

Dear Church family,

*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Ephesians 6:18*

Today is National Day of Prayer! I love that we live in a country where, for almost 70 years now, we've had a day of prayer. If you can, find some believer friends today and gather to pray for your neighborhood, workplace, community, and leaders.

I heard a story this week about how prayer has shaped our own church. Several years ago, the youth group had big dreams but no clear way to make them a reality. So our young people did something amazing. They found a journal to use for praying. They would pray, together, about their dreams for the church. They wrote two: forming a youth band and having a place to play sand volleyball. Then together, they prayed about those two things. Every day for weeks and months. The person telling me the story said that first, Meldi Martinez came forward to help lead the band- they had a sponsor! Then musicians started offering to play, to sing, to join. They had musicians! Someone built them a stage. They found old microphones that nobody was using. The church upgraded its drum set and suddenly there was an entire drum kit for the band to play. Over that semester, as they prayed, God answered that prayer, piece by piece, day by day. Although most of the members of that band are now in college, I've still gotten to hear them play when they are on vacation. Years later, those prayers are still producing fruit in our church. And the volleyball court? The day I heard about those students praying, I saw two folks from our community come out to learn the game on the court that was built on prayer and God's power.

Still today, we are dreaming God-sized dreams. We hear the call, but can't yet see the way forward. So today, on National Day of prayer, I want to ask you to do what the youth did all those years ago. I want you to find a prayer journal, or make a new note in your phone or on your computer. And I want us, together, to pray for two things. Then, as God answers those, we'll pray for two more. Here are the two first things I hear on so many hearts (and they are on my own)

- Our church finances. We dream of 10% of our giving (or more!) going directly to outreach. We dream of every dollar we give being used in ministry (not to pay off debt!). We long for the day when finances no longer hold us back, but our generosity unleashes God's healing in this community and beyond. Pray for God's healing and power within our finances.
- Our church family. With the vaccine and the decrease in the threat of COVID, it's finally time to invite those outside our church to be part of this amazing family of faith. We are *a faith family for all, serving all*. Pray for God to bring the lost to our family and for our ability to go out with hope and love and prayer, to where they are.

Oh, I'm excited! God answers prayers with power. God shows us the way forward. God provides what we need for the work of his Kingdom. So let's pray and then wait with hope for what God will do among and through us!

### **Speaking of what God is doing through us...**

- Did you know that our partnership with the Mercy Chefs has fed 33,655 people in the month they have been at FUMC. They have served immigrants at the Catholic Charities Humanitarian Respite Center, hotels housing COVID positive immigrants, La Posada Providencia in San Benito (a longer term shelter for immigrants), and even provided meals for the homeless of our community through Emily's meals!
- Last week, we partnered with Mercy Chefs to serve lunch/dinner to Customs and Border Patrol at the Donna Processing Center. There were approximately 400 for lunch and another 200 plates were taken for the night shift. Pastor Jon, Susan and I got to chat with the officers, many of whom are supervisors for the regions around McAllen. I was thankful for that time to build relationship and hear about their lives and families.
- Looking for a way to serve that you can accomplish on your own time and schedule? We have an amazing calling team that works to contact each member, by phone, over the course of the year. If God has given you gifts of connecting with others, we'd love to have you on our calling team. If you'd like to put that cell to good use, drop Laurie Micheletti a line at [txbelle@rgv.rr.com](mailto:txbelle@rgv.rr.com)

- Do you want to hear something amazing? We have a member who, upon getting his stimulus check from the government, gave the entire amount to FUMC! He said, as he prayed, he realized he wanted, not to keep it for himself, but to invest that money in FUMC's ministry to the poor and hungry. They have been hit hardest with the pandemic, he said, and I want it to go to them. WOW!
- Speaking of giving, we have a new giving system for online donations. This new provider will save us \$10,000 every year! When you get signed up, you'll see two options- Offering/General Giving and Capital Campaign (Debt Retirement). Some of you have asked how to give to Outreach- great question. Prior to 2021, most of the money that funded our Outreach work came from special offerings (communion offerings, collections, donations). In 2021, FUMC took a leap of faith and had Susan tell us what she needed for these ministries. Then we added that to our *regular* budget. Now that our outreach is part of our church budget (yay!) your *regular* giving funds all our outreach efforts! So how do you give to outreach? Just make a donation to FUMC. Your regular offering is now fully funding our Outreach efforts. WOW!
- Okay- some financial news. April was a tough month. We're still good for the year, but even with our deeply reduced expenses, our giving didn't cover the outflow in April. This happens. Though I pray and hope that every month will be an upward trajectory, sometimes we hit a bump.
- Speaking of bumps, we finally got the horrible (variable rate) utility bill from February. And it's worse than I imagined. Our typical utilities for a month are somewhere between \$3,000-\$5,000. This bill is for \$110,000. For one month. One month in which we stayed open to provide bathrooms to hospital workers, showers to those without power and food to the hungry. I believe God will help us find address this outrageous bill. We do not have the money to pay it, obviously, so on the suggestion of legal counsel, we're going to wait to see what the legislature does regarding these predatory bills and going to pay the same amount as our last bill as a show of good faith. As you pray for church finances, please pray for God's continued help with this electric bill. The last time we all prayed, the company went bankrupt and were able to get on a fixed rate contract! So I know God will hear and answer our prayers about this predatory bill.

### **We're moving forward with our gradual re-opening**

- Children's Church is now at 9:30 and 11am for kids 3years and up following the children's sermon. Each hour is different, so kids with parents who are here for Sunday School and worship will have new learning throughout.
- Last Sunday our Nursery reopened and we hosted our first little one! If you'd like to make a reservation, contact [laclemons@mcfirst.com](mailto:laclemons@mcfirst.com)
- Do you like to sing? We'd love to have duets, quartets, even quintets in worship. If you and your friends are ready to put something together, it would bless us! Contact Pastor Jon [jherrin@mcfirst.com](mailto:jherrin@mcfirst.com) if you'd like to sing!
- A couple of our Sunday Schools started meeting together in person this past Sunday. I've heard only good things from the joy that happened in those reunions. The timeline is up to each class, so if you're interested in what yours is doing, reach out to your leader!
- We've begun to plan summer programs including Day School camps, music and children camps and even VBS. Let's pray that things continue as well as they have been so that we can continue to bring all these online ministries back to in-person as well!
- With the increasing rate of access to COVID-19 vaccines and people being vaccinated, you may be wondering "How do I know what is safe or not safe for me to do?" Thankfully the CDC has put out this nifty graphic regarding choosing safe activities. Remember to be considered fully vaccinated it takes about 2 weeks after your last dose, also if you take medications that may lower your immune system be sure to take extra precautions and as always be sure to contact your primary health care provider for any questions or concerns. Remember that we are still learning a lot about COVID-19 and its variants, so continue to be mindful of your health and safety as well as that of our brothers and sisters in Christ. You can find more detailed information on how to protect yourself as well as others on the CDC website at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

**I give thanks to God for being part of such a vibrant, welcoming church family.**

With love,

Pastor Laura