March 2026

Bedford First United Methodist Church
Erie United Methodist Church
Grace United Methodist Church
Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church

LAWRENCE COUNTY FUMC NEWS

Transformation

On Transfiguration Sunday, my message not only focused on that momentous event in Jesus' life, but also about a transformation that will occur at Bedford First upon my retirement in just a few short months. Why? Because it is very likely that worship at Bedford First will undergo a partial change in form and/or appearance into what I, and a lot of others, pray will evolve into a more beautiful **AND** spiritual format. It **WILL** be different. It **WILL** take some getting used to. But the expectation is that it **CAN** work. But the success of this attempt rests squarely on the shoulders of each of you: the congregation.

In its simplest form, you would continue to meet just as you have on Sunday mornings. The pattern of worship would not change other than when it becomes time for the message, you would watch a streaming sermon most Sundays rather than one given in-person. When the message is over, you would resume the rest of the service as you are accustomed. The only difference is that a lay person would give the Pastoral Prayer and make the announcements and give the Benediction.

Inspired by a vision of Rev. Rick Bell, the Bedford First Strategic Planning Committee developed the parameters for an "Electronic Circuit Rider Worship Service." It takes its basis from the old circuit rider pastors in early Methodism. Under the circuit rider system, a Presiding Elder was appointed to several churches and would travel between locations each Sunday. Bedford First was part of a circuit in 1826 that also included stops at Bloomington, Indian Creek, Leatherwood, Shiloh, Hopewell, and Shiloh Camp. On Sundays when the Elder was not present, laypersons would conduct the service. (Not unlike what I do with the congregations of Grace and Wesley Chapel). Baptisms, communion, confirmation, marriages, etc. were limited to times when the Presiding Elder was present.

Fast forward to today. Fortunately, improvements in communications abilities have greatly expanded the ability to reach out to each other. That is extremely good news because the number of men and women answering God's call to serve as Pastors is rapidly shrinking in Indiana, yes; but also all around the world. So, we've come to this place where there are more congregations desiring pastors than there are pastors to fill slots; hence, this "Electronic Circuit Rider" idea.

Continued

Inside this issue:

2 Pastor's message
3 Soul Food
3 Birthdays
3 Calendar
4 Blessings

Transformation, continued

The whole thing is pretty simple:

- Congregation meets on Sunday morning
- Lay people lead the congregation through the Call to Worship, hymns and Scripture readings. The choir sings. Kay still does the Prelude, Offertory and Postlude.
- At the appropriate time, the service is halted and the congregation would watch a live sermon presented in a sister (what I've termed host) church.
- When the sermon is completed, lay leadership would continue with the rest of the service.

The beauty of this idea is its inclusiveness: the opportunity to participate in each worship service remains as it is at present. You would continue to worship each Sunday in this space. The only difference would be that the sermon is delivered by someone not physically present but rather through the magic of the internet. How? At the appropriate time, a large monitor would be wheeled from the side of the sanctuary to the center so everyone could view the message. When the sermon is over, the monitor would be wheeled back to side; therefore, the altar area is only blocked from everyone's view when absolutely necessary.

At the suggestion of Rev. Jevon Caldwell-Gross, Director of Church Revitalization and New Church Development for the Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church, I am currently in the process of completing a Multiplication Grant Application on behalf of Bedford First. Rev. Caldwell-Gross has expressed his full support for the project as has the Southern Rivers District Superintendent John Hogsett. We have the opportunity to seek a total of $75,000 to be paid over three years ($25,000 per year) if awarded the full amount.

Force Technology Solutions LLC has submitted an estimate of $10,454.67 for the equipment which will include a 75-inch Commercial 4K UHD Display (Monitor), a flat panel mobile AV cart, and various peripherals and connectors to make the whole thing work. That cost will be included in the budget for the first year of the grant. Therefore, you would not be responsible for paying for this equipment.

The remaining funds from that first year will be used to cover the cost associated with a 20 hour per week Director of Worship Ministry position. That person will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of the project and keeping things up and running. They will provide all visual materials (bulletins and slides) for the weekly service, make sure everything is operating as it should, recruit and schedule volunteers for each Sunday worship service, ensure compliance with the grant and it's reporting requirements, and serve as the point person between the Bedford First congregation and the host church. And before you start asking, the Bishop and Bishop's Cabinet is the team who decides who the host church would be once the grant is approved and funded.

The process is going slower than any of us would want. But it is vital that we take the time to think things through and try to visualize how this could all come together.

The changes being proposed for your weekly worship experience are not as dramatic nor earth shattering as the transfiguration of Jesus. But they do open the door to something different, something exciting, something that is hopefully designed to stir up the longing within each of you to continue being the hands and feet of Jesus. After all, no matter what the format of worship, you **ARE** still God's church!

Blessings,
Pastor Judi

Soul Food

On Wednesday, March 4, Soul Food Book Club will meet, as usual, at 10:30 AM in the Friendship Classroom. Linda will lead the discussion on Charles Martin's book *When Crickets Cry*. This is another good book, so I hope you all have a chance to read this prior to our meeting. Fellowship time will follow with a local restaurant for lunch.

Please feel free to invite a friend to our book club. We look forward to new members.

Our books are planned out for the entire year, except for October 7 and November 4, so if you have a book that you believe would be interesting to read and discuss, please let me know the name and author.

Linda Schoonmaker
bill.schoonmaker@comcast.net

3 Marcia Kruse
8 Amy Nikirk
10 Anna Bruhy
16 Rev. Richard Bell and Daniel Ellison
18 Janet Jackson
20 Marjorie Hodges
22 Bev Owen
23 Karen Brim
29 William Groce

March 4, Soul Food at 10:30 AM
March 4, Lenten Lunch at noon, BFUMC
March 10, Hospitality Committee at 9:00 AM
March 11, Lenten Lunch at noon, First Presbyterian
March 11, Administrative Council at 5:00 PM
March 18, Lenten Lunch at noon, Grace UMC
March 25, Lenten Lunch at noon, St. Vincent Catholic Church
March 28, Bertha's Mission Free Easter Lunch from 2:00-5:00 PM, First Baptist Church
Every Sunday, Chimes Practice, 8: 45 AM
Every Sunday, Choir Practice, 9:30 AM
Last Monday of the month, Euchre at 2:00 PM
Every Tuesday, Men's Breakfast at Denny's at 9:00 AM
Every Thursday, Fiber Time at 2:00 PM
Every Saturday, Gideons at 8:00 AM

Blessings

Indiana Grey and big sister, Merit; great-granddaughters of Judy Johnson. Indiana Grey was born on February 13, 2026.

Lynnie Lou Johnson was born February 24, 2026. She is the great-granddaughter of Judy Johnson.

Bedford First United Methodist Church

1409 K Street
P. O. Box 84
Bedford, IN 47421

812-275-2627
bedfordfirstumc@gmail.com

The Mission of Bedford First United Methodist Church is to grow in faith in Christ and to reach out in God's love to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.