

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – MAY 2 EDITION

Jesup First UMC and Epworth UMC merge to make Kingdom impact

By Jamie Denty (Contributions for this article provided by Conference Communications)*

When Jesup First United Methodist Church and Epworth United Methodist Church began praying about their future as one congregation, they knew it was more than just sharing a building or a name. For these two church families and one pastoral family, it was about bringing people together to make an even bigger impact for the Kingdom of God in their community.

On Easter Sunday, April 9, 2023, the members of Jesup First UMC and Epworth UMC worshiped together for the first time as one congregation.

Rev. Rebecca Duke-Barton has served as senior pastor of Jesup First UMC for 5 years, and Rev. Garth Duke-Barton has served as senior pastor of Epworth UMC for 5 years. The two churches will now worship together under the name of Jesup First United Methodist Church, and the clergy couple will now serve as co-pastors of the congregation, which will meet in the Jesup First UMC building.

“In 1956, Jesup First was overflowing. They had more people than they had space,” said. Rev. Rebecca Duke-Barton. “They planted another Methodist church in Jesup, with some of the members from First going over to Epworth, so that they could continue to reach more people. The Baby Boom era is long gone. If we pool our resources and our people, we can better serve this world that God so loves.”

On March 1, with the approval of the South Georgia Conference, the two congregations met for dinner and a called charge conference. In a packed fellowship hall, membership from both churches voted unanimously to merge.

This is a homecoming for the Epworth UMC that was birthed out of Jesup FUMC in 1956. Now in 2023, 67 years later, that congregation is returning home so that the people called Methodist in Jesup can be even more effective.

Almost from the time the Duke-Bartons arrived in Jesup in June of 2018, they have led the two churches to cooperate in numerous activities. Initially, the most visible was the merger of the Methodist Youth Fellowship from both congregations for worship and recreation. This joint MYF meets regularly for Sunday and Wednesday evening programs and for other special events.

Rev. Rebecca Duke-Barton recalls an interesting experience last year.

“We took a group of teens to the River of Life mission week,” she said. “Since we had people from both Jesup First and Epworth going, they started calling us ‘Jepworth’. We thought that was funny and appropriate because the youth groups are already so well blended that we could go under one name.”

Rev. Rebecca Duke-Barton will serve as the primary preacher and will oversee the planning of the worship services. Rev. Garth Duke-Barton will continue his work with the youth and will also assume more administrative duties. He will also focus on discipleship, Sunday school classes, small groups, and missions. Both pastors will do visitations and provide congregational support.

Before the Duke-Bartons ever moved to Jesup, they heard talk about merging the two churches. However, upon assuming their assignments, cooperation - not merger - was their goal.

Last year, during the weekly prayer meeting at Epworth UMC, members talked about and prayed about restarting the church. In prayer, they asked for God to lead them.

“After we had prayed, one member asked if the others heard the Holy Spirit speak,” said Rev. Garth Duke-Barton. Several nodded. “Merger,” they said. “This is where God is leading us.”

Spurred by that testimony, members, pastors, and the conference began to explore the concept.

“As with virtually everything, churches change, and we have to recognize the impacts and adjust to them,” said Bob Fox, lay leader at Epworth UMC. “It’s easy to simply ignore declining membership, but it’s not what God wants from his church. He wants us to adjust. As we look forward, we see a combined Methodist church that will be much more vibrant, with membership levels that support a variety of programs that reach out to its members and the community to further spread the word of God. The synergies between the churches are incredible, starting with the pastoral team and going throughout the membership, programs, and activities. We look forward to a new and exciting future focused on serving God.”

The Duke-Bartons are also excited about what a future focused on serving God together looks like.

“The District Superintendent told Rebecca and me that it’s a good move to make while we are here,” said Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, who smiles as he adds, “We do work well together.”

Mark McGregor, chairman of Jesup First UMC Administrative Council, acknowledges and appreciates the sacrifice the members of Epworth UMC are making.

“The merger of our churches is a win-win for both churches,” said McGregor. “This move should ensure a vibrant future. We appreciate the sacrifice Epworth is making, but in the end we are all children of God. They will be welcomed and loved.”

According to Madge Sewell in *Wayne Windsong*, Methodism in Wayne County began with a prayer in a little log store during the last half of the 19th century as railroad companies were laying right-of-way pegs and settlers were moving to the area. A survey crew, during a storm, was offered drinks in a little log store. The drenched foreman, Mike Darvis, looked at the other men and said, “What I need and what y’all need most is for us to get down on our knees and pray.” The men fell to their knees, and Darvis said, “Oh, Lord, we need you here.”

In 2022, Jesup First United Methodist Church celebrated its 150th anniversary. As the two churches now reunite into one in 2023, members once again repeat that very first prayer: “Oh, Lord, we need you here.”

**Jamie Denty provided an expanded version of this story to [The Press Sentinel](#), and it was published on Thursday, April 13, 2023.*



Special called session set for May 21 to vote on disaffiliating churches

At a special called session on Sunday, May 21, 2023, South Georgia United Methodist clergy and laity will meet online 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. The session will take place at 4 pm via Zoom. A live stream link will be available on the conference website, www.sgaumc.org, for guests who would like to watch.

On Monday, May 1, conference leadership [released the resolution that conference members will be voting on](#). 193 churches are requesting to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church.

“While there may be grief and sadness in reading the names of these churches, we acknowledge all of the ways they have shared the good news of a risen Savior as part of our United Methodist Church family,” said Bishop Graves [in a video to South Georgia United Methodists](#). “There is so much strength in our connection and in our relationships. For those who remain a part of this great Annual Conference it is this connection and these relationships that we will lean into in the days ahead.

“I have great hope for the future of the South Georgia Conference. While we may be smaller, numbers do not tell the full story or define our ability to bear witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ. I believe we will be stronger as we focus on reaching new people with the gospel message,” said Bishop Graves.

A Zoom meeting link and voting credentials will be issued to voting members on Monday, May 15. It is anticipated that the meeting will last approximately two hours. The agenda for the meeting is as follows:

- Welcome & Opening Remarks
- GNTV Online Webinar/Voting Instructions
- Organizing Motions
- Attendance Vote
- Votes to ratify the Resolution Approving Disaffiliation of Local Churches
- Closing Motions
- Adjournment



Wesleyan College inducts 26th president, Meaghan Blight

Wesleyan College President Meaghan Blight was formally inducted as the 26th President of Wesleyan College in Macon, Ga. on Wednesday, April 19, during the annual Honors and Awards Day Ceremony.

President Blight was presented with the presidential medallion and formally endowed with the responsibilities of the office. Blight shared her ongoing vision for the institution, which includes bringing more awareness to women's colleges and their importance in our communities. President Blight emphasized her objectives to enhance recruitment, provide further opportunities to Wesleyan students, and provide an environment that fosters forward-thinking, independent women.

“I am truly grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this community and its over 185 years of commitment to supporting and providing opportunities for women,” said President Blight. “Wesleyan College will continue to be a place that advocates for women's voices, talents, and success in their professional lives.”

Wesleyan College President Meaghan Blight started her position at Wesleyan in July of 2022. Throughout her presidency, Blight has strengthened community relations, created key academic partnerships, grown Wesleyan's international reach, and initiated programs such as the Working Warriors community initiative and the CEO Leadership Institute.

Within her first 100 days, President Blight released a campaign that exceeded her goal and raised over 1 million dollars for the College. Blight joins us from London, Ontario, Canada, where she served as Huron University's Vice President of University Growth and Chief of Staff. President Blight is joined here in central Georgia by her husband, two boys, and two dogs.

“We are thrilled to see Meaghan Blight installed as Wesleyan’s 26th President,” said the Rev. Dr. Michael McCord, Executive Director of the Georgia United Methodist Commission on Higher Education. “Her strategic leadership has already galvanized the community around our shared vision to advance the work of women’s equity in the world. We look forward to how President Blight will help lead Wesleyan College into the future.”



S3 groups help clergy renew, recharge, refresh

Applications now available

Serving in full-time ministry is consuming. It’s hard to relax and “turn off” at the end of the day. Being a pastor is an always-on, always-in-demand role with sometimes unrealistically high expectations.

The South Georgia Conference realizes the need to care for those in ministry, and has implemented S3, a program for sustaining excellence in ministry through small-group experiences focused on Sabbath, study, and service.

Brought to South Georgia nearly 20 years ago, the S3 program was designed and begun at Columbia Theological Seminary in 2003 and sponsored by the Lilly Endowment as a part of their “Sustaining Pastoral Excellence” initiative.

The S3 program continues to provide each approved group \$500 per person, per year for the first two years of the group’s learning process or experience.

With busy schedules, families, and ministry demands, it hasn’t always been easy to carve out time to rest and recharge, said Dr. Jimmy Asbell, senior pastor of Vineville United Methodist Church and former director of South Georgia’s S3 program. But the funding incentive helps individuals make it a priority.

“The time together, the camaraderie, the encouragement, the friendships, far exceeded the value of the money, but we realized that if it hadn't been for the grant – if we wouldn't have been able to play golf for free – we wouldn't have started,” he said. “And we knew if it was true of us it was probably true of others. But our relationships have outlasted the grant.”

Through births, adoptions, sickness, moves, retirements, deaths, and other life events, over 100 clergy in the South Georgia Conference are connected through S3 groups.

Rev. Precious Hawkins, senior pastor of Asbury UMC in Savannah, is part of the S3 Clergy Mamas group.

“Our time apart allows me to slow down and breathe before jumping back into the business of parenting and ministry,” said Rev. Hawkins. “It’s one thing to talk about the importance of self-care, it's another to actually slow down and care for yourself. This S3 group helps me to model self-care for both my family and members of my congregation.”

Dr. Ted Goshorn, who has now taken the mantle from Dr. Asbell as the new director of the S3 program in South Georgia, also acknowledges what a blessing his S3 group has been in his life.

“For me, the relationships formed in my group have been foundational for doing ministry together,” said Dr. Goshorn, senior pastor at Mulberry Street UMC in Macon.

The purpose of an S3 group is to create a sanctuary in time, providing a Sabbath environment for five to eight self-chosen participants who desire to spend a significant amount of time together over the next two years. Through Sabbath, study, and service the groups create deep, sustaining, enriching relationships with God and one another that sustain/enhance pastoral excellence through life giving settings of their choosing and creating.

Dr. Ben Martin, senior pastor of Wesley Monumental United Methodist Church in Savannah and a clergy member in the original S3 group, says his involvement with and participation in S3 is vital to his role as a pastor.

“I think it’s made ministry sustainable for me,” he said. Their group only gets together a few times a year these days, but they communicate with each other via group text message a few times a week. “It’s kept us connected, and we never feel isolated.”

Applications are now being accepted for S3 clergy groups. The deadline is July 9. More information, including the application, is available at mulberrymethodist.org/s3.



2023 prayer emphasis: May prayer guide, district prayer days, book studies

May Prayer Guide

The South Georgia Conference is centering itself around prayer in 2023. May’s prayer guide, written by *Reese McCurry, Alison Evans, Angela Gilbert, and Gail Springstead*, is now available at www.sgaumc.org/year-of-prayer.

District Prayer Days

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!

- Week 2: [May 3 - North Central District](#) – 12:00 noon (note change in time)
- Week 3: [May 10 - Northwest District](#) – 12:00 noon (note change in time)
- Week 4: [May 17- Southwest District](#) – 12:00 noon (note change in time)
- Week 5: [May 24 - Northeast District](#) – 12:00 noon (note change in time)
- Week 6: [June 1 - Coastal District](#) – 6:30 pm

Book Studies

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



FROM THE BISHOP
DAVID GRAVES

When I first began my time here with you in South Georgia, I said that I wanted to help people get to where they wanted to go. That is exactly what your conference leadership has done — and has done so in an exceedingly gracious process. Today we released a list of the churches who feel they need to now move in a direction other than The United Methodist Church.

My heart breaks over this decision. I know that you may share similar feelings realizing that churches that have been a part of your life are now choosing to separate from our connection.

While there may be grief and sadness in reading the names of these churches, we acknowledge all of the ways they have shared the good news of a risen savior as part of our United Methodist Church family.

There is so much strength in our connection and in our relationships. For those who remain a part of this great Annual Conference it is this connection and these relationships that we will lean into in the days ahead.

I have great hope for the future of the South Georgia Conference. While we may be smaller, numbers do not tell the full story or define our ability to bear witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ. I believe we will be stronger as we focus on reaching new people with the gospel message.

Friends, it is now time to turn the page and lean into the ways that God is moving so powerfully among us. People ask exactly what that means and what that looks like.

Here’s what I know.

We have 275 vibrant, Wesleyan, orthodox churches rooted in scripture. We have committed laity whose desire is to know God and make God known. This next conference year we will be appointing 213 ministers to local churches and an additional 50 clergy to serve in extension ministries, and we have over 300 retired clergy who remain aligned with the United Methodist Church. We have a wonderful staff devoted to walking alongside and resourcing the local church.

Our churches are welcoming new people each and every week. We are celebrating baptisms and life-altering decisions to follow Jesus.

We’re working to do our part to disrupt and dismantle racism. We’re putting intentional efforts and focus on our Hispanic/Latino ministries. We are making clergy mental health a priority.

We have fresh expressions and new faith communities popping up all over the conference. We already have new faith communities in Thomasville, Albany, Brunswick, Valdosta, St. Marys, and we are looking at more places throughout our Annual Conference. We have clergy who are coming out of retirement to provide pastoral leadership, and laity who are playing key roles in the formation of these new expressions. It's an exciting time to be a part of what God is doing!

I have formed a ministry strategy team that you will hear more about in the coming weeks. This team will help cultivate new expressions of ministry and will help our established churches vision and seek new ways of sharing Christ with new people.

I have been so encouraged by the clergy and laity who have stepped up to provide leadership in this season. This conference needs leaders who are guided by the Holy Spirit, who will serve with integrity, and who are committed to seeking God's future for the South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church. I call on all who are serving to be people of prayer, making decisions for our future here so that together we can build up the Kingdom of God.

Friends, there will always be denominational issues that may distract or disappoint us. The same will be true with any new denomination or church because people are always involved, and people aren't perfect. When we are focused on mission and ministry, it moves us to experience the power of God's Holy Spirit changing lives, being a voice for the voiceless, and transforming our families and communities.

It is time to put the word disaffiliation behind us and begin to write the next chapter in the story of this great conference. We need to prayerfully consider what God is calling us to - not in creating Church 2.0 - but as Easter people seeking a new beginning of reaching new people for Christ.

Yes, we are Easter people! I'm so thankful to be your bishop and to serve alongside you, and I'm looking forward to turning the page with you.

[{View video}](#)



Connecting Points – May 2023

Hispanic Ministry Task Force meets with Dr. Lydia Muñoz

On April 10, 2023, the South Georgia Conference Hispanic/Latino Ministries Task Force met with Dr. Lydia Muñoz, the director of the National Hispanic Plan, for an informational, evaluation, and advisory meeting. Dr. Lydia Muñoz is in charge of helping advise and provide resources to clergy and congregations of Hispanic origin in The United Methodist Church. This office is an administrative part of the Global Ministries agency.

This meeting with Dr. Muñoz took place at the First United Methodist Church in Tifton and is part of a series of trainings for laity and clergy in which they are coached to develop community ministries called Comunidades de Fe (Communities of Faith) in which the church acts on behalf of the community. These Comunidades de Fe represent the hands of the body of Christ and are means of evangelism and discipleship.

The Office of the National Hispanic/Latino Plan recently awarded a grant to Hispanic/Latino Ministries of South Georgia for training and development in this form of community ministry and congregational development.

Annual Hispanic Rally in Cordele

It has been the custom of Hispanic United Methodist congregations in South Georgia to come together every year to enjoy a day as God's people. This year, on April 16, 2023, it was held at Cordele First United Methodist Church. Around 300 people of all ages gathered from Americus, Morgan, Albany, Bainbridge, Attapulgus, Macon, Warner Robins, and Cordele. This is a much anticipated day each year to enjoy worship, Bible study, and fellowship. The speaker for the evening was Rev. Mike Ricker who preached about the 5 “P's” in the Christian life: Perspective, Position, Purpose, Priority, and Provision. Local leaders were in charge of the worship and music planning. After the worship service, the local church served a delicious meal.

Imagine Day

Our South Georgia Conference leadership is committed to creating space for vitality in our local churches and new expressions of ministry both in and outside the church building! On April 15, South Georgia clergy and laity gathered for an Imagine Day with author and Fresh Expressions Cultivator, Michael Beck. The workshop helped participants envision a distinctly Wesleyan Spirit-led movement of new Christian communities that serve the present age. We are excited to see how these teams will go back to cultivate accessible, transformative, and connectional forms of church!

Early Response Teams continue to have a presence in North Georgia communities

Our South Georgia Early Response teams continue to have a presence in the West Point, Ga. community following the destructive tornadoes on March 26. We're grateful for service and continued response of our ERT teams!

Museum receives New Room print from visiting speaker

David Worthington, Director of Global Relations, New Room, Bristol, England, presented Arthur J. Moore Methodist Museum curator Anne Packard a print of the John Wesley equestrian statue in the Broadmead courtyard of John Wesley's New Room in Bristol. The New Room is the oldest Methodist building in the world. On Thursday, April 20th, Friends of the Arthur J. Moore Methodist Museum hosted Worthington on his Florida/Georgia lecture tour entitled “Methodism Comes to America – The Bristol Connection.” Seventy-five visitors enjoyed the lecture presented in Lovely Lane Chapel at Epworth By The Sea retreat and conference center followed by a meet and greet with the speaker at the Museum.



May 7 Lesson: The Day of Pentecost

Spring Quarter: Jesus Calls Us

Unit 3: The Birth of the Church

Lesson 10: Week of May 7, 2023

By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scriptures: Acts 2:1-8, 14-24, 37-40

Key Verse: Acts 2:39

Lesson Aims

1. List the ways the Holy Spirit was active on Pentecost.
2. Explain why the Day of Pentecost was ideal for the birth of the church.
3. Write a prayer for empowerment by the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus more boldly.

A taxi driver in New York City said to his passenger, a minister, why doesn't God do something really big all around the world so that everyone would believe in Him and that would solve all of our terrible problems? The truth is, God has done some really colossal things! Consider the creation, the Exodus, the virgin birth, the cross, the resurrection; and then there was Pentecost and the Promise of Pentecost.

Lesson Context: The Holy Spirit

The descent of the Holy Spirit "like a dove" on Jesus at his baptism might suggest a picture of peace and acceptance (Luke 3:22). But the work of the Holy Spirit was not always a pleasant experience for those affected, since Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16). Imageries of fire in the Bible are associated with the destruction of God's enemies (Ezekiel 22:17-22, 31; Hebrews 10:26-27; 2 Peter 3:7, etc.) and the testing or purification of his people (Zechariah 13:8-9; 1 Corinthians 3:12-13; 1 Peter 1:6-7). The depiction in Luke 3:16 speaks of the power to do both, especially in light of the winnowing fork imagery of Luke 3:17.

Lesson Context: The Jewish Calendar

The most important observance on Israel's calendar was Passover. It was a time to remember deliverance from slavery in Egypt, when God's angel of death "passed over" Israelite households that had been marked with the blood of a lamb (Exodus 12).

Within a few weeks of leaving Egypt, the people of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai (Exodus 16:1; 31:18). There they entered into a covenant with God, agreeing to be his people while the Lord promised to be their God. For centuries thereafter, the Old Testament covenant people celebrated their deliverance on Passover and followed it 50 days later by celebrating God's giving of the lamb. Pentecost occurs seven weeks after the Passover Sabbath plus one day, which equals 50 days; it was one of the three great pilgrimage festivals (Deuteronomy 16:9,16). This celebration is also called "The Festival of Harvest," "The Festival of Weeks," and the "Day of the firstfruit" (Exodus 13:16a; 34:22a; Numbers 28:26).

The Jews in the time of Jesus had a marvelous temple in Jerusalem (Mark 13:1). The city's economy centered on that structure, as the periodic influx of visiting Jews brought in money. We might say that the Jerusalem of the time had a tourist economy, and the height of the tourist was the period from Passover to Pentecost. Many visitors would stay for the entire 50-day period between those two observances.

I. The Holy Spirit Comes (Acts 2:1-8)

The apostles continued to wait in Jerusalem as instructed by Jesus. There were eleven apostles from the original 12, Judas Iscariot having committed suicide (Matthew 27:8). The followers grew in number to about 120 (Acts 1:12-15).

"The day of Pentecost" marked the final full day of the Passover-to-Pentecost season. Most who were visiting Jerusalem to attend these observances would begin returning home the next day.

The fact that those gathered were "all together" suggests a shared priority: that of intense communal prayer (Acts 1:14). It had been 10 days since Jesus' departure, and the mood of those 120 was undoubtedly one of hopeful expectation. Seven weeks prior, the disciples had also been gathered together; but on that occasion

they had gathered in fear (John 20:19). But being able to gather “in one place” was not to last long; soon enough, persecution would cause Jesus’ followers to scatter (Acts 8:1).

When the Holy Spirit came, he was not visible. However, he made his presence known in two ways. There was an appeal to two of the gates through which all humankind receives his/her information - the ear-gate and the eye-gate. We hear and we see. The Holy Spirit used both these gates.

Through the ear-gate they heard the sound of a “blowing terrible wind from heaven,” and this sound filled the whole house where they were. The phrase “from heaven” signifies that we are intended to understand it as being of divine origin and note that it was not a wind, it was the sound of the wind. Probably the sound was not like the sound of wind blowing through tree tops but rather like the sound of a tornado. Everybody who has been through a tornado says that train sound is bad and scary.

The second appeal of the Holy Spirit was through the eye-gate. Some have interpreted this as a river of fire coming out of the sky. The word translated “separated” is translated “divided” in other places.

The separation of the tongues of fire “to rest on each of them” (v.3) seems to suggest that though under the Old Covenant the divine presence rested on Israel as a corporate entity and upon many of its leaders for special purposes, under the new covenant established by Jesus and inaugurated at Pentecost, the Spirit now rests on each believer individually. Of course, this does not negate the important of the corporate relationship with God, as Paul’s letters amply demonstrate. But from now on, the corporate rises out of a personal relationship with God through the Holy Spirit and this is in keeping with the prediction through Jeremiah that in the new covenant, the Law will be written on the heart (Jeremiah 31:33).

In verse 4, the sound and sight are followed by an act of empowerment as the Holy Spirit fills the followers of Jesus. The Spirit was active in Old Testament days, but only with a few of God’s people (example, see Numbers 11:25-29). But now the promise of God’s is coming to fulfillment, the promise that he will pour his Spirit on his people (Isaiah 44:3-5; 32:15; Joel 2:28).

The “devout Jews” in verse 5 had come from everywhere because of the Festival of Pentecost. This was their reason for being in Jerusalem. The sound the people of Jerusalem heard had never been heard before, so they came rushing. We are told that they became bewildered, “for each one heard their own language being spoken.”

The setting is clearly multilingual. The common trade language of the day was Greek. “Jews of the Jerusalem” area would also speak Aramaic. The fact that those gathered Jews were “from every nation under heaven” certainly would have included those whose native tongues was Latin. And other languages are implied as well.

The fact that “each one heard their own language being spoken” is thus the third great miraculous phenomenon. The word translated “bewilderment” implies confusion combined with a strong emotional reaction.

The fact that those who were speaking were recognized as “Galileans” is probably due to their accent and manner of dress. The multiplicity of native tongues that the crowd hears comes into sharper focus as provinces of origin are detailed in Acts 2:9-11 (not in today’s text). Here, we make sure not to miss the miracle: those listening, who hailed from a dozen or more provinces, heard the message of the gospel in languages the speakers had not studied.

II. The Apostle Preacher

Acts 2:14-24

Even in the midst of miracles, there were always unbelievers and doubters (compare Luke 11:15). Likewise, some of those who experienced this particular miracle doubted. They even suggested that those speaking might be drunk (Acts 2:13).

In verses 14 and 15, Peter quickly discredits the charge of drunkenness. “Nine in the morning” is a most unlikely time for indulgence.

Moving immediately from what the phenomenon (Pentecost) was “not” to what it “was,” Peter points to the “prophet Joel.” By some estimates, Joel prophesied in the eighth century BC, but exact dates are unknown. What he had predicted had been a long time in coming to pass, but come to pass it had!

Two things stand out regarding Peter’s quote of Joel 2:28-32. First is the announcement of the arrival of “the last days” (17a), the final period of human history, as evidenced by the outpouring of God’s “Spirit.” We understand this to mean that what remains are the events of the end of time: the return of Christ and the final judgment.

Second, the validation for Peter’s claim is the return of prophecy and the various methods by which prophecies come about. The Jews had not experienced prophecy for generations. Joel’s language points to the pouring out of the “Spirit,” evoking the image of a deluge that cannot be contained.

A word about prophecy! To prophesy is to speak or write a message received from God directly, not through a book or through another teacher. Peter and the apostles were prophesying as they spoke under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

In verses 19 and 20, we see that the special effects that accompany the outpouring of the Spirit are also noteworthy. In their original prophetic setting, these dramatic occurrences signaled the imminent arrival of the “Day of the Lords” in judgment of the nations that treated Israel shamefully. However, not so in Acts. In this new setting, the “signs and wonders” mark the presence and progress of the Spirit who prepares the way for the church’s missionary work (see Acts 2:43; 4:16, 22, 30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6,13; 14:3; 15:12). In this context, then, “the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day” no longer conjures up images of God’s imminent retribution but instead that of Pentecost, with its promises of empowered witness and God’s salvation. Peter ended his quotation of the ancient prophet with a shortened version of what he (Peter) went on to give in fuller form in Acts 2:38-39.

Everyone present surely was aware of “Jesus of Nazareth” and his reputation as a miracle worker (compare Acts 26:26). Since working a miracle was a demonstration of divine power, Peter demanded acknowledgement that God was the source of supernatural activity. The three Greek words translated “miracles, wonders and signs” point to a larger reality – “God” himself. The same Greek words occur together in various passages of scriptures (examples, 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:4).

In verse 23, we see that the crowd was also aware of the shameful death of Jesus several weeks earlier “with the help of wicked men.” Peter, however, saw no reason in this to doubt the plan of God, especially given what happened after the crucifixion.

Important point! The cross was no accident. It belonged to the eternal plan of God (verse 23). As one scholar observed, “the cross was a window in time to allow us to see the suffering love which is eternally in the heart of God.” So Jesus died on the cross to demonstrate the length and depths God would go to show us how much we are loved.

Note that even though the cross was part of the eternal plan of God, it did not remove the responsibility of those who sought to betray Him – “the wicked men” (read Luke 22:22).

We see in verse 24 that God’s plan did not terminate with Jesus’ death, since God had “raised” him to live again. Surely many in the crowd had heard rumors about the appearances of the risen Lord!

III. The Crowd Reacts (Acts 2:37-39)

Peter offered further proof that “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). This drew notable reaction. We perceive the crowd as having believed Peter and accepting his interpretation of events as true. This terrified them, thus their plea, “what shall we do?”

At this point, Peter gives two stipulations and promises two blessings. They must repent and be baptized, and they will receive the forgiveness of sin and experience the Holy Spirit. As Lord, Jesus demands repentance and baptism, which is an outward expression of allegiance to him. As Savior, he offers the unmerited gift of forgiveness. And there is no separation of the Lordship of Christ from his role as Savior here.

Some have understood the statement, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (verse 38), as implying that baptism is a necessary requirement for salvation. But, as some scholars point out, that interpretation may read too much into that text. In the home of Cornelius those present received the Spirit and spoke in tongues before they were baptized (Acts 10:44-48).

A New Testament scholar named F.F. Bruce says, “It is against the whole genius of biblical religion to suppose that the outward rite would have any value except insofar as it was accompanied by the work of grace within.” He points to the similar situation in Acts 3:19, where the blotting out of the peoples’ sins is the direct consequence of their repenting and turning to God...nothing is said about baptism, although it is no doubt implied. Take note, however, that the idea of an unbaptized believer does not seem to be entertained in the New Testament.

A further word about the importance of Baptism. The apostle Paul later explained that to “be baptized” was to be “buried” with [Jesus]...into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead...we too may live a new life (see Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). He further noted that “all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27). There is nothing magical about the waters of baptism, rather, baptism is God’s chosen time when regeneration and renewal happen (Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21). As such, baptism is not a human work of merit; rather, it is a work of God.

“Unto you, and to your children,” God’s message was offered to the people of that generation and to their descendants. The Messiah’s kingdom was to be an everlasting kingdom. “And for all who are far off” – the promise was not only to Jews who worshiped God, but also to Gentiles who were far from Him and His people. They too could be redeemed if they would repent and be baptized.

“For all whom the Lord will call”—God extended His call and offered His promise to everyone and that includes you and me. But, of course, the blessings of the Messiah’s kingdom will be available only by those who respond to His call.

So what happened to Peter at that first Pentecost can happen to us. On the night of the crucifixion, it was Peter near the fire. He followed afar off and warmed himself by the fire. Then it was Peter in the fire, when he failed to live up to his boast and denied his Lord and got into trouble. But on the day of Pentecost, it was

Peter on fire, empowered by the Holy Spirit to courageous witness. We are told that what happened to Peter happened to all the disciples. And, indeed, it can happen to us today. So be it!

Action Plan

1. How would you respond to the statement that new Bible translations are not needed?
2. How can a believer's actions and attitudes cause unbelievers to show aversion to the gospel?
3. Explain how you understand the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Resources For This Lesson

1. "2022-2023 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Lesson, International Sunday School Lessons," pages 305-312.
2. "The NIV Application Commentary (Acts)", by Agith Fernando, pages 100-103,106.
3. "Standard Bible Commentary (Acts)" edited by Orion Root and John W. Wade, pages 11-13, 16-17.

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May 14 Lesson: Jumping for Joy

Spring Quarter: Jesus Calls Us

Unit 3: The Birth of the Church

Lesson 11: Week of May 14, 2023

Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scriptures: Acts 3:1-11

Key Verse: Acts 3:8

Lesson Aims

1. Describe the life of the man who was lame.
2. Compare and contrast the people's reactions to the healing with reactions in Acts 4:1-22 and 14:8-13.
3. Write a prayer for discernment to recognize when to offer Jesus before offering material help.

The Lesson Context

Luke had just given a summary description of the community life of the young church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42-47). This included miraculous displays after the Day of Pentecost. And these displays are described as being "many wonders and signs performed by the apostles" (Acts 2:43).

Now, Hebrews 2:4 confirms God to be the one who authenticated the truth of the gospel preaching by "signs, wonders and various miracles." Although miraculous healings obviously brought compassionate relief to the afflicted, their primary purpose was to validate the truth of Christianity in general and the work of Jesus in particular (see John 20:30-31). Today's lesson forms part of that larger tapestry.

We are not told exactly how long the events of today's lesson occurred after the Day of Pentecost, but it was probably several weeks later. The church itself had been busy, including a ministry of the selling of property to provide funds for the relief of the poor (Acts 2:45). The apostles were still in Jerusalem, not having

returned home to Galilee. They and all the other followers of Jesus met daily in the spacious porticoes of the temple (Acts 1:46a). Activities included meeting in homes for breaking bread – fellowship meals that included the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (2:46b).

I. The Setting

Acts 3:1-2

We are presented in verse 1 with a daily custom of “prayer” that occurred at a specific time of day. It should be noted that all the believers at this point were of Jewish background – there were no Gentile Christians until the events of Acts 10. Belief in Jesus and his resurrection did not cause “Peter and John” to abandon all Jewish practices, and the same was true later for the apostle Paul (Acts 21:20).

Therefore, it is very interesting that the apostles still kept up the customs and the habits in which they had been trained. It was the hour of prayer, and Peter and John were going into the temple to observe it. They were well aware that the new faith that had come to them and the old discipline could not still walk hand in hand.

Prayer had been important before, and it still was. These traditional times for prayer at the temple were recognized: early morning when the priests made the daily sacrifice, in mid-afternoon, and at sunset (Exodus 29:38-39; Psalm 55:17). This is the second of those, “at three in the afternoon” (see Acts 10:3,30).

Peter and John, the two most important apostles, are depicted here as colleagues and pious Jews, unimpeachable witnesses to the miracle about to occur. The object of the miracle is a beggar they encounter on the incline heading up to the temple.

People suffering from disabilities were a common sight in the ancient world (compare Matthew 15:30), and no less so in Jerusalem (Acts 5:12-16). For someone to have been “lame from birth” indicates a congenital condition rather than a tragic accident (compare John 9:1, 32; Acts 14:8). The legs of this “certain man” had never been able to support his weight and allow him to walk.

Although his physical condition was terrible, he did have two things going for him. First, he had family members or friends who were willing to carry him to the temple “every day.” Second, he had a prime, high-traffic place that seems to be recognized as his right; the exact opposite seems to be the case with the man in John 5:7. This particular gate called “Beautiful,” officially named the gate of Nicanor, is usually understood to have been on the eastern side of “the temple” (some see it as having been the eastern gate for the inner courtyard).

Since the combination of temple prayers and alms-giving characterize Jewish priests, beggars are found outside the Temple at three o’clock in the afternoon. Such is true of the man in this story. Outside of being at the gate called “Beautiful,” he seems to have no other source of income.

Question! What adjustments can your congregation make to ensure that people with disabilities can easily participate in worship and other activities in your church?

II. The Expectations

Acts 3:3-6a

The book of Acts sets up a collision course: the men going into the Temple hear a beggar’s request. This man confronted everyone who entered by this gate, just by his presence alone. Peter and John may have seen him before, and he may have seen them since the apostles had been walking in the temple daily.

The Greek word translated “money” occurs 13 times in the New Testament (examples, Matthew 6:2, 3, 4; Luke 11:41; 12:33; Acts 3:2, 3, 10); it refers to a duty-driven monetary gift to the poor and needy. Jesus never renounced the practice of giving to the poor, but he did condemn those who made a show of their giving to gain praise and honor (Matthew 6:2-4). Peter and John had no doubt given to beggars many times, both in Jerusalem and in their hometown.

Someone said, “There are three kinds of giving: grudge giving, duty giving, and thanksgiving. Grudge giving says, “I hate to,” duty giving says, “I ought to,” and thanksgiving says, “I want to.” In giving to the poor and needy, Jesus would suggest “thanksgiving.”

Peter, no longer the wishy-washy denier from Jesus’ trials, speaks to the man with confidence. What Peter says first is interesting to compare with a previous verse, Acts 3:3. That verse indicates that the beggar had already seen the two apostles when Peter says, “Look at us.” Therefore, the request by Peter isn’t for the man to do something entirely different but for him to do something more intensely. That extra intensity undoubtedly results in making eye contact. In any case, the two apostles gain the full attention of the man.

Question! How can we practice being more attentive to people we might be tempted to ignore?

In verse 6a Peter says, “Silver or gold I do not have...” Imagine the depth of the lame man’s disappointment at this announcement. Led to expect much, he is now persuaded to expect nothing. The moment must have been fraught with bewilderment for this lame man. Hope was stirred again, but for what?

Back to Peter and John! To shirk one’s duty to care for the needy by not giving alms violated at least the spirit of the law, which required the people of Israel to care for those who were in need (see Deuteronomy 26:12). Others observing at this busy gate would have seen the apostles’ failure to give alms as being shamefully unprepared.

III. The Wonder Acts 3:6b-11

“...But what I do have, I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (v.6b). Thought it’s not the end of the story, Peter did indeed have something precious to “give” this poor man: healing in “the powerful name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”

Of course, this is the center of the whole event. The name represents the authority, just as the signature of any person carries with it full commitment of all he or she is and has.

Note that Peter did not present himself as having miraculous powers (examples, Acts 3:12; 10:26). If the man were to “walk,” the power would come from his Lord.

It has been suggested by some that the man might not have wanted to be healed. They speculate that he was delivered daily to a prime spot for begging, perhaps a more lucrative gig than we might guess. However, this is to misunderstand the anguish of those with disabilities. For sure, some do indeed rise above the limitation of their disability, but many with a disability would like to have it removed. As we have been encouraged, it is important to acknowledge the unique stories of people with disabilities and not assume a universally applicable narrative.

We need to remember that this man before us had been disabled from birth. Thus, his disability was not from disease or injury. He was not being “healed” or “restored,” technically speaking; since he was being made whole for the first time in his life.

At any rate, Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And in responding to the touch of a human hand, the lame man responded also to the power of God.

Before going further, I want to illustrate the power of the human hand – the power of touch. A friend’s wife was seriously ill in the hospital. He was attending a worship service in the hospital chapel. There were not many others, but the man sitting behind him was suffering. My friend just lovingly reached out behind him and grasped the other man’s hand. That loving gesture opened up further conversation and ministry following the worship service.

We further note that the right hand can indicate honor as the left hand indicates dishonor (see Matthew 25:31-46).

In verse 8, it is hard for those who are well to imagine the delight of this man who now could stand for the first time in his life. For him, there is more than having his feet and ankles made whole. He also learned to walk and jump instantly. Toddlers take months to learn to walk well and even longer to learn to hop about. Adults who have suffered traumatic injuries to the spine or legs can testify to the challenges of learning how to walk again. But because of being made whole, the lame man could walk and jump and leap instantly. His vigorous activity expressed his joy and also demonstrated the completeness of his cure.

And, notice that the man’s newfound physical abilities were accompanied by a sign of spiritual health: as he was walking and jumping, “the man praised God.” This would be appropriate 100 percent of the times such a miracle happened, but surprisingly it did not (contrast Luke 17:15-18).

We see in verses 9 and 10 that this man, now jumping about and happily “praising God,” was instantly recognized by those who frequented the temple courts. It is likely that he had only one set of clothes and one head covering. They had seen him many times, a beggar who had occupied a place at the “gate called Beautiful” for years. They had seen him so often and for so long that there was no doubt in their minds that he truly had been disabled and was now doing physical things that defied his disability. This caused “wonder and amazement” for them, for this could only have been the work of God (see Luke 5:26; compare and contrast with Acts 4:1-22 and 19:8-13).

In verse 11, we see that the man who was healed held onto Peter and John. In the man’s gesture there was enthusiastic gratitude, coupled perhaps with an unconscious fear that the miracle would depart with them if they were allowed out of his presence.

We are told that “all the people” who witnessed this miracle congregated in an area of the temple known as Solomon’s Colonnade. This was a covered open-air area on the east side of the largest temple courtyard, the Court of the Gentiles.

So the healed man had gone into the temple with Peter and John (v.8), and he came out with them, perhaps when the time of prayer ended. The three had made their way to Solomon’s porch, and they were joined by the astonished crowd who had seen the miracle.

Conclusion

Over half of Jesus’ miracles recorded in the Gospels involved people who were sick, blind, mute, deaf, or otherwise suffering a physical disability. And this does not count summary statements where we are told that Jesus “healed many” (see Mark 1:34). The word used several times to describe Jesus’ attitude and action is “compassion.” Jesus cared deeply for those who had disabilities, and he wants his church to have compassion for them as well.

So, what can our churches do to enhance our ministries to those with disabilities?

1. We can make sure our sanctuaries and ministry areas are accessible to those with disabilities.
2. We can invite those with disabilities to serve, speak, read scripture, help plan, greet, and pray for others.
3. We can listen and encourage those with disabilities to guide us in effectively meeting their needs.

Action Plan

1. How can you practice meeting a person's physical needs while also not ignoring his or her spiritual needs?
2. How can believers be attentive to the wonder and amazement of God's miraculous work in the world?
3. What do you think is the most important takeaway from today's lesson?

Resources For This Lesson

1. "2022-2023 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, Uniform Lesson, International Sunday School Lessons," pages 313-320.
2. "The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume X," pages 76-79.
3. "Standard Bible Commentary (Acts)" edited by Orion Root and John W. Wade, pages 19-23.

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Fried Chicken Love

PATHWAY TO HIS PRESENCE

B.J. FUNK

Having fried chicken once a week was a given at my house. How well I remember coming in from school, starting my homework and hearing the first sounds of grease popping on the kitchen stove. Soon, the smell of mama's chicken permeated the air, filling every available space with its mouth-watering aroma. My sister and I practically raced to get the table set, put the ice in the glasses, and pour our sweet tea.

I remember which piece each of us liked the best. Daddy and my sister wanted a chicken breast, I wanted the legs, and my mama wanted a wing. When growing up days were over, I would come back home often to sit at my parent's table and eat mama's delicious meals. If we had fried chicken, I always knew what piece each of us would select. No matter how many years passed, it was always the same. Daddy and my sister took a breast. I took the legs. Mama took one wing. I remember what my mama would say as we swallowed a bit of guilt over her taking the smallest piece. "Oh, I just love the wing," she claimed.

When mama was much older and no longer cooked, my sister and I brought home fast-food buckets of chicken. On one of those days, as we passed the chicken around, I was sure I did not hear her correctly. At ninety-two, her always soft voice seemed even softer.

"You want what piece, Mama?" I asked.

“Oh, the leg! That’s always been my favorite piece of chicken.”

The leg? The leg she always made sure I had? How does one woman keep a secret like this for so many years? Mama was always teaching me lessons, and most of them came when she wasn’t even trying. Who would have guessed there was a lesson for me wrapped inside years and years of chicken wings!

My Mama’s sacrificial love spoke loudest when she never said a word. What about you? Unconditional love speaks volumes to your children about the way God loves them. It also releases the Spirit of Christ over your relationship with them.

Sacrifices of love come to us in big and little packages. A mother’s long-planned shopping trip is canceled because she would rather stay home and make sure her child’s fever leaves. In a broader sense, a mother gives up one meal a day in order to make sure her child has a new winter coat.

Maybe you’ve been the recipient of someone’s sacrifice, and you understand the cherished feeling you gained of another’s love. The reverse is true, too. When you sacrifice for someone else’s happiness, you not only pass on what you have learned, but you receive the deep joy that comes from giving up something for someone you love.

God knows all about sacrifice. It is one of His best qualities. He showed it best when He gave His only Son to be sacrificed for our sins.

When Mothers live for Jesus, His love naturally spills out on their children. At the dining room table, in the kitchen, in the living room and in the yard, unselfish love brings volumes of Godly teaching to your family. Bless your children with the gift of unselfishness, and watch them learn about the goodness of God without your ever saying a word.

The Rev. B.J. Funk is the associate pastor of Central United Methodist Church in Fitzgerald.



Obituary: Reverend J. Don Proctor

Reverend J. Don Proctor, 93, of Saint Simons Island, departed this life to be with his Savior Wednesday, April 12, 2023 at his residence surrounded by his family. Funeral Services will be conducted at 2 pm, on Saturday, April 22nd, 2023 at Saint Simons United Methodist Church. The Reverends Tom Jones, Tom Dent and Jim McIlrath are officiating. Interment will follow at Taylors United Methodist Church Cemetery with Drew Osika, Cory Proctor, Garth Walton, Richard Soper, Chandler Giedl and Mike Fitzgerald serving as pallbearers. Members of the St. Simons United Methodist Church Pilot Sunday School Class will serve as honorary pallbearers.

Born February 19, 1930 in Atlanta, GA to the late Dedrick David and Berdie Lee Norman Proctor, Don graduated from the University of Georgia and Candler School of Theology at Emory University. A swimmer at UGA, he became Head of the Aquatics Program at the Boys Club of Atlanta while studying at Emory. In Atlanta he met and married the love of his life, Mable Smith Proctor. They recently celebrated 70 years of marriage. Reverend Proctor began his ministry at Trinity in Savannah. Followed by Buck Creek McBride in Sylvania, Woodland, Sardis, Evans Chapel and Matthews Chapel in Woodland, Southside in Macon, Soperton First Methodist and Midway in Soperton, Morningside in Albany, Cochran First Methodist in Cochran and Longstreet Methodist in Cochran, Calvary in Swainsboro, Wadley First Methodist in Wadley, Taylors Methodist in Brunswick, Darien Methodist and Morgans Chapel in Darien, Saint Simons United

Methodist Church as Director of Senior Ministry and Akin Memorial in Hortense, GA. Reverend Proctor attended several mission trips to Haiti, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Panama to build churches and schools.

Reverend Proctor had been a resident of Saint Simons Island since 1995. He enjoyed golfing, swimming, hunting, fishing and was an avid Georgia Bulldog and Braves Baseball fan. His passion for life came from service to others and he loved serving soup at the Soup Kitchen, working at the Youth Detention Center, MAP International, Cairos Prison Ministries, and Emmaus Walks. In 2000 he joined a popular Barber Shop Quartet which entertained groups around the island. His big smile, hearty laugh and desire to bring a smile to the face of others will be remembered by those who knew and loved him.

Don's love for his wife and partner in ministry and his children, and grands and great grands will live on in their hearts. He loved to make them laugh and was always proud of their accomplishments. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by a son, Jeffrey Matthew Proctor, and two brothers, Norman "Tony" Proctor and Col. William David Proctor. Survivors include his wife, Mable Smith Proctor, a daughter, Donna Proctor Nedik both of Saint Simons Island, a son, Alan Keith Proctor and wife Diana of Jacksonville, FL, three grandchildren, Cory Alan Proctor and wife Jamie, Marjorie Nicole Osika and husband Drew, and Lauren Ashley Walton and husband Garth, nine great grandchildren, Devin, Drew, Luke Guy and Adelyn Proctor, Brantley, Paisley and Kinsley Walton, Savannah and Hunter Osika, and several nieces and nephews.

The family will receive friends, April 22, 2023 from 12:30 pm until the funeral hour at Saint Simons United Methodist Church. Memorials may be made to Hospice of the Golden Isles and to Faithworks. Edo Miller and Sons Funeral Home is entrusted with the arrangements.



Obituary: Rev. William Michael Huling

On Thursday, April 20, 2023, a humble man of deep faith, The Reverend William Michael Huling, age 71, passed away peacefully at home surrounded by his family. Born in Washington, D. C, he grew up in Macon, Georgia. Graduating from Willingham High School in Macon, he continued his education graduating from the University of Georgia with a B. S. in Chemistry and a MDiv from Emory University.

An avid UGA fan, he loved watching and participating in all sports. His love of competition was an innate part of him. As time allowed, he played basketball, golf, softball, and body surfing at the beach. He looked forward to the extended family touch football game every year. A longtime runner, he liked competing in local races. His love of family was always at the forefront and family vacations in St. Augustine and family time was a priority for him.

A seventh generation United Methodist Pastor, he faithfully served the South Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church for 47 years. Beginning his career in June 1979, he served Vidette UMC, East Macon UMC, Pembroke UMC, Garden City UMC, Claxton First UMC, Pittman Park UMC in Statesboro, and Thomasville First UMC. He retired after serving as District Superintendent of the Savannah District. His last appointment was as a retired supply clergy at Darien UMC.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Morris Shepard and Mary Elizabeth Huling of Macon, Georgia and grandson Micah Williamson of Brunswick, Georgia.

Survived by his wife Melinda Stewart Huling of Claxton: children Melanie (Steve B) Williamson of

Brunswick; Matthew (Heather) Huling of Statesboro; Monica (Chris) Brister of Statesboro; sister Susan (Jeff) Wiley of Atlanta, Ga; three brothers: Jim Huling of Macon; Glenn (Kyle) Huling of Tacoma Washington and Patrick (Ruth) Huling of Olympia, Washington. Grandchildren: Emily and Olivia Huling of Statesboro, Ga. and Abigail, Michael and Robin Brister of Statesboro, Ga.; numerous much-loved nieces and nephews.

Visitation is Sunday, April 23, 2023, 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at Mellie Nesmith Funeral Home in Claxton, Ga. The Memorial Service is Monday, April 24, 2023, visitation will be 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at Pittman Park UMC followed by a Celebration of Life Service at 11:00 a.m. Honorary pallbearers are ministers and spouses and the Lectionary Sunday School Class at Pittman Park UMC. Remembrances can be made to Ogeechee Area Hospice 200 Donehoo St. Statesboro, Ga. 30458 or Pittman Park UMC. 1102 Fair Road, Statesboro, GA., 30458



Obituary: Mrs. Lynn Strickland

On the morning of April 26, 2023, the spirit of Lynn Strickland was released from her failing body for its journey to the Eternal Home which was prepared for her by the Christ she loved all her life. She was the first daughter of Arthur and Myrle Sparks of Portal, Georgia, was a 1965 graduate of Portal High School, and a 1969 graduate of Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky.

She married Bill Strickland in 1970, and they moved across South Georgia as a clergy couple serving Christ and the United Methodist Church. Early on, she worked with the Department of Family and Children's Services working with foster care and adoptions. Later she served as the first Director of Social Services for the Salvation Army in Vidalia, Georgia. Her greatest work was rearing two daughters who bear the markings of her values and spiritual heritage. Throughout the years, she was always an avid gardener who loved growing her own plants from seed. One of her great joys was to return to Portal and live on a small family farm on the edge of town where she faithfully tended the land with pride and respect.

She is survived by her husband of 53 years, Bill Strickland; two daughters, Jennifer Strickland of Albany, Georgia, and Leslie (Brent) Thomas of Alamo, Georgia; five grandchildren; two sisters, Nan Finch and Ann (Jimmy) Lanier, both of Portal; along with several nieces and nephews.

Upon returning to Portal with her husband in 2010, she came back to Portal United Methodist Church where her family have worshipped for three generations. It is the church which nurtured her faith in Christ, baptized her, and set her feet on the path that leads toward her eternal home.

The funeral service will be held Saturday, April 29th at 11:00am at Portal United Methodist Church with a visitation an hour before services. Interment will follow at Portal City Cemetery. Pallbearers will be Wayne Laircey, Mark Lanier, Josh Strickland, Jay Williams, Brian Hogan, and Bill Brown. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the Memorial Fund of the Portal United Methodist Church, PO Box 401, Portal, GA 30450.



Evangelism isn't a lost cause! New Reset Cohorts begin this Fall

Evangelism isn't a word you hear much anymore, unless it's around the time you're nominating people for committees within the church. Occasionally it may be talked about in terms of someone's spiritual gifts as if

only evangelists can do evangelism. In many ways, evangelism has become a “lost cause” in our programming and efforts today. It seems outdated in a world that shuts garage doors and doesn’t invite “visitation teams” inside for coffee and cookies. It can even seem intimidating in a culture that labels you a fanatic for talking about faith. What is evangelism and is it really a lost cause?

A group of South Georgia pastors and laity attended the Exponential Conference in March as part of this year’s Reset Cohort sponsored by the Office of Connectional Ministries. The emphasis of the Reset Cohort was to explore how to reset our churches back on mission and evangelism is an important part of that mission. The Exponential conference was focused around Evangelism with the theme of, “The Lost Cause.” As we have begun to process and implement what we experienced at Exponential, here are some of the learnings from those who participated. Allow what they have heard and learned to encourage you to revive evangelism in your church and community in a way that is winsome to people and points them to the good news of the Gospel.

“Evangelism is not about a program or strategy, although those were presented in the breakout sessions. It is about one-on-one relationships with one another and with Jesus. We must rethink “church.” Intentional invitation to our neighbors in our homes, digitally connecting beyond what we did during the surge of Covid, networking via lunch gatherings, etc. can be intentional ‘evangelism’. I left with two questions. How intentional is my individual invitation? Where am I being incarnational in my witness and invitation to others to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ?” - Christy Bandy, Waycross

“I enjoyed every one of the speakers, but it wasn't until I got home and sat down and recapped what happened that I realized how close to my heart this entire event was. As an evangelist at heart, everything about the lost cause began to stir in my spirit, and it was then that the message of Faith Eury Cho began to resonate with my soul. Her message from Acts 1 was that God is a movement – and are you willing to move with God? I feel as though the move of God is not sitting comfortably in our church buildings, where we separate ourselves every Sunday. The movement of God is forcing us to figure out how to receive his power to go to the uttermost parts of the world and testify about his death and resurrection.” - Chester Harris, Haven Sheffield/New Hope

“We heard that 40 % of Christians think evangelism is wrong, yet 63% of Christians believe they should be a witness to faith in Christ. Christians are confused! We must teach them that sharing your witness IS evangelism.” - Danita Knowles, Tabernacle/Tennille

“One thing I think was an important reminder, centered around collaborating with other faith groups to do community work. If you are going to partner with other denominations it's important to lay aside the denominational differences and focus on the goal of serving community. The common ground is to minister to the people, not pushing a denominational agenda.” – Precious Hawkins, Asbury Savannah

“Exponential was not only a learning experience, but a time of spiritual refreshment. The dynamic speakers and passionate, spirit filled worship were amazing. The emphasis on creating movements of evangelism and multiplication was inspiring and motivating. Beyond my expectations, the Holy Spirit brought back to the surface dreams and visions for ministry that had laid dormant in me for years. There was a sense that God did not want me to give up on those things but to move toward them.” - Jeremy Alexander, St. Mark’s Columbus

“This year's focus was "Lost Cause" highlighting how evangelism can easily be lost in our programming and discipleship efforts. The theme of evangelism shined through every day with inspirational and practical tools for reaching people with the Good News. I liked seeing the many ways that ministry can happen in the 21st century. From discipleship models for established churches to cell group models for new faith communities, there are many diverse and creative ways to reach people!” Matt Waldron, Guyton

“This was my first time attending Exponential Conference, and I will certainly be back! I learned so many things, but I especially enjoyed the workshops and prayer time that was offered to those attending. My biggest takeaway was from one of the workshops, and the speaker shared some wisdom that really resonated with myself and other leaders in my life: ‘Any leadership that requires affirmation from others, is distracted leadership. Be filled with worth from God, and the confidence that He has you in His arms always. Unless you're filled with that knowledge, your leadership will always be a debt to you.’” – Sara Fullerton, Encounter Church

“I was really blessed by attending the Exponential Conference! The worship music and speakers were amazing. I think we have become afraid of the word, evangelism, and allowed the word to take on a negative meaning. We all need the reminder of how to share the good news of Jesus Christ in a positive, inclusive way. The workshops shared innovative ways to go into the community and simply just talk to others about Jesus.” - Angela Gilbert, Trinity Warner Robins

If you'd like to participate in next year's Reset Cohort, and learn about resetting your church on mission, sign up here: <https://sgaumc-reg.brtapp.com/ResetCohort71>.



Conference Happenings

2023 Lay Servant Ministries & Certified Lay Ministry

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

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.

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.](#)

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.

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.

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](#)



Resource Roundup – May 2023

8 ways to connect young adults to the church

(UMCom) Young adults have a lot to offer, especially if they are taking a summertime break from school or their new job. Consider creating opportunities for them to engage with your church and community. Here are some suggestions to get you started. [Read more](#)

10 ways to engage online worshippers

(Lewis Center for Church Leadership) In this time of hybrid worship, church leaders may overlook or not give enough intentional thought to the people who are worshiping online. This article offers 10 tips for congregations to strengthen engagement and build relationships with online worshippers. [Read commentary](#)

4 tips for putting the fun in fundraisers

(UMCom) Fundraisers are valuable tools for achieving missional visions that create community and bring hope and healing to the world. This article offers four tips for churches to take the next step in advertising their fundraisers online. [Read story](#)

Email: Still Relevant After All These Years

(UMCom) Even though email is well into "mid-life crisis" age, it's still going strong. Almost every year, usually around the time people decide to clean out their inboxes, a thought tends to creep into our minds. We wonder if email works anymore. Guess what? It does, and surprisingly well! Thanks to having targeted messages that cater to one's interests, there is almost no other medium that individual recipients choose when it comes to mass communications or marketing. [Read more](#)

Hands-on social media assistance

(UMCom) Social media can get complicated. Between the forever-changing algorithms and the continuous march of new platforms popping up, it's OK to ask for some assistance. United Methodist Communications is here to help. [Find out more](#)

Facebook groups aren't just for the neighborhood watch

(UMCom) Most of us are part of a Facebook group, whether it's for town information or the area "free-cycle" treasures. But did you know that you can utilize Facebook groups for your congregation? Facebook Groups is a tool that provides a way for your church members to connect and engage outside of the church building. Since most of your church is already on Facebook in some form or fashion, why not utilize an infrastructure that is already there? [Read more](#)



Retired Clergy Birthdays – May 2023

- 5/01 – Jacque Asbel: 4116 Amberley Trail; Valdosta, GA 31602
- 5/01 – John Beck: 1210 Tribble Rd.; Ft. Valley, GA 31030
- 5/01 – Rick Mitchell: 325 Providence Trace; Statesboro, GA 30461
- 5/03 – Wayne Rogers: 126 Baynard St.; Pooler, GA 31322
- 5/03 – Rick Turner: 798 Mallery St., Apt. 11; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
- 5/06 – Eddie Morrison: 1610 Kings Way; Savannah, GA 31406
- 5/12 – Reese Nelson: 2804 Willow Wood Circle; Valdosta, GA 31602
- 5/14 – Kenneth Watkins: 170 Sanford St.; Wadley, GA 30477
- 5/15 – Dan Smith: 5462 Whittlesey, Apt 517; Columbus, GA 31909
- 5/19 – Ronnie Howell: 32 Vanceville Co. Line Rd.; Tifton, GA 31794
- 5/20 – Franklin Pierce: 602 Ft. King George Dr.; Darien, GA 31305
- 5/21 – Karen Ziegler; 868 McBride Circle; Sylvania, GA 30467
- 5/23 – Jeri Pruette: 2188 Peacock Rd.; Quitman, GA 31643
- 5/24 – Columbus Burns: 201 East 63rd St.; Savannah, GA 31405
- 5/24 – Robert Beckum: 5031 Spyglass Court; Columbus, GA 31909
- 5/26 – Faye Burgamy: 165 S. Burgamy Rd.; Warthen, GA 31094
- 5/27 – Cile Mitchell: 130 Hitchiti Ridge Rd.; Juliette, GA 31046
- 5/28 – Richard Newton: 1823 Kaufman Circle; Lady Lake, FL 32159
- 5/29 – Marsha Emery: 3855 Dennis Creek Road; Talbotton, GA 31827
- 5/30 – Luanne Kemper: 1412 Sapling Dr.; Orange Park, FL 32073
- 5/31 – Mike Brown: 4444 GA Hwy. 15; Vidalia, GA 30474



Scripture Readings – May 2 edition

May 7

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year A

- [Acts 7:55-60](#)
- [Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16 \(UMH 764\)](#)
- [1 Peter 2:2-10](#)
- [John 14:1-14](#)

May 14

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year A

- [Acts 17:22-31](#)
- [Psalm 66:8-20 \(UMH 790\)](#)
- [1 Peter 3:13-22](#)
- [John 14:15-21](#)