

MIRACLES IN *Mansfield*



My first full time appointment placed me in Mansfield, Arkansas, in a parsonage next to the church. I was pastor for two small rural churches about one mile apart, Huntington United Methodist Church and First United Methodist Church, Mansfield. The first meeting of the church was held in the small living room of the parsonage.

Sammye J. Rink

Growing was the word we were using and the word we were praying. Everyone at the meeting agreed, one after the other, that the growth emphasis needed to be in the area of our children. A previous minister, Rex Dickey, had formed an after school program for a small group of church children, calling it the “God Squad.” We decided to keep the name and extend the invitation to include all the children in the community from kindergarten through sixth grade.

The school allowed us to send invitations to all the elementary students. We advertised our mission in the newspaper and hung large banners on the fence at school. The landslide began. We sprouted from twelve to forty the first year, then on up until now we have over 150 children enrolled in our present God Squad after school program. It was a miracle.

But the greatest miracle was yet to come. One very warm October evening, the Church Council had their usual monthly meeting. Everyone agreed that we had no youth in our church. Actually, there were youth around, floating in and out of the church, but no program existed for them. The church members were not aware of them. In fact they *insisted* that there were no youth and, when I disagreed, they asked me to bring a list of names to the next board meeting. There were about forty names on the list I provided and everyone “oohed” and “aahed” over it. These youth were associated with the church in some way. Everyone was amazed. One Doubting Thomas said, “Let me see that list. I don’t believe this!” (He became one of our most dedicated workers.)

Not all of these youth were reached but we did get youth leaders and formed a youth program for the church on Sunday evenings. We had fourteen youth the first evening. We now have a paid youth director and our youth program continues to grow.

But the greatest miracle was yet to come. “Growing, praying, and working” became the action words for the congregation. The congregation built a new playground downtown on a plot of ground given to the congregation and children from everywhere play ball on the basketball court.

But the greatest miracle was yet to come. Growing and praying and working, the people began to invite others into worship. When our accompanist was called elsewhere, a young woman knocked on our door and said she was looking for a music ministry. We said, “You’ve come to the best place.” Pam Williams has become one of our greatest blessings. When our youth leaders moved, the Lord brought two wonderful people all the way from California. God called Allen and Michelle Baker and they answered the call. They are such dedicated workers and have done an excellent job teaching Christ to our young people.

As our needs grew, the Lord continued to bless and workers cropped up everywhere, but what amazed us most was the incredibly gifted people entering our ranks. At one point our music director became ill and we asked a very talented musician from a neighboring town to lead us. It was the beginning of a great love affair.

Reginald Moore was so loved and appreciated by our congregation that he was asked to stay. (At present we are the only congregation we know of with a black worship leader and a female pastor.) Reginald is one of the state’s most talented musicians. Every Sunday our congregation proclaims, “God is good all the time—Amen.” It’s true.

Still the greatest miracle was yet to come. Faith sharing became a way of life for the congregation. Two by two and sometimes as many as eighteen at a time joined our church family. As love for God and love for each other grew, so did the membership. New ministries began to develop ways to meet the needs in our loving community. Today as we continue to grow, pray and work—we are very close to a 200-member church. Our long range plans include a new action facility to accommodate our growing ministries. We are so grateful for God’s sweet blessings here at Mansfield UMC and pray he will continue to work through us to glorify his name. □



Pastor Sammye

Arlen always wanted to be a football coach and I always wanted to be a nurse. We dreamed of marrying and living happily ever after. The night we graduated from high school, Arlen fell from a building and was fatally injured. He died three days later. The world that I had known came to an abrupt end, but not my prayers or my dreams. It seemed even more important to get an education since I thought I would never love again.

I knew my family could not afford college. The future looked very bleak and my prayers became more frequent and more intense. During the summer after graduation, Arlen's mother invited me for a visit.

This kind, generous lady said she had saved sufficient funds to send Arlen to college and now wanted me to use these funds to get my education. I could never express the emotions I experienced that day. Through this wonderful woman, God touched my life with a special mission. I knew that nursing was my ministry, and it has been my unique focus all my life.

I did love again despite my despair over the loss of Arlen. I married Fred Rink 49 years ago and had two children, Chris and Gloria. I continued to use my nursing skills through the years, and then God called me to take my gift of nursing into the church. I became a parish nurse in 1990. I added a spiritual depth to my nursing skills and it became a ministry to the church. My ministry continued to grow until God directed me to become a full time minister.

I was working as a parish nurse in a small United Methodist church as well as a full time RN in the local hospital when my call came. I drove my little Ford Tempo into the shade one very hot summer day after finishing my parish nurse rounds. Suddenly I said aloud, "Father God are you calling me into full-time ministry—like as a preacher?" And the answer was clear. I was 62 years old.

The doors began to open quickly and as God is faithful to his word, because he sent me, he also equipped me. After finishing the licensing requirements, I was appointed to Mansfield UMC and have enjoyed a loving and working and growing and praying congregation to this day.

All through the five years of this congregation's growth, the members have nurtured and cared for and loved Fred and me. To Jesus Christ we give all of the honor and the glory, for he is able after all to make an acceptable servant of any person—me included!

God is good all the time.

Editor's Note: Prior to press date, CR was notified that Pastor Sammye heard God's call to serve a church in Moscow, Idaho.



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