

# The Church Bell

REACH - CONNECT - EQUIP - SEND

FEBRUARY  
2026



## What exactly is a habit?

Rev. Jonathan Jonas



Later this month we will begin the season of Lent, a forty-day period of preparation for the holy day of Easter, when we celebrate Jesus' victory over sin and death. During this season, we are invited to be more conscious, mindful, and intentional about our holy habits.

### What exactly is a habit?

In its earliest Latin verb form, *habere* meant "to have" or "to hold." The noun form *habitus* meant "a condition," "an appearance," or "a state of being." These old Latin words are the source of several of our English words, including *have*, *habitat*, and *inhabit*.

My Sage will appear in Primary Player's production of *The Sound of Music* in just a few days, and she will wear a nun's habit. This particular habit is a kind of appearance.

In Celebrate Recovery each week, we remember that Jesus offers deliverance from our hurts, habits, and hangups. This use of habit is one of those conditions or states of being.

We know that living species tend to inhabit the habitat that offers the best probability of not only surviving, but thriving.

Perhaps all of these ways of thinking about holy habits are helpful as we enter into the season of Lent.

Do we appear Christlike to the people who observe us? I'm not suggesting that we get caught up in appearance vs. reality, but it is helpful to ask ourselves whether the behaviors people observe in us glorify Christ. Do our lights shine so that people glorify God? If not, how could we use the season of Lent to get into new habits of revealing Christ through our lives?

Is close communion with the Holy Spirit a condition in which we typically live, or is it a state to which we occasionally return? How might we discipline ourselves in the season of Lent to make intimacy with God our habit rather than our occasional practice?

How do the circumstances in which we typically live make it more or less likely that we will thrive in our lives of faith? How do we spend our time? What are we watching? What are we hearing? What are our priorities? Just as a living organism cannot thrive without the necessities it requires, our faith cannot thrive when it doesn't get the time and tending that it needs.

So, how can we cultivate our lives in such a way that our spirits inhabit conditions in which we are better able to thrive as followers of Jesus? In what ways do we need to spend our time differently? What distractions or obstacles do we need to remove or overcome? What nutrients for our faith do we need to add? How can we cultivate a better faith habitat through Lent?

As you consider your habits for Lent and beyond, I pray that your taking up your cross daily to follow Jesus Christ becomes more and more habitual.



### Staff Contacts

You can find staff and ministry contacts under the "Reach" tab on the church website: [1stchurch.org](http://1stchurch.org)

The church phone number is 865-982-1273.



### Warming up to serve this winter

When temperatures fall this time of year, the people of 1st United Methodist Church **Go.Do.**, serving in various ways to help those seeking shelter or warmth when winter becomes a dangerous season to weather.

One of the ways people have been serving is to volunteer at the Warming Center at First Baptist Church. The shelter has been operating quite a bit as temperatures associated with two winter storms have met the criteria for keeping it open.

When the shelter is open on a Sunday, you'll see volunteers from 1st United Methodist Church pitching to prepare and serve meals. In late January, there was also a call for people to bring breakfast casseroles for the center and according to Amy Large, who asked fellow 1st UMC'ers to bring the casseroles, the Warming Shelter had enough for them to make it through the coldest days.

On the last two Tuesdays of January, you and other members of the church family more than filled up the **Go.Do.** bins with hand warmers, gloves, socks and hats. We will send these items to various shelters and warming centers in the area. Thanks for all each of you do to help keep others safe when it gets cold, something that truly warms our hearts!

## LEADERSHIP



**RESCHEDULED FOR  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23RD  
6:30 PM IN WESLEY HALL**



### Ready to celebrate something good?

When you think of the season of Lent, chances are you think about giving something up or maybe trying to do something, like prayer, even more. This year, Lent begins on February 18th and of course runs through Easter (not counting Sundays). It's usually a somber and reflective time, but that doesn't mean there isn't Good News to share and to spread.

During this time, sermons on Sundays will focus on what was central to Jesus' life and ministry. Things like love for neighbor, care for the vulnerable and how to find liberation, love, mercy and grace at the heart of what Jesus taught, all things that are meant to be very good news for all of us.

For Ash Wednesday (February 18th) there will be two worship services happening at 6:30 pm. The traditional Ash Wednesday worship happens in the Sanctuary. Down in Asbury Hall, Celebrate Recovery will have its own take on this important day. We hope you can join us as we journey toward Easter, together.

Everyone is encouraged to tune into special Lenten themed episodes of the **Grace for All Podcast**. You can also sign up to get the text from each episode in your email inbox. Jim Stovall has also compiled a book of the Lenten devotions, available on Amazon. We will have a limited supply of those books here in the office for those who need them. Visit [1stchurch.org/podcast](http://1stchurch.org/podcast) for more details.

Learn more about the Lenten and Easter Seasons at 1st at:  
[EasterinMaryville.com](http://EasterinMaryville.com)

## Comedian coming to Celebrate Recovery

When you feel broken, you may not feel like laughing, but sometimes laughter is just what you need.

Throughout his life, Mickey Bell has endured seasons of depression, mental health struggles and thoughts of how something about him must be broken.

On February 11th, YOU are invited to a night of Laughs and Inspiration as Mickey Bell delivers his personal testimony.



Come early for dinner at 5:30, hear Mickey at 6:30 and stay for share groups at 7:40.

*Check out the rest of February's lineup for Celebrate Recovery on page 7.*

## Groundbreaking times at DayBreak

A project funded with a grant from the Trinity Health Foundation of East Tennessee is underway at 1st UMC @ Sycamore Tree.

This project will improve the rear entrance and area next to the building. Work started on January 12th. By the time you are reading this, the work on the first 2 stages will likely be completed.

Come out and see the progress!



*Read more news from the 1st UMC @ Sycamore Tree campus on page 6.*



## REACH others through Sharing

Whether you catch 1st UMC's sermon clips on social media or on the church's YouTube Channel, just seeing them is only the first step. Be sure you are liking the clips, commenting on them and then be sure and SHARE them! It's amazing how powerful these clips can be and how far the messages in them can spread.



Each Sunday and Wednesday you can watch worship services LIVE on Facebook, YouTube and at [1stchurch.org/watch](http://1stchurch.org/watch). When you do watch, be sure and let folks know you're there by commenting and by sharing the live streams.

1st UMC's Witness Team is working on assembling some "Digital Disciples" to help make our online efforts even more impactful in people's lives. If you are interested in becoming a Digital Disciple send an email to [communications@1stchurch.org](mailto:communications@1stchurch.org).

## Staying connected via email

As we make the transition to a new church database management system, there will be a need for you to sign up again for any email lists you are currently on.

To make this simple, we will be including a link to the NEW email subscription list in future emails that we send. We will also be providing a link for signing up on social media, the bulletin and other communications.

If you are currently receiving general church emails, Rev. Jonathan Jonas' Friday emails or ones from ministries like 1st Kids, you will NOT automatically be signed up in the new system. So watch for the links to the new sign up form over the next few weeks.

## Taking the Lenten Journey

Ash Wednesday is coming up on February 18th. We encourage you and your children to attend the Ash Wednesday Worship Service at 6:30 that night in the Sanctuary. The Trackers of Truth Bible Study will NOT happen on this evening. However we will still offer childcare for preschool age kids and younger.

We are so excited to share a very special Lent resource with you this year that will help your kids develop a daily habit of Bible reading and prayer!

Pretzel Prayers is a family Lent resource, and it will only take 2-3 minutes a day. Here's how it works: Each day during Lent (taking Sundays off), your kids will choose a Pretzel Prayer card from their bag. You'll read the Scripture and complete the prayer prompt together, or older kids can do this on their own. That's it!

It's a simple and fun tool to help you develop spiritual habits as we prepare our hearts for the celebration of Easter.

You can pick up your Pretzel Prayers at the downstairs 1<sup>st</sup> Kids Check-in Desk. Supplies will be ready for pick-up on February 8<sup>th</sup>.



Trackers of Truth begins a Fluffy Faith Bible Story Adventure on February 25th!

We invite kids to join us on Wednesdays during Lent at 6:15 in Room C11



This year's Resurrection Youth Event in Pigeon Forge went on despite winter weather settling in over much of the region.



Instead of 51 people attending the event, 1st Youth had 15 go over to enjoy Friday night's session. While it was supposed to be a fun filled weekend, the group that did go for the abbreviated outing still managed to have some fun. Check out pictures from Resurrection at [1stchurch.org/Resurrection](http://1stchurch.org/Resurrection).



News



FOR MORE  
INFORMATION  
ABOUT  
1ST KIDS

Contact the 1st Kids Director  
Kristi Alton

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✉ [kalton@1stchurch.org](mailto:kalton@1stchurch.org)

☎ 865-982-1273 ext. 712

## Dreaming of a summer vacation

Has all this winter weather had you thinking about going to warmer places where folks are having fun and exploring new things? Well, Vacation Bible School will be here before you know it and it's time to get to work on creating decorations, something you can do at home.



If you are willing to cut, color, paint, watercolor, and do other forms of DIY creativity please contact Kristi Alton (contact info at the top of the page). Together, you'll help make this year's Rainforest Theme come alive by making leaves, birds, lizards, snakes, flowers and more.



Brayden York  
1st Student Ministries  
[byork@1stchurch.org](mailto:byork@1stchurch.org)

It is a blessing to have a home, and that's especially true in times when the weather is brutal. Now, try to imagine a car as the only shelter for yourself and your family. That was the reality for Jacqueline and her eleven-year-old daughter after their husband/father passed away. Both were able to enter the Family Promise shelter at Sycamore Tree in January.



[1stchurch.org/family-promise](http://1stchurch.org/family-promise)

Isabelle and Ronald along with their two children advanced into the transitional shelter program and they were able to get their own car. With your support and the support of many others, Family Promise is truly able to help families when they need it the most, allowing them the ability to work their way back into their own home.

For those who want to help make a difference in the lives of Blount County neighbors, here are ways to do just that:

- Get trained to host. It takes just over an hour to do so. Contact Mavis Ziegler through the Ministry Contact Form at [1stchurch.org/GoDo](http://1stchurch.org/GoDo).
- Shop and/or donate items to the Second Chance Family Promise Thrift Store at 705 E. Lincoln Rd., Alcoa, TN.
- Provide an item(s) from the wish list to help the shelter run more smoothly. [tinyurl.com/WishlistFamilyPromise](http://tinyurl.com/WishlistFamilyPromise)

Thank you to everyone who assists in making certain every child in Blount County has a home. Special thanks to Brooke Givens and Nathan Irwin for completing their service on the Family Promise Board. Congratulations to Mary Wilson for answering the call to serve on the FP Board as a new member.



Blessings,  
*Mavis Ziegler* - Coordinator of Family Promise at 1stUMC

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## Have you thought about helping DayBreak?

DayBreak is off to a strong start in 2026. Several new families have contacted us over the last few weeks. We have several visits scheduled, and we are looking forward to assisting more families in our community. If you would like to be a part of our mission this year, please let us know. We have quite a few ways you can serve even if you are not able or interested to work in the day program.



### Monthly Barrier-free Worship

Every second Sunday at 2:00pm at the Sycamore Tree campus, we are offering a 30 minute service with fellowship to follow. In December, we celebrated the birth of Jesus and all of the gifts we have been given.

Contact Jill Pope anytime at Daybreak for more information.  
Call or text 865-315-2371 or email [director@daybreakcare.org](mailto:director@daybreakcare.org).

To receive DayBreak *Morning Light* updates, please visit:  
[daybreakcare.org](http://daybreakcare.org)

Check out the new video produced by Express Strategic Service, helping you better visualize this ministry at [1stchurch.org/DayBreak](http://1stchurch.org/DayBreak).

### Blount County Food Connection

*In honor of:*  
Pastors & Staff

*Given by:*  
Doug & Emily Smith

### Celebrate Recovery

*In memory of:*  
Ashley Peery  
Ashley Peery  
Naomi Cunningham  
Matthew Rollins  
Naomi Cunningham  
Naomi Cunningham  
Naomi Cunningham  
Naomi Cunningham  
Naomi Cunningham

*Given by:*  
Marjorie Fugate  
Charles & Hilda Presley  
Leland & Lisa Blackwood  
Jill Rollins  
Dub & Mandy Schneitman  
Friends  
F. Rodney Lawler  
Karl & Sherry Miller  
A Friend

### Latvia Fund

*In memory of:*  
Carol Werker  
Carol Werker

*Given by:*  
Oakland UMC  
Brad & Patsy Lunde

### Memorial Fund

*In memory of:*  
Roy Kramer

*Given by:*  
Steve & Martha Shields

### Welcome Table

*In honor of:*  
Mary Wilson

*Given by:*  
Jill Pope

*In memory of:*  
Bill McCall  
Sharon Kull  
Ashley Peery  
Jama Mandrell  
Roger Wilson  
Donna Doede

*Given by:*  
Mike & Ibby Davis  
Mike & Ibby Davis  
Mike & Ibby Davis  
Pamela Schott  
Karl & Sherry Miller  
Gerald & Betty Smith



*Nancy Lynn Jenkins*

**Joined First Church**

April 1, 1949

**Entered the Church Triumphant:**

January 17, 2026

*Loretta Cate*

**Joined First Church**

January 8, 1989

**Entered the Church Triumphant:**

January 12, 2026

*Roger Wilson*

**Entered the Church Triumphant:**

January 12, 2026

### Christian sympathy extended to:

Vanessa Painter and her family in the death of her mother, Laurie Smalley on January 27th.

The family of Loretta Cate, especially her husband Lesley and daughters, Ashley and Lindsey. Loretta passed away on January 21st.

The family of Nancy Lynn Jenkins, who passed away on January 17th.

Judy Wilson in the death of her husband, Roger on January 12th.

Nick Tedrick in the passing of his grandmother on January 4th.



**FEBRUARY 4TH**  
**READY**

**FEBRUARY 11TH**  
**A NIGHT OF LAUGHS & INSPIRATION**  
TESTIMONY BY MICKEY BELL

**CELEBRATE @ 1st RECOVERY**

**Ash Wednesday**  
**FEBRUARY 18TH**

**VICTORY**  
**FEBRUARY 25TH**

Maryville First United Methodist Church  
804 Montvale Station Road  
Maryville, Tennessee 37803  
Phone: 865-982-1273  
Change Service Requested

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Learn more about all the special events during  
the Lenten and Easter seasons at:  
**EasterInMaryville.com**



Sermon Focus for  
Lent & Easter  
**Starts**  
**February 22nd**



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