

## **SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – AUGUST 2 EDITION**

### **A note from the editor**

Everyone has a story.

And for more than 13 years you've given me the privilege of telling your stories. What an honor and joy it has been.

For 13 years I've gotten to know you, learned what's important to you, and listened as you shared how God is at work in your lives and in your communities. You've opened your hearts and doors to me and allowed me to share your stories with others, and for that I am incredibly grateful. What a gift.

In these past 13 years I've seen you, the people of the South Georgia Conference, serve wholeheartedly, love extravagantly, give generously, and act justly. Thank you for loving others so very well in the name of Jesus Christ.

This is not goodbye; I plan to continue to write and share your stories as I'm able, so please answer my call when you see my name pop up! You've all become friends and extended family, and even though my job may be changing, my heart remains in the South Georgia Conference.

Thank you, South Georgia. It's been a joy to serve in ministry alongside you and share your incredible stories.

Grace and peace,

Kara

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### **Ellabell UMC shares God's love through brown bag meals**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

Ellabell United Methodist Church has taken to the streets to share the love of Jesus.

Every weekday during the third week of each month, church members stand on a busy street outside the local Dollar General and hand out sacks of food. It's a way to take church to the community, said volunteer and Ellabell UMC member Marilyn Page.

Knowing people might be reluctant to go to a church, the Fishes and Loaves ministry team decided to hand out the food bags about a half mile away from the church building. People still know they're from the congregation, Page said, but they're not intimidated or reluctant to stop.

“Not everybody is going to come to a church,” she said. “We want to make sure that our community knows we’re here and always looks to us for their needs.”

Like many small, rural towns, the past few years have hit Ellabell hard. Many struggle to pay their bills, buy groceries, and put gas in their cars, Page said. The church wanted to help where it could.

“There’s a lot of poverty in our community. We didn’t want anyone to be hungry.”

On Sunday evening, bags are packed with chips, cookies, candy, and fruit. Each morning, fresh ham sandwiches are made and packed into coolers. For an hour and a half Monday through Friday – sooner if the food runs out – volunteers pass out water and bags of food to anyone who stops. People often pause to talk and pray as they pick up food.

“We have been intentional in being out there,” Page said. “We’ve gotten to know people and our community has drawn closer to us through this. I think it shows that we care and that we want to be a part of our community.”

The group hands out 500 bags of food each month – 100 each day they serve. Some people are amazed the food is free and others stop just to donate money to the ministry.

“It’s a wonderful outreach and I’m amazed at the simplicity of it and how effective it is,” said Rev. Patrick Brannen, pastor of Ellabell UMC. “Jesus met people over meals, and it’s something that seems to work very well.”

Volunteering with the Fishes and Loaves ministry is also a great way to meet people, said Rev. Brannen, who was just appointed to the church.

“I love it; it’s a lot of fun and a good way to meet the community,” he said.

For Page, it’s just one more way to let people know she cares.

“We’ve all been in places where they are. We don’t want to stay closed up in a church,” she said. “We always try to show everyone God’s love.”



## **Asbury UMC in Columbus hosts job-readiness program, graduation**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

Asbury United Methodist Church in Columbus recently held a graduation for the first 11 graduates of Columbus’ inaugural Jobs for Life program.

Part of the Chattahoochee Valley Poverty Reduction Coalition (CVPRC), Jobs for Life is an 11-week evangelical job-readiness program to help those who are unemployed and underemployed find work.

Rev. Mike Powell, pastor of Asbury UMC and Stephen's Chapel United Methodist Church in Lumpkin, is a member of the CVPRC and served as a Jobs for Life site leader and facilitator.

A bi-vocational pastor, he says opportunities to serve the community are as much a part of his ministry as preaching on Sunday mornings.

"It was a sermon you could see," Rev. Powell said of the Jobs for Life program. "I'd rather see or participate in a sermon than hear or preach one any day."

Deneka Graham is one of the program's 11 graduates. She participated in the class to learn skills to better provide for herself and her family, she said.

"Jobs for Life has showed me how to handle day-to-day life situations and how to overcome them," she said. "I have learned new ways to handle conflict and how to speak clearly during interviews. I also learned how to handle my roadblocks so they don't stop me!"

The Jobs for Life course held at Asbury UMC was a pilot program in Columbus, but Rev. Powell said the CVPRC is hopeful it can be expanded throughout the city. He also hopes other United Methodist pastors and churches will see the program's impact and join.

"As a pastor, I have to be concerned with my fellow man," he said. "I'm trying to minister to the area, that's part of what the *Discipline* says we're to do. This is what I do; we're talking about changing lives. I see ministry in it."

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## **Heritage at Houston UMC's longstanding breakfast ministry serves spiritual food and physical food**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

"Some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers..."

Others pancake flippers, some egg scramblers, bacon fryers, or coffee pourers.

Maybe that's not exactly how it's written in scripture, but that's the gist of it at Heritage at Houston United Methodist Church.

For 884 Sundays – 17 years – the congregation has served breakfast to anyone and everyone who has walked through the Macon church's doors.

The ministry, named Scrambled Eggs for Jesus, feeds between 60 and 100 people every Sunday, said leader and church member Ray Rover.

“It’s a diverse mix of people including children, prostitutes, drug dealers, people who are living in homelessness, drug users, gang members ... anyone and everyone,” he said. “They come in and get fed. This is holy ground.”

Breakfast ministries aren’t unusual, but Scrambled Eggs for Jesus doesn’t just serve folks food and say goodbye. There are no to-go boxes; those who eat are asked to sit, get to know each other, and listen to a short gospel message.

“We feed anybody who is willing to come in, sit down, have fellowship, hear the Word, and hear about Jesus,” Rover said. “What’s important is that the Word goes forward.”

Each Sunday, a different Macon-area church volunteers to cook, serve, and clean. An ecumenical effort, Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, Presbyterians, community organizations, and even area sports teams help out.

“The Lord has shown me, ‘If He guides, He provides.’ And I’ve never worried about help. To this day I’ve had thousands of helpers serve breakfast,” Rover said. “It’s incredible.”

The food is simple but filling: scrambled eggs, grits, pancakes, bacon or sausage, toast, coffee, and orange juice. The same goes for the message – straightforward, but substantial: scripture, encouragement, and Jesus.

“We talk about the Lord and Jesus, repentance and sin, and how Jesus is our only hope,” Rover said.

Diane Coady began volunteering with Scrambled Eggs for Jesus in December 2019 and has served every Sunday since.

The people keep her coming back week after week, she said.

“I see the need for people to be shown love. It’s more than just breakfast; it’s being able to sit and chat and lead people to Christ,” said Coady, who also attends worship services at Heritage at Houston UMC. “Serving is so easy; it doesn’t cost you much of anything but time.”

Through Scrambled Eggs for Jesus God has shown Coady that real ministry is what happens outside the walls of a church.

“They get the Word, they get spiritual food and physical food,” she said of the breakfast ministry. “We get to sit and talk with them and pray with them. We are doing God’s work. We’re His hands and His feet.”



## **Apply today for Renfro Trust Grant**

Connectional Ministries is accepting applications for the Southeastern Jurisdiction Renfro Trust Grant. This grant is a brick and mortar grant specifically for small, rural churches.

Guidelines, [requirements, and applications can be found here](#). Completed applications must be submitted to Kelly Roberson ([kelly@sgaumc.com](mailto:kelly@sgaumc.com)) by our conference deadline: Monday, August 22, 2022. *(Note: application will say August 1.)*

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## **Coming up in September: District Gatherings with Bishop Graves and Clergy Time Apart with author Tod Bolsinger**

During three weeks in September, Bishop Graves will spend time in the districts visiting, talking with, and listening to clergy and laity. In these three weeks he wants to accomplish two things: to resource 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. [More information](#)

And clergy, don’t miss speaker Tod Bolsinger, author of “Canoeing the Mountains” and “Tempered Resilience,” who will join us Thursday, Sept. 15 for a Clergy Time Apart. Hosted by Bishop David Graves, we will meet from 10 a.m. until noon via Zoom. [More information and registration](#)

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## **Thank you, Kara**

### **FROM THE BISHOP DAVID GRAVES**

It is with a sense of sadness and gratitude that we say farewell to our longtime Advocate editor, Mrs. Kara Witherow. After 13 years, Kara, today, publishes her last edition. I know you will join me in offering Kara our sincerest appreciation as she has faithfully shared the good news of our South Georgia United Methodist churches. She will be greatly missed.

[Watch my video message here](#)

In Christ,

Bishop David Graves

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## **A New Home**

### **Summer Quarter: Partners in a New Creation**

#### **Unit 3: The Great Hope of the Saints**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of August 7, 2022**

**By Dr. Jay Harris**

#### **Lesson Scripture: Revelation 21:1-9**

#### **The Great Hope of the Saints**

We are beginning the third and last unit in our Summer Quarter series entitled “Partners in a New Creation.” The New Creation takes center stage in this unit. The title of this unit is “The Great Hope of the Saints.” You could say that the great hope of the saints is the coming of the New Creation. So, this is a fitting way to round out the Summer quarter’s theme.

Our scripture lessons in this unit come from the last two chapters of the Book of Revelation (or “Revelation,” for short). Some background about Revelation will be given as this lesson unfolds. According to the first verse, this book is “the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place, and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John” who was exiled for his faith. We are not sure if this was the same John who wrote John’s gospel and the three letters of John, or another leader of the Church who is referred to in history as John the Elder. The most important thing though is what the author of Revelation says about himself: “I, John, your brother who share with you the persecution and the kingdom and the endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.’”

You can get a good idea of the context for the Book of Revelation by reading the second and third chapters of Revelation, which contain seven letters – a letter each to these seven churches to which the Revelation of John is addressed. These churches were located in Asia Minor, which is present-day Turkey. The letters show what each church was dealing with, where they were being faithful, and where they were not. For instance, the church in Ephesus had been enduring and bearing up for the sake of Christ’s name and had not grown weary, but it also could be said that they had abandoned the love they had at the first. The letter to the church in Philadelphia does not have anything bad to say about the church, and only contains words of encouragement to them as they faced persecution and hostility from enemies of the church. The letter to Laodicea does not have much good to say about the church, and says that the faith of the church was, at best, lukewarm, and that was not good. Each letter contains words of encouragement and exhortation that they needed to hear.

## **The Old Passes Away, the New Comes**

**“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.”** (Revelation 21:1) This first verse of our lesson makes us very aware that a lot has occurred before we get to the new heaven and new earth. The first heaven and the first earth must pass away before the new comes. Before they pass away, we are told from the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter to the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of Revelation that numerous upheavals will unfold. Revelation tells about seals being opened, trumpets blown, woes announced, bowls of plagues poured out, and all causes of evil thrown into a lake that burns with fire and sulfur.

Revelation is filled with symbolism like this to capture in dramatic fashion the real spiritual warfare that Christians faced. The literary style used here is the same apocalyptic style used in the Old Testament books of Daniel, Zechariah, Joel, and Isaiah 24-27. Although we are not to read these events literally, we are to read them seriously. We should also not read them chronologically. Jesus himself said, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.” (Acts 1:7) It is better to think of the Book of Revelation as an apocalyptic sermon where the main point is being reinforced and expounded upon by relentless repetition and metaphors.

The message behind the symbols is the lure, snare, and harmful effects of idolatry and its corrosive effects on human life and the life of faith. The idolatrous culture of the Roman Empire was one that worshiped idols, filled the public spaces with idols, worshiped emperors, and fed the emperors’ monstrous egos. This culture also fed the superstitious obsessions of ordinary people’s egos, mixed idol worship with unbounded sensuality, and degraded human lives and families. Worst of all, it charged those who tried to separate themselves from that culture with treason, persecuted them, and made their deaths into entertainment and sport. Christians in the 1<sup>st</sup> century who lived under Roman rule faced real conflict and it only got worse in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. We who live in relative safety should remember there has been persecution going on against parts of the Church in every century in various parts of the world.

One of the features of apocalyptic messages is that they present clear choices for a person of faith: good versus evil, faithfulness versus sin, patient endurance versus abandonment of the faith, and ultimately the powers and principalities of this world versus the reign and rule of Christ. The assumption is that if you’re not running up against evil forces, you might be running with them. The idolatry in our culture today is harder to detect. You see it in what people choose to make their god or gods in our narcissistic culture and in the hate and soul-killing behavior in which people engage.

The first heaven and first earth will pass away when the evil forces in heaven and on earth are conquered. It has given great hope to Christians through the ages knowing that evil will be defeated. All of us await the coming of the new heaven and the new earth because it will mark the return of Christ and the completion of his reign. The backdrop of Christ’s promised return

gives the Revelation of John a palpable sense of urgency. It matters how believers deal with the pressures placed upon them by the culture. Not knowing the hour Christ will return means that a believer must be ever vigilant so that he or she will be found being faithful. Attention is given to the virtue of patient endurance. Those who endure through the conflicts and tension are described as “conquerors” who will be rewarded, because their faithfulness overcomes and therefore defeats the pressures to conform to the pagan culture surrounding them.

Notice that when the first heaven and the first earth pass away, the sea is no more. As the sea is vanquished, in Revelation 20:13, we are told that the sea will give up its dead. In the ancient world, the sea was associated with all the victims the sea claimed through the ages who never arrived safely back at port. Survivors who floated on the wreckage of their boats and never made it to shore thirsted to death although surrounded by water because salt water brings death, not life.

### **The Consolation of those Who Remain Faithful**

**“And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”** (Revelation 21:2) The new Jerusalem is the Church, the Bride of Christ. Presently, the Church is not ready to be the Bride of Christ with all of its many flaws, failures, divisions, compromises, and betrayals. So, when we see the Church, the New Jerusalem, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, we are seeing a symbolic picture of the Church that has undergone the refining process of sanctification. We are seeing the Church *as it was always meant to be*. In this vision, the new Jerusalem comes *down out of heaven from God*, meaning that the perfecting of the Church happens through God’s divine interventions and not through mere human effort. This vision provides a beautiful picture of the sanctification of believers.

**“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’”** (Revelation 21:3-4)

Notice that, in this vision, God comes down. God comes down to dwell with humankind. God makes his home with the members of the human family who have persevered. Members of the human family from every nation and ethnicity will be God’s holy possession—God’s people. No longer will God be thought of as “up there” or “out there,” but dwelling *down* with us. This will not be God’s temporary home, but rather God’s eternal home.

One of the burning questions for New Testament Christians was about the members of the Body of Christ who died before Christ’s return, or perhaps died or will die during the persecutions inflicted by the powers of this world. What happens to them? Throughout the Book of Revelation, between descriptions of the numerous upheavals faced by the Church, there are interludes that show the faithful being preserved through death and resurrection. They are

wearing white robes. They are rewarded – not in this life, but in the life to come. We hear about what happens to those who die before Christ’s return – before the battle between good and evil is complete. The voice from heaven tells us: “Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.’” (Rev. 14:13)

We are told that God himself will wipe every tear from our eyes, the eyes of our loved ones, and the saints who have gone before. Not only will God bring comfort and deal with all past misery suffered by the Church, God will put an end to all misery, all suffering, all death, all mourning, all crying, and all pain. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. In Revelation 20:14, we are told that Death and Hades will be thrown into a lake of fire that will bring about the end of death itself. Death and all that is associated with it will pass away.

The Apostle Paul described this moment in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of First Corinthians, which is called the resurrection chapter. Paul was describing how the work of resurrection continues beyond each believer’s resurrection. Resurrection is the force that continues throughout Christ’s reign. Paul wrote, “Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:24-26) When all things are brought into subjection under Christ’s reign, then Christ brings the completed kingdom, and himself, into subjection to God, “so that God may be all in all.”

When all that opposes God is gone, the fullness of God’s holy presence dwells everywhere and fills everything. All of God fills all in the new heaven and the new earth. God is all in all. God dwells in it all. God’s home is in it all, and the believers who have endured to the end are there too, for God has come down to be with and among them. To speak of the completion of Christ’s reign does not mean that the reign of God will end at that time. It means that the reign of God will have taken in everything. The new creation that results will be *just the beginning* – when time as we know it gives way to eternity.

## **A New Creation**

**“And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”**” (Revelation 21:5-6)

In the Book of Revelation, we are brought numerous times to the throne room of God. This is a reference to the fact that God reigns through Christ and the Holy Spirit. The reign of God is an ever-present theme throughout the Bible. The first coming of Christ at his birth marked the advent of the Messiah, the Son of David, God’s anointed One. To be taken to the throne room of God throughout Revelation is a reminder to Christians that, no matter how chaotic things get here on earth, our God reigns.

When the One on the throne announces that he is making all things new, it is a mighty declaration worthy to be written and preserved. God is making all things new – new heaven, new earth, a new situation with every enemy vanquished, a new creation. When God says, *It is done!* God is saying that the completion of God’s reign is already assured. This is the culmination of the revelation. This represents the accomplishment of what God has intended. This is the moment foreseen in the future when God gets all of what God wants. It has already been announced. Although there will still be trials to endure, the ultimate triumph of good over evil has been determined.

God truly is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. God holds the two bookends of history in his hands – Genesis through Revelation. To amplify this point God shows us in the Revelation of John *the spring of the water of life*, which was first revealed in Eden. We’re told in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Genesis that even before God had caused it to rain, “a stream would rise from the earth and water the whole face of the ground...a river [that] flows out of Eden to water the garden.” (Genesis 2:6,10) It is the water that first flowed in Eden that shows up again the Revelation of John. The sea is no more, but the river of the water of life remains. To the thirsty, God offers the water from this river of life as a gift. This is the water that truly satisfies.

Recall what Jesus’ said to the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus spoke about the water she came to draw, saying, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” (John 4:13-14) The water that God offers as a gift satisfies for eternity.

We live in a time in which people are preoccupied with so many things, trying to attain fulfillment but never getting there. Recall what God told the people through the prophet Jeremiah: “for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.” (Jeremiah 2:13) We commit one evil by forsaking God, and we commit a second evil by seeking fulfillment in worthless pursuits outside of God. God is calling his people to seek satisfaction in life from God.

### **Sinners and Saints**

**“Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” (Revelation 21:7-9)**

In this passage, after all that has transpired in the chapters preceding, we see the choice that the members of the seven churches of Revelation faced. Will they conquer or will they surrender to

the pagan culture? It is clear that the culture will be judged. Those who conquer, those who resist the lure of the culture and live out their faith in spite of persecution, will inherit an eternal reward. Is it an easy road? No, it is a difficult road.

When today's scripture lesson refers to the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and liars it refers to the people who seemed in the culture to get a free pass in doing evil. These were often the ones who were seen to benefit from the pagan, narcissistic culture in which Christians suffered. It was also at their hands that Christians suffered. To hear that they will be judged said to Christians that God cared. Injustice does not prevail. God wins.

It is noteworthy that it is one of the angels that carried the plagues who says, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." This is the Church, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. This image is about the sanctification of the Church – the sanctification of you and me. What an intimate image of our relationship with Christ!

The title of this unit is "The Great Hope of the Saints." This brings us to the use of the word "saints." The word here means "holy ones." Are we not a mixture of sinner and saint? Why does the New Testament insist on referring to believers as saints when our sanctification is clearly not complete? God seems intent on calling us saints until we become saints. Clearly, God wants us to live into that term. A famous quote by Goethe says, "If you treat an individual as he is, he will remain how he is. But if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be." A part of "God getting what God wants" is getting us to be saints. As we wage spiritual warfare, it is encouraging to remember that the victory is assured. That is reason enough for us to patiently endure.

### **Prayer**

God of Hope, Comfort, and Renewal, when the old order passes away, You have promised to make all things new. Show us where we need to die to sin and self, and rise to new life in Christ, that we may be sanctified through the influence and work of the Holy Spirit, through our Lord Jesus Christ who is the Alpha and Omega and the bridegroom perfecting His Church, 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](mailto:jharris@sgaumc.com). Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the "Layered Bible Journey," at [www.layeredbiblejourney.com](http://www.layeredbiblejourney.com).*

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## **A New City**

**Summer Quarter: Partners in a New Creation**  
**Unit 3: The Great Hope of the Saints**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of August 14, 2022**

**By Dr. Jay Harris**

**Lesson Scripture: Revelation 21:10-21**

### **Partners in a New Commonwealth**

The title of this lesson is “A New City.” When we think of cities, we often think of skylines, cityscapes, and SIZE! Perhaps a better word to use then is commonwealth – a new commonwealth. A commonwealth makes you think of a particular group of people and how they are organized. The New Testament Greek word which is translated “city” is *polis*. A city is a *poli*-tical entity – a particular social arrangement made up of people. Instead of size, think of the QUALITY of relationships and governance.

Think back to Genesis 11:1-10, to the Tower of Babel, which is one of the earliest stories in the Bible. At first, it just seems to be a story that explains why people began speaking different languages around the world. This story, however, is more than about language. Why did God think the actions of the people were so dangerous that God had to put an end to their work? Notice that they were not just building a tower; they were building a city. They were not just organizing to meet their basic needs. The people in the story wanted the top of the tower they were building to reach into the heavens – in order to make a name for themselves. They were building a monument to their own supposed greatness in their attempt to rival God. Centuries later, the pursuit of fame and power would lead the Egyptian pharaohs to build cities and great monuments at the expense of Hebrew slave labor. Perhaps God’s confusion of the language was meant to place a check on this human tendency toward vanity that so often leads to oppression and betrays the promise of God’s likeness in us.

This story of the Tower of Babel does something else in its placement within the larger biblical story. It tells us that the self-destructive tendencies within humankind that existed before the Flood still exist after the Flood. Something more was needed to realize the potential in the human family as God created it. Something more was needed to express the love that is capable of existing between God and the human beings God created. What happened in the very next chapter was that God made a covenant with Abraham and Sarah. From this covenant, God set out to create a people who live under the reign of God.

We need to keep the word “quality” in mind as we go through today’s scripture lesson in the Book of Revelation. It will feature the new city of God. The structure of the city, its unique building materials, and its dimensions will make us think of the physical. Let’s remember, however, that the Book of Revelation uses symbols. Symbols point beyond themselves to something greater. In this case, the physical will point to the spiritual.

**“And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.”** (Revelation 21:10) Notice that the

holy city Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God. Everything about its creation is divinely directed. The city is a divine creation for human habitation. A city which is God-made and coming down out of heaven from God is in direct contrast to the Tower of Babel, which was human-made and was being built to rise toward the heavens. In the case of the Tower of Babel, God had to confuse the language in order to prevent it from being built. The Tower of Babel was essentially a sin in the making. The holy city being sent from God is a symbol of the opposite – the completion of humankind’s redemption.

The holy city is called the New Jerusalem. Think back to the meaning of Jerusalem for God’s people. We recall what Moses told the people in Deuteronomy when they were about to cross over the Jordan River into the land God had promised them. They were to tear down the high places where the Canaanites worshiped their idols. They were not to worship on those places. Moses said, “But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there.” (Deuteronomy 12:5) At that time the location was not named, nor was it even known, except by God. It was just referred to as the place which would serve as God’s habitation and forever have God’s name attached to it. It was when King David, who took the fortress of Zion inside Jerusalem and made it the City of David, that Jerusalem was revealed as the city God had chosen. Jerusalem is forever associated with God’s name and, by extension, God’s reputation and holy nature.

After David established Jerusalem as his capital, Solomon would build the temple in Jerusalem. The temple and the city would be destroyed later by the Babylonians. The temple and city would be rebuilt, only to be destroyed again by the Romans in 70 AD. Nevertheless, Jerusalem continues to be known as the city in which God’s name dwells, despite its on again off again physical existence. Think of the New Jerusalem of Revelation as a spiritual arrangement of people built to embody God’s ideal and reflect God’s image.

According to Revelation 21:2, the New Jerusalem is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. We therefore associate the New Jerusalem with the Church, the Bride of Christ. The inhabitants of the new city are those who have remained faithful to the Lord through trials and temptations and have been refined. The New Jerusalem is both their habitation and their reward. This is meant to be a depiction of the Church, not as it is now, but as it was always meant to be. As it is being described, we should imagine what the symbols that follow might mean.

**“It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.”** (Revelation 21:11) Although jasper is not the rarest of jewels, it would definitely be considered the rarest of building materials to be used in the construction of a city. When we think of the building of a city, we normally think brick, cut granite, or concrete. What is different about this city is that it is made of materials that can be shined up like crystal and reflect light. It would be radiant because it would be reflecting God’s light and God’s glory. The light of God’s radiance would reflect off this city quite unlike a city built of brick or stone. The city would positively glow off the reflected light of God’s holiness, God’s goodness, and God’s love.

A Church that is the New Jerusalem reflects God's ideal in the collective life of a people in terms of its holiness of life and faith. God's ideal is also reflected in the quality of its relationships – its life together. The God who is, himself, love is reflected in the love shared and expressed by this community of Christ. This community would reflect God's glory. Reflecting God's glory and glorifying God are two ways of saying the same thing. When the Church perfectly embodies the love of Christ, it glorifies God and gives witness to God's love.

This same community that reflects the unity and love of the triune God is the same community described in Revelation 7:9: "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands." In other words, there is great diversity in this ideal portrait of the Church. There is unity in the midst of diversity. The beauty of the Church is in both its diversity and its unity.

**"It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."** (Revelation 21:12-14) Modern cities are often defined by their skylines, but ancient cities were defined by their walls and gates. The strength of the walls were byproducts of their foundations. Notice that the number twelve keeps repeating in the description of the new city. There are twelve gates, three facing east, three facing north, three facing south, and three facing west. On the twelve gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. On the twelve foundations which uphold the four walls are inscribed the names of the twelve apostles.

This is clearly a reference to the Old Testament and New Testament foundations of God's people, the Church, the New Jerusalem. The Church that is God's ideal at the end of time is the fulfillment of the promise God had always envisioned for Israel and the Church. This ideal for the Church is fully informed by the Bible – both parts of the Bible! You should note that there are more Old Testament references in Revelation than any other New Testament book. You could say that the foundations of the Church run very deep.

**"The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, one hundred forty-four cubits by human measurement, which the angel was using."** (Revelation 21:15-17) Notice that the city is shaped like a perfect cube – a symbol of perfection. The number "one hundred forty-four" is a symbolic number because it is twelve multiplied by twelve. This is a continued reference to the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles.

**"The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the**

**third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.”** (Revelation 21:18-21) The gemstone radiance of the New City continues to be emphasized. The city and its streets are pure gold, and everything is polished so that it reflects light like mirrored glass. There is a divine radiance in this symbolic picture of the Church as the light of God’s holy character and love are reflected in the life together of the saints. Gold and gemstones are also valuable. One of the meanings for “glory” that can be traced to its Hebrew origins emphasizes weight, heaviness, and gravity. God’s glory and immense majesty are reflected in the opulence of its construction materials and overall beauty of the New City in Revelation.

The twelve gemstones that adorn the foundations of the walls provide yet another reference to the Old Testament. It could be a reference to the sacred breast piece that the high priest in office wore, beginning with the first high priest, Aaron, the brother of Moses. The instructions for making it are recorded in Exodus 28. It had gold cords and rings, and it featured twelve different gemstones with the names of the twelve tribes (sons) of Israel inscribed on the stones. The twelve stones were arranged three across and in four rows. Wearing a breast piece made it where the high priest bore the concerns of God’s people over his heart when he went before the Lord.

The Letter of Hebrews emphasizes to the New Testament Church that Jesus is our high priest forever. Jesus is the one who brought the perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world. He brought the sacrifice, because he himself was the unblemished Lamb who allowed himself to be sacrificed. The high priest in the Old Testament had to bring the sacrifice over and over every year, but the Letter to the Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice once and for all. The promise and potential for atonement in the Old Testament is brought to complete fulfillment in Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus is therefore our high priest forever.

The dual foundations of the Church in both the Old and New Testaments echo what Paul wrote in his letter to the Church in Ephesus: “So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone; in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. (Ephesians 2:19-22) Paul mentions that the foundation of the Church comes from both the apostles and the prophets – a reference to the New and Old Testaments.

Our scripture in Revelation is the ideal Church revealed at the end of time, but notice that Paul’s appeal was to the Church living in the present. There are two theological terms that describe these two states of the Church: the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. The Church Militant is the Church pursuing, in the present, its redemptive mission of defeating evil’s hold over human lives and systems. The Church Triumphant is the Church of the future after its

mission is completed under the reign of Christ. The Church Militant is imperfect, but it is being made perfect through Christ and the refining fire that overcomes evil.

This picture of the Church at the end of time in Revelation is not intended to describe what the Church is, but what the Church will one day be if it continues to be faithful to its promise and potential in scripture. We should never presume that we are already the Church Triumphant. We should never take on that kind of presumptuous attitude. We should resist resting on our laurels. We should pursue our mission with militant and loving fervor and commitment. We should never presume in any way that we ourselves have arrived. It may sound counterintuitive, but the Church Militant should be filled with a deep sense of humility and dependence on Christ.

A church that pretends to be the Church Triumphant is usually a church that has 1) ceased to care about its mission beyond its walls, and/or 2) has ceased to care about getting better in its relationships as a community of faith. How much does your church care? How much do you care?

## **Prayer**

God of the New Jerusalem, the Church, You are refining Your Church to reflect Your holy nature and love. Continue to show us Your grand design for the Body of Christ and point out to us Her deficiencies in our life together, that we may see glimpses and experience foretastes of Your divine life as we seek to be a Church that reflects your radiant glory, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, 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](mailto:jharris@sgaumc.com). Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the "Layered Bible Journey," at [www.layeredbiblejourney.com](http://www.layeredbiblejourney.com).*

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## **Undo, Redo, or Reset?**

**By Anne Bosarge, *Director of Leadership Strategies and Local Church Resources***

I love icebreaker questions. They are such a great way to begin to get to know people you've never met or to get a feel for where people are when you're leading a group. One of my favorite icebreakers is this simple question, "Would you like to undo, redo, or reset something in your life right now?" Here's how I define those terms:

- Undo: One thing you would like to completely erase
- Redo: One thing you wish you could do again and change
- Reset: An area where you want a complete restart or reboot of the whole thing

Let's break the ice. Would you like to undo, redo, or reset something in your church right now? Maybe you'd like to undo something – the decision to add another service, do away with an

ineffective program, or even a staff hire that has never quite worked. Maybe you'd like to redo something – go back to your Easter service and be more intentional about capturing your guests' contact information, spend more time preparing for your last sermon, or respond differently to that last unsolicited critique. We can all probably think of Undos and Redos, but I bet there are quite a few of us who would just like a complete Reset.

In this “almost post-covid” era, many of us are realizing the churches we have been leading aren't as strong as we may have hoped. We've seen people we thought were committed drop out completely and we've watched as engagement in our programs and ministries decreased as well. Some of us are realizing the discipleship model we were using has become ineffective at making disciples for the transformation of the world. Covid exposed the shallowness of our strategies as some put their faith on a shelf in the face of a global crisis. Even if we could “undo” the pandemic, our problem wouldn't be solved – the pandemic just revealed what was already under the surface. What we need is a reset – a total restart of what discipleship was meant to be in the church.

Let's reset at the beginning – the very beginning of what discipleship was with Jesus! Back in Jesus' day, He chose 12 men to be His first disciples. These men left everything behind and followed Him, not metaphorically or figuratively, but physically! Their goal was literally to become like Jesus, not just in what Jesus knew, but in how He thought, taught, made decisions, and lived. They wanted to imitate Him in the practical details of their lives and let His teaching live in them. This didn't happen in structured classes or programs, but on the roadside and at the dinner table when they were with loved ones. Discipleship was meant to be a life-on-life relationship between the disciple and the master, not just a regularly scheduled impartation of knowledge.

At the end of His time on earth, Jesus called the disciples together and gave them this commissioning, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18b-20). Jesus basically said, “Go and do for others what I have done for you.”

What would it look like if we reset our mindset around discipleship and it became more personal and less institutional? What would it look like if every individual in your church was personally discipling someone else and engaging in faith-filled conversations outside of the walls of the church? What if the people in your church passionately pursued becoming more like Jesus in their lives so they could help others become more like Jesus in return? I think that's a church I would want to be a part of! I think that is a church that would impact the community and leave a lasting legacy.

This fall I'm gathering a group of pastors and laity who are ready to explore what it looks like to do a missional reset. We're not going to ask for an “undo” of the pandemic so we can return to

what was, we'll be talking about what it looks like to be disciples who make disciples. Will you join me as we remember what it means to "make disciples for the transformation of the world?"

To find out more and register, visit [www.sgaumc.org/reset](http://www.sgaumc.org/reset).

*Anne Bosarge serves as the Conference's Director of Leadership Strategies and Local Church Resources. Email her at [abosarge@sgaumc.com](mailto:abosarge@sgaumc.com).*

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## **Christian Perfection**

### **JOHN WESLEY MOMENTS**

#### **DAVE HANSON**

"Nobody is perfect." We have heard it all our lives and often said it ourselves to justify some mistake we have made. The Bible even affirms it when it says, "There is none righteous. No, not one, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It also cautions us by saying, "He who says he is without sin is liar and the truth is not in them."

However, we are also urged to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect. John Wesley believed and taught that we are called to Christian perfection and it is possible in this life.

He taught that Christian perfection does not mean we have perfect knowledge or that we do not make mistakes or are free from temptations. He means that through the grace of God we may find that God's love in our hearts has crowded out self and that our intention in life is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Humility is the hallmark of someone who is growing toward Christian perfection. The closer you get to God, the more you will realize how far you are from the Lord.

Christian Perfection keeps growing. If you look at a perfect acorn you will understand.

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

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## **What happens when God sends people to share the Gospel**

### **By Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, *Conference Secretary for Global Ministries***

Many of us remember Rev H. Eddie Fox. He served for 25 years as the executive director of the World Methodist Evangelism. He came from Sevierville, Tenn. near Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge. He told the world he was from Appalachia and never saw an ocean until the age of 21.

Eddie traveled the world, sharing the Gospel wherever he went. One of the places was in the middle of the Pacific Ocean in a country many of us did not know existed called the Kingdom of Tonga. Eddie also preached at Epworth By The Sea and told us about his many ministries throughout the world. One of those was to this island nation of Tonga. You might ask how in the world Methodism reached the shores of Tonga. I certainly did.

In 1616, Dutch explorers met the inhabitants of Tonga. They were seeking trading partners, not to convert people to Christianity. More ships came to what was then dubbed the Friendly Islands. From 1773-1777, British Navy Captain James Cook's crew sailed the Pacific Ocean and stopped three times on the islands of Tonga.

In 1797, missionaries from the London Missionary Society tried to plant Methodism, but it did not last. Again in 1822 a Methodist missionary from the Wesleyan Missionary Society in London moved there but soon left because of the failing health of his wife. Finally, in 1826, the Wesleyan Missionary Society sent a second missionary and this time it worked.

There is much more to this story, but it is a great example of what can happen when God sends people to share the Gospel message. To learn more details about the early days of Christianity in Tonga read [this excerpt](#).

Today, Tonga has 38,000 members in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. They are part of the World Methodist Council. The official head of the church is also the king of Tonga.

*Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, pastor of Epworth United Methodist Church in Jesup, also serves as Conference Secretary for Global Ministries.*

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## **Retired Clergy Birthdays – August 2022**

- 8/02 – Roger Mays: 1418 Eason Stalvey Rd.; Hahira, GA 31632
- 8/05 – Gordon Dukes: 126 Nelson Ave.; Garden City, GA 31408
- 8/05 – Joe Romigh: 3055 Cabernet Court; Cumming, GA 30041
- 8/06 – Rick Holt: 286 Knoll Rd.; Thomasville, GA 31757
- 8/07 – Wayne Anthony: 5830 Wiltshire Dr.; Columbus, GA 31909
- 8/07 – Ricky Varnell: 11025 Sunbury Rd.; Claxton, GA 30417
- 8/08 – Don Adams: 1104 Wingate Street; Dublin, GA 31021
- 8/08 – Jim Nelson: 3584 Hidden Acres Dr.; Atlanta, GA 30340
- 8/09 – Creede Hinshaw: 2924 Hillandale Circle S; Macon, GA 31204
- 8/10 – Allison Rhodes: 18 Lenox Pointe NE, Suite B; Atlanta, GA 30324
- 8/10 – Shareon Womack: 404 Bobby Ray Rd.; Reidsville, GA 30453
- 8/13 – Mike Huling: 514 Earl Ave.; Claxton, GA 30417
- 8/14 – Randy Spicer: 307 Hartford Rd. E; Ft. Gaines, GA 39851

8/15 – Nathan Godley: 322 E. Oglethorpe Ave.; Savannah, GA 31401  
8/15 – Charles Houston, Jr.: 505 Fort King George Dr.; Darien, GA 31305  
8/16 – Dick Reese: 6593 Patriot Dr.; Columbus, GA 31909  
8/17 – D. Eugene Pollett: 30 Branson Mill Dr. NW; Cartersville, GA 30120  
8/19 – Jim Giddens: 4 Cottenham Circle; Savannah, GA 31411  
8/19 – Jeffery Seeley: 3301 Stinsonville Rd.; Macon, GA 31204  
8/19 – John H. Stephens: 881 Nesbitt Rd.; Pavo, GA 31778  
8/20 – Cleo Gilchrist: 108 Easy St.; Dublin, GA 31021  
8/20 – Dave Hanson: 106 George T. Morris Cir.; St. Simons Island, GA 31522  
8/20 – Bev King: 140 Long Pines Circle; East Dublin, GA 31027  
8/21 – John Eckert: 237 Bartholomew Blvd.; Jeffersonville, IN 47130  
8/22 – Jesse France: 514 I.G. Lanier Rd.; Pembroke, GA 31321  
8/22 – John Powell: 3016 Gin House Rd.; Sylvania, GA 30467  
8/22 – Steve Vinson: 3212 Norcrest Dr.; Oklahoma City, OK 73121-1842  
8/23 – Derek Hobbs: 1708 Sisters Ferry Rd.; Clyo, GA 31303  
8/23 – Joe Johnston: 2109 W. Gramercy Dr.; Green Valley, AZ 85622  
8/24 – Jim Burgess, III: 661 East Plum St.; Jesup, GA 31546  
8/24 – Sam Lamback, Jr.: 821 Wesleyan Dr.; Macon, GA 31210  
8/25 – Charles Puryear: 106 Sandra St.; Thomasville, GA 31792  
8/25 – Elliott Sams: 6400 Poplar Ave.; Memphis, TN 38197  
8/26 – Ashley Randall: 801 Silver Leaf Dr.; Winston-Salem, NC 27103  
8/28 – David Carter: 102 Rivoli Oaks Circle; Macon, GA 31210  
8/28 – Robert Clark: 2022 E Pinetree Blvd.; Thomasville, GA 31792  
8/30 – Jenny Jackson-Adams: 17 Lands End Dr.; Greensboro, NC 27408  
8/31 – Lynn Hurley: PO Box 26; Attapulcus, GA 39815  
8/31 – Willie Beasley: 4451 Mahan Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31632

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## **Scripture Readings – Aug. 2 edition**

### **August 7**

#### ***Ninth Sunday after Pentecost***

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23 (UMH 783)

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Luke 12:32-40

### **August 14**

#### ***Tenth Sunday after Pentecost***

Isaiah 5:1-7

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19 (UMH 801)

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Luke 12:49-56

### **August 21**

#### ***Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost***

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalm 71:1-6 (UMH 794)

Hebrews 12:18-29

Luke 13:10-17

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## **Events in the South Georgia Conference – 8/2/2022 edition**

### **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](mailto: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](http://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.

### **Online Advanced Lay Servant Training – Sept. 13, Sept. 15, Sept. 20, Sept. 22**

Lay Servant training is designed to educate those persons interested in stretching their faith to participate more fully in the ministries of the church. They have three main areas of focus: Leading, Caring, and Communicating. The advanced class, based on Cokesbury's book, "Each One a Minister" by William Carter, is a study of the book of Ephesians and what it teaches about how we are called to use our spiritual gifts. Advanced LSM Training includes learning how to put your spiritual gifts into service. 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 wi-fi 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 at [anne@thechapelministries.com](mailto:anne@thechapelministries.com). [Register](#)

### **Clergy Time Apart with Tod Bolsinger – Sept. 15**

Speaker Tod Bolsinger, author of "Canoeing the Mountains," will join us Thursday, Sept. 15 for a Clergy Time Apart. Hosted by Bishop David Graves, we will meet from 10 a.m. until noon via Zoom. [Register](#)