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## Fun Fall Ministry Ideas

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Ecclesiastes reminds us that *there is a season for everything*. In United Methodist circles the autumn tends to bring a back-to-school, back-to-church routine rich with opportunities for new ministry ideas that engage new audiences.

### Pastors and Pets

Over the past 14 years, the annual Blessing of the Animals has become a beloved tradition at **St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Houston**. People and their pets gather for the festive outdoor worship service, evoking Psalm 98:4: "Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!" Children's choirs lead the singing, and every tweet, meow, and bark is added to the joyful chorus.



Anna Teagarden, Director of **St. Paul's** Children's Music, explains how the service is held on the Sunday nearest the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. "It is a true example of St. Francis' call on all of us to be 'instruments of peace,' as we include and honor all God's creatures in a beautiful and peaceful environment."

Pastors walk through the hodgepodge crowd to lay hands on and bless each animal—whether lizard or dog, cat or hamster. Some children even bring their cherished stuffed animals along for a blessing. Liturgy remains fairly brief for the service, yet many attendees linger long afterward to interact with one another and enjoy the space. **St. Paul's** even encourages participants to make pet food donations to local organizations, such as aniMeals on Wheels or Houston SPCA.

New to the **St. Paul's** clergy this year, Associate Pastor of Congregational Care, Rev. Andrew Wolfe, was excited about this unique worship service he had heard so much about. He finds it meaningful in that, "It gives us a chance to bless the bond between pet and their caregiver and celebrate the relationship that all creation shares with its Creator."

### Bridging to the Community

Rev. Wolfe and others from **St. Paul's** were proactive in inviting the community to the early October event, putting up flyers at nearby libraries, pet stores, and apartments. It was also posted and shared widely as a Facebook Event, boosted by some advertising dollars.

As over 220 humans and critters gathered for Blessing of the Animals, they sang the words of the familiar hymn:



"All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small, All things wise and wonderful, The LORD God made them all."

### Free Fall Festival Performance

Hurricane Harvey displaced Houston Grand Opera's *Opera to Go!* They have been holding rehearsals at **St. Mark's-Pecore**. As a thank you to **St. Mark's**, the Opera is hosting a free performance of *Hansel and Gretel* at the church during its Fall Festival on Saturday, October 14. Wes Landry, **St. Mark's** Director of Music Ministries at has been instrumental in providing Hurricane

Harvey relief efforts with the church and Grand Opera, most recently providing rehearsal space at the church.

"This is a great opportunity for church members to bring friends to the church campus," shares member Lisa Martinson. The free performance of this famous Brothers Grimm fairy tale, *Hansel and Gretel*, will be held in the church Fellowship Hall at 10:30am, featuring music by Engelbert Humperdinck and Libretto by Kate Pogue, full costumes and sets.

### Pumpkins on a Stick

**Cheatham Memorial UMC in Edgewood** is getting noticed for the right reasons this season. The church is hosting a unique pumpkin-themed fundraiser featuring wooden yard art — 47 of which are literally stopping traffic and inspiring calls from across the state. The idea was an inspiration of Bobbi Byford, a church member that Rev. Alan Van Hooser describes as "so creative she has glitter in her footsteps." Selling the wooden pumpkins as a fundraiser for local missions,

**Cheatham** has landed incredible visibility for the church and attention for the annual Fish Fry and Silent Auction event. "My husband and another church member donated the wood and time to cut out 60 pumpkins and sold them to be decorated as a way to give back to the community," shares Bobbi. "This little 'prophet patch' has been tons of fun for a good cause; the top three pumpkin designers will designate their prize money to a nonprofit of their choice." The winners, selected by judges from outside of the county, will be announced at the fundraiser on October 14.



The annual Fish Fry has raised over \$50k over the years for needs within the county via organizations including Child Advocates, Meals on Wheels, the battered women's center. Some of the proceeds fund the Go Packs distributed to feed school children and the "Community Connection" lunches hosted at **Cheatham Memorial** each year.

This colorful display has yielded great exposure for the church and local missions via "shares" on Facebook and the local news. "People are constantly parking and touring our little wooden pumpkin patch," adds Bobbi. "We prayed over these pumpkins and are excited to know that folks are joyful about stepping onto our church campus.



You never know where that might lead.”

**31**  
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