

Contact Us

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Middletown, OH 45044
513-423-4629
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(Phone messages checked daily)

Worship With Us

Sunday Service

Online & In Person @ 10:30 am

Online Only

Sunday School @ 9 am

Junior Church @ 12:30 pm

On the Net

www.myfumc.net

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Pastor's Reflections

At This Point in Time ...

We've been dealing with the Covid 19 pandemic for just about a year now, and its story is clearly not yet finished. And yet there may now be a light at the end of the tunnel. I don't want to jinx it, but here's what seems like good news:

- Super Bowl parties notwithstanding, there is nothing on the horizon like Thanksgiving/Christmas/New Year's Eve to bring lots of people together in so-called "super spreader" events, and so new Covid cases will likely not be spiking as they have been. There's evidence for this in that ICU rooms at our local hospitals are less crowded now. A good thing.
- Vaccines are becoming available, and some of you have received them. Also a good thing even though there are currently not enough vaccines to meet demand. Confusion and resentment will continue for a good while, and yet we are somehow moving forward.

Of course, there is also worrying news. Not only are there new and alarming varieties of the virus, but the UN Secretary General says he believes rich nations will be 100% vaccinated before poorer nations even get to 20%. As a church we are connected to many nations, so I hope our worries for all these people and places are genuine. We likewise need to keep in mind that some in our own faith community are suffering more than others. According to Henry Folgoso, every single family in our Hispanic ministry has been touched by Covid, with some having serious reactions.

So given cause for both optimism and concern, what might the Lord be asking of us at this point in time? I don't know with absolute certainty of course, but in terms of my own answers to prayer I believe he is calling me to guard the welfare of both the body and soul of our individual members. So yes, I need to ask that you continue to be wary, to stay as safe as possible. And yet I realize that maintaining one's faith must also be a high priority, and that for a fair number of you, simply being in our sanctuary with other members of the church is essential for keeping a vital spirituality. I do respect that. I also know that many others feel connected to God and God's people even while being physically separated. I respect that as well and make no judgments either way, and more importantly I'm certain God makes no such judgments. So I do believe we should open up again, although if you or someone in your house

Continued from page 1

hold has a medical condition that really should keep you away from others, please don't come. And same goes if you think you might be contagious.

As of this writing we are planning to hold in-person worship **this coming Sunday, February 6**, as it seems safer these days, if not perfectly safe. A warning – if for any reason you think we will need to reverse this decision, please check your email or call the church office at 513-423-4629. And we will have communion, but will be again using the little disposable packets of bread and juice. Expect to wear a mask, maybe more than one, and expect to social distance.

One last thing... JoAnn and I have received our first shots. We didn't expect this -- it happened when the vaccination event at two local Baptist churches had concluded. I was there helping out and since our local health commissioner had a few doses left over she insisted on giving them to JoAnn and me, said they would soon expire if we didn't. We were concerned about those who needed it more, and said so several times, but logistically it would have been a difficult if not futile attempt to find more deserving people at that late hour. We still feel hesitant to share this, but it's best to be honest and possibly set a good example. We both felt and still feel it's very safe. And likewise if the opportunity to get the vaccine is presented, I believe you should take advantage of it as it might go to waste otherwise.

Friends, this is clearly a time of testing for our congregation, but I have never been prouder of a church I've served, and have never felt more supported as a pastor. We are an interesting mix of folks, but contrary to what some might think, I believe our differences are an advantage, even a blessing. We are learning all the time how best to listen to each other and hang in with each other. Let's keep it up, keep on trusting the Lord will see us through.

Peace, John

Lent 2021 "This is when it counts ..."

Back in the 80s a movie came out called "Everybody's All American." It was an OK, not great film, but a single line of dialogue is lodged in my memory. It's about an aging athlete whose glory days are long gone. He is still married to his college sweetheart but he's become so difficult she's thinking of leaving him. She has a brief affair and then both she and the other man, a friend of her husband, truly regret it. The friend implores her to go back to her husband, and then references her marriage vows when he says, "This is when it counts."



This past year has been a time of testing and temptation for us all. It's brought out both the best and the worst in us as citizens, as neighbors and as Christians. No matter how we've fared it's a good time to recall sacred vows. They may be easy to keep when living is easy. It's times like these, however, when they count the most.

On page 34 of our United Methodist hymnal you'll find our church's membership vows. We will lift one of them up each of the first five Sundays of Lent, which is the season of reflection prior to Easter. They are written in the form of questions: (1) Do you renounce evil? (2) Will you accept God's help in resisting evil? (3) Do you look to Jesus for your salvation? (4) Do you promise to serve him? (5) Will you be a faithful member of your church?

Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday, February 17** with a service **at 7 p.m.** I hope you'll find a way to join us via computer screen or in person. It's an important time for renewing and strengthening your vows to be a faithful Christian. Try not to think of it as a chore, but rather as gift we all can give our battered souls. JCW



Celebrating Black History Month Through Music

When I plan music for worship, particularly the service music of Prelude, Offertory, and Postlude, I like to keep in mind several things: the liturgical season, musical style, and usually at least one variation of a hymn tune. In each service, I believe that it's important to have a variety of musical styles because we have a wonderfully wide range of musical preferences in our congregation. All Baroque would please some people, some would prefer hearing more contemporary music, for example, so each Sunday I try to mix it up a little. Especially during this time that we are not worshiping in person and we are not able to sing, I have been sure to include at least one variation or arrangement of a familiar hymn tune.

In this month of February, Black History Month, I was inspired by an article in "The American Organist" (the monthly magazine from The American Guild of Organists), about the large library of organ music composed by African-American composers. Not only have these musicians, and many before them, been responsible for the preservation of African-American Spirituals,



they have composed new organ music and arrangements unrelated to the African-American spiritual genre.

Each Sunday in February, the Prelude and Postlude will be a composition or arrangement of a hymn tune that is written by an African American composer. Most are still living and are from places as varied as Washington D.C., Nebraska, and Colorado

and Texas; and educated at Columbia, Eastman, Fisk, Julliard, Indiana U., and Oberlin, and many more..

As I challenge myself to learn this new music to be added to my repertoire, I look forward to honoring these composers who no doubt have faced difficulties as minorities in a field that is historically Western European. Some will be based on traditional spirituals, some will be classical in nature, and some, because some composers are 21st contemporary, may be fresh sounds to our ears.

I hope you will enjoy this music and rejoice in the universal nature of worshiping our God through song and the contribution that our brothers and sisters in Christ have made!

History of Black History Month

Black History Month originally began as Negro History Week in 1926. It took place during the second week of February because it coincided with the birthdates of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. Carter G. Woodson, a Harvard-trained historian, is credited with the creation of Negro History Week.

In 1976, the bicentennial of the United States, President Gerald R. Ford expanded the week into a full month. He said the country needed to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of

black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan issued Presidential Proclamation 5443 which proclaimed that "the foremost purpose of Black History Month is to make all Americans aware of this struggle for freedom and equal opportunity." This proclamation stated further that this month was a time "to celebrate the many achievements of African Americans."

With Your Help, UMW Has Successful Year

Dearest parishioners of FUMC and Circle Members:

The leadership committee of United Methodist Women want to give a **BIG! SHOUT OUT! THANK YOU!** for your participation in the many projects undertaken this year during the Covid 19 Pandemic. You contributed so graciously to the Nut Sale, the Porch Pot Sale, Bern's Gift Card sale and the Bake-less Cookie Walk. We were able to raise \$5625, which made for a very successful year.

Without your selfless giving and participation, we could not begin to meet our goal of raising funds for the UMW's many in-house and local missions. Your support made it possible to donate to:

- MANY (Middletown Area's Neediest Youth)

- HOPE HOUSE (sheltering the homeless)
- DOVE HOUSE (YWCA Women's Shelter)
- SHALOM (in honor of Pat Ickes)
- PREGNANCY CENTER
- BREAKFAST CLUB (for the food truck)
- FUMC NEIGHBORHOOD (emergency food bags, and benevolent fund)
- ART CENTRAL (summer art classes for "at need" children)

Thank you again for your participation and support!

We are also taking this opportunity to recognize **Sally Jo Inwood** and **Nancy Heberling** as our "Gift to Missions" recipients and **Pam Fugate** as our "Special Mission Recognition" recipient this year. Congratulations, ladies!



Gift Bag Delivery

Twenty bags (pictured left) filled with toiletries and other items were gratefully accepted by Hope House on Dec. 20. Thanks to Sonya Kramer who spearheaded this project for the CMC and to all those who donated!

Breakfast Club Resumes

FUMC was recently asked by SHALOM to partner with them to continue the FUMC Monday Morning Breakfast Club. Due to COVID restrictions the process had to be changed and change we did. We have continued offering breakfast each Monday with a limited menu. SHALOM provides the drinks and fruit and FUMC provides a hot breakfast sandwich or two and a potato cake. SHALOM parks their food truck at the back door and serves from it. We are thankful that with SHALOM's partnership we have been able to continue this service for all who need it.

We thank the volunteers who have stepped forward to assist and make this service possible.



Dear Friends at First Methodist, You outpouring of prayers and support during Charles' bout with Covid-19 has been phenomenal. We had a wonderful 11 years and four months in Middletown at First UMC. The day after I notified Nancy Heberling, I received a dozen emails and soon started receiving cards of concern and sympathy. We loved the time we spent with you and often reminisced of the good memories. Thank you for continuing to be such good friends.

Love and Best Wishes,
Patty Parham

Legacy Fund Update

It has been a while since we've reported the status of our Legacy Fund. With the Covid pandemic still raging, it's easy to lose focus on everything else. Hopefully this will be a reminder about this fund and its function.

The fund was started at the same time we commenced the Trust the Future capital campaign. The latter was to raise funds to pay for church repairs and improvements over a five- to six-year period. Your generous contributions made it possible to accomplish the goals that were identified by the Trustees.

The Legacy Fund was established to secure the long-term financial stability of the church. Funds donated by members and friends of First Church are invested for growth. Investment decisions are made by the Investment Committee, and the uses and future disbursement of the funds are governed by strict bylaws approved by a congregational Charge Conference.

Donations made to the fund are greatly appreciated. They can be structured to be tax-advantaged in a variety of ways. If you have questions about the fund or how best you can make a contribution please contact me or Reverend Wagner. All conversations are, of course, confidential.

We are very pleased to report that of year end 2020, the value of the Legacy Fund's investment is \$328,087.64.

John Hoffman

**There will be no First Friday Concert
in February**



February Meetings

Memorials—2/9 @11 am
Ad Council — 2/16 @7 pm



Christmas Fun for FUMC Kids

In December, we sent out nativity craft kits to all our kids and asked them to put it together and send us a picture. Thanks, **Jackson Vance**, for sending this shot of your beautiful scene.

Ministry Opportunity

Over the years, many of you have been recipients of birthday and anniversary cards signed by the staff . This effort was coordinated by Bette Fletcher, who moved to Florida this past year to be with her daughter.

Bette addressed the cards and brought them in for staff to sign. Since she has moved we now need someone to take over. If you think God might be calling you to this ministry, contact the church office at 513-423-4629 for more details.

An update from Dr. Les and Debbie Dornon, missionaries to Nepal working in the Tansen Hospital

Christmas, New Year and Covid in the U.S.

We had a wonderful Christmas in Michigan with Luke and his family-- but then on Jan. 2, we both tested positive for Covid! We thought it was very ironic that we had had many exposures in Tansen, but never turned positive until we had been more than three weeks in the U.S.! We are so thankful to so many of you who prayed for us, sent cards and messages, and even brought gifts of food. Thank you! We are so grateful to you all -- and grateful to God that our symptoms were very mild and we feel fully recovered now.

So -- this has been a very strange "vacation" for us -- most of it spent isolating alone in our house. We now understand better what life for you all has been like this past year. Many of you had it much worse, and we continue in prayer for those who are grieving and those who are ill.

We have tickets to return to Nepal on February 1. We have to get a negative PCR before that (within 72 hours of flying) so thanks for your prayers for that! We are happy to report that numbers of Covid cases in Nepal have been going down. Unfortunately, the political situation there is not good, and we would ask for continued prayers for the process of agreements with the government for our mission body there.

We are currently in the packing process to return to Nepal. Any of our kids will tell you that Mom goes into a different zone in these days -- trying to think of everything we want to take -- and how to get it packed well. This time we are carrying about 40 pounds of orthopedic implants -- I couldn't say no to

this, as one of those "implants" is currently in my leg! :) We are thankful for the company here which provides these free of charge to our hospital -- we just have to transport them. Usually, we are able to find plenty of travelers so that people only need to carry 5 -10 pounds, but since it has been over a year since any were carried in, we have a big load!

We have had the chance to read a lot during these days - and I have been really enjoying a new book called, *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot* by Ellen Vaughn. Many of you may remember that Elisabeth's husband, Jim Elliot, was killed in Ecuador in the mid-1950s by the Waodani Indians. She later returned to live with this same group of Indians with her young daughter. It is a wonderful and inspiring story which I highly recommend! I am thankful that the house we live in has walls! And a toilet!

May 2021 bring new hope and joy -- and may we learn to love each other and Jesus better and more each day. We can't tell you how much your prayers and support mean to us

Happy New Year to you all!

Love, देबी (Debbie) and लेस (Les)

Want more stories and photos? Check out our blog at dornonnepalmission.wordpress.com.





February Birthdays

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1 Matt Dixon, Hannah Voyle,
Christian McLaughlin

3 Kathy Lambert, Sandy Mills

5 Dr. Mark Frazer

6 Barbara Caudill

8 Anita McLaughlin

9 Mary Davis, Lynda Goecke

10 John McDaniel

12 Kira Wills

13 Martha Gill

16 Mary Ellen Clinard,
Daphne Murphy

17 Phyllis Richmond

19 Bill Alderton,

20 Marilyn Clark

21 Johnny Schmitt

22 Mark Mills

24 Joni Bachelor

26 Sylvie Gadness

28 Donna Burley

Happy Birthday!

Prayer Requests

Members of the Church Family:

Kathy Wright

Rick Lyke

Mary Lou Williams

Bob Wieneke

Rick Fugett

Judy Smith

Sharyn Edelen

Ken Tucker

Pat Beasley

Jerry Slama

Betty Risner

All Our Homebound Members

Members of our Armed Services

Front line workers

Alan Richmond, step-son of Phyllis Richmond

Jack Horton

Tim Brown, nephew of Mary Maurer

Darnell Williams, step son-in-law of Brenda Byrd

Jill, niece of Kathy & Dennis Swab

Marcia Young, friend of Glenna Combs

Dawson Harris, grandson of the Beasleys

Rick & Donna Wilson, friends of the Beasleys

Cindy Bell, Pat Beasley's sister

Tracy Snyder, sister, Vickie Frazer

Cindy Rule, friend of Phyllis Richmond

Family & Friends of the Church:

Jerry Gillespie, friend of Tammy Brown

William, friend of Mary Ellen Clinard

Jeanie Lands and family, friend of Rachel Hurley

Sue Essen, sister of Peggy Kramer

James Rogers, son-in-law of Ron and Mary Davis

Sam Barber, brother of Mary Davis

Thomas Swank II and Thomas Swank III, son and
grandson of Martha Swank

Peyton, great-great-niece of Sharyn Edelen

Steven W. Andrews, brother of John Andrews and son of the late Marcy Andrews, died on December 30, 2020, at his home in Surprise, AZ, at the age of 65 from complications of diabetes.

Here's What's Online

Livestream Worship: Sunday 10:30 a.m. — visit www.myfumc.net/worship-on-the-web/ - to join by phone, dial 312-626-6799 OR 646-558-8656, ID is 998 1948 9701, password is 998662—you can also see the recording anytime after the service at www.myfumc.net/worship-on-the-web/; **Adult Sunday School (9 a.m. on Sundays)**



and Bible Studies (Wednesdays at 10 a.m. and Thursdays at 6 p.m.): contact Johnny Schmitt at preachie@sbcglobal.net; **Junior Church:** Sundays at 12:30 pm for all ages, contact the church office at 513-423-4629 for details; **Corazones Ardientes:** Worship Sunday morning on Facebook Live; **Bible Studies** contact Dani Ortega-Folgoso at danio72@hotmail.com.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Middletown, OH 45044

120 South Broad Street

a united methodist community

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