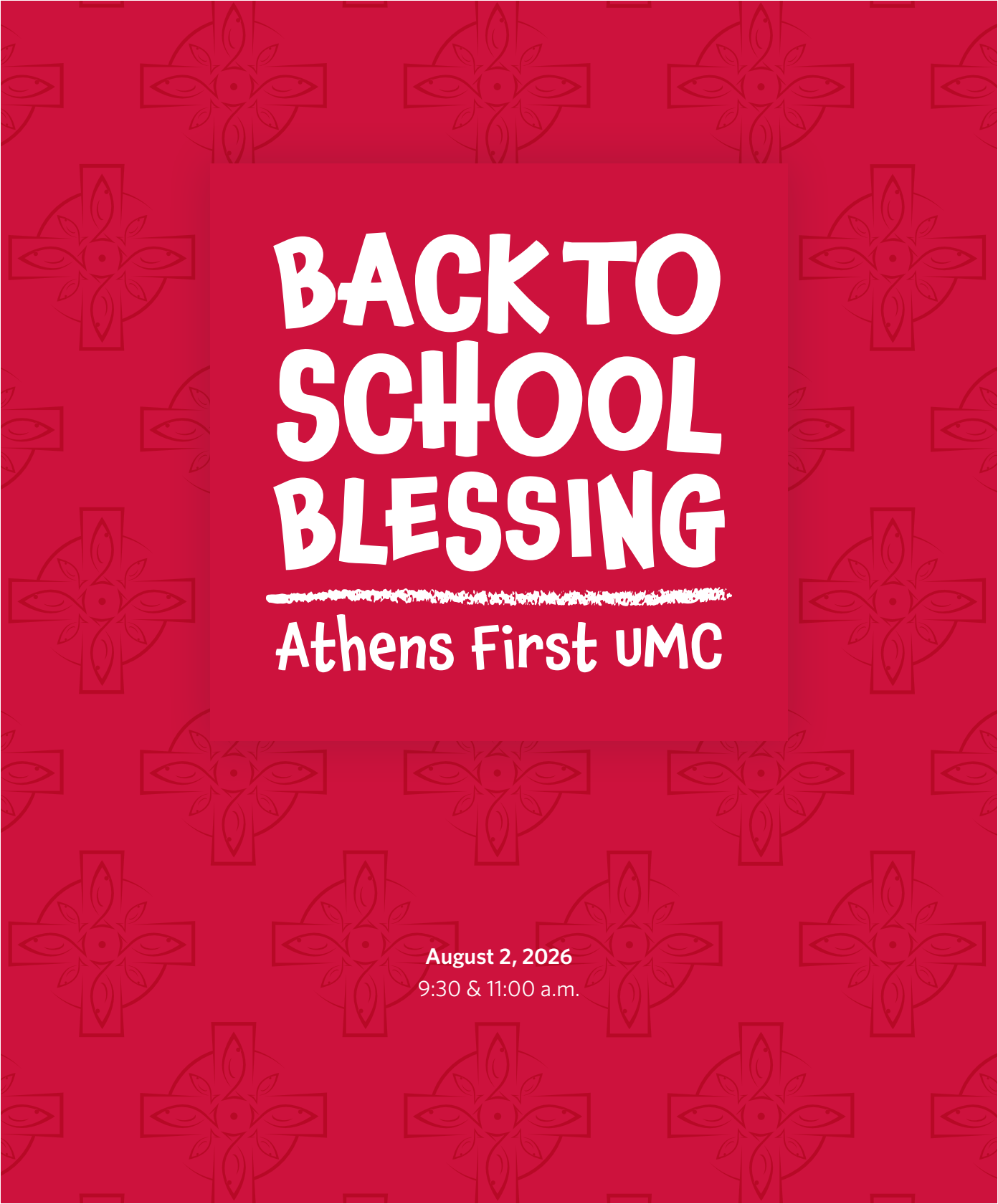




BACK TO SCHOOL BLESSING

Athens First UMC

August 2, 2026
9:30 & 11:00 a.m.

The Worship of God

*Please stand as you are able. The congregation speaks the text in **bold** type.

Large print hymnals are available in the Narthex. Please ask a member of our Welcome Team for assistance.



THE FLOWERS FROM THE WEDDING OF CAROLINE BLOCK & JOHN MCMAHON IV ARE GIVEN TO THE GLORY OF GOD

In honor of Mrs. Barbara Smith Block, Mrs. Claude Shelby Cain, Mr. and Mrs. John Lawrence Fesperman, and Mr. and Mrs. John James McMahon, Jr. and **in memory of** Mr. Richard Clarence Block and Mr. Claude Shelby Cain, grandparents of the bride and groom, and Mr. John Herbert Block, uncle of the bride.

Welcome to Back to School Blessing Sunday! This is a time for us to recognize the important role education plays in our lives and express our commitment to nurturing the faith and growth of our students and educators. Following today's services, join us in Hancock Hall to learn more about our upcoming ministry opportunities for people of all ages and enjoy a cold treat.

GATHERING

The Prelude

"Rigaudon" | André Campra

Brandon Craswell and Will Cuneo, trumpets; James Naigus, horn; Thomas Minor, trombone; David Stone, euphonium; Jackson Riffle, timpani; Ryan Ferguson, Director of Music and Worship

The Welcome and Opening Prayer | Rev. Dr. Natalee Dukes Hamby

PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

**The Processional Hymn*

UMH 89 “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” | HYMN TO JOY

**The Affirmation of Faith* | “The Apostles’ Creed”

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

**The Gloria Patri* | MEINEKE

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

**The Passing of the Peace*

The Hymn

UMH 191 “Jesus Loves Me” | JESUS LOVES ME

During the singing of the hymn, children up to Grade 5 are invited to the chancel steps. Students Grade 6 - 12 are invited to sit in the front right pews with Student Ministry staff.

Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong; they are weak, but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.

The Back to School Message | Traci Lowry, Director of Kids Ministry and
Kay Elder, Director of AFUMC Weekday Preschool

“Jesus Loves Me” | Verse 2

**Jesus loves me, this I know, as he loved so long ago, taking children on his knee, saying,
“Let them come to me.” Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.**

The Blessing of our Students | Rev. Montana Hamby

After the blessing, children and students may return to their parents during the hymn verse.

**Gracious God, we lift before you these students as they begin a new school year. Open
their eyes to the riches of your world. Open their minds to truth and knowledge. Open their
hearts to your grace. Bless them as they commit themselves to study and learning. Bless
them in the questions they ask and the answers they find. Bless them in their friendships,
old and new. May they be bearers of Christ’s light, sharing the love of Jesus with everyone
they meet. Amen.**

“Jesus Loves Me” | Verse 3

**Jesus loves me still today, walking with me on my way, wanting as a friend to give light and
love to all who live. Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.**

The Prayers of the People and the Lord’s Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us
from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.**

The Offering and Offertory Anthem

"God Has Called Us" | Robert A. Hobby

Sung by the Sanctuary Choir with the Brass Ensemble

God has called us: and how can we but raise our voices, echoing God's praise? God has called us: and let us answer with our lives. God has changed us: and how can we but live as servants of the Spirit's gift? God has changed us: and let us worship with our lives. God has charged us: and how can we but ask for wisdom for the Christly task? God has charged us: and let us labor with our lives. God has called us: Answer with our lives. Let us answer with our lives! Text by Susan Palo Cherwien

**The Doxology* | LASST UNS ERFREUEN

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise God, all creatures here below: Alleluia!

Alleluia! Praise God, the source of all our gifts! Praise Jesus Christ, whose power uplifts! Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

PROCLAMATION

The Scripture Reading | Romans 10:14-17 *The Message*

The Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God.**

The Message | Rev. Jeremy Lawson

"Beautiful are the Feet"

The Blessing of our Educators

God of all truth, we give thanks for the influence of our educators who bless our children and build our community. Breathe upon them your comforting and empowering Spirit. Fill their hearts with your abiding peace, even in chaotic moments. Bless their words with wisdom and their actions with love. As they give themselves for others, bless them richly. Unite our homes, our schools, and our church in a holy covenant of care and support. Let our prayers for one another unite us in your grace as we serve together generation to generation. Amen.

RESPONSE

**The Hymn of Response*

"Go Forth and Preach the Gospel" | ELLACOMBE

Setting by James Chepponis



(All:) 1. Go forth and preach the Gos - pel to all who
(All:) 2. Go forth and preach the Gos - pel to all who
(All:) 3. Go forth and preach the Gos - pel, go spread the



are in need. As wit - ness to the Sav -
live in fear, And share the joy - ful mes -
news a - broad! Pro - claim to ev - 'ry na -



ior, go teach by word and deed. The Spir - it is up -
sage that God is al - ways near. The Spir - it is up -
tion the great - ness of our God. The Spir - it is up -



on us, and sends us to de - clare The Good News
on us, and sends us forth in peace To bring the
on us, that all may un - der - stand The prom - ise



of the king - dom to peo - ple ev - 'ry - where,
poor glad tid - ings that jus - tice may in - crease.
of sal - va - tion re - vealed to ev - 'ry land.

**The Blessing and Congregational Response*

“Blest Be the Tie That Binds” | DENNIS

Blest be the tie that binds, our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.

**The Postlude*

“Festival Toccata” | John Weaver

THE STEEPLE

DOUBLE FEATURE | AUGUST 2



Kids at Athens First

Kids at Athens First helps children become young disciples of Jesus through fun, engaging, and deeply biblical ministry! From nursery and preschool to high-energy K-5 worship, age-level small groups, and Wednesday night discipleship, every child has a place to grow. Our Agape Ministry also offers an inclusive special-needs buddy program so children of all abilities can belong, participate, and experience the love of Jesus. **Sunday School returns** to meeting in Hancock Hall **Sunday, August 9, from 9:30 - 10:30 a.m.**, and our Wednesday Night Kids program starts back **August 26 at 6:15 p.m.** We hope to see you there!

Traci Lowry, Director of Kids at Athens First | traci@athensfirstumc.org



Upcoming Kids Dates

Ongoing | 5th Grade Leadership Program

August 9 | Sunday School for grades K-5 is back in Hancock Hall

August 26 | Wednesday Night Kids starts back

September 11 | 5th Grade Retreat

September 27 | 3rd Grade Bible Presentation

October 25 | 5th Grade Hangout

November 29 | Advent Celebration

December 13 | Baby Recognition

Traci Lowry, Director of Kids at Athens First | traci@athensfirstumc.org



Children's Music Ministry

We are looking forward to starting a new season in Children's Music Ministry and hope YOU will join us! Our theme this year is "Heroes of the Faith," and we can't wait to sing, play, and learn with your kids! Please register for choir to ensure your child will be on our rosters and check in sheets and to ensure you will receive emails with pertinent information. Children's Choirs (ages 3 years old through Grade 5) will meet your teacher on **Wednesday, August 19**, and weekly rehearsals begin on **Wednesday, August 26, from 5:00 - 5:45 p.m.** If you have questions, please contact Janis Maxwell.

Janis Maxwell, Director of Children's and Youth Music Ministry
janis@athensfirstumc.org



Student Ministry Kickoff | August 9

Bounce into the 2026-2027 school year with Students at Athens First UMC at Inflatapalooza on **August 9**. Inflatapalooza will be our kick off to Encounter for this fall, and you will not want to miss out! Inflatapalooza promises to be the most fun with inflatables that you've ever had! Come test your skills on an oversized obstacle course, slide down the water slide, and challenge your friends in the Wrecking Ball Arena. **Inflatapalooza will begin at 5:45 p.m.** with dinner in Hancock Hall before heading downstairs for worship and all the fun! Registration helps us to have a head count for dinner, and your registration includes \$20 to help offset the costs of catering and our inflatable rental for the night. You will not want to miss out!

Rev. Montana Hamby, Associate Minister | montana@athensfirstumc.org



Student Ministry Fall Registrations

Register now for our upcoming Student Ministry Fall Retreats. Our students are invited to start their new school year by joining us on one of our two Fall Retreats in August! High School Momentum Fall Retreat will take place **August 15 - 16 at Camp Glisson** with a trip zip-lining near Helen on Sunday afternoon. Middle School Spark Retreat is the following weekend at **Camp Glisson, August 21 - 23**. Registration for Spark Retreat is open for all middle school students and will have Confirmation specific elements for those registering for Confirmation. Confirmation registration is open as well! Rising Grade 6 students are invited to join Confirmation to learn about what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ here at Athens First UMC. **Registration for retreats will be closing soon!**



Wesleyan Youth Choir

The Wesleyan Youth Choir is back in session beginning next **Sunday, August 9!** Youth Choir meets weekly on Sundays for rehearsals in the choir room from 4:30 - 5:45 p.m. All 6th-12th graders are welcome. We sing in worship, in the community, and across the US! We hope you will join our choir family.

If you have questions, please contact Janis Maxwell.

Janis Maxwell, Director of Children's and Youth Music Ministry
janis@athensfirstumc.org

THE STEEPLE DOUBLE FEATURE | AUGUST 2



Athens First Fest | August 19

Join us on **August 19 for First Fest**, our Wednesday Night fall kickoff! Enjoy a delicious taco dinner from **5:00 – 6:00 p.m.** then explore ministry booths featuring everything you need to know about Wednesday Night Dinners, kids and student programming, adult small groups, and other opportunities to connect on Wednesdays this fall. Small group leaders will be available to answer questions, help you find the right study, and distribute books before groups begin the following week. Children and families can also enjoy inflatables, gaga ball, games, music, and more in the gym. Dinner is \$5 per person. Come share a meal, have fun, and find your place on Wednesday Nights at AFUMC! Scan the QR code to register.

Rev. Dr. Natalee Dukes Hamby, Associate Minister
natalee@athensfirstumc.org



Wednesday Night Dinner | August 26

Wednesday Night Dinners are back beginning **August 26!** We invite you to join us for fellowship and a delicious meal prepared by our very own Mitch Bain. Every week we will also offer a salad bar option. Dinner is served from 5:00-6:30 p.m. in Hancock Hall. Adult meals are \$10, and salad bar is \$7. Our child-friendly option is \$5. **All orders must be placed by Tuesday at noon.** Our church staff is happy to assist you if you have any trouble ordering online. Coming up: August 26 - fried chicken and September 2 - spaghetti with meat sauce. More information, the menu for the next month, and the link to register can be found by scanning the QR code.

Alisah Bain, Administrative Assistant | alisha@athensfirstumc.org



Small Group Ministry: Find Your Place at Athens First!

This fall, we're excited to offer a variety of opportunities to grow in faith and build meaningful relationships through our Adult Sunday School classes and Small Groups. We're launching a new Sunday School class, introducing several new Small Groups, and continuing many of the classes and studies that have become beloved parts of our church community. Whether you're looking for Bible study, fellowship, or simply a place to connect, we'd love to help your place at Athens First. Stop by our table after worship to explore all the possibilities!

Lisa Lawrenz, Associate Minister | lisa@athensfirstumc.org



Adult Choirs Start Back

This month, our adult choirs return to the Music Suite as we kick off our 2026 - 2027 music season at Athens First! If you are interested in becoming a member of a choir, we invite you to join us for a rehearsal.

The Sanctuary Choir leads music for our 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. services and presents concerts each season. Our first rehearsal is **Wednesday, August 5, from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.** **The Athens First Ringers** handbell choir offers music each month in services and rings for special events each season. Our first rehearsal is **Sunday, August 16, from 5:00 - 6:00 p.m.**

These choirs are open to all without audition, and childcare during rehearsals is available upon request. Join the AFUMC Music family this fall!

Ryan Ferguson, Director of Music and Worship | ryan@athensfirstumc.org



Concert Series Kickoff | August 30

Kick off the 2026-2027 Sanctuary Concert Series with us on **Sunday, August 30 at 3:00 p.m.** AFUMC Organist, Raina Wood, will present an afternoon recital, "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken," featuring works by Albrecht, Bach, Paine, and Widor. *Reception to follow in Hancock Hall.* Free admission; no tickets required!

We invite you to take a copy of our season booklet with you today! Booklets can be found in the pews or in the Narthex.

Ryan Ferguson, Director of Music and Worship | ryan@athensfirstumc.org



College and Young Adult Ministries

College students, graduate students, and young adults: we're excited to welcome you back for another semester at Athens First! Beginning **Sunday, August 16**, our Young Adult Sunday School, Graduate Student Sunday School, and our beloved Sunday College Lunch all return. Whether you're new to Athens, returning to campus, or looking for a place to belong, we'd love to have you join us. Our College Small Group also kicks off on **Wednesday, August 26**, offering another opportunity to grow in faith and build meaningful community. Come find your people, deepen your faith, and make Athens First your home away from home.

Rev. Dr. Natalee Dukes Hamby, Associate Minister
natalee@athensfirstumc.org

MEMBER NEWS

Sympathy

Heartfelt Christian sympathy is extended to Vicki Brown Hubbard and her family in the loss of her mother, Patricia Brown, on July 21.

FINANCIAL REPORT *As of July 27, 2026* (finance@athensfirstumc.org):

2026 Budget: \$3,055,000 | **YTD Total Revenue:** \$1,898,979 | **YTD Total Expenses:** \$1,820,896

WAYS TO GIVE



OFFERING PLATE:

Fill out the envelope located in your pew.



ONLINE:

Scan to be taken to Realm, our online giving platform.



TEXT-TO-GIVE:

Text "AFUMCTTG" to 73256.

FOLLOW UP WITH A MINISTER

Rev. Jeremy Lawson | Senior Minister
jeremy@athensfirstumc.org | 404-304-3574

Rev. Dr. Natalee Dukes Hamby | Associate Minister
natalee@athensfirstumc.org | 404-414-1701

Rev. Montana Hamby | Associate Minister
montana@athensfirstumc.org | 770-633-3140

Rev. Lisa Lawrenz | Associate Minister
lisa@athensfirstumc.org | 706-338-6952

REQUEST PRAYER | Have a prayer request? Scan the QR code located in your bulletin and select "**Needing Prayer**" to fill out a form to submit your prayer request. If you desire for the request to be shared with our Prayer Ministry team, please indicate that in your submission. Prayer requests can also be made directly via email prayer@athensfirstumc.org.

CCS #12591 • CCLI #1097880

ATHENS FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

327 N LUMPKIN ST. ATHENS, GA 30601 • 706-543-1442 | athensfirstumc.org