



News of the SEJ

Issue 1, September 2025



Picture a weekend that uplifts your soul, strengthens your faith, and brings you together with an unstoppable Sisterhood. Assembly will take place May 15-17, 2026, in Indianapolis, Indiana, bringing together thousands of United Women in Faith members, leaders and change agents for a powerful, spirit-filled gathering.

You won't want to miss our keynote speaker, Stacey Abrams, who will be joined by her mom, Rev. Carolyn Abrams. We know you will be inspired to Dream it! Believe it! and Do it! with these ladies as our Inspiration Speakers.

Assembly 2026 is our time to dream it, our time to believe it, and our time to do it. Come to this must-attend event to feel closer to God, bond in sisterhood, and care for yourself. Come be inspired and equipped to change the world.

Registration is open! We're getting ready and we want YOU to join us! Check with your conference president for scholarship opportunities. Sisters, it's time! See you in Indianapolis!

Deaconess Clara Ester Wins Award

The Alabama West Florida Board of Church and Society has created the Clara Ester Award. Its purpose is to honor individuals who embody

the United Methodist Church's baptismal vows to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. Deaconess Clara Ester is the inaugural recipient of the award.



A Word from our President



While the summer of 2025 may be remembered for its heat, storms, and politics, we can be grateful for our Mission u sessions, our annual days, and the new friendships we have developed. Your Southeastern Jurisdiction team has been working on site selection, theme/scripture selection, and visits to conferences. During the 2026 Assembly we will officially announce our SEJ Quadrennial site and theme. We will be calling on our conference leadership teams, PAG, and Directors to help make the 2028 Quadrennial one to remember!

Latest news for Assembly—Chanda Rule will lead the music, Influencers include Pastor Mya P. Miller, Ph.D., Reverend Liz Theoharis, Ph. D. , and Jennifer Hockenbery, Ph. D. [Click here](#) for more details.

A new Social Action Campaigns brochure is available online to download. As you know, for more than 155 years, United Women in Faith has been committed to advocating for women, children, and youth. Our bold foremothers advocated to improve women's health, raise women's status in society, organize for fair wages and benefits for workers and families and adopt the Charter for Racial Justice. Our social action priorities for the next four years are climate justice and ending mass incarceration and the criminalization of communities of color. You may order the free brochure [here](#).

As we head into what will be the final quarter of 2025, plan to show gratitude for God's blessings through the World Thank Offering. Our gifts help to support the total program of mission carried on through our national office and worldwide. You can make your "gift box" and share photos of your unit's creativity, download the World Thank Offering program and join the community gathering on October 30 at 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

The fourteen conferences of the Southeastern Jurisdiction are helping to make the world a better place. As Philippians 4:13 tells us, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

Debbie Bracewell
President
Southeastern Jurisdiction

What's Happening? This!

Diakonia World Federation Assembly in Tanzania

Deaconesses and Home Missioners in the United Methodist Church are members of the Diakonia World Federation (DWF), an international and ecumenical community of diaconal friendship. Every four years the DWF holds an assembly, bringing together deacons and deaconesses from all over the world and from many Christian denominations.

This year the Assembly took place July 7-12 in Moshi, Tanzania, the first time on the continent of Africa. Alabama-West Florida Deaconesses Clara Ester and Laurel Akin were 2 of the 250 people and 26 countries who attended.

A highlight of the Assembly was the special consecration service held for 15 new members of the United Methodist Order of Deaconess and Home Missioner, also a first on the continent of Africa.



Assembly? Why Should I Go?

I used to ask that question too. Why take vacation time and time away from my family to travel so far? Others were going and they would come home and tell me all about it. What's the point?

In 2018 I went to Assembly in Columbus, OH, to meet up with my friend Nancy, who came from another state. It was the most amazing experience!

UWFaith was celebrating 150 years of being Faith, Hope, and Love in Action. I met women from all over the US and around the world, who were passionate about being a voice for those who had none. I participated in sessions that moved me spiritually and educated me about issues that impact my world. And I was inspired listening to Harriet Jane Olsen, who was the UWFaith General Secretary at that time (that's me on the left with my friend Nancy on the right, excited to meet Harriet at Assembly 2022). I decided then that I would become more involved - that's why I'm writing this article!

I'm excited to go to Indianapolis for Assembly 2026. I know it will be a great experience of learning, worshipping, and spending time with my UWFaith sisters. Once again, I'll meet up with Nancy. And I hope to meet you there too!

Jane Darling
Secretary, Southeastern Jurisdiction

Inquiring Minds Want to Know



There are many roles UWFaith leaders fill to support the structure of UWF. Each of the five jurisdictions has a set of elected officers just as the local, district, and conferences have. The jurisdictions do not have coordinators, but they are led by a Board of Directors with advisory input from the Program Advisory Group (PAG) and national staff.

The Board of Directors consists of 25 directors, 20 of whom are elected by their jurisdiction and five who are nominated and elected by the National Organization. From the 25, a team of leaders is nominated and elected. They meet at least twice a year and serve a four-year term. Their work includes policy and governance, strategic planning, budgeting, care of retirees, and property. Currently on the Board of Directors are six members of the SEJ: Stephanie Dressler (NC), Renee Hayes (WNC), Zan Jones (A-WF), Melba McCallum (NC), Patsy Thomas (SC) and Katy Wrona (A-WF). Margaret Gipson (MS) and Lori Sluder (Holston) serve as alternates.

Another group that works closely with the national staff is the Program Advisory Group (PAG). This group (65 – 70 members) is selected from a pool of leaders nominated at their conference UWFaith annual meeting and from recommendations from the national board of directors and staff. This group may include the 25 Board of Directors members, a representative from each conference not already represented on the 25-member board, the five UWF jurisdiction presidents, representatives from United Methodist agencies, and five members selected by the Board of Directors for diversity. This group meets at least once a year to study issues and prepare recommendations to the national board regarding mission priorities, mission education, interpretation work, and program guidance on behalf of members of UWFaith.

All of us have a role to play in United Women in Faith. A thoughtful strategy mentioned in a local unit may find its way into a national UWFaith membership campaign. A district's efforts to clean up local parks may be highlighted in a video for UWFaith. We all contribute to the "bigger picture," whether we see results immediately or months into the future. We know our efforts turn love into action for women, children, and youth around the world.

--Debbie Bracewell
President, Southeastern Jurisdiction

Mission u 2025!



Virginia



Alabama-West Florida



Tennessee Western Kentucky



Florida



Assistant Dean Dorothy Carter and Dean Margaret Gipson guided us through a spiritual Mission u!



Mississippi



Western North Carolina



Mission u 2025!

MISSION U 2025



PRACTICING
HOPE
TOGETHER

I absolutely love Mission u. How could you not love Mission u? Not only is it an opportunity to experience God's presence, it is one event where you have an opportunity to mix, mingle and make new friends; an occasion to develop creative supportive fellowship. And, if that wasn't enough, it is also the event where you discuss mission opportunities. Whether your Unit/Church is large, small or somewhere in between, you come away with fresh new ideas/concepts of expanding our participation. In my opinion, Mission u offers the participant the perfect example of demonstrating our Purpose as United Women in Faith.

This year marked our third year as an in person event since Covid. And just as in 2020 when our Study was "Finding Peace" this year's study "Practicing Hope" was just as timely. As the topics and studies are done years in advance, it is a reminder that God plays a huge role, He often just prefers to stay anonymous!

Again this year our event was held at the Catholic Conference Center in Hickory, NC. The Center is centrally located in our Conference and offers lodging, dining, conference rooms, chapel and more under one roof. For our older more seasoned veterans, this is a huge bonus – once you check-in, you do not have to venture outside until you leave. Our event this year was Friday, July 18th through Saturday, July 19th. Many of our members are integral to their Sunday worship service and being able to drive home before dark on Saturday is ideal.

Participants were seated Emmaus style at their tables, with their place at the table marked with their name tent. Each table of ten included at least one 1st timer as well as a mix of District representation so they would form new friendships and share from various experiences.

Normally we have an early morning praise time, but this year we opted to offer twilight Vespers with the theme "We are the Light!" Five speakers gave a short 3-5 minute example representing the theme, and as we progressed through the speakers they were told to light their tea light and bring it forward and place it in one of the cubicles. When the last speaker finished, we turned the cross around to reveal a beautiful lit cross through stained glass. It was truly memorable.

Our entire weekend was awesome from beginning to end. Great study, excellent study leaders, perfect musical accompaniment – it was a Mission u to remember. This was my final Mission u as Dean, and I could not have asked for a better ending. I may be presumptuous in thinking our Mission u was the best, but honestly I leave Mission u every year thinking ours was the best! I hope everyone feels theirs is the best!

LaDonna Butts
Western North Carolina Conference

Odds & Ends



Do you have news to share?

We would love to hear from you! Send your articles and events to Jane Darling, SEJ Secretary, janedarling.umw@gmail.com. The next News of the SEJ will be January 2026.

Mark your calendar!

Events as of September that we know of

Western North Carolina: September 6, 2025

Annual Meeting, Williamson's Chapel UMC, Mooresville, NC
Speaker: Sally Vonner, General Secretary/CEO UWFaith

Holston: September 20-21, 2025

Annual Meeting & Spiritual Growth Event, Wesley Memorial UMC,
Johnson City, TN
Speaker: Rev. Dr. Sondrea Tolbert, Executive Director, Scarritt Bennett Center, Nashville

Tennessee-Western Kentucky: September 27, 2025

Annual Meeting, Gordon Memorial UMC, Nashville, TN
Speaker: Sally Vonner, General Secretary/CEO UWFaith

Alabama-West Florida: October 3-4, 2025

Spiritual Enrichment Event, Blue Lake Methodist Camp, Andalusia, AL

North Georgia: October 4, 2025

Annual Meeting, Cascade UMC, Atlanta, GA
Speaker: Emily Jones, UWFaith National Executive for Racial Justice

Florida: November 8, 2025

Annual Meeting, First UMC Plant City, FL
Speaker: Sally Vonner, General Secretary/CEO UWFaith



United
Women
in Faith