

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – APRIL 2 EDITION

Conference unites in prayer for General Conference

When people pray, God listens.

And John and Charles Wesley believed “that God does nothing apart from believing prayer.”

In a focused effort to prepare for the upcoming General Conference session, the South Georgia Conference is launching a month-long Conference-wide prayer initiative, “Hear Our Prayers.” It will begin the day after Easter - April 1 - and run through the General Conference session, scheduled [April 23-May 3 in Charlotte, North Carolina](#).

Psalm 4:1 says: “Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.” Each day laity and clergy will be asked to pause and pray for our church’s mission and for the upcoming conference at 4:01 pm.

The Hear Our Prayers initiative provides an opportunity for South Georgia United Methodists to be united in purpose through prayer, said Kelly Roberson, director of communications/conference ministries.

Daily prayers will be posted on the conference website at www.sgaumc.org/hearourprayers and on the Conference social media channels ([Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)).

“There is power in our connection and in prayer, and during this time of uncertainty, what better way to be in ministry together!” said Allison Lindsey, chair of the conference nurture team and member of the delegation. “In the words of Oswald Chambers, ‘We have to pray with our eyes on God and not on the difficulties.’ Hear Our Prayers gives us an opportunity to do just that, to come together in prayer with our focus on God.”

Bishop David Graves begins the prayer initiative, inviting all to pray this prayer:

With the hope of Easter People, help us face the obstacles and opposition in our lives with the same enthusiasm we embrace opportunities. Help us move faithfully forward, confident that God’s power is greater than all life will present us realizing that the worst thing is not the last thing. In Christ alone!

Rev. Doreen Smalls, chair of the South Georgia delegation to General Conference, says the delegation has been preparing and praying and is thankful for the prayers of the conference.

“As we prepare to do our work this month, and then as we travel to Charlotte and work each day representing South Georgia while we are there, we covet your prayers,” said Rev. Smalls. “God has great plans for the people called United Methodists, and I’m thankful this delegation has a voice in helping shape our future as we act with confidence and hope in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

View the outline for the prayer initiative at www.sgaumc.org/hearourprayers.



St. Simons UMC gives back to community through Serve Saturday

By Buddy Hughes & Terry Dickson from The Brunswick News and conference communications

There was a flurry of activity around the cabins at Epworth By the Sea on Saturday morning, March 9, 2024, and not just from the groups that were staying in them.

As luggage wheeled out and soccer balls kicked around, a group dressed in matching blue T-shirts pressure washed the exteriors of all the buildings. It wasn't a professional cleaning crew. It was one of 12 groups from St. Simons United Methodist Church volunteering in the community for the church's Serve Saturday initiative.

This is the second year the church used the second Saturday in March to do good in the community.

"We were looking for opportunities for our church to go out and help the community," said church member Anna Wilson, leader of Serve Saturday. "We kind of started small. Last year wasn't as big. We doubled in size this year."

About 135 volunteers spread out across St. Simons and Brunswick volunteering in a variety of ways.

At Epworth, a group led by Mike Suthard pressure washed buildings to remove mold and other substances. Both Wilson and Suthard were excited to be able to help Epworth – a United Methodist Retreat ministry in the South Georgia Conference – which Wilson said "does a lot to serve and grow Christians."

Suthard's connection to Epworth runs especially deep.

"My wife has been coming here since she was 9," Suthard said. "She grew up in middle Georgia and always came down here for camp until she was an adult."

With more volunteers this year, the church was able to expand how many people and organizations it could help.

Projects included cleaning the overgrown yard, removing debris and erecting a fence at a house on Albany Street that church member Tony Eisenstraeger owns.

He and his wife, Eisenstraeger said, had made the house their personal mission. They bought it from First African Baptist Church, made repairs to the structure, and placed a formerly homeless man in it. The man is working and paying expenses, but there was debris in the yard left by people who had camped there.

Work has been done on other nearby houses, and Eisenstraeger said, "Hopefully, this will change the whole block."

Wilson was thankful the church was able to help more people in more places because of the greater number of volunteers this year.

"One of the things we have made an effort to do this year is expand more into Brunswick," Wilson said. "We've taken meals to the Brunswick fire station. We're at Memory Matters. We're at Second Harvest. We had limited volunteers last year so now that we have more, we've tried to expand our scope into all of Glynn County. That will be what the focus will be next year too."

More people and more churches might even be involved in the event next year.

Scott Cleaveland, Coastal District lay leader, and Kelly Crane, district disaster response coordinator who also serves on the district board of mission, were on hand for the day.

Acknowledging that one of the great strengths of The United Methodist Church is seen in its connectional work, Cleaveland, Crane, and other district leadership are already looking at the second Saturday of March 2025 to replicate this opportunity for service and fellowship in the Coastal District by bringing churches together at additional locations between Savannah and Saint Marys.

“As Kelly and I visited the service opportunities in Brunswick and St. Simons we were moved by the deep connections the church had with ministries across the community,” said Cleaveland. “From advanced project planning, to online registration, the breakfast celebration and work team organization, Anna Wilson and the St. Simons UMC team provided a great day of service.”

Service is what the whole day was about. After the volunteers ate breakfast at the church early Saturday morning, the Rev. Tom Jones, senior pastor of St. Simons United Methodist Church, prayed for them and said, “We thank you for the calling you placed upon our hearts, the call to serve.”

The day’s work, he said, would be examples of “your love, your care, your compassion.”

With Easter Sunday and the celebration of Jesus Christ’s resurrection on the heels of their event, Wilson said it was a great time to get out and serve others as Jesus would.

“We’re called to serve,” Wilson said. “If there is a need in the community, we want to try to meet that need. Be the hands and feet of Jesus, who calls us to be his hands and feet. Do what Jesus would do, whether that is pressure washing or building a fence.”

Suthard added it’s also a great fellowship opportunity for church members.

“We love our church and the people especially,” Suthard said. “You sit in pews and say hello to them, but until you get out here and do a little work with them, you don’t get to know them. Everybody pulling on the same team makes it go quickly.”

While there is nothing wrong with donating funds to help a cause, Suthard said it’s a different feeling when you are putting in the time and effort yourself to give back.

“I can decide where my elbow grease goes,” Suthard said. “I can make a difference and see what I’ve done.”

Serve Saturday has also opened the door for the St. Simons UMC congregation to explore opportunities for hands-on missions. Some of the offspring of Serve Saturday include the participation of 22 volunteers in an Early Response Team Training last August. In the first week after being trained this group was called to serve in Valdosta after Hurricane Idalia. Now, in just a few short months, they have a trailer that is fully equipped with tools and other disaster response necessities.

This was followed by a project last fall when 70 volunteers packed 10,000 meals for the international feeding ministry, “Feed the Hungry.” Plans are already being made to increase the number of meals to 15,000 at a packing event in October 2024.

Additionally, the church has readily responded to a request in recent weeks to be a home base for the newly created Meals on Wheels program on St. Simons Island. Volunteers will be distributing meals twice a week to families and individuals on the island beginning in April.

“It is apparent God is moving in the hearts of our people to not only be supportive of missions financially, but to experience firsthand the tremendous benefits provided for others, as well as for those who serve. when

people choose to get involved – and the catalyst for this transformation in our church was a day of service,” said Rev. Jones.

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Preparing for General Conference

With General Conference less than a month away, the South Georgia Conference delegation has been meeting to pray, study, and discuss legislation as they continue to prepare for the global gathering, set for [April 23-May 3 in Charlotte, North Carolina](#).

General Conference is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church, which meets once every four years. However, because of the pandemic, the last regular session of General Conference was nearly eight years ago. The conference can revise church law, as well as adopt resolutions on current moral, social, public policy, and economic issues. It also approves plans and budgets for church-wide programs.

More than 1,000 legislative petitions will be before the lay and clergy delegates when they meet for the denomination’s assembly. The theme for the international gathering, which draws delegates and other church leaders from four continents, is [“...and know that I am God” from Psalm 46](#).

A [General Conference Primer](#) is available to help communicate about General Conference in your local church.

The [South Georgia Conference delegation to General Conference](#) is chaired by Rev. Doreen Smalls. There are 862 delegates to the postponed 2020 General Conference from around the world. Of the elected delegates, 55.9% are from the U.S., 32% from Africa, 6% from the Philippines, 4.6% from Europe (including Russia) and the remainder from concordat churches that have close ties to The United Methodist Church. The South Georgia Conference has 8 voting delegates.

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Shared Episcopal Task Group Meets to Begin Transition Work

On Thursday, March 14, 2024, representatives from Alabama-West Florida, North Alabama and the South Georgia Conferences met in Columbus, GA, to begin the necessary work of the shared Episcopal area. The group held an introductory Zoom session in February.

This work comes in response to the recent recommendation from the Southeastern Jurisdiction Committee on Episcopacy for a unified episcopal area, a change that calls for careful planning and preparation.

The group is facilitated by Rev. Rick Owen, a clergy person from North Alabama. Bishop David Graves, resident bishop of the Alabama-West Florida and South Georgia Conferences, and Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett, resident bishop of the North Alabama Conference, were also in attendance to offer feedback and guidance.

The day began with morning praise and prayer led by Dr. Jeff Wilson, district superintendent in the Alabama-West Florida Conference. His message was based on Genesis 1:1-3; focusing on new beginnings.

The team’s work concentrated on five main topics including office logistics, housing arrangements, travel, administrative support and cabinet structure. Team members chose which ideation group to offer their input and reported back to the group about the most important points around the focus areas. Priority was then suggested by each team member to guide the future work of the group and members offered their time to work on a specific area in the coming weeks.

“In addition to spending fellowship time with new and old friends, the day was a great success,” stated Rev. Rick Owen. “The room was overflowing with leadership from servants who deeply care about their conferences and the UMC. Each participant brought unique vantage points that enabled us to thoughtfully consider our best next steps.”

The day concluded with a poignant message from Rev. Doreen Smalls, district superintendent of the Northwest district in the South Georgia Conference. She stated, “We serve a God who knows all and sees all. He knows the beginning and end of our story and the in between.” Her message was based on Jeremiah 29. She continued, “God has not brought us this far to leave us.”

The goal for this work is to have a report ready in April in order to include any recommendations needing the vote of the annual conferences in each conference’s *Book of Reports*. Any vote at the three Annual Conferences would be contingent upon the official vote to set the episcopal areas during the Jurisdictional Conference in July. The Alabama West-Florida Conference meets June 16-18; the North Alabama Conference meets May 30-June 1; and the South Georgia Conference meets June 2-5.



Because He Lives

FROM THE BISHOP
BISHOP DAVID GRAVES

Christ the Lord is risen today! Hallelujah!

This Sunday marked the core of our Christian faith: the death on the cross and resurrection of Christ. What a day of celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

We truly do have so much to celebrate. I celebrate the churches in South Georgia who show what it means to be Easter people filled with joy and hope. You are offering a great message of hope - a hope that is out of this world! You are effectively reaching the least, the lost, and the lonely. You are challenging and encouraging one another in your discipleship efforts and your spiritual journeys. You are bringing people into a deeper relationship with a Holy God. You are showing that “every one” matters. You are changing your corner of the world.

I celebrate all of this and more!

As we look ahead towards the upcoming General Conference that begins this month I invite you to join me in daily prayer.

Yesterday, we began a prayer initiative called, [“Hear Our Prayers.”](#) Daily we are pausing at 4:01 pm to pray for our South Georgia delegation and the upcoming General Conference.

As Easter people filled with the joy and hope of a risen Savior, I call us to focus on the words of this familiar hymn:

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living
Just because He lives.

May we remember that Christ has risen indeed; He lives. He holds our future, and He holds the future of The South Georgia Conference and The United Methodist Church. He has come to bring us the life that we need 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.

In Christ,

David Graves



Young Clergy Fellowship offers scholarship, exploration of calling

Are you or someone you know exploring a call to ordained ministry? The Young Clergy Fellowship is designed to create experiences that assist college students in discerning their sense of calling to full-time ministry or missions, gaining broad experiences in a local ministry, and experiencing intentional discipleship through one-on-one mentoring.

"The Young Clergy Academy provided me with a sanctuary to explore my calling to ministry," said Sarah Hazelrig, Associate Director at the Wesley Foundation of Macon, as she reflects on her own experience.

“Through my placement at the Wesley Foundation of Macon, coupled with mentorship, networking, and training, my time in the Fellowship was an invaluable period of growth, learning, and discernment.”

This 9-month Fellowship – running August 1, 2024 through April 30, 2025 – will allow selected fellows to be immersed in a vocational ministry setting with intentional opportunities to deeply discern their call to clergy as a vocation with their specifically assigned mentor. The Fellowship is designed for each ministry fellow to develop leadership skills for effective ministry as they partner with clergy and laity in a local church or ministry.

The Young Clergy Fellowship is funded by the James Leon and Myrtice Peed Scholarship Fund and administered by the United Methodist Commission on Higher Education and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

The Peed YCF Scholarship includes 25 hours per week working in a UM-related church or ministry setting, a fellowship orientation retreat, a mid-year gathering, and a fellowship debriefing retreat and includes a \$9,000 scholarship (\$4,500 paid directly to the school each semester).

Applicants must be enrolled at least half-time at an accredited college or university, maintain at least a 2.75 GPA, and be connected to a South Georgia United Methodist Church, Wesley, or Chaplaincy. Two recommendations from a chaplain, District Superintendent, pastor, or Wesley Director are required. Candidates should possess a willingness to grow in areas of leadership, spiritual disciplines, self-awareness, and understanding of ordained ministry, coupled with a commitment to representing Christ in daily life.

“The cohort prepared me emotionally and spiritually to faithfully step into a Masters of Divinity program and a full-time Associate Director position within the Wesley Foundation,” says Hazelrig. “I am so grateful for the opportunity to grow as a part of the Young Clergy community!”

For more information and to access the application, visit [Young Clergy Fellowship Application](#).



Denman Award Nominations Sought

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 Monday, April 22.



April ‘One Matters’ Resource Toolkit: How do I bless my neighbors?

Connectional Ministries understand the importance of making disciples and nurturing spiritual growth within local congregations. Transformation is happening every single day across the South Georgia Conference.

We've loved hearing the feedback from our first two resource toolkits: [February \(Who is your one?\)](#) and [March \(Whose burdens are you carrying?\)](#) and are excited to roll out a new toolkit for April as we continue to put focus on our theme of "One Matters." These toolkits are designed to empower clergy and laity in their sacred mission of cultivating meaningful connections and fostering transformative discipleship. A single challenge question will be presented, followed by accompanying resources tailored to address that specific challenge.

[April toolkit hit inboxes of clergy and lay leaders at the beginning of the month.](#) April's challenge question is: **How do I bless my neighbors?** Can changing the world be as simple as loving your neighbor? It's so easy, yet the breakdown occurs when it comes to actually doing it. Praying and asking God to see the opportunities before you, listening to the needs of others and meeting those needs, sharing a meal together, and pointing it all back to the One who changed your life - easy, right? This month let's focus on blessing those around us and maybe, just maybe, the world will be changed.

To go along with the challenge question, a step-by-step resource – [5 Ways to B.L.E.S.S.](#) – is available to use as a small group resource, as a supplement in your church bulletin, or for your own personal reminder. This handout breaks down the 5 ways to B.L.E.S.S. your neighbors: Begin with Prayer, Listen, Eat, Serve and Story.

In addition, an [11-minute training video led by Anne Bosarge](#), she talks about how we, as disciples, can help our neighbors and those we are discipling by sharing five simple ways to make a positive impact on the people we meet every day. You are also encouraged to check out this month's book recommendation: [“B.L.E.S.S.”](#) by Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson.

[View April's Toolkit here](#) | [Sign up to receive the monthly toolkit](#)



We're having dinner near you in April! Come join us!

Do you love a good potluck? Have you seen the amazing power of a meal to bring people together at the table? Are you interested in doing church and community in a new way? Dinner Church is a way to provide a spiritual environment for people who might never step foot into a traditional church model. Over a meal and a casual conversation, Dinner Church allows people from all walks of life to discover Jesus in community. We hope you will join us this April at a location near you. Click the link below to register. Questions? Contact Anne Bosarge at abosarge@sgaumc.com.

- [April 4 - Pittman Park, Statesboro](#)
- [April 5 - ConneXion Church, Savannah](#)
- [April 6 - Waycross FUMC, Waycross](#)
- [April 18 - Trinity UMC, Warner Robins](#)
- [April 19 – United Methodists of Thomasville, Thomasville](#)
- [April 20 - Mosaic Church, Valdosta](#)



Setting the stage for digital ministry cohort begins in April

Does your church have a digital presence or are you actually doing digital ministry? If you're ready to move from using social media channels to communicating information to creating online relationships that facilitate transformation, you are invited to be part of a five-month cohort beginning in April. Join us as we explore how in-person and digital opportunities can work together to create a holistic discipleship experience for the people you are currently reaching and beyond. This is for clergy and key volunteers or staff who help facilitate discipleship within the church. The cohort will meet twice monthly on Thursday nights from 6-7:30pm via Zoom ([April 11, April 25, May 9, May 23, June 6, June 20, July 3, August 1, August 15, August 29](#)).



April 7 Lesson: Faith of the Persistent

Spring Quarter: Examining Our Faith
Unit 2: The Measure of Faith

Lesson 6: Week of April 7, 2024
By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: Luke 5:17-26
Key Verse: Luke 5:18-19

Lesson Aims

1. Identify the correct and incorrect conclusions of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees.
2. Explain the connection between the plural “their” and the singular “you” in verse 20.
3. Brainstorm modern helping situations analogous to that of the text.

It has been suggested that intimate friends are rare in life. Often, we have only one, occasionally two...usually not more than three in our entire lives. There’s something about an intimate friendship that causes our souls to be knit together. We are “kindred spirits.”

On the other hand, there are our numerous so-called “friends” on social media. Is it really possible to be friends with someone you have never met in person?

The writer of this lesson says that he has found a simple way to identify one’s genuine friends. Announce that you are moving and see who volunteers to help. At any rate, today’s lesson allows us a first-century look at the results of authentic Christ-honoring friendship.

Lesson Context

The third Gospel and the book of Acts were written by a man name Luke. He was a traveling companion of the apostle Paul and a physician by profession (see Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Because Luke was not an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus, he gathered his information from those who had been so he could write a detailed account (Luke 1:1-4). Most students believe that the Gospel of Mark was written first and, therefore, could have been one of the sources used by Luke. The scene in today’s lesson is worded quite similarly to Mark 2:1-12 (see Luke 5:17 and compare Matthew 4:1-8).

Today’s lesson locates Jesus in Galilee, early in his three-and-a-half-year ministry. His popularity was rising, and he was drawing crowds. The news of Jesus’ teaching and miracles was spreading rapidly (Luke 4:37), and attempts to keep things under control in that regard didn’t work (Mark 5:14-15).

As a result, Jesus had to make a conscious effort to carve out some “alone time” for prayer with his heavenly father (Luke 4:42; 5:16).

Luke 5:12 states that the healing miracle just prior to the one in today’s text occurred “in one of the towns” of Galilee. Mark 2:1 is more specific in indicating that the events of today’s lesson took place in Capernaum. This town located on the northwestern bank of the Sea of Galilee became something of a headquarters for Jesus during his town of Galilee (Matthew 4:13).

Faith that Seeks (Luke 5:17-20a)

The phrase “one day” indicates that the events that follow probably occur on a day other than a Sabbath. Recognizing that this supposition is an argument from silence, we note that there are no complaints from Jesus’ opponents concerning a Sabbath violation, as we see in Luke 6:1-11 and 13:10-16.

This verse includes the first of 26 mentions of Pharisee or Pharisees in the Gospel of Luke. Two factors indicate their presence to have been an ominous turn of events. The first is that they were accompanied by “teachers of the law.” This rare designation (a Greek word of 14 letters) is found only here, in Acts 5:34 (applied to the renowned Gamaliel), and in 1 Timothy 1:7 (regarding misguided aspirations). On the other hand, the NIV lists other times when “teachers of the law” accompanied Pharisees (example: Luke 5:30), but the English translation obscure the fact that a different Greek word is being translated in both cases.

Pharisees opposed Jesus (example: Luke 1:53-54) with a few exceptions (example Luke 19:39). On the destructive beliefs and practices of the Pharisees, see Mathew 23:1-36; Mark 7:3-5; Luke 18:10-12; Acts 23:88.

The second ominous factor is that these religious leaders are not merely “local yokels” from every village Galilee. Instead, they include individuals “from Judah and Jerusalem.” It’s a long walk from Jerusalem and its temple to Capernaum—approximately 80 miles. For these religious leaders to commit to such a trip points

out that they wanted to check for themselves the truth of the stories circulating about this teacher, preacher, healer, and exorcists. In other words, they wanted to investigate for themselves the person and work of Jesus.

Verse 17b says, “And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick.” With this phrase, Luke writes this event with Isaiah 61:1-2, which Jesus had read concerning himself when he was in Nazareth a short time before (Luke 4:16-21). The healings - both physical and spiritual - fulfill Messianic prophecy. The references to healing “the sick” raise a question of antecedent: Who were these people? In any case, the focus is on the source of the power: “the Lord” (compare Micah 3:8). And the use of the “Lord” to refer to God rather than Jesus is consistent with Luke’s use of the term through the infancy narratives (where the term occurs 27 times).

Moving on, the helping action of the friends of a “paralyzed man” is selfless and authentic. In their effort, the friends show what Jesus called the second greatest commandment: love your neighbors as yourself” (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31). Luke’s account does not indicate how many men were carrying the bed; but Mark does: four. This makes sense when we imagine something like a medical stretcher with one person at each corner.

Luke shows great sensitivity in describing the patient as a “man who was paralyzed” rather than as “a paralytic.” The man’s affliction made it impossible for him to come to Jesus without assistance.

Question! How will you demonstrate the second greatest commandment (see Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31) toward a friend in need in the upcoming week?

The crowd around Jesus has become a barrier separating him from the man in need. In an act of persistence and determination that will be interpreted as faith (v.20), the friends go up on the housetop and lower the paralyzed man down through the roof. Luke’s departure from Mark at this point suggests that Luke envisions a different style of house, and, apparently a different social setting. Mark says the men dug through the roof—that is, they dug through the reeds and baked mud that were used to cover a Palestinian peasant’s house. Yet, Luke says they removed the “tiles,” which would have covered more affluent Hellenistic homes.

At any rate, the rooftop was a place for household activities—drying laundry, getting fresh air, where people sometimes hid, conferred, mourned and prayed. Roofs were also places where bad things could happen (example 2 Samuel 11:2; 16:22).

Even with outside access readily available, for the four men to climb the stairs or ladder while transporting the man was undoubtedly quite difficult—another sign of their faith and commitment. And lowering the man “through the tiles into the middle of the crowd” could probably have required ropes, possibly an indication of advance preparation.

Verse 20a says, “when Jesus saw their faith, he said...” We are told that the four Gospels mention “faith” a total of 24 times (in Greek), and Luke features 11 of those instances. The verse before us is the first (earliest) of those 11. Faith, being a mental and spiritual state, cannot literally be seen in and of itself by us ordinary humans. However, that limitation does not apply to the Son of God. He knows people’s spiritual and mental states (see Luke 5:22). But even though we lack the divine ability to see the faith (or lack of faith) in someone’s heart, we can certainly see evidence of faith in one’s actions or inactions (James 2:17). What the crowd saw in the actions of the men (friends), Jesus saw in both heart and action.

We must not assume that the phrase “their faith” refers only to the man’s friends, to the exclusion of the paralyzed man. There is no indication that he opposed others carrying him to Jesus. It is likely that he was more than willing to seek out Jesus.

Question! In what ways do a believer's actions reveal his or her faith in God?

Several years back I conducted a funeral for a first cousin in Decatur, Georgia. My friend, Bishop Bevel Jones, and I held the service. At one point in his meditation, Bishop Jones said, "It is by grace that we are saved, but we must be worthy of that grace." The Bishop was talking about the importance of action as related to faith.

Faith that Finds (Luke 5:20b-26)

In verse 5:20b, the surprise comes! By underscoring Jesus' power to heal (v.17) and the bringing of a crippled man to Jesus, the narrator had led the reader to expect that Jesus will heal the man—just as he has healed others. Instead, Jesus pronounces the man's sins forgiven.

Until now, not finding anything in Jesus' teaching to criticize, "the Pharisees and the teachers of the law" focus their attention on his actions and implied identity. They are not correct in an absolute sense when they say that "God alone" can forgive sins—people are encouraged to forgive sins committed against one another (Matthew 6:14; 18:21-22; Luke 11:4; Colossians 3:12-13). But the teachers of the law and the Pharisees are correct in the sense of a person sinning against God (Exodus 34:6-7; Psalm 103:2-3; Isaiah 43:25; 1 John 1:8-9). According to Jewish writing in the period between the Old and New Testaments, the Jews expected a righteous Messiah to overthrow foreign invaders. They did not expect a Messiah who would be God in-the-flesh, able to forgive sins.

This unspoken question of the religious experts goes to the heart of understanding the person and work of Jesus. The experts actually had a good grasp of what was happening: Jesus was speaking and acting in a manner reserved for God. For a mere human to forgive sins committed against God would indeed be blasphemy, which was punishable by death (Leviticus 24:16). Various forms of the word "blasphemy" occur dozens of times in the New Testament. Jesus eventually would be crucified on this very charge (Matthew 26:65-66; Mark 14:64). Compare John 5:16-18; 10:31-33).

The text establishes this instance as the first organized opposition to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.

Question! How can you prepare yourself for others' questions regarding the identity and authority of Jesus?

Every one present could see the evidence of the faith of the man and his friends in their actions. Jesus, however, was also able to see the doubt and lack of faith in the hearts of the religious leaders. The ability to know people's hearts and innermost thoughts is one of the divine characteristics of Jesus that Luke emphasizes (example: Luke 6:8). With this ability, he was able to respond to their unspoken question with an audible question of his own. Although Jesus knew the thoughts of their hearts, he asked them a question, a method of teaching that he often used (example: Luke 2:49).

The question Jesus poses to the assembled authorities is nuanced with a fine ambiguity. On the one hand, it would be easier to say that a person's sins are forgiven than pronounce him or her healed because the latter is subject to verification while the former is not. On the other hand, the claim to forgive sins was the higher claim because others had been known to have the power to heal. And added to the nuance of Jesus' question was the lurking suspicion that the man's sin and his paralysis were related.

Repeating, Jesus' responds to the paralyzed man by saying, "your sins are forgiven," which causes the objection of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. This objection introduces conflict, heightens response, and focuses attention on the issue of Jesus' authority to forgive. Jesus' statement in verse 20 assumes that

forgiveness of sins is the key to healing for this paralyzed man. The story need not imply that every health problem is caused by sin, only that the man's sins are a significant factor in this case.

This verse (v. 24)—worded almost the same as Matthew 9:6 and Mark 2:10-11—stresses that Jesus healed the paralyzed man as evidence of Jesus' "authority on earth" to forgive sins (compare John 5:8). Luke again connects what has happened here to Jesus' reading of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue. When John the Baptist wavered in his faith while imprisoned, Jesus confirmed his messiahship by mentioning signs such as this (Luke 7:22-23). Faith in Jesus is based on evidence.

This verse is also the first of 25 occasions that Luke records Jesus using the self-designation "Son of Man." Overall, this expression occurs across all four Gospels more than 80 times. In almost every case, it comes from the life of Jesus and not as a description of Jesus by the Gospel writers (Luke 24:7 and John 12:34 are the only two exceptions, both quoting Jesus).

The background for this designation comes from the Old Testament. The book of Ezekiel applies the title to that prophet more than 80 times but without suggesting that he was divine (examples: Ezekiel 5:1; 6:2; 7:2). The two uses of the designation in the book of Daniel, however, recognize the Son of Man as having divine attributes (Daniel 7:13-14; 8:17).

Earlier, Luke established Jesus' authority and power to heal and drive out demons (Luke 4:33-36). And we remember that "authority" is "the right to do something," and "power" is the "ability to do something." Luke is the only writer of the four Gospels to use both words together (examples: Luke 4:36; 9:1). Although the text now under consideration does not explicitly use those words, both concepts are present in this verse (v.25).

The adverb "immediately" establishes that the healing happened instantly at the mere spoken words of Jesus. And there is no indication that Jesus' touch was involved as healing miracles featured in other contexts (compare Mark 8:22-25; John 9:6-7).

The man's sudden ability to walk was (or should have been) evidence that Christ had both authority and power to forgive sins (see Luke 20:2-8). The statement "in front of them" is essential to this proof—everyone present saw the result. In biblical times two or three witnesses were required to prove the veracity of an event (example: Matthew 18:16). Thus, Luke confirms that a sufficient number of witnesses were present to verify the miracle.

Question! How do you maintain an attitude of worship even when it seems God has not worked in the way you desired?

Verse 2b is the only verse in the New Testament where amazement, praising God, and fear occur together as reactions of a crowd. We assume that the word "everyone" includes the religious leaders who were present. This was their first encounter with Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke, and it's not unreasonable to conclude that they shared in everyone's reactions. Like everyone else, those leaders needed time to process the evidence for Jesus' deity just seen. Soon enough, some people will reach the wrong conclusion (see Luke 11:14-16).

But not this day! The crowd praises God and recognizes that they have seen wonderful and remarkable things through Jesus.

This event reveals one further picture. The ability of the paralyzed man to resume his walk of life is a picture of what Jesus does when he saves. His message is a liberating one.

Conclusion

The friends in today’s lesson remind us of the nature of authentic friendship. We are unsure how long they had been carrying their friend around on this bed. We know that when Jesus came into the city, they believed he could help their friend. However, they did not stop at simply believing. They put their faith into action and brought their friend to Jesus, overcoming every obstacle on the way.

To be sure, it was not an easy task to get their friend onto the roof, tear it apart, and lower him into the room. Undoubtedly, they could have spent their time on other matters that day. So how can we dedicate our time and resources to assisting a friend in need?

The English poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, once described friendship as “a sheltering tree.” He went on to say, “a friend is like a leafy tree that provides shade from the sun and protection against the cold blasts of winter’s loneliness.” A friend is indeed “a sheltering tree.”

Charles Kingsley, British clergyman, was once asked the secret of his success. He answered, “I had a friend.” That is to say, “I had someone who was always there for me.”

Resources For This Lesson

1. “2023-2024 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, International Sunday School Lessons,” pages 273-280.
2. “The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume XI Luke, John,” by R. Alan Culpepper, pages 121-125.
3. “The NIV Application Commentary Luke” by Darrell Bock, pages 154-158.
4. “Abingdon New Testament Commentaries Luke” by Robert C. Tannehill, pages 104-106.

Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way through Hal Brady Ministries (halbradyministries.com).

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April 14 Lesson: Faith of the Centurion

Spring Quarter: Examining Our Faith Unit 2: The Measure of Faith

Lesson 7: Week of April 14, 2024 By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: Luke 7:1-10
Key Verse: Luke 7:7

Lesson Aims

- Identify the reason for Jesus’ amazement.
- Explain the role of the town of Capernaum in Jesus’ ministry.
- Brainstorm ways to exhibit faith as analogous to that of the centurion.

Introduction

“I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel” (Luke 7:9). These words of Jesus make all of us sit up and take notice. For there is not anyone of us who does not long for a greater faith.

Lesson Context

The physical context of today's lesson is the village of Capernaum (see also the parallel account in Matthew 8:5-13). It was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, a freshwater lake in northern Palestine. Bible students are accustomed to thinking of Jesus as being from Bethlehem (John 7:42; etc.) or from Nazareth (Matthew 2:23; etc.). But a case can also be made for the claim that he was from Capernaum because the village becomes something of a headquarters or base of operations for his preaching teaching tours of Galilee (Mark 2:1; notice that Matthew 9:1 refers to Capernaum as Jesus' "own town.")

The importance of Capernaum is seen in the fact that it is mentioned 16 times in the New Testament, in one instance quite negatively (Matthew 11:23 and parallel Luke 10:15). Five of Jesus' twelve disciples were residents of Capernaum when Jesus called them to follow him: four fishermen (James, John, Peter, and Andrew; see Matthew 4:18-22) and one tax collector (Matthew, also known as Levi, see Mark 2:14). Although Capernaum probably did not have more than a few hundred residents, it was a thriving regional hub for at least three reasons.

First, the fishing industry provided steady income for many families. The lake was productive, with one account telling of a haul of 153 large fish (John 21:11). Fishing businesses like that of the Zebedee family would have caught more fish than could be sold locally. Some fish were preserved with salt and sent to larger cities such as Jerusalem.

Second, Capernaum was situated on the main road from Damascus into the region. This location made it a good place for the Romans to set up points for tax collectors to assess tolls on goods passing into the area. Matthew worked for the Romans this way, maintaining a tax-collecting booth on this road (Luke 5:27). Jewish tax collectors from Jerusalem also operated out of Capernaum to collect the annual temple tax from the Jews of Galilee (Matthew 17:24).

Third, Capernaum was important enough to have had some Roman soldiers stationed there, as today's lesson reveals (compare Acts 10:1). The need to safeguard the tax money collected may have been the reason. It is possible they were under the authority of Herod Antipas, the Roman client "tetrarch" of the Galilee region from 4 BC to AD 39 (Luke 3:1).

Capernaum has been the site of some remarkable archaeological discoveries over the last hundred years. A lavish synagogue dating from the fourth century AD likely sat on a foundation floor from the time of Jesus. This plan could be the location of the synagogue of Capernaum where Jesus taught (Mark 1:21). Also, uncovered nearby is a large house that has become a Christian pilgrimage site. Evidence suggests this was the actual house of Simon Peter, a place where Jesus resided while in town (Luke 4:38).

Desperate Need (Luke 7:1-5)

As we are informed, we reach a transition point in the narrative. The teaching ("saying all this") and healing actions of the previous section (Luke 6:17-49) were concluded, so Jesus moved from one place to another. For Jesus to have "entered Capernaum" was probably not a long walk, given his record of moments around that area at the time.

A centurion was a soldier who commanded a unit known as a "century in" a legion of a Roman army. A Roman legion ideally consisted of 59 centuries organized in 10 cohorts. The record through the tenth cohorts consisted of 6 centurions, each century having 80 men. A legion's first cohort was an exception. That cohort had only five centuries, but each of these, also commanded by a centurion, was at double strength. The math of all this adds up to 59 centurions in a legion of approximately 5,000 troops. Thus, the centurion in today's lesson was likely the most important and senior Roman officer around Capernaum. One other notation, a

centurion was the equivalent of a company Sergeant Major and like our present-day Sergeant Major, he was the backbone of the Roman army.

The centurion in our narrative has at least one “servant” in his household. This servant in all probability was not a hired hand but an enslaved person named by the centurion. Roman military campaigns often resulted in those people on the losing side being taken into bondage. Also common during this period were children born into slavery as the offering of women who were themselves enslaved. Legally, Roman slavery laws allowed the owner to use another man “like a piece of property or a domestic animal” (historian Dio Chrysostom; lived AD 40-120). But not all master/slave relationships were brutal or exploitive.

Slavery was not necessarily a lifetime situation among the Romans (compare 1 Corinthians 7:21). Ancient sources indicate that many were freed by age 30, thusly becoming “Freedmen” (compare Acts 6:9).

In depicting the deathly ill servant as “valued highly” to the centurion, Luke uses a word that expresses value and respect (compare the same word’s translation as “precious” in 1 Peter 2:4,6). Luke, a physician, does not give us the servant’s specific diagnosis of affliction but only that “he was sick” and “about to die.” Matthew adds more information by noting that the servant was paralyzed, suffering terribly (Matthew 8:6). Though people in that time had a very limited understanding of disease and its causes, they could recognize the signs of unlikely recovery and impending death.

In verse 3, we are told that the centurion had “heard” of Jesus. This is probably true in two senses: through general word of mouth (Luke 4:14, 37) and specifically of his return to Capernaum. Perhaps the fact that the centurion and his healing request by the “elders of the Jews” reflect an intentional strategy. The centurion apparently assumes that a recommendation from Jewish leaders is necessary for a Jewish healer to consider the case of a Gentile at all. This 3rd verse paints a picture of an intelligent man who recognized and understood the cultural issue of Gentiles interacting with Jews (Acts 10:28; 11:1-3). Rather than risk being spurned in a public, face-to-face meeting with Jesus, the Centurion turned to Jewish leaders with whom he had become a friend in the community.

So, the centurion sends a delegation of Jewish elders to ask Jesus to heal his servant. These are probably Jewish civil leaders, not synagogue leaders. The emissaries not only bring the centurion’s request but they also lobby for him, arguing that he is worthy of aid. He has contributed to the building of the local synagogue. Such acts of generosity are not without ancient precedent. He loves Israel, which may mean he has shown respect for the nation. The question raised here is signified at two levels. Will Jesus minister to someone from outside of Israel, and will he minister to a wealthy man?

Here's an important notation! The need for synagogues as gathering places for worship and instruction in Scripture arose during the Babylonian exile that began in 586 BC. With the temple in Jerusalem destroyed and Jews far from their homeland, the people needed places to congregate; the word “synagogues” is a Greek word that means “places of assembly.” The return from exile probably modified the function of synagogues to being primarily places of Scripture teaching rather than worship. This transition was because worship in its fullest sense was to take place in the temple which had been rebuilt.

Some students believe that the centurion was a Gentile in the category of “one that feared God” (compare Acts 10:2, 22; 13:16,26). Such Gentiles were not proselytes (converts) to Judaism but were devout, nonetheless. Therefore, the centurion’s contribution to the synagogue was more than a public works project designed to curry favor. Instead, it was rooted in his deep respect for Judaism and its God.

Question! How can your congregation partner with other congregations in acting as a go-between in connecting resources to those in need?

Unmatched Faith (Luke 7:6-10)

Capernaum was not a large city. Crossing from one end to the other would not have taken more than 15 minutes. Therefore, the time between when the elders spoke to Jesus and when the “friends” did so must have been very short.

Since the group was “not far from the house of the centurion,” the man may have seen Jesus and his entourage approach before he dispatched delegation number two. These friends may have been either Gentile, Jewish, or both.

As the centurion (through his friends) addressed Jesus as “Lord” in verse 7, we should not automatically presume that the centurion acknowledged Jesus as the Lord God. The Greek word translated “Lord” occurs more than 700 times in the New Testament, and it is often used as simply a polite address of respect. In such cases, it is equivalent to our modern word “sir” (examples: Matthew 24:63; John 4:11).

The centurion’s friends brought Jesus the unexpected message we see in the verses before us. Two things should be considered. First, there is the centurion’s humility. He admitted his unworthiness. Second, some Bible students propose that in addition to admitting personal unworthiness, the centurion was demonstrating sensitivity in avoiding a potentially awkward cross-cultural meeting under the “roof” of a Gentile (compare John 4:9; 18:28; Acts 10:28; 11:3).

Question! How will you show humility as you come before God in prayer?

The English author Thomas Hardy in his later years was greatly admired. An adoring public eagerly awaited his every word. But, to the very end, whenever he sent a piece to the London Times, he would include a stamped, self-addressed envelope in the chance that they might reject it. That’s humility, akin to the humility of the centurion.

“But say the word and my servant will be healed,” said the centurion. Just say the word! The power was in the word Jesus spoke. Nothing more was needed. It is important to note here that this centurion never actually came in contact with Jesus. Consequently, this centurion anticipated all of us who have not seen Jesus but who have believed his word as containing the power of His presence.

Stating it another way, we are not second-class disciples simply because we were born in another time and place. We do not have to see Jesus. The power is in the word Jesus spoke.

In verse 8, the centurion understands Jesus’ authority and knows that if he just issues the order, the healing will occur. To drive the point home, he illustrates his understanding by appealing to his own role as a man in authority. All he needs to do is issue an order and it is obeyed.

Thus, the centurion has authority over his soldiers. However, Jesus has unlimited authority over the world. Regardless of how we perceive the centurion’s words, they emphasize Jesus’ authority over all things—even sickness.

Now, the four Gospels do not often speak of Jesus himself being “amazed” at something or someone. Almost always, it’s the other way around: people were amazed because of Jesus or something he did. The two exceptions are the “faith” of the Gentile centurion (today’s text plus parallel in Matthew 8:10) and the lack of faith of the people of Nazareth (Mark 6:6).

As I mentioned, the centurion's remarks amaze Jesus, insofar as a Gentile has such faith. In fact, this Gentile has faith that is more perceptive and sensitive than anything Jesus had seen in Israel. What impresses Jesus is both the centurion's humility and his understanding of Jesus' power (the ability to heal from a distance). One can argue that the essence of faith is humility; the recognition of the uniqueness of God's power and our own unworthiness before it while trusting in God's care. As the text states, the healing takes place just as the centurion has anticipated. The power of Jesus and the presence of faith form a powerful combination.

We are informed that Jesus' healing miracles in the Gospel have been categorized in various ways. These include healing by touch (example: Matthew 8:15), command (example: Luke 5:24), and prayer (example: John 11:41-42). One other interesting way of healing, not often considered, is miracle healing from a distance. There are three such examples: the ones including (1) the Gentile centurion's servant in today's text and Matthew 8:5-13, (2) the Gentile woman's daughter in Matthew 15:21-28, and (3) the nobleman and his son in John 4:46-54. In all three cases, faith was vindicated.

Conclusion

When we offer up intercessory prayer for the healing of a family member or friend, are we exercising the faith of the centurion? Without doubt, any forthcoming healing will be a "remote healing," since Jesus is not here in the flesh, so that is not the issue.

The issue, instead, is one of believing in Jesus' authority. That's the issue of what we might call "Centurion Faith." Our intercessory prayer must have more than a "maybe" or "hope so" tone. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we demonstrate "Centurion Faith" that God will answer our prayers. When we are distracted from him and wring our hands in despair, nothing good happens (Matthew 14:25-31). Jesus taught, "if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matthew 21:22).

Further thoughts on a Great Faith

As you know, the centurion had some distinguishable characteristics:

- There is some knowledge of Jesus!
- There is some compassion for others!
- There is some involvement with the synagogue (church)!
- There's some sense of humility and unworthiness!

In an article I read, it said that people who are searching for faith may come to the church. Notice the article said they may come to the church. If they do come to the church, they're going to want to know from us if we know God. And they are not going to arrive at that by what we say. They are going to arrive at that by how we live. In conclusion, Great Faith is exercising the faith we have, recognizing the power of the Word and being characterized by certain distinguishable characteristics (those of the centurion). Jesus said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel" (verse 9).

Action Plan

- How can you use the position of leadership in which God has placed you to worship and serve him?
- How can you demonstrate "great faith" in your neighborhood? Your community? Your country?
- How will you have "Centurion Faith" in situations when it seems that God doesn't answer your prayers in a preferred or expected way?

Resources For This Lesson

1. "2023-2024 NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, International Sunday School Lessons," pages 281-288.
2. "The NIV Application Commentary Luke" by Darrell L. Bock, pages 201-204.
3. "Interpretations (Luke)" by Fred Craddock, pages 94-95.

4. "Abingdon New Testament Commentaries Luke" by Robert C. Tannehill, pages 123-126.
5. "The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume IX Luke/John," pages 154-156.

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Jesus says, "Come!"

By Dr. Craig Rikard

In John 20 the apostle John reminds us it was still dark when Jesus rose. Mary found the empty tomb before the morning sun appeared.

There are too many who feel as though they live in the shadows and darkness. Perhaps they assume their sins are too overwhelming, even for God to forgive. Some just don't have a great knowledge of Christianity and church. Thus, they feel uncomfortable on Easter amid the joyful hymns, prayers, and shouts of Hallelujah. For whatever reason, some feel discomfort on Easter. Remember, though, Jesus was raised in the dark where many of us feel we live. However, Easter is for you and all of us.

Though celebrated by Christendom throughout the world. Easter is a very personal experience. Yes, Jesus rose for the world, but Christ also rose for YOU!

Initially there were three people in the garden that first Easter morning. Two disciples raced to the empty tomb in response to Mary's news. I am almost certain at least one of them, Peter, is present to see if someone had stolen the body. He refused to believe Jesus' death had any redemptive merit. It is for this reason and knowledge of his own betrayal that he left Jerusalem for Galilee to be alone.

The other disciple is believed to have been John. He too was bewildered by Mary's news. However, John did not abandon Jesus on the cross. He possessed a loving, loyal connection with Jesus through the passion. Maybe he is there for the same reason as Peter: someone may have stolen the body. Yet, through his love he might have believed the story of Jesus wasn't over.

Mary had returned out of extreme grief and sorrow. She believes Jesus is dead, but she feels as though "she must do something." Her heart is filled with too much grief to do nothing.

Whatever their reasons for being there, it doesn't matter. The story of the empty tomb invites all to come for whatever reason we carry. Some of us may be like Mary. We have suffered losses in life that make God feel so very far away. Come! Some, like Peter, have had their faith tried and tested or can relate to the shame he felt. Come! Some, like John, have faith yet feel their faith is incomplete because they feel a need to find out more to experience hope. Come!

Jesus rose to meet each of us where we are, for the eternal purpose of drawing us unto himself and giving us eternal hope.

One of the more beautiful moments in John's narrative occurs when Jesus calls Mary by name. This is that personal touch of the Gospel. God is calling each of us, personally, to step out of the shadows and experience Easter morning in all of its glory and truth! God is calling you to come.

Dr. D. Craig Rikard is a retired South Georgia pastor. Email him at craigrikard169@yahoo.com.

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Conference Updates & Happenings

ERT Trainings: Two disaster response trainings are scheduled for April. A basic ERT Training is set for Saturday, April 20 from 8:30 am - 4:30 pm at Richmond Hill UMC. Another basic ERT Training & Chainsaw Safety Class is set for Friday, April 26 from 6 pm - 10 pm and Saturday, April 27 from 8 am to 12 pm in Midland, Ga. [Click here for more details](#). For more information, contact Luis Morales at ert@sgaumc.com or 478-216-7729.

Post-General Conference clergy lunch gatherings

The post-General Conference clergy lunch gatherings are set for the following dates. These gatherings will be a time for Bishop Graves and members of the delegation to report factual information around any decisions made at General Conference.

- May 13 - Tifton First UMC in Tifton at 10 am | [Register now](#)
- May 14 - St. Paul UMC in Columbus at 10 am | [Register now](#)
- May 23 - Goshen UMC in Rincon at 10 am | [Register now](#)

Post-General Conference Laity Webinar – May 14: A laity webinar has been scheduled to provide local church lay members with information following General Conference. The date for this webinar is May 14, 2024, at 6 pm. [Register now](#). If this date is not convenient, South Georgia laity are invited to take part in the [Alabama West-Florida Laity Webinar](#) on May 20 at 6 pm EST.

Summer Camp 2024: Registration is now open for Camp Connect! There is 1 week of senior high camp, 2 weeks of junior high camp, and 2 weeks of elementary camp. [Find out more information and sign up today!](#)

Annual Conference – June 2-4: The 2024 Annual Conference Session is set for June 2-4 in Tifton. [See all the details here](#).

Lay Servant Ministry: [Lay Servant Ministries & Certified Lay Ministry dates & registration](#)

- Online Basic Lay Servant Ministries: August 13, 15, 20, 22
- Online Advanced Lay Servant Ministries: Sept 10, 12, 17, 19

[View Full Conference Calendar](#)

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Resource Roundup – April 2024

Financial Ethics for Pastoral Leaders

Introducing a new online teaching series designed to help strengthen the financial practices of your church! A collaborative work of Discipleship Ministries and the leadership of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference, these 6 self-paced sessions will help guide you in your role as the pastoral leader in finance and administration in your local church. [Learn more and register today](#)

The Practical Guide to AI for Local Churches

There is so much information circulating right now about AI that you may not be sure what to use and how to find it. Whether you're not sure where to start or you feel like you've been wasting time with ineffective AI tools, MyCom contributor and author Jeremy Steele will guide us through an hour of what we need for practical use in and for our churches. This free webinar is set for Apr 10 at 1pm. [Register here](#)

10 Essential Ways Leaders Build Relationships with Their Team Members

(Lewis Center) Dan Reiland says investing in relationships is the make-or-break factor that determines the success of your leadership. He provides ten helpful tips for interacting with others that will help nurture positive relationships that will keep things running smoothly. [Learn more here](#)

8 strategies for churches to reach Gen Z

How can congregations build meaningful connections with young adults? Brandi Nicole Williams, director for the African American Church Evangelism Institute, offers eight practical strategies for bridging the generational gap and fostering relationships with Gen Z, people born between 1997 and 2012, to build a more relevant church community.

[Read commentary](#)

Could your church use a communications audit?

This is a great time to assess your church's marketing and communications efforts. Get an audit of your social media, your website, branding/logos and potentially even your on-site signage. [Learn more](#)



Retired Clergy Birthdays - April 2024

- 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
- 4/07 - Cindy Reichard: 92 Kane Blvd; Bridgeville, PA 15017
- 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 – Wesley Kaylor: 855 Chokey Rd.; DeSoto, GA 31743
- 4/16 – Barbara Nelson: 1106 Merrill Dr.; Dublin, GA 31021
- 4/16 – Tom Nichols: 619 Tattnell 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
- 4/28 – 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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Obituary: Rev. Ricky Bishop

Reverend Richard Marshall “Ricky” Bishop, 76, went home to be with his Lord and Savior on Tuesday, March 19, 2024. Services will be held on Monday, March 25, 2024, at First United Methodist Church of Warner Robins, with the Visitation from 10:00 until 11:00 a.m. and the Funeral Service at 11:00 a.m. Reverend Jon Brown and Reverend Tommy Martin will be officiating. Interment will be on Monday, March 25, 2024, at 3:00 p.m. in Bethany Church of Ellabell Cemetery, formerly Ellabell United Methodist Church Cemetery, 2079 GA Hwy 204, Ellabell, Georgia. In lieu of flowers, the family respectfully requests memorial contributions to Magnolia Manor, 200 Pierce Avenue, Macon, Georgia 31204.

Ricky was born on March 3, 1948, in Fort Valley, and grew up in Nashville, Tennessee. He graduated from Hume-Fogg Technical High School. He met Reba Stewart in 1969, and the couple married in 1970. In September of 1970 Ricky was convinced by his landlord, a Nazarene preacher, to attend church one time with the agreement that he would not return if he didn’t feel the need. The Lord is good and at the end of the service, Ricky laid his sins at the altar, accepted God’s free gift of grace, gave his life to the Lord, and never looked back. Having made that life-changing decision, he felt called to enter the ministry and earned his Bachelor’s degree from Emmanuel Bible College and Trevecca Nazarene University in Nashville. Reverend Bishop began serving as an ordained elder in the South Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church in 1990 and pastored at numerous United Methodist Churches in Georgia through the years. He earned his Master’s degree at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. Reverend Bishop served as a trauma chaplain at Savannah Memorial Hospital for years. He retired from the South GA Conference in 2009.

Ricky knew a life of sin before he met Christ, and subsequently had a deeper understanding of God’s free grace. His gift in ministry was pastoral care. Reverend Bishop was known for helping anyone who was in need. In fact, he gave away their entire Thanksgiving dinner to an unknown man who appeared at their door just as his family was sitting down to eat. Minutes later, a family of church friends called and invited the Bishops to Thanksgiving dinner at their house. He believed that God would always provide. So, he never resisted and would give the shirt off of his back and the shoes from his feet if someone was in need.

A loving and giving Daddy and Granddaddy, he enjoyed tinkering around the house, gardening, and figuring out how things worked. He was always ahead of technology and was thrilled to have dial-up internet in his home long before it was readily available to the general public. He dreamed big dreams, loved big, and enjoyed spreading joy everywhere he went.

Ricky was a husband, father, grandfather, son, brother, uncle, pastor, chaplain, Mason, and friend. But most of all, Ricky was a child of God.

He was preceded in death by his loving and devoted wife of twenty-two years and the mother of his children, Reba Stewart Bishop; his parents, Karl and Joy Bishop; his mother-in-law, Lucille Stewart; and his two brothers, Barry Bishop and Bruce Bishop.

Left to cherish the memories they made with Ricky are his caring wife of twenty-nine years, Carlene Stephenson Bishop; his daughters, Gracie Bishop of California, Joann Price (Terry) of Warner Robins, and Reverend Jamie Hill (James) of Kathleen; his granddaughters, Maryanna Price and Kiley Hill; his step-daughter, Laurie Patterson (Mitch) of Saltillo, Mississippi; his three sisters, Pamela Bishop, Peggy Bishop, and Becky Howarth; his brother in Christ, Sam Watkins; and many nieces, nephews, great-nieces, and great-nephews.

Condolences for the family may be left in the online guestbook at www.watsonhunt.com. Watson-Hunt Funeral Home has been entrusted with the arrangements.



Scripture Readings – April 2 edition

April 7

2nd Sunday of Easter, Year B

- [Psalm 133](#)
- [Acts 4:32-35](#)
- [1 John 1:1-2:2](#)
- [John 20:19-31](#)

April 14

3rd Sunday of Easter, Year B

- [Psalm 4](#)
- [Acts 3:12-19](#)
- [1 John 3:1-7](#)
- [Luke 24:36b-48](#)