



First Baptist Church Middlesboro, Kentucky

ABOUT

A stereotype is a powerful thing. A stereotype does more than describe a reality; it prescribes one. It comes prepackaged with assumptions about power, worth, intelligence—even dignity—and because there is a lining of truth to just about every stereotype, it's easy to embrace the assumptions along with the truth and move on. In fact, we human beings seem to learn to do so almost effortlessly.

I do ministry alongside a great group of people in the heart of one of the most stereotyped regions in the country. Best I can tell, the stereotyping of Appalachia began slightly before and around the so-called War on Poverty initiative signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1960s. Appalachia had always been a rural, low-income, familial society. In the ensuing years, it also became known outside and in as uneducated, socially-backward, and poor.

In response to the power of this pervasive and debilitating stereotype, First Baptist Church of Middlesboro has dreamed of an Appalachian Immersion Experience. The details are coming together, and we already have three groups booked to come in the summer of 2016. The idea is simple: to offer a one-part service, one-part learning “mission trip” opportunity in eastern Kentucky for youth and adults. We’ve repurposed the second floor of our education building into a mission wing to house groups and group leaders. We’ve partnered with the Appalachian Ministries Education Resource Center in Berea, KY, to ensure the integrity of the learning experiences. And we’ve reached out to our community here in Middlesboro in search of service projects that will help our neighbors. Over several summers, we hosted groups from Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, churches from Alabama, North Carolina, Ohio, and Kentucky, and a group of Amish young men restoring historic structures in our national park. As part of their experience, each of these groups volunteered in a food pantry, worked in a clothing closet, worked on a mountain farm, toured a coal mine, and learned about ecology, farming, and art at one of the settlement schools.

Perhaps most importantly, while doing all of that and more, they worked on growing themselves and their perspectives beyond of the stereotypes of Appalachia they brought with them. They learned to see a place in the world in all of its richness—challenges and blessings. Whatever else that might look like, to me it looks like redemption. To me, it looks like learning to love the world that God so loves.

-Rev. Zach Bay, Pastor FBC Middlesboro, KY

ACCOMMODATIONS

Housing Quarters

- 2 rooms with 12 bunks each
- Shower room has 3 private stalls
- Leaders' suite has 2 bedrooms + bath + common lounge area
- 2 additional bathrooms with one shower each
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Other Spaces Available for Group Uses

- Gymnasium with a full-size basketball court, corn-hole games, and other recreation
- Conference room and Chapel available as needed for larger group meetings
- Small apartment-style kitchen
- Small commercial kitchen
- TEL Chapel that seats ~75
- Fellowship Hall that seats 80+
- Extra linens or washer and dryer available for emergencies

COST STRUCTURE

- \$40.00 per person per night
- Groups using our space for lodging for other uses can inquire about current costs
- Groups are asked to pay a deposit in advance and complete the Facilities and Church Policy form

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information or to start a conversation about bringing a group for Appalachian Immersion, email Rev. Zach Bay, Pastor of First Baptist Church of Middlesboro, KY, at zach@fbcmiddlesboro.org.

Thanks to the gracious folks at Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Kentucky and Together for Hope Appalachia, this information can also be viewed online at:

<https://cbfky.org/the-appalachian-immersion-experience>