



JANUARY 2021 | VOL. 58 | NO. 1

THE FLAME

The First United Methodist Church of LaGrange

A Message from Dr. John...

'I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day!'

On Christmas day in 1863, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was inspired to write the poem we now know as the Christmas carol, **"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."** It was a testament to the resilience of faith in the human spirit.

The New England Historical Society reports that Longfellow had fallen into a depression in 1861 when his second wife Frances died. She had been sealing envelopes with hot wax when a flame caught her clothes on fire. Henry had rushed to her aid and tried to smother the flames. But by the time the fire was out, Frances had been burned beyond recovery. She died the next day. Henry, burned badly as well, was too sick to attend her funeral.

The death marked a turning point in Longfellow's life. His physical appearance changed dramatically as he began growing his beard because the burns disfigured his face. Mentally, he sank into depression. On Christmas day in 1862 he would record in his journal: *"A merry Christmas' say the children, but that is no more for me."*

The poet was a staunch abolitionist, but he, like the entire country, was troubled by the Civil War. His son Charley in March of 1863 had decided that, regardless of his father's wishes, he would join the fight. He ran off to Washington to enlist in the 1st Massachusetts Artillery. In November, Charley's unit was engaged in a battle, and he was shot. The bullet went through him from back to shoulder, just nicking his spine. Back at their Cambridge home on December 8, and a grim Longfellow set about the months-long process of trying to nurse his son back to health.

The circumstances challenged Longfellow's resolve, but he was inspired when he heard the church bells ringing. He found in them a message that peace would come again to the troubled nation. They inspired him to write the poem, **"Christmas Bells."**

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day, their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*And thought how, as the day had come, the belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*Till, ringing, singing on its way, the world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*Then from each black, accursed mouth the cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound the carols drowned of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*It was as if an earthquake rent the hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn the households born of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*And in despair I bowed my head; "There is no peace on earth," I said:
"For hate is strong, and mocks the song of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

While, for us, the year 2020 did not include a civil war, we were shaken by unresolved civil strife, a global pandemic, and a bruising presidential election. Many in our congregation lost a spouse and even children to death. The Colonial patriot, Thomas Paine, was right: "These are the times that try men's souls." Yet, I choose to exercise the faith of Longfellow and lean into 2021 with resolute trust in the providential goodness of God:

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: "God is not dead; nor doth He sleep!
The Wrong shall fail the Right prevail, with peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

Remember how much I love you ...
It is an honor to be your Senior Minister!

Dr. John Beyers

STUDENT MINISTRY

by Will Locke, Youth Minister | will@lagrangefumc.org

Happy New Year from Student Ministries! Assistant Youth Minister **Anabeth Ivey** and I wish everyone a joyous, safe, and blessed 2021. We are so excited for what God has in store for Student Ministries in 2021 and the spring semester.



Will Locke

On Sunday, January 10, immediately following church, Student Ministries will have a Student, Parent, and Volunteer Lunch in Wesley Hall. During this time of food and fellowship, I will share information about the Spiritual Life Retreat (SLR), such as the COVID protocols Camp Glisson has put in place and the new registration process for this year. We will go to SLR the weekend of March 12-14, the cost is \$200 for students, and registration for SLR will open right after our meeting on January 10. Also, I will announce the date and location of our mission trip for this summer. So, we can have enough food for everyone and practice appropriate physical distancing, we ask you to RSVP no later than Thursday, January 7. Anabeth and I look forward to seeing everyone, eating together, and discussing two exciting upcoming trips!

During Wednesday Night Youth this semester, we will be walking through the Book of Acts and hearing from two outstanding guest

speakers. Our first guest speaker will be with us in February, so stay tuned for an announcement about who that is. We will begin our study of Acts on January 13 from 6:00-7:00 p.m. at the church. I am excited to be exploring the impact of the Early Church with students this semester.

Tuesday Morning Prayer Breakfasts will resume on Tuesday, January 19. While the beloved Chick-fil-A chicken biscuits are going nowhere, there are going to be a few changes to how Prayer Breakfast will happen this semester. So, be sure to stay posted through our Weekly Rundown email, on our Instagram page, and the church's Facebook page.

While we enter 2021 with numerous unknowns—as well as some trepidation—about the year ahead, I am humbled by the honor and privilege Anabeth and I have of walking alongside students and their families during this season. I could not ask for a better congregation and staff to serve the Lord with as I grow in ministry.

May the peace of Christ dwell in you richly,

Will Locke
Youth Minister

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

by JEANNE JONES, CHILDREN'S MINISTER | jeanne@lagrangefumc.org

WHAT A WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS SEASON WE HAD!

All our children—and 125 families in our community—received an interactive Advent bag filled with goodies that they could use to celebrate and learn more about Jesus and His birth.

Our church family and community joined together safely at our drive-in movie, and our drive-thru “Night of Lights” with the true light of Christmas—Jesus in the manger—as the finale.

Wednesday Night Kids celebrated with a Christmas party complete with a living Christmas tree (aka Dr. John), pizza, hot cocoa, cookies, cupcakes, and a giant Saran wrap prize ball.

Our children showed the love of Christ this month by creating Christmas cards to send to our homebound members and by participating in the Christmas Eve service. Thanks to all the children who participated in the Nativity on December 24!

WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO 2021...

It's a new year, and we are learning new things! In 2020 our focus was on the life of Jesus for both our Sunday school and Children's Church lessons. In 2021 we are digging into foundations of faith. The foundations of faith program lays the groundwork for what it means to be a Christian. Kids explore what the Bible reveals about who God is and how God sees us, how we fit in God's family, and how we live the Christian life. If you haven't been participating weekly in Kids' Church, now is a perfect time to jump back in. Each lesson is available online through the online order of worship or on the children's Facebook page: @lagrangefumckids.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT KIDS

The first half of the year we focused on Ephesians and God's plan for reconciliation. This semester we are jumping into the Book of Acts.

Following the Troup County School System calendar is our normal practice, so we are planning to return to regular family ministries programming on January 13. Children will meet in Wesley Hall from 5:00-6:00 p.m. You do not need to register in advance for this program. Please walk your child into the building and stay with them until they have had their temperature checked and completed the sign-in process. All guests in the building must wear a mask at all times to comply with church policy.

Acolytes Needed

We are in great need of acolytes for the 11:00 a.m. service. Students in fourth or fifth grade through 12th grade and older are welcome.

If you'd like to acolyte with your church friends, we can make that happen by working on the scheduling together. Acolytes need to be strong enough to carry the crosses and torches. If you have questions, text or email **Nicole Kostial** at 706-957-7624 or kostialfamily@gmail.com.

New 'Soul Connection' weekly small groups to meet during Lent

Through the last nine months of not being able to visit as we normally would with friends, family, loved ones, and our church family, one thing has become abundantly clear to me: We Are Better Together! We were created to be in relationship with one another and with God, and we are not meant to go through life alone. As we begin 2021, we at First United Methodist are making it a priority to embrace and live into these truths churchwide.

Beginning Sunday, January 24, you will have the opportunity to sign up to be a part of new Soul Connection Groups at First Methodist. Groups will meet weekly throughout the course of Lent (February 21-March 28) and are open to all for participation. These small groups consisting of no more than a dozen individuals are designed to allow participants to do life together, further connecting with God and one another in transformational community. Modeled after early Methodist Class Meetings, these groups will revolve around two primary "check-in" questions that were employed by the founder of Methodism, John Wesley:

- 1) "How is it with your soul?"
- 2) "How did you experience God this week?"

Utilizing these two questions, Wesley gave people who had experiences of God in worship, the opportunity to dive deeper

into their faith and prioritize their daily walk with Christ within the context of small group discipleship.

Soul Connection Groups will prioritize transformation over information. While learning information about the Bible and theology are important aspects of our faith, this group is not intended to be a curriculum-driven Bible study class (although groups will discuss Scripture together), but a relationship-driven connection group.

In this season of working on New Year's resolutions, perhaps, like me, your soul yearns for deeper connections with God and others in the year ahead? If that's the case, let me invite you to do two things. First, be sure to tune into our Sermon Series for January in which we will examine the fact that we are "Better Together." Second, be on the lookout for more information about Soul Connection Groups and registration opportunities. I cannot wait to see the ways that God uses this new discipleship opportunity to help us grow in the grace of God together at First United Methodist Church in 2021!

Blessings,

The Rev. Ben Willis

MISSION OF THE MONTH: Homeless Coalition Warming Center

The LaGrange-Troup County Homeless Coalition Warming Center is our church's mission focus for January. As this is the coldest month of the year, we need your help to meet the immediate needs of those facing homelessness in our community. We ask for your support in two primary ways:

- 1) The Warming Center is always in need of volunteers to help staff the center and to be a supportive presence for guests. Sometimes the ministry of presence can make all the difference in another person's life. If you would be interested in volunteering, please contact Pastor Ben at ben@lagrangefumc.org.
- 2) We have set a goal to raise \$3,000 over the next month in support of those who utilize the Homeless Coalition Warming Center. For \$25, you can provide a Care Kit of material goods such as gloves, socks, and toiletries, two meals, a towel, and a sleeping bag to someone in need. With \$3,000 raised, we can ensure that 75 individuals have a softer place to lay their head, food in their stomach, and essentials to maintain healthy hygiene. You can give toward our efforts by making out a check payable to First United Methodist Church with "missions" in the memo line and sending it to the church, or by giving online toward "missions" for the remainder of January. All gifts we receive toward missions until January 31 will be used in support of this project until our goal is met. Any additional funds given in January that exceed our goal will remain in the missions fund for future projects to show the love of God in our community.

'DO SOMETHING' in 2021!

As you prayerfully seek discernment in the New Year, please join our church in discovering what God wants to do through us in the next phase of our ministry as a church and our



discipleship as individual believers. Also, please be sure to complete your 2021 Faith Commitment Card and return it to us as soon as you can. You can mail it to the Church Office, 401 Broad Street, LaGrange, Georgia 30240. You also can drop it in our secure mailbox slots at the Trinity Street entrance or the drive-up entrance in front of the Children's Building on Vernon Street. If you would prefer, you can quickly and easily visit bit.ly/commitment_card to fill out and submit your card online.

bit.ly/commitment_card

IN PERSON WORSHIP

Would you like for us to save you a seat?

Register online:

bit.ly/inperson_fumc
or call the Church Office.

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Mr. Rick Free	ext. 210	Director of Food Services/Hospitality
Mr. Eddie Giddens		Custodian
Mr. Scott Hill	ext. 213	Facilities Maintenance Coordinator
Mrs. Jeanne Jones	ext. 209	Children's Minister
Mr. Darian Krimm	ext. 202	Minister of Music
Mr. Will Locke	ext. 215	Youth Minister
Ms. Dodie Patterson	ext. 204	Member Engagement Coordinator
Mr. Andy Rainey	ext. 201	Executive Minister
Mrs. Natalie Shelton	ext. 203	Director of Communications
The Rev. Ben Wills	ext. 206	Senior Associate Minister

To reach all other staff members and/or volunteers, please call the Church Office. Our business hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

We now have a secure mail slot to the right of the Trinity Street office-door entrance. In addition, you also may drop off correspondence in our locked black mailbox under the portico on Vernon Street outside the Children's Building.

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Memorial Gifts

LEILA FULFORD

Suellen Smith Kinsley
Judy Baldwin
Sally & David Traylor
Alice Pendergrast

ORREN GILBERT

Tee Borders
Sylvia Davis
Judy Baldwin

BILLIE MCALEXANDER

(mother of Dan McAlexander)
Lauranne Buchanan

PAIGE SCHINE

Jan & Paul Mallory

JEAN & ELLIS SMITH

Jan & Paul Mallory

JACK S. DAVIDSON, JR.

(brother of Linda Daniel)
Alynda & Boopie Jones

MARY FUNK

Judy Baldwin

QUILLIAN BALDWIN

Jan & Paul Mallory
Charis & Marc Acree

CATHERINE HICKS

Judy Baldwin

KATHY KAAP

Jan & Paul Mallory

Poinsettias

In Memory of Ann Jones
by Hugh Jones & Family

In Memory of Jennifer Soltis Trizzino
by Paul and Karen (Soltis) Tobben

In Memory of
John & Sarah Soltis by
Paul and Karen (Soltis) Tobben

In Memory of David Soltis
by Paul and Karen (Soltis) Tobben

LAGRANGE FIRST METHODIST YOUTH LUNCH

Youth, parents, and youth ministry volunteers are invited to a lunch meeting to learn more about the **March 12-14 Spiritual Life Retreat at Camp Glisson.**

We'll also announce the date and location of our **summer mission trip!**



SUNDAY
JANUARY 10
12:00 - 1:30 PM
WESLEY HALL

PLEASE RSVP BY
THURSDAY, JANUARY 7,
TO WILL LOCKE AT
will@lagrangefumc.org
so we can plan for food
and physical distancing!

