



Statement from the South Georgia Conference

It is now public information that an arrest has been made in connection with the alleged financial embezzlement from Riverside United Methodist Church and the church's childcare center.

This past October, the South Georgia Conference made the difficult decision to close the church and childcare center. This decision was made even more difficult by the fact that we could not share details with the congregation due to a pending investigation.

We have now been able to share with the congregation what led to the abrupt closure of the church.

In the fall of 2025, church leadership and conference officials became aware of financial challenges facing the congregation. As significant details emerged the week of October 20th, it became clear that multiple obligations had gone unpaid, including utilities and mortgage payments, resulting in immediate operational concerns. Documentation then confirmed a broader pattern of outstanding debts, liens, and judgments.

After diligent efforts, we were unable to find a workable solution that would allow the daycare to remain open and compensate the employees. Because the child care center did not have sufficient funds, the Annual Conference paid all employees of the child care center for the three weeks of salary they had earned but had not been paid, two weeks of severance, and also refunded families who had prepaid for daycare services.

This has been a long, hard journey for all involved, especially for the members of Riverside UMC. We are deeply sorry for the hurt and pain the closure brought to the congregation and for the disruption it caused for families and employees of the childcare center.

While plans remain uncertain as to the future of the Riverside UMC building, we are grateful for the ministry of Encounter Church, which has continued to worship in the building and continues to represent Jesus on the property.

The people of Riverside UMC have shown the spirit of Christ in countless ways, and we trust that same faith will continue to guide all who have called this church home.

May we join together in prayer for all who have been affected by this situation, and may we continue to seek God's grace and wisdom as we move forward in faith.