For the first time since 1956, Ash Wednesday is February 14 -- Valentine's Day. How can faith communities celebrate public repentance and reconciliation while the popular culture celebrates romantic love? However you bring attention to February 14 this year, remember the sacrifice of Christ and the devotion of His people are examples of the greatest love of all. Go to http://bit.ly/2CnTavp to read about the history of these two events. Learn more about the significance of Ash Wednesday here: http://bit.ly/2EwRxlf.
Mark 1:9-15 (NIV)

The Baptism and Testing of Jesus

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted[a] by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Jesus Announces the Good News

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Bishop on the Move

Below are some of the events where Bishop James E. Swanson Sr. will be visiting in the upcoming weeks.

February 17 (Saturday)
Bishop Swanson and national director of men’s ministries, Rev. Rick Vance will be the featured guest at this event for United Methodist Men. First United Methodist Church in Canton will host this gathering of United Methodist Men. Details here: http://bit.ly/2F75Aek.

February 21-24 (Wednesday-Saturday)
Bishop Swanson will be in attendance of General Commission of United Methodist Men (UMM) meetings, meetings of the National Association of Conference Presidents, UMM Foundation and conference Prayer Advocates and jurisdiction meetings in Nashville.

February 25-28 (Sunday-Wednesday)
Bishop Swanson will be in attendance of a Council of Bishops meeting in Dallas, Texas.

March 2 (Friday)
Gammon Theological Seminary’s 16th president, Rev. Dr. Ken J. Walden will be inaugurated at Ben Hill UMC at 10:00 a.m. in Atlanta and Bishop Swanson will be in attendance.

March 4 (Sunday)
Bishop Swanson will be the celebrant (preside over communion) and the Right Rev. Brian R. Seage will preach at Wesley Feast Day at Gibson Memorial UMC in Vicksburg at 6:00 p.m.

For more information:
www.mississippi-umc.org/inm

March 14-17 (Wednesday-Saturday)
Sacramento, California is the host city for the 51st Black Methodist for Church Renewal General Meeting and Bishop Swanson will attend.

For more information:
www.mississippi-umc.org/inm

Imagine No Malaria Update

Imagine No Malaria 2017-2018 Mission Focus

As of 2/14/18
45,988 LIVES SAVED!

GOAL: SAVE 100,000 LIVES!
Watch Bishop Swanson’s Entire Navigating Tension Series

At a time when people are being regularly bombarded by chaos and divisiveness, Bishop James E. Swanson Sr. speaks to faith communities in a way that cuts through the tension building daily around various issues within our congregations.

In this series, "Navigating Tension," Bishop Swanson shares with the Mississippi Conference the landscape of our current climate, what wisdom Scripture provides about dealing with times of uncertainty and conflict and how we—the church—can live faithfully and be fruitful disciples of Jesus Christ in times of tension. Watch the three-part series in its entirety here: http://bit.ly/2BztcrU.

Invite Foundation Rep to Speak about Generosity at Your Church

The Mississippi United Methodist Foundation Staff is available to make free presentations relating to generosity, planned giving, electronic giving and investment opportunities with the foundation. Your presentation may be done on any day of the week for a variety of groups in the church. Rev. Mike Hicks is also available to preach during your morning worship service on the subject of generosity. For dates and more information, contact mike@ms-umf.org or call 601.948.8845.

Don’t forget to go to http://ms-umf.org/download-forms/ to apply for academic scholarships! The deadline is April 2.

Subscribe Now to Conference News and Updates

Do you receive The Circuit Rider but not conference e-blasts or cares and concerns? To opt in to either conference cares and concerns to be notified of clergy and clergy spouse deaths, or subscribe to conference news and updates and stay current on Mississippi Conference happenings, go to http://mississippi-email.brtapp.com/subscribe. After clicking on the link, enter your name and email address and wait for an email that will give you the option of what communication you would like to receive.

Belmont UMC’s Backpack Ministry Receives UM Appalachian Ministry Network Grant

By Lynn Chumbley, Circuit Rider Contributor

Photo right: Lynn Chumbley (left, red jacket) accepting check presented by Angela Kirtdoll (right, brown boots), executive coordinator for the United Methodist Appalachian Ministry Network.

This month, Angela Kirtdoll of the United Methodist Appalachian Ministry Network (UMAMN) presented a $2,500 Hunger and Poverty Grant check to Belmont United Methodist Church's Backpack Snack Pack Ministry. Each week 106 students in Belmont's Head Start and kindergarten classes are provided with a snack pack for the weekend. A snack pack consists of two meats, two cereals, two drinks, a pudding, an applesauce and a sweet treat. Church volunteers meet biweekly to pack these snack packs and deliver them to the respective classes on Fridays during the school year.

Disaster Response News

Register Now for the Miss. Conference Disaster Academy

The 2018 Mississippi Conference Disaster Academy will take place March 23 - 24 at Brandon First United Methodist Church located at 205 Mary Ann Drive in Brandon. This two-day conference aims to build enthusiasm about our ability to spread the Gospel through local ownership and engagement in disaster as we participate together with God in the restoration of life and community. Read more here: http://bit.ly/2ELiHEa.
Disaster Response News, continued...

Volunteers Needed in Miss. Counties Recovering from Disasters

If you have specific skills for which you would like to volunteer, or if you are not skilled at carpentry but feel a call to disaster response ministry, families in Washington, Perry, Lamar, Jones, Holmes and Montgomery Counties could use your help. Recovery efforts include installing attic stairs, drywall, interior doors, trim, fixtures, kitchen cabinets and bathroom vanities; interior priming and painting and several other building-related tasks. If you are interested in being helping hands and a non-anxious presence in the lives of those affected by disaster, contact Mellie Jordan, disaster recovery project manager at 601.354.0515 or disasters@mississippi-umc.org.

UMCOR Special Sunday Offering: March 11, 2018

We cannot all be present when disaster strikes. However, on March 11, we will equip others to go.

Join thousands of others across the United States by participating in a United Methodist church-wide special Sunday with offering. Together, we will help fund the critical disaster-relief efforts of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). Unlike other benevolent causes, UMCOR receives no funds from the regular United Methodist Church budget. Our generous gifts help cover the agency’s administrative costs so UMCOR can continue to guarantee that 100 percent of all other donations go toward specific relief projects. The examples are many -- helping rebuild after hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria in the U.S. and continuing to help survivors of floods and other natural disasters that happened before 2017.

Please prayerfully consider how God would have you cheerfully and generously show God’s love around the world with your gifts. Download this kit (http://bit.ly/2GcJFl5) that has everything you need to empower your congregation to give generously.

Spiritual Leadership

Leading Into the Future at the Clergy Leadership Conference

This year's Clergy Leadership Conference kicked off Monday, February 5 with opening worship and a plenary led by general secretary of the General Commission on Religion and Race, Erin Hawkins. This year is GCORR's 50th anniversary and Hawkins read some excerpts from a message delivered around GCORR's inception and acknowledged that the issues we faced as a church 50 years ago are still prevalent in our society and faith communities today.

Hawkins led discussion on diverse culture identities and challenged every clergy person to answer the question, "if everything in your church continues the way that it is going right now, where will it be in 10 years? 20 years? And why? See pictures from the conference here: http://bit.ly/2ELcJmD.

Plans in the Works for Youth Spiritual Formation, Worship Resourcing Academies

The Center for Ministry is currently developing a Millsaps College Youth Academy for Spiritual Formation anticipated to begin in the summer of 2020. High school students will engage hard questions so they will be better prepared to become future leaders for the transformation of the world as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Additionally, plans are underway for an Academy for Worship Resourcing beginning sometime in 2020-2021. Participants will learn how to corporately invite the Holy Spirit into worship services and to reflect upon “why we do what we do” or “don’t do what we don’t do.”

Administry

Register Now for Southeast Church Network Conference

Plan to attend the SECN Administrator's Conference being held at the Terrace Hotel in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina Sunday, April 29-May 1. Church administration can be a mine field and it often requires careful navigation of the traps to be successful. Get more information and learn how to register here: http://bit.ly/2F6z5wD.

Protecting Our Churches: Reducing Cyber Risk

In this issue of Protecting Our Churches you'll find a list of some basic tips a church can take to help prevent a cyber loss from happening in the first place. Learn more here: http://bit.ly/2BZzwu7.

Arthur J. Gallagher Risk Management Services, Inc. administers the conference property insurance plan and writes a monthly newsletter titled, Protecting Our Churches for the Mississippi Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Students

Tell Your Story at The Gathering 2018

If your life was a movie, what genre would it be? Action? Drama? Comedy? Themed, "Director's Cut," this year's weekend student conference aims to show youth that no matter the genre, their story, and their role in it are important to God. The Gathering: Director's Cut will take place February 23-25, 2018 at Christ United Methodist Church in Jackson.

Learn more about how students can attend this event and begin to let God direct their story here: http://www.mississippi-umc.org/thegathering.

Student Cohort Deadline Approaching

The student cohort was developed collaboratively by the Mississippi United Methodist Annual Conference and Ministry Architects and designed to equip today's leaders from different church sizes, cultures and locations to grow and serve their various communities as lifelong disciples. The program is a two-year commitment and helps build the participants' sense of community.

More information on how youth can apply to take part in the next student cohort can be found here: http://bit.ly/2sxkVSK or contact Mike Howington, youth and families coordinator at 601.354.0515 or mhowington@mississippi-umc.org. The deadline to apply for the next student cohort is March 31, 2018. See pictures from the cohort's weekend retreat here: http://bit.ly/2rmY0ZL.

Subscribe Now to Youth News and Updates

Whether you're an adult youth volunteer, youth minister or a parent who just wants to be more engaged in what's relevant to the life of your teenager, get plugged in to tips, news and updates on events dedicated to student ministry in the Mississippi Conference. Subscribe to youth news and updates here: http://mississippi-email.brtapp.com/subscribe.

Cares & Concerns

As you pause to pray this week, take time to ask for strength, peace and comfort for the families and friends of those listed below who have joined the church triumphant:

• With heavy hearts, we extend our sympathy and love to the family of retired elder, Rev. Rank William Boyte, who passed away February 6. We give thanks to God for his witness.

• Rev. John Higginbotham, retired elder and founding pastor of St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Brandon, passed away recently. His funeral was held at St. Mark's February 3.

• Rev. Dale Hensarling, entered fully into the presence of his Lord and Savior January 26. Hensarling was an elder and member of the Mississippi and North Mississippi Conferences from 1974 to 1986.

• It is with sadness that we announce the death of Mrs. Clyde Whiteside Hathorn, surviving spouse of Rev. Howard Hathorn. She passed away January 26. Her service was held January 28 at First United Methodist Church in Louisville, Mississippi.
Women's Retreat at Camp Lake Stephens  
February 16-17, 2018  
This retreat is designed for women of all ages and from all walks of life. Retreat sessions will encourage open dialogue and include topics such as parenting boundaries, vocation and calling, financial management and starting your own business. The retreat will also feature activities like yoga, high ropes, nature walks, a bonfire and music. Camp Lake Stephens is also thrilled to welcome Rev. Cynthia Davis of Christ United Methodist Church in Memphis as the retreat's guest speaker and Julia Sheets from the Delta State University Wesley Foundation as our worship leader. The cost is $100 and includes lodging, meals and programming.  

United Methodist Men Gathering in Canton  
February 17, 2018  
United Methodist Men, mark your calendars to attend one of three stops coming to an area near you. All three have the same format and information. Events will have tables with resources pertaining to assistance with chartering, "Strength for Service" devotional books, Rise Against Hunger and the domestic violence initiative. This first event, taking place at Canton First UMC, will feature Bishop James E. Swanson Sr. and national director of men's ministries, Rev. Rick Vance. In addition, there will be music and food. Dates and details can be found here: [http://bit.ly/2F75Aek](http://bit.ly/2F75Aek).

Interfaith Peace Conference at Lake Junaluska  
March 1-4, 2018  
In polarizing times, how can we communicate with civility and respect while upholding our core values and religious traditions? Join us for "Meeting the Other: Can We Talk?" At this multi-day event, Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders offer lectures, worship, music, prayer and meditation to guide us in learning to talk across differences. Those attending can gain 1.5 CEUs. For more details and how to register, go to [http://bit.ly/2o1XFKa](http://bit.ly/2o1XFKa).

Camp Lake Stephens Youth Leader Sabbath Retreat  
April 9-10, 2018  
All youth leaders are invited to join us for a time of community with fellow leaders to experience the beauty of God in the midst of creation, to discern where God continues to lead us in our respective ministries -- and of course -- to just have fun at camp! The $50 fee will cover lodging, four meals and all programming. Spouses and family members are also welcome to attend for a minimal fee.  
Contact program director, Chap Fenwick at chap@camplakestephens.com for more information regarding retreat details.

PAUMCS Annual Conference  
April 12-14, 2018  
Themed, "Make a Joyful Noise," the Professional Administrators of The United Methodist Connectional Structure (PAUMCS) is having their annual conference in Nashville, Tennessee. The deadline is March 13, 2018 to reserve a room at the PAUMCS rate. Free airport shuttle service is available to and from the hotel. Additional information will be included in your welcome letter. For a list of seminars, schedule or events and more information, Read the brochure: [http://bit.ly/2AsByOV](http://bit.ly/2AsByOV).

Celebrating the Retirement of Gulfside Assembly’s Mollie Stewart  
April 21, 2018  
The Gulfside Association, Incorporated, Board of Directors takes great pride in offering Mrs. Mollie M. Stewart a retirement appreciation for serving the Gulfside Assembly in Waveland, Mississippi. The Mollie M. Stewart's Retirement Celebration Brunch will take place April 21, 2018 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Atlanta Airport located at 1325 Virginia Avenue. The cost for the Brunch is $60.00 per person. If you plan to attend, please RSVP to Carolyn Malone Clark at cmalonec@outlook.com no later than April 10, 2018. More information can be found here: [http://bit.ly/2Gfj1vu](http://bit.ly/2Gfj1vu).
Announcements

Apply Now for 2018 GBHEM Scholarships
Deadline is March 7
Students who are members of The United Methodist Church may apply for a Fall 2018 GBHEM scholarship online between January 3, 2018 - March 7, 2018 at www.gbhem.org/scholarshipapplication.

Share the good news with your congregations and celebrate that the office of loans and scholarships awarded over 2,500 students a total of $5 million in financial assistance for 2017! Over 35 of those students receiving scholarships belong to the Mississippi Conference. Thank you for your support in recognizing United Methodist Student Day, World Communion Sunday and Native American Sunday which help fund a portion of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) scholarships. The remaining funds for these awards come from gifts, annuities and endowments GBHEM has invested and administered for decades.

2018 Scholarships Offered for UMEIT: USA and NWCU Events
The Council of Bishops is once again offering scholarships for young adult, first-time participants to attend the National Workshop on Christian Unity and United Methodist Ecumenical and Interreligious Training in the United States (UMEIT: USA). Please let young adults, aged 21-35 know!

The National Workshop (NWCU) and UMEIT: USA occur parallel to each other once a year in a different area of the United States. This year they will be held in Silver Spring, Maryland April 16-19, 2018.

The NWCU is an opportunity for Christians who care about ecumenical and interreligious ministry to learn and network. UMEIT: USA is the annual training in the US for Methodists engaged in ecumenical and interreligious ministry through the church.

The Council of Bishops will offer up to six scholarships, at $300 each, to assist young adults with the costs of attending. To receive a scholarship application, either email jhawxhurst@umc-cob.org or look for the posting at http://bit.ly/2mP13VV.

Registration for the NWCU and UMEIT: USA is open via www.nwcu.org. The scholarship application is due to jhawxhurst@umc-cob.org no later than February 28.

Four-part Bible Study: Living Out The POWER of We With Bishop James E. Swanson Sr.
Link to access the videos: http://bit.ly/2l1bUbW

Employment
As a courtesy to the Mississippi Annual Conference, job announcements from across the United Methodist connection are featured in The Circuit Rider. To submit an employment notice, send an email to news@mississippi-umc.org. Postings are not guaranteed to appear more than once in Mississippi Conference publications. To read a description of job opening(s) listed below as well as other listings, go to http://www.mississippi-umc.org/employmentopportunities.

- Conference Treasurer & Director of Administration (AL)
- Director of New Faith Communities (AR)
- Part-time Pianist
- Student Minister
- Director of Music Ministries
- Associate Director of Youth Ministries
- Director of Youth and College Ministry
- Children’s Minister
- Part-Time Director of Music
- Director of Communications
- Part-time Music Minister

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