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**LIVING OUR FAITH**

December 2019 | Volume 167, Issue 12



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## UNITED METHODISTS OF *Arkansas*

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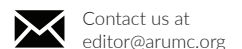
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### STORY IDEA?





# The Season of Joy

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

Last December, I wrote a From the Editor titled “The Season of Outrage.”

The idea came to me after observing the craziness on social media and in the news surrounding people who went viral over the so-called “War on Christmas.”

Everywhere you looked, there was someone getting outraged over the color of a coffee cup or a greeting of “happy holidays” rather than the traditional “Merry Christmas.”

And it was absolutely exhausting. It made me really wonder if Christmas -- the way we had glitzed and glammed it up to be a holiday about consumerism and gimme gimme gimme, rather than a reflection on hope, joy, and the birth of Christ -- was really worth it anymore.

But this year, I want to reflect on something else; joy.

This year, rather than getting mad at the people getting mad, I want to be joyful about the things that should bring joy to every one of us.

Number one on my list of things to be joyful about is the family with which I’ve been blessed.

I have a beautiful, intelligent, strong wife who keeps me humble when I’m being stubborn, laughs with me when I’m being goofy and shows me wondrous love when I’m feeling alone.

I have an amazing job that allows me to visit with people all over this great state, hear their stories, and try as best I can to tell that story to others who need to hear it.



I have a roof over my head, two happy (and fat) fur babies, a car that gets me from home to work and back again, and a supportive family that has been the perfect illustration of love I needed to reflect that love back to my own little family.

I also have eggnog! And pumpkin pie! And a new Star Wars movie coming out this month! (Hey, not everything has to be serious and sentimental when you’re thinking about joy).

So this season, I’m not outraged; I’m joyful. I’m celebrating everything I can think of.

And I hope you are able to find that joy in your life, no matter how small, and celebrate it, too.





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# Meet at the Manger

While I can't know with certainty, I have a feeling the first two Christians probably had a theological discussion over their respective interpretations of the faith. Not surprisingly, similar discussions have continued ever since, because faith is ultimately something very personal.

These differences, however, have taken an ugly turn recently. A huge gulf has opened between those who are more conservative and those who are more liberal that mimics the polarization gripping our nation. The result is the church now seems to be in full-blown battle mode.

Why is this happening?

I think it is because we have ideologized the Christian faith. We no longer primarily understand our faith in terms of our relationship with Jesus, to other believers in the Body of Christ and to the world based on how he teaches us to treat others. Instead, we have reduced Christianity to own personal belief system defined by our theological understandings, political preferences, cultural perspectives and a good dose of arrogance, which leaves little room for anyone who does not think like us.

The particularly insidious part of this ideologization of the faith is how easily we convince ourselves that those who disagree with us have bad beliefs and, therefore, are bad people. Because they are bad people, we feel justified in stereotyping them. The more we focus on our crude characterizations of them, the more they become the enemy. Since we are in a battle of right versus wrong, we have to protect ourselves and be victorious. Because they are the adversary, we can do anything to them we wish without a shred of remorse. And on and on and on, until we are trapped in a cycle of polarization, disdain and fracture. If you have any doubt whether this is an accurate picture of reality, just take a look at the current state of the United Methodist Church.

My heart hurts - indeed, it breaks - that it has come to this. What is more, there are days I have little hope that things will improve. And, yet, I cannot give up because God is calling us to break this sinful cycle, Jesus is molding all Christians into his body, and the Holy Spirit is working to bring together what we have rent asunder.

So what can we do?



**Gary E. Mueller**  
Bishop of the Arkansas Conference

What if all progressives, traditionalists and those somewhere in-between were to meet at the manger this Christmas? To get back to the heart of our faith. To remember God loves us so much God sent the only begotten Son right into the mess of the world to save it. To look - truly look - at those gathering with us, and see them as the light of Christ child illumines their faces. To allow the Holy Spirit to bind us together through the Christ child. And to join hands to wonder, worship and share the Good News of a Great Joy in real ways with real people in real life.

I confess I'm not exactly sure what will happen if disciples who are estranged from each other actually decide this is an idea worth trying. But I know that it will make a much-needed difference. And maybe, just maybe, we can experience how the power of the poignant words we sing each Christmas Eve can do what we seem incapable of doing on our own,

*Silent night, holy night!  
Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face  
With the dawn of redeeming grace  
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth  
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth*



# A Moment with **Methodist** FAMILY HEALTH

## Share the Light of Hope and Stability this Season



By Rev. J. Wayne Clark  
*President and CEO, UMFA*

**T**he Christmas season is certainly one filled with light – candlelight, Christmas tree lights, luminaries. It's one of my favorite times of the year for many reasons, and the twinkling lights of advent are just one.

Advent is a time of expectation, waiting and preparation, both for the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, as well as His Second Coming. In today's terms, we consider advent a time of preparation, too, but for gift buying, meal planning, family and work events. While I think in these terms as well, I also like to remember that advent is a time for children and the hope they bring us in renewal and hope.

In fact, James told us in James 1:17 that every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. I believe children are just that – good and perfect gifts from our Father, and ones to cherish and nurture. However, there are some children in our communities who aren't loved in this way. They are neglected, abandoned, abused. Instead of being considered blessings, they are viewed as burdens and treated as such.

The good news is our state's United Methodists have a resource for these children. Methodist Family Health has helped rebuild the lives of Arkansas children and families since 1899, and they provide a family, home and spiritual nourishment to our children who need it so badly. Whether a child has a psychiatric,

behavioral, emotional or spiritual issue, or his or her family can't or won't care for him or her as the gift God intended, Methodist Family Health can provide him or her the compassion, hope and therapy so desperately needed.

As you make plans this season to provide gifts for the children in your life, would you also plan to give a gift to a child in need at Methodist Family Health? Every amount makes a significant, positive impact. In fact, your monetary contributions provide everything children served at Methodist Family Health need, including personal hygiene items, clothes, bedding, Bibles and spiritual study guides, and so much more.

I will be sharing a gift with Methodist Family Health this season, and I hope you will share your light of hope, peace and stability with the Arkansas children and families in such need. There are several convenient ways you can do so. First, make a contribution to the Methodist Family Health Foundation and place it in the offering plate at church. Your church will take up these donations and send them to Methodist Family Health on your behalf.

You also can mail a check to Methodist Family Health at P.O. Box 56050, Little Rock, Arkansas 72215. If you would prefer to make a gift over the phone, you can call 501-906-4209 to use your debit or credit card, or text GIVE to 501-881-2258 to contribute by your smartphone. You also can contribute online by visiting <https://www.methodistfamily.org/donate.html> and completing the form.

However you choose to share your light, please know it shines on and brightens the lives of those in our communities who need to know God's love. Thank you for being the light in this world.



# Danny Wayne Rogers

## March 16, 1940 - November 15, 2018

It is with great sadness that the family of the Rev. Danny Wayne Rogers, Sr of Millbrook, Alabama, announces his passing on Thursday, November 15, 2018 after a brief illness. He was born in Selma, Alabama on March 16, 1940 and was 78 years old. He will be remembered



forever by his wife of 40 years, Joy M. Rogers. He is also survived by a son, Danny Wayne (Lauri) Rogers, Jr. of Birmingham, Alabama, and a stepson, Alan (Carol) Berry of Hillsboro, Illinois. Other survivors include two sisters, Betty (Gary) Burden of Selma, Alabama and Carolyn Stock of Pleasant Hill, Missouri; three grandchildren, Sarah Rogers of Washington, DC, Joel (Brittany) Rogers of New York, New York, and Justin Rogers of Nashville, Tennessee; and one great-grandchild, Skylar Gilbert of Louisville, Kentucky.

Rev. Rogers pastored United Methodist churches in the Northern Arkansas Conference, including churches in Batesville, Greenbrier, Horseshoe Bend, Marianna, Springdale and Little Rock. Following his retirement from full time ministry in 2004, he served as the Minister of Visitation at First United Methodist, Millbrook, Alabama. He was much beloved by his congregations, and in turn he served and loved them with an abiding passion for Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

Danny served in the United States Army and was deployed to Vietnam as part of the 46th Ordnance Detail in 1966-1967.

Upon his return home to Alabama, he worked at American Can Company in Bellamy, Alabama before feeling a strong call to ministry. He began his journey to a life of ministry at Baptist Bible Institute (now The Baptist College of Florida) in Graceville, Florida. It was at BBI that he met the love of his life, Joy, and they were married in January 1978.

Still feeling God's call to ministry, Rev. Rogers continued his education thereafter, earning a Bachelor's Degree from Livingston University in 1981, a Master's of Divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1984 and a Master's of Religious Education from NOBTS in 1986. Throughout this time, he continued to pastor churches in Alabama and Mississippi and also worked for the Salvation Army for a time.

In addition to his abiding love of God's church, Danny loved Alabama Crimson Tide football and basketball, eating at Cracker Barrel and visiting with those who were sick or lonely. He was always good at finding the right words to say to those in distress and those who needed a friend. He was never afraid to cry, whether for sadness, joy or pride, and he was never happier than when learning of some accomplishment or some good news about someone he loved. He will be missed by all who knew him, most of all by his loving family.

Services were held on Tuesday, Nov. 20, 2018 from Millbrook First United Methodist Church with the Rev. Jerry May officiating with interment on Saturday Nov. 24, 2018 from Liberty Cemetery in Mulberry Grove, IL with thr Rev. Jeff Hemken officiating. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to Millbrook First United Methodist Church, 3350 Edgewood Road, Millbrook, AL 36054 in his memory.

*The Arkansas United Methodist mistakenly ran the incorrect obituary for Rev. Danny Rogers in our November 2019 issue. We are rerunning Rev. Rogers obituary to correct the mistake, and We apologize to the family of Rev. Rogers.*



# Advent Is Where We Live

By Rev. William O. “Bud” Reeves  
*Senior Pastor at First UMC Fort Smith*

**W**e live in a world of uncertainty. We never know what the next day—or even the next hour—will bring. Not a week goes by that I don’t have to deal with someone whose world, in a moment, has radically and forever changed. A healthy, strong retiree suffers a debilitating stroke. A father of three loses his job in a corporate downsizing. An innocent driver is injured in a tragic accident. A house fire takes the life of a child. We never know what the day will bring.

We live with uncertainty on a grand scale. The political situation in our country descends closer to chaos every day. Our fellow human beings—from children in public schools to soldiers on the fields of battle—suffer the scourge of violence. “Huddled masses yearning to breathe free” are gathered outside our borders in unconscionable conditions.

And of course, our beloved United Methodist Church seems locked on a trajectory of division. After nearly half a century of often rancorous debate, it is clear there is still an intractable disagreement over matters of human sexuality, and there are enough people who are not willing to live with that disagreement that some sort of division is inevitable. (See our Bishop’s remarks from November 8.) The Wesleyan Covenant Association has distributed drafts of their new Book of Discipline and is organizing the committee structure for a so-called “new expression of Methodism.” Several plans of separation have been proposed for consideration by General Conference in 2020.

In these uncertain days, where can we turn? What can we do? Where is the hope?

As we begin the season of Advent, we find that this spiritual season (not so much the cultural Christmas) is all about the uncertain human condition. Before Jesus was born, the people were living in the midst of violence, oppression, and poverty. They never knew what the day would bring, either. Yet they longed for the promised Messiah. They never stopped hoping. Then God came as a baby to save the world. God sent the Son to live and grow and teach and die for our salvation. The Baby is Emmanuel, “God with us.”

Our response to the Advent reality may be to follow the advice of Jesus, to “stay awake” and to “watch” for the signs of the Kingdom at hand. Through Isaiah, God said, “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” We should keep our eyes open for the work of God in the world. It’s there for those who can see. Maybe we can join in.

Another critical response to the uncertainty of the times is, to use the metaphor of Jesus, to keep our hands to the plow and our eyes straight ahead. He said, “Whoever puts their hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God.” If we



spend our time and energy bemoaning the past, second-guessing individuals or groups, and letting ourselves be controlled by fear, we will never see the way God is preparing in front of us.

The most important task in these uncertain times is to do everything we can to make our local church as strong and vital as we can. Give, serve, pray, and work so that the church family you love can withstand the tides of uncertainty and change. The worst thing would be to abandon ship. Our mission has not changed. We are still here to make disciples for the transformation of the world. We are still called to teach the children, engage the youth, encourage the families, support the elderly, marry the couples, visit the sick, bury the dead, proclaim the Word, love the neighbor, and lead the lost soul to Jesus. Whatever happens in our world or country or denomination, we have to keep steady, plow the field, and look to the future.

We have not lost hope. God who came in Emmanuel is still with us. Jesus is still Lord. We live in an Advent kind of world, but this kind of world is where we can truly live. Advent acknowledges our human condition, but it also envisions our highest aspiration. We live in the midst of uncertainty, but with the undeniability of God’s ultimate victory. We face fear every day, but we do not give up our faith. In a world full of heartbreak, we dare to have hope.

This is not news. But this is Good News. In fact, it’s the best news of all. John Wesley said it memorably, as he lay dying: “Best of all, God is with us.” True. Thanks be to God.



# Order to the Disorder



By Rev. Michelle Morris  
*Lead Equipper, CFMD*

**H**ope. Peace. Joy. Love.

After some significant debate, that is what we settled on, this group of pastors who was trying to remember the order of the words associated with each of the weeks of Advent. Just for good measure, I checked the source of all knowledge these days: Wikipedia. It also lists hope, peace, joy, and love. Yes! We are all in agreement.

But then I started working on the Advent devotional offered by the Arkansas clergywomen as a gift to anyone in the Conference (find it as a study in CouRSe, our online Congregation Resourcing System; go to [arumc.myabsorb.com](http://arumc.myabsorb.com) to sign up). They have the order there as hope, love, joy, and peace. Now, I know from the discussions around this resource that one of the reasons for this order is to match the lectionary passages that go with that particular week. At least they are still working with the same four words, even if they are in a different order.

But imagine my surprise when at another gathering of pastors someone mentioned the Advent resources at Discipleship Ministries ([umcdiscipleship.org](http://umcdiscipleship.org)) has this list: peace, hope, joy, and trust. Seriously? What happened to love? Why did trust get added in there all of a sudden? I have to admit my mind went to a rather distrustful space of wondering if they were trying to subtly call us out for our lack of trust in each other, and I recognize that I proved their point if that is where they were going. But also, where is the love? That seems like a desperately needed word these days for our church.

I really don't need this lack of clarity about my Advent weeks this year. This is not the time to get creative and try to mess

around with my traditions and my expectations. Please, just let everything stay the way it has always been.

But if Advent did that, then it wouldn't be Advent, would it?

Advent is a season of darkness and confusion. Advent, in our Christian calendar, represents the time before the light came into the world. If you are reading through the lectionary passages for Advent this year, you will notice that the words of the prophets and the psalms come from dark places – places of loss, of destruction, of abuse and desolation. In truth, Advent points out that we don't need things to stay the same – we need a savior who will lead us out of this place. We need a change. Desperately.

I had become too attached to the wrong thing as I wrestled with these words. I had become attached to their order. When we are in dark places, order gives us comfort. But I needed to be attached to their meaning. And their meaning actually creates disorder in this space, because hope and joy and peace and trust and love all stand in opposition to the darkness we are living in, the darkness that deceives us into thinking it brings us order, when in fact it is the source of the chaos.

So now I welcome the disruption of these words. I welcome it because such disruption is making me see what I actually need to see. I need to see that my comfort comes not from predictable liturgy but instead from passionate, surprising worship. The kind of worship that reminds me to see a newborn child not simply as a baby but instead as the source of all the universe, and the one who rights all that is wrong in the world. So bring on my Advent chaos. Ultimately, it will bring order to all that is disordered.

P.S. – Discipleship Ministries didn't drop love altogether, but instead made it the center of Christmas Eve. Thank God!



# Saline County Cares Hosts Resource Fair at Benton First UMC



On Nov. 12, Benton First UMC, in partnership with Saline County Cares, hosted a Community Resource Fair at the church. The fair featured more than 25 vendors, including nonprofits, businesses and government agencies. The goal of the fair is to provide resources for the low-income population in Saline County. These resources include free flu shots, a free meal, information on where to receive medical treatment and employment help, and more. Organizations such as the Department of Human Resources, the Churches Joint Council on Human Needs, and the Federal TRiO program were on-hand to assist people at the fair. || Photo by Emil Woerner



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# Hendrix College Choir Candlelight Carol Services set for Dec. 5-8, 19-20 in Conway, Batesville, North Little Rock



*Photo by Nelson Chenault*

For more than half a century, the Hendrix College Choir's Candlelight Carol Service has held a special place in the hearts of many throughout Arkansas and the broader Hendrix community. The 2019 Candlelight Carol Services will continue this beloved tradition while also introducing new music to those who attend. Services in Greene Chapel on the Hendrix College campus will take place Dec. 5-7 at 7:30 p.m., and Dec. 8 at 4 p.m.; reservations for the on-campus services may be made online at [www.hendrix.edu/candlelight](http://www.hendrix.edu/candlelight) beginning at 9 a.m. Nov. 22. All performances are free and open to the public, though limited seating makes reservations required for the on-campus services.

This year, the choir will make tour stops Dec. 19 at First United Methodist Church of Batesville and Dec. 20 at First United Methodist Church of North Little Rock. Both tour services begin at 7:30 p.m. and do not require reservations.

In-person attendance is not the only option for those wishing to experience the Hendrix College Choir Candlelight Carol Service. The service will be streamed live from Greene Chapel at [www.hendrix.edu/candlelight](http://www.hendrix.edu/candlelight) on Friday, Dec. 6 and Saturday, Dec. 7.

The Candlelight Carol Service at Hendrix shares many features with the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols celebrated each Christmas Eve since 1918 at King's College in Cambridge, England. The nine lessons, taken from Old and New Testaments, weave a narrative from Adam's fall into sin, through the

prophecies of Christ's coming, and culminating in Christ's birth. The carols performed between the lessons change yearly, and offer opportunities for reflection, exultation, and celebration. Selections for this year's service include works by Abbie Betinis (b. 1980), Ola Gjeilo (b. 1978), Daniel Pinkham (1923-2006), and Elizabeth Poston (1905-1987), among others.

One of this year's musical selections is the piece chosen as the winner of the 2019 Candlelight Carol Competition, *A Cradle Song*, composed by John Madden of Newchurch, Wales. Madden's piece, a thoughtful and beautiful work for choir and organ based on poetry by William Blake, was chosen from more than 65 submissions. A committee including Dr. Gene Peterson (California Baptist University), Dr. Elizabeth Swanson (University of Colorado-Boulder), and choir member Michael Crippen Jr. '20 chose the winner.

Now in its fifth year, the competition welcomes composers of any age or nationality to submit works for consideration, and offers a \$1,000 award. Past winners of the competition, which began in 2015, include *A Christmas Lullaby* by Edmund Jolliffe, *Behold, I Come* by Janet Wheeler, and *On Christmas Night All Christians Sing* by Charles West. Information regarding next year's competition will be posted in February.

"We enjoy the ability to offer new carols for the Christmas season, while honoring this long-running tradition that connects generations of alumni to Hendrix," said Dr. Andrew Morgan, conductor of the Hendrix College Choir.





Two elderly friends take part in a fall activity during Seniors Day Out at Trinity UMC. || Photo provided by Tisha Gribble

## Seniors Day Out Gets Older Citizens Up and About

By Sam Pierce

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

**T**he older we get, the more we convert back to our younger selves. At least, that's the thought behind the Seniors Day Out program at Trinity United Methodist Church in Little Rock.

"It is the little things that make them happy," said volunteer Jenny Sweatland. "They really enjoy Christmas and Santa Claus. We bring in a Santa and everybody brings a gift, and Santa gives each one a gift — we also do a group picture."

Sweatland has been a volunteer for Seniors Day Out for about seven years. But this is the first year that the program has been held at Trinity UMC.

"It is a program that was formally held for many years at Camp Aldersgate in Little Rock, but they discontinued it," said Tisha Gribble, the head organizer for Seniors Day Out. "I knew about the program, and I recruited some of my friends to be volunteers."

"It is a volunteer-driven program with people who were involved at the camp, but the church is providing the facility and all the

incidentals."

Every Thursday, the church hosts the social event that features speakers, BINGO, bean-bag baseball and other activities. Sweatland serves as the programs' activities director.

"It has been very beneficial," she said. "We have some seniors that this is the only time they go anywhere during the week."

"They don't have very close family so their big day out is with the Senior Day Out program or going down to the Dollar General. I have seen a lot of happiness coming with us once a week."

"...Trinity was good enough to open their arms and allow us to meet in their building," Sweatland said. "It just brings me a lot of joy."

Sweatland manages all of the functions, including making sure the breakfast is ready.

"I'm doing their activities for the day, whether it be crafts or volleyball or bean bag baseball," Sweatland said. "I am the one that makes sure they are moving and not just sitting."



“I just make sure it all comes together in a day’s time. It is a lot of work, but it is very enjoyable, but I spoil them like I would spoil a baby.”

The program has eight dedicated volunteers that are there on a rotating basis every Thursday to help provide social interaction.

“I am a little more vested because it has been a good first for my dad,” Gribble said. “My dad has Alzheimer’s, and even though he is okay to be by himself, this is getting him in front of other people.

“He really enjoys bean bag baseball; he has really gotten into it.”

Gribble’s dad, Joe, has been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Disease for a few years now, but she said the weekly program has been “really good for him.”

“It wears him out,” she said. “He will come home and take a nap. But just to interact with other people, because normally it is just me and my mom, has been beneficial.

“He gets to be around people that he doesn’t know.”

Gribble said one of the things that they do is bring in different speakers. She said a member of Trinity UMC recently spoke to the group.

“Her daughter recently passed away, but it was an organ donor, and she said her organs helped like 50 people, I believe,” Gribble said. “So we try to have some educational and formal things, but we try to have fun, too.”

The program partners with CareLink and Gribble said they provide the meal and transportation. For the senior citizens, the meal is free, but there is a suggested donation of \$3 if you are 60 and older.

“We’ve got people in rural areas that do not go out, but are still living on their own,” Sweatland said. “They just don’t get out and get about. This brings them to a group together and it gives them an outing out of the house and they don’t get depressed.

“They look forward to this every week.”

Gribble said they usually open about 8:30 or 9 a.m. and serve



Seniors Day Out, an event that gets older citizens out and about in Little Rock, partners with CareLink and is hosted by Trinity UMC in Little Rock. The program has been great for senior citizens in the community who don’t get to socialize with other people as often as they used to. || Photo provided by Tisha Gribble

coffee. There is usually a craft, activities or board games. She said they have about 25 to 30 people in attendance each week.

“I would love to have more people,” Sweatland said. “On average we have about 26 to 30, which is a good little group, but I would love to have more.

“I would love for us to grow.”

Gribble said part of the reason they haven’t seen a lot of growth is they haven’t actively tried to recruit.

“This is our first kind of go at it, so we are still working the kinks out a little bit as well,” she said. “Once we get our flow going, we will begin to actively recruit, but we haven’t gone to retirement centers or anything of that nature.

“It is open to anybody. All the have to do is call the church by 10 a.m. on Tuesday to let us know they are coming, so I get the meal count to CareLink.”

“I would love to see more participants, but it is going to be on us to recruit,” Gribble said. “We want to get this first semester under our belts, and then in the new year, reach out to different centers.

“We want it to continue and CareLink is interested in it continuing. It is another site for them to serve. After the first of the year, that’s what my focus is going to be.”



# Ingathering Brings Methodists of All Ages to Little Rock

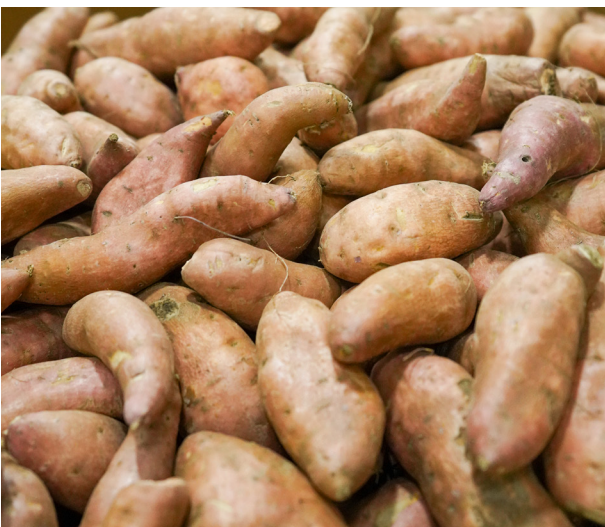


During the break between shifts, the Rev. Jim Polk asked Ingathering volunteers to raise their hands. Polk said this was symbolically acknowledging they were 'being the hands of Christ at Ingathering.' || Photo by Day Davis

**T**his year's Ingathering event, which took place the Saturday before Thanksgiving, brought more than 300 United Methodists from across the Conference to the Arkansas Food Bank in Little Rock. More than 40 churches were represented at the event, where volunteers helped to pack 40,000 pounds of sweet potatoes and 3,500 pounds of dried beans, which will be stored and distributed to area food pantries around Arkansas.

In addition, two pallets of disaster relief buckets and nine pallets of school and hygiene kits were collected.

Check out the pictures from the day, and make plans for you and your church to attend Ingathering in 2020!







All Photos by Day Davis and Caleb Hemington





# Family, Faith and Fresh Baked Bread

Community Bakery Cafe, located at 1200 Main St. in Little Rock, Arkansas. || Photo by Allie Atkisson Imaging, @allieatkissonimaging

South Main's Community Bakery is an important cornerstone of a revitalized neighborhood

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

In 2018, things were going pretty well for John and Juli Brandenberger. Both of them had comfy, good-paying jobs, -- John at Dillard's Corporate Office and Juli a CPA with her own accounting firm -- stable day-to-day work schedules, and plenty of reasons to continue their life journey in the direction it was currently going.

By most people's accounts, things were going amazingly well for the Brandenbergers. But, according to John and Juli, they felt like missing something truly important was missing from their lives.

"I really wanted to do something that would fully fulfill me. Nothing against Dillard's, of course, they are a great company, but we really wanted something that would allow both of us to live out our missions as a family," John said.

John had spent more than 20 years in the corporate retail business and was beginning to feel the effects of the many years he put into his job. Juli, although comfortable in her own job, was also starting to feel drained from her demanding job.

Something was missing, although they hadn't quite defined what that missing piece was. Not yet, at least.



## The Brandenbergers

John and Juli met in Springfield, Missouri while Juli was attending grad school at Southwest Missouri State -- now named Missouri State -- and John was working for Dillard's.

"I was forming a singles group and a friend of mine recommended I include her new boss at Dillard's. John had just transferred from the Columbia, Missouri store. We became fast friends and it quickly grew to more," Juli said.

That was in 2003. One year later, the pair were married at First United Methodist Church Little Rock and began making a life for themselves as newlyweds in Little Rock.

Speaking with the Brandenbergers, it's easy to see how the pair became more than friends.

John is a tall, slender man with a shaved head and long beard that would make any lumberjack jealous. Juli is also tall but a bit shorter than John, with cropped, shoulder-length hair and eyes that exude warmth and kindness, and give you the impression that you're old friends, even if you've just met.

The respect the two have for each other is evident in how they answer questions about their business and personal life.

John, when answering questions about the daily operation of the business, always make a point to compliment Juli and bring it back to her as the person who's the true brains behind the business.

"Juli is really the one in charge here. She's the one that makes everything really work here," John said.

Juli, perhaps a little embarrassed at her husband's outpouring of compliments toward her in front of a stranger, gives a slight smile every time John brings it back to her.

This dynamic manifests itself in their work as the new owners of Community Bakery in Little Rock. While Juli handles the money and behind-the-scenes operations at Community, John is the face of the business, typically seen helping out customers at the bakery counter and chatting with patrons of the store.

The differences between the two seem to create a perfect working relationship. Although, working together, especially in the setting of a bakery, was never something that crossed their minds. Until they connected with longtime Community Bakery owner Joe Fox.

## Community Bakery's History in Little Rock

Although Community Bakery has changed locations many times



John and Juli Brandenberger, the new owners of Community Bakery Cafe in the South Main neighborhood of Little Rock. || Photo by Caleb Hennington

over the years, it's been a staple of Central Arkansas since 1947. That was the year Ralph Hinson opened up the first Community Bakery in the Rose City neighborhood of North Little Rock.

In 1952, Hinson moved Community Bakery to 14th and Main Street, in the building that now houses Raduno Brick Oven & Barroom.

Fast forward a few decades and a few owners, and the building was sold to Joe Fox in 1983. A new location in West Little Rock came along in 1986, and then the Main Street location moved down a couple of blocks to its current location in the historic Cohn Building at 12th and Main in 1993.

This was long before SoMa was the trendy, millennial-filled neighborhood that it is now. Only a few of the businesses from the old days of South Main still exist today; one of them is Midtown Billiards, which moved next door to the first Community Bakery location on Main in the 1970s.

John said that when Fox bought Community Bakery, he really had a vision of transforming the business into a true community

meeting place with delicious fresh baked goods and piping hot coffee.

“I like to tell people we were SoMa long before it was SoMa,” John said.

Indeed, South Main only recently transformed into the busy tourist destination that exists there today. Looking at pictures from a few decades ago, where there were more closed businesses and empty buildings than open ones, the neighborhood is almost unrecognizable.

Juli remembers a time when South Main struggled. Her family moved to downtown Little Rock in the 1970s when she was just a girl, but she remembers that despite the struggles of that time, Community Bakery was always there.

“I grew up going to Community Bakery. We would ride our bikes down here all the time. It was an impoverished part of town but that didn’t mean it was unsafe. You know, every neighborhood goes through ups and downs and it was in a rough place during that time.”

Over the years, the neighborhood would change dramatically, but Community Bakery remained a cornerstone -- literally at the corner of South Main -- of the revitalized neighborhood.

When Fox announced that he was handing over ownership of Community Bakery to someone else, many wondered if the bakery would remain the same or change with the introduction of a different leader.

## Running Community Bakery

When the Brandenbergers took over ownership of Community Bakery in 2018, they made sure that the recipes and the legacy that made Community Bakery so important to Little Rock remained the same.

“When we came in, people asked us over and over again if we were going to change any of the recipes. We made a point to not change anything that made Community Bakery so successful in the past. It was really important to them, and to us, that we didn’t touch those recipes because they’re so magical,” John said.

Before taking over as owner of Community Bakery, John spent a few weeks working in the bakery with Fox -- for free, taking vacation time from his job at Dillard’s -- and seeing how the business operated. John said that when he first started having discussions with Fox about wanting to buy a franchise or a small business in town, Community Bakery really wasn’t for sale. But after working in the bakery, the conversation morphed into the idea of the Brandenbergers buying the bakery from Fox.

Though the recipes remain the same, the Brandenbergers have tried to put an extra emphasis on the “community” aspect of Community Bakery.

One of the newest initiatives they’ve started is Coffee for the Community, by the Community, a partnership between



Photo by Allie Atkisson Imaging, @allieatkissonimaging

Community Bakery and several local coffee roasters in Little Rock, including Leiva’s Coffee, Guillermo’s Gourmet Coffee, Standard Roasting Co., and Blue Sail Coffee.

The partnership brings in locally roasted coffee to the bakery to go alongside their usual selection of roasts, including a Community Bakery customer favorite, Folgers.

Other local businesses they’ve worked with include Flywheel Pies, Rebel Kettle Brewing Co., and Rock Town Distillery. Their freshly-baked breads are also used in many of the restaurants around Little Rock.

“When you’re biting into a burger at your favorite restaurant, there’s a chance that you’re eating Community Bakery bread. And a lot of people don’t know that,” Juli said.

The Brandenbergers have been able to draw on their faith as United Methodists when thinking about ways to give back to their community.

John and Juli attend First United Methodist Church in Little Rock and find a lot of inspiration in the messages that the Rev. David Freeman brings on Sunday mornings.





Photo by Allie Atkisson Imaging, @allieatkissonimaging



Community Bakery Cafe specializes in baked goods of all kinds, including beautiful custom cakes. Nearly every item sold by the bakery is handmade in the kitchen located in the building behind the front counter. || Photo by Allie Atkisson Imaging, @allieatkissonimaging

“David talks a lot about living a fulfilled life at First Church. We both came to the realization that we weren’t living fully fulfilled lives in our jobs and we wanted to do more. And we got to a point that we realized giving back to others was just as important as paying our own bills,” Juli said.

Their faith also manifests itself in the Brandenbergs commitment to social justice and ensuring that their employees are well-taken care of and secure.

They’ve worked to raise wages and provide better benefits for their employees. Juli noted that Community Bakery has a long history of employing people in the community who have a hard time getting jobs anywhere else, such as those with past criminal records.

“We tell people that the choices you made in your past don’t define you unless you continue to make those choices,” John said.

“That’s another part of collaborating with the community. We don’t necessarily call that our mission because that’s such an important word, but that’s another way we’ve been able to serve the community in Little Rock,” Juli added.

In other ways, the Brandenbergs agree that even though the time-commitment to their new job sometimes prevents them from being able to attend church on Sundays, the family and friends they’ve made at First Church, as well as the clergy, always

make a point to encourage them whenever they see them.

“A lot of the transformation that’s happened in us has happened because of studies and small groups that we’ve been a part of with First United Methodist Church. That has shaped who we’ve become. And we feel enormous support from the people there,” Juli said. “And I don’t mean just ordering cookies from us; I mean emotional support.”

“We’ve had nothing but great experiences with First Church and plan to continue being a part of that church,” John said.

Community Bakery Cafe is located at 1200 Main St. in Little Rock. Their hours are Monday - Thursday, 6 a.m. - 8 p.m., Friday and Saturday, 6 a.m. - 9 p.m., and Sunday 7 a.m. - 8 p.m. ☑

# Methodist Thrift Shop Raises More Than \$1 Million in 10 Years



Ida Holt manages the Methodist Thrift Shop in Clinton, Arkansas. The Methodist Thrift Shop is owned by the UMW group at Clinton United Methodist Church. || Photo provided by Ida Holt

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

**F**or more than 70 years, the Clinton United Methodist Church's Thrift Shop has been serving the mountain community of Clinton, Arkansas with low-cost goods and generous grants that are given back to their neighbors in need.

The thrift shop, which was started and is currently maintained by the church's United Methodist Women chapter, has served multiple generations of families in Clinton.

"The shop started out in a log cabin and then moved closer to town in an old cheese factory. Then, in 1973, they bought their own building in downtown Clinton," said Ida Holt, the Thrift Shop manager and member of Clinton UMC. "In 2005, we moved to our current location, which is at 570 Griggs St."

Holt's husband, Dell, is an Army veteran, and she said after moving to Clinton in the early 2000s, she was asked to come help with the Clinton Thrift Shop because of her experience running similar stores for the UMW at various Army bases throughout her life.

"They were looking at moving into a new building because they had run out of room at their old one," Holt said. "We actually had a church member donate the land where the building was constructed. And we went from 800 square feet to 3,200 square feet in the new building."

Everything that is sold at the Methodist Thrift Shop is donated by people from around the town. Donors drop off their items

at the shop during the week and the team of more than 20 volunteers at the Thrift Shop sort through the donations on Mondays.

The shop is only open on Tuesdays and Thursdays and the rest of the time is spent sorting through donations and deciding whether an item can be sold in the shop. None of the volunteers, including Holt, are paid workers; everything they do is because of a desire to help out their community.

Most adult clothing items sell for \$2. Children's clothing, which is the biggest seller, sells for less than \$2 apiece. Larger items, like furniture or appliances, are priced fairly. Heavier clothes, like jackets or coats, are sold for a slightly higher price than other clothing items.

At the end of the year, anything not sold at the Thrift Shop is donated to Soul Food Cafe Mission, a shelter and food bank in Conway, Arkansas, and some items are recycled. Nothing donated is wasted.

Holt said that all of the money made at the shop is given back to the community in the form of grants or relief kits, and despite selling their goods for an extremely low cost, the Thrift Shop has made enough money throughout the years to give back significant grants to the Clinton community.

"One of our favorite sayings is 'We make treasure out of trash,'" Holt said.

If you look at the money that they've been able to give back, that saying rings especially true for the people of Clinton.



In the first 10 years that Holt was managing the shop, they were able to put about \$1 million in grant money back into the community.

The Rev. George Odell, pastor at Clinton UMC, said one of the latest grants was \$10,000 given to the Clinton High School band to help pay for new musical instruments.

“If you know music, then you know that equipment is not inexpensive. The grant provided by the Thrift Shop really helped out the band program to buy that much-needed equipment,” Odell said.

They have also assisted other organizations around town, such as the Van Buren County Sheriff’s office. The Thrift Shop was able to buy and train a drug-detection dog for the Sheriff’s office as well as pay for the officer’s training.

Other beneficiaries over the years have included the local hospital, Ozark Health Specialty Clinic, for new medical equipment and furnishings for a new trauma room; local food pantries and food banks; a nursing home; and the Van Buren County Public Library, where they were able to assist the library with increasing the literacy rates in the county.

Holt estimates that the Thrift Shop has been able to give to more than 40 different organizations over the years, and their average grant-giving is between \$30,000 - \$40,000 per year.

“Our main goal is mission work within Van Buren County. We’re a very poor county and the need is always there. We’ve gone through so many natural disasters in the last 15 years, from tornadoes to flooding, and we want the shop to be open for anyone that needs help during rough times.”

That’s also why the Thrift Shop has worked over the years to provide burnout kits to families who’ve lost everything in a house fire.

Burnout kits are kits that have essential items in them and are given to families who have a verified home loss due to a fire.

“The kits will have everything from dishes and silverware to clothing and bedsheets in them. We always try to keep those available at all times in the back room of the Thrift Shop,” Odell said.



The Methodist Thrift Shop is located at 570 Griggs St. in Clinton, Arkansas. || Photo provided by Ida Holt



The shop sells a variety of items, including low-cost clothing, appliances, toys, books and more. || Photo provided by Ida Holt

Holt said that the shop provides kits, as well as gift certificates to the shop, to families who have lost their clothing and other items due to a disaster.

“The people who have lost everything are the ones that truly need our help.”

In addition to clothing and other items, the Thrift Shop has worked closely with some of the area food banks to provide meals for hungry families in the area.

Odell said that each year around Thanksgiving, the Thrift Shop donates cash to help the local food banks buy meals. The Food Bank in Choctaw, the largest food bank in the county, uses the money donated by the Thrift Shop to buy chicken breasts which are then distributed to anyone who is needing a hot, fresh meal for the holidays.

According to Odell, the Thrift Shop has made a major impact on Clinton and Van Buren County for the almost half-century that it’s been open.

“This has been a vital ministry for all of Van Buren County,” Odell said. “It’s amazing what they’ve done.”

The Thrift Shop is open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. If you’d like to donate, please bring your gently used items to the Thrift Shop at 570 Griggs St., Clinton, AR anytime during the week. 📍





Kim Carter is the new executive director of Cooperative Christian Ministries and Clinic in Hot Springs. She replaces Lynn Blankenship, who retired to move back to Oklahoma City to be closer to family. CCMC is a nonprofit organization that focuses on poverty reduction for under-resourced people in Hot Springs and Garland County. || Photo by Sam Pierce

## New executive director for Hot Springs nonprofit is servant-minded

*Originally Published in the Tri-Lakes Edition of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.*

By Sam Pierce

Featured Contributor, [@sjamespierce](#)

**K**im Carter was happy where she was and was not looking for a new job.

“It was kind of serendipitous how I found this position,” she said. “I’ve been part of a camping retreat ministry in the United Methodist Church all my life, and I was serving as executive director at Camp Tanako.

“I was happy in my job.”

Carter was online looking at an advertisement she had placed, when she saw the ad for the executive-director position at Cooperative Christian Ministries and Clinic in Hot Springs.

“I immediately thought, ‘What a job that would be,’” she said. “I wasn’t looking to make a move, but the more I thought about it, the more it stirred around in my brain — I could say it was nothing less than the Holy Spirit wouldn’t leave me alone.”

Carter was hired at the beginning of October as the new executive director for CCMC. She replaces Lynn Blankenship, who retired to move back to Oklahoma City. Carter said Blankenship has a new grandbaby in the area, and she wanted to move back to be closer to family.

“I am incredibly thankful for the leadership of Lynn Blankenship,” Carter said. “Her vision and dedication have changed the lives of the underserved and marginalized in Hot Springs.”

Prior to her being hired at CCMC, Carter spent seven years as executive director at Camp Tanako, an extension ministry of the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church. She said her new job is way outside her comfort zone.

“I was in a job where I was comfortable, and I knew what I was doing and had lots of experience,” she said. “Now I’ve transitioned to a job where I have had a lot of learning to do, especially in terms of the medical side.

“CCMC has many spokes that spin out from it, but those spokes are what allow us to impact lives and allow us to collaborate with other agencies working in the same arena.”

According to its Facebook page, CCMC is a nonprofit organization that “exists to improve the physical, spiritual and social well-being of those who are underserved in the Hot Springs area.”

Carter said CCMC is governed by a board of directors and is



supported by donations of individuals, congregations, businesses and foundations.

“When you live in poverty, you live from one crisis to the next, and it makes it difficult to plan ahead for the next thing to happen,” she said. “Many of the individuals who enter our classroom have no checking account and no plan for how they are going to pay their bills — [things that] many in the world take for granted.

“We work with people to help them plan ahead, learn how to budget, learn about debt-to-income ratio and how to start a checking account. ... Amazing things happen when the community collaborates.”

Jack Porter, the board chair for CCMC, said Carter is “the perfect fit to continue the work of CCMC.”

“With her proven record of successfully leading another faith-based organization, Kim possessed the expertise, as well as the managerial and interpersonal skills, to lead our organization,” Porter said in a statement. “Her fresh insight, energy and creativity will ensure that the mission of CCMC will continue to have a meaningful impact within our community.”

Carter graduated from Lakeside High School in 1986. She earned an undergraduate degree in special education from the University of Central Arkansas in Conway in 1990 and a master’s degree in early-childhood special education from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 1993.

Carter and her husband, Terry, spent 13 years as foster parents, adopting their son, Cameron, in 2008. Carter said Cameron has significant disabilities, including fetal alcohol syndrome, reactive attachment disorder, autism and “all types of issues that come with early-childhood trauma,” she said.

“Our family was a foster family for 13 years, and we fostered 54 children and adopted one,” Carter said. “We encountered, firsthand, generational poverty, and we saw the impact that poverty had. ... We never planned on adopting, but I was always passionate about school-age children, infants and toddlers with disabilities, and I saw the effects [of fetal alcohol syndrome], even before Cameron.”

Carter said one of the things that drew her to CCMC was its initiative to reduce generational poverty in the community through the organization’s Bridges Out of Poverty framework.

“The more I learned about this framework, the lens through which I viewed so much of my time with impoverished families was altered,” she said. “I look forward to collaborating with other community agencies and individuals to continue our mission of reducing generational poverty and serving others.”

CCMC will host a Chocolate Festival, which benefits the mission of CCMC, on Feb. 2 at the Embassy Suites in Hot Springs. General-admission tickets are \$20 per person, and VIP tickets are \$50. Tickets may be purchased online at [cmchs.org](http://cmchs.org) or at CCMC, 133 Arbor St. For more information, call (501) 318-

1153 or email [sculbreth@ccmchs.com](mailto:sculbreth@ccmchs.com).

“Bridges is the framework in which everything else is built,” Carter said. “... We really want to start working with employers and businesses in the area because there is a workforce shortage. Hiring good people and stable employees is a tough thing to do, and the turnover cost is about \$5,000 every time they hire a new employee. ... It benefits our community when our businesses and industries do well.”

Julie Smith, who serves as the board president of Camp Tanako and has known Carter since they were both in the fourth grade, said Carter is a “glad-hearted servant for sure.”

“She is always happy about what she is doing,” Smith said. “She was wonderful to have worked for us, and we will miss her, but we wish her nothing but the best. ... There is no doubt in my mind she will do well.

“I know her organizational and administrative abilities are certainly perfect for that job.”

When Carter told Smith she was considering leaving Camp Tanako, Smith said, “You aren’t really changing jobs, just changing mission fields.”

“I think her faith will play a very strong role in this position,” Smith said. “I don’t think you would be able to do something like this without it. It will be what brings you through. She has the heart to understand the needs of the community and the people — she is just the perfect person for it.

“We will be at a loss at Tanako, but we will make it work for us, too.”

Geoff Fielder will serve as the interim executive director at the camp. He has worked with Carter for about four years. Smith said he is going to step in and keep everything running smoothly until a new director is hired.

“We already have some very capable candidates, and I look for that to be filled very quickly,” Smith said. “It will definitely be business as usual; we plan not to miss a beat.”

Carter’s dad, Terry Everett, was the director of Camp Tanako for 34 years before he died in 2010. A few months after he died, Carter was asked to serve on the board of trustees for the camp — a position she thought was a nod to her dad.

“But two years later, they had a changeover from the new director, and there was no one on the board who knew how to run the camp,” Carter said. “When someone asked me if I was going to apply for the position, I said, ‘Heavens, no.’ I knew what this lifestyle looks like and the immense responsibility it takes.

“I never thought I would have applied for that job. Without a doubt, both of these positions that I have come into were not things I foresaw on the horizon for myself. I never thought I would be sitting here today — it wasn’t in my plan to look for a new job.” 📷



# Free Breakfast, Every Saturday

Batesville UMC Has Been Cooking Up Hot Meals  
for Their Community Every Weekend for 7 Years

By Sam Pierce

Featured Contributor, [@sjamespierce](#)

**E**very Saturday morning, Batesville United Methodist Church hosts a free breakfast for the community. They make enough eggs, bacon, sausage, gravy and the like to serve 80 people.

“And we serve all the meals on glass plates and glass coffee cups,” said organizer Mike Wilson. “We decided from the very beginning, we wanted to give them as much dignity as possible by doing that.”

Jeannie Wagoner, who has been a volunteer for the breakfast since the very beginning, said someone once told her that by serving the food on real plates with real silverware, “they felt like they were company.”

“They are our company, and we want to use our best things to serve and to bring pleasure to them,” Wagoner said. “They are so thankful. We can’t change their lifestyle or mannerisms, but we can be together for breakfast and they are guests in our church home.”

The breakfast began about seven years ago and the menu has been pretty consistent over the years. Wilson said initially the breakfast was a way to provide for the homeless and those that were really in need.

“But it has become a community gathering center where we can enjoy breakfast together,” he said. “Seventy five percent of the people there need a place to get a hot meal, but the rest are there for fellowship – but we can call both family.

“It is a time for community, prayers and singing.”

He said it was initially set up for those who really need it, and the church still serves that crowd, but it has opened up to the whole community.

“We socialize with them, we walk around and talk, and we try to get to know them,” Wagoner said. “It is the fellowship of the people and getting acquainted with them.”

Wagoner said when she first started volunteering for the ministry, some of the guests wouldn’t even make eye contact with her. She said they would take their food and sit down.



Volunteers from Batesville UMC prepare breakfast for the community. || Photo provided by Batesville UMC

“But now, they hug us, they love us, and I think it is because they realize we are all people, we are all God’s children,” Wagoner said. “They want to extend their love to us, just like we want to extend our love to them. It is not one-sided.”

Wilson said it is phenomenal the number of prayer requests they get each week through the breakfast.

“I can’t stand to see a child hungry or someone standing on the corner begging for food,” Wilson said. “Having some kind of food ministry is a way we can reach a larger number at a time.

“... We thought having some kind of meal service was the best way we could reach the most people. We are about making disciples, but if they are starving, we have to meet their needs first.”

Wilson said he and his wife thought for years of starting a soup kitchen, but it just didn’t fit the environment in Batesville.

“We had a men’s breakfast for years, and we deduced that the day is much better if it starts with a hot breakfast,” Wilson said. “We met once and made the decision to do it, and brought it up at the council meeting and went forward from there.”

The church has set aside a set amount for the breakfast but, according to Wilson, has yet to be touched thanks to donations from the Sunday School classes and the community. “This is a special church, everyone is so giving, it just fills your heart,”





Every Saturday morning, volunteers from Batesville UMC feed breakfast to more than 80 people in their community, free of charge. || Photo provided by Batesville United Methodist Church

Wilson said.

“One of the people we served brought me apples the other day,” Wagoner said. “When she was in the store, she bought apples for us, because she knows we serve it at breakfast.

“Some of the people that come, help clean up or sweep the floor, or clean the tables – they are a great bunch of people.”

Senior Pastor Mark McDonald said when he was appointed as pastor, one of the first things he wanted to do was visit a few ministries that the Rev. Justin Ledbetter had told him about – the Wednesday youth and children’s ministry, and the Saturday breakfast.

“I came one Saturday and Mike introduced me to some of the workers,” McDonald said. “Then, some of the workers started taking me around the room and introducing me to nearly 75 people by name.

“The members of the church knew their names and their stories ... I was amazed at how the workers knew everybody personally and discovered it wasn’t that way just with a couple of workers. They have become a family in Christ.”

He said on his initial visit, he met volunteers from this congregation, as well as other congregations in the community and learned that 15 or so come every single week, including missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“A lot of people that are involved in the church volunteer for this ministry,” said Joe Wagoner, Jeannie’s husband and volunteer. “We try to make everyone feel like they are family and we aren’t

just serving them.

“I don’t know anybody that’s there for any glorification. We are there to serve.”

Jeannie said she got involved because she is very social and likes meeting people.

“I needed to be a servant in that place, and it was something I could do, and I just had to know how to cut up the fruit,” she said.

McDonald said after he arrived, he found that many of the people who come to eat breakfast consider Batesville UMC their church. He said some arrive an hour or two early and simply drink coffee and visit.

“Others help with set up or clean up,” McDonald said. “Each week, when the food is ready, different people share a devotional. Some lead singing, some tell stories and some preach the gospel.

“We’ve had people who attend worship come for breakfast, and people who come for breakfast attend Sunday worship.”

“We have a good time serving these folks and it is a blessing for people who are doing the service,” Wilson said. “I don’t care if they don’t come to our church, I just want them to go to church.”

He said for most of them, the Saturday morning breakfast is the only church they get.

“They know there is a place to have breakfast and they know there are people here that care about them,” Wilson said. “And they are going to meet their friends here too.”



# Couples Cookie Exchange is a Great Way to Connect Families

By Melinda Shunk  
*Children's Ministry Coordinator*

**C**onnecting parents with each other is vital to sustaining a children's ministry that does NOT revolve around the children's minister! A way to accomplish that as the Children's Minister is to have caring get-to-know-you kind of conversations with each parent in the hallway, out for coffee, during a new birth visit, or after worship. You use the knowledge they share with you to help them connect with other members in your church when you have events like the Couples Cookie Exchange.

You must remember that you cannot be and should not be parents only tied to the church. Sure, they should know you, but you can't possibly "be there" for each person. You need to connect and equip them to be that for each other. Preferably

not forcing it but letting the Holy Spirit work within a ministry opportunity you help create.

How it works:

1. Setting the date for the first Sunday or Monday evening after Thanksgiving increases attendance. It is before parties happen, gets people's attention while they have time to make cookies, and stocks everyone who attends with their first round of Christmas Cookies.
2. The first time, you may need to do personal invites to couples. Don't just lay it out there in a bulletin announcement. Over time it will become an expected tradition, but for the first exchange, people may need a personal invite.
3. Hold it at the church and offer childcare. If your program is really big, you may want to have two Couples Cookie Exchanges

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HAVE A MERRY TIME CONNECTING YOUR  
KIDS PARENTS WITH ONE ANOTHER!

# COUPLES COOKIE EXCHANGE

**When:** 1st Monday after Thanksgiving  
**Time:** 7pm Appetizers and beverages  
**Bring:** 3 dozen cookies (homemade or purchased) & a tray.  
**Who:** The adults in your Children's Ministry program. No kids or offer childcare.  
**Why:** To help build relationships in casual setting between the parents.



based on kids' age ranges.

4. In my sample invite, you will see they bring three dozen and an extra tray. Have a table that is large and that all can stand around. You may need to put tables together. Greet the guest and as they arrive, place their full tray of cookies on the table and send them to get appetizers and beverages. A little Christmas music playing low helps set the festive mood. Make sure ALL have name tags. Set candles on the cookie table as centerpieces.

5. As they mill around one another, you will see some go to the friends they know; this is natural. Take the information you already know about the families and introduce them to someone they are not talking to. For example, "you all have two little boys, you all need to meet the Smith's and compare notes on parenting 5-year-old boys!" Continue to offer introductions until they are visiting in a large group and you can't tell where one conversation starts and another ends.

6. After about 40 minutes or an hour has passed, announce that they need to bring one tray per couple to the table and stand around the outside of the table. Once everyone is around the table, ask them to "introduce their cookie tray." Why did you pick those cookies? Is it a family recipe? Does the cookie spark

a childhood memory? Each couple can share their stories. This is really important because it gives everyone a chance to disclose something more about themselves even if it is "I bought them because we both work 50 hours a week." Introducing cookies helps further conversation after the cookie march.

7. The cookie march is when you or one person in the couple holds the tray while the other picks one cookie from the tray. You keep going around the table until they are gone. Don't try to do the math because not everyone likes all cookies, so they won't always put one each on the tray.

8. Outreach opportunity. If you know of a family that wanted to come but couldn't for a number of reasons, use your tray/s and fill for them. At the end of the night, ask one of the couples if they would mind dropping the tray off to the family on their way home. Be sure to have the address handy. You should not deliver the cookies. Having another family drop it by allows for another connection to be made!

I have done this ministry outreach for many years resulting in great connections between families in the church. You will see it become a tradition that allows people to invite their friends outside of the church walls as well.



# FUMC Springdale Renovates 80-Year-Old Chapel for Modern Use



The Chancel Choir led by the Rev. Danny Reding, Associate Pastor for Worship Ministries, performed for the Chapel dedication.. || Photo by Lori Krie

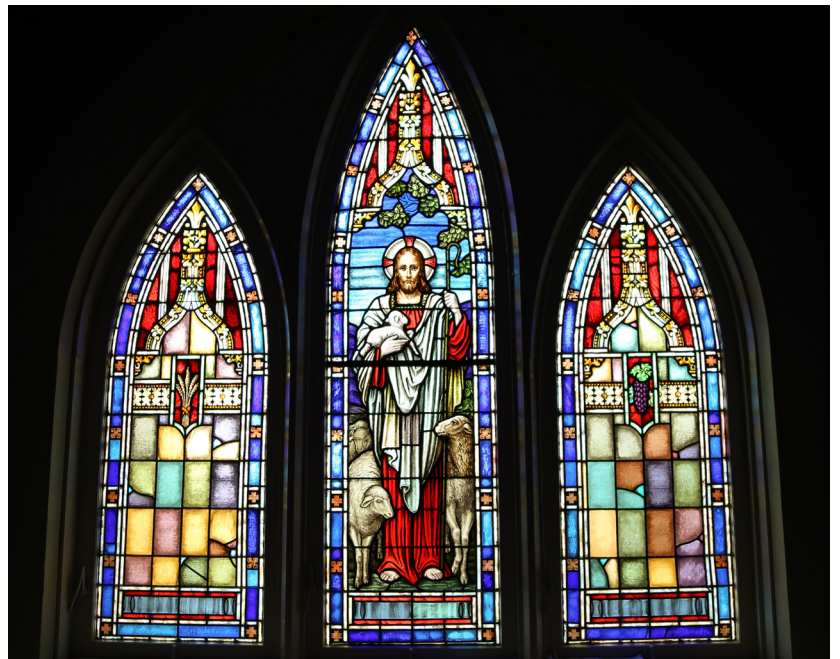
In November, First United Methodist Church Springdale celebrated the opening of their newly renovated chapel. The project, according to Senior Pastor Andrew Thompson, began in the fall of 2017 with a fundraising campaign, and all of the money needed to fund the project was raised by the congregation.

The original chapel was built in 1936 and served as the main sanctuary of the church from 1936 to 1980. It is the oldest existing part of FUMC Springdale, but was left pretty much unused for almost 40 years.

The Chapel, as the church calls it, now holds the Cornerstone worship service. It seats 250 compared to the sanctuary's 650 capacity, making it a more intimate worship experience.

Springdale First was also able to add an ADA-compliant ramp, making The Chapel handicap accessible for the first time in its history.

Pictures from the dedication ceremony held on Nov. 3, as well as shots of the interior of The Chapel, can be seen on the following pages.



The trio of windows in the balcony of the chapel are original to the building. They were created by Jacoby Art Glass in St. Louis, Missouri. || Photo by Lori Krie





Balcony view of the newly renovated space. The space is a combination of traditional and contemporary. Original flooring, lights, windows, and architectural features were saved. State-of-art lighting and sound were added. The pews were replaced with chairs so the space would be more versatile. The chancel was updated for contemporary service.  
 || Photo by Lori Krie



Renovation Committee Chairperson Mary Stockland spoke to the congregation during the dedication of the Chapel. || Photo by Lori Krie



Facilities Supervisor Dan Guido installs the original 1936 cornerstone into the new handicap accessible chapel entry.  
 || Photo by Lori Krie



