



Gary L. Johnson

Gary Johnson is a life-long member of Lennon-Seney United Methodist Church. He was born into the church along with his 5 siblings and has remained an active member to this day. He serves on several ministries within the Church structure such as a member of the Board of Trustees, Key Custodian, United Methodist Men Leader, Lay Leader, Evangelism and Outreach Ministry Leader, and co-facilitator of Jesus in the Park Ministry. Additionally, Mr. Johnson lifts his voice as a member of the Lennon-Seney Men's Choir and provides hot meals for over 100 food recipients each month during the Lennon-Seney Five Loaves Pantry Food Giveaway. Along with all of these giving ministries, he still has time to be a loving guardian and caregiver for his two young grandsons.

Gary Johnson has been an ardent supporter of, and an active participant in the Kairos Prison Ministry for over 10 years. Kairos is a lay-led, volunteer Christian ministry that addresses the spiritual needs of incarcerated men, women, youth, and their families through which volunteers bring Christ's love and forgiveness to the participants. This ministry is **three** programs:

- **Kairos Inside** - Brings positive and negative inmate leaders together for the weekend to begin building a Christian community inside the prison;
- **Kairos Outside** - A weekend support retreat for friends and relatives of incarcerated individuals;
- **Kairos Torch** - A long-term mentoring program which encourages young men and women to realize their God-given potential to make better choices.

Gary received 6-weeks of intense Kairos training in order to work with inmates and has actively participated in all three of these ministries since 2002. Additionally, Gary has been involved in another prison ministry developed by United Methodist Church clergy **Locked-down on the Outside**. This program focuses on inner-city at-risk boys and girls in an attempt to prevent youth incarcerations. Through this initiative, adult mentors meet with students using the Christian-centered Kairos Torch curriculum and philosophy of bringing participants to Christ. The students receive positive experiences, such as field trips to Florida Keys, baseball games, and college tours. Gary Johnson meets weekly with the students and teaches life skills such as how to financial literacy, personal hygiene, healthy food choices, and decision-making skills. Some graduates of this program have gone on to graduate from colleges and several who have attained advanced degrees.

Statistics are not in these young people's favor. According to data from NAACP research, "although Black people make up 13.4 percent of the population, they make up 22 percent of fatal police shootings, 47 percent of wrongful conviction exonerations, and 35 percent of individuals executed by the death penalty. African Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at five times the rate of whites. Black men face disproportionately harsh incarceration experiences as compared with prisoners of other races. Racial disparities are also noticeable with Black youth, as evidenced by the school-to-prison pipeline and higher rates of incarceration for Black youth". Johnson explains that he was like these young men in his youth and in danger of becoming one of the above cited statistics, making bad choices and witnessing his friends being shot or incarcerated. His faith in God was a life transforming event and now he is led to help young people in his community who were being impacted by negative influences. Gary is a Knoxville native who retired from the Knoxville Utilities Board and enjoys spending time with his family when not working "save souls" in prison and prevent youth from incarceration. The Beta Theta Boulè Foundation is honored to present the **2023 Fatherhood Excellence Award** to Gary L. Johnson.