



Flowering the Cross

Dawn Stover

Growing up in a United Church of Christ in Cypress, Texas, there are many traditions I hold dear. My home church was founded in a tight-knit, German farming community where protocol was paramount.

But in a time where women and men sat on opposite sides of the church, my grandparents defied tradition and crossed the aisle to sit together!

Despite my scandalous heritage, the traditions of this small, community-oriented church are incredibly important to me. Confirmation, first communion, acolyting, the Christmas pageant to name a few. My all time favorite tradition was flowering the Easter cross.

Flowering the cross is a centuries old tradition that beautifully symbolizes Christ's resurrection with a bare wooden cross transformed into a symbol of life and hope with the addition of flowers on Easter Sunday.

Back in Cypress, as in all historical iterations of the flower cross, our congregants brought flowers from their gardens as gifts towards this beautiful transformation. This is a simple and sweet way to acknowledge the divine beauty that culminates from Jesus' ultimate sacrifice.

My dear friend Donna Oliver and I have a shared fondness for this tradition, and have recently inherited this privilege for our church. We love providing flowers for the cross on Easter Sunday, BUT we want to bring back the tradition of families bringing treasures from their own gardens.

So when you are out hunting for egg items a certain bunny leaves in your yard, think about also collecting floral gifts to share on our Easter Cross to celebrate the beauty of eternal life that Jesus graciously gave to us all.

And don't worry if you're not a gardener, Donna and I will have plenty of flowers for you to take part in this tradition too! They may be from our gardens, but given the pace spring is springing this year, they may not. Regardless, we will be on hand to take photos of your family in front of the flowered cross. Please join us in making this a tradition your family carries forward.

OUR PURPOSE

To Build a Vibrant, Christ-Centered Community Where ALL are Becoming Deeply Committed Christians

What's Going On In April ?

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1

Ministerial Alliance Holy Week Service,
Christ Episcopal Church, Noon
Adult Bible Study, Parlor, 6 pm
Youth Homework and Hangout 5-6 pm
Youth Bible Study, Youth Lounge, 6 – 7 pm

THURSDAY, APRIL 2

Service Opportunity
Sew Blessed, Parlor, 10:30 am
Ministerial Alliance Holy Week Service,
St. Paul CME, Noon
Maundy Thursday Service, Sanctuary, 6 pm

FRIDAY, APRIL 3

Ministerial Alliance Holy Week Service,
FirstNac UMC, Noon
Tenebrae Service, Sanctuary, 6 pm

SATURDAY, APRIL 4

Service Opportunity
Easter Egg Hunt & Lunch
– Oak Hill Plaza 1:30 pm

SUNDAY, APRIL 5 - EASTER SUNDAY

Sunrise Service, Oak Grove Cemetery, 7 am
Worship 8:45 & 11:05 am
Egg Hunt, 10 am FLC
Sunday School, 10 am
ICAN Sunday
The Grove Youth Group 5 – 6:30 pm

MONDAY, APRIL 6

Service Opportunity
Heart-to-Heart Chorus Practice, Choir Rm, 9 am
Perform at Westward Trails, 10:00 am

TUESDAY, APRIL 7

Service Opportunity
Feed the Preschool Teachers Lunch, 11:30 am

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8

Adult Bible Study, Parlor, 6 pm

THURSDAY, APRIL 9

Service Opportunity
Sew Blessed, Parlor, 10:30 am
UWF Circle VI Meeting, Noon – 1 pm

FRIDAY, APRIL 10

Confirmation Class trip, Congregation Beth El, Tyler
Meet at FUMC at 4 pm

SUNDAY, APRIL 12

Worship 8:45 & 11:05 am
Sunday School, 10 am
Confirmation Class, Youth Lounge, 3:30 - 4:30 pm
The Grove Youth Group, Youth Lounge, 5-6:30 pm

MONDAY, APRIL 13

Primetimers. Parlor, 9 am - Noon
Service Opportunity
GODEL 1902 Douglass Rd, 5 – 6 pm, prepare & serve dinner

TUESDAY, APRIL 14

Service Opportunity
HOPE Evening Food Distribution, 2100 E Main St., 5 – 7 pm

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15

First Forward Leadership Meeting, Parlor, 11 am
Service Opportunity
GODEL, 1902 Douglass Rd, 5 – 6 pm, prepare & serve dinner
Adult Bible Study, Parlor, 6 pm

THURSDAY, APRIL 16

Service Opportunity
Sew Blessed, Parlor, 10:30 am

SUNDAY, APRIL 19

Worship, 8:45 & 11:05 am
Sunday School, 10 am
Confirmation Class, Youth Lounge, 3:30 - 4:30 pm
The Grove Youth Group, Youth Lounge, 5 – 6:30 pm

MONDAY, APRIL 20

Heart-to-Heart Chorus Practice, Choir Rm, 9 am
Perform at Garrison Nursing Home, 10:00 am
Board of Stewards Meeting, Parlor, 6 pm

TUESDAY, APRIL 21

Service Opportunity
Mobile Food Pantry, west parking lots, packing items starts at
2:00 pm and food distribution starts at 3:30 pm

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22

Adult Bible Study, Parlor, 6 pm

THURSDAY, APRIL 23

Service Opportunity
Sew Blessed, Parlor, 10:30 am

SUNDAY, APRIL 26

Worship, 8:45 & 11:05 am
Sunday School, 10 am
Confirmation Class, Youth Lounge, 3:30 – 4:30 pm
The Grove Youth Group, Youth Lounge, 5 – 6:30 pm

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29

First Forward Leadership Meeting, Parlor, 11 am
Service Opportunity
Love INC, 917 Ruby Street, 9:30 am - Newsletter Folding
Adult Bible Study, Parlor, 6 pm

THURSDAY, APRIL 30

Service Opportunity
Sew Blessed, Parlor, 10:30 am

A FirstNac Highlight



I'm Jan Cobb and I attended FUMC in Nacogdoches during my SFA days, but life and my first job took me away from the Pineywoods... but not forever! I returned to Nacogdoches in 1984, raised my family here, and haven't looked back!

Remember the term “warm fuzzies”? To me, a warm fuzzy is just an every day happening or occurrence that gives you a warm, comfortable, loved feeling. It was warm fuzzies that brought me back to MY church.

The first warm fuzzy I can pull from my distant recollection of FUMC is having lunch, along with my SFA roommate, at Frances and Melvin Wester's home. That hot roast beef and mashed potato meal and the warm fellowship of a loving family was just what this homesick, first-year Lumberjack needed.

Then, as a very young mom, Connie Lester, who I met while teaching VBS the first year after we moved back, took me under her wing. To this day, I make her sausage pinwheel recipe for my family – it's their favorite! Cozying up with family over sausage pinwheels is synonymous with the warmth portrayed through Connie! A WARM FUZZY!

It is my hope and my prayer that I can help provide that same loving and caring feeling to young people of our church and community. It's my turn to be on the giving end, as well as the receiving end. As the old saying goes what goes around, comes around.

Our transition to First Forward has made loving our neighbor remarkably easy, where opportunities to love and serve abound! I co-chair our church's School Partnership Committee, through which we share a very close bond with our partner school, TJR Elementary. I am a member of the Children's Ministry Team and the FUMC Preschool Board. I'm enjoying giving back to the church that “raised up” my family.

I feel that our church is becoming more and more recognized as a very giving, loving church....and I love being a part of that!

Find Your Opportunity to Serve

FIRST FAMILY Claudia Whitley, Team Leader

First Family is all about caring for our church family. That includes helping host special events in the lives of our families, special events in our church, caring for each other in any way and providing personal and pastoral care as needed.

FIRST DISCIPLESHIP Jared Barnes, Team Leader

Our team coordinates meaningful learning experiences that help people of all ages grow in their faith and fellowship together. We oversee Sunday school for adults, children, and youth; small groups; and Midweek classes.

FIRST COMMUNICATION Terri Thompson, Team Leader

Communication is a tool that can couple spirituality with business practices to convey God's grace as we continue to turn our beliefs into our behavior.

FIRST COMMUNITY LeAnn Solmonson, Team Leader

First Community is about being the hands and feet of Christ in our community. We focus on serving those experiencing food insecurity, supporting students and teachers in our schools and ministering to those who experience housing instability.

FIRST OPERATIONS Steve Westbrook, Team Leader

One of our key areas in the coming year will be our church building and grounds with a goal of having a facility and surrounding grounds that are well-maintained, meet the needs of the church's ministries and are appealing to members and guests.

THE FIRST EXPERIENCE Lynn Teague, Team Leader

The First Experience teams are all about insuring every person, member and guest find a warm and friendly place to join in meaningful corporate worship.



Message From the Pastor

Does it seem that our calendars keep shifting into higher gears? Every season brings new activity and it keeps getting busier. The Easter season (which lasts 50 days until Pentecost) seems to be no exception. Concerts, recitals, final exams, contests, graduations, and any other activities are crammed into our calendars in these next two months. No wonder the summer is such a welcome time for many of us! Not that it's less busy, but it works on a different kind of schedule.

Easter Sunday kicks off a season that is filled with joyful activity. After the 40 days of preparation during Lent, we're ready to celebrate! Our spiritual cleansing

during Lent leads to a new life-giving spirit during the Easter season. We want to hold on to that life-giving spirit when our schedules can be so demanding.

As we go through the busy weeks ahead we will need to plan time in our schedules for our bodies and minds to rest. Otherwise, the hurriedness will wear us down. We have to be careful not to run so fast that we leave our spirits behind. We may have to schedule time for our bodies to recover and our spirits to catch up. We want the joy to give meaning to our busy-ness, and not let the busy-ness overwhelm our joy. It's important in all our scattered activities to keep our devotional routines, keep worship as a priority, hold fast to our prayer time, and keep our healthy habits. As we focus on the life-giving spirit of God in our worship and study, and as we maintain healthy habits of mind, body and spirit, it can make our hectic schedules more joyful and productive.

Pastor Marlin

My First | A Comforting Walk

As a child of two clergy, I quite literally grew up in the United Methodist Church. For those in the know, we usually call ourselves "PKs" (pastor's kids). I can say with full authority that being a PK is not for the faint of heart, but as hard as it can be, it's a rewarding experience when I look back on it.

While I call Liberty, Texas my hometown, I have spent the past eighteen years of my life in over 10 different congregations all over the eastern side of Texas. I even lived in Nacogdoches for a while when I was a child, attending the Preschool at First Nac and TJR Elementary. I have a lot of memories of spending time at the church, hanging out in the office or playing on the playground. I remember even singing with the band while they warmed up for the early service. It's comforting to walk through the building and remember things from my childhood while also allowing me to make new memories. Though I don't remember a lot of names, I love looking out in the congregation and seeing familiar faces.

My parents were most recently appointed to churches in the Kingwood area, so I spend most of my weekends back and forth between there and Nac, so that I can spend time with my siblings and (most importantly) my kitten, but I'm almost always back in time for worship on Sunday mornings. I also have a passion for music and working with kids. I am a freshman music education major at SFA and I serve as a choir intern here at First Nac. In addition to singing in the Chancel Choir, I also volunteer with Pastor Melissa and the youth group on Sunday and Wednesday evenings.

- Ellie Hale



2026 Church Officials as Elected at the Church Conference

Board of Stewards	Permanent Endowment/ Planned Giving	Nominations	Staff Parish Relations	Preschool Board
Jamie Derrick	Don Clark	Rhonda	Beth Bogan	Lawren
Sam Smith	Steve Westbrook	Richardson	Don Clark	McDermant
Rob McDermant	Anna Ruby	Beth Bogan	Hank Crouse	Damon Derrick
Carolyn Hardy	Stephanie	Steve Whitbeck	Charmayne	Sharon Scifres
Hank Crouse	Stephens	Buddy Himes	Dickhaut	Jan Cobb
Garry Solmonson	Sarah Lane	Karen Barnes	Garry Solmonson	Brigid Pitts
Tina Smith	Justin Pitcock	Katherine	Stephanie	Leticiaa Martinez-
Scott Bowyer	Mike Coffee	Whitbeck	Stephens	Maldonado
Steve Westbrook	Mary Nelle	Aaron Polk	Clint Johnson	O.T. Allen
Karen Jenlink	Brunson	Gary LaFour	Keith Millard	Rhonda
Charmayne	Paul Smith	Donna Johnson	Scott Bowyer	Richardson
Dickhaut				Carla Coffee
Terri Thompson				

Focus on the First Five

The First Five represent five essential practices that can help us on our journey to become deeply committed Christians. They certainly are not all of the essential practices but they represent keys to our growth and align with the vows we make to the church.



April Focus: Study

There are many opportunities to study the Bible in your own quiet time and in a small group at FirstNac. There are multiple Bible study opportunities and the Daily First Five is a great way to get into a study routine.

THE FIRST FIVE

- WORSHIP:** Pray five times a day and worship weekly.
- STUDY:** Read five verses of the Bible daily and study the Bible in a small group.
- SERVE:** Practice five acts of intentional kindness a week and serve with others.
- GIVE:** Extend five acts of generosity toward others each month and give generously to God through the church.
- SHARE:** Let others know you are a Christian and invite five people to church each year.

When we practice these actions, we are living out our vows to the church and our commitment to Our Purpose.

Good Things

at FirstNac

A recent article in the New York Times suggested that if we spent less time looking for the bad in things, the things we believe to be bad or wrong or unworthy, and spent more time looking for the good that exists in the world around us, we would all be happier, more apt to show appreciation and thankfulness, and more apt to create our own good things. You know what I mean; those things that lift our spirits, that make us pause momentarily to bask in the warm and fuzzy feeling it gives us, or maybe just makes us smile. When we spend too much time looking for what's bad, we invariably find ourselves missing out on what's good. In order to combat this, the author suggested that we should become more intentional in memorializing the good things we encounter by creating and keeping lists of those things.

Amazing things are happening in, around and through our church every day. We are probably aware of many of them, but I am pretty sure that many more go unnoticed and/or forgotten. Therefore, we are rolling out a new section in our monthly newsletter focused on the good things we see at FirstNac. It will be a pictorial essay of sorts and will include pictures of just some of the good things that were seen during the prior month. We even have a very catchy name for it... "Good Things at FirstNac".

But we will need your help in making it a success. When you see something good at church, something that makes you stop and smile, simply take a picture of it and send it to Terri Thompson at terrihompson75965@gmail.com so it can be shared with the rest of our church community. Here is the first month's offering. We hope you enjoy it.





Update From the Board of Stewards

The Board of Stewards gathered in the Parlor for their regular monthly meeting on March 16, 2026. The meeting was called to order at 6:02 pm by Chair Chris Hancock. After an opening prayer from Pastor Marlin, members heard a devotional on “Good Things” from Lay Leader Gary LaFour. After thanking members who are finishing their terms of service on March 31, Claudia Whitley, Bret Arrant, Steve Thomas, Gary LaFour and Chris Hancock, the board welcomed new members Charmayne Dickhaut, Steve Westbrook, Karen Jenlink, Terri Thompson and Sam Smith. After hearing Pastor Melissa report on several ministry activities, members heard the Pastor Report from Marlin that focused primarily on the upcoming Church Conference. SPR Chair Hank Crouse updated the board on searches for leaders in Praise Worship,

youth and children’s ministries and Treasurer Carolyn Bowyer submitted early in the year financials that show a good start to 2026. The Board supported a proposed amendment to make SPRC a stand alone committee under the Board of Stewards and the hiring of summer interns to serve in youth and children’s ministries during the summer. In final action, the Board approved the adoption of a staff employment manual as presented by SPR. The Board of Stewards meets the third Monday of each month at 6 pm in the Parlor. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 20. All are welcome to attend.

If you have a question or matter for the Board of Stewards, please contact:

Chris Hancock, Board Chair
936.554.0029
chris@hancockadvertising.com

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201 E Hospital Street
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The FirstNac News is published monthly by the Communications Team of First Forward.



Need to talk to a pastor?

When there is a hospitalization, a death in the family or any other time you may need urgent pastoral care, we encourage you to use these numbers.

Monday - Thursday 9:00 am to 4:00 pm: 936.564.8308

Evenings and Weekends: 936.564.8308