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Fill the Fence Ministry Keeps Arkansans Warm

FUMC Rogers new ministry is a socially distanced way to give back to those in need

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Winter is one of the harshest seasons for many low-income Arkansas residents. Whether they find themselves without a home or are in a financial hardship that doesn't allow them to spend money on winter clothing, the cold temperatures bring an increased need for warm coats, hats, and gloves.

First United Methodist Church of Rogers is trying to fill that important need, with a new ministry that exists outside the walls of the church.

Fill the Fence is a donation ministry at FUMC Rogers that seeks to provide warm clothing to anyone who needs it by attaching donations to the iron fence that surrounds the church's grounds.

The Rev. James Kjorlaug, senior pastor of FUMC Rogers, said that the idea was shared with him and associate pastor Rev. Ron Hayes through a group text by the former pastor of the church, the Rev. Michael Mattox. Kjorlaug said that Mattox explained that he had seen a church in Oklahoma do this for several years, and thought it would be a great ministry for the Rogers community as well.

"They had Christmas trees that were outdoors. They had trees that were outside of a church that were decorated, and they started adding items of warm clothing onto it for neighbors in the community, people that needed it. We don't have any trees like that outside, but we do have a large, well fenced in churchyard," Kjorlaug said.

Mattox said that he had seen his son's church, Meadowcreek United Methodist Church in Collinsville, Oklahoma, fill a large Christmas tree downtown with warm clothing donations. His son, Nathan Mattox, has been an elder in the Oklahoma Conference for almost 15 years.

"I knew Pastors James and Ron there at FUMC Rogers would be touched, like I was, with this kind way to help others at Christmas. While they don't have a tree, like the folks in the small town of Collinsville, their situation there in downtown Rogers with a decorated fence seemed perfect," said Mattox.

The idea for Fill the Fence is simple, anyone can come by the church's fence at any time of the day and attach their donations to the fence. Right now, they are looking for winter coats, hats, gloves and other cold-weather items, but any type of clothing can be donated. If someone walks by the fence and sees an item of clothing that they need, they are free to take it from the fence.



Two kids add clothing to the Fill the Fence ministry at First UMC Rogers.

Help Us...

Fill the Fence

Give the Gift of Warmth ...

Attach hats, gloves, and scarves to the FUMC fence on Walnut for our neighbors in need.



Kjorlaug said not only is this a way to serve their community, but it's also a learning experience for kids. He said he's shown his own kids how the fence serves their community, and other parents in the church have done this as well.

"It's an easy way to talk to kids, in particular young kids, about hey, here's how we can care for people," he said.

Courtney Judy, who attends FUMC Rogers and is on the church's Board of Trustees, said she has definitely used the fence to teach her two children — Anabel, 9, and Drake, 6 — about serving others during the holiday season.

"When my husband and I first heard about Fill the Fence, we agreed it was the best idea!" Judy said. "It's such an easy, yet meaningful way for people to give and to receive."

"We took our kids shopping for winter weather clothing items. They picked out items they, themselves, would want to wear to school and they chose what they thought would be best for wearing on the playground during outside recess time. They loved hanging their chosen items up on the fence and they have been asking to go back to see if all of their 'picks' have been chosen yet!"

In addition to letting people take what they need from the fence, Kjorlaug said they have also been in contact with a few local elementary schools, shelters, and non-profit organizations.

Part of the reason for reaching out to different groups is because they've received so many donations that they're running out of room on the fence. Donations are now extending down the entire length of one side of the fence, which takes up a full city block of downtown Rogers.

Kjorlaug shared that he thinks the ministry has seen such a large response because people are looking for ways they can help their neighbors, even during social distancing.

"The response has been phenomenal because I think the fact that it's low participation, it's safe for our families that are trying to stay very, very socially distanced and quarantined and that sort of thing. They feel safe participating in it."

Judy, who said her family has had a fantastic experience donating to the fence, said she sees this ministry as a tangible reflection of God's love.

"The variety of items — and, of course, the amount — that were collected and hung up outside our church in such a short period of time is the manifestation of the love of so many, like our pastoral leadership team who thought of this ministry, quickly set it up, and then spread the word through church communication and social media. It's also the love of all of our church members, and probably some non-members, who immediately responded with items and also helped spread the word to others.

“Each item hung on the fence represents someone caring about and praying for a neighbor to whom they could show God’s love in this one little way,” she said.

To follow FUMC Rogers’ Fill the Fence ministry online, visit their Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/FUMCRogers>.

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