



## Dear Church Family,

I've seen 2020 described as a dumpster fire. While evocative, trash on fire doesn't give us much hope. Even if we put the fire out, we've only saved...*trash*. The more hopeful metaphor is that we are in the wilderness, a place God has used throughout time to grow and strengthen the faithful. A wilderness is dry, lonely and dangerous. It's a space where we realize not just our need, but our own powerlessness to meet those needs. The terrain can't sustain us. We can't sustain ourselves. Therefore we turn to God, daily, for help and sustenance. But not only does our faith grow in wilderness, we know to have hope. Because wilderness always proceeds great turning points in faith history (Noah on the wilderness of floodwaters, Israel in the wilderness before the Promised Land, Jesus in the wilderness before he began his ministry). It's a powerful space, wilderness. A faith incubator, and a time that prepares us for an amazing new chapter.



This past Sunday, a man in our church called me to share an amazing story. He was sitting in his seat, getting ready to worship, and as the prelude began,

something incredible happened. He said his heart felt warm. He told me that he hadn't felt that way in years, decades. But sitting there, he felt he knew what John Wesley meant when he said his "heart was strangely warmed." And in that moment, this man caught a glimpse of the future. He said he saw Promised Land just ahead- with vitality and people coming to faith in Christ and new outreach and service and this church family at the heart of what God was doing in people's lives and our community. He called to say, "Pastor, I saw that day. And it's just around the corner. I'm here to help, however I can."

Friends, we are still in the wilderness. God is still getting us ready, asking us to wait with hope. But like this member, I can see a change ahead. I can see beautiful future and hope ahead of us. And I hope that you can glimpse it, too. And that like this man, you are ready to help this church and God, however the Lord needs.

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**Speaking of new, fresh things... here is a bunch of good stuff the people of FUMC, McAllen have accomplished in Jesus' name over Thanksgiving and a whole month of good things to look forward to in December:**

- First and best is the amazing generosity that provided food for 840 families. That's thousands (about 2,996) of hungry people who have food because of you. The need for basic assistance like grocery staples has grown exponentially in the pandemic. Last Thanksgiving, we distributed to 170 families who came to our church food pantry. And yet there were still 40 cars waiting in the parking lot when we ran out. The need is such so heart-breakingly great. I am thankful for the dozens and dozens of you, who came to pack those backs, load them, hand them out, smile and encourage everyone who came. As the need increased, you've stepped up to give more of yourselves so the hungry can eat. That's something to be thankful for, indeed. The resources (and grants) to get the food and the people to make sure it gets to those in need.







- Returning to in-person worship has been such a joy. Everyone is taking safety of neighbors so seriously that we're excited to re-introduce congregational singing in a limited form, at the of the service. Studies have shown that singing, with masks and distance, is okay if not done for more than 30 minutes (our local choir directors have been helping us keep up-to-date on healthy singing) and so long as everyone wears a mask and maintains distance. So... starting this Sunday, we've put two Christmas Carols to the end of each service. We'll sing together, then everyone will exit, the space will air out for an hour and be ready to go for the next service. If you'd rather not sing, that's okay! There will be a chance for you to exit prior to that last part of the service.
- Did you know that this is Lee Ann Clemons' 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on our church staff?!? Lee Ann grew up in FUMC and began her ministry among us by working in the Day School. A few years later, she moved to the church office and then Children's Ministry. She's a beloved teacher, guide and friend. We've had to really twist her arm to get her agree to let us recognize this amazing milestone. But we reminded her that in a hard year, we needed to celebrate good things-like two decades of fruitful ministry. At her request, we are keeping it small. If you'd like to join in, send us a 20 second video of your favorite memory of Lee Ann to [vdillon@mcfirst.com](mailto:vdillon@mcfirst.com). And with her first grandbaby on the way in January, we're going to give her time off, outside of vacation, to go be with her daughter and grandbaby. These are meaningful ways we can say "thank you" for Lee Ann's **20 years of ministry**.
- Another Christmas season is here, so is another one of our Youth Ministry's annual events, Christmas Share. This year Christmas Share will be a bit different, actually quite a bit! We won't be able to load up in the church van, go to Wal-Mart to shop around, and we won't be able to have an all-night LOCK-IN. But that's ok, different can be good, it helps us to be resilient and brave. The good news is that we are still going to help kids in need, which is what Christmas Share is all about. The Youth Ministry will gather on Friday, December 18<sup>th</sup> to SHARE



their wrapping skills, GIVE their time after a long week of finals, and do it all with LOVE for their neighbors. This year we are asking you, our church family, to help contribute gifts for teenagers, ages 13 to 18 (the most often forgotten during this season). We are partnering up with Estrella's House, Children's Advocacy Center of Hidalgo and Starr Counties. They have provided a list of items most needed and wanted by these teens. You can take one of the red tags that are hanging on our festive-fun Christmas Share tree on Sunday mornings in the Foyer or during the week, the tree will be outside the church office. These gifts are due back to the church by Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup>. We will have the wooden crates in the foyer on Sunday mornings and outside the church office where you can place these gifts, unwrapped and with the tag. If you are interested in helping out with this event in anyway, please contact our Director of Youth Ministries, Veronica Dillon at [vdillon@mcfirst.com](mailto:vdillon@mcfirst.com)

## Some special Sundays are on the way...

- **This Sunday (Dec 6)**

- Bring and ring a BELL! Bring your favorite bell from home and get ready to ring it during our songs this Sunday. It's a COVID-safe way to make a joyful noise to the Lord. And it works equally well from home! All sizes, shapes and sounds of bell are welcome.



- Communion- served after both services (to-go) AND from 8:30-9am in the church circle drive by Pastor Jon for those who are worshipping with us virtually. We love you, church family and are figuring out how to make sure all of us, online and in-person can come to the table.
- If you are not in the RGV, use elements you have in your own home- even water and crackers are fine. Jesus will work in and through the meal before you to bring healing, peace and forgiveness. It's not the elements in themselves that have power, but the Lord working through them.
- Make sure to grab Christmas Share tags to select a gift for a teen in poverty.



- **Sunday, Dec 13**

- Wear your festive (or zany) Christmas garb.
- We'll celebrate Lee Ann Clemmons' 20 years of working at FUMC! If you'd like to send a little 20 second memory of Lee Ann, you can send to [vdillon@mcfirst.com](mailto:vdillon@mcfirst.com)
- Special music from our Children's choir (via video)
- Please make sure you bring all Christmas Share gifts by this Sunday.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13TH

# Wear Your Christmas Cheer

FEEL FREE TO BE TACKY OR SILLY



- **Sunday, Dec 20**
  - a very special lessons and carols service with special music, and congregation carol singing (at the end of worship).
  - The children's handbell choir will deliver their *first ever* bell performance
- **Wednesday, Dec 23**
  - Christmas Eve Eve worship at 7pm.
  - Outside on the lawn. Bring your own seats or blankets for seating and enjoy worship in the fresh air.
  - Family-friendly. We'll have glowsticks and carols and welcome our Savior under the starlight.
  - Since we are outside on the lawn, we can safely space out and accommodate many. Masks and maintaining distance are required.
- **Thursday, Dec 24, Christmas Eve**
  - 5pm and 7pm in the Sanctuary.
  - Christmas Eve worship with candles, music and lifting our hearts to welcome our Savior's coming.
  - Seating will be as on Sunday morning, 25% capacity, staggered rows, distance. We can accommodate about 150 at each service with overflow seating. (The most we've had on a Sunday so far is 100 at one service, 150 total).
- All services will continue to be live-streamed for all who want to continue to worship, but can't yet join us in-person!





# CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP SERVICES



Family Christmas Eve Eve Worship

Wednesday, December 23rd at 7:00 p.m.

Outside on the Church Lawn ~ Bring a chair or blanket

Christmas Eve Worship

Thursday, December 24th at 5:00 & 7:00 p.m.

In the Sanctuary ~ Candles & Carols

Stay safe and know that on the other side of every wilderness is a beautiful promised land. We will reach it together. And happy new (church) year!

Pastor Laura

Let's stay connected church family | [FUMCmcallen.com](https://FUMCmcallen.com)

