

## **SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – APRIL 21 EDITION**

### **2020-2021 Projected Appointments**

Bishop R. Lawson Bryan has announced projected appointment changes as of April 19, 2020. The appointments will be effective in June. [Click here to download the list of projected appointments.](#)

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### **South Georgia United Methodists celebrate Easter differently this year**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

For most South Georgia United Methodists, Easter usually means packed sanctuaries, big Sunday dinners with family, smocked dresses, and super-sized hats.

But this year, even though churches were empty and typical Easter traditions couldn't happen, families still found ways to safely celebrate the holiday.

Instead of her usual trip to Athens to celebrate Easter with her children, Karen Forester, a member of Bainbridge United Methodist Church, worshipped online, from home.

After cooking an Easter lunch, she and her family "met" via Zoom conference call. She also participated in the Conference's evening Service of Songs and Hymns.

"During this Holy week, I seemed to be able to focus on the meaning of Easter since I had fewer distractions," she said. "I did miss my traditions, but sometimes, new ones have to begin."

Instead of attending just one Easter service, Joyce Akins, a member of Community United Methodist Church in Nashville, watched five Easter services and three song services.

"I had a wonderful Easter celebration as God met me online through scripture, messages, and music," Akins said.

Susan and Cecil Roberson, members of New Harvest United Methodist Church in Valdosta, watched five United Methodist Church services, from South Georgia to Maryland. They were even able to see and hear their son Randy play piano for his church, Silver Spring United Methodist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland, as the service was broadcast via Zoom.

"It was wonderful to hear each pastor's love for the scriptures and each personal interpretation," Susan Roberson said.

And while they weren't gathered together in worship, members of Meigs and Pavo United Methodist Churches proclaimed the gospel message through song and signs. On three wooden crosses erected outside Meigs Food Market they placed signs with verses from a much loved and well-known hymn.

“We used some key phrases from ‘Come Thou Fount’ to explain the crosses of Calvary and how we have to continue to choose which cross we are going to pick up and carry daily,” said Rev. Royce Johnson, who pastors the churches.

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## **Pastors, laity use quarantine to nurture gifts, talents**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

While folks are spending more time at home than ever before, people are tapping into talents they’d let go dormant, rediscovering skills they didn’t have time to nurture, and pursuing passions long abandoned.

Rev. Grant Abernathy has always enjoyed doodling. In seminary, the pastime helped him stay focused and engaged as he listened to lectures, and the margins of his notes were usually littered with doodles and drawings.

The pastor of Crossroads United Methodist Church in Perry, during the Advent season Rev. Abernathy helped explain his sermons with drawings. One Sunday he sketched a star, another Sunday he drew Mary, and so on until the entire Advent story was illustrated.

“That seemed to go over really well, and people responded to it,” he said.

So instead of sitting or standing and talking to the camera during his daily Holy Week devotional videos, he decided to draw pictures to accompany and illustrate the scripture readings.

“One of the things I love most is not just telling the story, but seeing the pictures of the story,” said Rev. Abernathy during his [Maundy Thursday video devotional](#). “Stories come alive when we’re able to see pictures; that’s one reason I’ve been doing the charcoal scribbles. But the best picture we show one another about the story of Jesus is how the presence of Christ is alive within us.”

As he read John 13:1-17, 34-35, he drew a simple but powerful charcoal picture of Jesus washing Peter’s feet.

“People have said it’s helped them feel engaged; it’s helped them as we’ve talked about different stories to see some visualization of it,” he said of the drawings. “It spoke so much to me when others have done it, and if it means something to me, maybe it can mean something to someone else.”

Several years ago, Anne Smith began making communion bread for Mulberry Street United Methodist Church. Now, as Vineville United Methodist Church’s spiritual director she’s continued serving in this behind-the-scenes way.

“The idea of getting to bake the bread for our church family each month is a great privilege,” said Smith, who bakes eight to nine loaves each month except on Christmas Eve, when she bakes about 20. “It’s something I can share. I love the rhythm of doing it and I love being able to serve this way.”

The first week of April, Smith was filmed making communion bread at home and the video was shared on the church's Facebook page. The video, "[Cooking with Anne: Communion Bread](#)," walks viewers step by step through the recipe, which Smith calls "forgiving."

"We thought this would be a fun idea for folks to do at home and for kids to do," she said, adding that the bread doesn't require a lot of baking expertise to make. "It (the video) was something fun to stay connected and a way of marking the week that would have been communion Sunday and that we would have been gathered for the sacrament."

The seven-ingredient bread is, according to Smith, an easy bread for beginners to make. The recipe can be found [here](#).

"There's grace in making it," said Smith of the bread. "It doesn't have to be perfect. It's kind of like the grace of God; there's forgiveness in it. It's a nice way to think about our communion meal and how we share that meal with Christians everywhere."

Rev. Jerry Akin has been writing songs since he was a teenager.

For years, all he wanted was to make music and be a songwriter. The pastor of Vienna and Shiloh United Methodist Churches, Rev. Akin played bass in a rock band for about 10 years and even recorded an album.

Music is a hobby now, but Rev. Akin continues to write, record, and sing, especially now that coronavirus restrictions are in place and he's finalized his Residency in Ministry (RIM) program.

"During the three-year RIM process, I put the guitar down for a while," Rev. Akin said. "Now I have time to do things I enjoy. I just started really playing my guitar again in the past month."

With the shelter-in-place and social distancing mandates, it's been necessary to be creative with worship services, he said. While there are several talented musicians and singers at Vienna and Shiloh UMCs, it's difficult to record music.

So lately he's taken it upon himself to play guitar and sing, often playing original songs. His 8-year-old daughter, Hannah Clare, joined with him in a recent [song and video](#).

Faith and family inspire Rev. Akin's songwriting, including the song, "[Take this Thorn](#)," which he played and shared on Good Friday.

"I think sometimes people connect with a sermon really well and sometimes they connect with a song. It just depends where they are," he said.

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## **Collins UMC serves community in a big way**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

Collins United Methodist Church may be small, but it is mighty.

In tiny Collins, the congregation, which has about 12 members, is a big force for good. The members feed nearly 200 people at each of two large community meals every year, one at Thanksgiving and typically one at Easter; pack and donate dozens of Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes every Christmas; and give generously to ministries that serve those who are homeless.

Even in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, the congregation, which calls itself The 12 Disciples, continues to serve the community through its new blessing box, a small pantry filled with donated food, baby wipes and diapers, and other necessities.

Linda Bacon is one of The 12 Disciples who checks the church's blessing box a few times a week and stocks it with food and necessities.

"We just figure, especially now, people who aren't working need some extra food," she said.

The box looks like a little white church, Bacon said, with a roof and two doors. It sits next to Collins UMC and is emptied and refilled regularly.

The church members' generosity and love for their community is how they want to make an impact, Bacon said.

"We've got to show people love," she said. "You've got to show the gospel in action. That's our thing. We want people to say, 'That must be God.' I pray they will see a difference in us."

Rev. Thomas Kennison says that what the church lacks in size they make up for in enthusiasm and willingness to serve. He estimates that nearly 90 percent of the congregation participates in mission, outreach, and giving opportunities and that all give to the blessing box.

He also said they have a clear understanding that they are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps and serve others.

"That's the best way we can carry the gospel forward, by being servants," Rev. Kennison said.

"That's what Jesus was; he was a humble servant. We try to mimic him and be like Jesus so that we can live the lives we're called to live. We're really living out the gospel when we do that."

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## **South Georgia relief teams help with tornado damage cleanup**

South Georgia Disaster Response Teams are committed to responding and helping their neighbors affected by disasters, even in the midst of a pandemic. While extra precautions are necessary, they have not kept early response teams from showing up and working hard.

Following the Easter storms, on April 13 South Georgia Disaster Response Coordinator Luis Morales and district disaster coordinators immediately sprang into action and assessed affected areas and began deploying teams.

Kelly Crane, Coastal District Disaster Coordinator, said that as early as Tuesday, April 14, teams began working in Odum, Ga. after an EF-1 tornado touched down. By Saturday evening, 19 homes were completed thanks to hard-working volunteers and skid steer equipment provided by

a local dealer. Teams from Brunswick, St. Simons, Glenville, and Fitzgerald along with individuals from Ocilla and Claxton worked together over a four day period to assist the community. Most of their work included tree removal and debris clean-up.

“This is my first real experience directing an operation this large, and I would not be able to do this without all the folks that have come out to help,” Crane said. “I have never been as proud as I am this week to be part of such a wonderful team of volunteers.”

Waynesboro was another area hit hard by the storms. Rev. Issac Salgado, pastor of Waynesboro First UMC, in partnership with other faith groups and assistant director Bob Grieco, coordinated a cleanup day in their community. The ambitious group of volunteers assisted homeowners in cleaning up debris and personal items. Toward the end of the week, volunteers worked to tarp homes that suffered roof damage ahead of this past Sunday’s storms.

“In times like this, it is clear to see the tremendous amount of capacity South Georgia has built in order to provide a quick response after a disaster event,” said Allison Lindsey, Associate Director of Connectional Ministries. “We are very thankful for the churches and groups of passionate volunteers who are willing to deploy quickly to minister in a community when they are needed most.”

## **Relief teams help with tornado damage cleanup in Odum**

By [Amanda Aguilar](#) | April 15, 2020 at 3:56 PM EDT - Updated April 15 at 6:26 PM\*

ODUM, Ga. (WTOC) - The town of Odum is still dealing with the aftermath of Monday’s EF-1 tornado.

Several volunteers are helping in the recovery process, including the United Methodist Church.

Residents are in the cleanup phase, and thanks to several volunteers, they say they have hope that things will be okay.

“Oh! These people are wonderful. I just thank God for them,” said Kathy Rozier.

Kathy Rozier is one of about a dozen people the disaster response team, from South Georgia’s United Methodist Church, is helping.

“We come out early, as soon as the storms pass. We’re here on the ground to work with the community to help them get rebuilt,” said Disaster Response Coordinator Kelly Crane.

About 10 volunteers joined Kelly Crane, using chainsaws to cut fallen trees, and cleaning up

debris left from the tornado.

“It’s still difficult. This is a trauma for folks to go through, and to lose everything, or to have the damage they’ve had.”

Crane says it’s a blessing to be in Odum.

“We come into these disasters, hoping to be the hands and feet of Christ, and to provide hope for people.

”Rozier and other residents say they’re touched by the volunteers’ selflessness.

“I hope I can donate something. I hope I can do something. She said ‘It gives us joy. This is what we do.’”

Although the town of Odum might not look the same after the cleanup is done, residents know the community will come out stronger and closer/

“We’ll rebuild.”

We spoke with Wayne County EMA who says they are still assessing the damage. So far, the director says 60 homes have been damaged. They’ll continue the assessment following the tornado’s path.

*\*Reprinted with permission*

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## **Annual Conference postponed until August, Moving Day adjusted**

The 2020 Annual Conference session, scheduled for June 7-9 at The Columbus Georgia Convention & Trade Center, has been postponed due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Annual Conference is now set for August 14-15 at the [UGA Tifton Campus Conference Center](#) in Tifton, Ga.

"While we look forward to the day we can all be together, the reality is that the coronavirus has changed how we are all doing ministry and meetings at this time," Bishop Lawson Bryan said. "We have made the decision to not only postpone our Annual Conference session, but to shorten its length and move it to a more central location within our conference."

The action to postpone the Annual Conference session has been taken by Bishop Bryan and the Cabinet pursuant to paragraph 603.2-3 in *The Book of Discipline, 2016*, which provides provisions for the adjustment of the date and location. The health of those attending as well as a desire to lessen the financial impact for churches helped lead to the decision of a shortened

session later this summer.

"I am thankful we have leaders who can help us think through all aspects of how we conduct our business on the conference level," Bishop Bryan said. "To the clergy and laity in South Georgia, thank you for your patience and grace as we navigate our work together. I continue to be inspired by the ways in which you are being alive together in witness as we love and serve each other."

### **Hotels**

Those who made hotel reservations in Columbus through Valley Hospitality will not need to call to cancel their individual reservations within these blocks. Valley Hospitality will cancel reservations as a courtesy to guests, and no cancellation fees will be charged. Individuals who made a reservation outside the South Georgia hotel block will need to contact the hotel directly to cancel their reservation.

A hotel block is now open for the August Annual Conference Session in Tifton. [You can find the list of hotels here.](#)

### **Agenda**

An agenda for the two-day session is now being finalized. Careful planning is needed in order to be sensitive to the work schedule of laity elected to represent their local church and to the specific services and business matters that are an important part of the Annual Conference Session. To accomplish this, the conference will be structured so that registration will open at 10 a.m. on Friday, Aug. 14. The Retirement Recognition and Golden Anniversary Celebration will follow at 11 a.m. The Memorial Service will begin at 2 p.m. All who are able to attend these events are invited to do so.

"I feel certain that all clergy, and as many laity as possible, will want to be present," Bishop Bryan said. "These are high and holy moments for our annual conference."

Following the Memorial Service, there will be time for attendees to check into hotels and to accommodate the arrival of those who will be traveling after work to arrive for annual conference.

Friday evening includes the Clergy and Laity Sessions, the opening worship service, and the opening business session.

In addition to the regular business session Saturday morning, the Service of Ordination and Commissioning will be held at 11 a.m. The final business session will be held Saturday afternoon and will conclude in time for clergy and laity to be in their home churches Sunday morning.

No clergy photo directory will be taken this year. Additional details about the 2020 Annual Conference session will be provided in the weeks ahead.

## **Agenda Overview**

### Friday, Aug 14

- 10:00 a.m. Registration Opens
- 11:00 a.m. Retirement Service
- 2:00 p.m. Memorial Service
- 6:00 p.m. Clergy and Laity Sessions
- 7:00 p.m. Opening Worship
- 7:30 p.m. Opening Business Session

### Saturday, Aug 15

- 8:00 a.m. Business Session resumes
- 11:00 a.m. Ordination
- 2:00 p.m. Business Session resumes

*Please note: The business session will conclude before dinner time on Saturday with hopes to finish earlier.*

## **Moving Day**

Moving Day was originally scheduled for June 17. In recognition of the uncertainty about when churches can resume worship and acknowledging the need for pastors who are moving to have the time they need to conclude their work in their current appointments, Bishop Bryan and the Cabinet have adjusted the time frame. Moving Day will now be Wednesday, June 24, with the first Sunday of the new appointment being Sunday, June 28.

This will allow time for pastors to finish well and for churches to celebrate the ministry they have accomplished together with their pastor. If the current social distancing and stay-at-home recommendations issued by our state continue through the month of June, Bishop Bryan and the Cabinet will reconsider this date.

The usual procedures for payment of salaries for the month of June, for arrangements for the logistics and expenses of moving, and for July 1 being the date for changes of pension and benefits bills will remain the same.

## **Moving Forward**

The Annual Conference planning team will continue to monitor all announcements by state and local officials, realizing things remain in a fluid state, and will provide updates as necessary.

“We acknowledge the uncertainty we are dealing with regarding a large group gathering,” said Dr. Nita Crump, Conference Secretary. “We remain flexible and will continue to monitor to make sure the spread of the virus has been halted and a group such as ours will be able to meet safely.”

Both General Conference, which was scheduled for May, and Jurisdictional Conference, which

was scheduled for July, have also been postponed. New dates for these conferences will be announced soon.

Up-to-date information may be found at [www.sgaumc.org/annualconference](http://www.sgaumc.org/annualconference).

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## **Join me May 3 for a conference-wide Agape Meal**

To the South Georgia Conference:

Thank you for the exemplary ways in which you are being adaptive, imaginative, and innovative. This pandemic has revealed in a fresh way the commitment you have to Jesus Christ and to your church and community.

I celebrate the power of relationships and connectedness I see going on within the South Georgia Conference in the midst of this pandemic. Laity and clergy are finding creative ways that enable us to remain Alive Together in Christ.

I would like to offer one such way for us as the South Georgia Conference to be connected, even when we cannot physically be together. Sherrill and I would like to invite you into our home - virtually - for an Agape Meal on Sunday, May 3 at 6:00 p.m.

This will be a special time, lasting no more than 30 minutes, where I will lead us through the ancient practice of a Love Feast - or Agape Meal - that is well-suited for the time in which we find ourselves. The Agape Meal unites Christians in table fellowship using bread, cup, scripture, and prayer for encouragement and support—the very things we need most right now.

The New Testament letter of Jude, verse 12, contains a reference to the early Christian practice of a love feast. And who can read Acts 2:42, 46-47 without longing to experience this kind of connectedness among believers?

The Moravians, a group of German Christians, introduced the Love Feast/Agape Meal to John Wesley in Savannah, Georgia in 1737. Under Wesley's influence it became a significant part of early Methodism. His diary notes state: "After evening prayers, we joined with the Germans in one of their love-feasts. It was begun and ended with thanksgiving and prayer, and celebrated in so decent and solemn a manner as a Christian of the apostolic age would have allowed to be worthy of Christ."

The Agape Meal can be celebrated online. It does not require an ordained person to officiate; any Christian may conduct it. Historically, it has often been used in situations where a service of Holy Communion was not feasible. Although its origins in the early church are closely interconnected with the origins of the Lord's Supper, the two services became quite distinct and should not be confused with each other. The Agape Meal has its own uniqueness and can be a "fresh expression" of the Christian faith for our church members.

At a time when we are looking for ways to remain connected to one other, I am excited for this

time to celebrate an Agape Meal together. All you will need is your version of comfort food: something to eat and drink. I hope you will join me.

Alive Together in Christ,  
R. Lawson Bryan

*Additional instructions on how to prepare and take part in the Agape Meal will be provided on the conference website at [www.sgaumc.org/agapemeal](http://www.sgaumc.org/agapemeal) in the coming week.*

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**Being the Church during the Coronavirus: do justice, love kindness, walk humbly**

**By Rev. Ashley Randall, pastor of Garden City UMC and a member of the Advocacy Team**

**Back to Basics**

It doesn't seem quite right that in the face of an "unprecedented" worldwide pandemic the medical experts are urging all of us to practice the most mundane, unsophisticated, and elementary practices of personal hygiene: wash your hands, cover your cough, and stay home if you are sick. I mean, if this COVID-19 pandemic is as threatening as the experts say it is, there must be something more that they – or we – or somebody – can do to defeat this pernicious enemy. Maybe hand sanitizer will protect me more completely. Perhaps a mask will keep the virus from invading my lungs. Surely someone is close to finding a cure – or at least, an effective course of treatment.

While there is some evidence that "special measures" may offer limited additional benefits, the truth is that the most effective way to avoid becoming a victim of this novel coronavirus is by practicing the habits we first learned when we were very young. Whether it was our parents, siblings, or preschool teachers who taught us how to wash our hands, cover our cough, and stay home when we are not feeling well, their instructions still hold the most promise for making it through this pandemic healthy and whole.

I hope that you have already embraced these basic habits to protect your physical health as you are responding to this global pandemic. Let me ask you to consider what you are doing to attend to your spiritual health in these trying times. Again, your impulse might be to look for some special practice, an elaborate ritual, or an extraordinary discipline. Perhaps you are seeing the proliferation of resources that are being developed and offered (for sale) to those who are feeling anxious in these times. (Is there anyone who is not feeling anxious?)

Unfortunately, what we all have to accept eventually is that life is hard. It is filled with challenges, disappointments, and setbacks, as well as injury and disease. The community of faith has recognized this reality and developed habits of life to encourage and empower people in the midst of difficult circumstances. They are simple ideas that are commended repeatedly throughout the Bible. Over the centuries, these basic principles have carried faithful people through periods of great trial.

**Embrace Humility**

No matter what the circumstances, our first impulse is often to look out for our own interests. There are very few people who do not struggle with the temptation to put themselves first. Of course, we should be concerned about our own safety, but that does not give us license to rank ourselves as more deserving than others, to skip to the head of the line, or to hoard supplies that are in short supply.

Unusual conditions often spark curiosity. Some dive into research to learn as much as they can about the situation and what has caused it. This new information can give us a sense of control. We feel important and powerful when we share our newfound knowledge with others. Unfortunately, this naive expertise can also lead us to second guess those who have invested their lives in understanding and responding to these conditions and even to dismiss or argue with advice and direction that could prove invaluable.

Recognizing our own limits and acknowledging the gifts of others can free us from the burden of believing we bear the responsibility of being our own savior. This puts us in a much better frame of mind to cooperate with one another as we face the challenges together. Instead of feeling like time is running out, we find the patience to wait as solutions are tested and proven.

### **Deepen Compassion**

When we feel threatened, it seems natural to look for an enemy. Certainly, there is someone we can blame for disturbing our routine. We look at those who are different with suspicion, if not disgust. We start building a case for their prosecution and focus on the evidence that fits with our own preconceived ideas about their culpability for the current situation.

When we embrace humility and begin to be less concerned about protecting our own interests, we often find that changes our perception of others and expands our capacity to care for them. Our hearts develop a tenderness to respond to the concerns of others as we see them as those who are also treated in the image of God. We are less likely to assign blame and more likely to offer forgiveness – even as God has shown us grace. We also discover that our individual interests can actually lead us into alliances that improve the conditions for everyone involved.

### **Practice Justice**

Jesus said, “I came so that everyone would have life, and have it in its fullest” (John 10:10b). Unfortunately, there are many conditions in our communities and around the world that prevent people from experiencing life in its fullest measure. This COVID-19 pandemic is making that particularly clear. This virus threatens to wreak its worst impact on the communities and countries that are least able to withstand the shock.

While we do need to focus on meeting the current threat in our own communities, we have the responsibility to begin working and advocating for systems and structures that will not only protect us from future threats, but also improve the lives of vulnerable people around the world. Programs and organizations like PEPFAR, the Global Fund, the Global Vaccine Alliance and other organizations the United States supports have helped create and strengthen health and community systems in developing countries.

During the Ebola crisis, the U.S. led the way in building a coalition of nations to support pandemic response teams. Dr. Mark Dybul and Dr. Deus Bazira challenge us to advocate for greater cooperation and investment in the lives of others: “We should shift from disconnected programs, impactful as they may be, to develop plans for countries spanning economic growth and increased trade to health, education, agriculture, renewable energy, gender equality among others. Such an approach would put countries on a journey to self-reliance capable of managing a pandemic.”

You are not powerless in the face of this COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, any more so than the exiles were powerless in Babylon. So, what are we to do? How do you cope? It really is pretty basic. As the prophet Micah told the exiles, “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

*Rev. Ashley Randall, pastor of Garden City UMC, is a member of the Advocacy Team who has done extensive work with the ONE Campaign.*

*The ONE Campaign has recently launched its **ONE World Campaign**. As a movement dedicated to fighting extreme poverty and preventable disease, ONE is uniquely positioned to stand with the most vulnerable whether they live across the street or across the ocean.*

*We are one world and it's time to fight for humanity against this virus. Please sign ONE's petition telling our government that a global pandemic demands a global response. To sign the petition, visit [ONE.org](https://www.one.org).*

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## **Camp Connect: Covid-19 Update**

Dear Camp Connect families,

We are praying that you are staying healthy during this current COVID-19 outbreak. We are thankful for the hope we have in a BIG God who holds the whole world in His hands.

As of right now, we are making contingency plans for our summer camp programming. Because of this, we have pressed pause on our registrations until further notice.

Camps have not been canceled at this time. We are still waiting for the most up-to-date information possible before making any final decisions. Decisions regarding our summer schedule are anticipated to be made by the first of May. This timeline will allow us to make adjustments, if necessary, based on the facts at that time.

We will inform you immediately if things change regarding our summer schedule. Please know that we value your investment in Camp Connect, and should we find ourselves having to cancel any camps, a full refund will be given.

The safety and well-being of your children and our staff have and always will be our main priority. We are praying for a quick end to this season of sickness and uncertainty. We, like your kids, will be very ready to get outside and play again!

*“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”* Joshua 1:9

Sincerely,

Suzanne Akins  
Director of Camp Connect

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## **A Justice-Loving God**

**Spring Quarter: Justice and The Prophets**

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

**Sunday school lesson for the week of April 26, 2020**

**By Dr. Hal Brady**

**Lesson Scriptures:** Isaiah 61:8-11; 62:2-4a

**Key Verse:** Isaiah 61:8

### **Lesson Aims**

1. Identify the everlasting Covenant.
2. Explain why Old Testament parallelism promotes fuller understanding of the text.
3. Repent of a sin of omission or commission concerning a time he or she promoted or allowed an injustice.

Two high school boys were overheard conversing at a hamburger stand. Before leaving, one realized he had been given too much change. As he started to give it back, his friend said, “If you give that back, you’re stupid!” The young man gave the money back anyway. His simple act was a contrast to the habits of his friend, who clearly had a different set of values.

Lifestyle contrasts can indeed reveal important truths. Today’s lesson will make that clear.

### **Lesson Context**

Isaiah (ministered about 740-680 BC) lived in the days when Israel, the northern kingdom, was struggling against Assyria and was finally exiled from the land. For a time, the northern kingdom sent tribute to Assyria; however, Israel’s King Hoshea sought an alliance with Egypt in order to end Israel’s vassal relationship to the Assyrian oppressors. The consequence of Israel’s rebellion

against Assyria was that they were carried away into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 BC, never to be restored.

The southern kingdom of Judah remained, but Isaiah predicted punishment for its disobedience, as well (example Isaiah 3). His predictions were fulfilled almost a century after his ministry. God used the Babylonians as his instrument to bring down the monarchy of Judah and destroy the temple in 586 BC.

However, the Lord, in faithfulness to his covenant with David (2 Samuel, 7:1-17), brought back the Jews from exile in 538 BC and established them as a nation. And He used the Persians as his instrument to accomplish that restoration (example Ezra 1:1-8).

The book of Isaiah is generally viewed in terms of two larger sections: chapter 1-39 and chapters 40-66. Most of Isaiah 40-66 is conveyed in a poetic style. We are told that these chapters can be read as an ancient play.

Imagine a large stage with all the characters present. On one side of the room, there is Heaven with the Lord and the heavenly host present; on the other side, the earth and its inhabitants. Different characters speak, are addressed, or are discussed. The characters are the nation of Israel and the nations.

Within Israel there are the righteous and the wicked, the leaders and the commoners, and the servant of the Lord. The Gentile nations are distant but interested observers. Usually they are talked about, whether for future judgment or for blessing. But sometimes they are addressed directly.

Isaiah is at times an actor onstage with the other characters; sometimes he is an offstage narrator to the readers, who are the theatre audience.

Isaiah 56-66 “begins with the prediction of the salvation of the nations (56:1-8). The text then describes the punishment of the wicked of Israel, especially the leaders, for their ritual and ethical sins (chapter 58).

But the Lord is able and willing to deliver the repentant. And as a result, Israel will become a light to the nations (chapter 60) and embrace their priestly role (chapter 61).

Then comes a lengthy description of Israel’s glorious future with the arrival of their triumphant Lord (Isaiah 62-65). The grand conclusion describes the blessings and ministry of the contrite and the ultimate punishment of the wicked (chapter 66).

Isaiah 61:1-11 is a sequence of four speeches that follow up the Lord’s declaring Israel a light to the Gentiles in Isaiah 60.

### **The Priestly Nation (Isaiah 61:8-11)**

Before us is a picture of Israel as a nation acting as priest for the nations. It is also a picture of Israel receiving such honors from other nations as the lay folk of Israel were in the habit of offering their priests. Israel had been called in the beginning to be a nation of priests or a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6), and now this glorious destiny is at last to be fulfilled. The positions will be reversed. Israel, which had suffered such humiliation, will now be moved into the place of glory and dignity formerly occupied by the nations. There will even be some boasting (Isaiah 61:6).

Isaiah 61:8 identifies the speaker as the Lord. The conjunction “for” links verses 8,9 to the previous verses and explains what it means for God’s people to be a nation of priests.

First, the priestly people have moral requirements that stem from the very character of God. One of these is to practice “justice” (compare Isaiah 5:16). The word “justice” as commonly used today implies judgment and condemnation. It can also mean that in the Bible as well (example, Isaiah 34:5). However, the meaning of justice here has more to do with God’s character and what he expects from his people.

The Lord himself is just (Deuteronomy 32:4), and he requires the same of his people (compare Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 56:1). And this is especially true of their leaders (Proverbs 16:10). Justice has to do with the setting right of wrongs (example, Isaiah 1:17).

8b says, “I hate robbery and wrongdoing.” Contrasted with the justice that God loves is “robbery” that he hates, along with all types of “wrongdoing.”

In his condemnation, Isaiah may be casting the spotlight on the practice of fulfilling requirements of sacrifices only ritually, without keeping the moral requirements of the law (example Isaiah 1:10-17). God makes clear that acts of worship from those who do not follow him wholeheartedly are repulsive (example, Amos 5:21-24). God intends to bring about dramatic change in his people; his righteous standards do not vary.

8c and d says, “In my faithfulness I will reward (my people) and make an everlasting covenant with them.” In my “faithfulness” refers to God’s character and the certainty of his direction or rewarding.

In verse 8d, the Lord is giving his assurance that he will not forget his people in their exile. He will keep his promise to them.

Centuries later, the New Testament writers will confirm the fact of the Lord’s preservation of Israel for the inauguration of a permanent new covenant through the Messiah (see Romans 9:3-5; Hebrews 8:7-13). The salvation brought about by the one-time sacrifice of Jesus produces a covenant that is absolutely everlasting.

In verse 9, we see one of the most easily observable characteristics of Hebrew poetry and that is parallelism. This involves using, in adjacent lines, words having either similar or opposite

meanings. These phrases can explain each other or offer a contrast. Repetition through the use of parallel terms emphasizes whatever truth the writer is trying to convey.

The verse before us offers an excellent example of such parallelism in Hebrew poetry: “their descendants” parallels “their offering,” and “the nations” parallels “the peoples.” The repetitions found in these parallel phrases highlight one aspect of the dramatic transformation to come regarding the ancient Israelites’ reputation. In their future captivity, the Israelites will be derided by foreigners; God’s covenant people will become a “scorn and reproach” to the nations around them (example, Jeremiah 29:17-19).

However, the prophet Isaiah predicts a time when that reputation is to change. The release from captivity and subsequent events will result in the descendants of Isaiah’s current audience being known as “a people the Lord has blessed” (compare Genesis 17:2; Isaiah 43:5; 48:19).

In verse 10 Jerusalem is speaking and giving thanks. “God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth.”

It is a crippling weakness of Christians that we do not think often enough of God and his goodness to us to be overwhelmed. To be so overwhelmed by his greatness and grace that we are moved to ecstasy.

Coventry Patmore, the English poet, tells us that as a boy of 11, while reading a devotional book, “it struck me what an exceedingly fine thing it would be if there really was a God.”

Such rejoicing in God tends to alter the spiritual climate, restore hope, and make his presence and purpose clearer.

Verse 10 features poetic pairs in the mold of Hebrew parallelism, discussed earlier. The parallel here is easy to see:

I	delight greatly	in the Lord,
↓	↓	↓
My soul	rejoices	in my God.

We normally think of cause and effect in that order. But here Isaiah starts with the effect, then moves to state the cause.

The second poetic pairing states the cause of Zion’s rejoicing. Note that we say “cause,” not “causes.” There is one cause mentioned here, not two. And that’s the key to interpreting Hebrew parallelism properly. The phrases “clothed me” and “arrayed me” point to one action by God, expressed twice with different words. Likewise, the “garments of salvation” equate to “a robe of his righteousness.” These are figurative descriptions of a vitally important reality: they describe a person fully clothed by God so as to be acceptable in his sight.

The third poetic pair uses a comparison to describe the beauty of the clothing. The garments given by the Lord are as magnificent as the finest accessories worn by a bride and groom at their wedding (compare Isaiah 49:18).

The analogy involving a bridegroom and bride brings to mind the relationship between Jesus and his church (Ephesians 5:22-33). And while recognizing that the language of this verse before us is spoken by Zion, we also note that the blessings described as blessings Jesus shares with his followers. Revelation 19:7-9 tells us of the special clothing that awaits those who are part of the “wife” of the Lamb; he prepares us to join him at his “marriage” (compare Revelation 21:2).

We are reminded in verse 11 that God’s grace shown to Israel will in turn cause “all nations” to bloom with the same “righteousness” and subsequent “praise.” The righteousness that Zion displays will have an effect on nations as well. They too will know the Lord. The theme of people from among the nations coming to the Lord is highlighted throughout Isaiah (examples: Isaiah 2:2-4; 5:26; 49:6; 60:3; 66:18-20). The nations’ praise is an intended consequence of God’s faithfulness to Israel.

### **The Righteous Nations (Isaiah 62:2-4a)**

“The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory” (verse 2a). The Hebrew word here translated “vindication” is frequently translated “righteousness” (see Job 29:14; Psalm 9:8; Isaiah 51:5). Righteousness most often refers to moral integrity in doing what God declares right. The people of Zion will live lives so distinct from sin that the nations will take notice (example: 40:5).

“You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow” (verse 2b). Renaming in the Bible communicates some new characteristic of the one renamed. The new name, we are told, is prophetic, either in condemnation (Hosea 1:4-9) or commendation (example: Genesis 32:28).

Isaiah often uses name changes for the redeemed (example: Isaiah 1:26). Christians can look forward to the new names God will grant after the resurrection of the dead (Revelation 2:17).

Isaiah 62:3 says, “You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord’s hand, a royal diadem in the hand of our God.” The second statement once again builds on the first. A “crown” is often made of gold and worn by a king; “diadem” occurs parallel to the crown. They both signify the splendor of the Lord and his royalty. Zion is the crown or diadem in the Lord’s hand. Simply put, to be in the hand of the Lord is to be under his control.

4a. says, “No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate.” Israel forsook the Lord and because of this the land was to be deserted (32:14). From all appearances, the people

will seem to be forsaken in the Babylonian captivity to come. But once they yield to become the righteous crown in God's hand, they will know they are not forsaken (42:16, 60:15).

The Hebrew word translated "Desolate" is used six times in Isaiah, but this is the only time it is set in a positive light. The reason is because it will be permanently ended.

One last thought: if we live under the control and care of God we are mandated to share Christ with the world (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Sometimes someone will say to me, "Hal, I am not growing spiritually. Why can't I grow? Do you have a suggestion?" I usually ask that person, "Are you sharing your faith?"

### **Action Plan**

1. In what ways have your views of justice been challenged because of our studies over the past several weeks?
2. What viewpoint do you continue to hold even though you sense God wants you to change? Please share.

### **Resources for this lesson**

1. "2019-2020 Standard Lesson NIV Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching," pages 293-300.
2. "The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume VI," pages 514-517.
3. "The Abingdon Bible Commentary," pages 672-673.
4. "The Interpreter's Bible Volume 5," pages 713-715.

*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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## **Prophesying Restoration**

**Spring Quarter: Justice and The Prophets**

**Unit 3: Called to God's Work of Justice**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of May 3, 2020**

**By Dr. Hal Brady**

**Lesson Scriptures:** Zephaniah 3:14-20

**Key Verse:** Zephaniah 3:19

## **Lesson Aims**

4. Identify themes of restoration.
5. Explain the significance of those themes.
6. Why do you think this lesson is important to Christians?

The writer of today's lesson introduces it by pointing out that a small church in Spain had a famous painting of Jesus that was deteriorating due to age and moisture. Painted directly on the stone wall by 19<sup>th</sup> century artist Elise Garcia Martinez, the picture portrayed Jesus wearing a purple robe and a crown of thorns.

One day, church officials found the work of art changed beyond all recognition, and authorities suspected vandalism. It turned out that the culprit was not a vandal, but a church member who took it upon herself to restore the painting but had failed miserably.

When a priceless work of art needs to be restored, it's foolish to trust the job to anyone but the best. Like the painting, Israel needed true restoration. Was anyone willing and able to take on the job?

## **Lesson Context**

The book of Zephaniah stands in the ninth position of the collection of Hebrew prophetic literature called the Book of Twelve. The book has three Chapters and represents the collected order or divinely inspired sermons of the prophet Zephaniah, who was a prophet in the southern kingdom of Judah in the seventh century BC. Zephaniah's lineage suggests that he may have been of royal blood (Zephaniah 1:1). Undoubtedly, this family background would have given him special insight into the state of the nation and impact his understanding of God as King of Israel. For sure, Zephaniah understood the importance of leadership and what its absence would mean to a nation.

We are informed that Zephaniah likely wrote in the late 620s BC before King Josiah's spiritual reform. The prophet is primarily concerned with Judah's continued rebellion against God (see 2 Kings 22:1-23). The first two chapters of the book of Zephaniah describe a Coming Day of the Lord in which Judah is to face judgment for idolatry. This judgment is to come in the form of both the natural consequences of that nation's choices and as a tool of God for purifying his people.

God's process of purification would remove the rebellious in order to ensure the survival of those remaining faithful – "the remnant of Israel" (Zephaniah 3:12; 2:7,9; compare Isaiah 10:20-22). The prophet's warning to Judah carries weight because of the earlier deportation of the northern kingdom (Israel) by Assyria in 722 BC. That reality and its associated horrors underlined the fact that Zephaniah's warning was not an idle threat.

Thus, Zephaniah's prophecy of God's judgment came true in 586 BC. That was the year the Judeans were cast into Babylonian exile (2 Kings 25:1-21). The prophesied restoration would not begin until 538 BC, when Jewish captives were allowed to return to Judah (Ezra 1:1-4).

Important! Zephaniah's prophecy presents us with a sharp change of theme beginning in Zephaniah 3:9, as restoration of a remnant takes center stage. The Lord promises that the "meek and humble will trust in the name of the Lord" (3:12) and will be untroubled by those who are proud and haughty. Therefore, the remnant can freely celebrate captivity's end.

### **Celebration (Zephaniah 3:14, 15)**

Having been told why the remnant should celebrate, the people are encouraged to "sing...be glad and rejoice" (compare Psalm 9:2; 95:1; contrast 137:1-4).

The prophets frequently refer to Jerusalem and/or Zion in terms of a "daughter." This is a literary technique known as personification, in which the writer assigns the qualities of a person to something that isn't human. And since Jerusalem is the location of the temple, this imagery emphasizes the value of God's covenant people. It also stresses God's unique claim to stand as their champion.

The word "Israel," for its part, can designate different things depending on the historical context. Sometimes it refers to the entirety of the 12 tribes. At other times it refers only to the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom of the divided monarchy. Here, however, the word seems to refer to the faithful remnant, as do the two uses of "daughter."

Some students suggest that the use of the word "Israel" signifies the completeness of God's welcome home. Admittedly, that is quite possible as long as it is acknowledged that Zephaniah's prophecy refers to the completeness of a remnant, not the whole.

15a. says, "The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy." After the Prophesied Day of the Lord and the "punishment" that characterizes it (example, Zephaniah 1:7-10), God will step into the situation in a new way. Though the nation of Judah as a whole has disobeyed and turned its back on him, God will not abandon the faithful among his covenant people. In other words, God's anger concerning Judah's sin will subside.

After God uses Babylon as his agent to discipline his people, he will then defeat Babylon, thus ending the oppression Judah faced during that time. Most certainly, Judah will have to face the consequences of its choices, but God will not allow those consequences to destroy completely. God's affirmation of his faithful remnant is to be the cause for the joyful celebration mentioned above.

Note that the faithful remnant will suffer along with the unfaithful majority. But when the time comes for God to turn back the "enemy," he will bring to fullness of his presence to bear in

rescuing his remnant. The nature of the coming exile may look like God's complete abandonment. But that is never true for those who remain faithful.

*15b. "The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you;"*

In the ancient Near East, the presence of a king was essential to its well-being of his people. An absentee ruler cannot judge disputes.

Besides, when a king is present, the people expect him to provide some degree of protection and justice. So when Zephaniah describes God as "the King" present with his people, the prophet is telling a powerful story of God's protective rule (compare Isaiah 54:14; Zachariah 9:8,9).

We are informed that this language of "presence" foreshadows significant New Testament themes. God's promise to dwell with his people was fulfilled in Jesus. As the incarnate Word, he physically lived among people (John 1:1-18). Prior to his ascension, Jesus promised that "where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). And the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for the Christian is a blessed reality (Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Timothy 1:14).

The theme of the 17<sup>th</sup> World Methodist Conference held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, was appropriately "Holy Spirit, Giver of Life." The conference logo featured the Christ of Rio, with arms outstretched standing in the midst of a descending dove. Truly it was a powerful symbol. Down from the mountain the Holy Spirit brings Christ the Redeemer to meet the needs of humanity, indeed, all creation.

*15c. "Never again will you fear any harm."*

The promised restoration in general and this verse in particular does not suggest that God will exempt his people from experiencing the natural consequences of their choices. The context, rather, is that of God's removal of those who instigate "harm" against the remnant. The protection he gives, offers hope to God's people in the midst of judgment against the rebellious. As the psalmist put it, there is joy coming in the morning, even after the tears of the night before. (Psalm 30:5).

Now the promise of restoration does not end with Zephaniah's prophecies to pre-exilic Judah that is to become the post-exilic remnant. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray for restoration in terms of God's kingdom coming and God's will being done (Matthew 6:10).

As Jesus proclaims that coming kingdom during his ministry on earth, it is clear that he does not consider the restoration to be accomplished fully at the time. To the point, restoration and the establishing of the kingdom of God are inaugurated. Fulfillment is in some sense both "now" and "not yet."

Full restoration in terms of new life in Christ is consummated at his return (2 Corinthians 15:52; Revelation 22). In the meantime, we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us daily (Romans 12:2).

### **Promise**

#### **(Zephaniah 3:16-20)**

In verse 16, Zephaniah's phrasing makes it clear that the promise of restoration is certain, though the exact timing is unrevealed. "That day" points to a real occasion while leaving the timing open. For sure, people may fervently desire to know exactly when restoration is to come. However, God's fervent desire is that people be confident that the promise of the restoration is certain (compare Hebrews 11:1). Important to note that what is to happen on the day mentioned here is the opposite of what will happen on "that day" of Zephaniah 1:15.

Verse 16 also reminds us that there is no occasion for "fear" in God's restored kingdom. When the king of creation is fully present, peace and justice hold sway in his realm.

"Hands" in the Bible can express strength or symbolize power (example, Micah 5:9). However, they can also indicate a feeling of helplessness or hopelessness in situations characterized by fear (example 35:3,4). Thus if "hands hang limp" after this pronouncement, that, in turn points to a lack of faith (compare Matthew 14:26-31).

In verse 17, Zephaniah again presents a positive state of the future. The reason the people are not to fear is because the "Mighty Warrior" is present with them. The picture Zephaniah paints is of a victorious king. Having defeated his enemy, God's entire focus shifts to his utter "delight" over once again being with his people, providing and caring for them (compare Isaiah 62:4).

Here we see God shifting from a mode of active wrath to one of steady love. And in that mode God will no longer punish the people (compare Hosea 14:4). The Cycle of Joy is thereby complete as God's people celebrate their restored relationship with him, God celebrates being present with them.

Taken as a whole, verse 18 suggests that the "appointed festivals" that were instituted as an expression of faith have become a matter of shame instead. Now, the language of "reproach" which can also mean shame is the sense here. Shame and honor are more than simply matters of hurt feelings in the ancient Near East. Rather, those concepts speak of how people identify and value themselves. To be cast into exile will result in the Judeans no longer understanding who they are as a people (compare Psalm 74).

Important to note! This "burden" will be lifted when God reclaims his remnant. Restored relationship means restored identity. God brings the joy of identity with him in the place of the shame of his rejection.

The phrase "at that time" links the promises of verse 19-20 to the previous verses. The people are to experience restoration identity and so much more. Judah will no longer be known as the

people who abandoned their God (compare Deuteronomy 29:24,25; Isaiah 60:18). Restored relationship with God removes and heals these purported signs of abandonment. In other words, the oppressed, the lame, and the outcast will all be honored and praised.

The alienation caused by sin in general and idolatry in particular is reversed when God is once again present with his people. Those willing to affirm allegiance to God alone, rejecting idolatry – the opposite of which will be the main reason for the forthcoming exile – are promised God’s care in his plan to restore his people to wholeness.

“At that time” in verse 20, God promises return, restoration, and praise “Among all the peoples of the earth.”

### **Conclusion**

In concluding this lesson, there are two very important things to note. First, the word that ultimately came to Zephaniah was more about the future than about the past, and more about those who will inherit the future than about those who will be punished. It is God and the faithful who rejoice because of God’s having mercy in their behalf.

The interlinking of God, Israel, and the nations under which Zephaniah has vision of the future is a direct challenge to groups and races and religions and ideologies that continue to preach and push all kinds of separation in our time.

At least one of Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s sayings captures what truly causes God to rejoice as people learn to live together in unity:

“...In our African language we say ‘a person is a person through other persons.’ I would not know how to be a human being at all except I learn this from other human beings. We are made for a delicate network of relationships, of interdependence. We are made to complement each other. All kinds of things go horribly wrong when we break that fundamental law of our being. Not even the most powerful nation can be completely self-sufficient.”

Second, Zephaniah’s promise of restoration for the Old Testament remnant is relevant to us today because it foreshadows our restored relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

Christians have been delivered from the captivity of sin; yet we still live in a world that is bogged down in that captivity. Therefore, the fullness of our deliverance is yet to come. However, we trust God to keep his promise because he has, among other things, “set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit (2 Corinthians 1:22). Despite the fact that God’s kingdom is not yet here in its fullest sense, his continuing work of restoration is guaranteed by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

### **Action Plan**

3. Name one specific way God's care for you in the past should cause you to sing a song of gratitude yet today.
4. In what ways do you sense that God wants you to be His hands and feet with regard to restoring the lost to Him?
5. What is the most important thing to you about God's promise of restoration in this lesson?

### **Resources for this lesson**

5. "2019-2020 Standard Lesson NIV Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching," pages 301-308.
6. "The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume VII," pages 698-704.

*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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## **Yard flowers ignore the quarantine**

### **PATHWAY TO HIS PRESENCE**

#### **B.J. FUNK**

Today, on my 28<sup>th</sup> day of voluntary self-quarantining (not sick... just doing as we've been asked), I ventured outside to go to the drive-through at the bank. As I drove out of my yard, I noticed the beginning buds on my Crepe Myrtle trees that line both sides of my long driveway. My son, Shawn, pruned them in the winter, and for all of these months, they have looked like a sad bunch of limbs sticking out of the ground.

Not so today. New life called to me, "Drive slowly. Watch God's plan unfolding."

And so, I did. Also, for these last several days, I have enjoyed the beauty of an azalea bush outside my front bedroom window. From my desk where I write, I had a large daily splash of color smiling through my window. Now, those flowers have said good bye until next spring, but the crepe myrtles should be robust and lovely by midsummer.

I took my time. Often my schedule is run through the bank, stop for gas, get to the post office before it closes, run through CVS, go to the grocery store, and then go home. But today all I had to do was to take my time.

I called my good friend, Vicki, from the bank parking lot. “You home? Since we don’t get to see too many humans, how about a yard visit? I will pull up to the front of your home, and if you can come out into the yard, we can see each other and also practice social distancing.”

She was in.

What joy to have a few minutes to talk with a friend. I see pictures of people all day long on my computer and on TV. But there is nothing that compares with an honest-to-goodness person standing in the yard talking to me. I felt refreshed.

When I arrived home, I saw that the beautiful knock-out roses had come back to life. After sleeping all winter, they stretched and woke up, their lovely roses bringing color to the front of my home. Ignoring the quarantine, my roses are blooming in spite of what is going on in this world. There are just some things the coronavirus can’t take away.

What amazing gifts our yard flowers are. No one says to them, “Okay, it’s time for you to bloom!” They just know when it is their time to wake up, open up, and bring color into our days.

All of my yard is calling to me, “Drive slowly. Watch God’s plan unfolding.”

I do not believe God sent this coronavirus to our world, but I do believe God has a message for us through the spring flowers as well as a message through coronavirus. It’s the same message.

“Drive slowly and watch God’s plan unfolding.”

*The Rev. B.J. Funk is associate pastor of Central UMC in Fitzgerald. Email her at [bjfunk@bellsouth.net](mailto:bjfunk@bellsouth.net).*

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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. Don Warren**

Lt. Colonel/Reverend Donald Charles Warren, age 87, born on Dec. 9, 1932, went to live in his Father's house Sunday, March 22, 2020, after complications from pneumonia.

Don is survived by his wife of nine years Nancy (Miller) Warren of Marietta, Ga., and Bonita Springs, Fla. He loved and cherished all of Nancy's children and grandchildren as if they were his own. The younger grandchildren affectionately called him Papa or Papa Don. His beloved stepchildren and step-grandchildren are Kelli (Tony) and Christy Garlock, Jim Jr. (Lisa) Durand, Joshua Martin, Taylor Lynn and Jacob Durand, Stephen (Liz) Marcus, Isaiah, and Daniel Durand, Jason (Kelly) and Carson Durand with his mother Patti, her husband David and his daughter Annabelle Hansmann. He is survived by his eldest sister Laura (Bob deceased) Erb and his youngest sister Lois (Ed) Wensley.

Donald is preceded in death by his first wife of 54 years, Joan (Camper) Warren and sisters Dorothy Warren, Ruby Johnson, Marion Tolliver, Eleanor Waybrant, and brother Rev. Harvard Warren (deceased) and his wife Katharine. He is predeceased by his father in-law Eugene Miller and brother in-law Gary (Mary Jane) Miller. Chaplain Warren was born in Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan to the late Jay Russell Warren and Elissa (Fagin) Warren. Don leaves behind many nieces and nephews whom he adored.

Don earned a degree in Theology in 1955 from Owosso Bible College in Michigan. He attended five years and graduated with honors Magna Cum Laude. During that time he served on ten different organizations. He accepted a Pastorate for one year in Cheboygan. He continued his education at Michigan State in East Lansing, Michigan, where he earned his Bachelor's Degree in Theology. He was awarded a Masters from Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, NJ, and a Masters in Marriage and Family Counseling from Azusa Pacific University in California.

Lt Colonel Warren served as an Army Chaplain for 23 years. In November 1974 he was endorsed by the United Wesleyan Methodist America Church. He served in Korea in 1964 1st Cav and Vietnam where he flew by helicopter to the platoon he was assigned too, where he

prayed and comforted the soldiers. He served twice in Germany. When he was in Nuremberg 1976-1980 he served under World War II Gen. George Patton's son, Major Gen. George Smith Patton IV. Patton attended many of his Sunday services complimenting Don on how much he enjoyed the sermons. After retirement, he served 13 years as a Campus Minister for the Wesleyan Foundation, in their Chapel at the Ga Southern University in Statesboro, Ga., where his two stepsons Jason and Stephen Durand graduated. After moving to Marietta, Ga, he became a substitute teacher for 13 years with the Cobb County School System.

In Don's early years he was a skilled carpenter, making furniture and giving most of it away to relatives. He made several pieces for the sanctuary at the Ga Southern Wesleyan Chapel where he served in Statesboro, Ga. He loved to play racquet ball and walk his little dog Schatzi. Don exercised every day until his sickness in March. He was a voracious reader. He read about five books a week, mostly Christian books, history and novels. He enjoyed getting books from the library in Marietta, Ga, the Mt. Bethel Church library, and the Bonita Springs, Fla. Library. Don was an avid sports fan especially watching the Atlanta Braves.

Lt. Colonel Warren received several awards and medals in the service of his country as a Chaplain. He received the Army Service Ribbon/Overseas Service Ribbon with Numeral, 2/National Defense Service Medal/Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal with device (60)//Army Commendation Medal//Meritorious Service Medal (1st Oak Leaf Cluster) Bronze Star Medal//Air Medal//Vietnam Service Medal (1st Oak Leaf Cluster)

Reverend Warren joyfully served the Lord all his life. Finding the Lord at a very young age, he knew he wanted to go into the ministry. He attended Mt. Bethel UMC in Marietta, Ga for 34 years. He served as an Elder in the Methodist Church. Don sang in the choir contributing to the bass section. He taught occasionally the Contemporary Sunday School Class where he proclaimed his love of serving Jesus. He went on several Mission trips, helped to build houses for Habitat for Humanity and ran a 3k race winning in the over 75 age group. Don was one of the teachers of the Men's Bible Study group on Friday mornings. He taught from the Word of God and they prayed for the needs of each member and special requests. He has given the Homily at several of his relative's funerals, including sisters, brother and brother-in-laws.

The Memorial and Celebration of life Service will be held at the Mt. Bethel UMC 4385 Lower Roswell Road in Marietta, Ga 30068 at a later date. The Military Funeral Honors Service will be held at 2025 Mount Carmel Church Ln, Canton, Ga 30144 in the near future.

The Naples NCH Baker Downtown Hospital health team was outstanding, caring for Reverend Warren in his last 17 days of life. The families thank them for their expertise and the kindness shown to him during his illness. The family of Rev. Warren would like to thank Fuller Funeral Home of Naples for their assistance and kindness shown to the family during this grievous time.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made in Don's honor to Mt. Bethel UMC, 4385 Lower Roswell Road, Marietta, Ga 30068, including the UMC Choir or the Contemporary Sunday School Class.

John 11:25 “Jesus said. . . ,I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live.”

**Mrs. Juanita Wilder**

In the evening of April 9, 2020, Juanita Wilder died and entered into God’s presence in the eternal place prepared for her. Her life was a living testimony of her faith in Christ. She was born on September 3, 1932, in Brantley County to Frank and Missouri Hale who along with her eight brothers and sisters have preceded her in death. She is also preceded in death by her first husband, Sgt. Lester Strickland, who died in a peacetime military accident involving the B-29 of which he was a flight engineer.

She is survived by her husband, The Rev. W. Raymond Wilder, Jr. whom she married in 1960 at the Hebardville Methodist Church in Waycross, Georgia and with whom she shared over 59 years of marriage. She partnered with him to serve Christ and the church through the South Georgia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. She served Christ in many different capacities both in the local churches and in the Annual Conference as one of its delegates. When they retired and moved to Magnolia Manor in 1991, she immediately continued that service. She served on the Salvation Army Board, managed the Manor Mall, raised over \$300,000 for Magnolia Manor, and was in 2011 awarded the Thomas O. Marshall, Jr. Good Samaritan Award by her church, the First United Methodist Church of Americus.

She is also survived by her two children, Bill Strickland, a retired United Methodist pastor and his wife Lynn of Portal, Georgia, her daughter, Annita Edgar and her husband, David, also a retired United Methodist pastor, of Fair Oaks Ranch, Texas, four grandchildren, six great grandchildren, and her sister-in-law, Charlene Carl and her husband, Richard. Her love and spirit provided much care for each of these through the years of her life.

As she is remembered by family and friends, she is remembered as a woman of deep faith and a tenacious determination to get things done. She was one of those who lived with a servant’s heart and has touched the lives of many whose names she never knew. When she received the Good Samaritan Award she said, “God has blessed me, and I want to share this blessing and goodness with others.” From the beginning of her life to the end, she was faithful to this core commitment of her life.

While it is impossible to have any kind of formal memorial service at this time, a service of remembrance and celebration will be announced when the time is appropriate. In lieu of flowers please consider making a donation to a ministry for which she had great passion, the League of the Good Samaritan at Magnolia Manor.

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**Scripture Readings – April 21**

**April 26**

***Third Sunday of Easter***

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 (UMH 837)  
1 Peter 1:17-23  
Luke 24:13-35

**May 3**

***Fourth Sunday of Easter***

Acts 2:42-47  
Psalm 23 (UMH 754 or 137)  
1 Peter 2:19-25  
John 10:1-10

**May 10**

***Fifth Sunday of Easter***

Acts 7:55-60  
Psalm 31: 1-5, 15-16 (UMH 764)  
1 Peter 2:2-10  
John 14:1-14

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**Events in the South Georgia Conference – 4/21/2020 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](#).