



JANUARY NEWS

Happy New Year!

2026

**IS THE YEAR
OF OUR
BICENTENNIAL!**

2026 marks a historic milestone for First Methodist Monroe—our 200th anniversary! On October 4, we celebrate 200 years of faith, ministry, and God's faithfulness in our community. Be on the lookout all year long for special bicentennial worship events, stories, and celebrations as we honor our past and look boldly toward the future.

**WHERE IS GOD CALLING YOU
TO TAKE YOUR NEXT STEP?**



***NEXT
STEPS***

JAN. 25

**10:10AM
IN THE PARLOR**



SENIOR PASTOR
REV. DR. BRIAN MERCER

PastorBrian@
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

WED NIGHTS

SUPPER 5PM
STUDIES 6PM

WILL RETURN
JANUARY 14

We have
something
for all
ages

NEW YEAR, SAME MISSION

As we step into a new year together, First Methodist Monroe returns to the steady, shaping work at the heart of our life together: Becoming People of Christ. The calendar has changed, but our calling has not.

In January, we will lean into that calling through a four-week sermon series titled "New Year, Same Mission," inviting us to renew our commitment to God's mission in the world—to become People of Christ in word and deed. Our January 2026 sermon series will explore how the gospel shapes our priorities and practices for the year ahead. Each Sunday focuses on a distinct facet of mission, rooted in Scripture and lived out in the life of our congregation: rescue, holiness that heals, evangelism, and radical hospitality. These are not abstract ideals but practical ways we grow together into Christlikeness.

January Sermon Series Outline

JANUARY 4 — NO ONE SHOULD PERISH

Scripture: Jonah 1:1–4:11; 2 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 12:15b

We begin with Jonah's surprising story and God's patient heart for the lost. This service will include a Remembrance of Baptism, a tangible reminder of God's rescue—and our call to invite others into new life.

JANUARY 11 — HOLY, WHOLISTIC MISSION

Scripture: Luke 4:16–30; Isaiah 61:1–3

On Epiphany Sunday, we remember Christ's mission to bring good news to the whole person—spiritual, physical, and social. We will reflect on how holiness is not separation from the world, but healing for the world.

JANUARY 18 — EVANGELISM

Scripture: Romans 10:13–17

Evangelism is often misunderstood. This week, we will reclaim it as faithful, loving proclamation and attentive listening—helping our neighbors hear and see the good news of Christ.

JANUARY 25 — RADICAL HOSPITALITY

Scripture: Romans 12:9–21

We close the series by practicing hospitality that surprises, includes, and transforms. Radical hospitality is one of the clearest ways we show the world what it means to be People of Christ.

It is our hope at First Methodist Monroe to reach Northeast Louisiana with the transformative message of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Here are a few ways you can be part of the journey:

- Worship faithfully and invite someone who needs to hear the good news. Each of our five Sunday morning services offers a slightly different style, making it easier to welcome friends into a setting that fits them.
- Remember your baptism on January 4 by reflecting on the promises made for you and by you. Consider sharing your conversion or baptism story with a friend or in a small group.
- Serve with us in outreach and hospitality this month—ushering, greeting, serving in youth or children's ministry, or joining a ministry team that meets needs in our church or community. Small acts of welcome are how we live the sermon.
- Pray daily for one person who does not yet know Christ, and for the courage to speak and serve in ways that point them to Jesus.

2025 has been a year of great abundance for First Methodist Monroe (I look forward to sharing more about this in our February newsletter). May God continue the good work He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6) as we Become People of Christ.

Serving Him alongside you,
Brian Mercer



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

John@
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

BIBLE 101
JAN. 7 AT 6PM
IN THE FELLOWSHIP HALL
**PRACTICAL WAYS
TO LEARN HOW
TO READ & STUDY
YOUR BIBLE!**



**ASSOCIATE PASTOR
REV. CRAIG
FERGUSON**

Craig@
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

BE ON THE LOOKOUT
for **FIRST METHODIST
MONROE WOMEN'S**
events throughout
2026!

**We're excited to
gather regularly
and grow together
in fellowship, faith,
and friendship.**

ALL THINGS NEW

As we step into the new year, a phrase has been resonating in my heart over the past several months: All Things New. The arrival of 2026 invites us to reflect on the possibilities

ahead and encourages us to embrace new habits and pursuits that can truly enrich our lives. When I reflect on the phrase All Things New, I am reminded of the profound spiritual renewal and transformation found through faith in Jesus Christ. He promises to make all things new—offering hope, restoration, and the gift of a fresh start.

At the same time, this promise can sometimes feel confusing. As followers of Christ, we continue to live in a fallen and broken world. We still experience struggles that seem to linger, and we may find ourselves asking, "Why am I still struggling with this?"

These questions lead us back to the truth found in Scripture, which offers both reassurance and encouragement for our journey of faith.

One of the clearest reminders comes from 2 Corinthians 5:17:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

This verse reassures us that we are no longer defined by our past. In Christ, we have been made new—truly good news.

Another powerful reminder comes from Paul's letter to the Galatians. In Galatians 2:20, he writes: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

This verse reminds us that our identity is transformed through our relationship with Christ. While struggles may remain, we are being continually renewed as Christ lives and works within us.

Finally, we look forward with hope to the day when Jesus returns to rescue His bride, the Church. A beautiful promise of that future is found in Revelation 21:5, where God, seated on the throne, declares:

"Behold, I am making all things new."

This promise points us to the ultimate renewal—when suffering, death, and mourning are no more, and a glorious new reality is fully revealed.

As we move through 2026, may we be a church that reflects God's grace, love, and mercy within our community. Please know that I am praying for each of you as we journey together through this year, drawing ever closer to the reality of all things being made new.

May this year be filled with hope, renewal, and the transforming power of Christ in our lives.



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

Question: It is very uncomfortable for me to read parts of the Old Testament about the Israelites taking the "promised land" under Joshua and being commanded by God to commit violent acts. How do we justify this?

First, let me affirm that your discomfort is appropriate. These texts are hard. They should trouble us. When we read about Achan's family being stoned and burned (Joshua 7) or the destruction of Ai (Joshua 8), we're encountering something that feels deeply foreign to the God we know through Jesus.

However, YouTube skeptics who address this issue fail to acknowledge an equally troubling fact: The ancient Near East was a brutal world. Israel's neighbors practiced child sacrifice, ceremonial prostitution, and systematic brutality in warfare, not just killing but ritualized cruelty. These texts present the conquest of the promised land NOT as random violence but, rather, as God's judgment. The nations being displaced regularly committed acts so dehumanizing that Scripture says the land itself "vomited them out" (Lev. 18:28). Still, God waited generations before acting. Genesis 15:16 clearly reveals God telling Abraham his descendants won't inherit the land yet because "the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction." And Israel was also explicitly warned: if you do what they did, you'll face the same fate. This isn't "our tribe good, their tribe bad." It's God taking sin seriously, which should make all of us sober, not self-righteous.

The Old Testament pictures God working within a violent world, with a violent people, moving them slowly toward something better. We're not meant to read Joshua as the final word on God's character. We read it in light of Jesus, who tells us to love our enemies and who dies forgiving his executioners. Jesus is the clearest picture of who God is. The cross is where we see most lucidly what God is really like, not demanding death, but absorbing it. These passages remain difficult, but we can look to the cross and see most the beautiful picture of who God has always been. If you have a question you would like your pastors to address, email it to me at Craig@firstmethodistmonroe.com

WELCOME



2025 NEW MEMBERS OF FIRST METHODIST MONROE

What a year it has been! We joyfully welcome all of our new members in 2025 who have taken a step of faith by joining the First Methodist Monroe family. The joy, hope, and peace that have been so evident among our people can only come from God, and for that we are deeply thankful. We are excited to walk alongside you—speaking truth to one another, showing up for one another, serving one another, and overflowing with gratitude for one another. It is our joy to help you delight in the gift of our church and God's people as, together, we intentionally become people of Christ.



50+ ADULTS



50+ ADULT MINISTRIES
NANNETTE FLOWERS

NFlowers@
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM

Thanks

Thanks First Methodist Monroe for meeting the needs of seniors experiencing hunger through our "Day of Thanks!" With Louisiana ranking 1st in senior food insecurity in the nation, the Executive Directors for the Council on Aging and West Ouachita Senior Center were overwhelmed with our generosity in filling their two pantries and the monetary donation of \$1,600 (\$800 to each site)!

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

It's a new year, but the same mission continues in our 50+ Adult Ministries: connecting people to new hope, new life, and new beginnings. Whether you are a longtime member, a brand-new member, or a regular guest, we pray you will find a place to connect through the life and ministries of our church. We invite you to join a Sunday School class or Bible study, attend Adult Vacation Bible School, participate in Be Fit exercise classes, connect through contract bridge or our Grandparent Ministry, or enjoy a Lunch & Learn, day trip, or overnight trip. Below are many opportunities to grow together as we continue becoming people of Christ.

50+ Adult Happenings at the church

CONTRACT BRIDGE will meet on Wednesday, January 14, from 1:00-4:00 p.m. in the Aldersgate Classroom, room 16. If you are interested in participating as a substitute, please contact me.

BE FIT EXERCISE CLASSES meet at 10:00 a.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays in the Fellowship Hall. Wear workout clothes and tennis shoes, and bring a water bottle. It's a great way to meet new people while building strength and stamina, improving balance, and getting your heart pumping! In addition to caring for our own health, we also care for others. In November, the Be Fit group helps load non-perishable food items for the Senior Center pantries, and 426 toys and games, 11 bikes and two tricycles in the Salvation Army truck in December. Captain Casey and the Salvation Army appreciated these gifts for them to distribute to the children in NELA for Christmas and the monetary contribution of \$1,830!



50+ Adult Happenings outside the church



GOLDEN YEARS LUNCHEON
FREE EVENT FOR NELA SENIOR ADULTS
Thursday, January 29, from 11a.m.-1p.m.
Tennison Hall at First West Church
(311 Mill Street, West Monroe).
RSVP to NFLOWERS@FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM
by Wednesday, January 21, so we can reserve space for you at our First Methodist Monroe tables. We look forward to sharing a wonderful time of fellowship together!

DISCOVER NORTHERN ITALY on our faith-based tour with a convenient one-hotel stay, September 17-25, 2026. Experience rich history, beautiful landscapes, and meaningful spiritual moments along the way. For more info or to register online, go to [HTTPS://GATEWAY.GOCOLLETTE.COM/LINK/1329058](https://gateway.gocollette.com/link/1329058)



RISE YOUTH MINISTRY (6TH -12TH GRADE)

As we begin a new year—surrounded by Christmas goodies, freshly motivated intentions, and rejuvenated spirits—Rise Youth is pursuing the same vision we always have. Our ministry remains committed to supporting and encouraging young people as they become People of Christ. The start of a new year always brings to mind Ephesians 3:20, my favorite verse, because it reminds me of the limitless possibilities and unimaginable work God can accomplish in just one year. With that hope, Rise Youth is looking ahead to the launch of our Confirmation Program—an opportunity to help our 6th graders take an important next step in their journey of faith and in becoming People of Christ. As I have faith in all that God will do in and through our youth this year, I pray that you, too, will have faith and confidence that God is still working.

“Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.” - Ephesians 3:20 NLT

CONFIRMATION PARENT MEETING

Sunday, January 11, 2026 | 10:10-10:50AM | Upstairs Youth Room

All parents of 6th graders are invited to a Confirmation information meeting. Mark your calendars and plan to join us as we prepare for this important season in your student's faith journey.



**INTERIM YOUTH PASTOR
MACKENZIE
MILLER**



KINGDOM KIDS MINISTRY (K-5TH GRADE)

Happy New Year! I don't know about you, but I'm excited for what 2026 has to offer. Each new year gives us an opportunity to refocus and adjust our priorities. There are things from years past that no longer need to be carried forward—and there are new practices we can add that make our lives richer. Could you build in more quiet time each day? What about increasing your prayer time? Are there more moments when we can simply pause and say thank you?

As someone who is very Type A (very!), the unknown can be a challenge for me. Interestingly, there's something about 2026 that brings me a deep sense of peace—thank you, Lord. Through trials and tough seasons, verses like Romans 8:28, Exodus 14:14, and Jeremiah 29:11 are scriptures I have held onto tightly. If you need encouragement, I invite you to look them up. As difficult seasons pass, it's such a gift to look back and see how God used each of those verses to carry me through. Though the calendar has turned and a new year has begun, we continue to serve the same great God—and what an awesome God He is!



**CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES
JACKIE KITCHINGHAM**

**Jackie@
FIRSTMETHODISTMONROE.COM**



REPORTING OUR FAITHFULNESS

11/02/25

21ST SUN AFTER PENT

Here 741 Online 1324

WE GAVE \$52,117

11/09/25

22ND SUN AFTER PENT

Here 693 Online 1288

WE GAVE \$27,970

11/16/25

23RD SUN AFTER PENT

Here 733 Online 933

WE GAVE \$32,124

11/23/25

CHRIST THE KING SUN

Here 654 Online 997

WE GAVE \$33,203

11/30/25

1ST SUN OF ADVENT

Here 676 Online 970

WE GAVE \$24,767

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m o n r o e

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MEMORIALS & HONORARIUMS

In memory of Christine Holland,
Mother of Rev. JoAnn Cooper given
by Joe & Linda Walker

In memory of Bill Kelly given by
Desha Sims

In memory of Bill Kelly given by The
Clara & Aylmer Montgomery Family
Eugene, Olive, Elizabeth, & Mary
Laurens

In memory of Bill Kelly given by
Malcolm & Johellen Maddox

In memory of Bill Kelly given by Jane
& Richard Bordelon

In memory of William "Bill" Shepard
given by Fran & Sput Kennedy

In memory of Jeremy Spies given by
Aldersgate Class

In memory of Christie McRight given
by The Review Club

In memory of Bill Kelly given by Dan
& Hope Robertson

In memory of Bill Kelly given by
Aldersgate Class

In memory of Bill Kelly given by
Nancy Meinel

In memory of Christie McRight given
by First Methodist Women Circle #4

In memory of Violet Kulke Collins
given by Kyle & William Goulet

In memory of Dr. Ralph Karst given
by Aldersgate

In memory of Dr Ralph Karst given
by Nancy Meinel

In memory of Claudette Bartlett
given by Nancy Meinel

In memory of Bill Kelly given by
Jessika Melancon

In memory of Claudette Bartlett
given by Gene Baker

In memory of William Grady "Bill"
Kelly, Jr. given by O'Bannon Family,
James O'Bannon

In memory of Claudette Bartlett
given by Paul & Beth Cornelison

In memory of Bill Kelly Jr. given by
Rev. Dr. and Mrs. Fred Devall

In honor of Roy & Terri Arthur given
by Roy Heatherly

In honor of Lee Garland given by
Roy Heatherly

In honor of Bruce & Jeanne Bitler
given by Roy Heatherly

In honor of Tim & Aimee Kane given
by Roy Heatherly

In honor of Amanda Edge & Mike
Walsworth given by Roy Heatherly

In honor of Jeremy & Shelly Harrell
given by Roy Heatherly

In honor of Ronnie & Nancy Golemi
given by Roy Heatherly

In honor of Matt & Kelsi Dickerson
given by Roy Heatherly