

## **SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – APRIL 7 EDITION**

### **In midst of crisis, South Georgia congregations get creative to share love of Christ**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

The coronavirus pandemic has been called “the most challenging crisis the world has faced since World War II.” COVID-19 has killed more than 70,000 people worldwide and the global health crisis upended lives, caused mass shutdowns of businesses and schools, and churches have been asked to suspend worship services and other gatherings until at least the end of April.

But pastors say this health and human crisis need not be a spiritual crisis.

“When the noise of life is all around us, let us keep our eyes focused on Christ, who rides in not to make an announcement for He is the announcement of God's peace, of God's salvation that has come,” said South Georgia Bishop R. Lawson Bryan.

Across the South Georgia Conference, congregations are employing creative techniques to spread the gospel message. Instead of in-person worship services and small-group gatherings, Facebook, video conferencing, and other means of technology are helping congregants stay connected.

Rev. David Donnan, pastor of Twin City United Methodist Church, says his congregation is still focusing on making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world during this unique time.

“We have been staying open to what avenues God may have available for us to use,” he said. “We have been blessed to leverage technology to stay connected.”

The church’s worship services have been added to YouTube and Facebook for the past three weeks, Rev. Donnan said. He’s also inviting worshipers to participate in services using their smartphones and saying the Apostles Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and singing “Jesus Loves Me.”

For Palm Sunday they were asked to video themselves waving palm branches. This week they’re filming themselves releasing the caterpillars they were given earlier in Lent which have now transformed into butterflies. For the second Sunday of Easter, members will video children hunting for eggs. Those videos are being incorporated into the worship services, Rev. Donnan said, and he even wrote a tutorial on his blog about [how to use phones for worship](#).

“The strength of our online worship has been including the people of God through the gift of smartphones,” he said.

Rev. Antonie Walker is preaching live via Facebook each Sunday morning and streaming worship sermons online via [Riverside United Methodist Church's website](#) and YouTube, but he is also using low-tech ways to stay in touch with his congregation.

He spent one recent morning calling all of the church's members, spending time checking in, asking how they and their families were doing, and praying for them.

"It's a part of keeping the connection, the sense of community, and meeting people where they are," he said.

Churches across South Georgia are remaining [Alive Together in Witness](#) even while scattered. In the words of Josh McLemore, Douglas First United Methodist Church's youth director, "Sometimes loving others looks like hanging out on Zoom." Here are a few examples, shared with us via email and Facebook, of how local churches have creatively shared the gospel message and the love of Christ during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Please note: some of these have already occurred and are for reference only/to help spur creativity. To add to the list, email [allison@sgaumc.com](mailto:allison@sgaumc.com).*

- Churches and individuals are offering to pick up groceries and run errands for vulnerable populations in their church and community.
- Churches are providing daily devotions and "check-ins" through Facebook Live.
- Churches are moving small group ministries and weekly Bible studies online using Facebook groups and Zoom.
- Churches are using Zoom for youth and small group ministry.
- Annie Paulk, Children's Director at Tifton FUMC, is live on Facebook each night for [Bible Story Time](#). Annie and her children share a story from the Jesus Storybook Bible for peaceful sleep.
- Ted Goshorn, Eastman UMC Pastor, is offering [daily prayers and guided reflection](#) through Facebook.
- Glennville UMC is partnering with Tattnall County Schools to pack lunches for children with food shortages while out of school.
- Caren Dilts, Children's Director at Porterfield Church, goes live on Instagram to offer encouragement and connection with her children.
- [Allison Vandenberg](#), Children's Director at Albany FUMC, offers their Orange Curriculum with 5 resources for families to use at home and continue to grow in God's Word together.

- [Nashville UMC](#) is using the Facebook platform for daily devotions and prayer time.
- Jeremy Cole, Youth Director at St Mary's UMC, goes Live for youth on Sunday night.
- [Pierce Chapel](#) is bringing livestream to the preschoolers & friends with Chapel time with Mrs. Lynn.
- Pembroke UMC is using this as an opportunity for members to get to know one another better. They are recording video interviews to use during this time when they cannot be together face to face.
- Leesburg UMC, Friendship UMC (Donalsonville) and Trinity UMC (Warner Robins) have transitioned their food pantry into "curb-side" service.
- Clergy Cluster groups are meeting with technology to share ideas and offer support to each other during this unprecedented time.
- Avalon UMC and Bonaire UMC are dividing up the list of member/regular attenders and calling to check on each household and determine if there are needs.
- Jonathan Smith is working individually with churches to walk them through the use of technology for their ministry needs.
- Prior to Gov. Kemp's shelter-in-place order, Jesup UMC churches rented the drive-in movie theater and offered church to all in the community.
- Wesley Monumental is distributing craft kits loaded with all the children need to participate in Bible lessons and crafts via live stream.
- Porterfield will be hosting a Live Prayer Meeting event tonight.
- Ivy Kratzer, Waycross FUMC shared her Joyful Noise Children's Choir - Spring 2020 playlist (through Apple Music) with parents adding a short note encouraging them to engage in some praise and worship together since we can't be together Wednesday nights. Children are also drawing pictures and cards to mail to nursing home and homebound members.
- Pine Forest UMC is providing Discipleship Kits for children and youth to pair up with several interactive live streaming events throughout each week.
- Harvest Church, Dublin FUMC and Warwick UMC cast a Facebook challenge to "Love on each other today" by picking up the phone and checking on 3 people who live alone, are quarantined or are over 70 years of age.
- Metter UMC gathered on Facebook for "Sandwiches & Study" as their Wednesday Night program.

- Ben Gosden, Pastor of Trinity in Savannah, is sending out a few texts of encouragement each week. Members and friends can sign up to receive the texts and be uplifted.
- Kathy Israel McLeod at Hand Memorial is mailing out the weekly bulletin to adults who do not use technology, keeping them connected to prayer requests, the services posted to their website, and inspirational quotes and scriptures.
- Porterfield UMC & Mission Change partnered to deliver 209 snack bags to the medical staff at Phoebe Putney Health System.
- Richmond Hill and Trinity Chapel on Tybee Island have placed their Easter cross outside the church for people to stop by, add a flower, and pray.
- Skidaway Island UMC issued a "Sidewalk Challenge" to brighten up sidewalks and drives with pictures and scripture.
- Colquitt UMC provided prayer guides for members to pray for medical personnel.
- Clare Akins (Vienna UMC), Martha Bowman UMC Sainly Stitchers, Porterfield Memorial UMC, Albany First UMC, Pierce Chapel UMC and several local churches are sewing masks for medical staff on the front lines in our hospitals.
- Members at Pierce Chapel are loaning extra "devices" such as iPads and setting up for older adults to stay connected.

While COVID-19 has changed much about the church, much has also stayed the same, Rev. Donnan said.

“We are checking on people, praying with people, and standing on the promises of God,” he said. “Church members are loving their neighbors by making sure everyone is well and not in need of supplies. Our prayer phone tree is used multiple times each week to check in with everyone. At the end of the day, we are still clinging to our hope that Jesus has made us clean in the most important way!”

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## **Churches make masks for healthcare workers, patients**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

In the midst of the coronavirus crisis, it often helps to focus on what you can do rather than what you can't.

That's what many South Georgia sewers are doing: focusing their efforts on serving those in need and offering a solution to health care workers on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic.

In Albany, hard hit by COVID-19, Phoebe Putney Health System recently said they were running low on critical supplies. As of Sunday morning, April 5, [a total of 139 COVID-19 patients were being treated in Phoebe Putney Health System's main hospital](#).

Volunteers from around the region and country immediately offered to help by sewing face masks.

Sylvia Broadway, a member of Albany First United Methodist Church, has been sewing for as long as she can remember. Working as a seamstress, she put herself through college by making dresses and doing alterations.

She's recently put her skills to use by making masks, teaching others how to make them, and helping coordinate a volunteer effort to make hundreds more.

"It was such a God thing. I was writing in my journal asking God to show me what to do," Broadway said. "About that time Laura (Haygood, Albany First UMC's Director of Missions and Outreach) texted and asked if anyone wanted to sew masks for Phoebe (Putney Health System). Next thing I know, I'm thrown right in the middle of the project!"

The hand-made masks protect N95 masks from getting soiled. The covers can be laundered, sterilized, and reused so the N95 masks can be used more than once, Broadway said. Instead of using one N95 mask per patient, by using the hand-made masks on top of N95 masks, healthcare workers may only need to use one N95 mask per day, she said.

"It's been a blessing to see God's hand in all of this," she said. "Our community has stepped up big time."

Growing up, Kendra Gannaway helped her mother create custom window treatments. As a music graduate student, she made her own performance gowns. Now she's sewing face masks for healthcare workers.

The cone-shaped masks she makes also cover the now hard-to-find N95 respirator masks and extend their life spans, said Gannaway, a member of Tifton First United Methodist Church.

The masks are being sent to Tift Regional Medical Center in Tifton where they are used by nurses and doctors.

"It is a very helpless and useless feeling to not be part of the healthcare community or contributing an essential service," she said. "I want to help; I want to fix things. And I figured this might be a way I can help."

Gannaway, who made a [YouTube tutorial video showing how to make the masks](#), says her faith is instrumental in this effort. She and others who are making the masks pray over each as they're made and for those who will use them.

"We're being God's hands and feet here," she said.

Karen Knowlton has led The Chapel's sewing group for five years. What started as a small group to teach others how to sew has grown into a ministry that helps meet the community's needs, Knowlton said.

Prior to the coronavirus outbreak, the group had made chemotherapy port pads for cancer patients at Brunswick's Southeast Georgia Health System. A couple of weeks ago, the health system asked Knowlton if the group could start making masks instead.

The women have already made and delivered more than 100 masks to the Cancer Care Center and more are on the way. They're being used by cancer patients undergoing treatment.

"If there's a call out there and a need out there, we'll do whatever we're asked to do. If there's a need we try to meet the need," Knowlton said. "Everyone has a purpose."

*Want to lend a hand? Mask-making instructions and lists of needed supplies are posted online at [www.phoebehealth.com/coronavirus](http://www.phoebehealth.com/coronavirus). The hospital group said masks can be mailed to Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital, c/o Supply Chain, 1108 North Monroe St. Albany, Ga., 31701.*

*[Step-by-step instructions to make cloth masks for Tift Regional Medical Center in Tifton.](#)*

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## **Children and youth ministers find creative ways to stay connected**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

As social distancing has become the norm and people are physically isolated and no longer gathering for worship services, it has become a challenge to stay connected.

Although church services are cancelled, many South Georgia youth and children's ministers are finding creative ways to continue ministering, using social media and the Internet to communicate and come together.

Each evening, Annie Paulk and her two children record themselves reading a story from the "Jesus Storybook Bible" and post it on Tifton First United Methodist Church's [children's ministry Facebook page](#). Paulk, the church's director of children's ministries, hopes that the story time inspires parents and families to spend more time together reading the Bible.

"We try to impress upon parents the importance of spending time in the Word with their kids, and what better opportunity and time than when they're getting ready for bed," she said.

Paulk hopes that if families get into the habit of reading the Bible together during this time of quarantine and crisis, it may become a habit.

"Maybe when this is all over and we're back to normal they'll continue to devote that time to their kids and the Word," she said.

She's also hosting a Facebook Live Sunday school class each Sunday morning at 9:30 and a Wednesday afternoon Zoom video conference call in lieu of their regular in-person Wednesday afternoon activities.

As a low-tech option, she's making "Sunday school to go" packets each week for families who aren't able to get online or log onto Facebook. With a printed Sunday school lesson, Bible story, and activity ideas, the envelope includes everything children and parents need to have Sunday school at home.

Paulk hopes that barriers are broken even after the coronavirus pandemic passes.

"It's amazing how this is creating community even though we aren't supposed to be having community," she said. "My prayer and my hope is that people who are now actively reaching out for the Word, that they will seek it out when we can be social again."

Moving Douglas First United Methodist Church's youth ministry to Zoom video conferencing seemed an obvious choice to youth director Josh McLemore.

In addition to being the church's youth director, McLemore works at a curriculum company and uses Zoom daily. When he saw that in-person worship services were being discontinued, he knew that video conferencing would be a good option for meeting.

"It was just kind of obvious for me, especially for small groups," he said.

He's used the online video conferencing platform to continue the church's regular Wednesday and Sunday youth programming. The youth, he said, are handling it well and have even asked if the online meetings can continue after the COVID-19 crisis is over.

"They're Snapchatting, they're on TikTok, they video call all the time, they're used to that constant interaction over the internet," McLemore said. "They have handled this so well."

But even though the students seem to be handling the crisis well, they're still bored, some are worried, and all are adjusting to new routines. Now, more than ever, McLemore said, it's important to be genuine and meet people's daily needs.

"We're doing ministry in ways we've never done before," he said. "I think what matters more than quality of videos or sound is connection and authenticity. That's what our congregations need right now. Lean more into those things. It's a season for us to lean more into authenticity and less into trying to do whatever that other church is doing."

Creative communication is on the rise in South Georgia schools, neighborhoods, and churches, church leaders say.

"The need to communicate hope in Jesus to our kids and teens is imperative, now more than ever," said Suzanne Akins, the South Georgia Conference's Director of Camping and Retreats. "Our children's and youth directors are making that happen in a million different beautiful ways!"

*Looking for ideas and resources? Visit [www.sgaumc.org/children-youth](http://www.sgaumc.org/children-youth).*

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## **Admin. Services, Board of Pensions help churches during time of financial crisis**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

It's been three or four weeks since South Georgia United Methodist congregations have gathered in person. While on-site worship services have been cancelled, the church's ongoing mission and ministry continue. Most are holding online worship services, via Facebook or another method, and they are continuing to reach out and serve their communities and members.

In the midst of this pandemic, one practical concern for churches is how not meeting in person will affect the spiritual discipline of giving.

To help local churches during this crisis, South Georgia's Administrative Services Office has created an online giving platform for churches to use if they don't already have online giving in place. Using the Conference's existing technology, the platform allows users to securely pay their tithe online, via credit card or debit card, by filling out a short online form.

During this time when congregations aren't able to gather in person, the South Georgia Conference will pay all fees associated with online giving so 100 percent of the tithe will go directly to the local churches. All gifts are tax-deductible.

"I'm concerned about the ministry of our churches," said Dr. Derek McAleer, Director of Administrative Services. "Their ministries will be vital in the next months, and we can't let our lack of physical presence stop our ministry. I hope an easy to use giving platform will help our faithful Methodists across South Georgia continue to support their churches."

Before Lizella United Methodist Church even had its online giving portal set up, church leaders were pleasantly surprised to find that money had been donated. They appreciate the free service from the Conference, said Rev. Josh Gale.

"We're looking forward to promoting this avenue of giving until all this is over," Rev. Gale said. "After that, who knows; maybe we learned some things and we'll find a way to offer that service to people ourselves."

Lakeland United Methodist Church's last in-person worship service was Sunday, March 15. The congregation has gathered virtually, via Facebook Live, since.

While the church has money in the bank and is, so far, doing fine financially, Rev. Rick Hamilton is using this opportunity as a way to introduce online giving to his congregation.

"This can help move the congregation forward to embrace online giving," he said.

In his weekly email newsletters, he reminds members of giving options and includes options to tithe, including the new online giving portal.

“I really think that we’re going to see a lot of fruit from this. We’re going to be stronger on the other side of this,” he said.

The Conference Board of Pensions has also announced a “HealthFlex payment holiday” for the church portion of the clergy health insurance for the months of April and May 2020. This is for clergy appointed to local churches or to extension ministries, as long as they are on Conference HealthFlex insurance or Medicare.

In addition, President Trump signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) into law on Friday, March 27. This Act is intended to provide financial relief to individuals, businesses, and non-profits from the economic impact of the coronavirus. The Administrative Services Office is keeping our conference updated as churches navigate how this Act can help them.

*If your church would like to use the platform or if you have questions about setting up online giving, [email](mailto:) or call Dr. Derek McAleer (478-738-0048).*

*For more information about online giving, visit [www.sgaumc.org/online-giving](http://www.sgaumc.org/online-giving).*

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## **Administrative Services helps navigate the CARES Act**

**By Dr. Derek McAleer, *Director of Administrative Services***

President Trump signed the **Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) (HR. 748)** into law on Friday, March 27th, 2020. This Act is intended to provide financial relief to individuals, businesses, and non-profits from the economic impact of the Coronavirus. There may be something in it that could help your church. The Act allows for *forgivable* Paycheck Protection Loans from the Small Business Administration to cover payroll and related employee expenses for the period February 15 through June 30, 2020, to help churches sustain their ministries. The Act also provides for a refundable payroll tax credit for 50% of wages paid by employers to employees during the COVID-19 crisis. (I think you may not be able to take both; it's one or the other, but I'm not sure yet). The payroll loans can probably help churches with preschools that are closed.

This is all happening very quickly, and all of the details are not even written, much less available. I assure you that I am no expert in these matters. The prospect of a forgivable loan is very attractive; at the same time, there are concerns, such as

- the record-keeping to get a loan and have the loan forgiven is detailed;
- employees with salaries over \$100,000 are treated differently;
- some lenders do not recognize that, unlike other SBA loans, these are available to religious non-profits;

- it is unclear whether taking such a loan "lets the camel's nose into the tent" in terms of providing a cause for the IRS to require further documentation from a church, such as filing a Form 990 annually;
- some lenders don't know how to process an SBA loan for a non-profit;
- and so forth -- far too many details are unclear.

So let me urge a bit of caution and planning. I can share a few webinars and information sites that may be able to help you as you look to see how your church can get some relief, and whether you want to pursue this path.

- GCFA has provided some [guidance here](#), including some helpful instructions for filling out the application, an offer from LBMC (GCFA's accounting firm) to assist UMC churches in applying for a PPP loan from US Bank
- Horizons Stewardship paper: [Resilient Leadership Update #4 - The CARES Act Special Edition](#)
- INJOY Stewardship/Church Fuel: [Cares Act resources](#) (includes checklist and recording of webinar)
- ECFA webinar: [The CARES Act – Key Impacts on Churches and Nonprofits](#)
- Church Law & Tax.com webinar: [Churches and the CARES Act: Helping Congregations and Employees Weather the Cash Crunch](#)
- [Guidestone's news release](#)
- US Chamber of Commerce: [Coronavirus Emergency Loans guidance](#)
- Wespath: [Coronavirus Resources page](#)
- Wespath: [Preliminary Summary of CARES Act Potential for UMC](#)

Horizons Stewardship has released a [video interview with attorney Jeff Watson](#), to help you better understand the details of the recent stimulus package and what it means for churches. They also have a webinar scheduled for April 8, when attorney Wilson will go over the details we expect the Small Business Administration to publish between now and then. [Register here](#).

NEW: There are a few lenders who incorrectly believe that churches cannot apply for the PPP for clergy or staff engaged in religious work. While that is normally the case in SBA loans, it is not so for the PPP. The SBA has provided clarification in their "[final rule](#)" -- I've put it in red on

pg. 27-28. The SBA also issues a [specific "clarification"](#) to state that faith-based organizations can apply. You may need to provide this to your lender.

While there is much that is not clear, here are a few steps your church should be taking NOW so that you'll be ready to apply once the details are clear.

- Make sure your 2019 Financial Statements are complete and your first-quarter financial statements are prepared as soon as possible. You'll need your payroll for 2019, as the average monthly payroll for 2019 plays into how much you can borrow.
- Review your church's polity on receiving a loan and take steps toward notices of meetings that may be required. If a committee or church vote is necessary, think about how you will accomplish that during social distancing using mailed ballots, conference calls, or online meetings (such as Zoom) that can accommodate large numbers of people. Determine if approval is required to apply for the loan or just to sign documents. Those loans are unsecured meaning they won't require District committee approval and can be forgiven in an amount up to 8 weeks of payroll. If the loan is not forgiven, you will need to talk to your DS about the conversion loan being approved.
- Determine if your bank is an SBA approved bank and let them know you would like to apply. If not, locate such a bank. Ask them to immediately provide you loan documentation requirements once published by the SBA.

Here's a handy-dandy flow-chart that greatly simplifies the PPP Process, but will help you get your bearings: [PPP Flowchart](#).

#### NEED PROOF OF YOUR 501.c.3 STATUS?

United Methodist Churches in the South Georgia Conference are covered under the United Methodist Church's "group ruling." You can go to [this page](#) to print out your letter of inclusion. You will need your church name and EIN. NOTE: the web site reads like you might be "applying" for your 501.c.3, but you're actually applying to get a copy of the letter. Just go through the website -- you'll have your letter in .pdf form within 2 minutes.

*Disclaimer: This information is provided as general guidance and is believed to be accurate upon its presentation. Please seek additional assistance from your legal, tax, financial, lending, and other competent professionals.*

Needless to say, you should be consulting with a professional before you take steps. My office is not competent in these matters and will not provide all the guidance you will need. This is complicated – but it does appear there is some relief out there for your church. Get together with your leadership and figure out who in your church or community can assist you in this. Act quickly.



## South Georgia Disaster Response, churches deploy N95 masks

South Georgia's [Disaster Response ministry](#) is committed to providing the loving presence of Christ during all times of disaster, and this current pandemic is no exception.

Last week, the Conference's Disaster Response team deployed N95 masks from its stockpile of UMCOR cleaning buckets and delivered them to local emergency managers, local first responders, and local healthcare (hospitals and long-term care) facilities. Each [UMCOR Cleaning Bucket](#) (flood bucket) had five N95 particulate respirator dust masks inside.

The masks are included in cleaning buckets to be used by Early Response Teams and homeowners to provide protection from dust, mold, and toxins as they muck out homes after a hurricane or flood or cleaning up after a tornado. Now, however, they're being used to help protect healthcare workers and other vulnerable people from the coronavirus.

"The district coordinators met virtually and all agreed that we should donate the stored masks," said Luis Morales, South Georgia's Disaster Response Coordinator. "Each district disaster response coordinator gave out anywhere from 80 to 200 masks and gloves."

Knowing local first responders and health care workers were in desperate need of masks, Susan Hughes, the South Central District's Disaster Coordinator, contacted a doctor and arranged for transport and delivery of several boxes from her church's disaster relief trailer.

"He was ecstatic to get them! He immediately delivered them to our hospital," Hughes said. "We are so thrilled to be able to give such an important piece of PPE (personal protective equipment) to those on the 'front lines.'"

*Does your congregation have UMCOR cleaning buckets on hand? If so, please consider donating the N95 masks. Contact your [district disaster response coordinator](#) for more information on donating the masks.*

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## A Word from Bishop Bryan: COVID-19 update - Finding peace amid the noise of life

Dear South Georgia clergy, laity, and friends,

On Palm Sunday, Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey. He doesn't ride in on a chariot or on a warhorse with a sword slashing all those around Him. He rides in humbly on a donkey, the animal that is a symbol of peace and a beast of burden. Christ comes in as the Prince of Peace, bearing upon Himself the burden of the sin of the world.

Yes, the crowds are shouting, palm branches are being waved, and there is a lot of noise. Jesus knows full well what is coming, but He also knows who He is and to whom He belongs. He knows the great work God has called Him to do.

I invite us to reflect upon that image. When the noise of life is all around us, let us keep our eyes focused on Christ, who rides in not to make an announcement - **for He is the announcement of God's peace, of God's salvation that has come.**

### **Shelter in place**

On Thursday, April 2, Gov. Kemp issued a statewide [shelter-in-place order](#) to stop the spread of COVID-19: "...all residents and visitors of the State of Georgia are required to shelter in place within their homes or places of residence, meaning remaining in their place of residence and taking every possible precaution to limit social interaction to prevent the spread or infection of COVID-19 to themselves or any other persons...." {[Read full executive order](#)}

Gov. Kemp's order makes it clear that the ideal is to stay home. This means NO in-person services of worship or gatherings, NO drive-in services, and NO drive-in or drive-by Communion. Church staff are encouraged to work from home as much as possible.

The order goes on to spell out certain "essential services" and "necessary travel" that are permissible during this time. One of those special-case items is defined as: "The minimum necessary activities to facilitate ... members ... being able to participate remotely from their residences." It is possible to interpret this as permitting production of online worship using less than 10 people who maintain six feet of separation between each other. Even this, however, should be done knowing the health risks involved. The ideal would still be to do as much from home as you can. **Please take this order seriously and stay home as much as possible.**

The South Georgia Cabinet and I are inspired by the way our clergy and congregations are proactively fighting the virus through social distancing and by sanitary practices of many kinds. At the same time, the laity and clergy of South Georgia are [Alive Together in our witness](#) to the Christian faith in a multitude of ways.

### **Communion/Love Feast**

As we continue to adjust to a different experience of Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter, I want to remind us of an important resource we can offer our congregations at a time when we are not able to come together for Holy Communion. This special resource comes to us from the early Christian Church - the Love Feast, also known as the Agape Meal. Along with our Cabinet, I am asking that churches use the Love Feast rather than doing online communion since this is in alignment with our understanding of the Lord's Supper as expressed in the document, ["This Holy Mystery."](#) It also draws on our Wesleyan heritage of the Love Feast, which is quite suitable for online use. [Learn more about the origin, history, and specifics of this special worship experience.](#)

### **CARES Act/Board of Pensions**

President Trump signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) into law on Friday, March 27. This Act is intended to provide financial relief to individuals, businesses, and non-profits from the economic impact of the coronavirus. I am thankful to our Administrative Services Office for their help in [keeping our conference updated](#) as churches navigate how this Act can help them. Please continue to [check the website](#) for daily updates. In

addition to this, the Conference Board of Pensions has announced a “HealthFlex payment holiday” for the church portion of the clergy health insurance for the months of April and May 2020. This is for clergy appointed to local churches or to extension ministries, as long as they are on conference HealthFlex insurance or Medicare.

**Resources, Worship Service, and Prayer**

Our Connectional Ministries team has put together [resources specifically for Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter](#), and I will lead a [10 a.m. worship service for Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday](#) for churches that are unable to stream their own service.

Let us continue to join together in prayer daily at 12:19 p.m. as we pray for a vaccine, for medical workers, for those with the virus, for grieving families, and for the Holy Spirit to continue stimulating the amazing creativity of our South Georgia congregations.

As we look toward the cross, may we once again pray these words together: Come, Lord Jesus, enable us to ride with you into Jerusalem. Enable us to sit with you at the table. Enable us to learn from your witness on the cross so that we can be who our communities and our world most need: quietly courageous leaders. Come, Lord Jesus, and make it be so for us. Amen.

Alive Together in Christ,  
R. Lawson Bryan

.....  
**Christ the Lord Has Risen Today: Let’s Sing Our Faith!**

**FROM THE BISHOP  
R. LAWSON BRYAN**

Easter marks the core of the Christian faith: the death on the cross and resurrection of Christ. As the sun rises Easter Sunday and ushers in the worldwide celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, I can only imagine how Christians in all languages and continents, nations and people groups, will be celebrating.

I am amazed to think of Christians all over the world singing the words given to us in 1739 by Charles Wesley, “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” (No. 302 in the Methodist Hymnal). We are Alive Together in Christ as we celebrate the resurrection by singing these words of our Methodist forebear, Charles Wesley.

During the seven-week Easter season, I encourage us to study the Wesley hymns, which are based on scripture and communicate to us the truth of Christ's resurrection. In “Christ the Lord is Risen Today,” for instance, Charles Wesley writes, "Love's redeeming work is done...Fought the fight, the battle won." It's important to remember that Jesus - on the cross - was in a battle with sin and death and evil, and on Easter He won that battle and rose victoriously. That's why we have something about which to sing!

My question is this: “Are we singing our faith?” When we sing our faith, we lift our own spirits. We help ourselves rise above difficulties and dark moods and are able to live in the joy of Christ.

The Wesley hymns for Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost give us the Biblical theology undergirding all that we do. They speak to us especially as we pass through this coronavirus pandemic.

I think of the Charles Wesley hymn, "Hail the Day that Sees Him Rise" (No. 312 in the Methodist Hymnal), about the ascension of Jesus, the 40th day after Easter. It mentions that as Christ ascended into heaven, the nail prints were visible in his hands. Even the ascended Lord showed the scars that represent the healing of the world in His own hands. And then 10 days later - 50 days after Easter - we have Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit leading to the birth of the Church. Once again, Charles Wesley has given us a song - "Spirit of Faith, Come Down" (No. 332 in the Methodist Hymnal) - that is actually a prayer to the Holy Spirit. I hope we will all be singing that prayer on the day of Pentecost, May 31.

When John Wesley was on the ship coming to Georgia a great storm arose. Wesley was afraid for his life. In the midst of his fear, he heard singing. He went to the bottom of the boat and found a group of German Christians called Moravians who were singing their faith. Wesley said to them, "Are you not afraid of dying?" They responded, "No, we're prepared to die." And so they kept singing.

Wesley wrote in his journal, "I am a fair weather Christian." He was confessing that as long as things were going well he could talk a good game, but in the face of death he was afraid. To his credit, John Wesley began to earnestly desire the kind of faith he encountered in those Moravians. He asked God for the gift of that kind of faith. Two years later, at a Bible study in Aldersgate Street in London, he had the Aldersgate experience that propelled him forward in faith. Looking back, how grateful we are for all that John Wesley endured and for the way God raised him to a new life with a faith that was unshakeable!

During this unprecedented time in our lives, let us embrace the Wesley hymns and sing them vigorously and continuously. May we remember that Christ has risen indeed. He has come to bring us the life that we need.

I invite us to let Charles Wesley speak to us throughout the Sundays of Easter as we sing the hymns of Wesley. Christ the Lord is risen today! Hallelujah!

Alive Together in Christ,

R. Lawson Bryan

[Click here to watch Bishop Bryan's Easter message](#)

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**Rev. Joseph Lowery, UMC pastor, civil rights activist, dies at 98**

**By the South Georgia Conference Advocacy Team**

Rev. Joseph Echols Lowery, the beloved dean of the civil rights movement, died on March 27. He was 98. Lowery, a world-renown civil rights activist and United Methodist pastor, marched and worked with the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for civil rights and justice.

Lowery leaves behind a rich legacy of service not only to the cause of civil rights, but he also leaves behind an impressive history of service to The United Methodist Church.

To understand his lifetime of service and commitment to the civil rights movement and the church, it's important to know the life-changing incident that put him on the path to standing up and advocating for others.

Rev. Lowery was born on October 6, 1921, to LeRoy Lowery and Dora Fackler Lowery in Huntsville, Ala. As told in a 2001 Atlanta Journal Constitution article, Lowery's call and conviction to civil rights and justice activism began when he was walking out of his father's candy store and had an encounter with a white police officer. In the article, Lowery recounted the interaction this way, "He hit me in the belly and said, 'Get back, (N-word). Don't you see a white man coming in?'" He said, "I went home and looked for my father's pearl-handled .32. I got it and was gonna look for that cop."

But as he got to the porch, his father, LeRoy Lowery, appeared and asked why he was crying. His father took the gun and gave him a lecture. That lecture changed the course of Lowery's life. Although some were pushing him to become a preacher, he wanted to be an attorney. As Christians, we are thankful for the wisdom of an earthly father that can speak love instead of hate. Violence is never the answer. Lowery said he knew his "call to preach involved social justice as much as it did heaven."

Lowery's journey continued into young adulthood, as his post-secondary education begins. After high school, he attended both Knoxville College and Alabama A&M University before getting his undergraduate degree from Paine College in Augusta.

Later he began his first appointment, which came in 1949. He was appointed to his first church, East Thomas United Methodist in Birmingham, Ala. In 1953 he transferred to Mobile to take over the Warren Street Methodist Church. He later organized a bus boycott in Mobile and that brought him to the attention of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He also fought against Jim Crow laws around transportation for black people and was a part of monthly meetings with other preachers that were activists in Montgomery for this same cause.

In 1957, Lowery, King, and the late Ralph Abernathy were among a group of ministers and civil rights workers who formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). King was elected president and Lowery was his vice president. Later he became chairman of the board, and from 1977 to 1997, its president. He refocused the organization around issues such as AIDS education, protecting African-American workers' rights, and getting guns off the streets.

In 1965 he was asked by King to lead the delegation of protestors and marchers fighting for the voting rights, which was from Selma, Ala. to Montgomery. These marches included the "Bloody Sunday" march and two other subsequent marches, and on the third march, the president of the United States, but not the governor of Alabama, heeded to the demands for rights.

In 1968 after the assassination of Dr. King, he moved to Atlanta and continued to pastor United Methodist churches until he retired.

In 2001, in celebration of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Joseph E. Lowery Institute for Justice and Human Rights, a think tank to research and analyze issues related to civil and human rights, was established at Clark Atlanta University.

In 2008, Lowery capped his civil rights career by working on the Obama campaign as a national co-chair for voter registration. After the election, President Obama picked Lowery to deliver the benediction at his inauguration.

On January 20, 2009 – a cold, blustery day – Lowery delivered that benediction by reciting “God of our weary years. God of our silent tears,” lines from James Weldon Johnson’s “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” also known as “The Negro National Anthem.”

President Obama would later bestow the highest level of civilian awards of honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, in 2009, on Lowery. He was also given the Fred L. Shuttlesworth Human Rights Award by the Birmingham Civil rights Institute that year.

Rev. Lowery was not afraid to speak truth to power that included political leaders, to black people who had forgotten what it is to be marginalized because of their “American success,” and to others in power.

Lowery is survived by three daughters, Yvonne, Karen, and Cheryl Lowery; two sons, LeRoy Lowery III and Joseph Lowery II; and 12 grandchildren.

What a loving and Christian example Rev. Lowery has shown as a steadfast servant of God, serving the body of Christ and advocating for all who are marginalized and suffer from injustices and equality. His legacy lives on as a model for us to emulate “God’s hands and feet” here on earth.

The Advocacy Team will provide more information on ways to explore and engage in history and places of civil rights and justice movements, people, and legacies.

*For more information and dialogue about Religion and Race, contact Rev. Earnestine Campbell, Connectional Ministries, Advocacy/Multicultural Ministries, [earnestine@sgaumc.com](mailto:earnestine@sgaumc.com).*

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## A Resurrected Savior

**Spring Quarter: Justice and The Prophets**  
**Unit 2: God Promises a Just Kingdom**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of April 12, 2020**  
**By Dr. Hal Brady**

**Lesson Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45**  
**Key Verses: 1 Corinthians 15:19,20**

**Lesson Aims**

1. List the key elements of the gospel as Paul sees them.
2. Explain why Christ's resurrection is the key to understanding everyone's future.

The late James S. Stewart, minister and scholar of the Church of Scotland, once stated in the Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale University, "Not one sentence of the New Testament, whether of Gospels, Epistles, Acts or Apocalypse, was penned apart from the conviction that He of whom these things were written had conquered death and was alive forever."

Easter Sunday worship services today will likely feature songs, Scripture readings, and preaching to celebrate that fact – the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Many Christians even prefer to call this Sunday Resurrection Sunday.

For the first-century church, every Sunday was Resurrection Sunday. Every week was a celebration and recognition that they served a living savior. But we are told that at least one church had problems with regard to the implications of Jesus' resurrection.

**Lesson Context**

The city of Corinth was located on the Isthmus of Corinth. That was a narrow strip of land about five miles wide that connected upper Greece with the Peloponnesian Peninsula to the south. This allowed Corinth to prosper as a trade center for goods coming from the eastern Roman Empire across the Aegean Sea to the Gulf of Corinth on their way to Italy and Rome (and vice versa). Corinth became a large wealthy city made up of a business class, workers and – sadly – slaves. Fully one half of the population consisted of slaves. The city attracted entrepreneurs from around the empire, giving the city a cosmopolitan culture and a mix of religions.

The apostle Paul's first visit to the city of Corinth lasted 18 months in the early ADs 50 (Acts 18:11). That was some two decades after the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul ended up planting a church of considerable diversity in Corinth, which included Gentiles from many different religious backgrounds and Jews. And after Paul's departure, the Corinthian church endured many self-inflicted problems (examples: 1 Corinthians 3:3,4; 5:1,2; 7:1-16). Consequently, he wrote his first letter to the church in Corinth in AD 56 to address these issues.

But perhaps the most serious of the Corinthians' problems was a misunderstanding of the nature and significance of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul understood that the resurrection could not be

neglected; there could be no compromise about it. And this issue is dealt with more completely in 1 Corinthians 15 than anywhere else in the Bible.

### **Key to Preaching (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)**

In Verse 1, Paul is going over the good news which he first brought to the Corinthians. It was not news which he had invented. Rather, it was news that had first been delivered to him, and it was news of a Risen Lord.

So Paul reminds the Corinthians that what he taught them in the past is still valid. Since they had “received” his message as truth, Paul can say that they “stand” on his preaching. One of the very first functions of the good news is to give a person stability. Thus, the Corinthians can still use his teaching as a guide for their faith and practice.

It is the continuing acceptance of Paul’s “gospel” that gives the Corinthians assurance that they “are saved” from eternal punishment for their sinful rebellion against God. Paul urges the Corinthians not to forget his gospel essentials (which he is about to review). Otherwise all their earlier commitments will be in “vain.” Vain here may mean “without effect,” that is, to no purpose. Paul is saying if there is no resurrection then their faith is vain and worthless.

In verse 3, Paul presents himself as neither the originator nor the final recipient of his message. He received his message from the Lord himself (Galatians 1:12), and his plan for evangelism has always been to deliver the gospel to faithful people who will pass it on to others.

The phrase “first importance” indicates that what Paul is about to say is of primary, bedrock, and central importance. Paul is now at the heart of the gospel message. In other words, here are the facts of the gospel Paul received and preached.

Now, we see Paul’s gospel message in verses 3, 4 and 5:

“that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,”

“that he was buried,”

“that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,”

“and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.”

These four independent propositions, not subordinated to one another, reflect the nature of proclamation. The propositions each are laid down without explanation. We are told that two probable factors account for this. One is that the formula seems to be a fixed form, perhaps like a creed. The second factor is that this calls to the minds of the hearers, the message they had already heard from Paul and on which there would be no reason to elaborate – it is a statement of faith most surely affirmed by them all.

However, for moderns, a few additional comments about Paul’s gospel message seem appropriate. Absolutely no one, including Paul, seeks to trivialize Jesus’ life and ministry. But for Paul, the very core preaching of the gospel requires three things: Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection.

Though history bears witness to many unjust deaths, Jesus' death is unique because he "died for our sins," something no other human could do. In that regard, his death served as a propitiation, which means "something that turns away wrath" (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

And all this took place "according to the Scriptures." God had planned the gospel events before they happened, and the Old Testament Scriptures, written centuries beforehand, bear witness to this preordained design (Acts 17:2).

Then Paul insists that proclamation of the Gospel must include the fact that Jesus "was buried." During Paul's ministry, lies were circulating that Jesus' body had been stolen from his tomb. However, Paul does not tolerate such nonsense. The security surrounding that burial is well attested (Matthew 27:57-66). And no one contests that the burial took place.

Jesus' lifeless body lay in the tomb all day Saturday. Then he was "raised" from the dead, brought back to life by the Father (1 Corinthians 15:15) "on the third day." That is the day of the week we call Sunday.

The resurrection serves as God's stamp of approval for all time on Jesus (compare Acts 2:29- 32; Romans 1:4). Thus, Jesus was not a madman when he claimed to be God's Son. God had designated him as the sacrificial Lamb who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). That happened when he paid sin's price by dying on the cross.

Coming now to the appearance of our Lord, Paul discusses them at great length because they guarantee the truth of the resurrection. On the other hand, this lengthy reference is somewhat striking in view of the fact that the truthfulness of Christ's resurrection was not doubted at Corinth.

At any rate, verses 5-7 proceed to supply a list of key witnesses to certify the truth of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus' appeared to Peter by himself on that first Easter Sunday. Peter might have visited the Corinthian Church, giving him special influence there (1 Corinthians 9:5). The Twelve probably refer to the original apostolic band, even when Judas and Thomas were missing. We have no other information on the appearance of Christ to the crowd of more than 500. But Paul's statement that "some" of these "have fallen asleep" suggests that he knew some of these folks personally and had kept track of them.

We should also take note of the importance of the words "brother and sisters." With one exception, there is no record of Jesus appearing to any of his enemies or to unbelievers after his resurrection, only to believers. That one exception is Paul, when he was known as Saul (1 Corinthians 15:8).

The James referred to in the resurrection witnesses is one of the half-brothers of Jesus (Mark 6:3). Jesus' brothers did not believe in him before his death, but they did afterward (Acts 1:14). The mention of James coincides with the fact of his leadership in the first-century church.

And the mention of James helps us to understand why Paul writes here "then to all Apostles" when the Twelve [Apostles] have already been mentioned. Simply stated, more individuals in the New Testament have the designation "apostle" than just the 12. James, the Lord's half-brother, is one of them (Galatians 1:19).

Then Paul ends his list of witnesses to the resurrection with himself. He did not see the risen Jesus during the 40-day period between the resurrection and the ascension. Paul's personal encounter of with the risen Lord came later while he was a persecutor of Christians. That encounter points out that Paul is not merely repeating stories as secondhand hearsay (Galatians 1:1, 11, 12).

Important! Paul's status is the same as that of Peter or James. Yet he acknowledges that he came to this position based solely on an untimely and unexpected event. For Paul to be visited by the risen Christ (appeared to me also) was not in keeping with any predictable pattern, but out of the mercy and plan of God.

### **Key to Faith (1 Corinthians 15:12-14)**

Paul has now emphasized both the centrality of Jesus' resurrection and the credible evidence for it. However, despite what Paul taught the Corinthians, there are some in the Church who want to deny the possibility of "resurrection" while still maintaining that "Christ had risen from the death." So Paul proceeds to refute this illogical position.

Denying all "resurrection" logically denies Jesus' own resurrection. If we affirm his resurrection but deny the possibility of bodily resurrection for all people, then we are negating Jesus' humanity (contrast John 1:14). And such a denial nullifies the sacrificial power of Jesus' death that gives us new life (compare 11:23-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:14). Tragically, that would mean that we are still liable to the penalty for any sins (1 Corinthians 15:18).

Thus, the main point of these verses 12-14 is, if there is no coming bodily resurrection of all Christians then Jesus himself was not bodily raised, and that makes both the apostolic preaching and the Corinthian's faith useless (v.14).

Certainly one of the most daring phrases in the Apostles' Creed is this one, "I believe in the resurrection of the body."

Human reason has come up with give guesses about what happens at death:

1. Annihilation (death ends everything)
2. Angelism (the immortality of the separated soul)
3. Pantheism (we are simply part of the divine whole)
4. Ghosts (survival of a pale holy-self)
5. Reincarnation (we come back to other bodies on earth)

But the Christian boldly declares, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." God invented bodies and the self in all of its uniqueness will be preserved. Essentially, that is what is being said.

### **Key to Hope (1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 42-45)**

Paul moves from arguing about the centrality of resurrection for all believers to some specific implications of Christ's resurrection. The agriculture metaphor of "firstfruits" suggests the choice parts at the outset of a harvest. There is no harvest produce that comes earlier than the firstfruit. And this is true of the resurrection of Christ. His is only the first resurrection of many to come (1 Corinthians 15:23).

Genesis identifies “Adam” as the first human being. As we know, he disobeyed God and brought sin into the human realm. The inevitable result of this sin was “death.” Adam is thus the prototype of a sinner under the curse of death.

However, the new prototype is “Christ” (Romans 5:14-19). Christ has overcome the power of death through his resurrection. To be sure, Jesus is the “captain” of our salvation, implying his priority and leadership. But the resurrection of Christ is not the end of God’s display of resurrection power. We will follow in due time ascending to God’s plan (1 Corinthians 6:14). And Paul ties this fact to the second coming of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Paul later deals with questions concerning the nature of the resurrection body we will enjoy. His premise is that all bodies have their own unique characteristics. Though we do not know what our resurrection bodies will be like, we can be sure God has worked it all out.

As we know, our current bodies are “natural” (subject to the physical laws of nature). But our new bodies will be “spiritual.” And, while we understand this incompletely, Paul is aware of the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to his disciples in a room with locked doors. For sure, that was something no natural body could do.

Point! Jesus did not become some kind of spiritual blob or mist. He had a recognizable body and after our resurrection we will too.

William Sangster was one of the great preachers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Toward the end of his life, he became quite ill. His vocal chords were paralyzed and he was unable to speak. On the Easter morning just before he died he painfully penned a short note to his daughter. In it he writes these poignant words: “How terrible to wake up on Easter and have no voice to shout, ‘He is risen!’ But it is far worse to have a voice and not want to shout.”

### **Action Plan**

1. In what ways is the resurrection of Jesus necessary to the Christian faith?
2. How do you understand the importance of the “resurrection of the body?” Please explain.
3. Given culture’s growing secularism, what are some ways you can remind yourself continually of the truth of verses 13,14?

### **Resources for this lesson**

1. “2019-2020 Standard Lesson NIV Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching,” pages 277-284.
2. “The NIV Application Commentary 1 Corinthians,” by Craig Blomberg, pages 293-298.
3. “The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians” by Charles R. Erdman, pages 153-161.
4. “First Corinthians Christianity In a Hostile Culture” by Dan Mitchell, Mal Coresh and Ed Hindson, pages 208-218.

*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](http://halbradyministries.com) ([halbradyministries.com](http://halbradyministries.com)).*

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## **An Executed Scoundrel**

**Spring Quarter: Justice and The Prophets**

**Unit 2: God Promises a Just Kingdom**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of April 19, 2020**

**By Dr. Hal Brady**

**Lesson Scripture: Esther 7:1-10**

**Key Verse: 7:10**

### **Lesson Aims**

1. State how Haman's plan backfired.
2. Suggest elements of the account that are more likely to be providential than others.
3. Repent of a sin omission concerning a time when he or she should have opposed injustice but did not do so.

Scholars inform us that the story of Esther is one of several in the Old Testament that point out the success of Israelites living in foreign surroundings. In a few noteworthy cases, the Israelites rose to influential positions. Joseph, Nehemiah, and Daniel immediately come to mind.

These accounts illustrate God's care for his Covenant people. They also illustrate God's resolve to use them as agents of influence even when (or especially when) they faced opposition, criticism, and ill-treatment.

The events in the book of Esther take place in the Persian citadel of Susa during the reign of Xerxes, also known as Ahasuerus (485-465 BC). Two of the main figures in the account are the close relatives Mordecai and Esther. Though they were actually cousins, Mordecai treated Esther as his daughter following the death of her parents.

At any rate, they were part of a Jewish community that had remained in the area even after a decree in 538 BC allowed them to return home (Ezra 1:1-4; Esther 2:5-7).

Esther became queen after Vashti, the previous queen, was divorced by Xerxes (Esther 1:10- 22). Realizing his loneliness, Xerxes' staff sought to have a beauty contest to find Vashti's replacement.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that there were many as 400 women involved in this competition.

Throughout the selection process, Mordecai forbade Esther from revealing her nationality, and she complied (Esther 2:10). There is no indication that the king himself would have held her Jewish identity against her. But perhaps Mordecai was aware of a general prejudice among the members of the royal court in the larger community.

However, eventually, a scheme to destroy the Jews did materialize. Xerxes' highest official, Haman, had developed a fierce animosity for Mordecai (Esther 3:1-5). Haman hated Mordecai because he couldn't kneel down before him and because Mordecai was a Jew. This resulted in Haman's seeking an edict from Xerxes for the annihilation of all Jews throughout the Persian Empire (3:6). Haman secured this edict without revealing to Xerxes which people he had targeted for destruction. A date for their eradication was set, and the Jews found themselves in grave peril.

Then it was that Mordecai convinced Esther to act, at the risk of her own life, to save her people (Esther 4). A key part of his appeal was to consider the possibility that divine providence was at work. This possibility can be seen in his question to Esther, "who knows but that you are come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (4:14). Esther's resolve is now seen in her reply, "I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish" (4:16).

So after three days of fasting, Esther went before Xerxes and received his mercy (Esther 4:16-5:2). She asked that he and Haman join her in a banquet, where she would answer the king (5:3,4). When asked at the meal to offer her petition, she requested only that they come to another feast the next day (5:5-8).

#### **Scheme Explained (Esther 7:1-4)**

Esther's invitation to "the king and Haman" is brought about by Mordecai's telling her about Haman's plan to slaughter the Jews (Esther 4:7, 8, 15, 16). The banquet hosted here is the second the two men attend at Esther's request.

"What is your petition?" the king asks Esther. "What is your request?" He's already asked two other times: when she first approached him and he held out his scepter, and then at the first banquet, but Esther never answered him, because the time wasn't right. Esther had a sensitive ear and she knew when to act and when to wait. Everything must always be put in terms of what benefit it brings to the king.

Xerxes once again expresses his willingness to hear Esther's "petition." Having been asked to wait during the banquet the night before, he is undoubtedly intensely curious about what's on Esther's mind. Thus his exaggerated offer of up to "half the kingdom" is spoken.

In verse 3, we see that time is running out. At least two months have elapsed since the king's extermination order was issued, leaving less than nine months before it is to be enacted. That may seem like plenty of time in a modern sense. But it's not considering the vast expanse of the Persian Empire and the limited methods of communication in the ancient world.

Once King Xerxes opened the door the third time, Esther then took courage to express her petition. 4a. says, "For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated." Esther begins to expose Haman's plot to destroy the Jews (Esther 3:9). Haman most likely began to connect the dots first: Esther is a Jew! Her statement "my people have been sold," phrased in the passive voice, avoids implicating the king. The heaping up of phrases "to be destroyed, killed and annihilated," emphasizes the dire consequences of her "people being sold."

4b. says, “If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.”

This second clause of Esther’s accusation is a bit strange. We are told that the Hebrew is uncertain and the translations differ. Is she really saying that slavery would be acceptable? Or is she just playing a rhetorical game?

Actually, what Esther seems to be saying is, “If we had only been sold into slavery, I would keep silent, for it would not be worth bothering the king about.”

No matter what, this statement is Esther’s diplomatic way of stressing the important of this issue. Talk about the power of a woman! Can you believe Esther’s diplomacy and sensitivity, even in the midst of pleading for her life and the lives of her people? Amazing!

### **Culprit Exposed (Esther 7:5-8)**

Horrified, King Xerxes asked Queen Esther who had made this murderous plan? We might wonder how the king could be so clueless about this situation, yet there are several possible answers. First, it’s been several weeks since he was involved with this issue (comparing the time references of Esther 3:7,12; 8:1,9). Second, kings are busy people and therefore delegate tasks to subordinates. And third, the king is just now being made aware that Esther is part of the target group. At any rate, the king is still trying to put together the bigger picture.

To the king’s inquiry, Esther replies, “An adversary and enemy: This vile Haman!” (Verse 6). Note that Esther does not identify Haman as her personal enemy but as “an adversary and enemy.”

Esther had stated her concern with humility and deference, following the expected protocol of the royal court. Tact is of utmost importance (compare Daniel 2;14), given that Esther is accusing the king’s most trusted advisor of treachery that involves misuse of the king’s own power. She is careful to level this accusation at Haman without implicating Xerxes himself.

However, realizing that her moment had arrived, Esther neither stammered nor hesitated. As Esther put it, Haman is a traitor to the king as well as an enemy of the Jews. As she points to this wicked Haman she senses her triumph and notes the terror of Haman. He might well be terrified. Esther’s words to the king had been an eye-opener for him also, because he had not known Esther’s nationality. The realization that he had inadvertently threatened the queen’s life was a knock-out blow on top of his earlier humiliation.

So Haman’s reaction is like that of many who are caught in wrongdoing: his once steely exterior became a “deer caught in the headlights” look. Interpreters often identify this moment as the climax of the entire story. Haman knows he is exposed; the only question is how the king will react. Esther has completed her speech and speaks no further in this chapter.

With his blood boiling, King Xerxes storms out. He doesn’t need to hear Haman’s self-defense. The king has put the pieces together, and Haman’s guilt is obvious. The king’s highest official has abused royal authority, though the king does not know why. Haman has had his own best interests, not the king, in mind.

7b says, “But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.” The king’s intentions toward Haman are clear (compare Proverbs 20:2). Haman must do something, but he has no good options. He cannot follow the king outside, nor can he add to his guilt by fleeing.

8a. “Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining.” Persian royal banquets involved reclining on beds, like couches, instead of sitting at a table. Desperate for mercy, Haman approaches the queen who is reclining on her couch to plead for his life. Her silence may have increased his desperation, for he falls onto her couch. Ironically, Haman was enraged earlier when a Jew wouldn’t bow down to him, but now he will find himself at the feet of one of those same Jews.

Xerxes came back into the palace and, detecting Haman fully on Esther’s couch, misconstrued his intentions, accusing Haman of attempted rape.

How the king might have handled Haman’s treachery before seeing the man on his queen’s couch no longer matters. Xerxes indicts Haman for violating harem protocol and, even worse, appearing to molest the queen. In the Persian system, the only men allowed near the queen or the king’s other wives and concubines were eunuchs. Otherwise, an advance on any member of the harem was considered an affront to the king himself.

Thus, the king’s officials act on what they recognize as a capital offense. They cover Haman’s face because he is no longer worthy to see the king.

### **Scoundrel Executed (Esther 7:9,10)**

In verse 9, a eunuch named Harbona, who must have been present throughout the scene, proves helpful again. He recalls the gallows Haman had erected for Mordecai. Harbona also reminds the king of Mordecai’s speaking good concerning the king.

At this point, Xerxes needs no further prompting; he again makes a snap decision at the leading of others. Haman is hoisted on his own gallows, the one he had built for Mordecai, and finally “the wrath of the king subsides.”

Such an outcome points to God’s work on behalf of his Covenant people. God brings Haman’s wickedness down on his own head in the same way the Bible often declares (Psalm 9:16, Matthew 7:1,2). Before that day ends, Xerxes will give to Mordecai the signet ring that he had entrusted to Haman along with the position and authority that Haman had held. The Jews find deliverance by a second decree of the king (8:11,12).

### **Purim**

Esther’s story is the basis for the Jewish holiday “Purim.” It is a time of celebration when members of the Jewish Community gather to read the book of Esther (twice) and celebrate how they were saved from Haman’s plot. It usually falls in March.

### **Summary**

Though God’s name is not mentioned one time in the whole book of Esther, nevertheless God is present in every scene and event and brings everything to a thrilling climax. From Esther’s selection as queen to Haman’s execution to the Jew’s deliverance – the eyes of faith clearly see these events as much more than luck or happenstance. Rather God was at work behind the scenes.

Like Esther and her relative Mordecai, we are God’s imperfect servants in rectifying the wrongs in the world. But God can and does work through us nonetheless. Note there are two extremes to avoid: (1) thinking that confronting evil is all up to us and (2) thinking that confronting evil is all up to God. The proper path to take in any given situation will depend on prayer, Bible study, and openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We must always consider the possibility that God has placed us in a circumstance “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14).

In his commentary on Esther, Charles R. Swindol reminds us of another person who took a stand. His name was Martin Luther and the date was April 18, 1521, at the Diet of Worms, where he said, “Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen.” The prelates of the Roman Church despised him for his staunch determination and independent spirit. They would have killed him if they could. They had to be content with excommunicating him. Nevertheless, there he stood. God helped him, and he raised the torch that lit the fires of the Protestant Reformation.

I repeat, we must always consider the possibility that God has placed us in a circumstance “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14).

### **Action Plan**

1. While God is not mentioned in the book of Esther, many of the events seem providential. Even though there are definite answers, please be prepared to give reasons to support your conclusions.
2. What do you think is the main point of Esther chapter 7:1-10? Please explain.
3. Though the prayers will not be collected, write a prayer of repentance about a time when you could have opposed an injustice but failed to do so.

### **Resources for this lesson**

1. “2019-2020 Standard Lesson NIV Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching,” pages 285-292.
2. “The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume III,” pages 917-920.
3. “Esther” by Charles R. Swindol, pages 93-96; pages 130-134.

*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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## **4 Ways to be an Extravagantly Generous Leader**

## **LEADERSHIP REALLY MATTERS**

**ANNE BOSARGE**

**REV. JAY HANSON**

What is your most valuable resource? I've come to discover that time is one of the most valuable resources I have and that it is nonrenewable. I can always make more money, but I can't make more time. There is no end to the demands on my time. There are people who need my attention, problems to solve, messages to prepare, opportunities to take advantage of and issues to deal with. Does that sound familiar? In the midst of busyness, how do you decide the most effective way to use your time? What investments make the most difference?

What if I could guarantee a good return on the investment of your time? Let me suggest that any time you invest in developing new leaders will pay off 100 times over. When you invest in leaders and generously give your time toward their development, these leaders will share your load and take the ministry to levels you could never achieve on your own. Want to spend your time wisely? Be an extravagantly generous leader who invests lavishly in others.

### **1. Relational Generosity**

One of the most powerful ways to be a generous leader is to invest relationally, not just during designated staff and committee meetings, but in creative ways that go above and beyond the expected. Wondering what relational generosity looks like? Text those you lead and ask them how you can pray for them. Drop in on them during the work day or at places where they hang out and spend their leisure time. Call and tell them something you appreciate about them. Drop an email and share a story of how they have impacted you or someone else in your congregation. Give them access to your life – bring them along on a trip or visit and have conversations in the car. Go over and above to make yourself available to those you lead and give yourself to them extravagantly.

### **2. Opportunity Generosity**

Think about how you were developed in your leadership journey. Who was the first person to give you an opportunity to take charge, do something new, and step into a leadership role for the first time? Who believed in you enough to pass the baton before you were completely sure of yourself? That leader expressed opportunity generosity as they focused on giving power away and developing you as a leader. Leaders are called to make more leaders. Great leaders call out the greatness in others and create opportunities to elevate them to fulfill their leadership potential. When are people ready to be released? When they can do it 70 percent as well as you can. They will only learn the last 30 percent through experience. Effective leaders are multiplying leaders who give opportunity.

### **3. Creative Generosity**

The group who created the problem isn't the best group to solve the problem. Yet experienced leaders often spend a lot of time attempting to solve problems of their own making. The reality is

that the people who created the problem are rarely the ones who develop the most creative solutions for the problem. Great leaders reach outside their usual circles of influence and seek out others who have different points of view. They allow and expect others to speak new thoughts, new life, and new ideas into the ministry without making them conform to preconceived notions, mindsets and ways of operating. They see themselves as facilitators of creative discussions instead of the originator of all great ideas.

#### **4. Decisional Generosity**

Where does the buck stop in your church? Does every decision rest on the shoulders of one leader or a small group of leaders? When you limit decision making to just a handful of people, you create an organization of dependent followers who are unable to fully invest in the vision and direction of the organization. However, when a leader is generous with decisions, they give others permission to make decisions that affect their ministry areas. By giving away the permission to make decisions, leaders create leaders, not followers; they enable owners, not renters. Want to see increased motivation? Empower people with the ability to make decisions.

Want a good return on the investment of your time? Practice extravagant generosity!

*Jay Hanson, Lead Pastor, and Anne Bosarge, Multi-Campus Director, serve at The Chapel Ministries. They love sharing about the ways God is moving in their church. Contact them at [jay@thechapelministries.com](mailto:jay@thechapelministries.com) and [anne@thechapelministries.com](mailto:anne@thechapelministries.com).*

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### **How to be present in a pandemic: use your words**

**By Rev. Deborah Wight-Knight, Conference Pastoral Counselor**

I was a CPE (student) chaplain at Grady Hospital in 1984. One of my patients - I'll call her Gloria - was the first documented female diagnosed with AIDS in the southeast. This was before they called it HIV/AIDS. No one knew at that time exactly how the virus spread. Was it only sexually transmitted? Was it contained in the gay and lesbian community? Were our medical personnel at risk? No one knew. Studies were just beginning on intravenous drug use and the sharing of needles. Could it be airborne? Was it transmitted via touch, through saliva, or as a result of that used tissue in the trash can? Real research had just begun and facts - pre-Internet - were questionable and hard to acquire.

Gloria was an anomaly for Atlanta. She was straight when most other AIDS patients were gay. She was a lone sick female in a sea of sick men. She was not into drugs and she had not been sexually active with an infected male. She had, however, for quite some time, been sharing with her drug-dependent brother a sparse supply of needles that she needed in order to inject the insulin on which she was dependent due to diabetes.

When I met her, she weighed 86 pounds. Doctors, if wearing full protective gear, would examine her with a host of medical students and residents in tow. They were as afraid of and perplexed

about this emerging epidemic as anyone else. Gloria had lesions all over her body, part of the Kaposi's Sarcoma, so they never touched her. Nurses, also in protective gear, would administer her IV medications. Written instructions on the door alerted personnel to a "no touch" recommendation, even while protected with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Housekeeping was afraid to enter her room, so Gloria's trash piled up day after day after day. No one cleaned her bathroom or mopped her floors or gave her a bath. Workers from the cafeteria would leave her tray outside her door even though she was too weak to retrieve it.

I, too, stood outside that room helplessly for two weeks. She would look at me with the most intensely forlorn expression I had ever witnessed. At the beginning of the third week, when Gloria was down to 70 pounds, I went to the nurse administrator and said, "I need to see the Infectious Disease Specialist on Gloria's case." The nurse looked at me with sheer disbelief. Who in the world is this student chaplain demanding to see an overworked physician? I persisted. She finally gave in and paged him. A renowned infectious disease specialist from Emory arrived 15 minutes later. It took me 10 minutes - talking as fast as I could - to get his permission to enter Gloria's room and help her eat and bathe as well as empty her trash, as long as I wore fully protective clothing (cloth gown, gloves, mask, and eye protection).

Over the next two months I endured many chastising encounters with my supervisors, peers, and other hospital staff. Their argument was that even if I was not putting myself at enormous risk of infection with this mysterious disease, my job as spiritual companion on the journey was not to feed and bathe a patient. It certainly was not to act as a member of the housekeeping staff. Gloria's first words to me were, "It sure feels good to hear a compassionate human voice."

One day, after Gloria's weight was less than 60 pounds, I said, "To hell with it." I took off my gloves and held her hands and touched her forearm as she wept deeply from feeling the first skin to skin contact in more than three months. Shortly thereafter, Gloria died. I cried often, off and on, for weeks. Regardless of what the field of medicine reported, for the next five years I lived in fear of having contracted the disease. At that point, I drummed up the courage to be tested. I waited three weeks before receiving the news that I was HIV free.

You may think that I use that illustration to imply that we, as Christians, should ignore the precautions required during this current pandemic of COVID-19. Hear me! I am NOT recommending that. In fact, I implore you to honor the advice and instructions from those in authority who know best. This new coronavirus spreads quickly, especially through touching infected surfaces and being in close contact with infected people.

Instead, I tell the story about Gloria to emphasize the significance of the loss of human touch, actual skin-to-skin contact. You probably remember the research done decades ago on babies who were never touched or held close. As they got older, many developed serious personality disorders and other behavioral and mental health issues. We learned from those studies that touch is as essential to an infant as food. Appropriate nurture, in the form of food, love, AND touch, influences the progression of healthy natural development. Most humans either crave affection through touch or shun away from it. That quite often depends on our past experiences, especially when they include violence, neglect, or abuse.

So what are we to do when suddenly a touch or a kiss or perhaps even a breath means that we are putting someone in harm's way? How do those in current hospital beds and ICU units feel when the squeeze of a hand is offered only by a stranger through latex-covered palms and fingers? What is it like to not see a human face in full view or to hear the familiar voices of someone we love? Or, almost as difficult, how do infected loved ones at home feel when they are confined for weeks to the basement or a bedroom once they are symptomatic?

“And Jesus put out his hand and touched...” the leper, the woman with the flow of blood, the blind man, the ear of the high priest's servant. Very soon we will be reminded of Thomas putting his hands in the wounds of the risen Christ.

My time with Gloria was pre-Internet, pre-cell phone, pre-Facebook, before any other social media platform we can name. The other day I was introduced to a good friend's father for the first time, so I “air hugged” him and blew him a kiss from more than six feet away. Technology, whether in the form of FaceTime on your phone, the written blog or Facebook post, or through livestream on Sunday morning as a way of sharing or hearing God's word, can be a gift from God. When used for good, the means to stay connected and spread hope – even as a method of simply sharing your thoughts, fears, frustration, and loneliness during these complex and unprecedented times – is vital.

I have not forgotten about those without access to or the ability to use the latest technology. That's when we pick up a phone and dial a number or grab a pen and paper, write a letter, peel off a stamp, and help support the good ole' US Postal Service. Words create worlds. They incite imagination; provide important updates, and keep us connected...together...in Christ and in hope.

This too shall pass. It really will. Soon we will be hugging our best friend, our elderly parents, our at-risk neighbors, and the person in the pew next to us. Handshakes will resume. A pat on the shoulder or back will most likely be welcomed. In the meantime, do all in your power to be present for those who long for human contact and expressions of love. It's like we tell our toddlers in the middle of a tantrum: “Use your words.”

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## **Retired Clergy Birthdays – April**

- 4/01 – Edgar Chance: PO Box 524; Wrens, GA 30833
- 4/01 – Danny Treadway: 1417 Peabody Dr.; Maryville, TN 37803
- 4/03 – Jennifer Sherling: 2447 Tuxedo Place; Albany, GA 31707
- 4/05 – O.C. Dean, Jr.: 265 Three Oaks Dr.; Athens, GA 30607
- 4/05 – Kay Stanaland: PO Box 905; Murrells Inlet, SC 29576
- 4/07 – Jim Hamlin: 322 S. Houston Springs Blvd.; Perry, GA 31069
- 4/08 – Terry DeLoach: 209 Dixie St.; Brooklet, GA 30415
- 4/09 – Sandra Henry: 111 Laurel Overlook; Canton, GA 30114
- 4/09 – Glenn McCranie: PO Box 493; Grandy, NC 27939

4/12 – Tim Bagwell: 192 Barrington Hall Dr.; Macon, GA 31220  
4/12 – Gerald Goodman: 1572 Fluker Kiel Rd.; Coffeetown, AL 36524  
4/15 – Leigh Ann Raynor: 212 Torrington Blvd.; Thomasville, GA 31757  
4/16 – Nick Hazelton: 517 Ferncliff Terrace; Macon, GA 31204  
4/16 – Wesley Kaylor: 855 Chokey Rd.; DeSoto, GA 31743  
4/16 – Barbara Nelson: 1106 Merrill Dr.; Dublin, GA 31021  
4/16 – Tom Nichols: 414 Cardinal St.; Pooler, GA 31322  
4/16 – Jimmy Sharp: 2225 Teate Rd.; Vienna, GA 31092  
4/18 – Frances Howell: PO Box 658; Midway, GA 31320  
4/19 – Betty Sue Brantley: 210 Moseley St.; Vidalia, GA 30474  
4/22 – Fred Maddox: 200 Highland Rd.; Statesboro, GA 30458  
4/24 – Willie Lucas: 607 Holloway Ave.; Albany, GA 31701  
4/27 – B.J. Funk: PO Box 187; Chula, GA 31733  
4/28 – Bert Alexander: PO Box 964; Pine Mountain, GA 31822  
4/28 – Mike McAfee: 3 Porchester Ct.; Columbus, GA 31907  
4/29 – Sam Watkins: 1937 E. DeRenne Ave., Savannah, GA 31406  
4/30 – Don Kea: 5300 Zebulon Rd., Garden Home 20; Macon, GA 31210

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## OBITUARIES

### Rev. Ted Bass

Claude T. “Ted” Bass, 85, of Macon, passed away Sunday, March 1, 2020. Funeral services were held Friday, March 6, 2020, at Riverside United Methodist Church with the Reverends Dr. John Brown, Reverend Steve Keck, and Reverend Antonie Walker officiating. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Riverside United Methodist Church, 735 Pierce Ave., Macon, GA 31204.

Ted was born in Harlan County, Kentucky and grew up in West Point, Georgia. He earned a Bachelor of Art degree from Georgia Southern University and a Master of Divinity from Candler School of Theology at Emory University. Ted joined the South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church in 1956 and served churches all over South Georgia for 44 years.

Ted loved golfing and spending time in the mountains of North Carolina. He was the author of “Adventures of Charlie the Chipmunk,” a collection of Christian stories for small children.

Ted was predeceased by his parents, Cyril Wade and Lois Fullerton Bass, and one sister, Betty Jane Noble.

He is survived by his wife, Gail Bassett Bass of Macon; his children, Claude Bass, Jr., Bobby Bass, Norma (Frank) Butler, Shirley (Wes) Brown; stepchildren, Laura (Steve) Keck and Cathy (Rick) Maday; 15 grandchildren; and 13 great-grandchildren.

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

Hart’s at the Cupola, Hart’s Mortuary and Cremation Center, 6324 Peake Rd., Macon, GA 31210 has charge of the arrangements.

**Dr. Dwight D. Irons**

Reverend Dr. Dwight David Irons, age 66, of Tennille, died on Friday, March 27, 2020, in the Washington County Regional Medical Center. A memorial service for Dr. Irons will be held at a date and time to be announced later.

Dr. Irons was born in Providence, Rhode Island on February 20, 1954. He was the son of the late Edwin David Irons and the late Grace Dorothy Otton Irons. Dr. Irons was a retired Bishop of the Anglican Church of America. He was a graduate of Pawtucket Memorial Hospital School of Nursing and a graduate of Barrington College with a master’s degree in Organ Performance. He was a student of Kings College in Cambridge, U.K. He received an honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree from Hobart College NY and the Rhode Island House and Senate in 1988. Dr. Irons served as Chaplain of the Pawtucket and Central Falls Rhode Island Fire Departments and also for the Rhode Island Legislative Bodies. He was a pastor for many Christian churches in Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama, and for the South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church. He was consecrated as a Bishop in the Anglican Church of America in 2012. Dr. Irons was a member of the American Guild of Organist. He was also a member of the Rhode Island Shriner’s, the Allepo Temple in Boston, the Scottish Rite Bodies and the Tennille Masonic Lodge # 256 F&AM.

Survivors are his wife, Suzanne Gladin Irons of Tennille; children, Dwight E. Irons of Sandusky, Ohio, and Shannon P. Wilson and her husband Ken of Ellaville, Ga.; grandchildren, Allison Renee Irons, Taylor Wilson and Alexis Wilson; brother, Bill Irons of Macon; nieces, April Irons and Shannon Irons both of Rhode Island; and church families of the many churches he has served.

May & Smith Funeral Directors in Sandersville is in charge of these arrangements.



**Scripture Readings – April 7**

**April 9**

*Maundy Thursday*

- Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14
- Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 (UMH 837)
- 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
- John 13:1-17, 31b-35

**April 10**

*Good Friday*

- Isaiah 52:13-53:12
- Psalm 22 (UMH 752)
- Hebrews 10:16-25
- John 18:1-19:42

## **April 12**

### ***Easter Sunday***

Acts 10:34-43

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 (UMH 839)

Colossians 3:1-4

John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10

## **April 19**

### ***Second Sunday of Easter***

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Psalm 16 (UMH 748)

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

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## **Events in the South Georgia Conference – 4/7/2020 edition**

### **Native American Ministries Sunday – April 26**

On Native American Ministries Sunday, United Methodists cultivate and support urban missions with Native Americans and fund scholarships for Native American seminarians. Your annual conference retains 50 percent of the offering is to strengthen and develop Native American ministries. However, if no Native American ministries exist in the conference, the entire offering is remitted to the General Council on Finance and Administration for Native American ministries in other areas. The remaining 50 percent of the offering expands mission work with the Native American Urban Initiative and provides scholarships for Native Americans attending United Methodist and other approved schools of theology. Is it easier to learn Native American traditions from a Native American or an Irish American? This is why the Native American Ministries Sunday offering is critical – to continue the traditions and nurture the gifts of Native Americans. [More information](#)

### **Magnolia Manor Sunday – May 10**

Magnolia Manor is a South Georgia Conference ministry that serves older adults of all faiths in eight locations throughout South Georgia. On this Special Sunday, South Georgia United Methodists are asked to take up a special offering to support this vital ministry. To learn more about Magnolia Manor, visit [www.magnoliamanor.com](http://www.magnoliamanor.com).

### **ERT Basic Certification & Chainsaw Training, St. Marys – May 15-16**

An ERT and Chainsaw Training will be held Friday, May 15 and Saturday, May 16 at St. Marys UMC. Cost is \$25 for ERT only. \$31 for both ERT and Chainsaw, or \$12 for just chainsaw. (For chainsaw only, must be ERT ID card holders.) Registration fee covers badge, registration, t-shirt, and lunch. For questions, contact Kelly Crane, Coastal District Disaster Response Coordinator, at [kelcrane@gmail.com](mailto:kelcrane@gmail.com) or 731-499-0491. [Register here](#).