

Welcome to the November newsletter, which we affectionately call the “stewardship” newsletter! This edition highlights stories from 2018 and the impact our commitment of prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness at First Church-Downtown made within and outside the walls of 200 West High Street.

This has been a year of listening to God, to one another, and to the voices of our neighbors both near and far. A pencil sketch is beginning to take shape that celebrates our past, affirms our present, and compels our future. What has become very clear, to me anyway, is that our past is the plan for our future. Between starting new communities, developing leaders, and strengthening our community presence, we have our work cut out for us.

Let me start with a strong community presence. I firmly believe that we must grow each of our communities. And you have affirmed this. Listening closely, I hear your desire for a vibrant children’s and youth program; your celebration of one of the finest music programs in all of Methodism; and your commitment to be a strong witness of Christ in our community. I have also heard your concern for our aging facilities and the need for renovation sooner than later.

Starting new communities has been something that I feel is still a cautious “yes.” I have heard your questions that new places may dilute and perhaps weaken what we are already doing. All of these are valid concerns. My conviction is that moving across more streets is an opportunity for greater faith and a stronger witness in all our communities. Soren

### **“We are right where God intended us to be”**

Like many, my wife Ellen and I took a long and winding path in search of our church home. We wanted a church that offered a traditional service, a family-oriented congregation, and ample opportunities for ministry and discipleship. I vividly recall the warm and genuine welcome we received from so many people, including pastors and members, on our first Sunday at the Downtown campus. I knew we had found our church home as we sat through that first service. Everything about FUMC - from the choir (the best I have seen anywhere!) to the pastors to the congregation - was perfect for us. We are right where God intended us to be.

Our time at FUMC has been exciting, action-packed, and, above all, an immense blessing. God has been so good to us, and it is our responsibility as Christians to be good stewards of all the blessings God has bestowed by generously giving our time, our gifts, and our resources. Financial gifts are an important aspect of our obligation, but there are many other aspects we view as equally important. Time is one of the most precious gifts from God, and giving our time to celebrate His grace is so important. Ellen and I do this in several ways. First, we both attend Sunday School each week. I participate in various ministries aimed at fellowship and outreach, including the Thursday golf outings and the softball team. I also attend the Discipleship Intensive class along with FUMC members from each campus. Additionally, Ellen and I have participated in Vacation Bible School and in Trunk or Treat at the Fall Festival. We had a great time and were so encouraged by the unbelievable outpouring of love and support by so many for the youth at our church. FUMC is a wonderful church full of generous and loving people. I know God has great things in store for us all in the future, and I am thrilled to be a part of this congregation. *Kevin Osborne*

Kierkegaard said, “Without risk, faith is an impossibility.” That is what I believe we are doing. Our faith is grown as we extend the tent to Masterson Station.

Leadership development, laity as well as clergy, is at the center of what we are doing and where we are going. In the past ten years, First Church prepared over 22 clergy leaders currently serving within the UMC. Stop and let that sink in. A host of new clergy leaders, many coming through our Offerings community, have been helped by First Church to prepare them for continued service beyond our walls. In athletics, the trend is to identify which “coaching tree” a person has come through. We at First Church have our own clergy tree that will impact the UMC for years to come. In terms of laity development, we are on our seventh cohort in the Discipleship Intensive, a multi-year discipleship program, with 26 people. Nine of the 26 have completed the program on our way to meeting our goal of 20 completing by 2020. A new cohort begins in January. Please let me know if you’d like to be involved!

None of the above and so much more would be possible without your support! Thank you for your commitment to the work God is doing through this place. Because of you, 2018 has been a productive year of making disciples. While we never claim the credit, for it is a work of God, we can be grateful that God allows us be partners in this effort. The year 2018 has seen an eternal impact made in lives. I’m convinced there is no higher calling or greater need for our generation.



## **A story from our Backpack Program**

Recently, one of our members who helps pack and deliver was in a grocery store near one of the schools we take food bags to each week. On the same aisle was a mom and child, and our member noticed the mom carefully calculating before adding food to their cart. When the child asked for cereal, the mom hesitated. She then unzipped the child's backpack, opened one of the bags of food we had delivered, and said "You have cereal – we don't need to get that today." Each week, we deliver 50 food bags to Deep Springs Elementary and 25 to Beaumont Middle, and while we don't get to know the students, we know that these deliveries make a difference. Thank you for all of the ways you support feeding these children – the part of the Downtown Serve money that purchases food; donations of many of our frequently-sent items; other financial contributions; prayers for the students and their families; packing and delivering.

## **Showing Up**

Small Group Leader: "You should really come back on Sunday nights to be a part of our small group. We've missed you."

Student: "What's a small group? What do you do?"

Small Group Leader: "Well, if you show up we'll play some dodgeball."

Student: "Okay. Maybe."

That night, this student showed up, and our group had a blast beaming each other with dodgeballs. But that wasn't all we did. For the last 10 minutes of our time together, we put the balls away and we sat with each other talking about school, friends, home life, and things we are struggling with. We closed in prayer, and we each left knowing we had been heard and that we have a safe place where we belong.

A couple of weeks ago I received a call from one of our students. I thought it was strange for this person to be calling me at this time of the week, so I answered the phone wondering what was going on. On the other side of the line was not just that student but a few others. They asked if they could lead the Bible study this coming Sunday. For the month of October, Downtown Students have been studying the book of Ruth on Sunday mornings, and the Sunday before this phone call I asked if there was any student or students who wanted to lead the Bible study next Sunday. In that moment the invitation was met with silence, but later that week it was accepted by not one but four of our students. So, the following Sunday our students were led by four teenagers in our group who took up the challenge. They set a great example of leadership for all of us and opened our eyes to a number of things about Ruth that we hadn't seen before. *Cameron Bibb*

**Have you heard the expression, if you want something done ask a busy person?** Well, I have another one to add if you hang around the Downtown campus for any length of time. Have you talked to Brenda about that? Let me give you a few examples...who organizes the Advent/Christmas as well as the Easter season decorating? Have you talked to Brenda about that? I wonder what would look best on the chancel area? Have you talked to Brenda? Who made these great backdrop scenes for VBS? Have you talked to Brenda? How can we create an indoor play space for children? Have you talked to Brenda? These are but a few of many ways that Brenda Nally serves God and serves the good people of First Church's Downtown Campus. Elizabeth Moore, one of our youth, is on the record as saying that her role model is Brenda. In fact, so inspired was Elizabeth that she spearheaded her own facilities project by leading the remodeling of the youth café. Imitation is the highest form of praise!

Parts of the Downtown campus are well over 100 years. Much of it is at least 50 years old. It takes a lot of TLC to keep it up and running. And it is not possible without your loving care. Some of these folks we call Trustees, others Downtown Leadership Team, almost all are called volunteers and there is one we call Brenda. And we thank God for all of you.

## **Thank you's**

The other night during a break at Lexington Singers rehearsal, one of the long-time members of the group walked up to me and said, "Thank you." When I asked the person why they were thanking me, they let me know how very grateful they were that our church could be so gracious in allowing the community group to utilize their beautiful facilities each week to rehearse. Since that conversation, I have thought often about the cyclical effect of how we can be benefitted when we open our hearts and our home to others. Concerning the Lexington Singers, we offer our space to be utilized for their rehearsals and in turn, they provide us with an excellent, free, annual concert benefitting the backpack program here at the church. What a fantastic blessing!

In addition, folks are always so gracious in their comments to me about the weekly ministry of our own music department. Our Chancel Choir is a selfless group that offers their time and talent each week, as well as at the funeral services of our loved ones and all our special services and concerts. People's gracious comments are always magnified even further in the weeks around our Lessons & Carols Service, Christmas Eve, and our end-of-season concert. One of the multiple reasons for this is the tireless effort put in by our beloved Chancel Choir, but another reason is that these musical offerings are supplemented by orchestras that are brought in to accompany us on these occasions. Obviously, the bringing in of some of

our area's finest musicians is something to be thankful for; but more recently, I have noticed a different occurrence happening with more frequency. The players that come in to accompany these services make a point to come to me and say, "Thank you." When I ask them why they are thanking me, they respond by letting me know how much being a part of these services blesses them and ministers to their hearts.

These are wonderful reminders that in ministering to others, God ministers to us! I hope and pray that this will be the continuing mission of our musical offerings of worship here at First Church. And in the process, may God be the one glorified and lifted high so that all of humankind may be drawn unto Him! *Brock Terry*

### **Thankful for Small Groups**

This past weekend the small group I was a part of in Oklahoma for many years descended on Lexington...well, at least most of us did. Overall, 10 of us met together to study a book and pray for and with one another. And last year we decided we needed to reunite. We now live in 5 different states, so we have deemed the last weekend in October to be our reunion time. This year was our 2nd reunion and it was full of laughter, tears, sharing, and relaxing. It was wonderful.

This year when I was thinking of a book for our Downtown Wednesday mornings and evenings, I kept going back to one that was extremely transformational for me. So, this fall 18 of us have been journeying through *The Good and Beautiful God* together. I bought myself a fresh copy so I could read it anew and once again, it has been transformational. The book offers 9 chapters with 9 soul-training exercises we have practiced and continue to practice. We have learned how to see God as Jesus sees God and to take the narratives about God from Jesus himself.

What do those two paragraphs have in common??? Well, I first went through this book with my small group in Oklahoma—and we all experienced God's grace through the process. This past Sunday, several of you who have been studying this book with me this fall, greeted my friends, and they felt so loved and welcomed by you all. A book that was transformational for me and friends in Oklahoma has also been transformational for many of us here. Small groups who study together—whether that is through Sunday School or other studies—are important. We get to know people we may not sit next to in worship and we get to share in our prayers and our lives together.

So, as November is here and a month of thinking about what I am thankful for begins...I am thankful for each of you—whether we have sat in a class together or not, you are a blessing. I am thankful for those of you who have journeyed alongside me through this book and I look forward to our coming times together. I am thankful for all of our Sunday School classes and leaders who give of their time and energy to help lead us on our faith journeys. I am thankful for those who meet in homes or at coffee shops or around tables and share life together. I am thankful for you. Grace & Peace, *Carol Cooper*

### **Treasured Time**

This year, our pastoral team and staff have enjoyed times of fellowship and lunch with our members and friends at retirement homes and assisted living facilities. One of my most memorable visits, although I have thoroughly enjoyed them all, was the birthday-celebration lunch at Wesley Village. Although I am still fairly new to the team, and am still getting to know some of our members, I felt right at home among our members at Wesley Village. We sang, ate, laughed, and shared stories. It was truly a special time of gathering around the table with one another. These lunches are so much more than the food we share. To me, they are about the memories recounted, love received, and time of connecting. This has to be one of my most treasured times of ministry. *Cassidy Baas*

**Snapshots from Health Ministry:** Ushers doing CPR training in the Gathering Hall; someone asking for a band-aid and a child running to the cabinet to show them where they are; nursery workers taking first aid class; church members sharing about their health; students coming to take flu shots together: God provides the resources, our team coordinates, and our church family provides the heart of fellowship and learning and takes the journey together. *Carla Kimmons*

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## November Events

November 4: All Saints Sunday

November 6: First United Methodist Church Charge Conference, 6 pm, West Chapel

November 10: Healing Essentials seminar led by Dr. Steve Seamands, 9:00-12:00 pm  
We'll consider the story of Lazarus and what we learn about healing from this story. If you plan to attend, please sign up at the Welcome Center in the Gathering Hall, so we can best prepare.

November 11: Veterans Recognition

November 18: Commitment Sunday

November 25: Gingerbread House Build and Christmas Craft Night, 4:00 - 7:00 PM  
4:00 PM Gingerbread House build  
5:00 PM Crafts for all ages