



Volume 26, Issue #7
August, 2022

The Connexion



On the Christian Journey...
with Pastor Christopher.

One of my passions as a Pastor is to encourage people to read and wrestle with Scripture; to go deeper in their faith and engage the stories. One of the things I cherish about the Wesleyan/United Methodist approach to Scripture is that we take it seriously, without falling into the self-serving traps of literalism and inerrancy. God speaks through the Scriptures, even as we recognize that inspired human authors, and we ourselves, have limitations, biases, and do not yet fully understand.

The Jewish and later Christian councils that debated and set the canon – that is, what books are included in the Holy Bible – knew full well that there were tensions among them. One place will say Isreal obeyed God and completely exterminated the Cannanites... while numerous others document how the Cannanites and other peoples continually tempted Israel to turn away from their God. One place will make it clear that God hates Moabites for their evil ways, another tells the story of the faith and loyalty of a Moabite woman who ultimately becomes the great King David’s grandmother. We are supposed to wrestle with the great questions Scripture raises. We are supposed to work out our own salvation, to find a way to walk the narrow path, to be in the world but not of the world, yet sent to the world. (see *Philippians 2:12, Matthew 7:13-14, John 17:14-19*).

Recently, I preached on the exceedingly difficult text of Numbers 5. I often hold up Judges 18 as one to wrestle with – surely this is not the way God wants us to behave, so what does it mean? Why is this story told? And while I think we should avoid taking single verses and using them to clobber those we disagree with, the message of Ezekiel 16:49 is pretty clear, is it not? And yet it might make us more than a little uncomfortable if we take it seriously – so much easier to make sure the stories point at other people’s behavior – right? So often, Jesus quotes and honors the Scriptures – yet challenges the religious authorities who have reduced its words to tools of oppression and control of others. Scripture, viewed properly, is always about controlling ourselves and serving others, drawing ourselves closer to God and to neighbor.

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RECONNECT TO FAITH – A TIME OF REVIVAL!

This October, our stewardship theme will be “Reconnect to Faith.” We will again have yard signs that will start in the church yard then you’ll be invited to spread across the city to your homes.



We again got these signs at no cost to the church, using a periodic grant provided by a partnership between UMC Communications and the marketing firm Outreach.com. We are planning a special event Sunday, October 2nd to kick this off – mark your calendars and in prayer about who God is calling you to share your faith and invitation with!

I Wonder and I Notice – lead article continued

I want to invite you to try using a technique I've read about called "I Wonder and I Notice." When you are reading the Bible – by yourself or with others – pause and ask what you wonder about. Write down or share aloud with others what you notice. Pause, ponder, ask questions!

Let us consider this example shared by Shanna K. Hannan in her book "*The People's Sermon*." With the reading Mark 1:9-11. It begins "At that time..." – [you might wonder "what time?" – perhaps you notice what comes just before.] It continues that "Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized. [I wonder why Jesus, the son of God, has to be baptized?] "by John" [is who is doing so important? What do we know about this John? From Mark? From other Gospels?] "in the Jordan" [I notice that river gets named a lot, I wonder what it's significance is?] "Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water..." [I notice this was a full immersion, I wonder ho different kinds of baptisms developed?] "he saw the heaven being torn open [I wonder if he was scared? I wonder if anyone else saw it – I notice Mark doesn't even mention if John does!] and the Spirit descending on him like a dove [was it fast, slow? what does "like a dove" cause me to envision?] "and a voice came from heaven [I notice this is the 2nd thing that comes from the heavens being torn open. I wonder if the voice always follows the Sprit. Again I wonder if anyone else heard the voice.] "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." [I wonder how Jesus felt when he heard these words. I wonder how I hear and experience God's presence. How do I notice God?]

Hannan says that the point is not to readily have the right answers This is a form of playfulness, designed to throw open possibilities, lower defenses, it is to more fully engage the text and let it interrogate us. The practice requires us to slow down and really let the details of the Bible's stories – evne those we think we know so well – come alive. It's about engagement, wrestling and journey more than conclusions. The Bible itself, in my opinion, encourages this approach. It's why so many of the stories are told multiple times but never in exactly the same way. We are called to notice, to wonder – and to engage with God who is I AM and who is with us. Try it and let me know how you experience this approach? What other techniques have you used for engaging more deeply with the Bible?

THANK YOU –

from Sean Wells to HOCROC
and First UMC

"I appreciate your generosity a million times over and if I could write thank you that many times on this card, I would. This funding meant the world to me. Thank you!!!

(Through your generosity, HOCROC donated to CarePortal to enable this student facing significant family difficulties yet with a earning an education opportunity to have a laptop to facilitate his studies).



HOCROC NEWS for summer, 2022

Submitted by Debra Wood

In May, our committee began the calling for greeter and usher volunteers for the church service each Sunday. We appreciate everyone being so agreeable in volunteering for this hospitality outreach. If at all possible, please contact the office with any phone numbers you can share that might not be listed in the directory. We are finding many numbers that are no longer current.

Our group continues with outreach in CarePortal, as well helping with Sunday coffees, and special events. New this fall, with Pastor Christopher's guidance, we are working to schedule an opportunity for a lifelong learning event at our church. (See Healthy Congregations Updates on the next page).

Thank you again. Everyone. for your contributions to the recent drive for baby items for DCF (CarePortal outreach). And please if there are any questions, concerns, or ideas you want to share, reach out to our committee members. We are active at FUMC!



HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS GRANT UPDATE

Our Healthy Congregations team (largely the HOCROC committee) learned this week that we have qualified for a renewal of our \$1000 grant, so we will be getting a 2nd check in the next few weeks! Our key project is launching a Shepherd Center / Adventures in learning program here at First UMC that will be focused on retired adults and open to the community. We are

recruiting speakers for an planned first event Friday, October 10th with our 2nd event (or, if necessary a delayed start) on Friday, March 10th. We will then begin having several such events each year. We think this will help us address a number of identified needs in our congregation and community and use the blessings God has given us, including this building, fruitfully. Watch for more details in September's newsletter.

WALK THE LABYRINTH!

We are making steady progress on the new labyrinth on the 1st Presbyterian owned lot that was the site of the former Whiteside Grocery. Initially yellow lines were painted to mark the single path to a center that you are invited to walk as a form of prayer, discernment, meditation or just to enjoy a walk. Stones from the debris on the site are then being used to make the lines more permanent. Pastor Christopher has been working on this gradually and received invaluable assistance from the young man who was involved in knocking our sign over earlier this year as a voluntary community service. It is a profound thing to walk in a place of beauty and peace created from the remnants of destruction. Our labyrinth is



VBS kids playing follow the leader after the initial lines were painted – there is no wrong way to walk a labyrinth.

about 45' wide and based on the design found in Chartres Cathedral, France, which was laid in stone around the year 1200 as a pilgrimage and prayer site.

If you'd like more information, chat with Pastor Christopher. This fall when the weather is cooler and the labyrinth is more complete, we'll hold some events there as well.



Mark Your Calendars! We have been notified by District Superintendent Micki McCorkle that our Three Rivers network charge conference will be held **Sunday, October 23rd at 6pm. We will again be hosting this event here at First UMC Fort Scott.**

Charge Conference officially sets the pastor's salary, approves a slate of officers and committee members and makes other decisions about the life of the congregation.

As always, all members are invited to attend, and those serving as officers or committee members are requested to do so. Given Pastor's schedule and other upcoming events, we will be working to finalize most of our paperwork for this by mid to late September.

PASTOR CHRISTOPHER'S UPCOMING TRAVELS

None of these will require missing a Sunday, so most folks won't notice, but be aware that Pastor will be participating in a worship planning retreat led by Dr. Marcia McFee with Mr. Jason Moore of Midnight Oil Productions. It is being hosted at Church of the Resurrection and Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City from the evening of Sunday, August 14th through mid-day Wednesday, August 17th. This will both help him plan ahead, especially for the upcoming Advent and Lent seasons, but also satisfy his continuing education requirements as an Elder of the Great Plains Conference of the UMC.

On Saturday, October 1st he'll be in Lindsborg to preside at his youngest brother Noel's wedding.

Then October 6th – 8th he has been invited by the Great Plains Conference to represent the Board of Ordained Ministry in a special training opportunity called "Be the Bridge," helping the conference work towards "racial healing, equity and reconciliation." Pastor is excited about all of these opportunities and looks forward to sharing what he experiences and learns with you in the future.

UMC / GMC / Other? Do We Need To Do Anything?

I was asked to write a bit about our denomination's ongoing debates over human sexuality. The key takeaway is that there is nothing we at First UMC have to do. No vote is required, unless, collectively, we wanted to cease being part of the United Methodist Church.



Now some background. We have been intensely engaged in this debate almost as long as our denomination has been known as the UMC. In 1972, a phrase about incompatibility was inserted into the Discipline. There have been many developments since, all of which came to a head in 2016 when a bitterly divided General Conference was at loggerheads (despite voting 51% to 49% that they were not divided). Members of our own Great Plains Conference delegation asked the Council of Bishops to lead, find a way forward and develop a plan – which came to be known as the One Church plan. This would have allowed for diversity among different regions of the US and world. We have always allowed that kind of change to the Discipline for conferences outside of the US and on topics like the minimum salary for pastors domestically.

In 2019, at the special General Conference called to try and resolve this debate, by narrow margins, that One Church plan failed. At the same time, that special General Conference passed a new Paragraph 2553 of the Discipline, which altered and clarified the procedure for a congregation to leave the denomination. Briefly, Par. 2553 allows a congregation to leave provided that there is a deliberative process of study and conversation that leads to a 2/3 majority vote at a duly called Charge Conference and the congregation pays their obligations – including apportionments in full for both the current and following year, along with any existing debts to the Conference and, finally, “their pro rata share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations to the Annual Conference.” It is a quite expensive proposition, although more lenient than prior policy and one that can be managed if members feel strongly about it. In return, the denomination waives the trust clause and, thus, congregations can retain their buildings and property. Churches leaving would no longer be a part of the UMC and thus would not have pastors appointed by the UMC. The newly launched Global Methodist Church has said it will likely have a similar process of appointment, but exactly how that will work remains to be decided. The provisions of Par. 2553 expire at the end of 2023.

From what I can tell, the total number of congregations choosing to leave in the US will be under 10% and in the Great Plains Conference it will be maybe 3-4%. St. John's here in Fort Scott, which at this point will become independent, and their sister church Hammond, which is joining the newly launched GMC are among them. The third church in that charge, West Liberty, voted to remain in the UMC. As we see locally, somewhere between half and 2/3 of departing congregations will then join the GMC.

Again, there is nothing we at First UMC have to do – we will continue to be a part of the United Methodist Church automatically. If a significant number of our membership felt strongly enough, they could seek to begin a deliberative process and reach that 2/3 vote threshold. If there is a desire to do so, my duty would be to facilitate the process and I would. To be candid, I would also seek a change of appointment as I would no longer consider myself a good fit here. As I have said previously, I am personally invested in and rather attuned to these topics. My understanding and study of Scripture on these issues is deeply tied to my experience of a call to ministry and my journey to becoming a pastor. Yet, despite that, in my first year here, I haven't sensed that it's a major issue for people at First UMC Fort Scott – a marked difference from other places I have served – and so, I haven't said very much about it. There are certainly members here who would not want a gay or lesbian person appointed as pastor. I would note that, even if the UMC ultimately changes its polity to allow for ordination, that would not automatically mean such a pastor would come to Fort Scott. After all, as a denomination, we've been ordaining women since a decade before the 1968 merger created the UMC and no woman has ever yet been appointed to serve as pastor here.

I think our focus is and should be on being in Christlike ministry in our community and revitalizing our congregation, not attending to whatever arguments others might be having. I am happy to make an appointment to discuss the various debates and differences as objectively as I can, should you be interested. I can also point you to some podcasts and videos by our Great Plains Delegation leader, Rev. Adam Hamilton, who does a great job of discussing the options and developments. ~Pastor Christopher

FAITH BUILDER'S IN AUGUST:

We continue "Summer at the Movies" for the Faith Builders in August. We will be viewing and discussing film clips from a number of Biblical DVD's from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In addition to film clips, we will see "The Fall of Jericho" and scenic films of Capernaum, the believed tomb of Abraham and the possible site of Sodom and Gomorrah. Viewing the clips often gives us added perception. Come join us in fellowship as we do Bible study from a different perspective.

~Ron Wood



MATTHEW STUDY

The "new Sunday School Class," which meets in the Library in the Educational wing continues to work through the Gospel of Matthew each week. There are chairs available for anyone who would like to join us!

~Tom Braker

Thank You to Dorothy Kivett, who after serving as liturgist recently noticed the pulpit storage was a cluttered mess and took it upon herself to help get it organized with new containers. Much nicer!

August Birthdays: 2-Austin Stapleton, 4-Karen Reinbolt, 5-Star Blanz, 6-Shanna Albright, 9-Haley Denton, 12-Karen Nichols, 13-Zac Engle, 14-Darrell Burt, 15-Jamie Christuski, 16-Tori Post, 17-Bruce Majors, 18-Matt Chaplin, Clayton Tatro, 19-Erica Potter, 21-Becky Allen, 22-Paul Antonetti, 26-Randy Nichols, 27-Kacie Brown, Roger Sipe, 31-Rick Comstock.



August Anniversaries: 1-Tom and Shauneen Wolf; 4-Ron and Mille Sharp; 9-Scott and Rose Stoughton; 14-Glenn and Carol Newcomer, Dick and Jan Hedges; 15-Doug and Suziee Barlet; 19-Ken and Karen Rienbolt; 21-Bruce and Carol Majors; 30-Darren and Kelley Tucker.



Deepest Sympathy to families and friends of: Polly Alsop, Bettie DuVall and Mary Darling, all of whom passed in July.

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP

Are you ready to take the next step on your faith journey and become a member? Or maybe you just want to find out more about this congregation and United Methodism? You are invited to "Pizza with the Pastor." We'll share lunch and conversation on Sunday, August 28th immediately after the 10:30am service. It's a chance to get to know Pastor Christopher and for him to learn a bit about you to enable him to better serve as your pastor as a member or constituent here at First UMC. **RSVP required no later than Monday, August 22nd.**



PIZZA WITH THE PASTOR

RSVP required no later than Monday, August 22nd.



UMCOR remains one of the best ways to address natural and human disasters near and far. Note UMCOR on the memo line of your check or envelop and together, our little can accomplish a lot! Use Advance #982450 to target International efforts and #901670 for US efforts.

TRYING AGAIN – PLEASE FILL OUT AND RETURN TO THE OFFICE

What's Your Shirt Size? BRAINSTORMING / Survey – not a final decision.

A few of us are thinking about getting shirts made – so that when several of us do things like ride on a parade float or volunteer for the library we could represent First UMC. Locally, a solid color t-shirt from Shirt Shack with our logo and/or a few words in white front and back would be about \$11 each to print. Online seems similar.

The pictures are a quick mock up Pastor Christopher did on an online site – NOT a finalized design.



Sample: possible front and back designs

If we ordered some this fall – would you want one? If so, what's your shirt size? How many might you order? How much might you be willing (if anything) to pay or donate if we made them a fundraiser for something? Please return this form to the office – this is NOT an official order or commitment – but information gathering for our planning. Thanks.



Name: _____

Number of Shirts you'd be interested in: _____ Amount you might be willing to pay/donate: _____

Size(s). Adult Small _____ Medium _____ Large _____ X-Large _____ 2XL _____ 3XL _____

Comments: Note if you'd like youth sizes, have suggestions for the design, etc.

Again this is not a final order, just information gathering at this point. Please return form to the office or email the above information to Zandra at secretary@firstumcfsks.org for her to compile. Thanks.

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Return Service Requested

*Here is your August 2022
Newsletter from:*



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