



Sights & Sounds of the Season

The FirstNac family celebrated the Advent and Christmas seasons with a wide range of events. In an emotional celebration of the retirement of Pastor Lorraine Brown (more about that inside), in a Chapel presentation by the Lamplite Theater of “A Christmas Carole” and in the outdoor presentation of a TubaChristmas, the FirstNac family hosted very memorable moments. TUBACHRISTMAS® was conceived in 1974 by Harvey Phillips as a tribute to his teacher and mentor William J. Bell, born on Christmas Day, 1902. Every year since then, hundreds of TUBACHRISTMAS® events take place around the world, bringing together tuba and euphonium players of all ages and playing levels to perform arrangements of Christmas carols! The Stephen F. Austin State University Chapter of the International Tuba Euphonium Association, under the direction of Dr. Ramón Garavito, Jr., was excited to host one in the Oldest Town in Texas and was extremely grateful to First United



Methodist Church and its congregation for continuing to welcome them each year. This year’s performance was on Saturday, December 6 on the front lawn of the church.

During the performance, arrangements of classic Christmas carols allowed the band to showcase all of the energy and dynamic range of these extraordinary instruments and help showcase the Christmas season in downtown Nac.

What's Going On In January?

THURSDAY, JANUARY 1

Church Office Closed

SUNDAY, JANUARY 4

Sunday School, 10 am

Only One Worship Service at 11:05 am

Reception for Interim Pastor following worship service

ICAN Sunday

The Grove Youth Group 5 - 6:30 pm

TUESDAY, JANUARY 6

NACISD SPRING SEMESTER STARTS

Service Opportunity

Feed the Preschool Teachers Lunch, 11:30 am

THURSDAY, JANUARY 8

Service Opportunity

Sew Blessed, Parlor, 10:30 am

UWF Circle VI Meeting, Noon - 1 pm

SUNDAY, JANUARY 11

Worship 8:45 & 11:05 am

Sunday School, 10 am

The Grove Youth Group 5 - 6:30 pm

MONDAY, JANUARY 12

Service Opportunity

GODTEL, 1902 Douglass Rd, 5 - 6 pm, prepare & serve dinner

TUESDAY, JANUARY 13

Service Opportunity

HOPE Evening Food Distribution, 2100 E Main St., 5 - 7 pm

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14

SFA SPRING SEMESTER STARTS

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15

Service Opportunity

Sew Blessed, Parlor, 10:30 am

SUNDAY, JANUARY 18

Worship, 8:45 & 11:05 am

Sunday School, 10 am

The Grove Youth Group 5 - 6:30 pm

MONDAY, JANUARY 19

NACISD & SFA NO CLASSES

Church Offices Closed

Board of Stewards Meeting, Parlor, 6 pm

TUESDAY, JANUARY 20

Service Opportunity

Mobile Food Pantry, west parking lots, packing items starts at 2:30 pm and food distribution starts at 4 pm

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21

Service Opportunity

GODTEL, 1902 Douglass Rd, 5 - 6 pm, prepare & serve dinner

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22

Service Opportunity

Sew Blessed, Parlor, 10:30 am

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25

Worship, 8:45 & 11:05 am

Sunday School, 10 am

The Grove Youth Group 5 - 6:30 pm

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28

Service Opportunity

Love INC, 917 Ruby Street, 9:30 am - Newsletter Folding

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

Service Opportunity

Sew Blessed, Parlor, 10:30 am

A FirstNac Highlight

Steve and Lisa Thomas



are members of the Roundtable Sunday School Class and are active and energetic greeters for FirstNac worship services. Steve closes most class sessions with a timely and entertaining church-related joke of the week. His talents also extend to poetry and he recently shared the following poem with the class. It is included here with the hope of encouraging others to step out and be a part of welcoming guests and our church family into our church home.

The FirstNac Greeter

The Church Greeter is a curious creature,
They're happier than most is their feature.

They smile and welcome all they meet,
Sometimes helping them to their seat.

Their job is to make a good impression,
And have an answer for any question.

Formal training just gets in their way,
They're a free spirit is what some say.

Insure they are at their door is correct,
The Head of Greeters she will check.

She is friendly and thoughtfully kind,
Loves to visit to see what's on their mind.

When the organ starts their job is done,
Close the doors and to a task that is fun.

A Church Greeter has an important place,
To Welcome all with their smiling face.

Steve and Lisa Thomas-Greeters
First United Methodist Church

Want to Help Welcome Others to Church?

If you would like to help make our church as welcoming as possible, reach out to Carolyn Hardy. She works with a great team of greeters and would love to include you.

Carolyn Hardy
hardy_carmike@hotmail.com

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

Friends,

Thank you for welcoming me as your Interim Pastor. For the next few months, as Andrew Hook is on his time away, we'll get to spend some time worshiping and serving together to honor and celebrate how God is working through us.

Ministry has given me opportunities to love people in parts of East Texas I would not have gotten to know otherwise. Each of the churches I've served has taught me that God is at work loving the world around us, and God uses us to share that love. I retired in 2021 after living in Tyler for six years as Superintendent of the Northwest District and

returned to Katy, Texas, where I had served for the twelve prior years. Nacogdoches First UMC is my seventh Interim appointment since retiring. Interim ministry is intentionally short term (typically 3 months) and provides for pastoral leadership while the appointed pastor is on sabbatical, leave of absence, medical leave, or when a church is between pastors. I've served as Interim Pastor in each of those situations.

I'm excited to serve alongside you for the next few months. First Nac has some tremendous ministries to share God's love. I anticipate this being a time to celebrate who we are and why we're here. We are people of Jesus Christ called to share the love of God. As our purpose is reflected in our church's mission, we are here "To Build a Vibrant, Christ-Centered Community Where ALL are Becoming Deeply Committed Christians."

Our time together will go quickly, but it will be meaningful. I'm excited about the time we will spend together and look forward to watching God work through us together!

Pastor Marlin

My First | Feels Like Home

My experience at First United Methodist Church can be best described as the comfort of a home that's filled with love and support. From the warmth and kindness of the congregation to the church's beliefs that shaped my core values, FUMC is a place that has been a positive presence in my life. I went through confirmation in 1983 and I still have my original confirmation Bible which I use to this date. My wife and I share these same positive experiences and core values as we both have been lifelong members at this church. We were happily married in our Chapel, as FUMC is important and special to us. In addition, our two children were baptized here at FUMC and are currently forming their religious foundation for a lifelong love for Christ as well as love of our church. I have so much appreciation for our church and our church community. FUMC is not only about faith, but also about personal growth, supporting our community, helping those in need and finding purpose in everyday life.

- Aaron Polk



Neighbor Serving Neighbor

The week of December 14 kicked off with one of the most moving Sunday worship services many of us have ever been a part of followed by a reception that warmed the soul. It continued Monday with an assembly of Christmas gift bags that lined the church hallways from the rear glass-door entrance to the little Chapel. When all was said and done, there were 505 bags filled. And during downtime between filling dinner bags, there were Christmas gift bags being put together for teachers in our partner schools.



Then there was Tuesday, with undoubtedly the most efficient food distribution of the year. 545 families were served and received an additional Christmas dinner bag from our church before the food ran out early in the evening.

Wednesday, our church family fed a second holiday feast to the residents at Godtel.

And Thursday? The Sew Blessed knitters gathered in the Parlor to go to work filling their bins once again after a week of distributing all 766 hand knitted Christmas hats to people in need in our community.

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.



January Focus: Serving

Serving within our church family and in our community is one of the ways we live out Our Purpose and live into the life Jesus is calling us to.

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.

Celebrating Pastor Lorraine

On Sunday, December 14, the FirstNac church family gathered to say “Thank You” to Pastor Lorraine Brown and to celebrate her retirement. The following was written by Emily Taravella and reprinted with permission.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight.” – Proverbs 3:5-6

First United Methodist Associate Pastor Lorraine Brown said that scripture helped her through the darkest days of her life and ultimately led her to respond to God’s call to ministry in the late 1990’s.

Lorraine’s first career was working in a medical laboratory, where she gained experience helping patients and dealing with people in stressful situations. But she knew all along that God was calling her to ministry.

“I ignored it earlier in my life because people said women didn’t belong in ministry,” she said. “So, I taught Sunday School and such as that. But God didn’t take His hand out of my back. Regardless of what the world said about women in ministry, I knew what God said.”

Lorraine is the first African American pastor to serve First UMC, breaking down the barriers of both race and gender that kept the pulpit closed to many before her.

She previously served as a local pastor at a church

in Missouri City, and then in Dickinson before her appointment to Nacogdoches eight-and-a-half years ago.

Before entering the ministry, the tragic death of her son deepened Lorraine’s relationship with God. She entered 10 years of darkness after her son’s death, but during that time she grew in her faith. She attended a Walk to Emmaus retreat in 1997, and it was there that she finally said “yes” to her calling.



Losing her son and learning to lean on God made her an exceptionally empathetic pastor who is revered and respected by her congregation for her ability to comfort and guide people through life’s valleys. She is uniquely equipped for helping people in their time of need, because of her own experience.

“I may not know exactly what they are going through, but I understand their pain,” she said. “I became a new creation in God after my loss. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, ‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!’ It’s through our suffering that we grow. Without it, we might not ever know what faith is.”

Donna Oliver, whose daughter Flora faced cancer while in high school, said Lorraine prayed over Flora’s stem cell transplant outside in the hospital hallway as they were removing it from the cooler, then laid hands on Flora as the cells entered her bloodstream.

“It was a surreal experience which welcomed the Holy Spirit into our midst and made me feel light and unburdened for the first time in so long,” Donna said, adding that Flora’s children’s minister from First UMC, Elsa Jordan, was present, as well.

Elsa said Lorraine is deeply loved not only at First UMC, but in the Nacogdoches community at-large. “She is treasured because of her powerful prayer, her devoted pastoral care and her incredible spiritual presence,” Elsa said.

Lorraine has bonded with all generations of church members.

David Taravella and Michelle Coffee, both students at Texas A&M, continue to enjoy a close relationship with her, even though they are now in college.

“Pastor Lorraine has shown compassionate, pastoral care to members of all ages and backgrounds regardless of what struggles they faced,” David said. “She is someone every member knew they could go to for any needs, whether emotional, mental or spiritual.” Michelle said Lorraine has been a steady, calming, joyful presence in her life.

“She has shown me unconditional love and acceptance as I’ve navigated growing up, graduating high school, moving to college, and now graduating from college with her there cheering me on at every step,” Michelle said. “I cannot imagine my life without her, and I cannot wait to continue to spend time with her in her retirement.”

Church member Gary LaFour said he cannot find words big enough or expressive enough to describe the impact Lorraine has had on his life.

“She is my friend, my cherished prayer partner, and she has prayed me through more than a couple of hard times during her tenure here,” he said. “But what stands out the most is how she has loved and supported our church and the people who worship here. The importance of her steadfast presence, prayers, words of encouragement and showing us how to love as Jesus loved cannot be overemphasized when examining the impact she has had.”

Lorraine attributes the presence of God that people feel through her to her prayer and study of scripture. “I learned if you want to be good at something, practice it an hour a day,” she said. “That’s what prayer



and Bible study are for me – a daily practice. Prayer keeps me focused on being empty of me so that others can feel God’s presence.”

In addition to her pastoral care, Lorraine is well established as a gifted preacher and teacher. Some of her sermons have led to spontaneous applause at the end, members recalled.

Chris Hancock said, “Lorraine is simply the Godliest human I know. To my wife Cindy, my daughters and me, she’s a living testimony to reckless, unconditional, constant love.”

During her time in Nacogdoches, Lorraine has also been active in the Wesley Foundation, the Ministerial Alliance, Fredonia Rotary, local missions, and the public schools.

Fredonia Rotary President Amelia Commander said that Rotary is “service with heart.”

“Lorraine’s leadership has embodied that since day one,” she said. “Her dedication, compassion and commitment to others have made a lasting impact on our club and our community. She has set a standard of service that will continue to inspire us long after her move.”

Lorraine said her prayer is that people will feel they have had an encounter with Jesus Christ through her ministry.

In her retirement, she plans to be a “woman without a schedule.”

“It doesn’t mean I’m going home to sit down, but I will practice saying ‘no,’” she said, adding that she’s moving to Sugarland to be closer to family. “I’ll be busy again in time, but not right now. I want to go to church just to worship.”



Update From the Board of Stewards

The Board of Stewards joins the FirstNac family in welcoming Reverend Marlin Fenn to the Nacogdoches community and to our church.

Pastor Marlin has been appointed to serve our church as interim pastor in the months ahead and during that time, will be senior pastor of First United Methodist Church. He grew up in Deer Park and he and his wife, Kay Lynn Fenn, live in Katy. Since his retirement as pastor and district superintendent in 2021, Pastor Marlin

has served as interim in Dickinson, Sugar Land, Crosby, Texarkana and Liberty. The Fenns have two daughters and seven grandchildren, ages two to 16. It is with a warm Texas welcome that we invite the Fenns into our church family. The Board of Stewards meets monthly on the third Monday at 6 pm in the Parlor. The next regularly scheduled meeting will be on January 19 at 6:00 pm. 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

You are receiving this edition of the FirstNac News, a requested printed newsletter to help us communicate better as a church. If you prefer to receive an electronic version only, please let the church office know and we will remove you from the mailing list.

First United Methodist Church
201 E Hospital Street
Nacogodches, TX 75961

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