

BANNER ELK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“We are the Hands of God”

Tucked in Avery County’s small yet largest town, there stands a beautiful old stone church with a shining cross atop a steep roof. This church, Banner Elk Presbyterian, sits in the middle of Lees-McRae College’s campus and is a silent sentry to the passing of time. Its church family is united by God’s love and empowered by the Holy Spirit to worship, serve others and share that love with their own families, their community and their world. Continue reading to learn more about this unique and landmark church with a big heart for all.

“Banner Elk Presbyterian is a ‘roll up your sleeves and go to work church,’” according to Dr. Janet Barton Speer, a long-time church member and Lees-McRae’s Summer Theatre Artistic Director. “Our founder, Rev. Edgar Tufts, used to say that church work is worship. And our work in, and through our church to tell others about God and to help needy people is indeed how we worship,” she said.

Church History

Few churches have as rich, storied and comprehensive history as does Banner Elk Presbyterian.

The church dates its beginning to 1893 when 22 people made their professions of faith in response to the preaching mission of a Presbyterian evangelist, the Rev. Dr. R. P. Pell. For the next few summers, a

By Tim Gardner

young seminary student, Edgar Tufts, assisted in mission activities in a wide mountain area which included Banner Elk. With his encouragement and supervision, the first Presbyterian church building in Banner Elk, said to be one of the prettiest little churches of its kind ever seen, was completed and dedicated in 1896.



Reverend Edgar Tufts

When he graduated from seminary, Rev. Tufts returned to the area and was called to be pastor of Banner Elk Presbyterian Church and four other small churches. As soon as the church was established, its work extended to include several outreach locations, including Beech Mountain, Pigeon Roost, Hanging Rock Chapel, and an active Sunday school at the foot of Bald Mountain which was later to become Arbor Dale Presbyterian Church.

Blowing Rock, Cove Creek, Pineola, Boone Fork, Linville, Newland, Blevins Creek and Hanging Rock all had churches or mission outposts created, in part, through the energy of Edgar Tufts.

As church membership grew, Tufts shared his dream of building a church of native stone in Banner Elk. Many of the local mountain men were skilled in stone-craft, but rockwork previously had been used only for chimneys and foundations.

Rev. Tufts mobilized the community to help build the church out of native river rock. Nowhere in the immediate area had the beautiful and plentiful native stone

Photography By Tara Diamond

Banner Elk Presbyterian Church in 2019 with its shining cross atop its steep roof. Many observers say the church is not only one of the most beautiful in the North Carolina High Country, but also anywhere on Earth. For scenery and charm, it cannot be surpassed.

been used for an entire building. The congregation was said to be small in number and material wealth, but great in faith and dedication. Offers for materials and labor came from many sources, and much work went into raising funds to purchase property and begin construction in 1912.

Stories are still told of the community spirit which developed as local men of

all denominations assisted in the church construction, coming together each Saturday to help with the “new” idea of using native stone, instead of wood, to construct the building. Men and older boys would haul loads of big rocks in their wagons, often pulled by oxen. Children, including those who lived at Grandfather Home, carried water and collected piles of small rocks to be used in the cement. The

children, knowing they were assisting in important work, also found creative ways to earn and save pennies for purchasing two small stained glass windows which were built into the front wall of the sanctuary.

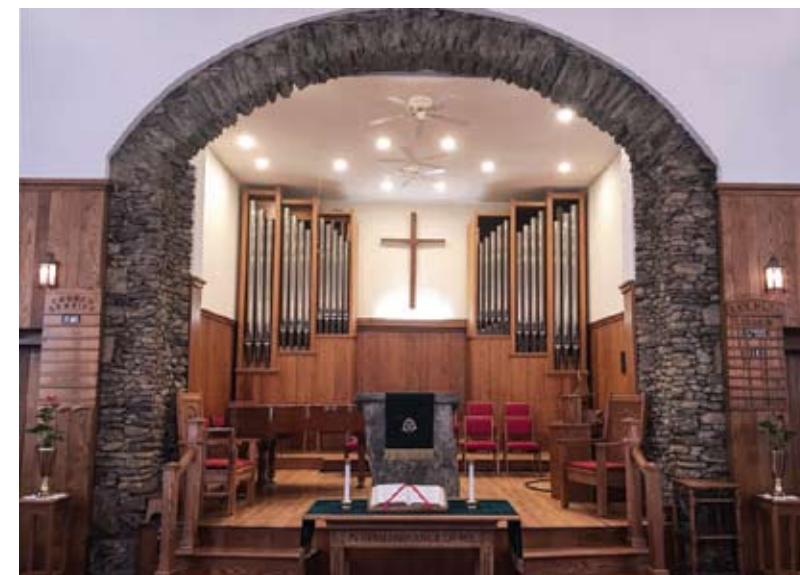
Each week, women brought picnic baskets of food to feed the workers and generously contributed their energy and talents to help. Building the church



Left - Banner Elk’s first Presbyterian church shown in 1896. Right - The stone church as built in 1915 across the street from the first church. The stone building was finished in 1914, complete with stained glass windows, the first that many people had ever seen.



Above - A bronze marker near the church’s entrance proclaims that it was organized in 1893, the current building constructed from 1912 to 1915 ‘By The Grace of God’ and under the leadership of Rev. Edgar Tufts, Pastor and Dr. W.C. Tate, Treasurer. Right - The Christian cross is the center focal point of the Banner Elk Presbyterian Church’s chancel.



became a community event as many eagerly assisted. The stone building was finished in 1914, complete with beautiful stained glass windows, the first that many had ever seen.

Fast forward several years: Under the auspices of Banner Elk Presbyterian Church and with the constant ability of Rev. Tufts to recognize and respond to need, Lees-McRae Institute (now Lees-McRae College), Grandfather Orphanage (Grandfather Home for Children), Grace Hospital (now Cannon Memorial Hospital) were established.

Jim Swinkola, another area resident and a Banner Elk Presbyterian Church member since 1983, echoed similar sentiments to Dr. Speer's about Rev. Tufts. "It's obvious that Rev. Tufts was a great visionary," Swinkola noted. "He had a keen ability to draw people to him and ensure that when things needed done, they got done and were organized and managed in the proper way. His contributions to the church and the town are monumental."

The church in more modern times has continued to recognize need and be an incubator for new and growing missions, including the birth of the program now known as Yellow Mountain Enterprises, the early incarnation of Habitat for Humanity, and part of the early foundation of Feeding Avery Families.

"Rev. Tufts felt like a church was the hub of a community and that it could help get so many needed businesses and happenings in the Town of Banner Elk. And he was right as it did just that," noted Dr. Speer.

Throughout the years, the original stone church building has been enlarged and renovated many times as the congregation has sought to meet ever-changing needs. The sanctuary was remodeled extensively during the 1940s, the educational building added in the 1950s and the fellowship hall and kitchen have undergone many upgrades with the most recent one in 2013. In 2003, a major expansion and renovation also was completed throughout the building to provide additional classrooms and offices.

In 2016 the church purchased a large nearby plot of land, and in 2017 completed the construction of a much-needed parking lot, filled to capacity on summer Sundays, and offered during the school year as able to Lees-McRae students. The new parking area permitted the repurposing of another small parking area behind the church into a modern preschool playground.



The sheer beauty and mystique of the Banner Elk Presbyterian sanctuary is evident in this magnificent panoramic view at the beginning of a winter worship service.

Also located on the church grounds and adjacent to Lees-McRae is a columbarium known as The Dwelling Place. The granite units match the color and character of the church building and surrounding rock structures. Each occupied niche is marked with an inscribed bronze memorial plaque.

In the center of a memorial garden is a rock planter over which the "scattering of ashes" may be performed when preferred. A bronze tablet memorializes the names of those scattered. A second tablet located at the archway entrance is available to honor and memorialize those buried elsewhere. Additional units may be added around the raised garden of wildflowers, creating a cloistered place with a vista of the mountains.

The Historic Stone Pulpit

Over a century ago, a most unusual and long-lasting gift was given by a Methodist minister to a Presbyterian minister. The story goes like this: On the east side of Beech Mountain, in a village called Rominger, there lived a "circuit rider" preacher. This Methodist minister preached at the Piney Grove Church near his home. He also ministered to neighboring village churches and to many rural families within a day's horseback ride. He was always on call, day or night, when sickness or some other need arose among his parishioners. This Methodist minister, Wesley Smith Rominger, and his family had lived several years in the area, thus the name given to the village.

Rev. Rominger was a small man, who had difficulty mounting his horse. So, each time he needed to travel, he led his horse to an enormous rock, stepped up on the rock and mounted with ease and rode to his destination.

Rev. Tufts' responsibilities and duties were similar to those of Rev. Rominger, and he also traveled on horseback to Blowing Rock and Cove Creek to preach, or to one of the many families throughout Avery and Watauga counties who called upon him

for help. The paths of these two preachers crossed on many occasions and they became friends. On a visit to Rev. Rominger's home, Rev. Tufts saw the giant rock. It was about as high as his head and as wide as his shoulders. The rock stood upright and alone, reminding him of a pulpit. He thought it would be an appropriate and attractive one for the new church at Banner Elk. Rev. Rominger agreed. He not only donated the stone to Rev. Tufts and the new church, but also had it delivered.

The large stone was loaded on a sled and pulled by a yoke of oxen over the up-and-down, curving Laurel Creek road all the way from Rominger to Banner Elk—eight miles. The trip was slow. It probably took the whole day to make the trip with such a heavy load. Perhaps with the assistance of other local men, those who delivered the huge rock were Rev. Rominger's youngest son, Coy Rominger, and his older grandsons, Charlie, Clyde and Grady Rominger. The latter three are brothers of Howard Rominger, who provided details of this occurrence.

Due to the size of the stone, the placement in the church was difficult. The large stone was set in concrete on the ground under the new church and the sanctuary's platform was built around it. A smooth, rock slab was placed on the top for a more level surface and to hold a Bible. This sturdy, solid rock will forever be an



One of many historic and distinguishing features of Banner Elk Presbyterian is the iconic stone pulpit around which the church was built.



Above - The church's long-time music director Diane Rydell plays a hymn on the organ. Left - Winter choir members make music an important part of the church's worship service.

inspirational symbol of man's giving, for the love of God and His church.

Pipe Organ

Another popular feature at Banner Elk Presbyterian is its pipe organ. A fairly recent addition to the church, it was installed in 1993 and dedicated "to the glory of God and in memory of Reverend Edgar Tufts."

The organ was designed by George L. Payne, President and Tonal Director of Lewis&Hitchcock, Inc. Two concepts became important as Payne worked with the church organ committee. The cross was to remain the focus of the chancel. Payne designed two freestanding organ cases, oriented to draw the eye to the center of the chancel. These cases contain all the pipe work and are structured so that most of the sound passes through the archway into the sanctuary. The other concept was to have the organ match the other church furnishings: no easy task. But Payne located enough chestnut lumber with which to build the cases. The finish was matched carefully



The breath-taking, majestic and towering stained glass windows add a special splash of color and unyielding reverence to the Banner Elk Presbyterian sanctuary. Photos by Tara Diamond

to its surroundings, resulting in a compact organ that looks as though it has always been there.

Swinkola told this most interesting story about the pipe organ and how it was provided for the church:

"Banner Elk Presbyterian Church benefits from the superb pipe organ that adds a special element to our music program. But that was not always the case. In the early 1990s, it was determined that

the existing organ needed to be replaced. A committee was formed to study the question of acquiring an organ that could be used for decades to come. The choices were to replace the existing organ or upgrade to a pipe organ. A pipe organ felt like a dream. Could such a large amount of funds be raised from the church family? The ensuing discussion was endless.

"Finally, one member in the congregation gifted \$50.00 for a pipe organ, hoping the gift would inspire others. However, pipe organ fund raising didn't reach its goal, and the \$50.00 donor was asked to remove the pipe organ restriction, so the funds could be used to purchase the smaller organ.

"The donor declined, believing that the church was ready for and would benefit from a pipe organ. A large, anonymous donation unexpectedly came forth and was added to many smaller gifts. The end result was that a magnificent pipe organ was installed and is still one of the most prominent furnishings in the church."



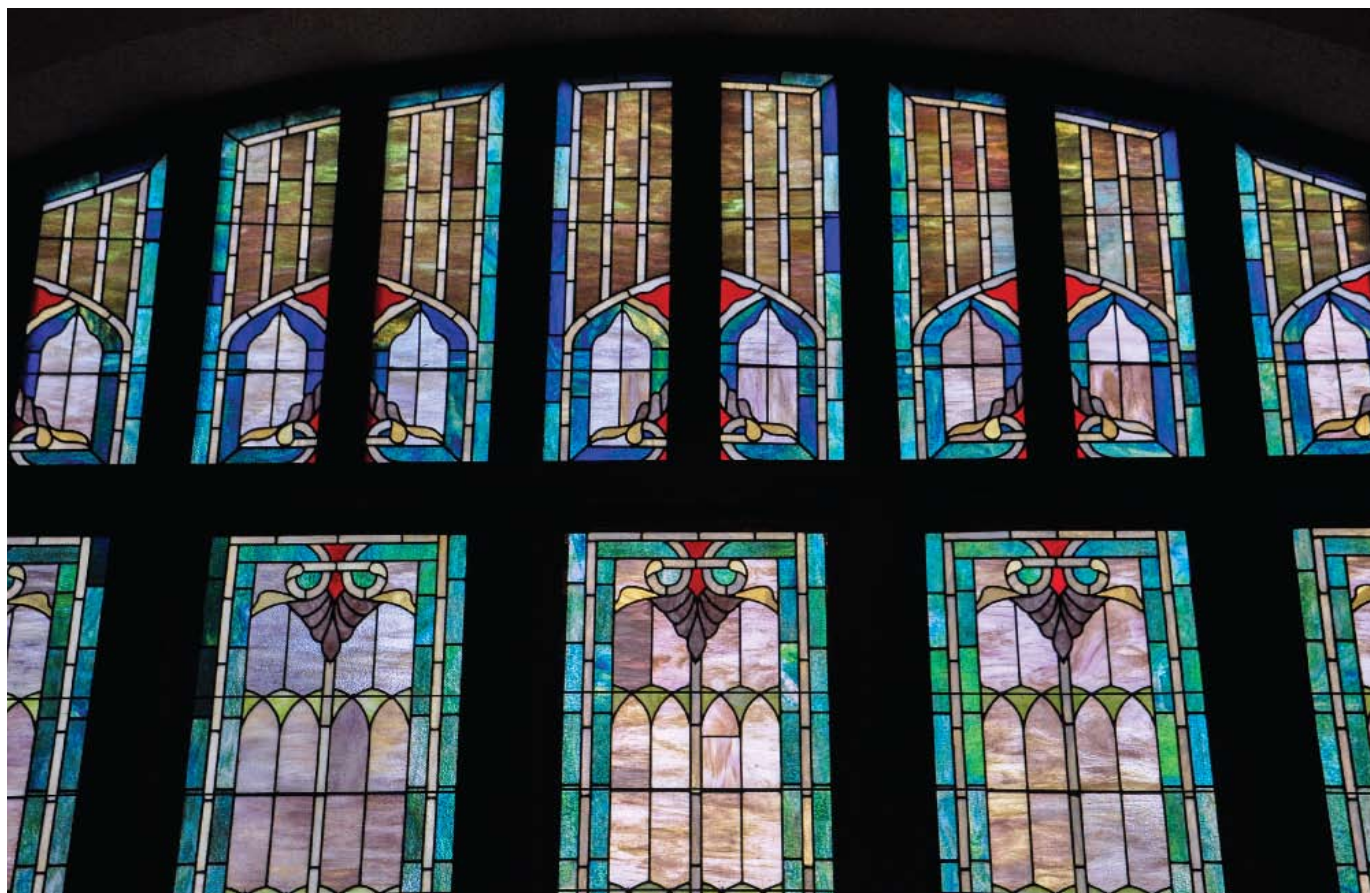
Left - Church Beadle Bill Cocke delivers the Bible to the front of the sanctuary during the Kirkin' O' The Tartans program, an almost-Scottish-American tradition, generally considered a rededication of clans and others to God's service.

Right - The Blessing of The Tartans concludes the annual Kirkin' O' The Tartans.

Kirkin' O' The Tartans - The History Behind It

A unique and special program held at Banner Elk Presbyterian is the Kirkin' O' The Tartans, an almost-Scottish-American tradition, generally considered a rededication (of clans and others) to God's service. Of the estimated 28 million folks around the world who claim Scots ancestry, North Carolina has the largest settlement of Scots, and large numbers are still right here, including many in the North Carolina High Country.

On this Sunday, worship begins as the piper plays from the rear of the church and the Beadle (a church official) delivers the Bible to the front of the sanctuary. Then the piper processes to the front, and two members of a color guard deliver the United States flag and the flag of Saint Andrews. Tartan bearers of the Scottish clans unfurl their banners and process down the aisles to the swirl of bagpipes. The tartan bearers, many wearing kilts, place their banners against the front of the church and are seated.



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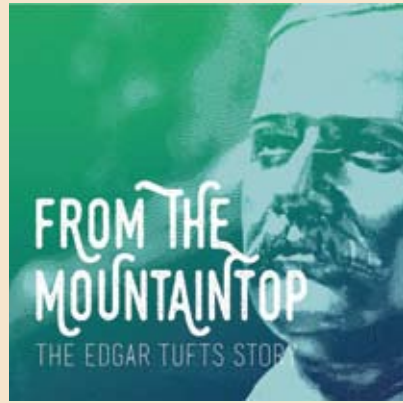
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Lees-McRae College's Theatre Play: From the Mountaintop - The Edgar Tufts Story

The 2019 Lees-McRae Summer Theatre season will feature a production that celebrates local heritage—From the Mountaintop - The Edgar Tufts Story. The musical, written by Dr. Janet Barton Speer, with songs and lyrics by John Thomas and Tommy Oaks, (composer and lyricist) is the story of Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Edgar Tufts, who first came to the region in the late 1800s to organize a church. Reverend Tufts' love and admiration for mountain people called him back to an extraordinary life of service that forever



Bronze statue of Rev. Edgar Tufts on the Lees-McRae College campus

changed the complexion of the area. With remarkable purpose, Tufts founded a number of institutions in Banner Elk: the Banner Elk Presbyterian Church, Lees-McRae College, Cannon Memorial Hospital (later consolidated with Sloop Memorial Hospital and relocated to nearby Linville) and Grandfather Home for Children.

The play follows Reverend Tufts from his earliest struggles as a motherless teenager, through his hardships and ultimate triumphs in

Tufts established an orphanage and a hospital in Banner Elk.

In addition to the show, the Town of Banner Elk and the institutions Reverend Tufts founded there will celebrate his life in a variety of ways. Performance From the Mountaintop - The Edgar Tufts Story will be held July 11–17 in the Hayes Auditorium and the Broyhill Theatre on the Lees-McRae College campus. Learn more about the show by logging online at lmc.edu/summertheatre.



Dr. Janet Barton Speer

Banner Elk. They will see how the church grew from a small wooden structure to the present building, with locally harvested stones and ornate stained glass windows. Reverend Tufts' story continues to the college's beginnings as "fireside readings" before becoming a school for young mountain women whose chances at success were minimal without an education. Audiences will see Reverend Tufts' heart torn apart by the abandonment and mistreatment of children and other people suffering who needed, but did not have medical attention. As a result, Reverend

Regular elements of the church service follow, until the end of the hour. At that point, the banners are retrieved, presented to receive the official Blessing O' The Tartans, and recess from the church, again to the sound of the pipes.

Not Just a Preacher, But Also a Pastor

Known for his friendly and genuine demeanor as well as his extensive knowledge of the Bible, Rev. Feild Russell has been Banner Elk Presbyterian Church's pastor since 2012. After graduating from Hampden-Sydney College and Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA, Rev. Russell served as an installed pastor or co-pastor at churches in Pennsylvania, Virginia and Valdese, NC.

When one of his flock or anyone else he finds out about needs help or comforting, Rev. Russell is always there. He is very much in step with the principles of the Golden Rule, and steadfastly believes that we all are our brother's and sister's keeper.

And while he appreciates the fundamental tenets of the scriptures, Rev. Russell is not too rigid as he follows Biblical teachings that because The Almighty

forgives, humans should do the same.

At the close of a worship service in the fall of 2014, Banner Elk Presbyterian's congregation joyfully witnessed the marriage of Rev. Russell and long-time



Rev. Feild Russell the church's pastor since 2012 leads a recent worship service.

Banner Elk Presbyterian Church member Laura Banner Carringer. Laura has two children (Hogan and Amanda), from a previous marriage, as does Rev. Russell, Kate and Anna, whose mother, Rev. Jenny Russell, passed away unexpectedly shortly after Rev. Feild Russell began serving Banner Elk Presbyterian as interim pastor.

Rev. Russell, who also is a member of the Lees-McRae College Board of Trustees, is elated about his pastorate at Banner Elk Presbyterian.

"I'm so excited because everyone who attends the church is together as family, receiving blessings, meeting challenges, and encouraging one another as heirs of God's grace through Christ and recipients of the Holy Spirit's power. Life and ministry among God's children is filled with meaning and delight," he declared.

"Our church members always find ways to get things done, year-after-year. Our flock wants to help, bless and share God with others as much as any church I've ever witnessed," he said. "And as a result, God is honoring them and our church in a wonderful way."

Besides Rev. Russell, Banner Elk Presbyterian has various other church officials and staff members. Its elders

Ministries, Missions and Charities Banner Elk Presbyterian Church Supports

Local

Reaching Avery Ministry (RAM)

Banner Elk Presbyterian members consistently support the work of this local agency. RAM consists of a food pantry and thrift shop. Gifts of food, good used clothing, household items and money are contributed to assist those in need in this area. Items always in need are soups, canned vegetables and fruits, meat substitutes (ravioli, hash, etc.) and disposable diapers. These items can be left in the box in the office vestibule of the church at any time.

Banner Elk Presbyterian also supports these other programs coordinated through RAM:

*Thanksgiving Food Boxes

This provides a way for members to assist families who are identified by RAM as being in need of food for a Thanksgiving meal. The church supplies frozen turkeys; individuals donate and pack generous boxes of food items not just for the one meal, but for several days.

*Avery Project Christmas

Donations of toys, gifts and money are given by members to RAM, which coordinates a program to help selected, needy families at Christmas. A "store" is set up for two days so that parents can select and wrap gifts for their children at no charge.

*"It's Time for a Change"

Outreach Committee members work with RAM to help provide diapers and powdered formula for low income young families who cannot afford these items. The request is for diapers that will fit babies of 15 pounds or larger. Those interested can help by purchasing disposable diapers and /or powdered infant formula or by submitting donations to Banner Elk Presbyterian Church with the notation "It's Time for a Change."

Feeding Avery Families

This ministry provides weekly distribution of food to those in need in Avery County. The church congregation provides donations of food items, funding and volunteers to make this program work. Besides food donations from Manna Food Bank in Asheville, local grocery stores, especially Food Lion and Lowes Foods, generously and regularly give items such as meats, bakery, and canned goods.

Habitat for Humanity

Approximately two homes each year are built in partnership with the families who will own and live in them. Volunteers from the church work regularly to advance the goal of providing affordable housing for those who qualify. Each spring, some women from Banner Elk Presbyterian participate in a National "Women Build Day."

Yellow Mountain Enterprises

This program, begun in 1980 in Banner Elk Presbyterian's basement, provides vocational, residential, social and support services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They provide a variety of work and living opportunities, scaled to the abilities of each client, believing that all people deserve the chance to lead productive lives and to earn a paycheck. A thrift store provides work opportunities and receives donations of clothing, furniture and household goods. Yellow Mountain programs are located in Newland.

New Opportunity School for Women (NOSW)

Operating in conjunction with Lees-McRae College, NOSW provides education, counseling and mentoring for women from this region. These services help improve career and social skills, thus benefiting both the women and their families.

Lees-McRae College

Lees-McRae College has enjoyed a long relationship with generations of members of this congregation for over 100 years. The church's outreach to students takes several forms including providing service opportunities for Presbyterian Scholars, organizing an outdoor worship

service to begin the school year and preparing and serving spaghetti suppers to students prior to exams at the end of each semester.

Rob Clemmer Benevolence Fund

The Rob Clemmer Benevolence Fund exists to assist people with housing related needs and other emergency situations, including ongoing needs such as rent, utilities, transportation and health issues as well as other crisis assistance.

This fund is named after a former staff member and church member who for years oversaw the distribution of benevolent dollars and ministries of the church, doing so with a compassion and love that epitomized the mission of the church. The Rob Clemmer Benevolence Fund is supported mostly through special gifts from church members and friends.

Blue Ridge Partnership for Children

This organization began in 1993 as a public-private partnership which continues as a merged entity with Avery, Mitchell and Yancey counties, staffing an office in Newland. It provides age-appropriate programs, assistance and funds to families of children who are under five years of age with the hope that these children will be better prepared to begin school ready to learn.

SCOTTIE Bus

SCOTTIE is a mobile pre-school classroom, staffed by a certified teacher, which delivers educational opportunities for young children in Avery County who are unable to participate in traditional programs. It's funded as a part of the Avery County School system, with additional help from private donors.

OASIS

Providing both emergency and non-emergency assistance to victims of domestic abuse, OASIS has been in existence since the 1980's. The church provides financial and volunteer assistance, as well as contributions of needed products.

Volunteer Avery County

Volunteer Avery County provides emergency food, fuel and funds to those struggling with poverty. This program seeks to help people who have fallen through the holes in our system's safety net. Among many other varied services, the program also coordinates construction of handicap access ramps for those in need.

Grandfather Home for Children

This 100-year-old ministry, founded by Reverend Edgar Tufts during the same era as the beginning of our church, continues to provide both residential and non-residential support, counseling and treatment for abused children from across North Carolina.

Missions Committee Discretionary Fund

This fund is designed to provide flexibility within the budget structure to deal with unanticipated mission outreach needs.

The committee oversees its benevolence and outreach programs, continuously educating the members of its congregation about its activities and the opportunities available for service to others. School student grants, disaster relief, support of the church's sister church in Guatemala are some committee recipients.

National and Global Missions

Presbytery of Western NC

The office for our Presbytery is located in Morganton, NC. Eighty-five percent of the funds given to Presbytery remain with the Presbytery for its work in Western North Carolina; 1.4 percent is forwarded to the Synod of our region and 13.6 percent goes to the General Assembly, the governing body for the Presbyterian Church USA.



All Kids Need a Little Help, a Little Hope and Someone Who Believes in Them.



Contact Madison Cornwell at 828-406-2424 to learn more about Grandfather Home.

2019 LEES-McRAE SUMMER THEATRE

Mamma Mia!
June 27–July 3

From the Mountaintop:
The Edgar Tufts Story
July 11–17

Newsies
June 30–August 4

HAYES AUDITORIUM
BROYHILL THEATRE

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include: Bill Ferguson, Murry Haber, Travis Henley, Nancy Owen, Steve Hill, Carol Larson, Debi Tornow, Mae Weed, Connie Addison, Bob Blalock, Lyndsay Ennis and Bob Todd. Susan Carter serves as the church's clerk of session.

Rev. Russell is amply assisted in the many daily church functions by an efficient staff, including: Alisa Ballard, office administrator; Diane Rydell, director of music; Dedy Traver, office manager; A.C. Marriott, children/youth coordinator and pre-school director; Mary Whiteacre, youth leader; and Margaret Trivette, housekeeper.

Current Congregation

In this early part of the twenty-first century, Banner Elk Presbyterian's congregation finds itself growing and consisting of both full-time and affiliate members, who are actively engaged in fulfilling the roles of the church. Visitors to the church have often commented about how welcomed they are made to feel.

Increasingly, the lovely and scenic area of the North Carolina High Country attracts numerous seasonal residents and vacationers whose attendance and support greatly enhance the church family and its service to others. Long-time residents and newcomers from diverse faith traditions unite in spirit and dedicated commitment to Banner Elk Presbyterian's mission to call all people to a personal acceptance of and a growing relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Seasonal resident Mary Dickinson commented that she and her husband, Chuck, of Germantown, TN, thoroughly like attending the church. "When we entered Banner Elk Presbyterian for the first time twelve years ago, we felt like the words of the hymn 'Surely the Presence of the Lord is in this place.' We are now members and active in the church during the five months we live in Banner Elk each year," she said.

Another seasonal resident, Mark Polderman of New Smyrna Beach FL, who attends the church with his wife, Pat, shared similar remarks. "As summer residents of Sugar Mountain for the past sixteen years, we have enjoyed being affiliate members of Banner Elk Presbyterian Church," he noted. "Friendship of the parishioners, inspiring sermons, a meaningful service and a wonderful men's choir, combine to have us look forward to the first service every Sunday when we are in the area."

Additionally, seasonal resident Betsy Godbold of St. Petersburg, FL, offered the following comment on behalf of herself and her husband Bo, concerning their feelings about attending Banner Elk Presbyterian: "We love doing so and every Sunday we attend there starts our week off on the right track."

The latest figure from the 2018 church statistical report shows that the church has 196



Banner Elk Presbyterian Church has a highly-professional and efficient support staff, which includes (left-to-right) Office Administrator Alisa Ballard, Administrative Assistant Dedy Traver and Director of Music Diane Rydell.



Rev. Feild Russell and church member Jim Swinkola during a meeting at the church offices. "Our church members always find ways to get things done, year-after-year," says Rev. Russell. Photos by Tara Diamond



Quilters Luana Anderson (left) and Martha Burns (right) show off one of the amazing pieces of work they helped construct. The church has two ladies groups-The Comfort Makers and the Prayer Shawl Group- which make comforters and shawl, lap robe or hug rugs, respectively, for anyone who might appreciate receiving such a gift of love, concern and remembrance.

Guatemalan Partnership

Since 1996, our church has been in a covenant relationship with Arca de Noe, a small, rural church in Guatemala, as part of a larger partnership relationship between our presbytery and two presbyteries in Guatemala. Members of the Banner Elk congregation have visited regularly, providing assistance with education, housing, drinking water and simply deepening the relationship. Additional monies support educational scholarships totaling \$5,000 to \$10,000 per year.

One Great Hour of Sharing

This special offering supports Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the Presbyterian Hunger Program and the Self Development of People program, all coordinated by the General Assembly.

Nickel-a-Meal

The last Sunday of every month, a special offering is collected to help alleviate hunger in the presbytery, locally, regionally and internationally. Families bring in their pennies and loose change that they put into a canister at meal time, remembering those who do not have food.

Souper Bowl of Caring

Taken on the Sunday of professional football's Super Bowl, this special offering is used to alleviate hunger locally and throughout the world. Each year, young people help collect funds at the end of worship. All funds are matched by the Presbytery's Hunger Committee to increase the impact on local hunger needs, given to RAM for their use in Avery County.

Christmas Joy Offering

This annual offering is part of the Presbyterian Advent tradition and helps provide assistance to PCUSA church workers and their families at times of significant financial need. Part of this offering also goes to Presbyterian-affiliated racial-ethnic schools and colleges.

English Language Institute of China

Banner Elk Presbyterian is a financial partner with Gordon Causby, a child of our church, and his wife Hui, who serve in a non-profit organization that teaches English in Asian universities, building relationships, one student at a time.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance

When natural or human-caused disasters impact communities, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) is poised to respond and work closely with congregations and local mission partners to bring Christ's love and healing. Often PDA is among the first to respond to disasters worldwide and that support remains in place long after other groups have departed.

In-House Ministries

Comfort Makers

The Comfort Makers piece together comforters for those who can use a lovely, warm blanket. Dozens of women have worked on these beautiful creations over the years, unique in design and colors. All are made from fabric contributed by members and church friends. They may be given to Reaching Avery Ministry (RAM), to new Habitat home-owners, and sometimes to a person who is ill or alone or who might just need a gift of love. More than 350 comforters have been distributed since the group began in 1990.

Prayer Shawl Ministry

The Prayer Shawl Group consists of women who enjoy a time of fellowship while creating beautiful, useful items for anyone who might appreciate receiving such a gift of love, concern and remembrance. Each shawl, lap robe or hug rug is dedicated with prayer and symbolizes not only the warmth and caring of friends, but also represents our being surrounded by God's love. Members of this talented group knit, crochet and weave to fashion their creations.

Shepherd Program

The Shepherd Program is a means of helping nurture, encourage and support members of the church family. Two people volunteer each month as Shepherds. Working closely with the pastor, they seek to convey God's love and our church's concern in ways they think will be helpful. This ministry may include phone calls, notes or cards, visits or gifts of food during times of celebration, illness, stressful family situations or bereavement.

The Freezer Campaign

Banner Elk Presbyterian has a freezer that is set aside solely to freeze meals that can go to recipients who need them. Anytime there is someone who needs a meal, members feel free to "raid the freezer" to provide.

The Meal Train

This is an online program that organizes and reminds others of the opportunities to serve meals to those who need them. Meal Train members can sign up for a date to take a meal to a recipient, with information about where that person lives, special food requirements and other pertinent information.

Prayer Ministry

The Prayer Ministry Team is comprised of dedicated, discerning individuals praying daily not only for church and world-wide concerns, but also for every church member throughout the year.

Walking with Shadows

Walking with Shadows is a support group that meets to discuss, share resources and discover new ways of coping with family and friends who have mental challenges. This subject is seldom discussed but mightily felt and should be addressed by people of faith. An important part of the group is to find ways that members can place themselves in a healthy mental state so they can better serve their loved one.



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(828) 963-8233

active members.

Rev. Russell said the church's average Sunday morning attendance is 110 during the winter and spring months and approximately 270 in the summer and fall months. He added that two Sunday morning services have to be held during the latter time periods to accommodate the large crowds when seasonal residents are back in the area.

Work With Many Ministries, Missions and Charities

The Banner Elk Presbyterian flock has a deep compassion for others --especially those less fortunate. The church helps a multitude of worthwhile

causes on local, regional, state, national and international levels with their prayers, service and participation, as well as financial assistance.

In the church's 2019 over-all budget, some 15.86 percent has been set aside to be used for benevolences and mission work.

The list of various ministries, missions and charities Banner Elk Presbyterian Church supports or sponsors is seemingly endless. Local ones include: Reaching Avery Ministry (also RAM-sponsored Food Boxes, Avery Project Christmas and It's Time For a Change), Feeding Avery Families, Habitat for Humanity, Yellow Mountain Enterprises, New Opportunity School for Women, Lees-McRae College, Blue Ridge Partnership for Children, SCOTTIE bus, OASIS, Volunteer Avery County, Children's Hope Alliance, and the church's own Rob Clemmer Benevolence and Missions Committee Discretionary Funds

National and Global Missions supported by Banner Elk Presbyterian are: Presbytery of Western NC, Guatemalan Partnership, One Great Hour of Sharing, Nickel-a-Meal, Souper Bowl of Caring, Christmas Joy Offering, English Language Institute of China and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

And the church's in-house ministries include: Comfort Makers, Prayer Shawl Ministry, Shepherd Program, The Freezer Campaign, The Meal Train, Prayer Ministry, Stephen Ministry, Walking with Shadows and The Permanent Funds Ministry.

Swinkola commented about helping others through so many different means: "Banner Elk Presbyterian has been rewarding for me, spiritually. This church has found the sweet spot balancing faith and works. The congregation not only studies scripture, but also takes action. The financial support of benevolences is sweetened by good works that directly impact the well-being of people."



The SONshine Playground is a favorite activity center for children who are students in the church's Pre-School, an outreach program for the Banner Elk community and adjacent area that provides developmentally appropriate Christian Education for those enrolled.



The Dwelling Place columbarium at Banner Elk Presbyterian provides niches for ashes and a rock planter over which the "scattering of ashes" may be performed when preferred.

Carter, whose membership in Banner Elk Presbyterian is the longest of any current member, added: "Our church makes a difference in people's lives through our sharing of God's word and our efforts to bless and help others. One of the most lasting and rewarding ways we do so is through our outreach work to help those in need. It's the difference we're making that makes me so proud to be one of the church's members."

Banner Elk Presbyterian Pre-School

The church operates a pre-school for two, three and four year-olds. This outreach program for the Banner Elk community



Left - Libby and June enjoying a book in the 4-year-old's reading center in the church's Pre-School.



Right - Alden, Riley and Jasper exploring with counting manipulatives in the 4-year-old's classroom. Photos by Tara Diamond

and adjacent area provides developmentally appropriate Christian education for the children enrolled.

Held in the church's classrooms, the pre-school runs from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Its foremost goal is to provide for the intellectual, emotional, physical, social and spiritual developments of its students through creative means.

At the start of this year, the pre-school had 28 students.

For more information about enrolling a child in the pre-school, which is known for its modest and reasonable tuition rate, visit the pre-school or phone its office at: (828) 897-1467.

Besides Marriott, who also serves as three-year-olds lead teacher, the pre-school staff includes: Kerri Ledford, four-year-olds lead teacher; Lucy Corning, three-year-olds teacher assistant; and Marti Dodd, two-year-olds teacher assistant.

Summation

Small town churches provide a fascination to many. The folk who worship there truly are the salt of the earth. Classic examples of both can be found at Banner Elk Presbyterian Church.

It's been said that a church is only a church if its members love God and all his children, and help others. Banner Elk Presbyterian IS a church.

"My paternal grandfather, Dr. W.C. Tate,



A.C. Marriott, Church Pre-School Director and Eastin focusing on math and cognitive skills during a patterning activity.



Tiffany Ledford, Assistant Director and Two-year Olds Lead Teacher at the Banner Elk Presbyterian Pre-School, preparing her students Lucy and Eloise for Kindergarten classes.

said that he had rather see a church 'Wear down than to rust down.' What he meant was he liked witnessing a church being used for God and for the benefit of others

rather than neither happening. Our church will never rust down from either not happening," Carter succinctly stated.

Banner Elk Presbyterian's flock extends a special invitation to all who will to attend its services or programs. Regular worship service is held every Sunday at 11:00 a.m. during the winter and spring months with an additional 8:30 a.m. worship service in the summer and fall months. Adult Sunday School commences at 9:30 a.m. and pre-school, middle school and high school Sunday School classes start at 10:00 a.m. The church is equipped with a T-Coil Hearing Loop system for hearing aid users. Many hearing aids have a special setting that connects directly to such systems.

For further information about the church and its many functions, write: Banner Elk Presbyterian Church, 420 College Drive, Banner Elk, NC 28604; email (bepreschurch@skybest.com); phone (828) 898-5406; or visit its online web site (bannerelkpresbyterian.org). ♦

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