Gardening Club has a ‘flipping’ good time

By David Broyles
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It was “challenge accepted” as the “Grateful Dirt Diggers” Gardening Club members at Hillsville Elementary took to a raised bed on October 19 to turn over their peanut plants for drying.

“We called this a flipping good time with the peanuts or flipping peanuts. It is the only way when you harvest peanuts to get them to dry. When you harvest them you turn them (over) in the field. We don’t have a field of them to turn here so we just pulled them up and flipped them over. That way the peanuts can be exposed.

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From drug dealer to faith
Dolinger finds new life after prison, gives first sermon in Hillsville

By Annette Spence
Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church

Michael Dolinger was 24 years old and the father of a young son when he was charged with five felonies for selling marijuana. Before the sentencing, he asked permission to take his family to Disney World because he thought he was going to prison.

“I never did anything like that with my dad, so I wanted a memory to go with me,” said Dolinger, whose own father was incarcerated when he was four years old.

On Sunday, Oct. 21, the 28-year-old former drug dealer preached for the first time at the United Methodist church where he has found sobriety and a new community. His seven-year-old son watched with big brown eyes. His wife held their two-month-old baby daughter.


Several in the crowd were not regular church-attenders. They came to the storefront church to hear what “Mikie” had to say. Hundreds of people watched the Facebook live video of his testimony, re-sharing the message “God wastes nothing” on their own pages.

“You didn’t come here because you’re perfect,” Dolinger said. “You came here because you’re broken. But God is the creator. He’s the source. He’s the manufacturer. You can go and look somewhere else, and most of us have, but every time it will lead you back to him.”

Dolinger is the seventh person from Out of the Box to take official steps that could lead to becoming a pastor (through the United Methodist “candidacy ministry process”). Three of the seven came out the church’s recovery ministry. Four of the seven are already serving churches in the Holston Conference.

“Michael lifted Jesus up, and no doubt people will be drawn to Him,” said the Rev. Ronnie Collin lead pastor at Out of the Box.

The story of how Michael Dolinger came to this place is loaded with grace as well as his sadness for other children who grow up in broken families.

Trying to fit in
“It was a viscous cycle I was raised in,” Dolinger says, in an interview on the day before he preached at Out of the Box.

When Dolinger was a young
Club

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and they can start drying out before we pull them off the plant," said Youth Development Associate Extension Agent Jonette Mungo.

She said this is the very first time they have been grown in the teaching garden. According to Mungo, the club attended the Virginia State Fair last year and saw peanut plants for the first time.

"There were several exhibitors out there. We went through the exhibits and learned about the different uses of peanuts and all about soils for peanuts. One of the vendors, after she found out we were from Southwest Virginia, said oh... you can't grow peanuts out here," Mungo recalled.

Gardening Club member Kayleigh Nester and her father were particularly interested in this and asked why not. The vendor explained the soil and the climate wouldn't favor peanut growing.

"Kayleigh (Nester)'s dad knew we have raised bed gardens so we can make the soil what peanuts like so we can grow them. They talked about it and mulched it over until our next meeting and they asked if they could set up one of the beds to grow peanuts," Mungo said. "I said absolutely we can. Our officers went in and..."

Dolinger

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ate pastor at First United Methodist Church in Maryville, Tennessee, where he leads the recovery ministry. Hall also served as the 2017 Appalachian Trail chaplain.

At Out of the Box, Dolinger quickly...