



Volume 30, Issue #2
February 2026

The Connexion



On the Christian Journey... with Pastor Christopher

A few days ago my daughter-in-law Jordan posted a photo of our grandson Henry. He was once again lying on a floor mat that lets them document his growth. 12 weeks old already! The stuffed elephant that has been his companion in these photos most of those weeks seems to be shrinking rapidly! Henry is learning about sounds and how his arms and hands can affect his surroundings. He's fascinated by ceiling fans. He is "growing in strength and wisdom." Utterly dependent on his parents, he is going through the same growth "the babe in the manger" did. This is the way humans develop, but we don't have stories and photos of Jesus growth. My "James" Bible study started this week – the author is traditionally thought to be the brother of Jesus and a leader in the Jerusalem church after the Resurrection (*see Matthew 13:55 and 1 Cor. 15:3-7, Galatians 1:19 and Acts 15:13*), and we were asked to envision James and Jesus and their other siblings splashing in puddles. Can you see Jesus that way?

Earlier this week was the 1-year anniversary of a tragic accident – a plane with many ice skaters on board took off from Wichita, KS but never landed in Washington DC due to an Army helicopter crossing it's flight path, causing the death of all aboard both aircraft. I found myself a bit stunned by the anniversary stories – paradoxically thinking both: "that was a year ago *already*!?" and "that was *only* a year ago!?"

As I write, earlier today a judge has ordered the release of 5-year-old Liam Ramos and his father, 11 days after they were detained. His parents checked in at a border crossing, applied for Asylum in 2024 (a legal process guaranteed by US and international law. A system the US helped establish.). Despite "doing it legally" they were targeted. Liam was used as bait to draw his father out, then taken to a crowded facility in Texas. He was the 4th student taken from one school in Minneapolis, sparking his teachers and administrators outcry – and photos of him in a blue bunny hat and Spiderman backpack helped capture public attention. At the end of his order today, the judge wrote: "*Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these,'*" and "*Jesus Wept.*" I wonder about the other children.



There are so many other stories that each of us could bring up – that draw our individual focus. Joys and injustices. Tragedies and triumphs. The days and years sometimes drag and sometimes fly by – usually both! Our current sermon series is focused on the assurance that God understands what it is to be human. That God knows the full range of human emotions and experiences. That God loves us – and calls on us to love one another, even our enemies. As we enter February, it's only a couple of weeks until Lent. We'll be inspired by passages in the Judeo-Christian scriptures that talk about the journeys, roads, and pathways of life, we will make our

way together through this season. The popular and poignant movie, *The Way*, about a father's pilgrimage in honor of his late son on the famed Camino de Santiago in France and Spain, accompanies us as our modern-day inspiration to live the life we've been given to the fullest. I invite you to be thinking intentionally about your journey, and perhaps what kind of pilgrimage would be helpful to you in dealing with life's joys and sorrows. Blessed to be walking with you ~Pastor Christopher

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FAITH BUILDERS IN FEBRUARY

We continue to discuss the multimedia study “The Twelve Apostles.” These ordinary men were chosen by Jesus to bring God’s plan to the world. We will see these men help bring changes in ways that would reverberate across time for two thousand years. Come join us in fellowship. ~Ron Wood



United
Women
in Faith

All women in the community are invited to come to United Women in Faith meetings. We are an ecumenical group. For more information visit www.uwfaith.org.

If you have questions, please call, text or email. Debra Wood, President (620) 215-3407 email: dollywood.2019@gmail.com

Our meeting dates for 2026 will be:

February 12, March 13, June 11, August 13, September – TBD, October 8, December 10

**Save Best Choice Labels for
United Women in Faith!**

You can leave them in the
glass jars by the entrances
each week.
Thank you!



FIRST UMC SCHOLARSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT – MARCH 1 DEADLINE

Graduating High School seniors and current college students (undergraduates only) who are active at First UMC and interested in completing a Memorials Scholarship application should contact the office to receive a copy. The deadline for completing and returning these applications to the church office will be March 1.



Weather Policy: January through March are the most likely times we’ll need this, so a reminder. In case of snow - during the week, we follow the USD 234 school district – if they close for weather, we close the office and most events here will be cancelled – check with group leader if unsure.

Sundays are more complicated – generally we will *not* cancel for snow or cold, unless it is so bad Pastor can’t make it from the Parsonage (*in which case few others would try*)! However, ice could cause a cancellation, in which case we will announce the closure via a MailChimp email blast, a Facebook post and by calling the radio station. As always, use your best judgement and be safe. ~Pastor Christopher



February Birthdays & Anniversaries:

Virginia Myers-1, Connie McKee-3, Jim Covey-5, David Shepherd-12, Edward Braun-15, Suziee Barlet-16, Xaviar Fowler-22,

No Member Anniversaries this month.

**The Gordon Parks Museum Presents:
Buffalo Soldier History Presentation "Slave to Soldier"**



Lunch & Learn: Bring your Lunch. Drinks & Dessert will be provided.

The Alexander/Madison Chapter – Greater Kansas City/Leavenworth Area 9th & 10th (Horse) Cavalry Association will be in full authentic Buffalo Soldier uniforms.

The troopers will provide a moving presentation on the great legacy and rich background of the historic Buffalo Soldiers from the years 1866 to 1944.

Original Buffalo Soldier artifacts will be on display during the presentation.

For more information about "Buffalo Soldier Presentation", contact the Gordon Parks Museum at 620 -223-2700 ext. 5850 or visit us

at www.gordonparkscenter.org/.

This event is FREE and open to the public. Join us for food, learning, and meaningful conversation.



FORT SCOTT
Presbyterian Village

A PMMA®
COMMUNITY

art is 
ageless.

Presbyterian Village Art is Ageless.

Open to area artist 65 and Older. Non-juried artist of all ages are welcome to exhibit.

Deadline for entries 3pm, March 25, 2026

Exhibit Open 8am – 5pm March 30 – April 10, 2026 in the first floor lobby.

For more information contact Angela Carpenter at (620) 223-5550 or visit ArtisAgeless.org to enter online.

CALL
—for—
ART

FORT SCOTT LIBRARY ACTIVITIES from Jennifer Carnes

Here are activities going on at the library in February.

February 2 at 2:00 is Bring Your Own Book Club downstairs in the events room.

Tuesdays at 10:30 is Story Time downstairs in the events room.

Wednesdays at 10:00 is Golden Aces downstairs in the events room.



K-STATE GARDEN HOUR 2026 LINE-UP by Krista Harding,



If you haven't participated in the K-State Garden Hour in the past, plan to start this year!

The K-State Garden Hour began in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic as a way for K-State Research and Extension horticulture experts to share research-based information to gardeners of all abilities and experience. Due to the overwhelming success, the K-State Garden Hour is gearing up for its

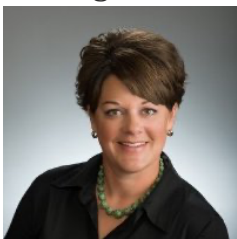
sixth year!

The 2026 lineup has been announced, featuring great topics and hosted by K-State Research and Extension horticulture staff across the state. Sessions are held on the first Wednesday of each month, online from 12 noon to 1 p.m. (CST), including a 45-minute presentation and 10-15 minutes for viewer questions. The 2026 webinars are based on the topics participants request most often.

A one-time registration gives viewers free access to all of the 2026 sessions, which include:

- February 4 – Honey Bee Colony Management and Key Floral Resources in Kansas
- March 4 – Naturalistic Landscape Design Style
- April 1 – April Showers, Rain Garden Flowers
- May 6 – Natives vs. Cultivars – Making Informed Choices for Your Landscape
- June 3 – Maximizing Garden Success with Extension Resources
- July 1 – Addressing Food Insecurity Through Extension
- August 5 – Local Food Gardening Projects in Kansas
- September 2 – Garden Renewal – How to Divide and Transplant Like a Pro
- October 7 – Groundcovers for Kansas – Covering Your Bases
- November 4 – Houseplant Propagation and Care
- December 2 – Spiff, Sharpen, and Stow – Wintering Garden Tools

To register for this free, online series, visit: hnr.k-state.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/ If you cannot join the live session, all sessions are recorded and can be accessed later at the same link.



Krista Harding is a K-State Research and Extension Horticulture agent assigned to Southwind District (*and Robin and Christopher Eshelman's sister-in-law!*) She may be reached at kharding@ksu.edu or 620-244-3826.

We got some great community submissions this month but almost nothing about what church groups are doing. I'm not quite sure how to interpret that? The weather was certainly a factor, but I'm still trying to figure out if this is a valuable format. How do we communicate about opportunities for fellowship and formation as members of First United Methodist? How do you want to receive information. We need some input.

~Pastor Christopher



RESISTING CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM WORKSHOPS

Join us for a FREE workshop focused on education surrounding the topic of Christian nationalism and how we can understand, recognize, and eliminate it from our church ministries

Southeast KS District:

Saturday, February 28th, 2026

8:30 AM-4:00 PM

Chanute First UMC

202 S Lincoln Ave, Chanute, KS 66720

Each workshop will include lunch and be hosted by:



REV. NEAL CHRISTIE
Executive Director of The
Religious Nationalism
Project

GREAT PLAINS
JUSTICE AND
MERCY TEAM



**REGISTER
TODAY!**



<https://gp-reg.brtapp.com/ResistingChristianNationalismWorkshops>



A Different Gospel: How Christian Nationalism Distorts the Way of Jesus

Article reprinted from United Methodist Discipleship Ministries

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/a-different-gospel-how-christian-nationalism-distorts-the-way-of-jesus>

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all." - Galatians 1:6–7 NIV[1]

Paul's warning to the Galatians could just as easily be written to the American church today. In our time, a different gospel has captured the imagination of millions, a gospel not of grace, but of grievance; not of love, but of power. It calls itself Christian, but it bears little resemblance to Christ. It is the gospel of Christian nationalism.

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM?

Christian nationalism is not simply loving your country or praying for its leaders. It is an ideology, a racialized, political theology, that fuses allegiance to Jesus with allegiance to the nation. It mythologizes America's founding as a divine act, portrays its history through a whitewashed lens of moral exceptionalism, and declares the United States to be God's chosen nation.

This is why faithfully diagnosing the prominent distortions of the Christian faith is an urgent task. Sociologists Samuel L. Perry, Ryon J. Cobb, Andrew L. Whitehead, and Joshua B. Grubbs define Christian nationalism as: "an ideology that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life" ("Divided by Faith (in Christian America): Christian Nationalism, Race, and Divergent Perceptions of Racial Injustice," *Social Forces*, 101(2), 2022).

They explain that, in practice, this ideology mythologizes and sacralizes America's past, casting it as founded on Judeo-Christian principles, uniquely blessed by God, and morally superior, while encoding religious language with racial content. In effect, words like "nation," "heritage," "values," and "culture" become racially coded, signaling whiteness and "native-born" identity as the markers of who counts as a "true American." Using a six-item scale, they measure support for ideas like declaring the U.S. a Christian nation, advocating "Christian values" through government, promoting prayer and religious symbols in public schools, and seeing America's success as part of God's plan. The data is sobering. Those who strongly affirm these beliefs, especially among white respondents, are far more likely to minimize racial injustice, oppose immigration, support authoritarian leadership, and justify political violence in the name of preserving a "Christian America." In other words, Christian nationalism replaces the gospel of Jesus Christ with a civil religion of dominance. It trades the cross for the flag.

A RACIALIZED IDEOLOGY

Christian nationalism, according to this study, is not just about fusing faith and patriotism; it is a racially coded ideology. It sacralizes a mythic Christian-America past, encodes whiteness into "true" citizenship, and functions as an epistemology of ignorance that allows white Americans to deny racism while claiming victimhood.

Christian nationalism did not arise in a vacuum. It is deeply entangled with the myth of white supremacy that has haunted American history from the beginning. Born out of the transatlantic slave trade, the attempted genocide of Indigenous peoples, and centuries of segregation and exclusion, this ideology has long baptized national power in religious language. Its theology sanctifies inequality. Its rituals center whiteness. Its prophets preach nostalgia for a past that never truly existed, when "America was great" for some, but hell for others.

This is why it is not enough to say, "You can love God and love your country." Of course you can. But Christian nationalism is not patriotism. It is a counterfeit faith that confuses devotion to God with devotion to empire. It demands loyalty to a flag rather than to the crucified Christ.

A DIFFERENT GOSPEL

Paul confronted the "other gospel" of his day, those who sought to add law and ethnicity to grace. His warning echoes across the centuries. Christian nationalism claims that faith in Jesus is incomplete unless it also serves the interests of a particular culture, race, or political movement. It exchanges humility for triumphalism, compassion for control, and neighbor-love for tribal loyalty. This ideology has become one of the greatest obstacles to evangelism in

our generation. Many people, especially young adults, aren't rejecting Jesus. They're rejecting the distorted version of Christianity they've seen weaponized in public life. On the other hand, it seems a growing number of young people are fueling a kind of nationalistic revival, wrapped in a Jesus bumper sticker. When faith is used to exclude, intimidate, or dominate, it ceases to be good news.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL REALITY

The language of Christian nationalism is measurable, not imaginary. Scholars across disciplines, sociology, political science, and religious studies, have studied it using rigorous empirical methods. Data from the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and Pew Research Center show that Christian nationalism is a real and growing movement, especially among white conservative Protestants.

These studies reveal clear patterns:

- Racial resentment: Christian nationalist adherents are significantly more likely to deny systemic racism and oppose multicultural education.
- Gender hierarchy: They strongly affirm patriarchal family structures and oppose women's equality in leadership.
- Authoritarianism: They express greater support for political violence, censorship, and a "strongman" leader willing to break democratic norms to protect their values.

To call attention to this isn't "partisan." It's prophetic. Social science gives us data. Scripture gives us discernment. Together, they help us tell the truth.

THE THEOLOGICAL CRISIS

Christian nationalism commits a theological heresy by confusing the kingdom of God with the kingdoms of this world. Jesus refused the devil's offer of worldly power in exchange for worship. Yet many today are eager to make that same bargain. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." His mission was not to seize political control but to transform human hearts through love, mercy, and justice. The earliest Christians lived as a creative minority, serving the poor, welcoming the immigrant, and bearing witness to a kingdom without borders.

Christian nationalism reverses all of that. It turns mission into conquest, discipleship into indoctrination, and the Great Commission into a political campaign. It is, as Paul would say, "no gospel at all."

A PASTORAL AND MISSIONAL RESPONSE

Our task as followers of Jesus is not merely to condemn Christian nationalism but to offer a more beautiful gospel in its place. That means embodying a faith that is incarnational rather than ideological, a faith that shows up in love, not in slogans. Through movements like Fresh Expressions, I've seen the Spirit at work in coffee shops, tattoo parlors, dog parks, recovery circles, and housing programs. In these everyday places, people are encountering a Jesus who is not American, not partisan, but profoundly human and divine, who transcends every tribe and tongue.

Christian nationalism may shout from the halls of power, but the real gospel still whispers in neighborhoods and dinner tables where people choose relationship over rhetoric.

CONCLUSION: TRADING PERFORMANCE FOR PRESENCE

To challenge Christian nationalism, we must loosen our grip on control, our obsession with winning, with being right, with protecting "our" way of life. We must trade performance for presence.

We have to care. We have to love. We have to learn in real time, even when it's messy. And above all, we have to trust that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is alive in others too, calling us beyond fear and into communion. The call of the church in this generation is not to "make America Christian again," but to "embody the compassion of Jesus again" through humility, justice, and love. Anything less is a different gospel.

FOOD AND FELLOWSHIP THIS MONTH – Bring a friend!

CARRY IN DINNER / POTLUCK
after worship
'Sunday, February 15TH



Bring your favorite entrée,
side, or dessert to share
and join us after worship!

FELLOWSHIP SOUP LUNCHEON -
Friday, February 27th
11:30am



Join us for chili, a variety of
soups, and dessert
– all for a freewill donation to benefit
First UMC ministries.

First United Methodist
Church
301 S National
Fort Scott, KS 66701-1397

Return Service Requested

*Here is your FEBRUARY
2025 Newsletter from:*



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