

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – OCTOBER 20 EDITION

Christ UMC gives away hundreds of free pumpkins at reimagined fall event

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

For 25 years, Christ United Methodist Church in Warner Robins has been known as “the Pumpkin Patch church.”

The annual fall event has raised nearly \$125,000 for local ministry groups and mission agencies like Wesley Glen Ministries, Habitat for Humanity, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, the local food pantry, and the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

But this year, because of the global coronavirus pandemic, church leaders didn’t think it wise to host a community event that attracts hundreds of children, youth, and adults.

So they reimagined their long-standing tradition and decided to give pumpkins away at a safe, socially distanced event rather than sell them.

“We’ve been ‘The Pumpkin Church’ for so long, and we don’t want to lose that,” said Christ UMC pastor Rev. Kirk Hagan. “We wanted people to know they can always get a pumpkin here and also get a great experience when they come to church.”

More than 500 free pumpkins were handed out Saturday, Oct. 17 during the church’s Drive-Thru Pumpkin Giveaway.

As families drove under the colorful balloon arch onto the church’s campus they were greeted with waves and smiles and handed a souvenir cup full of candy and topped with a stuffed pumpkin. Volunteers manned a popcorn machine and handed out bags of fresh popped-popcorn. Music played, the church’s children and youth were dressed in costumes, and the atmosphere was fun and festive.

While Christ UMC didn’t raise any money for missions and ministry groups through the pumpkin patch this year, the congregation did show the Warner Robins community its appreciation for the years of support it’s given to the church’s pumpkin patch ministry.

“The community has supported the patch and our mission for more than 25 years,” said LouAnn McLain, Christ UMC’s administrator. “We wanted to give back to them this year since we can’t do a traditional patch. We wanted to do something different and show them we appreciate all the years they’ve come to the patch and made it a priority. We wanted to share our bounty with them this year.”

Although the event was different than in years’ past, it was a great day, Rev. Hagan said, and nearly 40 church members showed up to volunteer.

“We had an absolute blast,” he said. “It was the highlight of our year as a church. It was a great day.”

The Christ UMC congregation has been extremely supportive of reimagining this year's pumpkin patch, perhaps because it's just one of several ministries they've reimagined this year. The pandemic has forced congregations to rethink long-held traditions, beloved events, and even the ways they worship.

This spring, Christ UMC's Connections Team began reaching out to those in the congregation who are homebound, asking if they need groceries, medicines, or other necessities. Deep relationships have developed, McLain said.

"It's brought them so much joy and it's made (the volunteers) feel like they are the hands and feet of Christ because they are doing something for someone who can't do for themselves," she said.

The congregation – which before the pandemic was in the midst of a building project – is now rethinking its future facility needs. Rev. Hagan says he's proud of the congregation's openness to trying new things, its flexibility, and resilience.

One thing Christ UMC won't reimagine or rethink is its commitment to the community and offering hope and love to all.

"The goal of our church is to serve our neighbors and to offer hope and encouragement, whether it's with a pumpkin or by welcoming them to worship," Rev. Hagan said. "We're here to encourage them and help them feel joy especially during the awkward and difficult seasons of life."

Longest-serving Conference employee celebrates 30th anniversary

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

This month we celebrate Eleanor Dickson's 30th anniversary as part of the South Georgia Conference staff. We are grateful to Eleanor for her faithful service over the years, and for the impact her ministry has had on our clergy, their families, our lay staff, and our entire Conference. While it's impossible to encapsulate 30 years of ministry into one article, we want to celebrate Eleanor and thank her for her three decades of ministry and service.

Capable. Highly regarded. Advocate.

Eleanor Dickson, who on Oct. 15 celebrated 30 years of ministry and service with the South Georgia Conference, is the Conference's longest-serving employee.

Dedicated, diligent, and hardworking, Dickson's favorite part of her job is the people.

"The people I work with are really what make the job," said Dickson, who serves as South Georgia's assistant director for pensions and benefits and also as the conference's part-time human resources officer. "I don't just mean the staff in the office, it's the whole extended family – the clergy, the treasurers, everyone."

Administrative Services Director Dr. Derek McAleer, who has worked with Dickson for more than six years, sees firsthand her dedication to her job and those she serves.

“She’s a consistent stalwart and fighter on behalf of our retired clergy, making sure we’re taking care of them,” he said. “That’s one reason they love her – they know she’s always thinking about them.”

Dr. McAleer tells a story that captures the close relationships Dickson has built over the years.

“A retired pastor called one day to talk to her, but she was out. The receptionist put his call through to me,” Dr. McAleer recalled. ““Can I help you?” I asked. ‘Do you have anyone up there who loves us retired preachers like Eleanor does?’ he asked. ‘Well, no sir. We try, but she is special,’ I replied. ‘Okay. I’ll call back,’ he said, hanging up! He only wanted to talk to the person who cared about him, and that was Eleanor.”

When she began her employment with the South Georgia Conference in 1990, personal computers were just coming on the scene, the Internet was not yet widely used, and postage stamps only cost 25 cents.

While much about technology, pensions, and insurance has changed, a good deal has stayed the same, Dickson said. She’s still handling benefits and apportionments, just as she did then.

“I’m doing pretty much the same work, it’s just grown over the years,” she said.

Pension and insurance matters are complicated, and during her tenure Dickson has deftly navigated the South Georgia Conference through three pension changes. She’s one who others trust and turn to for information and advice.

“She’s one of those people I’ll turn to and bounce things off of,” Dr. McAleer said. “She has a good understanding of the conference, she’s been with our conference a long time, and she has a good understanding of people.”

Each day brings an opportunity to love and learn, said Dickson, a mother of two and grandmother – Mimi – of two.

“I always tell Derek, ‘It’s a day not wasted if I learn something new,’ so every day is just about a day not wasted,” Dickson said. “The most rewarding part of my job is that I get a chance to love people and to help them. Usually when I get a call, the person has a need, and I get a chance to love them first and to help them with their problem.”

Congregations honor law enforcement during Faith and Blue Weekend

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

Across the South Georgia Conference, congregations recognized and thanked law enforcement officers for their service, prayed alongside police officers, and showed their support for those who protect and serve.

During the inaugural 2020 National Faith & Blue Weekend, held Sept. 10-11, nearly 1,000 events aimed at helping promote dialogue between places of worship, community organizations, and law enforcement were held across the country.

Here in South Georgia, several United Methodist congregations partnered with local sheriff's departments or police departments to show unity and foster understanding.

In Hahira, more than a dozen churches partnered for the Faith and Blue Peace Walk and Food Drive, a walk through downtown Hahira's Main Street that culminated in a prayer, rally, and community lunch.

"We wanted this to be a positive witness of our church and community in all of the darkness that's going on," said Hahira United Methodist Church pastor Rev. Mike Davis, who participated in the event.

Lt. Shannon Kingston of the Hahira Police Department helped plan and organize the Hahira Faith and Blue Peace Walk and Food Drive. The law enforcement community hopes that it and other similar events will show the community's unity.

"Events like this show that we can work together through anything, that we're going to work together through our differences," she said. "We're not going to be divided."

A few hours north in Statesboro, Statesboro First United Methodist Church was one of about a dozen local churches that participated in the online community-wide Faith and Blue worship service organized by the Bulloch Co. Sheriff's Office.

Rev. Scott Hagan, joined by Cpl. Bob DiNello of the Bulloch Co. Sheriff's Office, shared passages from Isaiah and John and thanked those who serve.

"On behalf of the church, we say thank you," Rev. Hagan said. "Thank you for answering the call; thank you for bringing peace to places that need it. Thank you for going out and making things right and seeking those who do wrong. And thank you for being willing to give up your life for our community."

Cpl. DiNello, who serves in the motor unit of the Bulloch Co. Sheriff's Office, thanked the congregation and community for their support and for participating in the Faith and Blue worship service.

"It means a lot to us in law enforcement and as first responders across this nation to have the unity of churches in our community helping us get through these trying times. Thank you again."

And just down the road in Savannah, Grace United Methodist Church recognized officers during their Sunday, Oct. 11 service. Nearly 20 officers attended, and to show their appreciation, the congregation presented them with a basket full of thank you cards and gift cards.

It's important for the Church to recognize law enforcement officers for their sacrifices and to let them know of their significance to the community, said Grace UMC pastor Rev. Cathy Green.

“We recognize the challenging circumstances they work under each and every day, and they sacrifice so much for our community,” she said. “We wanted them to know that we care and that we’re here for them and we will do what we can. They’re in one of those positions where all they hear is negative, and we wanted them to know that we support them and we know they’re doing the best they can in very difficult circumstances.”

Initiatives like the Faith and Blue Weekend are important because they help build relationships and foster communication among people, Rev. Davis said.

“Understanding one another always has to begin with relationships,” he said. “You can’t have a relationship without fellowship, without being with one another. For there to be understanding between the community and her police department, there has to be some way to connect. This was a great opportunity to be in relationship with one another.”

At the heart of the [Faith and Blue](#) initiative is the reinforcement of connections between law enforcement professionals and the communities they serve. While the 2020 weekend has concluded, there will opportunities for involvement throughout 2021.

From the Bishop & Cabinet: Church Matters

Dear South Georgia Conference Family,

The Cabinet and I write to you with gratitude and respect for the way you have navigated the past eight months. The global pandemic, reckoning with racial justice, and the rolling restart of local churches - any one of those alone would be a huge challenge. Yet, you have faced them all with a perseverance and passion that comes from Christ our Lord.

While we continue to pray for a successful vaccine, we also recognize that we must plan for several more months of this unprecedented season. You already know that Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas will be different in 2020. However, many of you are focusing on the question, “How can we reach more people than ever this year?” **The Holy Spirit is at work giving us fresh visions and dreams for ministry!**

We draw your attention to the way John Wesley’s General Rules continue to provide the guidance we need:

1. First, do no harm.

Acting with an abundance of caution, you have helped lower the rate of infection by using masks, frequent hand washing, and appropriate distancing. Protocols are in place for sanitizing church buildings and providing safe movement for people. Some are offering services designed specifically for medically fragile persons. Thank you for continuing all of these best practices.

2. Second, do all the good you can.

You have done this in a myriad of ways: adding online worship, Bible study, and prayer times;

helping schools, hospitals, and nursing homes; and now you have resumed in-person worship and other gatherings based on your own awareness of conditions in your community. Close collaboration between pastors and lay leadership is absolutely essential to effectiveness in the local church. One important area for this collaboration is in addressing the question of [what happens if a member of the church tests positive for the coronavirus](#).

3. Third, attend upon all the ordinances of God.

In addition to worship, Bible study, and prayer opportunities - both online and in-person - we have reacquainted ourselves with the early Methodist tradition of the [Agape meal](#) when Holy Communion is not feasible. With the resumption of in-person services, many churches are utilizing best practices to offer Communion in ways that reduce the likelihood of spreading infection. We commend the intentionality with which our clergy and laity are developing ways of serving Holy Communion that are safe and yet do not diminish the profound meaning of the sacrament.

For all the interruptions and uncertainties of 2020, one thing emerges with great clarity: church matters. Local churches are the glue of every community. What you do makes a difference. Thanks be to God that you have been strategically placed to be an ambassador of Jesus Christ in such a time as this.

Alive Together at the Table,
Bishop R. Lawson Bryan & the South Georgia Cabinet

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Bishop Bryan: Vote - it's our right and responsibility

With the November 3 Election Day only two weeks away, I encourage all eligible voters to cast their ballot either in person or by absentee ballot. Each time I vote in an election, I find myself remembering what Teddy Roosevelt said more than 100 years ago: “The Methodist Church is the most American of all denominations.”

He was not saying that we are more patriotic than others. Rather, he was referring to the fact that Methodism in America grew up alongside the developing nation. Our governing structure, for instance, reflects the three branches of the U.S. government: presidential, legislative, judicial. The bishops are our presidential officers while laity and clergy are elected as our representatives in annual conferences, jurisdictional conferences, and General Conference. Like the Supreme Court, our Judicial Council is composed of nine elected members. (Our own Warren Plowden is currently the first alternate on the Judicial Conference.)

Today, having become a worldwide denomination, our democratic structure continues to provide an opportunity for church members to be directly involved in decision making. Whether in the church or in the nation, we understand voting to be a privilege and a responsibility. Paragraph

164 of *The 2016 United Methodist Book of Discipline* describes the importance of voting in two statements:

Political Responsibility: The strength of a political system depends upon the full and willing participation of its citizens. The church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust... (Para. 164B)

Basic Freedoms and Human Rights: We hold governments responsible for the protection of the rights of the people to free and fair... The form and the leaders of all governments should be determined by exercise of the right to vote guaranteed to all adult citizens. (Para. 164A)

I encourage each of us to:

1. Prayerfully discern which candidates for public office to support.
2. Vote.
3. Do all in our power to ensure that every eligible U.S. citizen has access to voter registration, mail-in ballots, and convenient polling sites.

The actions of voting and ensuring others have the freedom to do the same are expressions of our faith and witness.

Sherrill and I recently voted by absentee ballot. It is our right and responsibility to vote and to work to make it possible for every eligible U.S. citizen to have that same opportunity.

And once the election is over, let's continue to pray for those elected and take advantage of our own opportunities to witness to our faith through engagement in the life of our communities, our state, and our nation.

Alive Together at the Table,
R. Lawson Bryan

Sacred Rhythms

OUR CONNECTION MATTERS

ALLISON LINDSEY

"The call of Jesus is a call to a two-beat rhythm of life: being with him and being sent from him." - Sheridan Voysey

Have you ever stopped for a moment to think about the rhythms God places into the fabric of our lives and throughout creation? I think about the ebb and flow of the tides, the phases of the moon, our sleep cycle, the need for sabbath, and our very heartbeat and breath. From sunrise to sunset we are surrounded by rhythm. Webster's Dictionary defines rhythm as a regularly

recurring sequence of events, actions, or processes. Just as we see in nature, our lives often become built around rhythm and routine, don't they?

This concept of rhythm has become more obvious for me the past few weeks as my family moved from our house in town to our land in a more rural part of the county. Surrounded by acres of peanut fields and woods, I am more attune to the ebb and flow and creativity of our amazing God. Life out here involves fewer distractions and at night there are "less lights to dim the heavens" - words used by Bishop Michael Curry sharing the experience of Howard Thurman and his mother driving outside the city to view Haley's Comet in the night sky and encountering God.

We have anticipated this milestone move for several years, but I did *not* anticipate how disruptive it would be. Our day-to-day life has been completely changed on many levels, and we are searching for and establishing new normals, routines, and rhythms. It's exciting and overwhelming at times!

Pastors and laity have shared with me that during this pandemic - the great pause - they have encountered God in new ways by slowing down, simplifying, and focusing on their soul care. For many of us, the rhythms of our lives were very connected to our church activities, and we find ourselves feeling somewhat out of sync during the pandemic. Encountering God through our faith community and in-person worship or small group has shifted and looks different right now, collectively.

Yet personally, we encounter God through spiritual disciplines, and using these "practices" gives us a framework through which to carve out and create space to be attuned to Him. I like the term "spiritual practices" because these different disciplines often are not natural to us and do take practice, commitment and, yes, discipline. It's through these practices that we develop spiritual muscles and God's work of transformation in us and through us thrives.

One of my favorite books that explores this rule of life is [Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Haley Barton](#). Her insight gives us guidance to cultivating sacred rhythms for spiritual transformation. (This book also contains a guide for small groups to journey together.) Before we develop a rhythm, our efforts can feel random or haphazard. A key for establishing sacred rhythms is in being intentional and having a plan.

In this book, focus is given to silence and solitude (daily and extended), scripture, prayer, honoring the body, self-examination and confession, discernment, sabbath and community. Here is a snapshot for Barton's advice on developing sacred rhythms:

- Explore the practices: Take time to explore different spiritual disciplines, practicing them, becoming more comfortable and reflecting on what is meaningful for you.
- Learn how to arrange: Choose those you find meaningful and learn how to arrange them (daily/weekly/monthly/annually) to carve out time to encounter God in a way that fits into your life.

- Make it personal: No two people will have the exact same rhythm! Consider your personality, your spiritual type, season of life or even a sin with which you are wrestling and desire to conquer and choose a practice that meets that need.
- Be realistic: The rhythm of spiritual practices needs to take into account a realistic assessment of our stage in life. If you are not a morning person, you might set yourself up to fail if you attempt to wake up at 5 a.m. for devotional time.
- Offer balance: Incorporate practices that are easy and some that stretch us! Think about this in terms of your personality and comfort zone.
- Allow for flexibility: Do not allow your rhythm to become rigid or legalistic. Evaluate your needs and desires to encounter God and the best way to meet this need on a regular basis. Barton recommends re-evaluating every six months or when encountering a life change.

Once you have taken some time to explore and practice, develop a plan to establish sacred rhythms, being concrete, specific, and flexible allowing room for adjustments.

Here are a few questions to help you do this:

- What am I beginning to understand about my minimum daily/weekly/monthly/annual requirements for ongoing spiritual (trans)formation?
- Which practices do I know I need to engage in regularly as a way of offering myself to God steadily and consistently?

It's a journey that we are all on together - both personally and collectively. As I am adjusting to rural life and establishing new routines and rhythms, I have begun practicing silence and solitude. I don't mind solitude, but silence is a BIG stretch! I am also being mindful of how I allow technology to encroach upon my rhythms. Won't you join me in creating sacred rhythms?

I would love to hear what spiritual practices and rhythms you find meaningful and how you incorporate them in your lives to stay in sync - "being with Him" (Voysey). Next month we will unpack the second part of the two-beat rhythm: "being sent from Him."

*To explore more of Ruth Haley Barton's resources, visit [Transforming Center: Strengthen the Soul of Your Leadership](#).

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Love Never Fails

Fall Quarter: Love for One Another

Unit 2: Inclusive Love

Sunday school lesson for the week of October 25, 2020

By Dr. D. Craig Rikard

Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:27-14:1

Key Verse: Now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Lesson Aims

Learn what love can do, and what it cannot. Learn why love is necessary for the effective functioning of spiritual gifts and graces. Learn how our personal spiritual gifts can express God's love in a redemptive manner through Christ.

Corinth was the perfect location for Paul to discuss in great detail the important task of exploring the church as the body of Christ. The letter to Corinth was written from Ephesus. The letter to Corinth allowed the early church to understand the purpose and mission of Jesus' church. Not only did the letter reveal a profound understanding of God's love in the church for Corinth for Jesus and the gifts employed to empower the Corinthian church, the church at Corinth made no attempt to hide its "feet of clay." Their ability to serve Jesus through spiritual power and human weakness are employed to reveal the church as divine and human. However, the church at Corinth made no attempt to hide its humanity and their feet of clay. Like all sinful people, the church at Corinth struggled with destructive issues like arrogance, pride, power, and a desire to possess the power overseeing a church hierarchy. There were some who valued spiritual arrogance so strongly they even wanted to undermine Paul's authority. Any issue could become a struggle to possess more spiritual power than another.

Of course, most of us are acquainted with the pride in the church related to spiritual gifts that are treated as having greater value than other gifts. Many argued, "Who has the greater spiritual gift?" Is it the one with tongues, the one who can prophesy, interpret tongues, or heal? The list can be extended. Sadly, at Corinth they seemed always prepared to judge one Christian as possessing more important gifts and power than another. As we will read later, Paul will speak clearly that there exists one power that reminds all that we stand on equal ground before Christ. Love is the power that declaws pride's vicious ability to wound and hurt another. Love does matter, and its use as an instrument of service has a direct bearing upon the spiritual functioning of the church of Jesus. If the love of Jesus on the cross saved us from ourselves and egotism, it continues to possess that same power of redemption. It is the love of Jesus that still possesses the mighty power to empower us to stand on equal ground at the cross. All of us are equal in sin and the need for forgiveness. Only Christ can empower us to overcome pride and arrogance in a manner that glorifies God through his holy church. In Christ, true humility is the genuine power that can teach us mutual respect and godly love.

From the beginning of the church, it has been our spiritual unity in Christ that empowers us and expresses Christ as living and moving in our world. Though the Corinthian Christians seem to desire arguing and debating over spiritually edifying matters, their debates and arrogance are really about our human desire for possessing greater human power, especially expressions of human power others lack and place them in positions of weak authority. Thus, Paul couches one

of the metaphors about human lust for power by using a metaphor still common today. He speaks of “moving mountains.” It is really an expression of hyperbole; an exaggeration. After all, what man or woman can truly move a mountain? In verse 13:2 Paul uses a metaphor intended to set up a major contrast between human and spiritual power. What greater power is there for man and woman than to move a mountain? The question is hyperbole. No person, other than God, can move a mountain. At best Paul is revealing the weakness of the human creature in contrast to the Lord who made heaven and earth.

For Paul, every part of the body of Christ was and is important as he addresses the omnipotence of the church of Jesus. One is not more important than another, and one is not unnecessary. In chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians Paul clearly states the important need for every facet of church life, and that without all ministering together in the Holy Spirit we fail to witness to the world that God is present in the world through Jesus saving us from our sin. Just as Jesus was literally present in the world for redeeming all, Jesus is still present in the world, saving and redeeming. The historical book of Acts begins by reminding the church that it was to offer “convincing proofs” that he was and is alive in the world as he was from the beginning. Paul understood very clearly that he was not a Christian on his own, nor did he believe he was more important than the other followers of Jesus. Paul knew the Holy Spirit had birthed him into a unique all-powerful community. Thus, for the early church there was no long debate as to whether Jesus was resurrected and in the world. For the church, he was in the world and would remain until the fullness of the Kingdom of God was permanently fulfilled. This issue was settled. For the first Christians, Jesus was alive. The church was the convincing proof that the very one who gave all for the redemption of the world was alive as the resurrected Christ.

I am always moved when I read the opening paragraphs of Acts 1. Luke uses the expression that the church was the expression of all that Jesus “Began” to do and teach. What is so fascinating in this paragraph is the one word “*began*.” Luke had included almost every event in the gospel of Jesus in his gospel. Luke recorded the birth, early years, the temptation, the life, the teaching, the arrest, trial, death, and resurrection. Luke even included the ascension. Thus, Luke could have written that “In my first gospel, I wrote to you, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus DID.” Why use the term “began?” He uses this beautiful term to let his reader know that Jesus wasn’t finished. He had recorded what Jesus began to do and teach. But there was so much Jesus was still doing in the world through his church. For Luke, the church was and is the body of Christ, literally alive in the world. Thus, the church wasn’t a metaphor of the body of Jesus. It was an accurate description that Jesus lived in his church, through every follower, using every gift and grace the world needed to experience the Living Lord!

It is a painful mistake to define the church, or try to measure its importance over other churches through its size. I, like most, am excited at churches that are growing and revealing Christ in their communities. And belonging to a large church in no way diminishes the power and importance of that church in the Kingdom of God. However, I on occasion grow concerned at the high place some assign to numbers and size. Some of the most powerful churches with whom I have ministered consisted of about 100 members. Yet, the members of that community knew each other, and who was gifted to perform one gift as another was used of God to offer a

different gift in that community. There was a clear sense that their pastor had educated them well about the church being one, united community. They knew they existed in their community to be used as the real authentic presences of Jesus in the world.

Paul will use the church at Corinth to reveal the power of the church united in Christ. He will also use its weakness and missed opportunity when it failed to intentionally value each person as a child of God with a unique, necessary ministry within that local community of faith.

Just as the human body consists of a multitude of necessary parts, so does the church. Each part is dependent on all other parts and is equally important. Though the functions of ministries and gifts within the church are bound together in the strongest bond in the world, if the parts of the spiritual body in the church are not bound by one power they are ineffectual and the sharing of the gospel suffers. It is the love of God in Christ that gives each part its life, its purpose, and ensures they do not operate independently.

It is upsetting and alarming that many facets of the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 are created and nurtured through spiritual arrogance. Love recognizes that every gift is equal in importance and power. And the mission of the church cannot be fully employed unless all are held together by the love of God in Christ and his selfless love. It is the love of God which holds all spiritual gifts together in purpose, meaning, and fullness of power.

The early church began as a Jewish community proclaiming that Messiah has come in Christ Jesus. Like many Jewish traditions, spoken words possessed active, creative power. The world was spoken into being, and Jesus the Messiah in the first chapter of John's Gospel was defined as "The Word became flesh and lived among us." The gift of the Holy Spirit was acknowledged as God's presence in the world through language. Tongues as of fire rested upon the early Christians in the upper room. These were manifestations of various languages from all over the known world, revealing the nature of the Gospel of Jesus to all. These were, according to Acts 2, the tongues of men, speaking the heavenly language that powerfully described the arrival of the Gospel and empowering the church of Jesus. Pentecost indeed involved the speaking of the tongues of men and angels. The vocabulary might differ and be expressed in a variety of ways. However, the message was unchangeable and its power irrevocable and unchangeable.

The proclamation of the Gospel at Pentecost had little to do with dialects and vocabularies. It was the content of the Gospel message itself that empowered the words with the spiritual language that transforms the ears of men, women and the community of Jesus and his church.

The early churches' means of speaking a variety of unlearned languages that conveyed the same gospel was miraculous and could be described as the tongues of men and angels that revealed and expressed the meaning of the gospel of Jesus. The Pentecostal language revealed the universality of the gospel of God's redemption in Jesus. This universal language's source of power had little or nothing to do with the actual vocabulary, dialect, etc. and had everything to do with its holy, spiritual life-changing content and redemptive meaning.

In 1 Corinthians 13, love is the nature of a person's character. Love is the character of Jesus that describes and defines his spiritual, Messianic personhood. Love is who Jesus is, the behavior by

which he lives, his motivation for his every activity, and the transcendent inner nature of his character that defies description or even comes close to accurately defining who he is as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Without the authentic presence of Love, the word and behaviors of Jesus are little more than sounds that draw attention and transform little or nothing in life of substance.

The gift of tongues was a highly valued spiritual gift, not simply because of the power of their ministry, but because they draw attention to themselves. Many desired the gift of tongues because they were observable and noticeable. But God's love is not to gain attention for the one possessing the gift. It is more concerned with the power of God's love as the instrument of redemption, changed lives and expressions of ministry many never considered.

Paul would be among the first to ask us to live in generosity, for God has been so generous to us. However, Paul also would be among the first to warn us that true generosity loses its power when it is treated like an investment. It is not the amount we give for the good of another or a church. It is the nurture of the Christian faith within us that further shapes us into the image of Jesus and empowers others to see Jesus within us as the natural fruit of heartfelt generosity.

I find it very difficult to describe our "God-given-self" as NOTHING. The entirety of the gospel functions according to one all-important truth. A child in Jesus would never say "You are not mine." What a Christian would say, "I am nothing." We, as those redeemed by the cross, are of such infinite worth it defies our description. Paul is writing that we cannot understand who we are as the children of Jesus. Does our inability to speak in heavenly language and human vocabulary make our worth horrible diminished? The only occasion when our self-worth as God's children would suffer would occur when we fail to speak in the holy language of heaven itself. Yet, even then, if we could speak in the tongues of men and angels, but do so for any reason other than God's eternal love, we are no longer speaking the "holy language" of 1 Corinthians. We are speaking languages that draw attention to the self, and away for the all-important message of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus.

Though speaking the eternal language of heaven itself would draw distinction and importance to any person. However, if this language is more concerned with drawing attention to itself it has lost and sacrificed the grand source of its spiritual power. It isn't our ability to speak that holds our power, it is use of that language as the means of proclaiming the gospel that makes speaking in a holy language the powerful instrument of evangelism it truly is. Paul would affirm that even if we could speak in this holiest of languages, if it is not spoken in love it sacrifices its power to share the gospel.

The latter section of this lesson contrasts what the language of the Holy Spirit may speak, and what it cannot. First, love will always act in Christ-like kindness. It will always sacrifice as Christ gave his own life, not for his own benefit, but for the benefit of his brothers and sisters in need. Christian love will always refuse to envy or covet the belongings of another. It will always refuse to dishonor the sacred value of one of God's children. It will never seek its own way over committing an act of sacrifice on behalf of another. It will never seek its own benefit even if it is personally costly. It will keep no record of wrongs. There will be no journal of how you might

have hurt me and thus deserve “payback.” Because the life in Jesus is holy and truthful, to tell a falsehood violates the very nature of holiness. Christian love will always protect another from harm, always trust one, even when trusting another is difficult. It will always hope that no matter where the Christian finds themselves, they will be accompanied by God and their circumstances used of God. It will withstand pain, suffering and difficulty if it furthers the kingdom of God in the world.

One of the all-important attributes of love is its inability to exhaust itself. There will always be a sufficiency of love that reflects the highest love and ideals of Jesus.

Even when we gaze upon the holiest expression of God’s kingdom and cast our eye upon its most glorious expression, when the fulness of God’s kingdom arrives, we will enjoy the highest, holiest expression of God’s Kingdom, more beautiful, profound, transcendent and beyond human comprehension. Love is eternal, for it has no beginning and no end. We walk into what has always been, and what will always be.

Almighty God, we recognize that we gaze upon that which our eyes cannot see or ears hear. It is too great and marvelous for these human ears and understanding, yet through grace God blesses us with the holiest expression of love that defies all attempts to fully define it. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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

But Grace said

PATHWAY TO HIS PRESENCE

B.J. FUNK

I never thought I could live in this world without my mother. That’s why the way God loved me through her passing will always be a beautiful, thankful remembrance.

I was teaching school and visiting her in another town as much as I could. At 94, she was in the nursing home, and my heart felt drained of joy because I could not take care of her myself. My plan was to take her to her home and stay with her after school got out for the summer. Roy was fine with that, and so I made my plans. However, Grace spoke to me suddenly and unexpectedly one afternoon in my classroom. Everything changed after that.

While sitting with a small group of kindergarteners, concentrating on their lesson, I heard a distinct voice deep inside.

“Go to the office and get a substitute for a half day tomorrow, and go see your mother.”

I had not planned to go the next day. I had just been there. I was going to wait a few days. But, because of the enormous love of God prompting me through grace, I made plans to go.

I immediately got up and did what the voice inside told me to do. The next day, I taught until noon and then left for my home town of Valdosta, Ga., about 45 minutes away. When I walked in my mother's room, the scene had totally changed from when I had seen her last, which was only a couple of days before.

A hospice nurse was in Mama's room, and she looked at me and said, "It's grim. She only has a few more days. Okay?"

I stood by Mama's side, talking to this dear lady whose life had so influenced mine, and I could not stop the tears. I asked her if she was hurting anywhere. She said she wasn't. She was just tired. There was actually nothing wrong with her, except that 94 years of living had caught up with her. The hospice nurse brought no comfort. She had this agonizingly painful habit of putting okay at the end of each of her sentences.

"Everything is grim. Okay?"

"She only has a few more days. Okay?"

"I'm going to give her this medicine, and take her off of that medicine. Okay?"

"She just needs to rest now. Okay?"

I cannot begin to tell you how irritating her "okay?" was. She had the worst bedside manner I had ever known.

As for me, I was a total basket case. The reality of my mother's death loomed over me like a heavy wave that was about to burst into a tsunami. I stayed by her side, just kissing her cheeks which always tasted to me like peppermint. Her food had been reduced to the mush they give patients who cannot chew. It was a terrible ending to the life of the mother I adored. And the hospice nurse with "Okay?" only made matters worse.

Sometimes I sat. Sometimes I stood. Always I cried.

Suddenly, prompted by a nudging within, I stood and walked to my mama's side. I leaned over her. I was her baby, and she had known always how hard it would be for me to let her go.

But, it was time to let her go. I surprised myself with my words.

"Mama, I will be okay. Aren't you ready to go join Daddy?" She said a weak "Yes."

Of course, I was crying so hard when I said those words that she likely knew I really would not be okay. But, I said them. She heard them, and then I sat back down.

An overwhelming and beautiful rainbow of love began to envelop me. I believed then and I believe now that this was the Spirit of God holding me as my mama was getting ready to leave.

She put one hand in the air and began to move it as if trying to touch something. I don't know what she saw, but I do know it was the Lord's mercy reaching down to her.

And that word, mercy, began to move inside my soul. Mama did not need to linger in this world. As I kissed her and left for home, I asked the nurse how much longer she might have.

"Three days, okay?" I wanted to report her to somebody ... and soon!

I only had a substitute for that one afternoon, so I headed home to prepare for teaching the next morning. All the way home, I prayed for mercy for my sweet mama.

I had no sooner walked in the door than my sister called. She had just gotten a phone call from the "okay?" nurse.

Mama was gone.

My reaction startled me. I immediately raised both hands in the air and said, "Thank you Lord for mercy for my mama!" Then, I walked all around my home praising God that she did not have to linger any longer in this body that had served her so well, but was now no longer of use.

However, for the okay nurse, I had other thoughts!

But Grace said ... let that go.

And so I did, for the moment at least, but I struggled inwardly with her bedside manner for weeks to come. In the overall scheme of things, however, she was just doing her job, and I had more important things to concentrate on.

I wrote and delivered Mama's eulogy. What an unbelievable honor.

To this day, 18 years later, my heart has Mama's ending on earth emblazoned on it. I got to be with her shortly before she died. I got to tell her what I never ever in a million years would have thought I could do. It was all right for her to leave me.

It was beautiful and perfect. Mama had one foot on earth and the other in heaven, and I got to watch. I am so very thankful.

And, as for the "okay?" nurse? Well, I couldn't let her ruin the glorious moment when I was given the awesome privilege to let my mother go and to see her reaching for something on the other side.

That was our moment. My mama and me.

And nobody – NOBODY – not even a hospice nurse with an irritating habit, can take that away from me.

Ever.

The Rev. B.J. Funk is associate pastor of Central UMC in Fitzgerald. Email her at bjfunk@bellsouth.net.

Awaken to a Camp Meeting

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

ANNE PACKARD

In a letter to a [Methodist preacher dated December 2, 1802](#), Asbury wrote, "I wish you would also hold camp meetings; they have never been tried without success. To collect such a number of God's people together to pray, and the ministers to preach, and the longer they stay, generally, the better."

It is not known when or where the first camp meeting occurred because the definition of camp meetings cannot be clearly stated, but outdoor preaching has been vital to the Methodist movement since John Wesley took up George Whitfield's advice in 1739 and preached on a hillside to 3,000 people in Bristol, England. From this time forward, John and Charles Wesley preached wherever they could, including their own father's grave, reaching thousands of people during their ministry. Outdoor preaching became an integral part of the early Methodist movement, a period known as the First Great Awakening.

Within 50 short years, America had won the revolution and Francis Asbury became bishop of a brand-new denomination, the Methodist Episcopal Church, but these new Methodists stayed true to their Wesleyan roots and outdoor preaching. The South Georgia Conference was one of the earliest areas in American Methodism with its own camp meeting site. The Effingham County Campground was created in 1790 by local Methodists and is one of the oldest outdoor preaching areas in the denomination. Despite the fact that the site has changed locations due to changing times and the introduction of the railroad, camp meetings are still held annually with their strong oral tradition both in preaching and in hymn singing. The South Georgia Conference was one of many Methodist areas to create camp meeting sites in this new country, and outdoor preaching became a key component to a tremendous religious movement known as the Second Great Awakening.

Prior to the Civil War, camp meetings had fallen out of favor, but in the new, post-war South, with the difficulties of life for all, camp meetings made a strong comeback and flourished. The Dooly County Campground was created at this time, in the mid-1870s, for just these reasons. Rev. G. T. Embry, preacher for the Vienna and Dooly Mission, was traveling south when he found a piece of land that was high and dry, surrounded by trees with a nearby spring, and thought that it would make a wonderful camp site. As he traveled the circuit preaching, he shared

this idea with all who would listen. This led locals to create the Dooly County Campground exactly where Rev. Embry had envisioned. The first camp meeting was held Sept. 10, 1874, and lasted four days. The second meeting occurred in August 1875 with Dr. Joseph S. Key as presiding elder and later preaching bishop. Two young ladies were converted, with one becoming a deaconess and the other becoming a missionary in the foreign field. Some historians have called this post-Civil War time period the Third Great Awakening.

I cannot imagine why, after a long, hot summer filled with online video meetings, I have wistfully thought of camp meetings. Maybe it's the cooler temperatures and lovely breezes that have found their way to South Georgia or the thought of meeting friends and family without the added protocol of face coverings, or maybe it's just lunchtime and the thought of a potluck dinner sounds delicious. Whatever the reason, I propose when the time comes that we can again gather within six feet, see each other's smile, and give a hug or hearty handshake, that we meet on land that is high and dry, surrounded by trees, near a fresh spring to sing joyously and listen intently.

Anne Packard serves as Conference Historian and director of the Arthur J. Moore Methodist Museum on St. Simons Island. Contact her at director@mooremuseum.org.

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 Clys-Kildare Rd.; Clys, 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

OBITUARIES

Mrs. Marlene N. Thornton

Marlene N. Thornton, 66, passed away on Monday, October 6, 2020.

Marlene was the pianist at First United Methodist Church of Hinesville. She had a deep love for music and for animals. Along with the piano, she played the flute, melodica, violin, and a variety of percussion instruments.

She was preceded in death by her parents, C. Marvin and Elizabeth M. Nettles of Ridgeland, SC; and her husband, best friend, and soulmate, Dale Thornton.

She is survived by one brother, M. Eugene Nettles (Nancy) of Spartanburg, SC; sisters-in-law, Marjorie Reese of Ridgeland, SC and Teresa Fowler (Harold) of Palm Coast, FL, as well as several nieces and nephews.

Memorial services will be private.

Family and friends are invited to watch the service via Livestream at www.facebook.com/cfhhbchapel2 or listen via audio feed provided by the Hinesville First United Methodist Church at www.hinesvillemethodist.com on Sunday, October 18, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, Marlene's loved ones request remembrances be made to GHC Hospice, PO Box 15665, Savannah, GA 31416 or the Isaiah 6:8 Mission isa68.org.

Arrangements are provided by Carter Funeral Home Oglethorpe Chapel. To share a memory or leave a condolence, please visit www.carteroglethorpe.com.

Miss Betty Sue Brantley

Miss Betty Sue Brantley, age 79, of Vidalia died Thursday, October 15, 2020, in the Community Hospice House in Vidalia, after a brief illness. She was a native of Vidalia and a 1959 graduate of Vidalia High School. She was a graduate of Andrew College and LaGrange College, earning a degree in Christian Education. She also did additional study at Scarritt College in Nashville, Tennessee. The additional study qualified her to be a Diaconal Minister of Program in The United Methodist Church. She began her 48-year ministry in Fort Valley United Methodist Church in 1963. During her ministry, Betty served as program director in 10 other Methodist

churches in North and South Georgia. In 2011, she retired from the same church where she had started her career in 1963.

After retirement, she continued her dedication to church work in the First United Methodist Church and Grace United Methodist Church, both of Vidalia. In addition to volunteer work with children's ministries, she was the President of United Methodist Women and a member of the Joy Fellowship. She had a passion for Christian Education that continued until her death.

Miss Brantley was preceded in death by her parents, John Collins Brantley of Vidalia and Frances Farnsworth Brantley of Abington, Virginia; and an infant sister. She is survived by her brother, Johnny Brantley and wife Cathie; one niece, Paige Murphy and husband Tommy; one great-niece, Brantley Murphy all of Vidalia; several other cousins also survive. She is also remembered by the hundreds of children she taught during her 48 years in children's ministry.

Services were held October 17, 2020, at First United Methodist Church of Vidalia. Reverend David Blalock and Reverend Jim Smith officiated.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the First United Methodist Church of Vidalia, PO Box 150, Vidalia, GA 30475; Grace United Methodist Church, P.O. Box 482, Vidalia, GA 30475 or Andrew College, 501 College St., Cuthbert, GA 39840.

Scripture Readings – Oct. 20

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

November 1

All Saints Day

Revelation 7:9-17

Psalm 34:1-10, 22 (UMH 769)

1 John 3:1-3

Matthew 5:1-12

November 8

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25

Psalm 78:1-7 (UMH 799)

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13

United Methodist Connectional FCU awarded Credit Union of the Year for the state of Georgia

On October 13, the League of Southeastern Credit Unions recognized United Methodist Connectional Federal Credit Union, based in Marietta, as the Credit Union of the Year for the state of Georgia. The Credit Union of the year award for up to \$100 million in assets highlights individual credit unions that have shown outstanding achievements in areas of daily operations, financial prowess, and community outreach.

Institutions honored as Credit Union of the Year demonstrate the all-around best the industry has to offer. These credit unions have accomplished outstanding achievements in the areas of daily operations, financial prowess, and community outreach.

“We are always proud of the great work all our credit unions do on behalf of their members and communities,” said Jared Ross, president of LSCU. “These awards give us a way to show our appreciation to those who truly went above and beyond in their duty to help people afford life. On behalf of the League, I am humbled to be able to thank them for their outstanding service.”

“We are pleased and honored to receive this honor,” said Jonathan Curtis, Vice President of Technology Solutions and Business Development. “2020 has given us a unique opportunity to meet our members where they are and help them navigate the new challenges and solutions, such as the Paycheck Protection Program for churches and refinances and payment deferrals for our auto and home loans. It is our members that put their trust in us, and we continually work to earn that trust.”

Congratulations to CEO Keith Pritchard and United Methodist Connectional FCU for being the recipient of less than \$100 million dollars in assets 2019 Credit Union of the Year for the state of Georgia!

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 10/20/2020 edition

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](#)

Advanced Lay Servant Training, Effingham – Nov. 6-7

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.) The class will be

held Friday, Nov. 6 from 6:30 until 9 p.m. and Saturday, Nov. 7 from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. Contact Anne Bosarge for more information. anne@thechapelministries.com. [Register here](#)

Wesleyan College Sunday – Nov. 8

Each local United Methodist Church in South Georgia is encouraged to take up a special offering to support the ministry of Wesleyan College in Macon. To learn more about Wesleyan College, visit www.wesleyancollege.edu.

Conversations at the Table: Communications - Clarifying your message – Nov. 10

Grab some lunch, pull up a chair, and join Connectional Ministries for Conversations at the Table. This conversation will focus on communications, specifically how a church can better clarify their message. 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](#)

Online Basic Lay Servant Ministries Training November 2020 – Nov. 10, Nov. 12, Nov. 17, Nov. 19

We are offering Basic Lay Servant Ministries Online Training. Basic LSM Training includes a basic foundation of the faith and an introduction to leadership. This training will be offered via Zoom. Registration fee for the class is \$25. For more information contact Anne Bosarge, anne@thechapelministries.com.

United Methodist Student Day – Nov. 29

The United Methodist Student Day Special Sunday Offering helps provide funds for scholarships and loans for United Methodist students. Student Day gifts make a real difference for those who hope to attend college. Ninety percent (90%) of the offering goes toward funding the many scholarships and loans administered by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (www.gbhem.org) and ten percent (10%) stays within our state and goes to Georgia UM-related schools for merit scholarships. Contact the Georgia Commission on Higher Education and Collegiate Ministry (770-854-7283 or www.umcommission.org) for more information.