

February 12, 2026

Canton First Family and Friends,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It is with a mixture of profound gratitude for his faithful service and joyful anticipation for his next chapter that we announce the intention of Lead Pastor, Rev. Dr. Kenny Ott, to retire in June, 2027. Reverend Ott's projected retirement date provides for a timeline with a lengthy "runway," allowing us to find the next pastor God has prepared and to embrace best practices for pastoral succession. The timeline gives ample time for celebration, grieving, mentoring, and a prayerful, healthy transition.

Celebrating Pastor Kenny's Ministry

We celebrate a ministry defined by a singular life purpose: to glorify God and make disciples. Over the past eight years, Pastor Kenny has faithfully walked alongside us, utilizing a unique blend of experiences to bring clarity and purpose to Canton First Methodist Church.

God uniquely prepared Pastor Kenny for this season of leadership through a rich and diverse journey that has directly shaped the health and trajectory of our congregation. Before entering full-time ministry, his ten years in the U.S. Air Force and fourteen years with Delta Airlines (in Technical Operations and Training) instilled in him a strategic vision and operational wisdom. These gifts have been instrumental in professionalizing our church operations and creating sustainable structures for ministry.

His ministry is deeply rooted in a personal call that began when he accepted Jesus as Lord at age thirteen. We are profoundly grateful for his wife, Cathi, whom God used to call him back to the Church of his youth, sparking a renewed love for Christ that continues to burn brightly.

Furthermore, Pastor Kenny leads by example as a lifelong learner. His theological depth, honed through a Master of Divinity from Emory and a Doctor of Ministry from Asbury, has grounded our church in robust, Biblical teaching. Beyond the pulpit, he has actively equipped our lay leadership through his specialized certifications as a Vision Navigator, Strategic Planner, and Professional Certified Coach. These tools have been vital in helping us articulate our vision and develop a culture where disciples are not just made but empowered to lead.

Canton First Methodist Legacy and Calling

Pastor Kenny's ministry builds upon the extraordinary foundation of Canton First. For 183

years, generation after generation has responded to God's call by building and reimagining ministry spaces, birthing community ministries, and sending missionaries.

We have a history of making bold decisions to reach new people. This was powerfully demonstrated on July 12, 1992, when the congregation symbolically walked from the old downtown building to our current home at 930 Lower Scott Mill Road. This faithful step was followed by the dedication of the Margarette H. McFather Chapel in 1994 and the completion of the Sanctuary, dedicated on February 20, 2005.

Today, we are writing the next chapter of this legacy with the development of the “Wesley Wing.” This ambitious project is proof that our mission is moving forward with energy and purpose. Extending beyond the Fellowship Hall, the new 10,000-square-foot facility is designed to be a dynamic hub for the entire church family. It features a modern, reconfigured kitchen and versatile spaces capable of hosting everything from Bible studies and small conferences to meals and overflow worship.

As we enter this transition, we remain grounded in our calling to *Glorify, Amplify, and Multiply* to further God's Kingdom:

Glorify: Modeling a God-centered life in worship and mission, keeping the church oriented toward God's glory rather than institutional success.

Amplify: Inspiring the people to proclaim and carry the Gospel into the community and region.

Multiply: Equipping disciple-makers, planting churches, and building missional partnerships with a sense of urgency and joy.

The Spiritual Journey: How We Live Missionally

The DNA of the church will not change. God calls us to live missionally—intentionally aligning our lives to participate in God's redemption by looking for what God is doing and joining Him in it. Our discipleship strategy continues to focus on three key areas:

Intentional Community: We gather to worship, study, pray, and serve together, becoming the love of God for one another.

Sharing Christ: We authentically share our faith out of personal experience, meeting people right where they are with mercy and care.

Experience God: We create opportunities for an intimate relationship with God—the number one factor for spiritual growth.

Our effectiveness is measured not by attendance, but by how we are SEEKING God with all our heart, SERVING unselfishly, SHARING Christ with others, and SHEPHERDING others in the faith.

God's Providence: Preparing Our Next Pastor

As we honor Pastor Kenny's legacy, our faith compels us to trust fully in God's providence for the future. Just as God prepared Moses in the wilderness and equipped the disciples for the early church, we know He is currently preparing the person He intends to lead Canton First Methodist Church in its next season.

This belief anchors us in hope and removes any anxiety from the transition. God has a plan, and He is at work right now, shaping the heart, mind, and skills of our next pastor. We stand on the promises of Scripture, knowing that God is faithful to His Church:

"And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding." — Jeremiah 3:15

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." — Romans 8:28

This transition is an opportunity for us to deepen our dependence on Him, confident that He will align the right leader with the unique calling and needs of our congregation.

Planning for the Future: A New Process

A multi-year timeline allows us to plan early and openly. It is important to note that the new appointment process within the Global Methodist Church (GMC) is a highly collaborative process between the local church and conference leadership.

To that end, a Succession Planning Team, led by Susan Dreschel, has already begun meeting and working, with the current focus of prayerfully reaffirming the church's strategy and in developing a robust Pastor Profile. The Team also will plan, coordinate and facilitate the process ahead:

Search Team Formation: The Succession Planning Team will eventually assemble a dedicated Pastoral Search Team.

Interviews & Selection: The Search Team will be responsible for interviewing potential candidates.

Conference Collaboration: Throughout the process, we will work closely with the GMC Conference Leadership—specifically Conference Superintendent Andy Postell and Connectional Elder Sandra Macht—to ensure the final pastoral appointment aligns with the GMC vision and theology.

Next Steps: Congregation Meetings

The Governing Board is committed to transparent communication. To share more details on this new process and answer your questions, we will be holding Congregation Meetings

on the following dates:

Sunday, January 25 | 2:00 PM | Fellowship Hall

Sunday, February 8 | 4:00 PM | Room 117

Please be in prayer for the Governing Board and the Succession Planning Team. Let us commit to unity in keeping the priority of God's calling and in maintaining momentum for the mission. We trust completely that God, who has led Canton First Methodist Church since 1842, will continue to lead us into a future filled with promise and purpose.

With Hope and Trust in Christ,

Canton First Methodist Church
Governing Board

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." Proverbs 3:5-6