

Select Page



Annie Lankford Shares the Light of Hope, Peace and Stability Found at Methodist Family Health

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By Kelli Reep

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You most likely know Annie Lankford. She is the associate pastor of First United Methodist Church in North Little Rock; in fact, she is a fourth-generation United Methodist pastor. Or,

you could know her from West Little Rock Rotary Club where she has been a longtime member and noted as Rotarian of the Year in 2019. Regardless of how you know her, you recognize Annie as accomplished, kind and friendly with a wonderful family. What you may not know is the deep grief, fear and uncertainty she faced just last year. On September 30, 2019, her son attempted suicide.

"I faced one of the most shattering and life-altering experiences any parent has to face," Annie said. "My handsome, sensitive, precious son, thankfully, did not complete his attempt, and I am so grateful that my family didn't have to face any of it alone. We had another family – our Methodist family – and being an Arkansas United Methodist, I knew the Methodist Behavioral Hospital was where I wanted my son to go."

Methodist Behavioral Hospital is part of the Methodist Family Health complete continuum of care for Arkansas children and their families struggling with psychiatric, behavioral, emotional and spiritual issues. Children as young as three and as old as 17 can be admitted for acute care if they are a danger to themselves or someone else. The hospital's goal for acute care is to stabilize the child's behavior and to connect him or her with community services for future success.

"I thought about saying nothing about my son's attempt, and I thought about what I would tell our congregation and our friends," Annie said. "But by saying nothing or sweeping it under the rug, the stigma is perpetuated. So, this is my story, and my son's story."

Annie's son completed his treatment at Methodist Behavioral Hospital then went on to extended treatment at an equine therapy program. As a result of his care, Annie has become an advocate for suicide prevention through the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention as well as for the services of Methodist Family Health.

"We are on the right path," Annie said. "I want parents and their children and anyone in the shadow of suicide to understand that suicide and suicide attempts are not selfish. The stigma needs to stop, and every suicide survivor needs to know he and she is loved and wanted. My son is a child of God, I am a child of God, and we needed God's angels on this earth. This is why I'm telling our story. We can be uncomfortable and sad and broken together."

If you or someone you know at home, church, school or community is contemplating suicide, reach out to Methodist Family Health. We are available 24 hours a day, every day of the year at 866-813-3388. To learn more about Annie's story, watch her [YouTube video](#) at Methodist Family Health's YouTube channel.

If you would like to donate to Methodist Family Health to continue programs and services like Methodist Behavioral Hospital, here are easy ways to give:

- Text GIVE to 501-881-2258.
- Donate online using [our secure online donation form](#).

- Visit <https://www.paypal.com/fundraiser/hub> and search for Methodist Family Health Foundation.
- Call 501-906-4201 to make a secure contribution with your debit or credit card.
- Mail your cash or check donation to:
Methodist Family Health Foundation
P.O. Box 56050
Little Rock, AR 72215-6050.
- Make a contribution at church. Note MFH on your check or offering envelope and place in the offering plate.

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[March 2020](#)

[February 2020](#)