



# FIRST NEWS

FEBRUARY 2023

## PASTOR'S PAGE

There are a few buzzwords floating around the church right now. One in particular is the word vote. Can we have a transparent conversation about voting for a moment? At the January 29th discernment team information session, one of the questions asked was: Why didn't this [the current situation regarding disaffiliation] go through the congregation as a vote first? The discernment team offered the following response:

United Methodist polity is representational. Members of leadership committees are to represent the congregation as a whole. The North Alabama Annual Conference also drafted a required discernment process laying out the necessary steps; this process ends, not begins, with a Church Conference and congregational vote. As well, church membership is voluntary. Members are free to "vote" by continuing to offer their presence, or by removing their membership.

That is an excellent and correct United Methodist church polity answer. Don't forget, we are United Methodist after all!

I would now like to also offer a brief biblical perspective regarding a congregational vote. Since our founder, John Wesley, claimed to be a "man of one book," although he was well-read, we should not be surprised that in our United Methodist tradition the Bible is held in high esteem.

*Matthew 15 It was customary during the festival for the governor to release to the crowd one prisoner, whomever they might choose. 16 At that time there was a well-known prisoner named Jesus Barabbas. 17 When the crowd had come together, Pilate asked them, "Whom would you like me to release to you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?" ... "Barabbas," they replied.*  
(Matthew 27:15-17 & 21b)

Unfortunately, the people of God got that vote horribly wrong!

## PASTOR'S PAGE

(cont'd)

Please understand, I'm not downplaying the importance of voting. Also, I'm not suggesting that the voices of others are not important, or that emotionally driven matters always result in wrong decisions. I don't necessarily believe that. However, when people, even the people of God, feel the need to hastily take matters into their own hands and respond out of fear instead of responding with patience and allowing space for amicable dialogue and for God to move and create, we don't always get it right in the end. As Sylacauga First United Methodist Church potentially moves toward a congregational vote regarding disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church, I issue a word of caution: What is prompting your desire to vote? Why vote to leave; is it an emotional response birthed from fear of what might happen? Is it strictly a business decision? Is it really a prompting of God, or is it the prompting of something or someone else?

I'm grateful for you and I'm praying for you as you wrestle with what and who God is calling SFUMC to be, both now and in the future.

Grace and Peace,

*Rev. Andy Curtis*

## DISCERNMENT UPDATE

Like several other churches in North Alabama, the leadership of Sylacauga First has chosen to enter a period of discernment regarding what and who God is calling our church to be. The discernment team members are listed here: **Raymond Styres, Beckham Jones, Tonya Henderson, Crystal Walker, Lynn Hodges, Carla Taylor, Jerry Fielding, Bonita Powell, Dee Dee Mathews.** Please make it point to keep these individuals and the entire team in your prayers as they navigate this process.

The Discernment Team will be meeting throughout January and February. **These will not be open meetings.** The team must engage in delicate and honest conversation, so a controlled environment free from additional distractions will serve them best as they do their work. However, **please stop to pray for your discernment team during these meetings.** Even though your physical presence might not be in the room, the spiritual uplifting of these team members is sure to be felt and appreciated.

If you have questions, comments, or input you may contact any member of the discernment team, or you may email the team at [sfumcdiscernment@gmail.com](mailto:sfumcdiscernment@gmail.com).

## Worship & Arts!!!

*Sing the glory of His name; make his praise glorious! (Psalm 66:2)*

**“Glorious worship is exuberant, never half-hearted. It is attractive, not off-putting. It is awesome, never sentimental. It is brilliant, not careless. It points to God, not to the speakers....There is nothing more evangelistic, nothing that will win the world more than glorious worship!”** *(Tim Keller, The Songs of Jesus)*

### Worship & Arts Calendar Update

Feb.1, Wed Choir, 6p / Band, 7p  
Feb. 5, Sun *Worship - John 8:1-11; Not a Pawn, a Person*  
Feb. 7, Tue Handbell Choir, 5:30p  
Feb. 8, Wed Choir, 6p / Band, 7p  
Feb.12, Sun *Worship - John 4:4-42; Woman at the Well*  
Feb. 14, Tue Second Mile Class Valentine’s Dinner  
Feb.15, Wed Choir, 6p / Band, 7p  
Feb. 19, Sun *Worship - (Transfiguration of Christ) - Matthew 17:1-9; Revealed!*  
Feb. 21, Tue Handbell Choir, 5:30p  
Feb. 22, Wed **ASH WEDNESDAY** / Choir 6p / Ash Wed Service 6:30p / Band TBD  
Feb. 24-25, Fri/Sat **Central Alabama Handbell Festival**, at Pleasant Hill UMC-McCalla  
Feb. 26, Sun *First Sunday of Lent – New Sermon Series “How is Your Soul?”  
Matthew 4:1-11 – “Clingy Hearts”*

**Would you like to join one of our music or media ensembles?**

[david@firstmethodistchurch.com](mailto:david@firstmethodistchurch.com)

Love of Christ!

*David Simpkins, Director of Worship & Arts*

## Youth & Children’s News

Youth and Children are still meeting Wednesday nights at 6:00.

Please come and invited your friends!

*Chrystal Whitehead, Director of Youth Ministries*

*Leslie Lucas, Director of Children’s Ministries*

Look at this increase in attendance! In 2021, we had 3,892 people at all of our services (10 AM, Ash Wednesday, Christmas Eve and Holy Week). In 2022, it grew to 5,351. Sunday School increased from 568 to 879.

~ SPECIAL GIFT TO THE CHURCH ~

~ January ~

In Memory of Betty Carlton by Carolyn M. Griffin.

### PRAYER VIGIL

*“Lord, we thank you for many in ministry at First United Methodist Church Sylacauga, we ask the Holy Spirit to guide us into the future and give us the boldness to follow you. In your name we pray Lord Jesus, Amen.”*

Through the spiritual discipline of keeping vigil, we hope to accomplish: an encounter with the living God, an increased sensitivity to his presence in our lives and in our church, and a better understanding of who we are individually and collectively.

Are you willing to commit one hour to pray fervently for WHOLENESS AND PEACE FOR OUR LEADERS, PASTOR, AND MEMBERS during these next 6 weeks? We will be in prayer during worship, Sunday school, committee meetings, and other church activities. Please sign up in the church office for a one-hour commitment to be physically in the prayer chapel.

### Prayer Concerns

Cindy Diffie	Tiffani Persons	Brandi McDonald
Cheryl Dobson	Linda Morris	Pete Baker
Mack Howell	Amanda Farr	Wes Coleman
Lee White	Ben & Linda Gamel	Tanner Bowen
Fay Simpkins	Pat Pownall	Lenette Calvin
Marese Rayfield	Larry Reynolds	Christopher Brown
Ginger Marable	Bill Roberts	Dennis Buckner
Amy R. Thomas	Diane Atkinson	George Gilbert
Lou Kyle	Vaughn	Sue White
Barbara Bailey	Pastor Joel Maxwell	AJ Heard
Rosie Cochran	Catie Simpkins	Cydney Heard
Jim Isbell	Kenneth Turner	Byron White
Dylan Durden	Sally Werling	Wayne Hawkins
Jake Montgomery	Ollie Heath, Jr.	

Van Junkins Family (Carolyn Etrass’ brother),  
Ken and Ozaline Carter (Karen Parker’s parents),  
Gene Sasser (Jan & Steve Rousseau’s family).

# Church Announcements

## ALTAR & NARTHEX FLOWERS

**February 5th - ALTAR FLOWERS** in the Sanctuary are presented to the glory of God and in loving honor of **the Reverend Andy Curtis** by Raymond & Glenda Styres.

**February 12th - ALTAR FLOWERS** in the Sanctuary are presented to the glory of God and in loving memory of **John Durden** by Lorez Durden.

**February 12th - NARTHEX FLOWERS** are presented to the glory of God and in loving memory of **Nell & Paul Sarvis** by Paul Sarvis, III, John & Ellen Sarvis.

**February 19th - ALTAR FLOWERS** in the Sanctuary are presented to the glory of God and in loving memory of **Ruth Johnson on the second anniversary of her death** by Willie Johnson.

**February 26th - ALTAR FLOWERS** in the Sanctuary are presented to the glory of God and in loving memory of **the deceased members of our families** by Travis & Averiett Wesson, Wallis & Jimie Wesson, John & Katie Wesson.

If you would like to provide flowers for the Sanctuary, we have the following openings: Mar. 19, Apr. 30, July 9, Aug. 27, Oct. 1, Oct. 29 and Nov. 19.

### ***New Members***

We wish to welcome Hans & Misti Harshberger who joined the church on December 18 and

Sophie & Josie Harshberger who were baptized and joined the church January 22!

We also want to welcome

Maury Gaston who joined the church January 15 and  
Alice Pitchford Collins who joined the church on January 29!

**MEALS ON WHEELS** has openings on the 1st Fridays (Feb.3, Mar. 3, May 5. . .) and 5th Fridays (Mar. 31, June 30, Sept. 29). Call the church office at 256-249-0362 if you can help.

**UWF** United Women in Faith will meet February 21.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY** During the month of December the church had a very special "Second Mile Giving" cause which we were asked to support with financial contributions: the United Methodist Children's Home (White Christmas). Sylacauga First UMC is sending \$1,134 to The White Christmas Offering. Thank you for this generous support for this important ministry!



Monday Morning Bible Study meets every Monday at 9:30 am in the church library. All ladies are welcome!

### **January Worship & Generosity Report**

Average In-house Attendance:	95
Average Sunday School:	17
Average Livestream views:	30
Average Facebook views:	55
Receipts	\$ 42,232
Expenditures	\$ 43,477

### **CHURCH STAFF**

Andy Curtis - Pastor

David Simpkins - Director of Worship & Arts

Chrystal Whitehead - Youth Ministries

Leslie Lucas - Children's Ministries

Robin Lewis/Charmelle Lewis - Pianists

Karen Brewer - Church Administrator

Dolly Perry - Administrative Assistant

### **KINDERGARTEN INFORMATION**

Monday - Friday 6:30 am - 5:30 pm (256) 249-2300



Lisa McCain - Kindergarten Director

Amanda McDaniel - Financial Secretary



# February 2023



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 6:00 pm - Children's Activities, Youth, Discernment Videos 7:00 pm - Choir	2 6:30 pm - Karate	3 Church Office Hours Monday - Thursday 8:00 am - 4:00 pm	4
5 8:30 am - Prayer for Worship 9:00 am - Sunday School 10:00 am - Worship 4:00 pm - Discernment Team	6 9:30 am - Monday Morning Bible Study 6:00 pm - APPS Group	7 5:30 pm - Handbells 6:30 pm - Karate	8 5:30 pm - Discernment Team 6:00 pm - Children's Activities, Youth, Choir, Bible Fellowship 7:00 pm - Worship Team	9 6:30 pm - Karate	10	11
12 8:30 am - Prayer for Worship 9:00 am - Sunday School 10:00 am - Worship	13 9:30 am - Monday Morning Bible Study 6:00 pm - APPS Group	14  5:30 pm - Handbells 6:00 pm - 2nd Mile Class Dinner 6:30 pm - Karate	15 6:00 pm - Children's Activities, Youth, Choir, Bible Fellowship 7:00 pm - Worship Team	16 6:30 pm - Karate	17	18
19 8:30 am - Prayer for Worship 9:00 am - Sunday School 10:00 am - Worship	20  9:30 am - Monday Morning Bible Study 5:00 pm - Finance 6:00 pm - Admin Board	21 10:00 am - UWF 5:30 pm - Handbells 6:00 pm - APPS Group 6:30 pm - Karate	22 6:00 pm - Choir 6:30 pm - Ash Wednesday Service TBD - Worship Team	23 6:30 pm - Karate	24 Handbell Festival, Pleasant Hill UMC	25 Handbell Festival, Pleasant Hill UMC
26 8:30 am - Prayer for Worship 9:00 am - Sunday School 10:00 am - Worship	27 9:30 am - Monday Morning Bible Study 6:00 pm - APPS Group	28 5:30 pm - Handbells 6:30 pm - Karate				