

Dear Church family,

Brrr... what a cold snap we've had! On Monday morning, it was in the 20s for most of the morning. I peeked outside my window, hoping I might see some of the snow that others said was flurrying in the night. Alas, nothing but a little ice.

As I looked, a tiny, shivering, hummingbird flew up to the feeder, not realizing the nectar was frozen solid. Amazingly, he stayed. His throat moved. He was drinking! Throughout the day, this little buff-bellied hummingbird has returned. Even though the top part of the feeder is frozen, there is a little unfrozen nectar in the well. I've been working at home today, so I've seen him return dozens of times. He shivers, fluff his feathers, takes a sip, and it seems as if he sighs in relief. That sugary mix is just the energy he needs to keep warm today.

Jesus says that when we feel beset by troubles and anxieties, we should find a bird and look at it. When we do, we'll remember that God, who provides for birds, can be counted on to provide for us, too.

As watch this little tropical hummingbird, it's expanded my understanding of Jesus' teaching. Since he said this as part of the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, I always pictured the setting for seeing God provide for birds to be warmth and sun. But this 20 degree day has opened my eyes to the fullness of what Jesus meant: that in the bitter bite of winter, God still provides. Not just for birds, but for us, too. We just have to trust. And like that little hummingbird, come to the feeder with hope.

"Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?" (Matthew 6:26)

Here are some of the ways God has been providing life and hope through our ministries at FUMC:

- One of the reports we fill out each year for the United Methodist Church asks for a ton of numbers and metrics. It should come as no surprise that 2020 saw a decrease of in-person worship attendance at FUMC, but despite that, there were a lot of really cool increases. Online worship went from 0 to 207 every week!! And though we've always been passionate about service and outreach, the number of people we reached skyrocketed up from 7,000 to 44,000! Wow! Last year the number of outreach ministries also doubled, from 34 to 67. 2020 was a hard year, my friends. But FUMC grew in ways that are beautiful to God. We reached new people in new ways. We touched thousands of lives in one of the darkest periods in living memory. Let's rejoice that God has given us the strength and faith to not just survive this pandemic, but share love in real, meaningful ways with our community.
- At our first Newbie lunch, we had 3 people who found FUMC online and are ready to be members! Each of them joined the church during that Zoom call, saying their vows and making their promises to God online. They are looking forward to the day they can worship with us in person. May it do your heart good to know that our family continues to grow, even in a pandemic. Welcome Manny, Rose and Judy! We are so glad to have you!
- But that's not all- Peggy Trom joined in person at the 9:30am worship service this Sunday. Welcome, Peggy! You are already so active in our ministry (Peggy is the leader of Woven Women) and we're just delighted that you are now an "official" part of this faith family.

- Kids + bells = joy (no matter the temperature!). The Children's Handbell choir started up again last week. The kids are practicing to play you a song during the Easter season. Practices are Thursday afternoons and Saturday mornings. All children 4 years old through 5th grade are welcome! Contact Lee Ann at the church office, 956-686-3784 or laclemons@mcfirst.com for more information.
- Our McAllen Police Department used our church to train early last Thursday morning. I love that when they needed a place to train their newest recruits, they called FUMC. And I love that we are able to provide our space, for free, to our Police Department for training. Thank you to these officers for what they do. And thank you, FUMC for giving them a place to train.

Here's a few of the special worship services and events that are coming up:

- **Children's Inside OutReach Lenten Activities begin Sunday, February 21 during the 9:30 am worship service!** Each Sunday during Lent children ages 3 through 5th grade are invited to join Lee Ann Clemons for fun Bible lessons, outreach projects, music, and more on following Time for Children. Remember to wear your masks!
- **Inside Outreach Events for Lent (all held on campus unless otherwise noted)**
 - **February 20** Coffee Talk VII - The Difference We Can Make: Reflections on Anti-Racism Resources, 9:45am Gathering, 10am meeting. Contact shellums@mcfirst.com or laclemons@mcfirst.com for the zoom link!
 - **February 27, 7:45 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Cornerstone / TRP – Activity:** We will build two ramps for two individuals in need!
 - **February 28 – March Teach for America Teachers - Activity:** Card and/or Letter Writing for 51 teachers. At home letter writing activity, return letters or cards to church for mailing. Assign in groups of 5 names per person to write.
 - **March 4 – 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. Manna Food Pantry – Activity:** Food Preparation for ARISE Centers – Separating food onto pallets for pick up by ARISE Centers (serving 495 families)
 - **March 9 – 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. Manna Food Pantry – Activity:** Food Distribution to ARISE Centers -- Loading food for distribution by ARISE Centers
 - **March 10 – 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 N Estrella's House / Children's Advocacy - Activity:** Easter Basket Assembly for children coming through
 - **March 11 – 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. Manna Food Pantry – Activity:** Pack food bags
 - **March 15 – 3:45 – 6:00 p.m. Manna Food Pantry – Activity:** Distribution to Families (drive-by)
 - **March 18 – 6:00 p.m. Rainbow Room – Child Protective Services - Activity:** Care Pack Assembly for children that come through and CPS without certain items of need. The items that we have gathered are those asked for by the Rainbow Room, specifically.
 - **March 22 Escandon Elementary – Staff and Teachers - Activity:** Teacher Survival Kits – These "kits" are just a little something to say "thank you" to the teachers and staff at Escandon Elementary, a long-time partner of First UMC!

Stay warm my friends, and if you are feeling anxious, find a bird and remember how God provides, no matter the season. I'll see you Sunday!

Pastor Laura