

2023 was the Year that....

Renewal continues. Even though 86 congregations in our conference chose to disaffiliate, Wesley UMC in Charleston didn't even ponder the possibility. Instead, we volunteered in late March with the conference to become a Lighthouse Congregation. These faith communities welcome and support 1,305 United Methodists whose churches have closed or disaffiliated. Our pastor, the Rev. Bradley D. Shumaker, writes in his February Our Ongoing Dialogue, "Our Wesley United Methodist Church and our Illinois Great Rivers Conference maintain integrity and direction through being connectional, accountable, and made strong through the love of God, grace of Jesus Christ, and the boundless movement of the Holy Spirit."

Physical changes reflected our growth; we'll list these "**Firsts in '23**":

- An April Church Conference unanimously approved a **capital campaign** and mortgage to fund a \$700,000 renovation project. After years of deferred maintenance, our building had a deteriorating roof system, damaged ceiling, poor ventilation, and aged carpeting. Members pledged \$515,000 to be given over three years. We relocated the worship services to the fellowship hall on Memorial Day weekend and were back in the sanctuary before Labor Day weekend. The Wesley staff was commended for their physical assist in moving all the pews, sound system, and pianos. We still have outstanding work on roof repair over the day care wing and stucco repair around the upper windows of the sanctuary when contractors are available in the spring. Reconsecration of the newly beautiful Wesley UMC sanctuary was celebrated on October 1.
- After years of planning and fundraising, the Charleston Community Early Learning Center erected a new **playground** with a soft ground surface, new equipment and three shade awnings.
- Attractive new **furnishings** in the children's Sunday school wing were funded by the Susan and Sheryl Snyder Memorial Fund.
- The church **library** was given an **update** by Judy Brown. Careful book reviews, new classifications and new decor created an inviting environment.
- A **van** was added; now our two vans provide safe transportation for 23 passengers.
- The **lighting system** was replaced in the **fellowship hall** prior to the rummage sale.

Additional "**Firsts in '23**" include these items:

- Our staff created a colorful **logo** featuring silhouettes of our sanctuary, the EIU Old Main tower, a home, and a heart/cross.
- After surveys and a Leadership Summit, a smaller group developed a **Mission Statement** as well as three-year **goals**, which were adopted by the Church Council, as follows:
Wesley United Methodist Church seeks to be a safe and inclusive home where all are invited to walk with Jesus Christ in the world.
- The **WUMC Family Cookbook** features a collection of over 200 delicious recipes.
- **Connie Wieck**, a missionary Wesley has helped sponsor for 30 years, was placed overseas as the English Language Educator and Coordinator of the Suntisouk Language and Vocational Center (SLVC) in Vientiane, Laos.
- The Illinois Great Rivers Conference has transitioned to five districts. Wesley is in **East District** (formerly Embarras and Iroquois Districts) based in Champaign with Rev. Angie Lee as District Superintendent.
- **Bonnie James** officially became our volunteer Parish Nurse, RN FBN (faith based nurse), in July.

Wesley UMC's ongoing ministries have been instrumental in creating a safe, spiritual home for all. Our two traditional worship services offered inspiring sermons, beautiful music by adult, children's and handbell choirs and "Wonderful Words of Life" congregational singing. Loyal in-person and online attendance has increased. Stewardship has grown as shown with the successful capital campaign and general fund support. The ease and security of online donations has increased with the larger online attendance.

We offered learning for every age level. More children and youth are joining the Sunday school hour where three adult classes continue their discussions. During the week adults participate in three Disciple Bible Study sessions. Sarah Gatton, Kait Jackson, Bonnie James, and Joy Schesselman completed 50 hours of training to become our newest Stephen Ministers.

Even with the restricted space during the sanctuary renovation, the VBS, "Stellar," transformed the hallways and fellowship hall into outer space! The "Shine Jesus' Light" theme inspired 38 children and 50 volunteers. In early June, a small but mighty crew of 8 people volunteered with Appalachia Service Project (ASP) near Booneville, KY. The team provided a "hug" for a home; they completed the house water-resistant wrap, the j-channel for new siding, and some insulation. In late March, The Rummage Sale returned and raised a huge \$8,500 to help fund the ASP trip.

Both Church and Society and Missions Teams provide assistance to local agencies and through our denomination. Each month our congregation supports an area of need-- a natural disaster, hunger here and there, immigrants, health issues, and local agencies, for example. The Missions Team appreciates "the generosity of the church members, who continue to show love towards our brothers and sisters in need through their financial gifts, while at the same time supporting the many upkeep and operating needs of our church." Church and Society raised awareness on matters of justice, peace and ecology through Sunday Chats. Volunteers serve on the Change the World and Helping Hands Days seasonal home needs. Local non-profit agencies are supported with food drives, Christmas gifts, heaps of toilet paper for the One Stop Community Christmas Drive, sponsorship of the Children's Summer Meals Program, first-Sunday-of-the-month evening meals for The Haven (shelter) crowd, and more!!

The WUMC Green Team's new very tall fence protected their three gardens: a Raised Bed Garden for church gardeners, an In-Ground Giving Garden where the team cares for plants and gives many pounds of fresh veggies to food pantries, and Pollinator Gardens where over 100 shrubs and native plants, purchased with grant money, grow in small raised beds beside the other gardens. On a hot day in July, a Garden Dedication was attended by Team members, Faith in Place Director Christina Krost, and the press. Both the local newspaper and WAND, Decatur's TV station, reported on the celebration.

Fun events, often intergenerational, fill our calendars. Naming only a few, the children and youth had a great year including an Easter egg hunt, a trip through a corn maze, Trunk or Treat goodies from 40 cars, getting SOAKED, the demolition derby at the county fair, kayaking, family bowling, candle painting, movies, and decorating cookies. The Young at Heart (slightly older in other places) meets twice a month for fun, food, and fellowship. Their partial list of activities included traveling by van to Decatur (Millikin's Vespers), to Oilfield (pie and music), to rural Paris (glassblower and ice cream), to Springfield (state fair), and to Casey (big things). They met at church to stuff 1,200 plastic Easter eggs, play games, celebrate birthdays, exercise, bake sugar cookies, and do crafts for the Bags of Love.

Pastor Brad's stewardship letter closes with words of assurance. "Hope has a home here at Wesley United Methodist Church. The song of community, assurance, and praise echoes through our halls and leads us into the world with God's gracious invitation opening our hands to one another."

About Staff

- **Amy Foor** was hired as dayshift custodian in early March.
- In March **Kaitlin Jackson** signed on as **Coordinator of Communications**.
- **Cole Dearnbarger** accepted the custodian position in August.

Our Church Community as of December 31, 2023

Every Baptized Member	Ministers
Bradley Shumaker	Directing Pastor
Janice Kahl	Pastor of Congregational Care
Ethan Hayward	Organist/Pianist
Michael Mellott	Choir and Children's Music Director
Elizabeth Halbe	Administrative Secretary and Bell Choir Director
Brock Warren	Director of Youth Ministry, Operations, and Technology
Kaitlin Jackson	Coordinator of Communications
Sarah Gatton	Director of Children's and Adult Discipleship
Rachel Mellott	Nursery Coordinator
Kaylie Hutton	Nursery Assistant
Mary Larson	Financial Secretary
Kris Hall	Assistant Financial Secretary
Cleve Karch	Treasurer
Cole Dearnbarger	Custodian
Janeane Koester	Custodian

Numbers of Interest

According to Illinois Great Rivers Conference records Wesley UMC membership stands at 734 on December 31, 2023, a decrease of 6 members. Average weekly online and in-person worship attendance was 339; 2022 attendance was 309. Sunday school attendance average increased to 65, up from 60 in the previous year. In 2023, we baptized 1 baby and 1 adult.

Five confirmands were welcomed to our official membership roll in May: Brady Henshaw, Callen Henshaw, Jonathan "Jack" Sharp, Brynn Symonds, and Lauren Wahls.

Eight members were removed by death:

"Jerri" Geraldine June Biggs (1-3-23)	Margaret Jane Hitchings (8-6-23)	Linda Kay Inman (1-9-23)
Marjorie Jean Ramsey (4-15-23)	Betty Jean Simon (8-8-23)	Margaret Ann Speer (4-23-23)
Larry Stephen "Steve" Whitley (6-12-23)	Jerry Williams (3-6-23)	

Conference numbers provided by Rev. Bradley Shumaker
 Compiled and written by Joan Gregg, Church Historian
 February 29, 2024

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Wesley United Methodist Church
Charleston, Illinois

HISTORICAL NOTES

L. Joan Gregg
Church Historian

Rev. Bradley Shumaker
Directing Pastor