

APRIL NEWS



# Hello Summer

## 2026 ONE WAY CAMP

**JUNE 8-12**

COMPLETED GRADES 6TH & 7TH

**JUNE 15-19**

COMPLETED GRADES 8TH - 12TH

*Contact the church office for more info!*



camp caney

**Pre-Camp** JUNE 12-14

Grades 2-4

**Elementary** JUNE 15-19

Grades 4-6

SCAN TO REGISTER!



*Contact Jackie Kitchingham for more info!*

# VBS 2026



# JULY 13-17

Contact Jackie Kitchingham if you would like to serve at VBS!

SENIOR PASTOR



REV. DR.  
BRIAN MERCER

PastorBrian@  
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

CELEBRATING THE WALK IN  
THE GARDEN ALONGSIDE YOU,

*Pastor Brian*

# WALKING FROM WILDERNESS TO GARDEN

Every year, the season of Lent invites us to walk with Jesus into the wilderness. It is a season of stripping down, of listening more closely, of letting the Spirit reorder our loves and our priorities. The wilderness is not a comfortable place, but it is a holy place—because Jesus goes there first. And wherever Jesus goes, transformation follows. This year, as a church family, we have been exploring what it means to walk in the wilderness with Jesus. We have discovered that the wilderness is not punishment; it is preparation. It is the classroom where trust is learned, identity is clarified, and obedience is strengthened. Lent teaches us that God does some of His deepest work in the places where life feels barren. But Lent is not the destination. It is the road. The wilderness leads somewhere. And this April, as Holy Week is upon us, we follow Jesus out of the wilderness and into a garden.

## FROM THE WILDERNESS OF TESTING TO THE GARDEN OF NEW CREATION

John 20:1–18 gives us one of the most tender and astonishing scenes in all of Scripture. Mary Magdalene, heartbroken and confused, comes to the tomb expecting death. Instead, she finds a Gardener—One who calls her by name and reveals that resurrection has already begun.

THE CONTRAST IS STRIKING:

Wilderness	Garden
Testing	Restoration
Stripping away	Being made new
Hunger	Abundance
Loneliness	Communion
Shadows	Morning light
Identity tested	Identity renewed (“Mary”)

Lent trains our hearts to recognize the voice of Jesus in the wilderness so that, when He calls our name in the garden, we can rise with Him into new life.

## WHAT LENT AND HOLY WEEK TEACH US ABOUT THE GIFT OF THE GARDEN

### 1. The Garden Is God’s Answer to Every Wilderness

The wilderness teaches us dependence; the garden reveals God’s abundance. The wilderness exposes our need; the garden shows us God’s provision. The wilderness breaks open our illusions; the garden breaks open the tomb. Holy Week gathers up every wilderness we carry—our griefs, our sins, our fears—and places them at the foot of the cross. Easter morning answers them with a single word: life.

### 2. The Garden Restores What Was Lost

The first garden—Eden—was where humanity walked with God in the cool of the day. The garden of resurrection is where that fellowship is restored. When Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener, she is not wrong. He is the Gardener—the One who tends, restores, and cultivates new creation in the soil of our lives. Lent prepares the ground. Holy Week plants the seed. Easter is the first bloom of God’s new world.

### 3. The Garden Teaches Us to Listen for His Voice

In the wilderness, Jesus confronts the lies of the enemy. In the garden, Jesus speaks the truth that sets us free. He calls Mary by name. He calls us by name. Lent sharpens our hearing so that, when the risen Christ speaks, we recognize Him—not by sight, not by proof, but by the unmistakable sound of grace calling our name.

### 4. The Garden Sends Us Out as Witnesses

Mary becomes the first preacher of the resurrection: “I have seen the Lord.” The wilderness humbles us. The cross redeems us. The garden commissions us. We are not just recipients of resurrection; we are bearers of it.

## A WORD FOR OUR CONGREGATION THIS APRIL

As we move from Lent toward Holy Week and into the joy of Easter morning, I invite you to see your own life in this sacred journey. Where is your wilderness? Where is God preparing you for something new? Where might the risen Christ be calling your name, inviting you to step into the garden of restored hope? My prayer for First Methodist Monroe is that we become a people who walk honestly through the wilderness, who kneel humbly at the cross, and who rise joyfully in the garden—ready to proclaim with Mary, “We have seen the Lord.” May this season lead us deeper into the heart of Christ, who meets us in every wilderness and walks us into every garden of new creation.



**REV. JOHN O'LEARY**

John@FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

# THE PROMISE OF NEW LIFE

Easter is not about what happened to Jesus, but what happens to us because of His

death and resurrection. Easter is a celebration of how the followers of Jesus are able to stand justified before the throne of heaven. It's a sign of the new life that we have been given by a loving and faithful Savior. On Easter we proclaim:

*Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory?  
O death, where is your sting? — 1 Corinthians 15:54-55*

Easter is built on death being brought to new life.

- The One who gave life **died** — so that those who were dead could **live**.
- The Judge **took the sentence** — so the guilty could go **free**.
- The One abandoned by God on the cross — so that **we would never be abandoned**.
- The greatest Friday in history was called **Good** — because the worst thing that ever happened produced the best news ever announced.
- The tomb — a symbol of ending — became the **birthplace of new life**.

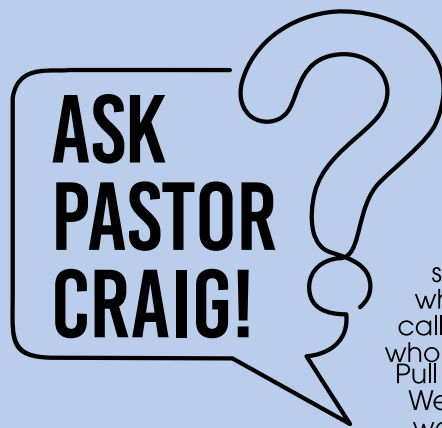
Easter is not simply a doctrine to be affirmed. It is an encounter to be experienced. When a person surrenders their life to Jesus, they are given new life. New life is not earned. It is not achieved. It is received — by faith, from a risen Savior who is alive, who is present, and who is offering it to all who believe. This is a promise and a privilege! Easter is not a cheerful religious holiday layered over spring. It is the announcement that the worst things are never the last things — because a man who was dead is alive, and He is making all things new.

May we take moments this month to rejoice in the new life Christ has given us.



**REV. DR. CRAIG FERGUSON**

Craig@FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM



A place where your real questions meet honest, biblical answers for everyday faith.

**Question:** If the Resurrection is real, why doesn't the world look more different?

Honestly? Fair question. If a man actually walked out of a tomb two thousand years ago, you'd expect the evidence to be a little more obvious. Wars still happen. Children still suffer. The evening news hasn't gotten noticeably better. So what gives? Here's what gives: the world is different. Dramatically, historically, measurably different. We just tend to forget who started what.

Pull the thread on almost any major humanitarian movement in Western history and you'll find Christians who said the reason was Easter. The first hospitals weren't government programs;

they were built by people who believed every human bore the image of a God who defeated death. Orphanages. The abolition movement. The Civil Rights movement. Martin Luther King Jr. didn't march because of a philosophy. He marched because of an empty tomb. But go back further. The earliest church was a social revolution so jarring it barely made sense to the people living it. Slaves and Roman senators taking communion at the same table. Women treated as credible witnesses in a culture that literally wouldn't count their testimony in court. Paul wrote to the Galatians around 50 AD: "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). That wasn't a nice sentiment. That was a grenade.

None of that happens without Easter.

So why does the world still look broken? Because the Resurrection changes people, and people change slowly. It's not a renovation that happened to the world from the outside. It's a revolution that moves through human hearts one at a time, and then outward. The tomb was empty by Sunday morning. But the disciples were still hiding behind locked doors. It took an encounter with the Risen Christ to move them from terrified to unstoppable.

That's still how it works.

Which means the question is worth turning around. You asked why the world doesn't look more different. The better question this Easter might be: why don't I?

The Resurrection already changed the world. The only question left is whether it's changing you. Have a question you'd like your pastors to address? Email it to Craig@firstmethodistmonroe.com





**NANNETTE  
FLOWERS**

**NFlowers@  
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM**



**ADULT VACATION  
BIBLE SCHOOL**

**THE  
Bee  
ATTITUDES**

**WITH PASTOR BRIAN  
& PASTOR JOHN**

**SAVE THE DATE  
AUGUST 24-26  
10:30AM-1PM**

Sing favorite hymns, support a mission project, enjoy a delicious lunch, and fellowship with others!

# ENJOY A NEW LIFE THROUGH BE FIT

*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies. 1 Corinthians 19-20*

Beginning on Monday, March 30, at 10am, we begin a five-week Be Fit series in the Fellowship Hall focused on honoring God through caring for our bodies and encouraging one another in faith. Each Monday and Wednesday, we will enjoy lighthearted themed workouts, fellowship, and moments of reflection as we work toward healthy habits and Godly goals together. Scripture reminds us in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and we are called to honor God with them. This program is designed to strengthen both body and spirit while building community, encouragement, and joy in movement, giving you new life!

## MEMORIALS & HONORARIUMS

Did you know that memorials can be made to the church in memory of a loved one or friend who has passed & that honorariums may be given in honor of someone? First Methodist Monroe acknowledges these gifts with a card mailed to the family of the deceased or to the honoree. Memorials & honorariums are also printed in the monthly church newsletter. No monetary gift is too small or too large and is used to advance the Kingdom.

## 50+ Adult Happenings at the church

**BRIDGE** is Wednesday, April 8, from 1-4pm in the Friendship classroom. If you play contract bridge and are interested in participating as a substitute, please contact me.

**LUNCH & LEARN ON PREARRANGING A FUNERAL** - will be Monday, April 27 at 11am in classroom #6. This is the greatest gift you may give loved ones as they begin a new life without you. The workshop will cover understanding funeral costs, pre-planning a funeral with the church, differences between donating your body to medical research or being an organ donor, passing away when out of town, and many other relevant topics. RSVP to [nflowers@firstmethodistmonroe.com](mailto:nflowers@firstmethodistmonroe.com) by Wed., April 22nd to reserve a seat, meal, and materials!

## 50+ Adult Happenings outside the church

**HOLLAND AND BELGIUM SPRINGTIME RIVER CRUISE**, April 20-28, 2027, highlighting the Keukenhof Gardens, where more than seven million tulips create a dazzling symphony of color, the Kinderdijk's 18th century windmills, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, an Amsterdam canal cruise, and visits to the historic cities of Arnhem, Bruges, and Middelburg! For more information or to register online, visit: <https://gateway.gocollette.com/link/1329277>



## FALL RISK/SAFETY WORKSHOP & EXERCISES

# HOSPITALITY



**EMILY MARTIN**

Emily@FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM



## FIRST METHODIST MONROE FISH & LOAVES Ministry

Our Fish and Loaves Meal Ministry has truly enjoyed serving and loving on our faith family by providing nourishment and a warm smile. Whether someone receives a meal during a difficult time, after a hospital stay, or simply needs a little extra support, we are grateful to be able to serve in this way. Each time we gather to prepare and share meals, we are reminded that ministry often happens in the simplest and most meaningful ways—through food, fellowship, and caring hearts. We are grateful for every opportunity to share a meal, offer encouragement, and reflect God's love through simple acts of service. Thank you to everyone who volunteers, donates, and supports this ministry! If you'd like to join this ministry, we would love for you to join us! Please contact Emily Martin at [emily@firstmethodistmonroe.com](mailto:emily@firstmethodistmonroe.com) or 318-537-0906.



### CRADLE CARE MINISTRY

Our mission is to support expectant mothers and new families with spiritual, emotional, and practical care—while fostering love, encouragement, and connection within the FMM church community. If you'd like to serve as a mentor or volunteer, please contact Shelley Mercer 318-548-4536.



# YOUNG ADULTS & YOUNG FAMILIES



**NATHAN MCCLAIN**

Nathan@FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

# LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

When most people hear the word "witness" in a church setting, they quickly think about sharing the gospel — picturing a street-corner evangelist with a megaphone or a carefully rehearsed conversation designed to lead someone through a series of steps. And while God absolutely calls some people to that kind of bold, front-line evangelism, that is not the only — or even the primary — way most believers are called to witness. The truth is far more personal, far more daily, and perhaps far more powerful than we often realize.

Being an effective witness starts by simply living in a way that makes God's presence in your life visible to others. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus tells His followers: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Notice that Jesus doesn't say to argue your faith or to explain your faith — He says to let your light shine. Our faith should be evident in how we conduct ourselves. This means sharing your faith is less about having the right words and more about being transformed by God's Word. It is seen in your grace, love, compassion, and peace on a daily basis. These are not small things — they are the very evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in you, and they speak volumes to a watching world.

That said, Scripture also calls us to share our faith vocally. 1 Peter 3:15 reminds us always to be prepared to give a reason for the hope within us. There will be times when someone notices a difference in you and asks why — and when they do, your answer should simply be an overflow of your love for God and His love for you. We are called to be a faithful reflection of the God who saved us. That looks like showing up consistently, loving well, and speaking truth when necessary — trusting that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is active in and through your everyday life. The world doesn't need a polished presentation of Christianity; it needs to see what Christianity truly produces in a person's life — hope that remains steady, love that endures, and peace that surpasses all understanding. Our responsibility is faithfulness, not results. Plant seeds, water when you can, and trust God to bring the growth.



**MACKENZIE MILLER**

Mackenzie@FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

**STOCK SALE  
MAY 3  
INVEST IN OUR YOUTH!**

# RISE YOUTH MINISTRY (6TH -12TH GRADE)

When the Bible says “new life,” it gets a bit challenging to explain to 11–18-year-olds. New life—our new lives that we stepped into the day we accepted Christ—is meant to remind us that we were once dead in sin. Throughout the season of Lent, you were examining yourself and your sinful ways, but be encouraged that God has already called you into new life. Yes, YOU. He has called you to live a life where He no longer sees the old you, but instead sees Jesus’s blood, which makes us NEW. 2 Corinthians 5:17 reminds us, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” So, as we look forward to and celebrate Easter Sunday, remind yourself that your old self is gone, for now it is Christ who lives.

**CONFIRMATION**  
*Sunday* **APRIL 26**

**SENIOR RECOGNITION & YOUTH**  
*Sunday* **MAY 3!**

FIRST METHODIST MONROE  
**RISE YOUTH**  
LIVE, LOVE, SERVE - 1 TIMOTHY 4:12

**DO YOU HAVE A 2026 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE?**  
If you would like your graduate to be part of our Senior Recognition Sunday on May 3, please email your high school graduate’s full name, high school, future plans, & a photo to Mackenzie Miller (Mackenzie@firstmethodistmonroe.com) Please submit this information no later than April 26.



**JACKIE KITCHINGHAM**

Jackie@FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

## KINGDOM KIDS K-5TH

You’ve heard “children are a gift from God” so many times. I couldn’t agree with that statement more. As a church family, investing in the spiritual life of our children is so important. You can invest in their spiritual lives in two meaningful ways.

First, set an example. When you are at church, be engaged in your service or event, reverent, and respectful. Not only do our children see you, but they also notice more than you may realize.

Next, you can volunteer to serve in children’s ministry. I know, I know... it’s not for you... but it is. Our children’s ministry is a place where kids feel safe, seen, and loved. It’s also a place where our kids are encouraged to grow in their faith.

Investing in our children is easy. It’s one hour a month, which means 12 hours a year, and it takes little to no prep time on your part. Lessons and activities are prepared and ready, materials are provided, and you simply walk in and execute. Easy peasy, lemon squeezy. I’d love to talk to you about the different areas where you can get involved.

Planting seeds of faith in our kids brings so much joy. Don’t miss the opportunity to share your faith while growing the faith of the future of our church.



# Welcomed!

## MATT PAXTON

LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR

We are excited to announce that Matt Paxton's counseling practice will be based at First Methodist Monroe!

Matt earned his undergraduate degree from Louisiana State University and completed his graduate training in counseling at LSU as well. At the heart of Matt's approach is the belief that therapy is a relational process—one person sitting with another—helping individuals make sense of their story and move toward clarity, connection, and purpose.

To schedule an appointment, please contact Matt through his website or by phone: [paxtoncounselingmonroe.com](http://paxtoncounselingmonroe.com) or 318-620-5921.

## REPORTING OUR FAITHFULNESS

02/01/26

4TH AFTER EPIPHANY

Here 671

Online 1523

TV Area Wide

**WE GAVE**

\$46,638

02/08/26

5TH AFTER EPIPHANY

Here 794

Online 1417

TV Area Wide

**WE GAVE**

\$74,515

02/15/26

TRANSFIGURATION

Here 624

Online 1174

TV Area Wide

**WE GAVE**

\$26,408

02/22/26

1ST SUN IN LENT

Here 827

Online 1348

TV Area Wide

**WE GAVE**

\$39,403

**ONLINE GIVING**

\$72,124

TEXT "GIVE" TO

318.217.8383

## MEMORIALS & HONORARIUMS

In memory of John Ellett given by Nancy Meinel

In memory of John Ellett given by David & Debbie McLemore

In memory of Sue LaBorde given by Jessika Melancon

In memory of John Ellett given by Jimmy Norman

In memory of Kathy Daughdrill given by Jimmy Norman

In memory of Claudette Bartlett given by Jimmy Norman

In memory of Claudette Bartlett given by Mike & Nancy Sutton

In memory of Kathy Daughdrill given by Kappa Kappa Iota

In honor of Helpers from FMM who came to our house with chainsaws given by Beth & Paul Cornelison

In memory of Claudette Bartlett given by Lisa Miller

In memory of Grandparents given by Katie Harrison

In memory of Gerald Golden given by Mike & Beth Shriner

In honor of Jan Golden given by Mike & Beth Shriner

**CONTACT THE CHURCH OFFICE  
IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A  
MEMORIAL OR HONORARIUM  
318-325-7335**

**APRIL 2026**

**firstmethodist**  
m o n r o e  
3900 LOOP ROAD  
MONROE, LA 71201-3125  
CALL OR TEXT 318.217.8383

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Monroe, LA  
Peregrine

- 2 MAUNDY THURSDAY 7PM
- 3 GOOD FRIDAY 5-6:30PM  
(COME & GO)
- 5 EASTER SUNDAY
- 6 CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED
- 8 50+ ADULT BRIDGE 1PM
- 21 FMW CIRCLE 2 11:30AM
- 26 CONFIRMATION SUNDAY
- 27 50+ ADULT PREARRANGING  
A FUNERAL WORKSHOP 11AM

**50+ ADULT BE FIT AT 10AM**  
MON., APRIL 13, 20, 27  
WED., APRIL 1, 8, 15, 22, 29

**MEN'S & WOMEN'S  
BIBLE STUDIES 10AM**  
TUES., APRIL 7, 14, 21, 28

**WED. SUPPER & STUDY 5-7pm**  
WED., APRIL 8, 15, 22, 29



*Worship*  
**ON THE BAY**  **U**  
**HAS RETURNED!**

**SUNDAYS AT 7AM | APRIL - OCTOBER**