WINTER 2020 | COVID EDITION // ISSUE NO. 1

THREAD

FREDERICKSBURG UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

20/20

CLEAR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

An update from our Leadership Council

PLUS

PANDEMIC FATIGUE? YOU'RE NOT ALONE

WINNERS & LOSERS

The year of 'disruptions' - how obstacles are inspiring opportunities

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The Thread.

Fredericksburg United Methodist Church Digest

WINTER 2020

Thread: Covid Edition

4 **Winners & Losers**

Pastor George reflects on the winners and losers of 2020 and how the church has come into play during the 'year of disruptions'.

7 **Christmas: A First Look**

While this year may look a little different for our Advent and Christmas season, we are excited as ever as the best is yet to come.

11 **20/20 Vision**

Amidst uncertain times in an ever-changing pandemic, our Leadership Council has been using this time as an opportunity to determine a clear path for our church's vision and our future.

27 **Pandemic Fatigue**

Struggling with pandemic fatigue? You're not alone. Zala Koym highlights our Stephen Ministry and the ministry's leaders who are trained to listen, support, and help.

Mission and Vision

The mission of Fredericksburg United Methodist Church is to make new disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The vision of our church is to be a vibrant, growing community of disciples; diverse in age, culture and giftedness; passionately committed to love each other and serve the world in the name of Christ. To Him be the glory!

We want to take this opportunity to invite you to make this place your home. Whether you're a new member or have been attending for many years, we welcome you, we support you, and we love you. *You are family.*

IN THE GARDEN: A REFLECTION BY PASTOR JACQUI | 9

JUDY HICKERSON: MY CHURCH MINISTRY | 16

'BECOMING NATIVE' | 19

PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE: A LOOK AT OUR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY | 24

'HERE I AM': ANSWERING GOD'S CALL | 30

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A LETTER

from the pastor

Rev. George Lumpkin, 2020

Dear Friends,

Well, it is still 2020, and the year continues to be strange and challenging in so many ways, including the weather! 48 hours ago I was sitting on the back porch in a t-shirt, this morning I had to go on a search and rescue mission in my closet for nearly forgotten sweaters, heavy coats, and gloves. Shortest Fall season ever.

Speaking of 2020, I have been fascinated with the "winners and losers" of the pandemic, several of which I never would have guessed. On a good day I might be a decent pastor, but it is obvious I am no prophet. But just to name a few...

Losers

- Cruise ships and airlines
- Movie theaters
- Stadium hot dog vendors
- Tuxedo rentals
- Square dancing

Winners

- Boat dealers and bike shops (who would have thought?)
- Takeout food container manufacturers
- Clorox (more predictable)
- Zoom stockholders (if only back in January….)
- The Church

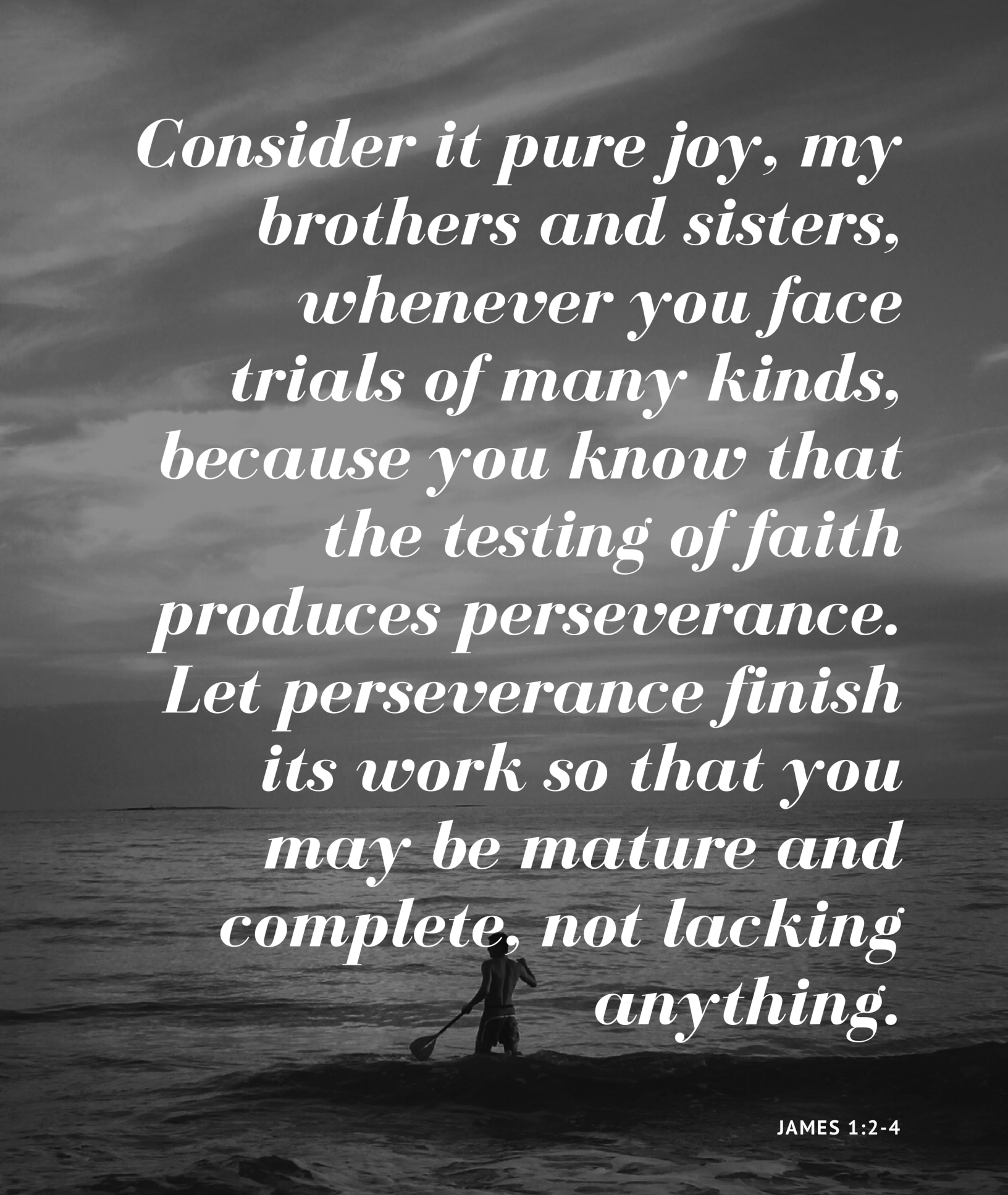
The Church? A winner? Really? Yes! The Body of Christ, the Church. To paraphrase from Bishop Schnase's Sunday message, if you had told me a year ago that in-person worship would be largely shut down, no passing of the peace, much less passing of the plate, no Sunday school, and most programming shut down, I would have said "that would be a total disaster! There is no way the church could survive that!"

But survive we have, indeed we have persevered and are still strong and viable, thanks to what God is doing through you, the Church. I am so proud of you for your love, support, encouragement, and your innovative ministry and outreach. Is it not true that one of the silver linings of this time is that we have all realized in fresh ways how important the Church and the faith is to us and to the world? Perhaps we can live without going on a cruise or even to a football game, but we know for sure that we need to have our faith and the power of the Risen Christ in our lives. Amen. Once again, God's Church cannot be defeated.

I miss seeing so many of you, but I know that we are still together in spirit. We are still the Church and still in the love and care of the Lord God. So hang in there, stay strong in prayer, and don't give up. We are still all in this together, and someday we really will be all together in-person and finally have that pot luck dinner. Amen?

Grace and Peace,

REV. GEORGE LUMPKIN
Senior Pastor


Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
JAMES 1:2-4

FIRST LOOK

THE FUMC CHOIR PROUDLY PRESENTS...

BEST OF CHRISTMAS

Our Chancel Choir is excited to celebrate Advent in fun, safe, and new creative ways

By Don Doss
Director of Music Ministries

Similar to the rest of our congregation, our beloved Chancel Choir came to a screeching halt back in March. Reflecting on years past, thirteen years ago in 2007 our choir had 30 members and an average of 24 in the loft. Dating back since predating the Civil War, our church has grown significantly and we are now blessed to have such a large committed, talented, and wonderful group of musicians. There has been a long, long line of choir members that has brought us to what we now know as our current outstanding Chancel Choir.

Fast forward to 2020 and the start of a global pandemic. Our church family could not meet in-person but through technology, we made a way to still worship 'together, but seperate.' Our church was the first in Fredericksburg to

acquire and stream worship. At the start of the pandemic in the Spring, we utilized recordings of our choir's previous anthems. Afterward, beginning in June we began to stream socially-distanced worship led by our Day 41 praise band. This August, we have made a way for a set amount of choir members to be able to safely distance and take necessary precautionary measures to perform live. Currently, the Chancel Choir leads the music for our Daybreak service in a traditional-style worship and the Day 41 praise band leads the Celebration service in a more contemporary-style worship.

What's next on the Choir's agenda? ***CHRISTMAS!!!!*** As we are only a month away from our Christmas program we are already in the stages of planning and rehearsing. Although we are disappointed to not host a full sanctuary, chancel, or orchestra due to necessary distancing and safety protocols, we have an exciting and innovative plan that will be unlike any advent service we have ever done in the past - thus was born the 'Best of Christmas.' We plan to bring back our favorite songs from our last four years of our previous Christmas programs. The choir and congregation will have the chance to sing along with our specially-selected videos of the arrangements. Some of the songs we plan to include are Ding Dong Merrily on High, Born a Mighty King, The Christmas Song, Merry Christmas, Christ was Born for This, and Silent Night.

We are currently planning a special Saturday workshop to prepare and refresh for what our choir will be performing. We still have some open spots available for choir members who feel comfortable and would like to join in this exciting celebration.

2020 has been a year of disruptions, unexpected circumstances, and for some loss, but Advent is a season of HOPE. Our long awaited Savior has come! Through the birth of Christ we have hope for the future. We have hope for our nation. We have hope for the world. And I, I have hope for our church. I know things may look a little different this year, but this year I challenge you to focus on the best. How blessed we are! There is hope of God's blessings and promises that no matter our circumstances, He is always faithful. I look forward to the day when we will once again worship together in-person, filling the sanctuary with all of your voices. Until then, take heart, remember only the very best, and let us praise in spirit and in truth to our great and glorious God!

IN THE GARDEN

A Story *of Growth*

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
Ephesians 2:8-10

By Jacqui Lirette

I have a brown thumb at best. I've talked with one of our resident master gardeners here, and we both agree that I could be good with plants, but I don't have the motivation. For some reason, I get caught up in other things and I don't have the continuous, persistent work and attention that plants require. I much prefer working with people. But my husband Chris has been tending his vegetable garden, faithfully, and I've learned some things from his work. Namely, that people and plants are not that different. This is what I've learned from the occasional plant-sitting I've done to help Chris out.

Plants Don't Earn Their Gifts [Eph 2:8-10]

This one is the simplest, but maybe the hardest truth to take. We trust in good soil, we wait for rain, we hope for seasons and shade and sunlight, but we do absolutely nothing to earn these gifts from God. God plants, waters, puts our fruit to use, and our job is to trust. Goodness. That's hard. But it's also freeing. We are in the tender care of our Lord, and we don't have to earn it. In fact, we can't.

Plants Are Who They Are [1 Cor. 12:4-11]

I think envy is one of the greatest enemies of our faith. It's hard not to look at someone who is very gifted, or very attractive, or very dynamic, and wish for what they have. But the cucumber plant bears cucumbers. The tomato bears tomatoes. Each plant according to kind, and we can't change what we have to offer to the world. God made you with specific gifts to give. I cannot offer the world

SOMETIMES WE WATER IN FAITH

what you can. This great celebrity or that great leader can't offer the world what you can. You are unique and your gifts are needed for the kingdom of God. This is why I rejoice in you, and I need you. We need each other.

Weeding Can Be Dangerous
[Matt. 13:24-30]

Jesus tells a great parable about this and I can hardly improve on it. Basically, in this story, there are weeds growing among the wheat. What do we do? There are bad people with wrong opinions among us! If you doubt this, sign into social media and scroll for thirty seconds. I'll wait. Ok, so these people. What do we do about them? How do we judge who is in and who is out? Jesus says a striking thing in His parable. Treat the wheat and the weeds the same. Our task is to love, to tend, to water, to make disciples, and it's above our paygrade to sort "good people" from "bad people."

Sometimes, We Water in Faith
[2 Cor. 4:16-18]

Chris has planted a variety of vegetables in his garden. And I've gotten pretty impatient about the peppers. Everything else has at least sprouted! But after 20 days or so, when he'd ask me to water, I would impatiently water the bare patch of soil where my peppers should be (they're mine because I'm the only spicy food lover in the family). Watering empty dirt. What's the point. It's boring. It's discouraging. It feels like a waste of time. Until one day, I saw a flicker of green. Sometimes we water in faith. Sometimes it seems like it's pointless. But again, the gift of life and growth is by grace, and our efforts are in faith. In this season especially, let's not lose heart. We're plant-sitting, at most. The Master Gardener, the Giver of Life, the Source of Light has us in His care.

UPDATE

LEADERSHIP'S CLEAR VISION AMIDST A FOGGY PANDEMIC

Our Leadership Council has been envisioning our future and it looks bright.

By Carol Batterton
Leadership Council Chair

So, what has your FUMC Leadership Council been doing during the pandemic? Lots of things! We have been busier than ever meeting on our regular schedule by Zoom and in-person helping to meet the needs in our community and planning for the future of our church.

Perhaps our most significant accomplishment has been the development of a strategic plan

for our church. In the Fall of 2019, the Council along with Pastors George and Jacqui started envisioning and identifying what we wanted our church to be like, look like, and how we wanted to be known in our community. One of the outcomes of that process was the "The Dream" in which Pastor George captured the ideas from our vision and tied it in to our overall mission as a Body. The Executive team of the Council took the six key priorities from "The Dream" and developed goals and objectives for achieving these ideas which then became what is known as our new strategic plan for our church. Keeping our mission and vision in mind, the plan outlines six strategic priorities along with goals for each priority to outplay over the next 3-5 years. This plan is intended to be our framework to guide our activities and budgeting, while being flexible enough to adjust to changing circumstances. This plan will be implemented through the workplans developed by staff and committee chairs. The six key strategic priorities in 'The Dream' call for us to be:

- **A Growing Church**
- **A Multi-Generational Church**
- **A Multi-Ethnic Church**
- **A Serving Church**
- **A Good Steward Church**
- **A United Church**

The complete strategic plan can be viewed at *fredumc.org/vision*.

In addition to completing

the strategic plan, the Leadership Council also secured a $20,000 grant from the FUMC Foundation for our church to contribute the Grace Center's Capital Campaign. We asked for a grant from the Foundation because this contribution was not budgeted for in the 2020 budget. We contributed these funds to the Grace Center as a matching grant. The Grace Center is working to build a safe shelter for those in our community who are living in an abusive environment. This is a important need, and we were pleased that FUMC could be a leader among the churches in Fredericksburg supporting this effort.

The Leadership Council also sponsored box lunch deliveries to key staff at the Hill Country Memorial Hospital to recognize their efforts in providing good healthcare to our community during the pandemic. We consulted regularly with Pastor George to provide feedback on the planning of worship services, provided feedback on hiring a new Communications Director and approved creating a position for an Outreach and Evangelism role which will both be essential in helping us achieve our vision for serving our community in the future. Yes, we have been busy. I have been blessed and privileged to serve with these outstanding members of our church's Leadership Council. The ideas and the energy from this group of committed Christians has been amazing and inspiring as we have laid the groundwork for the future of FUMC.

Carol Batterton has served as Chair for the Leadership Council for two consecutive years, and a faithful member of FUMC for 15 years.

Surgeons at Hill Country Memorial Hospital receiving lunches along with leaders Zala Koym, Carol Batterton, and Bud Harris.

EMPTY NESTERS

A PARENT'S JOURNEY

When our oldest daughter Jessica packed up and left the house to go to Tech, it was tough but not quite to the point of being a tear-jerker... at least on my part. We obviously missed her a lot around the family talk and routine, but there was yet another daughter on her way to fill some of the void. Jessica had definitely left a hole in our day to day going and coming, although not a total vacuum. She is two years older than our youngest, Jadyn, and we knew that all of the High School senior 'hoop-la' we had withstood would come again in a few short years.

Many of you that are reading the article have already been through this season in your lives and you could have warned me about the coming days, well, maybe you did and I just wasn't listening. You already knew full-well that time flies like nothing you've ever known - the two years with one daughter gone seemed like two months, if that. Jadyn blew through her last two years of High School faster than I ever would have imagined. My constitution of being strong and unflustered seemed to be chipping away the closer it came to graduation - and it didn't help at all that she was home her last three months of her senior year, that part of her life simply vanished and her last school year was actually shorter than the normal four nine-week periods, it was reduced to only about three. So not only did it seem faster, it really was.

During this very short time with one child still living at home, Jessica was fulfilling her personality of marching to a different drummer, following her own understanding of how God was leading her. She left Tech to go on her own for a while and now has found a future with a super guy who works in real estate in Corpus, and we are looking forward to a marriage in February or March!

Then it happened. We travelled with Jadyn to Baylor in August to move her in. She achieved a huge milestone in the trumpet world by landing a spot in Baylor's Trumpet Studio under one of the most outstanding professors in the nation, Wiff Rudd. That trip was pretty good, no big goodbyes or sloppy hugs. However, our last visit with.er a few weeks ago as we watched her perform in her first game with the Golden Wave Band was much different. We had gone through a month or so with no kids at home, so this departure was definitely more difficult… there were tears this time No more coming home late after work, no more free coffee from Starbucks, no more talk of her practice

time, no more discussion about whether or not scholarships were coming, no more arguments about driving too fast or not taking care of her car or not putting up her bike, airing up her tires or not keeping track of her keys - no more of that stuff… just a very quiet home except for the barking dogs that are no doubt wondering where their other humans have gone. To tell you the truth, if it wasn't for the changes in our church worship times due to Covid and the necessities of doing unusual things at break-neck prep time, I might have had more of a problem dealing with the vacancies in my family. But it's in those quiet times that it sneaks in - all those changes that are going on around me that I can't stop from happening. But life does goes on… those funny, loud children who filled our lives with joy grow up and are introduced into their own adulthood before we're ready. Careers, marriages, and eventually children come into view much before I'm ready.

So, what so we do? How do we continue on when things are changing so fast and the whole world seems to be rocking back and forth and coming apart? Philippians 4:7 comes to mind - it answers the question. I directed a youth musical at a former church called Room 77. In that story, High School kids visit a deserted classroom one at a time where they hear the voice of God answering their personal questions. One of those questions dealt with changes in people's lives and a song written by Wayne Watson and Claire Cloninger is inserted at that moment - one of my most favorite songs ever…

SEASONS OF MY SOUL THEY COME AND GO, BUT AS THEY SLIP AWAY
I KNOW SOMETHING ELSE REMAINS THAT WILL NOT CHANGE

PLACES IN MY HEART ARE TORN APART, BUT IN MY BROKENNESS
I FIND THAT SOMETHING STAYS BEHIND THAT WILL NOT CHANGE.

LORD, IN TIMES OF OLD MY HEART HAD KNOWN
WITH QUIET WORDS OF YOUR TENDER LOVE AND YOUR GENTLE TOUCH THAT CHANGES ME
EVEN THROUGH THE STORM I'M SAFE AND I'M WARM
LORD, YOU HAVE COMFORTED ME WITH GRACE IN YOUR HIDING PLACE,
I AM AT PEACE

PEACE COMES LIKE THE DAWN
PEACE THAT THE WORLD CAN'T UNDERSTAND
YOU TAKE MY HAND AND I STAND, THE WATERS MAY FALL

THE PEACE THAT PASSES UNDERSTANDING IS A BLESSING THAT WILL NEVER FADE AWAY
THE PEACE THAT PASSES UNDERSTANDING IS HERE TO STAY
THE PEACE THAT PASSES UNDERSTANDING NEVER PASSES AWAY

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. That beautiful peace of God will guard my heart and lead my thoughts - that's a promise. God is good for it. So, what do we do? How do we go on through all of the craziness and contradictions we face today? Trust in the peace of God, He's totally in control of the world around us and he knows the difficulties you and I face. Shed a few tears, and a few sloppy hugs, then gear up and go on… there's still a job for us to do.

The women of Don's life: daughter Jayden, wife Jennifer, and daughter Jessica

PROFILE

JUDY HICKERSON

MY CHURCH MINISTRY

From pianos to pipe organs and every key in between, our very own Judy Hickerson reflects on past years of playing and serving at our church.

Being part of Fredericksburg United Methodist Church has allowed me to continue two of my favorite passions long past retirement. If you had told me when my husband and I moved to Fredericksburg 20 years ago that I would become an organist / pianist for this church, I probably would have told you that you were crazy. I have always enjoyed playing the piano but always thought of the organ as a big, loud toy... then you offered me a job playing these instruments. My passion for learning new music and styles, coupled with my insatiable curiosity to try new things, I said yes. Little did I know I would find out some things about myself that I didn't know before. Mind you I had done choral accompaniment since I was 15 years old, playing hymns on both organ and piano nearly all of my life; but learning the *pipe* organ was a whole other subject and style of playing entirely. Furthermore there was a huge unknown factor... YOU, the congregation. I really had no idea what to expect but it is and has been a sheer delight and pleasure getting to know you - you have made me feel so special. Over the yeats I love hearing when you tell me a piece is special or means something to you. From playing your favorite song on a Sunday, to accompanying and celebrating you at your weddings, to your mourning and your grief; I felt felt touched that you would allow me to be even a small piece in your lives. In hindsight, I wish I had kept a diary of wonderful things you have said over the years. You have been such an encouragement to me, pushing me to explore new styles, new songs, new arrangements, you have challenged and

inspired me to find music that makes you and the Lord, rejoice. There may be some styles I may never fully master, but you inspire me to want to try. The other piece I have loved serving at this church has been the Prayer Shawl Ministry. I remember when I went to my first Prayer Shawl sessions. The ministry was still fairly new to the church and I really didn't know a lot of the people, but I liked to knit and I had a good time, so I kept coming and knitting. I met so many wonderful individuals through that ministry, but what I loved most was hearing what the shawls and prayers meant to you during your recovery or as you grieved. The devotedness of the Prayer Shawl team has been so encouraging, even when we couldn't meet in-person (like during this pandemic) I truly feel like I am missing time with my dearest friends. If you have ever considering joining this ministry I strongly encourage you to! Tuesday has become my favorite day of the week, being able to serve, knitt, and pray with my best friends.

Judy Hickerson, High School Senior Year

Judy Hickerson is a faithful member of our church family and serves as head of the Prayer Shawl Ministry Team as well as FUMC's organist and pianist for over 15 years

Judy Hickerson, 1963

Judy Hickerson, 8th Grade

An Open Letter:

Persevering

By Beth Cross-Watson

What a year it has been! I asked my mom, who is 89, "Did you ever think you would live through anything like this"? She admitted she never saw this one coming. As a nurse she has experienced first-hand sickness, death, healing and new life, but never imagined living through a pandemic of epic proportions.

2020 has been a challenge for everyone but, amidst the turmoil, there have been highs and lows. During the summer "Nana Camp" was a thing at my house. I was blessed to have my three granddaughters every Friday while their parents. worked. Normally my summertime Fridays would have been consumed by weekend preparations for company, trips, wineries, restaurants, etc. During covid-19 the things that I thought made up my life, fell by the wayside. Family became my focus as I cared for my mom at one end of the spectrum and grandchildren at the other. I began to grasp this continuum and appreciate more decisively the influence of those who introduced me to Christ. My desire to pass on the faith has escalated.

One hot day in the summer (or maybe it was the spring, time runs together) I saw my husband, who is Catholic, make the sign of the cross upon hearing troubling news. It was a tender moment from my strong and stoic man. I realized then, that growing up, that must have been something they did in their home. I had never witnessed this loving act from Wally before and I thanked God for our ancestors that have shown us the way. As people of faith we have a deep well to draw from when the days are sorrowful and a Savior to sing praises to when blessings abound.

Our family has both drawn from the well and sang praises. All in all, we have persevered and grown closer. We are blessed to have stayed healthy so far and continue to be vigilant about our health and happiness.

Beth Cross-Watson has been a faithful member of the FUMC family since 1995

BECOMING NATIVE

An open letter on the Church's future

By Chandler Sager | Director of Outreach & Evanglism

The interaction between Covid and Christianity has been interesting. Most Churches have been caught flatfooted and are scrambling towards relevance by learning online ministry and investing in technology. Yet Christians need to look beyond the COVID-19 crisis and realize the pandemic is not simply a scramble but also a stress point. There will come a day when social distancing between people will end, but social distancing from the church will continue. Young Americans are distancing from Christianity and this trend has been happening since the late 80s says Robert Jones in his book **"The End of Christian America":**

A generational snapshot uncovers a striking finding: today, young adults (ages 18-29) are less than half as likely to be Christians as seniors (age 65 and older). Nearly seven in ten (67%) American seniors are Christians, compared to fewer than three in ten (29%) young adults. Although the declining proportion of Christians is due in part to large-scale demographic shifts–including immigration patterns and differential birth rates–these stats highlight the other major force of change in the religious landscape: young adult's are rejecting organized religion.

You've heard stories of rebellion. There's 'too much judgement', 'Church is boring', 'it's too segre-

-gated' 'It doesn't speak to me where I am at', 'why would I give money to a church when non-profits do charity more efficiently?', 'why would I go to Church when I can sleep, watch sports, or be with my family during that time?' All are real comments I've heard and the stats and sayings can be alarming to cradle Christians. Most of us have only known a history where America and Christianity have complimented each other like Peanut Butter and Jelly. Even more so in Fredericksburg, we may not feel the changes as much as say Austin or New York where a larger majority of young adults live.

In such a time what do Christians do?

The Proud Self: Treading the American Landscape

Before we answer that and before we chalk the problem up to simple generational disparity, let's look at a commonality between younger and older Americans. One shared commonality that transcends generations is how Americans generally understand the 'Self' (aka. What it means to be an individual person on this planet full of individual persons). The American dialect is heavily influenced by the pervasive Aristotlean 'principle of identity'. In this view, things exist first as individuals and then subsequently, perhaps optionally, relate to others. For example, most Americans are taught the purpose of life is to seek self-expression, become self-made, increase self-possessions, and be self-sustaining ("The American Dream").

This 'principle of identity' is everywhere. For example, notice how the earlier church critiques by young adults center around the self as well. "I think the Church is boring" "The Church can't do anything for me" "I deem these non-profits better than the Church" "Why would I give the Church any of my precious time on Sunday?" Such sentiments convey something very clear about the American psyche, most of us are quite unwilling to be vulnerable or to trust others with our time, possessions, thoughts and ourselves. I then You, Me then We, Self then Other. We impose self-limits on our love.

Covid has exacerbated and exposed these sentiments because we are in a time of change and growing fear. American conventions tell us now is the time for self-preservation and self-defense. Not only do we physically quarantine, but now Americans quarantine their minds as well. We are consolidating our thoughts, politics, and friends into isolated groups of like-minded people. If they don't think like me, act like me, pray like me, believe like me, then they are _____ (Use whatever word seems appropriate here). Once again the language of self shines through!

Here we ask the question again, in such a time what do Christians do?

A Christian Response: Become a Native Christian

As we wade through fear and uncertainty, it is here where I love the Church more than America because our stories, our history, and our community run deeper. Christianity has survived far more pandemics, far more governments, and far more crisis. Our foundation lies on solid soil. I believe our

answer lies here. In re-examining the solid soil and deep roots of our native Christianity. If you imagine Christianity as an immense tree with diverging branches representing different denominations, some being well established and bigger while others may currently be wilting or hollow. Follow the branches to the roots. If you grew up farming, you know if the roots of a tree are in bad shape, the whole tree dies relatively quickly. The roots are the maxim by which the rest of the tree can grow, they are the conduit of life, they connect and ground the tree to its native place. "To be is to be in place" is an ancient maxim, first formulated by Archytas of Tarentum. Such a phrase indicates that place is the first condition for anything Archytas of Tarentum. Such a phrase indicates that place is the first condition for anything to be anything at all, I not the self. Unlike the 'principle of identity', Christians reflect and quickly understand that we are utterly dependent on a lot of things outside of ourselves. The simple practice of eating a meal or drinking a drink is a ritual that identifies our fallibility and our utter dependency on the Other.

For you to be you, for the self to be self, you depend on the daily duties of the Other. You depend on the sun to shine, the wind to blow, the water to flow, the soil to be fertile, the plants to grow, the animals to flock, the farmer to harvest, and the shepherd to herd. The Trappist monk Thomas Merton summarizes this when he famously stated, "No Man is an Island". Such reflection moves us to an essential Christian teaching: the self is more fragile and dependent than we think. At one time, I was living in South Sudan. If you know nothing of the place, know it is impoverished, war torn, and has a corrupt slew of officials running the show. I was tasked with teaching up and coming pastors a variety of subjects from New Testament Theology to Church History. They had requested my prestige and my expertise, and I was sent to Yei on a biplane with a head full of knowledge, a suitcase full of books and a flimsy piece of computer paper from my university saying I was allowed to be there. I learned quickly that ensigned embossed papers hold little merit halfway around the world. The passport officials in their synthetic suits cared very little and the guards armed with AK-47s cared even less. I was at the mercy of the other, and had seen what a South Sudanese prison looked like. The official said, "you don't have the correct papers and have not paid your visa fees". Of course I knew I had, but what was I to do? A student who I had met three minutes before began advocating on my behalf saying I was "I was his lifelong friend and that I had important work to do here". Even though the student did not know me, he vouched for a complete stranger, all he knew is that I was a Christian and that I was there to be there beside them. It changed me. I was the dependent stranger, the fragile vulnerable, I needed help, and this young South Sudanese man

Farmers Harvesting Crops, South Sudan

Sunday Worship Service, South Sudan

old them that I, a prideful American who lived a world away, was 'his lifelong friend'.

For a glimpse I saw the Kingdom in action. I saw the Christian story come alive.

Our Christian story begins with the radical acknowledgement of dependency on the other. In the Garden, humanity (adam) is and is only what it is because of its relation to soil (adamah) and the life God makes possible through it. Our scriptures convey immediately that we cannot and were never meant to exist in isolation or separation from each other. Kinship and harmony, mutuality and intimacy are to be the rule of healthy life together. This biblical gardening insight should not be surprising to us if we also recall Trinitarian communal life as the basis for the creation of the world. When Christ says odd things like, "I and the father are one" (John 10:30) or "Truly I tell you, whatever you did to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did to me." (Matthew 25:40), how as Americans are we supposed to understand this language? It seems very foreign because Christ's language breaks down 'self-centric' barriers quickly. Our ancient Christian teachers, the Cappadocian fathers, acknowledged this and developed a inspiring relational ontology: "The human being is defined through otherness. It is a being whose identity emerges only in relation to other beings, God, the animals and the rest of creation." This shatters our presumptions of self. The only way I exist myself and become who I am is manifested only in the ways in which I respond to others, receive them, and then give myself in return. What if this is what Jesus meant when He says,

"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Matthew 16:25

The vulnerability to trust others with your own life, the knowledge that you are not your own self-sustaining island, that all does not depend upon you can be a truly terrifying experience. It requires us to trust others. And yet, Christ makes clear that it is in this humble relinquishing of the self that

our lives may actually be found. There is a deep peace in knowing the world spins without your hand and the sun shines without your command. What if this is what Jesus meant when he said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30).

Water Transportation, South Sudan

We need to learn the gentle and humble heart of Christ, to bear the yoke of another means rest for my soul. The only way I am at peace is if my brother and sister are at peace. Paul came to discover this. His life is a living testament to this terrifying moment of Proud Saul to Humble Paul. In the end, Christ's self-giving language permeated Paul's life work and even influenced his letters, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). It seems an oxymoron, that when I bear the burdens/carry the yoke of others, I somehow find rest for my own soul. This is our native Christian soil. Our roots permeate and wind through the soil of self-giving, self-denying,and self-dying. If we are to begin to see a future health for this ancient Christian tree, it may be necessary to examine our roots and the soil in which we situate: Where do we feel most native currently? In American soil or Christian soil? Has our soil become toxic? Are our roots dying? Where is new life sprouting? If Christians are to be healthy and grow, we must begin firmly rooted in our native soil, a soil healthy, diverse, and overflowing with life. Our roots must expand towards this humbling dynamic of self-giving, self-denying, and self-dying. We then me, thou then I, other then self. We must learn to trust and be vulnerable witnesses allowing the Other to break through our toxicity of pride, self, and security. We must become native to this land, native to the movements of the Holy Spirit across Gillespie County, native to Fredericksburg, native to this community, native to Fred UMC, native to the poor, native to the vulnerable, native to your neighborhood, and native to your neighbor. In such movements, we may feel like we die a little, it may cause the self to be hurt and exposed sometimes, but Christ has placed the solid soil here and promises, "you will find rest for your soul" when you place your roots in such native places.

Chandler Sager,
Director of Outreach & Evangilism

TREEHOUSE KIDS CLUB: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

by Lisa LaJannette | Director of Children's Ministries

TAKE A PEEK INTO WHAT OUR CHILDREN'S MINISTRY HAS BEEN DOING, IS CURRENTLY DOING, AND WHAT WE LOOK FORWARD TO IN THE FUTURE

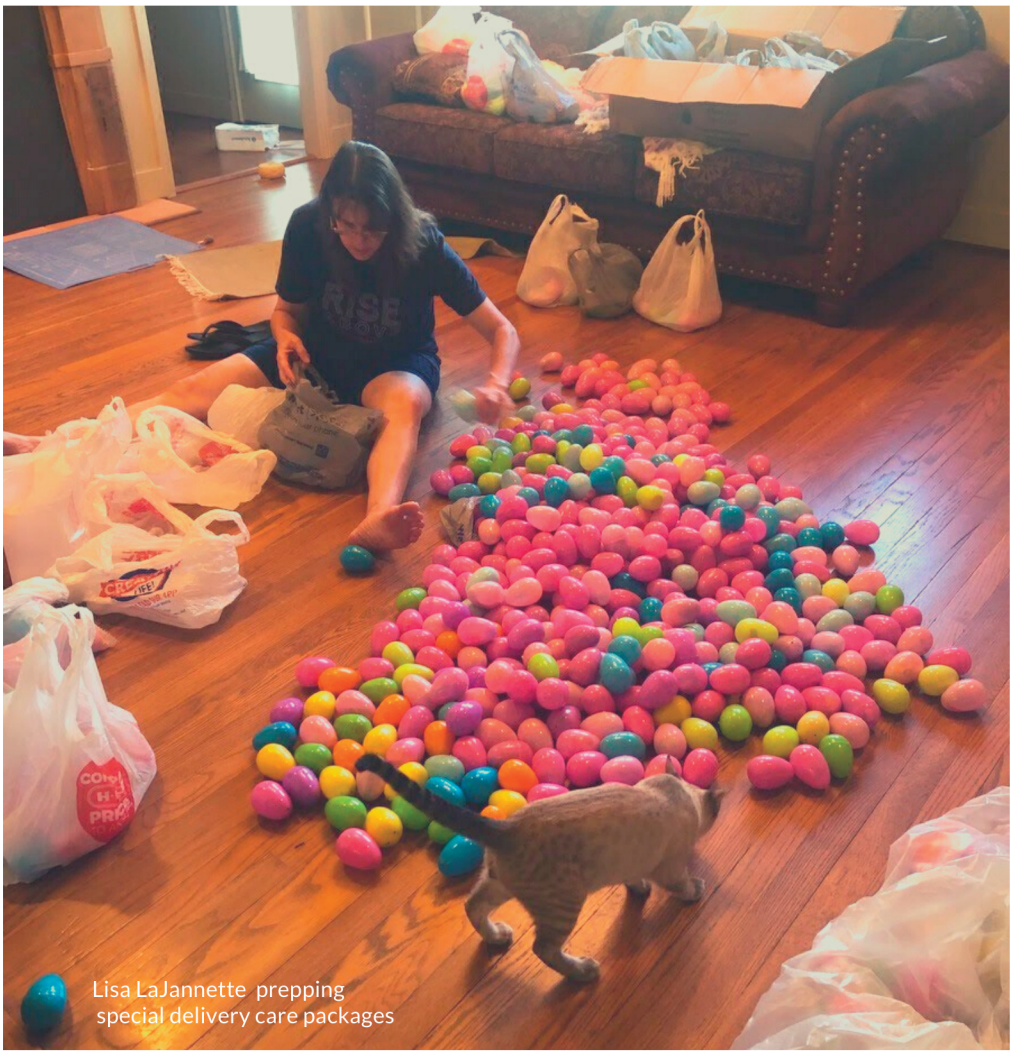
What has our Children's Ministry been up to since covid started?

Our last Kids Club was a field trip to the circus during spring break. Many of the kids had never been to a circus before, we had a lot of fun. I started looking for ways to connect with the families as we all stayed home. I made special deliveries to families with filled Easter eggs, care packages and devotionals. One parent asked me to explain why we called it Good Friday to his 3 sons, which I was delighted to do. Another special delivery was made

"Direct children onto the right path, so when they are older, they will not be lost."

Proverbs 22:6

devotionals, crafts, and activity pages. It was great to see the parents and kids and have some great conversations. For several weeks I sent out 3 texts per week that had activity ideas, scavenger hunts and service projects ideas. My biggest challenge was doing videos for children's time on Sunday. I loved to be able to bring puppets into the mix.



Lisa LaJannette prepping special delivery care packages

I learned how to produce, film and edit videos. At first it took about 8 to 10 hours a week. Figuring out what to do, finding a song or skit, writing a skit, filming all of the elements and then editing. Learning the editing software, which I did on my phone at first, was a big learning curve. As the weeks went on, all of the parts became easier to put together. But a 4 minute video will still take me about 3 hours. The best part for me with the puppets is that my two sons are a huge part of it. The time we spend together has been fun. And the puppet videos, especially the music ones, make me smile.

WHAT ARE WE DOING NOW?

We started up our after school program, Kids' Club, on September 15. To maintain social distancing we are meeting on Tuesdays and Wednesdays with a small group of 10 kids on each day. It has been great

to get back together in person. The kids have grown, in many ways, in the last 6 months. When we sit together to hear a Bible story, they are asking really good questions and are filled with wonder.

WHAT DO YOU LOOK FORWARD TO?

Currently I am looking forward to our Family Gingerbread House Building Event on December 11th *(head to fredumc.org for more event info)* and making plans for next year. Still feels like a lot of things are up in the air, but adaptability is on top of my list for whatever happens. Kids are hungry for knowledge and the Word of God. One of my dreams for 2021 is to have a solid team of volunteers who are passionate about Jesus, passionate about kids, and have a true desire to make a lasting and real impact in kid's lives.

"We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say, 'It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem. Then, there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes."

- Fred Rogers

Lisa's sons Jonathan and Christopher - two of her most hard-working and faithful volunteers

EXPERIENCING PANDEMIC FATIGUE?

DON'T GO THROUGH IT ALONE

Feeling exhausted from all the disruptions to life brought on by the pandemic? If you or someone you know are struggling with challenges like . . .

- ***Isolation and loneliness***
- ***Anxiety over health***
- ***Grief due to many different kinds of losses***
- ***Tension from juggling work, childcare, and schooling***
- ***Financial strain or job loss***
- ***Uncertainty about the future***
- ***Other unexpected life challenges?***

You don't have to face it alone, our Stephen Ministers are here, available, and ready to listen, care, encourage, and provide emotional and spiritual support.

We will pair you with a trained Stephen Minister to listen and offer private care and support — you have the option to talk by phone, by video chat, or, if safely possible, in person to offer care and support. It's free and completely confidential. For more information, call our church office (830) 997-7679 or Stephen Leader Zala Koym at (830) 992-1432.

STEPHEN MINISTRY 2020-2021 UPDATE

BY ZALA KOYM

Our congregation graduated six new Stephen Ministry in August to provide confidential, one-to-one Christian care to people who are going through a difficult time. A Stephen Minister is a well-trained caregiver who listens, cares, prays, encourages, and offers the love of Christ during a time of need. The Leadership Training Course is for church staff, leaders, and pastors from our congregation who will serve as your Stephen Leaders—the team that will oversee and lead your congregation's Stephen Ministry. We hope to send 2-4 people to this weeklong training in 2021.

If you are interested in becoming a Stephen Minister or Stephen Leader contact Pastor George or Zala Koym.

2020 Stephen Ministry Graduates: Linda Behrends, Grace Crook, Bel Keesee, Janet Lindley, David Newman and Fran Turner
Retiring Stephen Ministry Leaders: Sandy Doudna, Gregg Hagelstein, and Marcia Lyngaas
Other Stephen Ministry Leaders: Zala Koyom, Rick Shaffer
Some individuals may not be present in this photo

Music Academy Gone VIRAL

by Don Doss
Director of Music Ministries

Our Fredericksburg Music Academy began a new era by offering select private lessons this last school year. Even without much pomp and circumstance, we were delighted to enroll 30 students in individual music lessons. Lessons combined with Thursday classes, we offered over 80 students music instruction. In March, FMA Thursday classes came to halt due to Covid, but online instruction and private lessons continued throughout May and summer. As our church was closed for group use, during the fall semester we decided to hold Thursday classes and private lessons took off under a new label - Academy STUDIOS.

In lieu of the Thursday classes, the new Academy STUDIOS has enjoyed great participation! We have been able to continue our connection with the Hill Country Youth Orchestra program including some intermediate classes. Under 'normal' circumstances the intermediate classes would typically be offered in Kerrville but are now offered in Fredericksburg at our church. These classes coupled with the other private lessons, STUDIOS is seeing a participation of around 100 students each week! The students range from Elementary to High School in both public and home-schooled sectors and have even included some adults.

In the middle of Covid, our Fredericksburg Music Academy alive, well, and growing. We love using the Academy as one of our outreach tools to families and extended community that otherwise may not enter our building, or perhaps any church for that matter. FMA has been able to connect with these families. Thanks be to God for allowing us this avenue to reach out and share His love!

FMA
FREDERICKSBURG
MUSIC ACADEMY

HERE I AM

ANGELINA VANNICOLA

Angelina's three favorite C's... Christ, Coffee, & Communication

I have found there is a reason why it is called a 'walk' with the Lord and not a 'run' with the Lord. Walking is slow... gradual, and at times, dare I say... boring. Walking takes a sort of patience. As many of you know I was born and raised in Texas and after graduating from the University of Mary-Hardin Baylor in 2015 I felt the Lord calling me West - so naturally, I packed up everything I owned in my red Toyota Yaris sedan and went. *No friends. No job. No church. No community and hardly any money... BUT* I had a roommate that I met on Craigslist lined up (yet to meet in-person) AND an apartment (that I had not been to yet) so in my wanderlust eyes, I was set! One thing you'll learn about me is that the Lord has gifted me with a very independent and adventurous spirit (can you tell?). Alas I will have to save the amazing, incredible, and rollercoaster story of my 3 years in San Diego that ensued after moving for the next issue (it's worth the wait I promise).

Fast forward to this time last year circa 2019. I was working as a Marketing Coordinator at a privately-owned commercial real estate firm in Los Angeles that owned, managed, and marketed shopping centers. I have to preface with two years prior to me living in LA I said quote: "*I would NEVER move to Los Angeles.*"

Just a year and a half after I said those exact words, the Lord opened up an incredible opportunity to move there and after 'putting out my sheepskin' (so to speak) I knew without a shadow of a doubt and had a peace that surpassed my understanding that in that season, He was calling me there. So, I went. The job that then followed was extremely challenging as I was often ridiculed (yes, in the workplace) for believing in Jesus Christ. I wanted to leave shortly after starting. As you can imagine I began scouring the job sites and went on dozens of interviews; one thing I always did before the final decision would be made was I would always (at times reluctantly) pray that if it was not the Lord's Will for me to get that job that I would not get it... And I didn't. When asked the hirees couldn't even say

or explain why they couldn't hire me (as I asked hoping to gain insight of how I could improve). They would all say something similar along the lines of 'we want to hire you, you're perfect, for some reason we just can't' This made me take a step back. Why was I trying to leave the place He had given me peace about in this season? Why was I running so hard from this job, this opportunity, He provided for me? I wish I could say this revelation came soon, but after a year and a half of trying to 'run', I decided at last to simply... *let go.* Very much like Jonah going to Nineveh, I *finally... **SURRENDERED.***
I said "Alright Lord, if You want me here in Los Angeles, at THIS job I'm going to BE HERE! I'm going to preach Your Gospel unashamedly and be Your missionary in my own backyard." As I prayed to be a vessel the Lord worked through me in some incredible and truly miraculous ways. *(Word to the wise: If you ask to be a vessel He WILL use you as one!!)* He opened up conversations and opportunities to pray with people you would've never expected would say yes to prayer. He led me to places and surrounded me with people that one can only describe as divine. From only knowing three Christians in the whole city, He surrounded me with a Christian community and a truly incredible church... all things I had been desperately praying and searching for. Then came the beginning of this new year; before Covid was even on our radar, I began praying that this year - the year 2020 - would be a year that I would see in 20/20 vision with God. Ask in my name and you shall receive! [John 14:13]. I began to see myself, His world, people, and specifically unbelievers with what only I can describe as divine clarity. Cue COVID. LA was a wreck - riots, fires, TP shortages, hysteria, and yet throughout it all I felt... peace. I felt so serene I prayed the prayer of Isaiah (at the time was thinking of Los Angeles) "Here I am Lord, send me!". Flashback with me for a moment to 5 years prior when I moved out West. Upon moving many asked *"Would you ever move back to Texas?*" to which I would always reply *"Texas will have a special place in my heart, but I'm never moving back."* ...Personally, I have come to the conclusion that the Lord takes our 'nevers' and says 'Never? Not even for me?'. A month and a half later after praying that prayer, still working the same job in LA but have since surrendered and no longer scouring the job sites as I have full faith that the Lord knew the desires of my heart, and in His timing, He would pluck me and send me somewhere else, *Deo Volente*. i thought maybe He would move me back to San Diego. or Colorado maybe... I didn't know, but I trusted Him. Wherever He would lead I would go. Then an opportunity I (honestly) should have not heard about popped into my inbox: "Director of Communications" at a

Angelina's Family. Top from left:, Brother Isaiah, Aunt Cindy, Angelina, Uncle Martin, Uncle Adam, Dad Robert, Brother Zach, Cousin Samantha, Sister Isabella, Mom Kelli, Aunt Jamie, and Grandma Billie

From California {back} to Texas - when He calls, you must answer!

church in Fredericksburg. I had never been to Fredericksburg, but I was vaguely familiar with the area as my last remaining grandparent, Billie, lived in Burnet. My grandma Billie and I talk regularly and she would always ask me how my job was going and if I had heard of any new job prospects; to which I would say "No, but I trust in the Lord. He knows the desires of my heart and in His timing He will provide." ... This particular phone call she asked and I said "Well actually... I just saw this job and you'll never guess where." She was shocked (and seemingly thrilled) asking if I was going to apply. *"I've thought about it, but I don't know..."* to which she replied in her sweet Southern way, *"Well Angelina, pray about it, and what's an e-mail?"* ...She had a point. So I composed an email to Don Doss, the Director of Music at this church I had never heard of, in this town I had never been to. Furthermore, at the time that I applied, the link containing the job description did not work so essentially, I was applying blind. [Talk about blind faith!]. I knew that no matter what the Lord had me in the palm of His hand. Whether it was right where I was or a small town in Texas, I was ready to be sent wherever He wanted me. The Scriptures say what the enemy means for evil, our Father will use for good. If it wasn't for Covid, (most likely) I would not be here. If it wasn't for Covid, all of the interviews would have been conducted in-person. But, they weren't. So what's adding one more random girl who lives in California to the list of 41 applicants interviewing over Zoom?

Throughout the entire interview process I had an overwhelming feeling that regardless of whatever the outcome of the role was, that this church was placed in my life for a reason. While listening for the Lord He told me "I have divinely placed FUMC in your life. You are supposed to connect with these people and this church. I have a plan for you." ...If you read that and said 'whoa', that's what I said too. Which is why during the interview process I told Pastor George *"No matter what happens with the role, I know the Lord has placed this church in my life for a reason."*

After visiting Fredericksburg and this church for the first time I knew that if they (the team) also had the peace and offered me the role, it was meant to be. Spoiler Alert: They had peace and offered me the role! Within two weeks I packed up everything I owned in that same red Toyota Yaris sedan and drove from LA to FBG. Sign after sign it was so evident that this was His Will for me. I found a place to live the very day I was offered the role (shoutout Gwen Fullbrook!), I was able to get out of my lease with no penalties mid-month, and even on the drive down He gave me an opportunity to show His love to a stranger.

I cannot express how happy, how grateful, and how truly overwhelmed I am by the goodness of our God and how much I have sincerely loved making this place, this church... *my home.*

LET'S SHINE TOGETHER.

Whether you're new or have been a member of our family for a long time, we want to embrace and walk together with you as we make an impact in our community and beyond.

Fill out this card and send to Fredericksburg United Methodist Church, 1800 N Llano St., Fredericksburg, TX 78624

INFORMATION

- ○ I'm New
- ○ Updated Information
- ○ Attach w/ Giving Card
- ○ Other - Please Contact Me

Name

Address

City State ZIP

Email Mobile No.

Whether you're new or simply need to update your information, we would love to connect with you.

FREDUMC.ORG/CONNECT

GIVING CARD

- Offering -

- ○ Credit Card
- ○ Check
- ○ Money Order

Credit Card No.

Expiry CVC No.

Signature Total in $

Make checks payable to "Fredericksburg United Methodist Church"
Credit card holders must be placed by Credit Car holders only.
Questions? *Contact Angela Lee at Angela@fredumc.org*

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