

The Church Bell

REACH - CONNECT - EQUIP - SEND

JANUARY 2026





I want to confess to you something that I realized something about myself during a continuing education conference in October—I rely too heavily on organic growth.

The more I reflected on that, the more I realized that it's true of us as a congregation too. We simply have the luxury of organic growth. Here's what I mean by that.

We don't advertise heavily, and we don't initiate major campaigns encouraging our members to invite people to participate in our ministries. Yet new guests are here almost every single week. We don't advocate heavily and consistently for every person in the congregation to connect with others and to be intentional about spiritual formation. Yet dozens of people gather in Sunday school classes, study groups, and share groups each week.

We ask each person who joins the church to uphold its ministries by prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness, but we don't *really* hold each other accountable for the extent to which we live into those vows. Yet people give, serve, volunteer, and participate constantly.

We are fortunate to live in a healthy congregational culture in which people simply do come to worship here for the first time, connect with our congregation, engage in spiritual formation together, care, give, and serve. Thanks be to God for all the ways the Holy Spirit inspires this growth.

That's not to say that you and I aren't involved in that. We tend the culture in a variety of ways. We are encouragers and servers. We are friendly, engaging, hospitable, and loving.

What I realized a couple of months ago, though, is that you and I could be more *intentionally* invitational.

That phrase has resounded in my spirit over the past several weeks, to the extent that I feel called to keep it before us as a key motto, effort, and goal in 2026—**intentionally invitational**. So, I will strive to lead in such ways that we are more intentional in the ways we invite people to follow Jesus, to connect with people, to grow in discipleship, to serve in Jesus' name, to share their faith, and to make disciples of others.

We all know the difference that an intentional invitation makes. "You should go to Look Rock" does not communicate the same care and enthusiasm as "Let's go to Look Rock together on Saturday."

Let's join together this year in being **intentionally invitational**, not merely facilitating the conditions for organic growth, but encouraging and expecting greater growth together.



Staff Contacts

You can find staff and ministry contacts under the "Reach" tab on the church website: 1stchurch.org

The church phone number is 865-982-1273.

The Church Office will be closed on Monday, January 19th in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.



Leadership Launch 2026

The Church Council helps envision, plan, implement and evaluate the ministries of the congregation. During this first meeting of each year the congregation's elected and appointed leaders meet for a special evening of celebrating, equipping and commissioning 1st UMC leadership for the new year of mission and ministry.

This year's meeting happens on **January 26th from 6:30 to 8:00 pm.**

With leaders gathered in one place at one time, there will be time to:

- Celebrate the successes and victories of the past year;
- thank leaders whose terms have ended;
- review the 1st UMC mission, methods, and structures;
- identify priorities for the year ahead;
- and commission and consecrate the 2026 leadership.



Christmas Offering 2025

for



\$33,000
so far!

GIVE ONLINE AT:
1STCHURCH.ORG/GIVING

Welcome to



Bill & Jane Morton



Linda Spies



John & Rebecca Lamar



Kevin & Jillian Tillman, Finleigh, Piper & Chandler



Clint Helton,
Jenica Lamar & Beau

Every Wednesday
5:30 Dinner
6:30 Worship &
Message
7:40 Share Groups

COMING IN JANUARY

January 14th
Eating Disorders & Recovery
with Grace McCready

January 21st
Jennifer McIntyre

January 28th
Admit

Learn more and
watch online at:
CRat1st.com

Better ways to reach, connect, equip and send in 2026

In mid-January, the 1st UMC staff will undergo further training to use a new Church Management Software called TouchPoint. Although you won't likely see immediate changes, the implementation of TouchPoint will eventually broaden to help further the church mission. Staff members are already using elements of TouchPoint for attendance and member information.

While much of the work in TouchPoint is done by staff working at their desk, there will be a mobile App made available in the future. 1st UMC is also working with a Knoxville based company called Solertaie to create a new website that will be integrated with the TouchPoint system.



Here are some of the benefits of TouchPoint:

- Better tracking of attendance by concentrating on WHO is attending, not just how many people are attending. This feature will be made available to Sunday School classes and other groups.
- There are steps for pastors and staff to more effectively reach out to visitors through a system of automated and personal communications.
- There will be more effective ways to communicate via email, and texting will be added to the mix.
- Easier registration for events as the system will remember your information, and families will be able to sign up in just one step. No more repeating steps to register family members.
- You will have access to your giving statements as well as the ability to set up and/or change recurring giving.
- You will have opportunities to add photos to your profile and update information.

The Witness Team (along with staff members) will be testing out the app and the TouchPoint system as various features go online. There are also plans to provide training sessions to help people make the most of TouchPoint.

A year of growth - Jill Pope, DayBreak

2025 has been a year of growth, which we plan to continue in 2026. During 2025, we have grown from serving three families per week in January to eleven families per week in December.

We have served 20 families in our day program and consulted with over 50 families offering support, resources, and referrals. By the end of 2025 we had provided over 2,300 hours of respite to caregivers with over 1,700 hours of volunteer time. A Memory Cafe, a support group, and barrier-free worship also became part of DayBreak programming.

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

We have something new you can do to help.

We have joined the Walmart Round Up program. If you make purchases on the Walmart app or walmart.com you can now select DayBreak as your preferred charity.

When you make purchases, Walmart will round up to the next dollar, and it will go to DayBreak. We also have a registry. The link to our profile can be found at [Walmart Round Up/ Registry](#). You can also help by purchasing items on our [Amazon Wish List](#).

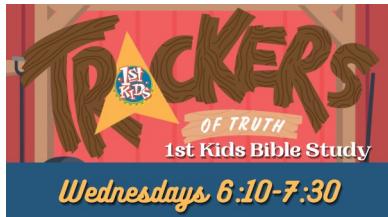
Barrier-Free Worship happens every Second Sunday at 2:00 pm at the 1st UMC @ Sycamore Tree Campus.



Heads Up: Great changes are coming!

Sometime in the coming months, 1st Kids Ministries will begin using a new check-in program. We are excited about this change, as it will allow us to increase 1st Kids' safety and serve families better!

Many aspects will be the same, such as name tags and pickup tickets, but there will also be a few updates we will all need to learn as a church. Thankfully, we can take this journey one step at a time together, navigating new and cool ways to improve Children's Ministries for the good of all our kids and families!



Exploring the Bible on Wednesdays

Every Wednesday our kids have a special Bible Study just for them in Room C11 from 6:10 to 7:30. We share our prayer requests, both big and small, and then focus on spending time with God together.

For the month of January, we will discover what it means to "Pursue Jesus." Jesus' offer is remarkably clear: if we look for Jesus, we'll find Him. He's not hiding from us, but closely connecting with Him does take us being intentional. We're called to follow and pursue Him. During Trackers of Truth Bible Study, we'll look at how individuals pursued Jesus through the challenges of their circumstances. Pursuing Jesus is not only a mental exercise for personal growth, but it also means living out our faith in tangible ways: showing up, listening carefully, receiving grace, and trusting Him.

For younger friends that are not ready for a full-on Bible Study we have our Tots of Truth in C3 from 6:10 to 7:30 as well, which is available for pre-K and younger.



Brayden York
1st Student Ministries
byork@1stchurch.org

With the new year, it's an awesome time to get active in 1st Youth Ministries. Coming up January 23rd through 25th, the youth head over to Pigeon Forge for the 40th Annual Resurrection event. It's going to be a blast. Reach out to Brayden if you are interested in going. The cost is \$150.

Rise n' Shine, the Tuesday morning (7:30 to 8:00 am) breakfast and devotion time starts up on January 13th. Sunday Night Youth starts up on January 11th at 6:30 pm. and Wednesday Night Youth started up on January 7th (5:00 pm for gathering, 6:45 for Bible Study).

Stay tuned for information about Summer Camp at Camp Wesley Woods. The goal is to pick a week when 1st Youth can be there together.



FOR MORE INFORMATION
ABOUT
1ST KIDS



Contact the 1st Kids Director
Kristi Alton

.....

kalton@1stchurch.org

865-982-1273 ext. 712



Explore the "wonders" of Jesus on Sundays!

Discover your wonder for God's Son - Jesus! As we continue to grow in our faith and learn more about Jesus, our wonder and awe for Him can grow too! Get ready to ask questions, discover truths about who Jesus is and continue to have a heart of wonder for God!

Monthly Memory Verse

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

- John 20:31

1st Youth WEEKLY PROGRAMMING Sundays

9:15 am Youth Sunday School
6:30 pm Youth Fellowship

Tuesdays

7:30 am Rise and Shine

Wednesdays

5:00 pm Youth Gathering
6:00 pm Youth Choirs
6:45 pm Youth Bible Study

Volunteers needed in the New Year

The beginning of a new year often spurs one's desire to make improvements in their life and to accomplish worthwhile goals. One impactful way you can do that is to consider being a host at Family Promise. This doesn't require a lot of time and can be very rewarding.

During the week of December 7th, six people volunteered as hosts at the Family Promise center inside 1st UMC @ Sycamore Tree. More volunteers are needed to make these host weeks run more smoothly. Be watching for more information about the next training sessions, the next host week, and how you can be a part of it all.

1stchurch.org/family-promise

And a big **THANK YOU** to Amy Large. She is stepping down as Co-Coordinator. Words are not adequate to express the appreciation for all her contributions and for modeling our call to "Love First."

Blessings,
Mavis Ziegler, Coordinator of Family Promise at 1st UMC



Celebrating 10 Years of compassion - Suzanne Stratton

It all began 15 years ago during a small conversation between Brenda Carroll, Greta Smith and Suzanne Stratton complaining about service gaps for mental health needs for people in Blount County. They were unable to find timely, affordable mental health services for clients where they wouldn't have to be labeled by insurance and their employers be informed about their mental health needs. They wanted mental health services to be a right, not a privilege.

Many members of 1st UMC helped through multiple years of trying to pull a board together, trying to start a non-profit, trying to find a way to make this vision a reality. None of this would have been possible without the many contributors both financially and physically who helped get Compassion Counseling from an idea to a successful non-profit organization.

When Compassion Counseling first opened its doors 10 years ago, Greta and Suzanne hoped that at least one person could find help. If one person was helped at least a difference was made in this community. As of today, Compassion Counseling has assisted over **2600 different individuals through therapy** and led more than **800 people through classes** in the Blount County area. That is a total of over **3400 people!**

We want to say Thank You 1st UMC to all those who have given of their time, their money, and their prayers, not to mention their physical labor to get this non-profit to be a successful organization (now located inside 1st UMC @ Sycamore Tree). We have made it a decade! And once again we thank you because without you none of this would have been possible!

Christian sympathy extended to:

Julie Evans, Mallorie Menden and their families in the death of Dorothy Belcher in November.

Dorothy was Julie's mother/ Mallorie's grandmother.

Karen Tucker in the death of her mother, Dorothy Templin in November.

The Family of Roy Kramer who passed away on December 4th.

Rachel Neisner in the death of her sister in December.

Elizabeth Brenneise in the death of her grandfather in December.

Karen Axley in the death of her brother, Jimmie Gregory on December 4th.

The Family of Naomi Cunningham who passed away on December 24th.

Donn & Janet King in the death of their daughter, Hannah, who passed away on December 15th.

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Phone: 865-982-1273
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Throughout the season, hundreds of people found ways to experience the magic and meaning of Christmas in Maryville. It was a time to learn more about the ways the Christmas story helps us find hope in a world filled with fear.

Thank you to everyone who came out to the numerous events. We hope they proved to be a meaningful way to celebrate the season. We also want to thank the many people who helped make this time so special.

Visit ChristmasInMaryville.com for photos and videos from the season.

