



**First United Methodist Church  
Downtown Bentonville  
Year End Report  
July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024**

## A Word from your Finance Chair and Lead Pastor

This is our third year end report to put before our congregation together. We look forward to these because we get to celebrate the amazing work of this congregation, and plan for what is ahead! There is much to celebrate! Even as we acknowledge the tardiness of this year's report, it is due at least in part to some exciting developments for our church that are detailed in these pages.

But we like to lead out with highlights of our outgoing and incoming budget year. We are excited to share that in 2023-24, we exceeded projected revenue by nearly \$75,000. We also came in under budget on expenses by just over \$21,000. That means we had an excess at the end of the year of almost \$100,000! What an incredible year! Those numbers are due primarily to three things: your abundant generosity, your willingness to serve our church and community as volunteers, and careful stewardship of the resources we are now accumulating. The finance committee is particularly proud of restructuring our accounts so that now much of our money works for us. By holding some funds in CDs, we were able to generate nearly \$18,000 in interest last year. All of that revenue was unbudgeted and contributed to our excess.

We know, however, that you do not give us funds so that they sit in accounts. While we do keep some funds back to cover us in case of catastrophe, the vast majority of what comes in goes right back out to make a difference for Christ in our community. And we are making a difference in our community! From our school partnerships, to our environmental work, to aiding in tornado recovery, to engaging in challenging problem-solving in our area through our interactions with government, school, and community officials, FUMC Downtown Bentonville is more and more becoming known as a church that does not exist for itself, but exists to serve and love others. This past year we grew the school partnerships, significantly filling in some gaps like supporting the kids at Gateway, Bentonville's online and alternative high school, by offering service opportunities (now required for graduation) and organizing a Career Fair aimed just at them. We also kicked off our Environmental Care Team, who has already impacted our community with the Environmental Fair. Both that team and the school partnerships were significantly supported by funds from our General Endowment,





which over the last few years has been able to support new ministries for us.

And within the pages of this report, you will also learn of the tremendous growth in our Youth and Children's programs. We want to lift up a couple of things that will not be in those reports, however. First, Allison shared with us earlier this year that the largest population of kids she has are preschoolers! We celebrate what that means for us now, and what it means for the years to come as these families develop relationships with one another and grow together. We can see this as the Sprouts Sunday school class, a group of mostly parents with kids of all ages now at times has as many as 30 people in it, and the new Sunday school class Parents of Preschoolers continues to grow almost weekly. And as for Youth, for a program that just three years ago had 3 youth attending, we now regularly see 25+ at weekly and special events. There are as many as 40 youth regularly engaged in our program!

With such growth comes a need to grow resources as well. And that is where the exciting news continues! Looking closely at giving trends and 2024-25 commitments, still figuring carefully and conservatively, our church has approved a budget this year of \$1,275,298. This is an increase of nearly \$100,000, but only \$25,000 more than we brought in last year, and only an 8% increase on last year's budget. It is in line with expected revenues. This also includes a combined youth and children budget growing by around 85%, and a 50% increase to the worship budget. Community outreach is also doubled. In short, this is a realistic budget that has grown where we need it to grow, not ahead of where we need it to grow.

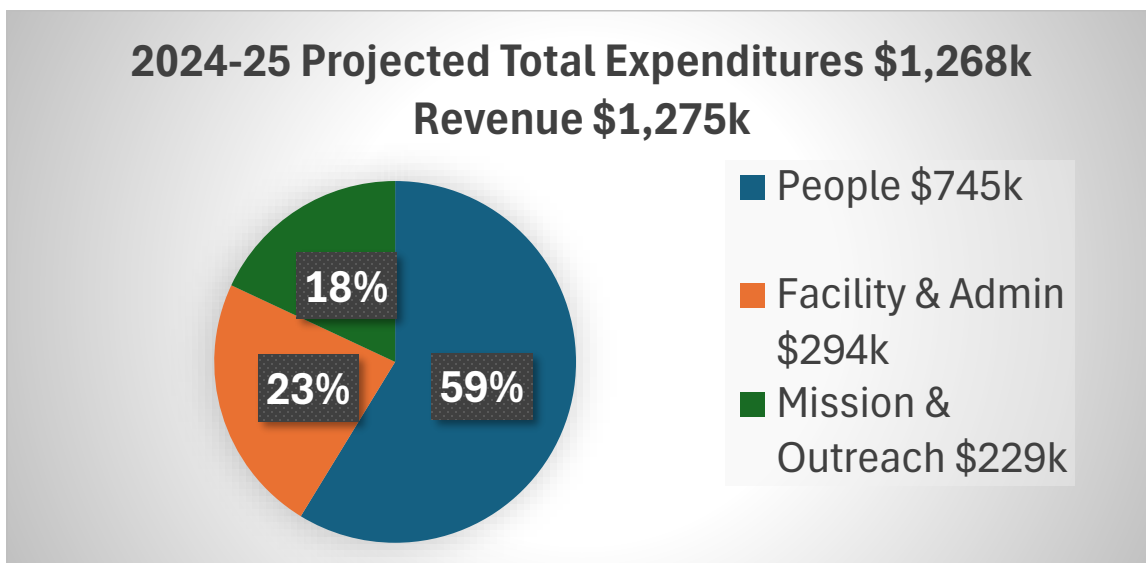
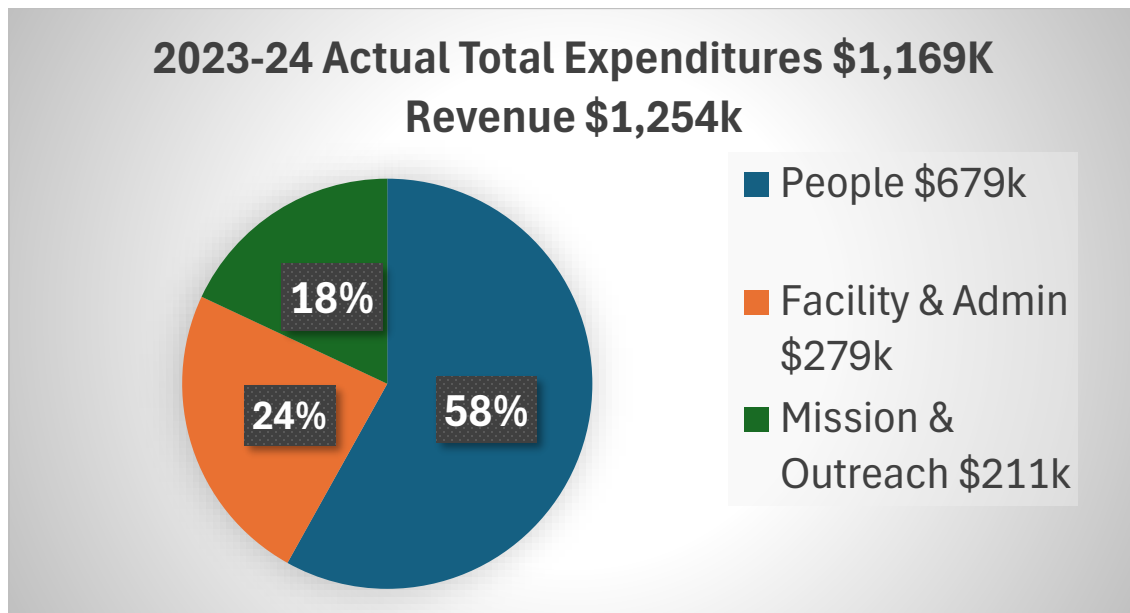
Now, the rest is up to you. A budget is an aspirational document – a work of faith. Whether it actually comes to be relies on your expression of that faith. All the ways you give – through time, talents, and money – make a difference. We are this much closer to reaching our Beyond Us 2023 goal of 25% of the budget going to mission and outreach. We have made it this far through your tremendous faith – in Christ and in each other! Let's keep moving forward as we make all the difference for Jesus right here in Downtown Bentonville!

Grace and peace,

Chris Knight – Finance Chair  
Michelle Morris – Lead Pastor

# Budget Comparison

As mentioned in the opening letter, due to your incredible generosity, we exceeded revenue projections from last year by almost \$75,000. We also kept expenses under budget, giving us a phenomenal 2023-24! For next year, you can see that we have projected expenditures that are lower than projected revenue by a few thousand dollars. The Finance Committee determined that, rather than just trying to push it into a category, we would list it as reserve in the budget. It will serve as cushion should we develop a new community outreach, have an emergency situation, or if our youth and children's programs continue to grow at a level that outpaces the budget. We just want to be transparent about that difference between projected expenditures and revenue. Also, our 1% increase in people expense is due in large part to increasing both Youth Director Kristin Wells and Family Ministries Assistant Lexie Burluson to full time to keep up with growth in Family Ministries. Below are graphs comparing last year with this year. Anyone who would like details can ask for a complete copy of the budget from the church office.



## A Memorial Day Weekend We Won't Forget



Around 1 a.m. on Sunday, May 26, tornadoes hit Benton County, doing significant damage in Decatur, Rogers, and Bentonville. It wouldn't be until the sun came up that we started coming to terms with the damage. County Judge and FUMC member Barry Moehring held a press conference with other city officials to offer us guidance as the light revealed tremendous loss all over the city. They urged everyone to stay off the roads, so in care for all of our people and our town, worship was moved to an online reflection and time of prayer led by Pastor Michelle.

While we were grateful that no one in our community lost their lives, the damage all around us was shocking. Brad and Connie Anderson had about half of their home smashed in by fallen trees. The Kingree family had extensive damage from a tree that pierced their home and rain that flooded the rest. And somewhere between a third to half of our congregation had significant damage, largely from fallen trees. The church building remained relatively unscathed (except for some equipment loss that occurred from a power surge as electricity was restored), but we lost many of the trees on the green space. Our building did have power restored quickly though, so we opened the space for people to come work, cool off, or just get a hug and have a place to pray and cry.

Then, our people did what our people do best: started loving and caring for our neighbors. We deployed teams to help clear debris steadily for the immediate aftermath. We had offers of homes, food, chargers, gas and generators that we shared with people both in and outside of our congregation. Bishop Laura Merrill came to town to tour the damage and promise prayers and resources for us. Our church also became a meal and housing station for the UMCOR teams that helped so many. It didn't matter if someone was a Methodist or not, just like it didn't matter to the LDS teams who helped our people out whether we were LDS, or the Baptists who helped us whether we were Baptist. We are all neighbors, we were all in need, and we all got to show and were shown the abundant and healing love of Jesus Christ.



## Recovering Together: Brad and Connie Anderson and the Methodist Connection

“Sunday morning May 26 we lost half our house and the finished basement from the storms that hit Benton County. During this time we found that we have a hidden safety net: FUMC Bentonville, family, friends, UMCOR and the Mormons. UMCOR showed up Wednesday morning and cut up the trees they could. All of our kids and grandchildren came home the following weekend to rally around us. The church brought over all the groceries we needed! Even Bishop Merrill came to support us. Church really is more than a building or more than Sunday mornings. So many people from church knew what we needed when we didn't even know. For that we are forever grateful!” – Brad Anderson

## Serving (and Served by) the United Methodist Connection



In United Methodism, we talk about the value of the Connection. What we mean when we use that term is that United Methodist Churches see each other as all linked together in support and care for each other. This year our church served and was served by our Connection:

- **Beacon Church** - Our church, along with several others around the Conference, became a Beacon Church. Beacon Churches have not even considered disaffiliating and are committed to welcoming those who find themselves homeless because their church left the UMC. We have had such people join us, and we include others in homebound visitation.
- **Foolish Love** - With so many United Methodist congregations hurting from the dual impact of pandemic recovery and disaffiliation, our congregation offered a free Lenten study to any congregation who wanted it. The series, called Foolish Love (Lent started on Valentine's Day and ended the day before April Fools), reflected on the bold and ridiculously generous love Christ offers to us and calls us to share. We shared that love in this series that included devotionals written by people in our congregation, a study guide, and free videos. More than 200 congregations took part.
- **Sager Brown Mission Trip** - 10 of our people plus two from Bella Vista traveled in February to Sager Brown in Louisiana, the primary UMCOR distribution warehouse, where they repacked damaged flood buckets and helped the community. Little did we know, we would soon be the recipients of such supplies.
- **Disaster Recovery and Visit from the Bishop** - When our area was hit by the Memorial Day weekend tornado, United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Disaster Recovery teams came to town immediately. Not only were some of our congregation served by the chainsaw teams, we also housed some of the leadership and fed the teams as they came through. We sent volunteers to work at the Multi-Agency Resource Center. Bishop Laura Merrill also came up one week after the tornadoes hit, assuring that such work would continue as long as needed and praying for our people

**“After the storms over Memorial Day weekend, we felt so supported by our church family. Pastor Michelle checked in on us and connected us with other people and families willing to help. But even after the initial recovery wave, we still had so much to do. When the offer of OMP help came, it was such a blessing.**

**We had a group of 12 young boys come and pack with us - they took what would have been a several weeks long, nights and weekends job for us and made it a half day of fun. Not only was the work done quickly, but spending time with them and seeing their connections with each other grow through shared service was incredibly special. I’m so thankful for our church and OMP for providing a place for others to deepen their relationship and understanding of God through the lens of community.” - Rebecca Kingree**



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Michelle Amos and Kristin Wells



Brooke Tilley (with Pastor Michelle)



Jake Cocke and Johnna Kosnoff

## Raising Up New Leaders

### Michelle Amos and Kristin Wells

This past year both Michelle Amos and Kristin Wells officially stepped into the process to become ordained elders in the United Methodist Church as they became certified candidates. Both also were accepted to Perkins School of Theology to pursue their Master of Divinity, receiving significant scholarship support to that effect. Kristin will continue as our Youth Director during candidacy, while Michelle left in June to start an appointment as the Director of the Wesley Foundation for Henderson State and Ouachita Baptist Universities.

### Brooke Tilley

Bentonville High Schooler Brooke Tilley has discerned a call to ministry this year. Identifying this call early on will allow Brooke to serve the church in long term and significant ways. Participating in Arkansas Conference youth events like Assembly, Veritas, and Hendrix Youth Institute have been instrumental in helping Brooke already live into this call.

### Certified Lay Servants

Also over the past year, several people in our congregation have taken additional training to become certified lay servants for the broader church. This training not only equips them for leadership in our own church, but also allows them to offer service to other congregations in case of an emergency need.

In October 2024, we will officially vote to recognize the work of these gifted servants: Michael and Jodi Burks, Marcia Patterson, Angie Barrington, Lauren Floyd, and Wesley Wells. Jake Cocke has completed one course as well, but it takes two to get certified. A huge thank you goes to Johnna Kosnoff who helps coordinate this work in our church



## Offering Who We Are: One Story of Many

Rich Maher has served this community in many ways in the short time he has been with us. He helps with hospitality on Sundays, stands in as an usher, and worked behind-the-scenes for the Multi-Agency Resource Center in Rogers after the tornadoes (see picture with Kate Schaffer). He also shows up for family ministries. Rich reflects on what this service has meant to him: “Since I started attending FUMC Bentonville last year, one of the most rewarding experiences has been working with the church youth. From Sunday School to VBS to the annual trip to Assembly in Conway, I have seen firsthand how this church nurtures young people's spiritual growth in a welcoming, caring, and joyful way.”



## Yearly Family Events

- Eggstravaganza
- Trunk or Treat
- Back to School Dance



## Regular Children's Programming

- Children's Sunday School and nursery
- Wednesday Night Kids (Elementary and Middle School)
- Monthly Meet-ups for Pre-K, Elementary, and Middle School



## New Gathering Points for Parents

- Parents in the Parlor on Wednesday nights
- New Parents of Preschoolers (POPs) Sunday school class meets in the Library across from the Office

# Children's Program Highlights

## Wild Life VBS

We had over 100 children join us for our Wild Life VBS this year! Each day we focused on a unique animal and learned about Jesus through Bible stories, art, games and service. We spent the week raising money for Heifer International and bought a bee hive to be sent to a community in need.

## Confirmation

14 students were confirmed into the Church in May, after spending the year learning about Methodist beliefs and practices in Sunday School. They attended a retreat and learned about other faith traditions, like Hinduism and Islam. To welcome our Confirmands to the Youth program, Middle Schoolers and Youth spent an afternoon in May at Modern Mission Laser Tag in Fayetteville.

## All the Children Leading Us

On the first Sunday of even months, our Elementary and Middle Schoolers lead Children First Worship at 9 a.m. in Hines Hall. We spend Wednesday nights talking about the upcoming Children First theme and preparing the liturgy, prayers and music. Our children volunteer to lead the different parts of worship and especially love helping serve Communion and passing the offering plates.

Our children also help usher in the joy of the season by presenting our original play, Christmas in Bentonville. We had over 40 children participate in our Christmas in Bentonville play this year. For the two months leading up to our performance, students learned their lines, created their costumes and built the set. They always perform to a packed house as angels on bicycles proclaim the Good News of a Savior born in the Salvation Army to bring joy to Razorbacks and Wal\*Mart employees alike!



## Conference Youth Events Participation

- Assembly: 2 youth and 2 adults
- Refuge: 5 youth and 3 adults
- Veritas: 6 youth and 3 adults



## Weekly Youth Events in School Year

- Youth Sunday School
- S.A.L.T (Sharing Actual Life Together) Sunday Nights
- Sacred Cinema Wednesday Nights



## Ozark Mission Project

- Number of our students who served in NLR: 10 youth and 2 adults

# Youth Program Highlights

## Youth Week

Each summer just before school begins, Youth Week gives our junior high and high school students a chance to have fun and serve together. August 2023 Youth Week included a trip to Silver Dollar City, service work at Beautiful Lives and Best Friends Animal Society, and our yearly local crawl event – this year’s was to determine who had the best Macaroni and Cheese (the winner was Panera). A total of 25 students participated throughout the week.

## Gathering Weekly to Grow Faith

Our youth have regular opportunities to gather each week to grow in their faith and connection with each other. On Sunday mornings they meet in the Sunday School hour and discuss Scripture and how it connects with their lives. Later in the afternoon they return to church for S.A.L.T. – Sharing Actual Life Together. This gathering includes checking in on each other, sharing food and fun, and at least once a month engaging in mission. On Wednesday nights they meet to watch about half of a movie (they do half one week and finish it the next) and discuss how that movie’s themes intersect with biblical themes. In the 2023-24 year, they finished the Marvel movies through *Avengers: Endgame*.

## Serving Pancakes and Neighbors

Our youth brought the tradition of Shrove Tuesday, sharing in a pancake meal the night before Ash Wednesday, to our congregation. The youth cooked the pancakes alongside our Methodist Men, who passed on their incomparable breakfast cooking skills to the next generation. It was a joyful intergenerational night with fabulous food that raised money for our youth program as well!

Our youth also served the wider community by participating in Ozark Mission Project in North Little Rock again this year. Then, when Church of the Resurrection brought an OMP team to us, our youth helped feed them, worshiped with them, and showed them love and hospitality. Our youth are admired across the Connection for their love, inclusion, and leadership.

**“My youth group is my family, it’s my favorite community, my most trusted friends, and it’s somewhere where I feel completely safe. It’s where I feel my highest connection to God through not just him but those around me.” - Duncan McCullough**



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## Weekly Average Attendance 23-24

- 276 people in person
- 534 online



## Growth in membership

- 40 New Members
- 20 Professions of Faith
- 15 Baptisms



## Holy Days Attendance

- Christmas Eve in person: 754; online: 1267
- Easter in person: 876; online: 913

## Worship Highlights

### Completion of the Bible Year

Our worship series continued to follow the congregation-wide commitment to read the entire Bible in a year, finishing at the end of last summer. Whether you made it all the way through the reading or not, we collectively made our way through the whole biblical witness through our communal worship. We celebrated that journey together!

### Stellar Music

Each week our FUMC musicians give their all to provide some of the best live music in the community. We continue to affirm the theology that God is found in all things by exploring a wide variety of musical expressions that underscore the message for each week. This variety has included classical, operatic, jazz, rock, folk, soul, pop, spirituals, gospel, and traditional hymnody. We work with incredible talent every week to craft a unique and authentic offering to God: giving truly what we have to give. Our hope is that each week, even if people do not remember the sermon, they walk out with the word of God in their hearts in song.

### A Beacon for the Connection

This past year has been a challenging one for United Methodist congregations across the state. However, FUMC Bentonville has continued to lead our conference in clarity of who we are – centering around a Methodist commitment to God’s inclusive grace. As a result of this congregation’s commitment to lead as a congregation where All Are Welcome, we continue to grow. For the period from July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024, FUMC Bentonville was the 11th largest congregation in terms of in person worship in Arkansas. We were, however, the 4<sup>th</sup> most viewed congregation online. We also had the 5<sup>th</sup> highest number of new members in the Conference.

We see this growth as an opportunity to give in extraordinary ways, not just to our community, but to our wider conference and connection. We commit ourselves to helping resource other congregations, sharing in the abundance we are experiencing so that the whole United Methodist witness is strengthened as well.



## Serving our Community with our Location

One of the great gifts we have to offer our Bentonville community is our location. Our building, parking, and green space give us an important way to be in service to our community at large. We were given a unique opportunity this year to serve our neighbors following the Memorial Day weekend tornadoes, as our property was relatively unscathed and became a haven for those who needed large spaces, or needed a place with air conditioning and internet in the immediate aftermath. This year our property has been a significant tool for ministry, offering space for:

- Life skills training for the Down Syndrome Connection of Northwest Arkansas
- Monthly meetings for DAR
- 11 recovery meetings a week (12 beginning in August 2024)
- Lifewater International planning retreats
- Girl Scout, Cub Scout, and Scouts of America troops
- Cub Scout smoked meat sale
- Weekly gatherings of Arkansas Lactation Support
- Into the Light Prayer Breakfast
- ESL tutoring
- BHS Alumni meeting
- Conference Lay Servant Training
- Disaster Recovery Team space
- Post-tornado 4<sup>th</sup> grade talent show
- Ozark Mission Project camp
- Mary Mae Jones Elementary PTA
- Choose Love Downtown event
- BHS Choir and Chamber Orchestra
- Mental Health First Aid training
- Master Gardeners Plant Sale
- Arkansas Public Theater rehearsals



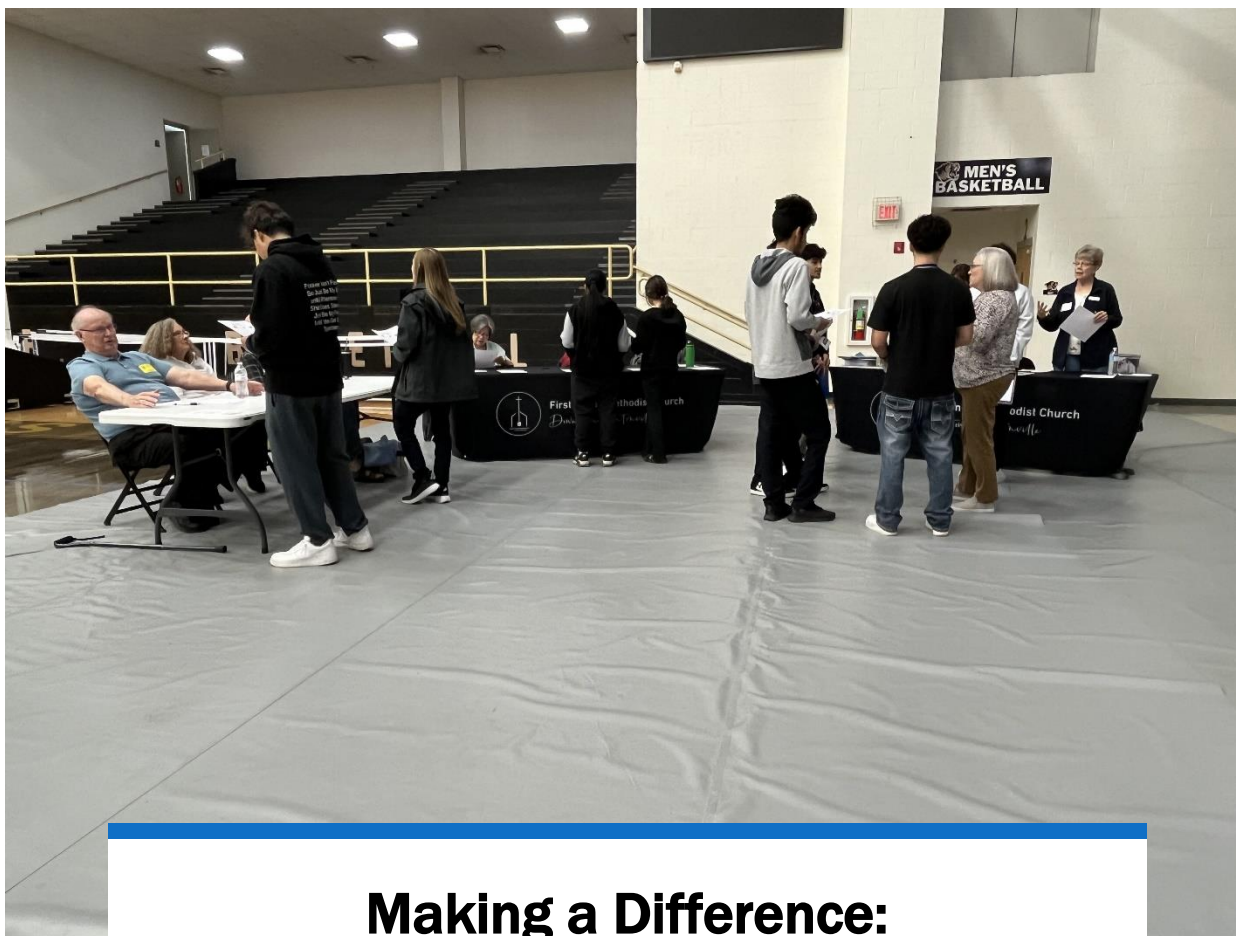
In addition to all the ways we served our community, our property provided space for the people of our own congregation for:

- Methodist Men's breakfast
- Dorcas Sewing Ministry
- Prayer Shawl Ministry
- Daffodils Women's Study
- Koinonia Women's Group
- Wednesday Night Bible Study
- Sacred Cinema
- Wednesday Night Kids
- Chancel Choir rehearsal
- Missional Prayer Team
- Environmental Care Team
- Grief Groups
- Parents in the Parlor
- Friday Fun Fellowship
- Intergenerational Back to School Dance
- Art and Faith
- Baby showers for Family Ministries  
Staff Kristin and Allison
- Youth Pancake Dinner
- Staff Talent Show
- Women's Retreat
- Eggstravaganza!

And we had space for the work our congregation did FOR our community:

- Faith in Action talks that included the Mayor, School Superintendent, Walton Foundation, and Pollinator Partnership,
- School teacher/administrator listening sessions
- Choir Chili Supper Scholarship Fundraiser
- Environmental Fair
- Gateway Service Day
- Trunk or Treat
- Providing space and/or supplies for our 4 related non-profits: Second Street Pantry, Beer and Hymns, Wee Friends Discovery Center, and Explore and Discover Preschool





## Making a Difference: Gateway Career Fair

This year our church organized a Career Fair for Gateway High School. The effort was chaired by Donna Reams. Thirteen companies and some of our FUMC retirees shared career possibilities with students who might otherwise fall through the cracks. The event was so successful that the Gateway Principal opened it up to the younger grades as well, and at least one student was hired by one of the companies over the summer. If you want to be part of this event this coming year, let Donna know and she will include you. We specifically need people who have opportunities for kids with a high school diploma.

**"Our goal was to instill upon these future leaders of our community that there are several options available to them upon graduation. We wanted the Gateway/Virtual students to know that we are interested in their success in securing further educational opportunities or potential employment opportunities." - Donna Reams**



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## Second Street Pantry numbers

- Contributions: \$57,383
- Cost of food: \$22,743
- Personal Care: \$577  
(supplemented by donated items)
- Snack Packs: \$682
- Benevolence: \$16,424



## Beer and Hymns Milestones

- Raised \$100,000 in 2023
- Biggest single night at Beer and Carols: \$30,000
- Total raised for nonprofits as of December 2023: \$304,513.



## Wee Friends and Explore and Discover

- Both financially healthy with strong enrollment
- Provided grant money to redo playground

# Non-Profit Spotlights

## Second Street Pantry

Our mission has seen an increase in the number of neighbors in need this year. We believe part of this is due to workers coming to the area to help with storm clean up and restoration. Some neighbors have also said family members impacted by the storm have moved in with them, explaining some of the increase in the size of families. The increase each month over last year was small at first but overall through June 2024 we saw an 18% increase over last year. The increase in the number of pounds of food distributed increased 33% from 51,260 pounds to 76,173 pounds. The number of families receiving diapers monthly increased 29% over last year from 173 to 242 families.

Of course the increase in the number of families means an increase in operating expenses. Due to our budget concerns in 2023, we have been very cautious with our budget in 2024. We reduced the budgeted amount for financial assistance from \$1000 a week to \$700 and have comfortably stayed under budget. We have kept approximately one year's operating expenses in a money market account to ensure we could continue to operate for a full year if our donations completely dried up.

## Beer and Hymns

2023 was a landmark year for Beer & Hymns, surpassing all our previous milestones. From our modest beginnings in a Sunday school class at FUMC, B&H has evolved into a major force in our community, significantly impacting local nonprofits. Thanks to the support of over 30 talented musicians and our dedicated participants, we raised over \$100,000 for local causes. Our annual Beer & Carols event was particularly impactful, generating \$30,000 for the Northwest Arkansas Children's Shelter. Despite facing several weather-related challenges in 2024, we are thrilled to report that we are still ahead of our giving numbers from the same period last year. We deeply appreciate your ongoing support and hope to see you raise your glass and raise your voice with us again soon.

- Ken and Casey Weatherford



## Changing Needs Mean Staff Changes

This year saw continuing changes to the staff, some behind the scenes and some more public. First, with the rapid growth in Youth and Children's ministries, both Youth Director Kristin Wells and Family Ministries Assistant Lexie Burleson were moved from part-time to full-time. This explains much of the jump in SPRC/People costs in the budget graph.

Then, our beloved Toni Hinrichs resigned from her position, effective May 31. While she is missed, her departure gave us the opportunity to restructure the office. The Business Administrator salary and the Bookkeeper salary were combined and divided to create two new roles: Church Office Accountant and Facilities Manager, filled in the new budget year by Chandra Rogers and Jason Bowen respectively.

And finally, we are grateful to our new Gentleman and Ladies At the Desk (GLADs), volunteers who greet, answer phones, and do other administrative tasks in the office. Thank you to Belinda Burton, Sandra Hutchens, Marjie Lewis, Charlene Underwood, Angie Barrington, Nancy Ringleb, and Joe Casper for their service!

## A Picture of Who We Are

### Reflections from Pastor Michelle

I love this picture of Harrison Knight, tucked perfectly in the pulpit after the Family Christmas Eve service. It is not just that it is ridiculously cute, though it definitely is that. No, I love it because it reflects so much of who you are, FUMC Bentonville. You are a church who makes space for everyone to feel at home, from our smallest and our newest to our oldest and our wisest. You are a people who are raising up new voices to preach, sing, and proclaim the love of God to others. You are a church who sees possibilities in everyone and wants all to know their value as a beloved child of God. You are a church who understands children and youth are not just the future of the church, but the church's present. You are a church who presents a different understanding of Christianity than the one that too often dominates our culture. You are a church who protects people while they heal of church hurt. And you are a church that understands when you are surrounded by the Word and love of God, when you are nurtured and strengthened by the faith, that you will find hope in all times and in all places and in all people. I see all of that in this picture. And I see all of that in you. Thank you, FUMC Bentonville, for being the people of this picture.



