

The Messenger Monthly

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Anniston First  **United Methodist Church**

The Messenger Monthly is published monthly by Anniston First United Methodist Church

Goodbye to the Harris family. We will miss you!

The following letters were written by church members asked to share their thoughts and memories of Brandon over his six years at Anniston First United Methodist Church

I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I MET BRANDON. He was almost as new to our church as I was, he was newly married, and kidless (and I thought he looked like a kid himself- although I am NOT THAT MUCH older than him!) At the time, the contemporary service was in Epworth, and the place was always full of families with little kids. When Brandon began his sermon, he began drawing me in with his analogies.... then, WHAM, out of the blue, came these huge words!! I'm talking about words that I (as an educated person) couldn't begin to spell, let alone understand the meaning of!!! I listened anyway and would leave with a great sense of purpose - to expand my vocabulary!! Hahahaha

Now, several years later, I can honestly say that my spiritual journey would have gravely suffered if it weren't for Brandon. Over the past 2 years, he has taught me about service, giving, prayer, worship, love, diligence, and humility (as well as so much more)! He has allowed our family to be ourselves and has unconditionally accepted us for who we are. He has become a true friend during this time, first taking Maia through the confirmation process, then allowing me to serve on one of his committees and help-



ing me to become a "good" mentor in the confirmation process. He baptized my husband and sons... it doesn't get much better than that!

Brandon, I will miss you terribly. I am glad to have been your friend and would not trade all of the chairs in the world for the time spent with you, picking your brain about rights and wrongs, Methodist History, and the state of life in general! I will miss your big words and strong messages. I will miss your beautiful wife and awesome children. I will miss your subtle hints at your Starbucks stock ownership (hahaha) Your time at FUMC has been a true blessing to the congregation, and to me as an individual!

Love ya, Brandon!
Cheri Hamilton

WHEN BRANDON FIRST CAME TO ANNISTON FUMC, he was very young, unmarried, childless, and collared. He was full of ideas and passionate that he could help our church to grow and prosper - to *change* - that word that causes most of us to stop

... continue on page 2

dead in our tracks. The mentality of *'well we've always done it that way'* will not work for the future of our church. As hard as it was to hear this from our young associate pastor, I think we all have come to realize that change is scary but good.

Today, Brandon is, well... still young, but is now married to a wonderful person, has two absolutely beautiful children, and is collar-less. Our church has changed and much of that is a direct result of Brandon's ideas and passion. As a church, we owe him so much. I know I will take his vision of what our church can be and use that to continue to build and grow our church into what God wants it to be.

**Thank you, Brandon.
Kim Merrell**

HOW DO YOU WRITE A HEARTFELT THANK YOU to a guy who is probably uncomfortable in the presence of heartfelt thank yous!?! It is a daunting task, but in the end you get through it by the same methods that have sustained you for the past 6 years . . . you realize that that guy doesn't always get his way!

Seriously, Brandon, I did not want you to ride off into the sunset (Birmingham IS west of here) without having the opportunity to express to you how much I have appreciated your ministry here at Anniston FUMC. I think enough has been said about your time of growth here and how much you have accomplished. I want to point out the things which you brought with you when you came and which are still an integral part of who you are.

You came to us with a genuine love for the study of God's word. That certainly hasn't changed. You have led Discipleship, Christian Believer, Parenting Classes, Studies for New Believers and led years of confirmants to a better understanding of their faith. While with us you not only were ordained by the North Alabama Conference but have served since on the very board that recommended you for ordination. Both the Bridge Service and the Sanctuary Service have been enriched by your study and presentation of God's word. The litanies you have prepared and the messages you have brought have contributed to some of my most meaningful worship experiences here at FUMC.

The other aspect of your ministry here that I would like to mention has been the emphasis on service in Christ's name. You have led us clearly to an understanding that a life which ignores the needs of all God's people is not a life pleasing to God. You have been faithful in preaching the duality of the cross—it reaches both up to God and side-to-side to our neighbors. There are ministries which were started under your leadership which will continue when you are gone. What better tribute can be paid to your time of service here?

There is another aspect of your time here that I must address on a personal level. You brought me kicking and screaming into the 21'st century as far as technology is concerned. I could not imagine at the time WHY you wanted me to be adept in Sibelius, a music writing program. I use it nearly EVERY DAY. Now I can't imagine my life without it! Along these lines I do have one favor to ask of you. Please continue to keep an eye out for software, programs and workshops which might benefit my ministry here. You have always given me good direction in those and seem to have a sixth sense in terms of what is being offered and by whom.

Please know that I am thankful for having had the opportunity to work with you and that my prayers go with you, Jennifer, Parks and Ava.

**Go Thou and Spread God's Word
and Technology to your next Parish!
In Christ, Kathy Murphy**

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE that it was six years ago that Brandon Harris arrived on the scene. My first impression like many others was "this man is too young to be a minister" but the more I have gotten to know him, the more I am impressed with his maturity, his intellect, his technical and musical abilities and his commitment to Jesus Christ, this Church and his family. As Staff Parish Committee Chair, I come in close contact with the clergy. My experience with Brandon has always been positive, rewarding and usually a learning experience. He has amazed me with his ability to deal with unique and complex issues from the security system, to bridge policies, to the best report for Charge Conference I ever read. Not only have we benefited from his leadership and

his dedication, we have also been blessed by his wonderful family; his beautiful wife, Jennifer and their two wonderful children, Parks and Ava. It has been a joy to watch this young family grow before our eyes and these children win our hearts. I know that whatever the future holds, Brandon will be up to the task and handle it with grace and ability. We wish him, Jennifer, Parks and Ava the best as they go to Avondale United Methodist.

We will miss you, Brandon!
Mickey Starling

MANY MEMBERS OF OUR CHURCH may be unaware that the Youth have benefitted from having Brandon as our Associate because he has expanded our vocabularies! In fact, soon after Brandon arrived at FUMC, we started a new challenge at UMYF on Sunday nights called "Brandon's Wordly Wise." The leaders would choose one of Brandon's most impressive words from his sermon on Sunday morning; we would attempt to find the correct definition of the word, which was not always easy since Brandon's vocabulary is more extensive than many dictionaries. Then on Sunday night, we would challenge the Youth to define the word and the leaders would read the attempts aloud for everyone's enjoyment. If anyone correctly defined the word, they were declared the winner. However, if no one could define the word correctly (which was often the case), the leaders voted on the most creative or entertaining definition as the winner. We had a great time with this exercise and learned a new word each week in the process! Brandon, I speak for the Youth in saying thank you for expanding our knowledge of the English language! As you leave, we would like to share a few definitions that you may not know and you can try them out on your new church:

- Drue Taylor

fibula - a small lie

benign - what you will be after you be eight

**abdicate - to give up all hope of ever
having a flat stomach**

vuja de - the feeling you've never been here

derange - where de buffalo roam

Brandon memories - Letters from children

How you always said "Good Morning" to the crowd.
- Turner

Thank you for preaching to me!
- Elliot

He let me pet his German Shepherd named Duke. Brandon was a awesome Dude!
I'm gonna miss him, his dog, and family.
- Caleb

He helped with my grandmother's funeral.
He is funny and always has a smile on his face.
- Korie

Brandon was always really nice and funny.
He was really nice to kids and I liked the videos he picked.
- Claire

Brandon, I had a fun time in confirmation going through all our classes and trips we took and I had lots of fun at Six Flags. Have a fun time in the rest of your life.
- unsigned

The funniest thing that happened to Brandon is when he got swamp slime poured on him.
- unsigned

When you got goop poured on you it was funny!
I will miss you. I hope you will come back soon!
bye
- Gabi



VBS
June 2009

Brandon was
drenched in
"Swamp slime"

Congratulations . . .

I asked parents to send me information on school awards that their children received. I hope I did not leave anyone out or make an error! Be proud of these boys and girls!

In absolutely no particular order

Reese McWhorter: 2nd place Bible Sword Drills for grades 2-3, A-B honor roll, Faith Christian School.

Zach and Korie Burgess were both on the A honor roll all year. Zach earned a pin for his academic letter and for his athletic letter. He was also awarded the 10th grade social studies award. He was selected as a member of the Alabama All State Choir. Both attend White Plains.

Sara Connell: CE Hannah 6th grade - Presidential Award; Honor Roll for entire year; Student Council Representative; Technology Fair Honorable Mention; she made 7th grade volleyball team at Oxford Middle School.

Emma Connell: DeArmanville Elementary - Honor Roll for entire year; she made Jacket Singations (choral group) for 4th grade.

Olivia Simmons: Sacred Heart School, 6th grade - Honors Student and Beta Club Member (honors club)

Caroline LaFollette: Honor Roll, Presidential Award, Outstanding Academic Excellence, 2nd Place in Youth Essay VFW Patriot's Pen Competition, Most Conscientious Student in English for 8th Grade, Donoho.

Tyler Flegel: received an award for highest GPA for the year in 7th grade Geography, maintaining a 99.14 for the year (Drew Middle School, Lincoln). He also won 2nd place at the Junior Beta State Convention in the sculpture competition.

Ellen Patricia Hardy: She was the recipient of the Drama Directors Award, The Senior Editor of the

Lure Award, and the Germaine Berman Award of excellence in the Arts for exhibiting excellence in the fine arts and involvement in cultural activities in the community. Ellen was named as a finalist for the Nancy Julian Outstanding Young Woman Scholarship offered by the Junior League. Ellen also received honor cords for the National Forensic League and for the Tri M Music Honor Society, Donoho High School.

Adam Ledford: was recently elected to full membership in Mu Alpha Theta, the National High School Mathematics Honor Society, Donoho High School.

Laurie Beth Beyerle: was honored on Sunday, May 16th at the University of Alabama for her high ACT score in the Duke TIP 7th Grade Talent Search State Recognition, Sacred Heart Catholic School.

Meredith Stafford: All "A" Academic Honor Roll; Golden Eagle Reading Award; and the "Most Unusual Word" Award for the 1st Grade Vocabulary Parade (her word was migrate), Kitty Stone.

Cole Stafford: All "A" Academic Honor Roll; Awards for Outstanding Achievement in reading and language; elected by his 3rd Grade class as "Best Reader" and "Best Personality", Kitty Stone.

Maia Hamilton: Grade 7 at Oxford Middle School was inducted into the Junior National Honor Society in May, achieved A-B Honor Roll all year, and participated as a member of the Scholars' Bowl and Language Olympiad Teams. She also just completed her 8th year of dance!

Elliott Hamilton: Grade 2 at Oxford Elementary School made at least a 93% in each subject area all year, achieved Gold Card for grades, attendance, and attitude for the entire year, and just completed his 5th year of baseball, where he played as catcher!

William Hamilton: Grade K at Oxford Elementary School exceeded all standards for first grade placement. He graduated Kindergarten on May 27th, and just finished his 3rd year of T-Ball!

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Interfaith Ministries
 Martha Vandervoort and David Wall

MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER are asking for charitable assistance. You may see them at the grocery store, on the street or around our church. We see many at Interfaith Ministries.

If you feel compelled to assist, it is best not to give cash. Tell them you will pay for a meal or groceries. When in doubt refer them to Interfaith Ministries. Our staff has the resources to efficiently evaluate need.

There are many resources in town. Family Services Center is the first stop; but, we welcome people who need assistance at Interfaith. You may not know that we allow people to use the showers in The Bridge and we give them toiletries donated by various individuals and church programs. For example, Diane Wood's confirmation class has made this type of contribution to Interfaith as one of their programs. We also give out donated snacks, pay for gas for emergencies and allow clients to use our phone, computer and address (for mail service).

Charity Tracker is a system utilized by a number of county agencies and churches to track charitable giving in our community. This growing network is vital to helping track the frequency of services given. It also allows agencies and churches to track abuses and dishonesty in the system. We are also able to better serve our clients in helping them budget their money with the collective information available on Charity Tracker.

A significant number of our clients live on \$674 per month, while many have much less or no income. For many food stamps is all they have. We gather information related to the client including an Interfaith Ministries application. This information is helpful in determining need.



Once the client is qualified, we assist with a number of different needs. Our funding goes toward utilities where cutoff is imminent, rent if the client has an eviction notice, emergency prescriptions, emergency dental care, identification replacement, bus tickets for homeless clients who have need to relocate, gas for emergency causes and a number of miscellaneous categories. We never give our clients

cash and we document the amount and the necessity of the funds given. We write checks for any assistance given.

Much of our time is spent assisting clients on non-funded task. For example, showers are available on Monday and Thursday mornings. We assist them in making applications for birth certificates from a number of states. With a birth certificate they can apply for an Alabama Non-drivers License Identification card. We make up business cards for clients seeking employment. We occasionally pay for temporary shelter at motels, but most of the time we look to place clients in local shelters. Some of our clients without permanent shelter frequently use our in-house Open Door Program. It is not uncommon for a client to have psychological issues that require a considerable block of time. We do a lot of listening.

Many of you have contributed to Interfaith Ministries with cash donations, toiletries, sleeping bags, coats and miscellaneous clothing, food and more. We also have a volunteer receptionist staff, including several from our church. These volunteers typically work one day per week for four hours.

As we see people in need in our community, a kind word and information about local social service agencies can usually be the best way to help.

Omar Ruskin Burns "BROTHER B" 1885 – 1971

The Rev. Omar Burns, affectionately known as "Brother B" is remembered for his gentle manner, unflinching wit, genuine concern and Christian witness. Perhaps, though, he is best known for his love for people of all ages.

He was pastor for sixty years, serving 21 of these years in his retirement at First United Methodist Church as Associate Pastor from 1950 to 1971. He is described by Harry Rainwater as *"a force for everything good in our church and community, a blessing to every life he touched."* (From the historical book on the life of "Brother B.") In 1971 the Administrative Board passed a resolution after his death stating that his *"life and ministry will always be a beautiful chapter in the history of the church"*.

A young couples group, the Carre adult Sunday School Class had requested a retired minister and wife who could come and live in a home they had just purchased as a memorial to the beloved physician, Dr. Hal Cleveland. Upon "Brother B's" death, a perpetual trust fund was set up for the continuation of service to others. The stated purpose of the fund is for *"helping people by undertaking only those projects that express the loves, ideals, and activities of 'Brother B' as exemplified in the life he lived among us"*.

A hiking trail named for "Brother B" is enjoyed by individuals and groups at Lee Farm. A playground located on the North end of the church was established in his memory.

FUMC FUNERAL PLAN DEPOSITORY

The Records and Archives Committee has recognized the need for those who make advance plans for funeral arrangements to have the same on file, accessible in the church for the minister. This would be important especially knowing that bank vaults are not available at times when a bank may be closed on weekends and holidays. If you plan to take advantage of this service, place the document in a sealed 9"x 12" envelope and give it to the church secretary. Your private information will be placed in a locked fireproof filing cabinet. If desired you may include obituary information.

- David Boozer

Music & Arts Week Camp Sumatanga July 5 -9

Children entering grades 3-7

Youth entering grades 7-12

Campers spend 2 to 3 hours a day in various choral rehearsals. They also choose two elective classes that interest them.

Daytime activities may include volleyball, swimming, canoeing and hiking.

Evening activities may include game night, folk dancing, scavenger hunts, movie night, karaoke night, and the talent show.

The week builds to a powerful conclusion in a combined children and youth concert on Friday night. Bring the whole family and a car full of friends to hear the choirs sing, the bells ring, and the joyful noises.

Cost \$310

Scholarship money is available.

Contact Diane Wood at the church

www.MusicAndArtsWeek.org

Possible classes:

Guitar

Signing

Vespers

Art

Instrumentals

Handbells

Barbershop

Drama

Women's Ensemble

Photography

Newspaper

Dance

Videography

Banners

Recorder

Puppets

Will Lawhon: Outstanding Choral Student; Academic Achievement Award (for maintaining overall 90 average), Oxford

Mitch Lawhon: Academic Achievement Award (for maintaining overall 90 average), Oxford

Andrew Davis: Graphic Art award, Faith Christian School.

Andrea Davis: 5th Grade A & B Honor Roll, Faith Christian School

Anna Kerri Davis: 2nd Grade A Honor Roll, Faith Christian School.

Brittany McDade: 7th grade A Honor Roll, Faith Christian School.

Elizabeth McCollough: 7th grade A & B Honor roll, Faith Christian School.

Coby Booth: 5th Grade A & B Honor Roll, Faith Christian School.

Summer Booth: 1st grade, A Honor Roll, Faith Christian School.

Jackson Tillman: 4th Grade A& B Honor Roll, Faith Christian School.

Noah Tillman: 3rd Grade A Honor Roll, Faith Christian School.

Corey Phillis: Outstanding Achievement Award for track, "Best Offensive Player" for JV volleyball and varsity soccer, and highest academic average for the year for Algebra 1, Donoho.

Darsey Norton: all A's, nominated for all county soccer, Donoho.

MK Taylor: Presidential Scholarship as well as the Alumni Heritage Scholarship and the Alumni Scholar Award from the University of Alabama. He was also the 6A Regional Bryant Jordan Scholar Athlete winner. 12th Grade, Oxford High School

Allison Schwyn: Historian of the Oxford Class of 2010.

Frazier Taylor: was inducted into the National

Honor Society at Oxford High School.

Kate Stedham: Outstanding Alto, Most Conscientious Senior Award, Donoho High School.

Elizabeth Smith: Band Leadership Award, I DARE YOU leadership Award, Donoho High School

Bryce St.Clair: Outstanding Woodwind Player, Most Outstanding Junior Boy, Donoho HS

Zachary St. Clair: Outstanding Percussionist, HOBY Youth Leadership Award, all A's, Donoho HS

Thank You!

Janice and I want you to know how much we appreciate the many kindnesses shown to us in both word and action these past two years. Anniston First United Methodist Church has an amazing history and a promising future. We are grateful to have been appointed to this great Church at the genesis of its transition into the future church recapturing our Wesleyan heritage of mission, ministry and evangelism.

We were humbled by both the reception following our final day of worship with you and the love gifts given, corporate and individual. As we do not have a listing of those who contributed to the church love gift, please accept our sincere gratitude for your thoughtfulness. Mickey Starling's statement of affirmation meant a great deal to us and left me speechless...how unusual! Actually, I was struggling with a huge lump in my throat and just could not verbalize my sincere reply. Thank you also for your intangible gifts of prayerful support and encouragement. Know that you remain in our thoughts and prayers. We extend an open invitation for you to visit us in our home at 1508 Bellingrath Dr. Tuscaloosa. Thus far, our neighbors do not know we are both Auburn grads. When you visit, please help us in maintaining our alumna anonymity.

*With prayerful thanksgiving,
Hal and Janice Noble*

Our new address is:
1508 Bellingrath Dr
Tuscaloosa, AL 35406

Email: noblsail@yahoo.com
Ph: Hal 256-710-7039 / Janice 256-627-8015

A Quick Introduction to Rev. Bill Brown and Rev. Minnie Stoval



Rev. Bill Brown
Anniston First, Senior Pastor

Bill Brown accepted the call to ordained ministry in 1997 after running the family insurance agency in Sylacauga for 12 years. The business which was sold in 1998 ended 95 years of a family heritage so Bill and wife, Terri could follow God's call. Bill holds a BS degree in Commerce and Business Administration from the University of

Alabama, and a Master of Divinity from Emory University. Bill has served the following churches in the North Alabama Conference: Oldfield / Center Hill, Anniston First, Gordo First, Montevallo First.

Bill has been active in several areas of the conference. He has served in leadership positions for the District Board of Ordained Ministry and the District Trustees and the District Committee of Buildings and Location. He was director of the Wesley Foundation at the University of Montevallo. He has been active in the Walk to Emmaus ministry where he has served as cluster Spiritual Director for two clusters. He is currently part of a cutting edge program for our conference: Clergy Coaching and Leadership Development Group. For the past couple of years he has been involved with First Priority, a ministry whose goal is to reach every city, every school, and every student for Christ.

Bill and Terri, who just celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary, have four children: Emily, Mallory, Andrew, and Jacob. They are also blessed with a son-in-law Brady Baird and two wonderful grandchildren: Evelyn and Eliza Kate.



Rev. Minnie Stoval
Anniston First, Associate Pastor

My entire life seems for the most part to have revolved around music and church-related activities. I have often joked that my family was "swinging Christians" –the door to the church swung open and we "swung in." I don't think we ever missed!

My family sang together constantly and my sisters and I (five girls, one boy) sang trio-style for years. In high school, I was in band and always sang alto in choir because I could read music and carry a harmony part. It was several years later that I discovered my upper voice and found that I was a soprano. I began to sing solos in church and became involved in local musical theatre. Music and singing opened quite a few doors for me.

My undergraduate degree from the University of Alabama is in Vocal Performance. I studied voice there with Ed White, Head of the Voice Department, and, later, with Dr. Richard Armstrong at JSU. Both of these gentlemen had profound impacts on me. Ed White taught me to value the gift (*a valuable lesson for one with a tendency to self-efface*) and Richard Armstrong taught me not to be a snob about operatic arias that are traditionally sung mostly by freshman sopranos (*ask me about that sometime.*)

I was raised in and attended a Baptist Church until my graduation from UA. My first music-related position after graduation was with St. Paul UMC in Boaz. It was during my tenure there that I joined the United Methodist Church and, ultimately, announced my call to preach.

I entered Candler School of Theology in 2004 during my first appointment in the North Alabama Conference as Student Associate Pastor at Talladega First UMC. I served three wonderful years there, first with Reverend Bill Gandy, and later with Dr. Kay Mutert. The last three years, I have served the two-point LaFayette Charge (LaFayette 1st and Sandy Ridge). I recently completed the Probationary process and will be ordained as an Elder on Friday evening, June 4, 2010, at Canterbury UMC.

I have one daughter, Lauren, and three grandchildren: Danielle, Alexis and Brendan. I am very excited to be in ministry with you here and I pray that we will choose to follow God completely...together.

**We look forward
to welcoming them both
to Anniston First**

WHEN UNITED METHODIST PASTORS are appointed to local churches who will be serving with an Associate, there are several unknowns, such as compatibility, work ethic, theology, gifts and graces. To share a brief history of my introduction to Brandon, while on the Cabinet, I listened to Brandon's District Superintendent discuss his enthusiasm about a Duke Seminary Graduate who was available for an appointment as an Associate Pastor. I recall the positive points made about Brandon's ability to articulate Wesleyan theology and that this young man had a promising future. Brandon was appointed to Anniston First. Later, I recall attending a District gathering at Anniston First during a question-and-answer time regarding the reorganizing of the Districts. Brandon stood and spoke during that session. My thought then was how well he articulated his thoughts and how he spoke with confidence. Little did I know that I would be appointed to serve with him in a few short years.

During these past two years, I have grown to appreciate and affirm Brandon's work ethic – he is fast and thorough. When I would ask him to take on a task, he would do so with excellence. When I would share a concern with him, he would carefully and respectfully listen and make adjustments. I found his Wesleyan theology and doctrine to be refreshing. We grew to appreciate one another as we served on the

Board of Ordained Ministry together with both our interview focus being Theology and Doctrine. Brandon's writings and sermons have consistently been well thought out, prepared and presented. I have increasingly enjoyed being in his presence as we developed seasonal emphases, preaching schedules and in discussing the challenges and opportunities in our providing pastoral leadership at AFUMC. He proved to be a team player. Anniston First has certainly been enriched with Brandon's appointment these six years.

I have also greatly appreciated Brandon's values of home and family...making certain that he would spend quality time with Jennifer, Parks and Ava, as well as setting aside time to be with their extended families.

At one time, I had no idea what kind of working relationship I would have with Brandon Harris. I can now look back and say with all sincerity, he has been one of the best Associate Pastors with whom I have had the privilege of serving. I agree with his former District Superintendent, he is a man with a very promising future. Thank you Brandon! Besides being a great Associate Pastor, I now consider you a friend in Christ.

- Hal Noble

We will bid a fond farewell to

*Brandon, Jennifer, Parks, and Ava Harris
on Sunday June 13, 2010*

We will celebrate his six years of ministry and dedicated service to Anniston First United Methodist Church.

10:30 AM Combined worship service at The Bridge
Noon - Pot Luck Lunch at The Bridge

Bring your favorite dish to share this Sunday.
You can drop it off in the Bridge Kitchen
before/after Sunday School.

A love offering is being collected for Brandon & Jennifer.
Any amount is appreciated.
You can drop off your gift at the church office.

**POT LUCK DINNER
WEDNESDAY - JUNE 16**

Our church-wide Pot Luck Dinners will continue this Summer! The next one is JUNE 16.

Dinner is at 5:15 in The Bridge. Please bring your favorite casserole, salad or dessert to share. We will present Jim Gray's Mission Trip Slide Show (and hope it works this time!)

Brandon's Final Thoughts . . .



As I prepare for my transition into a new congregation, I have been furiously drafting my 90-day plan for how I will approach the task of leadership in an unfamiliar church in an unfamiliar place. In my preparation I have been reminded of an arresting claim by church leadership expert Lovett

Weems, *"Leaders do not need answers. Leaders must have the right questions."*

Sometimes we think that asking a question is simply a neutral exercise of articulating a need or desire for information. What do you want for dinner? Where did you go to college? What are your children's names? What is your favorite TV show? Shaken or stirred? (paint...shaken or stirred paint...of course) To ask a question opens up a space of new possibility where once there was only inevitability. It looks beyond the present into the future, even as it calls upon one's interlocutor to delve deep into his or her past. Steak or chicken? It could be more than a meat choice; it could be a doorway into a childhood kitchen where golden fried chicken popped and crackled in grandma's iron skillet, where iced tea sparkled in a mason jar, and where one's fingers are rubbed raw from stringing green beans. Questions are never neutral exchanges; asked in the right way and in the right context they are excursions into the soul.

One of the questions I'm thinking of asking folks at Avondale, which I hope will help them delve into the core of their identity as disciples, has preoccupied my own reflections on my experience at Anniston: What are three wishes you have for the future of your church. After being at Anniston First for six years, being married here, bringing my children home from the hospital to their nursery in the parsonage, performing my first baptism here, and celebrating my first Eucharist here, Anniston is "my" church in more ways than by virtue of episcopal appointment. When I ask myself this question about my church, all of the joys and the sorrows, pains and hopes of these six years converge to form a new

bold vision for how I see Anniston First in the coming generation.

What are three wishes I have for the future of my church? It would be easy to wish for the debt to be paid off, for there to be more people in worship "like there used to be," for the budget to be balanced, or for there to be more young families. These would surely be good things to happen. But, in a way, they're too easy as wishes. These wishes are usually wished from the perspective of despair. "Oh my gosh! We have how much debt? I wish it would be paid off!" Or, "Oh no! There were only four children for the children's minute this week! I wish there were more children!" Wishes like these are generally evoked by fear and usually result either in deepened despair or in a wistful, nostalgic naïveté, if they result in anything at all.

Lately, though, I've been wondering if there is a more Christian way to wish, a wishing that emerges from the abundance of hope in God's promises rather than the scarcity and gloom of current reality. Is there a way of wishing that neither dismisses the current reality nor gives it the final word? The key, I think, is engaging in imaginative, playful dreaming about the current reality rather than letting "the way it is" name the outcome of the future.

It strikes me that Jesus was into this kind of playful wishing. In the gospels, we see him perform miracle after miracle: a blind man can see, a hemorrhaging woman is healed, a man in demonic bondage is set free, a lame man can walk, a deceased little girl rises from her bed. But are Jesus' miracles merely heroic and supernatural acts resulting from despair of reality or are they passionate and hopeful acts on toward a transformed reality? Did Jesus see blind Bartimaeus and panic over the state of first-century eye care? Or, did Jesus see Bartimaeus' blindness and see in it an opportunity for the health and wholeness of the reign of God?

I'd like to take a stab at a little wishing by answering the question I've been posing to myself: what are three wishes I have for the future of Anniston First? I offer these wishes not as a prescription that you must take per the doctor's orders, but simply as my

BRANDON'S FINAL THOUGHTS

own playful dreaming about our current reality. So, here it goes: I wish

- that Anniston First would be a church whose members actively seek out and engage people in the church's neighborhood of all ethnic and economic backgrounds in authentic, loving relationships (and remember...relationships are not about changing your partner while you stay the same; real relationships require vulnerability and risk).
- that Anniston First would see itself as the means of God's mission in Anniston and the world, and not as a destination or sanctuary where those who believe in Jesus can escape the world they live in. Christ sends us into the world, not the world to us.
- that the members at Anniston First would have a profound and robust engagement with the Holy Spirit in the course of their daily lives. This would include everything: church life, home life, work life...everything. Listening to God's Holy Spirit is the most direct means of knowing where God is leading.

In about a week, two new pastors are going to come, and they're going to have some questions. I don't know what they'll ask. They may ask something deep and profound. They may ask, "Steak or chicken?" But, in any case, they'll not just be fishing for information; they'll be probing the soul of our church; they'll be trying to open up spaces for new possibilities; they'll be inviting you to do a bit of playful dreaming about what God is doing here; they'll be inviting you to wish.

There is much to wish for here because God has done and is doing amazing things with the people called Anniston First UMC. And, I am so proud to have been the pastor of a church with so much to wish for. But, only when we are attentive to what God is doing can our wishes become more than tropisms of despair: they can be signs of God's future. Just please, do me a favor: if Bill or Minnie ask you to make three wishes for our church, don't just copy mine. That's cheating. You have to let your own imaginations run wild in God's promises! And God's promises run deep here.

- Brandon Harris

Celebrating and Honoring Others

Gifts Have Been Given to the Following Funds:

BUILDING FUND

In memory of Mrs. Marion Baker, given by Mr. and Mrs. Don Hackney, Evelyn Hubbard and Sherry Coats, Neysa Coker Sunday School Class, Frances Weeks, Mr. and Mrs. Greg Tatum.

In memory of Mr. Ira Hill, given by Louise W. Gray.

In memory of Mr. Frank Reynolds, given by Janet F. Booth.

In honor of Mrs. June Allred, Mr. Lee London, Rev. Tom Smith, and Mr. Mickey Starling, given by Neysa Coker Sunday School Class.

CHILDREN'S MUSIC FUND

In honor of Daniel Stewart Yim, given by Rebecca B. Stewart.

CHOIR FUND

In memory of Mrs. Marion Baker, given by Van and Lila Hamilton.

GENERAL BUDGET

In memory of Mrs. Marion Baker, given by Paul and Debbie Jackson.

MEALS OF MERCY

In memory of Leslie Edwards, Mr. Robert Dillon and Mr. William R. Owsley, III., given by Jean and Miller Weatherly.

In memory of Mrs. Marion Baker, given by Dr. and Mrs. Kenneth Vandervoort.

MISSION FUND

In honor of Hal and Janice Noble and Brandon and Jennifer Harris, given by Gerry and Jenny Stafford.

MUSIC FUND

In memory of Mr. Ira Hill and Mr. Larry Sylvester, given by Mr. David H. Best, Jr.

In memory of Mrs. Marion Baker, given by Louise W. Gray.

SOUP BOWL

In memory of Dr. Charles H. Chandler, Jr., given by Mr. Trey Chandler.

www.annistonfirst.org

Send in your items
for the website or Messenger to:

stacy@annistonfirst.org

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P.O. Box 1789
Anniston, AL 36202

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

The Monthly Messenger
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Making disciples of Christ by being disciples of Christ

Join us for Worship and Fellowship

Sunday School	9:30 Sunday
Worship in the Chapel	8:30 Sunday
Worship in the Bridge	10:30 Sunday
Worship in the Sanctuary	10:30 Sunday
Youth Group	5:00 Sunday

Special Dates:

JUNE 13

Combined Worship in The Bridge, 10:30 AM
followed by ...
Pot Luck Lunch for Brandon & Jennifer Harris

JUNE 14

Martha Circle - Girls Night out

JUNE 16

Shark Tooth Creek Day Trip, 7:00 AM
Meet in the parking lot by The Bridge

AND THAT EVENING

Pot Luck Dinner 5:15 PM at The Bridge
Bring your favorite dish to share
We will plan to show the Mission Trip Slide
Show & hope it works this time!

JUNE 20 (Happy Father's Day)

- Combined Worship in the Sanctuary 10:30 AM
We welcome Bill Brown and Minnie Stoval
- Vacation Bible School starts that night
High Seas Expedition - 5:30 to 8:30 PM
Exploring the Mighty Love of God!

JUNE 21

Camp Lee board meeting, 6:30 PM

JUNE 26

Angel Food Pick-up Day, 8:00 AM at The Bridge

JUNE 30

Children's Choir Fun Day 9:30 AM

JULY 4 - (Happy Fourth of July)

God Bless America! Everyone is invited to
Camp Lee for dinner, singing, a vesper
devotional and fireworks over the lake.
Bring a chair or blanket. Dinner at 5PM in the
Grove Dining Hall - \$6-person.