

Select Page



The Church Has Left the Building

England First UMC Serves Its Community With Heart, Dedication

Nov 18, 2020 | Arkansas United Methodist



By Caleb Hennington

Digital Content Editor



For many small towns, the church is the centerpiece of a thriving and connected community. That's especially true for the small farming community of England, Arkansas.

England, population approximately 2,750, is located about 30 miles southeast of Little Rock. It's a town with a healthy variety of churches, and according to the Rev. Diane

Hughes, pastor of England First UMC since 2018, "it's a very Christian community that loves the Lord."

"The people are very friendly and, for the most part, are very compassionate and dedicated to their town. The town stands behind the people who live here and is very supportive of those in need," Hughes said.

The community also struggles with poverty and food insecurity, according to Hughes. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, many families were struggling to make ends meet and provide a decent living for their household.

But that's where the strong Christian community of England has stepped up to help, said Hughes.

One of the ways that England FUMC has helped provide meals for families is through the Christ Corner food pantry. Although the food pantry is an ecumenical effort — many area churches maintain the pantry — it was started by England FUMC.

"They serve more than 200 families a month and for many, this is the only food they have access to," Hughes said.

One of the newest ways the church is serving the England community is through an idea that popped up as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hughes said whenever the pandemic arrived in Arkansas, many local businesses were forced to shut down, and many people lost the only income for their families.

So the church sprung into action and opened up their very own drive-thru market, called the Haywood St. Market. The market provides baked goods, casseroles, fresh produce, flowers, masks, and other items to the public, and is open every Saturday from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m.

The drive-thru nature of the market ensures that the community is provided for, while still practicing safe distancing practices to keep everyone healthy.

"The community has rallied around the businesses and we have assisted in keeping them afloat. It has also brought people closer together because we have all shared the pain and helped each other to survive," Hughes said. "The market has continued even after the businesses were able to re-open and it has been a true blessing."



England First UMC's thrift store, 2nd Time Around. The church continues to operate the store during the pandemic to help out the community. Items can be purchased for a flat price of \$1, no matter the original cost of the item.

Hughes said they have also continued to operate their store, 2nd Time Around, during the pandemic. The store sells donated, used clothing and household items to the public. All of the items sold in the store are sold for \$1 per item, no matter the original price of the item.

They also have occasional specials where customers are encouraged to fill a grocery sack with as many items as they can stuff in it for only \$3. All of the money made in the store is donated back to the community, Hughes said, making it a truly cyclical community business.

The Rev. Blake Bradford, District Superintendent of the Central District, said that he is consistently inspired by the work that England FUMC and Rev. Hughes have been able to do in their small town.

"I rejoice in how England UMC is reaching new people for Christ, encouraging community connections, and supporting those in need. Churches of any size can be fruitful, missional, and energized," Bradford said. "The entire congregation is working together to support the mission."

As far as the work of making disciples of Jesus Christ, England has been successful in that mission field as well, gaining about eight to 10 new regular attendees since the doors of the church reopened to in-person worship.

They have also performed two baptisms and a wedding recently. Hughes said they even have new people coming to the church who are interested in becoming members.

"They have stated that this is the first church that they have attended where they feel welcome and a part of a family," Hughes said.

"I am incredibly grateful for the tireless labor of Rev Diane Hughes and the dedicated lay leadership of England UMC for discerning a vision and then saying, 'God's got this — let's follow Him!' Their fruit from these efforts has been baptisms, nurturing of new disciples of Jesus, caring for people in need, and a stronger England," Bradford added.

For Rev. Hughes, this is all part of the work of serving the community where you live, and making the church a part of the everyday lives of the people living in that community.

"I love this church and the people in it and those in the community. The support to me has been overwhelming and I continue to be blessed on a daily basis. Our church believes in the power of prayer and many miracles have occurred through that prayer.

"We are growing and I think that having the excitement and folks participating in the many things that go on continues to show the community that we are real, and that we truly care for all of those we come in contact with," Hughes said.

Share this:

Facebook



Twitter



LinkedIn



Print



Email

<input type="text"/>	Search
----------------------	--------



English

Archives

[December 2020](#)[November 2020](#)[October 2020](#)[September 2020](#)[August 2020](#)