

## **SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – OCTOBER 6 EDITION**

### **In midst of 2020 hurricane season, caseworkers wrap up Irma, Michael repairs**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

When Hurricane Michael swept through southwest Georgia in October 2018, its strong winds toppled trees throughout the region.

In Brinson, about 10 miles from hard-hit Donalsonville, a large Live Oak limb slammed into Gloria Singleton's roof. A large Sweetgum tree hit the back of the house so hard it cracked the kitchen's ceiling.

More than a year after the hurricane, Singleton was still living with tarps on her roof, waiting for repairs. Mold was starting to creep in, she said, and every time it rained outside, it rained inside, too.

Today, though, thanks to South Georgia Conference's Disaster Response ministry and the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), Singleton's roof and walls are repaired and she can once again cook safely in her kitchen.

"Everything was piling up on us and then they came by and helped us, and it was a blessing," said Singleton of the South Georgia United Methodist caseworkers who offered assistance after seeing the tarps on her home. "I had a house that had water coming in the kitchen and on top of the sink and everything, and they helped me out a lot."

Nearly two years after the devastating Category 3 storm hit, South Georgia United Methodist caseworkers are wrapping up their work after helping 118 families recover from the hurricane.

"It was wonderful to be able to help so many people," said Rev. George Masciarelli, who served as Recovery Coordinator for Hurricane Michael. "People are grateful for the help they received."

Rev. Masciarelli and his team, funded through the connection by a UMCOR grant, focused on Decatur, Early, Seminole, and Miller Counties, the four counties where Hurricane Michael first entered when it came into Georgia.

In the past year Rev. Masciarelli has seen frustration turn to gratitude and those who suffered the wrath of Hurricane Michael reach out to those in Hurricane Laura's path. Friendship United Methodist Church in hard-hit Donalsonville recently sent their shower trailer to Fairhope, Ala. to help aid in the community's recovery.

Across the state in Savannah, Rev. Aimee Baxter has wrapped up her Hurricane Irma relief work, three years after the storm struck the coast.

Following Hurricane Irma, six counties along Georgia's coast, plus Coffee County further inland, received FEMA declarations. A United Methodist deacon, Rev. Baxter has served as a case manager in Savannah and Chatham County to help 40 families restore their homes and lives.

Many of the cases she's handled have dealt with tree damage, roof repairs, and flooding repairs.

"Mostly it's where the trees fall and the flood waters rise," she said.

While much of the community has moved on, those who are still recovering are weary but grateful for the assistance.

“Even years later you can sense the relief in them that this part is taken care of,” Rev. Baxter said.

Rev. Baxter and her husband, Rev. Shannon Baxter, are both members of the Coastal Empire Disaster Recovery Committee (CEDRC), a collaborative organization to prepare for, assist with, and recover from disasters. Kelly Crane, the South Georgia Conference’s Coastal District Disaster Response Coordinator, is also a member. As an organization, CEDRC has helped nearly 300 Savannah and Chatham County residents recover from the storm, Rev. Baxter said.

Rev. Shannon Baxter serves as president of CEDRC, and seeing the group’s growth, collaboration, and response to needs has been amazing, Rev. Aimee Baxter said.

And although South Georgia has so far this season been spared a major storm, now is the time to remain prepared and vigilant.

“Be aware. I don’t think people realize how long it takes to recover from a disaster. I don’t think you ever fully recover in some sense – some things are never the same. Keep paying attention and don’t forget. It’s a long, long, long journey,” Rev. Baxter said.

“These are people just like us. Hard workers who had an unfortunate event, and any one of us could find ourselves in their shoes. And it’s such a gift when we’re able to give help with no strings attached.”

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## **Howard Chapel UMC stays connected with unlikely combination**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

The unlikely combination of fruit and technology are helping one South Georgia pastor stay connected to her congregation in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

Like other churches, Howard Chapel United Methodist Church in Dublin suspended all in-person activities in March. But with a mostly older and vulnerable congregation, Rev. Cleo Gilchrist hasn’t yet felt comfortable re-starting in-person worship services.

It’s been hard being away from one another for nearly seven months, she said.

“I’m a people person, and I didn’t really get to know my members well before COVID kicked in,” said Rev. Gilchrist, who began serving Howard Chapel UMC in July 2019. “My PPR chair and I talked about how I could get to know the members better and keep in touch.”

Enter scuppernongs. Those sweet, green, and oh-so-Southern of fruits have helped her stay connected to church members.

On birthdays, when someone is sick or diagnosed with COVID-19, or just because, she and Cheryl King, Howard Chapel UMC’s Pastor-Parish Relations Committee chairwoman, will deliver a basket full of the large grapes to the person’s front porch. A note accompanies the treat, telling the recipient that they’re loved and being prayed for.

Rev. Gilchrist and King have delivered other such “porch surprises” like flowers, meals, and Upper Room devotionals to those who are homebound, having surgery, or are in the hospital. They brighten people’s days, King said, and lets them know they’re cared for.

“People need to know you care and are concerned about them,” said King. “We never know how it’s touching them spiritually.”

Even in the midst of the pandemic, these efforts have helped Rev. Gilchrist better know her neighbors, the congregation, and the people in the community.

“We found that (the porch surprises) really stirred the members,” she said. “My goal has been to get to know the members of my church and the community, the people around the church. You have to be intentional, you have to go out and talk to people and let them know you understand how they feel.”

Relationships are important, Rev. Gilchrist said, and to maintain and build their relationships with one another those in the Howard Chapel UMC congregation have stretched themselves and embraced technology.

More than 20 people are meeting together for Bible study every Wednesday via teleconference. They’ve studied Ezekiel, Daniel, Revelation, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon.

“Media has brought the church closer together than I could have, I believe,” she said. “Like Bishop Bryan said, it has stretched me, and it has stretched our members. Never would I have gotten them to read as much as they’ve read. We’re reading scripture in depth and are enjoying it.”

The congregation also “gathers” online each Sunday morning to worship, and every second Sunday of the month they share an online Love Feast. Videos of services are published and shared on YouTube.

Church members have stepped outside their comfort zones and have embraced technology, Rev. Gilchrist said. Nearly everyone has a cell phone and has learned how to use applications and access YouTube.

“They really like Zoom because they can see each other. I have a 90-year-old learning how to do Zoom!”

Learning, embracing, and using technology is helping the congregation stay connected when they can’t physically be together, but it’s also helping break down walls between the congregation and the community.

“It’s growing our church. It’s changing them,” Rev. Gilchrist said. “It’s helping us reach out. Now we’re fellowshiping with the community and hearing that they have the same needs and thoughts we have.”

But the low-tech methods – a phone call, a handwritten note, a safe in-person visit, or a love basket left on a porch – are just as important to keeping in touch, King said.

“It’s just those little things,” she said. “If it matters to me as a person, I know it will mean a whole lot to other people.”

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## **October is Pastor Appreciation Month**

**By J. F. Knapp, III, Conference Lay Leader**

*Encourage one another and build up each other.* (1 Thessalonians 5:11, NRSV)

While our response to this pandemic has been hard on communities and congregations across the country, we cannot overlook the fact that this has been particularly difficult for our pastors. These are individuals whose calling is to minister to people, especially in times of difficulty.

COVID-19's Rules of Engagement have closed sanctuaries, and social distancing has prevented gathering together and even hospital visitations. In the midst of it all, our pastors have led our churches in finding new ways to serve and to worship. The psychological burden our pastors have been stoically shouldering has not been easy.

This month is Pastor Appreciation Month in The United Methodist Church. What an opportunity to minister to our ministers! I hope I can count on the laity of the South Georgia Conference in spurring your congregations to help show the pastor - and church staff - some "extra" appreciation in the upcoming weeks.

This doesn't ever have to be a big, complicated task. I believe the "keep it simple" approach works best: enlisting members throughout the congregation to each take on a small task.

Every congregation is different, but here are some ideas to consider that can easily be scaled to size to fit any size congregation:

1. Recruit two or three willing members to commit to sending a "thank you" email on behalf of the entire church. Tell your pastor how glad you are to have them as part of your church family. Remind them how important they and their family are to the life of your church. Acknowledge them for their dedication and devotion.
2. Find two or three (or more!) members willing to place a phone call and just give a word of encouragement to your pastor.
3. Ask two or three members to write a personal note of thanks on behalf of the entire church and drop it in the mail.
4. There might be those in your congregation who want to take the pastor a meal or baked goods. Several congregants could go in together to provide a single meal (salad, entrée, dessert, drink). The more involved the better!
5. Oct. 25 would be a good Sunday for the Lay Leader to give a brief message of appreciation for your pastor at church.

I encourage you to stagger these suggestions throughout the month, one every day or two - the emails, the phone calls, the notes, the meals. Now just imagine: your pastor would experience an entire month of appreciation and encouragement. As we all know, sometimes it is the smallest gesture or compliment that really makes someone's day.

You know what will most impact your pastor. The important thing is that we take the opportunity and make the effort to express our appreciation and offer encouragement.

I am so appreciative of the dedication and ministry of the laity of the South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church!

J. F. Knapp, III  
Conference Lay Leader  
South Georgia Conference of The UMC

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## **Connectional Ministries highlights UM faith leaders, resources local churches and laity in two new series**

The Office of Connectional Ministries is working hard to connect and resource local churches during this unusual and challenging time. With their [Conversations at The Table](#) series, clergy and laity are invited to grab lunch, pull up a chair, and join the Connectional Ministries team for a series of Zoom conversations. Several upcoming topics are slated so you can learn from others, share ideas, and be inspired. All conversations will be held via Zoom. [More information](#)

In addition to the [Conversations at The Table](#) series, they're also hosting a new video series titled, "[Getting to Know the People of South Georgia](#)." Through the series they'll highlight United Methodist faith leaders in South Georgia and help us get to know them and their faith journeys. It's going to be a lot of fun! This month, to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, we're getting to know several of South Georgia's Latino/Latina clergy and laity. [More information](#)

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## **Lessons I've learned**

**FROM THE BISHOP  
R. LAWSON BRYAN**

What lessons are you learning as we navigate through the global pandemic? I want to share three lessons I have learned from the witness of our laity and clergy. I do so with gratitude as I join you in celebrating Pastor Appreciation Month in October and Laity Sunday on October 18.

First, we place a high value on "the connectional system." Our members take seriously the New Testament pictures of the early church: sharing their resources (Acts 2:42-47), laying on hands to send out missionaries (Acts 13:2-2), and appointing elders in every town (Titus 1:5). While there are great differences between their time and our time, nevertheless we sense that John Wesley

got it right when he envisioned local churches connected to each other for support, encouragement, and multiplication of our impact for Christ. It is this very connectional system that has held us securely in place over the past six months and continues to do so today. Many have said to me, “I feel that we are more connected than ever.” What a blessing!

Second, we take seriously Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 6:21, “...where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” I am referring here to the encouraging financial support that we are seeing in many of our churches and in our annual conference. I do not minimize the serious economic impact that the pandemic has had on our businesses, communities, and our personal incomes. But in spite of that, our members are supporting their local church and the South Georgia Conference. Because you have a heart for ministry, you are using your financial resources to keep South Georgia strong. Thank you!

Third, we are more “boat church” than “land church.” In Matthew 14:22-33 we see Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee toward the boat that’s carrying his disciples. Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water. But then Peter begins to sink. Jesus plucks him out of the water and puts him in the boat – the place of safety. No wonder the image of a boat became an early symbol of the Christian Church. You see it today in stained glass windows, needlepoint kneelers, and in Christian art. The largest part of a church building – the part where the congregation gathers – is called the “nave,” from the Latin word for boat or navy. Boat people have to be nimble and creative in order to sail safely, adjust for the wind and other conditions, and reach the goal. This reminds me of the adaptive spirit I have seen in our local churches these past six months. Something in us knows that Jesus has put us into the boat of the Christian faith. This is a good time to remind ourselves that this boat is built to sail in all kinds of weather.

I hope you will have a lively celebration of the ministry of the laity on Laity Sunday, October 18. And I thank you for observing Pastor Appreciation Month during October.

October is also an ideal time to recognize J. Knapp, our newly elected conference lay leader.

J. is a native of Thomasville, Ga. where he and his family are members of Thomasville First UMC. He was in management with Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. before joining a Thomasville start-up, Scentco, LLC., which develops and distributes innovative air freshener products. His wife, Lisa, is a Patient Advocate with the Lawson Neel Med Bank, where she helps those with chronic health conditions who have limited or no prescription coverage get the medications they need. J. and Lisa have two children. Lexi, 18, is a sophomore at Valdosta State University where she is a nursing major and a member of Kappa Delta sorority. Jace, 16, is a sophomore and a varsity football player at Thomas County Central High School. J. and Lisa ask for your prayers as they try to survive the “teenage years.” J. Knapp has already distinguished himself for the outstanding leadership he has provided as lay leader of the Southwest District. We are grateful for his service as the Lay Leader of the South Georgia Conference.

Alive Together at the Table,  
R. Lawson Bryan



## **Love for Enemies**

**Fall Quarter: Love for One Another**

**Unit 2: Inclusive Love**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of October 11, 2020**

**By Dr. D. Craig Rikard**

**Lesson Scripture: Luke 6: 27-36**

**Key Verse: To you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat him (Luke 6:27-28).**

### **Lesson Aims**

- Doing the unthinkable for the sake of love.
- Contrast Jesus means of interacting with those who challenge him with our temptation to do otherwise.
- Learn how-to live-in mercy with all

### **Refusing to see only the evil in another**

In conducting one of the funeral services many years ago the entire family of the deceased met me in the yard. Among the first things they said to me was, “Don’t say a good word about him.” They continued, “He was a lousy father and grandfather and deserves nothing good spoken in the service.” Naturally, young and green, I was stunned and clueless as to how to handle such a moment. I conducted the eulogy by talking about the love of Jesus, who could see goodness and something worth redeeming in those who hurt him most. Whether they were satisfied, I don’t know. But I was called to speak the gospel, and I felt this was indeed the message of the gospel. The nature of our sin would desire revenge and one last shot at hurting them as they had hurt the family through the years.

It truly is amazing that Jesus not only loved those who could literally be mean and unkind, and yet see good in them. He could see some attribute worth saving when my eyes were blind to it.

Some debate this passage from Luke as being different from Matthews’ sermon on the mount. I could certainly be mistaken, but I have no difficulty believing Jesus uttered such similar words in different places. This sermon was at the heart of his teaching, and more beautifully, at the heart of his life. I do believe the message was especially for his disciples, though others around heard the message and certainly remembered it and took it to heart. But this was the life to which the disciples were called to live. It was the life Jesus would teach, preach, live, and give his entire life as the most powerful expression possible. Even more profound for us is the fact that Jesus is describing the life he expects from his church. Since the church is the body of Christ, it must then embody this teaching in an authentic manner.

## **To you who are listening**

Initially this sounds like an odd introduction to the sermon. But Jesus has always made a clear distinction between hearing and listening. He said in Matthew 11:15, “You who have ears to hear, let him hear.” We hear hundreds of varied sounds every day and pay little attention to any of them unless they possess a direct bearing on our life. But Jesus is asking us to listen as those who understand his words do indeed have a bearing on their life. As a matter of fact, these words are to be their life, the expression of their faith and that which is at the core of their life in relationship with others.

These words of Jesus sound very difficult, for they are. But just because they are difficult does not mean they are not possible. Moral issues can be very difficult because many moral issues we have learned since childhood. Granted, we live on a journey of learning to live this life. Paul called it “a race;” “a course.” But it is important to understand that every day is intended to be another step along this path of Jesus’ incredible love. This love refuses revenge when revenge is by far the easier behavior. Jesus’ sermon asks us to look for the redemptive in some who are hard-hearted and so selfish they make loving them difficult. Yet, Jesus calls us to love them because they are God’s child, which he expressed as worth his sacrifice on the cross.

But Jesus isn’t just asking us to “look at people differently;” he is asking us to treat them differently. We are to treat them as the beloved of God. I can look for the good in another far easier than I can treat them as being of great value to God,

## **An Incredible Ethic**

The Sermon on the Mount is considered one of the highest moral statements in the world. Liberal theologian Rudolph Bultmann considered the Sermon on the Mount as so morally high and noble that Jesus had to say it because he believed the end of the world was near. But nothing could be further than the truth. This was an ethical statement he desired from his followers daily, as a way of life that could change the world. Some struggle with the content of the sermon because it exists as counter to our human way of life. We are sinners who are egocentric. Jesus’ teaching is asking us to lay down our selfish desires and self-centered perspective of life for the good of others; some of these others can even live lives that are immoral and uncaring. But our calling is not to judge them, but to see them differently and treat them as Jesus would. Jesus said if we want to find our life, we must lose it. If we want to find it, we give it away. This is the most difficult journey I seek to walk daily. Taking up the cross and following Jesus to redeem those I consider not worth redeeming is counter to the natural manner I would rather live my life. From my childhood I have been taught to look after myself and do that which brings me the most joy. Jesus is asking me to accept a totally different life. He has promised to empower us to live in self-sacrifice by dwelling in the Holy Spirit. Thus, we are not asked to walk this journey alone. We are accompanied by the one who lived this ethical, loving life perfectly. Following Jesus in obedience to the demands of this sermon is not easy just because Christ lives within us. We still

battle a lifestyle we have been taught most of our life. But the life of Jesus is not only possible, it is rewarding and transforming. We indeed find the highest value of our lives in giving our self-centered life away.

*Do you believe the ethical demands of the Sermon on the Mount are too difficult for practical living, and are they mere ideals? Some believe Jesus' ethics are ideals akin to stars. A sailor can navigate by noting the movement of the stars, but we can never reach them. Is the Sermon on the Mount intended therefore to be a journey toward the ideal?*

### **Bless and Pray**

To bless another is to speak the love and truth of God over them. Remember, in Judaism words had and continue to have creative power. It isn't coincidental that God created the world by "speaking it into existence." And in John's Gospel 1:1 he opens the good news by writing, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was and is God." The Messiah is the word incarnate. His presence is eternal, his ministry is irrevocable, and the content of his salvation is forever and unstoppable.

Once something was spoken it set forth a course of action that was as good as done and complete. The words were irrevocable. Thus, when the Jews said a vow, it was binding. A contract was made by simply speaking. To speak God's love, mercy, wellbeing, and goodness over the life of another was to set forth a way of life that had creative power. In a culture that takes the power of words so lightly it can be difficult to grasp the creative power of words to the Jewish people in contrast to our use of words in the west.

*How often do we truly pray for God's blessing upon someone who has deeply hurt us? What is the difference between contracts and promises today in contrast to Judaism in Jesus' day?*

To pray is not a weak exercise we use as a last resort. How often have we said, "I'm praying for you," as a manner of saying "good bye?" Praying is speaking powerful, creative words to God very often for the benefit of one we love and goodness for their life. When the words are sincere and consistent with the Gospel they too set forth a course of action. The action may not always manifest itself in the way we might choose. It will be an action that considers the redemption of everyone in the world. Therefore, there are requests I make in prayer that are not fulfilled for they are inconsistent with the high ethic of Jesus in Luke and Matthew. We do not live in a vacuum; we live in a community where all are equally important and loved of God. If I truly love one who has deeply hurt me, the most Christlike action I can take is to genuinely pray God's blessings of love upon them, thus loosening redemptive words to work in their life and those affected by their life.

### **Forgiveness and generosity**

Usually, when we speak of another hurting us, we mean verbally inflicting upon us actions that emotionally sting. I admit, it is very difficult for me to forgive and reach out in generosity when that person has intentionally hurt me. First, it humbles me. It makes me appear sheepish, or as some might say, cowardly. The world expects an eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth, yet it is amazing how often this O.T. passage is quoted and Jesus' command to love and forgive are ignored. To act in a manner that refuses to injure in like manner can look weak to the world. Yet, I doubt walking the Via Dolorosa with a cross beam across one's back after a severe beating could be understood as a weak action by one who was known as a miracle worker to the curious crowd. Even on Golgotha the crowd still expected Jesus to call down an act of retribution from heaven. He did not, though he could. It requires the most noble form of humility to allow another to strike you in public, and you just stand there and humbly do nothing but take it. We are not being asked to "just take it" and do nothing in return. We are asked *to return* their humiliating action with **tangible acts of forgiveness**. We live in a culture that values possessions so highly some would kill or injure to protect something they own. In this statement Jesus puts possessions in their proper place as they relate to human existence. Nothing is more valued than the soul. Jesus willfully gave everything he owned, including his life. As a matter of fact, he asks us to respond to their stealing our possessions by giving them an act of grace that is unexpected and transformative. It is astounding that Jesus places no conditions on his request. He doesn't say, "You can protect your property if. . ." or "You can forgive the thief if he or she . . ." or "We might allow them to be forgiven if perhaps they need what we have. . . ."

*Was Jesus a total pacifist? Is it permissible to protect one's family against intruders that threaten their life? Are there special circumstances when protecting one's property is permissible? How do we reconcile Jesus' statements with war? Is it absolutely wrong to own possessions others covet so deeply they attempt to take them? There are most likely many other questions dealing with war, pacifism, possessions and the protection of those items. Let these questions lead you into some interesting discussions as followers of Jesus. Expect a variety of responses, some quite passionate. The Golden Rule opens the door to questions and perceptions perhaps we've never considered.*

Jesus is asking his followers to choose grace over penalty. Who owns what? And, who has the right to injure another over a blessing God gave in the first place? After all, everything is God's creation and gift to humanity.

The nation of Israel, especially the Zealots, had one major desire: drive the Romans from their land. They considered Israel as God's gift to them, and therefore did not belong to Rome. Thus, when Jesus asked his followers to give to another, especially Romans, it would have irritated almost every Jewish man and woman. But Jesus was not defining the kingdom of Israel as a limited geographical possession for the Jews alone. The kingdom was always intended to exist in the heart of the Jewish people as a gift. It was a gift for which they would display great affection, and most importantly was a gift intended to be an instrument that would transform the world into a reflection of God's kingdom believed given by God. He never called for instruments for war or

violence. Remember, later prophets like Isaiah were used by God to beat weapons into plowshares. Isaiah offered us a vision of the world streaming to Jerusalem for truth, liberation, love and justice. Jesus called for a measure of forgiveness, and giving that was very difficult to understand by the Jewish people. To enact violence did not matter to many of the Jews against the Romans. Killing an enemy was considered acceptable. In the earlier years of Israeli life warfare was a necessity and permissible. However, Israel was involved in a moral progression designed by God. They would grow in grace and forgiveness and begin to understand the value of all to God. This was a slow process, but it did involve a moral development that would eventually be perfectly lived in and through Jesus.

Jesus never diluted his message or altered truth to make God's love of the world more palatable. Love is love. Forgiveness is forgiveness. The power of truth is the truth. These were the weapons that would usher in the kingdom of God when swords, knives and violence would always fail. Violence only created more violence. Hatred created greater hate. Revenge always resulted in greater attempts to make the one who did the injury pay even more. There was a kingdom, God's kingdom, and it would express its power and might on Golgotha between two forgiven thieves.

### **Lover to All**

Though the Sermon on the Mount was mostly heard by the Jews around Galilee, now Jesus wanted his message reaching and transforming the world. This section of the sermon is often called "The Golden Rule." Here Jesus is not just concerned with how these followers treat one another. He now is asking the entire world to consider how each person treats another. In the 1980s the self-help bookshelves in book stores were stocked with "How to love yourself" books. I admit I was a little puzzled. I met very few people who struggled with the issue of loving themselves, including me. Most of us loved the self and were very concerned with maintaining the value of the self. I did note that many did struggle with learning to love others as much as they loved themselves. I met few who wanted to learn how to care for the self and value the soul. Most seemed to already value the self. I also found it interesting that as these self-help books flew off the shelves, many were purchasing the bestseller by Elizabeth Kubler Ross, "On Death and Dying." So, we wanted to live in a loving, meaningful manner, and yet admitted we had yet come to terms with death.

In the one statement, "love one another as you love yourself," Jesus captured the one self-help statement that enriched all our social relationships. Loving the self was not that difficult and required few seminars. However, learning to love every other person from every walk of life with that same depth of love was the difficult section of this Golden Rule. If the world truly loved and respected each other with the same love of self we would begin to transform the world and note an obvious decrease in human violence. Furthermore, we would notice the greater power of loving others as the self. It would become possible which facet of the Golden Rule was far more powerful. Our teacher? The only person I know who loves with that broad and deep dimensions of love and treats every soul as precious to God is Jesus. Who loves themselves

enough to die for the best and worst? Who would forgive every soul as one truly made in the image of God? How powerful is this love? It immediately began to change the world and still continues to transform the world with the power that fills the human soul, with a measure of love possible only through the love of God in Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

Christianity doesn't simply offer us a moral set of rules. Our faith differs from others in that we are given a teacher who perfectly embodies the highest moral, ethical life possible. At its foundation is the Christ, the embodiment of perfect love. We are called to imitate his life. In our weakness we are offered the strength of the Holy Spirit to empower us to be the church, the embodiment of Jesus. The church is the body of Christ and therefore the incarnation of his perfect love. In his humanity he above all others understands the temptation to love the self above all others. Yet, he alone understands what it means to love everyone as precious to God and is willing to accept our worst behaviors when he has the power to respond with revenge. In its most simple expression, we are called to imitate the God who made us, loves us all equally, and refuses the mighty power of revenge, accepting a measure of humble love that transcends all other expressions of love in the world.

## **Prayer**

Almighty God, you have blessed us with the greatest power in the world. We have received the gift of treating all with respect and love even when living out such love is costly and very difficult for the world to understand. It is a risky love we accept. In Jesus' name, the lover of every soul, Amen.

*Dr. D. Craig Rikard is a South Georgia pastor. Email him at [craigrikard169@yahoo.com](mailto:craigrikard169@yahoo.com).*

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## **Love for Neighbors**

**Fall Quarter: Love for One Another**

**Unit 2: Inclusive Love**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of October 18, 2020**

**By Dr. D. Craig Rikard**

**Lesson Scripture: Lev. 19:18, 34; Luke 10:25-37**

**Key Verses: "Which of these three do you believe was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10: 36-37**

Our lesson is comprised of three contrasts that are all important to comparing Judaism with Jesus' teaching. The first contrast involves the interpretation of the Shema. The Shema is the most important law in Judaism. It is repeated daily by religious authorities. Jesus called the Shema the "law of laws." The contrast will be narrowed into a debate asking, "Who is my neighbor?"

Akin to the contrasts involving the Shema involves the question, "How do we receive eternal life?" Do we receive eternal life through our good deeds, especially keeping the Shema, or does it require our belief in God's Mosaic law? In the N.T., in books like James, we are asked if we are saved by our faith and trust in God or through our righteous actions in keeping the Law.

One of the major contrasts is very important, for it involves why some suffer and others do not. The Jewish leaders taught that if a person was obedient to the Law, they could expect a life of health, wealth and prosperity, with a few exceptions. For Jesus and his followers, it was believed our suffering was directly related to our personal righteousness. Have we been obedient in keeping the Mosaic Law, or failed? If we have been disobedient, we could expect suffering. Therefore, the pain and suffering in my life are directly related to my spiritual goodness or failure.

You will encounter many experiences in the N.T. in which even the disciples treated the suffering as sinners. People like Bartimaeus, the woman who crawled through the crowd to touch his garment, and tax collector Zacchaeus were perceived by the disciples as sinners who struggle because of their lack of righteous less. Thus, they were often surprised when Jesus accepted those who suffered as equals and loved by God. Furthermore, the disciples were not healthy, wealthy or prosperous yet often saw themselves as above others Jesus touched.

Many of the religious leaders lived in the area around Jerusalem for it was the seat of learning, education, and home of the powerful. Those who lived north in Galilee were perceived as lower-class workers, like Jesus's father Joseph. Thus, many looked down upon him and his ministry immediately simply because he was from Galilee. Remember the question, "Can anything good come out of Galilee?" The religious leaders especially had a disdain for Jesus, for he spoke as an educated man but was a Galilean.

*The literary tool used in Luke to set up these contrasts is the teaching method Jesus used probably most often: he used the parable. A parable was a simple daily action or behavior with which most Jews were acquainted, and Jesus used them to impart truth related directly to the Kingdom of God. For example, the farmer threw seed on three types of soil; Jesus' listeners would have understood this story and its spiritual message. The parable used in this text uses an important truth the Jews well knew, the Shema. But the Kingdom message was related, not to the farmer and seed, but to receptivity of the heart for the truth of God. This parable in Luke involves the Shema, the law well known to the Jews and understood as all important. However, the spiritual truth with which Jesus was most concerned was the section of the Shema regarding*

*“the neighbor.” The parable was given to allow Jesus’ followers to ask the great question, “Who is the neighbor in the Shema?” Is it only Jews, or those who have a relationship to the Jew but to a lesser degree, who are treated as neighbors? In other words, these are those who are to be loved as one loves their own life. Remember, Rome governed the geographical area the Jews considered a gift from God. As a part of the Roman Empire other nationalities and those from different ethical backgrounds occupied Israel. Thus, the concept of the neighbor had expanded. Jesus’ teaching involved the inclusion of all as our neighbor. His understanding had always been totally inclusive. Therefore, the parable raises a new question, as to “Who is our neighbor?” and has become a theological question and calls for a new understanding of the Shema.*

*A parable can involve a real historical event that is used to convey an all-important truth. In our parable, a religious leader stands and asks Jesus a question. Jesus is standing, which is the position occupied by rabbis. This scholar standing to address Jesus involves some degree of respect. Such respect was rarely given to Jesus by religious authorities. The scholar’s question reveals that he was struggling with the issue of faith versus works. Yet, it seems most probable that he believed it was our good works that earned us eternal life. Notice the emphasis on “what a man does that the scholar believes is the means of achieving eternal life.*

Jesus’ major method for answering a question used as an attempt to trap him with a complex question about the Jewish Law was to respond by asking a question of his own. It left the one interrogating him to do the thinking as he sought to answer Jesus’ question. After the religious question asked by the scholar was used to interrogate Jesus, Jesus asked his own question, “What is written in the law?” Asking a question as a response to a question asked to entrap Jesus was a common manner of responding to the question by Jesus. Jesus knew the religious leader already possessed the answer to the question he was going to ask. However, Jesus was looking for a different response from a totally different perspective. Thus, Jesus asked, “How do you read it?” Jesus, again, knew the scholar knew the meaning of the law. However, Jesus was now asking, “How do you interpret what you read?” It is one thing to understand truth with the mind, but another to understand its spiritual meaning in the heart. Jesus wanted to know how the scholar interpreted the most important moral law in Judaism quoting the full Shema from Deut. 6:5

Every Jew present would recite the Shema every day as a part of his or her disciplined spiritual life. It is the additional line the religious authority speaks that gives the Shema its spiritual heart: He added, “And thy neighbor as thyself.”

This type of love calls for sacrifice, respect, generosity and an awareness of just how deeply God loves each of us from every background possible.

Jesus placed the highest value on the life of another. Our life is found in lovingly giving it away. Our most meaningful life and most Christ-life existence is sincere belief that each of us have

equal love before God. This is the life we will find Jesus proclaiming. It awakens the soul and awakens the heart to discover the sacred value of another.

### **Luke 10:30-37**

This passage is actually where the parable begins. Again, the story of the religious scholar most likely was a real event. But the story Jesus tells from this narrative is a parable.

The parable itself is not that difficult to understand. The parable's truth about human compassion, Christ-like love, and love in action are equally understandable. Basically, the parable is concerned with conveying that those who should love most, give the most, and see the true value of every soul, especially the wounded and hurting, should be the first to minister to the wounded man robbed and beaten on his way to Jericho.

What two men would you expect as those who respond first and most passionately? The priest and Levite are both called to serve God in the sacred temple. They regularly sacrifice animals and receive offerings for God's sacred temple. Yet, the sacred temple lying beside the road in flesh and blood is ignored. There is no sacrifice to care for him as one of the sacred people of God. The near eastern law of hospitality within the Mosaic Law required treating another with hospitality. The Jew was to feed, provide shelter and bind the wounds of the injured. The priest and Levite ignored the sacred law of hospitality and left the injured Jewish man to fend for himself. Those who engaged in ministries involving sacrifices and expressions of God's love were willing to leave a wounded brother on the roadside to most likely die. After all, the priest and Levite represented the high callings of ministry in Judaism. If they ignored a brother, was any Jew going to stop and care? And how could he expect a person who wasn't Jewish, or of mixed blood, to stop and care?

When the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the mighty empire of Assyria, many Israelites remained in Assyria. Over the years, intermarriages occurred. The intermarriages were devalued and treated as lacking the equal value possessed by non-intermarriages which enjoyed greater privilege. As a matter of fact, the Jews despised the Samaritans as those who weakened the special relationship the Jewish people enjoyed with God. A Jew would feel rather helpless if his only help approaching was a Samaritan. A priest and Levite were Jews who served God in the temple through sacred rituals and holy days. The Samaritan would be the last person an injured Jew might want to see headed his way for help and hope. The Jews despised the Samaritans as the children of mixed-marriages or as those involved in a mixed marriage.

It is God's love that transcends a person's ethnicity and background and loves all equally within the Shema. This love manifests and reveals the kingdom of God. The love revealed in God's Shema possessed its own perception of God's love. It saw everyone, loved everyone, believed in everyone and saw the sacred worth in every soul. Every Jew was to repeat the Shema every day, for it captured the spiritual heart and truth of God's kingdom. Every gate of the city in Jerusalem contained a canister with the sacred scroll of the Shema rolled within. It reminded the Jewish

people that their going out and coming in were to be governed by the Shema. Since this was a parable in Luke 10 we have no idea why the priest and Levite didn't stop or why the Samaritan did. That information isn't of major importance in the parable. The important issue is that those who were to live in the Shema and treat one another with the love that made the Shema the powerful spiritual reality God intended it to be chose not to. The other facet was the listeners' awareness that the one most expected to ignore and care least was the instrument of God's caring grace.

The Samaritan not only cared immediately for the wounded man, he made provision for the man's care for the days ahead. He left enough money with the innkeeper for two months of the man's care.

The parable began with the religious scholar interrogating Jesus to define "neighbor" in the Shema. In Jesus' understanding of the Shema the definition of neighbor possessed no bounds, limitations, and regulations. The Shema had no legalistic dynamic within its definition. It was a spirituality defined and empowered by the love and grace of God. This one law embodied all others. If we could obey the Shema as an act of true love for God and another person we would be keeping all laws. The person who loves God with all their heart will not steal from another, covert another's possessions, take their life, or commit adultery. Try to imagine one moral law that can be broken if the Shema is obeyed.

### **Prayer**

Almighty God, our eyes, ears or imaginations cannot comprehend the depth and wonder of your love. Reveal to us in the Gospel of Jesus the indescribable love possible when we follow him as Lord. Empower us to become the surprising expression of God's love to one in great need. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Dr. D. Craig Rikard is a South Georgia pastor. Email him at [craigrikard169@yahoo.com](mailto:craigrikard169@yahoo.com).*

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## **Getting ready for a creative COVID Christmas**

### **LEADERSHIP REALLY MATTERS**

**ANNE BOSARGE**

**REV. JAY HANSON**

Did you know there are only 81 days until Christmas? When you think of Christmas, what comes to mind first? Does your mind wander to small groups caroling in a nursing home, sing-alongs in church, Christmas cantatas, kids' programs, buffets of cookies and carafes of hot chocolate with melting marshmallows?

What if those beloved traditions aren't accessible to us this year? What will we do to ensure our congregations are safe, yet still celebrate the birth of the Savior in meaningful ways? Can we even make new, more meaningful traditions in the midst of these uncertain times?

In order for this to be a creative Christmas where we embrace the potential instead of the limitations, we're going to need a few perspective shifts:

- **Shift from “I can’t” to “I can.”** Don't focus on what you can't do this year. Instead, make a list of what you can do and choose from those. If you force yourself to look for potential you'll find it!
- **Shift from “we will” to “we might” or “we can.”** Make your plans, but hold them loosely. Create contingency plans that allow you to be digital at a moment's notice. Embrace flexibility and allow your plans to change as a response to whatever is going on at the moment.
- **Shift from “what I'm losing” to “what I'm gaining.”** You have an opportunity to change programs that are no longer effective and to develop new, creative traditions. Recycled programs rarely give increased results as they age. They most often have diminishing returns on your investment.
- **Shift from “many things” to “few things.”** Do fewer things with greater quality. As we move things online, we often forget how much extra effort and energy it takes to do something new. Factor that in and give yourself some mental margin in which to accomplish this new initiative.
- **Shift from “what we want” to “what they need.”** Instead of spending hundreds of dollars on sets, décor, and internal church programming, find ways to invest in the community and spend your money helping those who have been suffering during this time. Demonstrate God's generosity at Christmas through the way you love your community.
- **Shift from “come here” to “go there.”** In the past we've asked people to come to where the church is. Now we have the opportunity to get the church out and go to where the people are. This approach more accurately represents the mission of the church anyway!
- **Shift from “weekly” to “daily.”** People who are more used to digital church engagement are looking for something that is more flexible than one set time per week to experience the community of the church. Think on-demand vs. network shows that are on at a set time. Look for small ways to engage people throughout the week instead of just one hour a week.

Are you ready to do something new? Are you excited to make the shift and find a new way to reach your community with the love of God this Christmas? Maybe this is the year where someone in your community discovers Christ at Christmas for the very first time! Let's innovate, create, and inspire as we seek to introduce others to a Savior born to save the world.

Looking for bright ideas of how you can get creative this Christmas? Go to [www.brightideasforchurchleaders.com](http://www.brightideasforchurchleaders.com) and download the COVID Christmas guide to get more than 25 ready-to-go ways to celebrate Christmas, from Advent prayer stations and Random Acts of Christmas Kindness to a community Cantata and Poinsettia Ding-Dong Ditch!

*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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## **John Wesley and the Germans**

### **JOHN WESLEY MOMENTS**

#### **DAVE HANSON**

Certain Germans had a powerful influence upon John Wesley's spiritual development. He was able to communicate with Germans because he learned to speak the German language, probably while he was a student at Christ Church College at Oxford University. John Wesley could communicate in eight languages: English, French, German, Spanish (which he learned in America), Italian (Latin), Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. He wrote grammars in five languages. One Sunday in Georgia he read Morning Prayers in English, German, French, Spanish, and Italian for the various language groups who lived in Savannah.

John Wesley's first known relationship with German Christians came during his first trip to the new world in 1735 aboard the ship "The Simmons." This relationship continued in America for almost two years, then was renewed when he returned to London. In all of these relationships John Wesley was impressed, influenced, and challenged.

Future articles in this series will show how important these relationships were in the spiritual development of the founder of the Methodist Church.

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

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## **Retired Clergy Birthdays – October 2020**

10/01 – David Haygood, Sr.: 100 Lindsey Barron Dr., Apt. 215; Newnan, GA 30263  
10/01 – E. Warren Williams: 761 Myna Dr., Unit 7084; Ellijay, GA 30540  
10/01 – Edwin Willis: 4847 NE Rocky Ford Rd.; Madison, FL 32340  
10/02 – Ross Tracy: 3800 Shamrock Dr.; Charlotte, NC 28215  
10/04 – Riley Middleton, Jr.: 5002 St. Francis Ave.; Columbus, GA 31904  
10/05 – Earl Seckinger: PO Box 766; Springfield, GA 31329  
10/05 – J.W. Womble: 2935 Cherokee St.; Waycross, GA 31503

10/06 – Donald Combs: 5572 New Jesup Hwy.; Brunswick, GA 31523  
10/08 – Bill Dupree: PO Box 169; Americus, GA 31709  
10/09 – Karen Kilhefner: 7 Mistletoe Court; Savannah, GA 31419  
10/10 – Hugh Baxter: 1272 Smith Bedgood Rd.; Harrison, GA 31035  
10/11 – Bob Shell: 210 Castlegate Rd.; Macon, GA 31210  
10/13 – Bill Neely: 149 O’Connor Drive NW; Milledgeville, GA 31061  
10/14 – Jairo Franco: Calle 1a Sur #42a 18 Barrio la Ponderosa; Bogota, Colombia  
10/16 – John Bacher: 400 South Main Ave. 106; Pine Mountain, GA 31822  
10/18 – Madison Morgan: 599 Cloy-Kildare Rd.; Cloy, GA 31303  
10/19 – Billy Oliver: 135 Hines Terrace, Macon, GA 31204  
10/21 – Stanley Harrell: 319 Crescent Road; Griffin, GA 30224  
10/23 – John Brodess: 803 Moore Drive; Americus, GA 31709  
10/23 – Frank Danner: 1415 Sunrise Ave.; Moultrie, GA 31768  
10/24 – James Duke, Jr.: 102 Clarksville Ct.; Macon, GA 31210  
10/24 – Evelyn Duvall: 10502 Regal View Loop; Clermont, FL 34711  
10/24 – Carl Howard: 154 Ridgeland Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31602  
10/24 – Willis Moore: 2378 Caladium Dr. NE; Atlanta, GA 30345  
10/25 – Jimmy Cason: 1321 Kermit Dr.; Statesboro, GA 30458  
10/25 – Gene Cochran: 4707 120th Blvd.; Lubbock, TX 79424  
10/25 – Martin Loyley: 1544 Harris Ridge Rd.; Young Harris, GA 30582  
10/25 – Craig Rikard: 3428 Brandon Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31605  
10/25 – Gil Tripp: 1203 Rose Ave.; Americus, GA 31709  
10/27 – Bill Jackson-Adams: 17 Lands End Dr.; Greensboro, NC 27408

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## **OBITUARIES**

### **Rev. Richard Trawick**

Richard Allan Trawick, age 76, passed away peacefully on Thursday, September 17, 2020, at Memorial Hospital in Bainbridge, GA.

He was born November 20, 1943, in Bainbridge, GA to Brandy Gee Trawick, Sr. and Jewel Irene Goodwin Trawick. He graduated from Seminole County High School in 1961. He entered the Air Force in 1962 and served four years.

He was married to Sandra Stewart Trawick for 54 years. They had three children. In 1976, he entered the ministry and served in the South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church for 32 years and touched countless lives along the way. He retired to Lake Seminole in 2008 and spent his days fishing with his wife and cooking for his friends and family.

He leaves to cherish his memory his wife of 54 years, Sandra Stewart Trawick; his son, Richard Keith Trawick and his wife Francis; his daughter, Tonia Renee Streets and her husband John; his sister, Olivia Juree Trawick Hornsby and her husband Jimmy; his brother, Brandy Gee Trawick, Jr. and his wife Atherlone; his brother-in-law, Paul Penn; and his grandchildren, Ashton Hall and wife Jennifer, Drew Hall, Jacob Trawick and wife Kelsey, Mary Catherine Duncan and husband Frankie, Hunter William Long and wife Abi, Sage Ward and husband Collin, Nicholas Stewart Streets, and Joshua Dean Streets. Mr. Trawick is also survived by two great-grandchildren, Mya

and Remington and numerous and much -loved nieces and nephews and adopted family members.

Mr. Trawick was preceded in death by his parents, Brandy Gee Trawick, Sr. and Jewel Irene Goodwin Trawick; his brother, Hugh Maxwell Trawick; his sister, Mary Ellen Penn; and his daughter, Melissa Trawick Mock.

A Celebration of Life was held outdoors on Saturday, September 26, 2020, at his home in Donalsonville, GA.

In lieu of flowers, please donate to Seminole County Warpath on Cancer, 200 W. 10th Street Donalsonville, GA 39845.

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### **Scripture Readings – Oct. 6**

#### **October 11**

##### ***Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost***

Exodus 32:1-14

Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23 (UMH 829)

Philippians 4:1-9

Matthew 22:1-14

#### **October 18**

##### ***Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost***

##### ***Laity Sunday***

Exodus 33:12-23

Psalm 99 (UMH 819)

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Matthew 22:15-22

#### **October 25**

##### ***Reformation Sunday***

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17 (UMH 789)

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Matthew 22:34-46

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### **Events in the South Georgia Conference – 10/6/2020 edition**

#### **Advanced Lay Servant Training, via Zoom – Oct. 6, Oct. 8, Oct. 13, & Oct. 15**

Lay Servant training is designed to educate those persons interested in stretching their faith to participate more fully in the ministries of the church. They have three main areas of focus: Leading, Caring, and Communicating. The advanced class, based on Cokesbury's book, "Each

One a Minister,” by William Carter, is a study of the book of Ephesians and what it teaches about how we are called to use our spiritual gifts. Registration fee for the class is \$25. (Note: Basic Lay Speaking class must be completed before taking Advanced Class.) Attendance in all four classes is required for certification. Contact Anne Bosarge for more information. [anne@thechapelministries.com](mailto:anne@thechapelministries.com).

### **Conversations at the Table: C.U.R.E & Justice Ministry – Oct. 8**

Grab some lunch, pull up a chair, and join Connectional Ministries for Conversations at the Table. This conversation will focus on C.U.R.E (Connecting and Understanding Race and Equality and Justice Ministry. ([This article provides background information about C.U.R.E](#)). We will share ideas, explore various topics, and become inspired. All conversations will be held via Zoom. Zoom link will be provided in your confirmation email once you register. [Register now](#)

### **Basic Lay Servant Ministry Training, Vidalia First UMC – Oct. 9-10**

Lay Servant training is designed to educate those persons interested in stretching their faith to participate more fully in the ministries of the church. They have three main areas of focus: Leading, Caring, and Communicating. The basic class is based on Cokesbury’s book, “Lay Servant Ministries Basic Course,” which teaches a basic understanding of ministry in the United Methodist Tradition. Registration fee for the class is \$25. This fee covers all materials and lunch on Saturday. (Note: Basic Lay Speaking class must be completed before taking Advanced Class.) For more information, contact Anne Bosarge, [anne@thechapelministries.com](mailto:anne@thechapelministries.com).

### **Conversations at the Table: Children’s Ministry – Oct. 13**

Grab some lunch, pull up a chair, and join Connectional Ministries for Conversations at the Table. This conversation will focus on children’s ministry. We will share ideas, explore various topics, and become inspired. All conversations will be held via Zoom. Zoom link will be provided in your confirmation email once you register. [Register now](#)

### **Basic Lay Servant Ministry Training, College Place UMC, Brunswick – Oct. 16-17**

Lay Servant training is designed to educate those persons interested in stretching their faith to participate more fully in the ministries of the church. They have three main areas of focus: Leading, Caring, and Communicating. The basic class is based on Cokesbury’s book, “Lay Servant Ministries Basic Course,” which teaches a basic understanding of ministry in the United Methodist Tradition. Registration fee for the class is \$25. This fee covers all materials and lunch on Saturday. (Note: Basic Lay Speaking class must be completed before taking Advanced Class.) For more information, contact Anne Bosarge, [anne@thechapelministries.com](mailto:anne@thechapelministries.com).

### **Advanced Lay Servant Ministry, Vidalia First UMC – Oct. 23-24**

Lay Servant training is designed to educate those persons interested in stretching their faith to participate more fully in the ministries of the church. They have three main areas of focus: Leading, Caring, and Communicating. The advanced class, based on Cokesbury’s book, “Each One a Minister,” by William Carter, is a study of the book of Ephesians and what it teaches about how we are called to use our spiritual gifts. Registration fee for the class is \$25. (Note: Basic Lay Speaking class must be completed before taking Advanced Class.) Attendance in all

four classes is required for certification. Contact Anne Bosarge for more information.  
[anne@thechapelministries.com](mailto:anne@thechapelministries.com).

**Conversations at the Table: Youth Ministry – Oct. 27**

Grab some lunch, pull up a chair, and join Connectional Ministries for Conversations at the Table. This conversation will focus on youth ministry. We will share ideas, explore various topics, and become inspired. All conversations will be held via Zoom. Zoom link will be provided in your confirmation email once you register. [Register now](#)