

~THE ST. JOHN'S POST~

March 2025 Edition

THE SEASON OF LENT:

Many signs and symbols point us toward God's love, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and an ultimate new life.

*Purple is the liturgical color for Lent because it represents repentance and suffering.

*Ashes remind us of our mortal nature. Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.

*A wooden cross that represents the cross Jesus was crucified on.

*A caterpillar represents Jesus's life on earth. The caterpillar then becomes a chrysalis, like a tomb.

*A butterfly emerges from the chrysalis as a sign of new life, The Resurrection.

On March 2nd during hospitality, we would like to show our appreciation to Rev. Bob Romanello for his many years of faithful teaching and sharing of pastoral care with numerous families at St. John's. Due to his growing physical limitations, Rev. Bob has decided to restrict his driving schedule. Therefore, his time as a leader at St. John's is coming to an end. Please join us for the fellowship time at 9:30 am in the fellowship center to show your appreciation to Rev. Bob Romanello.

I am so excited about the upcoming Lenten Season. Generally, by now, we would already be into the season of Lent, but this year, because Easter is late, Ash Wednesday doesn't begin until March 5th.

Sometimes, we get confused about Easter, because it changes yearly. Easter will fall between March 22nd and April 25th, as determined by the first full moon after springtime. This year, the first full moon of springtime is on April 13th; therefore, Easter will be the following Sunday, April 20th.

It's a blessing that we live in the 21st century and not during the early church when persons were often separated from the body of Christ for serious sins they had committed; where, after a process of penance for those sins, could be brought back to the community on Holy Thursday.

We find in Romans 3:23, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Since the death of Christ, he has taken on our sins, repaired our brokenness and made right with the community of faith.

We have so much to be excited about during this Lenten Season starting on March 4th at 5:30pm with our Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper when we rid our kitchens of all fats before Ash Wednesday.

We have two opportunities for all ages of our congregation to participate in Ash Wednesday services:

(1) Beginning at 6:00pm in the fellowship hall, we will have a family-friendly service with active information stations for children to learn about Lent with a child-friendly imposition of ashes.

(2) Our Traditional Ash Wednesday service in the sanctuary will begin at 7:00pm.

A Lenten Bible Study is being offered during the season. There are two sessions for members to join. Elaine Cryderman will lead the Monday afternoon session at 1pm in the loft and Lise Turner will lead the evening session at 6:30pm in the Men's Bible Classroom. Both sessions will meet on Mondays beginning March 10th through April 14th.

On April 6th, join us for Easter Jam, a fun and interactive celebration for families featuring music, games, and the story of Easter. After the excitement, kids can enjoy our Easter Egg Hunt, where they'll search for eggs and experience the joy of the season!

RELEASING THE BUTTERFLIES:

One of the most exciting events during the season of Lent and Easter at our church is the growing of our butterflies.

On Wednesday, March 26th during our worship time, we will assemble our caterpillar cups. This is a fun event where all who are in attendance can participate. As the weeks tick by, the caterpillars prepare to transform as they build their chrysalis.

On Easter Sunday, April 20th our beautiful butterflies are released during both worship services by our Living Cross!

I invite you to come along with all that will happen during Lent this year and get excited as we prepare for the Resurrection together.

Shalom,

Karen



March Reminders

March 1
9am-2pm
Fellowship Center

Mission
U

Communion Sunday
March 2
offering to support
Defend the Fatherless

March 3
6:30pm (FC)
Church Council Mtg.

7pm (MBC)
Book Club

Shrove Tuesday

March 4
Pancake Dinner
5:30 pm (FC)

Family Friendly
Ash Wednesday Service
on March 5 @ 6pm
in the Fellowship Center.



Regular Service
on March 5 @ 7pm
in the sanctuary.

March 10:
Clara Phillips Circle @ 5pm (FC)

March 11th:
Morning Glory Circle @ 10:30am (MBC)

Exercise with Avis:
11am - 11:30am (FC)
Monday - Wed - Friday

Upcoming Meetings: March 2 @ 12:15pm (FC) UMM Meeting
March 2 @ 12:15pm (MBC) Missions Meeting
March 23 @ 12:15pm (MBC) Finance Meeting
March 24 @ 6:30pm (Loft) Trustees Meeting



LENT BIBLE STUDIES: Mondays in March

March 10, March 17, March 24 & March 31 @ 1pm (Loft) and @ 6:30pm (MBC)

*Books can be purchased online at Cokesbury for \$14.99 + tax and shipping.
Please note that the books are hardcover. The paperback books are large print
and cost a little more if you prefer one of those.

LUNCH BUDDIES: Tuesday, March 18 lunch buddies will meet at 11:30am. Our
restaurant of choice is Sonny's BBQ in Rock Hill. The address is: 2781 Cherry Road.
Sign up online or in the Communication Center to join us! All are WELCOME!

MARCH 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p>2</p> <p><u>Transfiguration Sunday</u> <u>Communion</u> (Defend the Fatherless)</p> <p>12:15pm-UMM Mtg (FC)</p> <p>12:15PM-Missions (MBC)</p> <p>4pm-UMYF (Zone)</p>	<p>3</p> <p>6:30pm (FC) Church Council Meeting</p> <p>7pm (MBC) Book Club</p>	<p>4</p> <p>5:30pm (FC) Shrove Tuesday Dinner</p> <p>6:30pm Handbells</p>	<p>5</p> <p>6pm Family Friendly Ash Wed Service Fellowship Center</p> <p>6:30pm Cub Scouts Den Mtgs (FC)</p> <p>7pm Ash Wednesday Worship Service (Sanctuary)</p> <p>NO MEAL TONIGHT</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>7</p> <p>5pm (FC) Set Up Pinewood Derby</p>	<p>1</p> <p>9am-2pm Mission u (FC)</p> <hr/> <p>8</p> <p>9am Cub Scouts (FC) Pinewood Derby</p> <p>10am-New Women's Group Meeting @ Barri Helms' home</p>
<p>9</p> <p><u>1st Sunday in Lent</u></p> <p>Daylight Saving Time Begins</p>  <p>4pm-UMYF (Zone)</p>	<p>10</p> <p>1pm (Loft) Lent Study</p> <p>5pm (FC) Clara Phillips Circle</p> <p>6:30pm (MBC) Lent Study</p>	<p>11</p> <p>10:30am (MBC) Morning Glory Circle</p> <p>4pm-8pm Preschool Spirit Night @ Wing King</p> <p>6:30pm Handbells</p> <p>7pm Scouts (FC)</p>	<p>12</p> <p>5:15pm Music Makers</p> <p>5:45pm Dinner</p> <p>6:30pm Worship</p> <p>6:30pm REAL Kids</p> <p>6:30pm Den Meetings Cub Scouts</p>	<p>13</p> <p>2pm-until (Kitchen) In Use Missions Team</p>	<p>14</p> <p>Kitchen in Use-Missions Preparing to serve meal @ Bethel Shelter</p>	<p>15</p>
<p>16</p> <p>Fellowship Center In Use 1pm-4pm</p> <p>4pm-UMYF (Zone)</p>	<p>17</p> <p>1pm (Loft) Lent Study</p> <p>6:30pm (MBC) Lent Study</p> 	<p>18</p> <p>11:30am-Lunch Buddies Sonny's BBQ</p> <p>6:30pm Handbells</p> <p>7pm Scouts (FC)</p>	<p>19</p> <p>5:15pm Music Makers</p> <p>5:45pm Dinner</p> <p>6:30pm Worship</p> <p>6:30pm REAL Kids</p>	<p>20</p>	<p>21</p>	<p>22</p> <p>4pm-6pm (FC) Connections Team Sock Hop Spring Event Ice Cream Social</p>
<p>23</p> <p>4pm-UMYF Top Golf</p>	<p>24</p> <p>1pm (Loft) Lent Study</p> <p>6:30pm (MBC) Lent Study</p> <p>6:30pm (Loft) Trustees Meeting</p>	<p>25</p> <p>6:30pm Handbells</p> <p>7pm Scouts (FC)</p>	<p>26</p> <p>5:15pm Music Makers</p> <p>5:45pm Dinner</p> <p>6:30pm Caterpillar Cup Assembly</p> <p>6:30pm Cub Scouts Pack Meeting (Sanctuary)</p>	<p>27</p>	<p>28</p>	<p>29</p>
<p>30</p> <p>11am Children & Youth Sunday</p> <p>REAL Kids Movie Outing-12:15pm</p> <p>4pm-UMYF (Zone)</p>	<p>31</p> <p>1pm (Loft) Lent Study</p> <p>6:30pm (MBC) Lent Study</p>					

Every Sunday (Unless Otherwise Noted):

8:30am & 11:00am: Worship Service

9:45am: Hospitality

10:00am: Sunday School

2:00pm: Choir Practice

Every Monday-Wednesday-Friday:

Exercise with Avis (11am-11:30am)-FC

(Changes to schedule will be given in previous class)

GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP:

March 12 & March 26 @ 4:30pm (MBC)

CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY

We extend our Christian Sympathy to the family of Sue Ralls (Leslie Nielsen's grandmother) who passed away January 23, 2025.

We extend our Christian Sympathy to the family of Kay Gibson who passed away on January 28, 2025.

We extend our Christian Sympathy to the family of Juanita "Jay" Edmondson (R.W. Edmondson's sister-in-law) who passed away on January 31, 2025.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF KAY GIBSON:

by Benny & Joyce Patterson, George Rhinehardt, Brent & Bonnie Meche,
New Wesley Fellowship, Joy Honeycutt and H.F. & Meredith Jackson

IN LOVING MEMORY OF JUANITA "JAY" EDMONDSON

by New Wesley Fellowship

IN LOVING MEMORY OF ABBY TALLEY:

by New Wesley Fellowship



LET'S CELEBRATE!

March Birthdays & Anniversaries

LET'S CELEBRATE!

March 1 James Easterling
Hayes Harroff
March 5 Wayne Bouldin
Anna McAteer
March 7 Joan Pate
March 8 Doris Massey
March 9 James Wolfe
March 11 Cori Mitchell
March 13 Reggie Adkins
March 15 Nancy Stark

Anne Purcell
Michele Gainey

March 16 Lise Turner

March 17 Greg Bonéy
Jennifer Mayes
Cru Young
Johnny Myers

March 18 Sarah Ochoa

March 19 Tyler Edwards

March 20 Colton Clyburn
Myra Vaughn

March 22 Emily McQuay
Brianna Messer
William Isenhour
Bryson Newland

March 23 Joe Brown

March 24 Ruth Orwig

March 25 Chip Heemsoth
Luke Henley

March 26 Tracy Olinger
Jim Walker
Charlotte Walker

March 27 David Hord
Emory Mae Creel

March 28 Phyllis Helms

March 29 Rob Robinson

March 31 Leslie Nielsen

March 2 David & Rachel Cameron

March 10 John & Mary Vaughan

March 11 Steve & Minda Siebert

March 20 Zeke & Jan Patterson

March 22 Benny & Joyce Patterson

Michael & Anissa Miller

March 23 Anthony & Nancy Rivers



March Community Meals

DINNER @ 5:45PM

WORSHIP @ 6:30PM

REAL KIDS @ 6:30PM (MBC)

Costs:

age 13 & older (\$8 per person)

age 12 & under (free)

Family maximum (\$20)

**Sign up deadline is the Sunday before the meal.*

Chili, Cornbread, Salad and Dessert

**March
12**

Chicken & Noodles, Carrots
and Dessert

**March
19**

Spaghetti, Garlic Bread, Salad and
Dessert

**March
26**

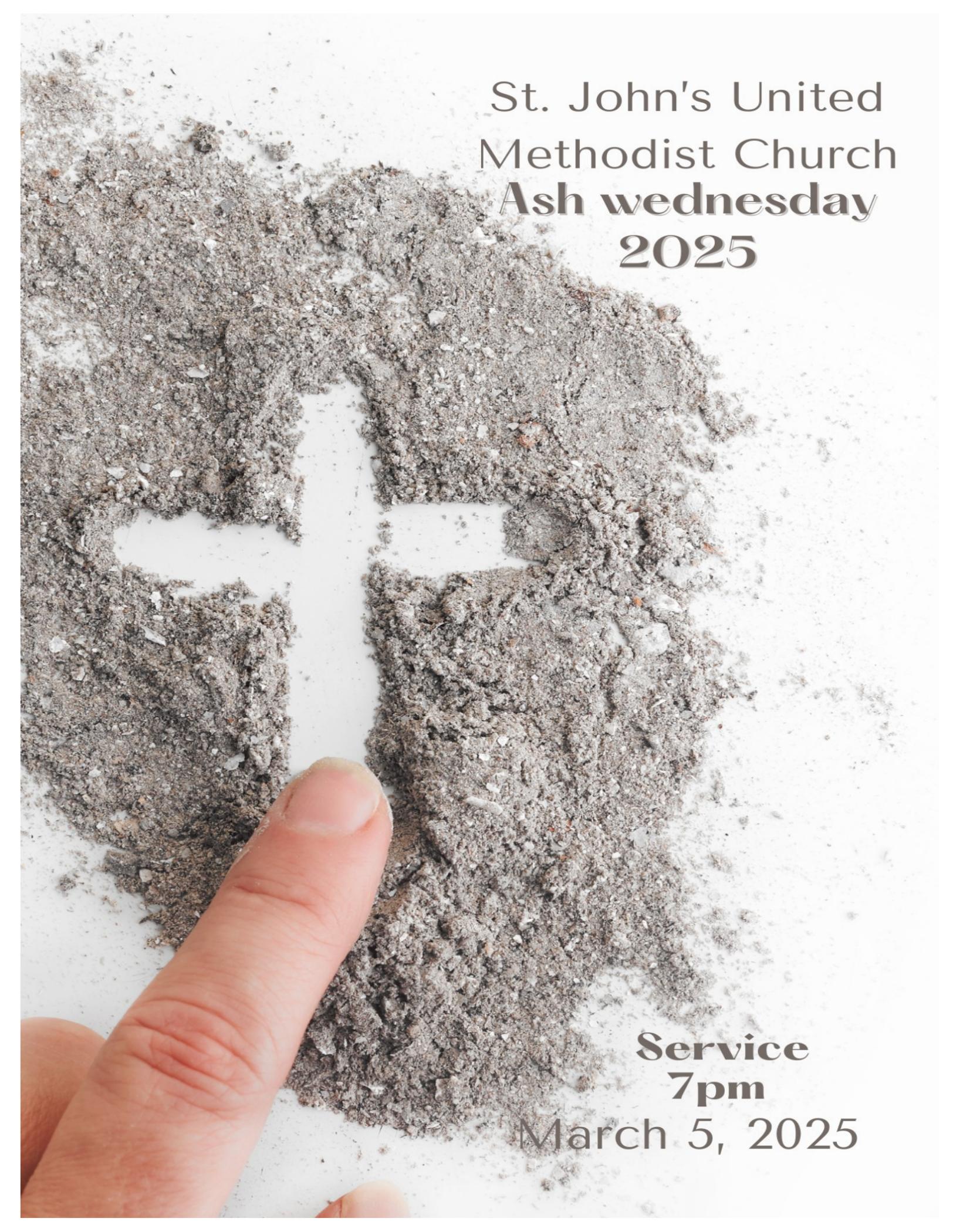
April 9 - Easter Jam
(for those who missed it @ the egg hunt)

May 7 - Outdoor Cookout
(Last Community Meal & worship)

Family-Friendly Ash Wednesday

Join us for a Family-Friendly Ash Wednesday Service on March 5th from 6:00–6:30 P.M. Experience prayer stations and the Imposition of Ashes in a way that engages all ages.





**St. John's United
Methodist Church
Ash wednesday
2025**

**Service
7pm
March 5, 2025**

March 2025

Children and Youth News

Children and Youth Director: Mallory Capps- stjohnsumc.youthandchildren@gmail.com- (843)-504-5419

Join us for a family-friendly Ash Wednesday service on March 5th at 6:00 P.M. This special service welcomes all ages to participate as we begin our journey toward Easter together. This month will be filled with meaningful activities as we prepare for Easter! We'll be growing our butterflies and getting ready for our Annual Easter Egg Hunt—stay tuned for more details! Looking ahead, Vacation Bible School (VBS) is coming soon! Mark your calendars for June 16-20, and consider volunteering to help make this a fun and faith-filled experience for our kids. Let's make this season one of growth, service, and celebration!



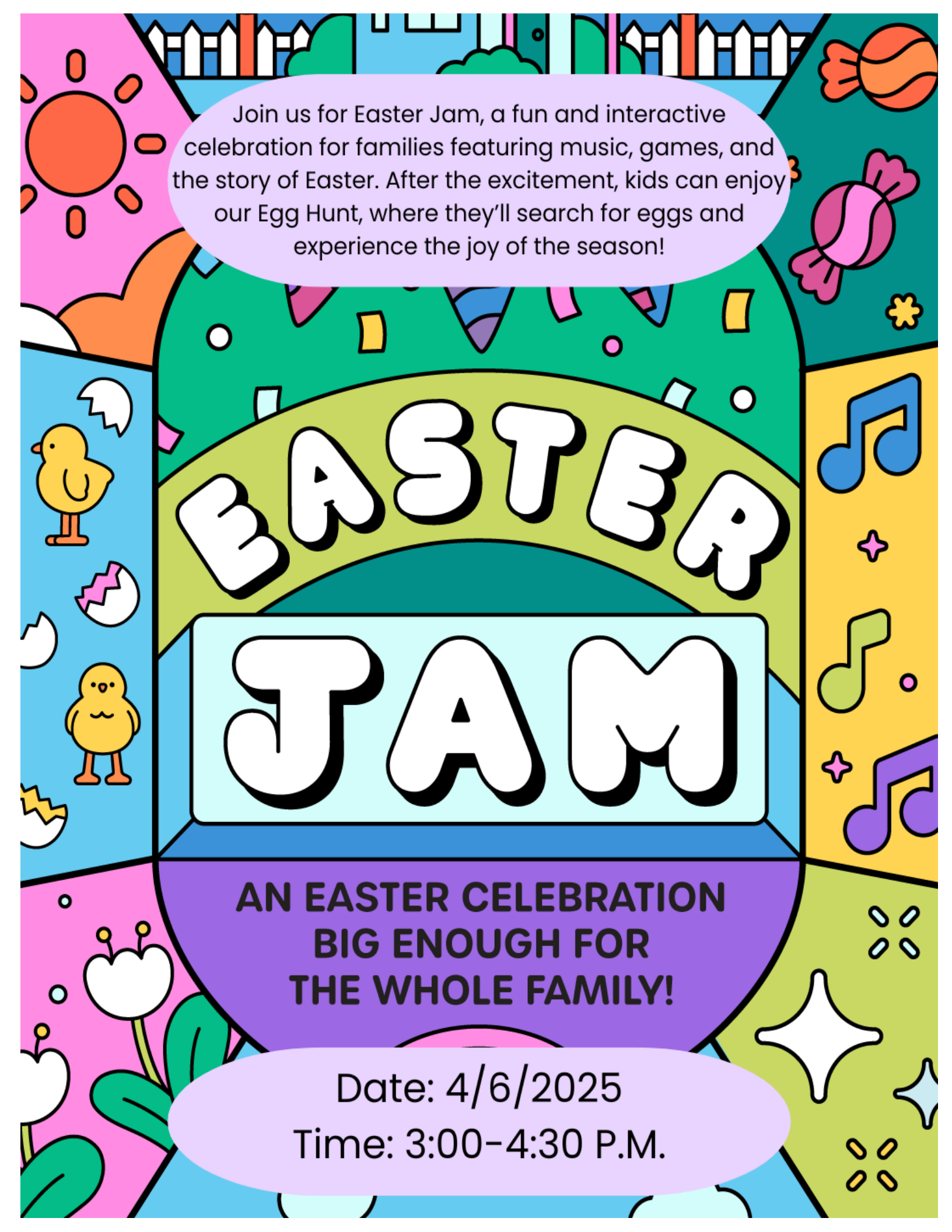
UPCOMING EVENTS

COME JOIN US!

REAL Kids will be March 12 & March 19 at 6:30 during our Community Meal and Worship. This is open for all children ages 3- 5th grade!

UMYF will be on March 2, March 9, March 16, March 23, and March 30 at 4:00pm-5:30pm.





Join us for Easter Jam, a fun and interactive celebration for families featuring music, games, and the story of Easter. After the excitement, kids can enjoy our Egg Hunt, where they'll search for eggs and experience the joy of the season!

EASTER JAM

**AN EASTER CELEBRATION
BIG ENOUGH FOR
THE WHOLE FAMILY!**

Date: 4/6/2025
Time: 3:00-4:30 P.M.

BIBLE QUIZ

submitted by Rev. Bob Romanello

Early in my teaching career I was asked by the administrative council at the Minford, Ohio, UMC to teach The Gospel of John for thirteen weeks at Wednesday Night Bible Study. It was a great learning experience for me. Some of you have participated in a like study. Do you remember how Jesus described himself in the seven "I AMs?" He said:

- "I am the _____ of Life" (John 6:35)
- "I am the _____ of the World" (John 8:12)
- "I am the _____ (John 10:7, 9)
- "I am the _____ Shepherd" (John 10:11, 14)
- "I am the _____ and the _____" (John 11:25)
- "I am the Way, the _____, and the _____" (John 14:6)
- "I am the _____ Vine" (John 15:1, 5)

You should commit verses 11:25-26 to memory. They describe in Jesus' own words who Jesus is, and, when someone asks, you have an answer.

some possible answers are:

Bread, good, light, resurrection, vine, life, door.



CONGRATULATIONS!!



Kathryn & Austyn Harroff are the proud parents of baby boy Roland "Ro" Thomas Harroff born February 5, 2025.

He weighed 6 lbs. 13 oz. David & Phyllis Harroff are baby Ro's proud grandparents. Congratulations to everyone!

Reed & Sierra Lewis (grandson of Phil & Cynthia Lewis) are the proud parents of baby boy Hudson Lewis born February 18, 2025.

He weighed 7 lbs. 10 oz. Hudson is Phil & Cynthia's 2nd great-grandchild. Congratulations to everyone!

MUSIC DEPARTMENT NEWS!

Dr. Jonathan Hall, Music Director

APRIL 13 IS PALM SUNDAY:

The adult choir looks forward to presenting the Easter cantata, "Glorious Cross," on Palm Sunday. We hope you can join us at the 8:30am or 11am worship service!

We would love to have you join the choir, please attend a rehearsal on Sunday afternoons from 2-3 p.m., if you are interested!



SUPPORT OUR CHORAL SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Each year, we are blessed to welcome Choral Scholars who enhance our worship by supplementing our adult choir. These beloved individuals not only contribute their voices each week but also assist with rehearsals, helping us create a richer, more vibrant worship experience for all.

The Choral Scholars program is entirely funded by contributions from our church community. Your generosity makes it possible to continue offering this valuable ministry.

If you are able, please consider donating to the Choral Scholars fund. Your support ensures that this important program can continue to thrive and enrich our worship services for years to come.

Thank you for helping us keep this beautiful tradition alive!

WEE School News



W.E.E. School Fundraising Spirit Nights

Mark your calendars and come out and support our W.E.E. School!

March 11th 4pm–8pm Wing King Fort Mill

April 1st 3pm–7pm Abbott's Fort Mill

Spring Event

Please join us on April 11th from 5:30pm–7:00pm in the fellowship center for an evening of "sports" fun, which will include games for the children and concessions. This event is open to everyone; we would love to have you join us for an evening of family fun. More information coming soon.

Scholastic Book Fair

Our Scholastic Book Fair will be held May 5th–9th in the Fellowship Center and will be open during the Community Meal.



 SCHOLASTIC

Registration 2025–2026

We still have spots available for next school year. Please pass along to your family and friends. We would love to have them join us at W.E.E.

School. For more information or to register please contact email sjumcweeschool@gmail.com

www.sjumcweeschool.org Beth Meador, Director sjumcweeschool@gmail.com

MISSIONS COMMITTEE NEWS!

Planning for Kindness Week has already started and we will be keeping you updated on how you can participate. We are looking for suggestions about new ways we can serve our community that week.



We delivered five containers of items to Tender Hearts and two 55 gallon bags of clothing to Bethel Day Shelter. We also purchased, assembled, and organized two clothing racks for the shelter. They are currently in need of trial size hand sanitizer, trial size deodorant for men and women, and little kleenex packets.



We need your help! Our Youth Group will be preparing and serving a meal at the Bethel Shelter for approximately 100 - 120 people. Everyone who is interested is invited to participate. We need people to prepare and package food the evening of Thursday, March 13. We also need volunteers to deliver and serve the food on Friday, March 14. We will be leaving the church at 4:30pm and should be back around 8:00pm. We will send out a sign-up sheet for donations of food and paper products.

The Fort Mill Care Center is currently in need of rice (1 lb. bags), pasta sauce, canned fruit, applesauce, canned meat, jelly, and snacks. These items, along with donations for Bethel Day Shelter and Tender Hearts, can be placed in the collection center beside the fellowship hall entrance.

Please join us for our next two meetings on March 2 and April 6 in the Men's Bible Classroom after the 11:00 service. Everyone is welcome to attend.

CONNECTIONS TEAM NEWS!

Joan Pate & Barri Helms, Co-Chairs

Welcome March! I don't know about all of you, but I'm ready for warmer weather, flowers coming up, and a beautiful spring. We hope you enjoyed the Newlywed Game in February at the Community Meal. Thanks to all our couples for making it fun.

Are you ready for a good old fashioned Spring Sock Hop? How about ice cream floats? Get your poodle skirts out, dancing shoes on, and be ready for some great ice cream floats.

We need all ages to come out Saturday March 22nd at 4 pm. I hear Mallory already has her poodle skirt and needs all the youth to dance with her.

Please join us for 5th Sunday Breakfast on March 30th. We welcome anyone to bring a casserole, juice, or fruit. Look for the sign ups! This is a great time for everyone to come together for food and fellowship!



NEW WOMEN'S GROUP



A new women's group is forming at St. John's, focused on service and community! This group will organize service projects in schools, the local community, and other areas in need. Whether you have a passion for volunteering or just want to connect with others while making a difference, we invite you to join us. Our first meeting will be on March 8, 2025 for a casual gathering over coffee and donuts, where we'll discuss the group's name, upcoming projects, and meeting times. The meeting will be at Barri Helms home at 413 Banks Street, Fort Mill. We will begin at 10am. All are welcome—come be a part of something meaningful!

● ● ● ● ASH WEDNESDAY STEWARDSHIP ● ● ● ●

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Genesis 3:19

With these ancient words from Genesis 3:19 and the swipe of an ash covered thumb across our foreheads, Ash Wednesday propels us into Lent with the proper context to understand our lives as stewards of the riches God entrusts to us.

The essential teaching of Ash Wednesday – that we are just mortals, after all dispels our pretensions, and drives us deep into God's mysteries. Why are we here? What are our lives all about? What's really important? Pray over these questions and profound insights emerge.

WE ARE DUST:

Yes, but we are God's dust. Our body consists of trillions of atoms, each a speck of "dust" created by God, billions of years ago. God put us together from the stuff of the universe.

· Therefore, we are quite literally "earthy" beings, made of the same material as air, water, soil and stone. Part of creation, we work to preserve and sustain God's creation for future generations. Therefore, we revere and care for our bodies through healthy living.

WE ARE BREATH:

We are not only dust. Genesis 2:7 describes us as "dust" into which God has "breathed the Holy breath of life." Our lives are the breath of God in our dust.

- Therefore, every breath we take is holy, a prayer that whispers God's praise.
- Therefore, we look to God to align our lives with God's holy reality that arcs towards peace, love, joy, justice, and truth.

OUR TIME IS BRIEF:

The "dust" that is us will return to the earth. We have a finite number of minutes.

- Therefore, every hour, every second is sacred. There is not a single moment to waste. We spend our time wisely, carefully, prayerfully.
- Therefore, we do not cling to our possessions, knowing that we will leave it all behind.
- Therefore, we nourish our lives with lasting treasures – relationships, trust, love, joy, service, generosity, and harmony.

This Lent spend time in prayer, with openness and honesty. See how God will transform you into the person you were created to be. Reflect each day on Ash Wednesday.

"Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

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submitted by Martha Jones

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

submitted by
Nancy Rivers, Team Lead

Are you one of the rare people who find change comfortable? Most of us do not. However, change is often necessary for growth. With that in mind, it is time to consider the effectiveness of our current Sunday School class offerings. I am seeking your opinion!!! Please, reach out to me via email with your thoughts on the following:



1. Do you currently attend a Sunday School class at least once every month, on average?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with the Sunday School class offerings we currently have? (1 for Not Satisfied to 10 for Extremely Satisfied)
3. Which type(s) of class format appeals to you most?
 - a. Lecture, primarily
 - b. Discussion, for most of the time
 - c. Activity based with a high level of engagement
 - d. Bible study
 - e. Faith and spiritual growth focused
 - f. How Christianity relates to events in the news today
 - g. Intergenerational class
 - h. Small class size – 10 or fewer
 - i. Medium class size – 11 – 18
 - j. Large class size – 19 or more
 - k. Grouped by age
 - l. Other, please describe
4. Please, share any additional thoughts you have on Sunday School classes.

Your input can be sent to me at nriversnc@gmail.com . Thank you!

United Women in Faith

All women are invited to join us as much or as little as you wish. The list below are some opportunities available to you through United Women in Faith, in addition to our regular circle meetings:

•**Mini-Mission u, March 1, at St. John's. See bulletin insert for more information.**

•**Legislative Advocacy Day, Tuesday, March 18**

~“Faithful Advocacy; Faithful Service; Transforming Justice and Energy”

~Epworth Children's Home; 2900 Millwood Ave; Columbia, SC

~8:00 am – 8:30 am Registration

~Program begins at 9:00 am

~See Nancy Rivers or Brenda Stowe to register

•**Mission u at Spartanburg Methodist College, July 17 – 19, 2025**

~This year's theme is “Practicing Hope”

~This is a wonderful time of worship, learning, fellowship, supporting one another, spiritual growth, fun, and good food.

•**Reading Program**

~A list of books on the program is generated each year.

~St. John's United Women in Faith has purchased some books and has plans to purchase more. These books are available in our church library.

•**United Women in Faith bulletin board – did you know we have one?
It is located in the hall outside the W.E.E. School office. Check it out!**

UNITED METHODIST MEN

Steve Siebert, UMM President

Upcoming Meeting

St. John's United Methodist Men will be having its first meeting in the Fellowship Center immediately after the 11:00 AM service on Sunday, March 2.

All men of the church are invited to attend, so if you are seeing this message for the first time while you are at church on March 2 please feel free to join us.

A light lunch will be served, and during this meeting we will discuss officers for 2025 as well as a calendar of events for the upcoming year.



Upcoming Event!!

Please be aware that there is an upcoming event that requires assistance from a whole lot of volunteers from the congregation.

Our church will again be an official parking location for the Fort Mill Strawberry Festival, and this year the event will take place both Friday and Saturday, May 2 and 3.

More details will be provided as we get closer to this date, but I wanted everyone to mark this date on their calendars.


This has the potential to be a significant fundraiser for UMM (and it can't possibly get rained out in back-to-back years, right??).

Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions about St. John's United Methodist Men.

EPWORTH CHILDREN'S HOME

Katherine Burns, Epworth Representative

A Celebration: Leena's Big Day



Leena came to Epworth last fall after her mother was sentenced to prison. While the four-year old was home, a violent domestic dispute between her parents erupted and the authorities arrested her mother during the incident. When the Department of Social Services investigated the living situation, DSS determined that the home was a dangerous situation for a young girl to be in. Leena experienced physical and verbal abuse and various forms of neglect in her young life. Because Leena's mother was in prison, and because there was no safe alternative, Leena was placed at Epworth. When she arrived in Asbury cottage, it was evident that she had been traumatized by the recent events in her life. She sobbed uncontrollably for hours at a time. She was withdrawn, and afraid to embrace the people around her. Her world was broken. Sadness and fear had taken over her life. Ms. Jamie and Ms. Linda, her cottage staff, consoled her and spent many hours with her to help ease the shock of being separated from her parents and the only home she had ever known. In the earliest days that followed her arrival, Leena became very dependent on the adults in her cottage. She used them to build a shell of safety around herself. The other little girls in the cottage would try to play with her and include her in activities, but Leena resisted their efforts.

After a period of getting to know her and assessing her needs, a care plan was developed to assist her staff in working toward common goals for Leena. She was enrolled in preschool to help establish a routine, build independence, and ease the sadness in her life. At four she was too

young for kindergarten, but fortunately the preschool at the Epworth Early Intervention Center (EEIC) had an opening. The EEIC is a program designed to serve children with developmental delays. The EEIC also serves typically developing children. Non-typically developing children are matched with typically developing children who model and encourage new skills. Leena did not have signs of delays, in fact she was quite advanced for her age, so she served as a model and peer. The school meets in the classroom building at the church on the Epworth campus. This enabled Leena to go to preschool without the added stress of leaving the campus. Her teacher, Ms. Sandy, still remembers when Leena came to the preschool the first day. The preschoolers start every morning by sitting in a circle. They sing and begin their lesson for the day. Leena cried during the ritual. Ms. Sandy tried to comfort her, but Leena continued to cry as the morning went along. The next day there were fewer tears. By the end of the week during opening circle, Leena spoke for the first time.

The lesson of the day was "Where We Live" and the children were asked to tell others where they lived. One by one, the children replied with their city and some even recited their street address. When it was Leena's turn she sat up and said, "My name is Leena and I live in the college at Epworth."

Ms. Sandy smiled at the first words Leena shared with the class, and then politely corrected her, "That's right Leena, you live in the cottage here at Epworth!"

After that moment, Leena started to open up a little with Ms. Sandy. As she grew more comfortable with her surroundings, she not only became active in her lessons, but she started helping Ms. Sandy work with the other children. Some of the children in the school use wheelchairs and have limited mobility. When one of them would drop a toy and was unable to reach it, Leena would be the first to pick it up and give it back. If a child cried she comforted him or her by singing. "She had such amazing empathy for other children and such a sweet spirit," Ms. Sandy recalled. Her role as "Ms. Sandy's helper" gave her confidence in herself, and she began to build friendships with others. She became close friends with two of the other children in the class. They played together, and slowly smiles and giggles replaced Leena's tearful demeanor.

Her growth in the preschool classroom immediately transferred back to the cottage. Ms. Linda and Ms. Jamie saw the weepy and clingy Leena transform into a different child.

They were amazed at the changes they saw in Leena. She emerged from her shell and became active in the cottage. She taught her favorite songs from preschool to the other girls in the cottage, and told them about what she learned every morning. She brought back schoolwork, and the staff and other girls helped her practice her alphabet, writing, and numbers. She wanted to read books constantly. One day Ms. Jamie sat down to read her a story out of her Bible. Ms. Jamie read it aloud to her and Leena clung to every word. When they had finished, Leena took the book and recited the story back to Ms. Jamie, page by page.

As Leena became comfortable at Epworth, she became a social butterfly around campus. She played dress up with the other girls, and even gained the reputation as the best hair stylist on campus. The staff pulled out feather boas, tiaras and princess dresses for the children to strut around in as they played in the cottage. Leena told jokes along the way, keeping the mood light and fun as they played.

The close relationships she built with new friends in the cottage and at preschool gave Leena the confidence to become more independent and adventurous. Once reluctant to do anything outside of her comfort zone, she now loved to try new things and developed a little motto which she repeats to anyone who will listen, "Don't cry until you try!" She really blossomed into a healthy and happy little girl.

By the end of July, the preschool year was ending and it was time for Leena to graduate and go to kindergarten. The graduation ceremony was held at Epworth Memorial United Methodist Church on campus. When she woke up that morning she could not wait to get there. Ms. Jamie helped her put on a new dress and fixed her hair. They walked to the church with excitement. She joined her classmates from the preschool where Ms. Sandy was waiting on her with a graduation cap and gown. She put on her gown but when her teacher went to place the cap on her head, Leena jumped and said, "Ms. Sandy don't mess up my hair!" Ms. Sandy assured her that she would be careful and her hair would look great for the ceremony.

Meanwhile, the rest of the girls and staff in Asbury cottage made their way into the sanctuary. As they filed into a pew, one of Leena's best friends leaned over to Ms. Jamie and asked, "Why are we here?"

"This is Leena's preschool graduation. This is her big day," Ms. Jamie replied. Still bewildered the girl responded, "What is a graduation?" The question stopped Ms. Jamie in her tracks. By this time the entire cottage was tuned in to Ms. Jamie's response. "A graduation is a celebration for completing your school work and moving on to something new. The question stopped Ms. Jamie in her tracks. By this time the entire cottage was tuned in to Ms. Jamie's response. "A graduation is a celebration for completing your school work and moving on to something new. Leena is graduating from preschool and is going to go to kindergarten." She went on to explain to the girls that graduations happen at many different levels and that when they complete school they too would have their own graduations one day.

Just as Ms. Jamie finished her impromptu life skills lesson about graduation, the preschool students came into the church in front of their proud teachers, family and friends to start the ceremony. The EEIC preschool has a long tradition of actively involving family members in the graduation ceremony. When it came time to hand-out diplomas, the teachers invited the family members to come forward to hand the child the diploma. One by one moms, dads and siblings came to the front of the room as their child walked across the front of the church to receive the diploma. Then came Leena's turn. Ms. Sandy stood up and said, "Would the family of Leena please come forward." The entire pew of her cottage mates and staff stood up. Leena's face lit up with a huge smile as they walked forward. Some of the parents and friends at the graduation never knew that Leena lived at Epworth, but now her family—all seven other little girls and her staff—

stood right there in front of everyone. Ms. Sandy called Leena's name and she walked to her family to receive her diploma. Everyone's eyes were filled with tears of joy and hope. It was indeed Leena's big day. She left the ceremony and returned to the cottage to have a full graduation party to celebrate. The cottage bought her graduation presents—new outfits for kindergarten. And just a few weeks ago, Leena wore one of those new outfits to her first day of kindergarten.

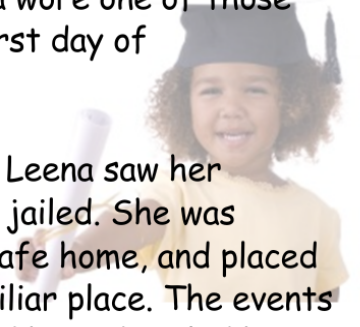
In just the one year, Leena saw her mother arrested and jailed. She was removed from an unsafe home, and placed into care in an unfamiliar place. The events she experienced could have derailed her childhood and beyond, but the transformational care she received at Epworth prevented her from spiraling into a cycle of despair. As Leena begins kindergarten her future is bright and joy has become part of her childhood.

What's next for Leena?

Leena is doing great at kindergarten and loves being in the cottage. During the last year her mother has been released from prison and is currently working to put her life back together.

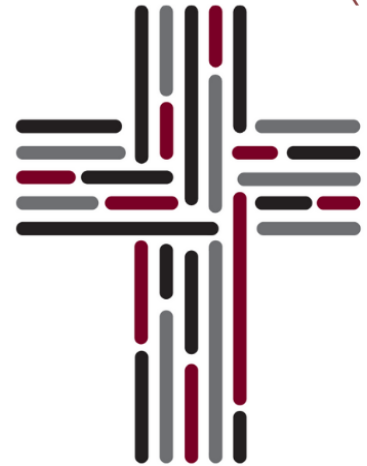
The hope is that Leena and her mom might one day be reunited but for now the two are enjoying supervised visits on the Epworth campus and phone calls whenever they can. As they work toward reunification, Epworth will provide family counseling to her and her mother so they can grow into a healthy family. There is currently no timeline for family reunification. The Department of Social Services will ultimately make that determination.

But as long as Leena is at Epworth, she will receive the loving care that she needs to continue to bloom.



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Nancy Rivers Handbell Director
Jennifer Isenhour Music Leader- Wednesday Worship
Suzanne Fisher Kitchen Coordinator
Maggie Helms Custodian
Katherine Burns Music Makers Director
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***...TO BE CHRIST TO ALL PEOPLE BY LIVING OUT GOD'S CALL
TO LOVE, SERVE, AND TRANSFORM THE WORLD.***