

## **SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – JULY 6 EDITION**

### **Brunswick couple shares love of Christ through daily waves, smiles**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

Nearly every weekday, from August 2021 through May 2022, a “cute little old couple” sat in their front yard in a pair of green Adirondack chairs, drinking coffee and waving at passersby.

Cars, busses, construction vehicles, and landscape trucks would slow as they drove past, honk, wave, and smile.

What started as a one-day sendoff to middle school for grandson Jax grew into something much bigger than Janie and Fred Alexander ever imagined.

“This is just a way to spread joy and love every day,” said lifelong United Methodist Janie Alexander. “We’re overwhelmed. We’re the ones being blessed.”

No matter the weather, the Alexanders were out on their front lawn, waving, smiling, and letting folks know they’re loved. They sat under umbrellas when it rained and huddled under blankets when it was cold.

The two became so familiar that children sometimes would say hello to Janie when she was out running errands around town.

“One boy was so shy at the beginning of the year and by the end of the year he’d hang out the window and wave,” Janie said. “I introduced myself at a restaurant to another boy and he said, ‘I know you; I wave at you every day!’”

On the rare occasion the Alexanders couldn’t make it out to wave, they were missed and people would ask their daughters where they were.

“I had to put a sign out if we weren’t going to be there so no one would get worried or think we’d died,” Janie laughed.

To the Alexanders, what started as a simple good-morning wave to a grandson on his first day of middle school has grown into so much more. It’s a ministry of sorts now, a simple way to share the love of Christ each morning.

“People stop and tell us it makes their day. It’s really humbling. It’s just been a joy. People come up and say they’re so blessed by us doing this.”

And folks who stop and talk to Janie, Fred, or one of their “tribe” – they have five children, 10 grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren – likely receive a small, square prayer stone with a scripture inscribed on it. Janie carries several with her everywhere she goes and hands them out

to grocery store cashiers, wait staff, fast food employees, and anyone else she thinks needs a little encouragement or hope.

“We’ve had people open up to us and share with us,” she said. “They open a lot of doors to pray for people and start relationships.”

The Alexanders’ United Methodists roots run deep. They were married at Brunswick First United Methodist Church and have been members at St. Simons Island United Methodist Church for decades. Their son-in-law, Chip Strickland, is pastor of Brooklet United Methodist Church.

But the joy and love they share knows no denomination. They wave at everyone who drives by these days, and they don’t plan to stop. They’ve taken a break for the summer, but come August, they’ll be back out front, waving to middle school students and their families (Glynn Middle School is just down the road from their home) and everyone else who happens to drive past. Janie says she and Fred have started something they can’t stop.

“It’s heartwarming that it means so much to them. It was a blessing to us that these kids are sweet enough to go by and wave to these little old people out there drinking their coffee.”



## **Methodist Home celebrates 150 years of helping children and youth**

**By Kara Witherow, *Editor***

Edwin arrived at [The Methodist Home for Children and Youth](#) as a 9-year-old.

A “wild creature” with no significant parenting, he was failing school and fighting during recess.

At The Methodist Home, he found structure, order, and values. He was no longer able to wander neighborhoods and alleys at will. He found adults who set limits and cared.

Today, more than 70 years later, Dr. Edwin Chase credits The Methodist Home for saving his life.

“The Children’s Home saved my life twice,” said Dr. Chase, a retired South Georgia pastor and pastoral counselor. “It blessed me twice. It blessed me once as a child and blessed me again as someone on staff.”

What began as an orphanage in 1872 has grown into an agency that ministers across the South Georgia Conference with residential care, community foster homes, specialized treatment programs, and counseling services. The Home currently serves about 55 children, teens, and adults from ages 6 to 21 years old.

This year The Home is celebrating its sesquicentennial, 150 years of caring for children and helping the community.

In an [anniversary video](#), four retired South Georgia bishops – Bishop James King, Bishop Michael Watson, Bishop Lawson Bryan, and Bishop Richard Looney – shared special messages celebrating The Methodist Home, its children, and the families it serves. South Georgia Conference congregations and members were also thanked for their support and love through The Home’s 150 years.

“God’s amazing grace has carried us through these years, and God’s providence, with your help, will carry us onward,” said retired CEO and President of The Methodist Home, Dr. Steve Rumford, in the [video](#).

Alison Evans, current President and CEO of The Methodist Home, thanked God and those who have led the ministry through 15 decades.

“Our ministry has flourished thanks to the blessings of God. He has worked through so many wonderful people as highlighted by several bishops in this anniversary video,” she said. “The hands and hearts of the people in the South Georgia Conference helped us live into our mission to restore childhoods, strengthen families, and build up the people we serve. We praise God for His mighty blessings.”

Dr. Chase estimates the number of lives impacted by The Methodist Home could fill The University of Georgia’s Sanford Stadium twice.

“I tried to figure out how many lives The Home has touched in 150 years, but I’d probably need an economist to help,” he said. “My estimation was 200,000 people. For me, I went to The Home as a single person, I got married, had three sons, and now have seven grandchildren. That’s 15 people now. That’s just me!

“The Children’s Home has had a profound impact on many, many, many, many lives.”

With five sites across South Georgia – in Americus, Columbus, Macon, St. Marys, and Valdosta – The Methodist Home for Children and Youth has served more than 10,000 abused and neglected children and young people in its 150-year history.

More than a home for children, it’s also home to a host of children and family programs and services including community foster homes, specialized treatment programs and counseling services.

Not just a place for children to have a bed and meals, The Methodist Home provides counseling, therapy, independent living skills training, and more.

It gave young Edwin - and others like him - much-needed consistency and security to be able to learn, grow, and thrive.

Through the years, he’s seen God work in his own life and in the lives of countless young people through The Methodist Home.

“I got to see the transformation The Methodist Home made in people’s lives from both sides. It thrilled me to see the difference in whole family lines,” Dr. Chase said. “The Children’s Home was part of God’s goodness to me.”

Click [here](#) to watch a video celebrating *The Methodist Home for Children and Youth's 150th anniversary*.

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## Videos highlight ways God is faithful

During the 2022 South Georgia Annual Conference session, attendees watched videos highlighting areas in the South Georgia Conference that are thriving and vital and ways our South Georgia United Methodists are faithfully serving their communities and one another.

### Ministry Moment Snapshots

Through several Ministry Moment Snapshots led by Anne Bosarge, Director of Leadership Strategies and Local Church Resources, the Conference was able to see the fruit of God's faithfulness in various ways throughout the South Georgia Conference.

- [Camp Connect](#): Camp Director Suzanne Akins shared the ways the Camp Connect Leadership Team prepared for a spirit-filled summer camp season. The camp lead team joined Akins on the video to highlight ways they planned and prepared for the 600+ summer campers.
- [Disaster Response](#): Kelly Crane, Coastal district disaster response coordinator, shared opportunities South Georgia United Methodists have to serve and bring hope to those in times of crisis and disaster. "When we have storms, we come together. We come together and we serve. That's what brings me hope."
- [Mission Spotlight](#): Rev. Garth Duke-Barton shared how he's seen God's faithfulness in and through the work of mission and ministry locally and around the world.
- [Justice Ministries](#): Bishop David Graves and Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed talked about moving forward in making racial justice a priority in our conference. "Let's hear the voices of other people and be quicker to listen than to speak," Bishop Graves said. "If we can get to a better place today there's hope for tomorrow." It's time to quit writing statements, he said. And while it's a lifetime process, we can have conversations with people who are different, we can engage with others, we can create an environment that is conducive for those who want to do the work. Rev. Lattany-Reed would like congregations to commit to pray for awareness, healing, and reconciliation. "Prayer changes everything. We can start that now," she said.
- [Hispanic/Latino Ministries](#): Rev. David Thompson, Rev. Jorge Moreno, and Rev. Isaac Salgado shared about our Hispanic Ministries in South Georgia. "I believe we have a lot of things in common," said Rev. Moreno, in Spanish, translated into English via Rev. Salgado. "I think we also have a great depth, a cultural richness, and I think we can share

more of that (with one another). I believe that if the local churches would allow us to be more involved in your ministries and our churches allow you to be more involved in our ministries our work together would be efficient. I believe that with a covenant of prayer we can go out from our churches to the marketplaces to reach the lost. It needs to be in prayer. I believe that we need to show the world the unity of the people called Methodist because our unity in Christ is what makes a difference.

*For full Annual Conference coverage, visit [www.sgaumc.org/annualconference](http://www.sgaumc.org/annualconference).*

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## **Coming up in September: District Gatherings with Bishop Graves and Clergy Time Apart with author Tod Bolsinger**

During three weeks in September, Bishop Graves will spend time in the districts visiting, talking with, and listening to clergy and laity. In these three weeks he wants to accomplish two things: to resource 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. [More information](#)

And clergy, don't miss speaker Tod Bolsinger, author of “Canoeing the Mountains” and “Tempered Resilience,” who will join us Thursday, Sept. 15 for a Clergy Time Apart. Hosted by Bishop David Graves, we will meet from 10 a.m. until noon via Zoom. [More information and registration](#)

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## **Labels**

### **FROM THE BISHOP DAVID GRAVES**

I received a lot of feedback from people about “labels” following my Episcopal Address at Annual Conference. I recently sat down with Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed, who is now officially on staff as the Director of Diversity and Justice Ministries for the South Georgia Annual Conference, to unpack how labels can be hurtful and distract us from our ministry.

[Watch this video of our conversation.](#)

I also want to say how excited I am to have Abra in this role and for the gifts and graces she brings to the table. I look forward to the work we have ahead of us in creating a culture of belonging and justice. I want us to lead in such a way that continues the work of the South Georgia Conference as we strive to do our part to change systems of injustice.

Dear Lord, let it be.

In Christ,

Bishop David Graves

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## **The Word Heals**

**Summer Quarter: Partners in a New Creation**

**Unit 2: The Word: The Agent of Creation**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of July 10, 2022**

**By Dr. Jay Harris**

**Lesson Scripture: John 4:46-54**

### **The Signs that Call Us to Believe**

There are two emphases in this unit: 1) the Word as the agent of creation, and 2) the power of believing the Word. We learned last week that all who receive the Word and believe in his name, he gives “power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13) In this verse, John was contrasting our natural birth to being born of God. Our natural birth is how we get into this world. To be born of God, then, represents a divine rebirth. We are born again.

Today’s lesson deals with how we come to believe in the Word made flesh. How did the people believe in Jesus when he came to dwell among them? How did they come to believe that he was more than just an ordinary man? An important word that we will consider in this lesson is the word “sign.”

### **The Need Beyond the Immediate Need**

Today’s lesson begins with a man with an immediate, urgent need that he will ask Jesus to meet. By the end of the story, Jesus will meet his meet immediate need and much more than that.

**“Then [Jesus] came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum.”** (John 4:46)

It would be good to remember what Jesus did the first time he was in Cana of Galilee as recorded in the second chapter of John. Jesus attended a wedding, and at some point, Jesus’ mother came to him and told him that the wine had run out. Jesus asked his mother what this had to do with the two of them. He told her that his hour had not yet come. Up until that point, it had not been the right time to draw attention to himself. At that moment, however, Jesus did decide to do something about the wine, even though it was guaranteed to draw a lot of attention. He turned

water into wine. We say this was Jesus' first miracle. John refers to miracles like these as "signs." According to John, this would be the first of what was to be a series of signs. The sign "revealed his glory" and "his disciples believed in him." (John 2:11)

So, Jesus found himself back in Cana of Galilee where he had performed his first sign. This new story began with a royal official, whose son lay ill in Capernaum. **"When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death."** (John 4:47) The man begged Jesus to come to Capernaum because he believed that Jesus could heal his son.

Since the man already appeared to believe that Jesus could heal his son, what Jesus said next must have addressed something about belief in a larger sense. **"Then Jesus said to him, 'Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.'"** (John 4:48) Jesus not only wants the man to believe that Jesus can heal his son, Jesus wants the man to believe in Jesus for needs the man has beyond the illness of his son. There is an immediate need and a much larger need beyond his immediate need. Healing the man's son will serve as a sign and a wonder to call forth a deeper level of believing.

### **Believing Begets Believing**

**"The official said to him, 'Sir, come down before my little boy dies.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your son will live.' The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way."** (John 4:49-50) Jesus did not have to travel to Capernaum to heal the official's son. Jesus did not have to be physically present to offer healing. Jesus simply told the man to go back to his son and his son would live. The father of this gravely ill boy did not argue with Jesus and beg him to go to Capernaum with him. The man understood that Jesus was not brushing him off. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he proved it by starting on his way. Notice that Jesus had not engaged in a long conversation with this father about faith. Jesus did not ask if he believed. Jesus was not looking for the right verbal response. The only response needed was for the man to obey Jesus' directive to go – to leave for Capernaum where the official's son was.

**"As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, 'Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.'"** (John 4:51-52) After this father heard the wonderful news that his child was alive, he asked about the time of day his son began to recover. He was inquiring about the connection between the word Jesus spoke to him and his son's recovery. **"The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.'"** (John 4:53) This confirmed some things for the father. Jesus' physical touch upon his son was not required to heal his son. The healing Jesus offered was conveyed by Jesus' word of confirmation that his son would be healed. The only faith response that had been required of the

father was the action of leaving Jesus in Cana of Galilee and returning in hope to Capernaum. **“So he himself [the official] believed, along with his whole household.”** (John 4:53)

When the scripture says at this point in the story that the father believed, it is after he had already believed that Jesus would heal his son. It seems to be that the father is believing something else about Jesus. The father is believing in Jesus – all of what Jesus and others are saying about him. The father was putting his faith in Jesus, God’s Messiah and God’s Son. Believing begets believing. Believing that Jesus could heal his son led to this father believing that there is a lot more to Jesus than this single act of healing. Jesus is someone a man could follow his whole life—must follow.

Not only did this official believe in Jesus, his whole household professed their belief. A household might contain multiple generations of the family, servants, and associates. The members of the household had not been present when the official encountered Jesus. Nevertheless, the belief of this official was contagious. Witnessing the boy being restored to life was a contagious experience. Think how incredible it was that the whole household of a royal official now professed to believe in Jesus. Believing begets believing.

### **The Power of Signs**

**“Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.”** (John 4:54) Notice that John counts the signs. John’s gospel lifts up seven signs. Toward the end of his gospel, John admits that “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31) At the end of his gospel, John went on to suppose that if every one of the amazing things Jesus did were written down, “the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (John 21:25)

So, we understand that the listing of seven signs is a curated list. Seven is the number symbolizing perfection in the Jewish understanding. The seven signs are:

1. Transforming water into wine (2:1-2)
2. Healing the official’s son at a distance from Cana (4:46-54)
3. Healing the paralytic at Bethesda (5:1-15)
4. Multiplying fish and loaves (6:1-15)
5. Walking upon the sea of Galilee (6:16-21)
6. Healing the blind man in Jerusalem (9:1-41)
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-53)

John’s stated purpose in selecting the seven is so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through believing, we may have life in his name.



What is this business about signs? Haven't you ever wanted a sign? Haven't you ever wanted God to make himself known in your circumstances? In Isaiah 64:1, the prophet cries out, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down." Somewhere along the way, God has shown up in your life in a way that testifies to his existence. There are times in your life in which the love of God has been made real to you.

A sign is something that points beyond itself to something greater. The signs in John have been called "sign-acts" because they are signs given in the form of special acts that Jesus performed. The sign-acts in John point beyond themselves to Jesus himself. A sign opens us up to experience something greater. In the case of the official whose son was healed, his son's healing was a sign that led the official to believe in Jesus himself and begin to experience all that Jesus offers. We say that seeing is believing, but it is also true that believing is seeing. A sign is something we see, but once we begin believing we are ushered into a reality in which we are able to see and experience a whole lot more. Believing begets more believing. Believing is seeing.

### **The Limitation of Signs**

In John's gospel, in the sixth chapter, there is a cautionary word given by Jesus about the limitation of signs. The chapter begins with Jesus feeding 5,000-plus people with five barley loaves and two fish. When the crowd approached Jesus the next day, he knew they had been looking for him. He said, "You are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves." They were hungry again and wanted Jesus to perform the same miracle he had done the day before. Jesus said, "Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." (John 6:26-27)

They didn't understand what Jesus was saying. Jesus knew that if they missed the point of the sign that was given the day before, they were not going to get it if Jesus fed them again. They said, "What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?" (John 6:30) They weren't satisfied, so they wanted Jesus to feed them again. They even pointed out that during the time of Moses, God provided manna on a daily basis. Couldn't Jesus match Moses?

Then Jesus said that it was not Moses who gave their ancestors the bread from heaven. It is Jesus' Father who offers the true bread from heaven. The bread of God comes from heaven and gives life to the world. The people said that this sounded like the bread they wanted, and they wanted this bread to be provided for the rest of their lives. That's when Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:32-35)

The people had a physical hunger for bread and a spiritual hunger for signs of God. The satisfaction that bread gives does not last. The satisfaction that a miraculous sign gives is just as short-lived. The value of a sign, any sign of God, is that it points to the Word made flesh. We will never be satisfied with signs if we do not take a leap of faith and embrace Jesus and all that

the true bread of life offers. It is true that we have a spiritual hunger for signs of God, but our true hunger and thirst is for God himself as revealed in Jesus Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Word Experienced Both from Far and Near**

Jesus had a reason for staying in Cana in Galilee and not leaving to go to Capernaum to heal the official's son. Jesus knew that he could heal the man's son from a distance. Jesus used the father's obedience to head to Capernaum as the means through which Jesus acted in the life of the man's son. Distance is no barrier to Jesus. The action of Jesus' love was manifested in Capernaum in the body of the boy and brought about his recovery from near death. Furthermore, the sign which originated from Cana of Galilee brought about the belief of an entire household in Capernaum.

The reign of the risen Christ originates today from heaven, but through faith in him, his divine life is manifested in our daily lives here on earth. Distance is no barrier to Jesus. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us 2,000 years ago, but in countless ways, the Word continues to be enfleshed in the lives of believers.

### **Prayer**

Dear God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son performed signs to point beyond the signs to himself. Move us to use all the means of grace available to see and feel your presence in our daily lives so we may embrace the Word made flesh and grow in grace and knowledge, through Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.

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

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## **The Word Saves**

**Summer Quarter: Partners in a New Creation**

**Unit 2: The Word: The Agent of Creation**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of July 17, 2022**

**By Dr. Jay Harris**

**Lesson Scripture: John 12:44-50**

**Understanding the Mission of Jesus**

Once Jesus began his public ministry, we see a person who was guided intensely by his mission. His mission gave his life focus. We see this focus in all four gospels. In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), Jesus' mission is stated using the language of the kingdom of God. Jesus came to urge people to repent and believe the good news of the kingdom of God. Jesus wanted people saved from the corrupt systems of the world and begin living according to the reign of God.

The emphasis is different in John's gospel. The term "kingdom of God" is rarely used in John's gospel. Think about that. The term used in its place is "eternal life." Now the very fact that Jesus talks about eternal life in place of the focus on the reign of God leads us to believe that eternal life refers to the reign of God. Nevertheless, the difference in the use of words adds to the layers of meaning. We will explore this in today's lesson.

The backdrop for Jesus' mission is saving people from darkness and bringing them into the light. There is always this more cosmic dimension to John's gospel. Cosmic does not, however, mean impersonal. The appeal Jesus makes is very personal. It gets personal because it is about what each person believes or chooses not believe. The stakes have to do with eternity.

In today's lesson, we are digging down into this rather short discourse to come to a deeper understanding of Jesus' saving mission in John's gospel.

### **The Father Sends, the Son Reveals**

In the synoptic gospels, we get plenty of glimpses into the relationship between Jesus and his heavenly Father. We see this, for instance, in the many references to Jesus' habit of praying. Jesus often makes references to "my Father in heaven." John's gospel goes a step further because the relationship between Son and Father is a frequent subject of conversation. **"Then Jesus cried aloud: 'Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me.'"** (John 12:44)

Jesus started by saying that to believe in him is not really about believing merely in *him*. In other words, you cannot believe in Jesus in just any way you like, detached from the story of his origins. To believe in Jesus is to believe he was SENT. Others have been sent by God: the prophets and John the Baptist, for instance. None of these were sent, however, in the same manner that Jesus was sent. John's gospel is the one that draws back the curtain for the reader and reveals that before the Son took on flesh, he existed with the Father from eternity past. Then, when the time was right, he was sent into the world – from his divine form in eternity past to human form in the womb of a human mother. Although we are let in on this mystery, we do not know how much Jesus revealed about all of this to his audiences. Jesus simply stated in no

uncertain terms that he was SENT. This is an article of faith that a believer was and is required to embrace.

To believe Jesus was sent is to believe in the One who sent him. To believe in the one is to believe in the other. We cannot understand the Son without the Father, and we cannot fully understand the Father without embracing the story of his Son. Something vital goes missing without understanding both the Father and the Son and the relationship between the two.

**“And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.”** (John 12:45) Jesus was not only sent, Jesus REVEALS. Whoever sees the Son, sees the Father who sent him. In this way, Jesus reveals the Father. The Word became flesh so we could see the Father. The First Letter of John amplifies this point: “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – this life was *revealed*, and we have seen it and testify to it and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was *revealed* to us.” When the Son was sent into the world, the Son revealed the Father in a way that was accessible to the human senses of sight, sound, and touch.

**“I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness.”** (John 12:46) The metaphors in John’s gospel often have multiple meanings. Light often refers to righteousness and darkness to sin. When Jesus said however that he comes as light into the world so that believers may not remain in darkness, light means revelation and hope. Darkness means ignorance and despair. Jesus is God’s revelation and light, but it is when we believe that we are delivered from darkness. Jesus was SENT, and Jesus REVEALS – and this calls forth a response.

### **The Gospel Calls for a Verdict**

We do not come to God in a vacuum. We do not come to God on our own power. God’s action precedes our own. Our action is always in response to God’s action. Believing is our faithful response to the light that has come into the world. What about when we do not respond to the light God offers through his Son? **“I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.”** (John 12:47) Jesus came to save, not judge.

This echoes John 3:16-17. According to John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” God loved and God gave. The gift of God’s only Son is the supreme expression of God’s love. In case we are not clear where the Lord stands, we hear these words: “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” Jesus came to save, not judge.

There is more however: **“The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge.”** (John 12:48) The word of Jesus, which is a word of invitation, calls for a verdict. We are called to believe or reject his invitation. Jesus stands over his invitation not as a judge, but as our loving defender. We know that Jesus soon would give his life for us on the cross after saying these words. At our judgement, Jesus takes the role of our defender.

This is so important for us to comprehend. Guilt and shame are crippling. Because of the guilt and shame that people experience, they feel unworthy of being loved by God. People who feel this way often view God as a distant, unfeeling Judge. This causes some to reject God – or the very notion of God. They do not understand that God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved. Jesus came to save, not judge. It is as if Jesus on the cross is seeking to bar the way to darkness so that we might come with him to the light.

Unfortunately, some people have heard more judgment than grace from those who represent the church for them. It is true that the gospel, the good news, calls for a verdict, but Jesus stands on our side that we might believe in him and put our whole trust in his grace.

When we say that the gospel calls for a verdict, we are saying that we must choose to believe or reject the good news of Jesus Christ. There is a famous quote by C.S. Lewis in his book, “Mere Christianity.” He writes, “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Jesus calls us to believe or reject him. We must decide whether or not he is the Son of God and truly represents the God and Father of us all. What happens when we step through this open door of believing?

### **The Gift of Eternal Life**

Jesus said, **“for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak.”** (John 12:49) And what is this commandment about which Jesus speaks? Jesus said, **“And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me.”** (John 12:50)

This ought to settle things in terms of how we view God. Jesus is the Father's ambassador who is under the Father's command to speak into our lives the gift of eternal life with the Father. Whatever Jesus said and did in his gracious life on earth was authorized by his Father. We see the character of the Father in the character of the Son. This is what we know therefore: God wants us to spend eternity with him. The source of all love wants to love us for eternity. This invitation calls for a verdict. Will we believe in him or reject his offer? The sooner we begin believing, the sooner we begin enjoying the eternal life God offers.

Remember what we said last week about John's gospel. In John's gospel, seeing is believing, but more than that, believing is seeing. When we begin believing, we begin seeing and experiencing more to life than we knew was possible. A whole new world opens up to us. Life becomes an adventure.

### **Prayer**

Loving God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son Jesus revealed your nature through his gracious life. Help us to believe Jesus through his words and deeds so we might see more and more of you as we walk each day by faith and action, through Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever, Amen.

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

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### **They will know we are Methodists by our love**

#### **GROWING IN GRACE**

**BEN GOSDEN**

The great separation has now begun. 2020 was supposed to be the pivotal year we finally settled the division over inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons in the life of our denomination. After almost 50 years of fighting, we were finally set to end the division and go our separate ways to serve the Lord as we felt God called us. And then a global pandemic caused General Conference to be postponed for four full years, making it five full years between gatherings. Nonetheless, leaders beyond the general church have decided it's time to begin the work of separation.

For many, to wait any longer would be a leadership malpractice in their local churches. For many others, these next two years are an act of patience and resiliency in leadership as we wait for the official details of our denominational split to be decided. Still, for others, now is the time to

declare proudly that they will #BeUMC as they live into whatever this next iteration of Methodism will be.

John Wesley once said, “And we would all embrace a mutual unity in things necessary; in things non necessary liberty; in all things charity.” As we seek to stretch and grow our historic bonds I guess the next thing we must ask ourselves is this: Can we really extend charity to each other or was Wesley naive at best and a liar at worst?

You don't have to go far to read a meme or a shared post or a diatribe online from a faithful Methodist somewhere outlining the many reasons why they want to remain a United Methodist even as our GMC brothers and sisters seek to split off. I've seen many of them, most of them shared many times by diehard UMC'ers from all over the connection. It's good to remind ourselves why we believe in our institutions. It's also good to find community in our tribal alliances. After all, one of the many reasons why we give our lives to institutions is for the sense of connection and belonging that comes with our allegiance.

But as we get swept up in the tide of the pep rallies and cheer sections for our denominational loyalty, we must be careful that we don't succumb to the temptation to demonize those who feel like their loyalty is increasingly to a different institution. If you're faithfully and deeply entrenched in Camp UMC, great. But if your celebration includes the belittling or demonizing of those who don't agree with you, then you might be missing Wesley's challenge to have charity for one another in all things.

Likewise, if you feel God is leading you and your church to the new Global Methodist Church (or to some other entity outside of the UMC), good for you. Your faithfulness means a lot to God and many other people. This new movement will no doubt teach its older sibling a thing or two about how to recapture a vigor and enthusiasm for the Gospel. But, if your realigning of loyalties includes the demonization of those who wish to remain in the UMC, then you're probably missing Wesley's point about having charity for one another in all things.

Those who do not agree with you are not necessarily bad people. At the same time, we must also remember that all of us — no matter our institutional loyalties — are sinners in need of God's grace. And this disease of sin is present in the ways we demonize and mischaracterize each other. I do not believe churches and pastors who opt to leave the UMC do so out of hatred for those who might be more included if some denominational stances change. Likewise, I hope you know that such changes are not an assault on basic tenets of the faith like the Lordship of Jesus, the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, etc. Invoking fear in each other is another expression of sin and we must name it for what it is lest we get blinded by it.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that we can have all of the right answers, believe the right things, do the right deeds, love the Bible and the Church more than anyone else and, if we lack love for one another, we are no more than a noisy gong or an obnoxious cymbal. John Wesley knew this and that is why he calls us to love, even if unity cannot be fully established. Jesus knew this, too.

It's why he told us that the world will know we are his followers by the ways we love one another, especially when it's hard (John 13).

As Methodists heading into this great unknown of a change-filled future that is yet to be determined, may we also know the power of love as we deal with change and each other with grace, humility, and charity for all.

*The Rev. Ben Gosden is senior pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church in Savannah. He can be reached at [ben@trinity1848.org](mailto:ben@trinity1848.org).*

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## **God is at work using The UMC on a global scale**

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

Did you know there were Methodists behind the Iron Curtain? In what was once the Russian Empire under Czar Nicholas II, the church was quietly formed by Swedish immigrants. It was allowed to become a church in 1905 when the czar signed the Edict of Toleration that made it okay for churches other than the Russian Orthodox Church to operate in Russia.

From 1905 to 1917, the Methodists built churches, clinics, schools and orphanages. In 1917, the Bolshevik Revolution brought the Communist party to power. While most of the Methodist missionaries left what became the Soviet Union, some stayed. They preached the Gospel. They fed the hungry. They cared for the sick and dying.

In 1921, famine gripped the Russian people. Methodists from around the world responded by sending provisions to missionaries still living in the city of Petrograd (St. Petersburg). Sister Anna Eklund became a familiar figure as she stood in the middle of a sleigh loaded with provisions donated by overseas Methodists. At her side was Pastor Oskar Pöeld. The story is that, though they had little to eat themselves, they gave away provisions so others could eat. Sister Anna Eklund also buried 18 people among the millions who died during the famine. The famine was so widespread that people were often stacked in graves rather than in individual graves.

After the fall of communism in the 1990s the world was surprised to discover there were still Christians in the former Soviet Republics. They were even more surprised to learn these were not all Russian Orthodox Christians. Today there are more than 110 churches in the former Soviet republics.

God is at work behind the scenes doing great things and preparing the way long before we are aware of what is happening. God is at work now behind the scenes in places we do not yet know with people we have not yet met, doing work to which we have not been called. We may never



be called. It may be a calling for our children or grandchildren. God is truly at work using The United Methodist Church on a global scale.

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

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## **John Wesley and disaffiliation**

### **JOHN WESLEY MOMENTS**

#### **DAVE HANSON**

##### *John Wesley disaffiliates*

John Wesley was a part of the Fetter Lane Society in London. The group was made up of Peter Bohler and about 40 Moravian Christians. It was as a part of this group that John went to a prayer meeting on Aldersgate Street and had his “heart-warming” experience. The group was very important to him. However, the society became involved in a movement called “Quietism” which taught that we should wait quietly for the Lord to move in our hearts. They said it was a sin to try to reach God by reading the scriptures, praying, or taking communion. John tried to convince them otherwise, but they responded by denying him the right to preach to the group. John went to the group, read a paper explaining his views, walked out of the meeting, and invited any who believed as he did to follow him. About a dozen people followed him. He disaffiliated!

##### *John Wesley refuses to disaffiliate*

Many early Methodists wanted to disaffiliate from the Church of England. They were weary of The Church of England criticizing Methodists for field preaching, giving leadership rolls to lay people and women, and preaching outside an assigned local parish. John Wesley would not allow his followers to leave the Church of England and form a new denomination during his lifetime. He said, “No, this movement is not about a new denomination or a new church; it is a renewal movement within the Church of England.” John Wesley refused to disaffiliate.

If you want to use John Wesley as an example in the issue of disaffiliation, take your pick.

*The Rev. Dave Hanson is a retired pastor and John Wesley scholar.*

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## **Retired Clergy Birthdays – July 2022**

**7/01 – Donald Wood:** 157 Arlington Row; Macon, GA 31210

**7/01 – Kenneth West:** 4183 GA Hwy 93; Pelham, GA 31779

- 7/02 – **Hugh Davis:** 102 Mossland Dr.; Perry, GA 31069-9213  
 7/03 – **Carl McDonald:** 315 N. Wheeler Ave.; Douglas, GA 31533  
 7/04 – **Glenn Martin:** 4418 Saddle Ridge Dr.; Columbus, GA 31907  
 7/08 – **Earl Bishop:** 143 Beale Court Dr.; Blairsville, GA 30512  
 7/08 – **Larry Rader:** 971 Willian Henry Cowart Rd.; Cobbtown, GA 30420  
 7/09 – **Marshall Singletary:** 200 White Blossom Trail; Thomasville, GA 31757  
 7/10 – **Betty Lou Miller:** 485 Tylerstone Dr.; Fuquay-Varina, NC 27526  
 7/10 – **Rickey Rushing:** 17575 SE 106 Terrace; Summerfield, FL 34491  
 7/11 – **Thom Davies:** 1 Seventh Street #1004; Augusta, GA 30901  
 7/12 – **Eric Sizemore:** PO Box 472; Rochelle, GA 31079  
 7/13 – **Randy Carnley:** PO Box 345; Midville, GA 30441  
 7/14 – **Loran Smith:** 121 Hidden Creek Circle; Lizella, GA 31052  
 7/14 – **Ronnie Wills:** 81 Gatlin Bluff; Thomasville, GA 31757  
 7/16 – **Roland Fall:** 321 Lake Joy Rd.; Perry, GA 31069  
 7/18 – **Ray Bittner:** 130 Ford St.; Poulan, GA 31781  
 7/18 – **Sonny Mason:** 2218 Glendale Rd.; Augusta, GA 30904  
 7/19 – **Sam Rogers, III:** 5300 Zebulon Road, #15; Macon, GA 31210  
 7/20 – **Man Lee:** 18 Mannering Dr.; Dover, DE 19901  
 7/20 – **Isaac Moon:** 100 Riverside; Griffin, GA 30224  
 7/21 – **Richard Lanning:** 104 Macintosh Lane; Centerville, GA 31028  
 7/22 – **Wayne MacDonald:** 203 Laurel Dr.; Sylvania, GA 30467  
 7/23 – **Norman Dunlap:** 708 Robins Nest Ct.; Columbus, GA 31909  
 7/24 – **Donald Woeltjen:** PO Box 1322; Fitzgerald, GA 31750  
 7/27 – **Charles Ricks:** 4191 Mt. Union Rd.; Huntington, WV 25701  
 7/27 – **Mark Zeitlin:** 154 Sweetwater Blvd.; Brunswick, GA 31525  
 7/28 – **Ron Dixon:** 1194 Country Club Dr.; Wrens, GA 30833  
 7/28 – **Donna Sue Roberts:** 1209 Loblolly Lane; Bainbridge, GA 39817  
 7/29 – **Jim Kenney, Sr.:** 139 Altama Connector; Brunswick, GA 31525  
 7/29 – **Sylvia Kersey:** 861 Pine Hill Rd.; Dublin, GA 31021  
 7/29 – **Al Lewis, Jr.:** 915 E. 42<sup>nd</sup> St. E; Tifton, GA 31794  
 7/31 – **Lowery Brantley:** PO Box 125; Pineview, GA 31071

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## OBITUARIES

### Rev. James Martin Ford

Rev. James Martin Ford, 79, of Hickory, passed away on Thursday, June 9, 2022, at Catawba Valley Assisted Living at Rock Barn.

He was born January 27, 1943, in Catawba County to the late Forest Blake Ford and Henrietta Edwards Ford. James was a United States Army veteran and a Methodist minister.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his brother-in-law, Bill Mitchem.

Those left to cherish his memory are his wife of 57 years, Brenda Young Ford of Conover; stepson James Hildebran and wife Wendy of Hickory; daughter Vickie Shaw and husband

Thomas of Buena Vista, Ga.; stepdaughter Beverly Hildebran of California; sisters Susie Shook and husband Forrest of Newton, Teresa Mitchem of Conover; and seven grandchildren.

A graveside service with military honors to celebrate James' life was held on Thursday, June 16, 2022, at Eastview Cemetery in Newton. Rev. Tommy Young officiated.

Memorials may be made to The United Methodist Association, PO Box 2757, Huntersville, NC 28070.

Condolences may be sent to the Ford family at [www.bennettfuneralservice.com](http://www.bennettfuneralservice.com).

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## **Scripture Readings – July 6 edition**

### **July 10**

#### ***Fifth Sunday after Pentecost***

Amos 7:7-17

Psalm 82 (UMH 804)

Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 10:25-37

### **July 17**

#### ***Sixth Sunday after Pentecost***

Amos 8:1-12

Psalm 52 (UMH 804)

Colossians 1:15-28

Luke 10:38-42

### **July 24**

#### ***Seventh Sunday after Pentecost***

Hosea 1:2-10

Psalm 85 (UMH 806)

Colossians 2:6-15

Luke 11:1-13

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## **Events in the South Georgia Conference – 7/6/2022 edition**

### **Mission u – July 15-17**

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 15-17 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](http://www.georgiapastorsschool.org).

### **Camp Connect: Elementary Camp 2 – July 18-22**

Camp Connect Elementary Camps, intended for rising 4th-5th grade students, are filled with a week’s worth of fun activities and opportunities to grow closer to Christ through daily worship, Bible study, and fellowship. Campers will enjoy the beach, boat rides, a bonfire, art, games galore, hilarious morning shows, and evenings of camp-wide games and worship. [SESSION 2 REGISTER HERE](#)

### **SEJ Historical Society Meeting – July 26-29**

The SEJ Historical Society and the Historical Society of the UMC are joining together for a gathering focused on “Walking With Wesley” July 26-29, 2022. Highlights include: The Wesleys at Frederica, The Decision for Georgia, The Wesleys’ Travels in South Carolina; Saddlebag Book Award; optional tour of Savannah and Cockspur Landing; and tour of St. Simon’s Island and Frederica. For more information, contact Anne Packard at 912-638-4050.

### **Online Basic Lay Servant Training – Aug. 9, 11, 16, 18**

Lay Servant training is designed to educate those persons interested in stretching their faith to participate more fully in the ministries of the church. They have three main areas of focus: Leading, Caring, and Communicating. The basic class is based on Cokesbury’s book, “Lay Servant Ministries Basic Course,” which teaches a basic understanding of ministry in the United Methodist Tradition. Included in the course is the following: Wesleyan Tradition and Foundations, Spiritual Gifts, Servant Leadership, Caring Ministries, Communicating, and Sharing Your Faith. Basic LSM Training includes a basic foundation of the faith and an introduction to leadership. This training will be offered via Zoom. You must complete all of the scheduled dates to complete your training. To participate you will need either a cell phone that will allow you to download the Zoom app (please do so ahead of time) or a laptop, a steady wifi connection, and a willingness to learn in a modern way. Registration fee for the class is \$25. (Note: Basic Lay Servant class must be completed before taking Advanced Class). For more information contact Anne Bosarge, [anne@thechapelministries.com](mailto:anne@thechapelministries.com). [More information](#) / [Register](#)

### **Called Annual Conference Session – Aug. 20**

Bishop David Graves has called a special session of the SGA Annual Conference. [www.sgaumc.org/called-annual-conference-session](http://www.sgaumc.org/called-annual-conference-session)

**Golden Cross Sunday – Aug. 21**

Golden Cross began in 1908 with the commitment of Methodists in Dallas, Texas to provide the first health care to persons who could not afford it. They began to receive offerings for the expenses of the poor patients at Methodist Hospital in that city. By 1930, the concept was officially adopted throughout the predecessor denominations of The United Methodist Church. Today, Golden Cross is a ministry that reaches out in love to the laity in our Annual Conference who are experiencing financial difficulty due to excessive medical expenses. Through Golden Cross, United Methodists care for members of our local churches in time of emotional stress and financial need. Each church is asked to observe Golden Cross Sunday to receive an offering and send it to the conference treasurer.