

Dear Church family,

When Kevin and I got here, one of the first things we did was plant trees: mango, orange, banana and avocado found places in our little yard in these first few months. We want to be enjoying them for years to come. But this freeze took a heavy toll on our new trees. Even the small ones, which we could cover, didn't fare well. And our lovely, established grapefruit tree looks like it's been poisoned. Its once-verdant leaves are withered and dropping to the ground.

As I drive around town, walk around the church praying, or just sit on my back porch, all I see is brown plants with withered leaves. A distressing visual. A reminder of the toll the polar vortex took on us. And that though we endured it, our landscape carries the scars.

Since God moves our hearts to life and hope, I want to give you an image to reorient your hearts whenever you see a struggling plant. I want you to think of a promise from Psalm 1:

*[The righteous] are like trees planted along the riverbank,
bearing fruit each season.
Their leaves never wither,
and they prosper in all they do.*

Our fate is not the same as that of the plants. When we set our eyes on God, when we sink our roots into that Living Water (which is always right at our side), then the worst years do not destroy us. In fact, God says we'll bear fruit in every season. Even the hard ones. And our "leaves," unlike those of the plants, *never* wither. Not when we are planted by the Living Water Jesus gives us freely and abundantly. If you are feeling dry, scarred, afflicted, take some time to sink your roots more deeply into God's provision. Read your Bible, wake up 10 minutes early tomorrow and begin the day with prayer, worship with us online or in person, find a Christian friend and pray for each other. Use all the tools God teaches us to tap into the renewal that God says is always right at our side.

Speaking of hurting landscapes, our poor church foliage is in need of some care, trimming, and help. Our custodial staff along with Susan and Lee Ann (both amazing gardeners) are planning a clean-up day on March 20th. We'd like volunteers for 9am-1pm on that Saturday. The more people who come, the faster the work will go! Bring clippers/sheers/gloves and gardening tools to help clear out all dead plants and spread out mulch.

Here are some ways FUMC bore fruit this past week. May you be encouraged:

- Cornerstone Ramp Project was a huge success. Teams from FUMC gave their Saturday to clear space, measure, and install custom ramps for families. What a delight to see so many faces: a college student from UTRGV, some folks who are new to our church, the youth, even two winter Texans who just arrived this week. Twenty-six people joined in to make a difference for two families who can now access their homes in their wheelchairs for the first time! What joy to bring healing and hope in a time of struggle.
- Last Sunday, was our second Inside/Outreach for kids at 9:30am on Sunday. The kids made 45 bags for our Emily Meals homeless friends. The care packages contain a pair of new socks, toothpaste, toothbrush, Kleenex, hand wipes, and a granola bar. Thank you, kids, for helping us change the world, one life at a time.
- Our Emily's Meals team took food to 45 of our homeless friends last week. They meet every other week, assemble meals, and drive a route to deliver those meals to anyone they see who is living on the streets. If you'd like to help with this ministry, more hands are always welcome. You can contact Donna Gibson for more information: gibsdondonna@gmail.com
- Our first open Gym (Sundays from 5-6pm) for youth was super-fun. Teens enjoyed playing games, hanging out, and being back in the gym. We'll be doing this every week so please share with the teens you know so they can join in.
- On February 21, Tom and Marie Curtis joined the church. Welcome Tom and Marie! We are so glad that you are part of this church family.

- On February 28, Tracie Ashlock joined. Tracie moved to McAllen just before the pandemic and has been worshipping with us online. She says God is calling her to be an active part of this faith community. How exciting!
- Speaking of new members, we've had **seven** folks join FUMC in February! Some of them are worshipping with us online and others in person- it's about half and half. Isn't it lovely to see God expanding our family, even in a hard time!?
- Confirmation Class of 2021 is starting very soon! This year, the confirmation class and their mentors will meet every Sunday from 2:30 - 3:45pm in the Social Room. The youth have already started the process of choosing their mentor. Our mentors play a crucial role in building up the youth and helping them gain a deeper understanding of their faith. The first day of class will be March 21st, 2021. If you would like to register your youth for confirmation classes, please send an email to djones@mcfirst.com . There will also be a brief meeting for the parents on March 7th, 2021 after the traditional service in the East Overflow Room.
- Scout troop 76 has open enrollment for boys ages 11-17. Our brand-new troop was recruiting Saturday morning in the church parking lot. If you'd like to join this amazing troop, contact Mike Key at mksm76@aol.com
- This week The Day School kids went all out in celebration of Dr. Seuss's birthday! We have a great school that make learning fun!!
- Through the Care Portal of McAllen, TX, we learned of a family whose home was damaged in Hurricane Hanna and experienced broken pipes in the recent freeze. Duane Grace is one of our members who recently relocated to Minnesota. Before he did, he asked if we might be able to use much of the furniture from his home here. He wanted it to go to people in need. Because of his generosity, FUMC was able to provide this family with 2 twin beds, a king-sized bed, a sofa sleeper to this family. They are a widowed mother with 10 children living near Monte Alto. Praise God for such a blessing!

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

- **Children's Inside OutReach Lenten Activities 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!
- **Open Gym** Every Sunday from 5-6pm for youth!
- **Inside Outreach Events for Lent (all held on campus unless otherwise noted)**
 - **February 18- March 7: Teach for America Letter Writing (51 teachers)** At home activity returning letters or cards to church for mailing
 - **March 4: Manna Food Pantry – Food Prep for ARISE**
 - **March 9: Manna Food Pantry – Food Distribution to ARISE**
 - **March 9, 16, 23: Women's Lenten Bible Study.** Peggy Trom will lead this study via Zoom. A Scripture, a prayer, and a challenge for daily life are also included each day. Please reserve your book (\$12.00) through the church office, 956-686-3784, or email laclemons@mcfirst.com by Feb. 16th.
 - **March 10: Easter Basket Assembly for Estrella's House 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon**
 - **March 11: Manna Food Pantry – Pack food bags**
 - **March 15: Manna Food Pantry – Distribution**
 - **March 28: Rainbow Room – Care Packs Assembly 6:00 p.m.**
 - **March 22: Teacher Survival Kits for Escandon Elementary (100) 6:00 p.m.**
 - ****TBA: Water/Snacks on Sports Field Evening**
 - If you'd like to serve, just reach out to shellums@mcfirst.com to get signed up.
 - **First UMC InSide/OutSide SHIRTS** will be available this SUNDAY! If you would like one please stop by the INFORMATION COUNTER at the church! We have all sizes at this time. SO COME EARLY to get your shirt! There will be someone there to help you! Wear this shirt to show we are and InSide/Out CHURCH!

I'll see you Sunday!

Pastor Laura