FEBRUARY 2021 | VOL. 58 | NO. 2 THEFITST United Methodist Church of LaGrange

Soul Connection small groups designed to nourish your soul, draw you closer to God and our church family

If we have learned anything over this past year, it is that We are Better Together! We were created to be in relationship with one another and God and weren't meant to go through life alone. Perhaps today you find yourself wanting to forge deeper relationships with God and with others in transformative community? Maybe you want friendships that dig beyond the surface and help you to look more like Jesus in your daily life?

If this describes your heart and the desires of your soul, we hope you will consider signing up to be a part of Soul Connection Groups at First Methodist. Groups will meet weekly throughout the course of Lent (February 21-March 28) and are open to all for participation. These small groups consisting of no more than a dozen individuals are designed to allow participants to do life together, further connecting with God and one another in transformational community. Modeled after early Methodist Class Meetings, these groups will revolve around two primary "check-in" questions that were employed by the founder of Methodism, John Wesley:

- 1) "How is it with your soul?"
- 2) "How did you experience God this week?"

Utilizing these two questions, Wesley gave people who had experiences of God in worship, the opportunity to dive deeper into their faith and prioritize their daily walk with Christ within the context of small group discipleship. Soul Connection Groups will prioritize transformation over information. While learning information about the Bible and theology are important aspects of our faith, this group is not intended to be a curriculum-driven Bible study class (although groups will discuss Scripture together), but instead a relationship-driven connection group.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE ...

If you would like to join a Soul Connections small group, you can fill out a registration form found on page 5.

Also in this issue, you can read more about Beacon of Hope, a new form of community brewing in LaGrange! In addition, meet some of our newest members, and read about the little ones who recently have been baptized.



For registration, you can choose group preferences most convenient for you, or signify a specific group you would most like to join. As we form the groups, we will do our very best to honor your preferences. Registration will run now through February 14. Hard copies of interest forms can be found in this edition of The Flame, in the Church Office, or at the Soul Connections table set up in the Narthex before and after worship each week and can be dropped off or mailed to the church. If you would prefer to register online, you can access the digital registration form on our website at www.lagrangefumc.org/soul-connections. Following the registration period, you will be contacted by a minister or Soul Connections Host about your group.

If you have questions or would like to learn more about these groups, Soul Connection Hosts who participated in a group of their own this past Fall will be stationed in the narthex before and after services throughout registration and would love to help. Or if you're worshipping virtually right now, can always reach out to Pastor Ben at ben@lagrangefumc.org.

We cannot wait to see the ways that God uses this new faith formation opportunity to help us grow in the grace of God together at First United Methodist Church!

Remember how much we love you!



Three generations of the Jackson family baptized at LaGrange First Methodist

We've celebrated infant baptisms and welcomed new members in January and February, and with each occasion, we feel incredibly thankful for our church family! In particular, the recent baptisms of infant cousins **John Morgan Jackson IV** and **Samuel Dorsey Jackson** were poignant reminders of how our family members—even those who are no longer with us—have helped shape our spiritual paths.

Morgan is the son of **John Morgan and Christina Jackson**, and Sam is the son of **James and Stephanie Jackson** (and little brother to **Jay**). Longtime church members **John and Cindy Jackson** are their grandparents. Morgan's and Sam's fathers, born a little more than a year apart, were baptized at our church 29 and 30 years ago. Their grandfather, John, was baptized at LaGrange First Methodist 60 years ago.



Morgan's and Sam's baptisms also coincide with the 75th anniversary of the year their great-grandparents, **Morgan and Joyce Jackson,** joined our church in 1946. (As far back as we can tell in the church history books, Joyce Rakestraw Jackson's parents became members here in the 1890s!)

We also welcomed Christina Jackson and Stephanie Jackson as new members! It is awe-inspiring to know our role is to lift up this special family and surround Sam and Morgan with love and support as they begin a lifelong journey of learning and growing in faith. John Morgan and Christina Jackson with their son, Morgan, and Dr. John





James and Stephanie Jackson with their son, Sam, and Dr. John Beyers



'Beacon of Hope' to offer faith and community in an unlikely setting

As we embark on new endeavors in mission and ministry for 2021, one thing is certain: Local churches face a world that is fundamentally different from any world they have ever known. As such, I fully believe we, the Church, must be willing to adapt and change missional strategies to correspond with the paradigmatic shifts that are happening in our community and the world. Now more than ever, I think we must embrace and embody the importance of breaking outside the walls of our buildings and join the Spirit's work out in the community, meeting people right where they are.

This is the thought behind an exciting new ministry called Beacon of Hope that begins Thursday, February 18, from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. at Beacon Brewery and will continue each third Thursday through June.

First United Methodist has a history of pursuing innovative ministry through Fresh Expressions like "Wing Church" and other community outreach programs. Beacon of Hope is meant to be another Fresh Expression of Church that is established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church or are disengaged from traditional forms of church.

In partnership with Beacon Brewery, who has graciously agreed to host us, we hope to gather to build meaningful community, fuel faith through discussion of some of life's big questions, and be a light to our community through serving those in need in a hands-on way. In February, we plan to build 80 Care Kits that will be



distributed at the LaGrange-Troup County Homeless Coalition Warming Center throughout the rest of the winter season.

Although many of you may not attend, you can still be a part of this new ministry opportunity! First, continue to support the work of the Evangelism Committee that is making this new opportunity possible. Second, pray that God might bless our efforts of reaching new people in this innovative way. In addition, invite those people in your life to participate; perhaps they might better connect with God and others in a different environment than on the beautiful campus of First United Methodist. Don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions or want to learn more about what we're doing and why. I'm looking forward to seeing how God uses this fresh expression of faith as a true Beacon of Hope for our community!

Blessings, The Rev. Ben Wills

FEBRUARY MISSION OF THE MONTH 'Souper Bowl' raises funds for church Soup Kitchen

Ready. Set. SLURRRPPP! Thank you to everyone who bought soup during our church's annual Souper Bowl fundraiser! **Rick Free** and a team of volunteers sold around 430 quarts of homemade soup (potato, vegetable beef, Mexican chicken corn chowder, and white chicken chili) to raise money for the Soup Kitchen.

Between Monday's hot meal, Wednesday's sack lunches, and the addition of Second Saturday meals, the soup kitchen served 4,100 meals in 2020! While many service ministries were forced to stop or reduce their outreach during COVID-19, the Soup Kitchen never missed a beat, safely serving others in the midst of challenging circumstances and expanding their services in 2020. Under Rick's leadership, this missional outreach makes a huge impact in the lives of those served.

None of this would be possible without the volunteer and financial support offered by our congregation. While the Soup Kitchen normally counts on income from Food Service Operations to help offset a portion of the funding for this ministry, normal operations haven't been possible since March 2020. As such, we need your help! In addition to the Souper Bowl fundraiser, you can support the Soup Kitchen, our February Mission of the Month, by writing a check to the church with "missions" or "soup kitchen" in the memo line. You also can give online at lagrangefumc.org/ online-giving and designate your gift to "missions" through the end of February.

If you would like to volunteer in the Soup Kitchen, please contact Rick at rick@lagrangefumc.org. Thanks in advance for your continued generosity as we SHOW the love of God!



Our 'SOUP-er' volunteers included (top photo) Mary Ellen Taylor, Trish Smith, and Laura Shedd. Dorothy Cammon and Gail Dacus are in the right photo. Volunteers not pictured include Jerry and Kay Clement, Bill and Libba Bowling, and Murray Schine.



JANUARY MISSION OF THE MONTH Warming Center



Thank you, church family, by responding so generously to our call to help the LaGrange-Troup County Homeless Coalition's Warming Center, our January Mission of the Month! You exceeded our goal in the first two weeks of January, and ultimately, we presented **Mike Wilson** with a check to the Warming Center for \$2,075 as well as 80 care kits (including 80 sleeping bags with hygiene kits for Warming Center guests. If you would like to volunteer at the Warming Center, please contact **Pastor Ben Wills** at ben@ lagrangefumc.org.

Volunteers needed at food distribution event at Warren Temple UMC

We need volunteers! Feeding the Valley Food Bank will deliver food to Warren Temple UMC, 416 East Depot Street, on **Tuesday, February 23.** Warren Temple will have 10 volunteers on hand to repack the food into boxes to distribute to people who come by the church the following day. Warren Temple is our sister church, and we would like to offer them four additional volunteers to help that day beginning at 11:00 a.m.

On **Wednesday, February 24**, we'll need six volunteers from our church to help at Warren Temple beginning at 10:30 a.m. to help place the boxes on a trailer parked beside the church. Beginning at 11:00 a.m., all 14 volunteers from both WTUMC and FUMC will place boxes from the trailer into vehicles of people who drive up to receive their food, or in some cases will hand boxes to people who walk to the church and line up for their boxes.

We are assured that safe practices will be in place that require masks, vinyl gloves, and social distancing for all volunteers. In addition, appropriate spacing will be required for walk-up recipients to receive their boxes.

The work is anticipated to end around 1:00 p.m. each day. You are more than welcome to volunteer both days! To volunteer, contact **Joe Ragland** at jfragland@centerstatebank.com.

STUDENT MINISTRY by Will Locke, Youth Minister | will@lagrangefumc.org

Happy February, everyone! It is tough to believe Lent is fast approaching when it feels as though Christmas was just yesterday. We are excited to be back in our regular Student Ministries rhythms as the semester is well under way.

TUESDAY PRAYER BREAKFAST

Tuesday Prayer Breakfasts are going strong; be sure to swing by the Wesley Hall parking lot with your students from 7:30 - 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday, February 16, for a brief devotional and a chicken biscuit on their way to school. We really enjoy connecting with our students and seeing their friends during our drive-thru Prayer Breakfasts.

ASH WEDNESDAY

On Ash Wednesday, February 17, come to the Wesley Hall parking lot anytime between 6:45 - 7:45 a.m. for our first-ever **Drive-Thru Imposition of Ashes** designed especially for our children and youth in mind. We also encourage students and their families to attend the church's 6:30 p.m. Ash Wednesday service in the Sanctuary. (We will not have our regular Wednesday NIght Youth.) Please read more on the back page of The Flame.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT YOUTH

During February, Wednesday Night Youth will continue to journey through the Book of Acts as we learn about the Early Church and how the Gospel message spread. Also, we will continue our exploration of different worship methods. A couple weeks ago, I was filled with awe as students wrote words describing how they each view God. While there were some commonalities, the differences reminded me God meets each one of us where we are and speaks to us in unique, specific ways.

One other important change to Wednesday Night Youth is we have been given the freedom to use classrooms on the second floor of the Children's Ministries Building in February and March to provide a more intimate place for small groups to have discussion on Wednesday nights. We look forward to how this new, more intimate setting will help to continue to facilitate thought-provoking small-group discussion.

BLESSINGS IN A BOOK BAG

Thank you to all our students, parents, and small-group leaders who stayed after our recent Youth Lunch to help with our January Service Opportunity: a Mega "Blessings in a Book Bag" Pack! As you can see by the photos on the right, we packaged over 300 meals for food-insecure students at Ethel Kight Elementary School to have food on the weekends. We are immensely grateful to this church for its deep heartbeat to meet immediate needs in our community with the love of Christ. Furthermore, I'm humbled to serve a church who equips students to be the hands and feet of Christ in our community. **Anabeth Ivey,** our assistant youth minister, began Blessings in a Book Bag when the was a high-school student, and our students have continued to give of themselves to offer this program to our community. Thank you, church family, for continuing to encourage, equip and empower each of them to be the hands and feet of Christ today.

UPCOMING TRIPS

Our Spiritual Life Retreat to Camp Glisson is March 12-14, and final payments are due Sunday, February 14. In addition, registration for our mission trip to Pensacola, Florida, on July 11-16 opens Sunday, February 28. The initial deposit for the mission trip is \$100; checks can be made out to the church with "Youth Mission Trip" in the memo line.

May the joy and hope of our Lord Jesus Christ dwell in you richly,

Anabeth Ivey and Will Locke Your Student Ministries Team



Interested in joining a Soul Connections small group?

Fill out the form to the right and return it to the Church Office. You also may sign up online at:

lagrangefumc.org/ soul-connections

QUESTIONS?

Contact Pastor Ben Wills at ben@lagrangefumc.org or 706.884.4635.

If you would like to share any additional information or concerns with us regarding Soul Connections, please include on a separate sheet of paper along with your form. Thank you!

INTEREST FORM

SOUL CONNECTIONS We're better together!

NAME

EMAIL

PHONE

To help us in organizing our small groups, please choose one option below and then fill out the corresponding information in that box.

Please place me in a group that best fits my preferences and schedules.

Check all the days of the week you are available to participate in a group: Monday Friday

Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	

ay 🛛 Saturday esday 🖵 Sunday day

Desired makeup of the group, if any (check one):

- CouplesIntergenerationalYoung Adults
- Parents
- College Age

Preferred way you'd like to meet (check one):

- In-person meetings following COVID protocols
- Digital/online meetings

OPTION 2

Please try to place me in the group hosted by:

- □ John Morgan and Christina Jackson Thursdays, 7:00 pm | Young Adults/ Parents of Young Children
- Kim Burch
 Wednesdays during children's evening church activities | Parents
- Jay and Ida Russell Tuesdays, 6:00 pm | Couples
- Jennifer Emery Mondays, 6:00 pm | Intergenerational
- Ben and Sammi Wills Sundays, 6:00 pm | Intergenerational
- Elissa Lamoree Mondays, 6:30 pm | College Students

Preferred way you'd like to meet (check one):

 In-person meetings following COVID protocols
 Digital/online meetings

Easter

To place an Easter Lily in honor or memory of someone on **Easter Sunday, April 4**, please complete this form and return it to the Church Office along with your check for \$12 made payable to the church (marked "Easter Lily") by **Monday, March 22.** Lilies will be delivered to our homebound members unless you indicate otherwise below. If you are purchasing more than one, simply include all pertinent information below on a separate sheet of paper and include with this form. Questions? Contact **Dodie Patterson** at dodie@lagrangefumc.org or 706.884.4635.

CHECK ONE:	🗅 In Honor	🗅 In Memory	
OF:			
BY:			
CHECK ONE:	Pick up after E	aster Service	Deliver to a homebound member

Thanks to all of you who completed our parent survey! As those involved in children's ministry, our hearts' desire is to see children begin a lifelong adventure with Jesus as their Savior and Lord. But, our time and influence is limited. The greatest influencers in a child's life are his or her parents. It is truly our desire to partner with you in your child's spiritual growth. **Ms. Elissa** and I value your time and suggestions. We will use your feedback to plan for the future as we look at how to most effectively come alongside you and help enhance the spiritual growth of your children.

LENT ADVENTURE FOR KIDS

Be sure to pick up a Lent Adventures book for each child in your family. This 40-page book offers a maze, a coloring page, hidden pictures, riddles, art projects, stories, and more. Besides all the fun and colorful activities, Lent Adventures includes 46 bite-sized devotions that any parent (or an older child) can lead. All devotions are focused on the life and teachings of Christ. They are short, action-driven and heart-focused. By design, they are meant to help parents and children to grow closer to God but also to each other. Books will be available at the church starting February 17 in the Church Office or the Children's Ministry office.

COMMUNITY EASTER EGG HUNT

We need volunteers for our Annual Community Easter Egg Hunt that will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 20. Our community is hungry for fellowship and a sense of something "normal." Please be in prayer about how you can help with our egg hunt. We will be collecting candy-filled eggs and asking for volunteers to stake the field, welcome guests, hide eggs, give out prizes, act as greeters, and host the Stations of the Cross tables. Contact jeanne@lagrangefumc.org to volunteer.

CHILDRENS' CHURCH

A new lesson is available for you and your children each Sunday. If your Sunday is jam-packed and you don't get to the lesson, no worries; the link is available whenever you want to access it. Be sure to check out the lesson using the link on our Facebook page or from First Methodist's Online Order of Worship.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT KIDS

Pre-K 4 to fifth-grade students are invited to join us each Wednesday in February from 5:00 - 6:00 pm. On February 10 we will have our Valentine's party and participate in a service project. We will be creating gifts of love that will be delivered to members at Vernon Woods.

TUESDAY AFTERNOON VISITS

Tuesday afternoon visits with Ms. Elissa and Ms. Jeanne are back, weather permitting. We want to see all of you, however we can! If you'd like us to drop by outside your home on a Tuesday afternoon for a quick 20-minute visit, we would love to do that. Ms. Elissa and I will bring an activity or two and a light snack. We are available from 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. Email me at jeanne@lagrangefumc.org or call to schedule a time for us to come and hang out with your child.

HOW TO ACCESS US:

Our new YouTube channel: LaGrange Children. (You can access our Wednesday Morning WakeUp and other videos on our channel.) Facebook and Instagram: FUMC Children@lagrangefumckids Email: jeanne@lagrangefumc.org

Acolytes Needed

We are in great need of acolytes for the 11:00 a.m. service. Students in fourth or fifth grade through 12th grade and older are welcome.

If you'd like to acolyte with your church friends, we can make that happen by working on the scheduling together. Acolytes need to be strong enough to carry the crosses and torches.

If you have questions, text or email **Nicole Kostial** at 706.957.7624 or kostialfamily@gmail.com.

ASH WEDNESDAY

FEBRUARY 17

Early Morning Ash Wednesday for Our Students | 6:45 - 7:45 a.m.

Come to the Wesley Hall entrance anytime between 6:45 - 7:45 a.m. for our first-ever Drive-Thru Service of the Imposition of Ashes. Though it is designed especially with families of children and youth in mind, it is open to everyone! We won't be having regular Wednesday evening activities for youth and children. The drive-thru will have two car lines outside Wesley Hall and St. Andrew's Chapel to allow everyone to move through quickly while still receiving this sacred and personal act of honest introspection and renewed commitment to leading a life of deeper discipleship following our Crucified and Risen Lord!

Ash Wednesday Worship Service Sanctuary | 6:30 p.m.

If you would like to ask the Risen Lord to clean your heart, ask Him for the faith to re-center your life on Jesus Christ and ask Him for the power to get your daily priorities straight, please join us! The service will include the Imposition of Ashes. Be sure to register to attend the in-person service: bit.ly/inperson_fumc and be prepared to follow our established COVID protocols. The service will be livestreamed on Facebook and our website.



WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!



After nine months of online worship, our pastors have yet another reason to celebrate the return of in-person services: the reception of new members! **Jan and Jim Beyers** had decided to join LaGrange First Methodist months ago, but the pandemic delayed their plans. Much to the delight of their son, **Dr. John Beyers,** our senior minister, they made their membership official in January!



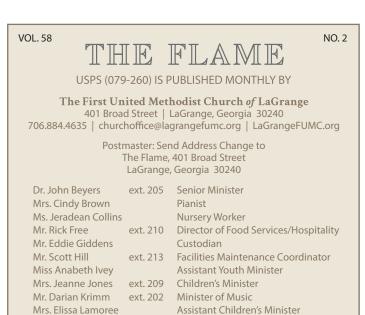
He's made it official! We're so happy to welcome **Will Locke** as one of the newest members of LaGrange First Methodist. Will joined the church staff in July as our new youth minister, and we think he's done a wonderful job as he's navigated the uncharted waters of building relationships with youth and their parents during these times of physical distancing. Thank you, Will, for your grace and leadership.



The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

We rejoiced with **Logan and Christian Johnston** in the baptism of their infant son, **William Adams Johnston**, in February. It was also a time of celebrating big brother, **Jack**, who was celebrating his third birthday the same week! Church member **Kim Adams** is the boys' proud grandmother. As a church, we are committed to loving and supporting the Johnston family as they begin a lifelong journey of nurturing their boys as they learn and grow in their faith.





Mr. Will Lockeext. 215Youth MinisterMs. Maxine OgletreeNursery WorkerMr. Don PapenbrockOrganistMs. Dodie Pattersonext. 204Member Engagement CoordinatorMr. Andy Raineyext. 201Executive MinisterMrs. Natalie Sheltonext. 203Director of CommunicationsThe Rev. Ben Willsext. 206Senior Associate Minister

Our Church Office is open 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Monday to Friday.

We have a secure mail slot to the right of the Trinity Street office-door entrance. In addition, you also may drop off correspondence in our locked black mailbox under the portico on Vernon Street outside the Children's Bulding.

Memorial Gifts

BILLIE MCALEXANDER

(Mother of Dan McAlexander) The Shearon & Taylor Glover Foundation, Inc.

FRANK McCOOK

Libba Trawick Sharon and Alan Jones Natalie and Wayne Shelton Carolyn Alise Jane Willey Shirra and Hoyt Rogers Ellen and Keith Parmer Anne Allen Lauranne Buchanan United Methodist Women Carlene and Dusty Mills Jennie Wadsworth

IRENE KING & KERRY KING

(Parents of Cindy Brown) Virginia Robertson Jane Willey Carlene and Dusty Mills Lea and J.M. Rawlinson Natalie and Wayne Shelton

KATHY KAAP Jane Willey

CHARLES HAYS (Brother of David Hays) Carlene and Dusty Mills **پپ** IN MEMORIAM Dr. Frank McCook January 1, 2021

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IN MEMORIAM Kathy Kaap December 21, 2020

W IN MEMORIAM **Dorothy Darden** December 8, 2020