

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – JAN. 7 EDITION

South Georgia UMs share Christmas with Navajo Nation

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

Several South Georgia United Methodists spread some early Christmas cheer last month when they took more than 2,000 shoeboxes packed full of gifts to the Navajo Nation.

Two trailers, loaded full of filled Christmas presents, left South Georgia Dec. 11. After crossing the country, the group arrived in northeastern Arizona ready to serve and play Santa.

While only seven people actually made the trip, thousands of South Georgia United Methodists contributed to the Christmas cheer. Dozens of congregations packed shoeboxes full of small gifts, books, stuffed animals, school supplies, and toiletries. In addition to the shoeboxes, the group also took coats, blankets, and clothing to give away. For some children, the shoebox was their one and only Christmas gift.

“It’s an incredible feeling to be able to help,” said Rev. Charles “Buddy” Whatley, who, along with his wife, Mary Ella, traveled more than 2,500 miles around Georgia and South Carolina this past November, collecting the shoeboxes. “For a lot of the children, that’s their whole Christmas, and they will keep the box as a treasure box. We’ve fallen in love with them.”

For the past 13 years, Rev. and Mrs. Whatley have traveled to the Navajo Nation, building relationships; making friends; and serving the men, women, and children who live on the reservation. They usually make the nearly 4,000-mile round-trip trek in the spring, so this trip was led by Gene Trulock, of Bainbridge, who runs Lifeline Ministries.

Rev. Christy Bandy, pastor of Cairo First United Methodist Church, has served on several overseas mission trips, but this was her first to the Navajo Nation. Cairo First UMC has, for several years, filled shoeboxes and supported Lifeline Ministries and the Whatley’s ministry to the Navajo.

The group worshipped at Sawmill United Methodist Church Saturday evening after sharing a meal with the congregation and Rev. Bandy preached at Blue Gap United Methodist Church Sunday morning. She read from Luke 2 and shared that God’s unconditional love is available to everyone.

“I shared with them that God showed his love through the birth of Jesus and the cross, from the cradle to the cross.”

While the poverty is extreme, the joy they saw on the children’s faces was priceless, Rev. Bandy said.

“The experience was indescribable,” she said. “Being able to take Jesus in a different way to them and show God’s love in various ways was indescribable.”

Thank you, South Georgia United Methodists!

As we begin a new year and a new decade, we want to give thanks to you, the faithful members of our local churches, for partnering with us to do the ministry we’ve been called to do. Because of your prayers, support, and gifts, we are able to minister to people all across South Georgia - and beyond - in the name of Jesus Christ.

Thank you!

A note from Bishop Bryan

I am so very grateful for the privilege of serving with you in the South Georgia Conference. The power and hope of the connectional system is found in the annual conferences. This is where we know each other, work with each other, and care for each other. Thank you for being Alive Together!

The Advocate

Thank you, South Georgia, for the privilege of serving you and sharing your stories. It is an honor to hear and share what God is doing in and through you and how you are open to God’s call on your lives to love, serve, and make disciples. Thank you for reading and for sharing your stories with and through The Advocate!

Camp Connect

Thank you, South Georgia congregations, for giving so many of your children and youth the opportunity to spend a week at Camp Connect this summer. Our heart’s desire is to connect kids with Christ in whatever means we can, from the silliest skits or games, to times of worship, cabin devotions or meals shared with friends, both new and old.

We recognize that you are putting your trust in us to take care of that which is most valuable to you, and that is our greatest honor!

We are so grateful to count each of you as a part of our larger camp family.

Suzanne Akins, *Director of Camping and Retreats*

Connectional Ministries / Advocacy / Multicultural Ministries

Thank you to the congregations and churches of the South Georgia Conference for allowing us to be a part of your church family and ministry. We rejoice for our partnership and the many opportunities to share and provide training opportunities for awareness, education, and participation, celebrating and embracing our strength and love through diversity and inclusion. I am reminded of Acts 2:1-4 as an example of the power of our uniqueness through the Holy Spirit. We look forward to the new year and are excited about doing more ministry together in 2020 as we work together as the Body of Christ and to reach and make disciples for Jesus Christ!

Epworth By The Sea

2019 was a great year to be Alive Together in Christ with the South Georgia Conference. Summer camps, Confirmation Retreat, KidzQuest, and Encounter were very successful events hosted by South Georgia's Camping Ministries. Winter Conference, Clergy Spouses, the Eagles, Spiritual Growth, Mission U, Mission Teams, the United Methodist Women and Men, along with many South Georgia churches and youth groups, held retreats at Epworth. In today's society, it is so easy to become anxious and isolated, with virtual relationships substituted for real connection. We are better together, and Epworth is a place to find peace, connection, and beauty with God and one another. Thank you to the South Georgia Conference for making Epworth truly holy ground.

GNTV Media Ministry

GNTV Media Ministry is thankful for the people of South Georgia. Our ministry to use technology has allowed us to support you in local churches, at Annual Conference, Pastors' School, KidzQuest, and the Encounter Youth Retreat. Together we have helped spread the gospel of Christ to our communities. With you, we are focusing our energies to assist in creating redemptive relationships with our communities, state, and world. We are grateful that you trust in us to be your technology partner!

Magnolia Manor

Without you, Magnolia Manor would not exist. We were born of a vision by our Church to meet the needs of senior adults. For more than half a century, you have helped us do just that. When we tell a resident that they don't have to leave Magnolia Manor even though they can no longer afford to pay, we do it in the name of Christ and our South Georgia Conference UMC family. When we pray with a resident who's grieving the loss of a spouse, it's in His name and yours. Thank you for allowing us to minister!

The Methodist Home for Children and Youth

Dear Friends in Christ,

YOU bring blessings of hope and healing to so many children across our conference. We are so **GRATEFUL** for your incredible generosity and deep commitment to our boys and girls.

Because of YOU, The Methodist Home for Children has expanded our reach to even more children and families. While many highlights of the year stand out, one is especially precious: more than 15 of our young people were baptized, including one mother and daughter! We are “**ALIVE TOGETHER IN WITNESS WITH YOU.**” Thank you for your prayers and loving support as we continue in this ministry **TOGETHER!** May God bless you in 2020 and keep His guiding presence and peace on The Methodist Home!

Warmly, Alison Evans, *President and CEO*

Moore Methodist Museum

The Ministry of Memory and the Moore Methodist Museum are alive and well in 2020, and it is all thanks to the generosity and devotion of the South Georgia Conference. More than 5,000 visitors enjoyed the Museum this year with hundreds of confirmation tours, games of Methodist Jeopardy, and research requests. We look forward to even great numbers in 2020 by hosting the National and Jurisdictional Historical Societies for a weeklong event in August entitled “Walking in the Footsteps of John Wesley.” Thank you for making it possible for us to continue the Methodist movement and outreach for God.

Open Door Community House

Open Door Community House is exceedingly grateful to SGAUMC for your leadership, prayers, and support of our mission to empower impoverished people in our community to realize their full potential as children of God as we create long-term solutions to poverty. You are providing vital resources, hope, and opportunities to children, women, and families for their journey to leave poverty behind. By God’s grace and your prayers and support, we see transformation occur every day. Thank you for helping make this possible!

South Georgia’s Disaster Response Ministries

The South Georgia Annual Conference is blessed to have such a growing number of disaster relief volunteers! This past December, right before Christmas, a tornado struck parts of Ben Hill and Irwin Counties and many of our United Methodist ERTs came to help. We had volunteers from the Northeast District, South Central District, and Coastal District serving with us, and they were great! Thank you to all who came to help. The South Georgia Annual Conference is in good, trained hands when a disaster strikes!

Vashti Center

We at the Vashti Center offer our heartfelt thanks to The United Methodist Church community in the South Georgia Conference. Thank you for giving your time, talents, and treasure which have given some of the most vulnerable children in Southwest Georgia hope for a better future and the opportunity to have an encounter with our Lord. We are especially grateful to the United Methodist Women who embody Love in Action, as well as for the United Methodist Men,

United Methodist churches and youth groups, the NOMADS, those who serve on our board and volunteer, and the Methodist-affiliated foundations who support our work. God bless you all!

Wesley Community Centers of Savannah, Inc.

From the Board of Directors, staff, and families at Wesley Community Centers of Savannah, Inc., we are grateful for the support of the members of the South Georgia Conference United Methodist members and United Methodist churches. Your support through your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service allows us to continue to enhance the economic, educational, and spiritual growth of the women, children, and families who come to us for their basic needs. Thank you for being a blessing and a vessel to care for “the least of these.”

Wesley Glen Ministries, Inc.

We at Wesley Glen Ministries would like to say a big “Thank You” to the congregations of the South Georgia Annual Conference for partnering with us in 2019. With your help, we have been able to provide excellent support to the wonderful persons with developmental disabilities under our care, which includes 24-hour a day medical, residential, spiritual, mental, and communal care. This is a sacred privilege for the staff of Wesley Glen and is one that we would not be able to accomplish without your support. We appreciate all that you do for us at Wesley Glen!

Blessings,
Dr. Tyler Plaxico, *President/CEO*

.....
Diverse leaders’ group offers separation plan

A Word from Bishop Bryan:

Grace and peace to you as we begin a new year Alive Together in Christ.

A new proposal for the future of The United Methodist Church was released today. This new proposal is the fruit of a mediation process undertaken by 16 United Methodists entitled, [“A Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation.”](#)

This eight-page document represents work done by a group of United Methodists from across the world who represent many (not all) of the important streams of our church. This work was done in collaboration with Mr. Kenneth Feinberg, a noted mediator known for his work with the September 11 Victim’s Compensation Fund, the Virginia Tech and Boston Marathon victims, and the BP Deepwater Horizon Disaster. Mr. Feinberg, who is not a United Methodist, offered his professional guidance pro bono.

Those who worked on this new plan represent many of the groups who have previously released their own plans. It appears to me that this new plan represents an agreement among a wide variety of groups.

It remains to be seen how much traction this new plan will receive across our diverse, global denomination. Ultimately, it is the General Conference delegates who will decide on the adoption of any plan.

As the South Georgia Conference, we can make a conscious decision to write our own story. We will respectfully receive and reflect upon whatever comes from General Conference 2020, for it represents the work of our elected delegates. and will evaluate it in terms of what fits best with the story we are writing in South Georgia.

The Leadership Forum Task Force will be meeting on January 13. A major topic of this meeting will be devoted to studying the Protocol. After that meeting, you can expect to receive an update from the Task Force providing details about the Protocol and the Task Force's response to it.

In the meantime, you may find it helpful to read the following information:

- [Press Release](#) (see below)
- [The Signed Protocol](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)

I am thankful for you as together we write our own story in South Georgia!
(<https://www.sgaumc.org/newsdetail/let-s-write-our-own-story-in-2020-13135794>).

United Methodist Traditionalists, Centrists, Progressives & Bishops sign agreement aimed at separation

A diverse group of representatives from United Methodist advocacy groups with contrasting views and bishops from around the world has collaborated on a proposed agreement for the separation of The United Methodist Church (UMC) that has the unanimous support of all the parties involved.

The agreement, the [Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation](#), was achieved on December 17, 2019, and announced today.

The action comes amid heightened tensions in the church over conflicting views related to human sexuality after the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference failed to resolve differences among church members.

Legislation to implement [the Protocol statement](#) — an eight-page document detailing the terms of a split of the 13+ million-member denomination — is expected to come before the United Methodist General Conference for a vote at their legislative meeting in Minneapolis, Minn. in May 2020.

The 16-member group came together as an outgrowth of a consultation initiated by bishops from Central Conferences located outside the United States. The parties sought assistance from prominent attorney Kenneth Feinberg, who specializes in mediation and alternative dispute resolution. Feinberg, who served as Special Master of the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund and administrator of the BP Deepwater Horizon Disaster Victim Compensation Fund, along with a number of other complex matters, agreed to provide his services pro bono.

Meeting over several months, the unofficial group reached an agreement by signatories associated with all of the constituencies within the UMC for a mutually supported pathway for separation, bridging differences among other plans to be considered by the General Conference. “The undersigned propose restructuring The United Methodist Church by separation as the best means to resolve our differences, allowing each part of the Church to remain true to its theological understanding, while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect of every person,” says the Protocol Statement.

The document’s signers include representatives from Europe, Africa, the Philippines, and the United States, and include persons representing UMCNext; Mainstream UMC; Uniting Methodists; The Confessing Movement; Good News; The Institute on Religion & Democracy; the Wesleyan Covenant Association; Affirmation; Methodist Federation for Social Action; Reconciling Ministries Network; and the United Methodist Queer Clergy Caucus; as well as bishops from the United States and across the world. The representatives have pledged to work together to support the proposal and develop legislation to implement it.

The Protocol anticipates the formation of a new traditionalist Methodist denomination. Once formed, the new church would receive \$25 million over the next four years and give up further claim to the UMC’s assets. An additional \$2 million would be allocated for potential additional new Methodist denominations which may emerge from the UMC. Acknowledging the historical role of the Methodist movement in systematic racial violence, exploitation and discrimination, the Protocol would allocate \$39 million to ensure there is no disruption in supporting ministries for communities historically marginalized by racism.

Under the Protocol, conferences and local congregations could vote to separate from The United Methodist Church to affiliate with new Methodist denominations created under the agreement within a certain time frame. Churches wishing to stay within the UMC would not be required to conduct a vote. Provisions exist for entities that choose to separate to retain their assets and liabilities. All current clergy and lay employees would keep their pensions regardless of the Methodist denomination with which they affiliate.

Under the Protocol, all administrative or judicial processes addressing restrictions in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist* related to self-avowed practicing homosexuals or same-sex weddings, as well as actions to close churches, would be held in abeyance until the separation is completed. The Protocol also references a plan which calls for a special general conference of the post-separation United Methodist Church. The purpose of the Special Session would be to create regional conferences, remove the current prohibitions against LGBTQ persons, and to repeal the Traditional Plan.

Speaking on behalf of the group, Bishop John Yambasu (Sierra Leone) stated, “All of us are servants of the church and realize that we are not the primary decision makers on these matters. Instead, we humbly offer to the delegates of the 2020 General Conference the work which we have accomplished in the hopes that it will help heal the harms and conflicts within the body of Christ and free us to be more effective witnesses to God’s Kingdom.”

The signatories to the Protocol have provided a [FAQ document](#) to provide additional information about the agreement. Comments and questions may be directed to the signatories at mediationprotocol@outlook.com.

A livestream event will take place on Monday, January 13, to provide further clarity and explanations of the plan by members of the Mediation Team.

This statement is being released by the Council of Bishops Office on behalf of the Mediation Team members.

Conference Nominations Committee looking for leaders

The South Georgia Annual Conference Committee on Nominations has begun a process to identify laity and clergy interested in serving on Conference and District boards, committees, and teams for the 2021-2024 quadrennium.

Between now and January 29, you are invited to indicate your willingness to serve or to encourage possible leaders to complete the [online Interest Form](#).

The Conference Nominations Committee is looking for resourceful and committed leaders who have vision, leadership skills, and a passion for the work of the particular board or committee on which they are interested.

The committee has also identified additional characteristics and qualities that will be needed during the next quadrennium as the Conference and The United Methodist Church face an unknown future.

“Words like calm, heart of peace, diversity, openness to change, respectful, and hopeful began emerging as we talked about those who would lead our conference over the next four years,” said

Dr. Nita Crump, Conference Secretary and chair of the nominations committee. “The committee wants individuals who are willing to hear all sides, will abide by the [HEART principles](#) and will honor the integrity of all voices.”

The annual conference will elect the leadership team for the 2021-2024 Quadrennium at the June 2020 annual conference session. The newly elected conference leaders will begin July 1, 2020.

Pastors, district superintendents, district nominating committees, and laity can help with the process by recruiting and identifying persons in local churches who should submit an interest form.

“This process will help the Conference and District nominations committees match people and their interests, gifts, and graces with the various opportunities to serve on the district and conference level,” said Dr. Crump.

Steps in the leadership selection process are:

- IDENTIFICATION — Indicate your interest(s) by completing and submitting the [online Interest Form](#). Note that this is the sole means available to indicate interest in serving. Jan. 29, 2020, is the deadline for submitting Interest Forms.
- NOMINATION — The District Committee on Nominations and the District Leadership Team will receive and evaluate Interest Forms and coordinate the nominations process with the Conference Committee on Nominations. The Conference Committee on Nominations will submit a slate of nominees (committee and board chairs and members) to the 2020 Annual Conference. If you are already serving on a committee or board and wish to be removed, please email your desire to the Conference Secretary, Dr. Nita Crump (nitac@sgaumc.com).
- ELECTION — The annual conference will elect the leadership team for the 2021-2024 Quadrennium at the annual conference in June 2020.
- SERVING — The newly elected conference leaders will begin July 1, 2020.

Questions or in need of help? Contact Dr. Nita Crump, Conference Secretary, at nitac@sgaumc.com.

.....

Let’s write our own story in 2020

**FROM THE BISHOP
R. LAWSON BRYAN**

The old year ends and the new year begins during the 12 days of Christmas (from Christmas Day to Epiphany Day on January 6). This seems particularly fitting since the coming of Jesus marks

the culmination of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. Standing on the shoulders of our Hebrew heritage, we hold the Christ Child and, like Mary and Joseph, move forward into a new future.

Certainly, we wonder about what this new year will hold for us. As United Methodists we are aware that 2020 will be an historic year with General Conference in May, our South Georgia annual conference in June, the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference in July, and, if needed, a special called session of annual conference in August to make any decisions necessitated by the outcome of General Conference. I encourage us to view this year not as a time of uncertainty but as a time of great certainty. The way to do this is to recognize that while the General and Jurisdictional Conferences are extremely important, the annual conference "...is the basic body of The United Methodist Church."

As the basic body of the Church we can make a conscious decision to write our own story. Writing our own story means that we will respectfully receive and reflect upon whatever comes from GC2020 for it represents the work of our elected delegates, but we will not be defined by it. What will define us? Well, that is what you have been teaching me over the past three and a half years. Here are just a few examples of what I have learned from you about the story we want to write in 2020:

- We value the South Georgia Conference as our spiritual home and we want to be Alive Together in Christ both now and in the future. Therefore, we commit ourselves to remain connected to each other to give space for God to move in us and through us.
- We live in the confidence that grows from remembering what happened on February 6, 1736: John Wesley landed near Tybee Island and planted the seeds for what is now the worldwide Methodist movement. Though Wesley felt like a failure, the truth is that God was preparing him for the remarkable Aldersgate experience. [Click here to see the video I recently made at the spot where Wesley came ashore on Cockspur Island.](#)
- By our conduct we want to honor the faithfulness of generations of laity and clergy who have given their time, talent, gifts, service, and witness to the cause of Christ. For example, Bishop Arthur J. Moore served the North and South Georgia Conferences starting in 1940. It was not an easy time as the nation recovered from the Great Depression and then became engaged in World War II. But Bishop Moore was undeterred by these realities and moved our conference forward in many ways. In 1949, he orchestrated the purchase of the land that would become Epworth By The Sea. We have a legacy of faithfulness, and we want that legacy to define us.
- The laity and clergy in our 588 local churches want to grow numerically and spiritually by making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We are not single-issue Christians, but rather we want to see all persons in every category of life

come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and serve him as Lord. We want hope-filled churches bringing hope to the communities of South Georgia.

This list is suggestive, not exhaustive. What would you add? What will be your story in 2020? What will be your local church's story? What will be our story as an annual conference? Ten years from now I hope others will look back to 2020 and ask, "How did South Georgia do it? They remained connected, wrote their own story, and found their way forward together."

To help write the South Georgia story, the Leadership Forum Task Force will continue meeting and reflecting on all the matters that will come before General Conference 2020. The Task Force will also be asking, "What plans and/or proposals align best with the story we are writing in South Georgia?" Then, the Task Force will seek to provide a process that each local church can use to understand the outcome of GC2020 and its implications for our annual conference. In addition, we will invite other annual conferences to join us in strategic conversations aimed at maintaining the connectional identity that is so important to us as United Methodists. Drawing on all these resources, we will work together as an annual conference to discern what we might call "the South Georgia plan"—the path that best enables us to remain Alive Together in Christ.

The key to having a happy New Year is to make a conscious decision to write our own story. Let us determine now that we will give ourselves time to pray, communicate, ask questions, pray, understand implications, have strategic conversations with other annual conferences, and pray some more – so that any decisions we make will be responsive rather than reactive.

I am grateful to be Alive Together with you in the story that Christ is writing in South Georgia.

Happy New Year!

R. Lawson Bryan

Leadership Tour 2020 heads to Warner Robins, Camilla, Hinesville

The Office of Connectional Ministries kicked off its [2020 Leadership Tour](#) Sunday, Jan. 5 in Statesboro. The leadership tour, which has four stops, is aimed at equipping and empowering local church leaders.

The 2020 Leadership Tour, which will travel next to Warner Robins, Camilla, and Hinesville, offers practical teaching and resources to inspire and help local church leaders lead with confidence. Similar to the Pathways training event, participants will choose two paths, or classes, to take to enrich their ministry. This free event is sponsored by the Office of Connectional Ministries. [Click here for more information.](#)

Students to tour colleges, campus ministries during 2020 Campus Crawl

[Campus Crawl](#), set for Feb. 27-29, 2020, is a bus tour designed to introduce 9th-12th grade students to United Methodist colleges and campus ministries around the state. In one weekend, high school students will meet representatives from our United Methodist colleges and universities in Georgia as well as meet several Wesley Foundations on public university campuses.

This year we're visiting the following campuses and ministries: KSU, Young Harris, Reinhardt, Georgia Tech, Clark Atlanta, LaGrange, West Georgia, and Emory.

Want to go? Sign up today! [Click here for more information and to register](#)

Solomon Speaks to the People

Winter Quarter: Honoring God

Sunday school lesson for the week of January 12, 2020

By Dr. D. Craig Rikard

Lesson Scripture: I Kings 8: 14-21

Supplementary text: 2 Chronicles 6

Key Verse: I Kings 8:15

“Praise to the Lord, the God of Israel, who with his own hand has fulfilled what he promised with his own mouth to my father David.”

Aim and Goal of the Lesson

To hear Solomon’s blessing upon his people, a historical blessing that reminds Israel God has kept his promises to the uttermost and those promises are rooted in God’s redemptive history.

Historical, Geographical, Theological and Experiential *background* of I Kings 8:14-21, and 2 Chronicles 6:

In Genesis 12, God initiated the ageless covenant with Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants. How one was to live out that covenant in an ordered, societal and spiritual life was defined in a second expression of covenant through the Mosaic Law. In describing the vehicle through which the living of the Mosaic Law would be observed and obeyed by Israel through its leadership came through the promise of the Davidic lineage of kings. (Read Isaiah 9, 11, and Isaiah’s servant songs) In the final expression of the covenant, the outer Mosaic Law would become internalized, as a “new covenant written in the heart.” (Read Jeremiah 31:31 fwd.). This new expression of covenant would be fulfilled fully in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.” (Mat. 5:17) **God has remained faithful to his covenant and empowered his people to live in that covenant in the world, should they choose to do so by**

faith. God has been truthful about God's truth! Thus, Solomon, as the temple is complete and the Ark in its place, blesses Israel by reminding them of this divine faithfulness. Solomon reminds Israel they can live confidently knowing their ultimate future is certain, for God's love and truth remain unchangeable.

In our lesson Solomon turns toward Israel after facing a bronze platform around which the priests minister before the Lord. He addresses his people in the act of worship through blessing them. What a powerful setting as he addresses Israel, calling their attention that the new temple sits atop Mt. Moriah, the same site where Abraham was believed to offer Isaac to God.

Remember, the author of Chronicles is known by scholars for addressing many of the important issues omitted by I and II Samuel and the Kings. The title in the Septuagint for Chronicles refers to "things overlooked in the earlier historical documents." Most believe Ezra the scribe began to write the Chronicles and they were later completed by other scribes who sought to complete the spiritual reform Ezra began. Ezra brought much needed reform back to those exiles who were returning to Canaan after the Babylonian empire had destroyed Judah and razed so many of their sacred symbols, especially the temple. The Mosaic Law they once cherished was steadily falling into neglect through the years in exile. The negligence with which they treated the Law naturally led to moral negligence. We should not be amazed that Ezra and the scribes want the returning exiles to remember that in spite of their fall to Babylon and the years of exile, God's love for and his promises to his people remain unchangeable. Life might prove a series of triumphs and failures, but the God of Israel is the God of covenant through it all. Thus, the Chronicler wants Israel to again hear the powerful blessing Solomon offered that special day at the new temple. What was true then was true now: God is faithful!

Historical, Geographical, Theological and Experiential *reflection* on I Kings 8:14-21, and 2 Chronicles 6:

I Kings 8: 14

The teacher's manual offers a beautiful account in which a son provided his father's eulogy. As a son who performed his own father's eulogy, I understand how difficult that position is and even more so how touching. The son wanted the congregation to remember that his father never broke his word; he kept every promise made. What is slightly different from this beautiful eulogy is that Solomon's eulogy for his father had less to do with David's ability to keep his promise and far more to do with God's choice to keep every promise made to his people in holy covenant.

Solomon is either standing or kneeling facing the altar around which the priests minister. The text reveals that Solomon turns from facing the altar area to face the standing congregation. In today's Christian worship people very often kneel when worshiping the Lord. We may kneel for communion or for a time of prayer at the altar. Often, we kneel together in corporate prayer. Kneeling represents sincere humility and reverence before God. However, it was customary in

Solomon's day also to stand as an act of worship. Standing too was an act of reverence and often represented a sense of vow and promise to God. When Josiah found the copy of the Law within the temple treasury, most likely a copy of Deuteronomy, he called the people together for solemn assembly. The entire nation gathered to listen to the reading of the Law after so many years without hearing it. And imagine, they stood the entire time the Law was read! It was their way of paying reverence and honor to the sacred Law and of saying before the Lord, "and we stand to it!" (Which meant, we promise to obey it!). Can you imagine holding an entire worship service with the congregation standing as the minister read the entire Book of Deuteronomy?

When you stand with the congregation in your church, do you see it as an act of worship? What exactly are we saying when we stand before the Lord individually and corporately? What are the special moments in our various worship services in which we stand rather than kneel? When does it feel more reverent to kneel in worship than stand, and vice versa? And, why?

I Kings 8:15a

Solomon speaks, "Praise to the Lord, the God of Israel." On the surface, this statement reads like many expressions of biblical praise. Yet, perhaps there is something beneath the surface that is important to contemplate. Solomon begins with his own expression to "Praise to the Lord." He is saying, "Join me in praising the Lord." Then, he follows the phrase with the descriptive, "the God of Israel." He is asking that the God he praises be praised by all of Israel. Only as the entire nation of Israel praises God would the entire world learn to praise the Lord of all. Before I can ask another to join me in praising God, my own heart must be in a meaningful relationship with the Lord. How can we ask others, and the world, to praise the Lord if we do not personally know and recognize him as our Lord? All evangelism begins with one's own relationship with Christ. If my life reflects the glory of Christ, then others can witness the wonder of that relationship in my own life. Before the entire world can witness the God of covenant in Gen. 12, they must first recognize God's presence in the Lord's individual servants, especially their kings. Only then can the world know the Lord of the chosen people known as Israel.

Do you believe the world can recognize the love and wonder of God through a nation, a church, or an individual? What would make God's presence in a group or person evident in the world? What can we do to better ensure that the world knows we honor and worship the Lord of creation and God's redemptive love?

I Kings 8:15b

Here we have the simple yet powerful statement that what God says, God does. If God speaks the divine promises, he will accomplish them. As the great hymn, "Great is Thy Faithfulness," states so beautifully, "There is no shadow, nor turning with thee." God has "integrity." I use this term carefully for it is important to me. Integrity means that a person's entire personhood, every facet of their being is consistent and integrated. Historically, what God has spoken from the first moments of creation has become reality, and will continue to remain true and fulfilled. As cited above, life can change in an instant. There are no certainties in life. However, there is one

certainty that is present in life, beneath life, and beyond life: God's word is true and trustworthy. Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of God's true love, and the trustworthiness of that love through all experiences of life. What God said in Jesus is true. St. Paul wrote all of God's promises are yes in Christ.

How strong is the assurance of God's certain love and promise in your life? How does it make a difference in your daily routine, and through the changes of life? Can you recall a specific moment when you were aware God had fulfilled a promise in your life, and it made a tremendous difference in your life?

I Kings 16a-21

These next verses provide a type of summary for the preceding message of God's faithfulness. Solomon appeals to the historical faithfulness of God, returning in memory to the Exodus itself. From the choosing of David as the source of inspiration for the temple, to Solomon building from that inspiration, to the city and site chosen, all has been done according to God's covenantal promise. All has transpired as the divine will intended. Our life may appear a series of arbitrary events with little connection or collective meaning. However, we learn from biblical testimony that God's loving will is always at work in life, using different people, in different places, and at different times. Though we may be unable to claim with certainty that God makes everything happen in life, we can claim that many events in our life are connected by a redemptive purpose beyond our own making. Yes, I can contemplate my past life and witness a string of events that seem to have little to do with one another. However, the great blessing in my life has been to look toward my history and become very aware that where I stand today in Christ was not of my making. Apart from God I would not stand where I stand. Instead of attempting to determine if God makes all things happen in our life, I think it is more meaningful and most likely true when I look for those incredible connections that led me to the incredible place of grace I now stand. I cannot understand all the mysteries of life, but I can understand all the blessings in it.

Do you understand your life as a disconnected string of events, or do you recognize that a loving plan is also at work? Do you see hope at work in your life? Can you recall moments that became incredible spiritual moments in your Christian life? How do you reconcile mystery and God's active will?

Summary

We belong to a historical faith. The blessing of Solomon that day included events that are also very important events in our spiritual journeys. The powerful fact of "journey" is that it isn't over until God wills that it is over. We remain on spiritual journeys in Christ. God is accomplishing the unimaginable, in ways beyond our thinking. We are not haphazardly speeding through life. We are on a walk, an important spiritual walk in Christ. All events will one day make sense and we will see the beautiful connection. Until then, we walk by faith, trusting in a trustworthy God who does what he says.

Prayer

Almighty God the mystery of life drives us to our knees. We hear your answer to Job when he questioned your will and you responded, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” We recognize we were not present, and therefore, cannot understand all. However, you have revealed we can trust you in all, through all, for you made it all. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Dr. D. Craig Rikard is a South Georgia pastor. Email him at craigrikard169@yahoo.com.

Solomon Seeks God’s Blessing

Winter Quarter: Honoring God

Sunday school lesson for the week of January 19, 2020

By Dr. D. Craig Rikard

Lesson Scripture: I Kings 8:22-53

Supplementary text: 2 Chronicles 6:12-42

Key Verse: I Kings 8:30

“Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear forgive.”

Aim and Goal of the Lesson

Understanding the Lord we worship is God of heaven, earth, and all that is above and below. This understanding enriches our experience of communing with the Lord. God is omnipresent and there are no limitations that impede our worship, for there are no limitations to God’s love.

Historical, Geographical, Theological and Experiential *background* for studying I Kings 8: 22-53, and 2 Chronicles 6: 12-42

Our text opens with King Solomon engaged in three interconnected postures of worship. As the narrative begins, he stands before the bronze altar of the Lord in the newly constructed temple. For Solomon, this was more than a respectful act, he was engaged in utter reverence! He was standing before the Lord, creator of all, in the holiest place he could imagine! Each posture revealed the reverence with which God’s people treated and approached God. The focus of all worship began with their spiritual (and biological) face set toward God. Prior to examining the faces of the people absent or in attendance, Solomon seeks God above all others. When Solomon turns from the altar and faces the gathered people of Israel he is intentionally involving all present in the sacred act of worship and adoration. Though each of us can always worship God within the confines of our own heart, it is potently vital to worship the Lord together in sacred community. In Solomon’s concluding act he raises his hands toward heaven and God. The

raising of his hands represented the worship of God who is above all on behalf of all. God is high and holy, and thus our unclean hands are raised toward the Lord. Our hands may prove far from holy and clean, but God's redeeming love declares them clean by grace. In Psalm 24:3 the psalmist asks, "Who can ascend the holy hill of the Lord? He who has clean hands and a pure heart." In reality, the answer to the psalmist's question is that no one can ascend the holy hill of God! Unless God declares those unholy hands pure by an act of grace! God! Also read Psalm 28:2. Raised hands also represent "empty hands." Solomon holds nothing in his hands to offer God. His hands can only be filled by the Lord of all. What a beautiful, picturesque opening to our narrative! When we read biblical narratives, we can easily become tempted to forget that the events are occurring in a real, historical setting alive in powerful meaning and significance. Their faces express touching emotion, and their bodily movements speak to their holy God.

Using the gift of imagination, what images come to mind as you picture Solomon standing before God with the assembled congregation? If there would be a modern setting that might capture what you imagine, how would the setting appear? Can you recall a moment when you sensed that a person truly sensed God's holy presence in a particular moment? Or, that a congregation was captivated by a sense of the holy?

One of the great, and for me personally, stunning statements to contemplate in our narrative is Solomon's question, "But will God really dwell on the earth?" Solomon is acknowledging that the greatest structures humankind can build will always stand inadequate, even when dedicated to the greatness of God. We get a sense that Solomon is deeply humbled in just thinking about the act of building a temple for God. As grand as the temple might appear, and the profound holiness the majestic structure expresses still leaves Solomon feeling feeble and frail. Solomon has become overwhelmed by the creator God of the cosmos, not by what God has made, but what Solomon has attempted to make "for God!" He realizes his temple cannot come near in ensuring it is fit for the habitation of God. How can we even speak of God dwelling anywhere when he is beyond everything and transcends every place? Yet, the text includes Solomon's humble confession and prayer. Solomon is basically saying, "Though your existence is beyond and above all, *hear us, your frail needful people.*" The very fact that our majestic God chooses to hear us is remarkable!

The content of this week's narrative is much akin to the previous text of last week's lesson. However, the reason some expressions of truth are repeated in the Bible is because they are so important. The Bible is sated with statements of God's greatness and love, and it never seeks to "tone those messages down." The message is just too important. Repeatedly we are told that God is faithful to his promises, and that what God says, God does. This is one of the grand threads that holds all of scripture together, and reveals to us the nature and character of God. Therefore, we need to hear it repeatedly, and we do.

Are there actions you can take that enable you to more easily recognize God's greatness in conjunction with you own humility? What are some of these actions and why do they work for

you? How does our inadequacy and God's magnificence complement each other? Why was it important for Solomon, after all he had done for God, to realize his accomplishment still left him feeling inadequate? Do you think God simply wants us to realize how weak we are, or do you believe God wants us to rather realize how great the Lord is? Could God desire both, and are not both important?

Historical, Geographical, Theological, and Experiential reflection of I Kings 8: 22-53, and 2 Chronicles 6: 12-42:

I Kings 8:22-23a

In the previous background material we addressed the worship postures of Solomon. Therefore, rather than repeat the discussion of their meaning and importance, I encourage you to read the text again and allow it to speak. Often, we can read texts more than once and hear God whisper some eternal truth we did not hear during the first reading. Almost every clergy and teacher of Scripture can attest to mining brand new nuggets of truth from texts we studied on previous occasions. At this moment we want to slowly and methodically contemplate what Solomon is saying when he claims "there is no God 'like you.'" The Spirit has inspired Solomon to write similar words on other occasions, but Solomon is often standing at a different place in life, or lives in a different context when he writes them anew. King David used beautiful, powerful wording in some psalms to express his need for forgiveness. However, read his cry for forgiveness in Psalm 51 and notice they possess a different, more profound power after his sin with Bathsheba. Solomon has repeatedly mentioned God's greatness and power. However, now Solomon is inspired to remind God's people the "kind of God" our Lord is.

There is no God like Israel's God in heaven above or earth below, Solomon proclaims. It is helpful to possess some understanding of the cosmological perspective of the universe believed by the Hebrew people. Heaven is perceived more like a dome covering a flat surface, the earth. However, heaven stretches out without end above the earth. The earth and world they know and understand is the world they witness every day. Solomon was not inspired to gift us with a scientific book and explanation of how heaven and earth operate, or even how they exist. He does not tell us that $e=mc^2$! However, he is concerned with us knowing that "creation and its remarkable laws exist!" And, it is God who made them and orders the cosmos with them. The Lord who made heaven and earth is not only their creator. God is above them, beyond them and greater than our greatest thought. Thus, again, how do we even begin to fully understand the greatness of God when we attempt to see the Lord as "living in, or being confined to a temple?" The temple represents the Lord's presence with his people, however, he fills heaven and earth with such presence and power we cannot even come close to comprehending God's greatness and personal relationship with us in covenant. Read Psalm 104:1-9 and gain the beautiful, poetic description of our indescribable God, who is Lord of over his indescribable creation!

What emotions do you experience when reading Psalm 104? What images do the psalm evoke, and which images are your favorites? What does Psalm 104 help you understand about God?

Still, Solomon continues to remind Israel that they need to understand not just God's greatness, but also seek to grasp the remarkable question, "What is God like?" What is the nature of God? What is God's personality? What are the attributes of God? What is God like???

I Kings 8: 23b

We read, "What is God like?" Solomon answers one of the great attributes of God he understands: He keeps his covenant of love! Covenants were a very important facet of the near eastern world and the functioning between nations. Nations often met and ratified covenants related to issues like water rights, territorial boundaries, and peace treaties. Love could be involved in the covenant, or omitted. Most often, nations did not enter into covenants based on love, but on mutual social respect. And they were mutually conditional. You give us A, and we will give you B. However, God's love with Israel, dating back to Genesis 12 with Abraham and Sarah, was initiated, perpetuated, and maintained by love, especially God's love for his people. Repeatedly, Israel failed to remain true to God in covenant and violated the call to love the Lord. However, God never failed to love Israel. As cited earlier, repeatedly we are reminded through the inspired word that God is faithful to his promises, the Lord does what he says, and above all, refuses to violate the covenant of love he initiated with Israel. Once again Solomon has reminded Israel of this all-important fact. This is the one dynamic and truth that defines their life together and their relationship with their Lord. God did not simply establish a covenant that allowed the nation to function as a society, or maintain good diplomacy with other nations; the Lord chose to create a covenant of love that proclaimed to the world, "this is what God is like!!!" God's love is as unbreakable as his promises in all of life.

The term "love" as used in covenant also implies "kindness." God is "loving and kind." St. Paul understood this holy connection in I Cor. 13 writing the simple yet memorable words, "Love is patient and kind." I once sat on a board that worked to construct a new facility for children in need of a group home. A large degree of time was spent discussing whether or not the windows should be squared or arched. For those like me, who were new to the importance of architecture and its messages, we failed to realize that arches convey "softness and kindness," whereas edges revealed a more rigid perception of life. Kindness is important, especially to those existing in an unkind world. The world of Israel could quickly become a violent world, void of kindness. However, the covenant of love God established with Israel revealed a constant, unmistakable kindness in the word. This is what God is like! There exists no greater expression of covenantal kindness and love than the revelation of Jesus Christ. He is what God is like in every manner possible. Epiphany is the liturgical season of light and life. In Jesus, we see the light of God's love and the life it brings to all.

If a person unfamiliar with faith asked you, "What is God like?" How would you answer? How could you add a personal dimension to your answer, telling the person what God is like to you? How does a personal relationship with Christ differ from other relationships in your world? Do you see kindness in the relationships we have with Jesus? In what manner? How could we allow others to know that God is loving and kind through the way we treat each other?

I Kings 8:23b-26

The Spirit inspires Solomon to include a very important dynamic in our covenantal relationship with the Lord. Though God's love is unconditional and unbreakable, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ, we do have an important role in the relationship. We are expected to love God in return, and "our neighbor as ourselves." From Deut. 6:4 forward we are taught the one condition that allows us to fully experience and enact the love of God in the world. It is called the "Shema." Jesus called it the "Law of laws." When asked to name the greatest of all laws, Jesus responded in quoting the Shema. We are to respond to God's faithful love "wholeheartedly." Solomon continues to call Israel to faithfulness. Having a spiritual descendent upon the just throne of God has everything to do with walking faithfully before God.

It is at this point that we engage in the discussion of grace and works. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. Furthermore, read James' epistle on the relationship between faith and works. How do you as a Christian reconciling God's unbreakable covenant of love with the condition that we live in faithfulness? How does the church explain this holy, special connection of the two? Do you find God's unconditional love and our need to be faithful confusing? What helps you most in understanding how the two are interconnected?

I Kings 8:27-53

As Solomon closes the narrative he returns to the one, most humbling dynamic he cannot escape. How can we expect God to inhabit what feeble humanity has made with its frail hands when God is greater than heaven above and earth below? However, in the Spirit he is moved by another inescapable truth that defines and gives meaning to all human life. God allows us to look toward the temple, that frail imitation of the Lord's greatness and pray, and be heard! What is God like? God loves and cares enough to hear our prayers and respond in love. Solomon realizes that wherever he finds himself, he can look toward the temple and pray, and God will hear. In our Christian faith we do not attempt to confine God to a place, such as a sanctuary. Even when visiting our holiest places in Israel we are aware that God is present, but still remains beyond. Most importantly, he knows "we are there!" Still, there is nothing wrong with looking toward sanctuaries and special places when we struggle in life and want to remember God is present and listening. I love church steeples. I love the fact that we can drive through towns, look upward, and see an image that says, "God knows you are here, and listens." Through the centuries, humanity has constructed many holy sites. For years men and women have visited these places not because we believe God lives there, but because they remind us that God knows "we live here."

What are your favorite places to visit for prayer? What place or places help remind you that God knows you are alive in the world, and precious to him? Are there not also places in life that we did not build, but exist naturally in nature that are just as special? What actions, thoughts, places, etc. most help you understand that God is truly listening to your prayer?

Summary

People of faith will always struggle to reconcile the greatness of God with the frailty of our humanity. We will ask, “How can God who fills the heavens and the earth fill my human heart?” However, it is our faith in Jesus Christ which is most helpful in reconciling the two. He joined humanity, not in a grand structure, but in a manger. He lived not in a large metropolitan area, but in the small town of Nazareth. He lived with common men and women for he refused to make them feel small and insignificant. In a small, common place in the world the God of creation joined us in such a profound manner he understands our deepest sorrows and highest joys. He understands our fear of death, and our strength in trusting God for everlasting life. What is God like? Look to Jesus!

Prayer

Almighty God, you hold the entire cosmos in perfect tension. Every planet is in perfect alignment to sustain our life. The myriads of solar systems and greatness of the heavens leave us confounded and humbled. Yet, you know our name, the experiences that break our heart, and the joys that emerge from sorrow because your goodness and love never abandon us or waste a moment in life. In humble adoration we praise your holy name. We may feel inadequate, but you never are. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Dr. D. Craig Rikard is a South Georgia pastor. Email him at craigrikard169@yahoo.com.

Two new resolutions to add to your 2020

GROWING IN GRACE BEN GOSDEN

Friday, Jan. 3, 2020, may well go down as a significant day in Methodist history. If I use my imagination, I can already hear a Methodist History professor teaching seminary students in 30 years about the day our denomination announced its biggest split since the issue of slavery divided us in the 19th Century.

13: The number of text messages I received within about 15 minutes of the story about the new protocol document breaking.

11: The number of church members, specifically, who called within the first four hours of the story breaking.

6: The number of non-Methodist friends who stopped me the following morning at the YMCA to ask what it meant. Turns out when you make national news, people of all denominational stripes start paying attention to The United Methodist Church.

No doubt there are many emotions swirling even as you read this column some 96 hours following such a paramount announcement. Some may be feeling a sense of shock and surprise because this proposal (at least on the surface) seems to turn back the decisions made at General Conference 2019. Others may be feeling a sense of anger: how could a proposal be made that seems to go against what the majority (at least according to General Conference voting) of the church wants? Still others may be feeling a sense of relief: finally, we can be done with the 40+ year battle over LGBTQ inclusion. For all, I'm sure, there is a sense of grief that accompanies whatever you're feeling: the church, as we know it, will likely never be the same after May.

In times like this, I am reminded of the wisdom of Fred Rogers: "Confronting our feelings and giving them appropriate expression always takes strength, not weakness." This is to say whatever you're feeling today is okay. In times of confusion and despair when we long for God to airlift us out of our current circumstance, we can take heart that it is then that God parachutes in to be with us, no matter what you're feeling or what side of the debate you find yourself on.

In sorting through our complicated feelings, I wonder if there's not a word from God that could guide us — not only through this circumstance, but into the new year. An Epiphany, if you will, that could shine light in the darkness and shed light on the path God wants us to walk in 2020. Two such Epiphanies occurred to me over the weekend.

The first Epiphany came to me late Friday night in one of the more unlikely places: Twitter. I was scrolling the reactions numerous Methodists were having in real time. From what I was reading, grief seemed to be the most prevalent reaction. And like a whisper, I felt God say, "The church was never YOURS to begin with. It belongs to Jesus and it exists for the sake of THOSE NOT YET A PART OF IT." And it hit me: while it's okay to be sad over change (that's a normal emotion), we cannot lose sight of the fact that the church doesn't exist to serve US — it exists for others, especially those in search of God's redeeming love and grace. As we manage this season of change, local churches should challenge themselves to focus more on reaching new people and less on what we perceive to be losing (or gaining). The local church is only as strong as its ability to reach outside of its walls for the sake of Jesus Christ. Likewise, I would challenge our district and conference leadership to focus more on seeing its mission as less about preserving the institution as it is, and more about imagining what we could become as a result of this change. The district and conference are only as strong as their ability to develop and empower leaders and create the framework through which life-changing discipleship can happen throughout its boundaries.

The second Epiphany came through an email conversation I had with a colleague and friend with whom I disagree on the issue of full inclusion of LGBTQ persons. In voicing our disagreement over email, it was moving that we were able to do so while also affirming each other's gifts and graces. We didn't try to change each other's minds at all. But I felt heard. And I hope he did too. We need to do more of this in the coming months. We need to hear and affirm one another as children of God even, and maybe especially, when we disagree. The reformation of the

Methodist Church may be born out of difficult disagreement, but it can also birth something else — namely a witness to the world that persons who disagree can do so with love and grace, upholding the humanity and blessedness of one other, and seeking to follow the command of Christ to be a peacemaker through it all.

I've made a number of New Years' resolutions this year. But, after Friday, I think I should add to my list: 1) A renewed love and mission for the lost; and 2) A commitment to be a peacemaker in all I say, do, and tweet.

The Rev. Ben Gosden is senior pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church in Savannah. He can be reached at ben@trinity1848.org.

John Wesley and the poor

JOHN WESLEY MOMENTS

DAVE HANSON

John Wesley cared deeply about the poor. In Bristol, he was proud to find the Methodist New Room Congregation active in ministering with the poor. They not only brought “good news to the poor,” but embodied various forms of “social holiness.” There was a school for poor children, a dispensary with free medicine for the poor, prison visitation, and the formation of a Stranger’s Friend Society which was for the benefit of those outside the Methodist Society – especially the poor. This Society visited and helped the poor in their homes.

John Wesley said one reason so many rich people cared nothing for the poor was that they had never been inside a poor person’s home, did not know how the poor lived, and had no first-hand experience of poverty themselves. He was highly critical of the rich as a class, and once, in preaching to a wealthy congregation in London, called them a brood of vipers – using a text from John the Baptist. One irate member of the congregation accosted Wesley afterwards and told Wesley he should preach that sort of sermon to the riffraff down at Spitalfields, one of the poorest sections of the city. Wesley replied that if he were to preach at Spitalfields, his text would be, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!”

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

Retired Clergy Birthdays - January 2020

1/01 – Cindy H. Autry: 2958 Roswell Lane; Columbus, GA 31906

1/01 – James Hancock: 4360 Manor Millwood Rd. S; Manor, GA 31550

1/01 – Larry Roberts: 12 Foxfire Estates Circle; Waynesville, NC 28785

- 1/01 – Dan Robinson: 222 N. Bobby St.; Lenox, GA 31637
 1/02 – Sharon Loyley: 1544 Harris Ridge Rd.; Young Harris, GA 30582
 1/03 – Marcus Tripp: 3791 Overlook Dr.; Macon, GA 31204
 1/04 – John Harrington: 4820 Oak Arbor Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31602
 1/06 – Joyce Harris: 111 Ingham St.; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
 1/07 – Tommy Martin, III: 606 Chastain Place; Macon, GA 31210
 1/08 – Kenneth Banker: 220 W. Pecan St.; Surrency, GA 31563
 1/08 – Ernie Rogers: 1803 Pineknoll Lane; Albany, GA 31707
 1/08 – Gary Starrett: PO Box 113; Bolingbroke, GA 31004
 1/11 – V.L. Daughtery, Jr.: 3713 Bermuda Run; Valdosta, GA 31605
 1/12 – Eddie Braswell: 1110 Moore Dr.; Americus, GA 31709
 1/12 – Grady Vance: 127-B Nina Dr.; Eatonton, GA 31024
 1/13 – Randy Nease: 195 Zipperer Rd.; Guyton, GA 31312
 1/15 – Gary Morris: 2445 Jacqueline Circle; Moultrie, GA 31768
 1/16 – J. Brooks Partain: 206 Eckles Rd.; Americus, GA 31719-2118
 1/17 – Ed Ellington: 675 Arthur Wolfe Rd.; Dublin, GA 31021
 1/18 – Steve Rumford: 130 Arlington Row; Macon, GA 31210
 1/21 – Billy Wicker, Jr.: 400 Ridgecrest Rd.; E. Dublin, GA 31021
 1/22 – Tom Davis, Jr.: 155 Twin Creek Ct.; Athens, GA 30605
 1/24 – Joe Dunagan: PO Box 1903; Bristol, VA 24203
 1/25 – Frank Harris: 312 Brim Dr.; Macon, GA 31220
 1/27 – James Ford: 1751 G 8th St. NW; Hickory, NC 28601
 1/27 – Bill Jones: 106 Hilldale Circle; Vidalia, GA 30474
 1/30 – Harold Feightner: 107 Harvest Point; Warner Robins, GA 31088
 1/30 – Holland Morgan: 2 E. 62nd Street; Savannah, GA 31405

.....

OBITUARIES

Mrs. Belle Cochran

Belle Cochran, 97, died December 17, 2019.

A native of Ashburn, Ga., she was a daughter of the late Lois Helms and Claude Lindsey Jones. She was preceded in death by her husband, Rev. W. E. Cochran; daughter, Patricia C. Mount; son, Andy Cochran; son-in-law, Blake Hardigree; and four siblings.

As the wife of a minister, she and Rev. Cochran served several churches in the North and South Georgia Conferences of The United Methodist Church for many years. She was currently a member of Ashford Memorial Methodist Church. Mrs. Cochran was a former resident at Lanier Gardens, and later High Shoals Health and Rehab, where she made many friends. The family would like to express their sincere appreciation to the loving caregivers of High Shoals Health and Rehab, as well as Affinis Hospice.

Services were held Friday, December 20, 2019, at Ashford Memorial Methodist Church. Graveside services were held at Fincher Memorial Cemetery, Meansville, GA.

Survivors include two children, Tom Cochran (Frances) and Sandra C. Hardigree, all of Watkinsville; sister, Sue J. Lewis of Thomaston; eight grandchildren; 13 great grandchildren; and two great-great grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to Ashford Memorial Methodist Church, PO Box 344, Watkinsville, GA 30677 or The Ark, 640A, Barber Street, Athens, GA 30601.

Scripture Readings – Jan. 7

Jan. 12

Baptism of the Lord

Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalm 29 (UMH 761)

Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 3:13-17

Jan. 19

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-11 (UMH 774)

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

Jan. 26

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalm 27:1, 4-9 (UMH 758)

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-23

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 2/7/2020 edition

Leadership Tour, Statesboro FUMC – Jan. 5

Leaders all across the South Georgia Conference have answered the call to serve in their local church setting. As a faithful member of your congregation, we know you want to serve and serve well! To help equip and empower you in your ministry role, the 2020 Leadership Tour will offer practical teaching and resources to both inspire you and help you lead with confidence. This free event is sponsored by the Office of Connectional Ministries. www.sgaumc.org/leadershiptour

Leadership Tour, Warner Robins FUMC – Jan. 12

Leaders all across the South Georgia Conference have answered the call to serve in their local

church setting. As a faithful member of your congregation, we know you want to serve and serve well! To help equip and empower you in your ministry role, the 2020 Leadership Tour will offer practical teaching and resources to both inspire you and help you lead with confidence. This free event is sponsored by the Office of Connectional Ministries. www.sgaumc.org/leadershiptour

Basic Lay Speaking Class, Pelham – Jan. 17-18

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. This fee covers all materials and lunch on Saturday. This class will be held Friday, Jan. 17 from 6:30 until 9 p.m. and Saturday, Jan. 18 from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. at Hand Memorial UMC. Registration: www.sgaumc.org/layspeakertraining.

ERT Basic Certification Training & Chainsaw Training, Nashville – Jan. 18

Be prepared to respond to the next disaster. Early response training covers the basics of early disaster response, including roof tarping, cleaning out damaged homes, spiritual and emotional care, team protocols, and more. The purpose of the training is to prepare our United Methodist volunteers to do good and do no harm. Cost is \$25 for ERT only, \$31 for both ERT and Chainsaw, or \$12 for just chainsaw. At the training, participants will receive an ERT training manual and, upon completing the course, will receive an UMCOR ID Badge and a conference ERT t-shirt. Lunch is provided. An UMCOR background check is required before receiving a badge. Information for submitting background checks will be sent to participants. This class, scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 18, 2020, will be hosted by Nashville UMC in the Family Life Center (304 South Berrien Street; Nashville, GA 31639). The class begins at 9 a.m. (participants must be present by 8:30 a.m.). Chainsaw Operators Training will begin at 1:30 p.m. at the conclusion of the ERT class. [Register here](#)

Leadership Tour, Camilla UMC – Jan. 19

Leaders all across the South Georgia Conference have answered the call to serve in their local church setting. As a faithful member of your congregation, we know you want to serve and serve well! To help equip and empower you in your ministry role, the 2020 Leadership Tour will offer practical teaching and resources to both inspire you and help you lead with confidence. This free event is sponsored by the Office of Connectional Ministries. www.sgaumc.org/leadershiptour

Human Relations Day – Jan. 19

Sunday, Jan. 19 is Human Relations Day, one of six churchwide Special Sundays with offerings for The United Methodist Church. Human Relations Day strengthens United Methodist outreach

to communities in the United States and Puerto Rico, encouraging social justice and work with at-risk youths.

ERT Basic Training, Pooler – Jan. 25

Be prepared to respond to the next disaster. Early response training covers the basics of early disaster response, including roof tarping, cleaning out damaged homes, spiritual and emotional care, team protocols, and more. The purpose of the training is to prepare our United Methodist volunteers to do good and do no harm. Cost is \$25. At the training, participants will receive an ERT training manual and, upon completing the course, will receive an UMCOR ID Badge and a conference ERT t-shirt. Lunch is provided. An UMCOR background check is required before receiving a badge. Information for submitting background checks will be sent to participants. This class, scheduled for Saturday, January 25, 2020, will be hosted by Trinity UMC (320 Benton Dr.; Pooler GA 31322). The class runs from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. [Register here](#)

Leadership Tour, Hinesville FUMC – Jan. 26

Leaders all across the South Georgia Conference have answered the call to serve in their local church setting. As a faithful member of your congregation, we know you want to serve and serve well! To help equip and empower you in your ministry role, the 2020 Leadership Tour will offer practical teaching and resources to both inspire you and help you lead with confidence. This free event is sponsored by the Office of Connectional Ministries. www.sgaumc.org/leadershiptour

Winter Conference – Jan. 26-29

Len Wilson, Creative Director at St. Andrew UMC, a large church in Plano, Texas, will be our keynote speaker. He is a storyteller and expert strategist in communications and creativity in church life. After GC 2019, each church will need a clear, concise, creative, and compelling message and brand to effectively communicate who they are and where they stand. Len will lead us through a comprehensive process to develop and implement your own strategy while improving all phases of communication and creativity in your ministry. He will also share his insights on church growth as the compiler of the list of the Top 25 Fastest Growing United Methodist Large Churches. Len is author of the book “Think Like A Five Year Old.” [More information](#)

Basic Lay Speaking Class, Perry – Jan. 31-Feb. 1

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. This fee covers all materials and lunch on Saturday. This class will be held Friday,

Jan. 17 from 6:30 until 9 p.m. and Saturday, Jan. 18 from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. at Crossroads UMC.
Registration: www.sgaumc.org/layspeakertraining.