



NOV./DEC. 2023

The Flame

A Word from Our Pastor

Happy Advent and Merry Christmas from Paragould First United Methodist Church!

Paragould FUMC is providing a devotional titled *Advent: Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room* to members and worshippers as we prepare to celebrate Christmas. Author Kerry van der Vinne says, "For many of us, the month of December is characterized by frantic activity and heightened emotion as we anticipate Christmas with shopping, decorating, cooking, and a flurry of seasonal obligations. In the frenzy to get ready for the outward rituals of Christmas we can fail to prepare our hearts. Advent is an invitation to step away from the tumult. Advent doesn't fit neatly into a soundbite or vignette. It's too complex, too deep, to compete with glitter and noise. But Advent is too important to be forgotten, because it is the season that prepares us to encounter our Lord."

Your pastors chose this devotional booklet because we believe it can be a helpful resource in guiding our prayers and spiritual disciplines in preparation for Advent. The author captures well the ancient practices that still shape our faith today.

You may sense a bit of a theme in my preaching and leadership lately. As fast as the world rushes on, I count it a blessing and gift to learn from the Saints and the traditions of church that keep us grounded and growing in faith. So it is with Advent. In this season we remember what it means to wait for the Lord. Our anticipation of Christmas mirrors our anticipation of Christ's return and final victory. Advent teaches us to wait with hope-filled patience and expectation, knowing God is at work within us and around in remarkable ways.

I want to encourage you to lean into your life of faith this Advent. Pray along with the rest of the church using the provided devotional. Give attention to important ministries of worship, fellowship, and service. Focus your spirit not on countless tasks, but on the surprising work of God across history and in our lives today. Advent is here! Jesus is coming! Soon we will celebrate Christmas!

As you study this newsletter, you will find information on many opportunities ahead the next few weeks. I cannot capture all of the details here, but I want to draw your attention to a few key events. FUMC will once again share in the Downtown Centennial Park Tree Lighting led by our choir (Dec. 1, 6pm). The Youth Christmas Progressive Dinner is always fun (Dec. 3, 5pm). Along with our usual Cookies & Communion, FUMC will share Carols with our friends at the Chateau (Dec. 4, 10am). The Children's Program & Kinders Concert brings fellowship and joy (Dec. 10, 5pm). The annual Choir Concert will be in the Sanctuary, including guest instrumentalists (Dec. 17, 6pm). And lastly - note that Christmas Eve falls on Sunday this year! Meaning the Fourth Sunday of Advent is Christmas Eve. Therefore, we have adjusted our worship schedule slightly by moving the



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noon service to 11am while the 5pm, 7pm, and 11pm services remain the same. All services will be in the Sanctuary, including communion and candlelight.

Please consider inviting others to worship and ministry opportunities this season. We will make use of social media and various advertising, but the most successful way to engage others is through personal invitation. Who will you invite to FUMC this Advent and Christmas? Can you offer to give them a ride? Can you plan to sit with them at church?

We have enjoyed a fun-filled fall at FUMC, including such ministries as Trunk-or-Treat. The rain put a damper on things, but we adjusted and had a wonderful time inside. We think we had 500+ in our building that evening. FUMC hosted Charge Conference for other area churches on November 5. Thanks to the Praise Band and Hospitality Team for helping make others feel welcome. It was inspiring to hear encouraging reports from ours and other local churches. We enjoyed a wonderful fall session of Connect Wednesday thanks to our excellent volunteers, including the many who work in the kitchen. Our junior high youth just returned from an excellent "REFUGE" retreat in the Ozarks. FUMC has welcomed new guests and members in the last few months. Our worship attendance is up 10%, and new people are joining regularly!

One ministry that is very important to our church is our annual Confirmation group. This year's students are meeting on Sunday evenings, alongside parents/guardians and mentors. To date, we have shared in six sessions. Our students are bright, interesting, and spiritually engaged. Please hold the following students in prayer: Izzy Branch, Hadley Ewing, Barrett Herget, Charli Hinkle, Barrett Lawrence, Evan Pearson, Dinah Sills, Maralyn Weaver, Benjamin Williams, Lawson Wooldridge, Korban Ellzey, Parker Watson, and Anna Horner.

The FUMC Witt House Food Pantry continues to see record numbers of clients - sometimes serving 100 families per day. We are reminded of the many in our community who experience "food insecurity" on a regular basis. The growing demand is concerning, but we give thanks God has called our church to partner in this important ministry. FUMC members and worshippers are encouraged to donate holiday cookies by the dozen to the Witt House to be included in food distribution in the coming weeks!

With regard to our facilities, I remind you of a few ongoing tasks. Crews have been working to repair water-damaged paint and plaster in the Sanctuary the last few weeks. Designated gifts/funds are already set aside for this work. Other issues have been cared for, including door seals around the courtyard and other waterproofing repairs in the basement. The tile bathroom floor at the parsonage at 417 W. Main was replaced last year, but has since cracked and will need to be redone by the original installers.

Our church is experiencing seasonal financial pressure. October was a difficult month due to a large quarterly insurance payment and decreased giving. I tend to focus less on month-to-month giving because many households give quarterly, or even annually. The church's cash balances were stronger in 2020 and 2021 due to pandemic grants and less extracurriculars. The national economic situation has shifted in 2022 and 2023. Our giving has stayed nearly identical and we have tried to keep our spending in line. Through October, YTD general funds giving for 2023 is \$704,866 versus \$713,671 in 2022. Spending in 2023 is \$797,252 vs. \$799,237 in 2022. Our church deserves a great deal of credit for its giving despite denominational and economic challenges. I give thanks for your consistent generosity and dedicated financial support.

The concern lies in growing expenses and ongoing needs. We need to end this year strong and begin 2024 in a healthy position. Expenses are growing. For example, our insurance will go up about 20% this coming year. Planned and unplanned capital needs will grow more expensive. I understand from experience your personal financial needs may be growing, as well. No one is immune to these challenges. But I want to encourage you in your giving this month and as we begin 2024. You can give in many ways, including cash, check, bank draft/transfer, online, via stocks or IRA distributions, etc. I have full confidence in God and in our congregation concerning our financial future. We will seek to be wise, prudent, and faithful as we move forward.

Again, I wish you a happy Advent and Merry Christmas. It truly is the "most wonderful time of the year" as we gather for fellowship and worship in the coming weeks. My heart is filled with anticipation surrounding the holiday season. May the peace of God be near to you!

Grace & Peace,
Rev. Dane Womack
Senior Pastor of Paragould FUMC

Trunk or Treat

FUMC was again host to Trunk or Treat on October 29 with 25 "trunks" participating. The event was moved inside to the gym due to cold temperatures and rain. It is estimated that more than 500 people came through the church to participate.



Hello FUMC Friends!

Our Christmas Pageant will be Sunday, December 10 at 5pm, followed by the Kinders and Santa in the gym. Students have their music so they can practice at home over Thanksgiving break.

Christmas Pageant practice will be Wednesday, November 29th from 5:30-6:30 and Wednesday, December 6 from 5:30-6:30 in the Worship Center. We will also practice on the following Sundays: November 26, December 3rd, and December 10 during the Sunday School hour.

Please make plans for your child to be there if he/she is

participating.

Fifth and sixth graders have voted to be helpers this year. However, if there are any that would like to sing with the other children, they are more than welcome to do that.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Blessings,
Angela, Children's Director



Above: Children being mentored by youth on Wednesday nights during their studies learning about Jonathan Wesley.



Greetings FUMC Friends-

I can't believe how quickly the time has passed from the start of our fall activities to entering into the Advent season. The youth and I, along with many volunteers, have experienced several activities together this fall. We have been busy serving others, having devotionals, attending retreats, enjoying some spooky fun, and spending time fellowshiping with each other, as well as other youth around Arkansas. It has been a great season together, and I continue to be thankful for this opportunity to work with our youth.

As the end of the year quickly approaches, I want to take this opportunity to talk about an event for next year: the ACCYM event, Veritas. It will be held February 23-25, 2024, in Fort Smith, AR. Veritas is always a youth favorite once they have the opportunity to attend. This year early registration will be open until December 20 for the price of \$75, and late registration will be open until January 18 for the price of \$100. If cost is an issue, please contact me or Denise Chipman as we always have scholarships available to help with cost. Check your calendars and sign up on the church center app so you can attend this event and experience a great time with youth from all over Arkansas. If you have any questions, please let me know and I will be happy to help in any way.

I am looking forward to all the activities at FUMC throughout the end of the year, as well. Wishing you and your family the best this Christmas season!

Mary Hickox
FUMC Youth Director



Above: Youth and adult volunteers participating in activities during Refuge Shepherd of the Ozarks November 10-12.

You are invited

Nov. 26 -6pm Hanging of the Greens

Nov. 27 -5:30pm Together We Foster
Christmas Gift Wrapping

Dec. 1 -6pm Centennial Park Tree Lighting
with FUMC Choir & Friends

Dec. 2 -9am Women's Ministry
Christmas Ornament Craft

Dec. 3 -5pm Youth Progressive Dinner

Dec. 4 -10am Cookies, Communion, Carols
at Chateau on the Ridge Assisted Living

Dec. 10 -5pm Children's Program & Kinders Concert

Dec. 17 -6pm Choir Concert

Dec. 21 -5pm Christmas Caroling

Dec. 24 -Christmas Eve Services

11am*, 5pm*, 7pm*, 11pm

(*nursery available)

Dec. 31 -10am One Service Sunday

*Donate holiday cookies (by the dozen) to be shared with neighbors
at the Witt House Food Pantry through Dec. 22!*

www.fumcparagould.org

404 West Main Street, Paragould

870-239-8541



Please Note

Connect Wednesday

Programming will start back on January 31 and will end on April 24. We will let you know specific studies as we get closer to the date.

Handbell Choir

Our handbell choir will next play the piece "We Three Kings" on Sunday, December 10 in the 9 & 11am services.

Witt House Closings

The Witt House food pantry will be closed December 26 and 29.

Holiday Cookies

This year, the Witt House is asking for donations of cookies, made by the dozen, for distribution during the holiday season for the many clients that pass through each Tuesday and Friday. You can leave them in the Welcome Center. The final day they will give out cookies, in addition to the other food and commodities, is December 22.

Christmas Eve Service

All of our Christmas Eve services will be held in the church Sanctuary. All four are identical as far as liturgy, though they will vary as far as musical content. Please remember to invite someone to one of these special candlelight and communion services held on Sunday, December 24 at 11am, 5pm, 7pm, and 11pm. Please note that the first service will take place at 11am and not noon, the time we typically have had the first Christmas Eve service.

Combined Service Dec. 31 at 10am

We will have one combined worship service on Sunday, December 31 at 10am. It will be held in the worship center. There will be no children's Sunday School. Adult classes can meet at their discretion.

Young at Heart Upcoming Events

Monday, December 11 at 1:00 pm Movie: "Joyeaux Noel"

Thursday, December 21 at 10:30 am Christmas Gathering

Movies are free; all other activities are dutch treat. There will be no game night in December.

HOLIDAY EVENTS



Centennial Park Lighting

Downtown Christmas Tree Lighting with
FUMC Chancel Choir

December 1 at 6pm

**Women's Ministry
Christmas
Ornament Craft**

December 2 at 9am



**YOUTH
Progressive Dinner**

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3 AT 5PM



**COOKIES,
COMMUNION,
CAROLS
AT CHATEAU
ON THE RIDGE**

DECEMBER 4 AT 10AM



Christmas Parade

December 5 at 7pm



Children's
Christmas Pageant

Sunday, December 10 at 5pm
The Kinders to follow

**CHORAL CHRISTMAS
CONCERT**

SONGS of HOPE

DECEMBER 17 AT 6PM



Christmas Caroling

DECEMBER 21 AT 5PM



Comfort & Joy

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES
11AM, 5PM, 7PM, 11PM



**One Service
Sunday
December 31
Worship Center
10am**

No children/youth Sunday School
Adult classes meet at their discretion



Hello to my FUMC family!
 It's that time of year again; the holiday season is here. After Halloween passes, time snowballs towards Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Year's Day. What does that mean for you? For many, it's a busy time, full of shopping and cooking and decorating and visiting. This can be fun, stressful, or (most likely) both.
 For many, this is the time of year we feel most acutely the absence of loved ones who've passed away. I always think of the song from Les Miserables - empty chairs at empty tables. As Christians, we don't mourn like those without hope, but it doesn't mean we don't mourn. As the church, we

also don't mourn alone - we support each other in our hurt and loss. Please reach out if you're feeling down this time of year; it's more common than you think.
 Whether you feel excited, or stressed, or laden with sadness as the holidays come, may I request that you set aside some time in the coming weeks? Set aside some time for thankfulness - we know that all good things are gifts from God.
 As you look over the church calendar, I hope you'll be in prayer for our congregation and make plans to join us as we worship, fellowship, and have fun together.
 Pastor Sarah

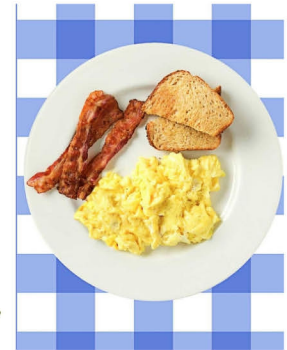
A NOTE FROM Pastor Sarah



Wedding

Ongoing

**METHODIST
 MEN'S BREAKFAST**
 2023 | 1ST & 3RD THURSDAYS
**NEXT: DECEMBER 7 & 21
 JANUARY 4 & 18**
 6AM @ IRONHORSE BBQ
 ALL ARE WELCOME
 FELLOWSHIP & DEVO



Paragould First United
 Methodist Church

Save the Date

The church office will be closed December 25 and 26 and again on January 1. You can turn in charitable donations to be counted for the 2023 year through December 31.

New members at FUMC

Mike Bridges



Mike is shown here with his mother, Gloria Bridges. Mike has already been playing the guitar in both the contemporary and traditional services.

Briget Williams



Briget is standing here with her dad, Don Williams, long-time member. Briget helps as a storyteller in the children's department during Connect Wednesday. She recently moved back to the area.

Curtis Cooksey



Curtis is engaged to Farrah Wilcox; the couple will marry in December. He is shown here with Farrah and his daughters, Adelyn and Maedyn.

Financial Report

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER

General Contributions:

September: \$72,023

October: \$62,340

Building/100 Year Contributions:

September: \$32,822

October: \$11,581

A Dollar A Week total: \$6,557 through October 31

Building Loan Principal Balance: \$2,779,836

In Memory of:

Danny Futrell by John & Carrie Cook, Stewart & Kathy Runsick, Larry & Denise Chipman, Sally Martin, Robin Patten, Mike & Tracy Finch, Bob Branch, Kay & Herb Bland, Janice Wilcox, Donna & Charles Brazil, Linda Black, Joe & Jackie Barnett, Phillip & Paige Wooldridge, Diane Blossom, Debbie DeVault, First National Bank, Roto-Rooter, Betty & Randy Hedge, Moud & Sharon Gazaway, Jann Willcockson, Dannelle Rogers, Gary Black, John & Ann Honeycutt, Tim & Lanie Mangrum, Farrah Wilcox, Fred & Judy Workman, Kristin Gray, Theresa Kirk, Ann Gregg, Bob & Carolyn Childress, Dianna Way, Carolyn Samuel, Jeff & Carolyn Block, Robin Patten, Davey Joe & Rena Jackson, Donis & Bonnie Hamilton, Pat Chesser, Tony & Charlen Bari, Andy & Sonjia Fulkerson, Dr. Jon & Ranae Collier, John Wyatt, Martha Chiles, Martha Jean Swindle, Terry Coy and family, Mary Catherine Way, Natasha Vincent, Lane, Courtney, Connor, Cohen & Cross McMurry, Beth Pace, Vance & Nancy Cupp, Shelia Ragsdell, Drs. Mack & Vern Ann Shotts, Gary & Beverly Biggs

Timothy McFarland by Bob Branch, Gene & Jill Weeks

Brenda Trimble by Dannelle Rogers, Janice Wilcox, Farrah Wilcox, Gene & Jill Weeks

Lisa Jarman by Linda Black, Donis & Bonnie Hamilton, Dannelle Rogers, Coffee Break Sunday School Class, Michele Crancer, Fred & Judy Workman

Kenny Cline by Stewart & Kathy Runsick, Donis & Bonnie Hamilton, Dannelle Rogers, Tim & Lanie Mangrum, Billy Cline Family, Gary & Beverly Biggs

In Honor of:

Rev. Dane Womack by Bob Branch

Pastor Sarah Ellzey by Bob Branch

LOVE GOD. SERVE PEOPLE. MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Church Office

8:30AM-4:30PM MON-THURS
8:30AM-NOON FRIDAY

*Witt House
Food Pantry*

4:30PM-6PM TUESDAY
9:30AM-11:00AM FRIDAY



Bishop Laura Merrill
District Superintendent Zach Roberts
Pastors Dane Womack (william.womack@arumc.org,
Sarah Ellzey (sarah.ellzey@arumc.org)
Music Director Brian Pearson
(brian.pearson@fumcparagould.org)
Director of Youth Ministries
Mary Hickox (mary.hickox@fumcparagould.org)
Director of Children's Ministries
Angela Newby
(angela.newby@fumcparagould.org)
Dir. of Media/Communications Karoline Risker
(karoline.risker@fumcparagould.org)
Organist Bernard Raley
Church Administrator Denise Chipman
(denise.chipman@fumcparagould.org)
Custodian: Mike Rutherford

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FOR MORE INFORMATION



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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