

Spring 2016



SURRENDERING TO THE CALL



*Reverend Jay Cooper Reflects On How The Stegall Foundation
Helped Him Be Obedient To God's Call On His Life.*

In May, 2008, I traveled to Israel with Dr. Karl Stegall, at which time God's call became stronger than ever. I shared with Dr. Stegall that I would not run from God's call any longer. It was time to surrender my life to the call of Christ.

"Responding to God's call into ordained ministry was a lengthy process for me. My wife, Susan, and I were married at a young age and began a family shortly thereafter. While enrolled as a fulltime student at Auburn Montgomery, I also began working for my father-in-law in a timber processing plant. For nearly five years, I shared each day between work and school.

I grew up in a different denomination, so I became a United Methodist when Susan and I were married. When Jim Dannelly at Aldersgate asked me if I promised to be loyal with my prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness, it affirmed the ways I wanted to be loyal to Christ through the church. One of the earliest commitments we made to each other was to pour ourselves into the life of our local congregation. For me, it meant volunteering my time to help with the youth program. After leading a youth group one Sunday evening, my associate pastor asked me a question I had never considered: "Jay, have you ever considered seminary and ministry as an option for your life? Do you think God might be calling you?" I could not shake that question and it even kept me awake at night, so when we graduated from college and a youth position came open at First United Methodist Church of Ozark, I took the opportunity to seize this calling. It would not be the last time God was trying to reach me.

After a period of thirteen years, twelve of which were spent working for my father-in-law's family business, God continued pursuing me by calling me into ordained ministry. Our membership was now at First United Methodist Church of Montgomery, and God's call was as strong as ever. The only challenge for me was to figure out how to leave behind a lucrative job and a comfortable way of life

for a call to ministry, which places my life and my family in the hands of an itinerant system. How would we survive? Our children, Caroline and Ella Cate, were no longer crawling around the house. They were 14 and 9 years old at the time. Asking them to understand a career change, lifestyle change, and that our residence now depended on where our appointive process needed to send us was not exactly an easy conversation to have.

In May, 2008, I traveled to Israel with Dr. Karl Stegall, at which time God's call became stronger than ever. I shared with Dr. Stegall that I would not run from God's call any longer. It was time to surrender my life to the call of Christ. In the fall of 2008, I began the conversation with Dr. Lawson Bryan about the possibility of ministry and pursuing the path of ordination. When I called Dr. Stegall to share with him the news that I would be entering seminary, he said, "Jay, that's fantastic! Don't you worry about a thing! God is going to take care of you and your family, and our seminary scholarship foundation is going to support you EVERY WAY POSSIBLE." There could not have been any greater words of assurance at that moment. My sponsors, local church, and clergy colleagues all made a significant sacrifice and effort to walk with us every step of the way. Every time I received a check from the Stegall Seminary Foundation, I felt that calm assurance once again confirming my call. Equally important to us as the faithful and generous donations of people to the foundation were the cards and calls we received throughout the journey. I would often receive calls from donors while traveling to Emory late at night and early in the morning. These calls were simple, "Just wanted you to know I am praying for you and your family. "If you need anything, just let me know." "Thank you for answering the call!" Each of these calls was a means of God's grace in my life.

The Stegall Seminary Scholarship Foundation made seminary and a life possible for Susan, Caroline, Ella Cate, and me. Thanks be to God for Karl and Brenda Stegall and the countless donors who carried the weight of seminary with us and for us. We are indebted to you and stand on the strength of your shoulders."

– Reverend Jay Cooper

Pictured on the front cover is Reverend Jay Cooper, former seminary scholarship recipient, and his wife, Susan. Jay is serving as pastor of the First United Methodist Church of Bay Minette, Ala.

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.

Gift from Kingswood United Methodist Church Supports Seminary Students



~ *Kingswood United Methodist Church* ~

The Kingswood United Methodist in Mobile recently presented the Stegall Seminary Scholarship Foundation with a gift of \$22,738.59. This donation represented the earnings from a bequest that was left to the church by John Howard and Frances Dunagan for the purpose of supporting seminary students from the Mobile area.

“The people of Kingswood United Methodist Church felt strongly that the gift with which we had been so graciously entrusted could be maximized by joining it with the Stegall Foundation,” said the Reverend Joe Reams, senior pastor. “Along with a dedicated Board of Directors overseeing and directing the gifts, the Foundation has a bona fide process already in place to determine the needs of seminary students from the Mobile area. This was appealing to our congregation, as we know that the money will be used in the most effective ways to benefit seminary students who will serve our Annual Conference for years to come. By partnering with the Stegall Scholarship Foundation, we were able to both honor the wishes of the family that originally left the money to the church, while benefiting from the strength and organization of the Foundation. Our decision to channel these funds to the Stegall Scholarship Foundation was a direct response to our connectional nature as a church. The goal of supporting seminary students is not only our goal at Kingswood, but the goal of our entire Alabama-West Florida Conference. We are grateful as a congregation to participate in such a historic enterprise for our Conference and Church.”

“I am extremely grateful to Rev. Reams and the good people of Kingswood United Methodist Church for this most generous gift to seminary students,” said Dr. Stegall, foundation president. “Joe has a great vision for his congregation, as well as for the larger church. His outstanding ministry has produced much fruit, and this latest effort will supply support for seminary students in years to come..”



Presenting the check to Dr. Stegall on February 8 were the Reverend Reams, pastor, and Gloria Davis, church treasurer.



Jackie Zeigler, Chair of Core Team; Joe Reams, Pastor; and Dr. Tom Fell, Lay Leader





STEGALL SEMINARY SCHOLARSHIP ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION
P. O. BOX 241661
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36124

STEGALLSCHOLARSHIP@GMAIL.COM

WWW.STEGALLSCHOLARSHIP.COM

WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/STEGALLSCHOLARSHIP

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT ORG
US Postage
PAID
Permit # 395
Montgomery AL

MORE THAN A SCHOLARSHIP

God has led me all of the way from Eclectic, Alabama to Durham, North Carolina where I have spent three wonderful years attending Duke Divinity School. I am preparing to graduate in May and eagerly look forward to serving the people of the Alabama-West Florida Conference. My time in seminary has shaped me into the man that God would have me to be. I would not have experienced this time of transformation if it had not been for the Stegall Seminary Scholarship Foundation.

I can hardly call the Stegall Foundation a “scholarship.” To do so would ignore so much good work that God is doing through the loyal donors to the Foundation. Scholarships pay for tuition and books, but the Stegall Foundation is also an expression of faith and love in the continuation of God’s Church.

Each quarter of my seminary journey, I have faithfully received a generous check from the Foundation. Each check quieted my rattled nerves that worried about paying the power bill. It freed me from the bondage of crippling debt. It reminded me that I was not alone in a distant land, but that I had a loving family caring for me more than nine hours away. In addition to helping pay for tuition and books, it also paid for an occasional movie where I could sink into a bucket of popcorn and rest from my studies. For seminarians like me, this scholarship does not merely offer financial help. It offers the direct love, support, and faithfulness of the body of Christ.

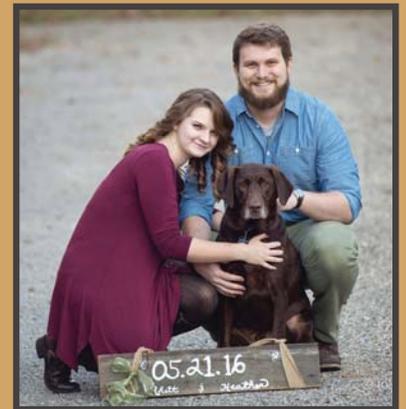
The church, as I understand it from the Book of Acts, is not a stationary people. We grow by following God’s call wherever it may lead us, bringing everyone we can into the waters of baptism and new life. The price of a seminary education is higher than ever before, and if God continues to call individuals like me---and I am sure God will---future seminary students may not be able to afford the vital education that will form the next generation of United Methodist pastors. Thankfully, the Stegall Scholarship Foundation through its generous donors is committed to growing the church and continuing to raise up educated pastors for the future.

God has been so good to me and blessed my life in so many ways. I am now engaged to Heather Jones, who, also, is a graduate of Huntingdon. We will be getting married in Dothan on May 21. Over the past three years, my dog, Obi (short for Obadiah), has been a constant companion, relieving lots of stress from my studies. We have taken over 200 hikes together on weekends, and he has listened to lots of my sermons I preached to him in preparation for preaching the same sermon in my homiletics class.

I will be forever grateful for what the Stegall Scholarship Foundation has meant in my life!

Rhett Butler,

Duke Divinity School, third-year student



*Rhett Butler with Fiancée
Heather Jones and Obi.*