

NFAMLP NEWSLETTER - JULY 2026

This month, I celebrate my eighteenth anniversary in pastoral ministry. Since licensing began in 2008, there have been six appointments that span every corner of Arkansas. From the prosperous, vibrant Northwest Arkansas, to a growing blue-collar city in Northeast Arkansas, the Delta in Southeast Arkansas, and the Piney Woods of Southwest Arkansas, the roots of ministry grow deep in the places where we are planted. Our family has occupied five parsonages and three rental houses.

When we first began, my wife and I were empty-nesters, a status we treasured while it lasted. In late 2011, God began to stir something in our hearts. We attended an event hosted by an organization called the Call, which seeks to attract people to become foster parents. We left still feeling God's tug, but being a foster parent wasn't it.

Two months later, we discovered what it was. Two little people came to our door: a little girl who was fifteen months old and a little boy who was six years old. We took them in, loved them, and finalized an adoption in June of 2012. God didn't want us to be foster parents; he wanted us to be real parents. To this day, we celebrate our family anniversary on adoption day.

The entire course of my ministerial career has been one of ongoing education and personal and spiritual growth. I am forever grateful for my first four years serving as an Associate Pastor in two different appointments. Those formative experiences with Senior Ministers and Clergy Colleagues taught me so much about what to do and a good deal of what not to do.

In 2013, when it was finally time to transition from part-time to full-time ministry, the theological education and hands-on experience had prepared me for the next steps. I can honestly say that every appointment, every community, every missional experiment has been formative, and the process continues.

Reaching people experiencing food insecurity has been a consistent thread in ministry. Feeding programs, food pantries, and helping people to navigate difficult times flow naturally from our Wesleyan commitment to social justice. The times in which we serve necessitate changes in the way we approach the endemic problems of our society. Times like these need principled people who can stand up and speak up.

One of the most profound truths I have come to embrace over the past 18 years is that God does not form every minister the same way. For some, the path runs through the halls of a seminary, shaped by systematic theology and structured formation. For others — and I count myself among them — the classroom is a COS and ACOS Extension School, a Delta food pantry, a parsonage kitchen table, a hospital waiting room, or in a car on the way to a court hearing for a child who needed a family.

Every pastor carries a story that is entirely their own. The wounds, the victories, the detours, and the divine appointments along the way are not detours from formation — *they are the formation*. God is not limited to a curriculum. *God is the curriculum*.

As I look toward the horizon of ministry still ahead, I am filled not with certainty about what comes next; that is not God's way. But I can tell you with absolute confidence that the One who has ordered every step so far is still in control. The church needs ministers who have been broken and rebuilt, who have sat with the grieving, the hungry, and the forgotten, who have learned that faithfulness is measured not by accolades but by presence.

To every pastor reading these words — whether you are in your first year or your fortieth — your path is not an accident. The places where you have been planted, the people who have shaped you, and the trials that nearly undid you are all threads in something far larger than any one of us can see. Keep going. The best ministry is still ahead. God is with us.

Also, I want to take this moment to invite you to consider attending our 2026 Annual Gathering to be held in Ocala, Florida from September 15-17th. We will be spending time learning from Rev. Dr. Michael Beck, the Director of the Fresh Expressions movement in the UMC. During this time together we will explore new ways to be the Church in the world today. Each attendee will receive a copy of his book, *Deep Roots, Wild Branches: Cultivating a Blended Ecology of Church for a Changing World*. For more information on the Gathering or the National Fellowship of Associate Members and Local Pastors check out our website at NFAMLP.org

In Christ,

Rev. Kenny Lee

Vice Chairperson

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