

SOUTH GEORGIA ADVOCATE – JANUARY 10 EDITION

Wesley Glen's Christmas spirit can't be dampened

By Kelly Roberson, Director of Conference Ministries/Communications

Chris, Jesse, Nathan, and Brian got a big surprise for Christmas, but not one they put on their Christmas list.

Just two days after Christmas, the Macon house these four Wesley Glen residents call home - Vineville Home - found itself with major damage.

Following a cold snap in the middle Georgia area, the Vineville Home suffered a pipe break during the sub-freezing temperatures. To complicate matters, the pipe was part of the fire suppression system. This put the system under heavy pressure and massive amounts of water quickly flooded the home, essentially destroying everything inside.

An immediate call went out to staff, area United Methodists, and other friends of Wesley Glen for help.

“We believe in doing things big at Wesley Glen, and closing out 2022 was no different!” said Mr. Cameron Bishop, CEO of Wesley Glen, a ministry serving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. “However, God is the master of big things, and we quickly discovered He had already been doing what only He can do.”

Bishop saw God at work from the start. Within an hour of receiving the call to help, he watched as people immediately began showing up, sacrificing their holiday time to help begin the long process of restoring the home.

One of the first people to respond was the Rev. Dr. Billy Oliver, retired United Methodist pastor and former Wesley Glen CEO. As Bishop and other volunteers began removing contents from the home, Oliver told of the long history of the home and those who lived where Chris, Jesse, Nathan, and Brian now live - a home that needs immediate restoration.

“Thankfully, Chris, Jesse, Nathan, and Brian were away visiting family and friends for Christmas,” said Bishop. “Yet, upon their return, they were confronted with the reality that they lost nearly everything, including the home where they feel most safe and secure.

“While this degree of loss is tough for most people to handle, think about the impact if you are someone with an intellectual or developmental disability – everything that was known as normal has changed – and change is incredibly difficult,” said Bishop.

Aside from restoring the physical structure of the home, everything inside the home must also be replaced – beds, furniture, clothes, and even favorite mementos.

Chris, Jesse, Nathan, and Brian will temporarily stay in extra bedrooms in some of the other Wesley Glen residences, and plans are being made for more suitable long-term housing during the repairs.

But getting these four men back into their home as soon as possible is the top priority for Bishop and Wesley Glen leadership. To do this, Wesley Glen needs to raise a substantial amount of money in a short period of time. While there is insurance coverage, initial estimates indicate there will be a gap in covering the true replacement and repair expenses.

Bishop has no doubt God will do big things again in providing the essential resources to cover these gaps.

“Although this incident has presented an interesting challenge, and we are at the beginning stage of the marathon that lies ahead, my heart is full of anticipation to see what big things God has in store for the community at Wesley Glen,” said Bishop.

This is the Christmas spirit that can’t be dampened. If you would like to join Wesley Glen in restoring the Vineville Home for Chris, Jesse, Nathan, and Brian, visit wesleyglenministries.com/ways-to-give/.

Wesley Glen is a ministry of the South Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church serving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Wesley Glen provides a home environment and continuum of programs to allow each individual to develop skills and greater confidence, living happy, full lives as contributing members of their Wesley Glen family and the surrounding community



Heritage United Methodist Church spreads love during Half Deep Dish Christmas event

By Raime Cohen, staff reporter for 13WMAZ in Macon, Ga.

[Heritage United Methodist Church](#) in Macon, Ga. celebrated their 11th annual Half Deep Dish Christmas on Sunday.

At least 40 different churches came together to make this event possible.

‘Tis the season for unity.

"Love, fellowship, for the lonely lost and broken," Director Ray Rover said.

"I know I could be doing other things but this is right where I want to be," churchgoer Diana Coady said.

Rover started Half Deep Dish more than a decade ago along with [Streets to Success](#), an organization who mentors young men and women in Macon. Men with Streets to Success came out to assist in the day’s festivities.

"I think they need to do more things like this so all the violence can maybe stop. If we come together as a community maybe some of the violence will stop," Yoshanda Bonner said.

Others had a similar sentiment.

"Come together and try to help the young. We do all that was can as parents but sometimes it takes a little more," Marilyn Dillard said.

And of course, what's the holidays without all the fixings.

"Ham, potato salad, sweet potato souffle, chicken and dumplings and turkey. Everything is delicious," Dillard said.

Rover says he hopes the event reminds folks that we are all in this together. “It’s not only the day that Jesus was born but it really means the day that we got a second chance in life,” he said.

"Some people are sad this time of the year, some people don't have anywhere to go. So, when they see this I want them to know that our doors are open," Coady said.

And to get back to the true meaning of Christmas.

“We believe that if we love God we should love people, and when we love people we do what we have to do to make sure their needs are provided for,” Rover said.

Rover says they took all the extra food to the Macon Rescue Mission so nothing went to waste. They also had giveaways for anyone needing something a little extra this Christmas. [See video](#)



Top *Advocate* Stories of 2022

You have been living out the mission of the church this year! [Take a look at some of our top *Advocate* stories of South Georgia United Methodists in 2022](#) featuring South Georgia United Methodist churches.

- [Quilters make more than 150 stockings for children at The Methodist Home](#)
- ['Tin can miracle': Perry church builds mobile medical clinic](#)
- ['Hands on Homerville' brightens up a community](#)
- [Pastor steps out in faith and discovers the promise of Ephesians 3:20](#)
- [Wesley Glen is in the business of spreading joy](#)
- [Cooks Union UMC offers meals to nourish and bring hope](#)
- [Disaster response team travels to Kentucky to help rebuild veteran's home](#)
- [Isaac and Paty Salgado find 'esperanza' on mission trip to the DR](#)
- [Leesburg UMC helps send students back to school with confidence](#)
- [Wesley Monumental Youth give sweat equity to serve their community](#)
- [Asbury UMC in Columbus hosts job-readiness program, graduation](#)
- [Ellabell UMC shares God's love through brown bag meals](#)
- [Heritage at Houston UMC's longstanding breakfast ministry serves spiritual food and physical food](#)
- [Bemiss UMC reaches out to community with hot dogs, prayers](#)
- [Cordele First UMC bridges gap between underserved community, healthcare](#)
- [Isle of Hope UMC VBS raises \\$3,000 for Wesley Community Centers](#)
- [Methodist Home celebrates 150 years of helping children and youth](#)
- [South Georgia United Methodists give more than \\$22,000 for North Katanga partnership](#)
- [Centerville UMC serves community with bi-weekly food bank](#)
- [Guyton UMC gives \\$7,500 to support Ukrainian orphans](#)
- [South Georgia Conference, churches respond after destructive tornadoes hit region](#)
- [Effingham County's Encounter Church constituted](#)
- [South Georgia UMs raise \\$75,000 for tornado relief in Kentucky, Tennessee](#)
- [St. Paul UMC supports, loves, helps Ukrainian orphans](#)
- [Wesley UMC builds wheelchair ramp, porch for Macon homeowners](#)
- [40-year-old kneeling cushions get new life at Wilmington Island UMC](#)
- [Waynesboro First UMC builds beds for children](#)

- [Cordele Ukulele Band spreads joy, happiness with music](#)
- [Thomasville First UMC members give time, serve others during Advent](#)
- [Central UMC's Work-Out Bible Study aims to firm body, mind, soul](#)

If you have ideas for an article you'd like to see in The Advocate in 2023, please email kelly@sgaumc.com.



Dr. Brad Brady, Mrs. Rose King among notable UMs remembered in 2022

United Methodist News recently honored 40 notable church leaders and members who died over the past 12 months in an article, "[2022: Noteworthy United Methodists remembered](#)." Among those remembered are Dr. Brad Brady, a clergy member of the South Georgia Annual Conference, and Mrs. Rose King, wife of Bishop James King, former episcopal leader in South Georgia. [Read the full article here](#).



South Georgia United Methodists continue in disaster relief

After the news stories subside it's easy to forget about the devastation caused by Hurricane Ian and Hurricane Nicole this fall. But South Georgia United Methodists haven't forgotten and keep showing up. Glenn Martin, the Northwest District disaster relief coordinator led a team to Ft. Myers November 28-December 1 to help with the relief efforts. Team members were Glenn Martin and Bob Gilstrap from Wynnton UMC in Columbus; Mike Tovey from Midland UMC; and Larry Thompson from Gray UMC.

The next ERT & Chainsaw Operator Safety Training is set for Saturday, March 25, 2023, at 8:00 a.m. at Pierce Chapel UMC (5122 Pierce Chapel Road, Midland GA 31820). [Click here for more information](#).



South Georgia Conference begins 2023 with prayer emphasis

When people pray, God listens.

In a focused effort, the South Georgia Conference is centering itself around prayer in the coming year.

"While it seems so obvious that prayer is the center of our work, sometimes we need to make intentional efforts," said Bishop David Graves, episcopal leader of the South Georgia Conference. "It is easy to get sidetracked by the business and agenda items of our meetings. We add more to our plates, we find ourselves in a cycle of busy-ness, and we stay in problem-solving mode. All of this distracts us from listening for God's voice and seeking His will for our churches and lives. This collective effort will allow space for the Holy Spirit to guide us in all we do."

Each month a prayer guide will be available that will contain a specific focus, including a weekly scripture, a breath prayer, and a prayer prompt. Clergy and laity throughout the conference will help guide these collective prayers each month.

January's prayer guide, written by Connectional Ministries staff, is now available at www.sgaumc.org/year-of-prayer. Bulletin inserts are also available for local churches to use.

The 2023 Annual Conference Session will be centered on prayer with the theme “When They Prayed” based on Acts 4:31. Each day of the conference session will offer a specific prayer focus where all work will be centered around praying as certain Biblical figures prayed.

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

“While we might have a lot going on around us, this intentional focus on prayer gives us the opportunity to lean into the leading of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit guides our way forward in the coming year,” said Kelly Roberson, Director of Conference Ministries/Communications. “God is calling us to share the love of Jesus Christ and make disciples that transform the world. What better way to sharpen our focus than coming together in prayer.”

John and Charles Wesley believed “that God does nothing apart from believing prayer.” As the South Georgia Conference we believe that, too. May the laity and clergy of South Georgia be bold in our prayers in 2023!

More information will be available and updates will be posted on the conference website at www.sgaumc.org/year-of-prayer.

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FROM THE BISHOP
BISHOP DAVID GRAVES

January 10, 2023

Dear Friends of the South Georgia Conference,

Happy New Year! As we begin a new year, I pray God will reveal to you a sense of peace and clarity in 2023.

In early November, the Commission on the General Conference announced that the 2024 United Methodist General Conference will be held April 23 - May 3, 2024, at the Charlotte Convention Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. This much-anticipated gathering will be an important time for the future of The United Methodist Church. I would ask that you begin to pray for this important event in the life of Methodism.

As I have shared on many occasions, I am asking churches in the South Georgia Conference to consider postponing any vote regarding separation from The United Methodist Church until after the 2024 General Conference. In these times of misinformation, assumptions, and fear mongering, we will have factual information following the 2024 General Conference to make prayerful and strategic decisions.

Knowing that the disaffiliation procedure outlined in paragraph 2553 of *The Book of Discipline* sunsets on December 31, 2023, the leadership of our annual conference worked diligently to provide an exit option that extends beyond this deadline.

As a reminder, I share the following information with you as we move forward together in a new year of mission and ministry:

- At the 2022 Annual Conference Session, members approved a report from the Conference Trustees in which a process was affirmed that extends the terms of South Georgia’s current disaffiliation policy through **December 31, 2024**. {[Read more](#)}
- The Conference Trustees' resolution and action is based on ¶2549. ¶2549 is the paragraph the Conference Trustees used before the disaffiliation process in paragraph 2553 was enacted by General Conference. The term we will use after December 31, 2023, is “departure.”
- The timeline related to matters of disaffiliations/departures set forth by myself, the Cabinet, the Board of Trustees, and the Conference Chancellor can be found here: www.sgaumc.org/disaffiliation-timeline.
- **Regardless of what decisions other Annual Conferences make, the policy written for and approved by South Georgia stands firm.**

Also, I want you to know that conference leadership is exploring further prudent additions to our [timeline](#):

- The Cabinet and I are currently looking at a date in August 2024 for a special Called Annual Conference to consider any possible decision that could be afforded or required of us following the 2024 General Conference.
- This date is in addition to the special Called Annual Conference we have already announced for November 2024 to ratify final local church departures under the trustees provision.
- An updated timeline will be posted in the weeks ahead.

We have found that people are affected by disaffiliation in many different ways. Some need a period of time to grieve the loss of community and their “spiritual home.” Others may be excited by this opportunity to do something new and may feel God calling them to take on the leadership to be part of something new. Still others might want to transition into an existing UMC church in their area. If you find yourself in any of these spaces you can go to the conference website to learn more: www.sgaumc.org/moving-forward-in-mission.

We are also working on some exciting developments in the area of congregational development. We are looking at ideas such as: planting new United Methodist Churches or Fresh Expressions in areas where there are no longer UMC churches, strengthening churches nearest to those areas, and inviting all churches to experience revival and renewal in Jesus Christ.

While all of this information may sound deeply detailed, I hope the spirit of our work is clear: we are seeking to do all we can to allow churches to remain a part of The United Methodist Church until after the work of the 2024 General Conference is complete. I would ask that you join me in prayer that decisions made at the 2024 General Conference will provide us opportunities that will unify our work and give options for all of us to make conference decisions that glorify and magnify God’s work in this corner of the world called the South Georgia Conference. Again, I believe that congregations can only make their best decisions when all the information is on the table. We are seeking to do all we can to give everyone this opportunity.

I am grateful to each of you for the many ways you live into our mission of making disciples. Our Kingdom work can be difficult, at times, but through our United Methodist connection we can rely on one another to bring light in the darkness.

During these days, I would ask you to join me in praying what the early church prayed in Acts 4: 29-31: “And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us your servants, great boldness in preaching your word.

Stretch out your hand with healing power, may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

I am encouraged by verse 31: “After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.”

When was the last time you prayed for boldness in the name of Jesus? For it is possible following the 2024 General Conference that the South Georgia Conference will be unified in ways that we have not seen in our lifetime. I see a vision of The United Methodist Church flourishing in ways that will make some churches that previously disaffiliated want to rejoin us. We will gladly welcome them back.

[Please join me as we live into a season of intentional prayer.](#) May God bless you and your ministry in 2023.

In Christ,

Bishop David Graves

This is the first of four articles that Bishop Graves will be sharing over the next few weeks.



2023 Clergy Ethics Training Scheduled for March and April

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

Trainings were postponed in 2022 while conference leadership worked on a new training model. The new model will have both an online component and an in-person component.

The two lead presenters in the online training have extensive knowledge and experience in sexual ethics training: Mr. Cameron Bishop, President and CEO of Wesley Glen Ministries in the South Georgia Conference, and Rev. Lindsay Geist, Director of Clergy Wellbeing serving the North Georgia Conference. In addition, other South Georgia clergy and laity will lead portions of the online and in-person trainings.

With this updated training, the South Georgia Conference is also moving to a quadrennial emphasis model. A quadrennial requirement puts the conference on track with the denominational requirement found in the 2016 *Book of Resolutions*, ¶2044.

In order to fall in line with the quadrennial model and get all clergy and lay supply on schedule, **anyone who will remain under episcopal appointment as of July 1, 2023, will be required to participate in one of the trainings in March or April of 2023.** This applies to everyone regardless of the date of the last training attended. Attending one of the 2023 trainings will fulfill the required ethics training for the next quadrennium, which will run from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2026.

Training Components

Part 1: Online component

The first part of the training will be completed online and allows participants to receive important information in an individualized experience where the participant can choose the time to engage.

Details to join the online component will be sent two weeks prior to the training a participant has registered for. This portion must be completed before attending Part 2 of the training.

Part 2: In-person component

The second part of the training will be completed in-person. Being in-person allows for discussion of the material and strategies on how to use the knowledge gained. There will also be an added focus on clergy mental health, which is a part of a conference-wide initiative on clergy wellness. A focus on mental health also helps with prevention related to clergy ethics violations.

****Please note:** Both parts are required to satisfy your Sexual Ethics Training requirement in order to remain in good standing and be eligible to continue to serve under appointment.

In-person Training Dates

Each in-person session will last from 10:00am to 3:30pm.

Dates and Locations

March 16	Pittman Park UMC, Statesboro
April 11	Tifton First UMC, Tifton
April 20	The Methodist Home, Macon

Registration and Cost

Registration is now open. Please register for the workshop by clicking one of the links below.

- [Register for the March 16 Workshop](#)
- [Register for the April 11 Workshop](#)
- [Register for the April 20 Workshop](#)

Cost for the training is \$50, which includes Continuing Education Units. The increased cost takes into account the expansion of the number of presenters and the inclusion of both an online portion and an in-person portion with a meal. In addition, the training will now cover the conference requirements for the next four years.

It is the hope of conference leadership that this new model will provide a fresh experience that will add value to the ministry of South Georgia clergy and lay supply.

If you have questions, please contact the Rev. Dr. Jay Harris at 478-738-0048 or by email at jharris@sgaumc.com.



Leadership training, SPRC videos available for local church leaders

A series of training videos designed for local church leaders is [available on the conference website](#). Laity who are stepping into new roles or who are continuing to serve in key leadership positions can take advantage of these video resources. In the videos, leaders will receive tools, training, and encouragement that will equip and empower them as they begin the year in their roles.

In 2022, Bishop Graves recorded a new Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) video.

In it, he expresses thanks for those who serve in leadership in the local church and the important role laity play.

“Our shared focus should be winning people to Jesus, seeing the unseen, transforming lives, and changing our corner of the world,” Bishop Graves said.

Matthew 28:18-20 and Matthew 25:40 encapsulate The United Methodist Church’s mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, he said.

“I believe the key for your staff parish relations committee, and for all of us, is asking the question: how do we align the mission we’ve been given with our strategy?”

Trainings for leadership positions and committees include: Stewardship, Finance, SPRC, Trustees, Lay Leader, and Treasurer.

Additional leadership trainings include: S.H.A.P.E., Meetings that Matter, Unleashing Creativity, Teamwork in Ministry, Virtual Tools for Ministry, Safe Sanctuaries, and a Strengths Coaching overview.

[Click here](#) to find the videos, resource documents, and to see the full listing of Leadership Training topics.



Camps & Retreats Happenings

Confirmation Retreat: Registration for the 22nd annual South Georgia Conference Confirmation Retreat opened December 1st for South Georgia churches and January 1st for all other churches. The 2023 retreat will take place March 3-5 at Epworth By The Sea. Designed for students in the fifth grade and above, the “Join the Journey” Confirmation Retreat will provide churches of ALL sizes an opportunity to connect with others through worship, study, and fellowship. Bishop Graves will be joining us to kick off the event! For more information, [click here](#).

Summer Camp: Registration opens up January 1st for Camp Connect - the South Georgia Conference Camping Ministry at Epworth By The Sea. These week long residential camps are offered for elementary, middle and high school students in June and July. For more information, [click here](#).

Camp Connect Leadership Team: Now hiring college students for summer staff at Camp Connect! Do you know of a college student who loves Jesus and desires a summer of ministry in a beautiful location? As a camp counselor, college students will be able to minister to hundreds of youth and children throughout the summer, while making Christian friendships with other staff that last a lifetime. As a paid position, the Leadership Team will commit to nine weeks of service which will include serving at high school, middle school, and elementary camps, as well as closing the summer serving at a camp for foster children. For more information, [click here](#).



God Promises to Guide

Winter Quarter 2022-2023: From Darkness to Light

Unit 2: God's Promises

Sunday School Lesson for the week of January 15, 2023

By Jay Harris

Lesson Scripture: Isaiah 48:3-8a, 17

Key Verse

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the LORD your God, who teaches you how to succeed, who leads you in the way you should go. (Isaiah 48:17)

Lesson Aims

- To examine the reliable map God had given his people through the law and the prophets
- To ponder how God went “off map” into uncharted territory to liberate God’s people from Babylonian captivity
- To recognize when God may be taking us off the map
- To contemplate ways we can discern God’s leading
- To think of the benefits of following God’s guidance

Recalling Our Journey

The theme for the lessons of the Winter Quarter is “From Darkness to Light.” Don’t we all want to be on a journey from darkness and despair to light and hope? We’re exploring God’s Promises in this January unit, which is appropriate for the first month of a new year. The promises of God fill our own lives with promise and potential. So far, we have explored, “God Promises to Hear and Forgive” and “God Promises to Restore.” Think how these promises help us in our journey from darkness to light. The theme for this lesson is “God Promises to Guide.” To have a guide on our journey makes a huge difference.

In this lesson, we will explore the various ways that God guides us as we move into the future. Much of the future remains unknown to us until we experience it. We can trust however that we move into a future kept by God. This is not to say that we move into a future that is predetermined. God leaves us with choices. Even when we make the wrong choices, God does not completely abandon us to our own free will. We have already learned that God promises to hear and forgive. God promises to restore. By meeting God in this way, we are co-creators with God of our future. If we will let God be God and take the lead, God will guide us. God goes before us into every place that we ourselves must go.

How the Law and the Prophets Provide a Map of the Future

**³The former things I declared long ago;
they went out from my mouth, and I made them known;
then suddenly I did them, and they came to pass.**

One of the distinguishing features that set apart God’s people from their neighbors in the Old Testament is the way they were taught to view God. Israel’s neighbors saw their gods primarily as gods of nature. They made idols to help control the natural forces that they believed shaped their lives. God’s people believed that God made the natural world, for sure, but the Hebrews were different from the beginning because God revealed himself more as a God of history than a God of nature. God was and is always making history with his people. God speaks to his people and sets history in motion.

It is remarkable to think how much of the Old Testament tells what is to come. In the call to Abraham and Sarah, the Lord said, “Go from your country and your kindred to the land I will show you.” (Genesis 12:1) God planned to reveal the destination as Abraham and Sarah walked by faith into the future. What served as their “map” was one in which the details were being added as they traveled with God as their companion.

We see the same thing in the call of Moses in Exodus 3, when Moses was called by God to lead the Hebrews in their liberation from slavery in Egypt. From the very beginning, before the first confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, God began filling the mind of Moses with a vision of their ultimate destination in “a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” God began forming God’s people with laws and commandments relating to every aspect of life. Many of these commands assumed a settled existence that God’s people would not achieve until decades later. God made these things known long before they came to pass. God told them that he would enable them to take possession of the land. When they doubted God, they ended up wandering in the wilderness for forty years until the generation that participated in the Exodus from Egypt died out.

The Book of “Deuteronomy,” which means “second law,” tells how God restated his laws for the benefit of the children of the Exodus generation who would be entering the Promised Land. It was as if God was giving them the spiritual map that they would need to follow in order to live and succeed in the future. When you read the commands in the Book of Deuteronomy they have a definite prophetic quality. They told of what was to come if God’s people were obedient. They also told what was to come if they were disobedient. These commands made up the map they were to follow.

The Old Testament prophets provided maps too. They made known God’s messages about the future before the events in question came to pass. The future that God’s people walked into was foretold. This allowed God’s people to prepare for the future. For this to work, they had to listen and follow what the Lord said through his messengers. Sadly, the people often did not listen. They did not heed the Lord’s commands. They did not follow the map that was given to them.

**⁴ Because I know that you are obstinate,
and your neck is an iron sinew
and your forehead brass,
⁵ I declared them to you from long ago,
before they came to pass I announced them to you,
so that you would not say, “My idol did them;
my carved image and my cast image commanded them.”**

We’re told in this scripture that another reason for announcing the future before it came to pass is because God’s people were stiff-necked and hard-headed. Often God’s people were rebellious. When they suffered misfortune, they could not say that they had been uninformed or that they had not been warned. When good things happened, they could not say that their idols had caused these good things to happen. In all these things, God had previously gone on record. God had given his people a reliable map to guide them.

The Former Things vs. New Things

In our scripture, we hear God announcing a strategic shift. We therefore need to pay attention. God referred to “*the former things I declared long ago*” (vs. 3), then God announced a pronounced shift: “*from this time forward I tell you new things.*” (vs. 6)

- ⁶You have heard; now see all this;
and will you not declare it?
From this time forward I tell you new things,
hidden things that you have not known.**
- ⁷They are created now, not long ago;
before today you have never heard of them,
so that you could not say, “I already knew them.”**
- ⁸You have never heard; you have never known;
from of old your ear has not been opened.**

Do you recognize the movement God was making? God was shifting from the former things that God declared long ago to new things. God continued emphasizing the shift. These new things were hidden from view. They were not known. They were recently created, not created long ago. No one had heard about these things. No one could say, “I already knew them.” In case we didn’t hear it in verse 7, we hear again in verse 8 that no one had heard, no one had ever known, and no ear had ever been opened to the new thing God was announcing in their hearing. The captives in Babylon would be the first in history to be exposed to this new thing.

One word we could use is the word “unprecedented.” If you use the word *unprecedented*, you need to be able to back it up. We already began exploring the new thing God was doing in the last lesson on January 8 when we explored a passage in Isaiah 43. In that same chapter, in verses 18 and 19, God summarizes the unprecedented nature of what God was doing: *“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?”*

God actually began in Isaiah 40 announcing this new thing that God was just starting. It was a new hope God was announcing. What exactly was new about these new things?

- Just when God’s people were tempted to despair that they would never return home, God said, “Comfort, comfort my people” (Isaiah 40:1) because the end of their exile was in sight. This would be most unexpected. It would amount to a second exodus—but a very different exodus.
- This second exodus from Babylon would differ from the first exodus from Egypt in the time of Moses because an enemy would not be pursuing them: “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)
- In the first exodus from Egypt, the people thirsted in the wilderness so that water had to be brought forth miraculously from rock, but in the second exodus, water will be plentiful: *“For I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.”* (Isaiah 43:20-21)
- Perhaps, the biggest “new thing” however was that the servant God had chosen to defeat the Babylonians and lead God’s people home was a Gentile, a Persian—a complete outsider to the covenant people of God. In several places in Isaiah, this chosen leader is referred to by name: *“I have aroused Cyrus in righteousness, and I will make all his paths straight; he shall build my city and set my exiles free.”* (Isaiah 45:13)

This last point brings out the most unprecedented aspect of what God was doing. You can almost hear God explaining his actions. His choice of a Gentile was that controversial. You can tell that God was not apologizing for his choice. God was doubling down on his selection. The former things had some kind of precedent, but the new thing God was doing had not been seen before. God was making a point. God can do the unprecedented.

Think of the former things, the course that had precedents, as the map that was somewhat familiar to God's people. If we use this analogy, then the new thing God was doing, the new direction God was going in was uncharted territory.

Think of the Lewis and Clark expedition at the beginning of the 19th century. They set out to explore the West and find a navigable water way to the Pacific Ocean. They set out in canoes. They were tracing upriver to find the headwaters—the source of the river—hoping to find a river on the other side of the mountains that would flow to the Pacific. When they got to the top of the mountains, they were surprised to find mountain tops spread out as far as the eye could see. Their maps at that point failed them. They had to go off-map. They were in uncharted territory. More than a map, they needed their guides.

God Promises to Guide Us

The scripture lesson skips to the 17th verse. It helps us make a connection to the earlier point God made about declaring the former things and then declaring new things.

**17 Thus says the LORD,
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
I am the LORD your God,
who teaches you how to succeed,
who leads you in the way you should go.**

When life goes into uncharted territory, we need a guide. Compare a guide to a map. A map is a great thing to have, but the instruction a guide provides is much more personal than a map. A guide customizes the experience of leading for the one being led. You can talk to a guide and ask questions and the guide can talk back.

According to the scripture, God guided God's people in the most personal way. God was their Redeemer, Savior, and Restorer. God was the Holy One dedicated to Israel. God was the Lord and the God who belonged to them. God was their personal guide devoted to teaching them how to succeed and to leading them in the way they should go.

As New Testament believers, we can claim this scripture. God is *our* Redeemer, the Holy One dedicated to us. God is the Lord and *our* God. Who knows us better? God knows us better than we know ourselves, because no one sees us better than God. Our Guide teaches us how to succeed and leads us in the way we should go.

One of my favorite experiences of using a guide is while fly fishing on a trout stream in western North Carolina. A friend of mine hired a guide for the two of us one year, and it was an amazing experience. So, a couple of years later, I hired a guide to take me and my adult son on a fly fishing experience. We were taken to the Pigeon River.

This is what our guide did for us. He told us where to meet him, and then we followed him in our SUV. The navigation screen in my car showed me where we were going thanks to GPS. It showed me where we were going relative to the rivers and streams in the area. Looking at the map on the screen made me thankful I was following our guide and not relying on my very limited knowledge of the area.

The guide took us where we would have a good chance catching trout. His knowledge of fishing in the area is extensive. He knew where it would not be too crowded with other fishermen. It's not as if there were signs all along the way saying, "fish here." He took us down an unmarked trail to our fishing spot. He had brought

the waders we would need to get into the stream. He brought the fly fishing rods we would use. His equipment was much better than anything I own and maintained in much better condition.

Then the guide taught my son how to fly fish. My son had never fly fished before. He was a beginner. The guide taught him how to use the equipment, and how the trout behave. He showed where the trout tend to hang out and how they point upstream.

He taught us how to “present” the fly so that the fishing line unfurls just so and the fly lands on the surface just so. He taught us how to trim the line so that there is not excess line, so that when a trout struck our fly, we would have a better chance of hooking the trout. He taught us how to strip the line to bring the trout in and net it with the nets he brought. He brought his cases of many varieties of hand tied flies. The guide knew which ones the fish were biting based on the species of natural flies in the area and where they were in their cycle of hatching and growth.

When we had fished an area for a time, we walked in the river to the next place he took us. He knew all the places because he knew what was below the surface. He was constantly talking to us so that we were continually adjusting what we needed to do. In all this, we were learning an incredible amount. He was teaching us how to succeed in our fly fishing trip. There is nothing like being taught by an expert who also possesses the local knowledge of the area that is needed to succeed.

When I hired the guide, I was giving a gift to myself and my son. The gift was an experience we would share. The guide helped make the experience what it was. The experience was designed to create a memory my son and I would share.

My point is not to try to sell the joys of fly fishing or the benefits of using a guide. It is an analogy, obviously. What a fly fishing guide means for fly fishing, pales in comparison to the way God guides us in life. What God brings to the guidance of believers comes from God’s infinite and intimate wisdom and knowledge. The question is, “How exactly does God guide us?”

Learning to Follow the Lead of our Guide

I am 58 years old, and I gave my life to Christ just before I turned fourteen. God has been my guide for a long time, but if I am honest, I know I could be much more in tune with God’s leading. I know this because I know people whose awareness of God’s leading is much greater than mine. The degree to which we experience God as our guide has to do with the depth of our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. (Right now, resolutions for the new year are forming in my mind, and I hope they will form for you.)

Going back to the language of using a map and following a guide, I know that in my life, the map and the guide work together. My study of scripture provides a map and my devotional life is how I engage the Lord as my Guide. Having said this, it is hard and not really advisable to draw a hard and fast line between the two. The map that scripture provides is God’s map after all. God as our Guide is the One who has provided in scripture our map.

In my study of scripture, God through the Holy Spirit speaks to me. This is why I can come back again and again to the same scripture and it says something different to me. This is why scripture reading and prayer go hand in hand. This puts us in the best position to hear both the former things and the new things God wishes to speak to us.

Think of the praying we do before we read scripture, during the study of scripture, and after our study times in scripture. The more we spend time with God in prayer before we read scripture, the more in tune with God

we will be. As we read scripture, we want God to invade our thoughts. We want to be aware of the “a-ha” moments when we gain a new insight. We want to recognize that in any new insights, there has been an intersection between the words of scripture and our present lives. We also want to pray after each study time in scripture. What connections does God want to continue to make between the ancient wisdom found in scripture and our present lives?

Our ongoing prayer habits are what allow us to be in tune with our divine Guide when we travel into uncharted territory. Let’s acknowledge that time spent in uncharted territory is often fraught with a certain amount of unease, restlessness, apprehension, and perhaps even agitation. In these times, God as our Guide is more than just a teacher. God is a companion, who is present with us, supporting us and loving us and comforting us and making us ready for the challenges before us.

We also know that God opens doors (and closes some too). God provides opportunities. The Holy Spirit prompts us. Sometimes what we call our intuition may be the Holy Spirit prompting us as we live our daily lives. The Holy Spirit also convinces and convicts. This kind of guidance is crucial in our daily living. We can trust the promptings of the Spirit best when there is a foundation in place based on a growing understanding of God’s Word and an ongoing prayer life. Read Psalm 119 on a regular basis and you will discover how the saints of old trusted God and his Word as their guide.

How do you recognize when God making be taking you *off-map*? How are you learning to follow God’s leading? What have been for you the benefits of following God’s leading in your life? How might you become more in tune with God as your Guide in the coming year?

Prayer

Covenant God, you raised up leaders and prophets to announce things before they came to pass to guide us. Help us to be open both to old insights and new movements of your Holy Spirit, that we may live life following your leading and to know you as our Guide, 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. Find his plot-driven guide to reading the Bible, the “Layered Bible Journey,” at www.layeredbiblejourney.com.



Reading Together in 2023: four books & four conversations on prayer

By Anne Bosarge

How do you feel about books? Some people love them, others would rather watch the movie. No matter how you feel about reading, the evidence is clear: reading stimulates your thinking, provides stress reduction, improves your memory, strengthens your problem-solving skills, improves focus and concentration along with so much more!

Here are some quotes from book-lovers throughout the years:

- Once you learn to read, you will be forever free. – Frederick Douglass
- We read to know we are not alone. – C.S. Lewis
- A person who won’t read has no advantage over the one who can’t read. – Mark Twain

- The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go. – Dr. Seuss
- Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read. - Groucho Marx

Books take you places you would never go on your own. Books expose you to ideas that challenge your way of thinking and cause you to reflect on your own perspectives and points of view. Books build creativity and strength in leaders. More than ever before, what is needed in this day and age is strong, creative leaders who are willing to change for the mission but grounded in who they are in Christ. That's why this year the Office of Connectional Ministries has selected four books for us to read together as a conference.

These four books emphasize the transformative power of prayer, which will be a focus for the South Georgia Conference in 2023. These four books will also expand our minds, challenge us, and encourage us in our prayer walk and our leadership within the local church, our homes, and our work.

Here's how this will work. Four months this year – February, May, August and November – you are invited to join together as we read the same book together. At the end of each month, Connectional Ministries will host a book talk on Zoom (at noon!) and chat about what you learned or received from the book. Sometimes this will be with an author of the book and other times it will be with someone within the conference facilitating the conversation for us. To help you plan your reading for 2023 below are the titles, months, and dates.

The Office of Connectional Ministries is looking forward to growing together with you this year!

Book One

“Prayer Changes Us” by Ted Goshorn, pastor of Mulberry Street UMC

Hosted by the author, Ted Goshorn

Read the month of February; book talk on Monday, Feb 27, noon-1pm

<https://sgaumc-reg.brtapp.com/BookTalkFEB>

Book Two

“Praying with Our Feet” by Lindsey Krinks

Hosted by Abra Lattany-Reed

Read the month of May; book talk on Monday, May 22, noon-1pm

<https://sgaumc-reg.brtapp.com/BookTalkMAY>

Book Three

“From Burned Out to Beloved” by Bethany Dearborn Hiser

Hosted by Grace Guyton

Read the month of August; book talk on Monday, Aug. 21, noon-1pm

<https://sgaumc-reg.brtapp.com/BookTalkAUG>

Book Four

“Dynamite Prayer” by Rosario Picardo and Sue Nilson Kibbey

Hosted by the author, Rosario Picardo

Read the month of November; book talk on Monday, Nov. 27, noon-1pm

<https://sgaumc-reg.brtapp.com/BookTalkNOV>

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

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Hetty's Tragic Story

JOHN WESLEY MOMENTS DAVE HANSON

Samuel and Susanna Wesley named their fifth surviving child "Mehtabel" but everybody called her "Hetty." She was born in 1697 and was six years older than John Wesley. She probably took care of him and changed his diapers.

If it was said that all the Wesley girls were beautiful, Hetty was gorgeous! Hetty was exceptional in every way. She was so smart that Samuel gave her special instructions in Latin, Greek, and the classics. Because she had such beautiful handwriting, he had her assist him in transcribing his books. Her chief talent was writing poetry.

Her intelligence was combined with liveliness. Even as a child she was vivacious, full of mirth, good humor, and wit. She had a tendency for mischief. Some suspected that when the Wesley family was plagued by a ghost - which they named "Ol' Jeffery" - Hetty was behind it.

At Epworth there were no eligible bachelors who were worthy of the bright, educated, beautiful Wesley girls. However, Hetty fell in love with John Romley, a local school teacher who had attended Oxford. But Romley insulted Rev. Samuel by singing a humerus song about an ambitious clergyman. The song sounded a lot like Rev. Wesley!

Samuel refused to let Hetty see Romley anymore and sent her away to be a servant without pay some distance away. Hetty was miserable and was soon dismissed. She had nowhere to go. She said, "I will not return home, and I cannot stay here." She went to London to stay with her uncle Matthew Wesley, Samuel's brother.

Some months later she did return to Epworth. But she returned five months pregnant! Samuel was horrified! He would not speak to her. She had shamed the entire family! He made her marry the first single person he could find who happened to be a journeyman plumber, William Wright. Samuel could not bear to perform the marriage himself. He sent them to a nearby village for the simple, shameful wedding.

Samuel simply could not forgive Hetty. She begged for forgiveness, but he turned a cold heart to her. John Wesley, who was serving as his father's assistant at the time, preached a sermon on "The Need to Forgive." Samuel was insulted and threatened to take out charges against his son for preaching against another pastor!

The saddest part of this story is that Samul never forgave Hetty.

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

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A Challenge for 2023: Look for the Good

By Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed

When God looks at us, I think He looks for a reflection of Himself in our character, choices, as well as our overall lifestyle. But what do we look for when we interact with people? Too often we focus on what's wrong with someone more than we spotlight what they do right. When a person is good, it means that he or she is morally excellent or a person of integrity, kind, friendly, refined, cheerful, and righteous.

This world we live in has a tendency to be very focused on negative information. The daily news is saturated with killing, stealing, and destruction! Many forms of entertainment encourage ungodly character practices such as adultery, fornication, lying, character assassination, self-centeredness, lust, envy and jealousy.

Actually, there are very good qualities that can be found in everyone! Sometimes we have to practice patience to find the good, but when we diligently look for and ask the Holy Spirit to help us, we will definitely see a lot of good in people. In some instances, you may need to forgive, let go of the past, and/or let go of past and present offense in order to succeed in seeing or recognizing the good in others.

Because our sinful nature prevents us from being perfect, there are times in which believers become angry, impatient, rude, or irritated. But we don't allow ourselves to stay stuck there; we quickly repent and get back into God's perfect will. This war with our flesh should help us to be more compassionate when we interact with unpleasant people. Hopefully, we will recognize that just like we have good and not so good days, so do other people.

When you sincerely look for the good in others, it prevents you from being critical, harsh, rude, impatient and disrespectful towards others. When you choose to focus on the good qualities in people, it prevents you from focusing on what you think is wrong with them more than what you see that is right. You inspire people to strive for excellence; you build hope and happiness in them, demonstrate acts of kindness and express unconditional love when you choose to focus more on their good qualities. Correction and/or constructive criticism will be embraced, accepted, and applied when you spotlight more of what a person does well than what they do wrong!

When you spell the word "good" with a capital "G" and strike through one of the "Øs", what do you have left? God! This confirms that there is a good God somewhere in everyone. Let's put forth more effort to look for and spotlight the good in people. Unfortunately, some people don't even realize that God loves them, but our kindness towards them will assure them that He does. Philippians 4:8 (TLB) instructs us to dwell on the fine, good things in others. In other words: look for the good!

Rev. Abra Lattany-Reed serves as the Director of Diversity and Justice Ministries for the South Georgia Conference. Email her at abra@sgaumc.com.



Resource Roundup – January 2023

Leadership Training Videos Available for Local Church Leaders

A series of training videos for local church leaders is available on the conference website. Laity who are stepping into new roles or who are continuing to serve in key leadership positions can take advantage of these video resources. In the videos, leaders will receive tools, training, and encouragement that will equip and empower them as they begin the year in their roles. [Click here to find the videos, resources documents, and to see the full listing of Leadership Training topics](#). Need something you don't see? Your connectional ministries staff is here to help! Email kelly@squamc.com.

2023 Worship Planning Calendar

This resource is the full music and worship planning calendar for each Sunday in 2023, as well as special days and times throughout the year. Designed to help pastors, worship leaders, Sunday School teachers, and more. [Download today](#)

Human Relations Day is January 15

Resources are now available to help churches celebrate Human Relations Day on January 15, 2023. This special offering benefits neighborhood ministries through community developers, community advocacy through United Methodist Voluntary Services and works with at-risk teens through the Youth Offender Rehabilitation Program. [Find resources here.](#)

10 free services for local churches

United Methodist Communications has a menu of services and tools as extensive as the menu of dishes at The Cheesecake Factory. Greg Petree has assembled a list of the top-10 services United Methodist Communications offers for free to help local congregations reach out to their communities.

[Read list](#)

Get that video on your website

When exporting videos for the web, the trick is to reduce the file size without compromising the quality. On this MyCom Tutorial, Kathryn lets us know the best way to optimize videos that you can upload to your website and make them play in the most efficient way possible.

<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/how-to-export-videos-for-the-web>

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Obituary: Mrs. Cora Herndon

Mrs. Cora Anthony Herndon, age 92, of Brunswick, Georgia passed away on Thursday, December 15, 2022. Cora was born in Ripley, TN. She was the widow of Rev. George Herndon. A memorial service was held December 30, 2022, at 1 pm at College Place UMC (3890 Altama Avenue, Brunswick, GA 31520).

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Retired Clergy Birthdays – January 2023

- 1/01 – Cindy H. Autry: 2958 Roswell Lane; Columbus, GA 31906
- 1/01 – James Hancock: 4360 Manor Millwood Rd. S; Manor, GA 31550
- 1/01 – Larry Roberts: 12 Foxfire Estates Circle; Waynesville, NC 28785
- 1/01 – Dan Robinson: 15 Kent Rd.; Tifton, GA 31794
- 1/02 – Sharon Loyley: 1544 Harris Ridge Rd.; Young Harris, GA 30582
- 1/03 – Marcus Tripp: 3791 Overlook Dr.; Macon, GA 31204
- 1/06 – Joyce Harris: 111 Ingham St.; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
- 1/07 – Darrell Carter: 2450 Odum Screven Rd.; Screven, GA 31560
- 1/07 – Tommy Martin, III: 606 Chastain Place; Macon, GA 31210
- 1/07 – Jerry Sharpe: 192 McElmurray Rd.; Waynesboro, GA 30830
- 1/08 – Annette Brooks: 114 Sunset Dr.; Fitzgerald, GA 31750
- 1/08 – Ernie Rogers: 1803 Pineknoll Lane; Albany, GA 31707
- 1/08 – Gary Starrett: PO Box 113; Bolingbroke, GA 31004
- 1/12 – Eddie Braswell: 1110 Moore Dr.; Americus, GA 31709
- 1/12 – Grady Vance: 127-B Nina Dr.; Eatonton, GA 31024
- 1/15 – Gary Morris: 2445 Jacqueline Circle; Moultrie, GA 31768

1/17 – Ed Ellington: 675 Arthur Wolfe Rd.; Dublin, GA 31021
1/21 – Billy Wicker, Jr.: 400 Ridgecrest Rd.; E. Dublin, GA 31021
1/22 – Tom Davis, Jr.: 155 Twin Creek Ct.; Athens, GA 30605
1/24 – Joe Dunagan: 130 Commercial Ave.; East Palatka, FL 32131
1/27 – Bill Jones: 106 Hilldale Circle; Vidalia, GA 30474
1/30 – Harold Feightner: 107 Harvest Point; Warner Robins, GA 31088
1/30 – Holland Morgan: 2 E. 62nd Street; Savannah, GA 31405



Scripture Readings – January 10 edition

January 15

Second Sunday After the Epiphany, Year A

- [Isaiah 49:1-7](#)
- [Psalm 40:1-11](#)
- [1 Corinthians 1:1-9](#)
- [John 1:29-42](#)

January 22

Third Sunday After the Epiphany, Year A

- [Isaiah 9:1-4](#)
- [Psalm 27:1, 4-9](#)
- [1 Corinthians 1:10-18](#)
- [Matthew 4:12-23](#)

January 29

Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany, Year A

- [Micah 6:1-8](#)
- [Psalm 15](#)
- [1 Corinthians 1:18-31](#)
- [Matthew 5:1-12](#)