

INSIDE

Folks You Should Know.....2
Honoring Kingsport's S.D. Dean

I Am Bays Mountain.....3
Highlighting this week's winner
and inviting you to share your story

Community Scrapbook.....4
Golfing for a cause with the
Kingsport Lions Club

**King University's Institute
for Faith & Culture.....6**
Welcoming legendary author
Katherine Paterson to Bristol

Haunts & Happenings.....7
Exploring the region's offerings

Scrapbook Showcase.....8
Featuring photos by Nancy Knight

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Sunday Stories

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CONTRIBUTED



Through fellowship, study and meals, the youth group First Presbyterian seeks to learn what it means to be a disciple of Christ in today's world.

First Presbyterian promotes exploration of faith for youth

By Suzi McKee

When Russ Pearson graduated from college, within two weeks he was in Kingsport working at the job of his dreams. Russ had been a camp counselor in college and had volunteered with the youth group at the orphanage located just across the street from his campus.

"I found my niche early on," Russ began, "and once I knew that was my calling, doors seemed to open for me. I have always enjoyed being the mentor that young people need and sharing my thoughts and ideas with them as they develop their own faith journey."

As Director of Christian Education and Youth Ministries, Russ has developed a safe place for youth to explore their faith. "Youth come as they are, to play games, hang out with each other, and have Bible study," Russ explained. "We explore our faith through prayer activities, video discussion and Bible teaching. Youth group is a place for students to bring their questions, concerns, joys and struggles before God in a way that is welcoming and accepting. As their youth leader, I strive for youth to have a meaningful experience in whatever we are doing."

In addition to weekly group meetings, the youth participate in regional Presbytery events such as a yearly youth retreat in Banner Elk, North Carolina. During the summer, both middle school and high school have opportunities to go to week-long conferences through Montreat Conference Center. These conferences have been a vital component to the youth's spirituality and experience of God. Before the COVID pandemic, youth group members participated in summer mission trips; Russ hopes to bring those back into the programming in the near future.



"Our time together on Sunday nights is simply titled 'Youth Group,'" Russ continued. "Through fellowship, study and meals, we seek to learn what it means to be a disciple of Christ in our world today. During Youth Group times, we will play games and have fun in a non-intimidating environment. Each week, we will also have a Bible devotion based around different topics. Some weeks we may discuss an Old Testament story and other weeks we may get deeper with big theological questions like, 'Why does God let bad things happen?'"

Russ believes no one has all of the answers about faith as it pertains to life events. He says,

"One thing that makes us who we are is we do not expect you to have all the answers or to feel like you have life all figured out. Come as you are, with your questions, concerns, faith, doubts, failures and successes."

"We could not have the youth group that we have without our families," Russ added. "Our families have been avid supporters, making youth group a priority in their schedules. Many of the parents had a great experience of youth group when they were students and seek that same opportunity for their children. Our church members have also seen the importance of youth ministry in the overall mission of the church, and they continue to support us as the students grow in their faith."

Russ added, "We believe God meets us where we are, and we believe God invites us into a loving relationship so we can spread the good news of God's love to the world." He invites all youth to come and be a part of the group so they can learn and grow with a strong support group.

Kingsport's First Presbyterian Church is located at 100 W. Church Circle. Visit the website at www.fpckpt.org to learn more.