

## **SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – MARCH 5 EDITION**

### **Disaster Response: State of Emergency declared for three South Georgia counties**

Areas across the Southeast woke up Monday morning to the devastation caused by severe storms and tornadoes. The Weather Service logged at least three dozen tornado reports Sunday as twisters swept across Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina, but none were as severe as those in Lee County, Ala., where at least 24 persons were killed.

“Our hearts hurt, and we grieve with those affected,” said Bishop Lawson Bryan. “I have contacted Bishop David Graves, of the Alabama-West Florida Conference, to express our grief and our desire to be supportive in every way we can.”

In the South Georgia area, initial reports showed major damage in the counties of Grady, Harris, and Talbot Counties. Governor Brian Kemp declared a [State of Emergency](#) for these three counties to deploy state assistance in the wake of severe thunderstorms, excessive precipitation, and tornadoes in those areas. The Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency is actively monitoring the severe weather event and is coordinating with our state, local, federal, as well as public and private sector partners to position resources around the state. South Georgia Conference officials have been in contact with pastors in the areas.

“Our prayers go out to those impacted, for the families who have lost loved ones, and for our clergy in the connection who are ministering in this time of tragedy,” said Allison Lindsey, associate director of Connectional Ministries. “We are thankful for our connection as UMCOR and surrounding Conferences have reached out to check on each other and offer assistance. Please continue to be in prayer.”

Reminder: Please do not self-deploy into the impacted areas as time is needed for the local responders to assess and secure their communities making it safe for volunteers to assist.

“Right now is yet another opportunity for us to be Alive Together in Christ,” Bishop Bryan said. “Please pray for those whose lives have been impacted. And when the time is right, please be the hands and feet of Christ and mobilize to help those in the affected communities recover and rebuild their lives.”

More will be shared as the Conference Disaster Response Team receives and confirms accurate information.

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**2019 General Conference passes Traditional Plan**

The special called session of General Conference began with prayer and ended with protest.

After three years of preparation, planning, and prayer, the 864 clergy and lay delegates who gathered Feb. 23-26 at The Dome at America's Center in St. Louis, Mo. passed an amended Traditional Plan 438 to 384.

The Traditional Plan keeps the church's current language around sexuality and increases accountability by streamlining the processes to enforce penalties for violations of *The Book of Discipline* related to marriage and ordination of LGBTQI persons. The delegates also voted to ask the Judicial Council to review the constitutionality of the approved legislation. The Judicial Council, the church's top court, will next meet April 23-26 in Evanston, Ill.

"The General Conference has spoken once again," said Bill Hatcher, head of South Georgia's delegation and a member of Statesboro First United Methodist Church. "The present language of *The Book of Discipline* remains unchanged. Marriage is still defined by our church as a union between one man and one woman. ... While there is much division and heartbreak in the U.S. church, we must move forward and love and care for all of our members."

Bishop Lawson Bryan acknowledged that people within the denomination and conference have differing thoughts about the outcome: some are relieved, some are confused, and others are grieving.

But, he said, no matter the votes or decisions made at General Conference, the South Georgia Conference is still – and always will be – one that loves and welcomes all God's children.

"This is the time to move from focusing on plans to truly focusing on people," he said in a [video](#) immediately following General Conference's conclusion.

"Whatever you are feeling right now, there is a place for you in the South Georgia Conference. Move toward those around you, let them know you care for them, and give them the opportunity to care for you."

In addition to passing the Traditional Plan, delegates also approved two Wespeth pension petitions and a disaffiliation, or an "exit plan," petition, via a minority report.

The pension petitions state that churches that decide to leave the denomination must pay their fair share of pension liability and that exiting clergy may retain their pension but it is converted to limit further liability to the conference.

The disaffiliation plan, if ruled constitutional by the Judicial Council, would allow for local churches to exit with their property and assets if two-thirds of the members vote to do so and if they pay one year's worth of apportionments and they care for pension liabilities.

To help churches move forward in the days following General Conference, Bishop Bryan shared the following "next steps":

Care for One Another

First, let us take time to care for each other. Since 2016 we have prayed, studied, held district meetings, and taken many other actions to consider the various Way Forward plans that were proposed. After three years, it is understandable that many of us may feel somewhat drained. Some are feeling relieved that it is over and a decision has been made. Others may be a bit confused and need time to reflect on the outcome. And there will be others who were hoping for another of the plans to be approved and therefore are experiencing grief over the outcome. This is the time to move from focusing on plans to truly focusing on people. Whatever you are feeling right now, there is a place for you in the South Georgia Conference. Move toward those around you, let them know you care for them, and give them the opportunity to care for you.

### Be the Church

Second, make a conscious effort to be in worship this Sunday and the seven Sundays from March 10 to April 21 (Lent and Easter). Something happens to us when we are together with brothers and sisters in worship, when Jesus is present as he has promised to be, that we can't make happen any other way.

### Come Together on March 9

Finally, be present on [Saturday, March 9 at the UGA Conference Center in Tifton](#) for an informational gathering of people from all over the South Georgia Conference. This is a meeting for the entire South Georgia Conference. You don't have to be a delegate; it's open to everyone. We will hear from our delegation, and we will learn the specifics of how we will journey together for the 12 weeks leading up to Annual Conference.

*General Conference is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church and is the only voting body who can speak for the denomination. The next session will be held May 5-15, 2020. Eight delegates, half clergy and half laity, represented the South Conference at the 2019 gathering. [Click here for more coverage of the 2019 special called General Conference Session.](#)*

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## **General Conference is over, what happens now?**

### **A UMC.org feature by Joe Iovino\***

The commission did their work. A conference was held. Speeches were given. Delegates voted. Decisions were made. Now what?

In the days following [General Conference 2019](#), the desire to move ahead is alluring. Those happy with the decisions are ready for implementation. Those grieving the results are tempted to react rashly.

At times like these, however, Scripture encourages us to pause, listen and actively wait for the Spirit's guidance. As the hymn states, reflecting [Psalm 46:10](#), "Be still, my soul: your God will

undertake to guide the future, as in ages past” (“Be Still, My Soul” verse 2, [United Methodist Hymnal](#) 534).

## **Pause**

A good place to begin, is simply to pause.

During the Exodus, God led the people with a cloud. Some days the cloud of God’s presence moved and the people followed. Other days, the cloud did not move and neither did the Israelites. “At the Lord’s command, the Israelites would march,” the Bible tells us, “and at the Lord’s command they would camp” ([Numbers 9:18 CEB](#)).

That may seem simple enough, but the author of Numbers helps us understand this wasn’t always as easy as it sounds.

“Sometimes the cloud would be over the dwelling for a number of days,” Scripture continues, “so they would camp at the Lord’s command, marching again only at the Lord’s command.”

Can you imagine? At this point in the story, the Israelites are a nation without a land. They’re camping in the Sinai Desert after fleeing Egypt where they were slaves. God has promised to lead them to a land of their own, but for days at a time God calls them to camp, to sit tight, to wait.

For those of us who are doers, these pauses are frustrating. Just think of the last time you were stuck in traffic, sitting at an airport terminal waiting for a delayed plane or placed on hold with a slow-moving government agency.

We can see the goal. We have some idea about which direction we need to go. Can’t we just get going?

## **Listen**

But this kind of waiting is different. It is an opportunity to listen to God, to hear that which we might miss in the noise of moving forward.

Scripture tells us the prophet Elijah learned that God isn’t always where we expect to find God. The Lord, he says, wasn’t in the strong wind, earthquake or fire. Instead, Elijah met God in “a sound. Thin. Quiet.” traditionally translated as “a still, small voice” ([1 Kings 19:12](#)).

Through the psalmist, God commands, “Be still, and know that I am God!” ([Psalm 46:10 NRSV](#)).

In the words of the prophet Isaiah, God says, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength” ([Isaiah 30:15 NRSV](#)).

Gospel writer Mark writes, “Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer” before leading the disciples to the next place ([Mark 1:35-39 CEB](#)).

Peace, rest, trust and direction are given to those who pause, listen and wait.

### **Actively wait**

As United Methodists, we know that waiting for God is not something we do passively.

In his sermon, “[The Scripture Way of Salvation](#),” John Wesley writes about an active waiting. As we wait for God’s grace to [mature us to sanctification](#), Wesley advises Methodists to engage in ministry. The things we do in service to [our souls and our neighbors](#), what Wesley calls “works of piety” and “works of mercy” respectively, help prepare our hearts to hear God and follow the Spirit’s direction.

“This is the way wherein God hath appointed His children to wait for complete salvation,” he writes (Sec. III, ¶ 9-10).

In this season, maybe that is our call as the people called United Methodists. May we take time to pause, listen and actively wait for the Spirit’s leading.

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*This story was published February 27, 2019.*

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## **10 ideas for a more meaningful Ash Wednesday**

### **A UMC.org feature by Joe Iovino\***

[Ash Wednesday](#) is an important day in the church calendar. It marks the beginning of [Lent](#), a season of preparation for the [celebration of Easter](#).

This holy day is not a holiday from work, school, or most other obligations, so if we are not intentional in our observance it is likely to resemble any ordinary Wednesday.

To help us find ways to remember the holy in the midst of our routines—something we should strive for every day—we offer some ideas to consider.

### **1. Worship**

Many congregations offer worship services on Ash Wednesday. In a typical United Methodist service, expect times of prayer, singing, confession and pardon, a sermon, and the [imposition of ashes](#). The somber tone helps us reflect on our own mortality and the need for us to confess our sins.

If your congregation does not offer Ash Wednesday worship, [Find-A-Church](#) will help you locate United Methodist churches that do.

## 2. Serve

On Ash Wednesday, we remember that we are part of the entire human family, making it a great day to [serve others](#). See if you can [serve a meal](#) during your lunch hour, or take a personal day to volunteer with a local [Habitat for Humanity](#) project.

Your service, however, doesn't have to be with an organized group. You might instead choose to use your lunch hour to hand out sandwiches and sports drinks to the homeless in your city. You could also mow a neighbor's lawn, or shovel the snow from their driveway.

## 3. Give

We encourage you to [give to your congregation](#), the [United Methodist Committee on Relief](#), and other organizations that serve others. [Your generosity](#) can also be creative.

Leave your server an above-and-beyond tip—maybe a 100% gratuity. Buy the coffee of the person behind you in line. Put money in the instrument case of a street musician. Purchase a paper from the homeless woman on the corner. Find ways to bless others with that which God entrusts you.

## 4. Abstain/fast

“[Giving something up for Lent](#)” is a common practice for many Christians. Often, we give up a favorite food or try to kick a bad habit during Lent. Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, is when this begins, but [don't confine yourself](#) to food or habits.

Can you abstain from gossip or complaining for Ash Wednesday? What about defensive attitudes, fear, or anxiety? You probably won't be perfect at this, but being mindful of times when these attitudes begin to take hold of your day can lead you to prayer.

## 5. Pray your day

Rather than setting aside [special time for prayer](#), pray your day. Pray for the drivers of the vehicles and fellow mass transit passengers with whom you share your commute. Pray as you pass the hospital, police station, and government offices. Lift up the trash collector and the mail carrier. Pray as you write a letter, email, or Facebook post to an old friend. Offer sentence prayers throughout the day thanking God for your coworkers.

## 6. Make something

Some of us reflect and pray best when our hands are busy, making today a great day to [create something](#). Get back in the workshop and spend time cutting, sanding, and gluing. Sit at a piano and let the music flow. Take out the paints, glue, clay, and other supplies to create a work of art.

As you create, be mindful of our Creator who longs to be in relationship with you.

## 7. Be still

Others find meaning in stillness. Try a practice like [centering prayer](#) by lighting a candle and pausing before the presence of God. Take a yoga class—some churches and spiritual directors offer holy yoga. Enjoy a cup of coffee on your deck. Listen for the crackling wick, the wind, the birds, the voice of God.

### **8. Clean something**

Ash Wednesday is a good day to get a jump on your spring cleaning. Spend an hour with the junk drawer, that cabinet at work, or organizing the files on your hard drive.

As you remove things you no longer need and reorder those you do, be mindful of the ways God “cleans” us. The Bible tells us “As far as east is from west—that’s how far God has removed our sin from us” (Psalm 103:12, CEB). As we get things in order, we remember that Jesus gave his life so that we might be free from our sins and know new life.

### **9. Burn something**

When you finish cleaning, take some of the papers you no longer need to the fireplace, light them, and watch them burn to ashes.

The [ashes our pastors smudge on us](#) during Ash Wednesday worship come from the burning of last year’s Palm Sunday palms. They remind us of our mortality and call us to repentance—seeking God’s forgiveness for our sin, both the things we have and have not done.

The ashes you’ll generate in the fireplace are not the same, but can serve as a similar reminder that your sins are forgiven. As the smoke rises up the chimney, know your prayers and life in Christ are rising to God as well.

### **10. Forgive and seek forgiveness**

As we pray for God’s grace, we should also [seek forgiveness](#) from those we have wronged. Ash Wednesday is a great time to go to those you have hurt.

It is also a wonderful day to forgive another. Jesus taught us to pray, “Forgive us for the ways we have wronged you, just as we also forgive those who have wronged us” (Matthew 6:12 CEB). Maybe while you are burning those old papers, you might also burn a grudge. If appropriate, let the person know you forgive them. Remember, however, that forgiveness has much more to do about us than the one who offended us.

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*This story was first published on February 21, 2017.*



**Make plans to attend the March 9 Post-General Conference Information Session**

South Georgia United Methodists are invited and encouraged to attend a post-General Conference information session Saturday, March 9 from 1-4 p.m. at the UGA Tifton Campus Conference Center in Tifton.

An informational meeting – not a special session of the annual conference – the gathering is open to everyone in the South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church. Visit [www.sgaumc.org/march-9-meeting](http://www.sgaumc.org/march-9-meeting) for more information.

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## **Cantore comes to town for Conference Disaster Response event**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

A popular meme states, “It’s never a good sign when Jim Cantore comes to town.”

Cantore, a meteorologist and on-air personality for The Weather Channel, is a famous figure in hurricane reporting and is well-known for being in the middle of the worst weather.

But on April 27, South Georgia residents have nothing to fear from Cantore. Instead of reporting from the eye of a hurricane he’ll be the keynote speaker at the Conference Discipleship Teams’ “Witnessing Through The Storm” event.

“Based on our experiences these past several years with hurricanes, straight-line winds, tornadoes, and flooding, responding to natural disasters feels like it has become our ‘new normal,’” said Allison Lindsey, Associate Director of Connectional Ministries. “During these times, churches have a tremendous opportunity to be a witness in their communities, and this event is designed to equip both individuals and congregations to be prepared and explore what their niche can be in their communities and throughout the connection.”

“Witnessing Through The Storm,” set for Saturday, April 27 at Cordele First United Methodist Church, will be a day of exploring the many ways individuals and churches can be prepared in the event of a natural disaster and “be the church” in their communities and throughout the world. An all-day event, it begins at 10 a.m. and ends at 4 p.m.

“This will be a day of equipping, inspiring, building capacity and preparing for our future impact in disaster response ministry,” Lindsey said. “The Conference Outreach and Missions teams are organizing this event for those who are seeking to learn more and are also offering advanced training for those who have been engaged in response ministries.”

In addition to Cantore, the day’s other special guests include Cathy Earl, UMCOR’s Director of Disaster Response and U.S. Partner Relations, and Jenny Phillips, Global Ministries’ Creation Care/Sustainable Development Program Manager.

The Conference Disaster Response Team will be collecting UMCOR hygiene kits and school kits the day of the event. [Click here](#) for information and instructions on assembling these kits.

[Click here for more information about the “Witnessing Through The Storm” event.](#)

[REGISTER HERE](#)

[Click here to download a PDF promotional flyer](#)

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## **Called to Sacrifice**

**Spring Quarter: Discipleship and Mission**

**Unit 1: Call to Discipleship**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of March 10, 2019**

**By Dr. Hal Brady**

**Lesson Scriptures: Mark 1:16-20; Luke 14:25-33**

**Key Verse: Luke 14:27**

### **Lesson Aims**

1. Restate Jesus’ concept of discipleship.
2. Explain how a Christian is to evaluate commitments in light of the call of discipleship.

How many times have we heard or read stories about the percentage of people who claim to be Christians in various parts of the world? Usually, however, those surveys have no accompanying criteria to support the authenticity of such claims to be Christian. Evidence of practical Christian commitment such as prayer, bible reading, worship attendance, and/or Christian ministry is absent. Therefore, many people are counted as Christians merely through their own self-identification as such. A term often used to describe such people is “nominal Christians” – Christians in name only.

However, before we form an opinion related to this designation, we ought to consider what Jesus has to say about it in today’s scripture lessons.

The first of today’s two texts come from the beginning of Mark’s Gospel. First up is John the Baptist’s preaching the message that all must repent and be cleansed by God to prepare for the imminent arrival of God’s king. Next, Jesus appears for his baptism, and at that time he is identified by a voice from heaven as God’s kingly son. Following his triumph in the wilderness over the devil’s temptations, Jesus repeats John’s message of repentance, announcing that God’s promised reign is very near.

Now, there is probably nothing in Christian theology about which there is more disagreement among scholars than the meaning of the kingdom of God. But all agree that it was the central message of Jesus’ teaching.

Whatever else it may mean – gift, task, here and now, future – God’s kingdom is the reestablishment of his rule over all creation, especially over rebellious humanity. This idea is

clearly expressed in the Lord's Prayer in the words: "Your kingdom come, you will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Timothy Keller stated, "The good news of the kingdom of God is that the material world God created is going to be renewed so that it lasts forever. And when that happens you'll say, like Jewel the unicorn at the end of 'The Chronicles of Narnia,' 'I've come home at last! This is my country...this is the land I've been looking for all my life.'"

At any rate, Jesus connects his coming and ministry to the inauguration of God's kingdom. And this is a movement that will stretch the rule of God to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), finding its fulfillment when Jesus returns as King (Acts 1:11). It is out of this context that Jesus calls his first disciples.

### **Heed the Call** **Mark 1:16-20**

Beginning to speak publicly about the kingdom of God, Jesus abruptly selects 12 men to be his disciples. Mark records the first two of these encounters, where Jesus begins to call unsuspecting fishermen to be his disciples. Jesus is not going to be a lone prophet wandering in the desert but a leader whose task as Messiah is to create a community of followers.

Jesus' ministry begins and largely focuses on Galilee. This is the northern region of Israel's homeland that features as its geographical focus "the Sea of Galilee, which is a large freshwater lake.

Along that lake shoreline, Jesus sees two brothers working as fishermen. Since Peter and Andrew are casting their nets from shore, they are possibly too poor to own a boat. On the other hand, the Zebedees are more prosperous with a boat of their own and hired hands to help with the labor.

Jesus' invitation is blunt and brief. His challenge is to follow him as disciples, as learners follow their teacher. The custom of Jesus' time is that students of Jewish religion teachers actually live side by side with their teachers. That allows the students to observe the actions of the teacher and participate in "on-the-ministry" training. Jesus' invitation is to that kind of life.

One of the striking notes here is that Jesus calls these fishermen to "follow me." Prophets did not call people to follow themselves but to follow God (compare 1 King 19:19-21). The sages of Jesus' day never called people to follow them, only to learn Torah from them. However, Jesus' call to these fishermen was so dramatically overpowering that their lives were never the same again.

Near the end of his life, in a television interview, Karl Barth was asked, "Has your view of Christ changed over the years?" "Yes," replied the honest old theologian. "At the beginning I thought Christ was the prophet of the kingdom of God. Now I know that He is the kingdom." When Karl Barth met Christ, his life was changed and never the same again.

Another note here is that "Jesus calls" these fishermen. As I understand it, this is unique in Jewish tradition. Students chose rabbis, rabbis did not choose students. Those who wished to learn sought out a rabbi for permission to study with him. But Mark is showing us that Jesus has

a different type of authority than other rabbis. Important! Our relationship with Jesus depends upon his call to us.

When Jesus says to Simon and Andrew, “Come, follow me,” at once they leave their vocation as fishermen and follow him. Keep in mind that fishing was a major industry on the Sea of Galilee. It was hard work, but it provided a reliable income for hundreds of families in a place and time when life as an overwhelming struggle for most. To simply walk away from the fishing profession was unheard of. But there was Jesus call to Simon and Andrew.

When Jesus calls James and John, they leave behind their father and friends right there in the boat. From reading the rest of the Gospels, we know that those men did fish again and they continued to relate to their parents. But what Jesus is saying is still disruptive. In traditional cultures, you get your identity from your family, so when Jesus says, “I want priority over your family,” that’s dramatic. Or when Jesus says, “I want priority over your career,” that is also dramatic. Jesus is saying, “Loving me, learning from me, acting like me and serving me must become the passionate priority of your life. Everything else comes second.” Certainly, we see here that there is a cost to following Jesus and living as his disciples.

Peter, Andrew, James and John’s responses are as abrupt as Jesus’ invitation. They abandon their trade, their way of life and means of survival as well as their families, and follow Jesus. Without doubt, their lives will never be the same again. But their lives will not be less, but more than before.

Scholars point out that these four fishermen show their repentance, their desire “to turn,” by dropping everything to heed Jesus’ call. And their response is more than just a matter of an internal transformation; they turn into something that they are not now, from fishermen to fishers of men.

So Jesus’ invitation to become disciples is an invitation to follow him and to work to extend God’s kingdom. The prospect of fishing “for people” sets Jesus apart from other teachers. Since these fishermen used nets (not rods) and fishing lines with hooks, we can see Jesus’ image is one of gathering. The prophet Jeremiah used this same image of fishermen to promise God would regather his scattered people after Judah’s exile (Jeremiah 16:16).

Now, these four fishermen are not chosen because they are choice. Mark will emphasize that Peter will argue with Jesus (Mark 8:31-33) and even deny him (14:66-72). James and John ask to sit in the place of privilege when Jesus is enthroned, failing to understand that Jesus is about to die (10:35-45). Truth is, all 12 of the disciples or later designated “apostles” will fail Jesus.

But even so, Jesus will invite them back into his company at the resurrection. He will commission them again as his messengers (Matthew 28:18-20). As powerful as these disciples’ response is, God’s grace is even more powerful.

**Count the Cost**  
**Luke 14:25-33**

When Jesus spoke the words of our second text, from Luke's Gospel, he was on his final trip to Jerusalem, which would result in death on the cross (Luke 9:22,44). He had tried to explain it to his disciples, but they had failed to understand (9:45).

The crowds that were with Jesus thought he was on his way to an empire. That is why he addressed them as he did. He tried his best to explain to them that the person who would follow Him was not on the way to worldly power and glory. Rather, the person who would follow Him must be ready for a loyalty that would sacrifice the dearest things in life, and for a suffering that could be similar to the agony of a man on a cross.

Jesus begins his conversation about the real nature of the kingdom of God by saying, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brother and sister – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be my disciple. As we are, Jesus begins with a list of family relationships that people cherish most. These are not merely valued by his audience. They were regarded as sacred and demanded by God's law. Added to this list, is one's own life, one's very existence. Yet, Jesus says that to be this disciple – one who follows him and learns from him how to live the godly life – one must hate all.

So, why does Jesus talk about hating? In other places we are not even allowed to hate our enemies. As Timothy Keller points out, Jesus is not calling us to hate "actively," he's calling us to hate "comparatively." Jesus says, "I want you to follow me so fully, so intensely, so enduringly that all other attachments in your life look like hate by comparison." If Jesus calls you to follow him, he must be the goal. As important as our other relationships are, Jesus is even more important.

However, disciples learn that following Jesus does not diminish love for others. Rather, it increases it. The irony of Jesus' instruction is that only by putting Him in unchallenged first place does one learn to love faithfully those most cherished.

The key verse of the lesson is verse 27 where Jesus says, "whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

The Roman Empire uses death by crucifixion as a way of asserting its absolute power over its subjects. So anyone carrying a cross is marked as a defeated enemy of Rome, about to feel the full effect of Roman wrath.

On the other hand, Jesus uses the image of the cross-bearing because of his own impending death by crucifixion. But his cross will not mean defeat. By giving his life willingly, surrendering to his enemies and letting them do their worst, Jesus will pay sin's price. In what is known today as "the substitutionary atonement," Jesus will give his worthy life on behalf of the unworthy.

Consequently, those who follow Jesus as disciples do so to join him in the work of God's kingdom, establishing God's reign in the world. And as they do, they must carry out that work as Jesus has modeled: by giving themselves sacrificially in service to others (Luke 9:23). Then, they, like Jesus, must trust God to provide and vindicate. The full fruit of their labor will be seen only at the resurrection from the dead.

Now, it is a Christian's first duty to count the cost of following Jesus. The tower which the man was going to build was most likely a vineyard tower. Vineyards were often equipped with towers from which to watch for thieves who might steal the harvest. An unfinished tower building would be quite humiliating. Therefore, a careful accounting would be required to be sure one has sufficient resources to complete the project.

I'm reminded here of the introduction to our marriage ceremony when the minister says, "It is therefore not to be entered into unadvisedly, but reverently, discreetly, and in the fear of God." The bride and groom are to count the cost of what they are about.

So Jesus urges his followers to listen carefully to his teaching, to understand the cost that he will pay and that they in turn will pay.

Jesus now provides a second comparison about assessing costs. In this illustration, a king faces a battle against an adversary with an army double the size of his own. Can the king with the small army prevail?

A proper assessment of the situation suggests that there is only one possible course of action. And verse 32 is that course. The outnumbered king has only one choice. He cannot take the risk of battle. Therefore, he can only send his representatives to meet his adversary "a long way off," way before their armies meet to pursue peace on unfavorable terms. And, of course, the choice is humiliating, but far better than defeat and death.

Like a person building a tower, they must understand the true cost of following Jesus. And, like a king facing an army of overwhelming force, they must be prepared to pay a cost that seems like defeat, but is in fact the way to life.

Some think of the word "Christian" to be a term for those who confess Christ, while the word "disciple" is reserved for those seriously committed to following him. As we are reminded, the New Testament knows no such distinction. To confess Christ as Lord demands a counting of the cost of that confession. The cost is everything, but payoff is participation in the eternal, victorious rule of God.

The late Sam Shoemaker, dynamic Episcopal priest, put it into perspective when he stated, "total commitment is giving as much as we can, to as much of Christ as we can understand, day by day."

There, if we are daunted by the high cost of following Christ, let us remember that we are not left to fulfill those costs alone. The One who has promised "to be with us always," will walk the steep road with us every step and will be there at the end to meet us.

### **Action Plan**

1. In what ways might the Lord call you to minister for Him in the week ahead?
2. What struggles might you have to undergo in order to "hate" your family in the way Jesus intends that word to be taken?
3. How will a person know when he or she has given up everything to follow Christ?

Information in this lesson was drawn from the following sources:

“2018-2019 Standard Lesson NIV Commentary,” Uniform Series “International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching,” pages 241-248

“The NIV Application Commentary, Mark” by David Gariand, pages 67-70

“King’s Cross” by Timothy Keller, pages 14-25

“The Gospel of Luke Commentary” by William Barclay, pages 202-204

*Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries ([halbradyministries.com](http://halbradyministries.com)).*

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## **Called to Return**

### **Spring Quarter: Discipleship and Mission**

#### **Unit 1: Call to Discipleship**

#### **Sunday school lesson for the week of March 17, 2019**

**By Dr. Hal Brady**

**Lesson Scriptures: Luke 15:11-24**

**Key Verses: Luke 15:22, 24**

#### **Lesson Aims**

3. Recall the details of the parable of the prodigal son.
4. Interpret the parable as illustrating God’s response to the repentant sinner.

Not long ago, I was talking with a friend about the difficulty of preaching and teaching on this beloved but familiar parable before us today. How can I help people really understand its significance? How can I put it in a fresh and meaningful way so that people will hear it? In some respects, this essential story of Jesus is just too familiar. And if “familiarity” doesn’t breed contempt, at least it breeds the possibility of monotony. But my friend made me feel immeasurably better. He said that no matter how many times the parable of the prodigal son is preached or taught it is heard ever fresh. And I know my friend is correct.

This parable before us today is the very heart of the gospel, and familiarity will not dim its exquisite beauty. No wonder people say this is the greatest short story in the history of the world. This parable, and the other parables in Luke Chapter 15, all have the same theme: it is concern for the lost coin, a lost sheep, and a lost son.

Why was this story of the lost son told? It was told because some of the most respectable people of the day (the Pharisees and teachers of the law) became quite concerned with the company Jesus kept. Jesus was surrounded by publicans (tax collectors), hated in his time as collaborators

with the oppressive Roman Empire. Sinners of various types flocked to him. As you can imagine, none of this sat well with the religious leaders opposed to Jesus. Therefore, these religious leaders grumbled about his association with such people, and especially about his eating with them. You see, as he ate with these tax collectors and sinners, he was breaking down the social barriers of his day. So, Jesus told this story to silence his critics.

Here, Jesus is defending his right to associate with sinners for the sake of the gospel. In fact, the gospel is for sinners and Jesus' mission fits his message.

### **The Assertion of Self-Will Luke 15:11-16**

Home was problematic for him; its freedom carried restraints. This younger son craved a freedom without restraints. To be sure, there were enticing worlds out there beyond the disciplines of home. Life beckoned.

The prodigal son said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." Now, Jesus' audience knows that the oldest son in a family has privileges and responsibilities that other sons do not have (Genesis 25:31). One privilege is to receive a double share of the estate (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). In this case, the younger son would receive one third of his father's holdings and the oldest son two-thirds.

At this juncture, however, the younger son wants to "cash out." Of course, such distribution is always made at the father's death. But this request is different! To ask for one's inheritance before the father's death is to say to one's father, "I want you to treat me as if you were dead."

An angry response would certainly be understandable! But the father in the story simply makes provision for the request. Is he being unwise in doing so (see Proverbs 20:21)?

So the father makes no attempt to hold his younger son back. How could he? Home would not be home to such stubborn alien will. The younger son must first find himself. Consequently, the father divides each son his rightful share. The father, granting his son's request, pictures a father who is letting a sinner go his own way.

What was feared takes place! This younger son loses no time turning his share of the estate into cash and putting his plan into action. For the audience of Jesus' day, this is much more than a long-distance move in a modern sense. This son is abandoning not only his family, but also the Promised Land and God's covenant. Having been born into an Israelite family, he now abandons that identity in favor of something else.

As he lives in a "distant country," the younger son has no concern for moral boundaries or good judgment. The result is that he wastes the father's legacy. What could have given the son a start on an independent life later is now dissipated even while his father lives.

It is this 13<sup>th</sup> verse that also gives the story its familiar name: the parable of the prodigal son. While the word "prodigal" is often associated with the son's decision to rebel against parental oversight and leave home prematurely, the word actually means "recklessly wasteful of one's property or means."

It is reported that when Napoleon drove his armies across Europe and penetrated Russia, he kept a wide path of pillage and conflagration. Years later the route of his army could still be followed and remnants of the waste of war could still be seen. Pieces of cannon, broken spokes of wheels, abandoned camp sites, also spoke one word – waste!

It is such a picture of sin that we now get as we follow the prodigal into the far country. In quest for meaning for his life, his self-will, he missed it completely.

Thus, this younger son squanders his fortune in a distant land. He has grown up in a prosperous household. But now, by his own foolhardy actions, he is estranged from his family and far from his homeland. A famine, however, presents a predicament for him. He's hungry and needs something to eat, but there is no one to help him. This is something that the dire circumstances that sin produces.

To understand the prodigal's plight, Jesus introduces an element that is particularly troubling to Jewish people: the destitute man is hired to "feed pigs" – unclean animals (Leviticus 11:7; Deuteronomy 14:8). This indicates that the "citizen of that country" who hires the prodigal is Gentile. Consequently, it is virtually impossible to honor the Law of Moses in such context. Though the prodigal has forsaken family and country, the pigs remind the readers how far he has fallen (or jumped).

Sometimes we speak of those who make bad decisions as "hitting rock bottom." At this point, that's who the prodigal is. The assertion of self-will has done him in.

### **The Road to Self-Discovery Luke 15:17-19**

We are now at the turning point in the life of the prodigal son. "When he comes to his senses" – these are the words Jesus uses in the parable.

However, we make a mistake if we think that the discovery of self is easy to come-by. More than likely, this son struggled for months or even years battling his self-will. And from our own experience, we know that this battle is real and strenuous. The old saying states that "people who do what they like become the slaves of their likes." Simply stated, there is no easy road to self-discovery.

But, thank God, this younger son finds that road. At the bottom, he is forced to reevaluate his situation and solution. His previous life of abundance has clouded his judgment. His destitute straits, however, clarifies the picture. Gone is the self-deception and self-will that wanted this chaos for him and others in the first place.

Thus, in "coming to his senses," this prodigal recognizes that things have to change. He decides that he will be better off as a hired slave of his father than working on the edge of the earth alone. Reality sobers the young man and prompts him to a new course of action. Having acted out of self-will, he now recognizes his sin for what it was. So, he resolves to confess to his father, affirming that he has done wrong, and ask for status as a hired slave.

“To sin against heaven” is to sin against God. It is to violate God’s law and will. God is Father to his people, a generous, loving, forgiving Father who commands his people to show honor to their parents on earth (Exodus 2, 12). This young prodigal’s actions were sadly dishonoring.

In a similar way, abandonment of the covenant people to live as a pagan among idolaters (those who worship idols) is an affront. Jesus’ audience is undoubtedly realizing that the prodigal’s spiritual poverty is more critical than his physical poverty.

So the prodigal son was going to return home with a prepared speech of repentance, “I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like me of your hired men.” In his desperation, I imagine that young prodigal had rehearsed that speech a thousand times.

A couple of realities are staring him in the face. First there is a legal reality. Because he has already spent his share of the inheritance, his father’s obligation to recognize or acknowledge him as a son no longer exists. Second, this fact is underlined by the son’s callous disrespect for his father. The son has treated the father as if dead. In addition, the son cannot return the inheritance because it doesn’t exist anymore. The only hope is that his repentance will result in his father’s pity and hiring him as a servant. At long last, the prodigal son’s on the road to self-discovery.

Maybe, just maybe, this returning prodigal can expect a little pity from his father. Pity! Instead of pity, the father overwhelms him with grace.

### **The Spotlight Is On The Father (Luke 15:20-24)**

In reality, the father is the main actor in this parable. We should never take our eyes off of him. We should observe his actions and reactions. We should listen to him, feel his heartbreak and sense the depth of his pursuing love. The father in this story received a great compliment when it was said of him that “He acts like a mother.”

Back to the story! Becoming repentant, the son returns to face his father. The son’s repentance and return are necessary to be restored to his family, but will not be sufficient. It will be the father’s action that accomplishes the restoration.

“When he was still a long way off, his father saw him ... he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him” (15:20). This is love unexpected and extraordinary. Of course, the father’s reaction indicates that the son’s repentant presence is more than acceptable. Without having spoken, the prodigal son has already received more than he hoped for and clearly more than he deserved.

But then the son begins his prepared speech of repentance. “Father,” he says, “I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (15:21). However, before he can get to the next part where he says, “make me like one of your hired servants,” he is abruptly interrupted. “Quickly,” the father shouts to his servants, “Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet” (15:22).

“The best robe,” likely very costly, is a sign of son-ship. Such clothing is very costly in the ancient world. The “ring” is not just ornamental jewelry, but likely bears a seal for identifying legal documents in the family’s affairs. And “servants” commonly do not wear shoes, while family members do.

The fattened calf is an especially extravagant animal for slaughter, as the owner is foregoing the growth that the animal might attain and the offspring it might bear. This is provision for the most festive of celebrations. Because of his enduring, undeserved love, the father is holding back nothing to welcome his lost son back to the family.

Truth is, we might have expected the father to make some provision for the son to repay what he has taken. But the father offers not a word in that direction. Instead, the father gives generously. His forgiveness for the repentant son is graciously full and complete.

As far as the father is concerned, there is no more special occasion than when a prodigal son or daughter returns home. The dead is alive, the lost is found and there is indescribable joy. We are talking here about Grace – God’s Grace! We are talking about God receiving sinners.

An author named Ray Anderson has written a book called “The Gospel According to Judas.” The book is based on some words that Mr. Anderson saw in a men’s restroom in a restaurant in San Francisco. The words were written across the top of a mirror and this is what they said, “Judas, come home – all is forgiven!”

In this parable of the prodigal son, Jesus is telling us the story of every person who has ever turned away from God and squandered the blessings of his love and grace. True, God may not stop a person from turning to a sinful lifestyle. But even so, God, in his extravagant mercy and grace, is always ready to take back the repentant. God may watch in silence as we depart but he leaves the door wide open for our return.

Grace Happens! So says a notice on an office door. When it happens is unpredictable, often unexpected. How it happens is a mystery. Why it happens is because God’s love is unconditional and extravagant. Thank God we can come home again.

### **Action Plan**

4. How do class members define repentance and why do they think it is necessary?
5. What guardrails can a church put in place to help members who are in danger of becoming spiritual prodigals and rejecting Christianity?
6. What should churches do, if anything, regarding unrepentant backsliders whose sins are separating them from the heavenly father?

Information in this lesson were drawn from the following sources:

“2018-2019 Standard Lesson NIV Commentary,” Uniform Series “International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching,” pages 249-256

“The NIV Application Commentary, Luke” by Darrell Block, pages 411-416

“The Parables of Jesus,” George A. Buttrick, pages 188-194

“Sermons on the Prodigal Son,” Thomas A. Whiting, pages 37-43, 55-62, 90-97

“The Gospel of Luke,” William Barclay, pages 210-213

*Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries ([halbradyministries.com](http://halbradyministries.com)).*

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## **A Love Letter to The Methodist Movement**

### **GROWING IN GRACE**

**BEN GOSDEN**

Dear Methodist Movement,

How are you? It's been a pretty rough week for you. Truth is, it's been a pretty rough last 40 years. I'm writing because I don't think I stop enough to tell you thank you. I owe you a lot.

On a cold December Sunday in 1982, I was baptized into the church by Rev. Dick Reese. From that moment, through cold water and the mystery of God's grace, my life course was to be impacted by the Methodist Movement.

Sunday after Sunday I went to church growing up. I soaked up the knowledge that God loves me and that there's no height or depth or obstacle in heaven or on earth that can separate me from that love (Rom 8). I learned the Bible from you. I fell in love with Jesus and found new life in Him through the love and teaching you offered me. I was called into ministry as part of the baptismal identity you introduced to me. And I work daily trying to help others find and live into their baptismal calling.

I guess I should pause here, in case someone else reads this love letter, to clarify why I'm calling you by your original name, “Methodist Movement,” and not, “Methodist Church.” I'd like to think that on your best days, despite the insurmountable red tape created by overly legal procedures, you are still an active movement marked by a dogged pursuit of personal and social holiness, evangelical zeal, and grace that seeks to make space for everyone to respond to the demanding call to follow Jesus.

But, after weeks like this past week, where do we go from here?

I'm not entirely sure I know the answer to that question. I think we fail to do you proper justice by continuing to meet in that toxic, three-ring circus we call a General Conference. I think we fail you when we choose to favor winning sides instead of God's grace. We fail you when we choose to speak ill of brothers and sisters in Christ and fail to heed the rules you whisper time

and again into our angry hearts: “Do no harm ... Do good ... Stay in love with God by way of the means of grace.”

You deserve better than we gave you in St. Louis. You deserve better than our constant infighting. You deserve better than 40+ years of decline because we prioritize self-preservation, a bloated bureaucracy, and our own personal preferences over the Great Commission and Great Commandment Christ gave us, shaped by the distinctly Wesleyan flavor you taught us. You deserve better. And so does God.

We don't need the bishops or General Conference to give us a way forward. The way forward is as ancient and as life-changing as our faith itself – lay down your life ... take up your cross ... follow Jesus. Maybe if we can make that the purpose of our life together instead of all of the junk that seems to hold too much of our attention, you'll start to look like your old self again – vibrant, alive, innovative, and on the move again seeking to change hearts and lives through the power of Jesus Christ.

It's been a rough few years, but we're still here with you. And grace is still here too. I really hope we can do better together.

Gratefully Yours,

Ben

*The Rev. Ben Gosden is senior pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church in Savannah. He can be reached at [ben@trinity1848.org](mailto:ben@trinity1848.org).*

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## **Wesley and Indians**

### **JOHN WESLEY MOMENTS**

#### **DAVE HANSON**

The [Arthur J. Moore Methodist Museum](#) recently acquired a copy of “Gentleman’s Magazine” from May 1737 which contains a conversation John Wesley had with five Chickasaw Indians in Georgia. Some of the dialogue was as follows:

Q: Do you believe there is One above, who is over all?

A: We believe there are four Beloved Things above: the Clouds, the Sun, the Clear Sky, and he who lives in the Clear Sky.

Q: Do you believe there is but One who lives in the clear sky?

A: We believe there are two with him, three in all.

Q: Do you think He made the sun, and all the other beloved things?

A: We cannot tell; who hath seen?

Q: Do you think He made you?

A: We think He made all men at first out of the ground.

Q: Do you believe He loves you?

A: I don't know. I cannot see Him.

Q: But, has He not often saved your life?

A: Yes, He has, for I have had many bullets gone on this side and that side, but he would not let them hurt me. And these young men have had many bullets that went into them, but still they are alive.

Q: Then He can save you from your enemies now?

A: Yes, but who knows if He will have mercy? We have so many enemies now all round about us, that I think of nothing but death. And if I am to die, I shall die and I will die like a man. But if He will have me live, I shall live, tho' I have many enemies, He can destroy them all.

Q: How do you know that?

A: From what He has done. When our enemies came against us before, then the Beloved Clouds came for us, and after much rain, and sometimes hail has come upon them, and that on a very hot day, and I saw many French and Choctaws, and other Indians came against one of our towns, and the beloved ground made a noise under them, and the Beloved One in the air behind them. They were afraid, and all went away, and left their meat and drink, and guns. I tell no lie. These saw it too.

Wesley's dialogue continued. More later.

*The Rev. Dave Hanson is a retired pastor and John Wesley scholar.*

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## **Retired Clergy Birthdays – March 2019**

- 3/01 – Ralph Bailey: 9650 Lehigh Ave.; Savannah, GA 31406
- 3/01 – Buddy Whatley: 2153 Bold Springs Rd.; Ochlocknee, GA 31773
- 3/02 – William Whipple: 2247 Eastway Rd.; Decatur, GA 30033
- 3/02 – Gene Yates: 705 Curl Rd.; East Dublin, GA 31027
- 3/03 – Richard Bishop: 292 Timberwind Dr.; Byron, GA 31008
- 3/03 – Thomas Williams: 1072 Lee Rd. #292; Smith's Station, AL 36877
- 3/04 – Irie Cyree: 4402 Bridgewater Dr.; Phenix City, AL 36867
- 3/05 – Tim Paulk: 104 Lee Rd. 2153; Salem, AL 36874
- 3/06 – Ellison Whitt: 443 Lee Smith Rd.; Ellaville, GA 31806
- 3/08 – Jerry Lillard: 253 Paul Lockley Rd.; Lyons GA 30436
- 3/09 – Grover Bell: 333 E. 53rd St.; Savannah, GA 31405
- 3/15 – Brenda Iglehart: 316 Palm Club Circle.; Brunswick, GA 31525
- 3/16 – Joel Dent: 1819 Pine Forest Circle; Dublin, GA 31021

- 3/16 – Truett Leveritt: PO Box 15893; Savannah, GA 31416  
 3/16 – Vance Mathis: 305 Jasmine Way; Bonaire, GA 31005  
 3/17 – George Durham: 844 Woods Hole Circle; Statesboro, GA 30461  
 3/17 – David Seyle: 304 Causton Harbour Dr.; Savannah, GA 31404  
 3/18 – Tom Oliver: 511 Victory Dr.; Waynesboro, GA 30830  
 3/19 – James Snell, Jr.: 1590 Piney Grove Rd.; Loganville, GA 30052  
 3/20 – Ronnie Culpepper: 2848 Sue Mack Dr.; Columbus, GA 31906  
 3/20 – Dan MacMinn: 95 Hardin St.; Waverly Hall, GA 31831  
 3/21 – Delia Steffen: 128 Cambridge Way; Macon, GA 31220  
 3/22 – Beverly Flowers: 390 Brook Hollow Dr.; McDonough, GA 30252  
 3/22 – Tommy Mason, Jr.: 7321 US Highway 41; Vienna, GA 31092  
 3/23 – Dwight Bishop: 133 Purple Magnolia Dr.; Alapaha, GA 31622  
 3/23 – James McIlrath: 555 Jenkins Farm Rd.; Brunswick, GA 31523  
 3/23 – Jimmy Pennell: 2257 S. Lakeshore Dr.; Lake Junaluska, NC 28745  
 3/24 – Larry E. Bird: 325 Langston Chapel Rd.; Statesboro, GA 30458-3773  
 3/28 – Hal Brady: 36 Lullwater Estate; Atlanta, GA 30307  
 3/30 – Allen Brooks: 535 Hendley Circle; Nashville, GA 31639

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## **OBITUARIES**

### **Mrs. Betty Swearingen Hurdle**

Betty Swearingen Hurdle, 89, of Macon, passed away Tuesday, Feb. 19, 2019. A memorial service will be held Saturday, April 6, 2019, at 2 p.m. at Mulberry Street United Methodist Church. The Reverend Matt Woodberry and the Reverend Tommy Perkins will officiate. The family will greet friends following the service in the Fellowship Hall.

The daughter of the late Rufus Darley and Carrie L. Swearingen, Mrs. Hurdle was a veteran of the United States Air Force Reserve. She was a teacher at Mount de Sales Academy and was a member of Mulberry Street United Methodist Church. She is preceded in death by her husband, William Hubert Hurdle, Sr.

Mrs. Hurdle is survived by children, Harriet Hurdle (Steve) Wade of Forsyth, Caroline (Mike) Calvert of Abbeville, South Carolina, William H. Hurdle, Jr. of Macon, and John L. Hurdle of Pinehurst, Georgia; and grandchildren, Tara Hobbs, Toni Weldon, Allison Dunlap, Kimberly Dixon, Kelley Fernandez, Henderson Hurdle.

Please visit [www.hartsmort.com](http://www.hartsmort.com) to express condolences.

Hart's at the Cupola has charge of arrangements.

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## **Scripture Readings – March 5**

**March 6**

*Ash Wednesday*

Joel 2:1-2

Psalm 51:1-17 (UMH 785)

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

**March 10**

*First Sunday in Lent*

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 (UMH 810)

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

**March 17**

*Second Sunday in Lent*

Genesis 15:1-2, 17-18

Psalm 27 (UMH 766)

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

**March 24**

*Third Sunday in Lent*

Isaiah 55:1-9

Psalm 63:1-8 (UMH 766)

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

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**Events in the South Georgia Conference – 3/5/2019 edition**

**Post-General Conference Informational Session – March 9**

An informational session will be held at the UGA Tifton Campus Conference Center in Tifton, GA to talk about the outcome of the 2019 called General Conference Session.

**Open Door Classic 5K, Walk, & Fun Run – March 9**

The Open Door Classic 5K, Walk and Fun Run is March 9, 2019, at Woodruff Park with the River Walk as a beautiful backdrop. Registrations begin at 7:30 a.m. with races beginning at 8:30 a.m. Runners, walkers, and children from the community come together for a morning of exercise and fellowship to raise funds individually, through churches, local businesses, and organizations. Together we raise awareness and financial support for all nine (9) Open Door program ministries where we serve those at or below federal economic guidelines for poverty.

We teach, train, counsel, mentor, and provide opportunities within our partnerships in the area. Visit [odch.org](http://odch.org) to register for the Classic, learn more about our program ministries, volunteer opportunities, and to donate.

### **Marriage Enrichment Retreats at Lake Junaluska – March 10-12**

Lake Junaluska invites you to their Marriage Enrichment Retreats. The retreats are perfect for pastors who regularly do marriage counseling, or anyone who wants to strengthen the bond in their marriage. Three retreats will be held at Lake Junaluska, March 10-12, Aug. 18-20, and Sept. 29 – Oct. 1. Learn more at [www.lakejunaluska.com/marriage](http://www.lakejunaluska.com/marriage) or call 800-222-4930.

### **Lay Speaker Training, Pittman Park UMC – March 15-16**

The Basic and Advanced Lay Speaking Courses will be taught Friday, March 15 and Saturday, March 16 at Pittman Park UMC in Statesboro. A lay speaker is a professing member of a local church who is ready and desirous to serve the Church, and who is well informed on and committed to the Scriptures and the doctrine, heritage, organization, and life of The United Methodist Church. A lay speaker has completed the required training courses in lay speaking and has been approved by a district or annual conference committee on lay speaking. Lay speakers serve the local church by witnessing to the Christian faith through spoken communication, church and community leadership, and caregiving ministries. When certified, the lay speaker may conduct services of worship, preach, and lead study sessions as requested by the pastor or the district superintendent. Registration fee for the class is \$25 which covers all materials and lunch on Saturday. (Note: The Basic Lay Speaking class must be completed before taking Advanced Class). [Register here](#).

### **Minister Spouses Retreat – March 15-17**

South Georgia's minister spouses are invited to "Come to the Waters" to refresh, rekindle, and remember at their annual retreat, March 15-17, at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. Please direct any questions to Lisa Crosby at (706) 392-6673 or [lisamcrosby@msn.com](mailto:lisamcrosby@msn.com). [Download the flyer](#)

### **#ServeSouthGA Day – March 23**

#ServeSouthGA is our Annual Conference's volunteer day, set aside for churches all over South Georgia to move outside the church building and into our communities. An event for all ages, #ServeSouthGA Day allows us to put our faith in action as we serve those in need in our very own town, neighborhood, and community. One Saturday each year, we set aside our personal agendas and head out into the community on a mission to serve others. It is truly a great day of sharing our time and talents with the charitable agencies the South Georgia Conference and your local church supports. [More information](#)

### **Wesley Glen's Cherry Blossom Road Race – March 24**

Join hundreds of runners for the 17th annual Cherry Blossom Road Race for Wesley Glen Ministries. It will be held in a very special location this year - Downtown Macon! Plan to enjoy

the 5k or Fun Run while parade spectators cheer you on. Please check the race website soon for more updates: [www.cherryblossomroadrace.com](http://www.cherryblossomroadrace.com) and [www.wesleyglenministries.com/cherry-blossom-road-race](http://www.wesleyglenministries.com/cherry-blossom-road-race).

### **Antioch UMC's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration – March 24**

Antioch UMC in Clinch County is turning 175 years old! The congregation will host a special celebration on March 24 at 3 p.m. Rev. Henry Bass, superintendent of the South Central District, will be one of the featured speakers. There will be lots of singing and good food afterwards. Past preachers, their families, and members are invited to share memories and photographs by calling or emailing Lori Miller at 912-286-5807 or [lorihowellmiller@gmail.com](mailto:lorihowellmiller@gmail.com).

### **Lay Speaker Training, Richmond Hill UMC – March 29-30**

The Basic and Advanced Lay Speaking Courses will be taught Friday, March 29 and Saturday, March 30 at Richmond Hill UMC. A lay speaker is a professing member of a local church who is ready and desirous to serve the Church, and who is well informed on and committed to the Scriptures and the doctrine, heritage, organization, and life of The United Methodist Church. A lay speaker has completed the required training courses in lay speaking and has been approved by a district or annual conference committee on lay speaking. Lay speakers serve the local church by witnessing to the Christian faith through spoken communication, church and community leadership, and caregiving ministries. When certified, the lay speaker may conduct services of worship, preach, and lead study sessions as requested by the pastor or the district superintendent. Registration fee for the class is \$25 which covers all materials and lunch on Saturday. (Note: The Basic Lay Speaking class must be completed before taking Advanced Class). [Register here](#).

### **UMCOR Sunday – March 31**

**UMCOR Sunday** (fourth Sunday in Lent) enables the United Methodist Committee on Relief to reach out through worldwide ministries of food, shelter, health and peace. A special offering is taken on this day to support humanitarian aid through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). You can be assured that when catastrophes cause suffering, your church, impelled by Jesus' love and compassion, will be in the lead to ease the pain. Gifts to the UMCOR Sunday offering underwrite UMCOR's "costs of doing business." That helps them keep their promise that 100 percent of every other gift you make to a specific UMCOR project can be spent on that project - not on home office costs. To learn more about UMCOR or to order resources to promote the offering, visit [www.umcor.org](http://www.umcor.org) or call 888-346-3862. [Click here for resources to help promote this offering in your local church](#).

### **Sexual Ethics Workshop – April 9**

According to the Conference Sexual Ethics policy, this workshop is REQUIRED EVERY (3) THREE YEARS for any person serving under appointment by the bishop (clergy, local pastors, extension ministers, appointed lay speakers). Cost is \$35, which includes lunch (collected at the door). Checks can be made payable to South Georgia Conference. For questions, email

[cpcassistant@sgaumc.com](mailto:cpcassistant@sgaumc.com). Please note that spouses and lay employees who are not appointed by the bishop are not eligible to attend the workshop.

### **Eagles' Spring Picnic – April 25**

The South Georgia Eagles (the Conference's retired ministers and spouses) will host a Spring Picnic for all retirees at McRae First UMC Thursday, April 25 at noon. The men of McRae First UMC will prepare a fish dinner for all and attendees are asked to bring dessert or salad fixings. The program will be the hilarious Jacki Beasley impersonating "Miss Busy Body." Come as you are and enjoy the food and fellowship. Contact Dr. Charles E. Cravey at [drrev@msn.com](mailto:drrev@msn.com) for more information.

### **United Methodist Men Annual Retreat – April 26-27**

The South Georgia United Methodist Men will gather for their annual retreat April 26-27 at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. [Download the brochure](#) | [Click here for housing registration](#)

### **Wesley Glen Ministries' Fish Fry – April 27**

Wesley Glen's annual Fish Fry event is the place to be for good food, music, and great fellowship. Join them for a fun-filled day on April 27 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.! For more information, visit [www.wesleyglenministries.com/fish-fry](http://www.wesleyglenministries.com/fish-fry).

### **Witnessing Through The Storm – April 27**

The South Georgia Conference has experienced multiple catastrophic events in the past three years and churches have been actively engaged in their own communities and beyond to meet the needs of those impacted by these storms. United Methodists have been a beacon of light during dark skies by being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ – before, during, and after the storms. Join the Conference Discipleship Teams Saturday, April 27 for “Witnessing Through The Storm,” a day of exploring the many ways individuals and churches can be prepared in the event of a natural disaster and “be the church” in their communities and throughout the world. This will be a day of equipping, inspiring, building capacity and preparing for our future impact in disaster response ministry. Special guests include Cathy Earl, UMCOR, US Disaster Response & Partner Relations, and Jenny Phillips, Global Ministries, Creation Care Program Manager/Sustainable Development. The training will be held from 10 am. – 4 p.m. at Cordele First United Methodist Church. The cost is \$25 per person and includes lunch. [Click here for more information, including the day's schedule.](#)