

# The Arkansas United Methodist

LIVING OUR FAITH

July 2019 | Volume 167, Issue 7

Arkansas River

## Flood Response

**OMP**  
in Pine Bluff

**ROOM**  
**29:11**  
Helps Foster Families

Connecting with  
the Community in  
**ALMA**

# 60 Arkansas Students Receive 2019 Dollars for Scholars Grants

The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas is proud to make \$60,000 in scholarship contributions to 60 students receiving 2019 Dollars for Scholars awards to begin or continue their education at United Methodist colleges, universities, and seminaries.

For each recipient, the students' local churches gave \$1,000 and the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation matched that contribution. The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas gave \$1,000, along with the student's selected college contributing \$1,000 for a significant \$4,000 scholarship award to each student.

## UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Mr. Samuel E. Adkisson, IV  
Ms. Lauren L. Berry  
Ms. Gwen T. Boone  
Mr. Kyle A. Bounds  
Ms. Aubrey N. Brink  
Mr. William C. Brown  
Ms. Lexie N. Burlleson  
Ms. Alexis D. Burns  
Mr. Joseph R. Coker  
Ms. Madison R. Connaway  
Ms. Kayla A. Cooper  
Ms. Hannah N. Cozart  
Ms. Lacey N. Crosby  
Mr. Joshua D. M. Dawson  
Ms. Anna R. Delony  
Ms. Katherine Delony  
Mr. Pedro T. Demeritte  
Ms. Rebekah L. Dodson  
Ms. Antoinette L. Elion  
Ms. Allison M. Epperson  
Mr. Matthew F. Esterer  
Mr. Sandarius S. Gillisipe  
Mr. Robert R. Harris  
Ms. Meredith N. Hatfield  
Mr. Chad E. Hornsby  
Ms. Jessalyn E. Hoskyn  
Mr. Tucker S. Humphries  
Mr. Martavious Johnson  
Mr. Denicio D. Knowles  
Ms. Laura M. Wilson  
Mr. John M. Mathis  
Ms. Virginia G. Mertz  
Ms. Valricka J. Mitchell  
Ms. Sydney R. Mulhearn  
Ms. Kelly J. Murray-Norman  
Mr. Silas B. Myane  
Ms. Annabelle N. Neilson  
Mr. Tyler J. Odell  
Mr. Robert C. Parker  
Mr. Lawson B. Points  
Mr. Creighton M. Polk  
Mr. Ackiem I. Powell  
Mr. Edward A. Powers  
Mr. Lincoln G. Pritchard  
Ms. Alyssa M. Savage  
Ms. Madison E. Shaddox  
Ms. Rachel J. Shepherd  
Ms. Myicara A. Spencer-Cole  
Ms. Makala J. Strang  
Ms. Kayla M. Vann  
Ms. Sydney R. Wagner  
Mr. Seth R. Wagoner  
Ms. Paulina C. Webber  
Mr. Tristam A. Williams Thompson  
Mr. Joseph S. Winningham  
Ms. Emily L. Wollenberg

## SEMINARY STUDENTS

Mr. Samuel M. Coker  
Mr. Walter J. Garrett  
Ms. Mary J. Meek  
Mr. Robin G. Roark

## HOME CHURCH

Lakeside UMC, Lake Village  
Pulaski Heights UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Conway  
FUMC, Greenbrier  
Sequoyah UMC, Fayetteville  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
Lakewood UMC, North Little Rock  
Duncan UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Conway  
First UMC, Hot Springs  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
Faith UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Greenbrier  
Asbury UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Fort Worth  
First UMC, Fort Worth  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, El Dorado  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Bryant  
First UMC, Bentonville  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
Pulaski Heights UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Brinkley  
Pulaski Heights UMC, Little Rock  
Pulaski Heights, UMC Little Rock  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
St. Paul UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Greenbrier  
First UMC, Prairie Grove  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Conway  
White Hall UMC, White Hall  
First UMC, Prairie Grove  
Village UMC, Hot Springs  
First UMC, Clinton  
First UMC, Fort Smith  
First UMC, Conway  
First UMC, Conway  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
Pulaski Heights UMC, Little Rock  
Asbury UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Sheridan  
Cabot UMC  
Pulaski Heights UMC, Little Rock  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
Fairfield Bay UMC  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Bentonville  
First UMC, Batesville  
Wesley Chapel UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Conway  
First UMC, Clarksville

## HOME CHURCH

First UMC, Conway  
Shorewood Hills UMC, Malvern  
Trinity UMC, Little Rock  
First UMC, Sheridan

## COLLEGE

Millsaps College  
Hendrix College  
Hendrix College  
Hendrix College  
Hendrix College  
Philander Smith College  
Hendrix College  
Philander Smith College  
Hendrix College  
Hendrix College  
Philander Smith College  
Oklahoma City University  
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Huntingdon College  
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Southern Methodist University  
Hendrix College  
Hendrix College  
Hendrix College  
Philander Smith College  
Hendrix College  
Dillard University  
Hendrix College  
Hendrix College  
Oklahoma City University

## SEMINARY

Boston University School of Theology  
Perkins School of Theology  
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary  
Saint Paul School of Theology





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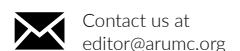
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## STORY IDEA?



# When Communities Come Together



**T**his past month has really gotten me thinking about the importance of community.

As many of you are aware, Arkansas was hit with a number of natural disasters in June: from the Arkansas River flooding that displaced thousands of people to heavy rains, high winds, and tornado damage that made an already bad situation even worse, this has been a rough time to be an Arkansan.

But despite all of the devastation that we faced in the state, I was encouraged and proud to see so many people step up, step out and ask their neighbors, “What do you need? I can help.”

Our Disaster Response team, led by Byron and Janice Mann, have been working hard since day one to assist communities affected by high flood waters. They’ve assembled volunteers from across the state who are willing to help “muck out” homes, save homeowners thousands of dollars, and try to get them back to a state of normality a little bit quicker.

Arkansans have given generously of their time and money, raising more than \$15,000 so far for flood victims.

As Bishop Mueller highlighted in his Episcopal Address, we need to “double down” on our mission work. As we’ve seen this month, Arkansans are really taking that challenge to heart.

In this issue, we highlight the work that a team of volunteers began in Fort Smith, one of the hardest hit areas by the Arkansas River flood. Volunteers from Northwest Arkansas, as well as United Methodist Churches in the city, worked together to improve and rebuild the lives of their neighbors.

We also showcase the work of another volunteer mission group, the Ozark Mission Project. Every year, this group of youth and young adults travels to all corners of the state to repair homes, build wheelchair ramps for elderly and disabled Arkansans, and learn that working together to improve the lives of people in your community is one of the best ways to show the abundant love of Christ to the world.

There are other stories of community-building as well, such as the work that Alma and Kibler UMC are doing in their small town to building community events for the whole city, and the work of the Adona - Wye Mountain UMC home repair mission that makes homes safe for residents of their small community.

There are countless other examples of Arkansas Methodists doing good work in their own communities, and that makes me proud to be a part of this wonderful church.

I encourage you all to get out into your own communities, get to know your neighbors and be the hands and feet of Christ for anyone and everyone you can.

**Caleb Hennington**

Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)



ARKANSAS RIVER FLOOD RELIEF

CAN YOU

HELP OUT?

Due to the historic flooding of the Arkansas River, Disaster Response is needing volunteers and donations to aid in clean-up activities.

SIGN UP NOW AT  
[WWW.EISEVERYWHERE.COM/VOLUNTEERSIGNUP](http://WWW.EISEVERYWHERE.COM/VOLUNTEERSIGNUP)

DONATE ONLINE AT  
[BIT.LY/ARUMC-DONATE](http://BIT.LY/ARUMC-DONATE)



# Discipleship is Always Personal

**T**he heart of our work in the Arkansas Annual Conference is to “create vital congregations that make disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples equipped and sent to transform lives, communities and the world.”

In other words, we’re all about discipleship. Discipleship matters. Deeper discipleship matters. Daily discipleship matters. And, ultimately, personal discipleship matters most of all.

But there’s personal and then there’s personal.

Personal discipleship is never primarily a matter of just what you think (although being thoughtful is critically important), advocating for a particular political ideology (although living out your faith is essential), or spending time on social media lecturing others when you think they are wrong (although there are times you have to speak boldly).

Instead, personal discipleship is focused on how your ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior transforms how you deal with people. After all, you’re not just living for yourself. You’re an ambassador for Christ. And that means you do what Jesus did - lead with compassion. Sure, he called people to repent and challenged them to change. But first, he always led with compassion.

Quite simply, you are to share Christ’s love before you do anything else. Sometimes this means loving someone with whom you disagree, someone who is difficult or



**Gary E. Mueller**

Bishop of the Arkansas Conference

someone who is different. At other times, it means giving money to support Lydia Patterson as part of the challenge grant from the United Methodist Foundation, joining with others in clean up after the devastating floods from earlier this spring or making sure your congregation is involved in feeding hungry children through 200,000 Reasons. And at still other times it means befriending someone who needs to experience Jesus’ love up close and personal.

In a day and age when the United Methodist Church is deeply divided over matters of human sexuality, our nation is polarized over politics and social media seems more hateful than helpful, what you do matters. So take seriously what Jesus has done for you. So seriously it turns you into a person of compassion. Then lead with that compassion. Because when all is said and done, discipleship is always personal.





# Remembering Ken

By Britt Skarda  
*Senior Pastor at Pulaski Heights UMC*

Upon my arrival as the new senior pastor at Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church in 2010, I received a bonus very few clergy can claim; I was blessed to serve a congregation with its own bishop in residence, Kenneth W. Hicks. Bishop Hicks began his role at PHUMC in 1992 after retiring from a distinguished career in ministry that spanned his ordination as deacon and elder in 1952-53 and his service as a bishop in the South Central Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church, 1976-92.

Prior to my appointment to PHUMC, Ken Hicks and I had been, to quote Henry Wadsworth Longfellow “ships that pass in the night.” In 1984, as Bishop Hicks was leaving his assignment in the Arkansas Episcopal Area to serve the Kansas Area, I was just beginning the process of entering the ordained ministry in Arkansas. In 1992, as Bishop Hicks was preparing to retire and return to Little Rock and PHUMC, I was leaving my appointment as an associate pastor at Pulaski Heights to serve another congregation. During this period, Bishop Hicks and I managed to correspond regarding his upcoming position at the church.

It’s not that I wasn’t already familiar with Ken’s reputation. As an active layperson in my local church during Bishop Hicks’ tenure, I had admired his leadership as our Arkansas Bishop. Ken served both the North Arkansas and Little Rock Annual Conferences with great distinction. I especially appreciated Bishop Hicks’ faithful witness during the infamous Creation Science trial of 1981 (*McLean v. Arkansas Board of Education*) that would ultimately lead to a United States Supreme Court ruling in a 1987 Louisiana case that banned the mixing of “science and religion” in classrooms nationwide. In his deposition prior to the trial, Ken was asked to offer his opinion regarding the origin of humanity. The bishop’s response was classic:

“Well, for me personally I am open—I believe that humanity, as with all other forms of life, was created by God. I am open to the manner in which that was done. In terms of it having been done instantaneously, if it could be verified some day that it was that way, you know, that’s okay with me. If it took 10 million years to do it, that does not bother me at all. In fact, I think it would be kind of neat if God did it that way...”

Kenneth Hicks was the ultimate peacemaker. His passion for peace with justice shaped his values and defined his life, both personally and professionally. From his work with the Arkansas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty to his service with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families; from his almost 73 years of marriage to his beloved Elaine to his love for his family and all people, Ken personified a brand of peace that demanded believers and advocates move from a position of “talking the talk” to “walking the walk.” The Kenneth W. Hicks Peace Endowment at PHUMC seeks to carry on this important legacy even today.

Ken Hicks had a way of teaching us valuable lessons we never realized we needed to learn. Staff meetings at Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church with Ken in attendance challenged my own long-held “let’s get down to business” philosophy of doing ministry. As much as I tried to stick to the meeting agenda, Ken would pick up on some critical moral or theological nugget and by the time he finished unpacking it for us, we knew we had spent time at the feet of a wise sage.

Ken Hicks was so much more than a great leader. He was a great human being. Who could ask for more?

To God be the glory for the life of Bishop Kenneth W. Hicks.

# The Method to Becoming a Scholar



By Rev. Deena Marie Hamilton  
*Featured Contributor*

**B**ecause this conference invested in me, I was able to learn from some of the world's greatest pastors and theologians. Their influence expanded my understanding of how to implement the Holy Club questions in the local church through a postmodern lens. Once I began to magnify my understanding of bridging theology to ministry in the church, I realized that these Oxford Holy Club questions were golden nuggets.

This article is a thank you letter to the following people: Revs. Charles and John Wesley, Rev. Bob Crossman, Bishop David Max Whitfield, Rev. Ted Campbell, Rev. William J. Abraham, Dr. Roderick Smothers, Rev. David Lowes Watson, and The Arkansas Conference of The United Methodist Church.

I've had the most magnificent honor of being a breakout session presenter at this year's 2019 conference of the Academy of Evangelism in Theological Education (AETE). I was super excited about it because I was representing Philander Smith College as an adjunct religion professor. This conference was an international conference for evangelism professors. Past presidents include Holy Club Expert and Wesleyan historian, Rev. David Lowes Watson Ph.D. and Bishop Scott J. Jones. This year, the conference was hosted by the Theology Department of The University of Notre Dame.

I was one of the presenters for the Theory and Practice of Evangelism. I presented the findings of my seven-year research project. I was able to prove and document 27 different ways

the Oxford Holy Club questions could be used in pastoral ministry to evangelize, order the life of the local church, and create a discipleship community. I applied these questions in the local church while I was the pastor of McCabe Chapel, and I continued to apply the questions to a congregational model of evangelism that I developed with my Wesleyan Studies professor, William J. Abraham. This was done in multiple contexts in three conferences (Arkansas, North Texas, and West Texas/New Mexico Episcopacy).

The applications of the Holy Club earned me the National World Communion Leadership Award from Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church, The MLK/Bishop Oscar Romero Scholarship at Perkins School of Theology, an Arkansas Methodist Foundation Scholarship, and the Bert Affleck Award for innovation and creativity in a pastoral internship for the 2017 graduating class of SMU/Perkins School of Theology.

The journey started when I was still the pastor of McCabe Chapel. I was enrolled in course of study, and Bob Crossman was our Evangelism instructor. He gave us the Oxford Holy Club questions of personal reflection in a handout.

John and Charles Wesley used these questions to disciple, evangelize, order the life of the church, and create an environment of self-reflection. This strict systematic catechesis resulted in the first rise of Methodism in 1729.

When I read these questions, I realized something ... these questions could be used as children's sermon topics. It didn't stop there. Once I read the questions several months later, I realized that these questions could be used to disciple youth, college students, and young adults.

Methodist Polity and Doctrine and pastoral administration professor, Bishop David Max Whitfield for a peer review. Why did I do that? For three weeks, I felt oppressed. LOL! But Bishop Whitfield warned me. He said, “I’m gonna hurt your feelings. I have to. This has to be perfect because you’re gonna be presenting before professors where some have been teaching evangelism for decades.” Bishop Whitfield got me together and ready, which I deeply appreciated. We worked on that paper together up until it was time for me to present.

Once I got to Indiana after a long overnight 10-hour drive, I didn’t have time to get any sleep. All I could do was check my bags into the hotel, change my clothes and brush my teeth, and go to the conference. When I got there, I saw David Lowes Watson. I knew that it was him because when he talked, I heard a British accent.

I had some deep reservations about showing his research in my presentation because I didn’t want for my interpretation to be incorrect. I was so nervous that I had to stand up to do my presentation ... What happened after my presentation was not what I expected ...

Going to that conference not only motivated me to be a pastor that will make evangelism accessible to the congregation, but I was able to connect with a mentor that is going to help me with my work.

And that person was none other than the Holy Club Expert himself, Rev. David Lowes Watson, Ph.D. Dr. Watson was the facilitator of the breakout session that I presented. He believed in and understood how I was able to implement those questions of reflection to order the life of the local church.

And together we are going to pray for each other, support each other, and work together to help our denomination get back to our Wesleyan roots.

It’s funny how we agreed to work with each other. A week after the conference, we had the opportunity to speak on the phone. The conversation made me feel like I was a soldier being knighted by a medieval lord. Dr. Watson didn’t ask me if I wanted to work with him. He told me we were going to work together. When he said that, it felt like a divine, sacred honor was bestowed upon me.

So, I just wanted to take pause ... and say thank you, to God and the people mentioned because they were part of “the method” that transformed me into a theological scholar.

To God be the glory.

*Hamilton is a graduate of Philander Smith College and SMU/ Perkins School of Theology; She teaches World Religions at Philander and is a certified candidate for ordained ministry Elder track*

*Hamilton’s theological concentrations are Evangelism and Wesleyan ecclesiology.*

*Hamilton can be reached via email at [deena.hamilton@arumc.org](mailto:deena.hamilton@arumc.org).*

That gave me the idea to invite churches, businesses, and institutions of higher learning into a partnership using hip-hop culture to form discipleship community among the participants of a radio talk show and iTunes podcast. The Method: Real Talk for Real People was based on the 22 questions of personal reflection of the Wesley Brothers when they were students at Oxford. Each show’s topic was something pertaining to these questions. This radio show aired for four years on KABF 88.3 FM in 156 countries and online. This was an evangelism partnership with St. Andrew United Methodist Church, Perkins School of Theology, Denman, Hamilton, and Associates CPAs, Better Community Development, Inc., and Opportunity Knox Productions.

Through circumstances beyond my control, I am not serving in a local church, but another window of opportunity opened up to me, which was becoming an adjunct professor at Philander Smith College. Because of the continuing education requirements and participation in professional organizations associated with our subjects, I had to search for one to be part of. This was the Academy of Evangelism in Theological Education. Because I teach world religions, I knew that qualified me to become a part of the association. I am grateful to Dr. Roderick Smothers, President of Philander Smith College, for requiring that kind of excellence from even adjunct professors.

I submitted my research topic for approval to present at the conference. I didn’t think that it would be accepted, but it was. And then I got even more scared because I knew how to apply the Oxford Holy Club questions in pastoral ministry, but I didn’t have a clue about the detailed history of it. I had to reach out to one of my favorite professors at Perkins, and that was world Methodist history expert, Rev. Ted Campbell, Ph.D. If it weren’t for Dr. Campbell, I would not have a grounded and sound understanding of the history of the Oxford Holy Club and its effectiveness because Dr. Campbell told me The Early Class Meetings by David Lowes Watson was one of the best sources I could have on the subject.

Now that I had my research and theological sources to back up my findings, I wrote my paper and submitted it to my United

# A Moment with Methodist FAMILY HEALTH

## Making Brighter Days for Arkansas's Abandoned, Abused, Neglected Children

*In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. - Matthew 5:16*

By Kelli Reep  
Director of Communications, Methodist Family Health

**F**or 120 years, Methodist Family Health has been ministering to the state's abandoned, abused, and neglected children and their families. Our genesis was at the Arkansas Methodist Orphanage, which was established in a two-story framed house on three lots in downtown Little Rock. Its purpose was to seek homeless orphans, find loving homes for them, and make it possible for families to adopt a child who would be a blessing to their home.

As the orphanage system progressed, so did Methodist Family Health. We established the Methodist Children's Home in the 1940s, which remains today. Instead of one large home with boys and girls of all ages living together, this campus was comprised of smaller cottages for a more family-like atmosphere. As we moved into the 21st century and had a better understanding of the roles trauma and psychiatric, behavioral, emotional and spiritual issues play in children, Methodist Family Health expanded our programming into a complete continuum of care to serve children and their families throughout Arkansas.

Today, Methodist Family Health has the state's only nonprofit behavioral hospital for children, Methodist Behavioral Hospital, in Maumelle. Our continuum also includes two residential treatment centers, eight therapeutic group homes, an emergency shelter, a day treatment program, eight counseling clinics, nine school- and community-based counseling clinics, the state's only grief center for children and their families, and the Arkansas Center for Addictions Research, Education and Services (Arkansas CARES).

In addition, Methodist Family Health has a 501 © 3 nonprofit foundation to serve as its fundraising program. The donations raised through the Methodist Family Health Foundation help the children in our care realize their own worth, recognize their potential, and provide them a firm foundation for the rest of their lives. You and the children at your church or in your neighborhood can help build this foundation – and have a ball before going back to school.

Bright Night, an event for Arkansas's United Methodist youth groups and their families, will be from 5-8 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 2 at Big Rock Mini-Golf and Fun Park. Kids and families can play mini golf, bumper boats, arcade games, go-karts, lazer



|| Photo provided by Methodist Family Health

frenzy, batting cages, an amazing aerial maze and much more. Proceeds from Bright Night help rebuild the lives of Arkansas children and families we serve at Methodist Family Health.

Tickets are \$25 each until July 28 and include the ticket holder's choice of three activities at Big Rock Mini Golf and Fun Park and a light supper. Beginning July 29, tickets are \$30. Additional concessions and activities are available for purchase from Big Rock Mini Golf and Fun Park. To purchase tickets, visit <https://methodistfamily.ejoinme.org/bright-night-tickets>. You also can complete and return the Big Rock activity waiver at <https://www.vantora.com/e/brfp/waiver/>. For more information, contact Jamie Griffith at 501-906-4209, email [jgriffith@methodistfamily.org](mailto:jgriffith@methodistfamily.org) or visit [MethodistFamily.org/Bright-Night](http://MethodistFamily.org/Bright-Night).

By shining your light on the abandoned, abused, and neglected children in our care, you are helping them focus their light on healing and hope. We hope to see you at Bright Night in August.



From left to right: Rev. Deborah Head, Rev. Melissa Maskell, Rev. Larry Dodgen, Bishop Gary Mueller, District Superintendent Mark Norman, Rev. Rocky Starnes, and Rev. Joe Head. || Photo provided by Helena First UMC

# Helena First UMC Celebrates 200 Years of Ministry in State

By Caleb Hennington  
Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)

**I**n 2018, Helena First United Methodist Church celebrated 200 years of “worship, faith, and evangelizing.” This past June, they held a celebration ceremony to commemorate the anniversary of the church’s founding in 1818.

According to an announcement sent out by the church, Helena First was founded in 1818 after William Harrison Bailey of Kentucky came to the Helena area and began holding prayer meetings in his home with other early settlers to the Arkansas territory.

Eventually, those prayer meetings became an organized congregation and was the first congregation of the Methodist Society west of the Mississippi River, marking the start of Methodism in Arkansas.

Helena First held a full weekend of events from June 7 – 9. There were sessions going over the history of the church, prayer breakfasts and dinners, an organ recital by Adam Savacool, a

recreation of an old time tent revival led by Southeast District Superintendent Mark Norman, and a formal worship service on Sunday night with a sermon delivered by Bishop Gary Mueller.

Bishop Mueller also dedicated and blessed a new addition to the church property; a historical marker that tells the history of Helena First United Methodist Church.

Rev. Deborah Head, senior pastor of Helena First UMC, said she is grateful for Bishop Mueller and Southeast District Superintendent Rev. Mark Norman’s presence at the celebration.

“Helena First United Methodist Church was blessed to celebrate 200 years of Methodist ministry in Eastern Arkansas,” Head said. “Brother Mark preached a fiery Saturday evening sermon and on Sunday, Bishop Mueller brought the Word and Scripture and presented us with a challenge of staying faithful for our next 200 years. It was a wonderful weekend of celebration.”

For more on the history of Helena First UMC, visit the history page on their church website. <https://helenaunitedmethodist.org/about-helena-first-united-methodist-church/>.

# Service-Learning Trips Engage, Inspire Hendrix College Students

Helping others in Rwanda and New York City provides opportunities for growth



Rwanda group photo, from left: Trip guide/host Paul Ruganintwali, director of ESOL and International Student Services Gwen Stockwell, politics and environmental studies professor Peter Gess, psychology professor Jennifer Penner, summer intern Hannah Henderson '20, Greer Ayers '22, trip guide/host Joan Umwiza, summer intern Hannah Eldred '21, summer intern Reagan Kilgore '20, Sumaira Sardar '21, Aleck Bratt '20, and Alex Scott '20.

|| Photo provided by Hendrix College

By Amy Forbus  
*Director of Communications, Hendrix College*

**T**wo groups of Hendrix College students, faculty, and staff began summer break with service-learning trips to New York City and Rwanda, where their experiences serving others led them to learn more about themselves and the world.

Organized by the Hendrix College Office of Religious Life and sponsored by the Miller Center for Vocation, Ethics, and Calling, service-learning trips welcome individuals from any faith tradition or non-religious perspective. Participating students work on projects that benefit communities experiencing material or social disadvantages while building relationships with those they serve. Students also spend time exploring their own values and social concerns, beliefs and commitments, gifts and limitations through guided discussions and journal writing.

“Service-learning trips give students an opportunity to connect with cultures and people who hold different perspectives of the world,” said the Rev. J.J. Whitney '96, chaplain and director of the Office of Religious Life for the College. “Through service that leads to significant interactions in the community, students continue to discern their vocations, discovering how their gifts and passions can make a difference in meeting the needs of our time.”

The New York City trip was coordinated through Youth

Service Opportunities Project (YSOP), a Quaker organization grounded in the Quaker values of respect, simplicity, and service with students from any faith or belief system and those who do not ascribe to any faith. Director of student activities Tonya Hale and biology professor Dr. J.D. Gantz led this trip, which included students Lexie Burleson '21, Christina Choh '19, Brittany Chue '21, Christine Donakey '21, Nina Faidley '20, Chelsea Flowers '21, Audrey Mutoni '22, and Harper Purifoy '19. The group spent their days serving at soup kitchens, organizing supply closets for shelters, distributing food and toiletries, and tutoring young readers in an elementary school. Evenings and the week's end brought opportunities to see the sights of New York City.

“This service-learning trip ignited a new passion to serve that I never knew was in me,” Flowers said. “Typically, as Americans, we see the homeless as more of an object of misfortune rather than an actual person. We tell the homeless what they need to survive in society without much concern for providing that aid.”

Flowers embraced the change in perspective the trip brought her, and recommends that others take advantage of similar opportunities. “I promise you that learning things about someone's experience will leave a lasting impact on you and them, and it may teach you some things. Be open to that,” she said. “The little things truly go a long way for people, and this trip helped me realize that. I am forever grateful for it.”

The second service-learning group traveled to Gashora, a

small village in rural South Rwanda, to spend a week at Gashora Girls Academy of Science and Technology (GGAST), a long-standing partner with Hendrix College. During lunch, Hendrix students interacted with GGAST students and talked with them about the U.S. college experience. In the mornings and afternoons, the group volunteered with Dihiro Public School, which serves primary and secondary students. They worked with teachers and students of Dihiro to strengthen English language instruction there, and at week's end, they watched the Dihiro English Club hold a debate on the topic of unplanned teen pregnancy.



Hendrix students who traveled to New York City. Front row: Nina Faidley '20, Harper Purifoy '19, Chelsea Flowers '21  
Middle row: Christine Donakey '21, Brittany Chue '21, Christina Choh '19, Audrey Mutoni '22, and director of student activities Tonya Hale.  
Back row: Lexie Bureson '21, biology professor J.D. Gantz.  
|| Photo provided by Hendrix College

Before returning to the U.S., the group engaged with Rwanda's history of genocide and reconciliation, and took some time to explore Akagera National Park by safari.

Dr. Peter Gess, a politics and environmental studies professor, and Gwen Stockwell, director of ESOL and International Student Services, led the Rwanda trip. Hendrix students Greer Ayers '22, Aleck Bratt '20, Sumaira Sardar '21, and Alexandra Scott '20 participated, and were assisted by Dr. Jennifer Penner, a Hendrix psychology professor who spent part of her recent sabbatical teaching at GGAST, and by Hannah Eldred '21, Hannah Henderson '20, and Reagan Kilgore '20, Hendrix students completing summer internships at GGAST.

"Our teaching topics included various aspects of grammar, vocabulary, and literature, as well as lesson-planning," Gess said. "We also trained the teachers on the use of technology—the LCD projector we donated was so happily received!"

"Rwanda is full of beautiful people whose smiles are contagious and whose joy is infectious," said Ayers. "I am so thankful for this experience from the Miller Center, as it has once again allowed me to experience cross-cultural servanthood as a way of deepening my understanding of the world and all the beautiful things it has to offer."





# Historic River Flooding Devastates Communities Across Arkansas

Arkansas Conference Disaster Response Works With Volunteers To Assist Affected Households

By Caleb Hennington  
*Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)*

**I**n late May 2019, the Arkansas River rose to historically high levels due to heavy rainfall and the release of swollen reservoirs upstream in neighboring Kansas and Oklahoma.

In many parts of the state, decades-old river records were broken, including a 1945 record set in Van Buren, and a Morrilton record from 1927.

The Arkansas River at Fort Smith crested at nearly 41 feet, almost 10 feet above flood stage, displacing families and businesses along the Arkansas River Valley. Nearly 500 homes were flooded in Fort Smith alone, and even more homes were affected in Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and further downstream in Pendleton, Arkansas.

The Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church's Disaster Response team worked with local emergency response officials to find people who were in need of help, and work to "muck out" the damaged portions of their homes.

In total, more than 250 volunteers have signed up to assist families and individuals with "mucking out" their homes. Mucking out is the process of tearing out carpeting, sheetrock and other parts of a home damaged by water that has entered a building.

Even though turnout has been good, Byron Mann, Arkansas Conference Disaster Response Coordinator, said they are needing additional volunteers to sign up for training days and help muck out the hundreds of homes still in need of clean up. To sign up to volunteer, visit [www.eiseverywhere.com/volunteersignup](http://www.eiseverywhere.com/volunteersignup).

They are also hoping to continue raising money that will be used to assist people in rebuilding their lives once the clean up process is complete. The Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church has raised \$15,000 in donations since late May. Mann hopes to continue receiving donations to reach their goal of \$100,000.

"This is a long-term process and by the end of it, we hope to have touched hundreds of lives by assisting in the cleanup process," Mann said.

To donate online, visit [bit.ly/arumc-donate](http://bit.ly/arumc-donate) and select the first box, "Arkansas Disaster Relief," to give to families affected by the Arkansas River flood.





To view a video of the Fort Smith Disaster Response clean-up, visit [bit.ly/river-flood-fort-smith](https://bit.ly/river-flood-fort-smith). Video Editing by Christina Choh



Volunteers with the Arkansas Conference Disaster Response team “muck out” the home of Keith Reeves in Fort Smith. The carpet, as well as soggy portions of the sheet rock, must be torn out and thrown away before repairs can occur. || Photo by Christina Choh



Disaster Response volunteers in Fort Smith. From left to right, Les Oliver, Alan Yount, Gary Reigel, Jane Oliver, Judith Vining, Rob Vining, Shelley Lee, Roy Lee, Ken Savells, George Graham, and homeowner Keith Reese. Not pictured: Amy Bradshaw, Don Bradshaw, and Linda Ray.



A house in Fort Smith that was damaged by the Arkansas River Flood. The owners of the home will spend many weeks clearing out the damaged parts of their home, replacing furniture, and throwing away everything ruined by the murky flood waters. || Photo by Christina Choh

# Ozark Mission Project Gets to Work in Pine Bluff

This year, the Ozark Mission Project traveled to different cities around the state to help out their neighbors by repainting homes, building wheelchair ramps, tending gardens, and other service projects. OMP held camps throughout June and July, from Fayetteville to Texarkana, Jonesboro to El Dorado and everywhere in between.

Our Conference Communication team traveled to Pine Bluff to witness the work that a group of youth and adults from Lafayette, Louisiana were doing for a lady named Bernice Hayes in Pine Bluff.

You can watch the video below and see the amazing work of OMP. If you are reading the print version, visit [bit.ly/omp-pine-bluff](http://bit.ly/omp-pine-bluff) to watch.





Bernice Hayes of Pine Bluff pauses for a minute for a photo. The OMP group from Lafayette came to Hayes's house to fix up her garden and build a new wheelchair ramp for her house. || Photo by Day Davis



The OMP team gets to work building a wheelchair ramp for Hayes. The group of youth and young adults traveled from Lafayette, Louisiana to Pine Bluff, Arkansas to participate in a week of service, learning, and fun. || Photo by Day Davis



Room 29:11 provides clothing, diapers, games, toys and more to families of foster children in the Morrilton area. || Photo provided by Sirina Robinett

## Room 29:11 Cares For Foster Families in Morrilton

By Sam Pierce  
 Featured Contributor, [@sjamespierce](https://twitter.com/sjamespierce)

Sirinia Robinett said she has never seen a path so clear. “I used to be sad about the church, not really sure where I belonged, but God put me in the church, the Methodist church, and now it is clear,” Robinett said. “I consider myself Methodist now — this where we need to be.

“It fell into our lap in such an obvious way.”

Robinett said she comes from a Baptist background, and she said right away what stuck out to her when she went to the Methodist church was how family oriented the church was.

“If there was a need, they were pretty much aware of it, and the church was immediately on it,” she said. “The congregation loves helping out those needs.”

Robinett is a member of Morrilton First United Methodist Church and is the founder of the Room 29:11 ministry, which provides supplies for foster care guardians.

“It turned into something we couldn’t have imagined, and we took the concept and ran with it,” Robinett said. “One of my coworkers found herself in a difficult situation with her daughter and was going through some rough times with drug addiction, and her granddaughter ended up in foster care.

“The steps to go through guardianship are almost impossible to do by yourself, and she didn’t have a lot of extra resources,” Robinett said. “Within a few days, they are up for adoption, and you may or may not see



Morgan Zimmerman from Crow Construction helps with the cabinets at Room 29:11. Crow Construction helped to build an enclosed carport that essentially became the outbuilding for Room 29:11. || Photo provided by Sirina Robinett



Sirina Robinett, middle, receiving a Walmart committee grant for Room 29:11. Robinett was presented the check by Dalton Grimes (left), her son-in-law, and her grandson (right), Hunter Grimes. || Photo provided by Sirina Robinett

your grandchildren again.

“She would have been up for adoption if she had stayed in foster care. The family is united differently now because she has been with grandma.”

When senior pastor Katie Pearce first arrived at Morrilton three years ago, people started talking to her about the house next door and how it was primarily used for storage for Christmas decorations, and other things for the church, but it was mostly filled with a lot of junk.

“We had two groups in the church,” Pearce said. “One side believed the house was worthless and another who saw the potential and an opportunity to use it for something other than a storage shed.

“Once we presented the idea for the promise house, there was almost no discussion. It was very clear this is why we have this house.”

Pearce said the house got started when “we had several families in our church who were foster parents or hoping to adopt.”

“The amount of clothing, diapers, cribs — families are really on their own when they foster, so that is how it started,” Pearce said. “In our upstairs space, we had a Sunday School class that we have never used, but it was mostly focused on clothing and other items.”

Pearce said the house was somewhat modeled after the Joseph’s House of Russellville, which she said has been helpful in getting the Room 29:11 ministry going.

Robinett said it had been an answer to so many prayers and “I was moved to tears when I heard what the church had done for us.”

“We serve DHS as well as the families as a children’s closet and to give children a more home-like environment,” Robinett said. “When children are taken out of their homes, they usually have to sit in the DHS office, while they are making phone calls and finding a placement — it is a horrible, traumatic experience.

“We are not okay with kids sleeping on the floor or the couch. This house will provide clothing and other amenities such as bedrooms for children to go to sleep in the most home-like environment we can provide them.”

Robinett said they just ordered a kitchen nook hutch so the children can have dinner at a table, too.

“We are basically begging overcrowded homes to make room for this child because we are so short on foster homes,” Robinett said. “Often you hear about the negatives of fostering, but if people have the resources they need and support of the community, maybe we can have more foster families in Conway County.

“Obviously, there is always going to be a challenge, but if the families feel supported, the hope is that it creates more foster families in our county.”

Pearce said they recently held a CALL meeting to try to encourage people who are considering fostering and adopting. She said they are always looking for new ways for people to get involved. One way volunteers can get involved is as a driver that can take foster children to dentists, doctors or court dates. “We want to try to offer them as much support as possible,” Pearce said.

She said the house also acts as a host to visitations.

“Before, when parents had visitation, one of the places it would happen is in the adult Sunday School class, but this house will offer another place for supervised visits and offer a little more space,” Pearce said. “The goal is to reunite the children with their families in a natural, home-like environment.”

Pearce said they are hoping the house will be ready by July.

“It has been cleared out now,” Robinett said. “We had a lot of work to do with plumbing, air conditioning and the furnace, as well as replacing a few faucets and drains.

“But everything has been inspected and is good to go.”

She said the furnace still needs to be repaired — possibly replaced — but she expects for everything to be moved in by the last week of June. The children’s closet is up and running for immediate placement, as well as visitation.

“The goal is to be ready for back to school time because that is probably our busiest time,” Robinett said.

“We still need to put up wall fixtures and stuff like that, but we are going to make do for right now because we have taken care of the majority.”

“One thing that has been amazing is how all the churches and organizations have been involved,” Pearce said. “From extension homemakers, Farm Bureau — really anyone that has something to offer.”

Robinett said extension homemakers raised \$200 from a bake sale and they did a 5K walk at Petit Jean Mountain that brought in \$2,300.

“One of the local churches painted the inside for us — literally everything has been coming together because of volunteers,” Robinett said. “Honestly, that’s why it is taking a little bit longer because people are doing it at cost.

“They are doing a great service. I’m so grateful.”

“It has been a very diverse group of people,” she said. “It is neat to watch all of the connections coming from it.

“I just love it when we all come together.”



# Home Repair Mission Assists Residents in Rural Community

By Sam Pierce  
Featured Contributor, [@sjamespierce](https://twitter.com/sjamespierce)

**P**aul told his disciples to sew the seed and let God take it from there. That’s the drive behind Russ Terwilliger and Bud Leach’s Adona and Wye Mountain United Methodist Parish Home Repair Mission.

Leach and Terwilliger assist the community by building wheelchair ramps and laying down hardwood floors in trailers.

“We don’t do it for any kind of specific gain or purpose in that sense, other than to show His love and give some indication that God has not forgotten about them,” Terwilliger said. “We want to them to know that there is someone out there who really cares about you.

“Coming to church is not necessarily the only response to our mission. A lot of people who live in the places we have to help are pretty self-sufficient and alone, and I think sometimes they like the idea of being alone.”

Terwilliger said he doesn’t think he is called to bring people to church but instead is called to express God’s love and leave it at that.

“I feel called to do this,” Leach said. “I told my pastor, I feel kind of guilty because I get something out of it also. I don’t know if I’m doing it for the right reasons, because I love the carpentry work – so I guess we all win.

“I love to help people. The people we work for really need it and can’t afford it. We’ve got two small churches involved in this, and they finance us pretty well if a person can’t do it themselves.”

Leach said they never charge for labor or anything like that, “We just go out and have fun doing it; that’s what we do.”

Terwilliger said while they are filling a practical need, they

are also serving a spiritual need.

“We are meeting with people, praying with them and talking to them,” Terwilliger said. “For most people, they are in a place where family or their church have not been helping them, and they are in a place they need to know somebody cares about them.

“Seeing them respond to somebody helping them is really touching. In essence, we are encouraged, and I think this happens in this situation a lot; our hearts are encouraged a lot more because it is just a great experience.”

Richard Gifford, the pastor at both Adona and Wye UMC, said there are four pragmatic ingredients to its fruitfulness and they are grounded in prayerful guidance of the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit.

“First, the churches in the Horizons Parish are increasingly growing into an identity and culture of class-meeting-based mission stations,” Gifford said. “Our campuses are not destinations for the community. They are launching points for watching over one another in love beyond the parking lot. They are catapults for the mission to our neighbors.”

Second, Gifford said he is increasingly focused on meeting the real needs of real people who live in their mission field.

“We are the only county in the district experiencing a net population decline, and we are the only county in the district with widespread rural poverty,” Gifford said. “Real people who really live in our mission field live in unsafe homes that adversely affect their health, education, vocational opportunities, and overall well-being.”

Third, Gifford said the women, the men and the students who are making the Horizons Parish home are increasingly embracing the Christ-like virtues of generosity, loving and serving.



“We are blessed with a community of women, men, and students, like Russ, who aren’t afraid to get sweaty and dirty,” Gifford said. “Because people are willing to invest themselves in our mission, our staffing expenses are low.”

Fourth, Gifford said in addition to generosity with time and expertise, the folks who compose the Parish generously invest material in our mission.

“Many of our Parish households don’t exceed the median income for Arkansas, however they are good stewards of what they have and are generous with it,” he said. “That makes it possible for us to really love Perry County in ways that many churches our size only aspire to.

“Great people genuinely committed to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, bent to the guidance of the Holy Spirit; that’s what allows the home restoration mission to Perry County to bear fruit.”

Prior to working with Leach, Terwilliger worked with a guy in Russellville for the Help Network. He said it was an organization that paid people’s utilities and helped them find jobs.

“There were also a lot of people that needed practical help, and that’s where I started, and I did that for 10 years,” Terwilliger said. “When I came here, and found out that Bud wanted to do the same thing, we just talked about what our vision was, and it was pretty close to the same thing.”

Terwilliger said he is not much of a carpenter, but most of the stuff that they do is basic. He said they mostly tear out floors and put in new floors – nothing highly skilled.

“I’m a big ol’ guy, and my knees are worn out,” Leach said.

“But even though (Russ) is a little older, he is in fantastic shape. He can get down to the cracks and crevices, and he’s a lot better on the PR side of it.

“I love people, but I’m not a real big talker. He’s really good talking to the people. But don’t get me wrong, he’s also good at helping me.”

Leach said recently they replaced 90% of the floor in the trailer of this one woman’s house. He said she had no way of repairing it, so she appreciated it big time.

“She was so sincere and grateful that it just sort of got to me,” Leach said. “That one probably stands out to me as much as any we have done.”

Terwilliger said that even though it is not required, he likes to ask people to donate to the church.

“We don’t make it a priority, but we really recommended a donation or something, because unfortunately, if people get something free, they tend to think it’s worthless,” Terwilliger said. “... Materials of a typical job cost about \$300, and we don’t use anything but treated wood, because it lasts longer than the trailer or whatever we are working on.”

Leach, who was a builder for more than 20 years, said they will always use treated lumber that will not rot, even if it gets wet. “That way, they don’t have to deal with it again for 15 or 20 years,” he said.

“The fruit we see in changed lives, both our neighbors and our own, is encouraging,” Gifford said. “My Parish pastor partner, Bill Nowell, and I often muse with one another how blessed we are to serve a loving, generous, mission-minded people who have made reaching our mission field a passion.”



A wheelchair ramp built for Mark’s Chapel UMC in West Little Rock shown to the left is similar to the ramps that Russ Terwilliger and Bud Leach build for the Adona and Wye Mountain United Methodist Parish Home Repair Mission. || *Photo provided by Richard Gifford*

# Fighting Hunger Through Photos

## Two Pastors Use Photography Passion to Raise Money For 200,000 Reasons

By Caleb Hennington  
Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)

**T**he Revs. Rodney Steele and Stephen Coburn are more than just clergy members who serve the Arkansas Annual Conference office as District Superintendents; they're also skilled photographers who capture the beauty of nature and God's creation in stunning still images.

Steele -- who retired this year and previously served as the Southwest District Superintendent -- and Coburn -- who is currently the Northwest District Superintendent -- have been good friends for years. Their photography has mainly been more of a hobby than a way of making a living.

But recently, the two decided to put their photo skills to good use, and have been holding photo exhibitions in Rogers, Arkansas, raising money for various causes through the sale of their prints.

One of their big projects has been raising money for 200,000 Reasons, a ministry of the Arkansas Annual Conference dedicated to reducing and eventually ending the number of hungry children in Arkansas.

Coburn has so far held three shows at Hark and Herald Co. in downtown Rogers. Through these three shows, he has been able to raise about \$2,500 for 200,000 Reasons.

At this year's Annual Conference, Steele and Coburn setup a booth where they sold prints of their photos as well as signed the photos for those who wanted them to be autographed.

"We raised just over \$2,000 during conference," Coburn said. He said his personal goal is to raise \$6,000 for 200,000 Reasons in 2019.

The money raised for 200,000 Reasons will be used to provide meals for hungry children in Arkansas.

Steele has also used his breathtaking photos of Arkansas landscapes and U.S. National Park scenes to gather donations for 200,000 Reasons, but he is also raising money for a passion project that is close to his heart.

"I've raised \$6,000 towards the \$9,000 needed for a freshwater well in the North Katanga Annual Conference in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," Steele said. "While in retirement, I hope to raise the remaining \$3,000 needed for a freshwater well as well as continue raising money for 200,000 Reasons."

Coburn's next show will be from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Sept. 27 at the Arkansas United Methodist Foundation Building in Little Rock, Arkansas. Steele will be showcasing his work the weekend of Nov. 15 at Hark and Herald Co. in Rogers, Arkansas.

You can check out some of Coburn and Steele's work on the next few pages.

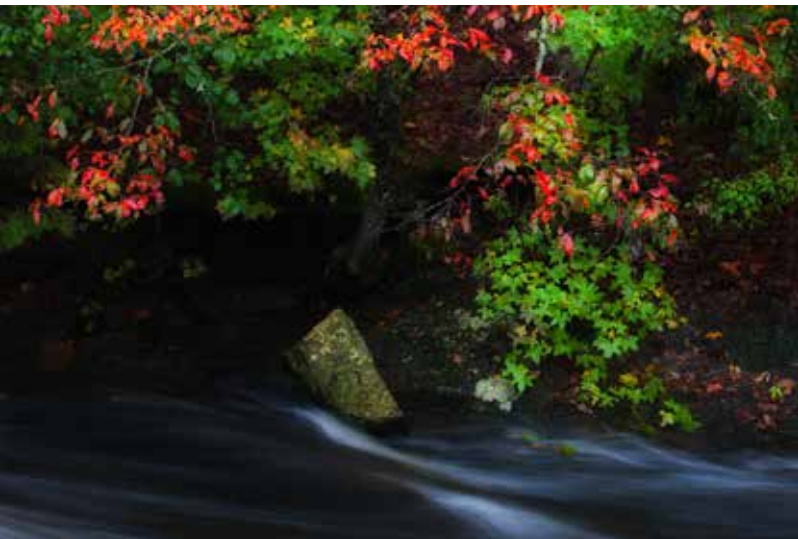


Rev. Stephen Coburn (left) and Rev. Rodney Steele (right) at the 200,000 Reasons booth at the 2019 Arkansas Annual Conference in Hot Springs, Arkansas.



Top: Devil's Den State Park in Northwest Arkansas.  
|| *Photo by Stephen Coburn*

Left: Cedar Creek Falls at Petit Jean State Park.  
|| *Photo by Rodney Steele*



Top Left, going left to right: Early morning sunrise on top of Petit Jean Mountain (Coburn); reflection of sticks on Lake Norfolk (Steele); Cedar Creek near Petit Jean State Park (Steele); Petit Jean Spillway (Steele); Petit Jean State Park during the February Cabinet retreat (Coburn); Long Lake in Colorado (Steele).



Top: Sunrise at Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming.  
|| *Photo by Rodney Steele*



Left: A man and a young boy sit on a city bench at Times Square in New York City.  
|| *Photo by Stephen Coburn*



The Building Better Moms group at West Memphis UMC. || Photo provided by Carissa Tarkington

# Building Better Moms

By Melinda Shunk  
*Children's Ministry Coordinator*

There are some tried and true ministry outreaches that so many churches use to make disciples who make disciples, but sometimes a church finds a very specific niche that serves their community best!

West Memphis United Methodist Church has done just that! When Children and Youth minister Carissa Tarkington was hired, she was met by a group of lay leaders that had a passion to go to Church of the Resurrection for their summer workshop training.

Upon arrival at C.O.R., they decided to divide and conquer so that they could get the most out of their workshop experience. One group went to a workshop called Building Better Moms, and they just knew it was a ministry their church could offer in West Memphis.

Once they returned to Arkansas, they were excited about what they learned but didn't immediately take the "build it and they come" approach to programming. They prayed and listened to how this could be used in West Memphis.

They started listening by creating a Facebook support group with moms in their church and inviting other moms from the community. They had teachers in the public school system who would invite moms that they knew to the public Facebook group. The administrator of the Facebook group kept daily discussions, ideas, encouragements going to give the moms what they needed. The group members needed to know they were not alone in not having all the answers about raising their children. The Facebook



Children and adults play a game of bingo at West Memphis UMC. || Photo provided by Carissa Tarkington

Group grew to 300 followers.

The helpful discussions in the Facebook group and building connections with the West Memphis UMC members made it easy to take a poll: "If our church would offer some parent classes and training, what areas would you like to see us cover?" They received overwhelming feedback for parenting children with special needs, and mental health for children and parents.

They also asked, "if they were able to offer this training, what would be the most likely night to come?" Tuesday was the night that worked for most moms, but they would also need childcare if they were to attend.

Carissa and her lay leaders got busy planning their first Building Better Moms training. They asked the UMW to provide a meal. Senior members of their church who were moms volunteered to sit as mentors at each table during the meal and speaker.

They asked several mental health providers to come and speak at the event explaining services and parenting techniques. Oh, that thing about childcare! Well, the nursery was provided by the church with help from the paid caregivers, youth and the fathers of the families attending. The fathers that helped found themselves creating their own support group while they supervised and played with the kids. This father group was an unexpected blessing that clearly showed their communities need for connection.

Table group discussions during this event lead to another overwhelming need. The parents attending had special needs

children, and their kids were not part of social groups or getting chosen for school activities like school plays. So, from that one night, the special needs cast for the Peter Pan production was launched. Building Better Moms members, the youth group, church members financial backing for set and costumes along with the director Carissa Tarkington debuted the first ever special need student theatre production of Peter Pan held at the church.

West Memphis UMC really let the Holy Spirit lead them to what their community needed. Building Better Moms, the program they learned about at C.O.R., does not necessarily focus on moms of children with special needs, but that is what this group became. The church body felt there was a need and just kept listening and following the need. Building Better Moms continues to be a growing ministry with more than 100 moms participating in monthly activities at the church and in the community.



A petting zoo for children with special needs was one of the activities that Building Better Moms helped put together for their community. || *Photo provided by Carissa Tarkington*



The Peter Pan production was the first ever special need student theatre production held at the church. || *Photo provided by Carissa Tarkington*

# Called to Serve

## Alma, Kibler UMC Help City With Two Community Events

By Sam Pierce

Featured Contributor, [@sjamespierce](#)

In August of last year, Doug Phillips participated in the Community Development Institute at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway. One thing he took away from it is how churches can't help with community development -- or help with economic development -- if the town is not connected.

"I started looking around our neighborhood, and in the downtown area of Alma; it is depressed, disjointed and disconnected," Phillips said. "Our streets are in bad shape, and our sidewalks are in bad shape.

"The city was making a big multi-million investment for downtown but had nothing happening downtown. With our church, being situated where it is, it is our obligation to help the community start bringing people together in this area."

Phillips is the senior pastor at Alma First United Methodist Church and Kibler United Methodist Church. Together with area businesses, such as the local downtown library as well as the city's chamber of commerce and other investors, was able to organize one of the city's largest fall festivals last year.

"We had so many churches, probably 15 or more churches that came out, as well as several businesses," Phillips said. "We just had so much diversity that night and so much fun – I didn't realize the community had been so disjointed – but we were able to do something big.

"It was a really cool thing to see."

Now, the church and the city have partnered again for the first-ever Liberty Festival, which will take place July 6 from 5 to 8 p.m. at Alma Lake and Park. The fireworks will begin at 9:15. Phillips believes even more people will show up for the Liberty Festival.

"I think, for the naysayers, they believed (the fall festival) is an event that wouldn't have the success it did," Phillips said. "Now that they've seen it, they are on board.

"... The problem is, churches, businesses and city departments even, feel like they are competing against each other. Churches are competing for people, and they do different events and fundraisers, but we are pulling from the same group of folks.

"For our fall festival, we relied on the generosity of others. They saw something that was equitable and an enjoyable event and something they could use to help promote their business or

church. We weren't competing that night."

Phillips said despite the event having to be moved inside because of the weather, every business or organization had the same space and same opportunity to set up a booth. He said it was essential to making sure the event was fair to everyone. For the city to succeed, everyone has to be an equal player, he said.

"We have had more participation than the fall festival," he said. "People see that we aren't competing but see it as an opportunity to promote themselves, right along with everyone else."

For example, Phillips said one day he was sitting in his office, struggling to figure out how he was going to promote the Liberty Festival, when he received a phone call from a local advertising company.

"He came up with sponsorship packages, T-shirts, and marketing information, and he did this pro-bono," Phillips said. "He lives in Alma, and he believes in what we are doing. He did it not to promote his business, but to promote his town, because he loves his community.

Jessica Blassingame is the administrative assistant at Alma FUMC and her husband, Larry, has lived in the city his entire life. She said it took someone like Phillips to finally put events like these in motion.

"I think (the fall festival) provided a safe environment, and sometimes it just takes someone to have an idea for it to grow," Blassingame said. "That was the biggest part of why it was successful. Doug had a passion for making Alma have something like this.

"That's why he was asked to be a part of the Liberty Festival – because of how well the turnout was."

She said Phillips has done a great job of coming up with different ways of how the church can be involved and how it can impact the community. Blassingame said for both festivals, she has worked mostly as the behind-the-scenes coordinator.

"We had to change the venue because of inclement weather, and fit everyone into a building – it was a little crazy," she said. "We had to make sure we had enough room for everybody and make sure everyone had what they needed.

"We had a lot more people than we anticipated."

Blassingame was a volunteer for the Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Foundation for 10 years and said it was there where she gained a lot of experience for coordinating events.

"I imagine we are going to have quite a few people at the Liberty Festival," she said. "I'm looking forward to seeing the people there volunteering."





Left: volunteers from the church and city help pass out candy to people at the Alma fall festival, held at Alma UMC.

Bottom: Rev. Doug Phillips poses with another volunteer, both dressed in costumes for the fall festival. || Photo by Alma UMC

For last year’s fall festival, Phillips said there was no way to tell exactly how many people were in attendance. But he said Southside Baptist Church gave out 5,000 pieces of candy and another business gave out 1,000 hot dogs within the hour.

“We were so cramped in there, the city showed up to help out with everything,” he said. “Cars were stuck in the grass, there was no place to park near the facility – people were parking a mile away and walking. And still, parking lots were completely full.”

He said Alma’s population is between 4,000 to 5,000, and he estimated there were close to 3,000 people in attendance at the event.

“The largest part of our downtown is impoverished,” Phillips said. “So we had some who walked across the road to get there, get food or candy and have fun. There was nothing there they had to buy – sodas, popcorn, games – it was all free.”

He said even though it was pouring down rain, people weren’t cranky, they were excited.

“We had all the ingredients for potentially grumpy people, but people were just happy to have somewhere safe and fun to take kids,” Phillips said.

The Fourth of July celebration is free and open to the public, but it will feature six food vendors and a tug of war competition between the fire department and police department and a bunch of inflatable bounce attractions, according to Phillips.

He said they are going to have a dunk tank set up with the mayor from Greenwood. Donations earned from it will go toward a trail system that the city is trying to implement.

“Greenwood and Alma are old rivals,” Phillips said. “So both mayors agreed to sit in each other’s dunk tanks.”

Phillips said in trying to build relationships and trying to bring all the pieces together, it could not happen without the spirit of God.

“I think everyone in my church is trying to communicate the same message,” he said. “We do this because we are living our faith; this is something we were called to do.

“There is no doubt there are miraculous things here.”



# Encouragement in Evangelization

By Charles Smith  
*Featured Contributor*

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**M**y great grand uncle, the Rev. Martin Luther Mathews, stands as a giant among those early Wesleyan leaders in the Methodist Protestant Church. He had a burning fire in his heart and a burden to help his fellow man. In fact, everywhere he went he would share the gospel not only in words, but in deeds. One quote that he would use consistently was from a poem, “Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today- -.” (Annie Johnson Flint 1919; *The World’s Bible*)

Rev. M. L. was born in true pioneer fashion in Johnson County, Arkansas on Sept. 23, 1875 to John J. and Isabelle (Barnette) Mathews. Martin was the eldest of four sons born to the family. Before John J. married Isabelle, he was married to Mary Jemima, in which they had eight children; (one of their daughters Mary E. married my great grandfather, Wiley Bunch). It was the death of his mother in 1888, that brought deep changes to the family. According to M. L., “In losing her (his mother) I lost the most important factor in my life. My father was not a Christian although he did become one later. For four years after Mother’s death, I did not follow her teaching but kept bad company. I had never attended revival meetings for the reason there had been none held in the communities where we had lived.” It was four years after his mother’s passing that he attended his first revival meeting, at the school house in Sevier County in 1892.

The evangelist was a Baptist preacher named Brother Denson, and it was during those meetings, while under deep conviction, M. L. came to surrender his life to the Lord. He became deeply concerned about spiritual matters and at the age of 27, he answered the call to preach. As a preacher, M. L. was a very humble and unassuming gentleman. According to the Rev. L. Gardner Griffin, who penned *Sycamore Chapel: A Most Unusual Country Church*, “M. L. Mathews did not look the way I expected a conference president to look. His suit was baggy and needed pressing, a condition that I was to see on him many times in the next few years. He was a large, rawboned man with a lined and craggy face, an Abraham Lincoln type but without the whiskers. He had one glass eye that did not always track straight with the natural eye. I don’t know about the others, but I was, to say the least, disappointed. It had been some time since the meeting closed. I was hungry to hear a good sermon and had been expecting one, (sic) but looking at this man I was not at all sure that he could deliver. But ... Rev. Mathews was a powerful speaker, and as I came to know in time fully as dedicated as the Rev. Goodnight. That first night his unprepossessing outward appearance was soon forgotten as we were caught up in his message.”

This same attitude was carried in various newspaper clippings concerning different meetings he would conduct at various locations, one article mentioned



A photo showing the Rev. M. L. Mathews in his later years. || *Photo provided by Charles Smith*

that the Rev. M. L. Mathews, “...who already held two very successful revivals this year, will begin a two weeks’ meeting at Eagletown Aug. 15, (1920). Professor D.L. Grace will conduct the singing. A great meeting is predicted, signed Revival Committee.” He was a mighty and marvelous messenger of the gospel. It was during his evangelistic excursions that he encountered several that would try to interfere with the meetings and reading his brief autobiography one can see the tact and grit he had to confront and dismiss these situations.

Rev. Mathews not only served as President of the Fort Smith – Oklahoma Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church for 19 years (from 1916-1935); but he served as a minister of the gospel for 60 years. His other accomplishments

consisted of, “1,500 conversions, have organized or helped to organize 15 churches; have built or sponsored the building of 17 churches; sponsored the building of three tabernacles for revival work; taught in 11 different schools and had five of his pupils become preachers; licensed 70 individuals to preach and have helped ordained a large number as well.” (autobiography)

His preaching was powerful, but rational and reasonable; his main thrust of his mission was to see men, women, boys and girls saved and sanctified in their service to the Lord. It is no doubt that M. L. would make a deep spiritual impact every time that he would speak about the Lord. I believe the reason why God used him as He did, is the fact that lived in an atmosphere of prayer and always sought after doing the Lord’s work. He desired to be the best he could be by going to the feet of Jesus where the only true scholarship is learned. He would spend many hours with the Holy Bible and desired to read it. He never forgot his humble beginnings and always blessed the continuing work that he did. Even though he passed away before I was born; I know that this

is what my great grand uncle has taught me: We as a blood-bought people need to preach the Blood of Christ, the Fire of the Holy Spirit and give our testimony as a witness of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us.

One thing that I do find quite fascinating is his great love for the History of Holiness, and his meticulous records of research that he shared with authors putting together the history of the Methodist Protestant Church. M. L. also had a chance to hear some of the “great and near great” evangelists in his day, Sam P. Jones, J. B. Culpepper, and even Billy Sunday, the baseball evangelist. I am looking forward to meeting him one day on that golden shore.

*Lieutenant Charles and Teri Smith are the Commanding Officers at The Salvation Army of Muskogee, Oklahoma, United States. They have two students in University, Clay and Abigail. Lieutenant Charles also has a writing ministry and has been published in England, Canada and in The United States.*

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