

The Church Bell

REACH - CONNECT - EQUIP - SEND

MARCH
2026





In the traditional worship services on Sunday morning, we sang Natalie Sleeth's *Hymn of Promise*, which includes this line: "In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be, unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see."

Of course, she's right, and the imagery is just beautiful. It is also true, however, that seasons are much more clearly differentiated from each other on the calendar than they are in our actual experience. For instance, we can truly say that March 20 is the first day of spring this year. However, we can't say with any confidence, "March 19 will be the last cold day until November."

Often we live in the in-between times, when the cold and snowy days are interspersed with the warm and sunny ones. Our children may wear shorts outside on Saturday and awake to snow on the ground on Monday morning.

The same is true with the seasons of our life. We have different opinions and experiences of what it means to be middle-aged or old. My Josie, for instance, says that anyone over age twenty-five is old. I vehemently object.

On the other hand, I had a friend who reached age fifty-five and informed his wife that he was going to make that midlife crisis purchase of a convertible sports car. She said, "Midlife? Exactly how many people do you know who are one hundred ten years old?" The point is that it's not always or even often clear precisely when we exit one season and enter into another.

The same is true of our experience of the Kingdom of God. We may pray, "Thy kingdom come," and imagine that future time when Jesus returns in victory and gathers all the redeemed in an eternal kingdom. Yet, Jesus also said to the teacher of the law who recognized the greatest commandment(s), "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34).

Scholars and theologians describe it as the present and coming kingdom, the now and future kingdom, the one we experience in part *now* and will experience in its fullness *then* when Jesus returns.

Friends, in these in-between March days of cold, snow, sunshine, and warmth, we are not far from the Kingdom of God. Some days, you can see it, feel it, observe it, and cherish it.

So, don't just wait for the coming kingdom - *work* for the coming kingdom. Look for the coming kingdom! It's on the way, but in some moments, when love, grace, mercy, peace, and compassion abound, glimpses of it are already here.



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.



A challenge for the Lenten Season

Each year as the season of Lent begins, our focus often shifts to answering the question “what will we give up?” or perhaps “what can we do better?” How we answer these questions can shape a path toward Easter that can bring us closer to God, or at least better reflect God’s plans for us.



On February 18th during the Traditional Ash Wednesday worship service, Rev. Sarah Slack brought up something she had heard from Pope Leo just a few days earlier. He challenged everyone to abstain from one bad habit many of us are guilty of, using words that offend or hurt others.



Whether it’s accepting the challenge about thinking before we speak or devoting ourselves to serving more we hope you will seek out meaningful ways to make your way through the season.

Throughout the Lenten season we encourage you to tune in to the *Grace for All* Podcast or subscribe to the text of each episode through Substack at 1stchurch.org/podcast .

A special week of Good News

In the last edition of *The Church Bell* we gave you a preview of what is in store for you throughout the season of Lent. It is a season often thought of as a somber time, but there is Good News to share.



In the week leading up to Easter Sunday, we journey through Jesus’ final days on Earth. There are a roller coaster of emotions during this time, but waiting underneath the layers of sadness lies the fact that the Good News is alive in the world today because of Christ’s resurrection. As we get closer to Easter in Maryville, please mark your calendars for these special days and plan to be a part of the worship services surrounding them.

Palm Sunday, March 29th

- 8:15 am Traditional Worship
- 10:30 am Traditional Worship
- 10:30 am Contemporary Worship
- 2:30 pm Hallelujah Hat Parade (details on Page 5)

Maundy Thursday, April 2nd

7:00 pm Traditional Worship Service

Good Friday, April 3rd

7:00 pm Tenebrae (shadows) Service
1st UMC @ Sycamore Tree



Spread the Good News

When you hear good news do you tell others about it? Spreading the good news is at the heart of Christianity. If we kept the Good News to ourselves, where would the faith be today? During this season of reflection and celebration you’ll see posts on social media channels (including ones exclusive to Threads and X) that you can share. There will also be sermon clips getting to the heart of the messages of the season. Sharing the content of 1st Church can go a long way in helping others learn about the Good News!

Good news from Good Neighbors

During the Christmas season your generosity resulted in a Christmas Offering totaling more than \$33,000! The money will go a long way in helping Good Neighbors of Blount County fulfill its mission of providing utility and rent assistance and many other services. 1st UMC member, Rodney Nelson is the chair of the Good Neighbors of Blount County. He sent these words in a letter of thanks on behalf of the organization.

Dear Jonathan, Sarah, Don and Church Staff,

On a personal level, I am humbled by the generosity of the congregation of our church and its support as a partner with Good Neighbors of Blount County with the special collection in December for GNBC. I am not surprised, as 1st Church has been a long time partner and supporter of GNBC and many other valuable ministries.

As the Board Chair, I offer my thank you to 1st Church. This donation is a jump start to our 2026 year of continuing services to our neighbors in need. As a church member I feel we are very blessed for the congregation's ongoing support of GNBC and our church missions!

*Sincerely,
Rodney Nelson*



Valentine's Day has come and gone, and the folks at the DayBreak Respite Care Ministry had a little fun spreading the love.

Book your read today!

Did you know there is a Book Club at 1st UMC? It meets on the 3rd Monday of each month from 10:00 am until 11:00 am (usually in Room 205). The reading list is set for the year and the group would love to have YOU join the discussions.

March 16th is the next meeting where they will discuss "The Frederick Alliance" by Jim Stovall who will be joining the club in-person.

For a look at the rest of the list and more on how you can be a part of the club visit:

1stchurch.org/book-club

Important news about emails

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 provide a link for signing up via social media and the website,
- we will have reminders and links in the bulletin and other communication channels.

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 it is important that you sign up for the new lists.

We are also adding a new list to receive the "In Memoriam" emails **(they will no longer come via the general email list)**.

Please watch for the links to the new sign up information and sign up soon.

The Hallelujah Hat Parade: Easter Praise in the Park

Date: Sunday, March 29th

Time: 2:30 pm – 5:00 pm

(Community Time and Hat Crafting ongoing)

Parade Times: First Parade: 3:30 PM | Second Parade: 4:30 PM

Where: Sandy Springs Pavilion

One of our core values as a church is to **SEND** people into the community and beyond to further Christ's mission. Engaging kids in this mission can be challenging, so this Easter, we're thinking **outside the box!**

The Hallelujah Hat Parade is a special event where families will gather at the **Sandy Springs Park Pavilion (near Best St.)** to worship, learn how **Jesus**

is worth celebrating, and create Easter hats for a joyful parade! We'll have plenty of crafting supplies for all, including any curious park-goers who want to join in. We would love for anyone in our



church family to bring a hat with them to the park to join in the celebration. All children must be accompanied by a guardian.

For this Easter event to be a wild success, we will need an amazing team of volunteers! You can serve behind the scenes before the event, during the event, and after the event. Please sign up to serve through the church website:

1stchurch.org/1st-kids.

You will find the event info and a link to the registration form towards the bottom of the page along with other 1st Kids events. If you have any questions, please contact Kristi Alton at **kalton@1stchurch.org**.



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

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



News



FOR MORE
INFORMATION
ABOUT
1ST KIDS

Contact the 1st Kids Director
Kristi Alton

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✉ **kalton@1stchurch.org**

☎ **865-982-1273 ext. 712**

The 2026 Vacation Bible School sign-ups for children and volunteers will be opening soon! Check your calendars and keep an eye out for other church communications so you can save your spot for this event. Be praying for those who will be participating in our Rainforest Fall VBS in June.



You can also support this event by using your creativity at home. Please reach out to Kristi Alton if you are willing to cut, color, paint, watercolor, or do other forms of DIY creativity. We are also all about sustainable and environmentally friendly decorations; therefore, if you have any materials at home that you think could be utilized for creating waterfalls, leaves, vines, tropical flowers, etc., let us know.

We are specifically looking for blue plastic that could be used as a waterfall instead of just being thrown away. Please refer to the picture on the right for an example.



One person's trash is another person's treasure!

Waiting for Spring

Like many of you, we are happy to see more sunshine each day and warming temperatures. We planted spring bulbs and tended them. Then we sent them home with families along with a few chocolates for Valentine's Day. We also have invited our friends and community members to come play the harp, visit with animals, and sing with community choirs. Our goal is to fill each day with laughter, as we work together on projects, enjoy beautiful things, and eat a little chocolate.



Trinity Grant Improvement at Sycamore Tree

The weather has slowed us down, but we are making good progress. The handrails should be installed before the end of February and then we can start adding landscaping, seating, and shade over the months to come.

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. **If you would like to help support this program please contact Jill Pope 865-315-2371 or at director@daybreakcare.org.**



To receive DayBreak Morning Light updates, please visit the website, daybreakcare.org or find us on [Facebook](#) .



We have an exciting update since the last *Church Bell*. After sleeping in their car, then entering the Emergency Shelter part of the program, Jacqueline and her daughter now live in their own home! Being able to live in their own home is the direct result of the help Family Promise offers families in crisis.



For the shelter at 1st UMC @ Sycamore Tree to operate, there must be at least one host present each evening and overnight. This is where you come in! More volunteers from 1st UMC are needed to provide the coverage needed during our host weeks the remainder of the year. There is no physical labor required to host. You just need to be present for a few hours during the evening or to stay overnight.

Serving as the hands and feet of Christ fuels the Go.Do. Spirit of the people of 1st UMC. We understand the hesitation for people to take on more volunteer responsibilities. Family Promise of Blount County needs volunteers like you to serve and the best part ... you only need to be there one night of the year. Just that one night helps Family Promise sustain the benefits of helping the homeless families in Blount County work their way back into a home.

Before you can serve as a host, you will need training which happens on the first or third Thursday of the month from 6:00 to 7:15 pm. Call Mavis at 865-233-4737 if you are interested in serving, or contact her through the 1st Church Website (a link to the Ministry Contact form is available at 1stchurch.org/family-promise).

Thanks to all who have and will answer the call to host, and to those who provide a dish for a meal. You make a tremendous difference in assuring that homeless families in the program have a safe place to sleep.

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

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Celebrating something good!

Easter in Maryville offers everyone opportunities to; celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ; to see how that moment transformed the world; and give everyone a reason to celebrate something GOOD!

Join others here at 1st United Methodist Church to reflect on the story of how God's love transformed the world at Easter.

Whether you are a lifelong follower of Christ, are exploring faith for the first time, or simply seeking a place where you feel welcome, we invite you to experience **Easter in Maryville.**



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



1stchurch.org

