

The Arkansas United Methodist

LIVING OUR FAITH

September 2019 | Volume 167, Issue 9

THE VINE

OF NORTHWEST ARKANSAS

Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month at Your Church, Pg. 11



TRANSFORMING LIVES FOR CHRIST

Rev. Mark Norman, Southeast District Superintendent, sees the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas as moving beyond support of the ministries of United Methodism in our state and toward transformation that makes disciples for Jesus Christ.

"I see the Foundation connecting people and communities to transform the Body of Christ, a living organism, not an organization," said Rev. Norman. "One example is the lay members and clergy from a three-point parish in the Delta who studied at the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City. From that experience, funded by UMFA, the congregations were able to create a new direction."

He said the Foundation helps churches in his district more efficiently manage their endowment funds, allowing the earning to be used to better serve their mission fields. Rev. Norman also highlighted innovative regional programs like the partnership between local congregations and UMFA to create mission opportunities for churches with different backgrounds to work together to address issues like crime and poverty.

"UMFA has sponsored many innovative projects that signal to me that the best is yet to come for the Arkansas Conference," Rev. Norman said. "I shudder to think what the Conference would become without change and growth."

Williams Named 2019 Fuller Few Scholarship Winner

By Haley Walker Klein
UMFA Contributor

A Texas family established a seminary scholarship with

The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas to honor loved ones who have pastored in our state. The Allen Asbury and Roberta Fuller Few Memorial Scholarship "awards funds to Arkansas students attending United Methodist seminaries and who desire to answer a call to ordained ministry within the United Methodist Church." Leah Williams of Bella Vista has been named as this year's recipient.



Leah is currently a student at Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia. She successfully completed three semesters at The Divinity School at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina before relocating to Northwest Arkansas. Leah is an excellent student and anticipates completing her Master of Divinity degree from Gammon following the fall 2020 semester.

The Allen Asbury and Roberta Fuller Few Memorial Scholarship will provide for her tuition and fees for the remainder of the 2019 academic year and all of 2020. Leah currently is on the Pastoral Staff at First United Methodist Church in Bentonville, Arkansas and is already serving with distinction in that community. Leah promises to be one of the most effective pastors in Arkansas Methodism and this connection will help her succeed and have a stronger influence in the world.

"I believe in my strength as novice, fierce theologian," said Leah. "Through the strength of the Lord, I am able to motivate others, preach directly to souls, and create connectedness. The Allen Asbury and Roberta Fuller Few Memorial Scholarship will enable me to continue my education in which I will then return my learnings to my community."

Donors like the Fuller Few family provide dividends for future generations and offer great hope for the building of God's Kingdom. Through generous support like theirs, The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas is able to put their faith to work supporting students like Leah in her pursuit of a seminary education.

To learn more about giving in support of seminary students, visit The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas' website at umfa.org or call 501-664-8632.



The United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas

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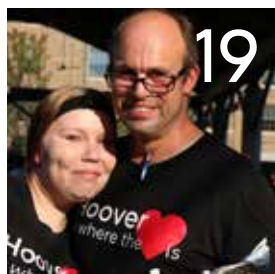
WHAT'S INSIDE

From the Editor	4
Growing Together in Christ	5
Conference Voices	7
Methodist Family Health	9
Q&A w/ Michael Bolin	10
Children's Ministry - VBS Refresh	21
Equip 2019	23
PAUMCS	24

Hispanic Heritage Month



Bayou Meto UMC Lemonade Stand



Recovery Jam



Clergywomen's
Gathering



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Caleb Hennington, Digital Content Editor

Amy Ezell, Director of The Center for Communication

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STORY IDEA?



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Meeting People Where They Are

By Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor, @arumceditor

As I travel around the Arkansas Conference meeting new folks for stories and other projects, I'm consistently reminded of how important it is to make a conscious effort to meet people where they are.

By that, I mean meeting people in the place where deep conversations are already happening.

Whether that's in a local coffee shop, at a community baseball game, at a tattoo parlor, at the hair salon, a grocery store or even a bar; wherever people congregate and build community, that's where the church needs to be as well.

Our cover story this month is all about engaging with communities through a different way of doing church.

The Vine of NWA, a new church concept initiated by the Arkansas Annual Conference, was created with the specific goal of meeting people where they are in an area of the state that's rapidly expanding and evolving.

For years, Christians have relied on the strategy of bringing people to a building rather than going outside their four walls and bringing the church to the community.

Because we've stuck with this concept for so long, every year our membership has declined. The number of young families and young singles who regularly attend church has gone down significantly.

That's not to say that traditional church buildings and Sunday morning gatherings aren't still relevant. But when other denominations grow and expand while others decline, you have to ask yourself, "What are they doing right and what are we doing wrong? And what can we do differently?"

As you'll read, the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church is doing something



completely different than previous church plant projects.

And by doing so, we are opening up the opportunity to reach people and communities that we've neglected to engage with in the past.

People who have given up on the church. People who think the church is too traditional and too elitist. People who have never heard the Gospel. People who have heard the Gospel but don't see how it's relevant to their lives. People with exceptionally busy schedules who don't think they can make time for church.

The Vine is looking to reach these people and more.

It's a way of doing church that seems scary and foreign because we've never done it before, but it has the potential to fundamentally change the way people think of church.

I invite you to join me in praying for the success of The Vine, for its strong and capable team of leaders, and for the potential to transform lives, communities and the world through the United Methodist Church in Arkansas.

Shaped by Jesus

Then the disciples gave the (fish and loaves) to the crowds. 20 Everyone ate until they were full, and they filled twelve baskets with the leftovers. 21 About five thousand men plus women and children had eaten. (Matthew 28:19-20 CEV)

The mission of the United Methodist Church is to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for God’s transformation of the world.” But if you are going to make disciples of Jesus Christ who transform lives, communities and the world, you first have to be a disciple who has been transformed yourself!

So what does it mean to be a transformed disciple? While Methodist people love arguing about this, it really comes down to something pretty simple. Transformed disciples are shaped by Jesus.

One of the most helpful accounts about how Jesus wants to shape us as his disciples is found in a somewhat unexpected passage of Scripture, Matthew 14:13-21. While it is best known as “The Feeding of the 5,000”, it is better described as “Way More Than Enough Food for a Whole Lot More Than 5,000 People!”

Here are the ways it shows you how Jesus wants to shape you so you can thrive through him.

Follow Jesus with everything you’ve got because he’s all you’ve got. The disciples run after Jesus because they

want to be fed by him. They won’t let anything stop them, including stopping to make provisions for eating or sleeping. In fact, they are so enthusiastic they beat him to the other side. Ultimately, Jesus is all



Gary E. Mueller
Bishop of the Arkansas Conference

you have. You have to seek him, follow him and ask him to feed you.

Lead with compassion. Jesus

has traveled to the other side of the water because he desperately needs some “me time” with God. When the crowds that have followed him meet him there, he immediately sets aside his personal agenda and begins healing people in body, mind and spirit. Jesus’ followers always lead with compassion. Compassion is not a liberal thing or a conservative thing. It comes from God’s heart, and you are called to share what Jesus has showered on you. If hard choices have to

be made, it's always in the context of the compassion you already have shared.

See life the way Jesus sees it. The disciples are concerned that it's late and no one has any food. They beg Jesus to send the crowds away because they see through the eyes of scarcity. Jesus tells them to feed the people because he sees through the eyes of God's abundance. You are called by Jesus to avoid the trap of seeing life the way it seems. Instead, you are given the privilege of seeing how the reign of God already is real all around you.

Do what Jesus tells you, especially when it's risky, scary or outside your comfort

zone. The disciples have questions, doubts and probably are wondering if Jesus has lost his mind. Yet they take the food he gives them in spite of their doubts and pass it out anyway. This

may be the most challenging thing you do, especially when everyone else is telling you what you should do. But it's essential, and it's always a privilege.

Expect God to do the unexpected.

When the disciples have finished passing out the food, they pick up the leftovers only to discover there is more food than they began with! While you live in the real world, you also live in God's world where the unexpected miracle is really just another everyday event!

Being shaped by Jesus is an everyday practice. Some days will be easier than others. But most painful situations can be opportunities for Jesus to so shape you from the inside-out that you literally become a new person. Of course, you'll never be perfect, but you will be more and more perfect in love. And that's always the bottom line for Jesus!

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Living in Anxious Times



By Rev. Dr. William O. “Bud” Reeves
Senior Pastor at First UMC Fort Smith

There is a branch of psychology often used in counseling called “Family Systems Theory.” I have had a little training and decades of experience dealing with family systems. Churches are like family systems, too, only with more people. The theory says that a system tries to achieve homeostasis, which really means normalcy, peace, harmony, and tranquility in relationship to one another. But there are usually events that inject anxiety into the system, upsetting the equilibrium. These may be good events—a marriage, birth, new job, or a child leaving home. These events may be negative—illness, death, divorce, addiction, etc. The system reacts to these events by trying to restore homeostasis, through denial or rejection of the problem or person, or by reconciliation and resolution of the problem.

We recently took our daughter to college. That is a good thing. But her leaving upset our family system; it put stress on our homeostasis. My wife and I are having to adjust to this new reality. (Actually, pray for our dog; she is taking it hardest of all!) It’s all good, but it’s a process.

The church as a family system rarely experiences homeostasis. There is always something to upset the peace and tranquility

we treasure—sickness, death, conflict, and organizational stress (which is often financial). If you experience a change in pastors or staff turnover, that produces systemic anxiety. There is uncertainty in the denominational organization. While many remain blissfully unaware, for some of us it is a constant, anxious concern.

Then there are all the anxiety-producing realities that are outside of our control: politics, injustice, climate change, pollution, violence at home and abroad. You can make your list. How do we cope, survive, or even hopefully thrive in an anxious system?

1. Take each day one day at a time. We can’t function if we worry about everything that might happen. Jesus said, “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” (Matthew 6:34) Do the best you can each day; lie down at night and rest; start again tomorrow.

2. Keep one eye on the horizon. While taking each day one at a time, keep glancing at the far horizon. There is a bigger picture, a greater vision, a further goal. Don’t forget that each day is an incremental step toward a preferred future.

3. Maintain a non-anxious presence. In these anxious times, it is important to keep enough distance between ourselves and

events so that we can see things from an objective perspective. The poet Kipling spoke of being able to “keep your head when all around you are losing theirs.” This is as important as it is difficult to do.

4. Never give up. When your life, your job, your church, your world feels like walking through a swamp, keep slogging through. If you stop, you will sink for sure. Progress is being made, even if you only see it in the rear-view. Don’t quit. After a year of war in which he saw his country on the brink of destruction and despair, the great Brit Winston Churchill said he had learned one lesson: “never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in.”

Life is full of stress, trouble, and anxiety. But life is also full of God, and God gives us grace and strength and peace and hope. God’s best work is often done in anxious systems. Remember Calvary?

There’s an old story about a preacher who was flying on a plane, and mid-flight the captain came on the intercom and announced that passengers needed to stay in their seats and fasten their belts because they expected some turbulence up ahead. Shortly after that, it was like some meteorological mutt had grabbed the plane and was shaking it like a rag toy. People were holding on to their seats with white knuckles, reaching for the barf bags, and weeping in fear.



Across the aisle from the preacher was a little girl who seemed to be in another place. She was calmly reading a book and seemed unaffected by the anxiety around her.

When the plane finally landed and was taxiing to the terminal, the preacher leaned over and said to the girl, “I noticed you didn’t seem scared at all through the storm back there. How could you be so calm?”

The little girl answered, “Why should I be scared? My daddy is the pilot of this airplane!”

In life, there will always be turbulence up ahead. But it’s OK. We are secure. We know who is flying the plane. If we can trust the Pilot, then we can live and work and serve and rest and thrive even in a system filled with anxiety.

Sharing God's Hope With Children and Their Families at Methodist Behavioral Hospital

By Amy Shores

Director of Pastoral Care, Methodist Family Health

According to MethodistFamily.org, "Methodist Behavioral Hospital in Maumelle is home to the acute (short-term) and subacute (longer-term) inpatient programs in the Methodist Family Health continuum of care. Methodist Behavioral Hospital offers the most intensive level of care in our continuum." As the director of pastoral care, I see our behavioral hospital as a beacon of hope. Our clients come to the hospital in a mental or emotional crisis, and many have never received the kind of support they truly need. The hospital serves a major link in helping provide them immediate support while connecting them with the longer-term care they need in order to be truly successful in life.

There are some children and teens that need additional support, whether it be for medication updates or for more acute intensive therapy to help them continue down the path of healing. There are clients throughout the state of Arkansas who come to Methodist Behavioral Hospital for a time of reset, and while this week of reset may not always be easy for the family or the adolescent, we see it as hopeful as the families and clients whom we have come to know trust us to play an important part in their journeys toward mental and emotional health.

I also see hope in our subacute unit where we have a group of six-to-12-year-old boys who are with us for an average of three to four months at a time. While they are at the hospital, they learn new coping skills and strategies for dealing with a wide-range of challenges, so they can return home and to school better equipped for success.

Not only do I have the blessing of observing this hope, I also have the opportunity to help bring the incredible message of God's hope to all those who enter the doors of Methodist Behavioral



Hospital. Because of continued generous donors, I can give an age-appropriate Bible to every client who would like one. I also have a regular Bible study group with the subacute boys who are very eager to learn more about the Bible (many of whom already have strong Biblical knowledge!).

I am definitely not alone in this opportunity, though. We regularly have youth groups from across the state of Arkansas (and even some from other states) join in the ministry at Methodist Behavioral Hospital. Since clients are not able to leave for church during their stay, we try to bring church to them, mostly in the form of abbreviated youth group programs. We play games, have worship, eat snacks, pray, hear a devotional and even have small group discussions. On occasion, we even have a vacation bible school or a choir come through and lead us.

Methodist Behavioral Hospital is truly a place of hope and healing. If you are interested in learning more about what we do or if you would like to provide a youth service, please contact Amy Shores at ashores@methodistfamily.org.

Q&A w/ Michael Bolin

Tell me about yourself: Where you're from, where you live now, where you went to school, your previous job, etc.

I was born in North Little Rock at the old Memorial Hospital by Fort Roots Hospital. I graduated high school from Central Arkansas Christian. I have a permanent home in Antioch but reside in Green Forest where I serve the Green Forest UMC and the community of Green Forest. Prior to living God's calling, I worked as an electrician for 25+ years through the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. I still retain my master's license in this field.

How did you get appointed to your new position as the Chair of the Committee on Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships?

I had the privilege to visit with the Bishop about my time at the National Conference on Christian Unity which is supported by the Council of Bishops and hosts the United Methodist Ecumenical and Interreligious Training (UMEIT). This is an annual event that I have been fortunate to participate in. I believe my interest and participation contributed to the Bishop's decision to appoint me to this role.

What is the purpose of your new position?

The purpose of this position is stated in Para. 642 of the Book of Discipline. While Christian unity through Christian action is certainly one aspect of this position, another aspect seeks to bridge the gaps between denominations, and communities of faith, through stimulating conversation and understanding working to promote and interpret the national and world ecumenical bodies.

What are you hoping to accomplish in this role?

The Bishop, I, and Rev. Jim Polk have just begun the process of discerning clergy and laity who have expressed an interest in serving on this committee. Those names will be presented



Name:
Michael Bolin

Home Town:
**North Little
Rock**

Title:
**Chair of the
Committee
on Christian
Unity and
Interreligious
Relationships**

to the Conference Nomination Committee. Our next goal is to begin conversations with Bishops of the Pan-Methodist for discussions on poverty and children.

What do you like to do when you're not at work?

My favorite past time is motorcycle riding. Having been appointed in the Northwest District, the scenery and terrain allow for some joyful wind therapy.

Who is someone that inspires you in your daily life and why?

Outside of Jesus, I would have to say my wife: Teresa (Tee) Bolin. Her passion for spiritual growth, and desire for helping people see God in every situation of life, inspires me in meeting the needs of the mission field where I serve. But that's not all... Tee is an encourager and prayer warrior. God truly blessed me with a partner in ministry, life, and love!



Experimente Nuevas Culturas Celebrando el Mes de la Herencia Hispana en su Iglesia

Por Rev. Lupita Chavarria
Pastor en Saint Andrew, Geyer Springs UMC

En Estados Unidos celebramos el Mes de la Herencia Hispana-Latina para dedicar un mes completo a la celebración de la contribución que la cultura Latina hace a nuestro país, en este mes varios países de América Latina celebran su independencia (México, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica y Honduras) acto que los declara países independientes de España, y lo celebran de una manera muy especial y con ingredientes culturales propios, llamando así a Septiembre el “Mes de la Patria” donde cada país celebra su orgullo nacional de manera única, así mismo cada país le rinde homenaje a sus propios héroes que contribuyeron a su libertad como país.

Los países latinoamericanos celebran con música, baile, comida y desfiles de niños uniformados de las escuelas y las fuerzas armadas brindan hermosos desfiles militares, todo acompañado de un hermoso espectáculo de fuegos artificiales.

En México se celebra el “Grito de Independencia” la noche del 15 de Septiembre y el Día de la Independencia el día 16. Se celebra con música, fuegos artificiales, desfiles escolares y militares. La primera vez que se dio el Grito de Independencia fue el 16 de Septiembre de 1810, cuando Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla al grito de: “Viva México!” Mientras toca una campana y se ondea la bandera Mexicana. Hoy en día el “Grito de Independencia” lo dan los presidentes municipales, gobernadores, presidente de México y fuera de México los Cónsules o Diplomáticos, seguido de la celebración.

El 18 de septiembre de 1810, Chile declaró su independencia de España. Hoy Chile celebra esta fecha con una semana de “fiestas patrias” con desfiles, rodeos, competencias de baile y comidas especiales.

El 15 de septiembre de 1821, Centroamérica proclamó también su independencia de España. Allí nacieron El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica y Honduras. Celebran las Fiestas Patrias el día 14 y 15 con desfiles, reuniones y competencias deportivas, vestidos de colores nacionales, bailes y desfile. Además en Centroamérica celebran con el “Recorrido de la Antorcha” que va desde Guatemala hasta Costa Rica, unos corredores llevan la humeante antorcha a lo largo de la ruta y niños uniformados los esperan.

En Nicaragua las fiestas Centroamericanas inician desde el primer día de Septiembre, terminan con la lectura del Acta de Independencia el día 15 de Septiembre. Las escuelas compiten con rítmicas bandas en sus festivales a lo largo del país.

En la Iglesia Metodista Unida en Arkansas nos unimos a estas celebraciones y cada año celebramos la herencia hispana con nuestros hermanos y hermanas. Hemos celebrado por años en nuestras iglesias PHUMC, St. Luke, Amboy, St. Andrew, Geyer Springs y otras más.

Y como un año es muy largo para celebrar solo una vez, tenemos también las fiestas del “Día de Reyes” (Enero 6), “Cinco De Mayo” (Mayo 5), “Día de Muertos” (Noviembre 2) e incorporamos la cultura latina a nuestras celebraciones de Navidad.... Todas las celebraciones contienen deliciosa comida, música, danzas regionales con coloridos vestidos. La cultura Latina es rica en fiestas colores y sabores, celebrando juntos tenemos la oportunidad de unirnos culturalmente con todos nuestros hermanos.

No quiero pasar solo la información, sin la invitación... así que los invitamos a celebrar con nosotros: Septiembre 16 a las 5 pm St. Andrew UMC, Septiembre 18 a las 5 pm Geyer Springs UMC.

Experience New Cultures by Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month at Your Church

By Rev. Lupita Chavarria
Pastor at Saint Andrew, Geyer Springs UMC

In the U.S., we celebrate Hispanic-Latino Heritage Month from Sept. 15 - Oct. 15 and dedicate a full month to the celebration of the contributions that Latin cultures have made to our country. In this month, several Latin American countries celebrate their independence (Mexico, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Honduras), an act that declares them independent countries of Spain.

These cultures celebrate independence in their own very special ways and with their own cultural ingredients, calling September the "Month of the Homeland." Each country pays honor or tribute to its own heroes who contributed to their freedom as a country.

Latin American countries celebrate with music, dancing, food and parades of uniformed children from schools, and the armed forces provide beautiful military parades, all accompanied by a beautiful fireworks show.

In Mexico, the "Grito de Independencia" is celebrated on the night of Sept. 15 and Independence Day on Sept. 16. It is celebrated with music, fireworks, school and military parades.

The first "Grito de Independencia" was given on Sept. 16, 1810, when Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla shouted: "Long live Mexico!" while ringing a bell and waving the Mexican flag. Today the "Grito de Independencia" is given by the mayors, governors, president of Mexico and outside Mexico, the Consuls or Diplomats, followed by a celebration.

On Sept. 18, 1810, Chile declared its independence from Spain. Today Chile celebrates this date with a week of "national holidays" with parades, rodeos, dance competitions and special meals.

On Sept. 15, 1821, Central America also proclaimed its independence from Spain. These countries were El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Honduras. They celebrate the National Holidays on the 14 and 15 with parades, meetings and sports competitions, dresses of national colors, dances and a parade.

Also in Central America they celebrate with the "Torch Tour" that runs from Guatemala to Costa Rica. Runners carry the smoking torch along the route and uniformed children await them. In Nicaragua, the Central American festivities begin from the first day of September and end with the reading of the Act of Independence on Sept. 15. Schools compete with rhythmic

bands at their festivals throughout the country.

In the United Methodist Church in Arkansas, we join these celebrations and each year we celebrate Hispanic heritage with our brothers and sisters. For years, churches in the Central District have celebrated Hispanic heritage, including Pulaski Heights UMC, St. Luke Campus of PHUMC, Amboy UMC, St. Andrew UMC, Geyer Springs UMC and more.

And since a year is too long to wait to celebrate Hispanic culture, we also have the "Día de Reyes" ("The Three Kings" on Jan. 6), "Cinco De Mayo" (May 5), "Día de Muertos" ("The Day of the Death" on Nov. 2) and we incorporate the Latin culture in our Christmas celebrations.

All celebrations contain delicious food, music, and regional dances with colorful dresses. Latin culture is rich in color and flavors; celebrating together, we have the opportunity to unite culturally with all our brothers and sisters.

For all of our Methodist churches in Arkansas who want to organize and celebrate the Hispanic-Latino Heritage Month, here are some ideas:

"In the United Methodist Church in Arkansas, we join these celebrations and each year we celebrate Hispanic heritage with our brothers and sisters."

- Incorporate traditional Hispanic music into your service, like: El Son de la Negra, Jarabe Tapatio, De Colores.
- Serve delicious food like: Tamales, Guacamole, Tacos, Tostadas, Tortas
- Decorate with Latino decorations in your church. You can find these in Latino stores in your area.
- Play traditional games like Loteria and Toma Todo.

If you need help planning your Hispanic Heritage celebration, I am happy to help! Please contact the Rev. Lupita Chavarria at chavarrialupita@gmail.com. I also invite you to celebrate with us, 5 p.m. on Sept. 16 at St. Andrew UMC, and 5 p.m. on Sept. 18 at Geyer Springs UMC. We will have a celebration of Hispanic and Latin culture, with games, food, dancing and more!



THE VINE OF NORTHWEST ARKANSAS

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A New Church Concept Takes Root in Centerton

By Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)

The church has an image problem. The Vine of Northwest Arkansas, a new church concept launching out of the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church, is looking to fix that image problem.

“We’re looking to be a different kind of mission and church for the community in Northwest Arkansas,” said the Rev. Jeff Jackson, former director of New Faith Communities at the Arkansas Conference and pastor of The Vine. “We really want to be the heart of the community.”

Jackson said when Bishop Gary Mueller approached him last year about starting a new church plant in Northwest Arkansas, he asked Jackson to come up with a plan for the church and a new way of doing ministry in Arkansas.

“So I did the only thing I knew how to do. I opened up my Bible one morning and came to the verse in John 15 where Jesus is explaining how He is the vine and His disciples are the branches. Apart from Him, we cannot bear fruit. The idea of The Vine came alive that morning.”

Centerton, Arkansas is where the new church plant has set up shop, using an old community soccer field and indoor gym as its base of operation.

It’s a strategic launching point for a new church community due to the rapidly changing, and expanding, landscape of the communities around





Northwest Arkansas.

Because of its proximity to Bentonville, much of Centerton is comprised of mostly executives and white-collar workers, due in part because of Walmart, which has its headquarters in Bentonville.

And if you view the demographics of the area, you'll see a place that is not only made up of white, black and Latinx workers but also workers who have moved from different parts of the U.S. and from different countries around the world to come and work for the growing economy in Northwest Arkansas. The location and the people provide a unique opportunity to reach a demographic in a new way that the church has struggled to reach with a traditional approach.

The town of Centerton, which is about five miles to the west of Bentonville, has expanded at an incredible rate in the past few decades. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Centerton has grown from about 600 residents in 1990 to more than 15,000 in 2019. In just a few more years, the population is estimated to surpass 20,000.

The 72719 zip code, which encompasses Centerton and a few areas outside of town, is the 4th fastest growing zip code by population in the state of Arkansas.

There are also a higher number of young singles and families (age 25 - 34) and middle-aged adults (35 - 54) than other parts of the state, making it a ripe area for fixing the age issue that has hurt the United Methodist Church for many years.

"This is one of the reasons I was excited to come here," said Kay Kotan, Director of the Center for Vitality and New Places for New People. "It's sometimes easier to grow a church when you have new people moving in that are seeking to find a community, and we definitely see that in Centerton."

Kotan -- who is new to her position, which she began in July 2019 -- has taken over the responsibility of leading the new church plant and assessing what needs to be done in order for it to succeed.

The town of Centerton is also an odd place. Since it's a much younger town than Bentonville or Rogers, the town has no dedicated town center; it's mostly suburban neighborhoods, schools, and a few stores.

"That's also a reason we picked Centerton as the place to build this church," Jackson said. "Because Centerton has no center, we wanted to be able to create that gathering place, centered around The Vine, for the community."

But where would this new church go?

There's plenty of land available to purchase in Centerton, but the Conference



The Arkansas Conference purchased the land at Centerton with the vision of it becoming a town center for Centerton, with The Vine as the focal point. The Vine is currently sitting on a 45-acre soccer complex. The 12,600 square foot indoor gym is where The Vine will hold its services. It is currently still being used as an indoor practice facility for a local soccer club. The Vine envisions the building being used as a community space for the six days of the week that it is not being used for church activities. Eventually, the land surrounding the building will be sold for retail or restaurant space. || Photo by Caleb Hennington

didn't just want to buy a piece of land and build a church on it; they wanted to build a true community surrounding the church.

"God's hand really was in this," Jackson said. "My wife and I were driving around Centerton trying to find someplace where this church could work. We just happened to drive by the soccer complex one day and saw that it was for lease."

When they inquired about the building, the owner of the complex didn't just want to lease the building to the Conference; he was looking to sell the building and the 45 acres surrounding the 12,600 square foot building as well.

At first glance, the purchase of the land surrounding the indoor gym -- which are wide-open soccer fields mixed with a few overgrown areas of large oak trees and tall grass -- seems like an odd choice. That's because it is odd if you think of church planting in the traditional way the Methodist Church has always done it.

Instead of the church being an "afterthought" in the community, Kotan said, they want to be at the center of everything that's going on in the town. A true center of Centerton.

The Vine is seeking to be a town gathering point for the growing city, with the church building functioning as a multi-use community center the other six days of the week that it isn't being used as a church.

With the Conference owning the land, that opens up the option to work with town officials in Centerton to subdivide and sell off pieces of the land to make room for retail, restaurant, or other businesses to move in.

"This area is expanding at a rapid rate. So if you don't get the land now, when a church is ready in a decade they won't be able to afford it," Kotan said. "So it was fantastic that the Conference was visionary in the purchase of this land as well as the building.

"But the property is secondary. The focus is really on building relationships in the community right now."

Which is what Jackson has been working on since being appointed to The Vine in July. Instead of trying to bring people to a church, which at the moment is nothing more than a gym, Jackson is working on reaching out to people in the Centerton community, such as the police department, fire department, city

hall, schools, church leaders from Methodist Churches in the area, and anyone he meets while walking around town.

“We’ve had a lot of people say they are excited about this idea and are interested in coming to our church,” Jackson said.

The Vine team believes that by doing church differently -- in an untraditional format, i.e. a gym that doesn’t look like a church -- they are more likely to pique people’s interest. But they are careful about using the word “attract” when talking about bringing people into The Vine.

“Attract is the word we used to use and depended on. The world is so post-Christian that attracting people no longer works,” Kotan said. “This isn’t a ‘put up a sign and they’re going to come’ idea. This is ‘how are you going out and building relationships, selling the vision, and offering community?’”

The Rev. Stephen Coburn, Northwest District Superintendent, likes to think of church plants, and specifically the strategy of The Vine church plant, using a clever analogy.

“I like to think of it using a box. There are people who function within the confines of the box. There are people who function outside of the box. That typically has been the two descriptions of church that we are used to.

“I think what we’re experimenting with is a third option that says there is no box,” Coburn said. “And that frees us up to try a variety of approaches.”

Particularly, for millennials and Generation Z, the team at The Vine understands that these generations aren’t just going to go to the closest church to their home or the church that their parents have always gone to; they are seeking authenticity, transparency, and community involvement.

“We might have a small group meeting at a bar, or do dinner church a couple of nights or week, or even have a community



“This isn’t a ‘put up a sign and they’re going to come’ idea. This is ‘how are you going out and building relationships, selling the vision, and offering community?’”

outreach event at an animal shelter helping to get dogs and cats adopted. We’re looking at this from all angles,” Jackson said.

“It’s all about how do we get into their lives instead of expecting them to get into our lives and come to us,” Coburn added.

While The Vine is still in its infancy, there’s no doubt that the team leading this church plant are well-prepared for the task.

Jackson is continuing to reach out to the community, make connections and expand the “branches” of the vine.

Kotan, as well as Coburn and others in the Conference office, are working on reaching out to people who might be interested in buying pieces of the soccer complex. Eventually, in a few years, they hope to see The Vine transform into “The Vine at The Village,” or a similar mixed-use concept that will benefit the entire Centerton community.

For Jackson, he knows there is a lot of uncertainty with The Vine, as there always is whenever you’re doing something that hasn’t been done before.

But he, and everyone else involved in the project, have no doubt that they’ve been blessed to be able to pursue this church plant for the Kingdom.

“The Conference made one of the biggest steps it has ever made by purchasing this land that we could own and share with the community. And if God wasn’t in that, I don’t know who was,” Jackson said.

To follow along with The Vine’s progress, like them on Facebook at facebook.com/thevinenwa/.

A Cool Drink for a Hot Day

Avery Hampton raises money for food pantry through lemonade, baked goods

By Sam Pierce

Featured Contributor, [@sjamespierce](#)

Every Sunday at Bayou Meto United Methodist Church, which is located about 19 miles south of Stuttgart, Avery Hampton helps distribute the bulletins and turns on the lights. Anything that needs to be done and an eight-year-old can do, she does.

“She knows where everyone sits and if they aren’t there when she is passing out the bulletins, she places them in their seats, waiting for them,” senior pastor the Rev. Nan Nelson said. “She is a little girl who wants to help.”

The church is relatively small, with just 48 members, and Hampton is the only young person who attends regularly.

“She’s an only child, her dad is a big farmer and her mom is very involved in the church,” Nelson said. “She tags along with her mom and she is of that age that wants to help and do a lot of things.”

Recently, Hampton -- along with some help from her mom, Rhonda, and other members of the church -- helped raise more than \$1,200 by selling lemonade and baked goods. The money will be used to purchase food, supplies and what Nelson called “snack packs” for some of the children in the area. The second lemonade stand was held on July 20.

“I saw quite a few people from church there,” Nelson said. “We are a small church, averaging around 20 to 22 people, but they were all participating in one way or another.

“When I got there, there were lots of farmers from all around the area, sitting there, drinking lemonade and eating cupcakes, cookies or whatever was there.”

The snack packs include coloring books and crayons and healthy snacks when children are with their parents at the Sharing and Caring Food Pantry, she said. The snack packs include teddy graham crackers and juice boxes.



Avery Hampton, featured in the photos above, serves ice cold lemonade and baked goods to patrons at her lemonade stand. Hampton raised money for her local food pantry and a backpack program for school children. || Photo courtesy of Bayou Meto UMC

“Last year, Avery raised almost \$700,” Nelson said. “Her money went towards the backpack program and help at the food pantry.”

The stand was located in the middle of nowhere, but it was in a central location for everybody that lives in that area, Nelson said.

The money she raised for the backpack program at DeWitt Elementary School allowed her to help fill 40 backpacks and purchase gift cards to give out to students who were in need of new shoes. In June, Hampton was awarded the Good Deed Award by the American Legion Auxiliary Brown-Wright Unit.

“I like to give people food that don’t have much,” Hampton said. “I saw grown-ups helping and I wanted to help.”

Nelson said within two weeks of the lemonade stand, members of the church started packing the items for the kids and she said the process took about 20 minutes, thanks in large part to Hampton’s leadership.

“Avery was there guiding, stapling and packaging,” Nelson said. “Everybody was pitching in. There were about 12 women there and I do believe Avery inspires them because they all want to do it, too.

“... I know everybody participated in the baked goods.”

Hampton said she looks up to her dad, Sloan, because “he always does the right thing.” She said she wanted to make a lemonade stand because farmers get so hot in the summer, and it cools them off.

“Her lemonade was really good,” Nelson said. “And word of mouth in the small community helped it spread so quickly – everybody wanted to be a part of it.”

Nelson has been the minister at Bayou Meto UMC for a little over a year; coming to the church after wanting to be at a smaller appointment. She said she already knew a lot of the people, so it was really nice and an easy transition for her.

“By helping her mother and the ladies of the church, Avery realized there was a need for more items in the area,” Nelson said. “She saw how the pantry didn’t have enough to give out to everyone and some of the kids, she knew from school.



Avery Hampton was awarded the Good Deed Award by the American Legion Auxiliary Brown-Wright Unit for her work raising money to fight hunger in her community. || Photo courtesy of Bayou Meto UMC

“She has been to the pantry more than once and she noticed that the kids didn’t always get something. She asked permission to do it – it wasn’t her mother’s idea – it was completely her idea.”

Nelson said when she arrived at the lemonade stand this year, there were 12 pickup trucks parked next to it and “they were all there to participate.”

“It was something cool to drink and something sweet to eat,” she said. “It was held along a highway, where the church used to be, and they gave her permission to host a lemonade stand on the front steps.”

Hampton attends St. John’s Lutheran School in Stuttgart and volunteers as an acolyte for the church. She is going to play in a community softball league this fall and she also participates in other activities outside of the church.

“I think it is unusual,” Nelson said. “There are no other children or youth in our church, but she is exposed to the places where people are in need and she wants to help.”



Volunteers and former patients of Better Community Development's Hoover Treatment Center celebrate recovery at last year's Recovery Jam, an annual event that has been going on for more than 38 years.
|| Photo provided by Better Community Development, Inc.

Recovery Jam Honors Individuals and Families Healing From Addiction

By Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)

Since its chartering in 1980, Theresa Hoover Memorial United Methodist Church has been a mission-minded church.

“Members of the church really looked at community outreach and engagement from the beginning and identified the big needs for the community,” said the Rev. Deborah Bell, senior pastor of Theresa Hoover UMC.

Bell, who is a founding member of the church, said that once they looked at the needs of their community, the members of the church founded Black Community Developers as a non-profit ministry to assist people living in the areas around Little Rock's 12th Street Corridor.

The name was later changed to Better Community Development, Inc. in 2010 to reflect the organization's inclusive nature.

BCD provides resources for developing programs that reshape and rebuild communities and lives. Some of the programs that BCD currently manages are their affordable housing program for

new home buyers; Empowerment Village, a residential facility for limited income, homeless or disabled individuals; the Youth Initiative Program that develops positive learning opportunities for at-risk youth; and the Hoover Treatment Center, which has provided treatment and recovery options for those suffering from substance addictions for more than 38 years.

The Hoover Treatment Center offers a 30-day residential treatment program and is licensed as the only faith-based substance abuse program in the state of Arkansas, according to Bell.

The Center is equipped to accommodate 24 residents, men and women, and 30 additional residents at the apartments in the Empowerment Village. According to Bell, the apartments at Empowerment Village provide an opportunity for patients who have completed residential treatment at the Center to move into an affordable, rent-based home.

The Hoover Treatment Center is able to supply treatment for low or no income patients and those without insurance thanks to Arkansas state funding and funding from the United Methodist Church's General Board of Global Ministries.

“We serve the least, the last, and the lost who truly have nothing,” Bell said. “These are people who come directly from

the county jail or who have been on the streets for years or have burned all their bridges with their families. We rarely turn people down unless they need something that we can't provide."

According to the Hoover Treatment Center website, patients who enter into Hoover's treatment program will receive safe, holistic treatment based on evidence and clinically sound approaches to treating substance abuse and trauma.

"We utilize a cognitive-behavioral and 12-step approach to treatment with a spirituality component as our foundation," according to the website.

About two years ago, BCD submitted an application for a Global Ministries grant to help fight substance abuse. The grant program, SPSARV -- which stands for Special Program on Substance Abuse and Related Violence -- awarded BCD with a \$100,000 grant to assist with their work on helping people recover from substance abuse and mental health issues.

Bell said they were asked to apply for the grant again this year and were just recently notified that they would be receiving the same funding again to assist with their programs.

"That's good news for the Annual Conference and the general church to know that in Arkansas, there is a church that is helping with substance abuse and residential outpatient care for men and women in our community," Bell said.

"The blessing over the years has been that most of the people we provide services to have been unchurched or hurt by the church. Because we're a faith-based program, we have a spiritual component. And most people who come through our program end up joining our church at Theresa Hoover."

Bell estimates that close to 80% of the members of Theresa Hoover Memorial UMC are people that BCD and the Treatment Center have provided some sort of treatment service to.

"We have a very diverse congregation with more than 100 members. We might have the most diverse congregation in the Conference," Bell said.

One of BCD and the Hoover Treatment Center's largest events of the year is coming up soon.

The 15th Annual Recovery Jam, an event held every September, is a celebration of patients and their families who have made it through addiction and reclaimed their lives. It also honors the prevention, treatment, and recovery service providers who make recovery possible.

Recovery Jam 2019 will take place from 4 - 8 p.m. on Sept. 30, 2019, at the River Market Pavilion, 400 President Clinton Ave., Little Rock, AR.

There will be games, live music provided by Dino Davis and



Volunteers sell snacks for attendees at Recovery Jam. || Photo provided by Better Community Development, Inc.



Face painting is one of the many activities that will be at Recovery Jam. || Photo provided by Better Community Development, Inc.



Volunteers pose with signs of encouragement at Recovery Jam. || Photo provided by Better Community Development, Inc.

the D Train Band, Willie P and other local artists, free health screenings, free food, dancing, personal testimonies, and sponsor booths distributing information.

The event is free and open to the public. For more information, contact Sandra Mitchell at smitchell@bcdinc.org or 501-663-7221.

Our Sunday School is on a Decline

What can we do?

By Melinda Shunk
Children's Ministry Coordinator

Sunday School is always there; it is never a required time commitment to be part of God's team! If the week is full of planned activities, the church is going to get cut for the mandatory activities. It is seen as optional. Since our wonderful God is always there and welcoming us with open arms, parents know that they can catch Sunday School the next week when they are less committed. This applies to our volunteers as well. They have been required to give time to an extra-curricular team in order for the child to be part of the team. Sunday School does not require parent participation to be counted as part of the class.



To be clear, I am NOT suggesting that we should apply the same requirement expectations to Sunday School as the extra-curricular activities do because that is not the church. Forced religion rules mixed with shame is the fastest way to stunt any person's spiritual development, no matter the age.

As a church body who wants families to be part of worship and class, you need to know that these wonderful parents want to give it all to their children. We were standing

there when their child was baptized and we all promised to help raise the child in the faith.

As the church, we can meet those parents and structure ministry programming to meet them where they are at in life. Just like our loving Jesus went to hills, seashores, boats, roof-tops, and parties to minister to people. We don't have to take Sunday School on the road but we can make accommodations to meet people's schedule restraints. So how can we help them with their spiritual formation within the constraints of their current parenting schedules? How can we meet them where they are and still make disciples who make disciples?

1 PLAN a whole year in advance with times, classes and events labeled at the same time each year so families who plan can put you in their plan! Post to your WEBSITE and SOCIAL MEDIA and everywhere else you can! i.e.: bathroom stalls, pews, cardstock handouts in bulletins for at least a month. Stick to the schedule because these parents are on a schedule too, and you want the church to make the mandatory attendance list, not the optional list.

2 Volunteers and their children like short term commitments. For example, plan a class that will be held for segmented dates that are no more than six classes. ie: Dig in curriculum lessons, Jesus grows up! Sept. 8, 15, 22, 29 and Oct. 6 and 15 (Take two Sundays off or a fall fest/Messy Church) then the class What is Advent? Nov. 3, 10, 17, 24, and Dec. 1 and 8.

3 Plan a six-session service/mission project for the whole family that is not held on a Sunday morning. Families that serve together, stay involved in church together. Shared experience of service connects us to one another.

4 Plan a six-week class, something that gets the kids in something productive/creative like drama, Children's First service, or a Children's Sabbath.

5 Six days a week the families have a mandatory wake up call to be at something, so it makes skipping Sunday morning easy because it is always going to be there. Consider creating a Sunday evening worship and class that can be promoted as a come as you are casual worship & class time. It's a great way for families to use Sunday evening to start their week centered with God and grab a bite to eat on their way home from church.

6 Let go of the thought that if we don't have Sunday School every Sunday of the year people will leave (we are losing people now). We are called to make disciples, and that call does not just happen on Sunday morning between 8 a.m. and 12 p.m. If you allow a Sunday School break, then have a simple multi-age class with two staff members leading a unique faith-based activity that all can enjoy during the normal Sunday school time slot. I recommend Illustrated Children's ministry curriculum if you go that route.

7 Now about that Sunday School on the road part ... It is doable! Let's say you have several parents at your church who have kids on the same traveling team. They miss a lot of Sundays. Adapt the lesson to a quick scripture read from one of the great picture Bibles, write a couple of reflective questions to go with the scripture and a closing prayer. Send it all with some snacks in a bag with one of the parents who has agreed to be the team "chaplain" while on the road. They can do the lesson with the team on the drive or while there is some downtime between games.



Advertising in your church's bathroom, as seen in the picture above, is a great way to let people know about your Sunday School events.



An example of a graphic that you can use to advertise a team chaplain. This graphic is available for free download on the Arkansas Conference Kids Ministry Facebook Page.

The Lion King, The Truman Show and Jesus

Equip 2019 Explores the Relationship Between Christ and Cinema

By Caleb Hennington

Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)

Youth workers in the Arkansas Conference who are seeking to receive vital training to assist them in their ministries will find everything they need to succeed at this year's Equip event.

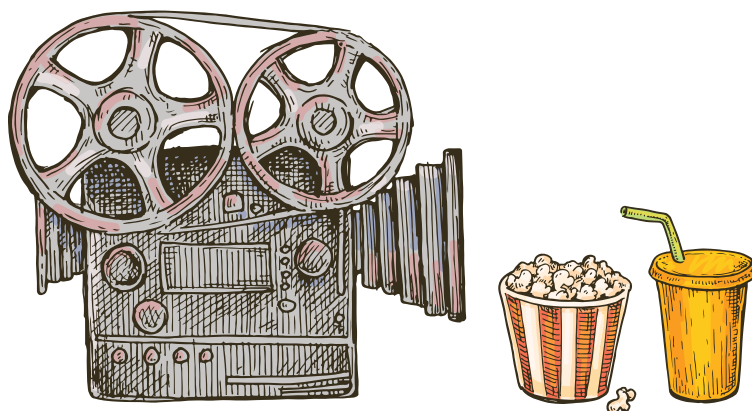
Equip is geared toward youth workers who are volunteers or not full-time ministry workers. It is designed to help those who don't have the resources to undergo long training sessions to get the training they need to do ministry well at their church.

The one-day training event will take place on Sept. 14 at Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas. It will be made up of various workshop sessions, as well as a keynote speaker, designed to give youth workers all the training they need for a variety of situations.

Equip rotates its focus every year, switching between Equip: Training and Equip: Sabbath. This year's event is focused on training youth workers. Last year's event -- and the event next year -- will be Equip: Sabbath, which is structured as a retreat where youth workers grow in community and learn about the importance of the Sabbath.

This year's keynote speaker is the Rev. Matt Rawle, senior pastor at Asbury UMC in Bossier City, Louisiana and author of the book *Hollywood Jesus*.

Hollywood Jesus explores the appearance of Jesus and Christ-like figures in many of Hollywood's most famous films, including *Cool Hand Luke*, *The Lion King*, *The Truman Show*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Rawle's keynote will teach youth workers how to use pop culture and film as a teaching tool in



their youth groups and ministries.

Attendees to Equip will receive a copy of Rawle's book with the price of admission. The event is \$20 per person and will also include lunch.

There will be six workshops available and people attending Equip will be able to register for three of those workshops to attend.

"Youth ministry is constantly changing and it's important to continue to stay up-to-date on the trends in youth ministry. It's also important to be a part of a network of people who are also in ministry with youth because support and understanding are vital to success," said Michelle Moore, Youth and Young Adult Coordinator for the Arkansas Conference.

"Whether you're in charge of your youth program or you're a volunteer, there's something that you'll take away from Equip and learn that will be helpful to your ministry."

For more information on Equip or to sign up, contact Michelle Moore at michelle.moore@arumc.org.

WORKSHOP OPTIONS

Each participant will select three workshops to attend.

BEYOND THE WALLS: HOW TO CONNECT WITH YOUTH OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

This workshop will cover creative ways to connect to youth where they are in the community. You'll learn to think outside the box when it comes to ways to show youth they are supported by their church family the other 6 days of the week.

SAFE PRACTICES & POLICIES FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

This workshop will include a quick summary of best practices for keeping you, your youth and your volunteers safe. From the basics of the two adult rule, to identifying adult grooming behavior, to mandated reporting, this will be a quick reminder of how to keep everyone in your ministry safe!

WALKING THE JOURNEY OF DISCIPLESHIP WITH YOUTH

This workshop will cover the types of discipleship that fit various personalities and how you can support youth with these varying personal preferences for spiritual growth. Learn how to support youth wanting to grow in the faith and those who want to dig deeper into a call to ministry.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING AND RESOURCES

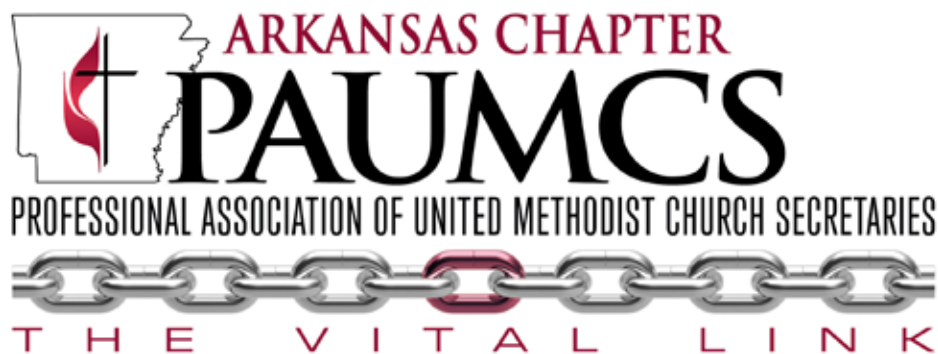
This workshop will cover the basics of how to be more than "just a warm body." You'll learn how to lead a small group discussion, make a genuine connect with youth and support a youth program without being the "main adult in charge."

EFFECTIVE CONNECTIONS WITH PARENTS OF YOUTH

This workshop will give you practical ways to connect to parents of youth while also helping you to create space for ministry with youth AND their parents rather than leaving parents on the sidelines of our youth programs.

MODELS OF YOUTH MINISTRY: FINDING PROGRAMMING AND CURRICULUM RIGHT FOR YOUR CHURCH

This workshop will explore a variety of models for schedules, programs, and curriculum. It will help you determine which model(s) might fit your youth program and church setting best while recognizing how to tailor any youth ministry resource to your particular program and its needs.



Arkansas PAUMCS Holds Annual Event for Church Administrators

Kay Kotan Featured Speaker at This Year's Event

By Sam Pierce

Featured Contributor, [@sjamespierce](#)

The biggest goal for the organizers of the annual Professional Administrators of the United Methodist Connectional Structure is for it to be used as a networking opportunity for administrators all across Arkansas.

"To realize, that they are not alone in their job," AR PAUMCS president Kathy Bracke said. "We are pretty cut off in our job because we are all at separate churches, so this is a chance to network and talk to people who are doing the same job you do."

"So that you are not sitting in your office, and not having anybody that you can pick up a phone and say, I've got this problem, how do you solve it, do you have the same type of problem?"

Bracke said it is really useful as an administrator to have that resource.

This year's conference is scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 26, at St. James United Methodist Church in Little Rock. Tickets are \$10 a person. You do not have to be a member of PAUMCS to attend. This gathering is open to church administrators, administrative assistants, secretaries, and financial secretaries.

"It helps you put a face with a name," Bracke said. "You can see somebody face-to-face, so you don't feel awkward calling them on the phone to ask a stupid question. It really helps us."

"In my own case, I can then picture the person and pick up the phone and tell them I have this issue. It does encourage them to be a little more connected through this meeting."

Bracke, who is an administrator at Christ of the Hills United Methodist Church in Hot Springs Village, said they also group everybody together with those who have a similar church and worship attendance so that someone with a church of 30 in worship won't be seated with someone who has 900 in worship.

"Because you won't have the same problems," Bracke said.

"Hopefully, by doing that, they will connect a little more with somebody more their size."

"It really is just an opportunity for all these administrators to get together and compare notes and not feel like we are so alone and cut off in our jobs."

The Arkansas chapter of PAUMCS was formed in 2006 with the first meeting taking place in 2007. Bracke said they have approximately 50 members and currently eight members are "Certified United Methodist Secretaries," which requires a week-long class in Nashville, Tennessee. At the last national meeting in Nashville, the Arkansas chapter had 13 people attend, which was the largest number from any chapter in the United States, other than Texas. The next national meeting, which is held once a year, will be held in Kansas City.

"We are really trying to grow our membership this year and we are trying to do more advertising," Bracke said. "I am thrilled that the conference has picked it up; hopefully, we will get a bigger turnout."

Kay Kotan, the director of the Center for Vitality in the Arkansas Conference, will serve as the keynote speaker this year. Bracke said Kotan has years of experience revitalizing congregations throughout the United States and has helped establish new church starts within and outside of central Pennsylvania.

She is the author of numerous books and workbooks on the subject of creating vital congregations.

"Basically, we want to get our group to see they are performing a ministry too, that it is not just a job," Bracke said. "We are the person that everybody comes to with a problem because sometimes they just want to vent their problems of the day and a lot of times, the administrators are the ones to do that with."

Bracke has been a member of PAUMCS since 2010 and she has seen the annual PAUMCS conference grow from about 30 to 40 guests to as high as 80.

For more information on the event, or to register for it, email Bracke at kathy.bracke@arumc.org.

Celebrating Deacons

ARUMC Clergywomen Gather for Annual Meeting

By Rev. Lauren DeLano
Associate Pastor at Conway First UMC

On Thursday, Aug. 8, the ARUMC Clergywomen gathered at First UMC in Conway for a day of fellowship, worship, and learning.

The theme for our gathering was “Celebrating our Deacon Sisters.” The Rev. Dawn Spragg brought the message during worship and reminded us that we are power-filled and loved women who have been called by God to live out our callings and to serve others. We do this knowing we are beloved children of God and are certain that we have the support and encouragement of one another.

We followed this with a time of small group conversation around Advent ideas for worship series, discipleship opportunities, connecting with college students and more.

It is a beautiful thing that we can resource one another about Advent or other topics, knowing that within our group we have a wealth of wisdom and knowledge to share with one another.

Finally, to carry on the theme of learning from one another and celebrating deacons, we featured four deacons on a panel. They shared their passions for ministry and their calling as pastors called to bridge the church and the community through word, service, justice, and compassion.

Reverends Haley Jones, Melissa Bowen, Sam Meadors, and Brenda Wideman shared their vast and varied callings with us and we were encouraged by their willingness to share their hearts with us.



The Rev. Dawn Spragg, an ordained deacon in the Arkansas Conference, delivers the message during worship reminding the gathered women of the important role that deacons serve in the church.
|| Photo provided by Rev. Corey Read





Communion was taken during the Clergywomen's Gathering. Clockwise, from left, are Rev. Trinette Barnes, Rev. JJ. Whitney, Rev. JJ. Galloway, Rev. Lauren DeLano and Rev. Claire Caldwell and her daughter, Presley. Serving Communion are Rev. Dawn Spragg and Rev. Gail Brooks.
|| Photo provided by Rev. Corey Read



From left to right: Reverends Brenda Wideman, Sam Meadors, Melissa Bowen, and Haley Jones present a panel discussion on deacons. || Photo provided by Rev. Corey Read

