A Word from Bishop Bryan: The Judicial Council Ruling

April 29, 2017

To the South Georgia Conference:

The Judicial Council, the highest judicial body or “court” of The United Methodist Church, has ruled that the consecration of an openly gay bishop in the Western Jurisdiction, Bishop Karen Oliveto, violated church law. Specifically, the Council said:

“...no individual member or entity may violate, ignore or negate church law,” the council ruled. “It is not lawful for the College of Bishops of any jurisdictional or central conference to consecrate a self-avowed practicing homosexual bishop.”

What does this decision mean?
It means that the Judicial Council has ruled that the consecration of Bishop Oliveto violates church law. The Council concluded that the bishop’s ministerial office is now subject to review, which will begin with the filing of complaints against her and possibly against those who participated in her consecration. The Judicial Council has, in essence, referred the case back to the Western Jurisdiction for judicial action.

If you would like to read the Judicial Council ruling in its entirety, click here.

I know that there are faithful United Methodists on all sides of this issue. What we can all appreciate is the way our denominational system has given a fair and impartial hearing to the positions presented and that the Judicial Council decision is based on adherence to the Book of Discipline as the covenant that binds us together.

What is next?
Now that the Judicial Council has made this ruling and the Western Jurisdiction moves forward to study the ruling and consider their response, we turn our attention to the special session of General Conference to be held February 23-26, 2019, in St. Louis, Missouri. The purpose of this special session is to act upon recommendations given to the Council of Bishops by the Commission on a Way Forward.
The Council of Bishops is committed to the unity of the church and the flourishing of its mission. I urge us all to stay focused on the Commission’s work as our best opportunity to determine God’s leading for the church. We believe the God who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it (Philippians 1:6).

What can I do as a South Georgia United Methodist?
The laity and clergy of the South Georgia Conference can be involved in this process in these important ways:

1. Pray daily for the Holy Spirit to guide the Commission on a Way Forward. Pray for the Holy Spirit to fill us with new possibilities, new hope, new life. God has honored such prayers in the past because room is created for the Spirit to instruct and guide. I believe God can and will do it again!

2. Share your own thoughts, ideas, and suggestions with the Commission on a Way Forward. I will compile all responses and convey them to the Commission. Your voice is important and needs to be heard. Share your responses here.

3. Continue to focus on our mission: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world as we remain Alive Together in Christ.

And now please join me in this prayer for the Commission on a Way Forward and for General Conference 2019:

God of resurrection and new life, we pray to you as Easter people:

When we were dead you made us Alive Together in Christ.

Now we journey toward Pentecost, remembering your promise to pour out your Spirit upon all people. Come, Holy Spirit!

We pray especially for the Commission on a Way Forward. May each member of the Commission be filled with the spirit of wisdom and discernment in all their deliberations. Use their experience and devotion for your glory. And as we prepare for General Conference 2019, give us grace now to hear the Easter message directly from Jesus: “Do not be afraid.” Give us such clarity of purpose that nothing can deter us from the mission to which you have called us.

How we thank you, Lord, for the legacy of faithfulness you have given us through the United Methodist Church. Renew within each of us the passionate spirit of John Wesley and the Methodist movement. Enable us to be a non-anxious presence so that the peace of Christ may guide our words and our actions.

Come, Holy Spirit, and fill us with new possibilities, new hope, new life.
We pray in the name of the One who can do far more than we can ask or imagine, Jesus Christ our Risen Lord. Amen.

Alive Together in Christ,

Lawson Bryan

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**Bishop Bryan Announces Projected June Appointments**

Bishop R. Lawson Bryan has announced projected appointment changes as of April 23, 2017. The appointments will be set at the South Georgia Annual Conference and will be effective in June.

The appointment list and a note about the projected appointments can be found at [www.sgaumc.org/projectedappointments](http://www.sgaumc.org/projectedappointments).

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**UMC Bishops Call Special Session of General Conference for 2019**

The Council of Bishops (COB) has called a Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church (UMC) to be held February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

In announcing the call, COB President Bishop Bruce R. Ough said the Special Session will be held in accordance with Division Two - Section II - Article II of The Constitution of The United Methodist Church as recorded in Paragraph ¶14 of *The Book of Discipline* (2016).

The purpose of the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference will be “limited to receiving and acting on a report from the Council of Bishops based on the recommendations of the Commission on a Way Forward.”

The 32-member Commission was appointed by the Council of Bishops to assist the bishops in their charge to lead the church forward amid the impasse related to homosexuality. The Commission’s task includes examining paragraphs in *The Book of Discipline* concerning human sexuality and exploring options to strengthen the unity of the church.

Per the Constitution of the Church, the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference shall be composed of the delegates to the 2016 General Conference or their legal successors or alternates, except when a particular annual conference or missionary conference shall prefer to have a new election.

The Secretary of the General Conference will communicate with annual conference secretaries regarding
updated delegate information, seating of reserve delegates, and the issuance of new certificates of election for annual conferences choosing to hold new elections.

The Commission on the General Conference and the Business Manager of the General Conference will develop and forward additional information regarding the logistics of the special session of General Conference at the appropriate time.

“The Council of Bishops encourages the entire church to continue in deep, unceasing prayer for Holy Spirit breakthroughs for the Commission on a Way Forward and the Special Session of General Conference,” Bishop Ough said.

Click here to read the full letter sent to the Heads of Delegations to the 2016 General Conference (or successors), Secretary of the General Conference and the Chairperson of the Commission on the General Conference.

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**S3 groups help clergy renew, recharge, refresh**

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

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

Brought to South Georgia nearly 13 years ago, the S3 program was designed and begun at Columbia Theological Seminary in 2003 and sponsored by the Lilly Endowment as a part of their “Sustaining Pastoral Excellence” initiative.

Through the South Georgia Order of Elders and the Board of Ordained Ministry, South Georgia continues S3 and provides to each approved group $500 per person, per year for the first two years of the group’s learning process or experience.

Even though they haven’t received funding in more than 10 years, South Georgia’s original S3 group still meets regularly. Shortly after Easter six of the members flew to Texas to visit Dr. John Stephens, a member of their group who is now serving as senior pastor of Chapelwood United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas.

They golf together, go out to dinner, and enjoy friendships that have developed and deepened over time.
With busy schedules, families, and ministry demands, it hasn’t always been easy to carve out time to rest and recharge, said Dr. Jimmy Asbell, senior pastor of Vineville United Methodist Church and director of South Georgia’s S3 program. But the grant incentive helps individuals make it a priority.

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

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

Six of them are in the newly formed Parks and Rec S3 group, which formed last September. Revs. Grace Guyton, Stacey Harwell-Dye, Aimee Baxter, Melissa Traver, Devon Smyth, and Kathy Israel-McLeod have met three times and will head to Washington, D.C. next week. Each of their gatherings will involve a state park, national park, or an outside activity.

“We use these times together to have a break from the grind of ministry and to relax and be with people we enjoy, to eat some good food, laugh, and to do some fun things,” Rev. Guyton said. “It’s a time of renewal, and we come back refreshed and revitalized.”

The purpose of S3 groups are to create a sanctuary, a Sabbath experience and environment for participants who want to spend a significant amount of time together. There are study and service components, as well – the Parks and Rec group always talks about best practices and has a visit to a revitalized United Methodist Church planned for their Washington, D.C. trip – but the focus tends to be on Sabbath.

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

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

Applications are now being accepted for S3 clergy groups. The deadline is July 1. Click here for more information.
Bishop Bryan encourages Conference to read “Overflow”

During the 2016 Annual Conference session, delegates set a goal of increasing average worship attendance by 10 percent by 2018. The 2017 Annual Conference session is being intentionally designed to help the South Georgia Annual Conference meet that goal, and when it gathers at the Jekyll Island Convention Center June 4-7, Dr. Lovett H. Weems, co-author of the book “OVERFLOW: Increase Worship Attendance & Bear More Fruit,” will teach three sessions that will provide practical steps for planning, implementing, and evaluating worship that can produce greater fruitfulness.

To fully prepare for the 2017 Annual Conference session; engage in Dr. Weems’ teaching; and be a more alive, fruitful conference, Bishop Lawson Bryan is encouraging all South Georgia United Methodists to read “OVERFLOW: Increase Worship Attendance & Bear More Fruit.”

“I was drawn to ‘Overflow’ because I knew that Dr. Weems has done a lot of work in helping congregations increase their attendance and I know the book is focused on practical steps congregations can take,” Bishop Bryan said. “It’s not a book about theories, it’s a book about how to do it. The practicality of it attracted me.”

With eight short, impactful chapters devoted to such topics as “Why Worship Matters,” “Pay Attention to Those You Seek to Reach,” and “If Churches Can Change, They Can Grow,” “Overflow” offers biblical and theological insight for worship planning plus several practical suggestions to increase worship attendance in churches of all sizes.

Any church of any size will find relevant, helpful information that can be useful in their context, Bishop Bryan said of the book.

“When delegates come to Annual Conference … if they have already read the book, they won’t be hearing Dr. Weems’ information for the first time. What he is saying will deepen within them and they will hear and understand better how to use it in their local church.”

He said it’s especially important for those not attending Annual Conference to read the book and watch the business sessions and worship services via live stream.

“The more people in the local church read the book, the more they can talk to each other about how to do it. They’ll be on the same page and have a clear game plan.”

To further prepare for Annual Conference and continue growing in the skills needed for fruitfulness and vitality, Bishop Bryan encourages pastors and laity to gather together in small groups and work through nine applications he prepared to guide the study of “OVERFLOW.” They can be found online at www.sgaumc.org/overflow.

Annual Conference Special Offering to benefit disaster relief
South Georgia has seen its share of storms – and then some – in the past year.

In early September 2016 South Georgia was hit by Tropical Storm Hermine and then its coastal communities were pounded again in October by Hurricane Matthew. In January, devastating storms ripped through the area, leaving death and destruction in their wake. The most affected areas of the South Georgia Conference were the South Central and Southwest Districts. The same area was again impacted in April when a tornado tore through Americus and Vienna.

In the wake of these storms and to help alleviate the suffering of friends and neighbors, thousands of South Georgia United Methodists have given selflessly and sacrificially, serving those in their own communities and around the Conference. The Conference’s disaster response team has coordinated 52 work teams and accumulated more 2,900 hours of service in the hardest hit areas.

And now each member of the South Georgia Conference has another opportunity to give to those who have been and may be affected by disasters in the future.

Each year, congregations from around the Conference faithfully receive offerings and present them during the Annual Conference session as gifts to help promote ministries and missions to help further the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This year, the Annual Conference Special Offering will be gathered and used to advance and support the South Georgia Conference Disaster Response fund to build the Conference’s capacity to respond to disasters now and in the future. Every congregation is encouraged to collect an offering prior to Annual Conference. It will then be presented during the Opening Worship service.

“Building capacity broadens our ability to respond to disasters that occur within South Georgia and throughout the connection,” said Allison Lindsey, Associate Director of Connectional Ministries. “This capacity building includes serving those experiencing devastation, training individuals for Early Response Teams and as Chainsaw Operators – who can respond here and across the connection by invitation – training case managers, training local churches to prepare as a congregation to stay so they can engage in the community when an event occurs and donations of health kits and cleaning buckets have tremendous impact.”

When a natural or civil disaster overwhelms a community’s ability to recover on its own, South Georgia’s Disaster Response ministry joins in to extend loving care to communities within the bounds of the South Georgia Conference. Wherever possible, we cooperate with other aid organizations to extend our reach.

In a holistic response to disasters, the Disaster Response team works with the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to:

- Offer early response team/disaster preparedness training.
- Provide essential supplies and care—both physical and psychological—in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.
• Support long-term rebuilding efforts, primarily through case management, and assist communities as they adapt.

“We continue to witness powerful examples of the church being ‘Alive Together in Christ’ during our recent catastrophic events,” Lindsey said. “Helping those affected by disasters recover and walking alongside families during the long-term recovery is also an instrumental part of our involvement. That is where United Methodists have earned the reputation of being ‘the last to leave.’ We have seen severe weather threaten the south with increasing frequency and severity and this creates an urgent need to be proactive rather than reactive following an event.”

For more detailed information and to download a bulletin insert and video to use to promote the special offering, visit www.sgaumc.org/specialoffering.

Dr. Melody Blake to serve as Wesleyan College’s provost and vice president for academic affairs

Wesleyan College is pleased to announce Dr. Melody Blake as provost and vice president for academic affairs (VPAA), effective July 10, 2017. Dr. Blake will oversee enrollment and all academic areas of the College including the faculty, academic programs and curricula, library, registrar, academic resources center, and the Centers of Excellence. The Provost/VPAA has key responsibilities in strategic planning, development of academic programs, outcomes assessment, faculty relations, and fiscal decision-making.

Prior to serving Wesleyan for one year as a visiting assistant professor of psychology, Dr. Blake held the position of professor of psychology and academic administrator at Mt. Mercy University in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Her administrative roles included department and division chair, director of academic assessment, dean of graduate studies, and provost. After leaving Mt. Mercy in 2013 she served as vice president of Mission Services at Goodwill of the Heartland. A native of California, Blake earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California, Los Angeles, and her Master of Arts and Ph.D. in social psychology from Claremont Graduate University.

Dr. Blake and her husband Christopher Blake live in Macon and enjoy gardening, walking, biking, and exploring the area. Dr. Blake has two married adult daughters who live in the Midwest: Katherine and Chris Francis and Stephanie and Ethan Graham. Dr. Blake said, “I am very excited to serve Wesleyan College as provost and vice president for academic affairs. Having been in the classroom as a professor for one year, I am convinced that Wesleyan students are women of courage, intellect and creativity.”

Dr. Vivia Fowler, current provost and president-elect of the College said, “We are thrilled that Melody Blake will be joining the Wesleyan family, and we look forward to the addition of her talents, energy, and wisdom to this vitally important position for the College. She brings a wealth of experience as an academic leader, and I am excited to move into my new position as president knowing that Melody is on
In February, Wesleyan College announced that Dr. Vivia Lawton Fowler will serve as the institution’s twenty-fifth president. She will assume the position on July 1, 2017, upon the retirement of President Ruth A. Knox.

God is at work in our community of faith

FROM THE BISHOP
R. LAWSON BRYAN

A fresh perspective on the possibilities of Annual Conference can be found in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. The first five chapters are filled with one moving experience after another: the Ascension; the Holy Spirit on Pentecost; 3,000 people are saved; and the early Christians meet daily to worship, break bread in their homes, and share their possessions to meet the needs of fellow Christians.

But then in chapter six a problem arises: “Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.”

What are the apostles going to do when faced with a problem that is causing division within the early church? Note carefully how they responded: “And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples ….

The apostles called together the whole community. They held a conference. They trusted that God was at work in the whole community of faith.

Through this community process seven people were chosen to oversee the food ministry to widows. We refer to this as the beginning of deacons, persons called to lead the church in ministries of service, compassion, and justice. The apostles prayed and laid hands on those whom the community had chosen. The result was renewed vitality and increased growth: “The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

Since the days of John Wesley we Methodists have been coming together to confer on how to live the Christian faith in all areas of life. Wesley started it when he called the early Methodist preachers together annually so they could reflect on what they had faced over the past year. Then he sent them out with renewed commitment and rekindled passion for proclaiming the Gospel and making disciples of Jesus Christ.

The conferences found in Acts 6 and in the early Methodist movement remind us of the spiritual vitality and practical help that our own annual conference session can give to us. At Annual Conference we
experience for ourselves what it means to be Alive Together in Christ. Worship will be the core of our conference sessions. Prayer will be ongoing, not only in the plenary sessions, but also through the prayer room that will be available throughout the conference. Testimonies will be shared so that we can see what God is blessing in the South Georgia Conference. Lovett Weems will have three teaching times based on his book, “OVERFLOW: Increase Worship Attendance and Bear More Fruit.” Bishops James Swanson and Mike Watson will preach during the opening service and the memorial service, respectively. I look forward to preaching for the service of ordination and commissioning, as well as during the sending forth service.

Annual Conference will also include an update on the work of the Commission on a Way Forward and on opportunities to give our own input to that group. The work of the commission will be the focus of the special session of General Conference that will meet in St. Louis, Feb. 23 – 26, 2019.

John Killinger, who taught preaching at Vanderbilt, once said: “Alone you are but a fragile vessel. But filled with the power of God there is nothing in the world that can defeat you.” This is my prayer for our Annual Conference session: that we may be filled with the power of God so that nothing in the world can defeat us as we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Alive Together in Christ,

Lawson Bryan

S3: The smartest decision I’ve made in ministry

GROWING IN GRACE
BEN GOSDEN

I want to tell you about the smartest decision I’ve made in ministry. The decision has nothing to do with a finance committee meeting. It has nothing to do with a perfect children’s minister I’ve hired. And it has nothing to do with a five-step evangelism plan. The smartest decision I’ve made in ministry was almost two years ago when I decided to form an S3 Group.

What is S3, you ask?

From the information on our conference website:

S3 is a program for sustaining excellence in ministry sponsored by the South Georgia Order of Elders and the Board of Ordained Ministry. S3 is a collaborative, small group, action learning experience that will help sustain/promote excellence in ordained ministry. You and your peer group develop and implement a two-year long small group learning experience focused on three areas: Sabbath, Study, and Service.
While that’s the official description, I want to share with you what S3 has come to mean to me. My S3 group was formed almost two years ago in about two hours. I know that sounds strange, but it’s true. It was a whirlwind. I had been wanting to start a group for a couple of years but had found every reason in the book not to do it: it would be too time consuming; it would take me away from my local church and my family.

But one ordinary Tuesday afternoon Dr. Ben Martin called me and told me a first-year group had backed out of attending the annual S3 training retreat. It was just a few days until the retreat and they needed a first-year group. Ben promised me they would help us complete the application and prep work during the retreat if I could get a group together. With a short deadline offered, I decided to take the leap and accept Ben’s challenge to find a group. So I proceeded to work through my contacts in my cell phone, looking for friends who were not already part of a group. Within two hours, we magically formed what became Group 13 in the South Georgia S3 program.

Over the last almost two years, our group has morphed from a sociological experiment to a group of people who enjoy taking retreats together to a true band of brothers. These “brothers from other mothers” have walked together through family struggles, new babies being born, tough appointments, and appointment changes. All of this not to mention the daily frustration of tough decision, tough meetings, and tough people to deal with. We’ve offered honest feedback in one another’s preaching, called one another out when we were about to say something dumb or make a careless leadership decision in our local church, and we’ve laughed together at the silly stuff only church people can do. We’ve cheered at the pinnacle of the highest highs of success in ministry. And we’ve faithfully sat on the ash heap of despair as different ones have played the role of Job. All the while we have grown to genuinely love one another, admire one another, compete with one another (in the healthiest of ways), and cheer for one another both in ministry as well as in life.

In short, we’ve learned to do the scariest things a pastor could ever do – we’ve learned how to take off the mask of “pastor” and dared to be vulnerable and bare our souls together.

As I reflect on these first two years and think ahead to the many, many years yet to be that we have together, I can’t help but be struck with wonder at the grace of God. Rev. Creede Hinshaw was right when he wrote, “The S3 experience is the difference between wandering through a barren land all alone or traveling with deeply loyal friends.”

And Bishop Bryan is right when he regularly reminds us of the words of Paul that we are “alive together in Christ” (Eph. 2:5 emphasis mine). Because as Paul says in completing his thought – this “alive together” is a sign of how we are saved by grace. It is that same grace that allowed our group to come together on a random Tuesday afternoon. It is that same grace that allows us to serve in a conference that cares deeply about the need for clergy to form deep and abiding relationships together. It is that same grace — God’s saving grace — that allows me now to enjoy seven brothers who will have my back and walk with me through this crazy and life-giving journey we call ministry. Thanks be to God.
The Rev. Ben Gosden is the pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church in Savannah. He can be reached at bgosden1982@gmail.com.

John Wesley: Outdoor Preacher

JOHN WESLEY MOMENTS
DAVE HANSON

It would be hard to list the various settings in which John Wesley preached the Gospel. He preached in small chapels, homes, great cathedrals, parks, meadows, mining pits, bridges, barns, you name it …

Such outdoor preaching came with built in perils: rain, snow, mobs, heat, cold, wind, you name it …

On one unusual day John Wesley was just beginning his outdoor sermon when an “unprovoked wasp” stung him on his lip! He feared the lip would swell preventing his preaching. But that didn’t happen. He preached for two hours with no discomfort and again the next day.

God’s Sustaining Love

Spring Quarter: God Loves Us
Unit 3: God’s Pervasive and Sustaining Love

Sunday school lesson for the week of May 7, 2017
By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: Jonah 1:7-17
Background Scripture: Jonah 1

The book of Jonah has always been somewhat controversial. Many readers have been inclined to write off the story of Jonah as fictitious. The value and beauty of the book have often been obscured by the fish story, which so many have difficulty swallowing.

Early, however, Jonah was a historical figure since he was referenced in another context in one of ancient Israel’s history books (2 Kings 14:25). And Jesus himself seems to have taken Jonah’s story as a matter of fact (for example, Matthew 12:38-41).

On the other hand, the writer of the “Interpreter’s Bible” states that the book is not history nor was it intended to be read that way. The writer suggests that the author of the book of Jonah was so on fire to drive home his message that he adopted the memorable method of parable, the story. It was the same technique which Jesus employed constantly, “There was a man who had two sons…” (Luke 15:11ff).
Obviously, that was not history, but the figure of that father running toward his returned and repentant son has moved through the ages and the hearts of humankind as no other blessed reality.

So regardless of how we interpret the story of Jonah, whether as history or parable, it is the story and message of the prophet Jonah that is the critical issue. Perhaps Frederick W. Faber in his hymn “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy” was pointing to it when he said,

“the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man’s mind”

**Story Review**

“The word of the Lord came to” is a common phrase in the Old Testament prophets. It indicates a “true” prophet, since the message originates with God.

As you recall, God instructs Jonah to go to Nineveh, which is the capital of the dreaded Assyrian Empire, the most hated and feared of Israel’s oppressors. Not too surprising, we discover shortly that Jonah is unwilling to go there. As a Hebrew he might have felt fear, hatred or contempt in response to the Assyrians.

But God’s message, meanwhile, is crying out against the city of Nineveh and its great wickedness. We are told here that while Jonah’s succinct sermon (Jonah 3:4) was a promise of destruction, the very fact that God sent the prophet to cry out is a sign of divine mercy. If the Lord had really wanted to destroy Nineveh, no warning would have been given.

Now, the exact location of Tarshish is unknown, but it is widely assumed to have been a destination in the Western Mediterranean. But wherever Tarshish may have been, we do know that Jonah boarded a ship headed west, presumably “away from the presence of the Lord.” In sharp contrast to Jonah, the psalmist knew that it was impossible to escape the presence of God (Psalm 139:7-12).

Scholars relate that the prophet of God would not do the Lord’s bidding, the forces of nature did. It is most noteworthy that God neither ignored Jonah’s disobedience nor punished it. Rather, the Lord simply made Jonah’s disobedience difficult, which is a beautiful thing. Meanwhile, we can assume that like Nineveh, if God has really intended to destroy the ship, it would have been destroyed. The danger only serves to urge repentance and obedience.

As the storm hits, all hands are on deck with the exception of Jonah. Everyone else is doing his part while Jonah is asleep and absent. In their fears, the sailors seek both a natural and supernatural rescue. The captain also insists that Jonah do his part as well.

Since the underlying paradigm was that the world was filled with many gods, it is only natural that all available gods would be called on to deliver the ship. The captain and his crew were trying everything.
Scholars inform us that casting lots is represented in Scripture as a commonly accepted means of discernment. In this case the sailors used the method to identify who was at fault for the storm. Jonah was found out, and so they questioned him, desperate to find the reason for their trouble and a solution for it. It all becomes clear to Jonah for he knows the truth. Then it was that he tells them who he is and who God is. He admits that he is the cause of the trouble, and he even offers the solution. Jonah understands that God is targeting him and not the ship. Therefore, as soon as he is thrown overboard, the ship will be safe.

Following Jonah’s admission, it is amazing that the endangered sailors do not immediately seize the opportunity to escape their difficulties. They are not so concerned in saving themselves that they will sacrifice this stranger, even with his okay. They try everything else, but to their credit they are reluctant to throw overboard a fellow human being.

However, when it became obvious that Jonah’s proposal was the only solution, still the sailors performed the act out of absolute necessity. And as scholars attests, as evidence of a certain conversion, these sailors do not repent before their own gods for what they are about to do. Rather, they appeal to Jonah’s God, acknowledging the Lord’s sovereignty in the entire matter.

As the story continues, Jonah’s proposed solution works. When he is thrown overboard, the sea becomes calm and the ship is safe. And that reality prompts those on board the ship to worship and make commitments to the Lord.

Interestingly, scholars point out that within the larger context of the whole story of Jonah, we notice that unbelievers are more responsive to the Lord than the prophet himself. Jonah was disobedient at the beginning and cranky at the end. However, the sailors with whom he had contact came to faith and obedience. And in similar fashion, as seen in chapter 3, the dreaded Ninevites also hastily turn to the Lord in response to Jonah’s message.

Finally, we are informed that just as the wind, sea, and storm were at God’s bidding, so, too, are the fish. All of creation is seen as under the Lord’s authority and instruments of the divine will. And further, realizing the profound faith of the pagan sailors, we see that it is Jonah, God’s own prophet, who emerges from Chapter 1 as the lone rebel against the will of God.

**Lots of Causes**

One of the central questions that comes out of the story of Jonah is “why?” Why did this calamity happen, or more accurately, why did this calamity happen to me? Seems that human beings have struggled with this question forever.

Why does this person enjoy good health most of his/her life, while that other poor soul suffers one calamity after another? Why does he live to a ripe old age, while she dies before her time? Diseases, accidents, disasters – so many troubles and surprises prompt us to wonder why.
As we all know, the closer to home the trouble is the more intense the question becomes. While we are mindful and concerned about calamities that occur far away, the question is more theoretical in nature. But when that calamity hits us or someone we love, then the need to know is much more urgent.

According to scholars, we meet with two extremes in trying to capture the role of God in the affairs of this world and of our lives. On the one end, there are those who believe that God causes everything. While on the other end, there are those that believe God causes nothing. And it is this latter growing conviction that is dominant in our modern and postmodern Western mind. Everything can be explained scientifically. The cause is found in astronomy or biology or genetics or other. For this group, the explanation for the storm in Jonah is meteorological, not theological.

Now, at the other extreme are those who believe or assume that God causes everything. This position can most often be heard at funerals. “The Lord took him” or “it was just God’s will,” they’ll say of the deceased, whether the cause of death was old age, a deadly disease, or a drunk driver. The certainty that God causes whatever happens helps them to feel more at peace with the situation. Note, however, that it may cause them to feel less at peace with God.

Getting back to the sailors on Jonah’s boat, they cast their lots because they didn’t believe in chance. They believed that those ancient dice revealed real answers to their peril. And going on 3,000 years later, we don’t want to believe in chance, either. We want to believe that there is a reason why things happen. So regardless of where we look for the answer – lots, science or in the heavens – we are all asking why.

**The Human Why**

As scholars assert, the ancients were perhaps more inclined than our generation to attribute happenings to divine causation. Likewise, the ancient peoples also understand human responsibility and causation.

“What is this that you have done?” the fearful sailors asked Jonah (1:10). These sailors didn’t doubt that the storm came from a god, but they reckoned that that god had a reason for sending the storm. And the lots had pointed to Jonah as the culprit.

Now, this brings up another very significant question. What role do we play in the troubles we experience? How much of a cause are we in the effect?

We are reminded that the story of Jonah presents us with some interesting insights into this matter of the human role in calamities. Specifically, we see three different case studies. First, there is Jonah. Second, there are his traveling companions en route to Tarshish. And third, there are the Ninevites.

Jonah’s circumstance is the easiest to understand. He disobeyed God and brought trouble on himself. We do not feel particularly sorry for Jonah. Here, our sense of justice is not offended.

The sailors, on the other hand, are a different situation. They face calamity, yet they themselves are innocent. The Bible doesn’t pull any punches about the realities of this world. We know full well how the
deeds of some can cause the suffering of others. 9/11 is a noted example. Human wickedness or foolishness almost always has a victim, and too often is an innocent victim.

Then there is the case of the Ninevites. For the most part, they are the opposite of the sailors and the most bothersome to Jonah. They are the guilty people, known for their cruelty and wickedness. And yet, at the story’s conclusion, they are forgiven. They seemingly go unpunished, and it galls Jonah that they don’t get what they have coming to them.

The Best Reason Why

Mainly, the story of Jonah is about the role of God. The narrative does not back away from attributing storms and fish, wind and waves, plants and worms to the work of the Lord. And the humans involved do not doubt God’s participation in their affairs.

But, as noted previously, the modern mind might reel at such assertions. Some even decry the story of Jonah as superstitious and naïve. Yet, as scholars point out, the objection is mostly rooted in a doubt about God’s existence rather than a doubt about divine activity or a concern for the laws of nature. Just as I break no laws of nature when I pick-up a rock and throw it, surely God has the capacity and prerogative to hurl a great wind or even send a fish to do his bidding.

As scholars make clear what we really have in the story of Jonah is not merely a glimpse into the activity of God but into the heart of God. We are reminded that the Lord sends Jonah to Nineveh to warn the city, which is an act of mercy. The Lord causes a storm to chasten Jonah. This, too, is a kindness, for either ignoring or destroying the disobedient prophet would have been unloving. The Lord spares the sailors, which turn into believers and worshipers. The Lord gives Jonah a second chance to obey. And, in addition, the Lord pardons the penitent Ninevites (3:10).

In summary, God is a very active cause of many effects in the story of Jonah. And as we grasp the heart behind that activity, we will discover the best answer to the most important “why.” As we are informed, it is not necessarily an answer to why everything happens, but it is an answer to why God does everything that God does. Because of love.

Action Plan

1. What is your answer to those who say that God causes everything or that God causes nothing?
2. How does God respond when human behavior causes calamity?

*Dr. Hal Brady is a retired pastor who continues to present the Good News of Jesus Christ and offer encouragement in a fresh and vital way though Hal Brady Ministries.*
Spring Quarter: God Loves Us
Unit 3: God’s Pervasive and Sustaining Love

Sunday school lesson for the week of May 14, 2017
By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: Jonah 2

Last week, we saw Jonah resist a call from God to go and preach in Nineveh. In fact, he boarded a ship and fled in the opposite direction. But God sent a frightening storm to trouble the ship, which was the vehicle of Jonah’s attempted escape. However, Jonah recognized the hand of God in the storm and advised his fellow travelers to throw him into the sea. As a result of the sailors taking action, the storm was stilled.

Meanwhile, the Lord sent a great fish to swallow Jonah. And as we are reminded, this could be the prophet’s transport back to where he belonged.

Though the trip back to where he belonged was geographical alright, more importantly, it was spiritual. Even if Jonah had never left his house, the reality was that he had turned his back and walked away from God. For sure, he needed to come back.

Scholars recall the old adage that there are “no atheists in foxholes.” Similarly, perhaps there are no atheists in fish bellies either. Important to note! Peril inspires prayer.

We are advised that Jonah’s prayer is written in poetic form, and the chief hallmark of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. Whatever else parallelism may mean, it always involves the repetition of an idea. As scholars note, we see that technique here in the phrases of verse 2. “I called” is paralleled by “I cried.” “Out of my distress” is matched by “out of the belly of Sheol.” And, “he answered me” is balanced by “you heard my voice.”

A central thought in our scripture passage is the phrase “Out of my distress,” for so often that is the place from which we call out to the Lord. Jonah characterizes that distress as “the belly of Sheol.” Belly, indeed. Sheol was the Hebrew term for the place of the dead. But while some translations render it “hell,” scholars state that it was not generally understood as a place of punishment so much as a place of nothingness. “Sheol” is also translated grave, which is probably where Jonah understood himself to be.

In verse 3, Jonah acknowledges that his situation is the chastening action of God. The prophet’s language may sound accusatory, but at some level it is a very positive affirmation. Just as King David wanted only a calamity that put him in the hands of the Lord (2 Samuel 24:14), Jonah was in the good place of knowing that God was in charge of his fate.

But then, like us sometimes, Jonah assumes the passive voice and says, “I am driven away,” he prays. Yet, we know that was not the case at all. He was no more driven away from God’s presence than the prodigal son was driven away from his father’s house.
Scholars inform us that the longing for God’s Temple is a common expression in the Old Testament. It was especially associated with the presence of the Lord. In Jonah’s case, therefore, the matters are synonymous in his heart. He feels that he is at a distance from God, and he cannot imagine even getting back to the Temple again from where he is.

But as we continue with the story and hear the descriptive picturesque language, we see Jonah sinking, deep into the waters of the Mediterranean. He figures he is a goner. However, it is then that the Lord spares Jonah, delivering his life from the Pit. And since this testimony does not come from dry land, we recognize that the fish is God’s means of salvation.

According to scholars, “Remembered” is a richly meaningful term in Scripture. It is not merely the opposite of forgetting. Rather, it assumes the actions that naturally follows from what is being remembered. Hence, it is sufficient for the Lord to command Israel to “remember the Sabbath day” (Exodus 20:8). That is not simply making a mental note of the Sabbath, but living out a conscious recognition of the implications and practice of the Sabbath.

For Jonah, to remember the Lord, therefore, is for him to turn back to God. He prayed to the Lord. And while Jonah had earlier despaired of seeing the “holy temple” again, still he affirmed that his prayer reached God there.

While scholars do not know exactly what Jonah meant in verse 8, they do understand the spirit of what he meant. Ever since Eden, humankind has been faced with a choice. And that choice is a theme that runs all through Scripture (Deuteronomy 30:19; Proverbs 4:14-19; Matthew 7:13-14; Romans 8:5). And one element of that choice has always been deceptive, empty, and ultimately very costly.

One thing we humans tend to do is complement our repentance with promises when we say we’re sorry for something past. Usually, we add a promise that we’ll do better in the future. Scholars assert that practice is not necessary for the Lord, because it is not a prerequisite for God’s forgiveness. However, those same scholars declare it is necessary for us. It is right and appropriate that our contrition should be accompanied by new resolve. And so Jonah looks hopefully forward and promises God his thanksgiving, his sacrifices and his obedience.

In summary, we are now aware that God’s mission and the fish’s purpose are accomplished. Jonah is back where he belongs. He is now in line with the will and call of God, and he’s back on land.

**A Place to Pray**

Whatever the circumstance or situation, it is always the perfect time and place to pray. And Jonah is our example and bore witness to this truth.

Where was Jonah? As you know, he was in the fish’s belly, and there he despaired that he might never again see the Lord’s holy Temple. For sure, the Temple was the most appropriate and inspiring place for prayer. That’s easy to comprehend – its architecture, its elements and its symbols – all point to God. The worshiper senses the very presence of the Lord, just beyond the altar, hallowed by the curtain.
But Jonah was a long sea-mile from the Temple. No question! He was not surrounded by the beautiful enhancements of worship.

Quite the contrary, as scholars remind us, Jonah was surrounded by the sights and sounds of digestion. His setting was dark, slimy and unbearably smelly. What sort of place for prayer was that?

In reality, it was a perfect place for prayer! As I mentioned previously, peril inspires prayer. Trouble is a perfect place for prayer. That is also true for “need” and “desperation.”

Personally, I do my best praying out of need and desperation. The reason is, that at that point I move beyond self-reliance and lean solely on the Lord.

George Matherson, the British minister and hymn writer, knew the truth of that. “I sink in life’s alarms,” he sang, “when by myself I stand.” Jonah had tried to go it alone, to be by himself without the Lord. But when he began to sink, he reached out to God once again.

No doubt, the belly of the fish was a long way from the Temple in Jerusalem. However, it became a catalyst for God to change Jonah’s heart. God is always near. Therefore, the belly of the fish became a perfect place for prayer.

The late Kenneth Leach, Anglican clergyperson, wrote a book entitled “True Prayer.” In that book, he said, “In prayer, we are seeking to achieve a continuous state of recollection of and wakefulness to the reality and presence of God.” Any place is a good place to pray.

**Deliver Us from Evil**

For many of us, praying The Lord’s Prayer is a normal part of our worship services, and perhaps even our private lives. And as a part of that model prayer, we find the familiar petition: “Deliver us from evil.”

Now, there is something quite right about praying for deliverance even when we don’t see or sense any trouble. After all, our senses are not infallible and our very perception of evil is clouded. There is, therefore, more evil from which we need to be delivered than we probably know. And as scholars make clear, the story of Jonah illustrates very effectively for us how God endeavors to deliver us from all kinds of evil.

Jonah’s prayer for deliverance came in the belly of the fish. That unpleasant and scary place was the “evil” form which he longed to be saved. But, as we are told, that is a bit like calling 911 from the back of the ambulance. You see, the fish was already part of God’s project to save Jonah.

At this point, we need to see the bigger picture. We need to move beyond this episode in the fish’s belly and see how God worked to deliver from evil. The very first words of the whole story reflect God’s heart in this matter.

The first order of divine business, as you recall, was to deliver the people of Nineveh from their evil. For that purpose, God sent Jonah to preach to them. The next thing we know, however, is that Jonah himself
needs to be delivered from evil. And that evil is not the fish, but Jonah’s disobedience and attempted distance from God.

The storm is God’s effort to save Jonah. The fish is another part of God’s effort to save Jonah. And Jonah himself is meant to be an instrumental part of God’s effort to save Nineveh.

So Jesus taught the disciples to pray, among other things, that the Lord would deliver us from evil. This prayer of our Lord reflects our ongoing need. And without doubt, it also reflects the heart of God, for delivering us from evil is what the Lord is doing far more than we know.

Can I Get a Witness?

At some point, most of us have probably had a fish-belly story. The details, of course, are not the same as Jonah’s experience, but his experience serves as a metaphor for us. Most of us could probably share our individual versions of it. We know about living through a rough time. We know about calling out to God for help. And a number of us have stories to tell about God’s deliverance.

As scholars note, the interesting thing about some of these stories is that they are told with smiles. Even though they were filled with details of inconvenience, expenses, and even danger, still they were told with smiles and laughter. Why? Because the people had come out of the other side of those troubles, and the passage of time has turned their experience into funny stories.

But, for us, the final product is something even better than a funny story. Even though these troublesome experiences may have a humorous side, the deliverance of God turns them into testimonies.

Toward the end of his prayer, Jonah speaks “with the voice of thanksgiving” (2:9). Thanksgiving is always the avenue of testimony, you see. It may be accompanied by smiles or even tears, but thanksgiving always points to loving intervention of God. And in the end, as we are told and are aware, Jonah makes a declaration that can be echoed by multitudes. Jonah, his fellow sailors, the people of Nineveh, you and I – we may all join together in affirming, “Deliverance belongs to the Lord!” (2:9).

Action Plan

1. Where do you see God’s love in today’s portion of Jonah’s story?
2. God never abandoned Jonah, as evidenced by the sending of a great fish to rescue him. What experiences have you had (class members) that assure you that God loves you and will never abandon you?

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**Events in the South Georgia Conference – 5/1/2017 edition**
The Southwest District of the South Georgia Conference and Next Step Ministry is sponsoring a conference at Veterans Memorial State Park in Cordele, Ga., for clergy and laity May 4-6. The purpose will be to aid churches in attracting and engaging young people in our congregations. For more information visit the event website at www.swdistrictumc.org.

**Early Response Team and Chainsaw Training, Nashville – May 6**
An ERT and Chainsaw Training will be held Saturday, May 6 at Nashville UMC. The ERT training time is from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. and the chainsaw training time is from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. [Click here to register](#). Early Response Team Trainings help equip individuals and teams to respond in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. The cost for the training is $25 per participant. At the training, participants will receive an ERT Training Manual and upon completing the course will receive an UMCOR ID Badge and a T-shirt. Background checks are required before receiving badges. Please provide proof of background check. Safe Sanctuaries background checks are applicable. Lunch is also included in the cost. *Chainsaw training requirements: complete and pass ERT training offered in the morning or hold current ERT badge. Cost for chainsaw training only is $12. If taken following the ERT class in the morning $6. The cost includes your textbook and badge. This chainsaw training will be demonstration and lecture style. There must be six participants for a chainsaw course to make. To schedule an ERT training/chainsaw training, please contact Luis Morales at morhilll@gmail.com.*

**Early Response Team Training, Bainbridge – May 13**
An ERT Training will be held Saturday, May 13 at Bainbridge First UMC. The ERT training time is from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. [Click here to register](#). Early Response Team Trainings help equip individuals and teams to respond in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. The cost for the training is $25 per participant. At the training, participants will receive an ERT Training Manual and upon completing the course will receive an UMCOR ID Badge and a T-shirt. Background checks are required before receiving badges. Please provide proof of background check. Safe Sanctuaries background checks are applicable. Lunch is also included in the cost. To schedule an ERT training/chainsaw training, please contact Luis Morales at morhilll@gmail.com.

**Early Response Team Training, Macon – May 13**
An ERT Training will be held Saturday, May 13 at Mulberry Street UMC in Macon. The ERT training time is from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. [Click here to register](#). Early Response Team Trainings help equip individuals and teams to respond in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. The cost for the training is $25 per participant. At the training, participants will receive an ERT Training Manual and upon completing the course will receive an UMCOR ID Badge and a T-shirt. Background checks are required before receiving badges. Please provide proof of background check. Safe Sanctuaries background checks are applicable. Lunch is also included in the cost. To schedule an ERT training/chainsaw training, please contact Luis Morales at morhilll@gmail.com.

**Magnolia Manor Sunday – May 14**
Magnolia Manor is a ministry of The United Methodist Church and serves older adults of all faiths
throughout South Georgia. On this Special Sunday, South Georgia United Methodists are asked to take up a special offering to support this vital ministry. To learn more about Magnolia Manor visit www.magnoliamanor.com.

**Local Pastors’ Licensing School – May 18-27**
Local Pastors’ Licensing School is a “crash course” in being a pastor for those who want to be available for appointment to a church or charge as a licensed local pastor. Those who are licensed for pastoral ministry make a commitment to continue their education beyond Licensing School either through the 20 classes of the Basic Course of Study or through a Masters of Divinity degree from a United Methodist approved seminary. The 2017 Local Pastors’ Licensing School will be held May 18-27 on the campus of Emory University in Atlanta. The school is open only to certified candidates. Visit www.sgaumc.org/localpastorslicensingschool for more information.

**New Start for Moving Pastors Meeting – May 24**
The New Start for Moving Pastors meeting will be Wednesday, May 24 from 10:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. in the fellowship hall at Riverside UMC (735 Pierce Ave., Macon, GA 31204). Lunch will be provided. If you are a pastor moving this year, please let your district office know if you will be able to attend.

**2017 Annual Conference Session – June 4-7**
The Annual Conference Planning Committee and the Local Arrangements Committee are preparing for the 2017 Annual Conference Session, set for Sunday, June 4, through Wednesday, June 7, at the Jekyll Island Convention Center on Jekyll Island. Visit www.sgaumc.org/annualconference for full details.

**Clergy Spouses’ Luncheon at Annual Conference – June 5**
The Northeast District Spouses invite you to the Clergy Spouses’ Luncheon, “In The Garden,” Monday, June 5 at the Jekyll Island Convention Center. We will gather at noon and eat at 12:30. The cost is $20 per person and the deadline for reservations is May 12. Click here to download the flyer. Click here to register.

**Small Membership Church Leadership Luncheon - June 5**
Small churches play a vital role in the mission and ministry of the South Georgia Annual Conference. At the 2017 Annual Conference session, the South Georgia Annual Conference, Conference Board of Laity, and Connectional Ministries have partnered to provide a luncheon promoting ministry resources for small churches. Clergy and Laity are encouraged and invited to attend “Celebrating Small Church Leadership and Vitality,” the Small Church Leadership Luncheon at the 2017 South Georgia Conference Annual Conference. The luncheon is scheduled for Monday, June 5, at 12:30 p.m. at the Jekyll Island Convention Center. The cost is $10 per person, payable online or at the door. The registration deadline is May 15. Click here for more information and to register.

**Eagles’ Annual Conference Lunch – June 6**
Peace with Justice Sunday – June 11
Peace with Justice Sunday enables The United Methodist Church to have a voice in advocating for peace and justice through a broad spectrum of global programs. [Click here for resources to help promote this special Sunday.]

Camp Connect: High School Camp – June 12-16
The rumors are true! High School Camp is coming in 2017! Students entering grades 9-12 as well as graduating seniors are eligible for High School Camp. Tailored toward the unique time in a high school student's life, this week of camp is filled with fun activities and opportunities to grow closer to Christ though daily worship, Bible study, and fellowship. Campers will enjoy the beach, pool, art, hilarious morning shows, and evenings of camp-wide games and worship. Stay tuned as more activities are in the works! High School Camp is held at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island and will begin at 3:00 pm on Monday and conclude at 11:00 am on Friday (no lunch will be provided on Friday). Campers will stay in a cabin for the week. [Click here for a complete list of what to pack.] Counselors are provided. Make sure to read the camp policies before registering. Both the Camp Connect Policies and Procedures Form as well as a legible copy of the front/back of camper's insurance card are required for check-in. Contact the Office of Connectional Ministries at (912) 638-8626 with any questions. The deadline to register for High School Camp is May 30. [Click here to register.]

Wesley Glen Day – June 18
Every local church in South Georgia is encouraged to receive a special offering to support the ministry of Wesley Glen. To learn more about Wesley Glen and its great ministry, visit www.wesleyglenministries.com.

Camp Connect: Middle School Camp 1 – June 19-23
Middle School Camps, intended for rising 6th-8th grade students, are filled with a week’s worth of fun activities and opportunities to grow closer to Christ though daily worship, Bible study, and fellowship. Campers will enjoy the beach, pool, crafts, games galore, hilarious morning shows, and evenings of camp-wide games and worship. Both Middle School Camps are held at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island and will begin at 3:00 pm on Monday and conclude at 11:00 am on Friday (no lunch will be provided on Friday). Campers will stay in a cabin for the week. [Click here for a complete list of what to pack.] Counselors are provided. Please read the camp policies before registering. Both the Camp Connect Policies and Procedures Form as well as a legible copy of the front/back of camper's insurance card are required for check-in. Contact the Office of Connectional Ministries at (912) 638-8626 with any questions. The deadline to register for Middle School Camp 2 is June 5.

Dooly Kids Camp – June 21-24
Dooly Kids Camp, for elementary-age students who have completed third through fifth grades, is set for June 21-24, 2017, at Dooly Campground in Vienna, Ga. Kids Camp offers a chance for children to grow in their relationship with God, make new friends, experience independence, and spend time outside. This year's theme centers on kids' abilities to serve and God's faithfulness to use what they have to offer. This includes Bible studies on Bible characters who served God in spite of the odds. Activities include
swimming, kid-friendly Bible study, worship, prayer, field games, nature activities, art, cabin devotions, snacks, basketball, four square and more! Click here to download the brochure and register.

Camp Connect: Middle School Camp 2 – June 26-30
Middle School Camps, intended for rising 6th-8th 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, pool, crafts, games galore, hilarious morning shows, and evenings of camp-wide games and worship. Both Middle School Camps are held at Epworth By The Sea on St. Simons Island and will begin at 3:00 pm on Monday and conclude at 11:00 am on Friday (no lunch will be provided on Friday). Campers will stay in a cabin for the week. Click here for a complete list of what to pack. Counselors are provided. Please read the camp policies before registering. Both the Camp Connect Policies and Procedures Form as well as a legible copy of the front/back of camper's insurance card are required for check-in. Contact the Office of Connectional Ministries at (912) 638-8626 with any questions. The deadline to register for Middle School Camp 2 is June 12.

OBITUARIES

Mrs. Laren Gail Reincheld
Mrs. Reincheld was born on April 22, 1946, and passed away on Thursday, March 23, 2017.

Mrs Reincheld was a resident of Brunswick, Georgia at the time of passing.

Mr. Joel Bennett Avera
Joel Bennett Avera, 56, entered into eternal rest, joining his heavenly father on Monday April 17, 2017.

A celebration of Joel’s life was held Thursday April 20, 2017, at Corinth United Methodist Church. Interment was in the church cemetery. Pallbearers were Wesley Croley, Wally Croley, Wade Croley, Ric Croley, D.J. Croley, and Jonathan Wright.

Born in Atlanta, Ga., to the late Bennett and Shirley Avera of Wrens, Ga., Joel was an engineer draftsman for over 40 years. His love for the Lord fueled his desire to serve in ministry as a deacon, R.A. director, Sunday school teacher, choir member, praise band guitarist, and pastor spouse. He was a member of Corinth United Methodist Church. Survivors include his wife, Donna Croley Avera, daughters and son-in-law Renia (Casey) Hullander and Rachel Clements, granddaughters Kinsey, Kaitlynn, and Clair Clements; brother and sister-in-law Stephen (Catherine) Avera; uncle Lester Avera; and cousin Betsy (Charles) Milburn.

Scripture Readings – May 1
May 7
*Fourth Sunday of Easter*
Acts 2:42-47
Psalm 23 (UMH 754 or 137)
1 Peter 2:19-25
John 10:1-10

May 14
*Fifth Sunday of Easter*
Acts 7:55-60
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16 (UMH 764)
1 Peter 2:2-10
John 14:1-14

May 21
*Sixth Sunday of Easter*
Acts 17:22-31
Psalm 66:8-20 (UMH 790)
1 Peter 3:13-22
John 14:15-21

Retired Clergy Birthdays – May 2017

5/01 – Jacque Asbel: 4116 Amberley Trail; Valdosta, GA 31602
5/01 – John Beck: 1210 Tribble Rd.; Ft. Valley, GA 31030
5/02 – Henry Erwin: 530 Liberty St.; Waynesboro, GA 30830
5/03 – Rick Turner: 11 Niblick Court; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
5/08 – Thomas Teate: PO Box 328; Unadilla, GA 31091
5/12 – William Willis, Jr.: 2021 Bernhurst Dr.; Knoxville, TN 37918
5/13 – Mabel Waye: 1838 Kinlaw Rd.; Woodbine, GA 31569
5/14 – Donald Clark: 197 Cubbedge Dr.; Rincon, GA 31326
5/14 – Marshall Howell: PO Box 658; Midway, GA 31320
5/14 – Kenneth Watkins: 170 Sanford St.; Wadley, GA 30477
5/15 – Jack McCollough, Jr.: PO Box 457; Woodbine, GA 31569
5/15 – Dan Smith: PO Box 188; Lumpkin, GA 31815
5/19 – Ronnie Howell: 32 Vanceville Co. Line Rd.; Tifton, GA 31794
5/20 – Franklin Pierce: 602 Ft. King George Dr.; Darien, GA 31305
5/21 – Beau Taylor: 109 Lady Huntington Dr.; St. Simons Island, GA 31522
5/23 – Jeri Pruette: 2188 Peacock Rd.; Quitman, GA 31643
5/28 – Richard Newton: 1823 Kaufman Circle; The Villages, FL 32159
5/29 – Marsha Emery: 3855 Dennis Creek Road; Talbotton, GA 31827
5/30 – Marvin Goodman: 97 Maple Ridge Dr.; Ray City, GA 31645