

# Why Sparr Elementary Matters to Our Community

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A Pastoral Reflection from Sparr Baptist Church

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I listened to the March 5 Marion County School Board work session deeply grateful for the way our community spoke up for the children and families of Sparr.

Many voices were heard that evening regarding the future of Sparr Elementary School. What stood out most was not anger or division, but the calm and thoughtful concern expressed by parents, teachers, and neighbors who care deeply about the next generation.

*“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.” — Philipians 4:5*

In many ways, the Lord’s presence was visible that morning. In a moment that could easily have been tense, our community demonstrated care, clarity, and conviction for the well-being of our children.

Those of us who have lived in or around Sparr for many years know that this kind of response reflects the character of our community. Sparr has always been a place where neighbors care about one another, where families look out for each other’s children, and where people step forward when something important to the community is at stake.

Moments like this remind us that God often reveals His work not only inside the walls of a church, but in the life of a community learning to care for one another.

## **A Story of Faithfulness**

Sparr Baptist Church has been part of this community since 1905. Our purpose has always been simple: to worship Christ and serve the people of Sparr.

When I joined the church in 2018, Sparr Baptist was going through a difficult season. Membership had declined for a variety of reasons. Some families had moved away, others had drifted from church life, and still others found churches with larger programs and resources.

The remaining members knew the church faced a crossroads. The faithful generosity of a small congregation could not sustain the church indefinitely.

Closing the church and joining another congregation might have seemed reasonable, but we never seriously considered that option. We believed God placed this church in this community for a reason.

*“He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” — Philipians 1:6*

So instead of relying primarily on human solutions, we prayed and asked the Lord to reveal His will for the church.

The Lord did answer, but not quickly.

There were seasons when it felt as though God had grown quiet. Then COVID arrived, and the challenge deepened. When the congregation returned after the pandemic, attendance had dropped to around thirty people on a good Sunday.

Still, we kept praying, and we kept working.

### **Small Ministries That Grew**

During that time, a simple quilting ministry began for women in the community who needed fellowship during a season of isolation. What started quietly continues to this day as Threads 329.

Soon afterward, we began looking for ways to encourage the teachers, administrators, and staff of Sparr Elementary School. At the time, our church did not have the numbers to directly impact the entire student body, but we could support the people who care for those students every day.

**So, we did what we could with what God had given us.**

Over time, those small efforts grew into a meaningful partnership with the school and its families.

It is also important to recognize the teachers, administrators, and staff who serve the students of Sparr Elementary every day. Anyone who spends time around a school knows that educating children is not simply a job — it is a calling that requires patience, sacrifice, and deep care for young lives. Our church is grateful for the men and women who invest their time and energy in the students of our community, and we count it a privilege to support and encourage them whenever we can.

Meanwhile, the Lord continued to grow the church. Today, Sparr Baptist Church has grown to more than three times the size it was just four years ago. That growth did not come through clever strategies or marketing plans. It came through God's faithful work among His people.

As Romans 8:28 reminds us, ***God works all things together for good for those who love Him.***

### **Every Child Matters**

In conversations about schools and funding, it can sometimes feel as though children are reduced to numbers and statistics.

Scripture reminds us that every child carries immeasurable value.

First Samuel 16:7 tells us that ***while people often look at outward appearances, the Lord looks at the heart.*** Each child is a human being created by God, deserving guidance, care, and hope.

Luke 2:52 tells us that Jesus Himself grew “*in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*” That kind of holistic growth - intellectual, physical, spiritual, and relational - is what we desire for the children of our community.

While government systems have their responsibilities, the church also has a calling to invest in the next generation and support the families who are raising them.

### **A Time for Discernment**

Sparr Elementary now faces an uncertain future. Decisions made in the coming months could shape the lives of many families in North Marion County.

Yet we serve a God who speaks creation into existence, parts seas, calms storms, and raises the dead. The challenges facing our community are not beyond His power.

### **What is required of us is discernment.**

We must listen carefully for the Lord’s guidance and be willing to follow wherever He leads.

Regardless of what decisions are ultimately made about Sparr Elementary, one thing remains certain: **the church will continue to be present in this community.** Our commitment is not tied to a building or a policy decision. It is tied to God’s heart for the people of Sparr - the children growing up here, the families raising them, and the teachers who serve them.

As long as God keeps Sparr Baptist Church in this community, we intend, by God’s grace, to continue praying, serving, and investing in the lives of the people around us.

### **A Call to Prayer**

As your pastor, I want to invite our church and our community to seek the Lord together in the days ahead.

Let us pray for our school.

Let us pray for our families.

Let us pray for wisdom for those making decisions about the future.

Rather than simply reacting to events as they unfold, we should prayerfully consider how our community can prepare for whatever future God may place before us.

The Lord is still at work in North Marion County. In His time, and in His way, His glory will be revealed.

### **A Look at Our Partnership with Sparr Elementary**

For those who may not be familiar with the work already happening between Sparr Baptist Church and Sparr Elementary School, the following overview provides a brief look at the ways our church has sought to serve alongside Sparr Elementary in recent years.

Our hope is that these efforts continue to grow — not for the recognition of our church, but for the good of our children and the glory of God.

**Sparr Elementary School & Sparr Baptist Church**  
**Community Partnership Overview**  
*A Shared Investment in Students, Families, and Teachers*  
*March 4, 2026*

**Our Commitment to the Flourishing of Local Students**

Sparr Baptist Church has developed a long-standing partnership with Sparr Elementary School. Our desire is simple: to invest in the well-being of students, teachers, and families in ways that help children flourish and grow toward their God-given purpose in life. We remain committed to continuing this partnership so that the students of Sparr Elementary may grow, thrive, and pursue the purpose set before them.

Our church's involvement with Sparr Elementary reflects a deep conviction that communities flourish when families, schools, and local organizations work together for the good of children. By supporting teachers, encouraging students, and helping families when needed, our goal is to strengthen the environment in which students learn and grow.

We also recognize that our church and the school are two of the few enduring institutions in this community that carry the name *Sparr*. Our presence alongside one another is more than coincidence. Instead, it reflects a shared opportunity to serve the families of North Marion County and to build upon the foundation laid by the pioneers who established this community in the early 1800s. As partners in the life of this community, we remain committed to investing in the next generation and helping create an environment where students can learn, grow, and flourish.

**At-a-Glance Impact (please read the more detailed summary that follows)**

- Annual “**Stock the Closet**” **school supply campaign** supporting teachers and classrooms
- **10–12 families assisted annually** with Thanksgiving meals through the *To Gather* initiative
- **3–4 families (about 7 students) supported each year** through the Christmas assistance program
- **9 bicycles provided** to students in need over the past three years
- **Faith Champions 329 student program** now serving **60+ enrolled students**, averaging **55 students each monthly session**
- Ongoing **tutoring and reading assistance** from church volunteers
- **Teacher appreciation meals and events** provided throughout the school year
- **Raised garden planters built** by church volunteers for the school's agricultural program
- **Threads 329 sewing ministry** supporting teachers and student programs with handmade gifts and creative assistance
- Planned **4-H mentorship and animal support program** beginning in the 2026–2027 school year

Our church's vision is “**to glorify Christ as an equipping community for believers at home and around the world to grow in faith, hope, and love.**” One way we live out this mission locally is by serving the students and staff of Sparr Elementary through practical support,

encouragement, and community involvement throughout the school year. Below is a summary of our annual ministry involvement.

### **School Supply Support – “Stock the Closet”**

At the end of each school year, our church begins the **“Stock the Closet” campaign**, where members collect school supplies throughout the summer months based on the needs identified by teachers and the school administration.

When the school year begins in August or September, we host a **teacher breakfast or luncheon**, during which all collected supplies are displayed so teachers can select the items needed for their classrooms and students.

### **Teacher Encouragement and Staff Appreciation**

Throughout the year, Sparr Baptist Church regularly hosts and provides meals and appreciation events for teachers and staff, including:

- Back-to-school teacher breakfast or luncheon
- Holiday appreciation meals prior to winter break
- Teacher work-day breakfasts or lunches
- End-of-year luncheon hosted at the church fellowship hall

At several of these events, our **Threads 329 ministry**—a group of senior adult ladies who meet weekly to quilt and sew—creates handmade gifts as a gesture of appreciation for teachers and staff.

### **Thanksgiving Family Support – “To Gather”**

Each fall our church conducts a campaign called **“To Gather,”** where church members donate food and household items to prepare Thanksgiving meals for families connected to Sparr Elementary.

Typically, we provide **food boxes for 10–12 families**, along with gift cards totaling approximately **\$200–\$300** to assist families with purchasing meats and additional items needed for their holiday meal.

### **Christmas Family Assistance**

During the Christmas season we partner with the school to support families in need.

Each year we receive information for approximately **seven students representing three to four families**. For each student we provide:

- Five wrapped Christmas gifts based on the child’s needs and wishes
- A family food box for the holidays
- A gift card to help purchase a holiday meal

Church volunteers gather for a work night to organize, wrap, and prepare all gifts and food boxes for delivery to the school. Over the past three years alone, Sparr Baptist Church has also provided **nine bicycles** for children through this Christmas initiative.

### **School Event Support**

Church members also participate in several school events throughout the year, including:

- Assisting with the school **Fall Festival**, greeting students and distributing candy
- Helping distribute treats during the **Valentine's Dance**
- Providing volunteers for school activities when assistance is requested

### **Threads 329 Community Contributions**

Our **Threads 329 sewing ministry** frequently contributes creative support to school activities. For example, last year volunteers created astronaut and cosmonaut fleece helmets for students participating in the **Arts in Aviation theater performance**.

Threads volunteers have also supported the school's **Heritage in the Arts program** by teaching crochet to students and providing yarn and supplies for student projects.

### **Faith Champions 329 Student Program**

Another meaningful partnership with Sparr Elementary is **Faith Champions 329**, a monthly student gathering that encourages character development, positive leadership, and community engagement.

- The program is now in its **fourth year**
- Participation has grown from approximately **30 students to more than 60 enrolled**
- Average attendance is about **55 students per session**

Students receive small encouragement gifts during the year, such as handmade stockings or seasonal treat bags prepared by church volunteers. At the request of some students, we plan to provide a **Bible as an end-of-year gift** this year.

### **Educational Support and Student Development**

#### **Tutoring and Reading Assistance**

Church volunteers regularly assist in classrooms by working with students who need additional help with reading, comprehension, and skill development.

#### **Agricultural Program Support**

Men from our church built **raised garden planters** for the school's agricultural program and continue to assist with related needs when requested.

### **Future 4-H Program Support (2026–2027)**

Beginning in the upcoming school year, we plan to assist with the school's **4-H program**. One of our high-school graduates will help lead the effort by mentoring students interested in raising animals. If needed, Sparr Baptist Church will provide **space on church property** for animals connected with the program.

### **In Closing,**

We are grateful for the work of the educators and leaders who serve Sparr Elementary, and we remain committed to supporting their efforts in any way that strengthens the learning environment and helps students succeed. Thank you for taking the time to learn more about our cooperative efforts. We look forward to many more years of cooperation with the school district moving forward.