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## Preaching Priority: Midkiff pastoring Beech Grove church for 35 years

By Freddie Bourne McLean County News  
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Pastor Jim Midkiff, of Beech Grove Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), stands Monday inside the church's sanctuary.  
Photo by Freddie Bourne | McLean County News

Jim Midkiff, who has been pastor of Beech Grove Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), just recently celebrated his 35th year with the congregation back in September.

Growing up in Fordsville, Midkiff, 69, was involved with the church early on at Fordsville Christian Church.

"I gave my first three-minute sermon when I was 13," he said.

Midkiff graduated from Fordsville High School in 1971 before getting his degree in agricultural education from Western Kentucky University in 1975 — a field that was close to his heart.

"FFA was really, really important to me," he said. "I was in speaking contests and loved speaking and that sort of thing. My senior year, I was elected district president and then my freshman year at Western, I was state FFA secretary in Kentucky; and that gave me a lot of speaking experience ...."

He also found time to use that experience to continue his work in the church setting when he became a supply minister for about 10 years.

"I preached at Fordsville and Whitesville Christian churches in 1973 during the summer while I was home from school," Midkiff said, "and people kept saying that I was going to be a minister.

“So, I guess next year will actually be my 50th year in ministry.”

However, his love for agriculture was apparent and ended up teaching for four years before going into sales.

But Midkiff said there was an opportunity to be able to still hold on to his other passion.

“...A lot of small churches in Kentucky, especially western Kentucky, couldn't afford a full-time ordained minister,” he said. “So they have this licensing program (and) I was encouraged to do that.”

Midkiff did an interim at Sebree Christian Church in Webster County from 1985 to 1986 and became a licensed lay minister (LLM) in the fall of 1986 before working as a bivocational minister.

He then headed to Beech Grove in 1987.

From the years 1989 to 2001, Midkiff had a co-pastor alongside him while raising his son Jason and daughter Sarah with his wife Cathy while going back to teaching students full-time at Ohio County Middle School.

“There's a lot of bivocational ministers in the Christian churches and it really worked out well,” he said. “My church knew that I had the school responsibilities, my school knew I had the church responsibilities.

“For 23 years, I lived in Owensboro, I taught in Ohio County (and) preached in McLean County.”

“I wanted to teach, but God would never stop putting these supply preaching opportunities in front of me. Being a bivocational minister gave me the opportunity to meet God's call to both professions. ...I was able to help a lot of people.”

After retiring from teaching in 2012, Midkiff stayed in the classroom for another six years as a substitute before becoming the primary caretaker for his father, Noble, a World War II veteran, who recently turned 103.

For Midkiff, he doesn't find that he is leading the charge in Beech Grove alone.

“...I like to think of it as 35 years of joint ministry — not just that I have been preaching there for 35 years,” he said. “The church is super involved and they are ministers just as I am. I just stand in the pulpit on Sunday mornings and preach.

“Our denomination believes in the priesthood of all believers — meaning that we're all ministers; just we have different ministries.

“The role of the laity is as important as the role of the pastor.”

Midkiff said there are 135 members of the church, averaging about 65 to 70 in-person on Sunday mornings with about 40 to 50 tuning in on Facebook.

“We are blessed with about 30 youth — from newborns to high school seniors,” he said.

The church even has a member attending the service via Facebook regularly from the United Kingdom.

But even with his years of experience, Midkiff said it was “a tough two years” when navigating through the height of the coronavirus pandemic.

“We didn’t have an in-person service for over a year,” he said. “I have never worked so hard at preaching than the 18 months that I had to preach online.”

It was during this time that the church committees “became purposely aware that we were all in this together and we had to take care of each other.”

“Through Facebook, through phone calls, through neighboring with each other — we were able to get through,” Midkiff said. “Lots of Zoom calls, ... we had a couple of meal functions where people would drive through and get their meal and get the lawn chair out and social distance out on the church yard and meet that way.

“Everyone was just very cognizant that we had to take care of each other.”

With his golden anniversary on the horizon, Midkiff still has his purpose very well intact.

“Just being able to serve God in a way that He gave me the ability to speak,” he said. “He gave me a compassionate heart. ...God just keeps telling me to do what I can and to serve people.”

And Midkiff feels the church will be in good hands regardless of when he decides to retire and spend more time with his wife and children, his granddaughters Molly and Addison and son-in-law Matthew.

“I don’t tell the church how to run the business of the church. They were successful before I got there; they will be successful once I’m gone,” he said. “The church family at Beech Grove Christian Church is amazing. I’m not sure I would be able to preach at a lot of churches this long. They are kind, compassionate, loving people.

“Over the years, we have laughed together, cried together, and everything in between.

“Authorities will say, keep your distance and don’t get too close to your parishioners, but how can you not after 35 years? They are my church family, and families should care deeply for one another.”

