



In the First Place

the monthly newsletter of First United Methodist Church, Sheridan, Arkansas
July 2019 Volume 2019/Issue 7

Volunteers Needed: Summer Feeding Program Update

The summer hasn't been too hot yet, but the Children's Summer Feeding Program has started on fire! Our church started it off the first week providing volunteers, and I cannot thank the volunteers enough for their hard work and effort to deliver meals out into the community!! Through June 28th, 6,847 lunches were distributed for an average of 342 per day! So far, we have provided nearly 800 more lunches than this date last summer, which is absolutely amazing!

Our church will again be volunteering to deliver meals into the community on July 8—12. Please let Sandra Turner or me know if you can volunteer. The sign-up sheet is in the narthex.

We continue to need your donations more than ever! It costs approximately \$1000 a day to provide lunches. This mission continues to grow, reaching out to more of our hungry children in our community! If you would like to donate to this mission, please mark your envelope or check to the Summer Feeding Program.

Thank you for volunteering and your continued financial support! We are making a difference in our community!

-Mike Carpenter, Summer Feeding Program Director

Answered Prayers for the CPC



Congratulations to the above group of paddlers! For the third year, First United Methodist Church of Sheridan has been well-represented at the annual River Cities Dragon Boat Festival by the team of "Praying for the Finish Line" with Joe Archer as their captain. They placed third in a field of 37 with a time of 1:11:176. The winning team's time was 1:08:724, so it was a *very* close race! PFL was second in the Community Division. Best of all, the team raised \$3,250, the fourth highest of all the teams, for the Children's Protection Center. They want to thank the congregation for the support.

Report from Annual Conference 2019

The 2019 Arkansas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church was held May 26 through June 1 in Hot Springs. Zoe Hines was our church's delegate while Betty Cook and Dee Ann Daniel were our members-at-large and voting delegates as Southeast District delegates-at-large. The following is from the conference report given during the worship services on June 2 by Zoe and Betty:

(Zoe) I want to first thank you for allowing me to serve as your delegate to the 2019 United Methodist Annual Conference and encourage you to look at ARUMC.org at the daily digests which provide a report on the activities of each day during the conference. We want to share with you some of the highlights of the last four days.

Bishop Gary Mueller set the stage for the conference as it opened, themed "The Best of All God is With Us," a John Wesley quote. With the continued concerns in the United Methodist church about how to start to stay united or how to start to split, he assured us we already have a start. God is With Us! We need to be doubling down on faith, ministry, and making disciples.

The bishop shared a letter to the Arkansas Conference from a group of clergy and laity, some with very opposing philosophies on our debate over the discipline and our structure. Members of the group read the letter with the majority of the signing parties standing together for the reading. The message lifted up a few statements that bind us together as Arkansas Methodists:

Our Belief in the Triune God

Our Wesleyan heritage

The Mission of the Church

We want to Listen well and Love well

We are stronger and will accomplish more working together

So the mood was set; our conference was to be about our charge to be in mission as Christians united in sharing God's word and making disciples. Following are some of the ways this is happening:

(Betty) Dr. Greg Jones presented our teaching times. He encouraged us that we need to cultivate our Christian imagination, get our faith grounded in the resurrection, and expect miracles. Dr. Jones shared several stories about Sister Maggie Barankitsa, a Catholic nun in mission in Burundi and then Rwanda while exiled. Her daily prayer was, "Lord, let your miracles break forth every day and let me not be an obstacle in any way." He assured us she was the least likely to be in the way, yet that was her prayer. We must have God-sized imaginations. *(continued on page 3)*

From the Pastor's Desk....



God helps those who help themselves. I imagine most of us have heard this phrase before. Historians like to attribute this theology to Ben Franklin, but he was merely repeating an old and popular idea of God — one that continues to resonate with American culture to this day. Pollsters estimate that roughly 75 percent of Americans believe this saying is found in the Bible. I even found a citation for it on the Web: "God helps those who help themselves" - Hezekiah 6:1.

The problem is that the book of Hezekiah doesn't exist. But I can imagine why someone would make it up. The notion that God helps those who help themselves affirms the deeply American myth that individuals should get only what they deserve and that God blesses the successful and punishes failures.

This is a myth that I, from time to time, have bought into, if not intellectually, then at least through my actions. I spend a lot of time working on moving myself and our church toward God's goals. However, it isn't that unusual for me to leave God out of the equation! I get so caught up in the busy-ness of doing my church work that I forget that it is God's business in which I am supposed to be engaged. When this happens, I become easily distracted, discouraged, and even afraid. The problems and challenges become overwhelming to me, and when I think of the (fake) Hezekiah axiom, I wonder if I am not working hard enough or if God has abandoned my efforts.

It is at times such as these that actual scripture becomes a great corrective! In the Gospel of John (20: 19-25), we find the disciples in a situation of distraction, discouragement, and fear. Jesus has been crucified, and the authorities are searching for his followers. The disciples lock the doors and bar the windows. Mary Magdalene has reported that she has seen Jesus, yet the disciples doubt and wallow in their fear.

This is a story that begins not in strength – at least not in the strength of God's followers – but in weakness. Have you ever sat in a dark room and despaired? Over your life? Your family? Your job? Your church? Your faith? Clearly, we fall in a long line of distinguished Christians who have done this! If God does indeed only help those who help themselves, then the slightest crack in our resolve can only lead to this place of fear and desperation.

And yet, John tells us that the disciples are richly blessed. The doors are locked, but Christ enters. The room is dark, but Christ gives light. The disciples are sinners, but Christ gives them the power to absolve sin. The message of the true Gospel is that God's blessing belongs to everyone: even to those who are unable to help themselves. The myth that God only helps themselves permits us, in our wealth and happiness, to look down upon those who do not share our fortune. Even worse, it absolves us from participating in ministries of justice, particularly to work to address not only individual needs but to address systems of oppression.

When we understand that we are all sinners who stand in the need of grace and that our God as revealed in Jesus Christ truly does love everybody (whether they are hard workers or lazy, whether they are saints or sinners) then we come to know that we can and should participate with God in revealing and creating God's Kingdom. Furthermore, we find that we are not on our own. The impossible problems before us are not ours alone to solve. God provides even (especially?) for those who need God the most and for those who think that they do not need God at all. And finally, there is HOPE!!! The future is not completely dependent on us. God remains deeply interested and involved in the life of God's people (and by the way, that includes people who don't even acknowledge that they belong to God).

God provides that which we, in our weakness, need to grow in faith, advance in discipleship, and serve the least, the last and the lost. It is not our strength or our ability to help ourselves that produces these gifts; it is only our willingness to place our hands in the side of Christ and our fingers in the holes in his hand.

-Pastor Todd-Paul

Memorials and Honorariums

In memory of Irene Blake: Summer Feeding Program by Jeanie Camp; Bobbie Hester; Gary & Zoe Hines; **Backpacks** by Shirley Phillips & family; **Youth** by Sparky & Cindy Hedden

In honor of Leon Lancaster's 89th birthday: Summer Feeding Program by Rebecca and Scott Hancock, Anna and Kate

In honor of Katie Beth Tadlock & Andrew Tadlock on their graduations: Snell/Tadlock Scholarship by Charles & Alexis Tadlock

In Sympathy

For the family and friends of Marcia Gartman, June 22.

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Todd-Paul Taulbee, Pastor
Betty Lancaster, Church Secretary and Treasurer
Sandra Parham Turner, Newsletter Editor

(continued from page 1) Four worship speakers provided us with messages that continued to strengthen the direction of being in action for God. Our lay leader, Karon Mann, along with the associate director and the district lay leaders, expressed a movement to "unleash the laity." Rev. Rodney Steele, a 2019 retiree, shared the power of touch during the retiree service. The youth address, by John Mark Mathis, encouraged us to make the main thing "The Main Thing." The ordination message by Rev. Linda Harker focused on defining moments. She shared insight and guidance with those new pastors and with us as we continue to recognize defining moments in making disciples for Jesus Christ.

This conference was challenged due to the flooding, with both laity and pastors needing to be at their homes and with family, and then an extended time required for voting. Consequently, the appointment service was abbreviated. Even though the reading of the appointments was skipped, each district recognized the pastor/laity in a general welcome. We are glad to welcome Todd-Paul Taulbee and his family back into ministry at First United Methodist Church in Sheridan. Bishop Mueller dismissed the conference with the assurance that Arkansas Methodists can be trusted to work together to find a way forward.

I want to close with a slightly adjusted version of the conference prayer:

*Eternal God
As we gather anywhere, everywhere and always
We do so as Christ's disciples.
May our words speak,
Our actions bear witness
And our thoughts ever remain
On the most important Truth of all,
You are with us!
Father, Son and Holy Spirit redeem and
Empower us to carry out your mission in the world!
Amen!*

-Zoe Hines and Betty Cook



Vacation Bible School

Vacation Bible School with the theme, "To Mars and Beyond!" was held June 17-20. All of the children had a blast and learned a lot! Thank you to all of the helpers and those who volunteered to supply food for them. An extra-special thanks to Jennifer Kelly, Dona Glaze, and Johni Beth Teague for directing again this year.

Dona, Johni Beth, and Jennifer are happy to have had so many kids and volunteers at VBS! For more photos, visit our Facebook page.



Wedding Announcement



Caden and Kara Strong Flint

Kara Strong and Caden Flint were united in marriage May 20, 2019, in Lake Tahoe, Nevada. Kara is the daughter of Sheila Strong and the granddaughter of Tom and Pauline Waller. Caden is the son of Michael and Angela Flint of Arlington, Texas.

The ceremony took place on a pier extending out into Lake Tahoe. The father of the groom officiated. The ceremony was attended by immediate family and close friends.

After a honeymoon in the Lake Tahoe area, the couple are residing in North Richland Hills, Texas, where both are employed.

Newsletter Notes

If you have good news you want to share, send that information and any photos to fumcsheridan@gmail.com, subject line "Newsletter." It will be included as space allows. The deadline for the August newsletter is July 29.