

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – MAY 18 EDITION

Bishop Graves to provide interim episcopal leadership for South Georgia beginning Sept. 1

The Council of Bishops, in consultation with the Southeastern Jurisdiction (SEJ) and the respective Annual Conference Committees on Episcopacy, on May 14 announced projected episcopal assignments. [Click here to read the published assignments.](#)

Upon Bishop Lawson Bryan’s retirement and during the interim – from September 1, 2021, until new bishops can be elected at the next Jurisdictional Conference, projected to be held fall 2022 – Bishop David Graves, current episcopal leader of the Alabama-West Florida Conference, will provide episcopal leadership to both the South Georgia and the Alabama-West Florida Conferences.

“Because I love both South Georgia and Alabama-West Florida, I am excited about this coverage plan,” Bishop Bryan said. “Bishop Graves is a colleague whom I respect and appreciate.”

Under Paragraph ¶407 of the *Book of Discipline*, the Council of Bishops has authority to fill a vacancy for presidential/episcopal supervision of an episcopal area due to death, retirement (¶ 408.1, .2, .3), resignation (¶ 408.4), judicial procedure (¶ 2712), leave of absence (¶ 410.1), or medical leave (¶ 410.4).

After much prayer and discernment, the bishops have approved the following recommendations for episcopal supervision:

- Bishop Ken Carter as the resident bishop of Western North Carolina Conference (Charlotte Area), in addition to his role as resident bishop of Florida Conference (Florida Area).
- Bishop Leonard Fairley as resident bishop of North Carolina Conference (Raleigh area), in addition to his role as resident bishop of Kentucky Conference (Louisville Area).
- Bishop Debbie Wallace-Padgett as resident bishop of Holston Conference (Holston Area), in addition to her role as resident bishop of North Alabama Conference (Birmingham Area).
- Bishop David Graves as resident bishop of South Georgia Conference (South Georgia Area), in addition to his role as resident bishop of the Alabama-West Florida Conference (Alabama-West Florida Area).

The new roles are effective September 1, 2021, and will continue until new bishops are elected in the SEJ. The SEJ Committee on Episcopacy will make the assignment of bishops once the new bishops are elected.

“It is an honor and privilege to serve as the episcopal leader of the South Georgia Conference,” said Bishop Graves in a statement to the South Georgia Conference. “Nancy and I look forward to meeting you all in the coming months. The South Georgia Conference will continue to do great Kingdom work. I’m excited about focusing on mission and ministry and making an impact on this corner of the world.”

Bishop Graves [was elected a bishop on July 13, 2016, and has served in the Alabama-West Florida Conference for five years.](#)

“It is good to see the collaboration that is happening between the Colleges and Committees on Episcopacy as they work together to determine the coverage that best fits the missional needs of the conferences involved,” said Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, President of the Council of Bishops.

“These are important in between times that call for collaboration and creative ways to ensure the ministry continues in the conferences,” she added.

Family’s love of music lives on though gift of new bell system to Douglas FUMC

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

Throughout downtown Douglas, Ga., the “bells will be ringing the glad, glad news.”

On Mother’s Day, Sunday, May 9, Douglas First United Methodist Church’s new carillon bell system was dedicated and commissioned.

The church’s first bell system, it was given to the church by Dr. Jane and Rev. Billy Kimbrel and their family in memory of Dr. Kimbrel’s late mother, Gwen Carver, a lifelong member of Douglas First UMC.

Generations of Dr. Kimbrel’s family have loved and appreciated music, and it was at Douglas First UMC that Kimbrel’s own love of music and musical talent were nurtured.

She learned to play the organ in Douglas First UMC’s sanctuary, practicing and rehearsing for hours as her mother sat patiently listening and sewing.

“She invested so much in music in my life, and to be able to give this back as a gift to the church and community and hear the bells play ... is really special to us,” said Dr. Kimbrel, who serves as organist and Director of Music Ministries at Perry United Methodist Church. “She was not a musician, but she invested so much in music and has always been a huge supporter of music, so it’s a gift I think will live on.”

Before Douglas First UMC’s carillon was installed there weren’t steeple bells or carillon anywhere in Douglas, so church leaders had to appeal to the city council to have it approved.

After several efforts and assurances that it would be an asset to the city and not a nuisance, the carillon was approved.

A digital carillon installed by Chime Master, the system chimes the hour and plays on the half hour with a melody of hymns played before the half-hour chimes. It's also hooked to the organ so the organist can play it, too.

“There’s excitement in the church and community,” said Rev. James Sapp, pastor of Douglas First UMC. “It will help the people in the community know the church is here. I think it will help give us some visibility and it will remind people of our Christian witness.”

While Douglas First UMC’s steeple wasn’t originally outfitted with bells, it seems to have been built with them in mind. Its height and tall windowpanes made for an easy installation, Dr. Kimbrel said.

She and her family hope the music that will come from the bells will be inspiring and serve as a reminder of God’s love.

“(My mother) loved music, and we thought it would be a gift not only to the church, but to the community,” she said. “We know from experiences in the churches we’ve served that people love the steeple bells. They’ll ride by on their lunch hour or sit outside near the bells and listen to the hymns play, so it really is an inspiration to the community.”

The congregation has warm, fond memories of Gwen Carver and is enthusiastic about the carillon, Rev. Sapp said.

“It is a very generous gift and (Jane’s) mother and grandmother would really enjoy it,” he said. “(The carillon) carries on the music heritage of Jane, her mother, and her grandmother.”

Mental Health Awareness Month: How communities of faith can help people heal

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

Divorce. Empty nests. Dementia. Deployment. Miscarriage. Traumatic injury. Addiction.

A global pandemic.

In her seven years serving as associate pastor at Vineville United Methodist Church in Macon, Rev. Grace Guyton has seen countless people experience ambiguous loss.

A loss that occurs without closure or clear understanding, ambiguous loss often leaves a person searching for answers. It complicates and delays the process of grieving and often results in unresolved grief.

Rev. Guyton, who is working towards licensure as a marriage and family therapist, said that, in the past year, everyone has experienced ambiguous loss as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“During the pandemic, there have been a lot of ambiguous losses that we’ve encountered as individuals and as a whole community and nation,” she said. “We were separated from friends and family and we didn’t know how long it was going to go on. We have all experienced ambiguous loss.”

There are two types of ambiguous loss, Rev. Guyton said, those that include physical absence and those that include psychological absence, but both rupture relationships and create trauma.

Seeing the need for conversations and resources about mental health in general and ambiguous loss specifically, Rev. Guyton recently hosted a two-part Ambiguous Loss workshop via Zoom. With time for teaching, discussion, and questions, she also recorded the sessions and posted them to [Facebook](#) so those who weren’t able to participate live could still access the information.

In her pastoral and clinical work, Rev. Guyton has seen a rise in anxiety and depression. She is also aware of a general sense of malaise and fatigue brought about by the pandemic and the uncertainty it’s caused.

“I don’t think we have thought about how much our daily rhythms, routines, and structures were so meaningful for our lives and gave us a sense of purpose,” she said. “All of that has been disrupted.”

With her Ambiguous Loss workshop, she hopes educating people helps them grieve and better understand and process their own or someone else’s emotions.

“When you’re going through something, if you can put a name to it, it helps to begin to process it and work through it,” she said. “I think one of the reasons understanding ambiguous loss is helpful is because we’ve been in limbo for so long and our brains really struggle with ambiguity.”

Even if individuals aren’t dealing with a grief they can name – caring for a parent with Alzheimer’s, having a child with an addiction problem, or living with a deployed spouse – these days everyone is dealing with some sort of loss.

There are tangible ways communities of faith can help one another cope, Rev. Guyton said.

“Overall, people are feeling tired, isolated, anxious, and depressed,” she said. “I think what people need are connection and community in whatever form they can get it.”

While May is Mental Health Awareness Month, it’s always a good time to check on folks, to have conversations about mental health, and to become more educated and aware.

“I think the first thing we can do is openly talk about it and create space to talk,” Rev. Guyton said. “Ask, ‘How is your soul,’ and talk about the ways we’re all struggling. Draw from scripture and lament.”

Name it, talk about it, and normalize it, she said.

“It’ll differ by congregation, but show that care and connection in whatever way you can.”

Interested in learning more about *Ambiguous Loss*? Watch Rev. Guyton's video sessions on [Facebook](#) or contact her at graceguyton@gmail.com.

The Comeback

By Suzanne Akins, Event Coordinator/Camp Director

“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:13b-14

It was February 1980 and one of the earliest memories of my childhood. I'm not even sure if it's an actual memory or I've just been a part of the retelling of the story so many times that it sits like a memory.

My brothers and I were sprawled out on our orange shag carpet watching the medal round of Olympic hockey on our tube TV with the antennae set just right. It was a showdown between the underdog amateurs of the United States and the powerhouse professionals of the Soviet Union.

We didn't know the rules of hockey; we were Georgia kids. But it didn't matter because we were all in, screaming for that puck to get in the right goal, calling our players by their first names like they were family. All we knew was that every card in the deck was stacked against “our team” and we were going to fight (from our living room floor) for a miracle.

The final minutes proved victorious for the United States and we knew instantly we had just been part of a historic moment. One we would never forget.

It was a miracle on ice.

We all love a comeback story. It's ingrained in us. We fight for the underdogs and rejoice in their victories. Give me *Hoosiers*, *Rocky*, *Seabiscuit*, *Bad News Bears*, *Rudy*, *Mighty Ducks* – any movie about an underdog – and I'll watch it wholeheartedly, pretending I have no idea how it's going to end. I'll sit on pins and needles, I'll cheer, and in the end, I'll cry. It's what we do.

After canceling all of [Camp Connect's](#) summer camps last year, we knew we needed, and *wanted*, a comeback in 2021. Unlike the movies, we didn't know how this was going to end. Not only is the pandemic still around, but our home base, Epworth By The Sea, remains closed to house the salvage workers of the Golden Ray shipwreck. We prayed for God to provide a place and clarify the details.

On a whim (or so I thought), I made a call to Camp Jekyll, just a couple of bridges away in the same county, knowing full well that they run 4-H camps all summer long with their own staff. When the director answered the phone, I introduced myself and said “I'd like to throw a Hail

Mary your way. Can I book your camp for the entire summer?” Silence followed and after a few uncomfortable moments I said, “Never mind. I know you’ve got camps. Just thought I’d check.”

“Your timing is catching me off guard,” he said. “The University of Georgia, just 30 minutes ago, moved all of our 4-H camps to one location, Rock Eagle. Our calendar has been wiped clean. My facilities manager and food services manager are heartbroken because I just told them the news that we would not have any kids here this summer. Mrs. Akins, if you’re serious, this will save us. Our site is hemorrhaging and may not make it much longer if we don’t have camps.”

The preventient grace of God had never felt more real than in that moment. The Comeback Story for Camp Connect is unveiling in real time. I’m on pins and needles, cheering (and maybe even crying) because we *get to* connect kids with Christ this summer at all of our sold-out camps. Not only are we able to have a full summer of camps, we’re able to keep it on the coast, feeling like home. God’s provision.

Will it be different? Yes. Our location is changing for the first time in more than 70 years. Our staff of college students will be leading a camp with a focus on healing after a pandemic. We have significant protocols to implement and follow to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19. It will be different.

Will it be life-changing? YES! More than 400 campers will pull away for a week to focus on their relationship with Christ through worship, community-building, and fun. Join us by praying for God to move mightily through the lives on everyone involved in Camp Connect. It will be life-changing!

In those final seconds of the Olympic hockey matchup, you could hear the announcer, Al Michaels, yell into the microphone, “Do you believe in miracles? YES!”

This may not be a miracle on ice story, but it sure feels like a miracle on the beach.

Suzanne Akins is the Director of Camping & Retreats for the South Georgia Conference. Follow [Camp Connect](#) via [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

Preaching to the Exiles

Spring Quarter: Prophets Faithful To God’s Covenant
Unit 3: Courageous Prophets of Change

Sunday school lesson for the week of May 23, 2021
By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: Ezekiel 18:1-9, 30-32

Key Verse: Ezekiel 18:4

Lesson Aims

1. Quote the mistaken proverb the exiles believed.
2. Explain the reasons for the exiles' misconception regarding how God judges people.
3. How can anybody refrain from or avoid blame-shifting?

A word about Ezekiel and the lesson context

Ezekiel was a member of the priestly family of Buzi and contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel.

As one would expect, the whole book is written from the priestly point of view of Ezekiel's priestly background (note sacrifices, the Temple, etc.).

Ezekiel prophesied during and after the final chaotic years of the kingdom of Judah. He was called by God "in the fourth month on the fifth day ... the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin (Ezekiel 1:1-2). Jehoiachin reigned only three months in 597 BC before the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and took him, along with thousands of the most prominent and skilled people of Judah, to Babylon (2 Kings 24:14). This detail dates the beginning of Ezekiel's book in 592 BC.

The name "Ezekiel" means "strengthened of God" and Ezekiel exhibited this quality as he spoke to the captives concerning God's mighty hand in judgment on the nations and in the religious restoration of Israel.

Almost needless to say, the ruin of Jerusalem was devastating for the exiles. Jeremiah's book of Lamentations captures the anguish that the destruction of the city and loss of human life caused. Thousands were left in Jerusalem and wider Judah; the survivors to whom Ezekiel spoke were those taken away to Babylon. They lived together by the river Kebar.

The writer of the lesson points out that the Babylonian exile created great uncertainty about the people's relationship with God. Could God, who had allowed his holy city to be ravaged and his people carried into exile, still care for the people? And if he still cared, could he actually take care of them in a foreign nation?

In a nutshell, the lesson today points out the dangerous flaw of a faulty self-assessment and the crucial importance of accepting personal responsibility. The exiles simply didn't understand their own role in the difficult situation the nation was facing. They assigned fault to their parents while claiming their own moral innocence.

A Proverb

Ezekiel 18:1-4

“The word of the Lord” is a common phrase used in Ezekiel to emphasize that the Lord spoke to his prophet. This phrase occurs far more often in Ezekiel than in any other Bible book. Its frequent use in Ezekiel points out that God communicated with his people even in exile. And his continuing to speak to Ezekiel was meant in part to reassure the people that God was still with them in a foreign land.

As the exiles wallowed in the misery of their situation, now in its sixth or seventh year (Ezekiel 8:1, 20:1), they naturally began searching for a reason for it. At that point, they landed on a “proverb” that became popular. A proverb is a short pithy statement used to express a general truth in a memorable way. The prophet Jeremiah was also confronted with this same proverb in his situation back in Judea (Jeremiah 31:29-30).

We are informed that the “Targum,” a first-century AD Aramaic paraphrase of the Hebrew Bible, gives the meaning of the proverb: “The fathers sin, the children suffer.” Therefore, “The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” expresses the belief that those in exile (the children) are unjustly bearing the punishment for the sins of earlier generations (the parents). Claiming that their problem is inherited, the exiles deny responsibility or guilt on their part.

And, like most profound deceits and delusions, there was an element of truth in their thoughts. Previous generations had indeed been evil, their actions inviting divine judgment. But for each generation, there had been the opportunity to avert the evil of the earlier times. As we are aware, judgment was not a bulldozer with no one at the helm. The brake could always be applied if persons exercised their responsibility by turning from evil back to God and the lives of righteousness.

However, it is a balance in the minds of those who have taken a simple truth and warped it that is sought here. It was certainly true that the evil actions of a parent could have scary consequences for his or her children. Even Ezekiel himself pointed out that the exile was the result of covenant unfaithfulness by many generations of Israelites (Ezekiel 16). God had revealed himself as the one “punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation” (Exodus 20:5). The exiles’ ancestors were indeed guilty (2 Kings 21:1-16).

But the fact that the sins of one generation have consequences for another is not the same as saying that God punishes an innocent group for the sins of the guilty group. Although there are times when the all-knowing and sovereign God deems this to be fitting, the scholarly suggestion is that is rare. I repeat: the problem in today’s text is that the exiles specifically apply their “proverb” to disavow any wrongful responsibility for their situation. And in so doing, they can claim that God is unjust in his dealing with them (Ezekiel: 18:25-29; 33:17-20).

Since God is the sovereign Creator, everyone belongs to him. This includes his chosen people as well as their Babylonians oppressors. God's justice is not limited by national boundaries. Therefore, he has the right to declare the "the one who sins is the one who dies." Each person is responsible to God for his or her own sin, and God will deal with each person individually. In giving the Israelites his law, God commanded that "parents are not to be put to death for their children nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:16). Thus, it was pointless for the exiles to insist on their innocence (Romans 3:23).

A minister had been listening to an alcoholic who blamed his problem on everybody else. He blamed the mayor, the president and the congress. He even cursed God for letting him be born.

Then he turned to the minister and said, "Well, aren't you going to say anything?"

The minister answered, "I was just wondering whether there's anybody else we could think of to blame this on."

The man looked at the minister angrily but then looked down. And after a few moments of silence, he said, "It is all my fault I've made such a mess of my life, haven't I?"

"Well," the minister answered, "you are a mess right now, but your life is not over, you can start again."

So these exiles could not blame their entire fate on their predecessors; they needed to recognize and acknowledge their own responsibility in creating their prison so far from home. Unless they made that recognition and accepted responsibility, they could not turn from their evil and, consequently, there would be no hope for a restoration of liberty and the fullness of life.

A case study

Ezekiel 18:5-9

Verse 5 sets up the first of three case studies. The second and third, verses 10-13 and 14-18 respectively, are not part of today's lesson text. However, Ezekiel's three text cases perform at least two functions. On the one hand, they systematically refute the people's understanding of how divine justice operates. On the other hand, they articulate guidelines for just and righteous living.

For the hypothetical "man" introduced in today's case study to be "just" is another, parallel way of saying that he does "what is just and right." Specifics follow.

Eating at the mountain shrines refers to participation in idolatrous practices that were common in the mountain regions. These high places featured altars, often dedicated to the worship of Canaanite deities such as Baal. To "look to the idols of Israel was to worship and seek help from fake gods or to make an image of the true God for worship.

Proper love for God always begins with worshipping no other gods (compare Exodus 20:3-6). The righteous person doesn't turn to fake gods for assistance. He or she remains dependent on God alone for health and protection.

Important to note! The temptation of straying to other gods remained real to the exiles. This was especially true when the exiles were uncertain of God's continuing care.

The just man is also careful to stay morally pure. The Laws of Moses prohibits not only adultery (Exodus 20:14) but also intercourse during a woman's menstrual period (Leviticus 15:19-33; 18:19). The penalty for violation of the latter was that "both of them are to be cut off from their people (Leviticus 20:18). Some suggest that the reason for this restriction was because of the special role of blood in atoning for sins, respecting certain rights of women, or to maintain ceremonial purity. Whatever the reason, the righteous man observes this statute as well.

The righteous man also exhibits love toward others. Righteousness consists of more than merely doing no harm. That's the reason we Methodists have more than one General Rule. "Do good" and "Stay in love with God" were also added to our General Rules.

At any rate, a righteous or just person uses his or her resources to provide for the material needs of others (James 2:15,16). These examples are all forms of economic righteousness shown to the debtor and "the hungry" and "the naked." And these are representative of other needy neighbors as well. In short, the righteous person puts God's law above any opportunity to gain at the expense of another.

The economically vulnerable often found themselves (and still do today) in positions where they had no choice but to accept the terms of predatory lenders. God viewed the practice as evidence that his people had forgotten him (Ezekiel 22:12). God is the protector of the downtrodden, and he expects his people to be the same (Psalm 82:3; Proverbs 14:31).

While the wicked people took advantage of the poor in various ways, the righteous person in Israel did not charge "interest" on loans to fellow Israelites. And while interest could be charged to a foreigner, it still had to be restrained (Deuteronomy 23:19-20).

In verse 9a we have a notable example of the parallelism that is a hallmark of Hebrew poetry: "follows" is another way of saying "keeps." Likewise, God's "decrees" are the same as his "laws." These same two sets of parallels of the underlying Hebrew terms are also found in several places in Ezekiel (11:20; 18:9; 20:19,21; 37:24). The point is that the righteous person does not follow the selfish, sinful ways of others in any respect.

In verse 9b, we see God's verdict! God will not judge or punish the "righteous" person for the sins of others – period!

A Call

Ezekiel 18:30-32

In this section, God said that he would judge the “Israelites [plural, corporate aspect]. “Each of you according to your own ways” [individual aspect]. Although each person was responsible for his or her own guilt before the Lord, individual decisions affected the community as a whole. The collective singular “house of” (CEB translation) shows that the covenant God had with Israel was corporate; it included the whole of Israel. The singular “each of you” shows that the overall moral tone of the community was formed on the collective choices of individuals. Therefore, the Israelites were to look not at the conduct of their ancestors but to their own. The people were to rid themselves of any and all personal sins. To repent is to avoid the judgment of death that sin brings. God would be gracious and forgive all who turn to him in repentance.

In this passage, God makes it unmistakably clear that condemnation isn’t inevitable. He defines repentance as the rejection of one’s past sinful ways, and he appeals to the “people of Israel” and to us to accept “a new heart and a new spirit.” God had already promised to do this (Ezekiel 11:19).

Because of God’s offer of forgiveness through repentance, each individual has the freedom to choose life or death. If people did not have free will they would not have had or have been responsible. People are capable of knowing right from wrong and God deals with us on that basis. Therefore, the blame for one’s sin and judgment cannot be shifted to God, Satan, nature, parents or circumstances.

We are told that God takes no pleasure in the destruction of creation (Ezekiel 33:11). He desires to deliver people from their unfaithfulness and the “death” that it brings. He judges, but he also provides all people with the means of salvation so they can escape that judgment. God’s invitation to all of us is to “repent and live.”

Bishop Will Willimon tells about going with his wife to the funeral of a friend which was held in a little country church out in the backwoods. The minister took advantage of the occasion to berate those who had come: “you people need to decide for Jesus now. This dear, departed brother is safe because he had chosen Christ. Now is the time! Repent before it is too late!”

After the service, Willimon said, “Can you get over that guy, taking advantage of having all of us here, to beat us over the head about how important it is to make a decision right now.”

“Yes,” replied Willimon’s wife, “and the worst thing about it is – he’s right.”

He is right! God says, “Repent and live!” The time to repent is now, and the Holy Spirit will daily recreate our hearts and minds in the likeness of Christ.

Action Plan

1. What old sayings do you need to let go of? Who will hold you accountable for progress?
2. What are some of the practical ways for Christians to be accountable to one another in keeping sin the rearview mirror?

3. Which thought in today's text do you have the hardest time coming to grips with?

Resources for this lesson

1. "2020-2021 Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching," pages 321-328.
2. "The New Interpreter's Bible Volume VI" pages 1255-1258, 1264-1266.
3. "The Daily Study Bible Ezekiel," Peter Craigie, pages 131-134.

Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries (halbradyministries.com).

Preaching to the Enemies

Spring Quarter: Prophets Faithful To God's Covenant

Unit 3: Courageous Prophets of Change

Sunday school lesson for the week of May 30, 2021

By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: Jonah 3

Key Verse: Jonah 3:10

Lesson Aims

4. Class members define and discuss repentance.
5. List reasons why the Ninevites' reaction to Jonah's proclamation was unexpected.
6. Commit to one needed change to obey God more fully.

Imagine that you are nearing the end of a good book that you just can't put down. You are anticipating a satisfying ending. But it's not there! The ending has nothing to do with the book itself or it ends in a ridiculous manner or it fails to end up somewhere. Few things are more frustrating to a reader than an unsatisfying ending to an otherwise meaningful book.

All Jonah wanted was an ending that made sense to him regarding the story of the Ninevites. They deserved to be destroyed. They had done "nothing" to merit a better ending. People for miles around could see that they should be destroyed. But how would God write the ending of this drama?

Lesson Context

Though the book of Jonah is only four chapters long it has much to teach us about the character of God. And that is also true of the character of Jonah. Jonah reacted to God's call like no other prophet in the Old Testament. At least, those other prophets agreed to speak for God even when they would rather not (Exodus 4:10-12; Jeremiah 1:6-9; etc.). However, Jonah chose not only to keep his mouth closed but also to try to run away from God (Jonah 1:1-3).

Scholars tell us that Jonah appears to have been willing to live in self-imposed exile rather than deliver a message of repentance to wicked Nineveh, an important city of the aggressive Assyrian Empire. In this way, Jonah held a mirror up to Israel, a nation that would prefer to believe that God's choosing them meant he cared about them "exclusively." Perhaps Jonah and his fellow Israelites needed to read the "all nations on earth" part of Genesis 18:18, 22:18, and 26:4 again!

Even so, Israel had good reason to desire God's sole protection. Assyria was a powerful, expansive nation when Jonah received his call from God in about 780 BC. The city of Nineveh, to which Jonah was called, was a royal residence for the king of Assyria. The city was massive and had a reputation for violence and cruelty (3:8). Far from small-mindedness, Jonah knew that his nation, indeed the known world, would be safer if the barbarous Assyrians were eliminated.

Ultimately, Israel's fear of Assyria was justified. Assyria invaded the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, plundered it, carried people into captivity, and resettled the territory (2 Kings 17). While history doesn't provide detailed accounts of the Assyrian invasion, there is no reason to believe that the aggressors didn't commit terrible atrocities on the northern kingdom of Israel as done elsewhere.

Now, that was after Jonah's time. But even so, he certainly preferred to avoid his assigned task. Adding to his escape attempt (Jonah 1:3), Jonah later revealed his deep disappointment in God (4:1-3). However, God insisted that Jonah fulfill his prophetic tasks. And even Jonah did not try to escape God's calling a second time.

The Word of the Lord

Jonah 3:1-4

That the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time is emblematic of the entire story. Jonah did not respond properly the first time, yet still God spoke to him a second time. And the second chance given to Jonah anticipates the second chance given to the city of Nineveh.

At any rate, Jonah's prior disobedience had not disqualified or exempted him from being God's chosen vessel.

Writing in his book "The Great Secret," pastor Walter Albrithon says, "God's grace is not reserved for people who are qualified to receive it. Instead, the grace of God qualifies those who receive it." Such was certainly true of Jonah in his second call from God.

This command in verse 2 repeats what God originally told Jonah. Noticeably missing is the previous emphasis on the city's evil seen in the phrase "its wickedness has come up before me" (Jonah 1:2). The prophet was already aware of that fact, but didn't see the remedy as God saw it. Jonah's desired remedy was fiery judgment; God's remedy was repentance (4:1-2, not in our lesson text). "Proclaim to it the message I give you" is a command for Jonah to speak only what God would tell him – nothing more, nothing less. Jonah's instructions had not changed.

Perhaps we wonder why would God send an Israelite prophet to a nation that threatened his chosen people. The answer is found in the last verse in the book:

"Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left?" (Jonah 4:11)

Point! God's love is not determined or constrained by national boundaries. Because ancient Israel had nationalistic and exceptionalistic pride due to the fact that they were chosen by God uniquely, it is not difficult to see that same trait in Jonah himself. Repeating, God's love is not determined or constrained by national boundaries.

Now, Jonah's time inside the great fish had evidently taught him the price of disobedience (Jonah 1:17-2:10). We see the evidence of this in his going to Nineveh. The "three days [it took] to go through it" ironically matches Jonah's three days in the fish (Jonah 1:17).

One suggestion regarding the meaning of a very large city that takes three days to pass through is that it includes the time necessary for Jonah to stop and preach neighborhood by neighborhood. Archaeology has determined that the size of Nineveh encompassed some 1,730 acres. Combining this with the 120,000 population gives us some idea of the strength of the Assyrian Empire.

We are told that Jonah walked one-third of the way into the city before delivering God's message. Given his lack of enthusiasm to this point, the prophet likely was giving God only minimum obedience. And, don't we do much the same thing when we obey the letter of the law without allowing our hearts to be changed by God's commands?

Jonah's recorded sermon is simple but powerful. It contains just five words in the Hebrew. Of course, this could be all that Jonah said, or it could be a summary of a much longer sermon. But note here that in Jonah's sermon there is no call to repentance. This omission seems to be in keeping with Jonah's mindset to this point: he seems not to want to mention the possibility that God would forgive. From Jonah's perspective, the Ninevites were an evil people who deserved judgment.

As we know, the number "forty" has symbolic meaning in the Bible. Rain fell for that number of days in judgment on wicked humankind (Genesis 7:17).

Forty was the number of years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness because of their faithlessness (Numbers 14:33-35). And it was the number of days Jesus fasted before facing the

tempter (Matthew 4:2-10). In each case, God considered the completion of this number of days or years to be sufficient to excise evil or prove its absence. Giving Nineveh that amount of time before being “overthrown” was fair in God’s reckoning.

The people of Nineveh

Jonah 3:5-10

Several startling events are recorded in the book of Jonah, but one of the greatest is the tremendous response to Jonah’s terse message. The faith of the Ninevites depended not on Jonah’s rhetoric or his enthusiasm for the subject. Instead, their reaction speaks to the work of the Spirit of God in their midst, although not specifically stated as such.

The late Albert Outler, prominent Methodist scholar, stated that “Without the Spirit in the church our sermons would become editorials...” It wasn’t Jonah’s editorial that brought the response from the Ninevites.

Fasting and wearing sackcloth are common symbols of both mourning and repentance in Scripture. As with any external or physical act, it isn’t worth much if it remains superficial. In the case of the people of Nineveh, however, it appears to be a sincere reflection of their hearts.

We also see how comprehensive their response is. The response of the Ninevites ranges all the way from their king to their animals. And it is the king who provides expression to the command and purpose: “God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger so that we do not perish” (Jonah 3:9).

In spite of the fact that the Ninevites had their own gods, we are told that the Ninevites believed God (v.5), the underlying Hebrew of that designation being Elohim, not Yahweh. When the word “Elohim” is used without the word “Yahweh” being adjacent, the implication is that of the Creator of the universe (Genesis 1).

Of course, the Lord is both Creator of everything on the earth and Ruler over Israel specifically. Old Testament texts, especially the Psalms, often use the names interchangeably. But the Ninevites’ belief seems to have been tied only to God as he makes himself known through creation (Romans 1:18-20), rather than to God as he reveals himself more fully in the Law of Moses.

Fasting from food or drink was a common religious practice in many nations during biblical times. It could be practiced privately or corporately. The practice indicated self-denial, repentance, and/or humility. In the case of the Ninevites’ fasting, all these applied. “Sackcloth” was a rough material that was generally made from goat hair, and wearing sackcloth signified submission (example: 1 Kings 20:31-32) or intense distress (example: 2 Kings 19:1). Fasting combined with wearing sackcloth’s added intensity to the situation (Psalm 35:13). A spiritual change was happening throughout Nineveh.

The fast was originally limited to the citizens of “Nineveh,” but livestock were also to be denied food and water. To cover these animals in “sackcloth” was a symbol of the city’s repentance. Though we often think of the consequences of sin being confined to humans, this verse (v.8) underscores that the natural world would also suffer because of sin (Romans 8:19-22). God’s last recorded response to Jonah also reinforces the fact that God cares for “all” of his creation, not just the human parts (Jonah 4:10,11).

For the king to risk the health of the city’s livestock by causing them to fast meant that he believed that destruction was imminent. If God didn’t see genuine repentance, the well-being of the livestock wouldn’t matter anyway.

Now, the king seems to have recognized that empty ritual would yield no benefit (see Isaiah 58:3-7). True repentance begins with the heart and is verified through righteous behavior. For that reason, the king commanded his people to reject their evil lifestyle. The city of Nineveh was called on to repent of a way of life built on violence, torture, and slavery.

Repentance then in the Biblical sense is more than simply a change of mind or a feeling of regret. It’s a decisive turning away from sin and back to God, and the emphasis may rest on the negative side to turning away, disobedience, or rebellion. It may also fall on the positive side, the turning back to God with the beginning of a new religious or moral life. But repentance is a U-turn. As mentioned earlier, true repentance always begins with the heart and is verified through righteous behavior.

“Who knows?” stated the king of Nineveh, “God may relent and change his mind” (Jonah 3:9). It was an amazing hope, but it was exactly what happened. The scripture lesson states, “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it” (Jonah 3:10, key verse).

Question: Is it possible to change the mind of God? As scholars point out, on the one hand, we read in Malachi 3:6, “I the Lord do not change.” While on the other hand, Moses’ experience echoes this episode from Jonah. After Moses interceded on behalf of the people: “The Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he had promised to bring on his people” (Exodus 32:14).

According to scholars, a closer look at Jonah’s story reveals both an important theological point and a lovely truth about God. For God’s mind to change is not the same as God’s nature of will changing. In fact, scholars point out, the change of mind actually reveals the consistency of the divine character and will.

Always, the question to ask is, “What does God want?” And the answer from start to finish is that God desires our salvation, our wholeness, and our love. And both the judgment and the forgiveness of God serve these purposes. As it is explained, the judgment pushes us backward

toward the wholeness of God's design while the forgiveness welcomes us back to God and provides that wholeness.

Without doubt, Jonah's message is one of coming judgment, but Jonah's presence is a proof of mercy. If the real desire was to destroy Nineveh, then no warning would be needed or given.

But the very fact of the warning proves that God would rather not do it. Therefore, when the narrator reports that "God changed his mind," there is no actual change in the nature or will of God. In reality, if God had persisted in destroying a repentant people that would have shone inconsistency in the divine character.

In closing, the theme of human repentance and God's forgiveness reaches its peak in Nineveh, but the same centrality was introduced in the experience of Jonah himself. Therefore, what was true for Jonah was true for Nineveh. And what was true for Nineveh is true for us. God always urges, invites, and welcomes us back. Our repentance continually embraces God's love, grace and forgiveness. You see, God forgiving laws do not change. Thanks be to God!

Action Plan

4. On what occasions should fasting be promoted today, if any? Why do you say that?
5. What do class members understand about God changing his mind?
6. What is your main takeaway from today's lesson regarding modern missionary endeavors?
7. Why is repentance important and how would you define it?

Resources for this lesson

4. "2020-2021 Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Series, International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching," pages 329-336.
5. "The New International Lesson Annual, September 2016-August 2017," pages 383-388.
6. "The New Interpreter's Bible Volume VII" pages 510-516.

Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries (halbradyministries.com).

Dealing with Loneliness

By Dr. Hal Brady

A thoughtful physician who takes time to deal with his patients as whole persons says that he has discovered that “99 out of 100 individuals are lonely. And the one who says he/she isn’t probably is.” Loneliness is indeed a universal problem and yet it comes to each of us on an individual basis.

No question, loneliness has been enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic. While appropriate during the pandemic, being asked to push away from each other, social distance, isolate, and quarantine from one another has put enormous stress on the very social connection we depend on for life and well-being. The result has been increasing loneliness.

Truth is, Jesus himself was no stranger to loneliness, and in one of his parables he specifically tells us how to deal with it. In the parable, we find a man possessed by an unclean spirit. With strong resolution, this man sweeps his mind clear only to suffer later on the invasion of “seven other spirits” more annoying than the first.

Now, what this parable teaches us about loneliness is that we can’t just sweep our minds clear of loneliness unless we fill the vacuum with other things.

Stating it another way, to successfully cope, we must replace our loneliness with something else – something better.

First, we can replace our loneliness with the recognition that being alone may not be lonely! At the beginning we need to be aware that there is a difference between alone and being lonely. Numbers of people find great peace, meaning, and inspiration in moments of aloneness.

Henry David Thoreau observed, “A man thinking or working is always alone, let him be where he will.” Solitude can be a helpful experience.

Second, we can replace our loneliness with a disciplined mind! To be sure, we cannot always change our outward situation, but we can do something about our response to that situation. Some of our loneliness is related to circumstances beyond our control. However, we can do something about the life we live in our minds. God does not intend for us to be victims of self-pity, inner emptiness, or boredom.

Years ago, there was a striking illustration of the power of the disciplined mind to overcome loneliness. It concerned Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa. In one of his first interviews after being released from 27 years in prison he said he “never felt despair.” Then Mandela went on to explain. He said that while he was in prison he continually read novels and biographies, and in later years he was allowed to see films – educational films. Such is the power of a disciplined mind in battling down loneliness.

Third, we can replace our loneliness with a great purpose! Do you know many lonely people who have a great purpose? I don’t! However, I know several lonely people who don’t have a great purpose.

When you asked, “What am I supposed to do with my life?” The answer is always, “Something useful.” And it always begins with a great purpose.

Fourth, we can replace our loneliness with a willing involvement! The Dalai Lama states, “That when one is thinking about others with kindness and compassion, one is never lonely. Openheartedness – warm-heartedness – is the antidote to loneliness.”

Fifth, we can replace our loneliness with an internal support system!

What is loneliness anyway? Basically, loneliness is nothing other than our homesickness for the Divine! There is a pain in all of us to return home. God has placed that longing for Himself in each of us. Augustine expressed it this way, “Thou dost keep us restless O God, until our hearts rest in Thee.

What I’m saying is that our internal support system will enable us to have a sense of the presence of the Divine Companion. As Jesus put it, “You will leave me alone, yet I am not alone for the Father is with me” (John 16:32).

Oh yes, we can replace our loneliness and successfully cope with it.

Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries (halbradyministries.com).

May we stay strangely warmed

WHAT’S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

ANNE PACKARD

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. – John Wesley’s journal, May 24, 1738

The Romans built a wall protecting the city of London in approximately 200 AD, but Aldersgate was not one of the original gates. Historians believe it was added in approximately 1,000 AD, being named after either Ealdrād, a man of the late Saxon period, or a group of alder trees which grew nearby. The original gate was taken down and rebuilt in 1617 to commemorate James VI of Scotland’s use of the gate to enter London prior to being crowned king, but the new

gate was damaged in the Great Fire of London in 1666. The damaged Aldersgate remained in place until 1761.

Originally, Aldersgate Street referenced only the section of road starting from the Church of St. Botolph Without Aldersgate towards Long Lane. There have been many known religious experiences that have occurred here. In 1554, 17,000 people came to hear a “heavenly voice” speak anti-Catholic statements, but this turned out to be Elizabeth Crofts, a woman who had been placed inside the old Roman wall. And before 1655, one of the earliest Quaker meetings in London was held in the house of Sarah Sawyer in Rose and Rainbow Court. But, these aren’t the religious experiences that we think of during the month of May.

In the evening of May 24, 1738, John Wesley “very unwillingly” attended a Bible study with the Moravians who had a church at 28 Aldersgate Street and, at 8:45 p.m., John was converted to the belief of justification by faith. Prior to his conversion, Wesley, in keeping with the Church of England’s teachings, believed that both man and God played roles in the justification, or forgiveness, of sins because man’s good works and obedience to the sacraments were instrumental in the process. The Moravians, however, followed the teachings of Martin Luther who believed and taught that justification, forgiveness of sins, was God’s alone to give and man’s works, whether good or not, were not a factor in God’s forgiveness.

John Wesley was burdened to his very soul with the effort of doing works that were “good” enough to earn God’s grace and forgiveness. Less than six months after his father Samuel’s death, John left England and his mother Susanna to journey to Georgia to do God’s will and convert the Native Americans. In less than two years, however, John returned to England having converted not one Native American to Christianity but having been jailed by his fellow English citizens.

What a relief it must have been on Whitsunday in 1738 when his younger brother Charles was converted to justification by faith alone. Maybe it was the mere thought of this relief which led John to attend the Moravian Bible study that Wednesday evening on Aldersgate Street. And, oh, how grateful are we that he did.

As we commemorate Aldersgate Sunday this year, may we remember that our good works and observances are important but it is only through God’s love and grace that we are forgiven. May we stay strangely warmed.

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 – May 2021

5/01 – Jacque Asbel: 4116 Amberley Trail; Valdosta, GA 31602
5/01 – John Beck: 1210 Tribble Rd.; Ft. Valley, GA 31030
5/03 – Rick Turner: 798 Mallory St., Apt. 11; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
5/06 – Eddie Morrison: 1610 Kings Way; Savannah, GA 31406
5/11 – Stan Posey: 3936 Island Creek Rd.; Valdosta, GA 31601
5/12 – Reese Nelson: 2804 Willow Wood Circle; Valdosta, GA 31602
5/12 – Ron Womack: 404 Bobby Ray Rd.; Reidsville, GA 30453
5/14 – Donald Clark: 197 Cubbedge Dr.; Rincon, GA 31326
5/14 – Marshall Howell: PO Box 658; Midway, GA 31320
5/14 – Kenneth Watkins: 170 Sanford St.; Wadley, GA 30477
5/15 – Jack McCollough, Jr.: 100 Lindsey Barron Dr., Apt. 232; Newnan, GA 30263
5/15 – Tommy Roe: PO Box 56; Montrose, GA 31065
5/15 – Dan Smith: 7176 Standing Boy Rd.; Columbus, GA 31904
5/19 – Ronnie Howell: 32 Vanceville Co. Line Rd.; Tifton, GA 31794
5/20 – Franklin Pierce: 602 Ft. King George Dr.; Darien, GA 31305
5/22 – Jimmy Gilbert: 464 Penia Rd. N; Cordele, GA 31015
5/23 – Jeri Pruette: 2188 Peacock Rd.; Quitman, GA 31643
5/26 – Faye Burgamy: 165 S. Burgamy Rd.; Warthen, GA 31094
5/27 – Cile Mitchell: 130 Hitchiti Ridge Rd.; Juliette, GA 31046
5/28 – Richard Newton: 1823 Kaufman Circle; Lady Lake, FL 32159
5/29 – Marsha Emery: 3855 Dennis Creek Road; Talbotton, GA 31827
5/30 – Luanne Kemper: 1412 Sapling Dr.; Orange Park, FL 32073

OBITUARIES

Mrs. Elizabeth Pratt-Hutcherson

Mrs. Elizabeth Pratt-Hutcherson, a retired school teacher and widow of two ministers, died Thursday, April 8, at Ogeechee Area Hospice in Statesboro.

Known as “Libby” to friends and family, she was 96 years old and had recently been battling the effects of Parkinson’s disease.

The former Lila Elizabeth Lee, daughter of Horace and Clara Lee, was born and spent her childhood on a farm near Newington in Screven County.

A graduate of Newington High School, she attended what became Armstrong State College in Savannah.

In 1944, she married the Rev. Frank T. Pratt, pastor of her family’s church, North Newington Baptist. Shortly thereafter, the couple moved to Pooler, where the Rev. Pratt became pastor of First Baptist Church and where, in 1948, their son, Ronald, was born.

In late 1949, Mrs. Pratt-Hutcherson and her family moved to Missouri, where the Rev. Pratt pastored churches, mostly in the St. Louis area, for the next 35 years. For many of those years, Mrs. Pratt-Hutcherson taught kindergarten in suburban St. Louis.

Upon their retirement in the mid-1980s, Mrs. Pratt-Hutcherson and her husband relocated, first to Screven County and then to Statesboro. The couple joined First Baptist Church of Statesboro, where both taught Sunday school classes until the Rev. Pratt's death in 1996.

Throughout this period, Mrs. Pratt-Hutcherson was a faithful caregiver to her husband, who was frequently hospitalized with heart-related illnesses.

In 1998, Mrs. Pratt-Hutcherson married Dr. Guy Hutcherson, a retired district superintendent of The United Methodist Church and a former pastor of First UMC in Statesboro. She continued to remain active in her church, First Baptist, teaching Sunday school classes, while also participating in various activities at First UMC. Dr. Hutcherson died in 2001.

Mrs. Pratt-Hutcherson remained in her Statesboro home for several years before moving to Southern Manor Retirement Inn in 2018. She relocated to Ogeechee Area Hospice in late 2020.

“Miss Libby” is remembered by her many friends in Statesboro and elsewhere for her vibrant, dynamic personality and her wonderful sense of humor.

In addition to her son, Ronald, of Statesboro, Mrs. Pratt-Hutcherson is survived by a stepdaughter, Ann Hutcherson of Atlanta; and several nieces and nephews.

A private graveside service and burial will be Wednesday, May 12 at North Newington Baptist Church Cemetery with Dr. H. William Perry officiating.

The family requests that memorial contributions be made to Ogeechee Area Hospice, PO Box 531, Statesboro, GA 30459.

Friends may sign the online register book at www.joineranderson.com.

Joiner-Anderson Funeral Home & Crematory of Statesboro is in charge of the arrangements.

Rev. Ray Lee Garren

Ray Lee Garren passed away Wednesday, May 12, 2021. Graveside services were held at 2:00 p.m., Sunday, May 16, 2021, at Monroe Hills Memorial Gardens. Rev. Mark Goolsby officiated.

Mr. Garren, the son of the late Lee Wesley Garren and Addie Mae Varner Garren, was born January 23, 1937 in Farmer, North Carolina. His son, Dale Garren, preceded him in death. Mr. Garren worked in the ministry most of his adult life, as a church pastor and managing gospel radio stations. He retired from The United Methodist Church.

Mr. Garren was a talented guitar and mandolin player, as well as an excellent singer. He sang and accompanied many gospel groups over the years. Mr. Garren enjoyed fishing, woodworking, gardening, and bird watching. After serious health issues, Mr. Garren moved to Pruitthealth Forsyth, where he became known as The Candy Man, for his habit of passing out candy to any and everyone. At the nursing home he enjoyed church services, where he would often lead the singing. He also enjoyed Bingo – especially winning – so he could use his tokens to buy items that he would then give away to his family and other nursing home residents. Mr. Ray was loved by the residents and staff at Pruitt Forsyth. They will miss his daily singing up and down the halls.

Mr. Garren is survived by his children, Debbie (Walter) Carter of Forsyth; Denise Garren of Lakeland, Florida; Dewayne (Evangeline) Garren of Forsyth; and Kayla Beth Garren of Florida; grandchildren, Abby Garren (John) Saxton of Taunton, England and Joshua (Ashley Jacobs) Horne of Florida; great grandchildren, Lyn Horne and Brooklyn Leftwich; sister, Jane Patterson of North Carolina; and brother, Herman (Pam) Garren of North Carolina.

Monroe County Memorial Chapel has charge of arrangements.

Scripture Readings – May 18

May 23

Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b (UMH 826)

Romans 8:22-27

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

May 30

Trinity Sunday

Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalm 29

Romans 8:12-17

John 3:1-17

June 6

Second Sunday after Pentecost

1 Samuel 8:4-20 (11:14-15)

Psalm 138

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Mark 3:20-35

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 5/18/2021 edition

ERT & Chainsaw Training, Byron – May 22

Early Response Team (ERT) Trainings equip individuals and teams to respond in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. The cost for the training is \$25 per participant. At the training, participants will receive an ERT Training Manual and upon completing the course will receive an UMCOR ID Badge and a conference ERT T-shirt, and lunch is included. You must be 18 years or older to get the UMCOR badge. An UMCOR background check is required before receiving badges—participants must register online (at no cost to participants). Contact your Lead Instructor if you need the Verified Volunteer Good Deed Code. This ERT and Chainsaw Training will be held May 22 at Harvest Church in Byron. ERT Training begins at 8 a.m. For

Chainsaw Training details, please contact Rob Belknap. [Register here](#). For questions, contact Rob Belknap, North Central District Disaster Coordinator: RWBelknap@cox.net.

Peace with Justice Sunday – May 30

Peace with Justice Sunday enables The United Methodist Church to have a voice in advocating for peace and justice through a broad spectrum of global programs. [Peace with Justice Sunday Pastor and Leader Kit](#)

AC2021: Virtual Clergy Session – June 1

The electronic clergy session is set for Tuesday, June 1, 2021, from 10 am - noon. For all Annual Conference information, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

AC2021: Virtual Retiree Recognition Service – June 1

A virtual Retiree Recognition Service will take place Tuesday, June 1 at 7 pm to honor and recognize clergy retiring in 2021. For all Annual Conference information, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

AC2021: Virtual Memorial Service – June 3

An virtual Memorial Service to remember clergy and clergy spouses who have passed away in the past conference year is set for Thursday, June 3 at 7 pm. For all Annual Conference information, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

AC2021: Virtual Commissioning and Ordination Service – June 6

Those approved for provisional membership or full connection at the clergy session will be commissioned or ordained in a local church setting on Sunday, June 6. The Commissioning and Ordination Service(s) will be live streamed so the entire conference may share in this important worship experience online. For all Annual Conference information, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

AC2021: Virtual Annual Conference Session – June 7

The one-day virtual Annual Conference session is set for Monday, June 7, beginning at 8:30 am. Full Annual Conference details can be found at www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

Basic ERT Training, Darien – June 19

Early Response Team (ERT) Trainings equip individuals and teams to respond in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. The cost for the training is \$25 per participant. At the training, participants will receive an ERT Training Manual and upon completing the course will receive an UMCOR ID Badge and a conference ERT T-shirt, and lunch is included. You must be 18 years or older to get the UMCOR badge. An UMCOR background check is required before receiving badges—participants must register online (at no cost to participants). Contact your Lead Instructor if you need the Verified Volunteer Good Deed Code. This ERT training will be held June 19 at Darien UMC. ERT Training begins at 9 a.m. and will conclude by 3 p.m. [Register here](#). For questions, please contact Kelly Crane, Coastal District Disaster Response Coordinator, at kelcrane@gmail.com.

Wesley Glen Day – June 20

Fathers' Day is Wesley Glen Day across the South Georgia Conference. Show your support for

adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities by making a gift to Wesley Glen Ministries on June 20 in honor of a strong male role model in your life. Celebrate by wearing your favorite Wesley Glen T-shirt from past years. Post your pictures on social media with the tags: #WesleyGlenMinistries #growingtogether www.wesleyglenministries.com