



In the First Place

the monthly newsletter of First United Methodist Church, Sheridan, Arkansas
September 2019 Volume 2019/Issue 9

Wednesday Night Activities Resume September 4 beginning at 5:30

September is here, and that means it is time to get back to our regular Wednesday night activities! September 4 will be our first Soul Food Café of the year, and enchiladas and popcorn chicken are on the menu! UMK will have a Back-to-Wednesdays bash beginning at 6:15 with a bounce house, games, ice cream, and fun! UMY will meet 5:30-7:30, and choir rehearsal is 6:45-7:30. Join us Wednesday evening for a celebration of being together in fellowship again!

Website Update

Visit fumcsheridan.org for Details

We have launched a new and improved website with a brand-new look. There is information about what we believe as United Methodists, as well as information about classes, groups, and activities we do here at FUMC Sheridan. There are lots of photos, and you will continue to find the current newsletter and calendar on it. Visit fumcsheridan.org and tell us what you think!

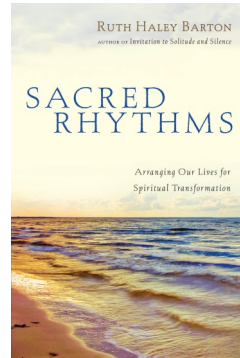
A Note from UMY Pastor, Robin Roark

Just a quick message to say "thank you" for the great turnout Sunday night! I really do appreciate the feedback, input, and especially your willingness to serve and volunteer with the youth this coming year! Parents and adults are always welcome to be involved in the youth program at anytime, and I'd love to have you! I am looking forward to a meaningful and productive year with our youth. I believe that with our collaborative efforts, our youth will have a safe, fun, and spiritually meaningful experience in the Sheridan FUMC UMY program! *(For the September schedule, see page 4)*

The Bridge

A New Sunday School Class for Senior High/ College/Young Adults

A new Sunday school class is available now for grades 10-12 and college/young adult students. The Bridge is meant to help this age group with emotional and spiritual support and they transition into their adults lives. The leaders are Shannon Archer and Gregg Scott, and they look to address certain life skills such as resume building, interviewing, building a budget, and relationships while continuing their walk in faith. Please join them Sunday mornings in the little kitchen area from 9:45-10:30.



Sacred Rhythms Small Group Study

Sundays 5:30-7:00
September 22-November 10
Education Building
Led by Pastor Todd-Paul

Beginning on Sunday, September 22, a short term small group study will begin to meet and learn. Are you an advanced pray-er? A beginner? Somewhere in between? Would you like to grow in your relationship with God and know that prayer is a vital component to that relationship? Pastor Todd-Paul will lead a six-eight week study of Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Haley Barton on Wednesdays following our fellowship meal. You may enroll by contacting the church office, indicating on a sheet in the narthex, or emailing Pastor Todd-Paul (toddpaul.taulbee@arumc.org).

Grant County Theater

Please note that the Grant County Theater group will be meeting from 6:00-8:00 p.m. in our Fellowship Hall on Tuesdays and Thursdays during September. For information about becoming involved in this new organization, please contact Karen Appleget.

Confirmation Classes with New Leaders



Confirmation classes began on August 18 with new leaders. Confirmation students received their study book and their parents received their guides on August 25. We are thankful for Cobey Wingfield, Rachel Sanders, and Amber and Miles Webb for their commitment to leading this class for the upcoming school year. Confirmation will be held Spring 2020.

From the Pastor's Desk....

In September of 2017, a study of faith in America was released. Though this study is now two years old, it is increasingly relevant as more recent (though less rigorous) studies show that the trends are deepening. In any case, the study shows that white Christians are no longer a majority of people in the United States. However, white Christians make up 73% of the Republican party. Believe it or not, white Christians make up a smaller percentage of the Republican party today than 10 years ago. Furthermore, fewer than 33% of the Democratic party consists of white Christians (down from 50% 10 years ago). This is a drastic change. In the late 1970s, when Jimmy Carter was president, white Christians accounted for 80% of the U.S. population.



PPRI, a public policy research firm that specializes in issues of faith conducted this survey for over a year, interviewing more than 100,000 people. USA Today reported on the survey, concentrating its article primarily on how the two major political parties in the country are becoming more and more divided, tribalistic in fact, with the Republican Party becoming more and more a white Christian party that is heavily rooted in the South and Midwest and the Democratic Party kind of following the demographic changes, becoming less white and less Christian. I am sure that this not a great surprise to any of you.

Quite obviously, strategists for both the Republican and Democratic Parties are exceedingly interested in these demographic shifts and how it will affect the ability of each party to shape policy and win elections (probably more the latter than the former). For those interested in politics, this is clearly a very interesting topic. What will this shift in demographics do to the face of our Republic in the next 10 years? 20 years? Beyond?

For political parties, there are real costs with becoming too closely related to one religious group or another, particularly during this time in our country's life, as religious affiliations and lack thereof are shifting. Does the Republican Party want to be the party of only white Christians? Does the Democratic Party want to become the party that does not appeal to religious folks at all?

I think, however, that while these are interesting political discussions, what is far more relevant for the Church is how we will address the changing demographics in our country

and community. What is more, does the Church (The United Methodist Church? First United Methodist Church of Sheridan?) want to become identified with only one political party? It doesn't take long to discover that our denomination, in spite of our ongoing denominational dispute, is a fairly "big tent" with people of all political persuasions, some passionately so, represented throughout United Methodism. Did you know that such wildly divergent political personages such as George W. Bush and Hillary Clinton are faithful United Methodists? It takes even less time to discover that we have passionate Democrats and passionate Republicans in our own church, indeed, who share the same Sunday School classes and other small groups!

There are many points of discussion to be raised for the Church from this study and from the changing demographics in our country. However, I'd like to point out two in particular. First, most United Methodists, including folks in our own church, have learned that as our country has become more tribal in our politics, if we are going to maintain "peace" in our church (or in our families or in our small groups), then we don't talk about politics. What better way to get folks riled up and angry than to even say the names "Obama" or "Trump"? Yet I would suggest that the Church, if it lives its life authentically following Christ, is exactly the place where Christians should discuss politics. What is necessary is not an avoidance of the key topics of our day and how we might address them as citizens, but rather a commonly shared understanding that we can have discussions about hard and divisive topics with one another in a space that is safe because as Christians we have made a commitment to love one another. Just because we disagree about politics need not mean that we hate one another. In fact, what a wonderful witness it would be if we could have civil discourse about controversial political topics, where our goal is not to "win" or even to change the other person's mind about the issue at hand, but rather to engage in conversation with one another where the goal is to find common ground and to know that at the end of the discussion we will still be united together by the love of Christ, and therefore, friendships will not be destroyed. In a country that is increasingly polarized on political and racial lines, perhaps the Church is the best place to discuss politics, at least under *(continued on page 3)*

Memorials and Honorariums

In memory of Rick Balwanz: Backpacks by Dee Ann Daniel

In memory of Lloyd Crossley: Youth by Sparky & Cindy Hedden

In honor of Andrew Tadlock: Backpacks by Charles & Alexis Tadlock

In Sympathy

Our sympathy to Bill Crossley in the death of his brother, Lloyd Crossley.

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Betty Lancaster, Church Secretary and Treasurer
Sandra Parham Turner, Newsletter Editor

Welcome to the World!



Congratulations to Kyle and Amy Reynolds on the birth of their son, Benjamin Hardin, on August 8. Grandparents are Mark and Patsy Reynolds and great-grandmother is Betty Robinette.

A Note of Appreciation

I want to thank everyone who has had any part of the Backpack Program during the school year for the students who would otherwise not have much, if any, food to eat over the weekends. There are many people who are involved in this, from the planning and ordering of food, to driving to Little Rock to pick up and deliver it to the school, to packing it in those blue backpacks on Thursdays, and supporting it with donations throughout the year. I see the faces of these children who receive these backpacks, and what having this food means to them. I am thankful for all of you who are committed to serving in the Backpack Program ministry.

-Melinda Covert

United Methodist Women

The UMW had their general meeting on Sunday, August 25, to discuss and plan for the upcoming year. There will be a District Meeting at Grand Avenue UMC in Stuttgart on September 28. For more information, contact Zoe Hines, UMW President, or Betty Cook, SE District UMW President. There will not be a Day Circle meeting this month, so those members are invited to attend the Night Circle meeting on Tuesday, September 10, at 7:00. Everyone is asked to mark Wednesday, October 16, on their calendars! The UMW Salad Luncheon will be that day, and we will need the church's help to make it a success as we raise money for our missions. More information will be in the October newsletter.

United Methodist Men "Man Church"

First Meeting of the Year

Monday, September 16, at 6:30

Fellowship Hall

(From the Pastor's Desk, continued from page 2) the guidelines that our conversation be guided by a shared commitment to building up the Body of Christ and witnessing to the love of God, instead of trying to shout over the other side.

Secondly, if the Church can become a place where we are able to disagree with one another in love and yet remain in covenant with one another under the Lordship of Christ, then perhaps the Church will become more relevant to the increasing number of people in our country who have no religious affiliation at all. The PPRI study shows that in 20 states the largest religious group is "unaffiliated." What is more, "unaffiliated" – the unchurched and the de-churched – is the fastest growing "religion" in the entire country. In many ways, many people see the Church as irrelevant, in part because denominations and/or local churches are so polarized and made entirely of one political persuasion or the other OR because those denominations and/or local churches refuse to engage in civic discourse in a meaningful way that does not divide people into opposing camps. It is so easy for churches to exclude people on the basis of their political leaning or to try to force people to conform to only one particular political tribe. Many people in our society have grown weary of this and so they avoid church all together. Shame on us! The Church should be a safe space – not safe from political discourse, but safe to have political discourse (or other kinds) where we know that we will be loved and accepted even if we disagree with one another.

This is not to say that politics should become our primary focus. After all, if our goal is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, then converting people to becoming Republicans or Democrats is hardly the best method (as the PPRI study indicates). But letting the figurative pendulum swing too far the other way and completely avoid the topics of politics within the Church is also not working either. Disciples of Jesus Christ are defined by a different ethic than everyone else. We are in the world, but not of the world. Therefore, we cannot be primarily defined by our political affiliations (or even our political leanings). We must be defined by the radical hospitality and grace of God and desperate love for our fellow human being (no matter what race, tribe, or party). Finding ways to live out this ethic is not easy, especially during these times so fraught with political division. But if we are to truly be the Church that Christ calls us to be, I believe that we must not become a church that is Democrat or Republican, nor one that is apolitical. I believe that we must become a community of faith so defined by our covenant to love God and one another that even such deep divisions as our politics will not keep us from living together in faith. And I believe that we United Methodists in Sheridan can be a part of living out our faith together...no matter whether we are "red" or "blue."

-Pastor Todd-Paul

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 October newsletter is September 25.

United Methodist Kids



Get ready for another fantastic year in UMK, starting with our annual Back-to-Wednesdays bash! We are going to have a big party with a bounce house, games, snacks, ice cream, and fun! It will be on September 4 right after Soul Food Café!

Once again, we will have missions as part of our rotational classes, and we are going to have a new way for the older UMK to get involved, with the help of some of our UMW! Be watching for more details to come.

We look forward to seeing you all on September 4! Bring a friend!

Join the Chancel Choir
as they begin rehearsals for
the Christmas Cantata!
Wednesdays, 6:45-7:30
In the choir loft

Blessing of the Backpacks



The Blessing of the Backpacks was held during the 10:50 service on August 18. Students brought their backpacks to the front of the sanctuary and were joined by teachers and staff to receive a blessing from Pastor Todd-Paul, while the rest of the congregation came forward to pray with them.

United Methodist Youth

The UMY and their parents attended a planning meeting on August 25 to discuss the upcoming year. Parents were asked to volunteer for various activities, including Sunday school teachers for the Junior High Sunday school class and Safe Sanctuary volunteers for Sunday and Wednesday nights, as well as to provide snack suppers on Sunday nights. The following is the schedule for September:

Sunday School (9:45-10:30)

- 8 TBD
- 15 Alexis Tadlock
- 22 Tamyra Cody
- 29 Sandra Turner

Sunday UMY (5:30-7:00)

Snack Supper

- 8 Lezleigh Robinette
- 15 Nicole Cacciatori
- 22 Anne Wells
- 29 Seth & Dona Glaze

Safe Sanctuary Volunteer

- Alexis Tadlock
- Nicole Cacciatori
- Anne Wells
- Seth Glaze

Wednesday Night Safe Sanctuary Rotation (5:30-7:00)

- 4 Alexis Tadlock
- 11 Jeff Appleget
- 18 Jennifer Kelley
- 25 Tamyra Cody

The Youth need adult volunteers to be involved! If you want to be added to the rotation for Sunday school teacher (at present, there are three volunteers) or a safe sanctuary volunteer, please let UMY Pastor, Robin Roark know.

Promotion Sunday

August 18 was Promotion Sunday, the day for all students who are moving up to the next class level to have a little ceremony before going to their new classroom.

Pictured are Reagan Shirron and Wesley Hines with their teacher, Zoe Hines, in the Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten class. Reagan and Wesley, along with Kellen Frisby, were promoted that day to the 1st and 2nd grade Sunday school class. *(Photo by Pam Reed)*

