



Blessed TO BE A BLESSING



Blessings in the name of Christ, Columbia First UMC Family!

Wow, this has been quite a year! Our church is living proof of this truth about God:

❖ **God has always seen us through and will continue to do so!**

It can be easy during a time of trials to lose sight of the amazing things of God that have happened. Our church is a church on the move and our missional DNA has not been stifled. I continue to believe God is getting us ready to do even more for the Kingdom. And, if you'll give me just a few minutes of your time, I want to remind you of how God has used our church this past year...

- ❖ Our **Youth AND Childrens' ministries have doubled** and almost tripled in size!!!!
- ❖ We've hired a **Childrens' Pastor** and a **Youth Director!**
- ❖ Over **15,000 meals served** through *The People's Table* annually! **WOW!! JUST, WOW!!**
- ❖ **Fifty (50) children fed per week** through our *Jet Pack* program (that's 1,800 packs)!
- ❖ **Eighteen (18) ramps built** utilizing over 2,000 volunteer hours for our community!
- ❖ Over **265 single nights of hotel rooms** for people in crisis (they also get hot meals)!
- ❖ Over **90 children and families get Christmas** through the Tree of Stars!
- ❖ Over **50 shut-ins / homebound individuals get Christmas Gift Bags** from us!
- ❖ Kids Helping Kids gives away **thousands of dollars to children** locally & nationally!
- ❖ We also give away **dozens of Jet Packs to those in our community without homes!**
- ❖ **Thousands of dollars donated to Disaster Relief** locally, national, and internationally!
- ❖ **Hundreds of students educated** in our building at the Weekday School & Agathos!
 - That's roughly **194,400 hours of instruction on our campus** per year!! **WHAT!?**
- ❖ **Hundreds of individuals getting the addiction recovery** resources they need on our campus!
- ❖ **Tens of Thousands of dollars given** to local and national nonprofits like...
 - Family Center, Kids Place, Place of Hope, the Pregnancy Center, veterans ministry, UMCOR, Disaster Relief, Center of Hope, FreshStart, Harvest Food Share, Imagination Library, Maury Co. Students in Crisis, South Central TN Workforce Alliance, warming shelter and cooling station during extreme temperatures, resources for High School guidance counselors, College scholarships, and more!
- ❖ The above list doesn't include the **countless volunteer hours and dollars our people give** to the community that don't come through the church!

AND, these also don't take into account the other fundamental faith building aspects of our church like worship, fellowship, discipleship, evangelism, mission trips, confirmation, VBS, and so much more! This is awesome! **Post this page on your fridge and give it to all your friends!! This is the Kingdom!**



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Columbia First UMC for 200 More Years!

We are inviting you to join us on a mission; a mission from God! A mission that has been active since the dawn of time and was brought to its fullest fruition in the life, death, & resurrection of Jesus Christ!

It's a mission that the people called Methodists in Columbia TN have been leading since 1807 when the Columbia Circuit and the Western Conference of the Methodist Church were created. And we have been an officially organized church since 1820 when the first Methodist Society in Columbia was organized at the corner of Woodland and 6th Street!

We used to meet in homes and at the Courthouse until 1820 when our first property was purchased and a structure was built. The property we are on now was purchased to accommodate our exponential growth and need for space in 1835 and the first brick church was completed in 1836 on this very lot!

We have survived wars, famines, depressions, slavery, election years, pandemics, and... disaffiliation!

We are still a church. And not just any church, but a church on fire for Mission, Service, Worship, and Christ!! We are just like our forefathers and foremothers who handed down to us not just these hallowed grounds, but a legacy of faith in action, obedience to God, relationship with Christ, love of neighbor, and faithfulness in our prayers, presence, service, witness, and gifts.

We are reinforcing this church for the next 200 years and the people who will then hold the reins and worship on this ground and among these bricks!

When we Worship on Sunday morning and feed those in need every Tuesday and Friday, we are standing among the Saints who have done the same for over 200 years in this city, on these very grounds, and inside and outside of these very bricks! It's palpable on our campus!!

Now it's our turn. To grow our faith. To love our God. To live like our Christ. To support our church. To make our community better. And to faithfully prepare for the generations who will live the faith we hand down to them.

I believe our forefathers and foremothers would be PROUD to see the page above and how we are engaging our community in loving service to others. They would be proud to see us worshipping God come thick or thin, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, in richer or poorer, until we move on to Glory and Peace forever.

They would be proud to see our love and mentorship of the children and youth in our care. They would be proud that we still witness to the loving sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. They would be proud of how we care for the Mission and the building of the church. And how we continue the Sacraments of Christ.

Beautiful Children of God, it's time to get on with the Mission of God! Let's go!



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How Are You Participating In God's Mission Through Columbia First UMC & Beyond?:

As we continue into God's invincible future for Columbia First UMC, we are writing to remind our congregation that in our Baptismal Covenant we promise to support the Mission of God through Columbia First UMC with our *Prayers, Presence, Service, Witness, and Gifts*. This is not a contract to be held to but a Covenant to live into and grow with as we continue to grow in faith.

During our "200 More!: Blessed To Be A Blessing" Stewardship Campaign and Worship Series, we will be talking about goals we are making as a church and individuals. How can you participate in the ministries of our church through your Prayers, Presence, Service, Witness, and Gifts?...

1. Prayer

- a. 2,025 Minutes of Prayer, as a church, Covering Every School in Maury County!
- b. 200 Prayers for Our Church (on cards in our Atrium)!
- c. 2,025 Minutes of Holy Scripture in 2025 (that's 6 minutes per day)!

2. Presence

- a. 25% Increase in Personal Worship Attendance (1 extra Sunday per month)!
- b. 200 People in Worship on Commitment Sunday (Nov. 17th)!
- c. 200 Acts of Caring During the Series!

3. Service

- a. 5,000 Volunteer Hours Pledged as a Church for 2025!
- b. 36 Volunteer Hours Pledged (per person) for 2025 (to the church or other organizations)!
- c. 200 Moments of Gratitude During the Series (on cards in the Atrium)!

4. Witness

- a. 20 New Families / Individuals in Sunday School and Worship (personally invite 5)!
- b. 200 Acts of Radical Kindness in 2025 (personally do one (1))!
- c. 200 Conversations of Faith Pledged in 2025 (personally have 5)!

5. Gifts

- a. 200 Financial Pledges Received From Our Congregation!
- b. 20 New Families / Individuals Pledging Financial Stewardship!
- c. 200 Blessings for Future Generations (Legacy Gifts)!

Our church is only as strong as the participation of its people. We want our church to be a thriving and life giving part of our community for 200 more years! If we are to reach that, we need your help right now to continue building the Kingdom of God through Columbia First UMC.

Join us each Sunday during this series and come prepared to make your commitments to God in each of the areas of your Baptismal Covenant:

❖ ***Prayers, Presence, Service, Witness, and Gifts!***



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2025 Stewardship Campaign:

Our Church Council and ministry area teams are currently planning for the Engaging, Connecting, Equipping, and Sending ministries of our church and they need your help!

Part of our responsible, accountable, and faithful planning requires our best estimate of the financial resources we will be using to build the Kingdom of God here in Columbia, TN and around the world. We need your financial pledges to understand our income so we can make sure our expenses are in line. We believe this is the kind of fiscally responsible stewardship our church demands and deserves. That means you have to do your part too by letting us know what our income will be.

However, this is not just a budgeting issue. ***This is a spiritual issue.*** God calls us to be a people of generosity and to set aside a portion of our income to continue building God's Kingdom on earth, and in heaven. Generosity also breaks the hold that material possessions can have on our lives. We want you to take your next step in faith to give God your "first fruits" in tithes & offerings. This is an act of discipleship and spiritual faithfulness.

Financial Commitment Card:

You will find enclosed with this letter your Financial Commitment Card for 2025. Please take a moment to review it now. Filling out and returning this card may seem like a small or insignificant task and it's easy to think "I'm giving either way so what does it matter?". But for your church, it is a huge help in our financial faithfulness and the accountability you hold us to. And for you, it is an act of growing personal faith and commitment to the church's mission through its ministries, volunteers, and people we serve.

Financial Values:

As you consider financially supporting Columbia First UMC, it is good to know that we believe in **transparency and accountability in how our finances are handled and allocated**. We undergo regular external audits, have a well developed financial operating procedure and controls, separate the duties of receipts and expense payment for accountability and report monthly in Church Council and quarterly to our whole congregation through digital and physical mailings. And, if you ever have any questions or concerns, you are invited to attend Church Council monthly and/or talk to Pastor Stephen and/or our Finance Chairs: Jim Richardson & Larry York.

2024 Financial Audit:

In line with our transparency and accountability values, we want our people to know that we had a full audit of our finances, by an outside firm, in September of this year (2024). The auditor reported that we exceeded expectations with flying colors. He stated that our church had the best first audit of his career. (First audit just means his first time auditing us before he had given any feedback on how to improve.) We have excellent procedures, policies, and oversight of our finances. We would be happy to walk through the glowing report with you anytime!



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Now, here are some budget details for you, if you're into that kind of thing like I am...

3rd Quarter Report:

At the end of Q3, we are \$17,764 ahead, or "in the black." However, as a reminder from our Mid-Year Update, this has only been possible through extraordinary support from some church members as well as very generous support from the Tennessee Western Kentucky (TWK) Conference of the United Methodist Church. The TWK assisted us with over \$300,000 through cost reductions and direct funding.

Our Q3 monthly congregant giving averaged \$39,573 per month, with a gradual upward trend that saw September reach \$45,640.

Using our Q3 average, adjusting for a gradual upward trend as some inactive givers re-engage and new givers begin giving, and accounting for December at our historical giving trend of being a 2X month, we believe our annual income projection to have a base floor of \$480,000 and a high probability of \$560,000 - \$600,000, in congregant giving. ***But we'll need your pledges to know for sure!***

2025 Budget:

We are currently in the process of setting our 2025 budget. Given our Q3 income trend and projection, our Church Council has set guidance to reduce our budget from \$806,000 in 2024 to \$650,000 in 2025. **That is a 20% reduction.**

And, if you will recall from our last mailing, our 2022 budget was \$1,031,150. Therefore, a budget goal of \$650,000 in 2025 is a nearly **40% reduction in three (3) years**. The church *has* and *is* adjusting to new economic, attendance, and giving patterns.

2025 Income Goal:

Our goal for 2025 is to reach \$600,000 in pledges from you and fund the remaining \$50,000 through building usage gifts from Agathos, FreshStart, the WeekDay School, and other gifts.

This goal is attainable but will require new givers taking their next step in faith and making a financial pledge for the first time. There are also those who stopped giving during disaffiliation, but are still here. We need you to make a financial pledge and begin giving again.

Without these pledges we will not have an accurate picture of our income versus expenses and may be significantly off in our 2025 budget. We want to be more responsible and faithful than that. If you need more information to make this decision then contact us and we would love to have a conversation with you!

Now onto the next question, where does the money given to Columbia First UMC go?...



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Where Does My God's Money Go When I Give To Columbia First UMC?:

Take a moment and run your eyes back over the list you read on page one (1). I'll wait.

(.....no seriously, it's awesome, take another look.....)

❖ **THAT is where your money goes when you give to Columbia First UMC!! Period.**

Sure, we pay for electricity, insurance, staff, and other physical plant & administrative costs. But all of those expenses... ALL OF THEM ... go to further the Mission of God, for our community and world!

Take some time to prayerfully consider how God is calling you to support God's Mission through our church. We are so very grateful for ALL the people who support our church in so many different ways. **And no matter how often, how much, or in what ways you give, you are an important and beloved part of our faith family. You matter to God. You matter to us.**

- If you are not a regular giver, we want you to consider making a regular percentage gift and pledge a part of your spiritual practices. Start at 1-10% and try it out.
- If you are a regular giver, we encourage you to **become a tither** by giving 10% of your income to our mission of "Making Disciples of Jesus Christ" here at Columbia First UMC.
- If **you are tithing**, we believe you have taken yet another faithful step in your faith and invite you to consider opportunities for special offerings and Legacy Giving!

After you prayerfully consider your Financial Commitment to the mission of God in 2025, **return the completed card** to the church office, fill it out online, and/or bring it to worship on **November 17th for a special Commitment Sunday!**

Thank you for reading this far and for prayerfully considering how you will support God's Mission in 2025 through Columbia First UMC!

If you have any questions, feel free to contact the church office, Pastor Stephen, and/or any of the Church Council. You can also visit our website for more information, to download the ACH Form, and/or to get started giving for 2025 at <https://www.columbiafumc.org/give>.

In Christ and Gratitude,

Pastor Stephen and the Columbia First UMC Church Council

Nora Cecil, Jill Craig, Keri Guill, Kay Hamilton, Rick Hamilton, Steve Hoelscher, Allen Lentz, Cathy Matyskiela, Shauna Pounders, Bobbie Ray, Jim Richardson, Bonnie Rodgers, Bill Walter, Robin Wilhite, Kara Williams, Larry York.



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How Do I Give?:

As you prepare to support God's Mission through our church, we want to make it as easy as possible for you and provide financial stability for the church during the natural high & low attendance times of the year. You can give in multiple ways and we want to mention them here.

We also want you to know that certain methods of giving are better for the church and possibly for you. Some are more regular, easier to oversee, do not incur fees, provide for more accountability in our financial controls, and may provide you with tax savings. They are in order below from best to still great!

1. **Automated Clearing House (ACH Form, enclosed and on website)**
 - a. This method helps you remain faithful whether you miss a Sunday or not, and it gives the church the best method for understanding its regularly incoming resources. There is no fee for you or the church, and we set it up for you!
2. **Recurring Bill Pay through your bank**
 - a. This method, like the ACH Form, helps you remain faithful even when you miss a Sunday and supports the church on a regular basis. Some banks have fees for bill pay but the church is not charged any fees. You would contact your bank to set this up.
3. **Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) or Stock Transfer**
 - a. When a QCD from your IRA is done correctly, neither the giver nor the recipient are taxed by the IRS. Contact your broker and/or CPA for exact details and execution.
 - b. A correctly executed stock transfer can minimize tax impact in your portfolio. Again, contact an investment professional and/or CPA for exact details and execution.
4. **Recurring Online Giving (through the church website)**
 - a. This method allows you to give by ACH or Debit Card, is easy and flexible, and can be set up as a regular recurring gift. However, it does incur fees paid either by you or the church.
5. **Check (offering plate or mail)**
 - a. This method, like those above, allows us to provide you with a quarterly and annual financial contribution statement. Also, it is fee free. However, it is often tied to attendance and can become irregular during times of illness, vacation and/or other absence. Volunteers and staff oversee the counting & accounting.
6. **Cash (offering plate)**
 - a. This method can only be used by placing cash in the offering plate or visiting the church office, meaning it is directly tied to attendance and is often irregular. It also makes it difficult or impossible for us to provide quarterly or annual giving statements.