



The Ambassador

May 2022

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From the Pastor

Friends, my time with you is short. I have many thoughts and feelings about retirement, and I'm actually nowhere near sorting them all out. I still have some days left for a letter and a farewell sermon. More on the way.

But before all that, a little church business.

I know there are plans for a party and some kind of gift, but the best gift would be to know that you and your new pastors are developing a good relationship, that all of you are doing your best to make that happen, and that the church becomes ever more serious about its commitment to Christ. If the church struggles after my departure, then I haven't done the job I should have in helping to build up a Christian community.

Yes, the last two years of pandemic have taken a toll – a number of our most vital ministries have been negatively impacted. Even so, I've been made much more optimistic about the future given the new additions to your pastoral staff. Daniel Cardenas has hit the ground running. Every single day he is making connections with both our Latino and Anglo members. His good humor and work ethic are already winning him friends and appreciation. Both Henry Folgoso and I are thrilled with his progress. Then there is the impending arrival of Rev. Kim Armentrout. She is leaving a church after serving 13 years – a very long tenure for a United Methodist pastor, longer than I have served anywhere, and indicates a loyalty to wherever she is assigned to serve. Unlike me she did not ask for an appointment change – she is not seeking to advance her career by “moving up the ladder.” The bishop and district superintendent requested she come here because her

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Contact Us

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Worship With Us

Online & In Person
Worship @10:30 am
Sunday School @ 9

In Person & Online
Bible Studies
@ 10 am Wednesdays and
@ 6 pm Thursdays

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special gifts meet the needs of this congregation. She was obedient to her vows and said yes.

As I said last Sunday, I've known Kim for over 20 years. She is truly talented, but more than that, a fun, caring and confident person who works hard at being a pastor. We served in the same town for several years, and you couldn't ask for a more supportive colleague. Again, as I said last Sunday, she was there for me at a low point – when JoAnn had her breast cancer surgery. She stayed with me in the tense hours before the doctor shared that the surgery had been successful. I will never forget that. I'm sure she will be there for you as well.

JoAnn and I have a home here in Middletown and plan to stay for a while longer. But as has been my practice when leaving other churches I will not be a part of church life at First United Methodist. I will refuse all weddings and funerals, so please don't ask me. I do have one wedding that was previously scheduled that will take place out of town, and that will be it. Some of you have asked why I would do this, that it seems rather cold. Some of you have then blamed our denomination. You should know this is my decision. When a pastor comes to a new church one of the few ways to truly bond with individual members of a congregation is to share deeply in times of joy and sadness. When I first came here there were people who clearly would have preferred another pastor be with them in their special moment, and yet they allowed me into their hearts. This would have been far more difficult, perhaps even impossible, if a previous pastor was still involved. Some years ago I was pastor of a church where the previous pastor had retired and then chose to stay and participate in nearly everything. This is a temptation for many retired pastors, and of course it can have consequences for their successors – I know that first hand. In my case it hurt my ability to form relationships, and I eventually felt I had to leave. Kim is a strong and confident person, but even so, I will do my very best not to inflict any such harm on my very able successor and her ministry with this church. To do so would be selfish on my part and would definitely hurt the Christian community I've grown to love.

Having said all that I will also say this: While I won't be your pastor, I will still be your friend. My feelings for you are real. It's been personal as well as professional. If you want to reach out please do so – but I won't comment on anything having to do with the church, and I won't do anything like formal pastoral counseling. I still care, but I won't have the same role.

Friends, I'm likely to repeat all this several times before June 24, but if you have any questions I neglect to address, please ask. God bless you all.

John



Music and Worship Notes *by Mary Ellen Clinard*

Several years ago, instead of our usual Christmas decorations in the windows of the sanctuary, we asked our congregation if they had a nativity scene, or a crèche that they would be willing to share with us that would be placed in the windows for others to enjoy. As usual, you responded enthusiastically and generously and we enjoy many unique and beautiful offerings. After the Christmas Season, some of you may have been out of town or busy and forgot about your contribution!

As the staff was clearing out some storage areas in the last week or so, we found the crèche and nativity scenes pictured below. These wonderful offerings are just waiting to be reunited with their owners! If any of these belong to you, please call the church office and let us know and we will make arrangements for you to have them back.

Thank you again for sharing these beautiful items with us!



A Note from our Associate Pastor, Daniel Cardenas

We face many challenges as we go through life. When we are first born we need to learn how to walk and eat, and we face more challenges as we grow up – getting a job, getting an education, finding a spouse. All of this requires determination and effort.

The same is true with our Christian walk, for it will require much from us. When we read the Bible we find faithful people facing situations that are very difficult. They experienced conflict, doubts and opposition. Moses, for example, had to confront the most powerful ruler of his day. Joshua had to conquer a land full of giants and warriors in order to lead God's people to the Promised Land. The Old Testament Prophets preached against pride, sin and abuse in their nation, even though it caused them to be rejected. Jesus went to the cross knowing that the people he was trying to save opposed him.

There are so many examples of patience, boldness and faith in the Bible. We need to learn from these examples.

As a pastoral family, Anahi and I went through many struggles to get here. It was an almost two-year process. We had doubts, often we felt discouraged. There was such an extreme change from Mexico to the US, but even in the fights, problems or questions, we found that God is always with us. When we got here, one month ago, we could see God's faithfulness right away. This congregation received us with love and kindness, the staff has been so patient with us, so we are so very thankful to all the First United Methodist Church members. We are witnesses to God's grace even when there are barriers like the language, the cultural shock and the Latino ministry transition. When all these barriers appear we still feel confident and supported by God, and of course, also by you. Now we have a place to live, we have a car and we are working with the Latino ministry members step by step, doing and giving our best for our new friends.

So we feel we can say to you now that God is also guiding you along your path. It may be rough and hard, there may be many difficulties, but God's grace is there to help us all to continue our journey. We can and should be courageous and bold, because God is watching over us.

God bless you,

Daniel Cardenas

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

Hebrews 12:1



2022 First Friday Concert & Artist Series

RONSTADT AND FISHER

Ronstadt creates dynamic and truly moving duets with his wife, pianist Serenity Fisher. These two create a lyrical, dreamy, and thought provoking music experience you won't forget.

Friday, May 6

@Noon

First UMC-Middletown

Free Admission

masks encouraged, not required

Church Library to Downsize - Come and Choose a Book

Church members are being invited to choose books from our in-house library. First Church Library is downsizing to use that space for a classroom. You are invited to come to the library and take whatever volumes you would like for your home collection.

The smaller library will continue to reflect the mission of our congregation with educational materials for classes, Bibles and Bible study guides and devotional materials. Outdated materials as well as the fiction collection will be phased out. Our congregational needs have changed and many materials are now available on the Internet and through other electronic means. Pick-up times are Sunday mornings and any time the staff is here during the week (Mondays and Fridays, 9 am to 1 pm; Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 9 am to 5 pm, OR by special arrangement.) We can no longer accept new donations – sorry. For more information, please contact the church at 513-423-4629.

Anita Shew

Help Needed

Can you spare one hour a month to help in the nursery?
Seeking kid friendly volunteers to help watch 0-4 year-old children in the nursery once a month during worship (10:30-11:30). You would pair with another volunteer on the Sunday of your choice. Scheduling is flexible. Please contact the church office or Susan Beagle if you are interested.



"Can
watch
with
church

Mission Moment

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



This is probably our final “story” from Nepal – at least for awhile! I believe it was Mark Twain who once wrote, “Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated...” We are not retiring yet – we are just taking a leave of absence from Global Ministries and from our time in Nepal. Over these past 10 years, we have often visited in the U.S., but we are feeling that we need a more extended time with family and to discern where God would have us go from here. Perhaps back here to Nepal or maybe to something new!

Do you think we fit in?

As we return to our passport country, it feels like our hearts are divided in two. This is also our home, and friends, work and church in Nepal have been our daily reality for many years now. In the meantime, the U.S., which we once knew, has changed greatly. We find it hard to “fit in” again to a life that is very different.

Interestingly, most churches/sending agencies estimate 3 months for a missionary to resettle. Missionaries themselves estimate 12 months, and Member Care professionals say 18 – 24 months to truly settle. You will find us sometimes looking blank about something that is part of your lives. We will say things that are politically incorrect, and act in ways that may seem “weird”.

I am sharing these thoughts to make a request. Please pray for us in the transition. We have spent the past weeks packing up everything in to bags that we can carry across the ocean. (Hard choices...where did all this stuff come from?) We have been eating with friends every night (and sometimes others in the afternoons) as all want to have us to their homes before we leave. We cry with sadness for what we are leaving – and yet anticipate with joy reunions with family and friends in the U.S. Pray for our loss, pray for our calling, pray for our marriage, and pray that we stay close to Jesus through all of the change.

At our recent Mission conference, we used Ecclesiastes 3:1 – 11 as our study. As we leave one season of our lives for now, and return to a new one, we pray for grace in the transition.

We also want to thank you for prayers over these past years which have helped support and protect us. And we pray for the ongoing work of God here in Tansen at the Mission Hospital where others will continue to uphold the motto, “We Serve, Jesus Heals”. See you soon!

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



Christ Our Life — Service Our Lifestyle

May 2022

Birthdays

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 COMMUNION 9 am Sunday School 10:30 Worship Native American Ministries	2 8:30 am Breakfast Club	3 2 pm Pantry	4 10 am Son Reflector's Bible Study 3 & 7 pm Choir	5 6 pm Sonshine Bible Study	7 Noon First Friday Concert	7 UMW Pie Pick up
8 MOTHER'S DAY 9 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship	9 8:30 am Breakfast Club	10 11 am Memorials 2 pm Pantry 1pm SPRC	11 10 am Son Reflector's Bible Study 3 & 7 pm Choir	12 6 pm Sonshine Bible Study	13	14 Joyce Anne Finch 12-Lily Crowe 14-Peggy Kramer Rebecca Symon 15-Davis Kramer 17-Isabella Folgoso-
15 9 am Sunday School 10:30 Worship	16 8:30 am Breakfast Club	17 2 pm Pantry 5:30 pm Finance 6:00 pm Council	18 10 am Son Reflector's Bible Study 3 & 7 pm Choir	19 6 pm Sonshine Bible Study	20 AMBASSADOR ARTICLE DEADLINE	21 9 am Hope Circle @ Bob Evans 10 am Elizabeth Circle
22 9 am Sunday School 10:30 Worship Rev. Henry Folgoso Reception	23 8:30 am Breakfast Club	24 2 pm Pantry 6:30 pm Trustees	25 10 am Son Reflector's Bible Study 3 & 7 pm Choir	26 6 pm Sonshine Bible Study	27	28
29 9 am Sunday School 10:30 Worship/Hymn Sing	30 MEMORIAL DAY—OFFICE CLOSED 8:30 am Breakfast Club	31			Dates to Remember in June June 3 First Friday Concert at Noon June 5: Pentecost Sunday June 19: Rev. John Wagner's Retirement Party	

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 **first**
church
M I D D L E T O W N
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