

# MINISTRY OF



FEBRUARY NEWS

## LOVE BY SERVING OTHERS

*"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God." 1 John 4:7*

First Methodist Monroe is truly a loving church. One of the beautiful ways that love is shared is through our Ministry of H.O.P.E. (Helping Others by Praying and Encouraging) Congregational Care program. Below are heartfelt words shared by a shut-in and by children whose parents were lovingly supported by members of our church family:

*"The H.O.P.E. visits are so precious and meaningful to me. I cannot tell you how much I have come to love and appreciate them. Thank you for giving the time, the prayers, and the love—especially the communion each month."*

*"The work done through the Ministry of H.O.P.E. was instrumental in extending my mom's quality of life over the last five years!"*

*"My mom felt so connected to her church. The Card Ministry is not always given enough credit. Just think how many times a card or letter has brought a smile to a church member like my mom!"*

These stories are a powerful reminder that loving through service truly makes a difference. **How Would You Like to Love and Serve Others in 2026?** Below are opportunities to serve through our Ministry of H.O.P.E. (Helping Others by Praying & Encouraging) Congregational Care program:

**COMMUNION TEAM** - Serve by delivering Communion boxes on the first Sunday of each month to church members and residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Another opportunity includes helping prepare Communion boxes quarterly for shut-ins.

**L.Y.F.T. MINISTRY** (Living Your Faith Transporting) Adult drivers are needed to provide transportation for older adults on Sunday mornings so they can attend worship in person.

**VISITATION TEAM** – Visitors are needed to make monthly visits that include serving Communion and delivering Ministry of H.O.P.E. holiday gifts to shut-ins, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes.

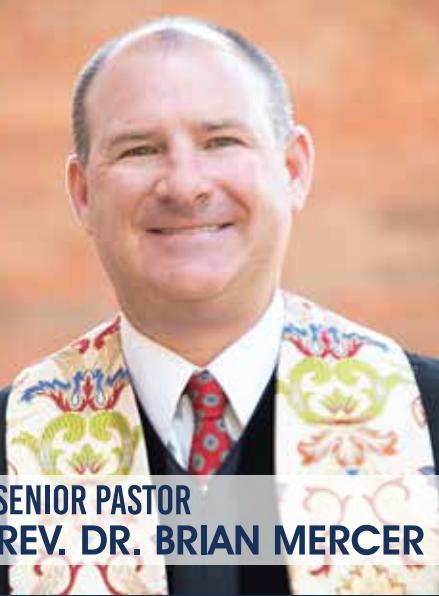
**HOSPITAL VISITATION TEAM** – Volunteers are needed to make monthly visits to local hospitals.

**CARD MINISTRY TEAM** – Those who enjoy sending greeting cards to encourage and uplift others are always welcome and greatly needed.

Please contact Nannette Flowers at the church office 318-325-7335 or email [nflowers@firstmethodistmonroe.com](mailto:nflowers@firstmethodistmonroe.com) if you feel led to serve our older adults through any of these ministries. **TRAINING IS PROVIDED!**

*Together, we live out God's love by serving others.*





SENIOR PASTOR  
REV. DR. BRIAN MERCER

PastorBrian@  
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

CELEBRATING ALONGSIDE YOU,

*Pastor Brian*



## HAPPY 200<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY FIRST METHODIST MONROE

Grace and peace to you, First Methodist Monroe family. As we step into 2026, we begin a year unlike any other in the life of our congregation: our 200th Bicentennial. This sacred milestone invites us to remember God's faithfulness

across two centuries and to imagine how God will continue shaping us in the years ahead. Our mission—becoming people of Christ—will guide every celebration, service, and story we share throughout this year.

As the Apostle Paul reminds us, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). May that promise steady our hearts as we honor the past and lean faithfully into the future.

### HOW THE BICENTENNIAL YEAR WILL FLOW

Throughout this year, we will celebrate intentionally. Each month will highlight a different era or area of our church's history and ministry, creating space for worship, learning, fellowship, and service that connect our past, present, and future. On the last Sunday of every month, we will share a brief video highlighting the beauty of God's work across the last 200 years. We are gathering stories from long-time members, welcoming descendants of founding families, and creating opportunities for every generation to contribute. Our goal is not nostalgia alone, but formation—so that remembering leads to renewed discipleship and a deeper commitment to becoming people of Christ.

### WAYS TO PARTICIPATE AND SERVE

- **PRAY!** Pray that our 200th Bicentennial celebration will be more than a journey down memory lane—that it will be a journey toward the abundant life found in following Jesus.
- **SAVE THE DATE** - Sunday, October 4, 2026, will be a banner day in the life of our church as we celebrate all day long. Former pastors will preach in our morning worship services, followed by an afternoon celebration beginning at 5:00 p.m. on our campus. Together, we will use our grounds to tell the 200-year story of our church while also looking ahead to God's future for us. Our celebration will conclude with a time of singing and devotion in the sanctuary, followed by a brief fireworks display over the bayou.
- **SHARE YOUR STORY** - We need your help preserving our story. Please consider sharing photos, wedding portraits, letters, or memories. Items may be dropped off or emailed to [lindsey@firstmethodistmonroe.com](mailto:lindsey@firstmethodistmonroe.com) for our archives. You are also invited to record a 3–5 minute testimony to be included in our bicentennial archive.

### 2026—A GIFT

This bicentennial year is a gift: a time to give thanks, to learn, and to recommit. Join us in prayer for wisdom, humility, and joy as we celebrate. Together, we will honor those who came before us and prepare the way for those who will follow—trusting that the same God who began this good work will carry it forward.

# LOVE IS A VERB

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in

honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. - Romans 12:9-18

**EXECUTIVE PASTOR  
REV. JOHN O'LEARY**

**John@  
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM**

**DON'T JUST PRETEND  
TO LOVE OTHERS.  
REALLY LOVE THEM.  
HATE WHAT IS WRONG.  
HOLD TIGHTLY TO  
WHAT IS GOOD.**

**ROMANS 12:9**

**ASSOCIATE PASTOR  
REV. CRAIG  
FERGUSON**

**Craig@  
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM**



This passage is a calling to put our love into action. When God calls us to love our neighbor, He expects that love to look different—to be visible, intentional, and Christ-shaped. In this passage, Paul exhorts us to love the way Christ loves us: with sincere love. Not perfect love—but love that is genuine, without hypocrisy. When we love others well, our love seeks to honor them, not elevate ourselves. Imagine being part of a community where people are competing—not for recognition—but to outdo one another in honoring others. Volunteers, coworkers, older adults, young people—everyone held in high esteem. That's a community worth belonging to. That's a church worth building.

In his book *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*, Joshua Jipp writes:

"God's hospitality is extended to His lost, broken, needy, and often stigmatized people. This divine hospitality comes to us in the person of Jesus, the divine host who extends God's hospitality to sinners, outcasts, and strangers and thereby draws them—and us—into friendship with God. God's embrace of humanity into friendship with Him is the ultimate form of welcoming the stranger."

When we love our neighbors well, we embrace, forgive, and extend grace the same way Jesus has shown it to us. My prayer is that God would use our faith family to extend this kind of love—active, sincere, Christlike love—to our neighbors and our community.

**ASK  
PASTOR  
CRAIG!**

Welcome to our new column, a place where your real questions meet honest, biblical answers for everyday faith.

**Question:** How do I deal with past hurt I've experienced in church or from Christians?

Let me say this upfront: if you've been hurt by church leaders or a church community, that pain is real and it matters. You're not being too sensitive, and you're definitely not alone. Church wounds cut differently than other kinds of hurt because they happen in a place that's supposed to be safe—among people who are supposed to reflect Christ's love. When that trust gets broken, it can shake everything.

This is crucial: flawed leaders and broken communities don't define who God is. The pastor who failed you isn't Jesus. The church that wounded you isn't the Church. They're human beings who sometimes represent themselves instead of Christ. Importantly, God is grieved by what happened to you. The same Jesus who overturned tables when religious leaders exploited people is angry about Christian leaders who hurt people today.

Here's where church culture sometimes gets it wrong: we pressure people to forgive and reconcile, as if they're the same thing. Forgiveness is releasing your right to revenge and choosing not to let bitterness poison your soul. It's something you do with God's help to keep you from being captive to the person who hurt you, and it's often a process. You can forgive someone and still maintain boundaries. You can forgive someone and never put yourself back in a position where they can hurt you again. That's not unChristian; that's wisdom.

The great tragedy of church hurt is that it makes people leave church altogether. Before walking away from faith completely, ask yourself: Am I leaving Jesus, or am I leaving what these people said about Jesus? Read the Gospels with fresh eyes. Pay attention to how Jesus actually treated people wounded by religious leaders. Every church has broken people who sometimes do things that cause pain. But the Church is bigger than any single congregation or leader. God is still good, still present, still redemptive—even when his people aren't. He is the God who heals. Church is the place God designed for us to learn how to do that. Cling to it; don't run from it. If you have a question you would like your pastors to address, email it to me at [Craig@firstmethodistmonroe.com](mailto:Craig@firstmethodistmonroe.com)

# 50+ ADULTS



50+ ADULT MINISTRIES  
NANNETTE FLOWERS

NFlowers@  
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

## Valentine's Day Luncheon FOR WIDOWS & WIDOWERS

All widows and widowers of the church are warmly invited to join us for a Valentine's Day Luncheon on SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14, AT 12:00 PM at Monroe's, located at 1301 N. 19th Street.

Please RSVP by Tuesday, February 10, so a seat may be reserved for you. Contact **NFLOWERS** @FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM or call 318-325-1775.



Grandchildren expressing their love for others with the presentation of needed baby gifts to the Life Choices Pregnancy Resource Center

## 50+ Adult Happenings at the church

### BRIDGE

Wednesday, February 11 | 1:00 - 4:00 PM | Aldersgate Classroom (Room 16)  
If you enjoy playing cards and would like to participate as a substitute, please contact Nannette Flowers at the church office.

### BE FIT EXERCISE CLASSES

Mondays & Wednesdays | 10:00 AM | Fellowship Hall

This one-hour class is led by a certified fitness instructor. Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing and supportive shoes, and bring a water bottle. Come work out with us and get your heart pumping!

## 50+ Adult Happenings outside the church

### TRIP TO NORTHERN ITALY

SEPTEMBER 17-25, 2026



Discover Northern Italy on a faith-based tour featuring a one-hotel stay. This unforgettable journey offers rich history, breathtaking landscapes, and meaningful spiritual moments along the way. The deadline to guarantee the discounted price is March 11. For more info or to register online, visit: <https://gateway.gocollette.com/link/1329058>

**Be on the lookout!**

2026 FIRST METHODIST MONROE WOMEN'S EVENTS! We're excited to gather regularly and grow together in fellowship, faith, and friendship.



DIRECTOR OF HOSPITALITY  
**EMILY MARTIN**

**Emily@**  
**FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM**

# SERVING ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE

We are incredibly thankful for the volunteers in our church family who serve with faithful hearts and joyful spirits. Each time you teach our children or youth, welcome others into worship, help feed families, or check in on one another, you beautifully reflect God's love in action.

As Scripture reminds us, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace" (1 Peter 4:10). We are called to serve one another in love, following the example of Christ Himself. In Galatians 5:13, we are reminded that freedom in Christ is expressed through humble service to others.

When we serve with love, we reflect the heart of Jesus, build up the body of Christ, and glorify God. May we spur one another on toward serving in love throughout this year!



# wednesday **NIGHTS** SUPPER 5PM STUDIES 6PM

## **PASTOR'S STUDY** • Sanctuary

Led by: Pastor John O'Leary  
The Character of God

## **MARRIAGE STUDY** • Garden Room

Led by: Enrique Magaña  
Newlyweds or seasoned couples, you'll learn to deepen love, improve communication, & build a Christ-centered marriage.

## **MOMS WITH LITTLES** • Room 24A

Led by: Savannah Smith  
Bible study, practical parenting tips, and lasting friendships.

## **EAT TO LOSE: NUTRITION CLASS** • Room 16

Led by: Andi Holyfield,  
Registered Dietitian Nutritionist

## **WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY** • Room 17

Led by: Rachel Shelby  
Unexpected Journeys of Faith

## **THE SEEKERS BIBLE STUDY** • Room 6

Led by: Marty Somoza  
Help Is Here - Unlocking The Power Of The Holy Spirit by Max Lucado. Discover the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit in everyday life

## **GRIEFSHARE** • Prayer Room

Led by: Annette Harrison-Davis & Wanda Ramsey  
GriefShare is a support group designed to bring understanding, healing, and community.

## **COLLEGE/YOUNG ADULT STUDY** • Room 12

Led by: Ashley O'Leary  
Bible study to be determined after first meeting.

## **RISE YOUTH (6TH - 12TH GRADE)** • Upstairs

### **KINGDOM KIDS (PREK 4 - 5TH GRADE)**

4th & 5th grade girls in - • Room 26  
4th & 5th grade boys in - • Room 32  
Prek4-3rd grade in - • Room 30

## **NURSERY - (6 WEEKS TO 4 YEARS OLD)** • Room 36

## ON THE MENU THIS MONTH

FEB. 4 - Baked Potato Bar  
FEB. 11 - Fried Chicken

FEB. 18 - Soup  
FEB. 25 - Meatloaf

Sign up for Wednesday Night Supper texts! Find out what's on the menu and make reservations.

**Text "MEAL" to 318-217-8383**



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

February is the month of love. In today's world, it's often associated with heart-shaped candy, cheesy cards, and overpriced flowers. People may be a little kinder, a little more generous—sharing kind words, grand gestures, and thoughtful gifts.

Yet my hope is that we remember this deeper truth: God is the truest and most complete expression of love. If we are to Become People of Christ, our love for one another must reflect God's presence at work in our lives.

May our words and our actions reveal a love that points beyond ourselves and leads others toward the light of Jesus Christ. Let us live as He has called us to live—loving our neighbors not only with seasonal sweets and gestures, but with grace, compassion, humility, and faithful care all year long.



INTERIM YOUTH DIRECTOR  
**MACKENZIE  
MILLER**



# KINGDOM KIDS MINISTRY (K-5TH GRADE)

February is the month that makes it a little easier to show love to others. We share hearts made of everything from paper to chocolate—and it seems like there's no shortage of sweet ways to say, "You matter." But as I think about all these hearts, I find myself wondering: does the person receiving them have a heart for the Lord?

Loving others isn't always easy—especially when someone has hurt your feelings or made you angry. Yet, we are still called to love. We are called to love others even when we don't agree with them or understand their choices. Loving like Jesus Christ means choosing compassion, patience, and grace, even when it's difficult.

As you move through the month of February, take time to talk with your children about loving others no matter what. Challenge them to befriend the new kid at school, to play with the child at recess who is alone, to help someone who is having a hard day, or even to share a chocolate heart with someone who needs to know they are loved beyond measure.

Sometimes the smallest acts of love can make the biggest difference.



CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES  
**JACKIE KITCHINGHAM**

**Jackie@  
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM**



**FIRST METHODIST MONROE**  
CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP

 **Spotify**



**Worship doesn't begin when the service starts, it begins when we intentionally turn our hearts toward God.**



# CHARIS MEN'S RETREAT



MARCH 12-14

CAMP CANEY | MINDEN, LA

This Retreat is a weekend set apart to worship, pray, share meals, and build meaningful fellowship with other Christian men. It will renew your spirit and re-energize your walk with God through rest, reflection, and connection. Registration is open! Go to [firstmethodistmonroe.com/retreats](http://firstmethodistmonroe.com/retreats)

## REPORTING OUR FAITHFULNESS

ONLINE GIVING \$96,929

**12/07/25**

2ND SUN OF ADVENT

Here 885

Online 1010

TV Area Wide

**WE GAVE**

\$37,143

**12/14/25**

3RD SUN OF ADVENT

Here 800

Online 906

TV Area Wide

**WE GAVE**

\$52,084

**12/21/25**

4TH SUN OF ADVENT

Here 806

Online 1041

TV Area Wide

**WE GAVE**

\$51,240

**12/24/25**

CHRISTMAS EVE

Here 1735

Online 3887

TV Area Wide

**WE GAVE**

**12/28/25**

1ST SUN AFTER CHRISTMAS

Here 638

Online 1219

TV Area Wide

**WE GAVE**

\$23,988

## MEMORIALS & HONORARIUMS

In memory of  
Ronald Herring given by  
Cindy Smith

In memory of  
Claudette Bartlett given by  
Oasis Sunday School Class

In memory of  
Howard F. Jackson given by  
Nancy Meinel

In memory of  
Claudette Bartlett given by  
Charles and Pat Muirhead

In memory of  
Claudette Bartlett given by  
Brenda Haley

In honor of  
Pastor Brian Mercer given by  
Mary Poe

In memory of  
Claudette Bartlett given by  
Barbara Potts

# FEBRUARY 2026

firstmethodist  
monroe  
3900 LOOP ROAD  
MONROE, LA 71201-3125  
CALL OR TEXT 318.217.8383

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

11 50+ ADULT BRIDGE 1PM

14 VALENTINE'S DAY LUNCHEON  
FOR WIDOWS & WIDOWERS NOON

17 FMW CIRCLE 2 11:30AM

18 ASH WEDNESDAY  
7-8AM COME & GO  
6PM FMM SANCTUARY  
& FOUNDRY

**50+ ADULT BE FIT AT 10AM**  
MON., FEB. 2, 9, 16, 23  
WED., FEB. 4, 11, 18, 25

**J-FORCE - 3:15-5:15pm**  
WEDS., FEB. 4, 11, 25

**MEN'S & WOMEN'S  
BIBLE STUDIES 10AM**  
TUES., FEB. 3, 10, 17, 24

**MOM'S IN PRAYER AT 5PM**  
SUN., FEB. 1, 8, 15, 22

**WED. SUPPER & STUDY 5-7pm**  
WED., FEB. 4, 11, 25

WEDNESDAY

February 18

7AM

COME & GO  
TIL 8AM | PRAYER ROOM

6PM

FMM SANCTUARY  
& FOUNDRY