHINGTON—The Rev. Adam Hamilton, a United Methodist pastor and the newly elected junior senator from Kansas, hopes to model a more mainstream view of Christianity in Washington, and be a unifier in bringing Republicans and Democrats together to address tough issues. In an interview with UM News, he talks about his faith and priorities in Congress, as well as his plans for staying connected to Resurrection, the United Methodist church he leads in Kansas.

More information on new Clergy Act

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—The United Methodist Church's finance and administration agency has more details on the new Clergy Act, which creates a one-time window for ministers who previously opted out of Social Security and Medicare taxes to reverse that decision. "This law will likely only impact a small number of United Methodist clergy because of United Methodist doctrine. But any who did opt out now have an option that didn't exist before," the General Council on Finance and Administration said in a release.

State supreme court blocks church-property suit

CHARLESTON, W.Va.—The West Virginia Supreme Court has halted a lawsuit by 33 United Methodist congregations seeking to leave the denomination with property. The West Virginia Conference says it remains committed to supporting the churches.

Group pushes Leadership Gathering ideas forward

VANCOUVER, British Columbia—The Connectional Table, which coordinates The United Methodist Church's ministry and resources, affirmed the work of the Leadership Gathering. That's significant because the Connectional Table can help give life to the gathering's suggestions. The body also explored the future of U.S. jurisdictions and how to handle disputes between regional conferences.

United Methodists get big wins in midterms

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—United Methodism is part of the "blue wave" that swept the U.S. on Election Day, led by the Rev. Adam Hamilton winning a Kansas Senate seat, and Keisha Lance Bottoms making history with a victory in Georgia's governor race. Both say they will take their values with them in their new posts.

Groups share concerns over border-wall effort

SELBYVILLE, Del.—The Native American Inter-Tribal Caucus expresses deep concern about plans to build a federal border wall in the middle of the ancestral homeland of the Tohono O'odham Nation, whose lands extend between southern Arizona and northern Mexico. "The Nation has cooperated with federal border security efforts for decades while consistently opposing construction of a permanent border wall through its Homeland," the caucus' statement said. The border-wall effort also was the topic of a Nov. 4 webinar co-sponsored by the Immigration Law and Justice Network, United Women in Faith, the United Methodist Committee on Relief and others.

Ministry marks 50 years of training caregivers

HADDONFIELD, N.J.—An ecumenical program that helps Christian lay members offer one-on-one emotional support to neighbors in need is celebrating its 50th anniversary with learning events nationwide. Stephen Ministries has trained more than 600,000 people from over 14,000 congregations and organizations, including nearly 3,000 United Methodist churches. A new initiative aims to help churches address the growing mental health crisis in their communities.

Group shares safety concerns with new location

SWAMPSCOTT, Mass.—Reconciling Ministries Network, a group that advocates for LGBTQ equality in The United Methodist Church, also is responding to the choice of Zimbabwe as a second site for General Conference 2028 with questions and concerns. "Our questions center around the safety of delegates and other Conference attendees and for the integrity of our shared commitments," the group said in a statement. "The legal landscape in Zimbabwe is not uncertain for the LGBTQ+ people who call it home. We are learning from them, and want to understand what delegates would face should GC 2028 be held there."

Highland Park votes to leave United Methodist Church

DALLAS—After two days of voting, members of Highland Park United Methodist Church approved a resolution cutting ties with The United Methodist Church. "Beginning this Sunday, we will worship as Highland Park Methodist Church," the church council said in a letter to members. The vote comes amid the church's legal battle with the Horizon Texas Conference, which argues "a congregational vote does not, by itself, sever a local church's relationship with The United Methodist Church." Bishop Rubén Saenz Jr. is making plans to care for Highland Park members who wish to stay United Methodist.

Courtesy of UMNews

Two locations to host General Conference 2028

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—In a historic first for the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, two locations will host the 2028 quadrennial event, slated for May 8-16, 2028.

The Commission on the General Conference has selected Harare, Zimbabwe, in Africa as the site beyond Minneapolis, Minnesota, to accommodate delegates unable to travel to the United States for the May 2028 event.

The commission voted on Oct. 27 during the second day of its fall virtual meeting.

The commission acknowledged that having two locations is not preferable for holy conferencing and that this decision was neither painless nor simple but was made with prioritization of making access for all. This decision is a reflection of the worldwide nature of the church and a witness to the connection with one another in Jesus Christ.

After exploring multiple options, the commission determined the site through prayer, discernment, grappling with questions of equity and access, understanding each site option's limitations and recognizing visa complexities and other travel realities facing the church and the world that are outside its control.

Both locations will operate concurrently, allowing delegates to work together in real time. While the exact venue in Harare is still being determined, planning can now move forward to ensure a successful General Conference.

Harare was selected because it falls within a city with a strong United Methodist Church presence; represents the continent with the largest United Methodist membership; offers greater visa access from other African countries; and was originally the 2028 location prior to postponement changes.

The decision reflects the Commission's attention to concerns about travel, safety and inclusion that have been central since its first meeting. It is especially poignant because the 2028 event will host the denomination's largest representation of delegates living outside the United States in the UMC's history.

Production and technology will be paramount to the dual-location General Conference. Initial conversations have already begun with United Methodist Communications to ensure the event has all necessary considerations and safeguards in place.

Looking ahead, the commission also reaffirmed its commitment to host the next General Conference at a site outside of the United States.

Delegate expenses were also discussed. It was determined that, at least at the Minneapolis site, lunch will be provided along with a $30 per diem to help supplement additional meals. Meal arrangements for those at the Harare site are yet to be determined as the concurrent schedule is worked out and venue contracts are negotiated.

The official General Conference website at https://umcgc.org will highlight updates as they are available.

General Conference is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church, which meets once every four years.



An all-ages music ministry

The Men's Choir at Mount Zion UMC, Kingstree, is an intergenerational ministry. Members of the choir range from age 17 and older. They contribute musical selections each month during the 11 a.m. Sunday worship service under the musical direction of Kendrick Huggins, church minister of music, and Burnett Pendergrass, UMM president.

Photo courtesy Toni Strawther





From the Archives
by Dr. Phillip Stone

Bishop Clare Purcell, the unifying bishop

Bishop Clare Purcell served in South Carolina for six years in the late 1930s and mid-1940s, presiding over our conferences during a time of transitions of several kinds.

Born in Columbia, Alabama, in 1884, Purcell studied at Birmingham-Southern and then Vanderbilt's Divinity School before joining the North Alabama Conference in 1908. The young minister served a series of appointments before World War I, when he became the chaplain of the 131st Infantry. Following the war, he served in Talladega and Tuscaloosa, then was the presiding elder of the Jasper District. From 1931 to 1938 he served in Gadsden, Alabama. He was elected as a clergy delegate to the General Conference in 1930 and again in 1934 and 1938.

At the 1938 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which met in Birmingham, Purcell was elected a bishop. He was the third person elected and was chosen on the second ballot. He was assigned to the Charlotte Area, which for 1939 and 1940 included the South Carolina and Upper South Carolina conferences. One observer noted that a speech Purcell made supporting Methodist unification, coming from a deep South minister, had helped win him support.

He would spend a lot of his time as a bishop bringing about different types of unifications.

The *Advocate* reported on a September 1938 address Bishop Purcell gave to more than 1,000 Spartanburg District Methodists at Bethel, Spartanburg. He answered questions and argued that unification would promote efficiency and help the church spread its message more effectively. The bishop sought to calm some of the concerns that White southerners had about unification, which did in fact perpetuate segregation in the church.

Purcell's report to the first Jurisdictional Conference was quite positive, but the one slight discordant note was when he observed some tension in South Carolina from those who had opposed Methodist union. He explained he had 10 or 12 churches where some people had to be "enjoined ... from interference with our work."

From 1940 to 1943, Purcell's area did not include South Carolina, but from 1944-1947, it did. In his second stint, Bishop Purcell had to work on reunifying the South Carolina and upper South Carolina conferences. After the 1947 sessions, the General Conference approved merging the conferences back into a single South Carolina Conference in 1948.

At the same time, the conference considered a plan to merge three senior colleges—Wofford, Columbia and Lander—onto one campus. In 1946, the two conferences requested Bishop Purcell appoint a joint committee to study the overall status of the state's Methodist colleges. Following the committee's recommendation, a joint session of the conferences rejected a plan to merge the colleges onto one campus, and subsequent sessions affirmed that. But, as Dr. Tom Norrell's dissertation on Wofford's history explains, after a confusing back and forth of motions and amendments, the conference secretary later argued the conferences had voted to merge the Wofford and Columbia boards and have one president for both colleges. This arrangement lasted about two years. And Norrell argues that Bishop Purcell was the driving force behind this merger, for reasons that are still somewhat opaque.

By the time this attempted merger ended, Purcell had returned to Alabama, where he was the bishop in Birmingham for eight more years.

Stone is archivist for the South Carolina Conference and Wofford College.

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Historical Society
by Dr. Roger M. Gramling

The sacraments and ordination: Their role in the organization of American Methodism

Methodism began as an unauthorized "movement" with the Church of England. Methodism first became a church, a separate ecclesiastical organization, in America. By 1784, the need for ordained clergy to serve the Methodists in America was well beyond critical. There simply were none left. As a result of the American Revolution, clergy of the Church of England had returned to England. John Wesley had held firm to his position that only "ordained clergy" could administer the sacraments.

For years, Wesley had used unordained laymen as his preachers. Even Francis Asbury, who came to America in 1771 and who remained Wesley's faithful and loyal representative throughout the difficulties of the American Revolution, was not ordained. Wesley asked several of the bishops of the Church of England to ordain some of his preachers for service in America. They refused to do so.

Caught between the urgent needs of the Methodists in America and the inflexible order of his own Church of England, Wesley took a major step by ordaining two of his best preachers for American service and supporting this decision by what he "reasoned" a logical theory. Namely, in the New Testament, the word for elder or priest, "presbyteros," and the word for overseer or bishop, "episcopos," were at times used for the same office in the early church. Thus, as a "presbyter" or "elder" in the Church of England, in succession with the presbyters of the early church, he reasoned that he was a "bishop" in the New Testament sense. And, as such, he had the right to ordain.

On Sept. 1, 1784, John Wesley ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey for service in America. Joining in the ordinations were Thomas Coke and James Creighton, "presbyters" or "elders" like Wesley in the Church of England.

But Wesley went even further. He sensed that the American Methodists would move in the direction of an independent church and desired that it have an episcopal form of government like the Church of England with leadership of his choosing to "oversee" the work in America and thus desired to influence the direction of the new church. Wesley, assisted by Creighton and Whatcoat, "set apart" Thomas Coke by the "laying on of hands" to be a "General Superintendent" over the work in America. Wesley then directed Coke, upon arrival in America, to similarly "set apart" Francis Asbury as a joint General Superintendent with Coke.

In this "setting apart" of Coke, Wesley used the order for ordaining a bishop from the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. However, if the "Superintendency" is no more than the office of an elder with administrative and supervisory authority, why should one "lay hands on" someone who was already an elder? Thus Wesley introduced the problem, albeit innocently, which remains an issue in American Methodism to this day. Is the "General Superintendency"—or "Episcopacy," as it soon came to be called—an "office" or is it an "order" in the older Catholic sense of being "ordained" to a separate and distinct theological order in the life of the church?

As for other ordinations, it has been recorded that John Wesley went on to "ordain" 22 more preachers for service to Methodist Societies in other places but only three for service in England. Such is evidence of his continued close ties to the Church of England and his desire to do only that which was necessary without too major a break with the established order of his own church.

While the validity of the ordinations by John Wesley has been argued over the years, no defense need be made for Wesley. The results of his labors, as attested to by the existence today of a worldwide Methodist Community, provide more than sufficient and convincing proof that the work of John Wesley was clearly "of God," even in instances when it was "technically" imperfect.

Gramling serves as secretary-treasurer of the Conference Historical Society.



A warm welcome

Manning UMC, Manning, held a Witness Wednesday Welcome recently for their new pastor, the Rev. Bill McCown and his family.

Photo by Kelly Gottheiner

Cedar Grove: From a humble bush harbor to 226 years of faith, fellowship, service and ministry

ORANGEBURG—Cedar Grove United Methodist Church celebrated its 226th anniversary Oct. 3, remembering a history that began with worship beneath a shelter of branches and honoring the pastors, trustees, officers and faithful members who helped sustain the congregation across generations.

The anniversary celebration included "An Evening of Elegance" Banquet & Pageant at Felicity Seven Studio in Orangeburg. Rev. Harry Lee Brown, pastor of Cedar Grove, was crowned the 2026 Anniversary King, and Sister Willa Maynard, a faithful and dedicated member, was crowned the 2026 Anniversary Queen. Jade McCall Johnson and Andre' Deshawn Major Jr. were named Little Miss and Master Cedar Grove.

Cedar Grove traces its beginnings to 1800. Much of its earliest story was passed down through oral tradition, with additional information preserved in deeds, the cornerstone and other surviving records. The congregation was organized under the Rev. Jim Devine. Early members cut bushes to create a "Bush Harbor," a simple shelter where they gathered for worship. As men cleared a grove of cedar trees, the name Cedar Grove was chosen. After years of worship beneath the shelter, a church building was constructed, and Rev. Pope served as minister of the new church.

Early trustees included William Thompson, David Felder, Bill Brown, Willie Robinson, Sam Robinson, Peter Jones and Hoe Streeter. The present church structure was built in 1927. Trustees associated with that period included Roy L. Felder, Henry Stroman, James Bonaparte, Joseph Stroman Sr. and Mary Felder. Present-day trustees include Daniel Starkes, Carolyn Stroman, Larry Starks, Robert Carson and Galaine Isaac, who continue the tradition of faithful stewardship and service to Cedar Grove.

The church's history records a long succession of pastoral leadership. In addition to its founding ministers, it names the Revs. Cooper, Robinson, Marcus, Miller, Amaker, Smith, L. C. Gregg, W. B. Dubose, Fulton Edwards, Eugene McCants, J. M. Mitchell, M. D. McCollum, W. A. Smith, McKay, Luonne Rouse, Ellie Hue Jones, Lorenzo Moses, J. Jacob Sanders, George K. Walker, Joseph Abram Jr., Kay Adams Best and Frank James. Each pastor contributed to Cedar Grove's spiritual journey and helped prepare the way for the ministry the congregation continues today.

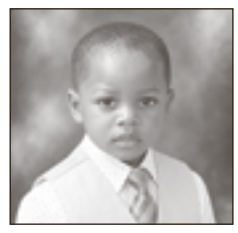
From June 2002 through 2015, Best and James provided pastoral leadership. During this period, the church's history records full payment of its apportionments, the confirmation of five young people in April 2003, the joining of the Senior and Gospel Choirs to form the Cedar Grove Mass Choir in 2003, front bathroom renovations, the Hanging of the Greens, joint Charge Joy Night services, baptism and dedication, door-to-door ministry and revival.

Cedar Grove's relationship with neighboring congregations also developed over time. In the 1920s, it belonged to the Rowesville Charge with Forest Chapel, Prospect and Central churches. In the mid-1970s, Cedar Grove became part of the Orangeburg Parish with Forest Chapel and St. Stephens. That arrangement continued until 2015. On June 24, 2015, following a conference change, Cedar Grove and Forest Chapel became the Cedar Grove–Forest Chapel Charge, and the Rev. Harry Lee Brown began serving as pastor.



Above, the Rev. Harry Lee Brown, pastor of Cedar Grove UMC, was crowned the 2026 Anniversary King, and Sister Willa Maynard, a faithful and dedicated member of Cedar Grove, was crowned the 2026 Anniversary Queen. Below, Jade McCall Johnson and Andre' Deshawn Major Jr. were named Little Miss and Master Cedar Grove.





Brown's leadership marked an important chapter in Cedar Grove's history. After 215 years, Cedar Grove began holding worship services and Sunday school every Sunday. The church's history describes Brown as a God-fearing leader who continued to seek God's direction as he shepherded the congregation. Under his leadership, the fellowship hall was renovated, the churches participated in joint vacation Bible school, and fourth Sundays included ministry to sick and shut-in members. They now have telephone conference calls and Facebook, where sick and shut in members can experience worship service from home.

The 226th anniversary also celebrated the members who generously supported the anniversary through the pageant. Contestants were Sister Willa Maynard, Merilyn Palmer, Ta'Miracle Heyward, Michael Bowman, Daniel Starkes and Rev. Harry Lee Brown. Their participation, dedication and support helped make "An Evening of Elegance" a memorable part of Cedar Grove's 226th anniversary celebration.

Special recognition is extended to the Rev. Stevie Palmer, who served as presider and did an outstanding job guiding the celebration. Candace Maynard and Catherine Major served as Mistresses of Ceremony and helped make the evening elegant, enjoyable and memorable.

Obituaries.

James Ralph Allen

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—James Ralph Allen, former chancellor of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, died Oct. 24, 2026.

Funeral services were held Nov. 7 at Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, Tennessee.

Mr. Allen is survived by his wife, Debra, two daughters and three stepdaughters.

Joe Darsey Durham



Durham

PICKENS—The Rev. Joe Darsey Durham, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church currently serving the Mount Bethel-Porter's Chapel charge and husband to the Rev. Brenda Ward Durham, died Oct. 29, 2026.

Prior to his retirement in 2013, Rev. Durham served the Fairview-St. Paul and Bethel-Rehumah charges. Following his retirement, he served the Gilgal-Shiloh, Grace Pelzer, Mount Bethel-Porter's Chapel charges.

A memorial service was held Nov. 10 at Grace UMC.

Memorials may be made to Mount Bethel UMC, 126 Mount Bethel Church Road, Sunset, SC 29685; to Porter's Chapel UMC, 151 E. Preston McDaniel Road, Pickens, SC 29671; or to the South Carolina Annual Conference, 4908 Colonial Drive, Columbia, SC 29203.

Rev. Durham is survived by his wife, two daughters and son.

John Henry Elliott



Elliott

ST. GEORGE—The Rev. John Henry Elliott, a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, died Oct. 25, 2026.

Prior to his retirement in 2011, Rev. Elliott served the Greenwood-Laurens, Greenwood-McCormick, Macedonia, Macedonia-Norway, New Light, Columbia-Bluff Road, Rock Hill Cooperative Parish and St. George Parish charges.

Funeral services were held Oct. 31 at St. Mark UMC.

Rev. Elliott is survived by his wife, Willa Dean Elliott.

Sue Lee Lineberger Huss

DENVER—Sue Lee Lineberger Huss, mother of the Rev. Eddie Huss Jr., died Oct. 18, 2026. Rev. Huss is the minister of music at Shandon United Methodist Church, Columbia.

Funeral services were held Oct. 21 at Pisgah Methodist Church, Lincolnton, North Carolina, with burial in Forest Lawn Cemetery, Lincolnton.

Memorials may be made to Christian Ministry of Lincoln County, P.O. Box 423, Lincolnton, NC 28092; or to Pisgah Methodist Church, 2582 Gastonia Highway, Lincolnton, NC 28092.

Mrs. Huss is survived by her three sons.

Robert Louis Jackson

CLOVER—Robert Louis Jackson, husband of the Rev. Cassandra Pasley Jackson, died Oct. 18, 2026. Rev. Jackson is a retired member of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Funeral services were held Oct. 23 at First UMC with burial with military honors in Green Pond UMC Cemetery.

Mr. Jackson is survived by his wife, two sons and daughter.

Susan Tindal Justus

GASTON—Susan Tindal Justus, sister of the Rev. Sharon Long, died Nov. 1, 2026. Rev. Long is the pastor of Mill Creek United Methodist Church, Columbia.

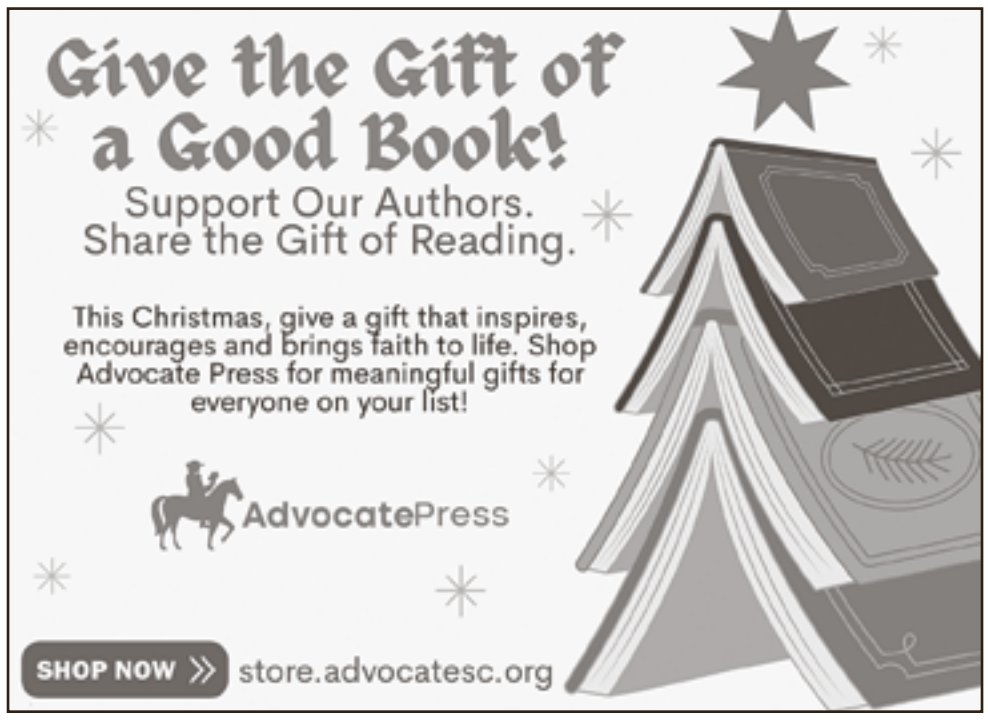
Funeral services were held Nov. 7 at Mill City Church of Cayce.

Mrs. Justus is survived by her husband, Paul, daughter and son.

Tonya Denise White

ESTILL—Tonya Denise White, sister of the Rev. Ellis White, died Nov. 2, 2026. Rev. White is the pastor of Wesley United Methodist Church, Columbia.

Funeral services were held Nov. 13 at St. John's UMC, Lynchburg.



Bible Study.



Adult Lessons
by the Rev. Chrisie Reeves-Pendergrass

About the Author

Reeves-Pendergrass is an elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church on family leave after serving in extension ministries in Hungary.

Light in a pitch-dark land

Dec. 6
A Great Light
Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 9:1-7
Background Scripture: Isaiah 9
Key Verse: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned (Isaiah 9:2).

It seems fitting that Advent takes place in the darkest time of year for those of us living in the northern hemisphere. We literally live in a pitch-dark land waiting for a great light.

Humans struggle without proper light, and places where less sunlight have higher caffeine intake and higher depression rates on average compared to locations with more sunlight. Sunlight isn't just a luxury but a necessity in in our lives.

Last winter I was living in Budapest, Hungary, which is significantly more northern than most of the United States. I was unprepared for just how short the days were in December, when the sun began to set around 3:30 p.m. Every day it felt odd to drive home in the literal dark from picking my child up from school. Even with all of the capital cities' streetlights, the lack of light began to feel draining. I found myself sleeping more, eating less healthily and feeling more pessimistic because of the lack of vitamin D. No amount of supplements helped near as much as the natural sunlight come springtime.

Isaiah proclaims to an oppressed and burdened Israel that the shadow and darkness of their situation was seen and understood by God. God likewise sees and understands the weight of sin and suffering in our world and lives. God knew that no substitute would suffice in healing the brokenness of our world and gave us not just a light, but a great light. God gave God's very self to restore hope, energy and joy to humanity.

Think of a time you were in the dark and stumbled into something. Would you have still hit the object if there was light?

How did you feel once the light was turned back on?

Dec. 13
Created Order
Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-9
Background Scripture: Isaiah 11
Key Verse: "The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion will feed together, and a little child will lead them. The cow and the bear will graze. Their young will lie down together, and a lion will eat straw like an ox" (Isaiah 11:6).

When I was in elementary school, my family took a trip to Yellowstone National Park.

One day we were driving through the park and ran into a traffic jam right in the middle of the wilderness. A family of bears was crossing near a road, and the park closed the road so that no one would spook the mama bear and cause her to attack in fear for her cubs. I had never seen a bear in real life and desperately wanted to get closer to see an adorable bear cub. I didn't understand why the rangers would let people get out of their vehicles to take pictures, but only from far away.

Now I understand that mother bears are deadly animals when protecting their young, and I'm shocked we were able to get as close as we could. The animal kingdom is violent, fierce, competitive and, most of all, dangerous.

It's with this in mind that Isaiah portrays the messiah as a king of justice, righteousness and peace.

Verse 6 paints a reality where predators and prey live together, not only in harmony but close enough to cuddle. The image is more than peace but affection. Isaiah proclaims that the messiah will not only restore the created order of an oppressed people but upend it entirely.

During this season, how is God giving you peace? What are ways or places that you still desire peace? How might you pray for a world in need of peace?

Dec. 20
God With Us
Lesson Scripture: Matthew 1:16-25
Background Text: Matthew 1
Key Verse: "Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, And they will call him, Emmanuel. (Emmanuel means 'God with us')." (Matthew 1:23).

When my son was a preschooler, we took him to Build-a-Bear for his birthday. He meticulously spent time picking a stuffed animal and choosing its clothes and accessories. He asked me to record a sound singing his lullaby that he could play at night, and we placed it in the stuffed dog. For years, the sound would help to soothe him if he awoke in the middle of the night—until one day, the battery began to fail and made a whirring noise instead of my voice. We went back to the store to get it fixed, but once the battery was removed, it stopped working entirely.

Of course, he began to cry, and eventually we chose to buy a new sound insert and I had to rerecord the song. Even older, the thought of not having the reminder of my presence was more than he could bear.

Emmanuel. The name is a simple statement that we are not alone. God's gracious response to our cries is to come ever closer to us. God came to be with us in both form and proximity. God did not simply appear on Earth but became truly human. Our God walks with us throughout life, knowing exactly what it means to walk on this very earth with this very frailty. God is not just for us, but with us.

What are ways we can be reminded of God's presence? What are ways we are called to serve and remind others of God's presence?

Dec. 27
Another Way
Lesson Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12
Background Text: Same
Key Verse: "Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another way" (v. 12).

As an avid baker, several years ago I had to learn how to make caramel for a specific recipe. Until then, I didn't realize that caramel is made purely from sugar. Sugar is placed in a saucepan and heated to 320 degrees Fahrenheit. The high heat melts the sugar molecules, the atoms begin to react and a new carbohydrate forms in its place. The color of the substance goes from white granules to brown aromatic liquid that hardens when cooled.

The magi set off on a long journey as intellectuals in search of new knowledge. The moment they see the star over the place Jesus is, they are filled with joy (v. 10). It only takes one look for them to fall down in worship and praise to the child (v. 11). The moment of worship changes the magi and their plans, and they go home another way. This is what real worship does for us. Like the sugar molecules changing forever, we are changed by seeing the face of God. We go home differently. Our hearts, minds and very lives are changed.

How do we order our lives and prepare for worship so that it is literally life-changing? Do we allow ourselves to be surprised by God in our daily lives in ways that cause use to spontaneously worship? If not, how might we adjust our lives to make more space to look for God's glory all around us?



Brown commissioned as an EarthKeeper
One South Carolina United pastor was among the 47 people the denomination's General Board of Global Ministries commissioned as an EarthKeeper to lead creation care projects in their communities. The Rev. J.T. Brown, pastor of Fair Lawn United Methodist Church in Columbia, was commissioned in the virtual service held Nov. 10. A UMC EarthKeeper is a lay or clergy member trained and commissioned through the United Methodist Church's General Board of Global Ministries and the United Methodist Committee on Relief to lead environmental sustainability and creation care projects in their local congregations and communities. To watch the commissioning, go to https://umcmission.org/story/2026-earthkeepers-virtual-commissioning-save-the-date.

Men N Ministry to host 'Living With Purpose' men's conference in Columbia Feb. 19–20

COLUMBIA—Men N Ministry will host its "Living With Purpose" men's conference on Friday and Saturday, Feb. 19–20, 2027, inviting men from across South Carolina to spend two days focused on faith, brotherhood and discovering what the organization calls "the calling God designed for you."

Built around the theme "Not just existing. Living on assignment," the event draws its foundation from Proverbs 19:21: "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."

The weekend opens Friday, Feb. 19, with a 10 a.m. golf tournament at The Spur at Northwoods. That evening at 6 p.m., attendees will gather for Cigars & Scriptures, an informal time of conversation and reflection.

The main conference takes place Saturday, Feb. 20, beginning at 8 a.m. at Journey United Methodist Church, 1151 Longreen Parkway in Columbia. The day will include worship, teaching and fellowship, followed by breakout sessions and lunch.

Organizers say the conference is designed to help men be equipped with practical teaching for real life, be encouraged through brotherhood, be empowered to discover their God-given purpose, and leave inspired, walking out stronger than they came in. The ministry's motto sums up the goal: "Men equipped. Men empowered. Men on assignment."

Admission is $75 and includes lunch. Registration is available at https://www.umcsc.org/men.

Happenings.

Event Calendar.

November
Native American Heritage Month

Nov. 26—Thanksgiving

Nov. 26—27th Annual Community Thanksgiving Dinner, Hudson's Seafood House on the Docks, Hilton Head Island, 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

Nov. 26—Annual Thanksgiving Buffet, Lakeside Terrace Hotel, Lake Junaluska. https://bit.ly/LJThanksgiving2026

Nov. 26-27—United Methodist Center closed

December
Dec. 4-6—The Living Christmas Story, Union UMC, Irmo, 6:30-9 p.m.

Dec. 5—Back to Bethlehem: A Journey of Faith, Philadelphia UMC, Fort Mill, 5-8 p.m.

Dec. 7—African American Clergy Women Christmas Gathering and Social, Francis Burns UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m. For information, contact Rev. Thessa Smith, tgsmith@umcsc.org; or Rev. Judith Knox, jaknow@umcsc.org.

Dec. 12-14—Creches Throughout the Ages and World Display, Washington Street UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. (Sat.), 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. (Sun.); 5:30-6:55 p.m. (Mon.)

Dec. 14—Clergy Connexion Monthly meeting, Trenholm Road UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. For information, email Matt Alexander, mlalexander@umcsc.org, or Jad Taylor, jdtayloriii@umcsc.org

Dec. 14—Annual Sing-Along Messiah, Washington Street UMC, Columbia, 7 p.m.

Dec. 20—Longest Night Service, South Main Chapel and Mercy Center, Anderson, 6 p.m. https://southmainmercy.org

Dec. 24—Christmas Eve

Dec. 24-28—United Methodist Center closed

Dec. 25—Christmas Day

Dec. 26-Jan. 1—Kwanzaa

Dec. 31—New Year's Eve/Watch Night

January 2027
Jan. 1—New Year's Day

Jan. 1—United Methodist Center closed

Jan. 3—Epiphany Sunday

Jan. 6—Epiphany of the Lord

Jan. 10—Baptism of the Lord

Jan. 11— Clergy Connexion Monthly meeting, Trenholm Road UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. For information, email Matt Alexander, mlalexander@umcsc.org, or Jad Taylor, jdtayloriii@umcsc.org

Jan. 11—Orangeburg District Connectional Ministries meeting, St. Mark UMC, North, 6:30-8 p.m.

Jan. 17—Human Relations Day

Jan. 18—Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Jan. 18—United Methodist Center closed

Jan. 24—Ecumenical Sunday

Jan. 29-31—Revolution, DoubleTree Conference Center, Columbia. https://scmyp.org

February 2027
Feb. 2—Groundhog Day

Feb. 7—Transfiguration Sunday

Feb. 8— Clergy Connexion Monthly meeting, Trenholm Road UMC, Columbia, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. For information, mlalexander@umcsc.org or jdtayloriii@umcsc.org

Feb. 10—Ash Wednesday

Feb. 14—Valentine's Day

Feb. 14—Scouting Sunday



Crèches throughout the ages
Washington Street UMC, Columbia, is hosting its Crèches Throughout the Ages and World Display. All are invited to the Washington Street chapel to witness a display of crèches from all over the world. The event is open to all on Dec. 12 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Dec. 13 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., and Dec. 14 from 5:30-6:55 p.m. The church is located at 1401 Washington St., Columbia, SC 29201.



Children's Sermon
by the Rev. Meg Cook

Promises of Advent

Here are four Children's Sermons around the Advent candles. Each week includes a lesson and a prop. A variation: If you wanted to, you could give the children a battery tea light candle each week so that by the last Sunday they get their own tiny advent wreath by the end of the series. Wrap the base of each tea light in ribbon or color with a marker (three purple and one pink).

Week 1—Advent 1: Hope
Date: Sunday, Nov. 29
Scripture: Isaiah 64:1–9
Time frame: 3 minutes
Supplies: The Advent wreath and Hope candle; matches or lighter.
Children's Sermon: A Light of Hope
Do: Gather the children near the Advent wreath. Light (or point to if your congregation has already lit the candle) the Hope candle.
Say: Today we begin Advent! Advent is a special time when we get ready for Christmas. Each week we light a candle to remind us of God's promises.
Today we light the candle of Hope. Hope means looking forward to something good, even when we have to wait.
A long, long time ago, God's people were waiting and hoping for God to come close and help them. A prophet named Isaiah helped them remember God's promises.
Ask: Do you know what a prophet is? A prophet is someone who listens to God and shares God's message with people. Isaiah was a prophet who helped people keep hoping.
Say: We are waiting for Christmas, too. This little light reminds us God is with us, even while we wait.
Prayer (echo): Dear God, we love you. Thank you for hope. Help us trust your promises. Amen.

Week 2—Advent 2: Peace
Date: Sunday, Dec. 6
Scripture: Isaiah 40:1–11
Time frame: 3 minutes
Supplies: The Advent wreath and Peace candle; a stuffed lamb (or a picture of a lamb).
Children's Sermon: A Light of Peace
Do: Light the Peace candle. Hold up the stuffed lamb.
Ask: What helps a little lamb feel safe? (Pause.) Maybe being close to its shepherd!
Say: Isaiah was a prophet who shared God's messages with people. Last week we heard how Isaiah helped people remember to hope. This week Isaiah brings a message of comfort. Isaiah tells us that God cares for us like a shepherd cares for their sheep. A shepherd stays close, watches over the sheep, and carries the little ones when they need help.
Ask: Does it feel good to know someone is taking care of you?
Say: That's one way to think about God's peace. Peace isn't just being quiet. It's knowing we are loved, cared for and not alone.
This candle reminds us that God is close.
Prayer (echo): Dear God, we love you. Thank you for your peace. Help us care for one another. Amen.

Week 3—Advent 3: Joy
Date: Sunday, Dec. 13
Scripture: Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11
Time frame: 3 minutes
Supplies: The Advent wreath and Joy candle; a small flower or plant in dirt, or a picture.
Children's Sermon: A Light of Joy
Do: Light the Joy candle. Hold up the plant or flower.
Ask: What do you notice about this plant? (Pause.) Isn't it wonderful when something grows?
Say: Isaiah was a prophet who told people God's promises. This time, Isaiah shared a message of good news! God would help people who were hurting, care for people who were poor and bring new life. Isaiah described it like a garden growing again. Something beautiful where people thought nothing could grow!
Ask: What makes you happy? (Pause for answers.)
Say: Joy is more than being happy every minute. Joy is knowing that God loves us and is at work bringing good things into the world. And sometimes like a plant, joy can grow slowly.
This candle reminds us of God's joy!
Prayer (echo): Dear God, we love you. Thank you for joy. Help us share your love and good news. Amen.

Week 4—Advent 4: Love
Date: Sunday, Dec. 20
Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16
Time frame: 3 minutes
Supplies: The Advent wreath and Love candle; a few building blocks.
Children's Sermon: A Light of Love
Do: Light the Love candle. Use the blocks to begin building a little house.
Say: Look! I'm building a house. A long time ago, King David wanted to build a house for God. But God made David a promise—not about a building, but about a family and a kingdom that would last.
God promised to keep loving God's people. That promise became part of the story that leads us to Jesus!
Ask: What are some ways we know someone loves us? (Pause for answers.)
Say: God has been loving God's people for a very long time. And at Christmas, we celebrate God's love coming into the world through Jesus.
Today we light the candle of Love. And next week, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Christ Candle!
Prayer (echo): Dear God, we love you. Thank you for loving us. Thank you for Jesus. Help us share your love. Amen.

Cook pastors Grace United Methodist Church, Columbia, and is the author of the Herbert the Hippo series from the Advocate Press, which is available at https://www.advocatepress.org.

Classifieds.

Marketplace

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‘The Pumpkin Church’ raises $13K for youth, mission opportunities

For more than 25 years, the youth of St. Mark United Methodist Church in Greenwood have welcomed the fall season with a beloved tradition—selling pumpkins to raise funds for youth ministry. What began in the early 2000s as a fundraiser has grown into a cherished community tradition, earning St. Mark the nickname, “The Pumpkin Church.”

Each year, youth, pastors, parents and church members come together to unload two tractor-trailer loads of pumpkins. In addition to boxes and crates of smaller decorative pumpkins and gourds, the shipments total more than 5,000 large “porch” pumpkins.

It is a tremendous undertaking that brings generations of church members together in service and fellowship.

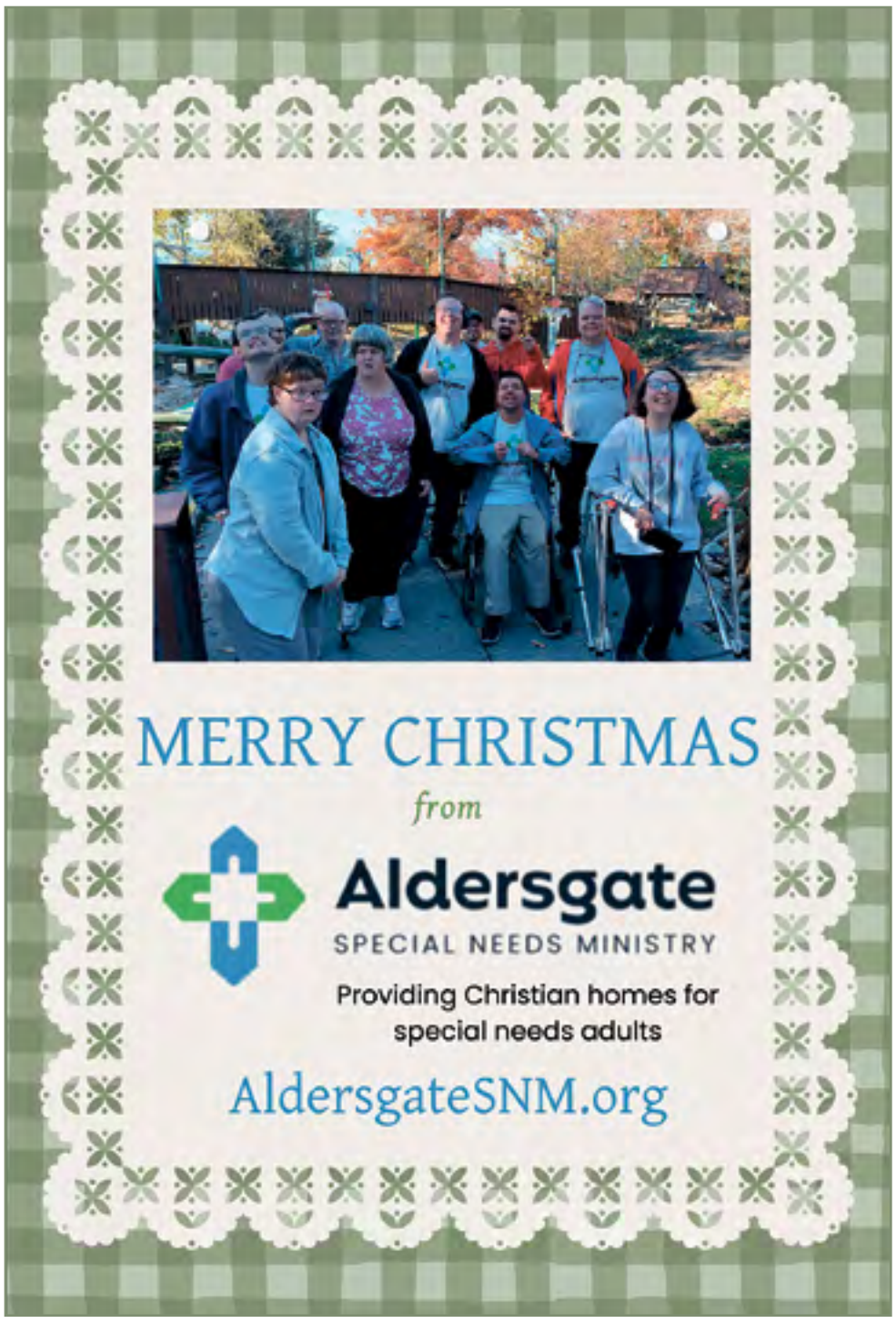
Open seven days a week throughout the season, the Pumpkin Patch is staffed by St. Mark’s youth under parental supervision. Over the years, it has become much more than a place to purchase pumpkins. It is a favorite fall destination for families, photographers, pet owners and visitors of all ages.

The patch also provides opportunities to connect with the youngest members of the community. Throughout the season, Julie McLaughlin and Jennifer Lybrand, St. Mark’s children and youth ministry staff, host special preschool story times, welcoming little ones to enjoy stories and the excitement of the pumpkin patch, while they share with the children that God is with them wherever they go. They do this with the help of Benny, their special scarecrow friend.

This year, the Pumpkin Patch raised approximately $13,000, with proceeds supporting youth transportation for trips and mission opportunities throughout the year. These funds help make it possible for students to grow in their faith, serve others and experience meaningful fellowship beyond the walls of the church.

While the pumpkins may be what first draws people to St. Mark each fall, the heart of this tradition is much bigger. It is about young people learning the value of hard work, serving together, building relationships and making a difference in their church and community.

After 25 years, St. Mark is proud to be known as “The Pumpkin Church”—a place where pumpkins bring people together and the proceeds help send young people out to serve others.



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