

R. Lawson Bryan – Resident Bishop

R. Christopher Ramsey - Superintendent

**January 2021**

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## *Alive Together At The Table*

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### **2021: a look ahead with Bishop Bryan**



**By Kara Witherow, Editor**

Hope. It is the message of Christmas and the promise of a new year. But after a year like 2020, where can one find hope?

As 2021 begins, Bishop R. Lawson Bryan is hopeful despite the uncertainties and unknowns.

He looks to the Bible – Matthew 2, specifically – to guide him into 2021.

The story he turns to often gets overlooked in the transition from Christmas to Epiphany, but it helps him remember there is hope, and sometimes just one thing needs to change for greater transformation to happen.

Matthew's account of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus' escape to Egypt; of Herod's edict to kill all the male children; and of Herod's death and Mary, Joseph, and Jesus' subsequent return to Israel reminds Bishop Bryan that, despite circumstances, things have, indeed, changed.

"I invite us all to live with that story guiding us into the New Year, to remind ourselves not to enter it thinking nothing has changed," he said. "We may not yet know what has changed, but there has been change."

He urged South Georgia United Methodists to receive Joseph's message themselves and move into the New Year with anticipation.

"Let us draw our attention to that biblical story and have us look for where change is occurring and join it," he said.

One thing that has certainly changed is the General Conference session. Originally slated for May 5-15, 2020, it is currently scheduled for Aug. 29 - Sept. 7, 2021 in Minneapolis, Minn.

This extra time, Bishop Bryan said, allows more opportunity for reflection and discussion.

He also reminded the Conference of all they have been through and survived.

"Since 1736 when John and Charles Wesley landed here in the South Georgia Conference, we have been through a lot of things, but here we are by the grace of God," Bishop Bryan said. "Perhaps we can give ourselves permission to have confidence that God is at work in us and through us. And perhaps we can take a truly deep breath based on the fact that we have come through so much."

The South Georgia Conference will remain the South Georgia Conference, he said, and will be resilient and survive, no matter the situation.

"We did not wilt on the vine. We are strong in Christ. Christ is strengthening us. The world needs to see that. The world needs to see a group of people who can have difficult conversations about tough matters and don't wilt but keep their arms around each other," he said. "That's us. That is what it means to be alive together at the table. That is where we need to be."

And what, exactly, does being "Alive Together at the Table" mean to Bishop Bryan, especially in the midst of a global pandemic?

"When you come together at the table you are building relationships. That is what it is all about," he said. "One of the things I want to think about in 2021 are relationships. That's what 'Alive Together at the Table' means."

That's how Jesus did ministry, Bishop Bryan said. He did not use techniques or a process; He brought people together and shared life with them.

"Let us see 2021 as the year we focus on relationships. Who is at the table with us? Celebrate them! Who else needs to be at the table with us? Invite them!"

As people are able to receive the COVID-19 vaccination and gather again, churches need to lead the effort, showing people how to have healthy relationships with one another and how to gather safely.

"Churches are the glue that hold communities together," he said. "Human relationships – that's my vision for 2021."

## **Annual Conference Session 2021**

### **2021 Annual Conference dates, Post-General Conference gathering announced.**

The 2021 Annual Conference Session is set for **June 6-8** at [The Columbus Georgia Convention & Trade Center](#).

The Annual Conference Session program committee met this week to discuss both the June session and other potential gatherings needed later in 2021. The 155th session of the South Georgia Annual Conference will meet in Columbus, Ga. beginning Sunday evening, June 6 and concluding on Tuesday, June 8. In addition to our time together in June, Bishop Lawson Bryan, in consultation with the program committee, has set a post-General Conference gathering for **Saturday, October 9, 2021**. The October meeting will be held in a conference-central location to be announced at a later date.

The UMC's General Conference will take place Aug. 29 - Sept. 7, 2021. An October gathering allows time for South Georgians to meet prior to the Jurisdictional Conference session which is set for Nov. 10-12, 2021, at Lake Junaluska, NC.

"We know our conference will want to gather soon after the conclusion of General Conference to reflect upon the outcome and how that will impact South Georgia," Bishop Bryan said. "Our goal is to do all we can to equip our laity and clergy with accurate information, provide adequate time for discernment, and allow for informed decisions to be made as needed."

With the continued uncertainty surrounding the global coronavirus pandemic, the committee also discussed the feasibility of an in-person gathering.

"While our plan is to meet in person in 2021, the program committee is wisely preparing for alternatives should an in-person gathering not be possible or recommended," said Meredyth Earnest, Conference Secretary. "If a virtual Annual Conference is again necessary, we have shown through the 2020 session that our conference is able to embrace technology and conduct business efficiently online."

In order to help facilitate the planning of the Annual Conference Session and meet deadlines with the convention center and Valley Hospitality - the group that handles the hotel blocks for our conference - a decision on the type of meeting (in-person or virtual) will be reached and communicated by **January 25, 2021**.

"We find ourselves in a continued state of flux around guidelines surrounding public health and large gatherings. Wesley's first rule is 'Do No Harm,' and the program committee will be evaluating all factors to make the best decision possible by the deadlines that are set. We want to be fair to all those who are a part of planning Annual Conference - the Local Arrangements Committee, the Worship Committee, GNTV Media Ministry, and so many more - as well as meet the terms of our contracts with the convention center and Valley Hospitality," Earnest said. "We all enthusiastically look forward to gathering together in person once more and sharing in the joy of fellowship. We appreciate the patience and prayers of the conference members as we make plans in these challenging times."

Bishop Bryan and the program committee realize that one very important aspect of any annual conference session can never be replicated in a virtual gathering: being together.

“It was clear from the 2020 evaluations that we all missed being in the same room, together. Fellowship is an important part of our gatherings and something we all highly value as part of our connectedness,” Bishop Bryan said. “However, we want to be wise in our decision making and make sure we are able to prepare the safest environment for our clergy and laity.”

The theme for the 2021 Annual Conference Session, “Alive Together at the Table,” is timely, he said.

“The Lord has prepared the South Georgia table for us, and we want to respond to Christ’s invitation to come to the table,” Bishop Bryan said. “There is a place for each of us at the South Georgia table. Our souls are nourished, and our ministries are empowered when we are Alive Together at the Table.”

### Additional Information

**Hotel room blocks:** Hotel room blocks will open on January 25, 2021. Valley Hospitality in Columbus has already secured more than 600 rooms for our event.

**Banquets, Displays & Childcare:** Information regarding banquets, displays & childcare will be communicated in January.

**2020 Conference Journal:** The 2020 Journal of the South Georgia Conference will be available this fall. When the book is complete, an announcement containing ordering and download information will be sent via email. Information will also be available at [www.sgaumc.org/conferencejournal](http://www.sgaumc.org/conferencejournal).

**Alive Together at the Table:** As we spend this year focusing on being Alive Together at the Table leading up to Annual Conference 2021, watch the [Advocate](#) and the [conference website](#) for stories about churches who are coming to the table in many different ways.

If you and your congregation would like help creating ways to be Alive Together at the Table through your ministries, please reach out to Allison Lindsey at [allison@sgaumc.com](mailto:allison@sgaumc.com). The Connectional Ministries staff will be happy to work with you to provide resources or help design a program tailored to your ministry needs.

**Questions:** For questions regarding the business of Annual Conference, please contact:  
Meredyth Earnest at [meredyth@sgaumc.com](mailto:meredyth@sgaumc.com).

For general inquiries, contact Kelly Roberson at 912-270-6172 or [kelly@sgaumc.com](mailto:kelly@sgaumc.com).



# **South Georgia Conference Pastoral Counsel Sexual Ethics**

In consultation with Bishop Bryan and the Cabinet, we have made the decision to offer the 2020-21 Sexual Ethics Workshops via a virtual platform. Instead of a day-long, in-person event, participants will be able to complete the necessary requirements by watching videos and participating in a small group Zoom discussion meeting. We feel like this will be the best way to meet the requirements of our Standing Rules around this important topic during a time when a gathering of 90+ clergy is not deemed safe.

The first workshop offering will be in late October. Two additional workshop offerings will be held in February and April and will follow the same format outlined below. For those who have already registered for the September 17 workshop, a separate email with instructions will be sent.

## **Virtual Format**

There will be four videos that will be sent to clergy registered for the workshop. You will have a two-week window to watch all four videos. At the time the videos are sent to you, you will also sign up for one of several Zoom discussion meetings that will be held after that two-week period. You will need to join a discussion meeting in order to receive credit for the workshop.

The Zoom discussion meetings, composed of small groups of clergy, will be facilitated by me and will last 1 ½ hours. Again, you must attend one of these meetings in order to get credit. After you complete the process, you will receive a CEU certificate.

## **Registration & Payment**

To register for one of the upcoming workshops, please click one of the following links.

- October: <https://sgaumc-reg.brtapp.com/SexualEthicsWorkshopOctober2020>
- February: <https://sgaumc-reg.brtapp.com/SexualEthicsWorkshopFebruary2021>
- April: <https://sgaumc-reg.brtapp.com/SexualEthicsWorkshopApril2021>

The cost of the workshop is \$35.00.

As a reminder, we have provided a list on our website of who is due to complete the workshop by the 2021 Annual Conference session. ([Click here to view the list.](#))

I know this will be new and different. My desire is to make this opportunity somewhat flexible as to when you watch the videos while also allowing the important aspect of discussion around some of these complex topics. I am appreciative of your flexibility around all of this. Keep this process and me in your prayers as I put together this material in a way that speaks to our collective minds, hearts, and souls while maintaining the sacred trust we share as clergy.

For questions, please email [cpcassistant@sgaumc.com](mailto:cpcassistant@sgaumc.com). Gratefully, *Deborah*

**Pastors in the Northeast District Needing Sexual Ethics**  
**Re-Certification**  
**By Annual Conference 2021**

Dorsia Atkinson  
Steve Brown  
Bruce Eaton  
Michael Kennedy  
Sonny Moon  
Chris Shoemaker  
Jeane Sturdivant  
Karen Zeigler

Judson Barnes  
Brian Durden  
Mary Griswell  
Thomas Kennison  
Robert Poston  
Carol Smith  
Tom Tidwell

Mira Barrett  
George Durham  
Mark Hardin  
Jason McClendon  
Larry Rader  
Lawson Stone  
Chad Watkins

### **Clergy Financial Literacy Academy**

The Clergy Financial Literacy Academy is an electronic toolbox developed by the Georgia United Methodist Foundation to equip and empower you to make better financial decisions! CFLA is now open and taking registrations for the next training of cohorts.

The cost of the program is \$50. The estimated time to complete the course is 12 hours of individual computer time and six mandatory Zoom sessions. There will be optional Zoom office hours after the sessions.

To learn more, contact Rev. Keith E. Lawder, GUMF President/CEO, at 770-449-6726, 877-220-5664, or [klawder@gumf.org](mailto:klawder@gumf.org), or Dr. Laudis H. "Rick" Lanford, GUMF Regional Vice President, at 478-256-7130 or [rlanford@gumf.org](mailto:rlanford@gumf.org).

More information can also be found [online](#).

### **Georgia United Methodist Foundation Newsletter**



Check out the latest edition.

Sign up at [www.gumf.org/stay-connected](http://www.gumf.org/stay-connected) to have Growing Generosity delivered right to your inbox. For more information, please contact GUMF at 770-449-6726, 877-220-5664 or [info@gumf.org](mailto:info@gumf.org)



2<sup>nd</sup> Jodi Atkinson  
7<sup>th</sup> Jerry Sharpe  
12<sup>th</sup> Mary Kennison  
14<sup>th</sup> Jane Ramsey  
17<sup>th</sup> Delona Watkins  
21<sup>st</sup> Jerry & Barbara Sharpe  
26<sup>th</sup> Michael & Carrie Anne Kennedy  
31<sup>st</sup> Jean Griffin

4<sup>th</sup> Mark Miller  
8<sup>th</sup> Michelle Reaves  
13<sup>th</sup> Michael Kennedy  
16<sup>th</sup> Mike & Carol Collins  
17<sup>th</sup> Jay & Becky Reppert  
24<sup>th</sup> Denise Vermeulen  
31<sup>st</sup> Paris Brannen



**Martin Luther King, Jr Day – Monday, January 18, 2021**



## 2021 Dates for Lay Ministries (LSM and CLM)

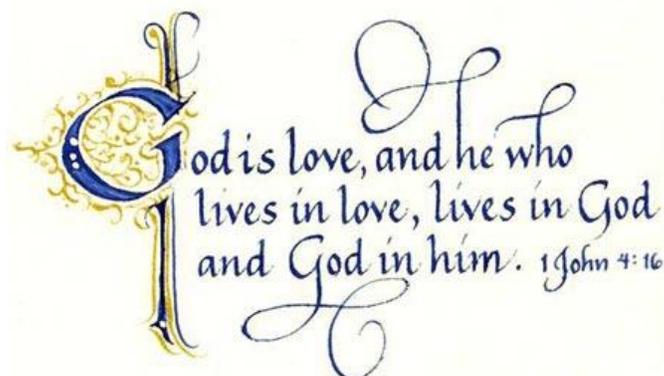
The 2021 dates for Lay Ministries - [Lay Servant Training](#) and [Certified Lay Ministry](#) - have been posted on the [conference website](#). The time is right for churches to take advantage of these leadership development opportunities. More than ever, we need well trained leaders in our local churches. For more information, contact Anne Bosarge, Associate Director, Office of Congregational Development, at [anne@thechapelministries.com](mailto:anne@thechapelministries.com) or 912-262-1331.



## 2021 Clergy Spouses Retreat – Canceled

Epworth By The Sea facilities are closed to the public through March 31, 2021. This means our **Clergy Spouses Retreat for 2021 is canceled**, but we are already signed up for 2022. Please mark your calendars for **March 18 – 20, 2022** for our 2022 Clergy Spouses Retreat and make plans to attend. More details to come on the 2022 Retreat.

Laura Grantham, 2021 Spouses Retreat Chair



# General Conference 2021

## **Revised Dates Announced for 2021 General and Jurisdictional Conferences**

*GC2021: August 29 - September 7, 2021, at the Minneapolis Convention Center in Minneapolis, Minn.*

*SEJ2021: November 10-12, 2021, at Lake Junaluska, N.C.*

The Commission on the General Conference has announced new 2021 dates for General Conference following the postponement of the event due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The quadrennial legislative event will take place on August 29 - September 7, 2021, at the Minneapolis Convention Center in Minneapolis, Minn.

"We're grateful that we were able to secure new dates while keeping the site of General Conference in Minneapolis. Nearly seven years of pre-planning and preparations by the host team have gone into this event," said Kim Simpson, chair of the Commission on the General Conference.

The Commission decided to [focus on 2021](#) as it was not feasible to schedule any earlier with so much uncertainty over international travel and the spread of COVID-19. Business manager Sara Hotchkiss was authorized by the Commission in March to pursue negotiations for new dates with the venue and area hotels after the Convention Center canceled May events due to concerns over coronavirus.

Hotchkiss said that it was surprising to find an available time block long enough to accommodate General Conference needs with so much competition for event space and lodging with other events shifting their dates as well.

"The hospitality industry has been devastated by COVID-19 with staffing levels significantly reduced, so negotiating amid the pandemic was a much slower process. I am grateful for our partnerships in the industry we have built over the years that assisted us in getting our foot in the door early enough to find any dates in 2021," said Hotchkiss. "Another challenge was to secure agreements for the number of hotel rooms and room types that we needed. Again, many of our partners faced furloughs and reduced staff hours."

Immediately following the announcement of the new dates for General Conference, the Council of Bishops announced that Jurisdictional Conferences in the United States will meet **November 10-12, 2021**. The Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference will be held at Lake Junaluska, N.C.

In the call letter to Jurisdictional Conferences secretaries and heads of delegations, COB President Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey noted that the dates chosen by the bishops intentionally followed the postponed 2020 General Conference. The bishops have the authority to set dates for the Jurisdictional Conferences as per Division Two - Section II - Article IV of The Constitution of The United Methodist Church (¶26 of *The Book of Discipline* 2016).

As per ¶30 of *The Book of Discipline*, Central Conferences outside the United States will be held within a year following the postponed 2020 General Conference that will now be held in 2021.

"The Council of Bishops encourages the entire United Methodist Church to continue in deep, unceasing prayer for the Holy Spirit to guide us through these unprecedented times of challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. God, who has been with us on this journey, will see us through and bring us together in praise and worship," [the call letter stated](#).

The coronavirus pandemic is not the first health crisis to affect the timing of a General Conference. According to [historical documents](#), the start date of the 1800 General Conference was moved up from October 20 to May 6 because of the prevalence of yellow fever during the fall – which is [how the General Conference came to be held in May](#).

The topic of General Conference dates was also discussed at a meeting of the [Joint Commission on Unification of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church South](#) in 1920. Bishop Richard Cooke said, “The General Conference has full power to do many things. But it is lacking in divine omniscience, and cannot predict the possibility of an epidemic ... Now, if there should arise any time in the providence of God such an epidemic as would render the meeting of the General Conference impracticable, the Commission would have the right ... to fix such other time as might be necessary.”

### **ADCA/Legislation to General Conference 2021**

The Advance Daily Christian Advocate (ADCA) contains the agenda, rules, delegate listings, petitions, reports from the general agencies/commissions and study committees, information for delegates, and codes of conduct for the General Conference. The official written languages of the General Conference for publication of the Advance edition include English, French, Kiswahili and Portuguese. Bound printed volumes of the ADCA may be [purchased from Cokesbury](#). These PDF versions are provided for your convenience.

View and download (PDF):

- [Volume 1](#) (Handbook for Delegates)
- [Volume 2, Section 1](#) (Reports and Proposed Legislation)
- [Volume 2, Section 2](#) (Reports and Proposed Legislation)
- [Proposed legislation to implement the Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation](#)
- [French, Kiswahili, Portuguese](#)

Feedback about General Conference

From Bishop Bryan: I have appreciated the feedback I received from clergy and laity over the past year when I have asked for your input. This feedback is helpful to me, and I use it to help guide future conversations. I want to do the same thing as we look towards General Conference.

[Here is a link to communicate with me any thoughts you have at this point.](#)

Let us keep the conversation going!



# Journal of the South Georgia Annual Conference

## 2020 *Journal of the South Georgia Annual Conference*

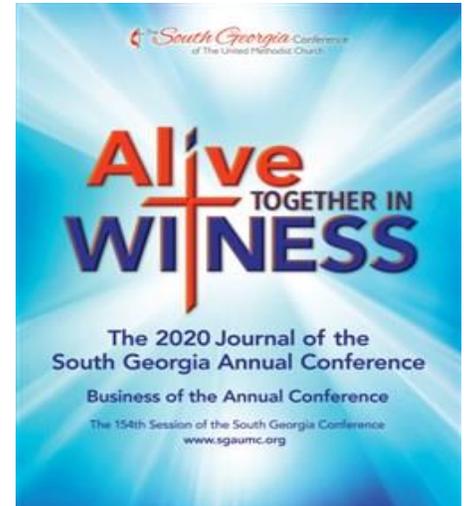
The 2020 *Journal of the South Georgia Annual Conference* is now available to order and download. Those wishing to purchase a Conference Journal will order their copy(ies) online directly from the printer. The cost of the *Journal* is \$25 each plus tax and shipping. This method has streamlined the ordering process and promotes better stewardship of Conference resources. The *Journal* is also available as a free PDF download. If you have questions, please contact the Conference Journal Editor, Meredyth Earnest, at [meredyth@sgaumc.com](mailto:meredyth@sgaumc.com).

### [CLICK HERE to order your printed copy](#)

*Each print copy of the Journal costs \$25 plus tax and shipping.*

Digital download / free PDF

The Journal Committee is offering a digital copy of the *Journal of the South Georgia Annual Conference* as a free PDF download. Adobe Acrobat Reader is required to download the file(s). If you do not already have it installed, visit [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com) and follow the instructions.



## Licensing School

The Office of Methodist Studies, the South Georgia Annual Conference, and the North Georgia Annual Conference work together to provide one educational program for the licensing of all certified candidates for ministry. The Division of Ordained Ministry, an entity of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, dictates the curriculum for licensing by providing guidelines based on competence in skills of ministry.

For further information, contact Amy Walker via email at [awalke8@emory.edu](mailto:awalke8@emory.edu) or call 404.727.4587.

*Grow* in the  
grace and  
knowledge of  
*Jesus*  
2 Peter 3:18

# Annual Confirmation Retreat Reimagined

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The 20<sup>th</sup> annual Confirmation Retreat may not look like it has the last 19 years, but the focus remains the same: to complement what a church is or will be doing for each Confirmation class and to bring a sense of connectedness to our churches.

Since 2002, the South Georgia Conference has sponsored an annual Confirmation Retreat at Epworth By The Sea for students in the fifth grade and above. This event provides churches of all sizes an opportunity to connect with others through

worship, study, and fellowship. While the gathering of more than 500 confirmands will not be happening in person this March, the content will be packaged (both digitally and tangibly) to be used in creative, useful ways for individual church groups.

Here are a few of the resources offered in the Confirmation Package:

- Live opening session/training for leaders only
- Mini video courses on topics of grace, United Methodist History, our connectedness, the journey as a disciple of Christ and more!
- Q&A Zoom sessions with District Superintendents
- Mission Moments spotlighting young people serving in South Georgia
- “How to talk to confirmands about General Conference” digital download
- Spotify playlist of worship/hymns/seasonal songs to match the courses
- Opening and closing videos featuring Bishop Bryan
- Sample schedule layouts
- T-shirts for each confirmand

Registration will be open **January 1-31, 2021 only**. Resources will launch February 1, 2021, for the churches registered and may be used at any time. The cost is only \$10 per person and includes all packaged digital content and a t-shirt. For more information, [click here](#).



# Epworth By The Sea

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**WE HAVE EXCITING NEWS!!!**

**The St. Simons Island Storytelling Festival  
is going  
VIRTUAL!**

Join us for the **6th annual**  
St. Simons Island Storytelling Festival  
**VIRTUALLY**  
from the comfort of your home!

**February 20-21, 2021**

Spend a cozy Saturday listening to tales of adventure, excitement, and hilarity. So, you do not have to travel, we will come to you! Relive past times and celebrate the best of humanity in the joy-filled space of story. You will laugh, you will cry and you will discover how very alive you can feel! Saturday will feature all the Storytellers, and Sunday will bring a very special message from Donald Davis!

For more information: [epworth@epworthbythesea.org](mailto:epworth@epworthbythesea.org) or 912-638-8688.

