

## **Pastors**

### **Rev. Leslie Wood**

Yesterday I wrote an article for the Sr. Newsletter, spotlighting the Leadership Retreat on Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>. I wrote in that article: We are currently in the liminal space between what church *was* and what it *is becoming*. Sometimes, that space is uncomfortable; but it is also a time ripe with opportunity to shake off complacency and recommit to following where God leads.

FUMC continues to experience evidence of both opportunity and challenge. Members and those who come here for spiritual connections and growth find it in a number of ways: Meaningful worship, study opportunities, means for mission engagement, a spiritual community specifically targeting the needs of Millennials and NexGeners (Union), and more.

Christmas Eve services welcomed 464 friends and neighbors between the two services. (304 at 4:30; 160 at 6:30) Sunday morning worship continues to average about 230-250 at the traditional 10am service per week, in-person and online combined. The new Alternative Worship Experience usually has 15-20 in worship.

FUMC's intentional goals to (re)establish this church as a safe, welcoming space to bless and serve the community has taken root. In addition to the variety of groups who already used this building for their gatherings, in the past six months we've made connections and long-term/regular facility use arrangements with Loveland Preschool, two girl scout troops, Braver Angels (a civil discourse organization), Aspen Club (a health program/services organization from UHealth). We've also hosted a pilot training led by UMCOR, designed to train church leadership how to help one another and their community in times of natural disaster.

I must also mention that, while we missed out on leasing our space to Desiree Aragon for her children/family coaching business, we gained her wonderful expertise and heart to our staff as the new Family Outreach Coordinator. Her position was specially created to serve children's programming for FUMC, TUMC and Union.

Discussions continue for more ways we can use our sacred space to bless and serve this community in the future.

While these are all exciting evidence of change and vitality, we are all aware that we still have a challenge with our operating budget. Reliance on the traditional model of receiving income through pledging is increasingly tenuous. While our attendance numbers are more stabilized for the time being, giving alone no longer covers current expenses. Key leaders are, prayerfully and carefully, considering the situation currently. It is not being tabled until the next budget season.

In the meantime, we are the church striving every day to be the church as faithfully as we can be. We offer meaningful worship and care for the faith community. We produced the annual Advent custom devotional, with several of our congregation contributing articles, including some from this group. Lee, Matthew and I collaborated on leading the annual Advent book study. For Lent, we've combined efforts to write the daily Lenten devotional. We were planning to co-lead a Lenten book study based on Fr. Henri Nouwen's book *In the Name of Jesus*, but due to low interest, we are cancelling that. Lee and I are collaborating with Rev. Bryson to facilitate the Lenten Immigration and Faith Soup and Study, to be held at TUMC.

We have quite a few constituent members who attend regularly and consider FUMC their church home. On March 30<sup>th</sup> Lee and I are hosting the next FUMC 101. We will invite those who haven't to join the church; but even if they choose to not join, we are grateful that they are a part of this community of faith.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the work that Matthew Utley has done these past few months. Not only does he do a great job leading the FUMC youth in their spiritual journeys, but he has been invaluable in his Ministerial Assistant role. He has been asked to participate in many areas of church leadership and has willingly said yes and always does excellent work. God is clearly calling him and FUMC is blessed to have shared in his journey.

### **Rev. Lee Anderson Harris**

In my October 2024 report, I wrote in more depth about my work with Braver Angels and Aspen Club around providing space for their classes. I am happy to report that there have already been two Braver Angels seminars at FUMC with good turnout. The first seminar was an introduction to Braver Angels, and the second was the first skills workshop they have offered at FUMC. At each of these, 20-25% of the participants were from FUMC (out of a total of about 60 each seminar). The rest were from the greater community of Loveland, Fort Collins, Boulder, Longmont, Johnstown, etc. Braver Angels has been wanting to set up a Northern Colorado chapter and because of this partnership, they are close to doing

so. Future gatherings are scheduled for March 15 and April 12. Aspen Club has classes scheduled through August, which will serve the community as well. Neither of these partnerships generate revenue, but they serve the community.

I have also included information about FUMC Serves, an effort to get FUMC folks out of the building and into the community on a regular basis. Service projects are set monthly for the remainder of the year.

I am happy to report that Loveland Community Night Out is returning in 2025, which was in question. It is set for June 25, and I do not think I am alone in saying we want to be a part of this again. As soon as applications are available in April, I will be applying!

The Missions/Social Concerns Committee is launching all-church meals that will serve as fellowship and a fundraiser to provide the ability to respond to urgent financial needs in the community and beyond (think wildfire relief or the laundry truck being involved in an accident). These are calendared for 2025, the last Wednesday of every *other* month beginning in March (except for November, which will be earlier due to Thanksgiving).

Jeremiah and I are now due for our sabbaticals. We will be taking renewal leave the month of July 2025, with an additional week or two into August. This time frame should have the least impact on the church. Plans for supporting Leslie with pastoral care will be made.

### **Newsletter transition.**

I picked up the senior newsletter that was begun by Shirley Reed after we weren't able to find a volunteer to compile and edit it. It was important to Leslie and I to continue this as a way to let the senior adults in the congregation know that they were seen and valued. It has been well received, and there has been decent readership. But there are downsides. One is that as the main contributor, I frequently (but not always!) struggle with what to write. Another is that it is an additional newsletter, along with the Mission Memo, The Window, and Ongoing Information and Opportunities (and the eblast). But the Senior Newsletter has been a vehicle for me to speak to readers about leadership discussions and the overall direction and trends of the post-pandemic Church (see February, March, April, June, November 2024, as examples).

A couple of things came up during a recent meeting that led to a discussion about making a change in newsletters. First was the observation that information is spread out over different places and there are too many newsletters to read if you want to know what's going on. Second was the observation that it would be great to have a way to communicate in more depth about the building changes. The result was an idea to have one monthly (albeit longer) newsletter. Instead of a Senior Newsletter there would be a "Senior Moment" (tee hee). Instead of a Mission Memo there would be a Mission Moment. Perhaps the Pastor's Pondering in the eblast would become a monthly article instead of a weekly one. I will continue to produce this newsletter. But, with multiple contributors, I would spend less time writing and finding inspiration, so I believe the time commitment would be the same.

This will only work if committee chairs and/or others will commit to contributing to the newsletter. These do not need to be long articles; it can be half a page with updates on what is going on with your committee or team. There might be some months when there is no update to provide, and that's okay. But the focus should be on regularly communicating things the congregation needs or wants to know.

Yours in Christ, Lee

### **Staff**

Financial Secretary ~ Cindy Utley  
Church Treasurer ~ Karen Lumpkin  
Music Coordinator ~ Kathryn Peiffer  
Choir Director ~ Nicole Ceciliani

### **Youth Ministries Coordinator ~ Matthew Utley**

#### **Youth Report:**

Ski Trip: Last month our youth combined with Fort Collins UMC youth for a ski trip. Unfortunately, due to dangerous weather and unpredictable I70 closures (due to both weather and accidents) we were not able to make it to Glenwood Springs. However, we had a fun day in town playing laser tag and going out to dinner with the kids.

Confirmation: We have one youth (Colton Landon) going through confirmation class with Fort Collins UMC. He will be confirmed in our church. More details to follow.

Senior Sunday: We have three graduating seniors this year (four if you include Noah Heusinkveld)! They will be recognized during church on May 18th with a small reception/fellowship time after.

Mission Trip 2025: This year the youth are going to Nashville TN from June 21st - 29th.

#### **Internship Report:**

Lenten Devotionals: Leslie, Lee, and I have been busy writing devotions for this Lenten season. The three of us wrote daily devotions for each day of lent. I have been also scheduling them to come out in daily emails and on our social medias.

Buckhorn: I oversaw fundraising for camp Buckhorn this year where we raised over \$2,000 to help send kids to camp. We currently have 14 kids signed up to go (5 for regular camp and 9 for minicamp) and will register by the end of this month. My internship ends at the end of May. I appreciate all the experience I have gained so far. Some goals I hope to achieve in the rest of my time include overseeing a website redesign (along with Andrea and Mark Elliott). I also plan to have an outline ready for a mental health resiliency group/class. Finally, I look forward to gaining more experience leading worship and other pastoral roles throughout church ministry.

Family Outreach Chair ~ Desiree Aragon  
Bell Choir Director ~ Susan Harding

### **Committees**

Lay Leader ~ TBD  
Staff Parish ~ John Morgan

### **Finance ~ Charlie Bouchard**

Finance committee met in January. In addition to welcoming new members, the following was discussed.

- 1) A review of church finances (PowerPoint on buckets presented at retreat) so that the committee has a good understanding of the difference between each of our assets - 57th street funds; CD's; foundation assets; FUMC operating budget.
- 2) We had a discussion on finance committee's concern about inheriting a budget that projects a shortfall of over \$140,000. Further discussions need to happen about a course of action.
- 3) We discussed the best way to handle the restriction on 57th street funds. Provisions as set up allow for all earnings in any one year to be used for operating expenses. It was decided since the funds are invested for long term, they are subject to market fluctuations - both positive and negative. We adopted a strategy of prudent money management and decided to treat these funds as if they were endowed, meaning a draw of 4 1/2% annually is deemed sustainable. We transferred 4 1/2% of the funds to our operating budget for the 2025 year - approximately \$18,000. This will serve to reduce our anticipated 2025 deficit and give the church something to plan on annually.
- 4) Occurring after the finance meeting, Charlie had a conversation with Mike Westbrook, chair of the foundation. It has been determined that funds held in the FUMC Foundation are endowed and that cannot change. That means that the maximum draw on that account is 4 1/2% annually. An advance has been given for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to pay for the flooring project. This means no funds are available from here until July of 2026 and they will be limited to approximately \$30,000 annually. Mike agreed that when funds become available, the foundation will reimburse FUMC for capital expenditures incurred (preschool construction, closet doors, etc).
- 5) Loveland Pre-School. This is not a finance topic specifically, but an update seems to be in order. Rob Proctor has done a terrific job of overseeing the construction team. Work should largely be completed by the time of this meeting. Pre-school teachers and volunteers will be painting their rooms over spring break and are very excited! A lot of work has been done by volunteers moving materials out of rooms and back in.

Allison has done great work in the nursery. Carolyn has been scarce around my home as she has taken on a load of work making sure things are ready for the construction crew, the flooring crew, and painters. Take some time to walk around and see the progress,

Trustees ~ Debbie Tikka

### **Abiding Memorials ~ Betty Hill**

No report this month

Stewardship ~ John Kindred

### **Missions and Social Concerns ~ Barry Wehrle**

The *Mission Memo* has it all! WOW!!

Marketing & Outreach ~ Andrea Ortega

Membership Secretary ~ Janeen Anderson

Safety and Security ~ Keith Flaming

UM Foundation ~ Mike Westbrook

Lay Members to AC ~ Matthew Utley, TBD

At Large ~ Marlene Thurman, Joy Shaw, Pam Erickson