

Tidings



A Monthly Publication from Trinity United Methodist Church, Tallahassee, FL

Wesleyan Rooted Sermon Series

By Rev. Dr. Matthew M. Williams, Senior Pastor

An Initiative of The Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church

Join us as we embark on a transformative journey with the **Wesleyan Rooted Sermon Series**, beginning **Sunday, October 6**, and continuing each week through **October 27**. This four-week series will deepen our understanding of Wesleyan theology, focusing on how sanctification and grace shape our lives. The weekly themes are:

- **Grow Deeply** – October 6
- **Embrace Widely** – October 13
- **Love Actively** – October 20
- **Serve Impactfully** – October 27

Through this series, you will experience a rekindling of God's love at work within you, renew your commitment to spiritual practices, and gain greater clarity and passion for engaging in the missional work of making disciples of Jesus Christ. Plan on being a part of this meaningful journey of transformation and growth!



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Lay Academy Fall Session 2

By Candace Duclos, Director of Christian Education

We've had a great first session of Lay Academy this fall, and we're looking forward to great participation in our new session, which begins Wednesday, October 16, and runs through Wednesday, November 20. Take a look at the various classes being offered:

4:15-5:15 PM

- **Study the Word of God** with Richard Andrews. This group meets in the Library.

6:00-7:00 PM

- **Parenting Village** meets in the Conference Room. Join a thriving group of parents as they discuss the joys and interesting moments of raising children.
- **NETKids After Hours** meets in room 205 and then moves to the playground. During this session, our kids will learn more about growing closer to Jesus through scriptures, stories, and prayer.

6:30-7:30 PM

- **The Being a United Methodist Christian Book Study** meets in room 301. This class is led by clergy members from our church. Come learn more about what we believe and how we are rooted in God's Word.
- **Being Informed and Prepared** meets in room 305. Sessions of this class will provide participants with information on everything from voting to writing a will. Each week, we will look at a new topic. On October 16, Sabrina Hartley will be here from the League of Women Voters to give more information about the amendments on this year's ballot. Subsequent sessions will cover basic first aid, hurricane preparedness, healthy living, and writing a living and final will.

Join us for Lay Academy on Wednesday nights to connect with one another in love and learning!

Hurricane Helene Causes Trinity's Bicentennial Celebration to be Rescheduled to January 12, 2025

Trinity's Bicentennial Celebration was postponed due to the uncertainty surrounding projections for Hurricane Helene's landfall and its impact on our community and surrounding areas. We have now finalized a date for our rescheduled celebration. Please mark your calendars for January 12, 2025. Details will be forthcoming!

In the wake of Helene's devastation, our focus now turns to areas impacted by the storm, both in Florida and throughout the Southeast. We ask you to join us in prayer for those affected and know that many of you have already joined in providing aid.

If you would like to make a donation toward relief efforts, checks can be made payable to Trinity United Methodist Church with "Disaster Relief" designated on the memo line. You can also contribute by selecting "Online Giving" on the Giving page of our website, tumct.org. Where you see the words "Operating General," open the drop-down menu and select "Disaster Relief."

Thank you for your continued support of our church, our community, and our brothers and sisters in need.

Trinity Welcomes Bishop Ken Carter

By Rev. Dr. Matthew M. Williams, Senior Pastor

Bishop Ken Carter has been a guiding light in my ministry journey, and his influence has left an indelible mark on my life and the lives of my family. From the beginning, he saw something in me—he recognized my gifts early and ensured that I was placed in ministry contexts that were beneficial for the churches I served and my family and me. That kind of discernment and care, what we call "good fits," has made all the difference.

One of the most profound moments in our relationship was when Bishop Carter baptized our son, Ethan. It was during the height of the COVID pandemic, and yet, with all the restrictions and challenges, he and Bishop Kammerer performed the sacrament at Lake Junaluska, NC. Bishop Carter's presence for that monumental occasion—praying for Ethan and for us—will always remain in our hearts.

Beyond the personal, Bishop Carter's leadership within the Florida Annual Conference during the pandemic was nothing short of remarkable. What stands out most from that time is his deep care and compassion for everyone—every church, every pastor, and every community that was part of our shared ministry. Florida will forever be indebted to Bishop Ken Carter.

Elected a bishop in 2012, Bishop Carter has continued to serve faithfully, now as the resident bishop of the Western North Carolina Conference. His leadership spans over 1,000 congregations, campus ministries, and outreach initiatives



Bishop Ken Carter

across the state. His service as president of the Council of Bishops from 2018-2020 and his work with The Commission on a Way Forward further exemplify his commitment to the United Methodist Church.

In addition to his episcopal duties, Bishop Carter is an accomplished author and academic. His recent memoir, *God Will Make a Way*, and his works on the Fresh Expressions movement reflect his deep engagement with the church's mission to reach new people creatively and faithfully.

Bishop Ken Carter's legacy is one of grace, leadership, and hope. His vision for a church that embraces God's radically inclusive grace while calling all followers to holiness and justice continues to inspire countless individuals like myself. Being part of his journey has been a blessing, and I am deeply grateful for how he has shaped my own.

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Due to the devastating impact of Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina, Bishop Ken Carter cannot serve as our guest preacher for the October Bicentennial Sunday on October 13. Bishop Carter has been a tremendous leader within the Florida Conference and now in Western North Carolina, where he continues to provide compassionate guidance through challenging times. We are incredibly grateful for his dedication and hope to welcome him to Trinity sometime in 2025, when we can celebrate our shared ministry and the long-standing commitment of the United Methodist Church to being the hands, feet, and body of Christ in our world.

Trinity Reflections

Compiled by the Bicentennial Publicity Committee

"Trinity United Methodist Church is a place that supports our growth in faith and raising our family. We have built a core group of friends from our time at Trinity, and we have been truly blessed by the wonderful children's programming offered from Sunday School to NETkids."

— Holly & James Hunt, Trinity UMC Members

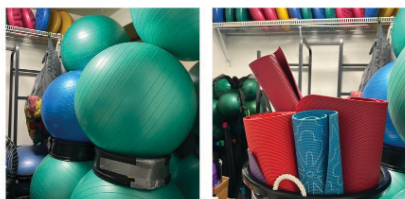
"I attend Trinity because of the worship services, the music, and—most of all—the people"

— Brent Chumbler, Trinity UMC Member

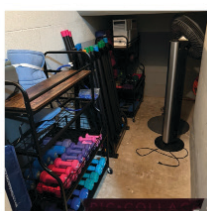
BFC (Becoming Fit at Church) Ministry Fall News

By Beth Curry, BFC Team Leader

Before



After



BFC Exercise is excited to have a new and functional exercise equipment room! Moving all the equipment from the crowded Parlor closet to the old Youth Robing Room has allowed us to streamline the sign-in process for the exercise classes and have all the lightweight equipment in one spot where it's easily accessible to participants. Moving all our heavy equipment from the china cabinet to the stairwell in the front of Moor Hall has shortened the distance that weights and body bars have to be carried. These improvements have increased the safety of the BFC Exercise program, which is always our first priority! Whether you are just starting out and want to use simple equipment like hand-weights and small balls or are more advanced and want the challenge of BOSUs, body bars, and more – there is something for everyone! Stop by sometime and see ALL our equipment – and join one of our four great weekly BFC Exercise classes. Thanks to all who helped make these spaces available.

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Thanks to the FSU Wesley Foundation for graciously offering their space at no charge to our Trinity BFO Pickleball group over the last several months. This has allowed us to play indoors on many Thursday nights. To show our appreciation, all funds raised from Pickleball donations from June to August were used to purchase a much-needed AED for Wesley. Our next goal is to help interested Wesley students become CPR certified by offering scholarships for the class. It has been great getting to know and play Pickleball with some of the students! BFO Pickleball hopes to continue building relationships with the students at Wesley during this school year.



For more information about BFC Exercise (which is offered in person and via Zoom) or BFO Pickleball, please visit our website at www.tumct.org/serve/bfc-becoming-fit-at-church/, or email BFCSeries@yahoo.com. And, if tech is not your thing, please contact the church office and ask for a return call.

Acolyte and Crucifer Ministry is Back!

By Rev. Dr. Matthew M. Williams, Senior Pastor

We are excited to announce that our Acolyte and Crucifer Ministry is back up and running, thanks to the leadership of Michael Plagens. Acolytes and Crucifers play a meaningful role in facilitating worship by bringing the light of Christ into the service and carrying the processional cross, symbolizing Christ's presence among us. This tradition stretches back to ancient Christianity, where acolytes were tasked with assisting in the preparation of worship, and crucifers carried the cross to remind worshippers of Jesus' sacrifice and victory.

Acolytes and Crucifers serve as visible reminders of scriptures such as John 8:12, where Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." The act of carrying the light and the cross is a special way to aid in the divine worship of God.



We are grateful to everyone who has chosen to serve in this important ministry and invite others of all ages to participate. If you are interested in serving as an Acolyte or Crucifer, please contact Michael Plagens at plagensma@cdsmith.com.



Living Hope Nicaragua (LHN) Is Igniting Hope

By Pat Striplin, Trinity UMC Member

A small team—Evert, Mily, Joshua, and Tania—have learned to speak English; and now they are teaching others. Their example of acquiring an employable skill that they can share with others fuels our mantra of “inspiring hope for a better future.”

LHN, a small mission group in Leon, Nicaragua, got its start in January 2019, in response to young people expressing a desire to learn English. Employment opportunities are limited in Nicaragua, and we have found that knowing English can open doors for employment. Opportunities to learn English, though, are also limited and economically out of reach for most Nicaraguans. LHN is tuition free, and word has spread quickly about this “free English School.”

In March, 2019, I was there in Leon as we were getting the project off the ground. The initial team of teachers was composed of students I had worked with through weekly Skype classes. Since all the students enrolling in LHN in 2019 were at a beginning level, four of those Skype students were able to assume Level 1 teaching roles. During the first two years, we kept adding levels of instruction up to Level 5, and I continued to teach by Zoom the top level of students and also the teachers. Those first teachers moved to a higher level of teaching as they themselves gained skills. Interestingly, all of the

original teachers have moved on to other jobs. As students graduate from the course, some of them have become LHN teachers, so the school itself has become a source of employment. I am inspired that the teachers view seriously their role in helping others. In fact, the whole school is like a big family. And, we actually have quite a number of students with family members also enrolled. Word of mouth is our advertisement method.



During the last trimester of 2023, I restructured the content of the five levels of instruction to decrease the number of levels to four. By this time, I felt the teachers had reached a degree of proficiency that enabled them to assume the teaching roles for all four levels. From the 2019 beginning, through weekly meetings with them, teachers have continued to expand their knowledge of English and to grow in teaching skills. NOW, they are running the little LHN English School.

My 2020 plans to return to Nicaragua were interrupted by COVID-19, and I have just this year been able to make

that trip again. This summer, June 2024, I returned to Nicaragua. Interestingly, all four of my current team members I had not met in person; so my time there was truly a get-to-know you better, a deepen-our-relationship time. We were able to make plans face to face. And, oh, what a wonderful time there it was!

The whole team met me at the airport with a welcome sign made by one of the students. We had our first team meal together—lunch at Tip Top (a Nicaraguan version of Kentucky Fried Chicken), a stop on our way to Leon from the airport in Managua. And we talked nonstop. During my time there, I had individual time with each team member. I met their families, even a grandmother. The team prepared a special welcome meal for me the second night I was there. I met all the students (about 64) individually, and was overwhelmed by their gratitude of being able to be a part of this program. I heard so many of their stories about how this language school experience has changed their lives. And happily, quite a number of them have already been able to get jobs.

Being on site, seeing the school in action, is infectious. I came away newly committed to continuing to support their efforts at helping themselves, of believing they CAN make a better life for themselves and their families. My hope is that others would like to join the support effort.

John Willis Years

By Susan Koehler, Director of Communications



In 1999, Rev. G. John Willis Jr. began his nine-year tenure as Trinity's senior pastor. He and his wife, Pat, moved from Kissimmee to Florida's capital city, eager to become a part of Trinity's rich and storied history. This trip down memory lane is a joyous journey. As John often said, "Trust me on this – you don't want to miss it!"

Setting the Stage

John recalls that he preached his first sermon at Trinity on a Sunday in July, and the very next day, crews arrived to begin tearing up carpet in the chancel area. Trinity's Organ Committee had been working tirelessly since 1996 to address issues with the Sanctuary's Austin Opus 2409 after it was damaged by a water leak. In a rather chaotic start to his tenure at Trinity, John watched as scaffolding was raised, leaks were repaired, and the soft floor coverings in the chancel were replaced by Italian tile.

Fortunately, John had a knack for creative thinking and liked using tangible objects to enhance his sermons. He found a "wall" that had once been used in a stage production, placed it in front of the rubble, and made it a central part of his sermon series. From the very beginning, he proved his ability to make the best of a difficult situation.

By October, the chancel work was completed and the organ, pipes, and other components were delivered. Following that, there was a month-long process of installation and tonal adjustment. Finally, on December 19, 1999, five months into his appointment, John led the dedication of the new Casavant Frères Opus 3786 organ, which remains an integral part of the worship experience at Trinity to this day.

A New Millennium

Although January 2000 began quietly and free from Y2K di-

sasters, John could not have predicted the trying times that lay ahead. November 2000 was marked by a presidential election that accentuated the nation's polarization and was so close that it required a manual recount of Florida's ballots. Tallahassee became ground zero for a storm of uncertainty that gripped the country and resonated throughout the world. The recount took place at the public library across the street from Trinity. The area was immediately overwhelmed by heavy traffic, swarms of protesters, and a barrage of media professionals.

John recalls receiving a phone call from an usher on Saturday, December 9, alerting him that police had blocked off the library parking lot. He feared church-goers would arrive the next morning and find no available parking. However, that was the Saturday that the U.S. Supreme Court made its decision to halt the recount and declare George W. Bush the winner of Florida's electoral votes. The ballot counters, media vans, and protesters dissipated, and by Sunday morning, the library lot had plenty of parking spaces available.

The Capital Faith Forum

Although the hotly contested election had been settled, the year 2001 began with an undercurrent of conflict still affecting the community at large. It was during this time that John led Trinity's establishment of the Capital Faith Forum. The idea was to create a forum where civic leaders and participants from across the community could share in civil discourse. The first Capital Faith Forum was to feature Florida Supreme Court Justice Charles Wells, and it was scheduled for September 11, 2001.

As the events of that fateful morning began to unfold, John called his scheduled speaker, and they debated whether to move forward with the event. In the face of grief, fear, and uncertainty, they decided to turn the first Capital Faith Forum into a time prayer. Both John and Justice Wells spoke briefly, and then attendees were invited to kneel at the altar while a harpist played.

Afterward, the group gathered for lunch in Moor Hall. During the meal, a local radio station called the church seeking solace from a pastor. John was able to share a prayer from a phone in the kitchen, extending the peace found at Trinity that day into the community at large.

Although the first Capital Faith Forum did not proceed as planned, it provided a sacred space on a day of turmoil. Over the next few years, the Capital Faith Forum brought college coaches, educators, and other community leaders to Trinity. They discussed their experiences, referenced their faith,

promoted civil discourse, and shared a meal with participants. For about three years, the Capital Faith Forum continued to connect church and community.

The Church with a Heart for the City

John had always been drawn to the story of Pentecost, but he became particularly struck by the fact that Jesus said to his followers, “Stay in the city until you have received the spirit from on high.” The words “stay in the city” resonated with John, and he began to reason that because of its downtown location, Trinity could have a profound impact on the capital city.



John began a campaign that proclaimed Trinity to be a church with a heart for the city. Members received red, heart-shaped pins inscribed with the letter T. He explained that the T represented three things: Trinity, which is who we are; Tallahassee, which is where we are; and the cross of Christ, which is whose we are.

In keeping with this theme, Trinity’s first Ministry Fair came into being. Community agencies and charitable organizations set up booths, shared their goals and accomplishments, and recruited many willing volunteers. Through the Ministry Fair, church members found ways to actively serve the city.



Trinity’s heart for the city extended to children as well, with designated outreach programs to schools and organizations throughout the city. The church established a partnership with Kate Sullivan Elementary, sponsoring school supply drives and enlisting volunteer mentors to provide tutoring and support for students. Bear Sunday was established in an effort to collect and distribute stuffed animals to children in our community who were experiencing trauma or grief. Both the Kate Sullivan partnership and Bear Sunday continue to this day.

Another initiative of this campaign was the designation of one Sunday in January as Community Sunday. In January 2002, Trinity honored Tallahassee firefighters. At the beginning of the service, firefighters carried a flag and processed behind the choir. The tragedy of September 11 had brought the courage and sacrifice of first responders to the forefront of public consciousness; honoring our city’s firefighters was a fitting start

to this annual tradition. Over the next couple of years, Trinity honored teachers and law enforcement officers, continuing to express gratitude to those who serve our community.

Celebrating Trinity’s Heritage

In 1999, Trinity was celebrating its 175th anniversary. A committee had already been working on plans to commemorate this occasion before Rev. Willis arrived. He immediately affirmed the importance of this milestone and embraced the celebration. Associate Pastor Rev. Mark Caldwell and his wife, Tiffany, dressed in period costumes and arrived in a vintage car. Retired Bishop Lloyd Knox attended as a guest of honor.

The day was so joyous that Rev. Willis decided Trinity should hold another celebration five years later. While commemorating a 180th birthday might not be a typically recognized milestone, he said “I just wanted to do it - we have a reason to celebrate.” And what a celebration it was!

There was only one service on the day of Trinity’s 180th celebration, and it was held outdoors in the Chain of Parks. Beneath the sprawling live oaks, nearly 1,000 congregants gathered for worship. Rev. Willis rode in on a horse, reminiscent of Methodist circuit riders. In addition to Trinity’s choir, music for the service included steel drums and a brass quintet. After worship, attendees were treated to an old-fashioned Southern lunch featuring fried chicken, corn relish, green beans, potato salad, cornbread, and an assortment of homemade desserts.

Trinity's Sister Church in Cuba

About one year into John’s time at Trinity, he was introduced to our sister church, Templo San Pablo, in Fomento, Cuba. During the early stages of this cross-cultural relationship, John appointed Sam Rogers, who had recently retired, to coordinate the project. Together with his wife Mary Margaret, Sam planned the visit and laid the foundation for an extension of Trinity’s love that reached across national boundaries and broke through ideological barriers.

Once in Cuba, John was able to preach to an enthusiastic congregation with the help of a translator. He was particularly warmed by the fact that so many children were in attendance. With great fondness, he recalls that “the entire front of the sanctuary was filled with children.”

Fortunately, he had brought Hollywood, his puppet, along with him. (Hollywood had often delighted young audiences at churches John served, including Trinity.) With the assistance of the translator, Hollywood was able to reach the children of Cuba and encourage them to bring their friends back for the second night of worship.

Hollywood was very convincing. Trinity’s group had brought

300 trinkets to distribute that night, and after the distribu-



tion, they had only five remaining. John was told that the only time children's shows aired on the state-sponsored channels was on Sunday mornings. The intent of the Communist government was to discourage children from attending church.

The engagement generated by Hollywood convinced John that he needed to leave the puppet in Cuba. With the help of the trans-

lator, he said, "As soon as Pastor John leaves, Hollywood will learn to speak Spanish immediately." On a recent trip to Cuba, Trinity members confirmed that Hollywood is fluent in Spanish and is still highly effective in serving the children of Templo San Pablo.

The Legacy of Rev. John Willis

Between 1999 and 2008, Rev. John Willis left an indelible mark on Trinity. In addition to the events and programs discussed, he also wrote Lenten studies for the entire church body and was one of forty pastors from different denominations selected to participate in the Oxford Round Table. Without a doubt, he seized opportunities for growth and learning, and he shared that growth and learning with his congregation.

When John reflects upon his legacy, he humbly states he was fortunate that Trinity had "the horses" to carry out the ideas he envisioned. During his time at Trinity, Rev. John Willis established himself as a person who put his faith into action – continually learning and enthusiastically sharing the love of Christ with everyone who crossed his path.

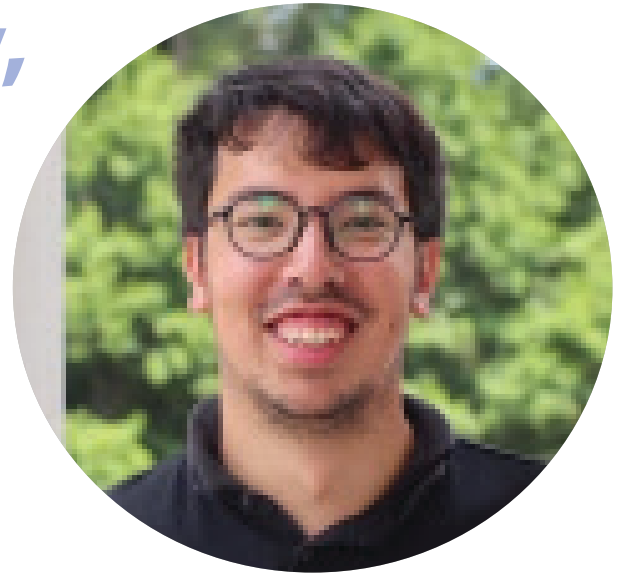
Although he retired in 2008, John and Pat remain active parts of Trinity's congregation today. If you have not yet been blessed by his infectious smile, enthusiastic love, and gentle spirit, you need to find John and introduce yourself. Trust me on this – you don't want to miss it.

Meet Britton Stacey, Trinity's New Director of Youth Ministries

By Susan Koehler, Director of Communications

Hi, Britton! We're excited that you've joined us at Trinity, and we'd like to get to know more about you. To start off, can you tell us a little about your background?

I grew up in Orlando, Florida, and attended First United Methodist Church Winter Park since before I can even remember. I grew up with my mother and stepdad; however, he is my dad since I have known him since I was two. I am big into everything having to do with sports, including playing Water Polo in high school. When I was not at school or at home, I was always at church. I was very active in the youth group, and attended many mission trips, youth choir and every retreat possible. Currently my church membership resides at FUMC Orlando, where I worked and attended after graduating from undergrad.



It sounds like you've had a lot of experiences with UMYF and other UMC youth functions. What are a couple of your best memories from these experiences?

Some of my greatest experiences have come from working at Warren Willis camp as a team member. I was on team on camp from 2017-2019 and was supposed to be high school team leader in 2020. One of the best things was being able to give the campers a place to be themselves. Campers came from so many walks of life, and for some of them their week

at camp was the best week of the year. Seeing them see that God loves them no matter what, is something that will always be in my mind. The most amazing thing was how they would say I changed their lives; the thing was that it was them that changed my life. Every time I go back to camp, it feels like I am back at home, in a place that shaped my life.

We understand you've recently received your Master of Divinity. Congratulations! Will you share what led to your calling into ministry and what path have you followed in answering that call?

I was in the hospital when I was in eighth grade, and one thing that really stood out is how so many people from the church would come and visit me. Some of them I knew and some of them I did not, but them being there meant the world to me. From that point on, my faith meant so much more to me than just going to church every Sunday. When I got to FSU, this experience led me to pursue a religion major to go along with my international affairs major. During this time, I was very active in the FSU Wesley Foundation. I worked with many community groups, led men's ministry, and helped with so many other ministries. Every summer I was in school, I went and worked at camp, falling more and more in love with the ministry of service.

Once I graduated from FSU, I knew I wanted to go to Seminary, so I joined the candidacy process and applied to Seminary. I ended up going to Candler School of Theology in Atlanta. I really dove deep into my calling by taking classes, and I even worked as a Chaplain for a class at the youth detention center. I got a JPACT (Justice, Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation) concentration and a certificate in religious education. During my three years, I knew that once I graduated I wanted to do something with our next generation because children and youth are going to bring the Church back to where it always used to be. That is what brought me to where I am today at Trinity.

Tell us a little about the experience you've had working in a leadership role with kids and families.

When I graduated from college, I worked as a ministry intern at First Orlando. There, one of my big responsibilities was helping with the youth group and children's ministry. I helped organize volunteers for mission trips and taught Sunday school. For a period of time, when the church was between youth directors, I was one of the people keeping the youth involved. I also was a director of children's ministries at East Cobb UMC in Marietta. One of my proudest accomplishments was growing the program from three to fifteen kids in just around a year working there. I took pride in building relationships with the families, as well as making sure

I attended youth events. While working at camp as counselors, we were responsible for the lives of children and teens alike. We helped them grow in their relationship with God and showed them that religion and fun aren't mutually exclusive.

Our senior pastor often refers to Trinity as "the most exciting church in Tallahassee." What excites you about coming on board at Trinity UMC?

I am excited to just try and spread wisdom and faith to the next generation. I remember the joy that all my friends from Trinity had about the youth group, and I want to keep that up. I used to come to Trinity when I was at FSU, and I remember how welcoming and spirit-filled everyone was. I am excited to work with a great staff and be around a great congregation. I hope to bring my spirit and joy to Trinity, and I hope that we can continue to carry on a rich tradition.

We've covered a lot of ground in getting to know you, but now it's time to learn some of the fun stuff. How about a little lightning round with some of your favorites?

Favorite food? Sushi

Favorite dessert? Peanut Butter and Chocolate Cake

Favorite genre of music? Country

Favorite game? Video game is NCAA 25, and UNO otherwise

Favorite holiday? Christmas

Dream vacation? I have been to 13 countries in Europe; however, I would love to vacation in Prague, my favorite city in the world.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be?
Invisibility because it would be fun to play pranks on people

Favorite sport(s) team? Pittsburgh Steelers, Seminoles, Orlando Magic, Orlando City, Real Madrid, Pittsburgh Pirates and Pittsburgh Penguins

Favorite Bible verse? John 11:35, "Jesus Wept"

Favorite book of the Bible? Esther

Britton, it's been great getting to know you! We look forward to learning more about your plans for our Trinity youth and watching the great things you'll do in your new role here. Thankfully, you do NOT have the superpower of invisibility, so we'll be seeing you around church and we'll be sure to say hello!

Trinity Team Attends the Onward Leadership Institute

By Susan Koehler, Director of Communications



From left to right, Rev. Anna Brook Opalinski, Candace Duclos, Susan Koehler, and Melanie Gonzalez attend the 2024 Onward Leadership Institute.

During the week of September 23, four of our staff members traveled to Kansas City to attend the Onward Leadership Institute at the Church of the Resurrection. A large United Methodist Church pastored by Rev. Adam Hamilton, this location hosts an annual conference designed to equip church leaders with vision, inspiration, and practical tools for making an impact in their congregations and communities.

Attending the conference were Melanie Gonzalez, Church Operations Administrator; Candace Duclos, Director of Christian Education; Susan Koehler, Director of Communications; and Rev. Anna Brook Opalinski, Associate Pastor. Each of us benefited from both general sessions that built a conceptual framework for the institute and individually selected break-out sessions that focused on skills and tools related to our specific roles within the church. Themes that permeated every session of the Onward Leadership Institute were as follows.

- **Being the Hands and Feet of Christ**

According to Rev. Adam Hamilton, the most thriving and successful churches are those that reach outward to serve their communities. Video interviews with service-oriented church leaders demonstrated strategies for identifying and ministering to specific needs in diverse environments. Whether integrating migrant communities, caring for the unhoused, or providing support and encouragement to service workers in the community, each church found a way to reach out and make a difference in the world around them.

Attendees were also introduced to the Church of the Resurrection's Kindness Campaign, which began as a response to divisive partisanship that had negatively impacted friendships, families, and community interactions. Each year, a different theme is introduced, always with the intention of spreading kindness from neighbor to neighbor. This year's theme for the Kindness Campaign is "Do Unto Others." Yard signs, social media posts, buttons, and random acts of kindness could be found all around Kansas City.

The Church of the Resurrection shares resources for this campaign with any churches wishing to participate. Many of those in attendance had already implemented the Kindness Campaign in their own communities and shared inspiring stories of success.

- **Restoration**

Many speakers focused on God's work of restoration in the world. Rev. Adam Hamilton spoke about the gap between "the world as it is and the world as it should be." He encouraged church leaders to work in this gap, restoring creation and humanity to the way God intended.

Rev. Dr. Paul Chilcote advocated for a more complete view of God's work in the world. He pointed out that Christians often focus on man's fall and



The theme for this year's Kindness Campaign is Do Unto Others.



Rev. Adam Hamilton of the Church of the Resurrection leads a general session at the Onward Leadership Institute 2024.

God's redemption. Instead, Chilcote pointed out that the fuller story of God's work begins with creation and leads to restoration.

Author Brian McLaren, a well-known voice from the Center for Action and Contemplation, spoke directly to our critical role in the restoration of God's creation. He pointed to our tendency toward fragmentation as a catalyst for fear, anger, and partisanship and advocated for a more holistic view of the world that would help us work as a team for the greater good.

- **Ministry for the 21st Century**

Rev. Dr. Candace Lewis, President Dean of Gammon Theological Seminary, detailed the changes in models of church growth movement since the 1990s. She discussed multiple waves of church growth over the decades, such as the Mega-Church Movement, the Purpose Driven Life, and Fresh Expressions. She stressed the importance of working to be fruitful within the context of our time and place, and pointed out repeatedly that "God does not give us trees; God gives us seeds." It is in nurturing those seeds over time that we achieve true fruitfulness.

Throughout the conference, participants were introduced to the growing role of technology in the church. A tour of the Church of the Resurrection facilities gave attendees a behind-the-scenes look at their full production studio, state-of-the-art sound and video components, and the mechanical systems operating within the building.

Electronic tools are vital to 21st Century ministry. Through user-friendly apps, social media, and other facets of an active online presence,



Upon Rev. Williams' recommendation, the team enjoyed a delicious meal at Jack Stack BBQ.

participants learned how to achieve an effective "digital ministry" as a conduit for communication, connection, and outreach.

- **Church Culture**

A final theme of the Onward Leadership Institute was church culture, which is the foundation of its identity. Break-out sessions focused on identifying and evaluating church culture in an effort to help churches grow in a healthy direction.

Dr. Kara E. Powell focused on church culture as it relates to young people. She advocated for intergenerational mentoring, tangible prioritization of youth ministry, and intentional implementation of evidence-based strategies for growing and serving the next generation.

Overall, conference leaders stressed the importance of a positive church culture that reflects the image of God at an elemental level -- through individual words, deeds, and attitudes. A church that is healthy on the inside is equipped to be effective in carrying God's message of love into the community.

While at the conference, Trinity's team was able to enjoy some authentic Kansas City barbeque and take in some of the local culture. Thanks to modern technology, we were also able to work remotely to assist with the planning and communication involved in the postponement of our Bicentennial Celebration due to Hurricane Helene.

The Leadership Institute at the Church of the Resurrection is an annual event open to pastors, staff, and lay leaders. Thousands of church leaders have been inspired by the institute over the years of its existence. Trinity's four attendees to the 2024 Onward Leadership Institute have returned with renewed inspiration, practical knowledge, and bold ideas for supporting our church's culture and its work of restoration in the community we serve. the community we serve.



With news of the impending storm, the team worked remotely to assist with the postponement of Trinity's Bicentennial Celebration.



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WORSHIP SERVICES

Early Service: 8:30 a.m. in the sanctuary
Contemporary Service: 9:45 a.m. in Moor Hall
Liturgical Service: 11 a.m. in the sanctuary

Contemporary Service and 11 a.m. Liturgical Service are live streamed
Please visit www.tumct.org for viewing links

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