

THE CHURCH BELL



Above all, clothe yourselves with love,
which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
Colossians 3:14



FEBRUARY 2025



As I responded to my call to ministry over thirty years ago, my greatest challenge was my notion of home. I had lived my whole life in the same house, just across the driveway from my grandparents. Home was not just a place, but it was also a particular set of people.

I struggled not only with being away from that place and those people, but also with the idea of having to live in a new place among new people every few years. That way of living in what we United Methodists call "itineracy" didn't match my idea of home. Nor did the idea of living in a place that someone else would choose for me, whether the community or the parsonage in which I would live.

Suzanne had lived in one home her whole life too, and in our premarital counseling, a wise pastor suggested that we insist on filling those future houses with our furnishings - especially if we had children - so that each house might feel a little more like home.

Across our twenty-six year marriage, Suzanne and I have lived in six houses, and though some have felt more like home than others, all have been filled with love and with the people dearest to us. I wonder sometimes where home will be when my vocational life as a United Methodist pastor ends, and frankly, I'm envious of people who have homes more like my childhood home - with nearby relatives, paid off mortgages, and lifelong memories in each room.

I marvel sometimes at how different my children's experience of home is from my own. My oldest daughter Grace says that when someone asks her where she's from, she often answers "Marion, Bristol, and Maryville." Those are the hometowns she best remembers.

Some of the most comforting scripture passages that we most often share in funeral services offer images of home. Psalm 23 celebrates living in "the house of the Lord" forever. In John 14, Jesus says, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places," and promises to prepare a place for us there. Revelation 21 assures us that "the home of God is among mortals." We find comfort in the promise of an eternal home.

This season, however, reminds us how fragile our notions of home can be. Neighbors near and far have lost their homes to Hurricane Helene and wildfires fueled by Santa Ana winds. Frigid temperatures have stirred us to provide warm shelter for even nearer neighbors who have no homes of their own. Mere weeks ago, we celebrated a thirty year partnership with Habitat for Humanity as we dedicated our seventeenth(!) home build in our community.

In just a few weeks, the upper floor of our Sycamore Tree will become home - only temporarily - for families who are presently without a place to call home. In the meantime, Family Promise staff and volunteers will assist them toward more permanent housing and toward a more secure notion of home.

Thank you for supporting these ministry efforts to help neighbors feel more at home.

Dreams becoming reality at Sycamore Tree

Following more than a year of planning and physical work, the dreams of turning the Sycamore Tree property into a ministry hub have moved into a new chapter. **On Sunday, February 2nd at 3:00 pm, we invite you to a special Open House to see the progress and learn more about all that's going on at 1830 Clydesdale Street.**

Family Promise - Rev. Nathan Irwin

After many months of hard work, Family Promise is ready to begin moving families into Sycamore Tree! Many of you are familiar with the work that Family Promise does in Blount County. Their mission is "to help families experiencing homelessness achieve sustainable independence through a community-based response." Family Promise is able to achieve this through a variety of programs but had to change gears after COVID-19 put a halt to a model of rotating families through host churches as emergency shelter.

Through the generous work of the people of 1st Church, Family Promise staff, and other churches and business groups, Family Promise will now be able to house four families at Sycamore Tree. This will roughly double the number of

families they are able to put on a path to stable housing! Once families move in, we will have many more ways for you to volunteer directly with families. This will include providing and sharing dinner; serving as overnight hosts; and providing enrichment activities for families on weekends. Mavis Ziegler and Amy Large (1st UMC's F.P. Co-Coordinator) will soon let you know about specific ways you can get involved.

DayBreak - Jill Pope

As we begin 2025, DayBreak is continuing to connect with families that need help locating resources and caring for loved ones with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. We have been able to assist several families with information about services for their loved ones while continuing to grow our day program.

Caregivers are bringing their loved ones to us every week to get some rest and to offer therapeutic benefits to those they have entrusted to our care. We are blessed and honored that they have chosen our program.

DayBreak welcomes you to visit our program at the Sycamore Tree campus. We have been serving families since October and have been outfitting our space. Come see

Will you Go.Do. at a warming center?

Throughout January, frigid temperatures prompted the opening of area warming centers. Here in Maryville, First Baptist Church is where those without a place to stay, seek shelter from the cold. Volunteers from 1st United Methodist Church pitch in to heat, serve, and clean up after the evening meal and to be friendly faces of hospitality.

The next time the warming center is open, will you be willing to serve as a volunteer?



Erin Barnett, Wendy Wand, and Chelsea and Parker Price all recently volunteered at the Maryville Warming Center.

If so please contact Rev. Jonathan Jonas at jjonas@1stchurch.org.



New year and new books to read! The 1st UMC Book Club is reading *Hamnet*, by Maggie O'Farrell as its current selection. Join the club for a discussion of it on February 17th at 10:00 am in room 205.

Remember your membership vows?

When we join an organization or download a new app, we are asked to agree to certain terms and conditions. Most of the time, we just skip to the end and check the box that says "accept." When you join the UMC you are asked questions in front of the congregation. One of these vows is to faithfully participate in the life and ministries of your local congregation through prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. The participation is not just for the benefit of the church, but a benefit to your spiritual life as you become the hands of God at work by serving others.

If you are looking for ways to get involved by lending your time and talents, please consider the following opportunities:

Wednesdays:

Greeters for Celebrate Recovery:

5:15-6:30pm

Kitchen clean up

6:30-7:00 pm

Sundays:

Greeters: 10:15-10:30am

Help by greeting folks with a smile and helping people find their way to worship.

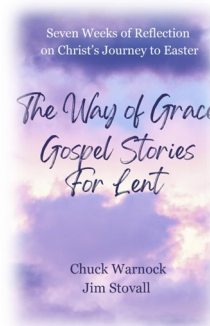
Substitute Worship A/V helpers: 10:30-11:30am

Help by changing worship visual slides for our Contemporary and Online Worship Services (if you can work a computer mouse and keyboard, you can do this).

None of these opportunities require particular skills other than a willing heart. We will provide training and work with you on a schedule that fits your needs. This can also be a great opportunity for students who are working toward service hours for scholarships/school.

If you feel called to help, please email Nathan at: nirwin@1stchurch.org or call the church office.

Make space for grace during Lent



Lent isn't just about giving something up, it's also about making space for something new. This is the focus of a new book, "The Way of Grace - Gospel Stories for Lent" written by Chuck Warnock and Jim Stovall (a member of the 1st UMC family).

Starting **March 6th**, Bernice Howard will lead a new 7-week study of this book during the Lenten season.

If you're interested in being a part of this group study sign up at:

1stchurch.org/thewayofgrace

Spend Wednesday evenings learning about World Religions

- Are you curious about the beliefs of other faiths?
- Do you want to build bridges of understanding between people of different religions?
- Are you ready to deepen your own understanding of Christianity by exploring its connections to other major world religions.

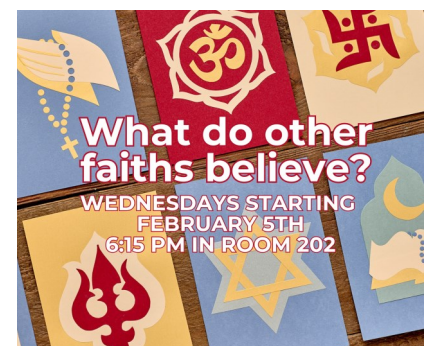
Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism may seem too different from Christianity to comprehend. However, all of these religions intersect with Christianity at times.

Starting February 5th, during our Wednesdays at 1st Adult Bible Study, we'll explore the world's religions, using the book, "Faith Questions - What do Other Faiths Believe?" by Paul Stroble as our guide. The study is in Room 202 each Wednesday evening at 6:15 pm. No sign up is needed and you can choose to come to some of the sessions or all of them.

You do not need to have the book to participate in this Wednesday evening study.

For more information, contact Rev. Nathan Irwin at:

nirwin@1stchurch.org





1st Kids Ministries Director, Kristi Alton and Sylvia Waters started the year off with a trip to the Children's Pastors Conference in Florida. Both came back with ideas for making 1st Kids Ministries even better!



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT 1ST KIDS



Contact the 1st Kids Director Kristi Alton

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✉ kalton@1stchurch.org

☎ 865-982-1273 ext. 712

What keeps us "up all night?"



Worrying is something both adults and kids do and sometimes that fear over the unknown keeps us from getting a good night's sleep.

During Sunday School sessions in February we take a closer look at the message that **God knows us** and how that message is reinforced over and over again in the Bible.

- Jesus told a group of His followers not to worry because God knows what they need.
- Jesus knew the heart of the woman who anointed His feet with oil and loved her deeply despite her sin.
- Knowing Peter's fear when they were walking on water together, Jesus rescued him. Jesus wanted His disciples to know Him and see Him as their Rescuer just like God wants us to know Him.

We'll be "Up All Night" (not really, just the hour of Sunday School each week) learning about all the ways we can get to know Jesus.

Monthly Memory Verse:

O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
(Psalm 139:1)

Exploring Jesus' Miracles in the Gospels

When we visit an aquarium, we find a whole world filled with sea creatures, plants, and more. Some of the discoveries we've made about what lives underwater can seem almost like a miracle.

But it's not just under the sea where miracles happen, Jesus used water in some of his most well-known miracles!

Throughout February in Kid's Own Worship, we learn about some of the incredible miracles Jesus performed to help people grow closer to God.

Along the way we'll learn how:

- **Jesus does everything out of love,**
- **calls us to follow him,**
- **knows what we need,** and most of all, **that Jesus can do anything!**



1stchurch.org/students
info@1stchurch.org

Another Resurrection youth event is in the books. 1st Church had 56 youth and adults in attendance. Check out pictures from the event on

our social media channels as well as online at **1stchurch.org/Resurrection**. And be sure and ask them what all those clothespins were for.





Family Promise continues to help homeless families find shelter. One family in static shelter has been approved for a mortgage and has already chosen a plot for their home. They are just waiting for the home to be delivered. This will be the second family in a short period of time that has become first time homeowners while in **Family Promise**.

In addition to that fantastic news, there is more. Since the start of 2025 ten families were spared from being evicted from their current residences through the assistance of the *Prevention/Diversion* program of **Family Promise**.

Yes, amazing results are occurring because of the impact **Family Promise** makes in Blount County but it does not happen without the assistance of volunteers like you. Come see for yourself the soon to open Family Promise center at 1830 Clydesdale St, Maryville, TN, on Sunday, February 2nd at 3:00 pm. Take a tour and get your questions answered.

Wait, there is more. **Family Promise** was nominated for the *Community Impact Award* for the **Best of Blount 2025**. At the time of this writing, the winner had not been announced yet. However, in the opinion of these writers they are already winners. Just ask the many families who now have a safe place to live thanks to Family Promise and people like you who make it possible.

Blessings,
 Mavis Ziegler and Amy Large
 Co-Coordinators of Family Promise at 1stUMC

WELCOME TO



We've had several people join the church since the fall. Please take time to welcome these new members whenever you see them and let them know you're glad to have them as part of 1st UMC.



Joe & Mary Anne Fitzgerald



Danny & Karen Lee



**Jennifer Manaker
 Jason (son)
 also pictured
 Michael (son)**



Jo Ann and Wayne Smith



Jack & Marcie Graves



Rachel Smith



Joe & Lucy Nash



**Nikki and Ben
 Becca (daughter)
 Bolden**

Not pictured:
Tanner Jones



**Nick Tedrick
 also pictured
 Rayden & Lucas (sons)**

Celebrate Recovery

In memory of: Given by:

Tony VonKlock Rick & Bonnie Betteridge

Community Food Connection

In memory of:

Given by:

Larry Ladd Marilyn Williamson

DayBreak Respite Care Ministry

In honor of:

Given by:

Jonathan Jonas Barbara Hammond
 Sarah Slack Barbara Hammond
 Ed Green Glenn Green
 Ed Green Judy Green

Holston Conference Hurricane Relief

In honor of:

Given by:

1st UMC Staff Doug & Emily Smith

Family Promise

In honor of:

Given by:

Liz Gaskin Trendsetters Class
 Reggie Gaskin Trendsetters Class

In memory of:

Given by:

Judy Delaney Trendsetters Class
 Eula Mae Gaskin Trendsetters Class

Memorial Fund

In honor of:

Given by:

Steve & Sandra Monroe Dallas, Amber & Ada Monroe

In memory of:

Given by:

Harold Bowman Bob Bowman
 Bill Howell Steve & Martha Shields
 Bobby Mull Steve & Martha Shields
 Lillie Mae Guge Steve & Martha Shields

Music Ministry & Choir

In honor of:

Given by:

Dwight Dockery Barbara Hammond
 Shelley Maddox Barbara Hammond
 Jennifer Anderson Barbara Hammond

Welcome Table

In honor of:

Given by:

Gene & Frances Lovell Barbara Hammond
 Doug & Emily Smith Barbara Hammond
 Phyllis Bostick Barbara Hammond
 Caroline Wilson Joy Carver

In memory of:

Given by:

Carl Murrin Chris & Patti McCloud
 Carl Murrin Nancy Jacobs
 Carl Murrin Richard & Nancy Ayers
 Carl Murrin Cliff & Marge Fugate
 Larry Ladd Wally & Nan Werner
 Buddy Blazer Steve & Martha Shields
 Jama Mandrell Joy Carver
 Jama Mandrell Pamela Scott

Christian sympathy extended to:

Reggie Gaskin in the death of his mother, Eula Mae Gaskin on January 1st.

Liz Gaskin in the death of her mother, Judy Delaney on December 9th.

Barbara Campbell in the death of her husband on January 6th.

Mike Ross and his family in the death of his wife, Evelyn Ward Ross who died on December 28th. We also extend sympathy to Rebecca Jordan (our administrative assistant) who is Evelyn's niece.

Jill Rollins in the death of her brother, "Buddy" Blazer on December 8th.

The family of Dave Patton who died on November 29th.

Bob Bowman in the death of his father, Harold Bowman on December 10th.

Joan Howell and her family in the death of Joan's husband, Bill on December 17th.



Dave Patton

Joined First Church: May 15, 2016

Entered the Church Triumphant:
November 29, 2024

Buddy Blazer

Joined First Church: August 25, 1957

Entered the Church Triumphant:
December 8, 2024

Harold Bowman

Joined First Church: April 7, 1991

Entered the Church Triumphant:
December 10, 2024

Bill Howell

Joined First Church: October 21, 1973

Entered the Church Triumphant:
December 17, 2024

Evelyn Ross

Joined First Church: July 1, 1984

Entered the Church Triumphant:
December 28, 2024

Bill Campbell

Joined First Church: September 24, 2006

Entered the Church Triumphant:
January 6, 2025

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Worship focus starting February 9th

Bread is crucial to the stories of our faith from beginning to end. Adam's curse is to have to work hard for bread. The Israelites eat unleavened bread before heading out on the exodus, where God provides manna - daily bread - from heaven. There is bread to honor God on the table in the tabernacle and temple, and Jesus offers his disciples broken bread as a reminder of himself.

On Sundays in February, we will explore and celebrate God's gift of bread, remembering together how God uses this great gift not only to nourish us but also to nurture us.

Learn more about each Sunday's focus and watch services at:

1stchurch.org/worship



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