Annual Conference to vote on five constitutional amendments

One of the major items of business during the 2017 Annual Conference session is the consideration of five constitutional amendments.

Voters will consider changes that address matters of gender equality, inclusiveness in membership, delegate and bishop elections, as well as bishop accountability. For an in-depth story about the amendments, scroll down or click here.

All five amendments were approved by a two-thirds vote of the 2016 General Conference and now must be ratified by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the aggregate number of voting annual members. These amendments will be voted on at every annual conference session across the connection.

Monday afternoon, Conference Secretary Dr. Jay Harris will present a brief overview of the amendments.

Balloting on the amendments will take place Tuesday morning, June 6.

The results of the balloting will not be announced during the South Georgia Annual Conference session. The vote count on each amendment will be forwarded to the Secretary of the Council of Bishops, who will collect results from the whole Church. Final certification of the results occurs at the fall meeting of the Council of Bishops, and the results will be announced then.

Click here to download Section 2 – Constitutional Amendments of the Book of Recommendations and Reports

5 constitutional amendments head to vote

By Heather Hahn

General Conference delegates had their say last year. Now, it’s up to annual conference voters to determine whether five amendments will become part of The United Methodist Church’s constitution.
In the coming months, the voters will consider changes that address matters of gender equality, inclusiveness in membership, delegate and bishop elections, as well as bishop accountability.

To be ratified, a constitutional amendment first requires at least a two-thirds vote at General Conference, which happened in May 2016. Then, it must win at least a two-thirds majority of the total voters at annual conferences around the world.

The voting starts at the Liberia Conference, scheduled for Feb. 13-19, and will continue through potentially early next year, depending on when annual conferences schedule their meetings. The Council of Bishops will certify the results at its next meeting after the voting concludes.

Here is an overview of the amendments in the order submitted to annual conference voters.

**Gender equality**

This amendment declares, “men and women are of equal value in the eyes of God.” It goes on to say that maleness and femaleness are characteristics of human bodies, not the divine. It also asserts that The United Methodist Church will “seek to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, whether in organizations or in individuals, in every facet of its life and in society at large.”

The amendment, if ratified, would become the new Paragraph 6 in the Book of Discipline, the denomination’s governing document. Subsequent constitutional paragraphs would be renumbered. General Conference approved the measure by a vote of 746 to 56.

Carol Napier, a Sunday school teacher for 17 years at Glenn Memorial United Methodist Church in the North Georgia Conference, submitted the amendment.

“I hope that this amendment will help churches remember that girls and women are of equal worth to boys and men because everyone is made in the image of God,” she said. “I believe that when churches remember and live out of this truth in all of their ministries, then villages, cities and even nations will be transformed to reflect Jesus’ perfect love for all of us.”

**Inclusion in membership**

If adopted, this amendment would add gender, ability, age and marital status to the list of characteristics that do not bar people from membership in the church. Specifically, the amended Paragraph 4 would say that no member shall be “denied access to an equal place in the life, worship and governance of the Church because of race, color, gender, national origin, ability, age, marital status or economic condition.”

The vote at General Conference was 509 to 242.

The United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women submitted the amendment and put together a site seeking to answer frequently asked questions about the changes. For example, the agency
notes that gender refers simply to men and women. The amendment also has the support of United Methodist Women, Discipleship Ministries and the DisAbility Ministries Committee.

“Paragraph IV, Article 4 protects people in The United Methodist Church against discrimination in membership based on age, gender, marital status and ability, while still protecting exclusivity in groups like United Methodist Women, youth groups and singles ministries, to name a few,” said Dawn Wiggins Hare, top executive of the Status and Role of Women agency. “We are enthusiastically supporting the ratification of this amendment for the betterment of The United Methodist Church.”

Delegate elections

This amendment to Paragraph 34 specifies that elections of delegates to General Conference as well as jurisdictional and central conference meetings will include open nominations from the floor at annual conference sessions. The measure also calls for the election of delegates “by a minimum of a simple majority of the ballots cast.”

General Conference supported the amendment by a vote of 767 to 22.

Paul Clinton Law of the Democratic Republic of the Congo submitted the amendment. The current provision in Paragraph 13 states that delegates “shall be elected in a fair and open process by the annual conferences.” Law said that is “unduly vague in some cultures without a democratic tradition.”

Bishop elections

This amendment to Paragraph 46 states that central conferences are to elect bishops at a regular, not an extra session of the central conference “except where an unexpected vacancy must be filled.” General Conference voted for the change by 621 to 15.

Lonnie D. Brooks, a member of the Alaska Conference, said the amendment aims to treat bishop elections in the central conferences — church regions in Africa, Asia and Europe — in much the same way they are treated in U.S. jurisdictions.

When bishops are elected in a special session, he said, “some of the delegates who would be present at the regular session will either not be present at a special session or will be placed in a hardship condition by the call of a session for the purpose of electing bishops.”

Bishop accountability

Under this amendment to Paragraph 50, General Conference can adopt provisions for the Council of Bishops to hold individual bishops accountable. General Conference approved the amendment by 715 to 79.

The Western Pennsylvania Conference submitted the legislation to address a ruling by the denomination’s top court, the Judicial Council. That ruling holds that it is unconstitutional for the
Council of Bishops to hold its members accountable. Currently, any complaints against bishops are to be handled in the jurisdictions or central conferences where they are elected.

The Rev. Robert Zilhaver, who wrote the legislation, said the goal is to keep primary responsibility for a bishops’ accountability where they are elected, while also creating a mechanism for the Council of Bishops to step in for global accountability if needed. Zilhaver is the senior pastor of DuBois Lakeside United Methodist Church in Pennsylvania.

“It moves us to a position, where in our church we might hold ourselves accountable for a sin that rises to global expressions,” he said, pointing to the example of a bishop holding slaves, which led to the denomination’s split in 1844. At the same time, he said, he wants to protect “cultural expressions from being labeled a sin and being prosecuted.”

Conference to consider, vote on three resolutions

Three resolutions have been presented for consideration and vote by the 2017 South Georgia Annual Conference. Resolutions, once approved by the Annual Conference, are statements that represent the position of the conference on a subject.

The first, a “Resolution in support of a Coordinated Action on Behalf of Undocumented Neighbors,” was written and submitted by South Georgia Hispanic pastors and allies. It calls on the presiding bishop to form a task force to develop a strategy to educate clergy and laity about the history of immigration and human and civil rights concerning undocumented members of society and to encourage South Georgia United Methodists to engage in works of piety and mercy towards their undocumented neighbors.

A portion of the resolution states “…we, the Hispanic/Latino pastors and allies of the South Georgia Conference, call on the presiding Bishop of the Annual Conference to form a specific task force for the purpose of developing a strategy to provide education to the members of the South Georgia Conference, both clergy and laity, about the history of immigration throughout the centuries and human and civil rights concerning our undocumented members. And to encourage members of our South Georgia United Methodist churches who so choose to engage in concrete Wesleyan works of piety and mercy – seeking justice, ending discrimination and addressing the needs of the poor – on behalf of our undocumented neighbors.”

The second resolution, “A Resolution Regarding the Report to the Bishop and Cabinet Form,” was written and submitted by Revs. Garth Duke-Barton, David Wood, Michael Finn, Tammy Fincannon, Randy Mosely, and Rebecca Duke-Barton. It aims to revise the current “Report to the Bishop and Cabinet” form with language that attempts to lengthen appointments and lessen anxiety surrounding potential appointment changes.
“The reasoning behind the resolution is fairly simple,” said Rev. Garth Duke-Barton. “Knowing that both the church and the pastor agreed to the itinerate system when we became United Methodist, the apportionive process can still create feelings of angst and pain for the clergy and the church, especially if a move is requested early in the ministry. Our hope with this resolution is to rethink the process of the form mailed each year to the church and pastor such that we would lovingly create longer and healthier tenures for pastors and churches.”

South Georgia’s Advocacy Discipleship Team submitted the third resolution, the “Multiculturalism Taskforce Resolution,” which resolves that the bishop appoint a diverse task force to consider the implications of multiculturalism education.

“It is clear that Jesus wanted his disciples not only to stay committed to God, but also to one another,” said Rev. Ashley Randall, a member of the Advocacy Team and pastor of Garden City United Methodist Church. “At the heart of the commandment to love one another is the reminder that all of us are made in the image of our creator. Paul was committed to reminding the early Christian community that faith in Jesus Christ makes us all children of God. We are all part of the same family because of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. It is as though all former classifications have been eliminated. That is not what we experience in our current cultural context, either in the church or in our wider social settings. We believe the church has an opportunity and a responsibility to initiate conversations which may help us recognize and affirm our common identity as children of God, and move us to discover ways to accept and honor one another. It is time for the people of God to build the kind of loving relationships Christ envisioned.”

The resolutions will be presented to the annual conference Monday afternoon, June 5.

Read the resolutions in their entirety here.

South Georgia Conference Chancellor serves on Judicial Council

South Georgia Conference Chancellor W. Warren Plowden, Jr., a member of Vineville United Methodist Church in Macon, is for the second quadrennium serving on The United Methodist Church’s Judicial Council, the denomination’s highest judicial body.

He was first elected fifth lay alternate during the 2012 General Conference session, held in Tampa, Fla. and elected for a second consecutive term, this time as first lay alternate, during the 2016 General Conference session in Portland, Ore.

In what was arguably the most highly publicized and divisive case to be heard by the Judicial Council, the court recently heard a petition from the South Central Jurisdiction about the legality of an election of a gay bishop.
Representatives of both positions argued their case before the Judicial Council during their spring session, April 25-28, in Newark, New Jersey.

In a concurring and dissenting opinion, Plowden, sitting for council member Beth Capen, said that the Judicial Council does have jurisdiction and further concluded that the Western Jurisdiction “knew full well that it was acting unlawfully when it elected a self-avowed practicing homosexual as a bishop of the church.”

Plowden said the Western Jurisdiction’s action “negated, ignored and violated provisions of The Discipline and is null, void and of no effect resulting in the invalidation of Karen Oliveto’s episcopal office.”

He decided to write the opinion because he didn’t agree with the way the majority opinion had ruled regarding whether or not the Judicial Council has authority over a jurisdiction.

“I didn’t agree with the way the working draft was handling the jurisdiction question,” he said. “So I wrote my version of that, and I also did not agree with the conclusion that Bishop Oliveto was entitled to all of these protections under the constitution and the discipline and there would have to be a charge brought to review her status as a bishop. I concluded that she never became a bishop, that what the Western Jurisdiction did was null and void.”

While the two weeks the Judicial Council sits each year – one in April and one in August – are strenuous and exhausting – Plowden says they do make their time together about more than just legal proceedings.

“We try to make it as worshipful an experience as possible,” he said, stating that they start each week with Holy Communion and begin each morning with a devotion. “We try to keep focus on why we are there and what we are about.”

Andrew College receives final approval for registered nursing degree program

Andrew College passed the final hurdle in the process of creating an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) program. On Monday, May 3, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS) approved the program and have included it in the scope of the current Andrew College accreditation.

Dr. Linda R. Buchanan, president of Andrew College, expressed her profound thanks to donors, the Board of Trustees, clinical partners and others who have stood behind the College as it worked to bring the critically needed nursing program to the underserved rural area of Southwest Georgia.

She said, “The process of developing a new program is long and arduous. I am so pleased that SACS has given us final approval so that we can move ahead with bringing badly needed programming to our area.”
We have received so much support from the community and our clinical partners, some who have requested that we send all of our nursing graduates to them!”

President Buchanan added that “Andrew College is moving full steam ahead with fall 2017 nursing enrollment. We currently have 35-36 students accepted into the fall program, with another 10 on the waiting list. The next academic year will be an exciting one, as we work to educate new nurses for our communities.”

The first nursing course to be offered fall 2017 is Foundations of Nursing. Students must have already taken Anatomy & Physiology 1, a pre-requisite course prior to acceptance.

Dr. Joan Darden, Andrew College professor of nursing, said “I am very pleased that the Andrew College nursing program has been granted final approval by SACS. The nursing program fits into the mission of Andrew College as it strives to meet the region’s needs. Therefore, it is an exciting time not only for Andrew College but for the region, as well. We will take great pride in offering this excellent program to our students.”

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the registered nurse workforce in the United States is expected to grow by 16 percent through 2024, making it one of the top professions in terms of job growth. Statewide in Georgia and particularly in Southwest Georgia, the demand is even greater.

Cokesbury unveils new Ministry Resource Center at Annual Conferences

Cokesbury has announced that it is bringing a new consultative retail experience to Annual Conferences this year with the new Cokesbury Ministry Resource Center. Focused on equipping leaders to build disciples, the Ministry Resource Center will offer the opportunity for more personalized consultations with church leaders in order to match products with their specific ministry needs.

Features of the Ministry Resource Center include:

- Showcases highlighting new and classic resources ranging from adult and children’s curriculum to church-wide stewardship and Bible studies – all available for review and ordering.

- A robust selection of additional new titles and best sellers available on-site for immediate purchase featuring the Bishop’s “picks,” speaker’s books, and UMC official resources, new titles, and best sellers.

- Consultation areas where church leaders can meet with trained consultants regarding ministry needs including studies, curriculum, robes, signs, sanctuary furnishings, and much more.

- An ordering kiosk with access to titles unique to each conference as well as resources not
included in the Ministry Resource Center.

- Free shipping on all orders placed at Annual Conferences on regularly stocked merchandise.

“We are excited to bring this new approach to each annual conference,” said the Rev. Brian K. Milford, president and publisher of The United Methodist Publishing House. “In previous years, up to 80 percent of purchases were from only 20 percent of the titles displayed. The new approach will showcase products that are intentionally selected for each location and focused on equipping your church leaders for ministry.”

God is doing a new thing

FOCUS ON THE VISION
DENISE WALTON

“Do not call to mind the former things, or ponder things of the past. Behold, I will do something new, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, rivers in the desert.” Isaiah 43:18-19 NASB

The summer is quickly approaching and many local churches will brace for the impact of fewer people in weekly worship and perhaps a lighter bottom line to contributions. Ministries which fail to plan for the summer lulls can find a plethora of things to take into consideration.

The month of May is a great time to consider new and creative ways to be supportive of the families in your church and community during the summer months. Here are a few things to consider:

- Invite leaders including children and youth to develop a resource that helps to keep families connected to the local church during the summer.
- Start small and be creative with resources such as a simple prayer journal.
- Remember, technology can offer a variety of ways to stay connected; invite the youth to explore ideas with adult leadership.

*If you wish to move mountains tomorrow, you must start by lifting stones today.* – African Proverb

May this summer bear witness in your local church that God is doing something new!

Shalom,

Denise Walton

*Rev. Denise Walton serves as the Assistant to the Bishop for Connectional Ministries. Contact her at denise@sgaumc.org.*
The Immigrant’s Creed

HISPANIC NEWS
REV. DANIEL MEDINA

Rev. Daniel Medina, pastor of Nueva Vida United Methodist Church in Macon and associate director of Connectional Ministries for Hispanic Ministries, presents the text below as a Christian reflection and statement in the midst of the political conversation in which we live. This creed has been part of the Hispanic liturgy in the recent years and expresses hope in a future where we all live in reconciliation and peace, “as it is in heaven.” Rev. Medina prays that it moves hearts to pray for and love our immigrant brothers and sisters.

I believe in almighty God, who guided his people in exile and exodus, the God of Joseph in Egypt and of Daniel in Babylon, the God of foreigners and immigrants.

I believe in Jesus Christ, a displaced Galilean, who was born away from his people and his home, who had to flee the country with his parents when his life was in danger, and who, upon returning to his own country, had to suffer the oppression of the tyrant Pontius Pilate, the servant of a foreign power. He was persecuted, beaten, and finally tortured, accused and condemned to death unjustly. But on the third day, this scorned Jesus rose from the dead, not as a foreigner but to offer us citizenship in heaven.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the eternal immigrant from God’s kingdom among us, who speaks all languages, lives in all countries, and reunites all races.

I believe that the Church is the secure home for all foreigners and believers who constitute it, who speak the same language, and have the same purpose.

I believe that the communion of the saints begins when we accept the diversity of the saints. I believe in the forgiveness, which makes us all equal, and in the reconciliation which identifies us more than does race, language or nationality. I believe that in the resurrection, God will unite us as one people in which all are distinct and all are alike at the same time.

I believe in life eternal beyond this world, where no one will be an immigrant or undocumented but all will be citizens of God’s kingdom that has no end. Amen.

- From FIESTA CRISTIANA, a United Methodist resource for Hispanic worship

El Credo del Inmigrante

Creo en Dios todopoderoso, quien guio a su pueblo durante el éxodo y en el exilio, el Dios de José en Egipto y de Daniel en Babilonia, el Dios de los extranjeros y los inmigrantes.
Creo en Jesucristo, el galileo desplazado, que nació lejos de su hogar y de su gente; que tuvo que huir de su país con sus padres porque su vida corría peligro, y cuando regreso del exilio tuvo que sufrir la opresión del tirano Poncio Pilato, servidor de un imperio extranjero; que fue perseguido, injuriado y finalmente torturado; fue acusado y condenado a muerte en un juicio injusto. Sin embargo, al tercer día, ese Jesús despreciado resucitó de la muerte, no como extranjero sino para ofrecernos la ciudadanía de los cielos.

Creo en el Espíritu Santo, el inmigrante eterno del reino de Dios entre nosotros, quien habla todas las lenguas, habita en todos los países y reúne a todas las razas. Creo en la Iglesia como un hogar seguro para todo extranjero y creyente que la forman, quienes hablan un mismo idioma y tienen el mismo propósito.

Creo que la comunión de los santos comienza cuando aceptamos la diversidad de los santos. Creo en el perdón que nos hace a todos iguales, y en la reconciliación que nos identifica mucho más que la raza, el idioma o la nacionalidad. Creo que Dios, en la resurrección, nos reúne a todos como a un solo pueblo en el que todos somos distintos pero iguales al mismo tiempo.

Creo en la vida eterna más allá de este mundo, en la cual nadie será inmigrante o indocumentado sino todos ciudadanos del reino de Dios que no tendrá fin.

- Tomado de Fiesta Cristiana, un recurso de la Iglesia Metodista Unida para la adoración

Rev. Daniel Medina serves as pastor of Nueva Vida United Methodist Church in Macon and associate director of Connectional Ministries for Hispanic Ministries.

A note to graduates

Dr. Hal Brady

Congratulations to all 2017 high school graduates! Graduation from high school is a notable milestone, and you are to be congratulated upon reaching this very significant moment in your life and in the life of your family. In your transition from student to graduate, our nation is once again blessed with renewed creativity and the blessing of youthful idealism.

With two of our own grandchildren graduating this year, I am particularly mindful of the significance of this moment. With a sort of beaming pride, I want to share a few thoughts with them, but also with others who have reached this high moment.

Before going further, however, I hope all of you will keep in mind that graduation is Commencement. To commence is not to end but to begin. As Carol Burnett once put it, “We don’t stop going to school when we graduate.” Of course, she’s talking about being a life-long learner.
But after all the congratulations and celebrations have quieted down, a good place to begin is with a “productive pause.” Louis O. Caldwell, psychotherapist and author, coined that phrase and reminded us that “pauses” were a vital part of Jesus’ earthly life. The idea is that Jesus paused again and again to restore and enlarge his perspective.

A pause at this time might just be the ticket to help you think through the great expectations of a diploma bearer. As a matter of fact, a leading educator of our time said, “A high school diploma is heavy. It is heavy with expectations.” And it is!

One expectation is that the diploma bearer will be something rather than have something! Who you are is far more important than what you do or accomplish. Every day adds to the importance and seriousness of this word, integrity. Integrity means wholeness, soundness, honesty, consistency, character.

A gentleman shared with me an admirable testimony to his personal honor and integrity. In another state he had refused to sell his vote for great personal gain in a large business transaction. He commented, “Eventually, because of it, I lost my job. But I can still look myself in the mirror, and I like what I see.” No price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning oneself.

A second expectation is that the diploma bearer will be an asset to society rather than a liability! Someone commented, “It is very commendable that many of our graduates will start out in the world with high ideals, great hopes and strong determination to serve humankind. But what these young graduates are going to find in the world is something else. Today’s graduates should be told that in the world morality, honesty and conscience are colored a nasty grey.” And as we continue to read about all the scandals, swindles and hackings in the world we know that to be true.

What is an asset anyway? An asset is something or someone having value – someone who makes better, contributes, gives, supports, challenges, encourages, affirms, and who keeps on keeping on. Above all, an asset is someone who makes better.

A third expectation is that the diploma bearer will be grateful rather than insensitive! Who are the happy people? Better still, who are the glad people? They are the grateful people. I have never seen a glad person who was not also a grateful person.

In your gratitude, you will be a better student, citizen, employee, mate, friend, and person. On the other hand, insensitivity leads to feelings of entitlement, selfishness, irresponsibility, increased burdens, blaming others, and whining. Gratitude leads to gladness.

And a fourth expectation is that the diploma bearer will bring the best he or she has to the highest he or she knows! We are told in God’s word to “set our affections on things above.” In other words, give your heart to something, fasten your feelings on something high enough to hold them. And if I may, I would like to suggest that the only person high enough to hold your finest affections is God.
When the young Michelangelo announced that he wanted to become a sculptor, a master sculptor said to him, “My son, this will take your life,” to which young Michelangelo answered, “What else is life for?” Well, whatever life is for, it is to be strong in our commitment to God and the higher things.

Yes, that diploma is heavy. It is, indeed, heavy with expectations. Again, congratulations on your graduation. We are all so proud of you, and thanks for listening.

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.

God’s Love for Ninevah

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

Sunday school lesson for the week of May 21, 2017
By Dr. Hal Brady

Lesson Scripture: Jonah 3
Background Scripture: Nahum 1-3

As we are aware, communities today are wrecked with separation and violence. What can bring people together to live in wholeness and peace? The scripture lesson points out that when the people of Nineveh repented, God brought peace and wholeness through divine love.

Review of Jonah scripture lesson

1. What does God tell Jonah? (Jonah 3:1-3)
   That the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time is symbolical of the entire story. Jonah did not respond properly the first time, yet God spoke to him a second time. And as we are reminded, the second chance given to Jonah anticipates the second chance given to the city of Nineveh.

   We see also that the book of Jonah identifies Nineveh as a “great city” three different times (1:2; 3:2; 4:11). Evidently, the phrase seems to refer to the city’s physical size (3:3) and population (4:11). Also, during its golden age, Nineveh had an abundance of wealth, architecture, and culture.

2. What does Jonah tell the people and how do they respond?
   Note that Jonah’s message is brief, yet evokes a tremendous response within the city of Nineveh. Fasting and wearing sackcloth are common symbols of both mourning and repentance in Scripture. Wisely, the people of Nineveh are genuine in their repentance. And we also observe how comprehensive their response is, ranging all the way from their king to their animals. It is
the king who gives expression to the communal hope and purpose: “God may relent and change his mind” (3:9).

3. **How does God respond to the actions of the Ninevites? (3:10).**
   The king’s hope was realized. The narrator reports that “God saw what they did.” Scholars call our attention to how reasonable the divine judgment is. Just as God had seen their wickedness before, so God sees their repentance now. With the people’s change of heart comes a change of behavior, and with the change in behavior comes change in their fate.

### The Book of Nahum

We are informed that Nahum serves as a kind of counterpart to Jonah in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. Both men are assigned messages concerning Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Conventional wisdom puts Nahum in the era of the Babylonian Empire’s ascendancy. Nineveh fell to a coalition of Babylonians and Medes in 612 B.C.

According to scholars, from about 900 B.C. Assyria had been a dominant empire in the ancient Near East. She gained and maintained her superiority through brutal military victories which resulted in a reputation as an evil world empire. It is not surprising that Assyria’s capital Nineveh, would be referred to as “the bloody city” (3:1). In 722 B.C. the northern kingdom of Israel finally succumbed to Assyria’s attacks. Nahum’s mission is to announce the judgment of Nineveh. Doubtless it is also to provide comfort to all those, especially God’s people, who have suffered abuse at the hands of this evil world power. As we are told, Nahum’s message is based on God’s justice, a side of His nature not given much attention in our time.

Stating it again, because of its centrality, Nahum’s mission is to announce the judgment of Nineveh, and the starting point of that message is not the wickedness of the people but the character of God. In case we suspect that the Lord acts in response to us and what we do, Nahum reminds us that human beings ought to live in response to who God is and what God does.

Quite often we humans like to ask God “why?” But perhaps it is even more common that the Lord wants to ask us “why?” Specifically, Nineveh, gives the justice and power of God, the question is why these people would presume to oppose the Lord.

We note in Nahum 1:12-13 that the personal pronouns change freely. Suddenly, in the midst of a message to Nineveh, we meet three words of comfort that are evidently meant for the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. The Lord assures those people that their oppressive enemy, the Assyrians, will be defeated and that their affliction and bondage will come to an end. This is true even as Nineveh’s name itself will be terminated, as another sign of divine judgment.

Since the book of Nahum is the background scripture for today’s lesson, I want to push forward by sharing with you “The Wesley Bible’s” outline of Nahum.

1. **God is merciful, but just**  
   1:1-11
II. God’s word against Nineveh 1:12-2:12
   a. Nineveh’s fall announced 1:12-2:2
   b. Nineveh’s fall described 2:3-12

III. God’s word to Nineveh 2:13-3:19
   a. Nineveh’s wickedness 2:13-3:4
   b. Nineveh will be debased 3:5-7
   c. Nineveh will be like Thebes 3:8-11
   d. Nineveh’s strength will be useless 3:12-19

In the conclusion of the book of Nahum, note that while Nineveh is experiencing judgmental calamity the scene everywhere else is just the opposite as “all who hear the news about you (Nineveh) clap their hands” (3:19).

The Anatomy of Repentance

“Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown,” proclaimed Jonah to the Ninevites. I think you will agree that this is hardly a rhetorical masterpiece. Compared to the impassioned exhortation and frighteningly detailed warnings of other prophets, like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos, Jonah’s effort seems a bit embarrassing.

In their amazement about Jonah’s seemingly weak effort, scholars suggest that this may not be Jonah’s whole message. Or, it may be that Jonah’s heart was never in this mission. But whatever he preached, the people of Nineveh responded commendably.

This may be a lesson for all of us who preach. We just never know about our messages. How many times have we preached a message that we thought was off the wall (less than our best) and it touched someone’s heart. Or, how many times have we preached what we thought was a powerful message and it turned out to be a disaster.

Consequently, when we set Jonah and Jeremiah next to each other, we conclude that it doesn’t matter how good the preacher is if the audience or congregation is unresponsive. On the other hand, it may not matter how average the preaching is if people’s hearts are inclined to respond.

The fact is that the people of Nineveh responded, and that is to their credit. The Book of Jonah offers a brief summary of how Nineveh responded. And their response is a model for us all.

The starting point is the heart of God, which sends a prophet to proclaim the word of the Lord. Paul’s words are appropriate to the situation: “How are they to hear without someone to proclaim (Jesus)? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?” (Roman 10:14b-15a).

The next step is the receptive and responsive heart of the listeners or audience. We are told in Jonah 3:5 that “the people of Nineveh believed God.” At this point, we are reminded of Romans 4:3 where it says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Abraham was justified by faith.
Next, comes the fasting and the command to turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands” (3:8). Fasting and turning are always the stuff of repentance.

As we are informed, the command to turn came from the king. In the Old Testament, that kind of loyal leadership is often part of national repentance and revival. Without difficulty, we think Hezekiah and Josiah.

Finally, we observe the comprehensive compliance that characterized Nineveh’s repentance. By the king’s command, both human beings and animals were to participate in the humble fast. And we are reminded that it is the same kind of thoroughgoing observance of all people and creatures that we see required in the Sabbath commandment: “you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your town” (Exodus 20:10). It is only this kind of total obedience and complete response that honors God.

**Perhaps God Will Relent**

“Who knows?” stated the king of Nineveh. “God may relent and change his mind” (3:9). It was an amazing hope, but it was exactly what happened. The scripture lesson states, “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it” (3:10, key verse).

So what can we say about this episode? Is it possible to change the mind of God? As scholars point out, on the one hand, we read, “I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6). On the other hand, Moses’ experience echoes this episode from Jonah. After Moses interceded on behalf of the people: “The Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people” (Exodus 32:14).

Is it possible for one who is omniscient to think differently? And if so, can we rely on God, or are we left with a capricious unpredictable deity?

According to scholars, a closer look at Jonah’s story reveals both an important theological point and a lovely truth about God. For God’s mind to change is not the same as God’s nature or will changing. In fact, scholars point out, the change of mind actually reveals the consistency of the divine character and will.

Always, the question to ask is, “What does God want?” And the answer from start to finish is that God desires our salvation, our wholeness, and our love. Both the judgment and the forgiveness of God serve these purposes. As it is explained, the judgment pushes us backward toward the wholeness of God’s design, while the forgiveness welcomes us back to God and provides that wholeness.

Without doubt, the prophet’s message is one of coming judgment, but the prophet’s presence is a proof of mercy. If the real desire was to destroy Nineveh, then no warning would be needed or given. But the very fact of the warning proves that God would rather not do it.
As scholars suggest, when the narrator reports that “God changed his mind,” therefore, there is no actual change in the nature or will of God. Indeed, the inconsistency would have been if God had not changed his mind. If the Lord had persisted in destroying a repentant people, that would have reflected inconsistency in the divine character.

Now, this same truth is revealed beyond just the story of Jonah. The instance from the time of Moses, for example, follows the same pattern. There, too, the Scripture declares that the Lord changed his mind, but it was the same change: a decision not to destroy people.

**A Recurring Story**

The theme of human repentance and God’s forgiveness reaches its peak in Nineveh, but the same centrality was introduced in the experiences of Jonah himself.

Prior to the people of Nineveh hearing and responding to God’s word, the courier of that word foretold their experience. As we remember, Jonah disobeyed God, and God did not ignore it. Thus, divine presence brought Jonah back to his senses, and within the belly of the great fish, Jonah repented. Jonah himself was the beneficiary of the mercy and forgiveness of God.

But even after Jonah, the melody of this sweet music keeps playing. The same motif is woven through all of Scripture, and it resounds in our own lives and experiences as well.

Therefore, what was true for Jonah was true for Nineveh. And what was true for Nineveh is true for us. God always urges, invites and welcomes us back. Our repentance continually embraces God’s love, grace and forgiveness. You see, God’s forgiving love does not change.

**Action Plan**

1. Conduct a class discussion on Nineveh’s model of repentance and why it is important for us.
2. What do class members understand about “God changing his mind?”

*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.*

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**God’s Pervasive Love**

**Spring Quarter: God Loves Us**

**Unit 3: God’s Pervasive and Sustaining Love**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of May 28, 2017**

**By Dr. Hal Brady**

**Lesson Scripture: Jonah 4**
In reading Jonah, Chapter 4, we get the impression that Jonah was a jerk. He was ornery and unwilling to serve God in the lives of the Ninevites. While everybody else on board the ship was struggling to survive, Jonah complacently slept. And now he is unhappy and angry about the good thing that has taken place between God and Nineveh.

Earlier, the wickedness of Nineveh was so great that God had pronounced judgment against that city. However, when the Ninevites heard that sober message, they repented. And their change of heart led to God’s change of mind. But Jonah was more interested in their destruction than their salvation.

Yet, Jonah still understood God’s nature. In verse 2b, Jonah stated, “…for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.” While most sensible people would be praising and thanking God at this point, for Jonah, it is nothing but criticism. He is unhappy with God’s forgiving nature.

Interestingly, God’s nature comes as no real surprise to Jonah. That, he claims, is why he “fled to Tarshish at the beginning.” Jonah’s lament here only serves to indict himself, not God. We have the picture of a child threatening to hold his breath until he gets his way with his parents. It is a self-important, self-pitying tantrum.

As scholars remind us, the Lord knows that Jonah’s anger is misplaced. The fact that God responds with a question rather than a condemnation, however, is further evidence of divine mercy. The question invites Jonah to reconsider and gives him the opportunity to come back to his senses on his own. There is a tremendous difference between God declaring, “you’re wrong” and God asking, “Is it right?”

This is a good place to pause and think about where we sit. Do we sit on Jonah’s side of the table or on God’s side of the table? In this episode before us, most of us are inclined to side with God and sit on his side of the table. We see that Jonah is in the wrong. Yet we might contemplate the times when we are on Jonah’s side of the table. When might God ask us, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

The prophet, so reluctant to go to Nineveh, now seems unwilling to leave. At first, Jonah most likely had a distaste for the city and its people. Consequently, he didn’t want to go there. And now, in this moment, it is his disdain for Nineveh that causes him to camp out nearby so he could have a front row seat to watch Nineveh’s destruction.

Meanwhile, as scholars note, the fact that Jonah erected for himself a booth is an important detail. On the one hand, it paints a more complete and damning picture of this prophet’s heart that he seeks to make himself as comfortable as possible to watch a city being destroyed. In addition, it introduces us to Jonah’s need for shade in that climate.

Next, it is God who makes provisions for Jonah’s shade and comfort, though God has a bigger purpose in mind than mere comfort. After providing the bush, God also provides for that bush to be destroyed. Here God turns up the heat on Jonah so much that again, in his unhappiness, he declares that it would be better to die than to live.
Important! If we see this passage against the larger backdrop of Jonah’s whole story, we’ll see the patient and providential work of God in one person’s life. Earlier, as we are reminded, God had provided a storm and a fish. Now God provides a bush, a worm and a hot wind. Most of these are not desirable, but Jonah brings them on himself. They are all designed to teach and grow this man of God.

At this point, God returns to the earlier question, which Jonah had evidently ignored. With this additional divine prodding of Jonah’s anger, the prophet is ready to answer God’s question. Indeed, he is right to be angry, and he reiterates that he is angry enough to die.

But, like a good teacher, the Lord has asked questions of Jonah so that he might come up with a better answer. First, God asked Jonah about his anger, in general. Then God asked Jonah about his anger over the plant. It is here that God turns that disproportionate concern for a mere plant into an object lesson for Jonah.

According to scholars, the transition from “angry about” to “concerned about” is a stroke of genius on the part of God. The fact is that Jonah’s anger was mostly born out of self-interest and self-concern. For God to interpret Jonah’s anger as concern, however, elevates the discussion and flatters Jonah. It also sets the stage for the larger point that God wants to make, for whether the attitude is “anger” or “concern”, the issue is that Jonah feels strongly about the plant, while God feels strongly about the city.

So what is the object lesson? The object lesson displays that this debate is a matter of perspective. God reminds Jonah how ultimately inconsequential the plant is, as well as how little he had invested in it. By contrast, the scholars make clear, Nineveh has tremendous value. It has value as a place, as a population of people, and even as the home of many animals. The logic here is simple and undeniable. If Jonah feels strongly about a mere plant, shouldn’t God feel strongly about a great city?

**Heart Problem**

In spite of what I said earlier about Jonah being a jerk, and in some ways he was, there is also some empirical evidence that suggests that he was quite remarkable. He enjoyed clear communication with God. Both Matthew and Luke report on the success of Jonah’s preaching in Nineveh. Jonah accurately perceived the Lord’s activity in nature and events. And he had a profound understanding of God’s character and will.

With all that in his favor, why was he a jerk at times? What was the matter with him? As scholars inform us, clearly he is a disappointing character and substandard prophet. So what was wrong with Jonah?

The suggestion here is that Jonah had a heart problem. He had the word of God, but he didn’t have the heart of God. And one separated from the other become a terrible deviation from the true standard. Without doubt, the heart of God desired Nineveh’s redemption. Even though it was the Lord who initiated the judgment message, the purpose of the message was to bring about salvation. Thus, when the people of Nineveh repented and changed their ways, God was pleased. Note that Jonah was not.

Now, this attitude does not belong to Jonah alone. We think quickly about the prodigal’s elder brother. For sure, he did not share their father’s enthusiasm for the younger boy’s return. While the father was evidently
watching for the prodigal, the elder brother was oblivious. Soon after, when the father brought about a great celebration upon his wayward son’s return, the elder brother sulked and resented him.

You guessed it! Jonah is the elder brother. While God rejoiced at the “return” of the Ninevites, Jonah sulked and was full of resentment. The prodigal didn’t deserve a party and Nineveh didn’t deserve forgiveness.

Scholars tell us that what people deserve is the issue. God, Jonah, the prodigal’s father, and the elder brother are all acutely aware of what is deserved. We are reminded that in some hearts there is an eagerness to offer more than what is deserved. But in other hearts there is a stingy version of fairness.

We certainly see evidence of this in Jesus’ parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). You remember the property owner hires workers throughout the course of a day to labor in his vineyard. At the end of the day, he calls them forward to pay them their wages. The folks hired first were paid the agreed upon amount. Yet all the rest of the workers, including those who had barely broken a sweat, were also paid that same amount.

We note that the first workers were content with their pay until they saw other workers who had labored for fewer hours getting the same amount. The owner calls them in and asked, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” (Matthew 20:15).

It is clear that God’s grace to Nineveh didn’t cost Jonah a thing. Yet Jonah still fumed about it just like the elder brother and the workers who labored the longest in the vineyard. What we observed before us is that God is never less than fair and so often more than fair. Such is the nature of grace, and it reflects the heart of God. Too bad Jonah didn’t have a heart like that.

**Big Enough to Love**

During one scene in the 1963 movie “Cleopatra,” Julius Caesar overhears a young man reciting the Roman poet Catullus. Caesar speaks appreciatively of the recitation. Cleopatra challenges Caesar, saying, “Catullus doesn’t approve of you. Why haven’t you had him killed?” And Caesar coolly replies, “Because I approve of him.”

Now, it doesn’t take much effort or character to dislike someone. Children on the playground often make this an easy reality with their teasing and mistreatment of one another. But it does take a bigger, more secure individual to like someone else, especially if that someone else is unlikable. Caesar in the movie is an example for us. He is strong enough and secure enough to approve of someone who did not approve of him.

And this is so true of God! God is big enough, strong enough, and secure enough not only to like the unlikeable, but to love the unlovable. With God’s love for the unlovable, he reaches out even to those who do not believe or approve.
In Matthew 5:43-44, Jesus encourages the same kind of bigness of love in us. He says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy:’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” And Jesus, not Caesar, is our model (John 13:34). We are to love as he loves us.

Scholars inform us that our unwillingness to forgive others is often just a monument to our own pain. The same is true of our choice to dislike someone.

In the story of Jonah, that smallness and weakness is seen in close connection and comparison with God’s generosity and greatness. Jonah never did like those Ninevites – and he never would. They had probably inflicted some pain on Jonah and his people. And so we picture Jonah there with his arms crossed and his back turned stubbornly away from the city. On the other hand, however, there is God turned toward that city with arms open wide.

As scholars point out, we can imagine the movie’s conversation between Jonah and the Lord. “The Ninevites don’t love you,” Jonah declares. “Why haven’t you had them killed?” And God gently replies, “Because I love them.”

**Jonah in the Mirror**

“How did he miss that?” the irate sports fan screams at the television set. It looks so easy from where we sit in the comfort of our living rooms. We wonder how the player could mess up so badly.

And we often wonder the same thing about certain characters in Scripture. We shake our heads disapprovingly at the faithlessness of the Israelites, the fearfulness of the disciples, and the insensitivity of the priest and the Levite. And it is also easy for us to disapprove of Jonah, who is so obviously disobedient, petty, and jerk-like.

In the case of the player who failed on the field, we have the luxury of never having to perform in his place. But this is not so with Jonah! I will have to stand in his place and so will you.

To be sure, we are not sent to Nineveh, but we are God’s ambassadors. Specifically, we carry God’s word and reflect God’s love. Or, we do not.

Scholars tell us that we have three orders of business as God’s ambassadors.

First, we are to recognize God’s heart. The divine purpose is still for people to repent and turn to the Lord. And for this to happen, someone must represent God to the wayward world. Is that you? Is that me?

Second, the question is, will we do God’s bidding? Or, will we flee from our responsibility like Jonah?

Finally, we must be truthful with God about the people we dislike. And then we can truthfully admit to ourselves that God still loves them. God is as eager to extend the same grace and forgiveness to them that we have received and enjoyed.
Action Plan

1. Ask class members to explain and discuss Jonah’s heart problem.
2. What insights has the class gained from the four chapters of Jonah?

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Deborah and Barak

Summer Quarter: God’s Urgent Call
Unit 1: Called to be Strong

Sunday school lesson for the week of June 4, 2017
By Rev. Denise Walton

Lesson Scripture: Judges 4:1-10

Purpose: To consider how we can accomplish great things when we work together to carry out any mission God gives us.

Judges 4:8-10
Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.”

“Certainly I will go with you,” said Deborah. “But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

Called to be Strong! The “Adult Bible Studies” lesson provides an excellent introduction to the Book of Judges and today’s text in Judges 4:1-10.

Much of the people referred to in scripture who served as judges between the time of Joshua and the monarchical period were not judges in the modern sense. Their main task was not to hear complaints, make legal decisions, or rule on points of law … The primary role for these biblical judges was to serve as military leaders.

The scripture today (Judges 4:1-10) offers the reader a unique perspective on the call of several leaders Deborah, Barak, and later Jael whose purpose and destiny were tied together. Deborah was unique as a she represents the only female judge named in the Book of Judges. Also, Deborah’s roles were unique as she was not a military leader but a judge in a traditional sense of hearing complaints and addressing disputes among the Israelites.
As a leader, one aspect of Deborah’s character in the text invites the reader to consider the call that God places on our lives. One of my favorite books, “Hearing God’s Call – Ways of Discerning for Laity and Clergy,” addresses the matter of discerning God’s call for laity and clergy:

God has always called human beings to share in the divine mission in the world – and He still does. God calls women and men to ordained ministry in the church and he calls other followers of Christ to special ministries both in the church and outside it ... One of the persistent questions in the minds of both serious clergy and seeking laity can be stated simply, “Is God calling me to do this ministry?”

The author of “Hearing God’s Call – Discerning for Laity and Clergy,” Ben Campbell Johnson, further explains, “A call from God has the power of a conviction that is not our work alone but is something both intended and empowered by God.”

As we embrace the reading, let us acknowledge the main character in scripture is always God. Therefore, we are invited to begin the first four summer Bible lessons by framing our reflection around the following questions – What is God doing? Who are the secondary characters in the text? What is the relationship between those characters and God? How does this text inform or impact my relationship with God?

**What is God doing?**

To understand more clearly, let us go back to Judges 4:1-3 as it helps the reader understand the context of today’s biblical reflection. We will engage the text using the Message version of the Bible:

The People of Israel kept right on doing evil in God’s sight. With Ehud dead, God sold them off to Jabin king of Canaan who ruled from Hazor. Sisera, who lived in Harosheth Haggoyim, was the commander of his army. The People of Israel cried out to God because he had cruelly oppressed them with his nine hundred iron chariots for twenty years. (Judges 4:1-3, The Message)

As the main character in the text, God is involved with his beloved children, the Israelites. Once again, the Israelites have chosen to turn away from God and engage in acts of evil. God then allows the Israelites to receive the consequences of their actions, they cry out for mercy and God sends deliverance.

The interesting thing to note here is that deliverance begins with repentance of the Israelites and it involves more than one deliverer. The deliverance involves a group of leaders trusting one another and depending on one another as they are led by God to complete the mission and ministry set before them. (Now that can truly preach!)

**Who are the secondary characters in the text?**

The Israelites, Deborah, and Barak serve as secondary characters in Judges 4:1-10. As you read the lesson consider exploring each character and how the call of God appears in the text?
Now consider the following questions:

What is the relationship between those characters and God?

How does this text inform or impact my relationship with God?

Gideon’s Call

Summer Quarter: God’s Urgent Call
Unit 1: Called to be Strong

Sunday school lesson for the week of June 11, 2017
By Rev. Denise Walton

Lesson Scripture: Judges 6:11-18

Purpose: To recognize that God is with us even we doubt or feel abandoned.

In today’s Adult Bible Lesson, I invite you to consider engaging in a kinesthetic learning activity (learning by doing).

Kinesthetic Activity: Invite one person to be Gideon, one the angel, and one person to be God. Have them stand as far in the room as possible (Gideon and the angel) but God will stand in the center. Gideon and the angel will engage in conversation. The angel’s voice is non-anxious, peaceful and consistent. Gideon’s voice is filled with fear and anxiety but with each comment, Gideon moves physically closer to Go in the center.

Angel: The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.”

Gideon: “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

God: The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

Gideon: “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

God: The Lord answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.”
Gideon: Gideon replied, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.”

God: And the Lord said, “I will wait until you return.”

As a leader, one aspect of Gideon’s character in the text invites the reader to consider the call that God places on our lives. However, the call can be difficult to discern and leave us feeling alone. In the book, “Hearing God’s Call – Ways of Discerning for Laity and Clergy,” it says:

*God has always called human beings to share in the divine mission in the world – and He still does. God calls women and men to ordained ministry in the church, and he calls other followers of Christ to special ministries both in the church and outside it.*

*One of the persistent questions in the minds of both serious clergy and seeking laity can be stated simply, “Is God calling me to do this ministry?”*

*Following closely on the heels of that question is another question of equal urgency: How do I know the call comes from God and not my own unconscious longings or fears or even cultural influences on my perceptions and decision-making?*

My dear brothers and sisters, allow me to share a personal reflection here: God is always calling us. Yes, God is calling you right now in the midst of your life. For some it is a call recognized at a young age, you knew early on that God was calling you to a unique place to do unique things. For others, you are busy with life and yet you may feel or sense a call in your everyday life or your work. Still others, your call has materialized in the golden years of your journey and now that you are older you clearly hear God calling.

Allow this text, to speak to you today. Listen to the exchange between Gideon, the angel and God. Take a moment to engage in personal reflection. You may choose to reflect silently or to write your responses in a prayer journal.

*What is God doing?*

*Who are the secondary characters in the text?*

*What is the relationship between those characters and God?*

*How does this text inform or impact my relationship with God?*
It’s natural for us as human beings to be afraid or even uncertain in the midst of call but God is with us and goes before us.

May you rest in knowing that you are never alone and you are needed in the kingdom of God,

Shalom,
Denise Walton
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 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 12.

Scripture Readings – May 15

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

May 28
Seventh Sunday of Easter
Acts 1:6-14
Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35 (UMH 790)
1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11
John 17:1-11

June 4
Day of Pentecost
Acts 2:1-21
Psalm 104:24-34, 35b (UMH 826)
1 Corinthians 12:3b-13
John 7:37-39