

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – APRIL 18 EDITION

Perry UMC volunteers witness God’s perfect timing in Honduras

By Allison Lindsey, Advocate Contributor

When Katie Cawthon attended her first United Methodist Volunteer in Mission (UMVIM) Team Leader Training seven years ago, she had no idea the doors that God would open to serve alongside the people in Subirana, Honduras. But through the United Methodist Church connection, Cawthon, Missions Coordinator at Perry United Methodist Church, has seen a beautiful partnership launch, relationships built, and a deep love planted and nurtured for the people of Subirana and their culture.

The UMVIM team leader training Cawthon attended was led by Dr. Gene Barber, former UMVIM coordinator for The South Georgia Annual Conference. Barber had a long standing relationship traveling often to Honduras and enjoyed sharing his experiences as teaching tools during his training. Following this workshop, an invitation was extended for participants to join him on his next trip. Four members from Perry UMC took him up on his offer. This became the springboard for a new relationship and partnership to grow and flourish between Perry UMC and the church in Honduras.

This March, Cawthon and a team of 16 other volunteers embarked on their sixth mission trip to Subirana to serve.

“One thing that stood out to me about our time in Honduras is how much the whole trip was soaked in prayer,” said Cawthon. “I prayed for this trip for months leading up to it, our church prayed through a daily prayer guide while we were gone, and our team prayed with each other and for each other. And, man, did we see God move! It is amazing to see God answer our prayers and in ways we never could have dreamed of - open doors, confirmations, blessings on blessings.”

The entire congregation of Perry UMC was invited to join in the preparations for the mission journey through financial support, donations of specific vitamins and over the counter medications for clinics, a Sunday morning prayer send-off prior to the team’s departure, and a daily prayer guide during the week the team served in Honduras. The support was overwhelmingly felt by the members of the team.

The 2023 team was a diverse group of believers God brought together to use their gifts, professions, and experiences to share the good news and serve in another culture. Team members included nurses, a physical therapist, and members from various churches and denominations with a passion to serve where needed. They quickly had plans underway for clinics, Vacation Bible School, and food distribution for their week of serving.

“It’s really cool how God brings just the right people together,” said Cawthon. “Every year I think ‘this is my favorite team,’ and I don’t know how the next team will top it; but every year it just gets better!”

Partnering with Pastor Carlos and the [United Methodist Church in Honduras](#), the team served over 600 patients while hosting a medical and dental clinic, led VBS for approximately 500 children and youth, and delivered 25 blessing bags filled with food to families in need. Each of these avenues of service offered time to share the gospel and pray with the people in the community in addition to learning more about their culture and building relationships. Some members of the team also rolled up their sleeves and engaged in construction work to replace a roof and pour a concrete floor in a local home.

A God-wink

As mission teams cross cultural boundaries in ministry, they often witness God at work in miraculous ways. This was true for this team as they encountered a “God-wink” that truly stood out to Cawthon and the team.

Cawthon described the story of a two-month old baby boy who was brought to the medical clinic severely dehydrated. His mother was very young and was brought to the clinic by a concerned family friend. The nurses told the family that the baby needed to go to the hospital, but the mother explained they did not have a way to transport him since the closest hospital was three hours away. The clinic secured an ambulance to take the baby, the mom, and the family friend to the hospital, but the emergency vehicle arrived an hour later with a flat tire. Not to be deterred, the clinic found a truck to drive the family down the mountain and to the hospital.

One of the team’s Honduran interpreters happened to have a friend who was a doctor at the hospital where the baby was being sent. With one quick phone call, the doctor was waiting on the baby upon their arrival. As the hospital administered fluids, they soon discovered internal bleeding and decided to transfer the baby to a bigger hospital in San Pedro Sula. The cause of this infant’s bleeding was a cultural practice of running a baby’s limbs to stimulate blood flow, and then giving the baby a laxative. The hospital the baby was sent to in San Pedro Sula engages in research on this same cultural practice, so they can educate and raise awareness on the harm this cultural practice can cause.

Cawthon and the team were in awe of God at work through this encounter.

“First of all, if we had not been there, the family would not have sought medical treatment and the baby would have died,” said Cawthon. “If our nurses had managed to get an IV in the baby, the family would not have taken him to the hospital. And then to get sent to a hospital where they are doing a research project on the exact thing that harmed this baby, so he can be a part of their research, it just blows my mind how perfectly God orchestrates things like this.”

God’s timing always has a purpose

Several times throughout the week, the team recognized and acknowledged just how perfect God’s timing is - even when it didn’t line up with their plans. God always has a purpose.

Another life saving event that was evidence of this purpose unfolded as the week came to an end, and the team was gearing up for departure. They received notice before leaving the hotel of their flight cancellation. After hours of frustration in an attempt to reschedule, tickets were finally secured for the next day, but the team would be flying separately on four different flights for part of the journey home. On the first leg of the trip to Miami, a male passenger suffered a medical emergency, showing symptoms of a heart attack. The flight crew called for medical assistance, and the Honduras team’s nurses were the only people on board able to assist. They stayed with him and cared for him until the plane landed in Miami, and he was released to paramedics.

“I’m just so proud of our team, and I have so much love for the people of Subirana,” said Cawthon. “I’m also really proud of our partnership with the Methodist church in Subirana. Every time we go I ask God if our season in Subirana is over, and every time He just blows the door wide open and confirms that we are supposed to be there, that there is still work to be done.”

Throughout the years, singing “God of This City” over Subirana has become an honored tradition before the team leaves. This continues to be the team’s hope and prayer for the church and the people there: “greater things have yet to come, and greater things are still to be done in this city!”

Allison Lindsey is a member of St. Mark UMC in Douglas, Ga. and chairs the Conference Nurture Team.

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South Georgia Conference to elect delegates at 2023 Annual Conference session

The South Georgia Conference will elect persons to fill vacancies in its delegation to the postponed 2020 General Conference (to be held in 2024) and the 2024 Jurisdictional Conference during this year’s Annual Conference Session in Tifton, Ga. on June 4-6, 2023.

The General Conference is the global gathering of The United Methodist Church where mission and ministry priorities are established and *The Book of Discipline* is reviewed for possible revisions. The General Conference is the policy setting body of United Methodism. The postponed 2020 General Conference will be held April 23-May 3, 2024, in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The purpose of the Jurisdictional Conference is to coordinate the connected ministry and mission of this region and to elect and assign Bishops for leadership in the Church. The 2024 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference will meet July 10-13, 2024, at Lake Junaluska in North Carolina.

[The current South Georgia Delegation roster may be found here.](#) Those persons elected in June to fill vacancies will be seated behind the current delegation in order of election.

In total, the South Georgia Conference is allowed four (4) clergy and four (4) lay delegates to General Conference and an additional four (4) clergy and four (4) lay delegates to complete the Jurisdictional Conference delegation. Two (2) alternate clergy delegates and two (2) alternate lay delegates to the Jurisdictional Conference also serve on the delegation. The *2016 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* defines who is eligible to serve as a delegate and who is eligible to vote for delegates. Conference Standing Rule Appendix C: [“General and Jurisdictional Conference Delegation Elections Policy”](#) contains the South Georgia procedures for elections.

Each delegate is expected to attend the General and/or Jurisdictional conferences to be held in 2024, attend 4 to 6 meetings of the delegation prior to General Conference for intensive preparation, commit the time necessary to read extensively and study the issues, and pray for God’s guidance in decision making. It is also expected that anyone submitting his or herself for election is committed to The United Methodist Church and to serving faithfully through the conclusion of the General and/or Jurisdictional Conferences when they are held in 2024. Delegates should expect that they will bear a portion of the cost of travel, since the per diem rates often do not cover all costs.

Those South Georgia United Methodists who wish to be nominated as a lay or clergy delegate to General and Jurisdictional Conference may [complete a self-nomination form by filling out the Delegate Interest Form](#). Eligible clergy and laity may still be elected without completing this online form, but it is preferable.

The South Georgia Annual Conference established a policy on elections in an effort to “create a level playing field and be fair with all potential candidates.” [The complete policy can be found on the South Georgia Conference website.](#)

This elections policy is clear in stating, “The website information is intended to be sufficient and to preclude candidates or supporters from sending other forms of campaign materials printed and/or electronic such as brochures, flyers, e-mails, faxes, letters of endorsement, etc.”

Completed delegation interest forms must be completed **no later than Monday, May 22, 2023**.

As a reminder, the Conference policy encourages diversity in the membership of our delegation. There are many qualified South Georgia United Methodists who may represent our Annual Conference at these two important Conferences. May clergy and laity join together in praying for the Spirit's guidance and wisdom as the South Georgia Conference elects a diverse and representative delegation in June.



Exegeting your Community

By Anne Bosarge

Author and speaker Thom Rainer once did an informal survey on Twitter and asked how much time pastors spend in sermon preparation and exegeting scripture each week. Here is a breakdown of the results:

- 1-9 hours per sermon: 25%
- 10-18 hours per sermon: 69%
- 19-33 hours per sermon: 6%

I think we would all agree that spending time on sermon preparation is extremely important. Good pastors spend time exegeting the text to make sure they have an accurate interpretation of the text before presenting this to the congregations. Truth is important and should be handled as such.

What is exegesis and why does it take so long? Exegesis is the process of researching and analyzing a text to understand its meaning and significance. It involves studying the historical and cultural context in which it was written and considering the author's intended message and audience. Exegesis helps us make sense of scripture and shows us how the Bible applies and connects with our lives.

Have you ever considered exegeting your community? Too often churches today are isolated from the neighborhood and community around them. Instead of becoming relevant to the community, the church makes assumptions that the community is like them, cares about what they care about and will respond to the same programs and ministries they respond to. We take the story of the community and interpret it through our own experience instead of taking the time to get to know the historical and cultural context in which the community has developed. If we are to accomplish our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ, we must take the time to get to know the needs and dreams of the people who are writing the larger story of our communities. As we exegete the community we can better know how to meet the community's needs and show them how the Gospel meets them right where they are.

In South Georgia, we have a tool for you to do that work of exegeting your community! MissionInsite is a powerful tool for learning about your community and the neighborhood in which your church is planted. MissionInsite allows you to study your community, learning about their preferences, lifestyles, and desires. In MissionInsite Mosaics, you learn about the types of people in your community and can even receive suggestions on ministries that would directly meet their needs. Mosaics are people types, non-numerical, qualitative data. They are little short stories of the groups of people living around the church and in the larger community. Mosaics provides information about their preferred leadership style, hospitality, type of worship, and outreaches they will best respond to. It also includes educational, small group, financial, and communication preferences.

If you're ready to learn more about how to put MissionInsite Mosaics to work for you, plan to join us for our upcoming training online with our MissionInsite representative. Let's take time to exegete our community and neighborhood so we can make the Gospel relevant to the people God has sent us to reach.

What? MissionInsite Mosaic Training

When? May 10, 1pm

Where? Zoom

Who? Clergy and Laity are invited

Register Here to attend: <https://sgaumc-reg.brtapp.com/MissionInsiteTraining>

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2023 prayer emphasis: April prayer guide, district prayer days

The South Georgia Conference is centering itself around prayer in 2023. April's prayer guide, written by South Georgia Certified Lay Ministers Anne Bosarge, Joeli Chance, Sara Fullerton, Gracie Martin, Whitney Weyeneth, Chris Moncus, and Ben Hasty is now available at www.sgaumc.org/year-of-prayer. District prayer days are also being planned. This year for Annual Conference our theme is, "When They Prayed." During the six weeks leading up to Annual Conference each district will be assigned one week to pray for our Annual Conference. Laity and clergy from each district will gather over Zoom and spend time praying through scripture, liturgy, response, and silent individual prayer. If you'd like to join us, choose your district's date and fill out the registration below to the appropriate district. If you would like to participate and you can't make your assigned date, join another district! The most important part is that we all pray! Each Zoom will begin at 6:30 and conclude by 8:00pm.

- Week 1: [April 27- South Central District](#)
- Week 2: [May 3 - North Central District](#)
- Week 3: [May 10 - Northwest District](#)
- Week 4: [May 17- Southwest District](#)
- Week 5: [May 24 - Northeast District](#)
- Week 6: [June 1 - Coastal District](#)

In addition to the prayer guides and prayer days, book studies centered on prayer and hosted by Connectional Ministries, will expand our minds, challenge our hearts and encourage our prayer walks. [Click here for a synopsis and links to register for these fruit-filled conversations.](#)

Book Two: "Praying with Our Feet" by Lindsey Krinks
Book talk hosted by Abra Lattany-Reed on Monday, May 22, noon-1pm

Book Three: "From Burned Out to Beloved" by Bethany Dearborn Hiser
Book talk hosted by Grace Guyton on Monday, Aug. 21, noon-1pm

Book Four: "Dynamite Prayer" by Rosario Picardo and Sue Nilson Kibbey
Book talk hosted by the author, Rosario Picardo, on Monday, Nov. 27, noon-1pm



Moore Methodist Museum to host British Lecturer David Worthington on April 20

The Moore Methodist Museum staff and volunteers will welcome David Worthington, Director of Global Relations New Room in Bristol, England, to St. Simons on his long-planned U.S. east coast lecture tour. The free lecture, entitled “Methodism Comes to America: The Bristol Connection,” will be presented Thursday, April 20 at 1pm in Lovely Lane Chapel at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island, Ga. A Meet & Greet opportunity immediately following the one-hour lecture will be held across the street at the Moore Methodist Museum with Worthington and South Georgia conference historian, Rev. Dave Hanson. Refreshments will be offered. Please call the Museum staff at 912-638-4050 or email assistantdirector@mooremuseum.org to register.



Denman Award Nominations deadline is April 20

The South Georgia Annual Conference is now accepting nominations for The Harry Denman Evangelism Award for Clergy, Lay, and Youth.

The Harry Denman Evangelism Award program recognizes United Methodists in each annual conference whose exceptional ministry of evangelism – expressed in Word (what), Sign (why), and Deed (how) – brings people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

Evangelism happens in many contexts and many settings; impacts and engages all generations; and requires relationship among a variety of persons. Persons who demonstrate the spirit of this award are ones whose life and ministry exemplifies the teaching of Christ and the Great Commission.

Recipients of these awards, nominated by individuals, churches, or districts and selected by the Conference Witness Team, live their call to “Offer Them Christ” daily as modeled by Dr. Harry Denman, founder of The Foundation for Evangelism that sponsors these awards.

Neither the size of the local church with which the person is affiliated, the age or gender of the person, nor the length of their service limits a person’s eligibility. What is important are the persons whose lives have been changed by the life and ministry of the nominee. (Note: the youth award is limited to individuals who would be considered students - college age or younger.)

The award is named for the late Dr. Harry Denman, who was a distinguished lay evangelist. The awards are made possible by The Foundation for Evangelism, which was founded in 1949 by Dr. Denman, who felt it was the business of every Christian to be an evangelist. It is most fitting that annual conferences today honor persons who carry on the spirit of Harry Denman.

To learn more about the award or to download nomination forms [click here](#) or contact the SGA Conference Witness Chair, Rev. Danita Knowles, at danitaknowles52@gmail.com.

Nominations must be received no later than April 20.



SGAUMC Connectional Ministries Highlights

MissionInsite Mosaics Webinar - May 10

Let's learn about our neighbors! MissionInsite Mosaics is a powerful web-based tool for learning about your community and the neighborhood in which your church is planted. If you're ready to learn more about how to put MissionInsite Mosaics to work for you, plan to join us for our upcoming training online with our South Georgia MissionInsite representative on May 10 via Zoom. Let's take time to study our community and neighborhood so we can make the Gospel relevant to the people God has sent us to reach. Both clergy and laity are invited to attend! [To register, click here.](#)

Clergy Mental Health Retreat - May 18

In a season of high anxiety, we realize that those called to meet the needs of others are in need themselves. To help address the needs of our clergy, the South Georgia Conference Clergy Mental Health Task Force is putting together a series of retreats to support clergy in their mental health. The first retreat, Anxiety: Enemy or Ally, is set for May 18 from 10am-4pm at [Wesley Gardens](#) in Savannah, Ga. Led by Jason Mehl and Christian Swails, this one-day retreat will focus on what anxiety is and is not, how to work through anxiety, and how to speak to fear. The cost for this event is \$20 (lunch is included). To register, click here: <https://sgaumc-reg.brtapp.com/ANXIETYEnemyorAlly>. Please note: this retreat will be capped at 30 participants. Additional clergy retreats are being planned for the Fall.

SUMMER CAMP!!

Camp Connect, the camping ministry of the South Georgia Conference, gives children and youth from rising 4th grade through rising seniors in high school the opportunity to spend a week away from normal everyday life in the beauty of God's creation. Diving into scripture and sharing life stories will show campers they are created in God's image and for a purpose.

Five camps are scheduled for the summer; one week for high school students; two weeks for middle school students and two weeks for elementary students. Held at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island, the week-long camps run from June 12 through July 21.

Our prayer is that every camper will have the opportunity to encounter Christ in a powerful, life-changing way during their week at camp! For more information, visit www.campconnectumc.org.

Lay Planter's Training - Fall 2023

Here in South Georgia, we are seizing the opportunity to start new things for new people in new places. We are seeing a resurgence of grassroots efforts among our laity to dive deeply into disciple-making using new models for church planting like home churches, fresh expressions and more. Can you imagine what it will be like in a few years when laity across the conference will be engaged in leading discipleship efforts across the conference? These discipleship groups and home churches will be able to meet in all kinds of places, made up of all kinds of people. Coming up on July 22, we will have an informational zoom session to find out more about an online Lay Planter's Course we will be offering this Fall to interested laity. Coming to the meeting doesn't commit you to the course; it's an opportunity to hear more about it. [Learn more](#)

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April 23 Lesson: Jesus Reinstates Peter

Spring Quarter: Jesus Calls Us

Unit 2: Experiencing the Resurrection

Lesson 8: Week of April 23, 2023

By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scriptures: John 21:15-19

Key Verse: John 21:15

Lesson Aims

1. Summarize the conversation between the risen Jesus and Peter and the reason(s) for it.
2. Explain the relationship between loving Jesus and caring for his flock.
3. Describe the way he or she will act on that relationship in the coming week.

A basketball team may struggle mightily for the first half but turn the game around in the second half to earn a comeback win. We've seen that happen more than once in the recent NCAA Basketball Championship. It could be called a redemption story. A redemption story depends on early failure but is defined by a finish that makes what came before pale in comparison.

Popular culture loves these stories, especially because of the self-determination that is required for redemption. The redemption story features characters who change their attitudes, make different decisions, and perform more nobly in the end. They redeem themselves.

Our story today is also one of redemption. But it is not the story of a person who failed and then brought himself to a redemptive success. Instead, it is the story of the Lord who called the man to accept redemption.

Lesson Context

Today's lesson picks up immediately where the previous lesson left off. For this reason, the context from lesson 7 is immediately relevant to the events of John 21:15-19. We note that the focus narrows from the disciples in general to Peter specifically. But keep in mind that as Jesus and Simon Peter speak, they are still in the presence of the others, including John.

The New Testament testifies in various ways to Peter's unique and ongoing role in Jesus' ministry and in the earliest life of the church. Along with Paul, Peter stands out among the apostles in terms of his fame and influence. Peter (also known as "Cephas"; John 1:42) was one of those apostles considered by Paul to be "pillars" of the church (Galatians 2:9).

Peter emerged early on as a leader, bold in word and deed (examples: Acts 2: 14-41; 3:1-10). He was among the first to recognize that when Jesus told his followers to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), he really did mean to go to the Gentiles without requiring them to take up Jewish practices before accepting him (Acts 10:9-11; 13; 15:6-11). Peter's influence resounded throughout the church. The impact and importance of today's text are therefore incalculable.

Jesus Questions Peter (John 21:15-17)

"When they had finished eating" refers to John 21:12-13. "Simon son of John" is an attention-getting greeting. We might compare it to a mother calling her daughter by her first, middle, and last names. My wife's maiden name was Myron Lane Marchman. She said when she was growing up and her mother really wanted her attention she would say "Myron Lane" and that was Myron's attention-getter.

At any rate, the solemn character of the moment is underscored by Jesus' form of address: "Simon son of John." It was Peter's old name, the name he had possessed before he met Jesus. We read about it in Chapter 1. When Peter had been brought to Jesus, Jesus had greeting him by saying, "you are Simon, son of John.

You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter) (John 1:42). The old name meant “pebble,” a light, unstable thing. But Jesus said that he was going to name Peter “a rock.” He was saying that he was going to turn Peter the jellyfish into a solid and courageous person. Now, in recollection of this earlier incident, Jesus goes back to the old name in order to remind Peter of his weakness.

As we remember, Peter had overtly denied Jesus while Jesus was on trial (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27). One explanation for Jesus’ question in John 21:15b is simple redemption. This understanding was widespread in ancient Christian interpretation. Jesus was giving Peter the opportunity to repent of his betrayal and reaffirm his love for and devotion to Jesus.

The first step in Peter’s restoration comes when Jesus asks Peter to bring “the fish” to shore (21:10). Even this mundane task sets him apart, affirming his position as a leader among these men. Jesus may even be remembering his call to make these men “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19), so that now the “catch” is going to be Peter’s responsibility. But fishing will not be the primary metaphor for Peter’s future.

Though it is possible in 15b Jesus was asking whether Peter loved him “more than” Peter loved the other disciples or even his fishing profession, those meanings are unlikely in context. The best explanation is that Jesus was asking whether Peter loved him more than the other disciples did. More than a comparison between the states of their hearts—clearly a task Peter was not qualified to take on—the question was about the depth of Peter’s own love. Did Peter’s experience deepen his love for Christ, or shorten it? And if Peter loved Christ more than the others did, would Peter be prepared to do as Jesus would command? We might ask ourselves the same questions following sinful failures.

In 15b, Peter’s address of Jesus as “Lord” communicates Peter’s awareness of Jesus’ power, insight, and authority. We might expect that someone called “Lord” to demand some kind of groveling. Instead, Peter answers Jesus’ question affectionately, not in terms of mere loyalty but in terms of “love.”

Preachers and scholars have made much of the fact that Jesus and Peter use different words for love. Jesus asks using one Greek verb, while Peter responds with another. Attempts to characterize “agape”—the form Jesus used—as a more godly divine love doesn’t account for the evidence of actual usage. For example, Jesus used the same word in Luke 11:43 when he rebuked the Pharisees for loving the seats of honor in the synagogues; in Matthew’s record of that same incident, Jesus used the same form that Peter responded with here (Matthew 23:6). Demas’s love of the word uses the verb again (2 Timothy 4:10). This illustrates the interchangeability of those two Greek verbs (“agapav” and “phileo”) that are translated “love.”

When one surveys the use of these words, both in the Bible and outside of it, the evidence suggests that they were considered near synonymous. Therefore, this should caution us about attempts to over-emphasize their usage in this chapter. It is noteworthy that ancient Christian commentators who spoke Greek fluently made no note of the alternating records in this passage. We do well to think of it as a literary feature, of John’s choosing not to use the same verb over and over again in order to vary the dialogue and have a more dynamic story.

Though the word “repentance” is not used here, Peter’s response clearly illustrates it. His response was an important step in repairing his relationship with Jesus. Jesus’ question allowed Peter to affirm for himself and his companions the depth of his love and loyalty, despite his prior stumble. And Jesus’ questions allowed Peter to affirm for himself and his companions the depth of his love and loyalty, despite his prior stumble. **And Jesus’ question to us is also whether we will allow him to be the Lord of our lives.**

In 15d, Jesus himself is the loving shepherd who feeds and protects his flock. He demonstrated this by healing the rich and feeding multitudes. Jesus taught God’s love for the lost sheep and indicates his own role in seeking the lost. With Jesus’ time on earth rapidly coming to a close, the task of shepherding his flock was

still primarily his own. But Jesus would ensure that his disciples were empowered to care for the fledgling church (Luke 24:49; John 14-17)—and this work continues today.

While questioning Peter, Jesus implied that he accepted Peter's answer. This is understood when we consider that Jesus would not leave Peter such an important task if Jesus did not trust Peter's renewed dedication. Furthermore, take the command to "feed my lambs" would be an ongoing opportunity for Peter to demonstrate his love.

In a somewhat surprising move (verse 16), Jesus asked Peter the question again, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter himself may have wondered why Jesus asked again. Nevertheless, he dutifully gave the exact same response, to which Jesus gave the same commission, worded slightly different.

Some see in Jesus' three questions a parallel to Peter's three denials. Symbolically, Jesus provided Peter with an opportunity to commit to him as many times as Peter had previously denied him. However, Peter himself did not seem to understand it this way, as shown by the fact that he "was hurt" to continue answering the same question. Perhaps Peter felt he was being tested and found wanting, since surely Christ knew "all" things. Could it be that Peter harbored some impurity that Jesus was encouraging him to recognize?

But still, Peter answered the same way, though more emphatically. Seeing that Jesus ended his questioning here could suggest that Peter passed the test—that no falsehood was found in him as he asserted his love for the "Lord." Whatever the case, Jesus' response of "feed my sheep" once again echoes his previous response to Peter.

In summary of verses 15-17, the focus of Peter's conversation with Jesus has to do with his commission to tend the flock of Christ, not the quality of his love for him. Peter is thus upset (John 21:17) not because Jesus has changed the verb for love, but because Jesus has asked him the same question for the third time. Jesus commissions Peter three times to care for his flock.

Jesus Speaks Truth to Peter (John 21:18-19)

At this breakfast with Jesus, Peter received a twofold blessing. He received both a commission and a cross. And he received a threefold challenge concerning the care of God's flock. In each case, Jesus used the pronoun "my," reminding Peter that though he had responsibility to the flock, the flock still belonged to Christ. Hence, Jesus is the Shepherd and pastors are the under-shepherds.

In verse 18, the words "very truly" translate the Greek word that we have adopted into English as "amen." Although Jesus always spoke the truth, statements he began in this way often revealed spiritual truth (examples: John 3:3-5; 8:58) or future events (examples: John 13:25,38). "When you were younger" sets up a contrast. In the past, Peter took care of himself and lived as he saw fit.

In light of what lay ahead for Peter, faithfulness to Jesus required a love so great that it could overcome the instinct for self-preservation. In Jesus' words, Peter's redemption is made clear. The man loved Jesus and he could show this through his own ministry and death. "Stretch out your hands" is an allusion to carrying one's cross to one's execution. "Someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go" finishes the contrast began in John 21:18a.

Peter's life would not be his own. In this way, his life would parallel that of Jesus.

The earliest reference to Peter's death is found in a letter called 1 Clement of Rome, at the end of the AD 90s. This letter is the oldest Christian writing in our possession outside of the New Testament. It states that

Peter was martyred (1 Clement 5:4). Other early church traditions further date his death in the context of Emperor Nero's persecution of Christians in AD 64. These traditions state that Peter was crucified, perhaps even upside down due to Peter's conviction that he was unworthy to die in the same manner as his Lord. There is no reason to disbelieve these early Christian leaders, especially since their testimony affirms what Jesus himself said would happen.

Lest there be any confusion about what Jesus meant, John clarifies (v.19a) that "Jesus said these things to signify the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God." The idea that being crucified could be a glorious death is a Christian innovation. Crucifixion was intended as a public shaming, an ignoble end to a vile criminal. Following Jesus' death, the purely negative connotation was turned on its head for Jesus' followers because Jesus flipped the script (Philippians 2:8-11). This radical reinterpretation of crucifixion led Jesus' followers to reinterpret what the world called shame as glory (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). What had always in the past been a final humiliation became for Christians an unexpected way in which God glorified himself.

Having warned Peter, Jesus calls him again to "follow" (Matthew 4:18-20; John 1:40-42). This is not the same command as caring for Jesus' flock. But for Peter, following Jesus would certainly entail care for the flock (Acts 9:36-41). The image of caring for Jesus' flock remains with Peter, as his admonitions to Christian leaders attest (example 1 Peter 5:1-4).

So, to love Jesus means to follow him. To follow him means to go into the world. To go into the world means to reach those who have, for so long, been unreachable. To reach the marginalized means transforming—no, revolutionizing—the way of the world. To revolutionize the way of the world means to make disciples. Then, as Jesus' followers, we are to care for the flock.

Conclusion

Peter stands out as a model disciple for several reasons.

First, Peter was not unique in his need for redemption! All of us stand before Jesus needing redemption. Second, Peter's redemption resulted in commission. This means we are more concerned about the will of God than with our own agenda.

Third, our commission comes with knowledge of what our faithfulness can cost us! Like Peter, we accept the call to follow with the clear understanding that because Christ suffered and we are his, we too expect the life of the faith to entail suffering (John 15:18-16:4), just as Peter did.

Fourth, like Peter's pain, our own suffering comes with a promise. When we suffer like Christ and for godly purposes, we bring glory to the Lord, no matter how humiliating the world might believe our plight to be (Matthew 5:10-12).

John Claypool tells the story that comes from his first pastorate in a small town in Tennessee. Only after he had begun his duties was he informed that in addition to being parish priest, he was also expected to be chaplain of the volunteer fire department. Not too many weeks into his ministry, there was a house fire. An older woman was trapped on the second floor. One of the volunteer firefighters dashed into the house at the risk of his own life and brought the woman to safety. John, naturally, congratulated the man on his courageous act. But the firefighter responded, "I feel blessed to be asked to do this, because the highest compliment that can be paid to a fireman is to be asked to do the most dangerous thing."

And there is even a higher compliment, and that is, to do the "Christ thing" and take care of His flock.

Action Plan

1. What role do you play in caring for those lambs, and who are Jesus' lambs?
2. What evidence is there in your life that you truly love Jesus?
3. How can you prepare for undesired experiences so that they can bring spiritual growth?
4. What are you doing now to ensure that your eventual death will glorify God?

Resources For This Lesson

1. "2022-2023 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Lesson, International Sunday School Lessons," pages 289-296.
2. "The NIV Application Commentary (John)", by Gary M .Burge, pages 586-588.
3. "The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume IX, Luke John, pages 860-862.
4. "John Believe and Live" by Elmer Towns, pages 216-220.

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April 30 Lesson: Jesus Makes a Promise

Spring Quarter: Jesus Calls Us
Unit 3: The Birth of the Church
Lesson 9: Week of April 30, 2023
By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

Key Verse: Acts 1:8a

Lesson Aims

1. State the initial sequence of the geographical progression of the gospel message.
2. Analyze what the disciples meant when they asked Jesus about the restoration of Israel.
3. Recommit to the work Jesus has given him or her in accomplishing the gospel mandate.

As we are reminded, serialized television programs often feature brief flashbacks at the beginning of each episode. These flashbacks typically condense the key parts of the previous episodes into 90 seconds or less. The resulting salient points help viewers make sense of the new installments. These are particularly important for those of us who watch only one episode at a time rather than binge watch multiple episodes!

Unlike any other pair of books in the New Testament, Luke begins his second volume (the book of Acts) with a summary of the first volume (the Gospel of Luke). This is a little like a modern flashback, a highly condensed version of the previous "episode" as a key to understanding the installment at hand. That's how the book of Acts begins.

Lesson Context

It might be surprising that a Gentile who was not an apostle wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else. We are talking about Luke the physician (Colossians 4:14). His writings of the Gospel that bear his name and the book of Acts total 37,932 words in Greek across 2,158 verses. By comparison, Paul wrote 32,408 words across the 2,033 verses of his 13 epistles.

The sheer volume of Luke's writings also explains why the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are separate. As the scholars attest, writings were frequently on scrolls in Luke's day, and the maximum practical length of a scroll was about 10 yards. Luke's Gospel and the book of Acts have about two scrolls worth of material, making a physical division necessary. Luke did this thoughtfully by dividing the books into his account of Jesus and his account of the church. The bridge between the two is the ascension of Jesus, found in Luke 24:50-53 and repeated in Acts 1:6-9.

It has been pointed out that a careful study of both Luke and Acts show that Luke maintained high standards for accuracy. Where his historical details can be corroborated, he has proven to be completely reliable.

I. Promise Number I

Acts 1:1-5

The opening section of Acts contains a prologue along with a historical introduction. The author (Luke) begins by referring to his "former book," gives the name of the recipient (Theophilus) and summarizes the contents of the earlier book (the Gospel of Luke). Theophilus means "friend of God" or "loved by God," but it is unlikely as some have suggested that their name is a symbol for an anonymous person or group of people. This particular name was in use at the time, and the description of Theophilus as "most excellent" (see Luke 1:3) suggests that a real person is meant. "Most excellent" could suggest that a high government official is being addressed, but that is not a necessary inference as it was also used as a "form of polite address." In those days it was common for books to be dedicated to distinguished persons.

In the 40 days before Jesus' ascension, his primary ministry is related to the truth of the gospel (vv.2b.3). He gave "instructions...to the apostles" (v.2). The verb for instructions (entellomai) has the idea of commanding or giving orders. This must refer to the commands given in verses 4 and 8 not to leave Jerusalem until the Spirit comes and to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth (Luke 24:46-48). These instructions were given through the Holy Spirit (v.2), which we are told introduces a key theme of Acts: all Christian ministry depends on the activity of the Spirit in the minister and in the one ministered to.

Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to the apostles and others are attested in many places (see Matthew 28:17; Luke 24:34,36; John 20:19, 26; 21:1, 14; and 1 Corinthians 15:5-8). Time periods involving the number 40 are significant in the Bible (see Genesis 7:4; Exodus 16:35; Ezekiel 4:6; Jonah 3:4; Mark 1:13; etc). Three instances often have figurative associations. But the "40 days" in the text before us should be understood in conjunction with the 50 days between the Passover (when Jesus was crucified, which was "his suffering; Matthew 26:2) and the Day of Pentecost (where the church was birthed; Acts 2:1). After Jesus' departure and before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, there remained a brief-yet-intense week and a half period of waiting and anticipation.

"...and spoke about the kingdom of God." Jesus used the occasion of His appearances to the apostles, first to convince them that it was He and that He was truly risen, and second, to explain the things which they had not formerly understood (Luke 24:44-48).

In verses 4 and 5, we should remember that most of the disciples were from Galilee, many miles north of "Jerusalem" and Judea. After Jesus departed, they might have been inclined to leave Jerusalem and return home. In fact, they had already made one such trip after Jesus' resurrection (see John 21).

Even as the disciples were "eating" with Jesus, the food per se would have been secondary. They gathered for another purpose: God had strategically chosen Jerusalem as the birthplace of his church. We take this for granted today, but the choice would not have been self-evident to disciples like Peter, Andrew, James, and John. If the fellowship of Jesus' followers were to continue, why not out of the synagogue in Capernaum, surely a safer place? But this was not God's plan.

At this point, the promise of Jesus plays on the meaning of the word “baptized.” The water baptism practiced by “John the Baptist” was contrasted with a promise of pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, which would arrive “in a few days.” The Greek word translated baptized means to engulf or immerse completely. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit to come would be like that: an immersion involving body, soul, heart, spirit, and mind.

The theme of the 17th World Methodist Conference held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil was appropriately “Holy Spirit, Giver of Life.” The conference logo featured the Christ of Rio statue, with arms outstretched standing in the midst of a descending dove. Truly it was a powerful symbol. Down from the mountain the Holy Spirit brings Christ the Redeemer to meet the needs of humanity, indeed all creation.

II. Promise Number 2

Acts 1:6-8

In verse 6, “they” likely refers to the core group of the 12, reduced at this time to 11 due to the demise of Judas. In this setting, a burning question comes out.

It must have saddened the heart of Jesus to hear his disciples ask about the time of restoring the kingdom of Israel. He had taught them about the kingdom of God, but they talk about the kingdom of Israel. John Stott points out that the verb, the noun, and the adverb of their sentences (v.6) all betray doctrinal confusion about the kingdom. The verb “restore” shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom; the noun “Israel” that they were expecting a national kingdom, and the adverbial clause “at this time” that they were expecting its immediate establishment.

Rather than answer the question about the kingdom of Israel, Jesus’ reply regarding, the “time and date” refers to his return in glory and judgment. This future event is discussed extensively in the Gospel of Luke (see Luke 17:20-37).

Jesus reveals that the timing of the Day of Judgment is “set” by the Father’s “own authority” alone. Even the Son does not know the exact timing of his own return (see Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32). There is a warning here: if Jesus himself did not know, it would seem unwise for any human being to attempt to precisely determine the date of his return. These are things reserved for the power of the Father (compare Deuteronomy 29:29).

Verse 8 begins with “But,” suggesting that Jesus is presenting an alternative aspiration for the disciples. Their primary concern should not be the political power that will come with the restoration of Israel’s kingdom. It should be the spiritual power that will come through the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which will enable them to be witnesses “to the ends of the earth.”

We are told that this verse presents an outline and summary of Acts. The Holy Spirit’s power and witness is the theme of the book. The “geographical terms provide a sort of ‘Index of Contents’...in Jerusalem covers the first seven chapters, in all Judea and Samaria’ covers 8:1 to 11:18, and the remainder of the book traces the progress of the gospel outside the frontier of the Holy Lord until it at last reaches Rome.”

In a sense, the disciples were already witnesses for they had seen the risen Lord that was the key to their witness (1:22). But they also needed power to be effective witnesses, power that would come from the Holy Spirit.

Now, if the purpose of the powerful coming of the Holy Spirit was to empower the spread of the message to the ends of the earth, we should be clear as to what the disciples were to be witnessing about. They were to give their eye-witness testimony about Jesus, especially concerning his resurrection from the dead. All the subsequent messages in Acts include such testimony. That kind of testimony is different from what we call a “personal testimony” today. In this testimony, I may testify about my changed life, personal peace, acceptance in the church’s fellowship, the love of God, and many other things. But if I do not pass along the testimonies about the objective fact of Jesus the Christ risen from the dead, then I have left out the most important thing (see Luke 1:2; 24:46-48; 2 Peter 1:16).

John Bunyan, the author of “Pilgrim’s Progress,” said that when he came to the full realization that Christ was now his friend and savior and Lord, he went home singing a hymn at the top of his voice lungs. “I knew not how to contain myself,” he wrote. “I felt I could have spoken of his love to the very crows that sat upon the plowed lands before me.” When we feel like that, we will not leave out the most important part of our testimony—Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

III. Promise Number 3 **Acts 1:9-11**

Jesus’ ascension takes place after his giving the Great Commission for the last time (v.9). In the early church the ascension was associated with Christ’s exaltation to God’s right hand (see Ephesians 1:20-21; Philippians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3; 2:9). The expression “he was taken up” carries this idea, for “the Jews thought of heaven as ‘above’ and earth as ‘below.’” But given our modern understanding of a massive, spherical planet Earth and a vast empty outer space, we naturally wonder, “Where exactly did Jesus go?”

A key detail here is the presence of a “cloud.” When the cloud did so, Jesus was hidden. This was not a random cloud parked in a handy place in the sky. Rather, it was a prepared, supernatural cloud, could be a sign of the presence of God (see Luke 9:34-35), even a means of divine transport. Therefore, being received by the cloud in our text should be understood as being received by God.

While the apostles stare into the sky in stunned silence, “two men” enter the scene. Their “white apparel and sudden appearance” indicate that they are angels (compare John 20:12). The apostles do not seem to notice them immediately, since the apostles’ attention is still fixed skyward, looking into the sky.

The two speak, and this does get the disciples’ attention. In essence, the angels’ message is, “what’s done is done. Now it’s time to get busy.”

The expression “men of Galilee,” which in 2:7 is in essence a disparaging label, may suggest a divine reminder that the apostles were provincial who had a worldwide task ahead of them. The angels specifically give Jesus’ post-ascension abode as “heaven” (1:11-6). The promise that he will come back in the same [exalted] way” (v.11c) would have helped make some sense out of Jesus’ repeated statement to the disciples about his second coming. This prospect encourages Christians to “live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:12-13).

Conclusion **Luke’s Great Commission**

Luke’s version of the Great Commission is found in Acts 1:8, which could be summarized as “Go to the ends of the earth and be my witnesses.” The message here is not confined to a small group of men who were physically present at Jesus’ ascension, men who died some 2,000 years ago. Rather, these commands also apply to Christians today.

The New Testament teaches that all Christians are to be involved in making disciples. This is to be motivated by our love for those who do not know Jesus, as well as the need to obey his commands as our Lord (John 14:15). Jesus went to the cross out of his love for the world and his obedience to his Father’s will, and we should do no less.

Harry Denman, General Secretary of the Board of Evangelism, was supposed to speak at Lake Junaluska one evening at 7:30pm. He arrived 30 minutes late. What happened? Why was he late? He had hailed a cab to take him to Lake Junaluska. On the way, Harry started talking to the cab driver about Christ. The cab driver didn’t know Christ. So Harry Denman went to the cab driver’s home, won him to Christ, and then arrived 30 minutes late at Lake Junaluska.

That’s the idea! Winning people to Christ, and we should do no less!

Action Plan

- 5. How will you order your life so that you might be a witness to your own “Jerusems,” “Judeas,” and “Samarias”?
- 6. How would you respond to someone who seems fascinated with speculation about Christ’s return?
- 7. How can believers be ready for Christ’s return without disregarding what he has called his followers to do?

Resources For This Lesson

- 5. “2022-2023 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Lesson, International Sunday School Lessons,” pages 297-304.
- 6. “The NIV Application Commentary (Acts)”, by Ajith Fernando, pages 49-57, 72-73.

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Interview with Allison Lindsey: Proud to be a United Methodist

The following interview was posted on the South Georgia Abide website. Allison Lindsey is a member of St. Mark UMC in Douglas, Ga. and chairs the Conference Nurture Team. She formerly served as the Director of Connectional Ministries.

Where do you see God moving among us?

I have always felt very blessed for the doors that God has opened wide for me through The UMC. I have been given a front-row seat to see Him at work - "here, there, and everywhere". It's been an honor to serve as a Director for the General Board of Global Ministries for the past 10 years and see God at work all over the world through The UMC connection!

I am seeing God through the health and vitality of my local church, St. Mark UMC in Douglas. We are a smaller congregation and God just continues to bless this congregation in all areas of ministry, through growth spiritually, numerically, and financially. God's presence is so evident in these ways and it reminds me of the importance of "keeping the main thing the main thing", which is our focus- discipleship. I see God and his prevenient grace in the new expressions of faith communities, committed to remaining United Methodist, and the ways God is meeting each one where they are and providing for them in the most profound ways.

I see God at work through our Conference leadership in their commitment and creativity through difficult decisions that our current climate is requiring to be good stewards of our resources and mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world!

I see God at work through the local churches, the conference agencies, the age-level camping and retreat ministries, and throughout other Annual Conferences in our connection. I love hearing the stories on all these levels- testimonies of God at work!

I see God at work all over the world currently in the North Katanga Annual Conference through the partnership with South Georgia, work in Syria/Turkey is ongoing following the earthquakes with UMCOR, partnerships and ministry happening in war-torn Ukraine. Also through local churches engaged in short-term mission journeys to have God's hands and feet and share His love. The list goes on and on!

I have seen firsthand and understand the value/strength in our connectional structure when it comes to mission and outreach and know that I am a part of that, beginning with my local church offering plate, through our apportionments - all around the world. That's such a powerful witness and impact. One that makes me so proud to be United Methodist!

Tell us about the ministry you're doing now.

My (I guess you would call it) vocational ministry is full circle now and back in a local church! I am serving as the Director of Discipleship quarter-time at St. Mark UMC in Douglas and enjoy teaching, age-level ministries and filling the pulpit on occasion. At this stage in life, my family is truly my highest calling. I love being home and keeping up with my grandson, Mac, who will be two in May. What an amazing opportunity to see him grow up and have an influence on his life and faith!

I will forever be grateful for my time serving our Annual Conference and I continue to stay plugged in various ways. We joke about the fact that I cannot tell Kelly Roberson "no", so I am working on different communications projects, social media, and writing for The Advocate. This has been perfect for me and so uplifting because I get to share the stories of the awesome ministry happening across South Georgia.

How has disaffiliation been a part of the work you're doing?

I am very fortunate that right now the conversations and discernment within my local church have been to wait until the General Conference 2024 and see the outcome. I personally am very thankful that our conference has paved a way for churches to do this. My knowledge of The UMC, our conference, and serving as a delegate in previous GCs has enabled me to help provide accurate information to questions and to change the narrative to the misinformation that others have been told or heard.

I also recently wrote an article for The Advocate on the United Methodists in Thomasville, a group that has been birthed out of disaffiliation and I am following this group closely. Seeing their genuine faith and trust in where they feel called and led by God, is inspiring. I know there are many others coming together in new ways and I have no doubt there will be many more stories to share as we move forward together.

What does it mean to be a South Georgia United Methodist today, especially in light of the ministry you're doing?

I know this sounds cliché but, I believe what it means to be a South Georgia United Methodist today is the very same thing it meant yesterday, the day before, last year, etc. Our calling is the same in living out The Great Commandment and The Great Commission. It is so simple yet we manage to make it complicated. I pray that my ministry reflects this each and every day both at home and out in the world! Sharing the good news, discipling one another, and giving ourselves fully to God to be used for His purpose. There are so

many distractions pulling our focus away from the heart of our purpose and ministry- we must stay focused on our mission!

How can churches and individual United Methodists across the conference support this ministry?

First and foremost, keep the main thing the main thing- share the good news and focus on discipleship. Do not let the issues in our denomination distract or paralyze you or your church from making disciples and being a positive witness to God and our faith. I think more so now than ever, we need to be walking alongside one another, building one another up, encouraging and supporting one another in ministry. Sharing where we see God at work in our personal faith journey and in our churches are powerful ways to accomplish this. There is much hurt as a result of the disaffiliations, voting, and uncertainty and this will take time to heal. How can God use us to be His hands and feet and to build bigger tables? Moving forward together will look differently, no doubt, but God is already there and I can't wait to see where that leads. The world is watching and I hope we are being the light and salt He has called us to be in the midst of our chaotic reality right now. Hindsight will be a gift as we move forward. If we will do the hard work of deep reflection on where we have seen God, we will see Him in ways we are not able to right now.

Where do you see hope for South Georgia and The United Methodist Church?

I see great hope in the ways that laity are birthing new and creative expressions of being the church. What I see happening feels like peeling away the layers to get back to the basics of what it means to be the church. In a sense, it feels to me like what the early church was in Acts 2. I see hope when I see a minister come out of retirement out of love for The UMC to shepherd a new community and the support that has been given through the connection. I see hope because I see so clearly that God is indeed at work. UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) used to have a saying BE HOPE. Hope is powerful in the transformation of lives and essential to showing God's love in the brokenness of our world. I think that is a great calling for each of us as Christians for such a time as this - BE HOPE!



Dead Formality

**WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN
ANNE PACKARD**

The third article in our series supporting prayer in the South Georgia Conference focuses on Francis Asbury, one of the first two bishops of the newly created Methodist Episcopal Church and the architect of the Methodist movement in America. Asbury spent 45 years in the colonies and young country riding horseback and preaching to anyone who would listen. He was the most recognizable person in America during his time, and it is estimated that he rode 250,000 miles and preached 16,000 sermons throughout his ministry. However, Asbury's commitment to his prayer life rivals any other numbers that can be offered.

“My present practice is, to set apart about three hours out of every twenty-four for private prayer; but Satan labours much to interrupt me; nevertheless, my soul enjoys a sweet and peaceful nearness to God, for the most part, in these duties” (Journal, December 8, 1776). What Asbury meant by private prayer included time for private worship, confession of sins, thanksgiving for all God's blessings and intercessions for others. Can we imagine for one moment what the world would be like if people spent three hours of every day in prayer with God? That would be 45 minutes in worship, 45 minutes confessing one's sins, 45 minutes in gratitude for one's blessings and 45 minutes asking for blessings for others. Who could we be if we were to follow Asbury's example?

To answer that question, we must first answer the question, “Who are we now?” According to the Western Washington Medical Group, the top three physical ailments for Americans are chronic disease, addiction, and mental health. Some reasons for the large percentage of chronic diseases are poor nutrition, excessive use of alcohol, insufficient exercise and tobacco use. According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, in 2020 50% of people over 12 years of age used alcohol in the past month, 61% of alcohol drinkers were considered binge drinkers, and over 100,000 people died from overdoses from March 2020 to April 2021. According to Mental Health America, over 50 million Americans are suffering from mental health issues with over 12 million having serious thoughts of suicide. These figures show that modern people are facing grave difficulties.

So, could three hours a day spent in private prayer help cure what ails us? Counting our blessings daily for 45 minutes could help lower blood pressure and slow our breathing. Walking for 45 minutes while in private worship could provide sufficient exercise of both mind and body. Spending 45 minutes a day reminding ourselves that we are not perfect but we serve a perfect God could help us with humble prayer and fervent praise as advocated by Charles Wesley. Thinking of our neighbors and their needs might remind us that we are brothers and sisters in the body of Christ that should be treated with faith, hope, and love. So, yes, I believe adhering to Asbury’s schedule would cure many of our modern ailments.

Asbury also wrote in his journal, “So prone is man to grow languid in devout exercises, that without fresh and powerful exertions he will soon sink into dead formality” (Journal, January 2, 1775). Maybe we have sunk into a dead formality with our prayer life, which is leading us to death in other areas of our lives. As Bishop Graves calls the South Georgia Conference to prayer, may we also follow Francis Asbury’s practice of long, fresh and powerful prayer so as not to sink into both literal and spiritual death.

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.



Conference Happenings

2023 Lay Servant Ministries & Certified Lay Ministry

Check out the [dates & registration for the 2023 classes](#).

Clergy Ethics Training – April 20

Every three years, according to the South Georgia Conference Sexual Ethics policy, persons serving under appointment by the bishop (clergy, local pastors, extension ministers, appointed lay speakers) are required to attend a Sexual Ethics Workshop. Under the guidance of the Office of Ministerial Services, the South Georgia Conference will offer Clergy Ethics trainings in March and April 2023. For more information and to register, [click here](#).

Men's Spiritual Life Retreat – April 21-22

A Men's Spiritual Life Retreat is set for April 21-22, 2023, at Epworth By The Sea on St Simons Island. This in-person event is sponsored by the United Methodist Men of South Georgia and is open to all Christian men of South Georgia to attend. The retreat will be a time of spiritual renewal through: solid biblical teaching by Rev Tommy Mason, dynamic and uplifting music led by the Goshen Travelers Band, shared fresh testimonies of God's Grace, worship, prayer & fellowship, and a brief annual business session of the South Georgia United Methodist Men. [Click here for more details](#).

MissionInsite Mosaics Webinar - May 10

Let’s learn about our neighbors! MissionInsite Mosaics is a powerful web-based tool for learning about your community and the neighborhood in which your church is planted. If you’re ready to learn more about how to put MissionInsite Mosaics to work for you, plan to join us for our upcoming training online with our South Georgia MissionInsite representative on May 10 via Zoom. Let’s take time to study our community and neighborhood so we can make the Gospel relevant to the people God has sent us to reach. Both clergy and laity are invited to attend! [To register, click here.](#)

Clergy Mental Health Retreat - May 18

In a season of high anxiety, we realize that those called to meet the needs of others are in need themselves. To help address the needs of our clergy, the South Georgia Conference Clergy Mental Health Task Force is putting together a series of retreats to support clergy in their mental health. The first retreat, Anxiety: Enemy or Ally, is set for May 18 from 10am-4pm at [Wesley Gardens](#) in Savannah, Ga. Led by Jason Mehl and Christian Swails, this one-day retreat will focus on what anxiety is and is not, how to work through anxiety, and how to speak to fear. The cost for this event is \$20 (lunch is included). To register, click here: <https://sgaumc-reg.brapp.com/ANXIETYEnemyorAlly>. Please note: this retreat will be capped at 30 participants. Additional clergy retreats are being planned for the Fall.

Called Annual Conference Session – May 21

A special called session of the annual conference has been set for Sunday, May 21, 2023. The meeting will begin at 4 pm using the Zoom Webinar platform in conjunction with an online voting system. The sole purpose of the special called session of the Annual Conference is to complete the process of ratifying the current requests for disaffiliation of local churches who have met the requirements outlined in ¶2553 of the Book of Discipline and who have met the published South Georgia Conference deadlines. [Click here for more information.](#)

Annual Conference Session – June 4-6

The 2023 South Georgia Annual Conference session will be held Sunday, June 4, 2023, through Tuesday, June 6, 2023. The conference theme will be: *When They Prayed*, based on Act 4:31. [Click here for full Annual Conference details.](#)

2023 Summer Camps

Don’t let your kids miss out on this summer’s Camp Connect - the South Georgia Conference Camping Ministry at Epworth By The Sea. These week-long residential camps are offered for elementary, middle and high school students in June and July. For more information, [click here.](#)

2023 Georgia Pastors School – July 17-20

Georgia Pastors School is set for July 17-20, 2023, at Epworth by the Sea on St. Simons Island. This spiritual formation event for pastors will feature Rev. Juanita Rasmus, co-pastor of St. John’s United Methodist Church in Houston, TX, and Johnny Sears from The Upper Room as this year’s teachers. To register and for more information, visit www.georgiapastorsschool.org.



Resource Roundup – April 2023

Tips to protect churches from fraud

(Discipleship Ministries) Eight steps can help churches avoid being the victims of fraud when it comes to their finances. Among the tips are having someone different from the check signer approve invoices for payment, regular financial reports and an annual audit. [Read story](#)

How to Plan for Church Emergencies

(UMCom) If you don't already have one, it is vital that your church put together an emergency preparedness plan. Having a solid plan will help to hasten whatever recovery efforts may be needed, whether you are faced with a natural disaster, health crisis or fire. If you don't already have one, it is vital that your church put together an emergency preparedness plan. Having a solid plan will help to hasten whatever recovery efforts may be needed, whether you are faced with a natural disaster, health crisis or fire. [Read more](#)

Why being mobile-friendly matters

(UMCom) People in the United States are now spending more than five hours a day on their telephones. Their user-friendly ease and mobility factor have made mobile phones the No. 1 driver of web traffic. This means that it is essential that your website is mobile-friendly. [Read more](#)

Achieve great graphic design

(UMCom) Graphic design doesn't have to be hard. The age old principle of "less is more" really does ring true when trying to be most effective in designing graphics for your church. Find help for your designs here, or you can even let us take it off your shoulders altogether. [Read more](#)

UMCOR Mustard Seed Migration Grants program accepting applications

More United Methodist churches will have the opportunity to help immigrants, migrants and refugees living in their local communities thanks to an expanded Mustard Seed Migration Grants program from the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). For 2023, the number of grants awarded will be increased from 50 to 100. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis until October 1, 2023, and processed within four weeks of application. The grants program, now in its third year, continues the agency's 80-year tradition of helping refugees, immigrants and migrants seeking to build new lives. [Learn more here.](#)



Retired Clergy Birthdays – April 2023

- 4/01 – Ed Chance: PO Box 524; Wrens, GA 30833
- 4/01 – Danny Treadway: 1417 Peabody Dr.; Maryville, TN 37803
- 4/03 – Jennifer Sherling: 2447 Tuxedo Place; Albany, GA 31707
- 4/05 – O.C. Dean, Jr.: 265 Three Oaks Dr.; Athens, GA 30607
- 4/05 – Kay Stanaland: PO Box 905; Murrells Inlet, SC 29576
- 4/07 – Jim Hamlin: 322 S. Houston Springs Blvd.; Perry, GA 31069
- 4/08 – Terry DeLoach: 209 Dixie St.; Brooklet, GA 30415
- 4/09 – Sandra Henry: 111 Laurel Overlook; Canton, GA 30114
- 4/09 – Glenn McCranie: PO Box 493; Grandy, NC 27939
- 4/12 – Tim Bagwell: 192 Barrington Hall Dr.; Macon, GA 31220
- 4/12 – Gerald Goodman: 1572 Fluker Kiel Rd.; Coffeetown, AL 36524
- 4/15 – Leigh Ann Raynor: 212 Torrington Blvd.; Thomasville, GA 31757
- 4/16 – Nick Hazelton: 517 Ferncliff Terrace; Macon, GA 31204
- 4/16 – Wesley Kaylor: 855 Chokey Rd.; DeSoto, GA 31743
- 4/16 – Barbara Nelson: 1106 Merrill Dr.; Dublin, GA 31021
- 4/16 – Tom Nichols: 619 Tattall St.; Savannah, GA 31401
- 4/16 – Jimmy Sharp: 2225 Teate Rd.; Vienna, GA 31092
- 4/18 – Frances Howell: PO Box 658; Midway, GA 31320

4/22 – Howard White: 9577 English Ivy Court; Fortson, GA 31808
4/24 – Willie Lucas: 607 Holloway Ave.; Albany, GA 31701
4/27 – B.J. Funk: PO Box 187; Chula, GA 31733
4/28 – Bert Alexander: PO Box 964; Pine Mountain, GA 31822
4/28 – Carol Smith: 1931 4th Street Lane NW; Hickory, NC 28601
4/29 – Sam Watkins: 1937 E. DeRenne Ave., Savannah, GA 31406
4/30 – Don Kea: 5300 Zebulon Rd., Garden Home 20; Macon, GA 31210

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Scripture Readings – April 18 edition

April 23

Third Sunday of Easter, Year A

- [Acts 2:14a, 36-41](#)
- [Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 \(UMH 837\)](#)
- [1 Peter 1:17-23](#)
- [Luke 24:13-35](#)

April 30

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year A

- [Acts 2:42-47](#)
- [Psalm 23 \(UMH 754 or 137\)](#)
- [1 Peter 2:19-25](#)
- [John 10:1-10](#)