

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – ANNUAL CONFERENCE EDITION

God’s faithfulness felt amid much-anticipated annual conference session

Detailed recaps of each day’s events, including listings of who was ordained and commissioned, those who retired, and the ministers and spouses who were remembered during the memorial service, as well as the appointment list, photos, and bulletin insert can be found by clicking [here](#).

For the first time in three years, nearly 1,000 South Georgia United Methodists gathered to worship and conduct the business of the annual conference as Bishop David Graves led his first annual conference session in South Georgia.

Held June 5-8 in the Columbus Convention and Trade Center, it was a much-anticipated but anxious time as a gamut of emotions were experienced throughout the four-day session.

Speculation and sorrow, fear and frustration, trust and truth. All were felt as delegates conferenced. But one overriding idea prevailed: God is faithful.

“I see God’s faithfulness on the faces and hear it in the sound of those who continue to lift their hands, hearts, and voices to God in praise even when there is much to lament,” said Rev. Tony Crosby, who was just appointed pastor of Vienna and Shiloh United Methodist Churches.

“Above the anxiety of conflict, grief over those lost to death, and the collective weariness of this world’s strife and suffering, we still sing of ‘strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.’ Our songs are affirmations of faith that God is bigger than all of this and will see us through.”

Meeting under the theme of “Great is Your Faithfulness,” clergy and laity from across the South Georgia Conference rejoiced and remembered God’s faithfulness and goodness.

With vibrant and meaningful worship sessions, Ministry Moment Snapshots that highlighted various ways God’s faithfulness is seen in the South Georgia Conference, and powerful messages from Bishop Graves and Lay Leader J. Knapp, South Georgia United Methodists said they saw hope amid the struggle.

“God’s presence was in this place. Even in the midst of all that’s going on, that’s the majesty of God’s greatness, and we’re to lean into that faithfulness,” Bishop Graves said. “I’m thankful for the people of the South Georgia Annual Conference, for being here and for their participation. We saw God speak through worship and even through our debate. We saw God work through all of that.”

Opening Worship

With his trademark passion and fervor, Bishop James Swanson, resident bishop of the Mississippi Conference of The United Methodist Church who served as a pastor and District

Superintendent in the South Georgia Conference until he was elected to the episcopacy in 2004, opened the annual conference session with a rousing and inspiring sermon.

Reading several Psalms, he reminded delegates and guests that, despite circumstances, they are never alone.

“We often think we’re fighting this battle by ourselves. The psalmist tells us we’re never alone. Quit trying to fight by yourself! Our Father, through the Holy Spirit, lives in us. We’re never alone.

“You are never alone because God is with you and because you have each other,” he said. “Lift up the name of the Lord no matter what you do.”

After Bishop Swanson spoke, a [special offering](#) for South Georgia’s mission partnership with the North Katanga Annual Conference was collected totaling more than \$22,000. With the money, South Georgia United Methodists will help support two of the North Katanga Annual Conference’s ministries, Kamina Orphanage and Wings of the Morning Aviation.

Music was led by St. Mary’s Road United Methodist Church.

Monday, June 6

Monday morning, June 6 began with separate laity and clergy sessions. Afterwards, the Conference moved into [a time of worship led by Rev. Adriane Burgess](#), pastor at St. Mary’s Road UMC in Columbus. Reading the parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10, Rev. Burgess challenged those gathered to be moved with compassion.

“Sometimes God’s business cannot be done from a distance. Sometimes our acts of mercy can’t be done at arm’s length,” she said. “Everything can’t be done at a distance. Sometimes we have to step down and get a little dusty to help someone else. Isn’t that how someone saved you?

“We know what matters. To do God’s work in the name of Jesus. It is all about love and compassion. Let us be moved toward each other with compassion. Let us be moved toward our neighbors with compassion. Let us not miss a single person on the street because we are moved with compassion. Let us be moved with compassion with the powerful name of Jesus.”

Bishop Graves then called the 156th session of the South Georgia Annual Conference to order. This was Bishop Graves’ first Annual Conference to preside over as the resident bishop of the South Georgia Area.

In Monday morning’s business session, the conference welcomed Bishop David and Mrs. Nancy Graves to their first South Georgia Annual Conference session; celebrated the ministry and impact of Camp Connect, the conference’s summer camping program; heard overviews of the standing rules, safe sanctuaries policy updates, and the resolutions; heard a second Ministry Moment Snapshot from Rev. Garth Duke-Barton where he shared how he’s seen God’s

faithfulness in and through the work of mission and ministry locally and around the world; and presented a check to the Kamina Orphanage and the Wings of the Morning Aviation ministry of the North Katanga Conference.

During the afternoon business session, the conference heard a South Georgia Conference history moment from Rev. Dave Hanson; heard the Board of Ordained Ministry report given by Rev. Fran Magoni; recognized clergy who faithfully serve beyond the local church in an extension ministry appointment; thanked Rev. Josh Bizzell for serving six years as the Board of Ministry Coordinating Registrar; affirmed clergy who have been elected into provisional membership and into full conference membership; heard a Ministry Moment Snapshot with Bishop David Graves and Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed as they talked about moving forward in making racial justice a priority in the conference; heard the report of the delegation on disaffiliation and the postponement of General Conference to 2024; approved a report from the Conference Trustees in which a process was affirmed that extends the terms of South Georgia's current disaffiliation policy through December 31, 2024; voted on and approved the disaffiliation of 18 churches; and celebrated the Methodist Home for Children and Youth's 150th anniversary.

The Conference gathered Monday evening in St. Luke United Methodist Church's sanctuary for [the service of Ordination with Commissioning](#).

In his sermon, Bishop Graves challenged the ordinands and those being commissioned to remember where they came from and to be all God calls them to be. He also shared a few guiding principles that have helped him be all God created him to be: stay in love with Jesus; ministry is best accomplished when you do it with a team; learn to be a great communicator; discipline yourself so no one else has to; don't just work hard, work smart; change is a must; and handle success like you handle failure.

"We're supposed to walk with each other so we can be all God created us to be. That's my prayer for you."

Bishop Graves presided over the ordinal rites and was assisted by Mr. J. Knapp, Conference Lay Leader, representing the laity, and Rev. Fran Magoni, Chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry, observed the ordinal rites.

Tuesday, June 7

Tuesday morning also began with worship, led by Rev. Teresa Edwards, newly appointed associate pastor at Vineville UMC in Macon. She preached from Luke 9:18-20 in which Jesus asks the questions, "Who do the crowds say I am?" and then "But what about you? Who do you say I am?"

"Jesus always knows how to ask the right questions," Rev. Edwards said. "The question for us at hand today is about identity. Jesus' identity and our identity."

All are witnesses, here and now, she said, and the question all must answer, before all others, is the same one Jesus asked, “Who do you say I am?”

“Hear the good news - today we can remind each other through our witness, of faith and faithfulness, of kindness and respect, of hugs, of prayers, of thoughtful discourse, and yes, even loving disagreement - here’s the photo we’re all looking for; it’s the one with Jesus in the center. There, see, we’re all gathered around, in the name of Jesus for this moment, witnesses, together! Jesus, the sure foundation by which we are saved and on which we stand, we, the South Georgia Conference, are here to be your witnesses. Make it so.”

In Tuesday morning’s business session, the conference approved the [2022 Report from the Committee on Nominations](#) and elected Carolyn Fletcher as an at-large member of the Nominating Committee; heard a minority report from several members of the delegation who shared differing opinions from the previous day’s delegation report; voted on [resolutions](#); and celebrated with pastors who have served 50 years in the ministry and [pastors retiring at this Annual Conference session](#).

Conference Lay Leader J. Knapp also gave [the Lay Leader’s Address](#) in which he celebrated the faithfulness of the laity of the South Georgia Conference. Knapp shared stories of how congregations all across South Georgia are sharing the love of Christ in life-changing and life-giving ministries, from Hazlehurst First UMC and Albany First UMC to Sylvania UMC, St. Luke UMC, Thomasville’s Lawson Neel MedBank, and more.

“Service in ministry is a special function. It’s not the role of the pastor or staff. It is ours,” he said. “It is up to us, the laity, to be more engaged. The clergy can do nothing without the laity!”

That afternoon, [a memorial service was held to honor the 46 faithful clergy and clergy spouses](#) who have died since the 2021 Annual Conference session. Rev. Bill Bagwell, South Georgia minister, reminded those gathered that hope is an important work.

“Hope is in our job description,” he said.

“I dearly need hope. Do you? It is the essence of how we, the community of Christ, maneuver life and death.”

Just an ounce of hope can transform everything, he said, before asking the congregation if they have been in a place of hope during the past year and whether they have sensed God is present.

“Proclaim Jesus crucified and risen. He is our judge and our hope,” he said. “God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.”

In Tuesday afternoon’s business session, the conference heard a Ministry Moment Snapshot with Rev. David Thompson, Rev. Jorge Moreno, and Rev. Isaac Salgado as they shared about South Georgia’s Hispanic ministries; approved changes to the conference’s Standing Rules; approved a

recommendation that every local church revisit and update as necessary their Safe Sanctuaries policy by Dec. 31, 2023; approved changes to the conference Safe Sanctuaries Policy; heard another John Wesley moment from Rev. Dave Hanson; approved the establishment of a Retiree Health Care Trust; approved the recommendations from the Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits; approved the report of the Equitable Compensation Report including a 3 percent increase in minimum salary; and approved resolution 6 with the following addition: if a church or charge votes to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church at a time other than at the June session of the South Georgia Annual Conference and the pastor appointed to serve that church or charge does not desire to leave the United Methodist Church and an appointment is not available, the disaffiliating church will pay the salary, housing and benefits of all the pastor (all appointed clergy regardless of status - to include local pastors, provisional and full deacons appointed to the local church, and provisional and full elders) for the remainder of the Conference year to the Annual Conference along with the other funds required by the Discipline in paragraph 2553 and the Annual Conference disaffiliation policy.

Wednesday, June 8

Wednesday morning, June 8 began with [a worship service led by Rev. Daniel Medina](#), pastor of Nueva Vida UMC, Warner Robins First UMC, and associate director of Hispanic Ministries in the Office of Connectional Ministries.

“Jesus goes to places of deep suffering and pain, Rev. Medina said as he recounted the story of Jesus casting out demons in Mark 5. “Jesus always surprises us by where he goes.”

Jesus has not come to add to human misery but to free us from our misery and fears, he said.

“Jesus is still the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Shalom. Let us not be fearful,” Rev. Medina said. He encouraged those gathered to notice the marginalized, the homeless, the immigrant, and the refugee in their midst.

“Who is our Gerasene brother or sister today? God’s love transcends race, nationality, language, culture, status, and borders. It is a love that cries for justice and peace. It is a love that is deeply needed today.”

In Wednesday’s business session, the conference heard a Ministry Moment Snapshot where Kelly Crane, Coastal district disaster response coordinator, shared opportunities South Georgia United Methodists have to serve and bring hope to those in times of crisis and disaster; approved the church closings of Brooks United Methodist Church and Elko United Methodist Church; heard a report from the Conference Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) and approved a budget of \$7,936,868 for 2023, a reduction of \$500,350 from the previous year; heard a final John Wesley Moment from Rev. Dave Hanson; prayed a prayer of lament for harm done to Boy Scouts participants; recognized all Eagle Scouts, all Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and the positive impact of scouting ministry; heard a word about the [called session of Annual Conference](#), set for

August 20, 2022; showed appreciation for the work and hospitality of the Northwest District and the Local Arrangements Committee as well as the Conference Worship Committee, Conference Secretary, and all of those who work to put on Annual Conference; expressed appreciation for the clergy and lay staff who the Annual Conference; and accepted an invitation to hold the 2023 Annual Conference session in Tifton.

Service of Sending Forth

Annual Conference 2022 ended with a Service of Sending Forth and [an episcopal address by Bishop Graves](#).

The six District Superintendents read the names of those receiving a new followed by a prayer from each District Lay Leader. [Click here to view the 2022-2023 Clergy Appointments](#).

[In his episcopal address](#), Bishop David Graves acknowledged that, like Jeremiah, life is hard and messy. He read Jeremiah: 20:7-18 and asked, “Are there days where you feel like Jeremiah?”

While all have had those feelings, he encouraged South Georgia laity and clergy to “chill out and do our work.”

“I want to be a part of a church that seeks to be in relationship with each other. If you walk away from each other you don’t have influence,” he said. “I want to be in a church that is more focused on the outside than the inside.”

He shared evidence of God’s work and goodness in his life, starting with the church he grew up in and was nurtured in through the last local church appointment he had.

“God kept speaking, ‘David, I called you. You are a bishop in The United Methodist Church because I allowed it. You have been preparing your whole life for this moment. Don’t you remember? Have you forgotten? I did not bring you to this day to leave.’”

Bishop Graves urged South Georgia United Methodists to hold on and to keep making disciples in their local churches.

“Hold on. Let’s see what God is going to do. In the meantime, chill out and do your work.”

The 2023 Annual Conference Session will be held in Tifton, Ga. beginning June 4, 2023.

South Georgia by the numbers

Membership stands at 98,324, down 5,140 from the previous year. Worship attendance stands at 23,427, down 2,104. Church school attendance stands at 11,762, down from 979. Professions or reaffirmations of faith for 2021 were 765, up 176 from 2020. Adults and young adults in small groups for 2021 was 21,318, down 234 from 2020.

For full Annual Conference coverage, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

Celebrating God's faithfulness through mission, ministry & evangelism

Churches throughout the conference continue to demonstrate how great God's faithfulness is through mission, ministry, and evangelism.

Evangelistically Fruitful Congregations

The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. A significant dimension of the disciple-making process is that of leading people to make a commitment to God through baptism and profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Reaching new persons with the gospel is at the very heart of every church's purpose. Below are congregations in each district that charted the largest net gain in membership, the largest number of professions of faith, the best ratio of professions of faith with regard to membership in 2021, and every local church showing a net gain in membership for 2021.

Wesley Monumental was the overall conference leader with the largest net gain in membership, Albany First led the conference in the largest number of professions of faith, and Oak Grove (Nan Williams) had the best ratio of professions of faith.

The churches with the largest net gain in membership in each district in 2021 were:

Coastal: Wesley Monumental
North Central: Andrew
Northeast: Swainsboro First
Northwest: The Ridge
South Central: The Porch Community Church
Southwest: Ashburn

The churches with the largest number of professions of faith in each district in 2021 were:

Coastal: Richmond Hill
North Central: Sandersville
Northeast: Statesboro First
Northwest: St. Paul
South Central: Park Avenue
Southwest: Albany First

The churches with the best ratio of professions of faith in each district in 2021 were:

Coastal: Emanuel
North Central: Wesley Chapel (Wrightsville Circuit)
Northeast: Oak Grove (Nan Williams)
Northwest: Andrew Chapel
South Central: Friendship (Alma)
Southwest: Bethel (Grady County)

Every local church showing a net gain in membership for 2021 has been designated an Evangelistically Fruitful Congregation.

Coastal District

Akin Memorial
Bethesda (Rincon)
Brunswick First
Clyo
Ellabell
Emanuel
Emory Chapel
Goshen
Guyton
Isle of Hope
Jekyll Island
Kingsland First
Odum
Richmond Hill
Springfield
St Simons Island
St. Luke (Savannah)
Taylors
The Waterfront Church
Trinity (Savannah)
Tybee Island Trinity Chapel
Wesley Frederica
Wesley Monumental

North Central District

Andrew
Arline-Bethel
Bethel (Baldwin Ct.)
Centenary
Centerville
Christ (Warner Robins)
Danville
Hawkinsville First
Heritage
Martha Bowman
Northview
Pleasant Grove UMC Milledgeville
Sandersville
Wesley Chapel (Wrightsville Ct)
Wrightsville

Northeast District

Bethany (Burke Co.)

Brooklet
Landsburg
Mt. Vernon
New Hope (Statesboro)
Poplar Springs
Shiloh (Wheeler Co.)
St. Andrews
Statesboro First
Swainsboro First
Union (Bulloch Co.)
Union Grove
Zoar (Glascock Co.)

Northwest District

Andrew Chapel
Bethel (Marion Ct.)
Concord (Hopewell)
Cuthbert
Eilerslie
Evans Chapel
Howard
Lee Street
Powersville
Reynolds
Roberta
St. Paul
The Ridge
Wesley Chapel (Powersville)

South Central District

Bickley
Douglas First
Friendship (Alma)
Homerville
Lake Park
Manor
The Porch Community Church
Waycross First

Southwest District

Albany First
Arlington
Ashburn
Bethel (Grady Co.)
Camilla
Christ (Albany)

Doerun
Edison
El Faro
Evelyn
Kimball
Leesburg
Thomasville First
Trinity (Donalsonville)

Fully Connectional Churches

Also recognized were those churches that were fully connectional in 2021 by giving 100% or more of their apportionments. [Click here to view a full list.](#)

Mission Giving

The generosity of South Georgia United Methodists in their mission giving makes an impact in the Kingdom of God every single day. Mission giving keeps with our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

Second Mile Giving

Second Mile Giving is an exciting and significant element of the stewardship program within our connectional system at both the General Church and Conference levels. One official Second Mile Giving program within The United Methodist Church is The Advance for Christ and His Church. In 1948, the General Conference launched the Advance as a call to Christians to help rebuild a world shattered by World War II.

The first mile, or priority, continues to be for local churches to fulfill their commitment to the World Service Fund, Conference Benevolences, and other apportioned funds. Second mile stewardship through The Advance fosters partnerships between those who give and those who receive. Through Advance gifts, persons determine and support their own individual and local congregation’s giving priorities.

Conference Advance Specials are projects geographically located within the boundary of the South Georgia Conference. They have been screened by the Conference Outreach Team and authorized by the South Georgia Conference to solicit support from local churches.

Three Star Churches

Local churches are challenged by the Conference Outreach Team to achieve stars of excellence in Second Mile Giving by:

- sharing faithfully in the total mission of the church by paying 100% of all apportionments;
- investing a minimum of \$25 in at least one fruitful ministry listed in each of the Six Lanes of the Advance; and
- boldly extending support of at least one ministry listed in the PLUS lane.

[Click here to view a list of Three Star Churches for 2021.](#)

Carruth Mission Awards

The Carruth Mission Awards were inaugurated in honor of Rev. Carlton and Mrs. Augusta Carruth for their many years of faithful service and support of missions.

Highest Total Given to Missions: Isle of Hope

Highest Per Capita Given to Missions: Odum

The churches with the highest total given to missions in each district were:

Coastal: Isle of Hope

North Central: Pine Forest

Northeast: Vidalia First

Northwest: Pierce Chapel

South Central: Douglas First

Southwest: Albany First

The churches with the highest per capita given to missions in each district were:

Coastal: Odum

North Central: Davisboro

Northeast: Swainsboro First

Northwest: Wesley (Howard Charge)

South Central: Hebardville

Southwest: Morningside, Albany

Giving to Agencies

Magnolia Manor

Top 10 Supporting Churches: Americus First, Vineville, Concord, Albany First, St. Luke (Columbus), Park Avenue (Valdosta), Cairo, Isle of Hope (Savannah), Lee Street (Americus) Porterfield Memorial (Albany)

Methodist Home for Children and Youth

Top 10 Giving Churches (amount given): Tifton First, Vineville, Mulberry Street, St. Marys, Vienna, Perry, Wesley Monumental, Hinesville First, Waycross First, Gray

Top 10 Giving Churches (per capita): Wesley, Mauk, Danville, Sardis, St. Luke, Chula, Alston, Vienna, Linton, Tifton First

Open Door Community House, Inc.

The Mrs. Butch Deaton "Living the Vision" Award: Mrs. Cindy Coldewey, Board Member

Outstanding Financial Stewardship in Charitable Contributions: St. Luke UMC (highest giving) and Cordray UMC (highest giving per capita)

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Celebrating Ministry Milestones and Achievements at Annual Conference

Annual Conference is a special time to celebrate ministry milestones and achievements, from those just entering the ministry to those taking the next step of their journey into retirement.

During the Board of Ordained Ministry report Monday afternoon, individuals were recognized for achieving milestones and achievements.

Received into their new relationship with the conference as Elders and Full Conference Members were Jonathan William Beckum, Nathan Christopher Lehman, and Jeremiah Haynes Martin.

Elected into provisional membership were: Elder track - Lauren Elizabeth West; Deacon track - Madelyn Mary Henderson.

Others highlighted during the Clergy Session Monday morning were:

New Certified Candidates: Kris Dockery, Michael Green, Katie Griffis, Laurel Griffith, Michelle Hayes, Hal Jenkins, Matt Mullis, Lindsay Neal, Eric Pittman, Jennifer Stockert, and Payton Stone.

Licensing School Graduates: Hal Jenkins, Michelle Hayes, Matt Mullis, Laurel Griffith, and Eric Pittman.

New Local Pastors: Tim DeGuire, Michael Green (from Florida), Katie Griffis (student appointment in North Georgia), Laurel Griffith, Michelle Hayes, Hal Jenkins, Tab Miller, Matt Mullis, Lindsay Neal, Sean O'Neil (from East Ohio), Sam Paul, Eric Pittman, Payton Stone (from North Georgia), and William Walley (from Mississippi).

Course of Study graduates: Michael Forbes, Clay Loadman, Thomas Tidwell, Antonie Walker, Jay Williams, and John Ryan (2019-2020).

Tears streamed down Rev. Fran Magoni's face as she processed with other Board of Ordained Ministry members into St. Luke United Methodist Church's sanctuary Monday evening during the ordination and commissioning service.

"There just aren't enough words to describe the joy I felt as we processed in to the hymn, 'The Church's One Foundation,'" said Rev. Magoni, chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry and associate pastor at Martha Bowman United Methodist Church. "After two years of not being able to gather in person for Annual Conference, it did my soul good to be in the midst of God's people, singing at the top of my lungs, tears streaming down my face as we proclaimed in song together:

‘Elect from ev’ry nation, yet one o’er all the earth; her charter of salvation: one Lord, one faith, one birth. One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food, and to one hope she presses, with ev’ry grace endued.’

“What a holy moment it was to see men and women who have said ‘yes’ to the call of God being commissioned and ordained to the ministry to which they have been called and for the inspiring message from Bishop Graves. The Ordination Service was the highlight of Annual Conference for me this year, and a reminder of just how precious our connection is in the South Georgia Conference.”

On Tuesday morning, the South Georgia Annual Conference celebrated with those clergy who have served in ministry for 50 years and those who are entering into a retired relationship with the Annual Conference.

Clergy recognized for having served 50 years in ministry include:

Rev. Donald L. Adams

Rev. John E. Brodress

Rev. Edwin Chase

Rev. Tom B. Nichols

Rev. G. Lynwood Roberts

Rev. Eric L. Sizemore

Rev. Stephen L. Webb

Clergy honored for retiring this year:

Rev. Bill Bagwell

Rev. Carl Barnhardt

Rev. Mike Brown

Rev. Patricia Burns

Rev. Ellis Carpenter

Rev. Derek Hobbs

Rev. Ron Johnson

Rev. Mike Lyons

Rev. Rick Mitchell

Rev. Mike Ricker

Rev. Uley Robbins

Rev. Lynn Roberts

Rev. Rickey Rushing

Rev. Randy Spicer

Rev. Tim Steffen

Rev. Jackie Thomas

Rev. Julie Tisinger

Rev. Jimmy Towson

Rev. Howard White

Rev. Karen Zeigler

Before those gathered were dismissed, Bishop Graves and Conference members prayed a closing blessing that read, in part:

“Go into the world and respond to the love of Christ in all you do. Live out the vision God has given you. May God's mercy, grace, and peace be with you. May you be channels for God's mercy, grace, and peace to the world wherever you may be!”

For full Annual Conference coverage, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

Memorial Service 2022: ‘Hope is in our job description’

[A Memorial Service](#) for those faithful servants who served in the South Georgia Annual Conference was held Tuesday afternoon, June 7, at 2 p.m. as conference members gathered at St. Luke United Methodist Church in Columbus, Ga.

Rev. Bill Bagwell, outgoing pastor at Pittman Park UMC in Statesboro who retired at this year’s Annual Conference session, reminded those gathered that hope is an important work.

“Hope is in our job description,” he said.

“I dearly need hope. Do you? It is the essence of how we, the community of Christ, maneuver life and death.”

Just an ounce of hope can transform everything, he said, before asking the congregation if they have been in a place of hope during the past year and whether they have sensed God is present.

“Proclaim Jesus crucified and risen. He is our judge and our hope,” he said. “God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.”

Those faithful servants remembered include:

Deceased Clergy

Archie Bob Dixon

February 22, 1958 - April 10, 2021

Ray Lee Garren

January 23, 1937 - May 12, 2021

Herbert Stephen Peavy

September 17, 1957 - July 4, 2021

James Truman "Jim" Trice, Jr.

September 20, 1939 - July 22, 2021

Henry Lee "H. L." Pharr, Jr.

July 22, 1933 - August 11, 2021

Wayne McDonald

October 20, 1942 - August 13, 2021

Byron Johnson Scott, Jr.

August 9, 1945 - August 14, 2021

Jairo E. Franco

October 14, 1946 - September 21, 2021

Edwin Leon Willis

October 1, 1952 - October 29, 2021

Rodger Randall Ray, Sr.

June 19, 1940 - November 5, 2021

Shirley Carter Berkeley, Jr.

November 25, 1932 - November 12, 2021

Lee Creig Smith

December 17, 1956 - November 15, 2021

Eul Lark Kim

July 14, 1935 - December 4, 2021

Cecil Earl Hazen

September 6, 1932 - December 10, 2021

Thomas Jackson "Jack" McCollough, Jr.

May 15, 1927 - December 31, 2021

Kirk G. Loyless

November 10, 1950 - January 25, 2022

Elvin Edward East, Jr

July 25, 1948 - February 2, 2022

Fred Mosley Foster

September 3, 1934 - February 4, 2022

Remer Logan "Brad" Brady, III

November 16, 1953 - February 4, 2022

Fred Lemore Maddox

April 22, 1933 - February 8, 2022

James Pickett Walker

August 24, 1939 - February 25, 2022

Gordon Grover Bell

March 9, 1928 - March 3, 2022

William Donald Clark

May 14, 1952 - March 11, 2022

Beaufort Garfield "B. G." Roberts, Sr.

August 7, 1932 - March 19, 2022

Wallace Grable Page, Jr.

June 25, 1938 - March 22, 2022

Robert Wayne Poston

February 11, 1946 - March 28, 2022

Grady Watson Mills, II

June 17, 1943 - March 28, 2022

Deceased Clergy Spouses

Marguerite Ziegler-Buchan

July 4, 1949 - April 5, 2021

Lila Elizabeth Lee Pratt-Hutcherson

September 27, 1925 - April 8, 2021

Sharon McMahan Atkinson

September 28, 1945 - April 10, 2021

Eleanor Howard Walton

July 30, 1938 - April 13, 2021

Marilyn Sue Johnson Dupree

May 31, 1935 - May 2, 2021

Jackie Henderson Miller Pryor

July 23, 1942 - May 18, 2021

Betty Claire Pierce Smith

September 24, 1932 - May 24, 2021

Sandra Arwood Homer

December 6, 1942 - June 20, 2021

Juliann Glaspy Rogers

August 3, 1953 - August 8, 2021

Martha "Marty" Wycliffe Hendry Durham

February 14, 1939 - August 18, 2021

Clara Mae Harris Dunbar

August 18, 1931 - August 22, 2021

John Christopher "Jack" Payne

December 7, 1943 - September 2, 2021

Jane Ellen Bryan Bass

February 28, 1941 - September 4, 2021

Merrie Louellen Freeman Posey

October 8, 1949 - September 6, 2021

Evelyn Meadows Steele

February 1, 1924 - October 23, 2021

Dorma Gemiah Smith Perry

October 1, 1925 - November 18, 2021

Carole Moore Mitchell

December 1, 1939 - December 13, 2021

Carol Whitley Sizemore

August 7, 1951 - December 20, 2021

Sally Lou Powell Strickland

June 9, 1930 - December 27, 2021

The Conference Memoirs Committee and the Conference Worship Committee help plan and lead the Memorial Service. They also put together a Book of Remembrance that contains beautiful tributes to each of these faithful saints who have passed away in the past year and presents one to each family prior to the service.

[Watch the service here.](#)

For full Annual Conference coverage, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

South Georgia United Methodists gives more than \$22,000 for North Katanga partnership

At the 2022 South Georgia Annual Conference session, South Georgia United Methodists gave \$22,708 to support two North Katanga Conference ministries: Kamina Orphanage and Wings of the Morning Aviation.

On Monday morning, Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, conference secretary of Global Ministries and senior pastor of Epworth UMC in Jesup, presented a check to the Kamina Orphanage and the Wings of Aviation ministry of the North Katanga Conference. Receiving the check on behalf of Global Ministries were Jim and Bernice Keech, Southeastern Jurisdiction mission advocates.

“The Wings of the Morning Aviation Program is saving the lives of many people, especially those living in remote villages and yet seeking high quality medical attention,” said Bishop Mande Muyombo, episcopal leader of the North Katanga Episcopal Area of The United Methodist Church. “I am grateful to the South Georgia Annual Conference for giving hope and loving these young men and women. Thank you for advancing God’s kingdom with Christlike concerns for the orphans.”

Since 1997, Kamina Orphanage has helped thousands of children, orphaned by disease, violence, and poverty, have hope and a future. South Georgia’s support of the orphanage will help provide children with meals, healthcare, tuition, and care.

An aviation ministry of The United Methodist Church in North Katanga, Wings of the Morning is under the care and supervision of the General Board of Global Ministries.

With little or no transportation infrastructure such as paved roads or a railway system, the Wings of the Morning airplane is a lifeline to the 6 million people of the Katanga province and provides vital services including: carrying life-giving pharmaceuticals and supplies to remote villages and towns; transporting critically ill patients to clinics and hospitals; providing transportation for pastors, missionaries; and volunteers; and delivering payroll and other supplies to villages, towns, and churches.

“The gifts given for this special offering give hope and love in ways we can only imagine,” said Kelly Roberson, assistant to the Bishop and director of Conference Ministries/Communications. “What a beautiful expression of our connection as we offer these gifts to God to be used for His glory.”

Over the past two years, South Georgia has helped the North Katanga Annual Conference build and reconstruct several local churches, host empowerment training events and leadership training conferences, and train local farmers.

The [mission partnership](#) that began three years ago when a team of six South Georgia United Methodists traveled to the North Katanga Annual Conference, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), continues to develop.

- [Give online](#)
- [Read more about the ministry of Kamina Orphanage](#) | [Visit their Facebook page](#)
- [Read more about the ministry of Wings of the Morning Aviation](#)

For full Annual Conference coverage, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

Conference approves three resolutions

During the 2022 Annual Conference session, [three of seven resolutions](#) presented to the Conference Committee on Resolutions for consideration and vote by the 2022 South Georgia Annual Conference were approved.

In the Monday morning, June 6 business session, the conference approved Resolution 1, “Say ‘No’ to Single-Use Plastic” and Resolution 2, “Resolution on Wage Equality.” Later that afternoon, Resolution 6, “Resolution to Amend the Disaffiliation Policy of the South Georgia Conference,” was approved with the addition of an amendment.

The first resolution, “Say ‘No’ to Single-Use Plastic,” calls on those responsible for planning Conference, district, and local church events to adopt Creation Care practices that focus on waste prevention and waste reduction with the goal of moving toward eliminating the use of all single-use plastics.

The second resolution, “Resolution on Wage Equality,” denounces “any policies that prohibit, condone, or reinforce the inopportunity for women to be paid less wages than men doing the same job.” It also asks that women be treated fairly in their jobs by getting the same pay as their male counterparts and that other minorities be treated fairly in jobs with pay. In addition, the resolution asks that the church and all of its members denounce policies that do not grant equal employment opportunities and Title IX in education and support and adopt those policies which will help women enter higher paying jobs in fields and occupations that are still off limits to women.

“Our main purpose of both of these (resolutions) is to be not just our brothers’ keeper, but our sisters’, and keepers of this beautiful earth God entrusted to us,” said Denise Rooks, chair of the

Advocacy Committee and a member of Harper’s Chapel United Methodist Church in Baxley. “These are the legacies we want our children to inherit.”

The sixth resolution, “Resolution to Amend the Disaffiliation Policy of the South Georgia Conference,” was approved with the addition of an amendment. This resolution adjusts the timeline for churches to petition for disaffiliation at called sessions of the Annual Conference.

For example, for the Aug. 20, 2022, [called Special Session](#), the deadline for informing the District Superintendent that a church wishes to have a called Church Conference to discuss disaffiliation shall be July 8, 2022, and the Church Conference must be held no later than August 5, 2022.

The addition states: “If a church or charge votes to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church at a time other than at the June session of the South Georgia Annual Conference and the pastor appointed to serve that church or charge does not desire to leave the United Methodist Church and an appointment is not available, the disaffiliating church will pay the salary, housing and benefits of the pastor (all appointed clergy regardless of status - to include local pastors, provisional and full deacons appointed to the local church, and provisional and full elders) for the remainder of the Conference year to the Annual Conference along with the other funds required by the Discipline in paragraph 2553 and the Annual Conference disaffiliation policy.”

A rule of law was asked in regards to Resolution 4, “A Resolution for a Called Session of the Annual Conference in Response to a Meeting of the General Conference.”

According to Conference Chancellor Cater Thompson, under paragraph 2609.6 of *The Book of Discipline*, the bishop shall rule on questions of law within 30 days after the close of the Annual Conference session at which it was submitted. The Judicial Council shall pass upon all decisions of law made by bishops in the regular course of a business session of Annual Conference, and each bishop shall report all decisions of law to Judicial Council. No decision by a bishop is authoritative until it has been ruled on by Judicial Council.

Resolutions 3, “Resolution of the delegation of the South Georgia Annual Conference,” Resolution 5, “A resolution for a called session of the Annual Conference in response to a decision of the judicial council,” and Resolution 7, “South Georgia resolution in response to the Judicial Council declaratory decision stating an AC may withdraw from the UMC,” were all withdrawn by the makers of the motions.

During the report of the Resolutions Committee, Rev. Doreen Smalls, chair, expressed her appreciation for the work of the committee.

For full Annual Conference coverage, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.



Conference votes on disaffiliation matters

During the 2022 South Georgia Annual Conference session, clergy and lay members voted on several matters related to disaffiliation.

On Monday afternoon, June 6, Conference members approved a report from the Conference Trustees in which [a process was affirmed](#) that extends the terms of South Georgia's current disaffiliation policy through December 31, 2024.

Already voted on and approved by the Trustees, the resolution states, "the Trustees wish to provide a means for local churches desiring to exit the denomination on the terms outlined in ¶2553 after the expiration of ¶2553."

With the further postponement of General Conference to 2024, the Trustees believe it is important to give South Georgia congregations additional time to pray, discern, and make decisions, said Dr. Jimmy Asbell, chair of the Conference Board of Trustees.

"It was the intent of the Trustees to prevent an unpredictable or unanticipated closing of a window and force a church to make a decision it was otherwise not prepared or not desiring to make," he said. "We didn't want time to be the deciding factor but wanted to give congregations time to make informed, prayerful decisions. If us honoring the terms a year longer does that, we think that's in the best interest of the Conference.

"This action is to reduce the fear or the need to make a decision based on incomplete information," said Dr. Jimmy Asbell, during the Trustees report.

In addition, 18 South Georgia congregations disaffiliated from The United Methodist Church: Antioch, Barney, Claxton, Friendship (Bacon Co), Grace (Tift Co.), Kirkland, Laurel Branch, Liberty, McBride, Mizpah, Naylor, Park Avenue, Reidsville, Springfield, The Pointe, The Porch, Trinity (Seminole Co), Turkey Branch.

Provisions passed at the called 2019 Special Session of the General Conference and two policies passed during the 2019 South Georgia Annual Conference session – a [Disaffiliation Policy](#) and a [Pension Liabilities Proposal](#) – laid the groundwork for the churches to disaffiliate.

After the conference approved the disaffiliation of the 18 churches, Bishop David Graves offered a prayer of thanksgiving for each church and its ministry.

It read, in part, "We feel sorrow in your leaving, yet we rejoice with you in anticipation of this new phase of your life. We will miss your love and support, yet we know you will add much to the lives of those who will be your new church family, as you have added much to our lives."

Per the policies adopted, once each congregation pays their pension liabilities, their two years of apportionments, and the legal fees involved, they will be released from the trust clause and will own their property.

For full Annual Conference coverage, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

South Georgia Conference approves establishment of Retiree Health Care Trust

South Georgia retirees and those approaching retirement can breathe a little easier.

During the 2022 South Georgia Annual Conference session, delegates approved the establishment of a [Retiree Health Care Trust](#). This trust helps secure retiree healthcare funding as the denomination moves into an uncertain future. It will benefit all clergy and conference staff currently receiving retiree healthcare funding and will also secure funding for those clergy and staff who are 55 and older and who have or can meet the qualifications for retiree healthcare.

“You are probably aware of the discussions going on in our denomination about what our future looks like – whether we remain a single united denomination or split into one or more separate groups,” Dr. Ben Martin, chair of the Board of Pension, said [in a video](#). “The future of The United Methodist Church is not clear at this point.”

The Board considered what potential changes might be in store for South Georgia churches, pastors, and the annual conference. Over the past few years its focus has been on ensuring clergy pensions are as secure as possible, explained Dr. Martin. Meeting that goal allowed the Board to consider other retiree needs, such as retiree healthcare.

The Board appointed a Task Force to look at the options and make a recommendation. The Task Force reviewed how other conferences are funding retiree healthcare, considered actuarial projections for South Georgia clergy, and consulted with Wespeth and other legal authorities. Members of the Task Force include: Dr. Marcus Tripp, retired clergy; Dr. Scott Hagan, senior pastor of Statesboro First UMC; Connie Flannigan, healthcare social worker and lay member of South Columbus UMC; Dr. Derek McAleer, Director of Administrative Services; Cater Thompson, Conference Chancellor; and Eleanor Dickson, Assistant Director for Pensions and Benefits and Human Resources Officer.

After much research and discussion, the Board of Pension found a way to secure funding for retiree healthcare, and the laity and clergy agreed. Below is the outline of what was approved:

- That our annual conference will establish a Trust for the sole purpose of providing a healthcare benefit subsidy to retirees and conference staff of the South Georgia Conference.

- That the initial Directors of the Trust be the Conference Board of Pension.
- Should our conference and denomination undergo some sort of separation, the Board of Pension will appoint a new Board of Directors that represents the racial, gender, and theological diversity of the clergy who receive retiree healthcare benefits.
- The Trust will be funded by a combination of investments currently available, all of which are presently earmarked for the benefit of our retirees. These assets are sufficient and will not require that we solicit additional funding from churches.

In addition to an explanatory video, in January, the Board of Pension posted a draft of a full organizational plan for the Trust and a summary of the Trust as well as a Frequently Asked Questions document. ([View video and all documents here.](#))

“The churches of our Annual Conference have been gracious over the years in providing for our clergy and Conference staff,” Dr. Martin said. “We are grateful that we have pensions and healthcare in retirement. Our Conference has already taken steps to secure pensions for our retirees.

“The approval of this Trust gives us the opportunity to secure support for healthcare in retirement.”

For full Annual Conference coverage, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

Bishop Graves sets 2022-2023 pastoral appointments

On Wednesday, June 8, during the 2022 South Georgia Annual Conference session, Bishop David Graves fixed the 2022-2023 pastoral appointments for the South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church.

2022-2023 Appointments

[Click here to download and view the list of appointments by district.](#)

For full Annual Conference coverage, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

Bulletin Insert

[Download a recap bulletin insert to help tell the story of Annual Conference in your local church](#)

For full Annual Conference coverage, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

District Gatherings with Bishop Graves set for September

**FROM THE BISHOP
DAVID GRAVES**

To the clergy and laity of South Georgia:

As you know by now, my passion is sharing Jesus, seeing the overlooked, joining God in transforming lives, and changing the world one person at a time.

I've had the privilege of getting to know the great people of South Georgia over the past nine months, and I've seen firsthand that our local churches share in this passion. I continue to be amazed at the incredible ministry happening all across the South Georgia Conference.

Many of you, clergy and lay, have asked, "Bishop, what are you going to do to come alongside us and help us in the local church? What are you going to do to help with dismantling racism and social justice in our communities? What can our church look like post-Covid?"

These are the conversations I want to be a part of: leaning into and focusing on our mission and ministry and continuing to find ways to be sustainable and, more importantly, thrive.

I realize, though, that we often hold things in tension in our lives. One thing we hold in tension right now is the call to move forward, to restart, and to focus on mission in our local churches. And, at the same time, to have necessary conversations and provide necessary information around denominational matters.

With this in mind I am setting aside three weeks in September to be in our districts among the laity and clergy of South Georgia. You will see the schedule below. The District Superintendents have been a huge help in planning these times in the districts so we can be with as many people as possible.

In these three weeks I want to accomplish two things: to resource around ways we can "restart" our focus on mission and to share relevant information that will help your church be equipped and informed about the South Georgia Conference.

I look forward to visiting, talking with, and listening to clergy and laity from each district as we seek to refocus on our mission. I hope you will make plans now to be a part of a gathering near you. Please contact your [district office](#) with questions.

In Christ,

Bishop David Graves

The following are dates, locations and times for various gatherings that have been scheduled. In addition to these, District Superintendents are scheduling other opportunities for Bishop Graves to meet with laity and clergy during his time in each district.

Week 1: North Central District & Northwest District

Joint North Central/Northwest District Gathering with Bishop Graves (for Laity and Clergy)

Sunday, September 11 | 4 – 6 pm

Location: Perry UMC

Northwest District Clergy Gathering

Monday, September 12 | Noon – 2:30 pm

Location: St. Paul UMC

North Central District Clergy Gathering

Tuesday, September 13 | Noon – 3 pm

Location: Methodist Home

Week 2: South Central District & Southwest District

Joint South Central/Southwest District Gathering with Bishop Graves (for Laity and Clergy)

Sunday, September 18 | 4 – 6 pm

Location: Tifton First UMC

South Central District Clergy Gathering

Monday, September 19 | Noon – 3 pm

Location: TBA

Southwest District Clergy Gathering

Tuesday, September 20 | Noon – 3 pm

Location: Camilla UMC

Week 3: Coastal District & Northeast District

Joint Coastal/Northeast District Gathering with Bishop Graves (for Laity and Clergy)

Sunday, September 25 | 4 - 6 pm

Location: Gateway Church, Bloomingdale

Coastal District Clergy Gathering

Monday, September 26 | Noon – 3 pm

Location: Epworth By The Sea, Turner Lodge Conference Room

Northeast District Clergy Gathering
Tuesday, September 27 | Noon – 3 pm
Location: Pittman Park UMC, Statesboro

God's People Shall Prosper

Summer Quarter: Partners in a New Creation
Unit 1: God Delivers and Restores

Sunday school lesson for the week of June 19, 2022
By Dr. Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 49:18-23

Look at All the People Being Gathered

¹⁸Lift up your eyes all around and see;
they all gather, they come to you.
As I live, says the LORD,
you shall put all of them on like an ornament,
and like a bride you shall bind them on.

You might wonder what the big deal is about people gathering. The more scattered people are the bigger the deal when they are gathered, especially when their condition is desperate. When gathering such scattered people seems impossible, it becomes an even bigger deal. What situation awaits the people once they are gathered? What work will need to be done? Who else will gather after the first group arrives? Each addition to the gathering adds more meaning and significance to the whole. How will the lives of the people who are gathered be transformed? How will all this glorify God?

Important Background

Consider that there were several significant scatterings in the history of God's people. Each was caused by a different event. In the late 8th century B.C., the Northern Kingdom Israel was devastated by the Assyrian army. These were the 10 northern tribes who were descendants of Jacob. It was the policy of the Assyrian Empire to take the people from each of the nations they conquered and scatter them among other conquered nations so that they ended up mixing the different nationalities, cultures, and religions. This was a deliberate attempt to erase the religious and cultural memory of the various groups.

The next scattering happened in the 6th century B.C. to the Southern Kingdom Judah, which included the two southern tribes that also traced their lineage to Jacob. The Babylonian army

took the leading citizens of Judah to Babylon in three separate deportations. They destroyed Jerusalem, the capital city, along with its palace which was built by David, and most importantly the temple that was built by Solomon. Before they destroyed it, they looted the temple. They did the same kind of thing to other nations that they conquered in an attempt to erase their religious and cultural memory. Instead of scattering the people of these nations, they brought them near Babylon to keep a close eye on their captives. As devastating as this was to God's people, it ended up being a better situation for them compared to the scattering of the people of the old Northern Kingdom. With the leadership of the prophets, they were able to cope with their captivity and cope with the knowledge of the destruction back home. With the temple destroyed, spiritual leaders kept the memory alive of the law of Moses and the message of the prophets. With no temple during the exile, God's Word took on a more central role as people gathered together to connect to God.

It was messages like we have read in the Book of Isaiah that gave hope and sustained the spiritual identity of the exiles in Babylonian captivity. The next large-scale movement of people foreseen in this message of hope had to do with the rise of the Persian Empire, led by Cyrus. This next scattering to happen would actually involve a bunch of migrations that were more like gatherings than scatterings.

Cyrus followed a very different policy than the Assyrians and Babylonians before him. We actually have a record outside the Bible of the policy that Cyrus followed. The name of this record is called the Cyrus Cylinder. It was discovered almost 140 years ago in the ancient ruins of Babylon in what is now Iraq. Its home is in the British Museum. It tells of the conquest of Babylon and the capture of the last Babylonian king in 539 B.C. by Cyrus. It tells how Cyrus was led to bring peace, to improve the lives of the Babylonians, and to send home all the people who had been displaced by the Babylonian army. It tells of his policy to let people worship the god of their choice and not the god of the conqueror. It tells of his efforts to restore temples all across Mesopotamia and letting people go back to their way of life in their home lands. This was something not heard of at the time. Some have called this clay "document" the first charter of human rights. The Jews are not mentioned specifically, but the record found in the Bible reflects this policy of Cyrus. According to the Bible, Cyrus was being used as God's instrument.

So, when our scripture lesson tells God's people to lift their eyes and look all around and see people being gathered to them, it is a very big deal. The exiles are to visualize themselves back home reconnected to Zion, the mount David established as the center of their life together under God. Zion is personified as a bride dressed in a wedding garment. Everyone who is being gathered to them becomes an ornament on this garment. It is a beautiful picture of God's people being dressed as a bride adorned for her husband, who is God.

The Setting in Which God's People Will Gather

¹⁹ Surely your waste and your desolate places
and your devastated land -
surely now you will be too crowded for your inhabitants,
and those who swallowed you up will be far away.

The condition of the land that once was Israel had become a wasteland, a desolate place, a place of utter devastation. This seems to be the most unlikely place to contain the abundance promised by the prophet. Surely now Zion will be too crowded for all the inhabitants that will be coming. These inhabitants are all the more likely to come, however, because the Babylonian army that swallowed them up will be far away. The Babylonians will be defeated by the Persian army. With the Babylonian army no longer posing a threat, God's scattered people will be able to emerge from captivity and obscurity and gather once again.

Where Did All these Children Come From?

²⁰ The children born in the time of your bereavement
will yet say in your hearing:

“The place is too crowded for me;
make room for me to settle.”

²¹ Then you will say in your heart,
“Who has borne me these?

I was bereaved and barren,
exiled and put away—
so who has reared these?

I was left all alone—
where then have these come from?”

In this scripture, the exiles who have returned home to Zion continue to be personified collectively as a woman – Lady Zion, if you will. With the devastating loss associated with her destruction and the exile of her people, it was as if she had been living in a time of profound bereavement. Surprisingly, it was in this time of bereavement that she bore children – more children than she realized. The exceeding number of children will say in her hearing that there is not enough room for all them to settle. Their sheer numbers will cause them to happily demand more room for them to settle. Lady Zion will ask, “Who has borne me these?” She will say that she was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away. She knows they are her children, but she seems to be unaware when and how they were born and how they were reared. She had been left all alone in exile, so she has no clue where all the children came from. What an amazing picture!

Let's unpack the meaning of this vision. As we have learned, there were multiple waves of Jacob's descendants displaced by war. Some were displaced by the Assyrian army more than a century and a half earlier. Others were displaced by the Babylonian army. In these waves of destruction, people were forced from their homes and scattered across great distances. We call

these Jews in Diaspora. The word “dia-spora” means scattered like spores in the wind. God through the prophet was saying that these children of Jacob/Israel had been growing in number through the years. They had grown in number while hidden from view as persecuted minorities.

It was the rise of Cyrus, the Persian king, that was creating the conditions for God’s children to come out of darkness and show themselves. By removing the threat under which they had lived, they could come out of hiding and rally together. The interesting thing is that not everyone in Babylon returned home at once. Some would continue to live where they were for the rest of their lives. Some Jews in Diaspora from other places would choose to return home and others would form communities where they were. There seems to be no judgment upon those who choose to remain where they had already established a life. Even when they chose to remain, they gathered. They formed faith communities. The places where they met were called synagogues. The life of these communities would be nourished by God’s Word. There will be Jews reviving their spiritual life in Zion, and there will be others who will carry Zion in their hearts and in their life together wherever they happen to live. The story of Esther gives us a view of Jews in Diaspora living in one of the Persian capitals, named Susa.

God Is Making this Happen

²² Thus says the Lord GOD:

I will soon lift up my hand to the nations,
and raise my signal to the peoples;
and they shall bring your sons in their bosom,
and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.

²³ Kings shall be your foster fathers,
and their queens your nursing mothers.

With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you,
and lick the dust of your feet.

Then you will know that I am the LORD;
those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.

Notice that it is the Lord God who makes all this happen. It is God’s hand being lifted to the nations that raises the signal for the nations to play a role in the gathering of people. What was happening throughout the Mediterranean region was happening because of God’s direction. The sons and daughters of Israel, who had been scattered by world events, will be carried on the shoulders of nations – Gentile nations! In all this movement, it is as if Gentile kings and queens will become the temporary foster parents of the Jews during this period of history. It is as if they were brought to this moment to become the servants of the Jews. When all this is happening – and it really would happen – God’s people will hear God say to them, “Then you will KNOW that I am the Lord.” Who else but God could make this happen! Those who wait for the Lord, those who do not give up on God, or give up on their faith, or lose hope, will not be put to shame. There will not be a bit of regret that they put their trust in the Lord.

Fast forward centuries later when Jesus was born into the world and carried out his ministry in the land of ancient Israel. Think about where he started out when he went from town to town. He started in the local synagogues. The apostle Paul, in his missionary journeys, also went first to the local synagogues. The missionary work of the New Testament Church happened throughout the Mediterranean region in a time when it was ruled yet again by Gentiles – Romans in this case. The Romans were not nearly as hospitable as the Persians to God’s work. Yet, it was the infrastructure of the Roman Empire and the relative peace that they enforced that allowed Paul to travel as he did. The Roman Empire provided an abundance of Gentiles who would be receptive to the gospel of Christ. Everywhere there were conversions to Christ, congregations were formed. Believers were gathered. There would be the church in Corinth, the church in Ephesus, the church in Rome, and so on. The New Testament also speaks of the Church as a whole. All the countless local gatherings of believers across the globe constitute the Church, the Body of Christ, and the Bride of Christ.

God would still say to us, “Lift up your eyes all around and see; they all gather, they come to you.” God is still reaching people through the Church. We are to continue lifting our eyes to the people God is gathering to himself in love. We are to be involved in reaching out, inviting, and incorporating the people who are coming to us. The Church is being adorned as a bride for her husband, who is Christ. How beautiful to imagine everyone God gathers as an ornament for the wedding garment.

Prayer

Gracious and merciful God, you have gathered those in bondage and captivity from their scattered places into the light of your glory and love. Help us hear your call to be involved in your work as partners in your new creation, that we may discover significance, joy, and peace in this work that matters, through Christ, the Great Shepherd who gathers His sheep to Himself, Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministerial Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com. Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the “Layered Bible Journey,” at www.layeredbiblejourney.com.

God Offers Deliverance

Summer Quarter: Partners in a New Creation

Unit 1: God Delivers and Restores

Sunday school lesson for the week of June 26, 2022

By Dr. Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 51:1-8

Strength to Pursue Righteousness

51 Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness,
you that seek the LORD.

Look to the rock from which you were hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were dug.

²Look to Abraham your father
and to Sarah who bore you;
for he was but one when I called him,
but I blessed him and made him many.

The message is addressed to those who pursue righteousness and seek the Lord. Later in verse 7 these same people will be addressed as the ones who know righteousness and have God's teaching in their hearts. This is the frame of mind of the scripture lesson's audience. It has a different tone than the *warnings* to pursue righteousness given to God's people *before* they were taken into captivity. It is as if it is being acknowledged that God's people have received discipline through the experience of exile and have learned from it. The readiness level is there. They do not see the pursuit of righteousness as a chore or a burden, but a pursuit that they are being given the privilege to follow. Their heart has been changed, and now, due to the events that are unfolding, they will be unfettered as they seek the Lord.

Looking to the Beginning of their Story

So, what is needed in this pursuit? They are called to look to the rock from which they were hewn and to the quarry from which they were dug. Although the Lord is often called the rock, it seems as if this metaphor is being used in this instance to refer to Abraham, and the quarry refers to Sarah. Abraham and Sarah are the father and mother of faith for God's people. They were the original partners whom God chose to begin this covenant journey with God. From one couple, God made many. The "many" includes the descendants of Isaac and Jacob.

From Jacob came the tribes of Israel. These were the tribes that in the time of Moses were given an allotment of land as they prepared to settle in Canaan – the land of Promise. These were the tribes that David united under his rule – tribes from the northern kingdom united with the southern kingdom. These were the tribes that unfortunately divided again after the death of Solomon. In the 8th century B.C., the descendants of the northern tribes were scattered by the Assyrian army. More than a century later, the Babylonian army scattered the descendants of the southern tribes, the nation of Judah. These were the exiles in Babylon.

The exiles in Babylon are being asked to look to the rock from which they were hewn and the quarry from which they were dug. They were being reminded of the common heritage they shared with the other displaced descendants of Abraham and Sarah. They were being reminded of their spiritual identity in God. They were being reminded of the covenant that God formed

with their ancestors in the faith. They were being called to renew their relationship with God under this covenant.

On the eve of their restoration, they were being called to pursue righteousness. They were being called to seek the Lord. They were being called out of the darkness of captivity into the light of a hopeful future in which they could begin life anew. God was reminding the exiles in Babylon of their brothers and sisters who all look to Abraham and Sarah as their father and mother. These brothers and sisters were scattered all around the Mediterranean region. God was rallying God's people from all over to return to their spiritual home and unite under the banner of pursuing righteousness and seeking the Lord.

Looking to What God Was Doing in their Midst

³ For the LORD will comfort Zion;
he will comfort all her waste places,
and will make her wilderness like Eden,
her desert like the garden of the LORD;
joy and gladness will be found in her,
thanksgiving and the voice of song.

In the first two verses of our scripture lesson, we were told to look to the past. In verse 3 above and in the verses that follow in our scripture lesson, the prophet speaks in the future tense. It is helpful to discern, however, whether the prophet is addressing the near future or a distant future. When the prophet says that the Lord will comfort Zion, the prophet means the near future. In Isaiah 43:19, God said, "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" This draws attention to what God was about to do. It was springing forth even then. There were signs in the events happening in their midst that pointed to this near future. They could perceive this hopeful future for themselves.

In situations in which we are tempted to despair, these are the times in which we need to lean in with greater effort and heightened sensitivity to any signs of hope. When the prophet says that "the Lord will comfort Zion" and "comfort all her waste places," the people in exile could know that God was already doing something in some place just beyond their sight. God was raising up the Persian ruler Cyrus to overthrow the Babylonians so the captives could return home and start anew.

The term "Zion" has messianic overtones. It recalls the mount where David established his capital – the place promised in the Book of Deuteronomy where God would choose to make his name dwell. Just as David's action marked the fulfillment of the promise made in Moses' day, the return of the exiles to Zion would fulfill God's promise to David that the reign of David would never end.

Notice the reference to Eden. God “will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord.” Eden was the original garden paradise where Adam and Eve lived before the Fall of humankind. Every wilderness and every desert that we experience in life is a sign of Eden lost – paradise lost. Is there anything more hopeful for God to say to God’s people than to announce that their wilderness will be turned to Eden? It is no wonder that joy and gladness will be found in the exiles. The news of returning to Zion would fill them with thanksgiving and give them the ability to sing again.

The prophet Jeremiah foretold that the exile would last 70 years, which was much longer than the false hope given by the false prophets in his day. The younger people in Exile would live to see their return to Zion. The older people, who might not live to see that day, would nevertheless be consoled that their children and children’s children would experience it. They would live in terms of that hope. They would continue to pursue righteousness right where they were. They would teach the younger generation to seek the Lord.

In times of despair, not only must we lean in with heightened sensitivity to the work of God in our midst, we must also fill our minds with the promises God has made to us in scripture. We will be blessed as we feed our minds and our souls with the words and images God’s Word provides to us. These not only give us the language of our faith, they give us the language of our hope.

⁴ Listen to me, my people,
and give heed to me, my nation;
for a teaching will go out from me,
and my justice for a light to the peoples.

God was using all of this to get the attention of God’s people. God was urging God’s people to listen and give heed to God. God was using all of this to teach God’s people, and teach any who would observe what was happening to God’s people. God wanted to get God’s people noticed by other nations, so that God’s teaching and justice would serve as a light to the peoples.

⁵ I will bring near my deliverance swiftly,
my salvation has gone out
and my arms will rule the peoples;
the coastlands wait for me,
and for my arm they hope.

What God was doing would bring deliverance swiftly not only to the descendants of Jacob, but also to other groups of people who had been displaced by wars of conquest. God’s salvation was being distributed. As we have learned in previous lessons, the policy of Cyrus would change the conditions of many conquered peoples for the better. God’s people must remember that it was God who was making this all happen. It was God’s arm creating the conditions of hope.

Looking to What God Will Do in the End

⁶Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth beneath;
for the heavens will vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment,
and those who live on it will die like gnats;^[a]
but my salvation will be forever,
and my deliverance will never be ended.

Not only must we look to the near future, but we also must look at times to a distant future on the horizon. We must look to the end. The study of end-times is called “eschatology.” We must remember that the “end” should really be thought of as the “end of the beginning.” It is the end of time as we know it, but at the same time it is the beginning of eternity. The reason we look to this more distant future is because we need to know the goal of history.

When we reach the true goal of history, we will know what really mattered and what did not. When you look both at the heavens above and the earth beneath, you are looking at that which will one day vanish like smoke, wear out like a garment, or die like a gnat. It is difficult to see anything hopeful in this description. To make sense of this you must look at the words that follow: “but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.”

Some of our concerns in this earth-bound, time-bound arena in which we live will one day be exposed as fleeting preoccupations and of no eternal importance. Much of what we see around us – our temporal, or time-bound existence – will give way to what is lasting and enduring and of ultimate concern. Our materialism and consumerism will surely be unmasked as a hugely unprofitable waste of time and energy. God’s ultimate salvation and ultimate deliverance will be experienced in the activities we do that have eternal significance. For instance, the significance of what we do for others will last longer in most cases than what we do for ourselves.

⁷Listen to me, you who know righteousness,
you people who have my teaching in your hearts;
do not fear the reproach of others,
and do not be dismayed when they revile you.

⁸For the moth will eat them up like a garment,
and the worm will eat them like wool;
but my deliverance will be forever,
and my salvation to all generations.

God was speaking to people who knew righteousness and had God’s teaching in their hearts. They had the basis to judge what is lasting and what is fleeting. This did not mean that it would always be easy to pursue righteousness and seek God. There will always be others whose reproach we must bear. There will be people who will revile us. Why is this so?

Whenever we pursue righteousness it may make others feel uncomfortable. Those who will become uncomfortable around us might rather live according to the status quo. When we give our lives more and more to pursuits with enduring significance, we may end up leaving behind some of our friends who see our new ways as a departure from the ways that were familiar and therefore comfortable to them.

Our scripture lesson encourages those who pursue righteousness not to fear the reproach of others. They are encouraged not to be dismayed when others revile them. The influence of the negative people will not last. Ultimately, their notions of what is important will go the way of a garment that will eventually be eaten up by moths and worms. God's deliverance stands in sharp contrast because it will be forever. God's salvation will extend to all generations of those who know righteousness and have God's teachings in their hearts.

Our scripture lesson gives us a great game plan to follow. When we are pursuing righteousness and seeking the Lord, we should look to the past, look to the present unfolding right before us, and look to the distant future. What is your spiritual heritage? What has God done for you? How has God saved you? What is God doing in your life right now? How is God saving you now? How has God shown up in your life in the last week? What is God showing you in the thoughts you have about the end of life? What do you want your life to have been about when it is over? What about your life will outlive you? How will you be remembered? Is there anyone who would say that you made a difference in their lives – perhaps a difference with eternal consequences? It is not too late to begin making history.

The theme for the Summer Quarter continues to be "Partners in a New Creation." We began our exploration in the Book of Isaiah where the prophet energized the exiles in Babylon with hopeful visions of their dramatic restoration. What we have learned this far makes the words come alive in the affirmation of faith with which we began this unit:

We are not alone; we live in God's world.

We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,

to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayer

O God of Abraham and Sarah, you challenged your people to look to the rock from which they were hewn and to the quarry from which they were dug. Help us see your faithfulness in our lives right now, that we may gain strength to pursue righteousness and seek you, through our Lord Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministerial Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com. Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the “Layered Bible Journey,” at www.layeredbiblejourney.com.

The Word Becomes Flesh

Summer Quarter: Partners in a New Creation

Unit 2: The Word: The Agent of Creation

Sunday school lesson for the week of July 3, 2022

By Dr. Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: John 1:1-14

The Word: The Agent of Creation

The theme for the Summer Quarter is “Partners in a New Creation.” We are exploring our partnership with God in all that God is creating anew in, through, and around us. We began our exploration in the Book of Isaiah where the prophet energized the exiles in Babylon with hopeful visions of their dramatic restoration. In the new unit we are beginning, we spend five weeks in the Gospel of John. The focus of this unit is on the Word as the agent of creation.

Throughout this quarter we have been referring to an affirmation of faith from The United Church of Canada that is included in the United Methodist Hymnal. The beginning of this affirmation goes like this:

We are not alone; we live in God’s world.

We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh...

In our lesson today, we learn about the Word as the agent of creation and the amazing fact that this same Word is the one who was made flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus. We will explore the implications of this truth.

In John's Gospel, the Christmas Story Begins with a Creation Story

In this lesson there are two men named John that we want to tell apart. Keep in mind that the "John" associated with John's Gospel is not John the Baptist, but rather the disciple of Jesus named John.

John's gospel is unique. When the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are viewed together, they appear to share a similar basic point of view, especially when compared to John's gospel, which has a very different view. For this reason, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the "synoptic gospels" because they share the same "optic" or same view. John's view is different.

The differences in the gospels are really telling when you note where each gospel begins. When Mark's gospel begins, Jesus is already 30 years old, and the opening scene is John the Baptist preaching and baptizing. Luke's gospel also begins with John the Baptist, but it is with the announcement of John's conception, quickly followed by the announcement of Jesus' conception. You could say that Matthew's gospel begins much earlier, because it begins with a genealogy that starts with Abraham.

The gospel that goes back the earliest, by far, is John's gospel: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God."** (John 1:1-2) Compare the beginning of John's gospel with the beginning of Genesis:

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God...

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word...

In John's gospel, the Christmas story does not take us to Bethlehem, but takes us instead to eternity past. The origins of Jesus go back before the world was created, when there was nothing but the "Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Relationship (with God) and identity (was God) are intertwined. The identity of the Word is expressed in relationship. John's gospel gives us a glimpse into the mystery and intimacy of the divine life of our Triune God.

"All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." (John 1:3) All things came into being through the Word. This is why we speak of the Word being the agent of creation. It is natural to think of the "Word" being the agent of creation because each

day in the Genesis account of creation begins with the words “God said...” Psalm 33:6 also echoes this when it says, “By the *word* of the LORD the heavens were made and all their host by the *breath* of his mouth.” Think of the intimate connection between a word, the one who speaks the word, and the breath it takes to speak the word. God spoke creation into being through the Word, and by God’s breath, or *pneuma*, which is also translated “Spirit.”

The New Testament Greek word that is translated into “Word” is “Logos.” We get our word “logic” from this word. John is saying that the “Word” is the logic of creation. We find this idea in Proverbs 8:22-31 where it personifies the wisdom involved in creation. Read these words:

“The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, *before the beginning of the earth.*
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth,
when he had not yet made earth and fields
or the world’s first bits of soil.
When he established the heavens, *I was there*;
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker,
and I was daily his delight,
playing before him always,
playing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.”

This scripture passage from Proverbs resonates with the idea that the Word was with God before creation and that all things came into being through the Word in the act of creation. You get a sense of the joy that surely was involved in creation between God and the master worker, the Word. In this passage from Proverbs, you see how this joy and delight also carried over into the creation of the human race. John’s gospel echoes this: “**What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.**” (John 1:3b-4) The Word, the agent of creation, is the giver of life to creation, and the life it gives to the human race is also what gives light to all people. The Word provides life and illumination.

The Light and the Darkness

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:5) With the mere mention of darkness, we have all of a sudden jumped to another point in the story that assumes the fall of humankind has taken place. We know that sin was introduced into the human race through humankind’s rebellion and disobedience. Darkness exists in the human race because of sin, but the light of the Word has been shining in this darkness in all the centuries between Adam and the advent of the Christmas story. In this span of time, darkness was never able to overcome the light. The light has held back the darkness until the time was fulfilled that God’s Son should be born.

John’s gospel takes us next to the ministry of John the Baptist. **“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”** (John 1:6-9) John the Baptist was sent from God to be the forerunner of the light. He was not the light, but the one sent to bear witness to the light, in preparation for the light that was coming into the world. John understood that someone infinitely greater than he was coming into the world – the true light which enlightens everyone. John’s job was to testify to the light so that all might *believe* in the light.

Believing is very important in John’s gospel. Believing is mentioned throughout the gospel. All four gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – are referred to in Christian tradition as the four evangelists. John’s gospel, especially, has this relentless evangelistic force throughout. The implications of believing and the obstacles to believing come up throughout John’s gospel. John the Baptist became the first evangelist for Jesus, because he was sent into the world for this very purpose. It was a major part of God’s plan.

When John’s ministry was in full swing, Jesus was already born and was an adult, but Jesus had not begun his public ministry. This is something to ponder. It was God’s plan that the Word not introduce himself. It was God’s plan that John the Baptist introduce the Word and prepare people for the coming of the true light which enlightens everyone. This has always been the nature of believing the gospel. John was not the light; he was just a man. The gospel being shared with us from an ordinary man or woman is what precedes our believing. It becomes a part of the experience. This was intended. A part of the experience of believing involves the witness who willingly and lovingly shares the gospel from his or her first-hand experience of the true light so that we also come to believe in the true light.

The World that the Word Was Entering

The true light was coming into the world, but what kind of world was the light entering? **“He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.”** (John 1:10) The setting of John’s Christmas story is unique. Bethlehem is never

mentioned. Ponder that. The focus is not on Mary or Joseph or the stable. The setting for the Christmas story that we are to picture is the whole world. There is a cosmic dimension to John's Christmas story. And this is the very ironic part: the Word came into a world that came into being through him, but in many ways did not know him. This should have been a homecoming of sorts, but it wasn't. The Word was entering the scene of rebellion.

“He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.” (John 1:11) The Word came to the Jewish people. His mother was a Jewish maiden. He was raised in a Jewish home and a Jewish community. He was born in the land where the story of the covenant people happened. This was foretold in the Jewish prophecies. The 12 disciples were Jews. His audiences were mostly Jewish and his followers were mostly Jewish. The Word had the homefield advantage. But when it came to the trial before the crucifixion, the rejection was the story. His own people did not accept him on that day. This also is ironic. We learn a lot in John's gospel about believing and obstacles to believing.

The Gospel We Believe

“But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13) What we learn about the setting of the Christmas story is that there were a lot of forces present that would cause people not to believe as the story unfolded. Although there is a backdrop of rejection present throughout the story, John's gospel is filled with amazing stories of how people came to believe. They received him. They were receptive to ideas that were outside the box. They could suspend their preconceptions long enough to hear him out. They were not so invested in the old order of things that they refused to listen to a new order God was bringing into human history. Then they believed in him.

Once they believed in him, he gave power to become children of God. Something deeply transformative happens when a person goes from being merely open-minded about God to becoming a child of God. The only way to truly express it is to say that they are re-born. They are born of God. It is different from being born in the human sense where blood, genetics, the will of the flesh, and the will of parents are involved. They are born of the power that is released through the will of God upon believing. A very relational and spiritual transaction takes place that makes a human into a believer, not someone who rejects, rebels, or sits on the fence. It makes the human into a child of God. The power to become children of God continues on in the believer's life.

The Incarnation

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) From the first verse of John onward, we knew that the Word was going to become flesh, but it is still amazing to ponder it. The Word who existed in the beginning before the creation of the world was sent into the world

as a human being. The Word who was and is the agent of creation came in the flesh. The Word who had a celestial home in eternity past was implanted in the womb of his human mother. The Word came into the world as a baby completely dependent on a young mother and stand-in father.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians (2:6-7), says it this way: “though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness.”

From this story of the Word becoming flesh comes the doctrine of the Incarnation. “Carne” means “flesh.” The Incarnation is the belief that the Word became flesh. This doctrine is central to our Christian faith. In the Apostles’ Creed, we say that Jesus “was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary.” Here are a few implications that we can draw from the Incarnation.

- We see who God is. Before the word became flesh, no one had ever seen God. When the Word became flesh, however, believers could see God the Father revealed in his Son. They could see God’s divine glory in human form. As the Letter to the Hebrews puts it: “He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being.” (Hebrews 1:3)
- We see the divine potential of the human race. Throughout the gospels we see the perfect relationship unfold between a human being and God. We see the Son’s reliance upon his Father. We see his good life. We see his good life coming into conflict with a rebellious world. Throughout we see his incredible faithfulness to his mission. We see a servant. It is not that we see his divinity despite being a servant. We see his divinity come through especially by being a servant. We see his love for humanity and the way he stayed true to God. Jesus, the Word made flesh, was and is full of grace and truth.
- He came to take our place. Being born a human being, he was able to be one of us. When the time came for him to stand in for us, he would be able and willing to do it. He took our place when he willingly offered himself to be sacrificed on the cross. The sinless one took upon himself the sins of the world. When he died on the cross, he took upon himself the punishment that should have been ours. In this way, he made atonement for our sin. He experienced death so that we could experience eternal life.
- God drew near us when the Word became flesh. The Word, who was with God and was God, came to live among us. Those who believe this never have to think of God being some remote, detached figure. According to Matthew 1:23, Jesus is our Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” The God of the universe demonstrated the intimate nature of his love for us by sending his Son into the world – a perfect reflection of himself into the world in which we live. We can experience intimacy with God through our relationship with Jesus Christ.

These verses in the first chapter of John’s gospel prepare us for all that follows in this unit. Continue to reflect on the implications of the Incarnation. Remember:

We are not alone; we live in God’s world.

We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh...

Prayer

Lord God | You are the Revealer, and Your Son is the Revelation: You are the Speaker, and Jesus is the Word | Help us to see in Jesus' life, ministry, and message, the Word and just how the Word is made flesh | That we might see the grace and truth in it, and might take note how we are responding to the Word | Through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh to dwell among us, Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministerial Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com. Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the "Layered Bible Journey," at www.layeredbiblejourney.com.

A royal priesthood of 12-year-olds

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

ANNE PACKARD

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. 1 Peter 2:9

It's truly the most wonderful time of the year again. There is no snow. Instead, it is 90 degrees with 90 percent humidity and a 20 percent chance of afternoon showers. There are no gifts to buy or presents to wrap. Instead, we are loading up on boxes of popsicles and bottles of bubbles. There are no green trees to light and decorate. Instead, there is Hawaiian-themed décor to purchase and assemble. It's summer camp time!

This year's passage is 1 Peter 2:9 and we at the Moore Methodist Museum are hitting the royal part of that scripture hard. The Queen's Jubilee has us dreaming of crowns and corgis, scones and castles. The campers will begin their time at the Museum by eating Ring Pops (a lollipop shaped like a big, gaudy ring) and decorating their very own crowns. We even splurged for stick on "jewels" because nothing is too good for our royal priesthood. They will play games and try to find the "worms" in the bowl of beans. These visitors will be a mess of sticky giggles and that is just the way we like it.

Sometime during their hour with us, we hope to demonstrate the difference between being royal in the world versus being royal in God's world. We hope to lead them from their jewel-encrusted crowns to a crown of thorns. Take them from a banquet feast of Ring Pops to a simple meal of

bread and wine. Show them that the best way to win a game is to finish with the least amount of points.

If I had one wish this summer, it would be to have summer camp for adults. I truly think we need it after the last few years. I think we need the candy, games, and complete foolishness that comes with camp. I also think we need to remember what is most important and that these things are often the most simple: good friends, much laughter, the true joy of God.

So, whether you are attending camp this summer or not, please take the time to eat s'mores, sing camp songs, and laugh until your cheeks hurt. Enjoy the sunshine and warmth, swim in cool water, make time for friends. Remind yourself of the true joy of summer and of Christian fellowship. Here's to the royal priesthood of 12-year-olds!

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.

But Grace said

PATHWAY TO HIS PRESENCE

B.J. FUNK

My car broke down and I needed a loaner while it was being repaired. You've gotten a loaner before, right? How much gas did it have in it? I thought so. Almost on empty. Mine too. I think they learn that in car school. So, I went to the gas station right away and moved the line way above empty.

After a few days, I learned that my car was in worse shape than I thought. I needed a new engine. That would take a while. Meanwhile, I had places to go. A sign hollered at me from the dashboard: "38 miles left before empty."

I was in unfamiliar territory, with an unfamiliar car, but found a dilapidated gas station with a handwritten sign on the pump: "Only have 87 here." (I love living in small-town south Georgia.) I could not for the life of me figure out how to get the pump to work. Wouldn't you know, I was on a tight schedule and didn't have time to worry with an old pump. I went inside to ask for help, standing behind three people taking their time with the only clerk in the store. Oh, and there was the older man waiting to buy lottery tickets.

But, the good thing about small-town south Georgia is that people are more than willing to help. I drove away with three-quarters of a tank.

Two days later I had driven to church and back many times and had a song of joy in my heart. My car was almost repaired. I looked at the amount of gas, and it looked like I could be almost

on empty by the next day. Perfect. I could give it back to them with about the same amount of gas it had when I got it! That's fair, right?

And then, clear out of nowhere, Grace said, "BJ, remember when your children's daddy divorced you and later abandoned the boys? When I got you, you were below empty.

"I didn't leave you there. I lovingly filled you up with my Spirit so you could get back and drive safely on the road of life again."

Humility and I waited as the pump gurgled its last bit of gas into my car. Then, I smiled as I drove back to the repair shop and left my loaner with a full tank of gas. That's fair, right?

Grace always tells me to do more than is expected. Kind of like what God does for me.

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

Retired Clergy Birthdays – June 2022

- 6/02 – Jan Durham: 103 Willeford Dr.; Savannah, GA 31411
- 6/03 – Cindy Garrard: PO Box 39; Midland, GA 31820
- 6/03 – Joyce Payne: 423 Nandina Ct.; Warner Robins, GA 31088
- 6/04 – Frank Parr: 24 Wylly Ave.; Savannah, GA 31406
- 6/05 – Pam France: 41 Holsteiner Lane; Dallas, GA 30132
- 6/06 – W. Raymond Wilder, Jr.: 2001 South Lee St.; Americus, GA 31709
- 6/06 – Sandra Wilson: 4657 Twin Oak Dr.; Macon, GA 31210
- 6/07 – Bob Williams: PO Box 665; Dublin, GA 31040
- 6/08 – Marcia Cochran: 344 Stone Mill Dr.; Brunswick, GA 31520
- 6/09 – John Clements: 468 Edwards Creek Rd.; Alamo, GA 30411
- 6/09 – Whit Kirkland: 551 Kirkland Dr.; Byron, GA 31008
- 6/09 – Sylvia Ross: 2000 Cambridge Ave. #331; Wyomissing, PA 19610
- 6/09 – Matt Woodbery: Box 4028; APO AE 09096
- 6/10 – Bill Huddle: 5310 Winding Lakes Dr.; Cumming, GA 30028
- 6/10 – Charles Smith, Jr.: 4102 Serendipity Ct.; Martinez, GA 30907
- 6/15 – Mira Barrett: 433 Paul St.; Portal, GA 30450
- 6/15 – Stephen Webb: 260 Riverchase Dr.; Bainbridge, GA 39819
- 6/17 – Charles Cravey: 6500 Clito Rd.; Statesboro, GA 30461
- 6/17 – William Harris: 111 Ingham St.; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
- 6/17 – Heyward Hiers: PO Box 187; Berlin, GA 31722
- 6/18 – Leland Collins: 130 Surrey Place; Perry, GA 31069
- 6/20 – Glen Hancock: 3098 Rufus Thompson Rd.; Donalsonville, GA 39845
- 6/20 – Saunders Pinckard: PO Box 6555; Americus, GA 31709
- 6/20 – Jim Rush: 160 University Park Dr.; Homewood, AL 35209

6/21 – Nancylee Cater: PO Box 8547; Warner Robins, GA 31095
6/21 – Lonzie Wester: 2616 Winchester Rd.; Waycross, GA 31501
6/23 – Sue Diebolt: 2006 Waverly Ct.; Lancaster, SC 29720
6/23 – Don King: 140 Long Pines Circle; East Dublin, GA 31027
6/24 – Doug Harvey: 5109 River Rd.; Jakin, GA 39861
6/24 – Jack Knight: 255 Cross Country Chase; Stokesdale, NC 27357
6/24 – Benjy Varnell: 100 Militia Hill Way; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
6/25 – Gary Brady: PO Box 382; Ochlocknee, GA 31773
6/25 – Russ Elkins: 104 Oak Dr.; Adel, GA 31620
6/25 – Jim Emery: 3855 Dennis Creek Rd.; Talbotton, GA 31827
6/26 – C. Graton Helms: PO Box 4476; Eastman, GA 31023
6/26 – Tom Johnson: PO Box 1202; Pine Mountain, GA 31822
6/27 – Bill Strickland: PO Box 355; Portal, GA 30450
6/28 – Ethan Strom: 384 Midnight Cypress Dr.; Winter Haven, FL 33881
6/29 – Nancy Scarbrough: 1345 Hardeman Ave. #239; Macon, GA 31201
6/30 – Roy Dial, III: 3015 Chadbourne Trail; Alpharetta, GA 30004
6/30 – Sally Flowers: 507 Sunnymeade Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31605

OBITUARIES

Rev. Bill Dupree

Well known Americus citizen Rev. Bill Dupree died on June 4, 2022, at age 89.

Funeral services were held Saturday, June 11, at the First United Methodist Church of Americus. Rev. Daryl Brown officiated. Interment followed in Oak Grove Cemetery.

He was born in 1932 in the Concord community of Sumter County to Charlie and Lula Belle (Weaver) Dupree. Bill graduated from Concord School, Americus High School, and Georgia Southwestern College when it was a Junior College where Dr. Henry King Stanford was president. Later he received his Senior College degree from Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky and a Master's Degree from Emory University in Atlanta.

Bill served as a pastor in the South Georgia Methodist Conference for 44 years. From 1980-1985 he was pastor of Americus First United Methodist Church. He served his first church at Bronwood near Dawson when he was 19 years old and a student at Georgia Southwestern College. The first five years of his 1998 retirement he preached in over 100 different churches including over 30 times at Rehoboth Baptist Church in Sumter County. He also served a year as interim pastor at Salem Methodist Church on Upper River Road and at his home church, Concord Methodist Church, on the highway to Buena Vista. Bill loved the ministry. He was dedicated to spreading the word of God and touched many lives throughout his ministry. He will be missed by all those who knew him.

Bill's hobbies included collecting Indian artifacts from the fields of south Georgia. He also enjoyed traveling the world and genealogy, having published a 500-page Dupree family history.

Bill and his wife Sue lived for 24 years in retirement at Magnolia Manor in Americus. They were married for 65 years until her death in 2021. They are survived by two daughters: Susan Nichols (Mike) of Brentwood, Tennessee, and Mary Lynn Matthews (Jeff) of St. George, Utah; one grandchild, Kathryn Nichols Kresse (Jonathon); and one great-grandchild, Oliver Kresse, of Antioch, Tennessee.

For those wishing to do so, memorial contributions are suggested to the League of the Good Samaritan, c/o Magnolia Manor, 2001 S. Lee St., Americus, GA 31709; or to the First United Methodist Church of Americus, 200 S. Lee St., Americus, GA 31709.

To sign our online guestbook and express your condolences to the family, please visit www.hancockfuneralhomeinc.com

Hancock Funeral Home, 427 S. Lee St., is honored to be entrusted with these arrangements for Rev. Bill Dupree.

Rev. V. L. Daughtery Jr.

The Rev. Vergil Lacy (V.L.) Daughtery Jr. passed away peacefully at his home after a short illness on June 8, 2022, surrounded by family. He was born in Adel, GA, on January 11, 1934, where he was a graduate of the public schools of Cook County and played fullback on the Cook High School 1949 state championship football team. He was in the last graduating class from the junior college Emory at Valdosta, where he earned an Associate of Arts with honors. He also earned a bachelor's degree with honors from Valdosta State University (VSU) with a major in History and a minor in English. He earned a Master of Divinity, magna cum laude, from Emory University's Candler School of Theology in 1958.

A partial list of his leadership in the South Georgia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church (UMC) includes Chair of the South Georgia Conference Council on Ministries (1984-1987); Trustee of Wesley Glen Ministries (1987-1995); President of Wesley Glen Board of Trustees (1995-1999); President of the Board of Trustees, South Georgia Methodist Home for Children and Youth (1986-1992); President of the South Georgia Cabinet (1990-1991); Trustee of Magnolia Manor (1992-1999); and Member (1985-1996) and President (1996-2000) of the Council on Finance and Administration of the South Georgia Annual Conference.

He was a five-time elected delegate to the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference. He was a four-time elected delegate to the General Conference. He was a delegate to the World Methodist Conference in Kenya (1986) and Brighton, England (2001). He was a Member of the World Methodist Council 1991-1996 (Singapore) and 1996-2000 (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). He was also a President of the Valdosta Rotary Club (2001-2002).

Daughtery had a lifetime of ministry. While in college he served as a Youth and Children's Director at Quitman UMC. He served Westview in Valdosta (1958-1961), Tennille (1961-1965), Cuthbert (1965-1970), Epworth in Savannah (1970-1976), Thomasville First (1976-1982), Mulberry in Macon (1982-1987), District Superintendent of the Valdosta District (1987-1993) and Park Avenue UMC in Valdosta (1993-1999). While a District Superintendent, he was a driving force behind the creation of Magnolia Manor Moultrie. His love of children led him to work for the creation of The Methodist Home for Children and Youth in Valdosta. He retired in 1999, but he continued to work on special projects such as VSU Wesley Foundation. While in retirement, he continued to teach Sunday school and Bible studies and preach as long as he was able.

He was given both the Dr. S. Walter Martin Visionary Award for Extraordinary Leadership and the Thomas O. Marshall, Jr. Good Samaritan Award in 2003.

He was preceded in death by his youngest son, Peter John, his brother, Frank Daughtry, and his sister, Patricia Brandell. He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Catherine Tipton Daughtery; a son, Vergil III (Beth) Daughtery; a daughter, Joy Dickinson; and a daughter-in-law, Julie Daughtery. His grandchildren include Vergil IV (Kimberly), Sara Fiffick (Ryan), Meg Daughtery and Sara Dickinson. His great-grandchildren reside in Norwich, England, and include Kayley, Morgan, Elle, Vergil V and Charlie Daughtery. He is also survived by his sisters-in-law Elizabeth (Libby) Webb, Sylvia Daughtery and Pat Tipton; his brother-in-law, Dick Brandell; and several nieces and nephews.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to The Methodist Home for Children and Youth in Valdosta (themethodisthome.org/donate), VSU Wesley Foundation (vsuwesley.com), Wesley Glen Ministries marked for Daughtery Home (wesleyglenministries.com) or Magnolia Manor Moultrie (magnoliamanor.com/moultrie).

Services are tentatively scheduled for Sunday, June 12, 2022 at Park Avenue United Methodist Church. Visitation will be on Saturday from 6-8 pm at Carson McLane Funeral Home.



Scripture Readings – June 14 edition

June 19

Second Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 19:1-15a

Psalm 42 (UMH 777)

Galatians 3:23-29

Luke 8:26-39

June 26

Third Sunday after Pentecost

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20 (UMH 798)

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Luke 9:51-62

July 3

Third Sunday after Pentecost

2 Kings 5:1-14

Psalm 30 (UMH 762)

Galatians 6:(1-6) 7-16

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 6/14/2022 edition

Wesley Glen Day – June 19

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 19 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

Certified Lay Ministry, Summer Immersion, Brunswick – June 20-24

If you've always wanted to pursue your Certified Lay Ministry certification but didn't have the weekends to give toward classes, our CLM Immersion in Brunswick might be a great option for you! Take off one complete week of work and join us for an immersion that will allow you to complete all your classes in one week. Then finish up the assignments on your own time and finish up after the week is over! Sound like something you'd be interested in? Register today: sgaumc.org/certifiedlayministrytraining

Mission u – July 14-17

Mission u provides opportunities to prepare for leadership in mission study and personal growth. It's a weekend full of worship, service, training, and study. Mission u will motivate, inform, challenge and enrich your commitment to global ministry. Mission u is set for July 14-17 at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. The retreat theme is "Luke 13: A Transformative Biblical Curriculum for Adults, Children & Youth." [More information](#) | [Download the flyer](#) | [Register now](#) | [Click here for hotel information](#)

Georgia Pastors' School – July 18-21

Active and retired United Methodist clergy and their families are invited to Georgia Pastors' School at Epworth By The Sea July 18-21. Find registration and information at www.georgiapastorsschool.org.

Online Basic Lay Servant Training – Aug. 9, 11, 16, 18

Lay Servant training is designed to educate those persons interested in stretching their faith to participate more fully in the ministries of the church. They have three main areas of focus: Leading, Caring, and Communicating. The basic class is based on Cokesbury's book, "Lay Servant Ministries Basic Course," which teaches a basic understanding of ministry in the United Methodist Tradition. Included in the course is the following: Wesleyan Tradition and Foundations, Spiritual Gifts, Servant Leadership, Caring Ministries, Communicating, and Sharing Your Faith. Basic LSM Training includes a basic foundation of the faith and an introduction to leadership. This training will be offered via Zoom. You must complete all of the scheduled dates to complete your training. To participate you will need either a cell phone that will allow you to download the Zoom app (please do so ahead of time) or a laptop, a steady wifi connection, and a willingness to learn in a modern way. Registration fee for the class is \$25. (Note: Basic Lay Servant class must be completed before taking Advanced Class). For more information contact Anne Bosarge, anne@thechapelministries.com. [More information](#) / [Register](#)

Called Annual Conference Session – Aug. 20

Bishop David Graves has called a special session of the SGA Annual Conference. www.sgaumc.org/called-annual-conference-session

Golden Cross Sunday – Aug. 21

Golden Cross began in 1908 with the commitment of Methodists in Dallas, Texas to provide the first health care to persons who could not afford it. They began to receive offerings for the expenses of the poor patients at Methodist Hospital in that city. By 1930, the concept was officially adopted throughout the predecessor denominations of The United Methodist Church. Today, Golden Cross is a ministry that reaches out in love to the laity in our Annual Conference who are experiencing financial difficulty due to excessive medical expenses. Through Golden Cross, United Methodists care for members of our local churches in time of emotional stress and financial need. Each church is asked to observe Golden Cross Sunday to receive an offering and send it to the conference treasurer.