

The Craddock Center

by [William Brosend](#) in the [March 4, 2015](#) issue

*Read the main article on [Fred Craddock in retirement](#).*

The idea for the Craddock Center began when a Head Start staffer in Ellijay, Georgia, called Cherry Log Christian Church and spoke to Fred Craddock.

“I hear you care about poor people,” she said.

“Well, yes, we do,” Craddock replied.

“I have a woman here with four children, another one on the way, and no place to stay and nothing to eat.”

“I’ll come down.”

The poverty in the nine counties of Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina that are served by the center is immense. Craddock realized that children need to have their basic needs met and that they need something more: they need to be delighted, to laugh, sing, and dance. And they need a book of their own.

Under the leadership of Julie Jabaley, executive director, the Craddock Center provides services to 1,100 children each year, mostly pre-K to second grade. The public schools have no music programs, so the center sends someone each week to teach songs. They also send Story Express, a bookmobile with a difference—the children can pick out a book to keep. The center stuffs backpacks with snacks for the weekend and coordinates “seamless summers” of meals (funded by a federal government program) at Camp Craddock (Craddock is said to hate the name). In the basement of the center, people can find used furniture and warm clothing, including caps knit and crocheted by volunteers. The center also supports a food program in Ellijay.

After years of teaching preaching, Craddock now limits his appearances to the Preaching Day held on the first Mondays of March and October at the Cherry Log Christian Church. Free and open to all, the Preaching Day has welcomed preachers such as Tom Long, Amy-Jill Levine, Will Willimon, and Barbara Brown Taylor.