

## **SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – AUGUST 16 EDITION**

### **Leesburg UMC helps send students back to school with confidence**

**By Kara Witherow, *Advocate contributor***

Thanks to Leesburg United Methodist Church, more than 200 Lee County schoolchildren walked into school Friday, Aug. 5 with full backpacks, fresh haircuts, and new-to-them clothes.

The church’s inaugural Community Back to School Bash, held Sunday, July 31, was a fun family event designed to help relieve some of the back-to-school burden families may feel.

“We realize that preparing for school can be financially challenging,” said Leesburg UMC Children’s Director Hollyanne Craft. “We wanted to help alleviate some of the stress by sending students back to school with confidence – with a fresh haircut, school supplies, new underwear, socks, clothes, and an afternoon of fun. We wanted to help set the stage for a great school year for students.”

The event was funded by generous congregants, community partners, local businesses and churches, and a \$1,500 grant from the South Georgia Conference’s Bishop’s Initiative for Children and Poverty.

Beginning in May, the first Sunday of each month was dubbed “Undie Sunday.” Worshipers brought packs of new socks and underwear and placed them in collection bins. The donated items, along with clothes from the church’s clothing closet, were given out during the Back to School Bash.

“We had a ton of kids and families who came through our clothes closet and picked out back-to-school clothing,” said Rev. Lee Smith, pastor of Leesburg UMC. “It was all about helping those families who needed help.”

Also at the Back to School Bash, representatives from the Lee County Library System registered children and parents for library cards, the Gideons distributed free Bibles, and nine barbers and hair stylists gave free haircuts to children. Bounce houses and free food stations were set up across the street at the Baptist Church.

Partnering with the community and other churches to put on the event was great, said Rev. Smith.

“We just wanted to give kids the things they need and let them have some fun before they go back to school,” he said. “It’s good to do things together for the kingdom of God instead of competing against each other. It was neat to have everyone there.”

Church leaders said they plan to have the Community Back to School Bash next year, and it’s just one way the congregation reaches out to serve those in its community.

“At Leesburg United Methodist Church, we strive to love God and one another, care about our community and make a difference in this world,” Craft said. “We continually look for ways to reach out beyond the walls of our church to help others.”



### **Wesley Monumental Youth give sweat equity to serve their community**

**By Allison Lindsey, *Advocate contributor***

Soaking up one of the last weeks of summer vacation for youth at Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church meant serving God and giving sweat equity for the kingdom through their Local Missions Week.

Around 30 middle and high school students and their adult volunteers spent a week doing service projects around Savannah. They sweated through hot days and put in hard work as they put their faith into practice.

“The Local Missions Week is great for our students because they get to learn about all of the needs right here in our own community and discover ways that God can use them to help,” said Rev. James Owens, Director of Student Ministries at Wesley Monumental UMC in downtown Savannah, Ga.

One of their projects was part of a unique community collaboration with Family Promise of the Coastal Empire, an organization that partners with local groups and ministries to address family homelessness, and Design For Good, a program of the Savannah School of Art and Design (SCAD). Design for Good assigns SCAD students with community organizations for revitalization projects in areas of the city.

For this project, SCAD students and Wesley Monumental students assisted with two houses that will be used by Family Promise to house transitionally homeless families. The youth helped build a deck on each one and helped paint one of them. This contribution paved the way for SCAD students to use their creativity and talents to create a fun outdoor space for families to enjoy. [{WTOC News in Savannah shares about the partnership}](#)

In addition to building and painting the deck for these transitional houses, Wesley Monumental youth volunteers also painted an old church building that will be used as a community center for seniors and children. They also contributed to Wesley Monumental’s food donation and refugee ministries by sorting and delivering items.

Owens shared that volunteering right there at the church was an added bonus for his students.

“They also got to be a part of missions efforts that our church is involved with, in an on-going manner,” said Owens. “The students and our awesome team of adult volunteers served enthusiastically and made it an awesome week!”

*[Family Promise](#) is a national non-profit organization that offers a holistic approach to family homelessness. United Methodist congregations throughout South Georgia partner with the Family Promise’s program through the rotational shelter model in which families experiencing homelessness are temporarily hosted by different local congregations each week and are provided with a safe place to stay, meals, and assistance in meeting their needs. Another model known as the static housing model offers families the opportunity to stay at the same location while they are part of the Family Promise Program.*



## **Called Annual Conference Session is this Saturday, August 20**

In February, Bishop David Graves, episcopal leader of the South Georgia Conference, announced there would be a special session of the Annual Conference held on Saturday, August 20, 2022. The meeting will begin at 10 am and will be held via Zoom and is anticipated to last no longer than one hour.

The purpose of the special session is to vote on any matters related to local church disaffiliations within the South Georgia Annual Conference. Only matters pertaining to the call made by Bishop Graves can be considered.

There are two items of business on the agenda for the called session: completing the process of disaffiliation for churches who have met the requirements outlined in paragraph 2553 in The Book of Discipline and voting on an adjusted 2023 budget.

In the first item of business the South Georgia Conference will vote to ratify the decision of sixty-two local churches to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church. [Click here to read the full resolution](#), which includes the names of all churches to be voted on.

In the second item of business, the Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) is proposing three adjustments to the 2023 budget approved in June. These proposed reductions total \$223,847, which will ensure that remaining churches do not have increased apportionments resulting from local church disaffiliations. [Click here to read more and see the adjusted budget](#).

Registered clergy and lay members to Annual Conference will receive their voting credentials and a link to the Zoom meeting on Tuesday, August 16. Retired clergy not serving a church and clergy on medical leave will automatically receive their credentials on this same day.

A live stream link for non-voting members will be made available on the conference website, [www.sgaumc.org](http://www.sgaumc.org), the morning of August 20.

The agenda for the called session is as follows:

- Welcome & Opening Remarks
- GNTV Online Webinar/Voting Instructions
- Organizing Motions
- Attendance Vote
- Resolution Approving Disaffiliations of Local Churches
- CFA Report: Revision of the 2023 SGA Annual Conference Budget
- Closing Motions
- Adjournment

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## Registration open for fall children's and youth retreats

Registration is now open for KidzQuest, the Conference's annual fall children's retreat for students in third through sixth grades, and Encounter, the Conference's annual youth retreat for students in sixth through twelfth grades.

**KidzQuest** is scheduled for September 23-25 2022, at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island for 3rd-6th grade students. [More information & registration](#)

**Encounter Youth Retreat**, for 6th-12th grade students, will take place November 18-20, 2022, at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. [More information & registration](#)

[www.sgaumc.org/kidzquest](http://www.sgaumc.org/kidzquest)  
[www.sgaumc.org/encounter](http://www.sgaumc.org/encounter)

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## **Renfro Trust Grant application due August 22**

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 David Graves will travel across the South Georgia Conference to meet with clergy and laity in various settings. The purpose of these gatherings is to provide necessary and accurate information around current denominational matters. While the three Sunday regional gatherings are geared toward laity, all are welcome to attend. Clergy will have an opportunity to meet with the bishop while he is in each district for clergy specific meetings.

“I look forward to visiting, talking with, and listening to clergy and laity from each district as we seek to bring clarity around where we are as a denomination and a conference,” said Bishop Graves. “I hope you will make plans now to be a part of a gathering near you.” [Click here for dates and locations](#)

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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## **The River of Life**

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

**Sunday School Lesson for the week of August 21, 2022**  
**By Jay Harris**

**Lesson Scripture: Revelation 22:1-7**

### **The End of the Story Takes Us Back to the Beginning**

In today’s lesson we come not just to the last chapter of the Book of Revelation but to the last chapter of the Bible. Think about that. This is where the story of our faith culminates in the future. This is where, in God’s faithfulness, the arc of human history is directed. We, therefore, want to take it all in as much as we can and ponder its meaning.

**“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree**

**of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”** (Revelation 22:1-2)

When we hear “the river of the water of life” mentioned together with “the tree of life,” we are hearing echoes of the Garden of Eden. We’re told in 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.” It is referred to as a “*river*” that “flows out of Eden to water the garden.” (Genesis 2:6,10) We’re also told that “out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, *the tree of life* also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (Genesis 2:9)

This river of life and tree of life are present where the story of our faith begins in Genesis and present again where the story culminates in Revelation. The story of our faith began in the Garden of Eden, and at the culmination of the journey, there is a return to Eden—at last! This reminds us that there is an overarching epic story that runs through the Bible. The earlier we learn this story by reading the Bible in its entirety the better. Below is an excerpt from a book I have written entitled, Layered Bible Journey.

*Reading the Bible is a means of encountering God and being transformed by the encounter. By reading the Bible we are able to read what God has said and the record of what God has done in human history. Best of all, God continues to speak through the Bible and to act in the lives of those who read it. Be warned, though. The Bible is not just a neat and tidy catalogue of life lessons. It is much richer than that. The amazing variety within scripture is one of the features that make the Bible so rewarding to read. After all, the Bible is not just one book, but a diverse collection of sixty-six books. Within these books there are many stories, and interspersed among these true stories are laws, histories, sermons, teachings, poems, songs, proverbs, prophecies, gospels, letters, parables, visions, and, yes, some genealogies and census findings thrown in. What you have in this is the evidence of a real, continuing encounter between God and many generations of people. It is out of this continuing encounter that an overarching epic story emerges.*

*This is the story of God and God’s people that runs through the Bible. The people in the Bible are often deeply flawed, so this is a story of conflict and redemption. It is also a story of relentless love as God perseveres with these flawed people. We all love a plot like this in a story. The plot takes us on a journey.*

When the last chapter of the Bible takes you back to the beginning of Genesis, it is recalling the epic story running through the Bible. The revelation of the angel to John on the island of Patmos recalls the epic journey of redemption because the angel reveals the conclusion of the story. It serves as a recapitulation of the biblical story—a review of the story’s main points. The point of this is to give encouragement to the New Testament Church by reminding it of its past, revealing its future, and showing the thread connecting the beginning and the end of the story.

When I think of Eden at the beginning and the end of the biblical story, I am reminded of a quote by T.S. Eliot: “We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” In this lesson, we will recall the story of our faith by starting in Eden and returning to Eden. We will ponder what Eden means in the future when we return to it at the culmination of the story.

## **Reviewing Eden in Genesis When It Was Paradise**

In the second chapter of Genesis, the Garden of Eden is paradise. It represents God’s ideal. In this garden paradise, Adam was given meaningful work to do: to till and keep the garden. At this point, there is no such thing as thorns and thistles. In the paradise of Eden, toil and frustration have not become a part of work.

Work in paradise is simply a calling. In Eden, any effort that Adam puts forth will be rewarded many times over by the fruit of God's work. Eden is a picture of bounty and human fulfillment.

To address Adam's isolation, God created animals to become Adam's first companions. God gave Adam the responsibility of naming the animals. Imagine Adam exploring the beautiful diversity of God's living, breathing creation and learning to categorize it and give names to it. When Eden was still perfection, there was no threat or cause for fear posed by the animals toward Adam or posed by Adam toward the animals. Eden is a picture of harmony.

We learn however that none of the animals, amazing as they are, could serve as a suitable partner for Adam. This is when God created Eve. She was created from Adam's rib which helped balance the scales between the sexes. The first woman came from a man, and after that every man that has been born has come from a woman. This is the quintessential picture of mutuality and the basis for true partnership. Adam recognized what he shared with Eve and their loving interdependence when he said, "This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." There is no competition, no conflict, or shame, but a picture of innocence, mutuality, and harmony.

In the paradise of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve both freedom and limits: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden [freedom], but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat [limits], for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." (Genesis 2:16-17) This command was given while Eden was still paradise. This tells us that limits do not diminish our lives but instead maximize our lives. It sounds counterintuitive, but God-given limits increase our freedom and capacity to enjoy true fulfillment.

### **Being Expelled from Eden and the Tree of Life**

In the third chapter of Genesis, Adam and Eve disobeyed God by transgressing the limits God lovingly gave them. They ate the forbidden fruit. They wanted God-like knowledge so that perhaps they would not be as dependent upon God. Their actions amounted to a declaration of their independence. As a consequence, they learned what it means to exist on their own. There was a loss of the harmony that once existed between them and the animal kingdom. Also affected was the spirit of partnership between man and woman. Thorns, thistles, labor, toil, and frustration became a part of work. Labor pains and infant mortality became a part of child-bearing. Humankind's mortal nature became an ever-present reality.

Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden. Due to the sin of Adam and Eve, it became necessary for God to prevent their access to the Tree of Life. In time, they would have been granted access to the Tree of Life had they not transgressed God's command, but we will never know what that story would have looked like. The Lord banished Adam and Eve from the garden by setting the cherubim and a flaming sword "to guard the way to the tree of life." (Genesis 3:24) At this point in the story, we learn that if humankind is ever to return to Eden, it will not be by the same way they were made to leave.

Soon, Cain murdered Abel. In the generations after Cain, unrestrained vengeance and evil created a world so wrought with violence and suffering that God had made the decision to flood the earth and bring an end to what God had started. The only question for God was whether to end the human experiment altogether or use this opportunity to start over and continue the experiment. God decided to begin again. The ark that God instructed Noah to build represented God's desire to preserve a remnant of humanity who would constitute a new beginning for the human race. The rainbow is a sign of this covenant.

### **The Long Journey Back to Eden**

This begins God's beautiful story of redemption with all of its exquisite twists and turns. According to Genesis 12, God took the initiative and chose a couple, Abraham and Sarah, to become the objects of God's

special favor so they could model the blessings of a relationship with God. God made a covenant with them and their descendants to bless them as they, by faith, followed God's leading. They were chosen for this blessing to become a blessing to all the families of the earth.

Their descendants would grow into God's people Israel. When they were eventually enslaved in Egypt, God delivered them. God gave his laws so they could know how to model a life of blessing, and led them back to the land where God had first sent Abraham and Sarah. We see the covenant people become the nation, Israel. An important concern throughout is whether or not they will choose to live faithfully under the reign of God. In the beginning they will live under God's reign without a king, then they will ask for a king. We see God make a promise to King David that his reign will last forever. When we see David's dynasty come to an end, we struggle to see how God was keeping his promise. This is when we hear of the promised coming of God's Messiah.

The story of the New Testament is about the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of God. We see in his story that Jesus is not just another main character. Jesus' life and ministry, his death and resurrection, explain how he is the central character of the Bible and all of human history. Then, we see the story of the Church. After Jesus was raised from the dead and exalted to heaven, we see how his reign is manifested on the earth through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is sent to Christ's followers, they become Christ's hands and feet, his Body, in the world. We see how the Holy Spirit fills flawed men and women, calls them to lead and serve, and restores within them the image of God.

So, when we come to the Book of Revelation, we see a dramatic presentation of the struggles faced by the saints of the Church as they seek to be faithful when beset by temptations and trials. We are made to understand that the upheavals faced during these turbulent times are making way for the breaking in of God's reign. By the time we get to the last two chapters, the future culmination of God's reign unfolds before our eyes. God announces, "Behold, I am making all things new... 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)

### **The Return to Eden in the Last Chapter of the Bible**

The last chapter of the Bible shows us the source of the water that satisfies every thirst. It is the River of Life that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb through the center of the city along its "Main Street." Reaching across both sides of the river is the Tree of Life, producing twelve kinds of fruit for every month of the year. In other words, there is no season during the year that the Tree of Life doesn't produce fruit. Droughts and famines are a thing of the past. As we picture the culmination of God's reign, we see the original bounty that existed in Eden being restored as it was before the Fall. The leaves of the tree provide for the healing of the nations. In the new creation, we see the original harmony of Eden being restored.

**"Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever."** (Revelation 22:3-5)

Nothing accursed will ever exist in the new city—the new creation. In the new Eden, the consequences of a fallen humanity will have been dealt with through the finished work of Christ. All that happened to Adam and Eve when they were expelled from Eden will no longer be a part of the human experience in the new creation. Thorns and thistles and the like that frustrated human fulfillment will not be found in the new creation. Nor will the pains, fears, and sometimes perilous nature of childbearing be found. All the ancient enmities will be gone that grew out of the conflict between Adam and the serpent, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, as well as their descendants.

There will be no need for the descendants of Adam and Eve to try to hide from God like they did when they rebelled against God in the garden. The experiences of shame, blame, regret, and jealousy will be gone. In other words, sin and death will have been dealt with finally. The darkness within the collective heart of humankind will be overcome by the light of God's countenance, majesty, goodness, holy nature, and radiant love. There will be no need for lamps or even a sun for the Lord God will provide all the light needed. The saints of God can live fully in the light of day because their sanctification will have been made complete through the work of the Holy Spirit.

They will have been refined by their trials and their patient endurance. Any compulsion to rebel or live independently from God will have departed. The picture of God's servants worshiping God before the throne of the Lamb is a picture of the relationship between humans and God as it should be. When all is right in our relationship God, there is no other place we'd rather be than seeing God's face. There is no other name we would want imprinted on our foreheads than the name of God.

### **What We Do with this Vision of Eden Now**

This vision of the new creation is obviously about the future and not our present reality. We know this. We experience it. There is too much separation between God's future vision and our daily experience not to notice the tension. The question is, "What do we do with a future vision in our present daily living?" The fact that this vision is of the future should not mean that it's too remote in time or too removed from our daily experience to take seriously.

**And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." (Revelation 22:6-7)**

God is saying in no uncertain terms that this vision is not only true, but it is trustworthy. In other words, this vision is worthy for us to place our full trust in it. One reason that is given is that the God who imparted this vision is also the "God of the spirits of the prophets of old."

It was the practice of the prophets of old to show God's people what was to take place in the near future. The prophets who gave warnings of coming judgement did so in order to awaken God's people out of their complacency. If people are complacent, if they aren't alarmed about their present bad behavior, or its consequences, then let them see the future before it happens. If they see the future, they can start making changes in the present. This is what it means to live in the present in light of the future.

The prophets who gave a message of hope gave it to people who needed to be brought out of despair. If they could be told about a brighter future ahead of them and see it, they could begin to live in the present in terms of that more hopeful future. They could anticipate it and be lifted up by that sense of anticipation.

Both kinds of messages, whether of warning or of hope, were sent to energize God's people—to move them forward out of the status quo! Knowing God's future is not just about the future. Knowing the future before it happens has an effect on our present lives. Why postpone what could begin making a difference now in our lives?

The Book of Revelation is a prophecy for New Testament saints. It is filled with messages of both warning and hope. Moreover, the vision is communicated through rich, action-oriented symbolism and dramatic metaphors. The vision of a future Eden is intended to fire the imagination so the follower of Christ can live not only faithfully, but also imaginatively.

We are also told that the vision does not come to us in a vacuum. The One the vision is about is coming soon. We are blessed as we keep the words of this New Testament prophecy because we are living in anticipation of the coming King! The imminent return of Christ means we live life with a sense of urgency. More will be said about this in the next lesson.

## Prayer

God of the prophets, You sent your messengers to show us the future. May you continue to fire our imaginations and guide us with visions, that we may lead lives with hope and a sense of purpose, Through Christ our Lord, 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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## A Welcoming Invitation

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

**Sunday School Lesson for the week of August 28, 2022**  
**By Jay Harris**

**Lesson Scripture: Revelation 22:10-21**

### Leaning In to the Invitation

For this third and last unit of the Summer Quarter, we have been working through the last two chapters of the Book of Revelation. Now, we are in the last lesson of the quarter. Additionally, because Revelation is the last book of the Bible, we are looking at the closing verses of the whole Bible.

Not surprisingly, the scripture for this lesson reviews some of the running themes we have encountered in our previous lessons from Revelation. What this review does is gets us to contemplate any actions we need to take. It is like the conclusion of a Sunday morning sermon. A good sermon should review what has been said and invite people to make a response. The same is true for our scripture lesson. There is an implicit invitation in some of the verses and in other verses the invitation is presented outright. We have an opportunity and an obligation to lean in to this invitation.

**And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy." (Revelation 22:10-11)**

The opening lines of our scripture passage refers to all "the words of the prophecy of this book." In the Book of Revelation, seals were opened which set events in motion. Now, we're told that the words of the prophecy of this book are not to be sealed up—yet. Events are still in motion. Although much of the future has been foreshadowed in these words, there are still outcomes yet to be determined. Among the most important outcomes that are still to be determined have to do with where believers stand as human history continues to

unfold. There is an invitation to act now and determine where you stand because it will affect the ultimate outcome for you.

We are also reminded that “the time is near.” This is why the invitation is to act now and not postpone the response we make to some indefinite time far in the future. Although the words of the prophecy of Revelation are not to be sealed up at this time, the assumption is that they will most definitely be sealed up in due time—which is reported to be near. This prods us not to procrastinate.

The next part messes with us. If the time is near and the outcome is not predetermined then why should “the evildoer still do evil” and “the filthy still be filthy”? We can understand the righteous still doing right and the holy still being holy, but why is there not a call for the evildoers and the filthy to repent? Perhaps there is some reverse psychology being employed here.

Perhaps the point is that evildoers do not simply stop doing evil. Filthy people do not simply stop acting in filthy ways. If there is to be a different outcome, they must recognize the evil, filthy things they do, they must repent and invite Jesus to transform them. Jesus said, “For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.” (Matthew 15:19) A heart change is needed. The invitation is for the intended audience of this letter to look within themselves and ask, “Am I committing evil or holy actions?” Where would these actions be coming from if not from a heart that is inclined in a certain way? This is an invitation to contemplate one’s actions and one’s heart.

Perhaps what is being stated here is that there is no middle ground. The time for fence-sitting is gone. It is time to assess whether you are truly a follower of Christ or not.

**“See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”** (Revelation 22:12-13)

When Jesus returns soon, his reward will be with him. Jesus will repay everyone according to their work. You might wonder what this means in light of all that we understand about grace and forgiveness. Every believer has a “B.C.” and an “A.D.” posted in their lives. B.C. represents our life before Christ. A.D. stands for “Anno Domini,” which means “the year of our Lord.” Our “A.D.” represents our life after we turned our life over to Christ. Not only were we forgiven for our sins, but we also entered a life where we continue to experience forgiveness as we die to sin through repentance and rise to new life as Christ continues to hold us in his loving faithfulness. Our works reveal whether we have lived in Christ or simply given lip service to being a Christian.

If Jesus is “the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end,” and he is coming to judge the living and the dead, then the time of his coming is a bookend moment. The bookend at the end of the history of time is the time when we must give an account. There is a sense of finality to this moment which demands from us a verdict. What choice will we make?

A similar message is found near the close of Deuteronomy. When the Book of Deuteronomy is coming to a close and God’s people are preparing to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land, Moses issues a challenge that summarizes the message Moses has given throughout the book: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you.” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

The Book of Revelation has unfolded in a similar way. From beginning to end it is an apocalyptic message. A feature of the apocalyptic style is that it amplifies the conflict between good and evil. We are reminded that we are involved in spiritual warfare. This view of life presents 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.

**“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”** (Revelation 22:14-15)

When Revelation refers to “those who wash their robes,” it is referring to the saints. By this point much has been said about the saints, what they have undergone, and how God has dealt with them. They have gone through the upheavals presented in Revelation: seals being opened, trumpets blown, woes announced, and bowls of plagues poured out. These upheavals, however, have been punctuated by beautiful interludes in which we see that God has never forgotten his faithful followers.

In one of these interludes, one of the elders in the heavenly court addressed John, asking, “Who are these robed in white, and where have they come from?” John admits he does not know, but he wants to know, so the elder gives the answer:

“These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:13-17)

The saints have washed their robes and made them white by the blood of the Lamb. This visual is made all the more powerful by its apparent contradiction. Under normal circumstances blood-stained clothing is ruined. In this analogy, however, a robe has been washed by *using blood*.

This echoes Isaiah 1:18: “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” This is the language of forgiveness won by sacrifice. The blood of a sacrifice was intended to show the injury and death caused by sin. It was understood that the sacrificed lamb had taken the place of the sinner. The lamb had received the punishment that the sinner deserved. Since the lamb paid the sacrifice on the sinner’s behalf, the sinner gets to go free and start anew. This reminds us that the forgiveness of sins comes at a cost. Christians understand that Jesus is the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for the sins of the whole world.

In the case of the saints described in the Book of Revelation, more is being said. The saints that endure the tribulations described in Revelation have in some cases shed their own blood. They patiently endured their trials in solidarity with Christ who also suffered death at the hands of sinners. Because of their faithfulness, some even to the point of death, they are privileged to wash their robes in the blood the Lamb. By remaining faithful in the midst of trials and temptations, they share in Christ’s victory over the forces of sin and evil.

No wonder that they “will have the right to the tree of life” and will be able to enter “the city by the gates.” The right to the tree of life can only be given by Christ. The only way to enter the holy city is by the gates that Christ opens to those who have finished the race and kept the faith.

Those who have oppressed the saints will be kept from entering and bringing further harm to the community of faith. The “dogs” are enemies who, like a pack of wild dogs, strike fear and bring harm to the community of faith, especially to its weakest members. “Sorcerers” would be those most active in leading people astray in a pagan culture. “Fornicators” would be those doing the most to sell sexual immorality and breed oppression among those being exploited. “Murderers” would include informants who turned their neighbors

over to the authorities in a culture rampant with the persecution of Christians. “Idolaters” worshiped idols, dealt in the distribution of idolatry, and fed the superstitious obsessions of ordinary people in ways that degrade human lives and families. “Everyone who loves and practices falsehood” are those responsible for the erosion of truth in the culture. Question: What forms does this kind of oppression take in today’s culture where the idolatry is harder to name?

**“It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”** (Revelation 22:16)

This is Jesus claiming the ultimate authorship for this message to his Church. Although an angel has given John of Patmos this guided tour through Revelation, Jesus is the One who told the angel everything to say. When Jesus says that he is “the root and the descendant of David,” he is providing a picture of his reign and rule over the universe that flows from the epic story of the Bible. Who could be both the *root* and the *descendant* of David?

In Matthew 22, Jesus tested the Pharisees over this very question. Jesus asked what they thought of the Messiah. He asked, “Whose son is he?” This was an easy question. Everyone there knew that the Messiah would be the son of David, not just *a* son, but *the* long-awaited son to emerge and sit on David’s throne. Jesus then asked, “How is it that David calls him Lord?” Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1, where David is speaking of the Lord who is to come and reign on the throne. Jesus then asks, “If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” The Pharisees could not give him an answer.

We know the answer. Jesus existed at the foundation of the world. Long before David came onto the biblical stage, Jesus was his Lord from eternity past. Jesus, the main character in the epic story of our redemption, is indeed the root of David. It is also true though that Jesus came onto the biblical stage when he was born in human form in a manger in the town of Bethlehem many generations after David—*from* David’s lineage. What an amazing story!

This is when we need to pause for a moment and ask a great theological question: “So what?” What does it mean for us that Jesus is “the root and descendant of David.” It draws attention to the grand sweep of the story of our hope in Christ. The reign of God has never been interrupted, despite appearances at times. Those long centuries without a descendant of David on an earthly throne may have seemed that God had not kept his promise, but the truth is that the Messiah was on his heavenly throne during that time. God was keeping his promise. In the same way, God will keep his promise to the Church concerning the return of Christ.

This is why Jesus is compared to “the bright morning star.” We know the actual bright morning star to be the planet Venus that can be seen near earth’s horizon at morning when the sky is still dark enough to see it. Venus reflects the light of the sun just before the light of dawn overtakes it. The bright morning star represents the light of hope that shines in anticipation of the dawn of our full salvation. Christ is both our hope and the One who brings about our full salvation.

In all that we have read thus far, an amazing invitation has been building. What has been implied, becomes explicit in the next verse.

**The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.”  
And let everyone who hears say, “Come.”  
And let everyone who is thirsty come.  
Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.** (Revelation 22:17)

Notice that the invitation comes from the Spirit and the Bride of Christ, the Church. The Church has heard the invitation and accepted it. The Church is now being enlisted to share the invitation with others that others

might be included. There are many who share a spiritual thirst that only Christ can satisfy. No one has to earn this life-giving water. It is offered as a free gift, because Christ has already paid the price. There is water enough for everyone who hears this invitation and responds.

**I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon."**  
(Revelation 22:18-20)

Many have asked over the generations whether the Book of Revelation, with all of its symbolism, should be taken literally. Some ask the question as if they should take Revelation with a grain of salt. Although the apocalyptic symbolism of Revelation should not be taken literally, this does not mean it should not be taken seriously. The symbolism should fire our imaginations and our motivations. We should neither add to the message nor subtract anything from it in a way that waters down the sense of urgency and call to action in the Book of Revelation.

The Lord wants us to hear and believe that he is coming soon. Although we are living almost two millennia after this Revelation was first given, this sense of urgency should still be a driving force in believer's lives.

According to the Second Letter of Peter, there has been a tendency since the first century to dismiss the promise of Christ's return: "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!" (2 Peter 3:4) The letter reminds us that God's timing is different than ours: "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day." (2 Peter 3:8) There is an important reason for God to delay the return of Christ: "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) The door has been kept open for more people to enter a relationship with God.

According to Second Peter, "the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be destroyed with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed." (2 Peter 10) In other words, the return of Christ will happen suddenly without warning, and the old order will end to make way for the new creation. Since we do not know when Christ returns, we need to be prepared and remain vigilant, so that we will be found faithful when Christ comes. Since we know the old order will pass away to make way for the new creation, the question is asked, "What sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God?" (2 Peter 3:11-12)

To believe that Christ is coming soon gives us hope. The fact that we do not know when he will come means that we strive to live as if he were coming today. The fact that the old order is passing and the new creation is coming means that we should no longer live in terms of the old order. Why would we want to do that anyway? Why should we postpone a minute longer the opportunity to be partners in God's new creation? It is foolish to wait. We won't be disappointed if we begin now working with God to 1) live as if we were a part of the new Eden, and 2) invite others to join us in God's blessings and God's work. In fact, we will be blessed beyond measure.

In mutual love and affection, let us end this Summer quarter together with the last words of the Bible, which offer a beautiful benediction:

**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.** (Revelation 22:20-21)

*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](http://www.layeredbiblejourney)*



## **History Made Every Day**

### **WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN**

**ANNE PACKARD**

The historical societies of the Southeastern Jurisdiction and The United Methodist Church met at the Moore Methodist Museum this summer to trace the footsteps of John and Charles Wesley while they ministered to the colonists in Georgia. Highlights of the week's events included a stop at Peeper's Island, a walking tour of historical Savannah, and time on the grounds of Christ Episcopal Church and Fort Frederica. While walking in these sacred places, the journals of John and Charles were read to help identify what was happening and who was being encountered while they spent time in these same places. What's Old Is New Again!

Standing on the bluff of what we now call Cockspur Island, it is easy to visualize the Symonds tall masts coming into view and imagine the gratitude that must have been felt by those aboard. After four months at sea, with the last few weeks being especially stormy, the sandy beach and swaying palm trees must have looked like paradise.

The Savannah that John and Charles knew was much smaller than the one we know today. It was only a few blocks in length and width and, because of Oglethorpe's meticulous planning and detail, we know exactly where houses and churches stood in the earliest days. The parsonage where John lived backed up to the ground reserved for the Anglican Church. The church wasn't constructed until several years after John left but, had it been constructed, it would have been wonderfully convenient. And Thomas Causton's house, where Sophy Hopkey lived with her aunt and uncle, was located on the same square where the Anglican Church was constructed and only one square away from John Wesley's parsonage. It was truly a small town, and people would have known each other well.

Fort Frederica, like Savannah, was small and well planned. The soldiers guarding the fort from the Spanish to the south and the Native Americans all around were given the best food and accommodations. Townspeople would often fill many roles as both doctor and barkeeper, for example. This was an even less educated, less civilized group than was found in Savannah and John and Charles both suffered because of this.

While here in Georgia, John and Charles went to church, spoke to small groups, worked with fellow colonists, and met strangers. They had good days, bad days, and really bad days. There were people who liked and supported them and people who didn't. The brothers tried new things; sometimes they succeeded but, oftentimes, they didn't. When seeking the true high points of the Wesleys' ministry, there would not be many found while they lived in Georgia. However, here we are, hundreds of years later, tracing their footsteps through their average daily lives because the lessons they learned while living here went on to greatly influence the work done later and the subsequent success. While living their "normal" lives, John and Charles were changing the Christian outlook forever. They were making history every single day.

As we go about our average daily lives, may we also change the Christian outlook by truly welcoming strangers into our small groups with faith, hope, and love. May we constantly reach out to those who have

been forgotten or overlooked and proclaim the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. May the footsteps we make today leave such a positive impact that others will follow in them even years later.

*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](mailto:director@mooremuseum.org).*

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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.; Clyn, 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 – August 16 edition

### August 21

*Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost, Year C*

[Jeremiah 1:4-10](#)

[Psalm 71:1-6 \(UMH 794\)](#)

[Hebrews 12:18-29](#)

[Luke 13:10-17](#)

### August 28

*Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost, Year C*

[Jeremiah 2:4-13](#)

[Psalm 81:1, 10-16 \(UMH 803\)](#)

[Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16](#)

[Luke 14:1, 7-14](#)

### September 4

*Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost, Year C*

[Jeremiah 18:1-11](#)

[Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 \(UMH 854\)](#)

[Philemon 11:1-21](#)

[Luke 14:25-33](#)

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## Events in the South Georgia Conference – 8/16/2022 edition

### 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.

### September Gatherings with Bishop Graves

During three weeks in September, Bishop David Graves will travel across the South Georgia Conference to meet with clergy and laity in various settings. The purpose of these gatherings is to provide necessary and accurate information around current denominational matters. While the three Sunday regional gatherings are

geared toward laity, all are welcome to attend. Clergy will have an opportunity to meet with the bishop while he is in each district for clergy specific meetings. [Click here for dates and locations](#)

### **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 [abosarge@sgaumc.com](mailto:abosarge@sgaumc.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](#)

### **Methodist Children's Home Work Day Offering – Sept. 18**

Every local church in South Georgia is encouraged to receive a special Work Day Offering to support the ministry of The Methodist Home for Children and Youth. The Work Day Offering for the Methodist Home is a tradition from the 1900s, a time when people, mostly farmers, donated the equivalent of one day's wages to the Methodist Home. Sometimes they would load a freight car with cotton or peanuts and send it to Macon. Today folks just use a calculator. The amount of the work day offering can be calculated quite simply: Divide your annual income by 365 (farmers didn't take vacation days.) For example, if a person made \$60,000 a year, it would be \$60,000 divided by 365 = \$164. Whether you give cotton or a check, be assured that your gift will bring hope and a new lease on life to the more than 400 children and families they serve every day. To learn more about this incredible ministry of our conference visit [www.themethodisthome.org](http://www.themethodisthome.org).