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Methodist preacher and wife welcome everyone to church



Pastor Alex Christian and his wife Velma Christian say First United Methodist Church of Chiefland has open doors and no boundaries. Everyone is welcome in the church.

Story and Photo

By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 9, 2017 at 9:07 p.m.

CHIEFLAND -- The new pastor at First United Methodist Church of Chiefland welcomes everyone to worship God at the church located at 707 N. Main St. (U.S. Highway 19) in Chiefland.

Pastor Alex Christian and his wife Velma Christian spent some time Tuesday (Aug. 8) introducing themselves to those who do not know them yet.

Pastor Christian began at the church on July 2. Worship services are each Sunday at 10:15 a.m. in the sanctuary. Sunday school is each Sunday at 9 a.m. in various meeting rooms on the ground.

The United Methodist Church is known for its slogan "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors."

Alex and Velma were married in February of 2002 in Las Vegas.

Pastor Christian was born in Montreal, Canada. He was raised for his first six years of life in orphanages. He was adopted and resided in New Jersey after that.

"I went through a turbulent youth and childhood," he said, "and lots of different experiences. And God helped me through all of those things.

Before coming to Chiefland, he was an assistant pastor at First United Methodist Church of Kissimmee for two and a half years, before serving for two years in two Baptist churches in Palm Bay.

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Pastor Christian and Ms. Christian are excited and thrilled to be in Chiefland, he said.

His vision of the church is “a church without walls,” which is part of the “Open Doors” of the United Methodist Church. Pastor Christian wants everyone to know that all people are welcome to First United Methodist Church of Chiefland.

There are no barriers stopping any person from coming to First United Methodist Church of Chiefland, he said.

Everyone is welcome – no matter whom they are, no matter what they have done. It does not matter what they wear or what they look like, he said. The pastor said this is how God welcomes all people.

“Our mission is not just to love all people inside the walls of the church or during the church service,” he continued. “We are to do that outside – seven-days-a-week.”

Pastor Christian said this can be shown through the several ministries of the church, and in its community-oriented events such as the recent Epic End of Summer Bash.

This is his question, “How can we reach people with God’s love?”

There are many broken people, even within the walls of the church, he said.

“God is working on us with His grace and love,” Pastor Christian said. “So we want all people to understand that and connect with that. Sometimes people are not aware, where God is working already in their lives.”

He reaches out to people, the pastor said.

He wants this church to help meet the physical needs and the spiritual needs of people.

Pastor Christian wants Christians to show their belief.

“Thelma and I will identify ourselves as followers of Jesus,” he said, “because sometimes Christianity has a connotation other than to follow Jesus. Do what He did in His life, being like Jesus; growing into that.

“Help other people to know what Jesus is by the way we live our life,” he continued. “You know God called from the early days of the Old Testament for God’s people to be there in a relationship with God, but also to be in a relationship with each other – looking out for the widows, the orphans, those who are broken and hurting.”

Building authentic relationships on a face-to-face level with each other is important in today’s world, he said, where often those relationships are superficial.

Be an example to all people, he said, by showing the love, faith and hope that can be shown each day in actions with each other.

No person does this perfectly, he added. Each person, himself included, is a work in progress.

“I am amazed and reminded on a daily basis of my weakness,” he said. “How God can use someone like me, with all of my wrinkles and warts, and imperfections. But that is how God is glorified.”

He wants everyone to know, regardless of where they are in their relationship with God (even if they don’t have one yet), to rest assured they are welcome to come and ask questions of the pastor.

The pastor said that he and his wife “really have a heart broken people. These are people who have been or are going through very difficult times in their lives. Another part of the couple’s calling, he said, is to accept diversity.

“We believe that God welcomes all people,” he said. “We want to be a church that is known for that – accepting all people just as we are, because we are all growing in our relationship with God. None of us have arrived. And we won’t, until that final day when

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Jesus returns and finishes that work in us.”

In the meantime, he added, everyone is in a process of growth. Different people are at different points, he said, but that does not make any person better than any other person.

Thelma Christian provided more.

She is a registered medical assistant.

God called on her, she said, to look at people with His eye; to hear others with His ears; to touch others' hearts with His hands.

Sometimes, she continued, people have so much going on – work, sports, school, children – so that they fail to see the sadness in the hearts and on the faces of others.

God has put it on her heart, she said, to give that person a smile. Say “Hello” to person and listen to the story they may need to get out.

Give a person a hug, because that may be what they need today, she said.

She said people are not to be so caught up with the things of the world that they forget to show the love of God to each other.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

-- 1 John 2:15 (KJV)

She endorses the practice of asking neighbors if there is some way to help them.

“Say ‘Hello’ to your neighbor,” she said. “Don’t just wave. Go over and start a conversation.”

And if there is a stranger who looks like they need a greeting or a smile, do that too, she said. Thelma Christian said she strives to lift the hearts of people in Chiefland.