



**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

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E-mail: office@fumclvks.org  
Office Hours—M-Th 9a-3p, Friday—9a-noon  
Or visit us at [FUMCLVKS.ORG](http://FUMCLVKS.ORG)  
Sunday services stream at either site.

**May 2024**

<b>28 Music Sunday</b> 8:30 & 11:00 Worship 9:45am Sunday School 12:00 pm Fusion 56 6:00 pm youth	<b>29</b> 5:00 pm Virtual Grief Share	<b>30</b> 10:00 am Bible Study	<b>11:00 am</b> Prayer Group 1:30 pm H & S 3:45 pm WW 6:30 pm Choir	<b>2</b> 8:30am Staff 6:30pm Women's Bible Study	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b> 
<b>5 Congregational Care Sunday</b> 8:30 & 11:00 Worship 9:45am Sunday School 12:00 pm Fusion 56	<b>6</b> 5:00 pm Virtual Grief Share	<b>7</b> 10:00 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Book Club 5:30 pm AAFV Community Meeting	<b>8</b> 8:30 am MMO 11 am Prayer Group 1:30 pm H & S 3:45 pm WW 5:00 pm GriefShare 6:30 pm Choir	<b>9</b> 8:30am Staff 6:30pm Women's Bible Study	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>12 Graduation Sunday</b> 8:30am Graduate breakfast 10:00 am ONE service	<b>13</b> 5:00 pm Virtual Grief Share	<b>14</b> 10:00 am Bible Study 1:00 pm Spouse Grief Share	<b>15</b> 11:00 am Prayer Group 12 pm Ladies Lunch 1:30 pm H & S 3:45 pm WW	<b>16</b> 8:30am Staff 1:30 pm Itchin' to Stitch 6:30pm Bible Study Anthony Elementary Family Fun Night	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b> 8:00 am Men's Prayer Breakfast
<b>19</b> 9:00 am Sunday School 10:00 am Worship	<b>20</b> Anthony Elementary Field Day 5:00 pm Virtual Grief Share	<b>21</b> 10:00 am Bible Study	<b>22</b> 11:00 am Prayer Group 1:30 pm H & S 3:45 pm WW 5:00 pm Grief Share 6:30 pm Choir	<b>23</b> 8:30am Staff	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b> 
<b>26</b> 9:00 am Sunday School 10:00 am Worship	<b>27 Memorial Day Office closed</b> 5:00 pm Virtual Grief Share	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b> 11:00 am Prayer Group 6:30 pm Choir	<b>30</b> 8:30am Staff	<b>31</b>	<b>1</b> 

**LIFE @ First United Methodist church**  
**May 2024**







Think on these things...



Luke is the one Gospel writing that continues with the story of God through the work of the disciples. Acts of the Apostles could be named "The Story Continues." He stated in 1:1 about "all that Jesus began to do and teach." The followers of Jesus keep it going. We'll stay from May 12 through August in the Book of Acts. We'll continue doing and teaching what Jesus taught.

**May 5** – Marsha Gaffin and Kristen Howell will be presenting on Caring Congregation. Communion will be served as usual. Dave will be in Colorado for a wedding.

**May 12** – Starting with Ascension Sunday we'll recognize our graduates as they transition from this season to wherever Jesus calls them next.

**May 19** – Pentecost and focus on how God is with us in all of our journeys. We also bid farewell to CGSC families.

One major change coming for May is the transition to our summer schedule. WE'LL BEGIN HAVING ONE SERVICE ON MAY 12 – IT WILL START AT 10AM. I realize that this affects parts of our normal Sunday schedule. You may be attending morning services earlier or later than usual. Sunday School classes will need to do the same. However, the benefits to our church are numerous. Many people don't realize the number of people it takes to create a great Sunday worship service: musicians, nursery leaders, and front door greeters. We run thin on people who are willing to serve in these areas due to vacations and their summer activities. Summer might be a great time for you to volunteer to serve in the nursery for a Sunday or welcome people at the front door.



Pastor Dave will be starting a new sermon series on May 19 focusing on the early church and five core values that they possessed; prayer, the apostles' teaching, worship and sacraments, generosity and justice and fellowship. We will consider ways that our church family can grow deeper into those core values.

The series will feature testimonies from our church family and how they live out these core values as we focus on telling our Jesus stories. If you would like to share your Jesus story, contact Sandy Wood at the church office at [swood@fumclvks.org](mailto:swood@fumclvks.org).

# MAY Birthdays



1st	Ainslee Frederick	15th	Lucien Rader	20th	Sheryl Reddell
	Matthew McKinley		Karen Tish	22nd	Penny Bowen
2nd	Megan Rust	17th	Dinah Zeck	23rd	Sarah Lauber
5th	Dean Hamon	18th	Don Gaffin	25th	Dana Piper
	Sarah Williams		Isaac Papineau	28th	Susanna Banker
8th	Tammy John		Luke Papineau		Vera Hrabak
9th	Esther Polson	19th	Michael McKinley	30th	Jef Peckham
12th	Natalie Heim		Cynthia Wepking		
	Connie Poe	20th	Donna Cade		
14th	Jan Glick		Rosemary Jacobs		
	Michael Piper	20th	Sandy Pepper		

# MAY Anniversaries

18th	Richard & Suzanne Gray	28 years
	Dae & Jennifer Ko	21 years
23rd	David & Christine Varnal	8 years
24th	Jim & Cynthia Walley	48 years



Did we miss your birthday or anniversary? Please help us update our records. Send an email with your current address, phone number and birthday to Sandy at [swood@fumclvks.org](mailto:swood@fumclvks.org).

# UPCOMING Events



WED. MAY 15, 12:00 PM  
ICHIBAN JAPANESE RESTAURANT







**MAY COLLECTION ITEMS:**  
**VEGETABLE OIL, RICE & BEANS**

The HUB is a United Methodist food pantry and clothing closet ministry in Argentine, KS. They have around 70 families that shop their self-choice market each week. They provide pantry staples, meat, produce, and personal hygiene items. They also have a community garden that supplements their store with fresh vegetables in the summer. Below are the donations our church family gave to the HUB in April. Thank you so much for your generous, and consistent giving to help feed our neighbors.

## STRONGHOLD COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY

In addition to supporting The HUB, our church family regularly gives to the Stronghold Community Food Pantry on Ft. Leavenworth. Our church staff had a serve day at Stronghold in April. We delivered your donations, which was 155 pounds of food! We stocked shelves, made feminine hygiene kits, and hunger buster packs which are their version of the Backpack Buddies packets. You can see photos in the center of the magazine. Monica Basset, the Founder and Director, expressed her deep appreciation for our church family's support.




## TRINITY HOUSE

Trinity House is a food pantry and clothing closet ran by Trinity Lutheran church. We have several church family members who volunteer at Trinity House at 2101 10th Ave. They are open to our community Tuesday through Thursday from 10 am to 1 pm. We have several church family members who volunteer at Trinity House. They currently need gently used children's clothing. If you're moving, they will accept partially used cleaning and laundry supplies. They also are in need of pantry staples such as tuna, peanut butter, jelly, and cereal.

The Alliance Against Family Violence will hold their Community Meeting here on May 7 at 5:30 pm. In addition to presenting their mission they will be putting together "To Go Home" boxes. These are for their success stories as they start a new life in their own new apartment. The boxes will contain some of the items that you need to start a new home such as pots and pans and other cooking utensils. They will also including items just has hand towels, cleaning supplies and small appliances like can openers or mixers. You can bring donations to the church office.



**Alliance Against Family Violence  
Community Meeting  
May 7, 5:30 pm**

### Building "To Go Home" boxes

- |                   |                |
|-------------------|----------------|
| Silverware        | Dishes         |
| Cooking Utensils  | Pots & Pans    |
| Cleaning Supplies | Paper Products |
| Can Opener        | Towels         |




## Baptism

Many blessings to Austin and Emily Haddock who baptized their son, Huxton in April.



Fred and Elizabeth Hersey welcomed their third son, Luke Durham Hersey on April 8, 2024. He was 7lbs 5oz. Congratulations to big brothers, James and John.




**FORWARD AS ONE COMMUNITY**  
**Leavenworth/Lansing Area Chamber of Commerce**

### Operation International

Host families needed for international officers  
Contact Mike Brettmann for details  
[mjbin@hotmail.com](mailto:mjbin@hotmail.com)



Operation International from the Leavenworth/Lansing Chamber of Commerce is seeking sponsors for the 126 international military officers from 99 countries attending the US Army Command & General Staff College for the next academic year. The officers will arrive in June and be here for one year. They will receive three sponsors, one from Fort Leavenworth, one from Leavenworth/Lansing and one from Kansas City. Sponsors assist the officers getting settled and show them how Americans live. Please contact Mike Brettmann at 913-724-2864 or [mjbin@hotmail.com](mailto:mjbin@hotmail.com) if you are interested.





Greetings and the grace of our Lord to you all. The financial state of the church is strong. *The descendants of His servants will inherit it, and those who love His name will dwell in it. Psalm 69:36*

The Trustees, led by Mike Mix, walked through our historic facility last month and did a needs/wants inventory of the campus. Though hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent over the last several years, as in all seasoned facilities, several areas of immediate concern and attention have been identified:

1. Drainpipe and gutter work around main building The gutters are rusted.
2. Drain pipes that run through ceiling
3. The age of the main church roof

Last month during a particularly violent thunderstorm we once again had water run from the southwest corner of Wesley Hall all the way to the basement. We are currently investigating the cause and potential correction to this issue.

4. Fire Detection and Alarm system in the main church (well on its way to completion)
5. Electric Circuits in Fellowship Hall

Through the first four months of the year giving has held strong, with the church family providing tens of thousands of dollars for ministries programs and thousands of volunteer hours. Generosity and compassion are the hallmarks of the use of our treasures. Potentially, we have several major expenses on the horizon, which we will faithful pray and plan for the resources needed to meet those challenges.

*Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7*

Finally, the calendar is full for the next few months with graduation this month:

- The Youth Mission Trip**, June 10-14,
- The Leavenworth Attainable Housing Campout and Dinner**, June 7,
- The Deeper Windows Sweet Exchange**, June 15
- Vacation Bible School**, July 22-26

Buckle up! Please look at the church calendar and this newsletter to find out more information on these exciting events coming soon. If you have a question on these events or any other topic – call or email me 816-805-4771(my cell), egarven@fumclvks.org.

Prayer is powerful, worship is wonderful and Jesus is the Lord! Love gives life to Kingdom building! in Christ Jesus, Ed



Global Hope Executive Director, Sara Hendren, is going to Romania in May. She has offered to hand-carry letters to the children. You may send greeting cards, letters, pictures, postcards. Please don't send money, food, or gifts. Mail cards to **Nancy Week, 1680 W. 130th Ct. Westminster, CO 80234** Please be sure she receives your letter by MONDAY, MAY 13.



## SCOUTS HAVE A BUSY SPRING

When is the last time you camped out? The Scouting ministry did it in April...and you know what? The thunderstorms are strong in April! Before the storms, our younger Scouts learned to safely handle and start fires and sharp things like knives and hatchets. Back in my day it was starting a fire with two matches; today we do it with striker and sparks. Way cool! A little cotton ball and some antibacterial sanitizer gel works wonders.

The older scouts went on a map orienteering course that covered a mile. They cooked a spaghetti dinner and the most awesome dessert in a cast iron kettle. The Scouts are working through the Citizenship in the Nation, Cooking, and Hiking merit badges. April 20 scouts helped clean up Leavenworth. We have invited Senator Pittman to return and talk about Legislation in Kansas and how it affects youth.

We also have the great blessing of Cub Scouts Pack 3109 who crossed over from Cub Scouts to join the Scouts BSA Troops here. It is a simple ceremony where they cross a representative wooden bridge with their Cub Scout friends on one side and walk to the other end, are greeted by their new unit members and receive their new scarf and insignia. At the end of the month the Cub Scouts sold meat sticks to help cover costs of things like annual registration (about \$100), uniforms and equipment. They also completed an outdoor hike.

In May it is Scout Day at the K. Pastor Dave, you are welcome to join us, and you can step out on the outfield and even smile and wave as they parade around the field before the first pitch.

Spring and Summer are the super active periods with camps in June. Thank you, First Church, for including the Scouting Ministry as part of the Youth Program.



## CAMP Chippewa Summer Schedule

A Great Plains UNITED METHODIST CAMP

Camps	Weeks Available	Grade *Incoming Grades	Price <small>Price goes up \$20 when April 1st</small>
Fath & Fun	1,2,3,4,6,7,8	3-8	\$400
Mini Faith & Fun	5	3-8	\$225
Mini Beginner Boots 'N' Bible	5	5-6	\$250
Beginner Boots 'N' Bible	3,6	5-6	\$490
Boots 'N' Bible	1,4,8	7-8	\$490
Sr. High Boots 'N' Bible	2	9-12	\$490
Future Chippewa Leaders	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8	9-12	\$275
STEAM Adventure	7	6-12	\$430
Survivor Camp	3	9-12	\$430
Institute	4	9-12	\$490
Confirmation Camp	5	6-12	\$430
Middle School Camp	6	6-8	\$430
Out on the Range	7	9-12	\$725
Living Waters	7	6-12	\$430
High School Camp	8	9-12	\$430
Day Camps (Mon-Fri)	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8	K-5	\$200/Week
Volunteers	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8	21+	Free
<b>Dates</b>	Week 1: June 3-7 Week 2: June 10-14 Week 3: June 17-21 Week 4: June 24-28	Week 5 (Mini Week): July 1-3 Week 6: July 8-12 Week 7: July 15-19 Week 8: July 22-26	*Institute: June 24-29 *Confirmation June 30-July 3







It is always hard to say goodbye to our military families that we have grown to love. But we know they have a new mission and new friends to make. So make sure to let them know how much you love them and will miss them before they go.

Shawn will graduate from CGSC with a Masters. In June Shawn, Sydney, Samson, Varick, Leona, and Arlen Berry will be moving to Ft. Drum in New York. This has been one of their favorite churches and they really loved the Children's Ministry here.



Teddy Kay be receiving a Masters of Operational Studies from CGSC. Teddy, Jenna, Michael, Edward and Callum are headed to The Third Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa, Japan, where Teddy will be an Infantry Staff Officer in the Command Element.

Daniel Porter also will receive his Masters of Operational Studies from CGSC. Then Daniel, Maggie and Lillian are headed to Camp Zama in Japan where Daniel will be the Executive Officer for the US Army Aviation Battalion.



Let me introduce you to my friend, Kerry Brungardt. Kerry was one of the first people I met when Don was transferred to Ft. Leavenworth. He taught both of our daughters in sixth grade at McArthur Elementary School. A native of western Kansas, Kerry was young, energetic and absolutely dedicated.

Two of his McArthur buddies, Barb Ernzen and Connie Harnish, decided that they should fix him up with a blind date. They tricked him by inviting him to dinner; on the way they told him they needed make a stop. They swung by St Joseph's Church, and out walked Michelle Lawrence; she had been practicing organ for the Sunday mass. "Why, what a surprise! Michelle, this is Kerry. Kerry, this is Michelle," then they promptly sped away, leaving Kerry and Michelle stranded. In spite of the awkwardness of the situation, they agreed to go to dinner together. They ended up closing the place down. When they returned home, they both knew that something special had happened. Kerry called his grandma and told her, "I've just met the girl I'm going to marry".

Kerry and Michelle dated for three years and were inseparable. They married June 6, 1987. Michelle had a successful career at Ft Leavenworth and Kerry continued at McArthur, pursued his Masters, and along the way they had two sons. Kerry transferred to Lansing as an assistant principal. Life was good.

In 2006, Michelle had her yearly mammogram, which was normal. Six weeks later, she noticed a lump in her breast. Tests revealed metastatic breast cancer, so at the age of 44 she had a lumpectomy, brutal chemotherapy and radiation treatments. The treatments worked and she was pronounced cancer free. However, the KU medical staff warned that she must stay vigilant, as 35% of people with this variant had recurrence. She remained cancer free for the next 12 years.

In 2018, Michelle developed some small bumps on her shoulder. It seemed innocuous, but to be on the safe side she saw her doctor. The devastating diagnosis was Stage 4 cancer. It had metastasized to her bones, skin, and eventually her lungs and liver. More rounds of chemo ensued, and for a while she did well. Her body rejected the drug and started to fail. She lost her battle with cancer August 4, 2020.

Unless you've experienced it yourself, no one can imagine the desolation and trauma that comes with the death of a spouse. Kerry was utterly devastated, his whole world shattered. He couldn't return to his former life and eventually resigned his principal position at Lansing Middle School. His grief was intense and he slipped into depression. "I thought I was prepared, but nothing prepared me for the emotions I was experiencing. I even thought I was going crazy. I wasn't sure I could do this".

His friend Alicia Moody told him about GriefShare. At this point he was ready to try. "If someone had told me that swan diving off the Abernathy Bridge would help me with my grief, I would have done it". He started attending GriefShare. The first thing he learned was that many people in the group had experienced the same emotions that he had, he wasn't crazy, he was deep in the throes of grief. He also discovered that he knew several of the people in the group, and felt comfortable enough to begin expressing his struggles.

"For me, as hard as the first year was, I believe the second year was even harder. By then, reality had set in and the visits and cards had tapered off. Thank God for my sons; they gave me a reason to keep going." He also wisely sought a therapist. Eventually, he started improving. "Every time I laughed, I'd feel guilty. GriefShare helped me process everything. I think if hadn't joined I would have become angry and bitter."

Now, almost four years into his journey, Kerry is a changing man. I'm so much more empathetic and I can put life's problems into perspective. He continued going to church. At first seeing someone else playing the organ was painful, and he also started taking on some of Michelle's tasks. He makes sure everyone gets a birthday cake, decorates for holidays and continues to follow through on plans that they had made.

He is going to Europe in a few days, bittersweet because they both had planned this trip together. He still has setbacks but continues to make progress. "You guys saw me at my absolute worst and you embraced my pain and cared. That was my first step towards recovery". He is also finding that he can help others experiencing fresh grief and assure them that there is hope.

Marsha Gaffin







Kids First Worship will meet during the 11:00 service on May 5. Beginning May 12 we will meet at 10 am each Sunday on the lower floor of the Sanctuary building. In May we will be focusing on the Great Commission, Jesus' Ascension, and Pentecost. **We will not meet on Sunday, May 26 (Memorial weekend).**

- May 5 – Jesus Gives the Great Commission (11:00 service)
- May 12 – Jesus Goes Back to Heaven (10:00 service)
- May 19 – Pentecost (10:00 service)

Sunday School will meet on May 5 from 9:45 – 10:40 am. Beginning May 12 we will meet at 9:00 am. We have two classes, one for non-readers and one for readers. With the Bible as our foundation, we will be using science, art and activity to not just tell God's story, but learn what it means for us. Our lessons will be a deeper dive into the Great Commission, Ascension, and Pentecost. We won't meet on May 26. (Memorial weekend).



Wonderful Wednesday is a fantastic way to remind children that God is not just for Sunday, he is for EVERY day. Our theme this year is The Journey. We meet in the Education Building from 3:45 – 5:30 pm. The month of May, we will finish up our journey with Paul in Ephesus. While we are there, we will find out who lived there, who traveled with him, what happened while he was there, and what he wrote in his letter to them. Our final session for this school year is May 22.



**April here at FUMC Kids has been amazing!**

Just a few takeaways:

1. Thomas really gets a bum rap! Sure, he didn't fully believe that Jesus had shown up to the other disciples, but the other disciples didn't believe Mary Magdalene and the other women either—until they saw with their own eyes!
2. We have amazing volunteers here at FUMC! Many thanks to all who helped with Mother's Morning Out!
3. The letters Paul wrote to the Corinthians are filled with words that we use a lot today. "The greatest of these is love," and "Do this in remembrance of me," are two biggies.
4. Giving Bibles to kids is AWESOME! We had the pleasure of giving 12 this year!

**Nancy Shade**



**PAST PASTORS**

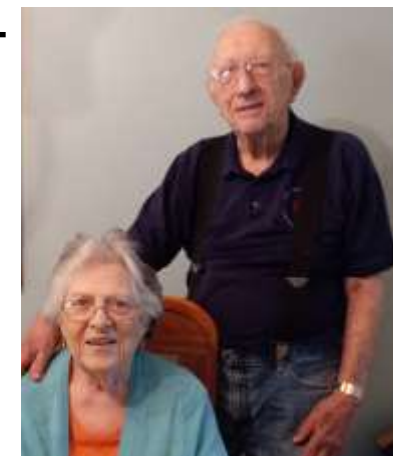
Pastor Kevin Hopkins, or Rev. Kev, as he is better known, was the pastor at First United Methodist church from 2010 to 2014. He is currently working as the Chaplain at Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas. In addition to preaching weekly services, he spend a lot of time counseling students. He said, "Students experience lots of highs and lows at college and sometimes they need a pastor's perspective".

The campus chapel where Rev. Kev speaks was originally home to a

Methodist congregation in Sproxtton, England, for 124 years. In 1995, it was dismantled and shipped to Baker University stone by stone. Feel free to visit Rev. Kev on Thursdays at 11 am when he holds chapel for the Baker students.

Pastor Bob Atwell was our Associate Pastor when Kevin Hopkins was the pastor from 2010 to 2014 and a few other years. Bob is retired now but still lives in Leavenworth with his wife, Joan. They still attend our services every week online.

Being a pastor was a second career for Bob. Bob said, "When I was the Associate Pastor the staff worked very well together, just like the staff now." This spring, Bob is celebrating his 25th anniversary of graduating from St. Paul's School of Theology. Congratulations on your anniversary. We are so thankful for your years of service.



**We ♥ our pastors!**

Dear Church Family,  
I thank you for all the beautiful Easter cards and for the love, prayers, and encouragement you send my way. It's nice to know I have so many church family who hold me up in prayer. It's nice to know so many people care and appreciate who I am and how I am trying to lift up praises here. May the Lord continue to bless all of you for carrying out his work in our community and throughout the world.

Love Always,  
Tim Yenny



Dear FUMC family,  
Many thanks for the Easter greetings. I miss you folks and hope to get back to see you soon. I manage to stay busy at COR. I am a greeter for most of their large group activities. I serve Communion every month. Almost everyone in my Bible Study have "Walked Where Jesus Walked" - not a safe place to go right now. Other than church I play cards, yoga, gym and line dance every Friday. I can walk to all these activities.

Love,  
Mary Eleanor







# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Sam Vasquez (back row, second from the left) qualified for the State Wrestling tournament in his freshman year at Leavenworth High School. Congratulations!



Natalie Heim, a sixth grader at Pleasant Ridge, entered the CoolScience art competition where the middle school students sent in art designs to educate the public on what to do in extreme weather. Natalie's was chosen and will be on KTA busses until May 10! So cool!



Liam Neidig was awarded his 6th NAIA All-American title for the Men's 1000m run at the 2024 NAIA Indoor National Championships this March. He also received the title of Champion of Character and an Academic All-American Honor. He was a member of the University of Saint Mary Dean's list and earned the title of KCAC Scholar for his performance on the track and in the classroom. He loves to incorporate sport as part of his ministry and would like to thank God for blessing him with an amazing team, family, and church.

**We love our church family kids. When your child has a special accomplishment, please share it with us. Contact Sandy Wood at [swood@fumclvks.org](mailto:swood@fumclvks.org).**



## Loving Our Neighbors Through Our Public Schools

The Leavenworth High School choirs performed their Spring Concert here on April 8. It was a privilege to welcome hundreds of students and their parents into our beautiful sanctuary. As a church family we have pledged that we are "disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of our community and world." One of the ways we have chosen to interact with our community is to partner with local schools. In May, we have two opportunities for you to volunteer at our local Elementary school, Anthony. May 16 is Anthony's Family Fun Night. They need a few volunteers to help serve food so the teachers can interact with parents. May 20 is Anthony's Field Day. They need volunteers to help man the games and activities. If you can help with either of these events, contact Ed at [egarven@fumclvks.org](mailto:egarven@fumclvks.org).





**CLASS OF  
2024**

*Congratulations!*



**Anya Anderson**  
Lansing High School  
Anya has a soccer scholarship to KCKCCC and will major in Chemistry.



**Jonas Anderson**  
Lansing High School  
Jonas will be going to Kansas State University to get a degree in Accounting.



**Susanna Banker**  
Lansing High School  
She received the Presidential Scholarship from KCKCC She will major in Early Childhood Education.



**Karl Burland**  
Leavenworth High School  
Karl is going to KCKCC for an Electronics Technology Certificate so that he can maintain and repair digital electronic devices.



**Kelsi Ko**  
Lansing High School  
Kelsi is going to Northwest Missouri State University to earn a degree in exercise science to become a physical therapist.



**Derrick McManagle**  
Leavenworth High School

**Kristen Howell story continued**

infinite ways to think about God that still fit within the bounds of even a conservative orthodoxy. It was freeing, but ultimately having so much ripped out from under me at once meant I lost not only my faith, but also my worldview and, ultimately, myself. I felt like I was careening through space with nothing to ground me. I decided that I could never be okay with ignoring the very real questions and issues that I was raising, so I took a leap of faith and I let it all go. My beloved Christian Studies professor, Doc, encouraged me to keep pulling the thread that was unraveling, even if it was terrifying. I figured if God had given me a brain, God wanted me to use it. And that if God was worth following at all, God would be gracious to me as I explored and learned about what I believed and why. "God's grace is sufficient for me." became my mantra. I let it replace the ongoing repetition of the Sinner's Prayer that was constantly just under the surface. So I asked the big questions. I studied and learned and talked. I didn't quit seeking and talking to God, but I did ask God to go with me as I attended mini-lectures my college put on, inviting practitioners and experts of other religions to come speak about their beliefs. I wrote, and I read all the books, and I kept showing up. I discovered that even as the world felt like it was falling out from under my feet and God felt far away, God was faithful. I can see in hindsight all the places and ways God was working through that time. Through learning about other religions, I discovered that while there were things about each of them that I wanted to incorporate in my own faith practice (the Muslim commitment to prayer, for example, or the way that the Jews are much more playful with their interpretation of scripture), I was at home in Christianity. Something about the God that loves deeply enough to put on flesh and get messy speaks to my soul.

There's so much more to my story that wouldn't fit in the newsletter. My rough draft was 8 pages and that didn't even include everything. But the sum of it is this: God never left my side. I discovered that all this time I had been putting my faith in doctrine about God and not in the goodness and love at the very core of who God is. Once you believe that God is love, everything else is kind of ancillary. I went on to seminary where I thought my questions would for sure be answered and learned that a lot of times, we don't get the answers, and that's okay. I'm not done deconstructing and reconstructing -- I'm still reevaluating what I believe and why every day, but I hold a lot of it with an open hand. I hope I never stop adjusting my beliefs as I experience more and more of who God is. If I have the same beliefs at 82 as I do now, I probably didn't do a very good job of seeking to know God more. And one of the best outcomes is that I'm now able to work with teenagers and help them make their faith their own so that hopefully when they get to college they're so comfortable in their relationship with Jesus and know that it's okay to ask the big questions. Returning to my 90's roots, I'll leave you with this quote from Miss Frizzle that is surprisingly relevant: "Take chances, make mistakes, get messy!" Faith isn't about getting everything right, it's about encountering God along the way. *Kristen Howell*

**We are committed to sharing our Jesus stories this year, both in video and written form. If you would like to share your story of what God is doing in your life, please contact Sandy Wood at [swood@fumclvks.org](mailto:swood@fumclvks.org).**

**Take chances.  
Make mistakes.  
Get messy!**

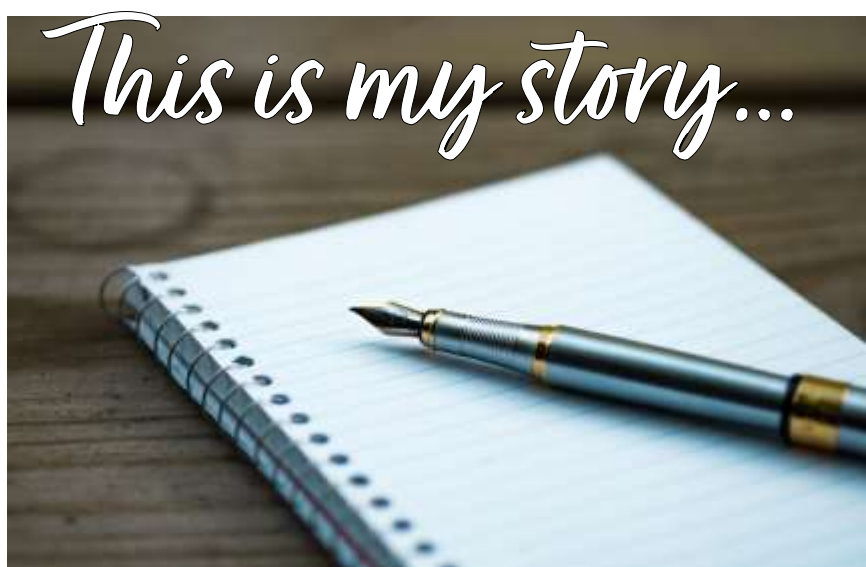




**LIVING WELL**  
CROSSROADS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
101 E GILMAN RD, LANSING, KS

Crossroads United Methodist church, 101 E Gilman Road in Lansing, is offering free community classes. May 9, at 6 pm the class is "Social Skills Training" for kids. May 23, at 6 pm the class is "Compassion Fatigue" for caregivers. For info contact [ehayden@tfifamily.org](mailto:ehayden@tfifamily.org)





# Congratulations!



There's this stereotype of people who leave the faith that they were never "all-in" in the first place, but speaking for myself and many others who left the faith as we grew up, I can confirm that for many of us, it was the opposite. Like Icarus, the closer to the "Son" (pun- intended) we flew, the further we fell. From the very beginning, I was all-in, ride-or-die for Jesus. I grew up in a Christian home in the '90s and early 2000s, so I ended up in the very thick of Jesus-is-my-boyfriend purity culture and "the end is nigh" doomsday sayers. We were in church every week, several times a week. I memorized scripture before I could read and said "The Sinner's Prayer" at age 4 to prevent my eternal damnation. I spent elementary school getting bullied for trying to convert my classmates at lunch because the pastor told us it was our responsibility to make sure those around us didn't go to hell. I got myself up at 6am on Wednesday mornings in middle and high school to attend the student-led interdenominational Bible Study. In summary, I was *that* kid.

As a kid, I was taught a particular brand of Christianity that pushes a scary, vengeful God who desires sacrifice significantly more than mercy. We knew that we were "saved," if we said the prayer, but the concern was that you might've said it wrong, so I began reciting it over and over, daily and then sometimes several times a day to cover my bases. I began to develop severe mental health issues. By the time I was a 5th grader, I was already suicidal and struggling with what I now know is OCD focused on religious scrupulosity. It turns out that years and years of being told I was damaged goods that disgusted God, paired with some really not great genetics in the mental health department is a bad combo.

At the time that I was having this damaging interaction with the Church, I was having a very different experience with God. While my earliest memories of church were rules, structure, and doctrine (not all bad things depending on context), my earliest memories with God are comfort, joy, and freedom. Because I was bullied so much as a child, I spent a lot of time talking to God. God as friend and playmate, was my first encounter with the Divine. God marveled with me at the stars at my grandparents' house and caught fireflies and danced in the rain, jumping extra hard in the biggest puddles. Every time I encountered something that reminded me how small I am and how big God is, I took in everything with awe and felt God's overwhelming love.

As I hit my teenage years, life drove a perceived wedge between me and God. I believed that God wouldn't want anything to do with a person like me. I couldn't pray my way out of depression and I was sexually abused by a boyfriend for almost 2 years and so all those purity pledges were out the window. The organized part of religion got bigger and bigger and my experiential knowledge of God's presence morphed more and more to fit inside the box of doctrine. God was still at my side, but I knew God less and knew about God more. Following Jesus became about being "right" more than about being in love.

Enter college: the culmination of several years of performative Christianity and obsessive rule-following meant that I was a big ball of anxiety and OCD, depression and self-loathing. I was the trifecta of physically, emotionally, and spiritually drained from years of needing to control my environment, my faith, and my God. I majored in journalism, but had plenty of space in my degree plan to take a minor so in response to my breakdown, I figured I would "think" my way out of what was quickly shaping up to be a doozy of a faith crisis by taking on a religious studies minor.

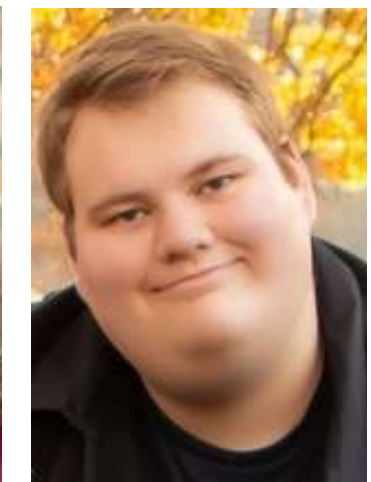
That decision ended up being one of the very best decisions I've ever made. It started simply. One small question here. Picking at a thread where something from my upbringing just didn't add up. I discovered that there were nearly

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# LIFE @ FUMC



There are many opportunities to build relationships in your church family. Above is the Men's Prayer Breakfast. Below is Heart and Soul.



The church staff volunteered at Stronghold Food Pantry in April. They stocked shelves, made feminine bags and hunger buster backpacks for school children that may need food on weekends.



Seventy three people from our church and community came to the Preparing for the End of Life seminar. Mike Crow, Liz Brown and Pastor Dave did an amazing job presenting their topics. Watch for new seminars coming soon.

The Wonderful Wednesday kids made May baskets. Wednesdays are filled with children with Mother's Morning Out and Wonderful Wednesdays. What a joy!



Wingtips, a widow support group, held a garden party here in April. Cecilia Belser-Patton spoke about planting new seeds in our lives, then they each planted some flowers.