

The Arkansas United Methodist

LIVING OUR FAITH

January 2019 | Volume 167, Issue 1

New Digs for **UMFA**

Therapy Dogs at
PHUMC



Staying Healthy in
2019

West Memphis UMC uses UMFA services

When Rev. Dr. William Buchanan came to First United Methodist Church, West Memphis in July, he noticed there were five or six CDs at the bank that were established for various purposes, but were not yielding substantial returns on church investments. He suggested working with the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas to combine these resources in accounting that would provide better stewardship of the church's funds.

"I talked with Clarence Trice and he came to visit with our Trustees to explain how the Foundation could help our money provide a greater return," Dr. Buchanan said. "We are working now to set up accounts that are structured to provide earnings every year, while still being able to identify the ministry purposes from the original gifts. I stressed to our congregation that UMFA handles investments every day, and we can trust them to manage our funds wisely."

In addition, UMFA Vice President of Development Janet Marshall will be working with a local attorney to hold a Provide & Protect seminar at the church that will help members understand estate planning choices. Dr. Buchanan is looking forward to the event that will help congregation members learn how essential it is to make or update a will, so they can decide how their assets are shared, and how they can make estate planning choices that can have present benefits.

"West Memphis First UMC is a relatively stable congregation, but it is aging," he said. "Many of the members have been here for three or more generations and want to make an ongoing investment in the future of the church they love beyond their lifetime, and the United Methodist Foundation can help make that possible."

If your local church would like to hear how the United Methodist Foundation can help your congregation, contact Senior Vice President Clarence Trice at ctrice@umfa.org or call 501-664-8632.



GOOD ADVICE

The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas provides financial advice to local congregations and individuals, according to John Stroud, a former UMFA Board member, attorney, and former Arkansas Supreme Court Justice and Arkansas Court of Appeal Chief Judge.

"Janet Marshall and other staff members travel the state to meet with local churches and tell them about their mission to start endowments," he said. "They also offer expert advice and assistance on lifetime and testamentary gifts. Many people put off making these decisions and are hesitant to see an attorney to get the process started."

John calls the *News You Can Use* newsletter emailed from UMFA to 15,000 Arkansas United Methodists "full of good advice and information about taxes and other matters." If you would like to begin receiving this fact-packed electronic e-newsletter, email jmarshall@umfa.org.

As one of his first actions when he joined the board in 2006, John helped his church, First UMC in Texarkana, move \$837,000 from several money managers to UMFA for investment management. Through excellent investment performance and the addition of new funds raised for an endowment to provide for maintenance of church facilities, the church's total endowment had grown to over \$2,500,000 at the end of 2017.

If your church is interested in learning about investment management options at the Foundation, email ctrice@umfa.org or call Clarence Trice at 501-664-8632.



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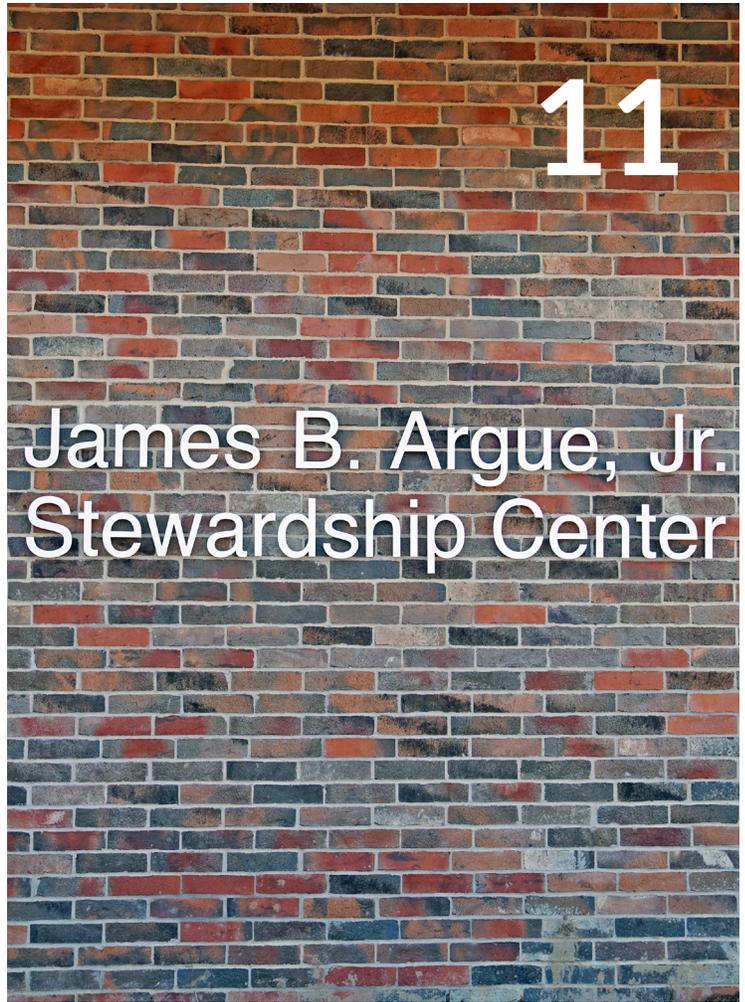
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Amy Ezell, Director of The Center for Communication

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STORY IDEA?



We won't be left in the dust



Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor

The six months that I've spent working for the Arkansas Conference have felt like an entire year.

Not because my team and I have been slacking off, merely coasting through the summer months into the fall; it's quite the opposite.

Since taking over this position in mid-June, the Arkansas Conference has undergone a lot of change and growth.

In early August, our team, led by Hendrix College senior Jacob Turner, gave the arumc.org website a much-needed facelift; updating the design of the site as well as making it mobile-friendly for the thousands of people who now access Conference information on their phones rather than their computers.

Not long after that, we relaunched the Arkansas United Methodist newspaper into the Arkansas United Methodist: Living Our Faith digital magazine, switching from a print-first publication into a digital-first endeavor.

As you might have already assumed, this was my favorite thing we accomplished this year.

Journalism is my passion.

It's why I chose to spend four years of college at Arkansas State University learning the tools of the trade, and it's why I spent the limited free time I had working for the school's newspaper, *The Herald*.

Running a publication isn't the easiest task to take on these days. Not only has certain inflammatory rhetoric made it harder than ever to gain the public's trust, but with the advancement of the internet -- and the rate at which information travels in the modern age -- it's difficult to gain people's attention as well.

With information so freely accessed and readily available at the click of a button, it's no wonder why many well-established publications have had to rethink the way they disperse information to the public.

You can even see this change in many of the publications here in the Natural State.

The *Arkansas Times*, the most well-known free alt-weekly in the state, recently switched its publication strategy to focus on digital journalism, ending its longtime weekly printing schedule and changing to a monthly publication.

Even the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* has undergone significant changes this past year, upgrading its website to be easier to read on mobile devices and focusing its sales tactics on special deals for digital-only subscriptions.

And just this month, *Arkansas Life* -- which has been free since its launch in 2008 -- is asking people to pay for subscriptions or else the print version will cease to exist.

I say all this to make the point that journalism is not dying; far from it, it has evolved with the technology of the times and figured out new ways to reach the most people with the most accurate information available.

The Arkansas United Methodist -- although operating on a much smaller scale with a more specific audience than other publications in the state -- is right there with the others.

We won't be left in the dust when it comes to getting you the information you need, because we understand that unless you evolve with the changing world, you'll never grow your audience.

We're excited this month to be moving our digital publication of the AUM to a new platform: Issuu.

With this new platform, you'll still have access to the full publication on your desktop computer, but when you're on your phone or tablet, the stories will fit your screen perfectly for easy reading.

No more pinching and zooming to read the text.

This new digital platform is just the next step toward meeting our goal of providing you the resources you need and sharing stories of the good work being done in our Conference every day.

Happy New Year, and let's make 2019 just as amazing as 2018!

Enough Already



Gary E. Mueller
Bishop of the Arkansas Conference

which means coming to grips with aches and pains that won't seem to go away, signing up for Medicare and having to ask younger people to do what I once was asked to do for "old people." Yet the older I become, the more I experience the blessings of family and close friends who make real the concept of grace, help me experience joy, and give me hope when I am running dangerously low on it. I also experience something else that is an amazing grace. I'm able to increasingly glimpse the spiritual reality that is more real than life itself

As I enter this new year, uncertainty reigns in so many ways. This makes it tempting to think I don't have enough, try to take control, and get caught in that endless - and fruitless - cycle of trying to stockpile for the future. Thankfully, I've experienced that there's a far better way to deal with uncertainty. It is to anchor my life in God. When I do - imperfect as I am - there is always enough. Indeed, there is always more than enough. It may not be what I thought I wanted -- or even what I imagined I needed -- but it is truly miraculous how God provides what I need when I need it in exactly the way I need it.

My prayer for you in this New Year is quite simple and, to be honest, grows out of my spiritual journey. May you realize that you already have enough and will always have enough. Not because you've earned it or even deserve it. But because you experience how the reality of God, the love of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit is so at work in your life that you receive what you need, when you need it, in exactly the way you need it.

The world has changed a great deal in recent years, and those changes keep on coming more quickly than ever. Some are good, and I am overjoyed at how God is at work in unexpected and marvelous ways. Others are not good for anyone, and I deeply mourn the injustice, pain, suffering and, yes, idolatry that are their fruit. And many are just what they are - changes I need to adapt to.

The church I love so much has changed dramatically and faces a future I'm simply unable to predict even as I complete my 40th year in full-time ministry. I'm heartbroken by its fixation on being comfortable and ideologically correct to the point it seems to be merely a reflection of the polarized and sinful world in which it exists. Yet almost everywhere I go, I see Jesus-followers who have experienced his salvation, been freed from their past and are engaging in the work of sharing his love in real ways with real people that makes a real difference.

And now it gets personal. I've also changed a great deal more than I want to admit. I'm older,



Starting not so fresh

By Rev. William O. (Bud) Reeves
Featured Commentator

New Year's resolutions have gone out of style. Nobody keeps them anyway. The average New Year's resolution lasts until the second week of February; only 10% last six months. We have a hard time starting over.

Still, there is something about the New Year that calls us to take stock, assess, evaluate, and resolve to do better about some aspects of our lives. We would like to think the New Year gives us a clean slate to leave the past behind and stride confidently into the future. It doesn't; the baggage and consequences of the past do not magically fall away and disappear.

As I write, our government is close to a week in partial shutdown mode. Hundreds of thousands of federal workers are temporarily out of work. The intransigent leadership, continuing division, animosity, and gridlock of our political system will not disappear when the ball descends on Times Square.

Our United Methodist Church will not magically get unified in the New Year. No matter what happens at the special General Conference in February, we will need to keep praying, keep reading and thinking, and most of all keep talking as we try to be faithful to God's mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Those pesky personal problems won't go away just because the number on the calendar is different. Family conflicts and dysfunctional relationships take time and toil and tears to resolve. We can't just put them away like we do the Christmas decorations. And our weaknesses and sins are harder to eradicate than a New Year's resolution can conquer. Why do we keep doing the things we know are wrong and destructive? Even St. Paul couldn't figure that one out. (See Romans 7)

So what's the point? Is renewal a pipe dream, progress an impossibility? Can the New Year actually be a time of starting over in a meaningful way? I think it can.

In the New Year, we can accept forgiveness for the past. So many things went wrong last year; so many times we fell short. But grace means forgiveness. We know God forgives us. That was the whole point of the cross. Forgiving ourselves can be harder to do, but we have to find a way if we hope to move forward. And if someone we have hurt offers us forgiveness, take it like a kid

grabbing candy. There's nothing sweeter.

In the New Year, we can generate new resolve. The human process involves many new starts; why not let one of them be right now? You'll probably need another new start by April and July and October. But don't let that stop you from starting over today. One thing is for sure: you won't do any better unless you decide to. We Wesleyans believe free will is a gift of God, and progress, while not inevitable, is not impossible either.

In the pursuit of personal progress, we have the encouragement of God. Our Creator wants us to leave the past behind, walk the narrow path that leads to righteousness, and become the person we were created to be. Paul, who struggled so mightily with his sin, gave witness to this encouragement in Philippians ("Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.") and Ephesians ("Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.") Scripture is replete with encouraging words from God.

In the New Year, we can also find encouragement in the community. There are many reasons people pack the churches for Christmas Eve services—the music, the story, the threats of family matriarchs. But I'm convinced that one of the reasons we gather is that at some significant level, we acknowledge that we are part of a community of faith, and it does our soul good to be in a church full of people who share our spiritual foundation. Yeah, we may neglect our faith 50 weeks of the year, but a couple of times a year, we can't escape our Christian DNA.

Christmas Eve and Easter only happen twice a year. What if in this New Year we re-engaged with the community of faith and rediscovered the encouragement of like-minded pilgrims on the journey? Every week isn't a high holy day. The sermon may be a snoozer, or half the Sunday School class may be absent. But little by little we grow in Christ. Inch by inch, we make progress toward the goal. We will find it helps to feel accountable to someone else traveling beside us.

Renewal is an ongoing process. We could start just as well on March 2 or June 23 or September 16. But we probably won't. There is something about the New Year that calls us to a new day. Let me encourage you: Engage the process. Take some baby steps. Trust in God. Find community. Soon you will look back and discover how far you have come. The goal of perfection in Christ will be nearer than ever before. Happy New Year!

What can the new year bring?

By Rev. Dede Roberts

Featured Commentator and General Conference Delegate

As I write this, I am finishing a day of reflecting on 2018 and planning for 2019. I have had enough experience to know that some of my plans will come to naught, but some will flourish and bear fruit. So I set goals and plan, holding loosely to my dreams and making room for what God dreams for me.

In the last several months I have been surprised and disappointed, and encouraged and hopeless about the future of the United Methodist Church. I met Jesus in the United Methodist Church, and the United Methodist Church nurtured that relationship and taught me how to follow him. The church taught me to read the Bible and how to pray. The church encouraged me to listen with the ear of my heart and see through eyes of faith. The United Methodist Church confirmed this teenaged woman's call to ordained ministry and provided for my education as an undergraduate through seminary and beyond. Then, for over three decades, the United Methodist Church provided a place for me to serve, offered support for my family, and gave me a community of believers with whom to share life and love.

It never dawned on me that all that could end -- not even six years ago when Bishop Scott Jones announced that the United Methodist Church no longer existed and he and some "others" were working on a plan to dissolve the church. You see, everything that is good in me, and everything that I value, is somehow connected to the United Methodist Church in all our complexity and imperfection. We mediate the grace of God to each other and the world. We have the opportunity through our call to serve the least, last and lost in Jesus' name. And we are invited to live a higher, holier life; a life set apart for sacrifice and service guided by the very mind of Christ.

Therefore, as I face into this new year and the called session of General Conference, I do so with hope and awe. God has been and is with the United Methodist Church. God is doing a new thing, in spite of our sin and faithlessness. God is doing a new thing in our midst, and it might just emerge as we are busy doing our own things.

I have no doubt that many of my brothers and sisters who read this will be disappointed by my refusal to choose a side or endorse a plan. Frankly, none of the plans, as they are, capture my imagination of the future God is bringing to the church. As one scholar recently commented, the Traditional Plan represents a 19th Century solution to a 21st Century problem. And in much the same way, the One Church Plan is a 20th Century solution to a 21st Century dilemma. I am prayerfully preparing for God to bring us a 21st Century witness in the midst of this divisive 21st Century conference because I believe in a higher unity that comes



Photo by Ben White on Unsplash

through our baptism into Christ and reveals the One Lord God and Father of us all.

I hope that God will deliver the General Conference from Robert's Rules of Order, and we will truly conference together as disciples of Jesus Christ. My deepest desire is that the Holy Spirit will show up, and we delegates will be led home by another way—a way that is not currently available in any piece of legislation but one that will emerge as we worship together. My fondest vision is that Jesus will come, and we will finally know what Jesus would do and have the courage to do it ourselves.

These are my prayers even as I plan to be a member of and minister in the United Methodist Church before and after the called session. For as Isaiah foretold it, "Forget what happened long ago! Don't think about the past. I am creating something new. There it is! Do you see it? I have put roads in deserts, streams in thirsty lands." (Isaiah 43: 18-19 CEV)

And so it goes, with my planning: make it yours, oh God. Amen.

This is part of a continuing series from members of the Arkansas Delegates who will be traveling to St. Louis for General Conference in February 2019.



Photo by David Dibert on Unsplash

A grace-filled church

By Rev. John Miles II
Featured Commentator and General Conference Delegate

In the fall of 1974, I was a freshman at Hendrix College in Conway. Every Sunday morning, I would put on my three-piece polyester suit and walk to Conway First United Methodist Church. At the time I was not sure I believed in God, but somehow I could not get away from the church. The church had always been a place of grace where I felt welcomed and loved.

In the summer of 1975, I knelt by my bed in the parsonage at Arkadelphia and felt the presence of God. I have heard somewhere that there are three conversions in the life of a Christian. We are converted to Christ, converted to his church, and converted to his cause. I guess I found my way to the church before I found Christ, but the United Methodist Church has always been a place where I experienced grace. After my conversion, I soon felt the call of Christ to his cause. For me, that was the cause of full-time ministry as a pastor in the UMC.

I am now in my 36th year of ministry, and I have to say I have had a wonderful time as a United Methodist Pastor. The grace I experienced as a boy in the church has continued to this day.

In 2012, I had the opportunity to serve my church as a delegate to General Conference. That year, I was assigned to the committee that addressed the issue of human sexuality. It was a remarkable experience to sit in that room with 30 other people from around the world. That experience confirmed three things for me around this controversial issue.

First, even though those 30 delegates were worlds apart in their understanding, we offered grace to one another. It was the same grace that I have encountered throughout my life in the Methodist Church. At the close of the meeting, a young man approached me who was on the liberal side of things. He acknowledged our differences, but also said, “I bet I would enjoy going to your church.” I smiled at him and said, “I would love to have you as a member.”

Second, there really are three distinct groups in our denomination: liberal, moderate and conservative. Liberals view the issue of human sexuality from the lens of love based on Matthew 22. Moderates see this issue from the lens of unity based on John 17. Conservatives view this issue from the lens of biblical continuity based on Matthew 19.

The final observation was the one which most surprised me. In that 2012 meeting, and in subsequent discussions, I have concluded that we really don’t understand each other very well. Due to our misunderstandings, we sometimes assume the worst of others in our community. We accuse liberals of being amoral and unbiblical. We accuse moderates of being institutionalists who only want to maintain the bureaucracy of the church. We accuse conservatives of being schismatic and homophobic. While this may be true of a small percentage of each of these groups, this is certainly not true of the vast majority of people on all sides of this debate.

Given our differences, I don’t see us being able to resolve our dilemma around human sexuality at our 2019 General Conference. At the end of GC 2019, some will be joyful, and some will be heartbroken no matter which plan or no plan we choose. Here are my hopes for GC 2019.

I hope we can offer each other the grace that I have found so abundantly in the United Methodist Church. Even in our differences, I hope we can see the love of God in each other. I hope we can avoid belittling and demonizing people with whom we disagree and don’t understand.

Finally, I hope we can respect the pain and sorrow that is going to come from whatever we decide in 2019.

No matter what happens, I thank God for the love and grace I have found in the United Methodist Church!

This is part of a continuing series from members of the Arkansas Delegates who will be traveling to St. Louis for General Conference in February 2019.



Residents of the Arkansas Methodist Children's Home at the turn of the 20th century.

To receive a child is to receive Christ himself

By Rev. Michael Mattox
Featured Contributor

As we “recover” from the hectic holiday frenzy – shopping, celebrations, decorations, gifts and meals – and look at these first days of the New Year – I’m reminded that at their core is the beckoning of a new beginning; a new beginning in the form of a child.

The birth and life of Jesus ushered in not only a new way of thinking about salvation, but he also spoke to prevailing attitudes toward those who were the least of these: children, women, old men and slaves. Before Jesus, many in society viewed these people as burdens. In Greece and Rome, it was even accepted for unwanted children to be abandoned on the roadside.

However, it wasn’t acceptable for Jesus. He welcomed all children. He viewed them as valuable and worthy of love. Matthew writes that Jesus said, “And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” (Matthew 18:5)

These words are simple, but they are abounding with meaning to me as I reflect on Methodist Family Health’s 120 years of service. As the pastor of First United Methodist Church in

Rogers as well as a member of the board of directors at Methodist Family Health, I think about the early Christians who gathered children abandoned on the roadside and raised them as their own. It’s essentially what Methodist Family Health still does every day.

Methodist Family Health began as the Arkansas Methodist Orphanage in Little Rock in 1899. From the beginning, Methodist Family Health welcomed children in the name of Jesus, and what started as a mission of the Methodist Church in Little Rock has now become a statewide continuum of care, one that offers help for children and their families who have been abandoned, abused and neglected.

Like the children left on the side of the road, the children who have received a home and care from Methodist Family Health had nowhere else to turn. Like the families who could not care for orphans, widows, the disabled or enslaved, Methodist Family Health was and is a safe place to turn for help.

Since its beginning, Methodist Family Health’s mission has expanded from providing short-term care for orphaned children and helping them find homes in 1899 to seeking homeless orphans, finding loving homes for them and making it possible for families to adopt a child who would be a blessing to their home in 1910. Its

current mission in 2019 is rebuilding the lives of Arkansas children and families struggling with psychiatric, behavioral, emotional and spiritual issues by giving the best possible care to those who may need our help.

As the Kingdom of God welcomes both children and adults, Methodist Family Health does the same. Women with a dual diagnosis of a mental health issue and a substance abuse problem can find help – and bring their children with them – at the Arkansas Centers for Addictions Research, Education and Services (Arkansas CARES) program. Children who are a danger to themselves, someone else or both will find help at the Methodist Behavioral Hospital in Maumelle. Families who need guidance for a child’s learning, behavioral or emotional issue can get the care they need in Methodist Family Health’s outpatient and school-based counseling services, day treatment programs, psychiatric residential treatment centers or its grief center serving children and adolescents.

As always, children who have no family who can provide for them can find that care and consistency in Methodist Family Health’s group homes and emergency shelter.

As I reflect on this season of new beginnings in this blessed season of Epiphany, I encourage you to learn more about how Methodist Family Health’s legacy of welcoming the least of these continues to create new beginnings for the children and families in Arkansas.

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The outside of the new United Methodist
Foundation of Arkansas building, located at 601
Wellington Village Rd. in Little Rock.
|| Photo by Stephen Gideon

UMFA's New Digs

Foundation celebrates opening of
new headquarters in West Little Rock

By Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor, [🐦 @arumceditor](https://twitter.com/arumceditor)





In late November 2018, just before the Thanksgiving holiday, the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas finally moved into their brand new building in West Little Rock.

The new UMFA headquarters – located at 601 Wellington Village Rd. – will serve as the base of operations for the foundation, which manages \$165 million in endowment funds and other charitable assets that benefit local Arkansas churches and United Methodist ministries.

The new building is a big improvement over their previous location at 5300 Evergreen Dr., both in terms of square footage and amenities.

The more than 10,000 square-foot building is almost four times as large as the previous headquarters, and features more meeting spaces, a larger reception area, a new training room that seats up to 70 guests, and extra office space to fit new hires if the Foundation chooses to expand its employee numbers in the future.

The Foundation will have its building dedication and open house from 3 to 6 p.m. on Jan. 24. Email hklein@umfa.org or call 501-664-8632 by Jan. 18 if you plan to attend.

Continued on Pg. 13



A wall in the new UMFA building showcases the numerous Faith Funds articles that have run in the *Arkansas United Methodist* newspaper and magazine over the years. || Photo by Stephen Gideon





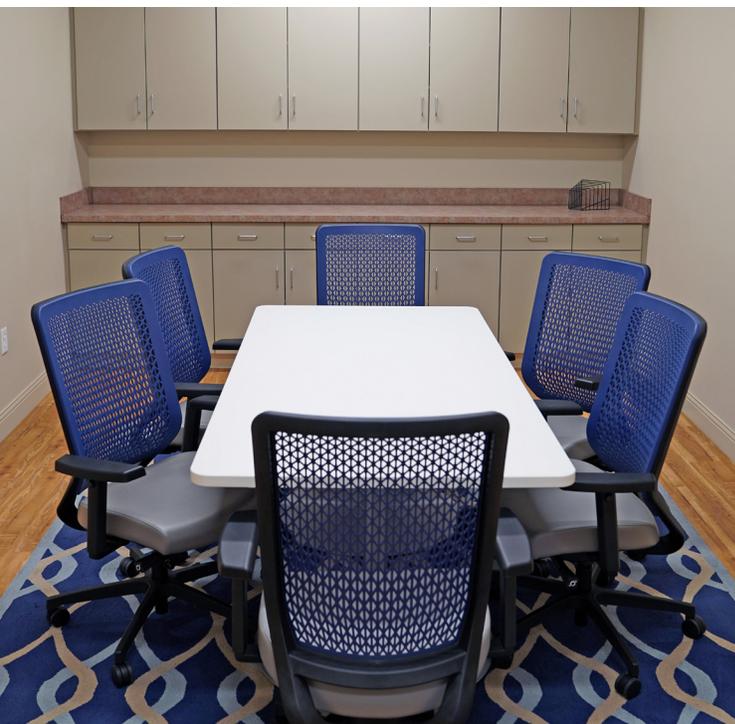
TOP: The main entrance to the new UMFA building showcases a beautiful metal church steeple, reminiscent of many of the United Methodist Churches of old. The quiet space at the waiting area is open and inviting, encouraging calmness and reflection.

LEFT: The Lusk Training Center -- named for John and Becki Lusk of El Dorado who made a \$1 million gift to fund the building -- is one of the new additions to the UMFA headquarters. This room will be used for training courses, as well as a place to host seminars and other events. It's furnished with the latest technology, including "power towers" in the floor, which allow guests to plug in their electronic devices for charging. Each tower can charge up to six devices. The room seats around 70 people.

|| *Photos by Stephen Gideon*



From left to right: Clarence Trice, Senior Vice President & Chief Financial Officer; Janet Marshall, Vice President of Development; Mackey Yokem, Grants Administrator; and Kristin Hartman, Account Manager.
 || Photo by Stephen Gideon



LEFT: One of the many meeting rooms located throughout the building.

RIGHT: A memorial dedicated to James B. Argue, Jr., president of UMFA for more than 35 years, hangs on the wall so visitors can read about his legacy.
 || Photos by Stephen Gideon

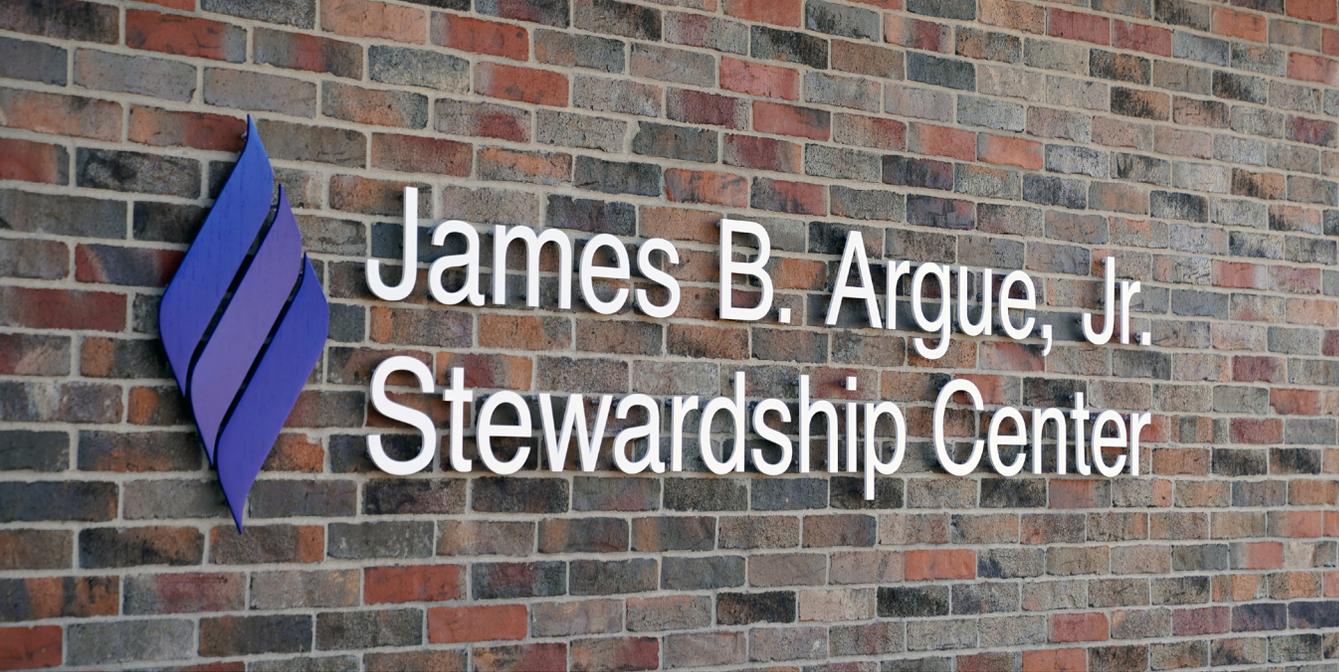


James B. Argue, Jr.
1951 – 2018

Jim Argue lived life abundantly. He was genuine and caring and was a cherished friend of many. He was dedicated to stewardship and providing for his fellow man. A lifelong United Methodist, he became president of the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas in 1981. Jim's primary goal as a steward was to help others see the opportunity to provide for their church.

Jim's stewardship extended to the state legislature where he served for eighteen years with a focus on public education. He sought to help youngsters gain an education and achieve the potential endowed by God. Jim viewed education as his chance "...to change a child's life forever."

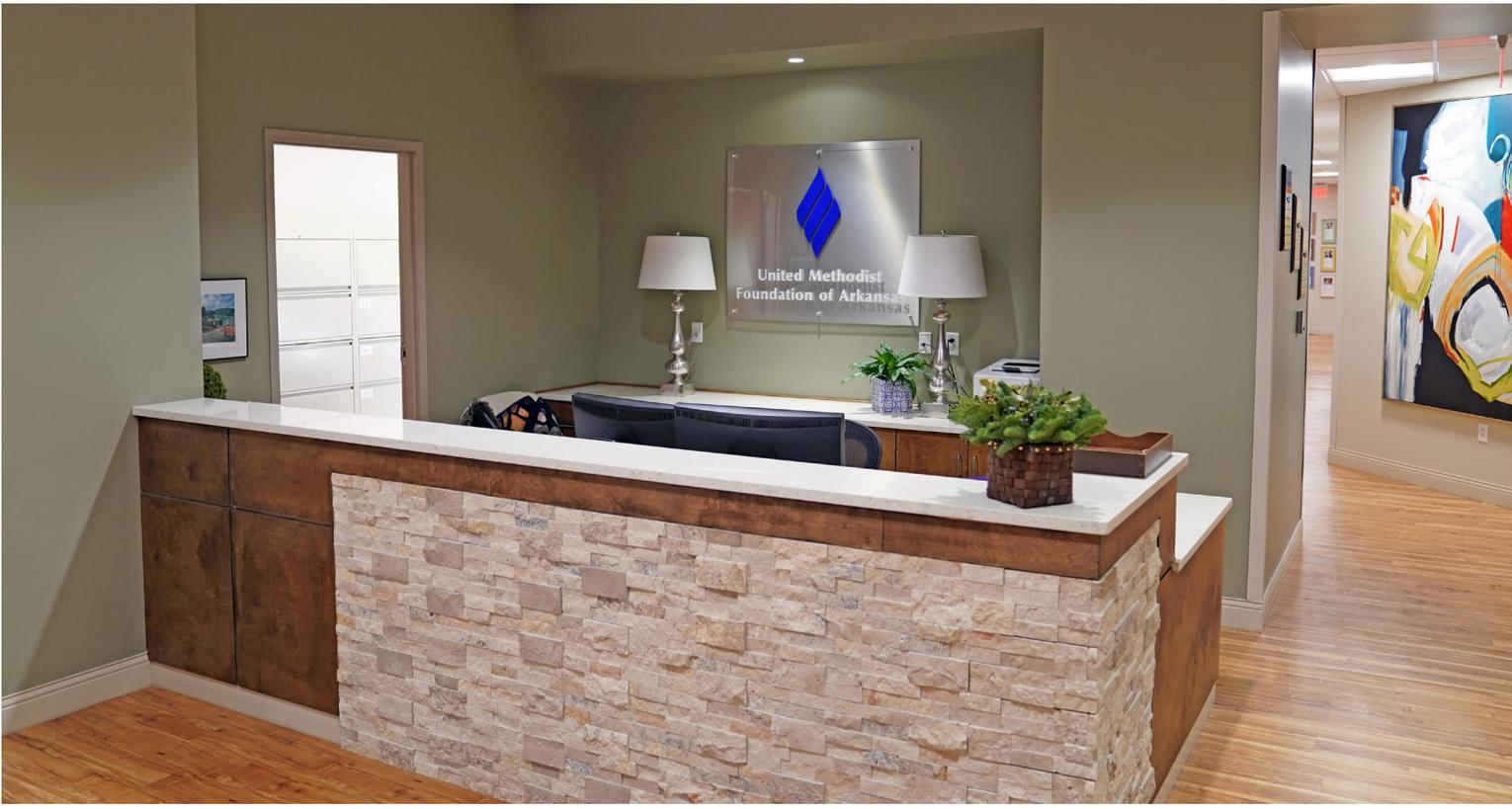
Jim spent most of his life as a servant encouraging others' desire to provide resources necessary to live into their potential for service to God. Though his physical presence has ended, the differences he made – all focused on creating the world he believed God intends for us – will continue forever. "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master."



LEFT: The James B. Argue Jr. Stewardship Center, the official name of the UMFA building, is named after Jim Argue, who served as the CEO of UMFA for more than 35 years. Argue passed away in May 2018 due to health complications.



MIDDLE: An old sign from the original UMFA building sits inside the new building as a reminder of the journey the foundation has taken since its beginning in 1963.



BOTTOM: The reception area of the new UMFA building. || Photos by Stephen Gideon



7 Ways to fight off the *Winter Blues*

By Kat Armas
Featured Contributor, [@kat_armas](#)

Winter can be rough. While its onset can have us feeling like giddy little children with the romantic nostalgia of snow, holiday movies, hot chocolate, and cozying up by the fire, those feelings may surely be gone by February after the holiday cheer has passed and the cold weather keeps lingering.

If you find yourself with the “Winter Blues,” you’re not alone. Nearly 10 million Americans suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD. While some cases are more severe than others (please don’t hesitate to seek out a professional for help if you’re experiencing ongoing depression), most of us oftentimes need a little extra encouragement during this time of the year.

While self-care doesn’t cure sadness, engaging in certain practices can help pull you out of a funk. Here are seven ways to help you get through the Winter Blues.

Remember that life is in seasons

For some reason, it’s easy to forget that life is in seasons and that nothing lasts forever. Ecclesiastes 3 addresses this, highlighting the bitter-sweet reality that time is a double-edged sword, giving both occasions to mourn and dance, love and hate, plant and uproot.

The cold and dreary winter months tend to be a time of reflection upon this truth as we find ourselves bidding farewell to the current year and welcoming in the new one. Oftentimes, this can leave us feeling frustrated about missed opportunities or anxious about future desires. While this is all a part of life, it’s important to remind ourselves of the poet’s wisdom, acknowledging the richness of life’s experiences in each season and remembering

that God is present in all of it.

Connect with creation

Depending on where you live, it can be hard to see, touch, or smell the earth around you. Whether it’s because of the snow, gray skies, or the less than lively plants reminding us of our longing for spring’s promise of new life, winter can make the earth feel dreary and dead.

Forgetting that life is still happening around us can take a toll on our mental and emotional state because the truth is: we belong to the earth as part of God’s creation. Engaging with creation is part of the richness of life.

So, if you’re feeling disconnected, take any opportunity you can to experience life when you see it. Are the birds chirping outside? Take a moment to listen. Caught deer hanging around, grazing? Appreciate them. I know going for a walk may seem like a daunting task when it’s cold outside but try and pick a warmer time of the day to take in the fresh oxygen so freely given to us by the trees outside.

Give yourself some grace

Weird things happen to your body during winter. For example, you build up “brown fat” to keep warm, release more stress hormones, experience dehydration more easily, and are more susceptible to migraines due to lower intakes of Vitamin D.

Not to mention your muscles tend to tighten because of the cold and things like asthma and arthritis can be aggravated.

Winter can be tough on the body, so be easy on yourself and pay attention to your needs. Is it an extra hour of sleep? Take it.

Are your muscles feeling tight? Enjoy a warm bath. Is the sun shining? Get yourself some Vitamin D.

Need to burn some calories? Do some jumping jacks. And don't forget to drink lots of water and take supplements as needed!

Embody gratitude

This is age-old advice, but sometimes it's a necessary reminder. We're often told to practice being grateful by keeping a journal or praying, but I say that we should take it a step further and actually embody gratitude.

Is there a specific way you've wanted to show someone you're thankful for them? It can be writing a personal letter, getting a gift basket together, or making a simple phone call. Is there a cause that you feel passionate about that you can volunteer some of your time to? The holidays can be overwhelming and feel consumeristic, but being intentional about engaging in a "gratitude detox" by paying it forward can be helpful.

Get creative with your worship

It can be hard to get ourselves motivated when we're feeling down. This can especially be true when it comes to our "quiet times" with God. If you find yourself in this rut, it might be helpful to engage in creative ways of prayer and Scripture reading. One option is Lectio Divina, or Divine Reading, in which you read a specific passage of Scripture multiple times, engaging in meditation, response, and contemplation.

Another option is the Ignatian Prayer in which you read passages of Scripture and visualize yourself in the story, engaging all five of your senses. Similarly, the Examen prayer is an imaginative way in which we reflect upon the events of the day in order to detect God's presence.

There are dozens of other ways to engage in creative worship, so try different ones to see which works for you. Also, consider following the Revised Common Lectionary for 2019 to help you engage with specific passages of Scripture!

Take on new activities

Experts say that keeping your mind active with a new interest helps to ward off some of the Blues. So, besides getting creative in your worship, allow yourself to take advantage of the extra time you'll be spending indoors and take on some creative activities you've wanted to do! This can not only help you feel better but perhaps give you an opportunity to embody that gratitude by creating something for someone else.

Is there a new recipe you've wanted to try? A space you've wanted to declutter? Or a DIY project you've wanted to do? Enjoy tackling one (or all)!

Stay Social

You may feel inclined to spend more time alone during the winter months, but experts say that spending time with friends and loved ones can have a positive impact on your mood. It's also important to be open and talk about how you're feeling with trusted people in your life because chances are, they've felt or are feeling similarly, and you can help each other along.



Illustration by Nicki Hennington

So, plan a movie outing or invite a couple of friends over for some tea. It can also be helpful to ask a family member to check up on you and encourage you to keep social. Again, if you're struggling with ongoing depression, it is important to speak to a professional.



A group of therapy dogs and their handlers take a group photo after a training session in the PHUMC gymnasium. || Photo provided by Gayle Fiser

Everyone's Best Friend

Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor
@arumceditor

Pulaski Heights's therapy dog ministry brings people closer to Christ

When the idea for a therapy dog ministry came to Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church, it took the church completely by surprise.

"None of this was planned; we just called it a God thing when it happened," said Gayle Fiser, the volunteer Outreach Coordinator for Therapy Dogs International Chapter 255 of Arkansas.

Gayle's husband Paul – a retired math teacher from the Little Rock School District – was out shopping one day, more than 11 years ago, when he happened to run into a former colleague whom he hadn't seen in a decade. The friend mentioned that she was now doing therapy dog training, and if Paul ever wanted to get his dogs certified as therapy dogs, then she could help train them. The Fisers had recently purchased two Cavalier King Charles Spaniel puppies.

A week later, Gayle was in a meeting with the Rev. Betsy Singleton Snyder, who at the time was serving as a pastor at Quapaw Quarter UMC in Little Rock, where Gayle attended church.

The two were discussing a church member whose dog had recently died and how the church was able to make a pet food donation in the dog's name to someone who needed help buying pet food.

"I had mentioned how much I loved that we were able to do that for someone through our pet food ministry," Gayle said. "And then Betsy said 'oh, speaking of dogs, I was in a meeting last week and someone had mentioned that it would be great if we could get our dogs certified to be therapy dogs so we could go visit the nursing homes around here,'

"And I said, 'I can make that happen.'"

Soon after, the church began offering certification training for therapy dogs through Therapy Dogs International, one of many organizations that helps to train and certify dogs worldwide. Gayle's Spaniel puppies were two of the first dogs to go through the Quapaw Quarter therapy dog training.

A few years – and a few appointments – later, Singleton Snyder was serving at Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church when the idea for a therapy dog ministry came up once again.

This time, she knew exactly who to ask for help.

“That was one of the first things I wanted to do when I got her,” Singleton Snyder said. “I called up Gayle and said ‘I know we want to do therapy dogs here. Would you be willing to help?’” Gayle, of course, said yes.

Training to be a Therapy Dog

The first step for a dog to become a therapy dog is to receive certification through Therapy Dogs International.

Therapy Dogs International (TDI) was founded in New Jersey in 1976, with the exclusive goal of training dogs and their handlers to be beacons of comfort for nursing homes, hospitals, or any other area where a therapy animal is needed.

There are no specific breed requirements for a dog to be certified as a therapy dog, and dogs from all different backgrounds – both purebreds with pedigrees and rescue dogs from shelters – can go through the certification training.

“The only requirement is that they are not aggressive dogs and they have to be at least one year old,” Gayle said.

During the spring and fall, dogs and handlers who want to go through the therapy dog certification training can come to the Pulaski Heights UMC campus on Woodlawn Drive in Little Rock for a 7-week course, led by a professional dog trainer. The dogs are trained in the church gym and classes are free for anyone who wishes to go through the training.

After completing the training, the dogs receive an ID badge and a bandanna that they wear to let people know they have undergone certification training. Handlers also receive a necklace with an identifying badge. The dogs are TDI certified dogs and aren’t specifically stationed at PHUMC, but can be sent to many different places that need their services, including churches.

Gayle said this type of training is usually hundreds of dollars, but by offering it for free, from a professional trainer that volunteers her time, they can reach more people in the community who want their animals to become certified therapy dogs.

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Dianne Hocut (left) with her dog Bart, a Yorkie and the smallest therapy dog in the group, and Stacey Hightower, Hospitality Coordinator & Welcoming Assistant at PHUMC (right). || Photo provided by Gayle Fiser



Four-Legged Friends in the Sanctuary

But what role can a dog play in the sacred space of a church service?

“They’re greeters,” Gayle said.

“I think around this time of year – the season of Advent – when we have a lot of guests and people who might feel intimidated by the church, having the dogs greet them at the door makes them feel a little more comfortable.”

Singleton Snyder thinks having animals at church also lets people know they consider dogs a part of the family as well.

“Even your furry family members are welcome,” Singleton Snyder said. “If someone hasn’t been to church in a while or thinks church is a place that you have to segregate some of your family from, like your dog, then they might be surprised seeing all of these dogs greeting them at the entrance to the sanctuary.”

“We want people to know that their pets are just as valued in God’s creation as people. It sends a signal of welcoming, in a different way.”

Gayle said that the people who have signed up to be greeters at the door aren’t always United Methodists or even Christians.

“They might be Baptists, or they might be Episcopalian or Catholic. We even have people who have been hurt by the church in the past and atheists. These people don’t always stay for the church service, but they’ll sign up to greet people entering the sanctuary,” Gayle said.

Singleton Snyder thinks she has an idea for why these people are signing up to greet.

“I think the reason they’re coming is that they care about people. They care about animals. They feel like they are doing a service for people. And who’s to say what God is doing with that person?”

Recently, the therapy dogs were present during Pulaski Heights’ Blue Christmas service on Dec. 14. Blue Christmas is a solemn and reflective service for those who have gone through difficult times – whether that be the loss of family, financial burdens or divorce – and feel that joyful Christmas celebrations are a painful experience.

The dogs were able to be at the service and comfort those who simply needed a soft bundle of fur to cry into.

“The dogs understood that people were sad. And when people would pet them or cry into them, they understood that they were there to comfort people,” Gayle said.

The Therapy Dogs are also a big part of the Helping Hands Respite Care Program at Pulaski Heights.

The program -- which offers care for seniors with dementia, Alzheimer’s and other care needs -- is the perfect place for a dog’s love, according to Helping Hands Coordinator Beverly Villines.

“Many of the friends who attend our Helping Hands Respite Care Program have had dogs of their own and warm up easily to the dogs who come to visit,” Villines said. “When one of them arrives in somewhat of a ‘blue mood’, upon seeing the therapy dog



Rev. Betsy Singleton Snyder says hello to Flare before worship at the New Heights service. || *Photo provided by Gayle Fiser*



Pam Turner (right) with her dog Flare and Michelle Justus (left) and her children. || *Photo provided by Gayle Fiser*



Dixie Land (left) with her dog Beau, a former Paws in Prison rescue dog and a Catahoula mix, and Cindy Burns, Minister to Children & Families at PHUMC. || *Photo provided by Gayle Fiser*



Photo provided by Gayle Fiser

the person visibly changes.

“I believe the therapy dogs have a way of knowing who needs them the most on any given visit.”

Next Steps

For the future of the therapy dog ministry, Gayle and Singleton Snyder have some exciting ideas planned out for 2019.

The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas – one of the largest United Methodist congregations in the United States – hosts a Leadership Institute every year. Its goal is to bring together church clergy, staff, and volunteers and train them to make disciples of Jesus Christ and strengthen the local church.

Gayle attended the Leadership Institute this year and, after meeting with COR’s pet ministry director, came away from it with fresh ideas on how to expand not only Pulaski Heights’ ministry but COR’s pet ministry, as well.

“They not only have a therapy dog ministry but they do other types of pet outreach as well, like classes teaching children how to behave around pets that they don’t know, and visiting different shelters in the area to see the animals that are housed there.

“So when we were together, we just couldn’t talk fast enough about our different ideas for pet ministries,” Gayle said with a laugh.

Gayle has also submitted a proposal to the leadership at COR to potentially teach a pet ministry workshop at the 2019 Leadership Institute.

“This workshop could be related to discipleship, missions or hospitality. Because it’s really all three.”

For Gayle and Rev. Singleton Snyder, the Therapy Dog Ministry isn’t just another job; it’s personal.

“I’ve always had dogs. We have three dogs at our house now. And I was the first person to do animal blessings her in the ‘90s. So finding ways to minister to people with pets was always my vision for ministry. And as time has gone on, it’s become even more clear that our pets are part of our families,” Singleton Snyder said.

Gayle agrees and believes that pets have a lot to teach us.

“I think that because dogs offer unconditional love, they help us model that behavior, and we should be following their example. They are accepting of all people, no matter what” Gayle said. “We have a lot to learn from our dogs.

“I believe there is a lot of healing power in fur.”



Gayle Fiser with her dog Allee, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, and Cindy Simpson. || *Photo provided by Gayle Fiser*



Every month, people living in and around Magnolia come to Main Wash Coin Laundry on East Main Street to have their clothes washed for free, thank to the generosity of Greers Chapel United Methodist Church. || *Photo provided by Dan Read*

Showing love through clean laundry

Greers Chapel UMC offers free laundry service to Magnolia community

By Sam Pierce

Featured Contributor, [@sjamespierce](#)

Greers Chapel United Methodist Church in Magnolia has gained a reputation of being “the church that does your laundry.”

Once a month, Greers Chapel offers a free laundry service to the neighborhood at Main Wash Coin Laundry on East Main Street, through the national Laundry Love ministry.

“I thought it was an amazing thing,” the Rev. Dan Read said. “I was not expecting as big of a crowd as we do.”

“We are not wanting anything out of the people we are serving. The first time I saw the impact it had on these people and receiving this gift, it was overwhelming.”

“It is amazing what clean clothes mean for someone and how it lifts their spirit.”

Read has been the lead pastor at Greers Chapel for a year and a half, but the ministry began in 2013.

Before coming to Magnolia, he was an associate pastor at First United Methodist Church in West Memphis.

“We run about 40 in worship, but many people know us as the church that does laundry,” Read said. “We use donations to pay for all of it. We provide quarters for the laundry, detergent and fabric softener.”

Read said they average about 76 loads of laundry each month. Church members usually provide some baked goods as well.

“I didn’t realize people could be this nice,” Read said. “It has been a real blessing for them because, for some, this is the only time they can do laundry.”

“It has made a difference in my congregation too, interacting with people that they normally wouldn’t interact with.”

Read said they get new people that show up every month for their laundry service.

“We have gotten to know people through Laundry Love,” Read said. “When we see them around town, we get to know them a little better and build a relationship.”

Read says he hasn’t seen a lot of growth from the Laundry Love ministry, but he said a lot of that is because the church is located right outside the town.

“And the laundry mat is on the inner part of town and a lot of people that go there, don’t have access to transportation or they attend other churches,” Read said. “But that’s not really the goal.”

“I think our goal is to show complete grace, no questions asked. We aren’t looking for anything; we are just looking to show God’s love.”

According to the website, www.laundrylove.org, “Laundry Love is a neighboring movement that partners with groups, schools and local laundromats to wash the clothes and bedding of low-income families and individuals.”

All of the supplies are completely donated by members of the

church or other interested parties. The church does supply the coins for the machines.

Lu Waters, 83, a member at Greers Chapel, said she talked the board into doing this ministry after reading a story about a church in El Dorado doing the same.

“It is a national organization that began in California, and it has blossomed from there,” Waters said. “They help us as much as they can.”

“Lu has been doing this for a long time,” Read said. “She is very passionate about it, and she helps organize everything.”

Lu said her and Read have discussed the possibility of expanding the ministry to twice a month, but she said if they did that, someone else would have to be in charge.

“I don’t think I could handle two,” she said. “I am not completely handicap, but I am on a cane, and I start the publicity the first of the month and go from there.

“So he has mentioned (having two), but let’s find someone else to gather the supplies and organize it.”

Waters said it is something that “warms your heart and allows us to give back to the community and help people.”

“We had this one young man, that was married and had a girl in high school,” Waters recalled. “He didn’t have anything, including a car. His brother brought him up there and would wash his clothes.

“We just did our thing, helping with the coins, the detergent, and the softener and offered some peanut butter crackers and something to drink...This man’s brother came and told us one night, ‘I am so glad you are doing this. I don’t have to worry, he and his family have clean clothes once a month and get something to eat.’

“That gives you an idea of what I’m talking about because he didn’t have to tell us that.”

She also told a story of how one little girl blessed her with a picture that she had colored.

“We always have coloring sheets and crayons that we let them take home, and this little girl came up to me and said, ‘I did this for you,’” Waters said. “I don’t remember what the picture was, but that is something that stuck with me; that the child would thank me.”

Jerry Smith is the owner of the laundromat and Waters said he has been super friendly and helpful with the ministry.

He will occasionally bring fried chicken and biscuits for all the guests and volunteers.

“I’m sure it means a lot to this community for them to get their laundry done,” Smith, who has owned the laundromat for four years, said. “A lot of them have no income or very little income.

“So this might be their only food for the night as well, if they didn’t have something like this.”

“He bends over backward making sure all the machines are working, and he helps any way he can,” Waters said.

Waters said all of the guests who show up are registered so there is an order to things, that way nobody can jump ahead in the line.

“If I start at five, they are usually standing and waiting for us to open,” Waters said.

She said, in 2014, Greers Chapel served 148 families, and in 2016, they served 176 families. The numbers have only gone up since then.

“Before the last Laundry Love, there was an abnormal amount of shootings and murders for Magnolia,” Read said. “And we prayed about it to help our community.

“Plus, our country and state feel so divided, so to have all different types get together and pray for each other, I think they really appreciate that.”

“We prayed for the town, for the country, and for each other’s families,” Waters said. “To be able to do that, that alone is a blessing.

“The Lord has blessed us; I can tell you that.”



Members of Greers Chapel also provide food for those who need a fresh meal or a snack on laundry night. || Photo provided by Dan Read



The Rev. Stephen Copley leads a devotion during one of Amboy United Methodist Church's Monday Night Live events.

A different kind of worship service

Amboy UMC reaches more people through Facebook Live

By Sam Pierce

Featured Contributor, [@sjamespierce](#)

Amboy United Methodist Church in North Little Rock was searching for a way to reach its Hispanic community. The Rev. Candace Barron, who is also the senior pastor at Gardner Memorial United Methodist Church, said in November they came up with the idea for broadcasting their sermons through Facebook.

"We started to reach the Hispanic community, people we haven't actually seen here for church services," Barron said.

Stephen Copley, the executive director of Interfaith Arkansas and one of the pastors at Amboy, said Facebook might reach those who aren't coming into the building.

"We thought it might be a good way to get out into the community," Copley said. "The genesis of how it started was really an attempt to reach people and use our technology to – first of all – share the good news of God's grace and create a fiscal worship experience."

The Monday Night Live at Amboy UMC is held every Monday at 6:30 p.m. for 30 minutes of prayer, Bible study and a thought-provoking meditation on life. The event is geared towards the Hispanic community, but it also for those who have a difficult time getting to church on Sunday mornings due to disabilities, work or other reasons.

"We wanted to expand our footprint in a different way and be accessible to those who can't physically make it to church," Barron said. "This is a way to reach them, where they felt safe and not have to worry about being picked up by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement)."

Copley said, initially, they had hoped to start in mid-September, but they didn't get rolling until late October. He said they are looking to boost it again this month in hopes of getting the word out and hopefully increase the number of views. He said it is

still kind of early to tell just how many people the Facebook Live ministry is reaching.

On Nov. 26, the service reached 84 people, and there were 41 video views, six likes and multiple comments, according to Copley. He said he is pleased with those numbers.

"The hardest thing is, we don't know who they are and how consistently they are watching," Copley said. "The main idea behind it is that folks are busy and life gets chaotic, but somehow they can still build a relationship with God."

He said it is difficult to build a relationship compared to those who actually come into the building, but at least in this way, they have some kind of connection with people.

"To me, it's exciting," Copley said. "It is a real contemporary way to reach people. Even in the early church, even Jesus proclaimed the gospel in different ways, and that is the driving force in what we are doing."

"We are planting seeds, some of those we may never know, but someone's life could be changed," Copley said. "And that's the heart of the good news, and that is what is exciting about it."

Amboy UMC has a membership count of 200 to 250, but worship attendance is usually about 20. Copley said the Facebook ministry might assist the church in growing.

"We have been here since the 1950s, and this is just another way to engage a community by adding a different kind of worship service," he said.

Barron, who has been with Amboy UMC for four years, said they recently contacted every person on their membership and a lot of their members have moved out state but want to keep their membership. She also said some aren't really "church people anymore, but they don't want to drop their membership."

"Most of them wouldn't budge, even though they lived in Dallas, Memphis or some other place," Barron said. "Some still send in checks for their tithe."

"This (ministry) is an experiment we are trying. The Spanish

service uploads to the other website in the Spanish community and we have been at it a lot longer. We are trying to build up the Spanish service.”

The Spanish service is held on Sundays at 4 p.m.

In December, Amboy hosted a toy drive for people in the community, where they met residents and gave away toys and let them know “coming into a church isn’t a scary thing.”

They also recently visited the local Veterans Affairs hospital for caroling, and the church works closely with the neighborhood

association. Barron said she wants people to be aware of all their services.

“In the spring, our thoughts and plans are to try to create a service in the building (on Mondays) and use that as a springboard to invite folks,” Copley said. “We will continue to do the Facebook live, but we also want to meet in the building and have a service and see if folks respond to that.

“That might give us the first indication of this ministry’s impact.”



Bright Nights at Searcy FUMC

In early November, I attended the Northeast District small group Children’s Ministry. They try to meet at least six times a year for lunch, praying and sharing. I met Catherine Vest, who had only been on staff as a Children’s Minister for two years but has more than seven years experience in ministry if you count all her years of volunteering. She was so excited to share her newly revamped Wednesday night program with her small group. Catherine shares her new program, in her own words, this month.

Melinda Shunk

Conference Children’s Ministry Coordinator

Sept. 5, Searcy First United Methodist Church began a new Wednesday night children’s program called Bright Night. This brand new program is for children entering Kindergarten - 5th grades.

Each Wednesday from 6 - 7:15 p.m. children hear God’s word, actively use the Bible and know what it means to give God glory! The focus for the fall semester was Matthew 5:14-16; God made us be lights in the world.

Wednesday evenings at Searcy First are the highlight of a lot of children’s week. This fun-filled experience on Wednesdays forms faith we hope children will carry with them throughout their lives.

The idea for Bright Night came out of a ministry planning session in the spring of 2018. Our ministry team wanted to provide an opportunity for everyone in our congregation for mid-week discipleship and study. Whether you are nine months old or 99 years old, we wanted there to be something that would grow faith and fellowship in the middle of the week.

In working with children through Sunday School and our other programming, I noticed an overall lack of empathy among children and a need for children to be encouraged. After meditation, prayer, and study, Mathew 5:14 – 16 stuck with me as

a means to teach young children who God intends them to be to others in the world.

Each Bright Night of the fall semester, the lesson plan revolved around this verse. We studied it together and talked about ways we could live out this verse.

We looked at ways to live it in our own lives, and how others are lights in the community to us. We also looked at ways we could be lights to others.

This was accomplished through art, music, drama, science and even some mission field trips! Our schedule began each night with singing and prayer request time, then moved on to a large group lesson. Small groups followed for various age groups and then we all gathered back together to play large group games.

To emphasize the Bright Night theme, every week our group meeting room was decorated with colored twinkle lights and each child was given a flashlight to write prayer requests by and a glow stick bracelet to wear during game time.

We celebrated our end of the semester by taking healthy goody baskets to thank some “bright nights” in our community at the Searcy Fire and Police Departments. We are looking forward to continuing this program in 2019!

