



October 17, 2023

Dear Asbury Family,

This fall marks the 20th anniversary of when I received my call into pastoral ministry. I could not have imagined then where the journey would lead. (None of us really know where Jesus is going to take us.) However, I praise God that the journey has led me to Asbury.

There is something special about our church. Perhaps the hymn writer put it best:

*“There’s a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place, And I know that it’s the Spirit of the Lord; There are sweet expressions on each face, And I know they feel the presence of the Lord.”*

I want to start by sincerely thanking you for your support of Asbury. Because of your ongoing commitment to our mission—*To know the love of Jesus Christ and pass it on!*—we continue to reach out and invest in the lives of so many of God’s children.

So far this year, we have received 11 new members, baptized 8 persons into the Christian faith, and have 4 students engaged in confirmation. Keep in mind that behind all these numbers is the story of an individual or family whom God has impacted through our shared ministry.

Listed below is Jonathan Jack’s story:

*My wife and I found our way to Asbury through a past coworker who introduced us to the church. We discovered that Asbury recorded their services on Facebook for people who otherwise can’t make it. We decided to start there because at the time I worked on Sundays. We then watched the services for a few weeks and were both really impressed. The messages were captivating, comprehensive, and insightful. We both could tell the amount of dedication and life put into each message and the friendliness of the community. The sermons were always very thought-provoking and left me thinking about them for long periods afterward. Shortly after, we decided to attend a service in person, and on that day, met Pastor Will. The next service we attended we also met Pastor Chris.*

*I was eager to talk about a variety of topics concerning faith and Biblical teaching, and Pastor Chris scheduled a coffee meet-up with me nearby. It was at this time that I got to know Pastor Chris as we exchanged some thoughts concerning the nature of God and details about each other’s lives and how we both ended up in the places we are. After the meet-up, I texted Pastor Chris and made the decision to join the church. My wife is not formally part of the church since she is a committed Catholic, but we both go together, and she enjoys every service just as much as I do. I don’t believe we could have found a better church, and I am very happy to be part of Asbury.*

Jonathan’s story represents the story of so many whom God has reached through our church!

On top of all this, we celebrate the 5 new community groups we launched this fall (as well as all our existing groups, Sunday school classes, and Bible studies), the growth of our Early Learning Center (enrollment is nearing capacity), and the life-changing organizations we prayerfully and financially support (the United Methodist Committee on Relief, the Florida United Methodist Children's Home, the Russell Home, Family Promise, the Sharing Center, Central Florida Wesley, etc.). Our church is also engaged in other forms of outreach.

Not long ago, two of our staff, Antwion Henderson and Larry Koch, met with the leader of a local school and asked her how we could support their ongoing work to educate children. After sharing the need for new uniforms, we immediately responded with a financial donation.

Dr. Paul Schumacher informed me that he played a recording of a recent sermon during a worship service at a nearby prison. He reported that the 80-some men in attendance responded joyfully when they heard the message about God's desire to be in a relationship with them.

I could list many more stories (remember I am a preacher!), but you get the point: God is using our church to make a profound—indeed an eternal—difference in the world.

That brings me to the point of this letter.

On October 22, we are starting a 5-week series titled "A Community That Thrives." The series will focus on stewardship, which means recognizing that what we have is not ours but God's, and then entrusting those gifts to God through the church. To be sure, stewardship involves more than our finances; however, it always includes our finances. There is no getting around this (Matthew 6:19-21). My encouragement to you (and spouse if applicable) is to prayerfully think through your financial commitment to Asbury and see within this commitment an act of worship. For Amanda and me, this means tithing or giving 10% of our household income to the church. (Jesus upheld the Old Testament practice of tithing in Matthew 23:23). As we have done this, we have discovered that even in difficult seasons, God generously provided and then some. We cannot truly know the depths of God's provision until we fully trust Him.

Included in this letter is a Commitment Card. After prayerfully completing this card, we ask that you mail it to the office or turn it in at our combined service on Sunday, November 19 (details to follow). Is it possible to give without filling out this card? Of course. However, filling out this card—like every other aspect of the Christian life—is an act of faith. It is a way of saying, "I don't know what the future holds, but I know the One who holds the future. I am committed to giving back a portion of the daily bread I have generously received from God."

Thank you for what you do to make Asbury such a great church. I look forward to the future God has in store for us!

Blessings,



Reverend Christopher M. Jones