

Dear Church family,

Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. 1 Corinthians 13:12

A couple of weeks ago, something strange and wonderful happened. I met two church members and got to their faces *before* I saw them with masks on. This was a first! Being your new pastor in a pandemic means I've met 99% of y'all with masks on. Kevin, likewise, started a new job with all new coworkers. He works in surgery and is wearing PPE (personal protective equipment) most of the time. Both of us have met hundreds of new people behind masks.

Which means, we now know what it's like to see "imperfectly." There is only so much I can guess at about your face from just your eyes. Kevin and I have talked about this bizarre experience of being shocked to finally see someone's face! Wow! My mind has been trying to fill in the blanks, but nothing compares to actually seeing what someone really looks like.

It's given me insight into what Paul says in this scripture: that all human knowledge is only partial. Back in Paul's day, you could see everyone *else's* face clearly, but *your own* was a mystery. A polished piece of metal, the reflection in water, they might give you an idea of what you looked like, but you didn't really ever *know* your own face because the mirrors of the day were imperfect. These poor reflective surfaces produced a picture that was incomplete- just like meeting someone behind masks! But, Paul says, in eternity, it all becomes clear. We know fully: God and God's will, ourselves and one another!

So the next time you meet someone wearing masks, remember this verse and let it remind you that here on this side of eternity, there are things we can guess at and try to puzzle out, but for which we'll never have full understanding. But when we reach eternity, it will all become beautifully clear.

Speaking of beauty, Holy Week was outstanding and our outreach has been incredible. Here are just some of the good things that have been going on...

- The Mirabella Apartment office staff brought us beautiful, delicious tomatoes. They are our neighbors and know what we're doing for the community. We took them right over to the Mercy Chefs, who used them to make meals for over 1000 people that day! Thank you, Mirabella!
- What a blessing!!! Mercy Chefs came to the RGV to serve on March 26th and began cooking in the First UMC Kitchen on March 27th. There have been approximately 24,720 meals prepared. That includes sandwiches lunch boxes, prepared by volunteers, and dinners, plated by volunteers, for those immigrant/migrants staying temporarily in 6 hotels. These have been delivered to the six motels, also delivered by volunteers from the RGV! There are approximately 750 – 800 meals delivered and served at the Humanitarian Respite Center! Another opportunity for volunteers. As of this Friday, April 9, there will no longer be food prepared for the hotels. That is no more sandwich boxes or dinners that must be plated and served. This piece will be taken over by World Central Kitchen. Mercy Chef still needs volunteers to help with: 4:00 – 5:30 p.m. Kitchen Cleanup, 5:00 – 8:00 p.m., Meet at First UMC Kitchen to load food and caravan to Humanitarian Respite Center to serve food. If

anyone would like to serve, they can call, text or e-mail Susan Hellums (956)648-8509 – shellums@mcfirst.com Or sign up on line, directly with Mercy Chefs at <https://secure.mercychefs.com/site/SPageNavigator/volunteer/registration>

- As part of our children's Inside/Outreach, the kids (and the amazing Carolyn Gibson) made thank you cards for all of the AEP lineworkers who were so dedicated to restoring this community's power following the polar vortex. The workers were so very grateful. They sent a note and took their pictures with their cards.
- Also as part of our Inside/Outreach, we put together little "Thank you" gifts for the teachers and staff at Escandon Elementary School here in McAllen. Your regular giving provided the resources, our McFirst Children decorated the bags, and another group put it all together. Thanks be to God for the generosity of our Church! Escandon has been an MISD partner school for years. We are planning something for them for Teacher Appreciation Week the first week of May...stay tuned!
- Finally, here are pictures from all our worship services this beautiful Holy Week:
 - **Holy Thursday**- 114 people came for communion to go.
 - **Good Friday**- 106 people walked through the stations of the cross. Families, couples and individuals told us how moving this time of self-guided and self-paced worship was.
 - **Easter Sunday** We had three worship services and welcomed 435 people in person, with at least 50 more online.

Beginning this week, we're moving forward with our gradual re-opening

- There will be children's church at 9:30 and 11am for kids 3years and up. Just follow Mrs. Lee Ann after the children's time. At 9:30, it will be Godly Play and 11am is JAM. Each hour is different, so kids with parents who are here for Sunday School and worship will have new learning throughout.
- We're working to re-open the nursery (birth-2 years old) on a reservation basis starting in May. Stay tuned for more details.
- Pastor Jon is reaching out to Sunday School classes with 12 and fewer folks to see which ones are interested in in-person meetings on campus. Health and safety guidelines will continue to be in effect and we've got special instructions on how to clean your rooms when you're finished so they're ready for the next group.
- 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!

Pastor Laura