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Too Many Books? Give Them a New Home Through the Literacy Initiative

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Take a moment and locate the closest book to you right now. Maybe it's on the bookshelf behind you. Perhaps it is in your bag. If you're an e-book fan, it could even be in your pocket. I'd venture a guess that, if you're like me, there is a book within 10 feet of you at any time during the day.

Now, you probably know this about me, but I am a pastor. Like many pastors, I have books upon books. Despite giving some to church libraries along the way, my books continue to accumulate. In fact, the time you most hear about a pastor's books is when they move, in which case they may pack more than 20 boxes with books to send to their next office.

Despite the numerous books that sit on many of our shelves and fill many of our church libraries, access to books is a real problem in our communities.

Unfortunately, access to books, like access to many other resources, is limited based on economic status. It is estimated that 61% of low-income families do not own any children's books. Still, studies have shown that having books in the home is twice as important an indicator of later academic achievement as parental education level.

Take another look at that book closest to you. It carries a bit more weight now, doesn't it?

Starting now, 200K More Reasons is challenging Arkansas United Methodists to donate 35,588 books to build the personal libraries of low-income children in Arkansas.

Why such a specific number? There are 35,588 third graders in Arkansas. And third grade is when students move from learning to read, to reading to learn. Imagine what kind of possibilities could spring from an additional 35,000 books in the hands of students in Arkansas.

Churches can begin by collecting new and gently used books from their congregations, Sunday School classes, youth groups, or children's ministries. While our number comes from the number of third-graders in the state, donated books can be for children or youth of any age.

Make sure to take pictures of your congregation in action. Tag us on social media telling us the number of books you collected. We'll add that number to our count and will report our total at Annual Conference. Use the hashtag #givingbooksforlove so we can share your story.

Finally, make a plan to distribute books to kids. You can partner with a teacher, a specific grade, or even an entire school. Teachers in your congregation might be willing to help get you connected. You can also locate a little free library in your community using the [map on their website](#) and donate there.

Another way to distribute books is to connect your book collection to your feeding ministry. Offer books to take home during food pantry hours. Incorporate books into the weekend feeding backpacks given to local schools. Where churches are already doing so much for children, let us continue to do even more.

We long for every child to have access to books in their home. Access to books improves literacy and literacy improves academic potential.

But there's more to it than that. We want students to know that we care about them. We want them to understand that they are loved. That we hope they might reach their God-given potential.

Be on the lookout for more information coming soon about how you and your church can get involved in the 200K More Reasons Literacy Initiative!

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