

The Arkansas United Methodist

LIVING OUR FAITH

October 2019 | Volume 167, Issue 10

WHAT IF?

A HOLY LIVING EXPERIMENT, Pg. 6

What Type of Disciple are You? Q&A w/ Michelle Morris, Pg. 11



A WESLEYAN VIEWPOINT

"My Methodist roots can be traced back to the 18th Century in Virginia; so I was exposed early and often to Wesleyan theology," said Dewitt Smith of Bella Vista. "I believe that Wesleyan theology is more relevant than ever for our children as they are faced with a myriad of 21st century challenges. As United Methodists we are called to be practicing Christians in every phase of our lives."

His wife Cindy said the church is very important to her family, "I didn't grow up Methodist, but I see how it influenced Dewitt, and I am so happy our daughter and our son had good experiences in the church. "It's now being passed on to our grandchildren."

The Smiths support the training of pastors in United Methodist seminaries so they can help the next generation learn and experience the Wesleyan tradition. UMFA Seminary Scholarships fund three-year educations at United Methodist seminaries for student pastors who agree to come back to the Arkansas Conference to serve local churches.

And the Smiths are personally reaping the benefits of the scholarship program. They are members of Oakley Chapel United Methodist Church in Rogers, where two pastors have been UMFA Seminary Scholarship recipients — Rev. Brian Timmons and Rev. Shane Pair, their current pastor.

Foundation Awarded \$20,000 Grant for Clergy, Congregation Financial Literacy Program

By Haley Walker Klein
UMFA Contributor

The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas was awarded a \$20,000 grant for training aimed at increasing financial literacy for Arkansas United Methodist clergy and congregations. The grant was awarded by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of the United Methodist Church (doing business as Wespeth Benefits and Investments) as part of its work with the National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders, an initiative of Lilly Endowment Inc.

"We learned through Foundation research that one of the weakest areas of pastoral ministry is financial stewardship interpretation and leadership," said the Rev. Mackey Yokem, UMFA's Director of Leadership Ministries and Grant Administration. "Our discussions with clergy revealed deep insecurity about financial issues. Our program's goal is to provide greater knowledge about fiscal matters for our pastors for both personal use and the ability to offer congregational leadership."

The Clergy and Congregation Financial Literacy Program will provide a faith-based stewardship syllabus in partnership with Wespeth Benefits and Investments. Wespeth, the largest faith-based pension fund in the United States, oversees the retirement and welfare benefits of United Methodist clergy members. The curriculum will target two selected cohorts over two years and will focus on topics such as interpreting stewardship theology, church finance 101, debt reduction processes, and preparing for retirement.

In addition to the \$20,000 grant, the Foundation will contribute an additional \$40,500 in funds to cover program expenses. "With the development of this program, we hope to help achieve the mission and vision of local congregations around Arkansas," said Yokem. "We are committed to providing meaningful training experiences that benefit our pastors."

The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas manages \$170 million in endowment funds and other charitable assets that benefit local churches and other United Methodist ministries. The UMFA is one of the largest United Methodist Foundations in the country. Founded in 1963, it is responsible for over 800 funds that support United Methodist ministries.



The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas

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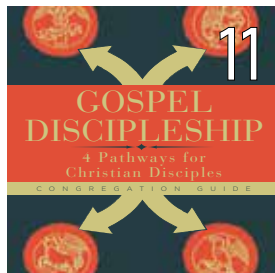
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Quest 2019: Loving God



A Summer Serving in
Panama



Beth Lenderman Art



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Caleb Hennington, Digital Content Editor

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STORY IDEA?



Cover photo by Rodney Steele Photography

It's OK to Not be OK



This past month, the faith community lost a powerful and outspoken voice for mental health advocacy in the church.

On Sept. 9, 2019, news outlets reported that Jarrid Wilson, a 30-year-old pastor at Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California was found dead. Shortly after, social media and news outlets around the world blew up with the news of his death.

The tragedy of Jarrid's death not only comes from seeing how his wife, Juli, and their two young children have processed this past month of unimaginable loss and grief but also in the knowledge that Wilson didn't die under accidental or mysterious circumstances; he took his own life.

Jarrid was a strong advocate for mental health. He encouraged churches to not shy away from discussing tough subjects like suicide and depression in the church. He was a key figure in promoting transparency, openness, and understanding in an institution that historically has not been especially compassionate toward people with mental health struggles.

"But how could that be?" people asked online. How could someone who advocated so strongly for mental health support inside and outside the church, and for people to not feel ashamed of their own struggles with depression and anxiety, take his own life?

Jarrid wasn't shy about his own lifelong battle with depression. He openly discussed it in many of his articles, sermons, and speeches.

The thing about depression is that it doesn't have to make sense. It doesn't need to make sense to someone who doesn't struggle with suicidal thoughts or anxiety because it never will. The same day that Jarrid killed himself he was seen on video laughing and playing with one of his sons at a baseball game. It's not something that can be fixed with a pep talk, or a hug, or your favorite TV show. It's a disorder, a cancer of the mind.

I was supposed to hear Jarrid speak just a few weeks ago at a conference for church communicators. He was scheduled to speak on mental health and the importance of remembering to take care of yourself when you're feeling overwhelmed or discouraged in your role as a communicator. Jarrid's absence at that conference made the urgency of his message all the more real for me.

In the United Methodist Church, we don't believe that suicide gets you a one-way ticket to Hell. We certainly know that Christ would never want us to harm ourselves, but Jesus does not turn His back on His children for any reason, including suicide. Our struggles in this life do not define our eternity in the next.

The Book of Discipline's Social Principles says that churches have an obligation to provide care and resources for those struggling with suicidal thoughts, depression, and loss of self-worth.

From a Biblical perspective, we also know that there is nothing, including suicide, that can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39), and we should reject the condemnation of those who die by suicide. Neither should we condemn surviving families and friends of those who take their own life.

Jarrid was a master of Twitter. His tweets got thousands of likes and retweets every day. His final tweet, just hours before he took his own life, leaves us with a reminder that some struggles follow you throughout your life and may not be curable simply because you're a follower of Christ.

"Loving Jesus doesn't always cure suicidal thoughts. Loving Jesus doesn't always cure depression. Loving Jesus doesn't always cure PTSD. Loving Jesus doesn't always cure anxiety. But that doesn't mean Jesus doesn't offer us companionship and comfort. He ALWAYS does that."

Let those words be a comfort to all of us whenever we feel like we aren't good enough, or that our life doesn't matter, or that we can't overcome the difficult battles we face in our lives. Every day that we wake up and let the sun wash over our eyes and take that first labored breath of morning air is evidence of a God that cares about us and wants us to live.

Jesus offers unending compassion and comfort, no matter where we are in life or what we face.

And never feel ashamed to reach out to someone and talk. Getting help starts with being open about your mental health needs.

If you are struggling with depression or suicidal thoughts, please reach out to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, 1-800-273-8255. Help is ALWAYS available.

Caleb Hennington

Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](https://twitter.com/arumceditor)

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UNITED METHODISTS OF
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CENTER FOR MULTIPLYING DISCIPLES

What If?

By Gary E. Mueller
Bishop of the Arkansas Conference

I have a confession to make. At times - probably too much of the time - I feel trapped in the worst of “church world.” I guess it just goes with the territory of being a bishop, but it often seems as if all I hear is bickering about matters of human sexuality, complaints about leadership and pessimism about the church’s future.

I have realized how much I unconsciously absorb this negative energy. The result is that I begin to think this negativity is reality. Well, it’s not. While all these things are real and have an impact on life, there is something that is ultimately far “realer.” It is the love of God, the saving grace of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the world so that one day God’s will shall be just as real on earth as it is in heaven.

This powerful realization of what is “realer” frees me to dream about life in new ways. One of the most exciting ways I do this is to engage in a holy thought experiment called, “What if?”

What if every United Methodist congregation in Arkansas participated in 200,000 Reasons and embraced the children they serve as if they were their own?

What if every Arkansan United Methodist read at least one chapter of scripture every morning?

What if those who are most at odds over matters of human sexuality intentionally developed a relationship for prayer and holy conversation with someone on the “opposite side”?

What if we all fasted from making political comments on Facebook and other social media for the next three months?

What if every United Methodist congregation in Arkansas had at least one profession of faith this year?

What if every United Methodist pastor spent one-half hour in prayer every day?



What if we actually sought spiritual revival in a serious and sustained way?

What if people looked at United Methodists and said, “They’ve got something. I’m not quite sure what it is, but I sure want whatever it is”?

What if five lay persons in every congregation once a month shared the difference Jesus makes in their lives with someone they know?

This is a not particularly ambitious list. Indeed, it is rather modest. But it is something we can do individually and together. And if we do it - not legalistically, but because we want to - we will be changed. And if we are changed, our churches will be changed. And if our churches are changed, lives, communities and the world will be transformed by Jesus’ love.

There is, however, one more “What if?” I want to add to my list. And it just may be the most significant of all. What if we were to move from a holy thought experiment to a holy living experiment?



Why the Church Should Talk About Mental Health

By Gracie Rymel
Featured Contributor

As someone who has grown up in the Church and struggles with mental illness, I can tell you that it has not always been easy to talk about.

We have been taught to enter the Church doors with a smile on our face and pretend that everything is okay. It seems ironic to me that we are supposed to bring our heavy burdens to the altar but, oh wait, did you say anxiety or thoughts of suicide? I wonder what would happen if the Church started treating mental health as important as physical health? How much more willing people would be to share their brokenness.

Mental illness is something that leaves you feeling very isolated and alone, no matter how much support you have from others. Anxiety can convince your brain that you don't have any friends, you are not loved, and that you are too much of a burden.

Trust me, I have felt that way plenty of times.

While it may be difficult to understand, there is so much power in presence and the act of simply just being there. We, as the Christian community, are called to be in relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, whatever the case may be. No exceptions.

This may be hard to hear but sometimes prayer just isn't enough. While prayer can offer peace and comfort during a very difficult time, it is not going to fix or make it better. That would be like saying, "If we just pray hard enough, your broken arm will be fixed."

Mental illness is something that can be caused by a lack of serotonin or dopamine chemicals that your brain needs in order to function properly. So no, it's not something we are just "making up," it's actually real.

Throughout my darker valleys of battling with anxiety, depression, and OCD, I can honestly say that the Church was not the first place I wanted to turn toward. When you have been taught to give everything to Jesus, it's hard not to feel ashamed for not being able to "let that go." I have wobbled on the tight-rope of my faith because of things that my anxiety and depression have told me.

In the Church, the minute you express your faith is lacking, it's as if a red flag goes off to alert everyone that something must be done immediately. The last thing I want is to be reminded of the shame I feel for not being able to believe God can heal me.

Having a mental illness does not make you a bad Christian or mean that you lack faith. To be honest, I don't think I would be where I am in my faith journey without the things I have overcome with my mental health.

One thing I have learned is that the more you talk about

it, the better. If we are able to have casual conversations about mental health in the Church, that opens the door to vulnerability, which leads to deeper relationships.

Jesus says to love our neighbor as ourselves and I believe these acts of listening and empathizing is what leads us closer to Him.

Despite a lack of understanding, if you want to be the Church, then help those struggling with mental health by listening, empathizing, and supporting them. Reach out. Speak up. You never know what is going on behind a smile.



Gracie Rymel is a senior at the University of Arkansas - Fayetteville studying Social Work. When home, Gracie attends Beebe First UMC in Beebe, AR.

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Group Home Growth Because of Donors, Supporters

By Amy Shores

Director of Pastoral Care, Methodist Family Health

Methodist Family Health's therapeutic group homes are the foundation on which the Methodist Family Health continuum of care was built. Many may be familiar with our homes around the state as our organization began in 1899 as the Arkansas Methodist Orphanage. Caring for Arkansas's children and teens who can't live with their families is something we have been doing for 120 years, and over that span of a century plus, many changes have taken place in the way we provide that care.

Our therapeutic group home program has been renamed by the Arkansas Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) as qualified residential treatment programs (QRTPs). No matter what we call the homes, they remain family-style, and our staff uses the Teaching-Family Model of care in all interactions with the kids in residence. The Teaching-Family Model is a well-established, evidence-based, trauma-informed model of care that assists our kids in learning the appropriate alternative behavior to the behaviors which may have caused them to struggle in the past.

While Methodist Family Health has eight homes around the state, we currently only have four staffed and running: Magale Manor in Magnolia, as well as a home in Little Rock, are serving boys, and the home in Helena/Lexa is serving girls. Our home in Searcy should be serving girls again soon as we work to hire staff to care for them. We also have homes in Heber Springs, Springdale and John Magale in Magnolia.

Our home in Fayetteville is currently housing sibling groups as it can be difficult to place a family of brothers and sisters together in the same setting. However, it is vital to their treatment to do so. The children we serve in these programs are all in DCFS custody, and they come from broken homes, failed adoptions, multiple placements, and other traumatic situations.



We work to treat them in a community setting where they attend public schools, play on sports teams or in the band, or become a Scout or 4H member. Our kids also attend church in their community with our Teaching-Parents who are on duty, and we have some amazing United Methodist Churches that partner with our homes to ensure our youth are comfortable and welcome in services.

Arkansas' congregations also provide for other needs our youths have, particularly during special times of the year like Christmas and back-to-school. I've attended choir concerts and seen band solos and award-winning artwork. Recently, I even have had the extreme joy of celebrating the baptism of a couple of our kids!

Regardless of what our civic and church communities provide, it demonstrates to the kids in our care that they are loved, precious and accepted just as they are. As we prepare for the holidays, I ask you to consider working with your church or small group to provide Christmas gifts for the children in our care. If you would like to take a Christmas Wish List for a teen who will be spending Christmas with us, please contact me at AShores@MethodistFamily.org.



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The Many Paths of Discipleship

Q&A With Rev. Dr. Michelle J. Morris and
Her New Book, *Gospel Discipleship: 4
Pathways for Christian Disciples*



Tell me about yourself: Where you're from, where you live now, where you went to school, some of your favorite things to do when not at work, etc.

Ahh, the dreaded where you're from... most pastors pause on this one, take a deep breath, and then go through the litany of all the places we have been from, because to leave one out is like leaving out family. So I will do the same: born in Stillwater, OK; moved to Benton, AR at 13 and graduated high school there; moved to Fayetteville for college (BA in English and French, MA in Comparative Literature); then Rogers where I got my call to ministry, which took me to Dallas to attend SMU (MDiv and Ph.D. in Religious Studies, emphasis New Testament); then served churches in West Memphis and Fort Smith before my current appointment in Little Rock, which I commute to from Hot Springs Village when I am in the office. When I am not at work, I spend time with family, write, and I love to listen to music - all genres, but mainly pop.

You have a new book coming out next year called *Gospel Discipleship: 4 Pathways for Christian Disciples*. Where did the idea for this book come from and what is it about?

The book idea came from the Holy Spirit as I struggled to come up with a way to help churches figure out their intentional paths of discipleship. My struggle was that I knew there needed to be a way to teach about such a pathway in a broad sense, something Bishop Mueller pushed me in a helpful way to recognize, but I also know that churches have their own unique personalities and exist in their own unique mission fields. I came to the Conference Offices from a two-point charge. My Fort Smith churches - Wesley and Cavanaugh - were 2.5 miles apart from each other, made up of the same demographics of people, and were formed within a year of each other, but I could not do the same thing successfully at both churches. There had to be a way to take a useful system to the churches, and to God's people, and still take into account their uniqueness. Thus, *Gospel Discipleship* was born. People take the Discipleship Type Assessment to determine if they are Markan (Holy Spirit inspired), Matthean (action driven), Lukan (relationship focused), or Johannine (mentor-apprentice nurtured) disciples. Once someone understands their type, there are four distinct, but readily customized, pathways for them to grow in their faith.

Name:

**Michelle J.
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Home Town:

**Stillwater,
OK.**

**Currently,
Hot Springs
Village, AR**

Book Title:

**Gospel
Discipleship:
4 Pathways
for Christian
Disciples**

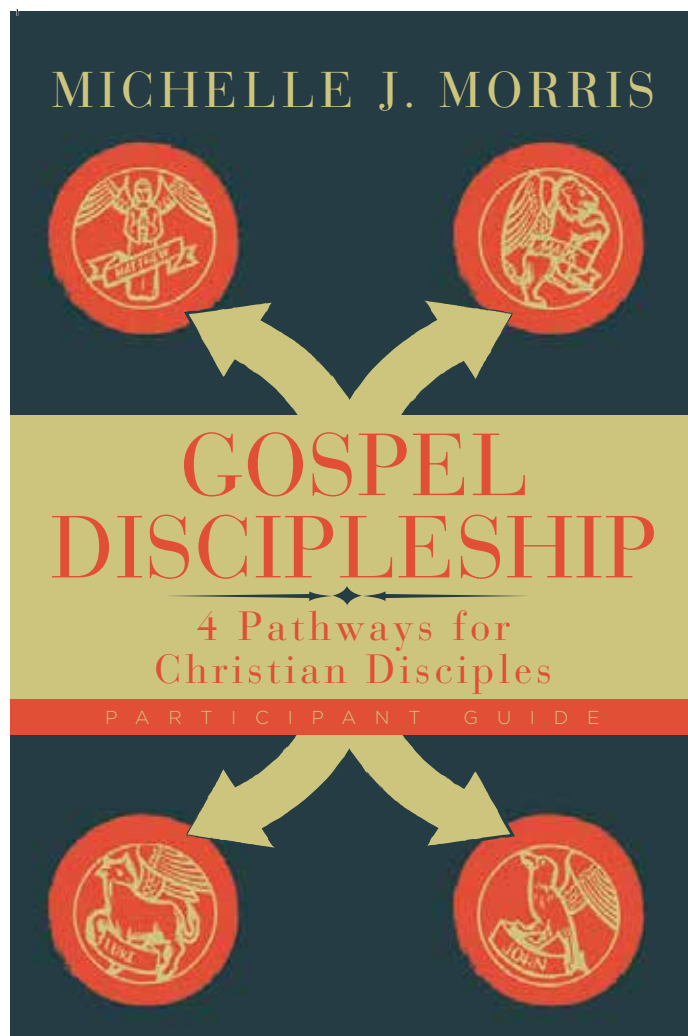
The book revolves around four types of disciples: Markan, Matthean, Lukan, and Johannine -- named after the four Gospels that are at the start of the New Testament. It's interesting to me that these people are different enough to construct four distinct personality types from studying their words. Did that surprise you as well?

I wasn't surprised about the distinctness of the Gospels, but I had never thought about the Gospels giving rise to distinct understandings of discipleship. I remember our final exam in New Testament I in seminary required us to identify which quotes came from which Gospels, and once you have studied the Gospels and their unique characteristics, that is actually a pretty easy exercise to do. Each of the Gospel writers has particular phrases and particular emphases, because they were writing to particular communities. They narrowed the huge story of Jesus (of which we have only a minuscule amount) in a way that would resonate with the people in their community that they were trying to reach. That consequently also built Christian communities that had distinct personalities. What surprised me was that today, even though we have all four Gospels available to us, these stories still resonate with us in particular ways, drawing us to some stories and understandings over others. We are drawn to the stories that make sense in light of our own life experiences.

I noticed the particular discipleship traits of each Gospel as I worked with about 20 churches from around the state on their intentional discipleship pathways. I offered an online Bible study on the last words Jesus proclaimed in each of the Gospels, because it seemed to me that the last words Jesus spoke to us before he ascended were probably our parting instructions for how we live as his followers from here on out. Each of those last words is different. No Gospel recounts exactly the same words. Each of them, though, defines a particular way of approaching discipleship. Once I noticed that trait, I looked through each of the Gospels and found that such a thread carries through the whole story as told by each of the Gospel writers. So these stories, that reflected particular communities who had distinct understandings of what it means to follow Jesus, are still creating such distinctions.

Most people are familiar with personality tests such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or the enneagram. How is finding out your discipleship type similar to these tests and how is it different?

Like those other assessments, the Gospel Discipleship Type Assessment aids in self-awareness. It helps to name things about us that allow us to grow and learn. What is distinct is that this assessment is geared around and grows out of Scripture, and is aimed specifically at helping us grow in our faith journey. Probably the most familiar similar type tool would be a Spiritual Gifts test. However, while a Spiritual Gifts test reveals particular skills you bring to the table as a disciple, this assessment reveals how you live out that discipleship. You will use your spiritual gifts in that journey, and to some extent your spiritual gifts are probably shaping which type you are drawn to, but this



assessment helps you map out what the journey looks like. It helps you take the next step, and the next step, and the next step toward Jesus.

Your book has two guides, one for individuals and one for congregations. What is the purpose of having two guides? How would an individual's result differ from a congregation's result?

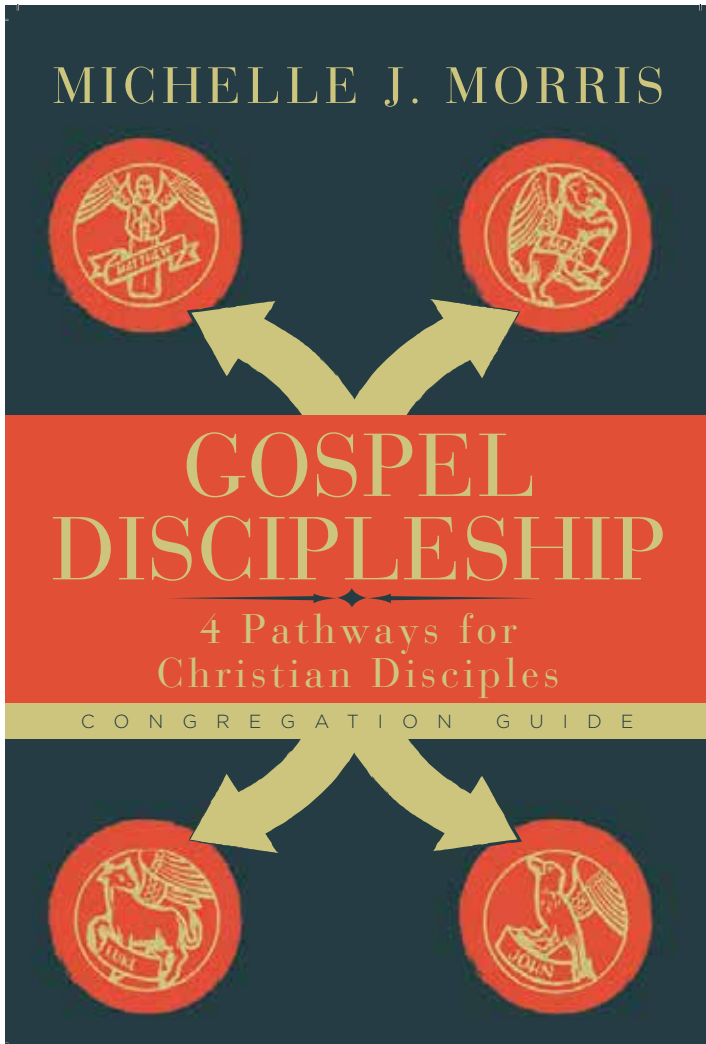
Everyone who takes the assessment would do well to pick up an Individual Guide. That book not only tracks each of these types through Scripture so people better understand how the story is shaping them, but it also explains each of the types in depth. It covers not only typical characteristics but likely spiritual crises. Then it shows how each type can grow their discipleship in four realms: spiritual formation, worship, service, and evangelism. The congregation guide is really meant for a group to understand their whole identity. This can be small groups, or it can be an entire congregation. That guide helps a group understand how to lean into their dominant type identity, but also what role people who do not share that dominant type play in the health of the group. Congregations have personalities just like individuals do. This assessment helps us admit that reality.

Once an individual or congregation discern their particular discipleship type, how can that knowledge help them in their lives or the health of their congregation?

Let's be honest about something that's difficult for us to admit: we talk a lot about discipleship in

realized I had not actually been practicing what I preach. I know that I am Markan, and I know a Markan path centers around identifying your top spiritual gift or gifts, and then planning for how to use that gift intentionally in the realms of discipleship mentioned above. So, I put a plan in place. It is pushing me out of my comfort zone, but in a way that is authentic to who I am. As part of this journey, I am not only practicing regular centering prayer now, but also sharing original poems with theological bents at Wednesday Night Poetry in downtown Hot Springs. I would not have tried either if I didn't understand this was the next step I could take in my faith journey, not because it is the latest trend, but because it is who I am and who God is calling me to be next.

As for congregations, I have to say that has been the most exciting part of watching this whole process unfold. I am infinitely grateful to the churches who have agreed to be pilot churches in this process. The learning that has taken place has sharpened Gospel Discipleship for everyone who follows. But I am also excited that they have received something through this process as well. Many of them are still discerning the specifics of their particular discipleship pathways, but here are some of the immediate benefits they have seen: congregations better understand the leadership style of their pastors, and pastors better understand how to lead their churches; congregations now understand why there has been significant conflict, particularly in churches with two dominant discipleship types; and churches understand now



the church, but we don't really know what that means. For too long now we have assumed if we just say, "Be a disciple!" everyone will know what that means and how to do it. Maybe we have quit explaining because we take it for granted that people know. Maybe we've quit explaining because we don't know either.

I want to answer this question with some specific examples, and I want to start with myself. For months now I have been going around sharing how this process can help people grow in their faith, that knowing your type lays out a pretty clear path of discipleship. But about a month ago, confronting my own faith struggle, I

4 Types of Disciples

Markan
Holy Spirit
Inspired

Matthean
Action
Driven

Lukan
Relationship
Focused

Johannine
Mentor/
Apprentice
Nurtured

why some programs work for them and some fail spectacularly (and they should be able to better predict what will work). And those are the big things. Practically, two churches are using these results to influence their small group development, one church successfully rearranged their worship seating with minimal resistance (and that same church is now integrating discipleship understanding into discussions around design of a new sanctuary space), one church is now taking a hard look at their practices of hospitality and welcome, and one church has used results in their nominations process. In short, there have been a number of surprising side effects, but they are helping churches shake loose from being stuck in their discipleship in the ways that they need.

Do you see this subject as something that attracts more younger or older individuals, or do you see it being relevant across a spectrum of age groups?

People of all ages have taken this assessment now, and it has resonated across the spectrum. It has been incredible when I have the chance to sit with someone individually and go over their results, and watch them nod in astonishment at how much it reveals about them. Just a couple weeks ago, I visited with a woman who tested Markan, and when I mentioned that Markans are okay with messy, she grabbed me and said, “That’s my house! But why would I waste time cleaning my house when I have stuff to do for God?!” She was a Baby Boomer, recently retired, and she suddenly had some clarity about what the priorities for her life should be.

If there is a generation that really resonates with it consistently, however, it would be Millennials. Every training I have done

with Millennials present, they constantly nod, and they quickly come up with applications in discussion. That generation actively cultivates self-awareness. They see the value in seeking understanding of yourself and others, and learning how to navigate a diverse world. Also, I am sure it doesn’t hurt that they have been raised in a world of social media quizzes like “What ‘80s sitcom matches your life?” They love understanding what kind of disciple they are, and consequently imagining what that means for their life going forward.

Where can people purchase or find more information on your book?

According to the current timeframe, the books don’t actually come out until April 2020! There has been energy to make them available at least for pre-order ahead of their release, though. I encourage folks to go to Cokesbury to pre-order, as Cokesbury contributes to our denomination, but you can also find them on Amazon. Just search for Gospel Discipleship, Michelle J. Morris, and it should pull up. You can also find links to purchase them from the website gospeldiscipleship.net. You can sign up for the Gospel Discipleship newsletter at that site, and I will provide updates on the release there, as well as add supplementary material (the two books cannot contain all that I have already discerned, and presumably more is coming).

If you have questions about the books or the process, I also encourage people to reach out to me by sending an email to info@gospeldiscipleship.net. I would love to help as many people and churches as possible figure out their authentic and particular paths for following Jesus! 🙌



Serving an Older Congregation

Benton First's Encore Ministry Hosts Fun and Fellowship for Those 60 and Up

By Caleb Hennington

Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)

According to the Pew Research Center's statistics on U.S. United Methodists, a majority of professing members are age 65 and older, but while many churches invest in their children's and youth ministries, ministries specifically designed for adults age 60 and up are more difficult to find.

First United Methodist Church Benton is trying to grow its outreach and increase that number through Encore Ministry, a new program aimed at church members who are 60 years old and up.

Donna Hogue, Director of Encore at First Benton, said the idea for this ministry came about a little more than a year ago through conversations she was having with Benton's senior pastor, the Rev. Ben Crismon.

"Ben and I started talking about the fact that statistics show at least half of United Methodists are over the age of 60, and that's quite a staggering statistic," Hogue said. "We began discussing what our church needed to do to serve that age group."

Hogue said the generation that makes up the 60 and older group, mostly Baby Boomers, is different than the generation before them, the Silent Generation. She said that the 60 and up group is very active and still interested in traveling, golfing, getting outside, and sharing their experiences with other people.

She said a letter from Bishop Mueller from 2014, called "Living With No Regrets," is where she read about the UMC's aging statistic. In another resource, Hogue said the author of a magazine article described the trend toward older members in the church as an "aging tsunami." In other words, the average UMC church membership is aging rapidly; faster than the church is prepared to handle.

"We decided that we needed to help those people and minister to them in our church, and we felt that Encore was a great name that accurately described the group."

Hogue and Crismon began to ask small groups and Sunday School classes at First UMC Benton, "What would you do with a group that you wouldn't do alone?"

From their answers, Hogue and Crismon built a ministry plan around meeting the needs of their older members.

"From its development, our intention was to create a ministry



The Encore Ministry at Benton First UMC is a new ministry that takes care of the older generation in the church. Each month, the group ventures out into their community, or meets at the church, for a time of fellowship, fun and community building. || Photo provided by Donna Hogue

with the express purpose of making new disciples and bringing new people into a relationship with Christ," Crismon said.

"We often focus our evangelical efforts on the young and young families, but our demographic research showed that many of the unchurched in our area were older adults."

Hogue said they emphasized to the older members that they are vital and wanted in the church; older generations have many skills that are necessary for the growth of a healthy church.

"They have a wealth of experiences, gifts and talents that need to be shared," Hogue said.

The Encore Ministry groups are broken down into four distinct categories based on shared interests. In this way, the groups are more likely to work together harmoniously and build each other up. The categories are Travel, Study & Engagement, Missions, and Community.

The groups meet regularly and base their activities around the categories they are in. For example, the Travel group plans educational trips -- sometimes large trips, like to England to visit historic Methodist churches -- while the Study & Engagement group focuses on Bible study and short-term educational studies on topics like finances, computer training or Will preparation.

It's not always an educational program though; sometimes, the groups gather simply for a fun night of community-building and fellowship. Recently, Encore Ministry held a potluck dinner and game night with First UMC Benton's youth.

“Every month that has a fifth Sunday, we get together with the youth, have a meal, and play games. The Encore group provides the food and then we play Bingo,” Hogue said. “Our youth minister is Daniel Curry and he was the Bingo card caller, and you would have thought the prizes were top-dollar! We got so competitive.

“One of our youth told us later ‘I didn’t know Bingo could be so much fun!’”

Hogue sees this as an example of bridging the gap between generations in the church, and a great way for knowledge and personal stories of a person’s faith walk to be passed between age groups.

The ultimate goal of Encore Ministry is not only to bring people with similar interests together for fellowship and fun but to also be a beacon of light and hope for the Benton community.

“Everything we do is meant to make disciples of Jesus Christ who are so transformed that we transform the world,” Hogue said.

Crismon echoes that mission statement and said the group has been hard at work reaching out into Benton.

“As of now our Encore ministries are already reaching out to those not connected to our faith community, and bringing them into the life of Christ. We have great staff leadership who has equipped laity to make this a thriving ministry,” Crismon said.

Hogue said when they started the ministry more than a year ago, they began with a small group of interested individuals. Since that time, Encore Ministry has grown into more than 100 people participating, in one form or another, with the ministry.

“This is something that was more needed than I think we realized. People were excited at the chance to get to see more people who go to the same church that they do.”

For the future of the Encore Ministry, Hogue said she thinks that expanding the ministry will be a natural process. As more people hear about this ministry, they are more likely to join in and tell their friends about it as well.

In Hogue’s mind, and in the mind of those involved with the ministry at First UMC Benton, this ministry will only continue to grow because there will always be a need to take care of the older generations.

“Just because someone has retired, doesn’t mean they are ready to quit. I think, as a church, we need to take advantage of the experience and gifts that God has given them. But we also need to be there for them when they need us,” Hogue said. 📷



Top: Daniel Curry, youth minister at Benton First, lead a game of Bingo at one of the Encore Ministry potluck and game nights at the church.

Bottom: The Benton First youth and Encore Ministry fellowship together during a potluck dinner at the church. It was a great time to share fun and experiences between generations.

|| Photos provided by Donna Hogue

Art From the Heart

Beth Lenderman uses her God-given talent to support the local Wesley Foundation



Beth Lenderman poses with a few of her original paintings. She is currently raising money for the UofA Wesley Foundation through a "30 for 30 for 30" series of paintings. || Photo by provided by Beth Lenderman

By Sam Pierce
Featured Contributor, [@sjamespierce](#)

When Beth Lenderman was little, she drew all the time. She took painting lessons in middle school and art in high school. When she got older, she listened to a lot of negative comments and moved away from art and did other things.

But about six years ago, she got back into it, part-time, and this past year, her passion for the arts has blossomed into a full-time career.

"This is truly my passion," she said. "I am thankful for it and that I am able to do it because I love it."

Her dad was very artistic, as was her older sister. Lenderman said they were both very influential and supportive and they both wanted her to pursue it full-time, but Lenderman didn't listen to them.

"They have both passed away now, but I know they would be very happy with what I am doing," she said.

Her sister died in 2013, a year after Lenderman had taken art up again.

"I wanted to paint more, but I just couldn't find the time," she said. "It wasn't working out. But then, I felt

like God was putting it on my heart and doors started opening and I just saw God answering the prayer and passion for art that I put on the back burner.

“I was thankful for the opportunity and it made me see what God was doing in my life. I feel like my art is tied to my faith because the biggest thing for me, is to use it in a way to glorify Him.”

Her passion for art reemerged almost 20 years ago, when she volunteered to paint an entire floor to ceiling mural in a Sunday School class at First United Methodist Church in Prescott, Arkansas. According to her Facebook page, she painted mountains, creeks, wilderness, forests, sheep and camels.

“It took countless hours and I loved every minute of it,” she said. “And after I completed that project, I picked up the paintbrush again for myself and began painting.”

Lenderman said God uses what she does to bring Him glory and meet people “who don’t have a strong faith.”

“He has put me in these places I wouldn’t necessarily be if I wasn’t painting,” she said.

Lenderman is currently doing a “30 for 30 for 30” series of paintings with 10% of the proceeds going to support the Wesley Campus Ministry at the University of Arkansas. This is the second year she has done this project, raising \$553 a year ago.



Lenderman's heart series sold very well last year, raising \$553 for the Wesley Foundation at the University of Arkansas - Fayetteville. || Photo by provided by Beth Lenderman

“I was painting 30 paintings in 30 days, one per day, and they would be paintings of hearts, using a pallet knife to paint,” she said. “A lot of artists will have a series, where they will paint so many paintings in so many days, and I got the idea from that, but I wanted it to mean something. (And last year,) I was thinking hearts because there is not a lot of love in the world right now.”

She chose to donate the proceeds of the sales to the Wesley Campus Ministry because both of her sons have been involved with it. Her oldest, Hayden, graduated from the U of A and was an intern at the ministry and her youngest, Jordan, is currently enrolled at the U of A and is part of the leadership team at Wesley.

“It has just been such a good thing when they were in college,” she said. “So it was a way to give back and support the ministry for what they have done.”

Lenderman is charging \$30 for each piece, where normally her pieces go for about \$52. She said she wanted to make it affordable and available for someone who wanted a piece of original art, but normally couldn’t afford it.

“Originally, I knew I would give 10% of each painting sold to Wesley, and initially, I didn’t know if anyone would care,” she said. “I knew if I sold all 30, I would be able to donate close to \$100.”

She said when she started the series last year, she wasn’t sure if anybody would buy anything, and she might end up with 30 heart paintings hanging on her wall for her to enjoy. She said she was overwhelmed by the response from last year.



Beth Lenderman also enjoys painting and drawing animals, and has painted numerous pictures of horses. || Photo by provided by Beth Lenderman

“I think people liked the hearts and I think they liked there was a Bible verse on each painting underneath,” she said. “I think they really liked that part of the money was going to something that made a difference, like the Wesley Ministry.

“I think it makes people feel good to be able to donate something; they were getting to do something with their purchase. Some people even paid double and anything extra, I gave to the ministry.”

She said, until a couple of months ago, she wasn’t even sure if she was going to do the series again.

“The new verse was placed on my heart and it speaks of the Holy Spirit, so I did it again,” she said. “People will watch (my Page) and they know what time I’m going to post and they will try to get it before someone else.

“... I had no idea it would be successful like that.”

This year, she is doing something a little different for the art series, including a different scripture, Romans 15:13, and a different picture, a dove, representing the Holy



This year, Lenderman painted a “30 for 30 for 30” series based on doves. The dove represents the Holy Spirit, and she is also basing the series off of Romans 15:13. || Photo by provided by Beth Lenderman

Spirit. The money is still going toward the Wesley Ministry. The series will run until Nov. 1.

“I have already done all 30 projects, and I will post on Facebook every day,” she said. “If someone likes one that is already bought, I will offer to paint another one like it and still sell it to them for \$30.”

She has a public Facebook Page, Beth Lenderman Fine Art, where she posts all of her artwork.

“I am wanting to use my art to glorify God and to make

a difference,” she said. “I try to glorify Him in all my paintings. Whenever I am commissioned a piece, I pray for that person and when I did the series, sometimes I am doing it for people that I don’t even know.

“It is a way for me to use my art, a talent God gave me, to glorify Him and spread love.”

Lenderman lives in Lowell, Arkansas with her husband, Jim, who is the senior pastor

at Central Rogers United Methodist Church. Jim and Beth will have been married for 33 years this December.

“I am very proud of what she is doing,” the Rev. Jim Lenderman said. “For her to step out in faith, and seek to honor God with her gifts and abilities, is a beautiful thing to watch.” 🙏

Berryville United Methodist Men Provide Snacks for Hungry School Children

By Sam Pierce

Featured Contributor, [@sjamespierce](#)



More than three years ago, the Berryville United Methodist Men's Group saw a need within the church to help not only the children in their community but also the children within their own church by providing a morning snack during the school year.

"Of course, probably not just here, some children younger children are going to school without something to eat," said the Rev. Andy Hughes, who has been the senior pastor at Berryville United Methodist for three years. "Some children have parents that go to work earlier and they need a safe place for them to stay before school started.

"So they are able to drop them off here at the church. We have a lot of walking traffic of children, so we saw the need to invest in that, with an outreach ministry. We pray with kids, encourage them and give them snacks."

The church is located across the street from the middle school so students come right up to the ministry, even if it is raining. He said they pray with the kids, encourage them and give them snacks.

"We talk to them, and invest

time with the children," Hughes said. "It was a need we saw within the community and it has been well received, so we kept it going."

The parking lot usually opens up around 6:30 a.m. and runs till 8, when school starts. Hughes said sometimes the kids will show up right at 6:30.

"We have activities for them too," he said. "We have a basketball goal out there and a tether ball, as well as a football. We have different things for them to do and it gives them something to do while they are waiting for school to begin."

Hughes said they average between 20 to 25 kids during the year, having dropped off a little bit from previous years.

"Last year, we averaged 30 to 40 kids every morning, but several of those rode the bus."

He estimated that 70% of the kids that come to the ministry in the morning are middle school children and the rest are probably high school students.

"Some of the high schools, drive, so they park in our lot and grab a cocoa or coffee or a snack," he said.

The ministry offers a variety of snack items including

Honey Buns, Nutty Bars and Oatmeal Cream Pies. He said they also have apples and fruit snacks. There is also a prayer jar for requests and volunteers will hand out Bibles to the students.

A large part of the expenses are funded through donations by either individuals or organizations such as the local Kiwanis Club. He said, for a month's worth of snacks, the church will spend anywhere from \$50 to \$75.

"I know that doesn't sound like a lot, but without the donations, it would be more than that, probably closer to \$100 a month for all of the expenses," he said. "I thank the Lord, that we have had quite a few people that have donated.

"The Lord has met the need so far, and nobody has to suffer a lot because of it."

He said through the ministry, he has seen salvations and he has seen some families feel uplifted during difficult times.

"The ministry has proved to be effective and more than that, it is a witness to our community.

"The community sees the outreach the church is doing and not because we are getting

something out of it, but we understand the burden for some children."


He said the intent of the ministry is to see children come to church — even if it isn't his church.

"Some of the kids that come go to other churches," he said. "We are out there trying to be a support for them. I would guess, about 20% of the kids that have come have been regulars for years and 80% are new kids that have come in."

He said the church has a youth program on Tuesday nights and over the three years he has been the pastor, about 10 to 12 kids have transitioned from the morning ministry to the youth program.

"It is a blessing to the church and to the community," he said.

"It has also helped other churches and caused those churches to get some young people, because those children weren't able to come to our church, so they went somewhere else.

"That's what ministry is all about — to see children transition into a Christian life. As long as they get in church and find Jesus as their savior, I'm encouraged either way." 

Worship for All at Jacksonville First UMC

By Melinda Shunk
Children's Ministry Coordinator

Last March, the Rev. Nathan Kilbourne shared with the ministry team at Jacksonville First UMC that he really wanted to develop more of an intergenerational worship service so that in worship the span of mature members and young members could all have their worship needs met. Stephanie Dunn and Katie Howell embraced the idea, but the ministry team didn't have any go-to ideas immediately, so it took a little time to research and learn how intergenerational worship would look at Jacksonville.

Dunn is the Children's minister at JUMC and was eager to get her children and families more involved in worship. She was the first to sign up when she received her monthly Conference Children's Ministry newsletter announcing the new Worship for All class that was offered for free online with the ARUMC CourSe program. Stephanie shared that the class gave her inspiration and sparked creative ideas that she could offer during the worship team planning sessions.

Kilbourne, Howell, and Dunn planned all summer and worked within Kilbourne's "I Am" sermon series that would start in September. Together, they planned ways that all who worshiped could feel involved. How could they model special prayers? How could they engage people during the sermon so that the message really stuck? How could the music move and interest all as they worship? These are the kinds of questions they worked together on as they planned over the summer.

Once the planning was done it was time to start the transition process by removing the worship boxes two Sundays before the new Worship for All approach. Stephanie didn't announce she was taking them away or why



The staff at Jacksonville First UMC plan out the intergenerational worship service. || Photo provided by Stephanie Dunn

they were gone. A few students noticed because they wanted the dry erase boards to doodle on during worship. Most had grown tired of the boxes and sadly watched their phones instead.

The next Sunday each member of the church was met with a special bag of model magic and a finger labyrinth as they walked into the Sanctuary. These bags were for all; they were not busy bags for the kids. They were given instructions that they would be used during worship so please wait for instructions on their use.

Worship began as usual until it was time to pray and all were asked to remove their finger labyrinth. Together they traced the labyrinths and prayed together. All adults were asked to assist any student or child sitting next to them. During the sermon, Kilbourne asked all to take out their model magic in their pews. He asked them to pretend the model magic was dough and taught them all to knead the dough. At the end of his sermon,



Top Left: A member at Jacksonville First traces the finger labyrinth during the intergenerational worship service.

Top Right: A child kneads his "dough" during the intergenerational worship service.

Bottom Left: An older member at Jacksonville First UMC helps a younger member trace the labyrinth with his finger. The labyrinth and dough allowed the younger and older generations to work together and share knowledge during the worship at Sunday service. || Photo provided by Stephanie Dunn



most had formed their "loaf" of bread without instruction. Before communion was offered, Kilbourne asked that all bring their "bread loaves" to the altar. Service concluded with traditional hymns that gave all a calm and center.

Members were given an interactive experience in their worship on that early September Sunday. Small changes in prayers, tactile sermon, and movement during worship kept ALL engaged in worship. Older members enjoyed helping children they didn't know. Stephanie had parents of little children comment that they didn't feel the need to get out their phone once to keep their children engaged! Stephanie had taken a picture of every part of the worship service and posted it on their church's Facebook page. She said that the photos of that service received the most positive feedback they had ever received. The best comment given was people sharing the post and inviting their friends to come and see what would happen at the next worship for all service! 🙌



Photo by Christina Choh

Quest Teaches Kids to Love God

This year's Quest was another amazing success. The annual event is geared toward 3rd - 5th graders, and 6th graders who are not a part of a youth program at their church.

The event was created so pre-teens can "Explore the meaning of God's call on their lives, develop and deepen their practice of spiritual disciplines, acquire a solid foundation of United Methodist theology, and become equipped to go into the world with confidence in their faith and calling, so they may, in turn, make disciples who make disciples of Jesus Christ."

Quest operates on a three year cycle. Last year's Quest was focused on "Hearing God." This year's Quest was all about "Loving God."

Quest 2020 will be about "Serving God."

Check out some of the photos of the awesome weekend of fun and learning at St. James UMC in Little Rock!

You can also view a recap video of all of the fun in the digital version of the magazine, or online at <https://youtu.be/mHZzhyrisTg>.



Bishop Mueller prays for the kids gathered at Quest 2019. || Photo by Christina Choh



Photos by Christina Choh

A Summer Like No Other

Hendrix Student Spends Vacation Helping At-Risk Youth in Panama

By Sam Pierce

Featured Contributor, [@sjamespierce](#)

Greer Ayers is the youngest of four sisters. And as long as she can remember, she has always looked up to them.

“The reason I was really going (to youth group and church) was because of them, and the great experience they had,” Ayers said. “And they found so many great friendships through that youth group.”

“When I got old enough, when I did get there, I developed friends at church and that was part of it. What made me continue, I think, really was the relationships I got to build.”

This summer, Ayers worked for the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission Program in Panama City.

She worked at the San Miguelito Youth Outreach Center, which focuses on at-risk youth in the neighborhood surrounding the El Redentor Methodist Church in San Miguelito, Panama.

“Our aim is to help young people develop a life plan, use their free time in a positive manner, make a commitment to stay in school until they graduate, make healthy decisions and be agents of change among their peers and in their community,” Ayers said.

She said, in San Miguelito, the poorest and typically most dangerous part of the city, youth experience gang violence, domestic violence, human trafficking, and exposure to drugs.

“The center seeks to provide asylum from issues that the youth have in their own community,” she said.

She said she applied for the opportunity through UMCOR and the United Methodist Church and she went through their training and application process. She said they ended up giving her two or three locations that she could choose from and she chose Panama City.

“I was looking for a new experience,” Ayers said. “I would be working at a youth center, in the poorest part of Panama City, and has the highest rates of gang violence.”

“... Just to be able to experience something new and develop relationships with students younger than me, I thought it would be special.”

She said would go every morning to the center and the students would be in class until 12:30 p.m., where they learn English,



Greer Ayers spent her summer in the Central American country of Panama, where she helped at-risk youth in one of the poorest and most dangerous places in San Miguelito. || Photo provided by Greer Ayers

math and participate in workshops on character development.

“We would develop goals and stick to those goals, which included scheduled discipline and going to your class,” Ayers said. “... Pretty much whatever my boss wanted me to do. Once the students got to the club, they were required to do their homework and I would hang out with them, and answer questions if they needed help.”

Afterwards, she always had a scheduled activity or plan including making slime, or baking soda volcanoes or other workshops. Occasionally, she said she would go with them to soccer practice. She said it works similar to the Boys & Girls Clubs in the states. Ayers grew up in Franklin, Tennessee, which is about 30 minutes outside of Nashville. She attends Christ United Methodist Church in Franklin and is a sophomore at Hendrix College in Conway.

“I grew up in the UMC, and I was in my youth group,” Ayers said. “I went on every trip that I could go on, including choir trips, and winter retreats.”



Greer was able to spend time in Panama thanks to the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission Program. During her time in the country, she worked at the San Miguelito Youth Outreach Center.
|| Photo provided by Greer Ayers

“My best friends from high school went to my church and I had a really great community there ... I took advantage of every opportunity that was given.”

Ayers said, originally, she did not plan on going to Hendrix College after having lots of family members go there, including her older sister; she was determined to do something different.

“What appealed to me the most, was how Hendrix really supports the idea of developing you as a person and as a student outside the classroom,” she said. “They give you the means to do that.

“... It felt healthy and I really liked the small school environment. I knew I wanted a smaller liberal arts school anyways, because the professor-to-student ratio is a lot smaller, which is something important to me.”

She said she liked the idea of being able to know everyone in her graduating class and finds it super easy to build relationships with people.

Ayers went on her very first mission trip when she was in the 7th grade. She said it was a local mission trip to Nashville, where she was split into different groups and her project for the week was to make quilts for cancer patients. She said other groups had to sort medical supplies, so tasks varied.

Paul Bonner is the youth pastor at Christ United Methodist Church and has known Ayers and her family since she was in the third or fourth grade. He said he has been at the church for 15 years and when he started, Ayers’ sisters had been in the youth group for about two years.

“Greer is someone who has always taken her faith seriously,” Bonner said. “Even when she was in middle school, after we had a retreat or worship, she tended to be someone who considered the messages and the theological emphasis and wrestling with how that affected her and her choices.

“I feel like she has always been someone who has taken her faith seriously. Her family has been super committed to the church

and have worshiped there every Sunday — this was a part of the rhythm of her life.”

Bonner said Ayers anticipated being a part of the community and her sisters helped her look forward to it by going on mission trips and being on the leadership team.

“So, I think in that respect, she had a really optimistic outlook and saw her older sisters were having a good experience and she wanted that for herself,” Bonner said. “They have continued to push her and help her develop her faith and have a desire to be the change in the world.”

Bonner said young people tend to need something to have hope in and see a change for good, even if it is small.

“God put it in her heart, and she wanted to be doing something good and she wanted to serve,” he said. “For whatever reason, it wasn’t just about the trip. It is exciting to get away from home, and for her that was part of it, but it wasn’t the main motivation.

“For her, it was about doing mission work, service instead of vacationing with her friends or family. She just loves getting to know the people and doing the work with her hands.” Bonner said it allows her to connect some abstract belief with some tangible work with her hands and feet.



After class, Greer spent most of her time doing extra activities with the youth in Panama. She became very attached to the kids who she met during her time there. || Photo provided by Greer Ayers

Bonner said he has seen first hand the engaging and humble approach Ayers takes to building relationships or connections with someone outside the group.

“She just has a really good balance of personality and isn’t afraid to ask those difficult questions,” Bonner said. “She has a ton of love and desire for justice.

“She has a soft, caring side, that is very loving and compassionate.” 📷



Arkansas Board of Church and Society, UMFA Hosts Faith Advocacy Training

By Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor, @arumceditor

United Methodists in Arkansas often seek to offer assistance and advocacy for their community, but are many times unsure where to begin or are worried that they do not have the proper resources. A new training event is looking to offer aid to Christians who wish to make real change in their local communities.

The Arkansas Conference Board of Church and Society is hosting a two-day Faith Advocacy Training seminar on Oct. 4 and 5 at First UMC in downtown Little Rock, 723 Center St. The training will focus on teaching participants how advocacy can be rooted in faith, and how they can make their voices heard on the local, state and national levels.

The Rev. Jay Clark, associate pastor at Pulaski Heights UMC and member of the Arkansas Conference Board of Church and Society, said the event came about after the advocacy team for the CBCS realized that although people in churches wanted to make changes in their community, they were ill-equipped to advocate for those changes.

“This gave us a chance to bring in some experts to talk to those interested about what it means to be a United Methodist and stand up for what we believe and work toward positive change,” Clark said.

“We want to look at cultivating change that challenges systems at the root that keep all children of God from thriving,” added the Rev. Haley Jones,

deacon at First Church Little Rock. “The General Board of Church and Society is using grassroots organizing as that tool.”

The multi-day event will feature two speakers from the United Methodist Church’s General Board of Church and Society, Rebecca Cole and John Hill.

Cole is the Director of Grassroots Organizing for GBCS. According to her bio, Cole “connects, trains, and equips United Methodists all over the world with the tools to organize for justice in their communities.”

She earned her Master of Divinity from Wesley Theological Seminary, and previously worked for the Sacred Heart Community Service in San Jose, California, organizing for immigrant rights, and with the Interfaith Council for Economic Justice to work at improving workers’ lives.

“As we see the ongoing challenges facing God’s people and God’s planet, we are grateful that United Methodists in Arkansas are coming together to learn how to put their faith into action and engage



**Rebecca Cole,
Director of Grassroots
Organizing for GBCS**

systems and policies that create injustice,” Cole said.

Hill is the Assistant General Secretary for Advocacy and Grassroots Organizing Director of Economic and Environmental Justice for GBCS. His focus is on educating and leading others in ways to be better stewards of the Earth through environmental justice, and ensuring that “all God’s children have access to sufficient resources to thrive” through economic justice.

Hill is a graduate of the University of Virginia where he received a degree in international affairs. He has also served as a legislative aide in the U.S. Congress and has worked as a lobbyist in the private sector.

The training is a partnership between the Arkansas Conference’s Board of Church and Society and the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas, and Clark says UMFA has awarded them a grant to help pay for the event.

“UMFA was a huge help in underwriting this event. Most importantly, it gave us the means to offer scholarships to high school and college students,” Clark said.

Scholarships are available on a first come, first served basis and cover the full registration fee for the event.




**John Hill,
Assistant General
Secretary for Advocacy**

Registration for the training is \$25 and the fee covers meals, snacks, a T-shirt, and resources for the event. The training will take place from 6:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m. on Oct. 4 and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Oct. 5.

“We all believe in something. For most things, our faith informs what we believe. This training will give us tools we can use in our churches to make a difference in others’ lives for the better.

“Our hope is that you will leave this event with more knowledge about how you can make a difference as a United Methodist Christian,” Clark said.

To register, visit <http://bit.ly/faith-based-advocacy>. For questions about the event, contact the Rev. Jay Clark at jclark@phumc.com or the Rev. Haley Jones at hjones@fumclr.org. 

Early Response Team Assists Homeowners Throughout the State with Disaster Recovery

By Ida Rose
Perryville UMC

The Perryville United Methodist Church Early Response Team has been working very hard this summer as neighbors helping neighbors due to tornadoes and flooding. Byron and Janice Mann, Arkansas Conference Disaster Response Coordinators, have deployed our volunteer team to sites all over the state.

We began, along with other local volunteers, assessing damages from a destructive tornado in Bergman, Arkansas, near Harrison.

In May, we received an urgent call to help move a lady and her family from the flooded banks of the Arkansas River at Toad Suck near Conway. Our team, along with another team of volunteers from the Greenbrier United Methodist Church, moved her personal belongings from her house to another house near Conway Lake.

A group of volunteers gathered at Mayflower, loaded trailers and trucks with UMCOR cleaning buckets out of a 18-wheeler from Sager Brown, and transported them to the Fort Smith area. The Perryville UMC Team did more than 100 assessments in Perry County on flooded homes in the middle of June. Volunteers from Adona UMC and Perryville UMC also worked on building a wheelchair ramp and enlarging doors for the wheelchair in the home. Volunteers cleaned out and unloaded building supplies from a storage pod in Mayflower and put them in a storage unit in Conway. More flood assessments were made in Perry County and helped load cleaning buckets to be delivered in Pine Bluff.

In July, members from Batesville UMC and members from Perryville UMC spent several weeks at a house on River Bend Road, Perry County, mucking out the house. After it dried, we insulated the walls, then hung sheetrock.

In August, members from Batesville UMC, Harrison UMC and Perryville UMC traveled to Wright, Arkansas, 30 miles from Pine Bluff, completely mucking out a house that had 4 feet of water in it and the homeowners lost most of their personal belongings.

After mucking out was completed, we repaired and



braced up the floor joists, replaced new sub-flooring, and installed insulation and sheetrock. Lakeside UMC of Pine Bluff provided great hospitality with a place to stay overnight and showers. One evening, they invited us to join them for dinner in their Fellowship Hall.

We continued to work at Wright until we finished all the work we were required to do. The next day, we were sent to Lavaca, near Fort Smith, to muck out a flooded home. Because we had additional volunteers from the Adona United Methodist Church to help on the house, we finished all the mucking out in the afternoon. We were also blessed with a nice lunch provided by the ladies from the First Baptist Church of Lavaca.

We want to thank everyone who volunteered on all these houses. Every home owner couldn't thank us enough for our kindness and willingness to help them. We always feel like we are the ones that are blessed because we love to help people and love to give back wherever we are needed.



The Perryville UMC's Early Response Team assisted with tornado and flood recovery throughout the state this summer. Photos show the various projects the team helped with over the past few months. || Photos provided by Ida Rose

