

Winter 2016

SIMPLE GIFTS



First United Methodist Church of Prattville Blesses Students through Christmas Ministry

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Prattville FUMC blesses seminary students through Christmas fundraiser

The Joy You Give

-JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

Somehow, not only for Christmas
But all the long year through,
The joy that you give to others
Is the joy that comes back to you.
And the more you spend in blessing
The poor and lonely and sad,
The more of your heart's possessing
Returns to you glad.



This classic poem by American Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier embodies the spirit of the United Methodist Women (UMW) of First United Methodist Church of Prattville, Ala. Each Christmas season since 2010 the women collectively produce and sell over 600 homemade cheeseballs to support seminarians. The proceeds from this annual sale are given in total to the Stegall Seminary Scholarship Foundation, which in six years has totaled gifts of over \$23,000.

The idea for the cheeseball fundraiser came from another local church, and inspired the UMW of Prattville FUMC to use such a project to fund gifts to missions. "We now sell four flavors of 10-ounce cheeseballs for \$10 each: Hawaiian, Party, Blue, and Buffalo Chicken," says Rita Brown, chair of the Cheeseball Committee since 2013.

The fundraiser is the result of the labor of about 30 dedicated individuals broken into two teams. Most of the volunteers involved are members of various UMW circles within the church, but also occasionally in-

clude youth. Cheeseballs are mixed, weighed, shaped and wrapped by hand before being frozen. Prior to delivery they are labeled, bagged, and tied with festive seasonal bows. "Most of all, we have lots of fun and fellowship when we gather to make the cheeseballs," says Brown.

The church kicks off the annual sale each September, with the first cheeseball deliveries taking place the week before Thanksgiving and continuing until mid-December. During the kick-off event, Brown emphasizes the reason they are selling cheeseballs: "We remind them that these seminary students are the future of our church and we want to support them," says Brown.

For the first year of the sale, pro-



Cheeseball Project participants: Left to right seated - Mary Ann Chambliss, Carol Sharpe, Annette Brownell, Claire Miller, Lera Hill Left to right standing - Bitsy Nelson, Ann Fuller, Rita Brown

ceeds were donated to multiple area mission agencies, including the Stegall Foundation. However, by the second year it was decided that all proceeds would now be directed to the Stegall Foundation. "We have had several young women in our church respond to God's call to enter the ordained ministry," says Brown. "Over the years, our own church has benefited immensely by receiving clergy who had been recipients of Stegall Foundation scholarships. This was



Bitsy Nelson mixes cheeseballs in the church kitchen.

our way of giving back for all that we have received."

In addition to a personal connection to young clergy through the church, many members of the UMW group attend the foundation's annual banquet where students share with donors the impact their gifts and prayers have had on their seminary journey. "After hearing what the support from the Stegall Foundation has meant to each student, it just warms your heart - and occasionally brings you to tears," says Brown.

In choosing to bless the students of the Stegall Foundation through this annual event, the UMW of Prattville FUMC have taken the seemingly simple gift of a bow adorned cheeseball and turned it into a life-changing donation for a seminary student. "The gift we are able to present to the foundation each year may not be huge by some standards, but it provides approximately half of one annual scholarship for an individual student," says Brown. "We know our donation is making a real difference in the life of one person and that makes all of our efforts worth it."

Meredyth Earnest

Photos in this article and on cover by Luke Lucas

The Stegall Seminary Scholarship Foundation is a 501(C)(3) non-profit foundation, and all gifts are tax deductible. Gifts for our Seminary students should be mailed to Dr. Karl K. Stegall, Seminary Scholarship Foundation, P. O. Box 241661, Montgomery, Alabama 36124-1661.

Generosity Compelled by Grace

I remember it well! It was my final year of college. I was engaged to be married, “broke as a joke,” and seminary bound. Standing in my college dorm, I made a covenant with God: “I believe I know where you want me to go to seminary, but it won’t be free. I also believe that it would dishonor you to go into great debt when I could go somewhere else and have my way paid, but I will go where you lead in faith.” I would like to share with you that the Lord immediately wiped away my seminary expenses, or that an angel came down from heaven and wrote a big, fat check so that for four years I did not have to worry about money. However, that is not how things unfolded, but the true story is much better. I enrolled at Asbury. I got a job. I was encouraged by my mentors. Yet, I worried about money every time my student account was substantially lower than the tuition bills posted, and then I watched God answer prayer through the financial support that we received.

While we thank God for all of the financial blessings that we received, both large and small, none was as consistent and personal as the generous donations that came to us through the Stegall Seminary Scholarship Foundation. The quarterly gifts were always right on time and, often-times, accompanied by a personal note signed by a brother or sister in Christ that I had never met.

Our last year in Wilmore, Kentucky, was our first year as parents. Finances had gotten tighter. With both of our families a full day’s drive away, and our jobs limiting the number of days we could visit for Christmas, my wife and I were heartbroken that our finances were spread so thin that we did not have enough money for our child’s first Christmas. Even though children don’t remember their first Christmas, you just try to tell a new mother that her child’s first Christmas gifts aren’t important! It was then a miracle happened. I went to the mailbox and found a



**Jonathan (Associate Pastor at Shalimar UMC),
Liz, Noah, and Eden Hart**

check channeled through the Stegall Seminary Scholarship Foundation. “Hmm,” I thought. “They decided to send us a little early the quarterly check that arrives in January, and I am grateful.” However, when I opened the envelope, I could hardly believe my eyes. There was a generous check inside of the envelope with a note attached, “Dear Jonathan and Liz, We are the Seekers Sunday School Class of First United Methodist Church of Montgomery. We know that you will be receiving your quarterly check in a few weeks, but we just wanted to send you this additional gift for Christmas. We hope that you can find some special use for it and it blesses you.” I’ll never forget sitting down on the side of the bed and handing it to Liz as she cried. I have heard it said that grace compels generosity. We will always be grateful for the saints who have been compelled by God’s grace to be generous through the Stegall Seminary Scholarship Foundation. We will always remember this special Christmas gift. It truly was a means of grace for us.

Jonathan Hart

Deemer Hopes to Serve AWF Conference as Counselor



Halle Deemer

A native of Montgomery, Halle graduated from Saint James School and the University of Alabama where she majored in art and minored in psychology. As an active member of the Saint James United Methodist Church, Halle served as President of the Youth Leadership Team while in high school. Halle also served as a summer youth intern and assistant youth minister during the years that she was a student at Alabama. Her immediate goal is to attain a degree in pastoral counseling and be ordained a deacon. Her long-range goal is to return to the Alabama-West Florida Conference and serve in a local church.

*Have you considered
remembering our
Seminary Scholarship
Foundation in
your will?*





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Why Make a Year-end Gift?

Joseph Newton once said, "Only God could have thought of Christmas. While it is so simple, it is yet profound. While it is homely, it is still heavenly. Christmas is truly God's gift to all humankind." As we focus our eyes upon God's gift to us in Jesus Christ during this holy season, we are inspired to share our gifts with others. In light of this, let me encourage you to consider a special gift for our seminary students that will make a huge difference. What makes a year-end gift to our seminary students such an attractive option?



Brenda and Karl Stegall

1. We have a record number of 47 students enrolled full-time in seminary this December, and many of these students, especially those with children, feel great financial strain during this time of the year.
2. Every penny of your gifts will be mailed directly to these students where each will feel the full impact of your generosity.
3. One of these 47 seminary students will most likely serve one day as the pastor of your church. Your investment in your future minister's seminary education will reduce significantly the amount of indebtedness that he/she will have accumulated when he/she is appointed to your church.
4. The more you give, the more our seminary students receive! When our Seminary Scholarship Foundation began in 2007, we were giving \$1,200 a year to each full-time student. In direct response to your great generosity, we have moved from giving \$1,200 a year to \$10,000 a year to each full-time student. Since it costs approximately \$40,000 a year to attend a seminary full-time, we would love to continue increasing our cash scholarships to each student each year. With your generous support, this dream can come true!
5. In a world that is hungry to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, I do not know of a greater investment that you can make than that of investing your financial resources in those who are preparing for a lifetime of service to Jesus Christ and the church.

Brenda and I wish for each of you a joyous Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Karl K. Stegall