

December 2025 Newsletter St. Andrew United Methodist Church



Come join us for coffee and conversation with Pastor Darick from 9:00 AM to 9:30 AM on Sunday mornings.

Our worship service begins at 9:30 AM in the Sanctuary. Nursery and Sunday School for children will be provided during the worship hour.

YOUTH MEET AT NOON – YOUTH ROOM – THIRD FLOOR

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHARLESTON CHORUS, under the direction of Josie Fisher, will be with us this Sunday, December 7. They will be joining our choir in singing three lullabies. Please plan to attend!

POINSETTIA ORDER FORM

Please submit your order by Wednesday, December 10.

The poinsettias will all be red and will be placed on the altar by December 11 in time for the Community Christmas Celebration.
On December 12

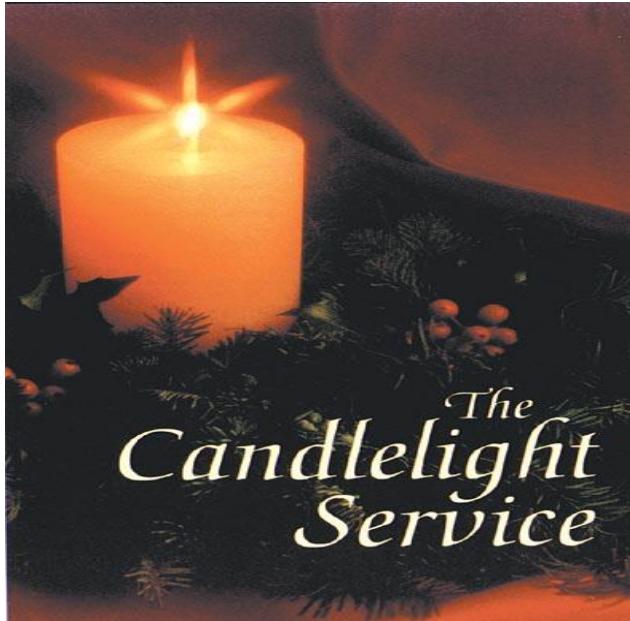
Name: _____

Telephone Number _____

Medium Plant: \$ 13.00 How Many Total
Large Plant \$ 22.00 How Many Total

In Honor of _____

In Memory of _____



Please plan to join us for
our Christmas Eve Service
at 5:00 PM on Wednesday,
December 24, 2025.

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY
Thursday Mornings at 10:30 AM
Coal River Coffee
Olde Main Plaza



Come join us!

The group will not be meeting during the
Holidays on Thursday, December 25, 2025.
or Thursday, January 1, 2026.



This promises to be a beautiful service, and we are the host church.

Please plan to attend!

Rev. Dr. Michael Poke, pastor at
St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church
will be the guest speaker.

ADVENT POTLUCK AND EVENING PRAY

This Advent we invite you to an ecumenical meal and worship including three churches from three denominations: St. Timothy-in-the-Valley, Cross of Grace, and St. Andrew. Every Wednesday evening in Advent (Dec. 3, 10, 17), starting at 6pm, we will be joining together for a potluck dinner at St. Timothy-in-the-Valley (3434 Teays Valley Rd). This will be a true potluck, and each week will be a different variety of foods. So bring an old favorite or a fun new recipe to share!

Then at 7pm, after the meal, we will transition into the sanctuary where we will join together in Compline - Prayer at the Close of the Day, as found in the Lutheran Book of Worship. This is a simple sung prayer service (without a sermon) to mark the close of the day, and it will be led by Pr. Darick Biondi.

We invite you to join us for food, fellowship, and worship this Advent, every Wednesday evening, at St. Timothy-in-the-Valley starting at 6pm (and worship at



Pastor's Report: St. Andrew 2025

Pr. Darick Biondi

This year has been filled with an abundance of surprises and blessings that I was not expecting this time last year. Last Advent, I remember receiving a call from Rev. Joe Hill late one evening as I was putting the twins to bed. He asked if I would be willing to serve St. Andrew for six months and only six months as they had a pastor taking medical leave starting January first. This led to a lot of discussion with Cross of Grace about how this would be possible, and in the end, I was able to say yes to six months. We make plans, and God chuckles.

I honestly was not sure how well things would go with St. Andrew. I remember vividly how much of a struggle I had in previous churches with the current political climate and figured I would be in for another bumpy ride. I hoped I could serve the six months, but was not going to be surprised when they started wanting a new pastor by my second or third month. This is partially because in the past four years, I have been affirmed in my call by Cross of Grace in a way that I had never been affirmed before. I was going to advocate for a safe space for all people, including our LGBTQ+ siblings, and I was not going to simply accept the words of “Christian” leaders as Christian if their actions and words did not align with Jesus’ life, teachings, death, and resurrection.

I was not hoping to cause controversy, but I know how these topics had gone in the past at other United Methodist Churches I served (one of which is now proudly a Global Methodist Church). My first sermon was centered on the life and ministry of Jesus and how this is the model that we as Christians must never forget. I even referenced the hymn “Give Me Jesus” in my sermon, and to my joyous surprise, the praise band decided to change the closing song to Give Me Jesus, and their rendition of it has become one of my absolute favorites. Not only did the praise band respond, a fair portion of the congregation responded very well to the message, and it felt like the Holy Spirit was stirring up something beautiful.

Also, on that first Sunday of January I presided over communion, as was custom for first Sundays, but I asked St. Andrew if they would be willing to join me in weekly communion for these six months. This is very much steeped in my love of Eucharist, as well as my longing to get to know each and every person at St. Andrew by name. I had seen how serving each and every member each week impacted my ministry with Cross of Grace, and I hoped St. Andrew would be open to this practice. As I asked, from the front of the service, I saw a fair number of nods of affirmation, and thus began our traditional Wesleyan practice of weekly communion. Each week, it is my goal to serve each and every person by name, and while the first month was an uphill battle, this practice of serving communion to each worshiper by name has had a profound impact on my ministry by putting me in a closer connection to those that I serve.

In the late winter or early spring we started a Bible Study at Coal River Coffee every Thursday at 10:30am. Each week, we work our way through a book of the Bible one paragraph at a time. We read the passage and then open the discussion up. Since the very first meeting, we have had rich discussion and wonderful questions come from those that attend. It has also been an opportunity to bring a Christian faith based in Biblical Studies and Theological education to the community. More Thursdays than not, we notice active listeners at other tables and in the coffee shop “overhearing” our discussions about scripture and how this scripture impacts our daily lives. We have even had a couple of the locals that were not initially associated with the church join the study on a weekly basis. Thus far we have read through the Gospel of Mark, the Book of Ruth, and most of the Letter of James, and our goal in the new year is to delve

deeply into the Book of Acts so that we may understand how the early church functioned. The hope is that this can guide us to a better vision of ministry in the new year, as the model of church continues to shift from the model I knew (and was at home with) in the late 20th century.

We have also been active in the St. Albans Ministerial Alliance, soup kitchen, and food pantry. Many ministerial associations, from my experience, are merely a social time for pastors to rub elbows and show off to one another. However, much to my blessed surprise, SAMA is an organization based upon focusing the resources of all the churches to meet the actual needs of our community. I have constantly been blown away by the commitment of this organization and each church to the health and life of these essential ministries. The Christians of St. Albans take the needs of the most vulnerable very seriously, and this organization has truly been a joy to work with.

In the midst of all of this ministry, St. Andrew started to ask if there was a way to keep me for longer than six months. After much discussion with both churches, the cabinet, and the family, we discerned that there is a way to make this possible that will allow me to serve both churches. The true blessing for Cross of Grace is that appointment season now comes with far less trepidation. For the last few years, there was always a lingering uncertainty between January and May where everyone waits to see if I will be moved away. When Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett was receptive of an appointment for no less than “three to five years” – this news was received with joy from both congregations.

Cross of Grace and St. Andrew have been good about sharing ministry opportunities together, and it has me very hopeful for the future. This past spring, both shared in Lenten activities together as we had potlucks and worship every Wednesday night at the St. Andrew building. We will be trying this again in Advent, but it will take place at St. Timothy-in-the-Valley Episcopal church, and we look forward to having three churches from three different denominations coming together for food and worship.

Cross of Grace is a small but mighty church that focuses on theological engagement. We meet Tuesday Nights and Saturday mornings to discuss topics and books that are relevant to our context. We have read through about four books this year

including *True Inclusion* by Brandan Robertson and *Toxic Empathy* by Allie Beth Stuckey. Each book offered a very different understanding of Christianity, and it helped Cross of Grace to better understand its own identity and how we are called to live as followers of Jesus. We also have assisted St. Marks by making weekend breakfast options for our unhoused neighbors in Charleston. We came together for a movie night, but before we watched the movie, we set up an assembly line to make a wholesome oatmeal breakfast that can be prepared without hot water. These meals have been well received and we hope to do this again as St. Marks finishes giving out the first batch.

Cindy and I have also been working with Justice and Jubilee to help Christians be able to identify and confront “Christian Nationalism.” Over the course of 2026, we have held two online classes that each met over five weeks. We produced a video with content each week that the students were asked to watch, and then we met each week for one hour via Zoom to have both small group and large group discussions. We also led two in person workshops, one in Charleston in July and one in Morgantown in November called Disarming Empire. These one-day workshops focused on understanding the historical context of “Christian Nationalism” and ways that we can actively resist and work around systems of oppression. We had a great turn out for each, about fifty at our first gathering and about thirty at our second. We hope to continue to have these workshops throughout the state in the coming months.

Moving forward my hope is that St. Andrew will continue to prioritize importance of growing in discipleship and understanding of God’s call in our lives and the needs of its neighbors. This priority is based in Jesus’ two greatest commandment of “Love God, love neighbor,” and I believe these guiding foci will carry us into 2026 and beyond.



Donation Options

As we approach the end of 2025, many retirees and others are in a position that they must take a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from their 401K or their traditional IRA. One consideration is to use a portion of this RMD to make a contribution to St. Andrew to fulfill your pledge or give above and beyond..

One question to ask yourself is "**did you know that you can take an RMD from your 401K or traditional IRA? and donate it to a qualified charity (eligible nonprofit organization) and reduce your tax obligation?** These distributions aren't taxable but they still count toward satisfying your required minimum distributions for the year and reduce your tax obligation. For 2025, you can donate up to \$108,000 from your IRA as a Qualified Charitable Deduction to avoid taxes if:

- Your IRA custodian agrees to transfer the funds to your chosen charity on your behalf. (You can't make the donation directly.)
- You don't claim that donation as a charitable deduction on your taxes.

As an example if your RMD is \$15,000 this year, and you wish to make a donation to the church for \$10,000, you may ask your IRA custodian (Financial Institution) to make a payment directly to St. Andrew from your IRA. This payment can be to **cover your entire pledge for the year or a gift above and beyond your pledge**. By doing this, your tax obligation on your RMD is reduced from the original \$15,000 to \$5,000, saving you a \$10,000 tax obligation for the year.

If you would like to take advantage of this option on your 401K or Traditional IRA RMD, please take the time to contact your Financial Institution and discuss this option with them.

IF you would like to speak with someone on the Finance Team about this option, please contact Ernie Downey (Finance Team Chair), Carol Hutchison (Finance Secretary) or Walter Wood, any of which would be glad to discuss this possibility with you. This donation can be done anytime during the year, and most Financial Institutions will work with you to make these contributions once or multiple times during the year. **The only thing you need to consider is that your contribution must be received by the church before the end of the calendar year to qualify for this year's contribution. For this year, all contributions need to be in the church by December 21.**



Financial Campaign for 2025 Update

As we continue into week two of the 2026 Financial Campaign, we have received 32 Ministry Cards for approximately one half of the 2026 budget. We mailed out approximately 150 cards/letters and received back about 6 that were non deliverable. With the 2026 budget we have again this year reduced our expenses through reducing our Apportionments (down \$15,000 for 2026), eliminating the Director of Christian Education position, and making other reductions.

We will continue to receive Ministry Cards through early January, so if you haven't returned yours yet or lost the mailing and need a new one you can either get one from the ushers during Sunday service or let the office know (304-727-7114). Please prayerfully consider your contribution for 2026 and if you would like to speak with someone on Finance, please reach out to Ernie Downey, Carol Hutchison, Robert Stalnaker or Walter Wood.



OUTREACH

Christ's Kitchen: canned chicken, Ragu spaghetti sauce, canned corn
Food Pantry: any canned or boxed



SNAP

This promises to be a busy and fun month for SNAP.
We decorated for Christmas and have been
watching Christmas movies.

We go to the Hansford Center every Tuesday morning for different activities (bingo, exercise, and karaoke) and then have lunch there. We have worship and communion with Pastor Darick on Tuesday afternoons at St. Andrew.

We will attend a Christmas performance by the Tappers at the Hansford Center. and will stay for lunch. This is on Wednesday, December 10.

We have planned a Christmas shopping trip to Dollar Tree on Monday, December 15.

Our Christmas Party will be on Wednesday, December 17.

Our last activity before the Holiday Break is attending “The Grinch” at the Children’s Theater on December 18.

Everyone at SNAP wishes you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



If you are sponsoring a family for the Christmas Basket Program, by now you should have made contact with them and have your shopping plan in place. I did send out an email on December 1 with some reminder notes so check your email if you haven't.

Delivery should be the week of December 15. Please review the packet that I handed out to each of you on Sunday, November 16 and if you have any questions please let me know, Ernie Downey, 304-545-7857. Again thanks to each of you for sponsoring a family and to those in the congregation who have supported the program with your prayers and financial support

December Birthdays and Anniversaries



Birthdays

December 4	Amy Robinson Kathy Smith Nick Loftis
December 8	Lydia Sturm
December 17	Michael Quinlan
December 19	Bob Foster
December 22	Pepper Harrison
December 25	Ted Danford
December 26	Barbara Danford

Anniversaries

December 21	Molissa Fitzwater and Ed Stoneking
December 27	Lori and Chuck Young

IN OUR PRAYERS



Rev. Jarrold and Debbie Lanham
Bob Hubbard and Family
Dan Rittenhouse
Jill Taylor
Emma Gandee
Grace Cochran, friend of Kathy Stalnaker
Linda White, friend of Kathy Stalnaker
Beverly Loftis
Josh Reuter, cousin of Kathy Stalnaker
Tim Dempsy, cousin of Robert Stalnaker
Judy Casto by Kathy Stalnaker
Tony Losacco
Alice Baldwin
Mary Frances Combs
Judy Casto, friend of Kathy Stalnaker
Larry Winter, Claudia Bowles's brother
Donna R. by Molissa Fitzwater
Lori and Chuck Young, Megan and Trey
Pam Cochran
Nassar by Leigh Long
Tom Wills by Amy Loftis
Melanie Ogu
Ted Danford
Jane Beth Talley Haus
Connie Kendall
Cathy Henley by Tina Shuck
Jerry McCormick, brother of Joyce Dixon
Sarah Topia
Carol Linger
Ann White, sister-in-law of Barbara Foster
Pam Frame
Regina and Christee Davis by Pam Frame
Cathy Henley by Tina Shuck
Ruth Frame
Jimmy Ferrell by Ruth Frame
Philip Chapman by Ruth Frame
Nancy Lawrence



SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN...

FOR

BREAKFAST WITH SANTA!!



Saturday, December 13 from

9 AM to 11 AM

We'll see you there! 😊