

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – JUNE 1 EDITION

Riverside UMC organist retires after 50 years

By Kara Witherow, *Editor*

For nearly 51 years, Gail Pollock was Riverside United Methodist Church's organist. For more than 2,600 Sundays she sat at the church's Schantz organ and played beloved hymns, soaring symphonies, and moving melodies.

Sunday, May 15 was Pollock's final performance, a swan song to cap off five decades of service to a congregation and church she dearly loves.

Her final Sunday morning playlist included "All Creatures of Our God and King," a duet accompanied by Helen Adams on the piano, a Bach prelude, and, by special request, the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's "Messiah."

"I tried really hard to keep it together," Pollock said of playing her final worship service. "That was not my finest hour; by then I was so emotional, and when you're emotional you can't play. They made sure I got emotional!"

Since 1971, Pollock has served with 12 different senior pastors and 10 different ministers of music. It was a former Riverside UMC choir director, the late Earle Barnette, who persuaded her to take the job all those years ago.

"(Riverside UMC) became a second home."

Rev. Antonie Walker is one of the pastors Pollock has served alongside. When he arrived at the church in 2019 Pollock was there to help ease the transition, train Rev. Walker, and introduce him to the community and congregation.

"As pastors change, Gail has still been here and is a pro at her job," he said. "I credit a part of my training, my introduction to Riverside, to Gail. She provided consistency for the congregation and church."

Pollock began playing the piano when she was just 8 years old. The organ came a bit later, at 15. Since then, she's played scores of songs at thousands of worship services and hundreds of weddings and funerals.

Music is an emotional experience, she said, and helps set the mood and tone for the experience.

"Music just naturally influences people emotionally. We're wired to feel it," she said.

Pollock played the music she wanted to hear in church, which included a lot of Bach and other difficult arrangements. Her go-to postlude for a big occasion like Easter was always Widor's "Toccata (from Symphony for Organ No. 5)."

As an organist, Pollock's role was to help guide people through the service via song, but she often delivered a message through music, Rev. Walker said.

"Sometimes before I'd even get up to preach Gail has already 'played' my sermon and preached it, pretty much, through the music. I think that unity between the music and the message is important."

Even though she's now retired from Riverside UMC, Pollock will continue sharing her gift of music. She teaches piano as an adjunct professor in Mercer's Townsend School of Music and plays there as an accompanist. She plans to spend retirement traveling and said she'll now be able to visit Forest Hills United Methodist Church where her son, Tommy, plays drums in the contemporary worship service band.

But Riverside UMC won't be the same without her, Rev. Walker said.

"There is no way we can replace Gail. She's the best."

South Georgia prepares for 2022 Annual Conference session

[ALL ANNUAL CONFERENCE INFORMATION](#)

For the first time in three years, nearly 1,000 South Georgia United Methodists will gather June 5-8 at [The Columbus Georgia Convention & Trade Center](#) to worship, fellowship, and discuss the future of the South Georgia Conference.

Meeting under the theme, "Great is Your Faithfulness," attendees at the 2022 Annual Conference session will worship five times in four days, will see friends, and make new ones. It will be a homecoming of sorts, conference leaders said.

This year's Annual Conference session will be marked by daily worship services. Much like annual church homecoming services celebrate and honor the life and ministry of the church, the worship services will celebrate and honor the life and ministries of the Conference.

Many South Georgians will recognize the conference's opening worship service preacher, Bishop James R. Swanson. Bishop Swanson, who will preach Sunday evening, attended seminary in Atlanta and served as a pastor and District Superintendent in the South Georgia Conference until he was elected to the episcopacy in 2004. He now serves as the resident bishop of the Mississippi Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Dr. Adriane Burgess, pastor of St. Mary’s Road UMC in Columbus, will preach during the Monday morning worship service; Rev. Teresa Edwards, associate pastor at Forest Hills United Methodist Church in Macon, will preach during the Tuesday morning worship service; and Rev. Daniel Medina, pastor of Nueva Vida United Methodist Church in Macon, associate pastor for Hispanic Ministries at Warner Robins First United Methodist Church, and associate director of Hispanic Ministries in the Office of Connectional Ministries, will preach during Wednesday morning’s worship service.

Five people will be ordained or commissioned Monday evening, June 6, and Bishop Graves will be the preacher for the service of ordination and commissioning. On Tuesday, June 7, the conference will recognize those retiring and, during the Memorial Service, celebrate the lives of South Georgia clergy and clergy spouses who have died during the past year. Rev. Bill Bagwell, senior pastor of Pittman Park United Methodist Church in Statesboro, will preach. All three worship services will be live streamed.

During the 2022 Annual Conference session, South Georgia United Methodists will have the opportunity to partner with the North Katanga Annual Conference through the opening worship service’s special offering, which has been designated to support the North Katanga Partnership. Offerings will help support two of the North Katanga Annual Conference’s ministries, Kamina Orphanage and Wings of the Morning Aviation.

“We are excited to once again put focus on our partnership with the North Katanga Annual Conference,” said Kelly Roberson, assistant to the Bishop and director of Conference Ministries/Communications. “These ministries – the Kamina Orphanage and the Wings of the Morning Aviation – are two examples of the great work being done in and through United Methodists all over the world. What an honor to be in ministry with them as they help those who need it most.”

Congregations are encouraged to send and present their offering during the opening worship service on June 5. [Click here for additional and information and promotional materials.](#)

In a [recent South Georgia Advocate column](#), Bishop Graves encouraged South Georgia United Methodists to pray and anticipate God showing up.

“Get prayed up, my friends ... For it is amazing what happens when God’s people show up.”

For more detailed information and a daily agenda, visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference.

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Meaghan Blight selected as Wesleyan College’s 26th president

The Wesleyan College Board of Trustees proudly announces the appointment of Meaghan Blight as the institution’s 26th president effective July 1, 2022. President-elect Blight comes to

Wesleyan from Huron University College, a small liberal arts institution in London, Ontario, Canada. She has spent the last 13 years as an executive in higher education, partnering with industry, private donors, and foundations to identify advancement opportunities for students, faculty, and community and since 2016 has served as Huron's Vice President of University Growth and Chief of Staff.

While at Huron, Blight's responsibilities increased to include supervision of advancement, alumni relationships, communications, and marketing, recruiting and admissions, and student services. She is credited with leading Huron's success in all of those areas. Under her leadership, Huron led all Canadian academic institutions in enrollment growth with increases of 110 percent in domestic enrollment and 300 percent in international enrollment. Retention also grew by 10 percent. She accomplished these gains while increasing academic standards and creating programs focused on student well-being and success.

Also, under her charge, annual fundraising revenue skyrocketed and key academic partnerships with the Ivey Business School and Harvard Business School were developed.

Huron President Barry Craig noted, "Meaghan came to Huron eight years ago and immediately made her mark on this institution. None of the successes that Huron achieved during this period would have been possible without Meaghan's direct involvement. I wish her every success in her new role."

President-elect Blight was well-received by all Wesleyan constituencies during her interviews on campus, sparking great excitement with her energy and vision for Wesleyan. Dr. Jim Ferrari, Chair of Faculty Counsel and member of the Search Committee, said, "The faculty enthusiastically welcome Ms. Blight to Wesleyan College and look forward to working with her to advance her vision for the College."

"The Search Committee was impressed by Meaghan's accomplishments upon review of her submission and then when she interviewed on campus we realized just how special she is in her ability to articulate a vision, communicate effectively with all constituencies and create an electric atmosphere on the Wesleyan campus. We are pleased to have had a role in bringing this caliber of leader to Wesleyan College," stated Search Committee Co-Chair, Deborah Moses.

Wesleyan is primed to play a significant role in closing the gender equity gap, elevating the lives of women worldwide. Wesleyan's mission since 1836 has been to educate women. Under Meaghan Blight's leadership, Wesleyan will embrace that mission with a renewed focus based on the needs of current and future women around the world.

President-elect Blight is excited to serve a women's college as she understands the important role they play in accelerating gender equality. Her mission will be to situate Wesleyan and her alumnae as main contributors in this endeavor. "After spending the last eight years rebranding and repositioning Huron University to be a sustainable and formidable force in the academic

space, I am ready to commit my energy, drive and experience to Wesleyan College, to lead this prominent institution through her next chapter.”

In addition to Meaghan’s professional accomplishments, she is very proud of her personal accomplishments too, including being married for 13 years to her greatest supporter, Kyle, and being the mother of two very active, kind, and witty boys: Jake (10) and Cole (6). Meaghan is the head coach of her son’s baseball team and enjoys camping, golf, snowboarding, and walks with her dogs, Ruby and Walter. She and her family look forward to becoming active members of the Macon and Middle Georgia communities.

Founded in 1836 as the first college in the world chartered to grant degrees to women and shaped by Methodist values, Wesleyan College remains a residential, liberal arts college for women. Wesleyan provides students an academically challenging and relevant liberal arts education, drawing a wonderfully eclectic mix of women – about 800 in all – from across the United States and a variety of countries around the world.

Wesleyan offers 25 majors and 36 minors including self-designed interdisciplinary studies, the Bachelor of Science in nursing, and the Bachelor of Fine Art degrees, plus nine pre-professional programs. Traditionally the top five majors are business administration, nursing, psychology, elementary education, and biology. Additionally, the College offers women online bachelor’s degree programs in business, accounting, and applied psychology. Men and women can enroll in five graduate programs: Master of Business Administration, Master of Elementary Education, Master of Science in Nonprofit Management, and the Master of Arts in Music.

Wesleyan is home to six NCAA Division III athletic teams – basketball, cross country, track, soccer, softball, and volleyball – and an award-winning equestrian program that competes in the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association and the Intercollegiate Dressage Association.

Wesleyan invites the community to enjoy College resources that include a 100-acre arboretum featuring approximately three miles of trails, Mathews Athletic Center, Wesleyan Academy of Lifelong Learning, and Willet Library.

UMC Bishops agree to call regular sessions of jurisdictional conferences in 2022

In response to Judicial Council decision 1445, the Council of Bishops (COB) has formally set the dates for regular sessions of the Jurisdictional Conferences of The United Methodist Church (UMC) to be convened November 2-5, 2022.

During a special COB meeting held today, the bishops approved a motion that the jurisdictional conferences will meet for purpose of the election and assignment of new bishops for the limited purpose of effectuating the continuance of the episcopacy in The United Methodist Church.

Each jurisdiction will determine how many bishops will be elected in their areas.

The President of the Council, Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton said, “I was very pleased that the council engaged in a very thorough and thoughtful discussion. We weighed and balanced all of the pros and cons involved in making this decision. While there is no scenario that is without obstacles, we celebrate the ability we have been given to conduct Jurisdictional Conferences and elect bishops to serve the church in its next expression.”

In another development, the bishops voted to ask the Judicial Council for clarification on the following issues:

- Does Decision 1445 mean that only those bishops elected to fill vacancies existing as of the jurisdictional conferences in November 2022 may be assigned to fill those vacancies or may active bishops already serving in the jurisdiction be reassigned to fill the vacancies and newly elected bishops be assigned to fill vacancies created when active bishops are reassigned?
- If a bishop who must retire “on August 31 next following the regular session of the jurisdictional conference” elects to remain in the bishop’s assignment from the adjournment of the jurisdictional conference in November 2022 until August 31 of 2023, how can a newly elected bishop be assigned on an interim basis to the episcopal area served by the retiring bishop before August 31, 2023?

The Council of Bishops encourages the entire church to continue in deep, unceasing prayer for the Church and the world in this difficult time in the life of the church.



District Gatherings with Bishop Graves set for September

**FROM THE BISHOP
DAVID GRAVES**

To the clergy and laity of South Georgia:

As you know by now, my passion is sharing Jesus, seeing the overlooked, joining God in transforming lives, and changing the world one person at a time.

I’ve had the privilege of getting to know the great people of South Georgia over the past nine months, and I’ve seen firsthand that our local churches share in this passion. I continue to be amazed at the incredible ministry happening all across the South Georgia Conference.

Many of you, clergy and lay, have asked, “Bishop, what are you going to do to come alongside us and help us in the local church? What are you going to do to help with dismantling racism and social justice in our communities? What can our church look like post-Covid?”

These are the conversations I want to be a part of: leaning into and focusing on our mission and ministry and continuing to find ways to be sustainable and, more importantly, thrive.

I realize, though, that we often hold things in tension in our lives. One thing we hold in tension right now is the call to move forward, to restart, and to focus on mission in our local churches. And, at the same time, to have necessary conversations and provide necessary information around denominational matters.

With this in mind I am setting aside three weeks in September to be in our districts among the laity and clergy of South Georgia. You will see the schedule below. The District Superintendents have been a huge help in planning these times in the districts so we can be with as many people as possible.

In these three weeks I want to accomplish two things: to resource around ways we can “restart” our focus on mission and to share relevant information that will help your church be equipped and informed about the South Georgia Conference.

I look forward to visiting, talking with, and listening to clergy and laity from each district as we seek to refocus on our mission. I hope you will make plans now to be a part of a gathering near you. Please contact your [district office](#) with questions.

In Christ,

Bishop David Graves

The following are dates, locations and times for various gatherings that have been scheduled. In addition to these, District Superintendents are scheduling other opportunities for Bishop Graves to meet with laity and clergy during his time in each district.

Week 1: North Central District & Northwest District

Joint North Central/Northwest District Gathering with Bishop Graves (for Laity and Clergy)

Sunday, September 11 | 4 – 6 pm

Location: Perry UMC

Northwest District Clergy Gathering

Monday, September 12 | Noon – 2:30 pm

Location: St. Paul UMC

North Central District Clergy Gathering
Tuesday, September 13 | Noon – 3 pm
Location: Methodist Home

Week 2: South Central District & Southwest District

Joint South Central/Southwest District Gathering with Bishop Graves (for Laity and Clergy)
Sunday, September 18 | 4 – 6 pm
Location: Tifton First UMC

South Central District Clergy Gathering
Monday, September 19 | Noon – 3 pm
Location: TBA

Southwest District Clergy Gathering
Tuesday, September 20 | Noon – 3 pm
Location: Camilla UMC

Week 3: Coastal District & Northeast District

Joint Coastal/Northeast District Gathering with Bishop Graves (for Laity and Clergy)
Sunday, September 25 | 4 - 6 pm
Location: Gateway Church, Bloomingdale

Coastal District Clergy Gathering
Monday, September 26 | Noon – 3 pm
Location: Epworth By The Sea, Turner Lodge Conference Room

Northeast District Clergy Gathering
Tuesday, September 27 | Noon – 3 pm
Location: Pittman Park UMC, Statesboro



God Foretells Destruction

Summer Quarter: Partners in a New Creation
Unit 1: God Delivers and Restores

Sunday school lesson for the week of June 5, 2022
By Dr. Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 47:10-15

The summer's theme: Partners in a New Creation

In this season we will be exploring the partnership between God and us in a new creation. We will learn more about who God is and who we are in relation to God. We will learn about the new creation God is bringing about and how God seeks to involve us. This divine endeavor is God's grand purpose both for creation and for our lives. There is an affirmation of faith from The United Church of Canada that is included in the United Methodist Hymnal. It affirms that we are not alone, that the world in which we live belongs to God, that God is still creating it, and God has called the Church to be involved.

We are not alone; we live in God's world.

We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Biblical Context for the Unit

Over the next four weeks, in the first of three units this summer, we will explore passages in Isaiah under the title, "God Delivers and Restores." Remember that in the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 40 begins a new section. Chapters 1-39 address God's people in the 8th Century, B.C., where the major threat is the Assyrian Empire. It contains warnings and visions designed to motivate God's people to repent before destruction and judgment come. Chapter 40 begins a new theme. The time period addressed is more than 150 years later. God's people have been held captive by another superpower, the Babylonian Empire. God's people have already been undergoing the discipline of captivity and exile. They also know that their homeland was destroyed by the Babylonian army. Their need is for hope in the midst of despair. In Chapter 40,

the message from God is a word of comfort and hope for their return home. The theme that “God delivers and restores” summarizes well the chapters of Isaiah beginning with Chapter 40.

What God Must Do to Free God’s People

The title for today’s lesson is “God Foretells Destruction.” This title perhaps misses the larger point because the destruction being foretold is happening to the Babylonian Empire, which has held God’s people in captivity. In other words, the destruction coming to Babylon is good news for God’s people! This is the announcement of God’s deliverance from a foreign power and the beginning of what will be their restoration back to their homeland. God’s people will witness God’s judgment coming upon their enemy. What should they learn from the judgment of Babylon?

Learning from the Judgment of Babylon

Not surprisingly, the lessons that Babylon should learn are also lessons God’s people should learn. God addresses Babylon’s pride and its false sense of security. **“You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, ‘No one sees me.’ Your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me.’”** Mighty Babylon and its rulers felt that there was no higher authority to whom they had to answer. They felt secure in the wisdom and knowledge they had, because of where it had gotten them. Their false sense of security, however, led them astray. They did not stop at any point to consider that their ways were wicked, nor did they care. In their pride and arrogance, they did not stop to think about the oppression that they inflicted on smaller nations like Judah, the cradle of God’s people. For the Babylonians, “might makes right.” Their military ability to brutally subjugate nations told them that they had a divine right to act as they had. Their actions however were morally wrong. They inflicted suffering upon others. This is what happens when the powerful think there is no one else to whom they must answer.

The prophet, however, was announcing that God, not Babylon, would have the last say. **“But evil shall come upon you, which you cannot charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, which you will not be able to ward off; and ruin shall come on you suddenly, of which you know nothing.”** The tables were turning on the Babylonians. God’s people had been held captive in Babylon for so long with no end in sight to their misery and suffering. They could not imagine that they could ever be delivered from so powerful a foe as the mighty Babylonian army. God was saying through the prophet, however, that God is the one and only true God who created the earth and stretched out the heavens. God has all the nations and peoples available to use for his purposes. We begin learning in Chapter 45 that God was already raising up the Persian ruler, Cyrus, to build an army more powerful than the Babylonian army. God would use Cyrus and the Persian army to defeat the oppressor of God’s people. The Babylonians, through the worship of their idols, would not be able to charm their way out or ward off their destruction. Their destruction would happen so suddenly that they would not see it coming.

Next, we hear the prophet taunting the Babylonians and their religious superstitions. **“Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed, perhaps you may inspire terror. You are wearied with your many consultations; let those who study the heavens stand up and save you, those who gaze at the stars, and at each new moon predict what shall befall you.”** The Babylonian Empire had persisted in their oppression of smaller nations and their people because they felt that their deities had authorized them to do so and had aided them in all their military victories. They believed that their system of idol worship, their spells, and their astrological consultations had assured them of remaining on top as a world power. They believed that their reign over others for all eternity was literally written in the stars.

In the chapters of Isaiah leading up to this we are told a very different story. It was the one true God of the universe, the God of Jacob, who had allowed world events to unfold as they had. God had used this time in the life of God’s people Israel to show them the error of their ways in their rebellion against God. Now, after they had learned the spiritual lessons of their exile and had come to repent of their sinful ways, God was ready to deliver his people and restore them. God would now bring about the destruction of the Babylonians. The scales of justice were being balanced. Justice meant mercy for God’s people and judgment for the Babylonians. Their many spells and consultations could do nothing to save them at this point. **“See, they are like stubble, the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before! Such to you are those with whom you have labored, who have trafficked with you from your youth; they all wander about in their own paths; there is no one to save you.”**

It was important for God’s people to picture the future when the Babylonians would be defeated and their false gods unmasked. In past generations, God’s people had once been lured into the idolatry practiced by neighboring nations. It was important for God’s people to imagine the idols and artifacts of the Babylonians’ world-view being consumed by fire. God wanted God’s people to imagine not just a small campfire, but a fire sweeping across a field of stubble. God wanted to wipe away the lure of idols once and for all from the collective mind of God’s people. In bringing down the Babylonian Empire, God was also proving the futility of their idolatrous worldview. What would grow in its place in the mindset of God’s people is the importance of seeking God and God’s way and worshiping God with all one’s heart, all one’s soul, and with all one’s might.

What Should We Learn?

What do we make of the references to astrology? Is it wrong to consult your horoscope in the newspaper? Just how superstitious are you? Do you fancy yourself to have psychic powers? Are you drawn to new age mysticism? How gullible are you to what you read on the Internet and in social media? With what do you feed your mind? The Babylonians had this whole pseudo-religious thought-world in which they thought they could charm the forces around them, ward

off bad luck, and consult various supernatural entities and powers. The same thing exists today, unfortunately, even among people who identify themselves as Christians. Where does it exist the most? It exists the most when our thought-world is not informed by sound, biblical teaching. 2 Timothy 4:3-4 should serve as a warning to us: “For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away into myths.”

Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.” If a way can seem right to us, isn’t this a situation fraught with danger? What can guide us to the truth of what truly is right and what is wrong? According to Isaiah, Babylon’s wisdom and knowledge led its people astray. The people of Babylon felt secure in their wickedness. Without God’s Word to guide us, our self-styled wisdom and knowledge can lead us astray. We can have a false sense of security while walking a self-destructive path. Perhaps most telling of all, the people of Babylon said, “no one sees me. I am, and there is no one beside me.” Not only should we be guided by a knowledge of God’s Word, we should have trusted brothers and sisters in Christ surrounding us. We should ask them to hold us accountable, and empower these friends in various ways to do so. Are you a part of an accountability group of some kind?

If we are to be partners with God in a new creation, we should embrace the theological worldview of the book of Isaiah. We should believe in one God who has created the earth and stretched the heavens. We should believe that the God who created the universe is the God revealed in the Bible. We should want to fill our minds with the grand story of the way God has revealed himself to Abraham and Sarah and to their offspring who grew to be God’s people Israel. We learn in this account that Israel is not some shining example of righteousness. They just happened to be the ones entrusted by God to receive God’s laws, learn God’s ways, and model this divine way of life to their neighbors. We learn from their failures and the story of God’s redemptive love and actions to form them and give them hope. Ultimately, we learn about God, our partner in God’s new creation, through God’s Son, Jesus Christ. We believe that God continues to be revealed through the Holy Spirit empowering God’s people in this age to be the Church – from the time of the apostles to now. The God revealed in the Old and New Testaments has created and is creating. We are not alone. We live in God’s world. Thanks be to God!

Prayer

Creator God, you cause to us hope for an abundant life lived in partnership with you. Help us to build our lives on the foundation of your Word, that we may learn the joy of being accountable to you, through our Lord Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministerial Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com. Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the “Layered Bible Journey,” at www.layeredbiblejourney.com.

God Foretells Redemption

Summer Quarter: Partners in a New Creation

Unit 1: God Delivers and Restores

Sunday school lesson for the week of June 12, 2022

By Dr. Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 49:1-13

When God Has Bigger Plans

It is important to remember the larger context of our lesson scripture, which starts with the section of Isaiah beginning with Chapter 40. The words and images in this part of Isaiah are so powerful because they are giving God's people a preview of a dramatic chapter about to unfold in their life together. What is about to happen amounts to no less than a second exodus. The first exodus was about the liberation of God's people from bondage in Egypt. This second exodus is about the liberation of God's people from captivity in Babylon. The first exodus was made in haste with the Egyptians in hot pursuit. In the second exodus, God will say, "For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard." (Isaiah 52:12) If you will remember, not everything went well in the first exodus in the time of Moses. Unfortunately, the exodus generation that left Egypt complained incessantly about the journey, wishing they could return to Egypt. That's how small their vision was. Consequently, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. In this second exodus, centuries later, God's people are being prepared with prophetic visions of the future that God has for them. God says, "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:18-19) Yes, in this lesson God foretells redemption, but God has bigger plans than just the redemption of God's people.

A People Being Formed (Isaiah 49:1-3)

49 Listen to me, O coastlands,
pay attention, you peoples from far away!
The LORD called me before I was born,
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.
²He made my mouth like a sharp sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me a polished arrow,
in his quiver he hid me away.

³ And he said to me, “You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”

Again and again, in this part of Isaiah, we hear, “Listen to me, O coastlands.” In other words, what is being said is not just of interest to God’s people, Israel. It is of interest to all people in every nation extending to land’s edge – every coast. Throughout this part of Isaiah, God asserts himself as the One God of the universe who created the earth and stretched out the heavens. Other nations, including the Babylonians, believed in lots of localized deities, but God wants his people to understand that God is not just their deity, but the one God of all who determines the fates of all nations and peoples. What God has to say is of interest to all people in all lands, and God’s people will have a special role to fulfill.

We hear over and over that God’s people are the ones called by God and formed from the womb to be God’s servant. The womb is where humans are formed. Before we took our first breath, we were being formed. God’s people were not only formed through the creative forces that bring life to all human beings; God’s people were formed through their special history, beginning with the call of Abraham and Sarah. They were formed through God’s redemptive acts in their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. They were formed through the giving of the law and their special covenantal relationship with God that emerged as they sought to live according to God’s way.

If God had a quiver of arrows, then God’s people would be that one polished arrow hidden away for a special divine purpose. Just as the archer aims the arrow at the intended target, God is aiming God’s people toward their chosen destiny. It was so important for God’s people to remember that God had been forming them for generations and God was still at it in their lifetimes.

God says, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” It should always be kept in mind that what God does in and through God’s servant, Israel, is ultimately for the glorification of God – God’s fame, God’s renown, and God’s majesty and radiance. In turn, as we bring glory to God we get caught up in the experience. As the Westminster Confession says, the chief end of humankind is to glorify God and enjoy God forever. Glorifying God and enjoying God are linked together. It is as if God is the sun, and we get to be the moon. The sun shines on its own. The moon does not shine on its own. The moon shines only when it reflects the sun’s light. The greatest joy comes to us when we glorify God through our lives. The ultimate goal of our formation in God is God’s glorification.

A People Being Redeemed (Isaiah 49:4-5)

⁴ But I said, “I have labored in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;
yet surely my cause is with the LORD,
and my reward with my God.”

⁵ And now the LORD says,
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
and that Israel might be gathered to him,
for I am honored in the sight of the LORD,
and my God has become my strength—

Another way God's people were being formed was in the redemption story that was unfolding for them while they lived in exile. With their experience of exile and captivity, they were made to realize how they had squandered all the opportunities given to them as God's covenant people when they lived in Judah. In the time before they were exiled from their homeland, they had gone after other gods. They had lived a lifestyle that bred oppression in the lives of others. In the words of confession in our Communion liturgy, they had not loved God with their whole heart, they had failed to be an obedient people, they had not done God's will, they had broken God's law, they had rebelled against God's love, they had not loved their neighbors, and they had not heard the cry of the needy. They had labored in vain and spent their strength for nothing and vanity.

Yet they understood that their cause at this point was with the Lord. If their cause was to be taken up at all, it would be the Lord who would take it on. Their only hope was with God, and they understood that God was offering forgiveness and redemption. Their reward was with their God, though completely undeserved. God was graciously extending mercy to them. God, who had formed them in the womb, was aiming to bring Jacob back to him.

God's people are referred to as "Jacob, my servant," or "my servant Israel." It is helpful to keep in mind that neither Judah nor Israel existed at this time as an independent, sovereign nation. The Babylonians had killed their rulers, leveled their capital city to the ground, and removed all the leading citizens into captivity. Having said that, however, God's people still existed as a people—the recipients of God's redeeming love.

God was turning the story of their former rebellion into a story of redemption. We all love a story of redemption. We all love a story where a life is being turned around. This is true when it is our own story. What greater way does God honor a people than to make them the object of God's own redeeming love. In their redemption, God's people would learn how God becomes the strength of a people.

God Has a Bigger Plan Than One's Own Redemption (Isaiah 49:6)

⁶ he says,
"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;

I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

This is the point when God reveals the larger purpose of his redemptive and saving work. Yes, God intended to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the survivors of Israel to their lives in their homeland. It was too light a thing, however, for God’s people to think that their redemption was something that was only to happen to them. God had a much weightier purpose in what God intended to do.

God intended for the redemption of God’s people to be a beacon of hope that would shine to other nations – all nations. God’s people would have a story to tell. Their story of redemption was not to be kept to themselves. God was putting his people out there to be a light to the nations. This has been God’s plan since the beginning in Genesis 12:2-3. It was always God’s intention to make something great from the offspring of Abraham and Sarah. The plan in Genesis was that God’s people would be blessed SO THAT God’s people could be a blessing and bless all the families of the earth. The exiles were being reminded of God’s purpose working in and through them: that God’s salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

An Incredible Reversal of Fortunes (Isaiah 49:7)

⁷ Thus says the LORD,
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,
the slave of rulers,
“Kings shall see and stand up,
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,
because of the LORD, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

Think of the drastic change that was happening. From being deeply despised and abhorred by the nations, the standing of God’s people was about to be reversed. From being the slaves of rulers, these liberated captives were to become the ones that rulers would admire, to whom the rulers would cater, and from whom the rulers would learn. Talk about a reversal of fortune! After living as a conquered people, they would become a liberated people. After suffering under the cruel reign of Babylonian kings, they would come under the reign of a benevolent ruler, the Persian king, Cyrus. Whereas the Babylonians attempted to wipe out their religious and cultural identity, Cyrus will offer a form of respect to the God the Jews worshiped and even give aid to the restoration of their worship of God. God’s people will once again be in the position of showing the world the living God they serve and just how it is that they serve God.

It will be as if the esteem shown to God’s people by Cyrus will help others to see how great is the esteem shown by God to God’s people. Think back to Deuteronomy 7:7, where God says, “It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on

you and chose you – for you were the fewest of all peoples.” Despite not being as numerous or powerful as the superpowers that ruled, God’s people were to be served by the Persian king Cyrus, because the Holy One of Israel had chosen them for a special purpose.

God Will Prepare the Way for the Second Exodus (Isaiah 49:8-11)

⁸ Thus says the LORD:

In a time of favor I have answered you,
on a day of salvation I have helped you;

I have kept you and given you
as a covenant to the people,
to establish the land,

to apportion the desolate heritages;

⁹ saying to the prisoners, “Come out,”
to those who are in darkness, “Show yourselves.”

They shall feed along the ways,
on all the bare heights shall be their pasture;

¹⁰ they shall not hunger or thirst,
neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down,
for he who has pity on them will lead them,
and by springs of water will guide them.

¹¹ And I will turn all my mountains into a road,
and my highways shall be raised up.

Those who had lived in exile in Babylon were to experience the time of God’s favor. It was God’s answer to the suffering they had experienced and an answer to their prayers. It was their “day of salvation.” God had kept them according to God’s covenant with them. Now God was giving the exiles to all of God’s people as a covenant to them. They would be returning home to the remnant left there and offer their leadership. We will see that the exiles, not the remnant, were to be the leaders in the restoration of God’s people. For in exile, God’s people had experienced the discipline that made them repent and brought them back to the Lord. The exiles would return home and establish the land. They would “apportion the desolate heritages.” In other words, they would return to the desolation wrought earlier by the Babylonian army and apportion the areas of land to each group according to their ancient tribal heritage. They will tell the other prisoners scattered around that it will be safe to come out of the darkness and into the light and show themselves.

After living decades in captivity, God’s people will not just be permitted to return home, they will be aided in their endeavor by Cyrus. With Cyrus as God’s instrument, the returning exiles will feed along the ways of their journey home. The bare heights will be their pasture. They shall neither hunger or thirst along the way. They will be protected. They will be led. Springs of water

will guide them on their way home. Mountains will become roads and highways. In other words, they would not wander in the wilderness for 40 years as the people did in the first exodus.

A Rallying Point for Refugees

¹² Lo, these shall come from far away,
and lo, these from the north and from the west,
and these from the land of Syene.

¹³ Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!
For the LORD has comforted his people,
and will have compassion on his suffering ones.

Finally, in our scripture lesson, we see the refugees of war coming from far flung lands to return home. It's as if all of God's creation is singing for joy around them as God comforts his people and has compassion on twho have suffered. All this has the making of a great story to tell to the nations.

Prayer

God, the Revealer | You called Your people to a vision of being a light and carrying that light to the nations | Work in our hearts to rescue us from being so provincial and self-centered in our faith | That we might come to see the grand design of Your work in the world and join in that work | Through Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, Amen.

Dr. Jay Harris serves as the Assistant to the Bishop for Ministerial Services for the South Georgia Conference. Email him at jharris@sgaumc.com. Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the "Layered Bible Journey," at www.layeredbiblejourney.com.

Reflect, don't repeat

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

Have you ever looked at someone's life and been confused about why they keep making the same mistakes over and over again? Or maybe, if you're like me, you realize that person is you! Why do we get stuck in a cycle of doing the same failing things over and over again? Why do we keep repeating our missteps and failures? One of the main reasons is we aren't taking the time to reflect on our experiences.

See if you can identify with any of these character traits:

- a. I overthink and second-guess myself after every event or experience.

- b. I don't have time to think about what I just did – what is next is already in front of me.
- c. I don't like to think about what I've done because I might feel bad about where I have failed.
- d. I follow my gut, not my head, so I move from one gut decision to the next.
- e. I intentionally sit down and evaluate, review, and process what happens in my life to learn lessons for the future.

Being a good thinker and planner is critical for leadership. Thinking involves forward movement and strategizing; it helps you make plans to get from point A to point B. But reflecting is equally important. Reflecting is slowing down to learn the lessons God has for you from past experiences and seeing how to apply them to your thinking going forward.

In the mid-1980s, Chris Argyris coined the term, “double-loop learning” as he discovered the importance of being reflective. Single loop learning is focusing on whether you met the objective, the goal, or the purpose. Double loop learning focuses on the assumptions and mindsets that drove you to make the decisions you made so you can uncover the reason for your failure or success. We can get at those deeper held beliefs, assumptions, and mindsets through inquiry and questioning. Reflection questions aren't fact-based questions, but deeper level, contemplative questions.

If double-loop learning is so effective in helping us evaluate why we do what we do, why don't more people use this powerful tool of reflection? Double-loop learning involves asking questions that often make the reflector uneasy and uncomfortable. It causes you to go back into the messiness of the past and look deeper than your actions to uncover the heart and motivations behind the actions. Double-loop learning is painful and humiliating at times, but far more powerful than just focusing on whether you experienced a success or failure.

Lamentations 3:40, “Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord!”

How can you build a rhythm of reflection in your life?

1. Stop/Pause: In order to reflect, you've got to stop moving forward. Too many of us keep moving because we think we'll be left behind if we don't. But what we fail to realize is that even though we are moving, we might be making progress in the wrong direction. Developing a rhythm of stopping to reflect helps us take stock of where we are in light of where we are going. Pause throughout the day, in your conversations, after your meetings, and at the end of the day to reflect on where you have been and what you have been doing. Schedule hard stops in your week, month, and year where you take larger amounts of time for reflection. Forward motion is only good if you're learning from the past and using that to guide you in the present toward the future.
2. Consolations/Desolations: The ancient discipline of reflecting on consolations and desolations at the end of your day helps you consider what you learned about where God was present in your life. Reflect on where you felt the presence of God most closely

during your day (consolations.) In the same way, reflect on when you felt furthest from God as you moved away from His presence (desolations.) Consider what these experiences teach you about your choices, motivations, and behavior. How can you move toward more consolations and fewer desolations tomorrow?

3. Journaling: If you have trouble keeping your mind in a reflective state because of the never-ending to-do list and busyness, grab a pen and journal and write your thoughts. Start with these general questions: 1. What happened today? 2. Where did I see God moving? 3. Where did I miss God? 4. What did I learn from what I experienced? 5. How will that influence the future?
4. Evaluation: Take time to gather with others who can help you debrief experiences and talk about lessons learned. Be honest with yourselves. Don't just debrief effort ("You did a great job.") but look at impact ("We were/weren't effective in meeting our goal."). Spend time evaluating what you did well and why it went well as much as you talk about what didn't work well and why. If we don't learn from our successes, how will we be able to repeat them? If we don't reflect on our failures, how will we prevent them in the future?

Are you tired of making the same mistakes and doing the same things? Build in a rhythm of reflection so you can learn from the past and leverage it to shape the future. Reflect, don't repeat.

Anne Bosarge serves as the Conference's Director of Leadership Strategies and Local Church Resources. Email her at abosarge@sgaumc.com.

Methodist missionaries in India

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

There are many worthy projects for mission in our world. We cannot do them all. The best way to decide which project to undertake or fund is to listen to the calling of God. God will reveal to us which mission works best for us. My wonderful role is to highlight the many projects we have in the world. Thus far I have talked of Afghanistan; Korea; Hawaii; Africa; North Katanga; Yemen; Washington, D.C.; North Carolina; Mississippi; and Russia.

Continuing our journey around the world I return to Southeast Asia to a mission in India. Since 1922, Leonard Theological College (LTC) is where most of the pastors and deaconesses for the Methodist Church in India are sent to be trained. When LTC is falling on hard times like now, one saying often heard is, "No LTC means no MCI." LTC provides that crucial need of the Methodist Church in India to prepare ministers for the ministries of the Church in both rural as well as urban settings – for the pulpit, Christian education, evangelism, administration, and the care/ counseling of the youth, children and elderly people.

There are currently 28 million Christians in India, a country with more than 1 billion people. Of that large number more than 7.5 million have Methodist roots. We have had missionaries in India from 1810 through today. Prayerfully consider helping this vital mission at [Leonard Theological College](http://LeonardTheologicalCollege.com).

For more information about Leonard Theological College, visit www.leonardtheologicalcollege.com or contact Rev. Dr. Naveen Rao at ltcjbp@gmail.com.

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

Retired Clergy Birthdays – June 2022

- 6/02 – Jan Durham: 103 Willeford Dr.; Savannah, GA 31411
- 6/03 – Cindy Garrard: PO Box 39; Midland, GA 31820
- 6/03 – Joyce Payne: 423 Nandina Ct.; Warner Robins, GA 31088
- 6/04 – Frank Parr: 24 Wylly Ave.; Savannah, GA 31406
- 6/05 – Pam France: 41 Holsteiner Lane; Dallas, GA 30132
- 6/06 – W. Raymond Wilder, Jr.: 2001 South Lee St.; Americus, GA 31709
- 6/06 – Sandra Wilson: 4657 Twin Oak Dr.; Macon, GA 31210
- 6/07 – Bob Williams: PO Box 665; Dublin, GA 31040
- 6/08 – Marcia Cochran: 344 Stone Mill Dr.; Brunswick, GA 31520
- 6/09 – John Clements: 468 Edwards Creek Rd.; Alamo, GA 30411
- 6/09 – Whit Kirkland: 551 Kirkland Dr.; Byron, GA 31008
- 6/09 – Sylvia Ross: 2000 Cambridge Ave. #331; Wyomissing, PA 19610
- 6/09 – Matt Woodbery: Box 4028; APO AE 09096
- 6/10 – Bill Huddle: 5310 Winding Lakes Dr.; Cumming, GA 30028
- 6/10 – Charles Smith, Jr.: 4102 Serendipity Ct.; Martinez, GA 30907
- 6/15 – Mira Barrett: 433 Paul St.; Portal, GA 30450
- 6/15 – Stephen Webb: 260 Riverchase Dr.; Bainbridge, GA 39819
- 6/17 – Charles Cravey: 6500 Clito Rd.; Statesboro, GA 30461
- 6/17 – William Harris: 111 Ingham St.; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
- 6/17 – Heyward Hiers: PO Box 187; Berlin, GA 31722
- 6/18 – Leland Collins: 130 Surrey Place; Perry, GA 31069
- 6/20 – Glen Hancock: 3098 Rufus Thompson Rd.; Donalsonville, GA 39845
- 6/20 – Saunders Pinckard: PO Box 6555; Americus, GA 31709
- 6/20 – Jim Rush: 160 University Park Dr.; Homewood, AL 35209
- 6/21 – Nancy Lee Cater: PO Box 8547; Warner Robins, GA 31095
- 6/21 – Lonzie Wester: 2616 Winchester Rd.; Waycross, GA 31501
- 6/23 – Sue Diebolt: 2006 Waverly Ct.; Lancaster, SC 29720
- 6/23 – Don King: 140 Long Pines Circle; East Dublin, GA 31027
- 6/24 – Doug Harvey: 5109 River Rd.; Jakin, GA 39861
- 6/24 – Jack Knight: 255 Cross Country Chase; Stokesdale, NC 27357
- 6/24 – Benjy Varnell: 100 Militia Hill Way; St. Simons Island, GA 31522

6/25 – Gary Brady: PO Box 382; Ochlocknee, GA 31773
6/25 – Russ Elkins: 104 Oak Dr.; Adel, GA 31620
6/25 – Jim Emery: 3855 Dennis Creek Rd.; Talbotton, GA 31827
6/26 – C. Graton Helms: PO Box 4476; Eastman, GA 31023
6/26 – Tom Johnson: PO Box 1202; Pine Mountain, GA 31822
6/27 – Bill Strickland: PO Box 355; Portal, GA 30450
6/28 – Ethan Strom: 384 Midnight Cypress Dr.; Winter Haven, FL 33881
6/29 – Nancy Scarbrough: 1345 Hardeman Ave. #239; Macon, GA 31201
6/30 – Roy Dial, III: 3015 Chadbourne Trail; Alpharetta, GA 30004
6/30 – Sally Flowers: 507 Sunnymeade Dr.; Valdosta, GA 31605

Scripture Readings – June 1 edition

June 5

Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b (UMH 826)

Romans 8:14-17

John 14:8-17, (25-27)

June 12

Trinity Sunday

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Psalm 8 (UMH 743)

Romans 5:1-5

John 16:12-15

June 19

Second Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 19:1-15a

Psalm 42 (UMH 777)

Galatians 3:23-29

Luke 8:26-39

Events in the South Georgia Conference – 6/1/2022 edition

2022 Annual Conference session – June 5-8

The [2022 Annual Conference session](#) is set for June 5-8 in Columbus, Ga.

Peace with Justice Sunday – June 12

Peace with Justice Sunday enables The United Methodist Church to have a voice in advocating

for peace and justice through a broad spectrum of global programs. [Peace with Justice Sunday Pastor and Leader Kit](#)

Wesley Glen Day – June 19

Fathers' Day is Wesley Glen Day across the South Georgia Conference. Show your support for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities by making a gift to [Wesley Glen Ministries](#) on June 19 in honor of a strong male role model in your life. Celebrate by wearing your favorite Wesley Glen T-shirt from past years. Post your pictures on social media with the tags: #WesleyGlenMinistries #growingtogether

Certified Lay Ministry, Summer Immersion, Brunswick – June 20-24

If you've always wanted to pursue your Certified Lay Ministry certification but didn't have the weekends to give toward classes, our CLM Immersion in Brunswick might be a great option for you! Take off one complete week of work and join us for an immersion that will allow you to complete all your classes in one week. Then finish up the assignments on your own time and finish up after the week is over! Sound like something you'd be interested in? Register today: sgaumc.org/certifiedlayministrytraining

Mission u – July 14-17

Mission u provides opportunities to prepare for leadership in mission study and personal growth. It's a weekend full of worship, service, training, and study. Mission u will motivate, inform, challenge and enrich your commitment to global ministry. Mission u is set for July 14-17 at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island. The retreat theme is "Luke 13: A Transformative Biblical Curriculum for Adults, Children & Youth." [More information](#) | [Download the flyer](#) | [Register now](#) | [Click here for hotel information](#)

Georgia Pastors' School – July 18-21

Active and retired United Methodist clergy and their families are invited to Georgia Pastors' School at Epworth By The Sea July 18-21. Find registration and information at www.georgiapastorsschool.org.