



THE PARABLE OF THE BARREN FIG TREE

LUKE 13:6-9

Jesus told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷ So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ ⁸ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

AGRICULTURE IN THE HOLY LAND

The land in the Holy Land is noted for its substrata of rock. It was very difficult to find a place where a fig tree could be planted, or any other tree for that matter. Sometimes, it would simply be a carved out place in stone which had been filled with dirt or some unique feature of the rock allowing roots to go deeper than the few inches of topsoil. Because of this, whenever such a place was found or made, it was special. In the case of a fig tree, when one was planted it was expected to produce fruit in the third year following its planting and, if it did not, then it was considered that it should be replaced with a new plant that would bear fruit.

WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE PARABLE

On this particular occasion, the man had a fig tree that was planted in his vineyard and he had waited patiently for three years for it to bear fruit. When it did not, he ordered his gardener to cut it down but the gardener said, “Give me yet another year and during that time I will water it, feed it, and nurture it. And if it does not then bear fruit, then you can cut it down.”

THE MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE

The message is one for all of life. We are called to bear fruit. As one person has said, “Life is God’s gift to us, what we make of life it is our gift to God.” In other words, our sense of purpose and meaning in life is derived from our ability to utilize God’s gifts to us in a productive manner.

THE MESSAGE FOR THE CHURCH

It is a reminder to us as Christians and as Christ’s Church that we are called to bear fruit. That is, we are called to fulfill the mission of Christ by bringing the unchurched into the church and, thereby, furthering the kingdom of God in the world today. Or in the words of the mission of the Methodist Church, we are to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

BEARING FRUIT IN A CHANGING CULTURE

The Christian Church in America is facing many challenges today. It is estimated that some 4,000 new churches are opened each year but nearly 7,000 churches are closed. Within the United Methodist Churches in Florida they have closed over 100 churches since 2000 and there are many more that are declining today. And we too experienced a decade of decline in the new millennium.

SO HOW ARE WE DOING TODAY?

The answer to that question is that until everyone has become a part of the Kingdom of God then we need to do more. But we are blessed.

- One key indicator of church vitality is worship attendance and we have been on an upward trend in worship attendance since 2014.
- A second key indicator of church vitality is giving and

in 2018 we received cash contributions for the budget, outreach and missions of \$2.25 million, the highest since 1995 when the Family Life Center was built.

- A third key indicator is capital expenditures which have totaled \$5,894,016 million since 2014. These expenditures included a campus wide parking lot, 35 new air conditioners, replacement of every roof on campus with the exception of the children’s building, the purchase of the dog grooming building, the addition of two new maintenance buildings, the addition of the fellowship hall kitchen and the replacement of all kitchen equipment in the Family Life Center.
- A fourth key indicator is the addition of new members which has enabled us to reverse the decline which began after the split in 2006. Even after the dramatic closure of the church due to COVID in 2020 we immediately began to recover as we have continued even through the disaffiliation as evidenced by our worship attendance.

IT HAS NOT BEEN EASY AND IT HAS NOT SIMPLY HAPPENED

Becoming effective in ministry in a Post-Christendom world requires change. Many of the things that have worked for us before just don’t work anymore. But change, as dreaded as it has been by some, has made a difference.

For example,

- Taking the Early Education Center from a Mother’s Day Out Program to a Full Day Program reversed a declining matriculation and mounting losses each year into a program that is growing and self-supporting.
- Taking Vacation Bible Camp from a three hour program to a full day program has not only increased matriculation but alleviated dependency on the budget.
- Taking the Upward Basketball Program to that Program’s Structure and Budgeting has increased volunteerism, matriculation and outreach.
- The Good Samaritan Ministry has their own space in the mission house to distribute food which has increased the ability to give out more food to people in need.
- By partnering with the Early Education Center, we were able to improve the quality of our food service, serve meals year round and quadruple attendance.
- By making our Services of Worship more user friendly, by adding special themes and recognition through Celebration Sundays, by making it easier to attend services on busy times such as Thanksgiving Eve by adding a meal, we have been able to counter declining worship trends that plague churches in the new millennium. For example, in 2014, only 95 people attended Thanksgiving Eve and in 2025 we had 231.
- By making investments in our physical plant we have seen a significant impact on our programs and ministries. For example, the parking lot project has played an integral part in the growth of new programs such as Trunk or Treat for our children at Halloween and the doubling of proceeds for youth ministries through the Pumpkin Patch.
- The addition of an incredible breakfast offering during the Gathering has resulted in an awesome opportunity for bringing our church family together before and between services with come and go numbers reaching as high as 200 on some Sunday mornings. And this year our 4th Sunday of Advent Breakfast hosted 380.

A SHIFT TO ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

Adaptive leadership calls us to reflect upon our mission and to ask if what we are doing is taking us where we want to go. It requires that we be willing to change when change is necessary and it recognizes that the message is not the problem, simply the model we use to deliver it. My prayer for each and everyone of us is that we can move beyond “we always did it that way” to bring about the required change that is necessary to “create disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” in a post-Christendom world.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

WEEKLY EVENTS

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES

- Held during the 9:30 AM Worship Service
- Nursery & Toddlers: Room 6105 in the Family Life Center
- 3 & 4 year olds: Room 4110 in the Education Building
- K - 3rd Grade: Fellowship Hall
- 4th- 6th Grade: Room 6204 in the Family Life Center

CHILDREN'S GATHERING: 10:15 AM to 11:00 AM

In between Children's Sunday School and Children's Worship, children can gather in the Fellowship Hall and enjoy food, drinks, and fellowship while listening to some of their favorite worship songs!

CHILDREN'S WORSHIP

- Held during the 11:00 AM Worship Service
- Grades K-6
- Located in the Fellowship Hall

SUNDAY MORNING NURSERY

- Open 8:00 AM - 12:00 PM
- Ages 0-2: Room 6105 in the Family Life Center
- Ages 2-4: Room 4110 in the Education Building

SUNDAY NIGHT CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS 4:30 - 7:30 PM

- All 1st- 6th graders are welcome to a night full of Faith, Food and FUN!
- The night will include Bible Discovery, Choirs, Games, Activities, and more!
- Dinner: \$5

Club 456/JAM Choir (4th - 6th graders)

- 4:30 PM: Drop off in the Fellowship Hall (Building #7)
- 7:30 PM: Pick up in the Music Center (Building #2)

Kids Club/ Carol Choir (1st - 3rd graders)

- 4:30 PM: Drop off in Fellowship Hall (Building #7)
- 7:30 PM: Pick up in the Fellowship Hall (Building #7)

UPCOMING EVENTS

SUNDAY, MAY 10TH: KIDS CLUB & CLUB 456 MOTHER'S DAY TEA PARTY

- 4:30-5:30 PM (During regularly scheduled Kids Club/Club 456 program)
- Delicious refreshments and of course, tea!
- Mother's Day activities
- Mothers and mother figures of Kids Club & Club 456 members are welcome, but please also come if you have been interested in your child becoming a member!

FRIDAY, MAY 15TH: PARENT'S NIGHT OUT

- Dinner, crafts & activities, and watch a movie on the big screen!
- \$20 for 1st child, \$15 for each additional child
- **Drop off:** 5:30 PM in the Family Life Center Lobby
- **Pick up:** No later than 9:30 PM in the Family Life Center Lobby
- Scan the QR Code to Register by Sunday, May 10th



WONDERFUL WEDNESDAY SUMMER KIDS CAMP 2026

- Kids Camp is a single day version of our summer Vacation Bible Camp. This ministry is a full day program from 7:30 AM to 5:30 PM. The purpose of this ministry is to meet the needs of the families in our church and community, while teaching children about Jesus Christ. The day includes breakfast, lunch, two snacks, an exciting field trip & other activities. If interested in volunteering, please contact Ellen at edespres@opmethodist.org or (904) 264-2241 Ext. 243
- Cost: \$40.00 per child per event
- To register your child, please visit www.opmethodist.org or email Ellen Despres at edespres@opmethodist.org

KIDS CAMP DATES & ACTIVITIES:

- Wednesday, June 3rd: Horseback Riding at Batton Family Ranch
- Wednesday, June 10th: Pinball Palace in Brunswick, GA
- Wednesday, June 17th: Swimming & Splash Pad at Green Cove Springs City Pool
- Wednesday, June 24th: Skating at Skate Station
- Wednesday, July 1st: Sweet Pete's Lollipop Making Class
- Wednesday, July 8th: Bowling, Laser Tag, & Arcade at Batt Family Fun Center
- Wednesday, July 15th: IMAX at Epic Theatres Oakleaf
- Wednesday, July 29th: Swimming at Madison Blue Springs

VACATION BIBLE CAMP 2026 – RAINFOREST FALLS

Step through the mist into Rainforest Falls, overflowing with wild waterfalls, towering trees, and colorful creatures.

Beneath a canopy of chattering birds and howling monkeys, kids plunge into a lifelong adventure of discovering the nature of God. They'll explore what it means to be rooted in relationship with God, their creator, a safe place in life's storms.

- Dates: July 20-24, 2026
- 7:30 AM-5:30 PM Daily
- Includes breakfast, lunch, two snacks, exciting field trips and experiences, and more!
- Grades PreK– Rising 6th Graders
- Exciting field trips and experiences including Summer Waves Water Park, Marine Dolphin Adventure, Falling Creek Falls State Park, Dave & Busters & more!
- **Cost and Payments:**
- Participant Cost: \$210 per child
- \$100 Refundable Deposit Due Upon Registration. (Full refunds on deposits/payments are available if cancellation is on or before June 22nd)
- Youth/Adult Volunteer Cost: \$90 per person (this cost covers field trips, shirt, and meals)
- Deadline for Registration & Final Payment- June 22nd
- To register your child, or to register as a volunteer, scan the QR Code:



YOUTH MINISTRY

WEEKLY EVENTS

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School - 11:00 AM - 11:45 AM

We join together in the Youth Classroom and then break into smaller conversation groups.

SUNDAY NIGHT SCHEDULE

WIFFLEBALL

- Each year we wind down the busy school year by playing Wiffleball.
- Every Sunday Night in May at the field
- Open to all students 7th-12th grade.
- Dinner is \$5
- 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM
- Wiffleball season t-shirt provide for free

UPCOMING EVENTS

GRADUATING SENIORS

Graduation is right around the corner! We are honored that over the years you have let Orange Park Methodist Church be a part of raising your child in the faith! To celebrate their accomplishments and the next chapter of their life we will recognize graduating seniors on May 24th in the 11 AM service.

To have your senior recognized in the worship service, please register them. You can do so by scanning the QR Code below and filling out the brief form. Thank you so much and congratulations to our seniors!

SPRING CONFIRMATION RETREAT

- Friday, May 1st – Sunday, May 3rd
- This is the first retreat that our rising 7th graders/ confirmation students can participate in. We look forward to having a big group this year! There are opportunities to kayak or enjoy their slip-and-slide into the lake. This year we are also going to have tubing in the lake!
- Register by scanning the QR code below and clicking the event
- Cost: \$80

YOUTH MISSION TRIP: BELIZE

- Saturday, June 20th - Friday, June 26th
- Destination: Belize
- Partner Organization: Praying Pelican Missions
- We are returning to Belize to continue our partnership with Mark and Shari Somerville.
- Cost: Youth - \$900 Adults - \$1300
- Register by scanning the QR code below and clicking the event



SUMMER ACTIVITES

ST. AUGUSTINE BEACH & MINI GOLF

- Thursday June 4th, 2026
- Destination: St. Augustine, FL
- Cost: \$40

BOWLING AND LASER TAG

- Thursday, June 11th, 2026
- Destination: Jacksonville, FL
- Cost: \$40

SUMMER WAVES

- Thursday, June 18th, 2026
- Destination: Jekyll Island, GA
- Cost: \$40

MOVIE DAY

- Thursday, July 2nd, 2026
- Destination: Oakleaf, FL
- Cost: \$40

ICHETUCKNEE RIVER FLOAT

- Thursday, July 9th, 2026
- Destination: Ichetucknee Springs, FL
- Cost: \$40

JACKSONVILLE DAY

- Thursday, July 16th, 2026
- Destination: Jacksonville, FL
- Cost: \$40

NEPTUNE PARK AND PINBALL PALACE

- Thursday, July 30th, 2026
- Destination: St. Simon’s Island / Brunswick, GA
- Cost: \$40

Events are all day. 8 AM - 5 PM

Register for all events by scanning the QR Code and selecting the correct link

EARLY EDUCATION CENTER

This month we will be talking about mothers and about how “God Makes the World Grow”. Our children will be making special presents to honor their moms for Mother’s Day on May 10th. Please pray for all the moms in our program. We will offer our prayers for all moms in the church during our weekly chapel.

May 4th through 8th is Teacher Appreciation Week where our parents will have an opportunity to acknowledge all the hard work the teachers do. During May we will be teaching our children about how things change but how God never changes. Our character Trait for May will be Citizenship – For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus. Philippians 3:20.

On May 5th, Mrs. Laura, our Spanish teacher, will have a celebration with the children for Cinco de Mayo with piñatas and instruments that the children will make. She will have the children make instruments and march around the facilities singing a Spanish song that they have learned with her.

Our facilities will be closed on May 25th in honor of Memorial Day to remember those who gave their lives for our country.

Our Pre-K will be practicing hard for the Graduation Ceremony scheduled for May 26th at 6:45 PM. This is a wonderful ceremony for our VPK children and they look forward to this delightful night. We will serve punch and cake for the special occasion.

Please remember to register your child or tell a friend that we still have some space available. We provide full-time care for children ages 2 months to VPK from 6:30 AM to 6 PM Monday through Friday. We now have room in our 4 year old VPK classes providing full childcare with breakfast, lunch and 2 snacks for a wonderful price. Please call 904-704-9762 or 904-264-7330 for more information.

WONDERFUL WEDNESDAYS

DINNER PRICES

ADULT - \$8 AND CHILD (ages 3-12) - \$5
Non-season reservations must be made weekly.
Please call 904-264-2241 ext. 278
SEASON TICKETS FOR MAY & JUNE -
Adults - \$56 and Children - \$40

May 6 - Seasoned pork chop, black eyed peas, cheese scalloped potatoes, cornbread, coleslaw and carrot cake
May 13 - Chicken Parmesan with noodles, vegetables, green beans, garlic bread, salad and apple crisp
May 20 - Beef stew, carrots, potatoes, garlic bread, salad and chocolate cake
May 27 - Hawaiian Pork with rice, broccoli, sweet potato casserole, roll, coleslaw and pineapple upside down cake

All Menus are subject to change.

METHODIST MEN

We will meet in the Fellowship Hall for our next meeting at 8:00 AM on Saturday, May 16, 2026. All men of the church are members of the Methodist Men and are encouraged to come and enjoy one of our delicious breakfasts prepared by one of our cook teams.

METHODIST MEN’S BBQ

Come enjoy food and fellowship at the BBQ!
• Sunday, June 7th, from 10:30 AM to 1:00 PM
• Pulled pork BBQ with baked beans, coleslaw, drink and dessert
• All for only \$12.00! Dine in or take out
• ALL PROCEEDS GO TO OPMC MISSIONS
• For tickets, see any member of the Methodist Men

SAVE THE DATE

Methodist Men and Women will host a Trivia Night on July 10th. All proceeds will go to missions. Please look for more details in the June edition of the Dove.

METHODIST WOMEN GENERAL MEETING

The Methodist Women will be having its next General Meeting on Thursday, May 14th, beginning at 10:00 a.m. in the FLC gym. Our guest speaker will be Doris McDaniel, a member of the Orange Park Women’s Club. Lunch will be served so reservations must be made by May 10th to Circle Chairs or Diantha Owen (904-699-0882). All ladies of the church are invited to attend.

MUSIC MINISTRY

MUSIC THEORY CLASS

If you love music and want to know more about it we do offer a Music Theory class on Tuesday nights at 7:00 PM in the Music Center. Doug Westberry, the Director of the Inspirations, is the teacher and makes it fun to learn. Come join us!

SYMPHONY CONCERTS

Do you want to go to the Symphony? We have two more dates that we have planned to attend the Jacksonville Symphony as a group. We sit in the Terrace seating area that is above the stage. The Ticket price for Terrace seating this year is \$35.00. All tickets must be paid in advance of each concert. There are no refunds. We will use the church bus or vans for transportation to and from the concert.

CONCERT DATES

Friday, May 15th - Beethoven’s Triple & Brahms
Friday, June 5th - Rachmaninoff’s Third

If you are interested in attending any of these please contact Ruth Loomis 904-264-2241 ext. 245.

SENIOR ADULT MINISTRY

ROCK “N” AGES

Start your month right by joining us at the Rock N' Ages Luncheon. It will be held on Tuesday, May 5, 2026 at 11:30 AM in the Fellowship Hall. The program will be presented by Doris McDaniel from the Orange Park Women's Club. Please bring a dish to go with a taco bar. Hamburger, cheese and tortilla chips will be provided.

Invite a friend and join us. If you have questions, please call Cindy Koon at 904-210-3546.

BOOK CLUB

You are invited to attend our Book Club! We meet on the first Monday of every month to discuss the book that we just read. We meet in Room 1107 in Park Square at 5:00 PM. Here is a list of the dates we are meeting. Everyone is welcome to attend.

May 4
June 1
July 5

For more information, please call Donna Macleod at 904-910-4227.

OUR CHURCH FAMILY EXTENDS OUR SYMPATHY To

Richard Keyworth in the death of his wife, Chris Keyworth
Jerry Cioffi in the death of his brother, William Cioffi
The family of Ellen Hill
The family of Ray Demming
Bob Bradshaw in the death of his sister, Sandi Felland
Ann Tabor in the death of her mother, Lois Woodward
Louise Crowe in the death of her stepmother,
MaryAnn Crews

STAFF DIRECTORY

Church phone number - 904-264-2241

PASTOR

Dr. Charles C. Lever, Sr. Pastor, ext. 273
clever@opmethodist.org

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Robyn Voigt, Director of Pastoral Communications, ext. 273
rvoigt@opmethodist.org
Debbie Frendahl, Director of Finance, ext. 281
dfrendahl@opmethodist.org
Mari Anne Peeples, Director of Congregational Care,
ext. 272; mpeeples@opmethodist.org

EDUCATIONAL STAFF

Ellen Despres, Director of Children and Adult Ministries,
ext. 243; edespres@opmethodist.org
Pat Noonan, Director of Early Education Center, ext. 230
pnoonan@opmethodist.org
Jason Williams, Director of Youth, ext. 282
jwilliams@opmethodist.org
John Thielen, Director of Culinary Services, ext. 235
jthielen@opmethodist.org
Connor Hanks, Facility Manager, ext. 273;
chanks@opmethodist.org

MUSIC STAFF

Nick Despres, Director of Music Ministries, ext. 236
ndespres@opmethodist.org
Ruth Loomis, Music Administrative Assistant, ext. 245
rloomis@opmethodist.org

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

THE DOVE is a faith based publication of Orange Park Methodist Church. It is not a forum for community news, political debate or personal opinion. Submissions are to be made in Microsoft Word attachments sent via email to rvoigt@opmethodist.org. Space is limited. All submissions are subject to available space and are subject to approval and redaction at the sole discretion of the editor.

MAY RECOGNITIONS

ANNIVERSARIES

Donna Dvorak and Rick Schimmel	05/01	6 years
Lowell and Willette Steely	05/01	60 years
Norman and Alisa Jones	05/05	47 years
Billy and Becky Wall	05/07	60 years
Bob and MaryAnn Harvey	05/07	59 years
Grady and Pearl Boles	05/09	56 years
Paul and Debbie Frendahl	05/10	24 years
Steve and Louise Crowe	05/15	16 years
Harold and Robyn Voigt	05/19	36 years
Larry and Dianna Shivertaker	05/20	59 years
Jerry and Mary Cioffi	05/23	56 years
Dave and Diantha Owen	05/23	40 years
Marty and Tonya Wilson	05/23	58 years
Pat and Patrice Dougher	05/24	6 years
Dave and Rachel Harwood	05/24	11 years
Rick and Pam Jacobs	05/25	52 years
Jerry and Molly Sidner	05/26	59 years
Fred Nagle and Samantha King	05/26	25 years
Tony and Alma Quails	05/27	48 years
Bill and Lisa Adams	05/30	45 years

BIRTHDAYS

Charlie Aiken	05/01	Sydney Killian	05/18
Ian Strong	05/01	Ben Pledger	05/18
Ken Johnson	05/02	Leslie Kennedy	05/19
Taylor White	05/02	Blake Griffith	05/19
Alex Mosborg	05/03	Carol Ann Freehafer	05/20
Lillian Andujar	05/03	Tanya McCranie	05/21
Shirley Theurich	05/04	Anna Gardella	05/21
Stephen Adams	05/05	Lynn Tyree	05/23
Deanna Graham	05/05	Dee Unsicker	05/23
Sue Anne Rubright	05/06	Dolores Pierson	05/23
Bill Kennedy	05/06	David Gardella	05/23
Kary Bruce	05/07	Dave Owen	05/23
Chris Schoolfield	05/08	Jason Butacan	05/23
Chandler Cioffi	05/08	Elaine Carden	05/23
Cera Gentry	05/08	Hattie Heyer	05/25
Russ Sessions	05/10	Aaron Turpish	05/25
Max Brooke	05/10	Brooke Tabor	05/26
Jim Pierson	05/11	Connie Killian	05/27
Nancy Mitchell	05/12	Jenny Wagner	05/28
Eddie Dayrit	05/12	Bud Pace	05/28
Tony Quails	05/12	Ron Gebhard	05/29
Marie Bendy	05/13	Marti Frain	05/29
Tom Etherington	05/13	Nerina Berberi	05/29
David Mitchell	05/13	Adelle Crawford	05/29
John Tabor	05/15	Stephanie Wilder	05/30
Tim Barnes	05/15	Larry Shivertaker	05/31
Samantha King	05/15	Alex Turpish	05/31
Andy Manson	05/16	Keira Hernandez	05/31
Michael Moore	05/16	Jada Butacan	05/31
Nicole Strong	05/17		