

First Things

Issue No. 29

A weekly publication of First United Methodist Church, Oak Ridge, Tennessee

July 26, 2020

July 21 Church Council Highlights

Noting the current spike in COVID-19 infections in our region, Council members voted to not reopen for in-person worship at this time. They will take up the issue again in August.

The Council voted to purchase and install equipment and cameras to livestream worship services from the Sanctuary and Multi-purpose room.

The Missions Committee provided \$1,000 to stock local food pantries. Additionally, twenty items and \$2,874 were collected and delivered to Holston Home for Children.

The Christmas Shoppe is being reimaged for this fall. There will be two separate drive-thru events, one in November and one in December. Each will provide baskets with food and basic necessities for 50 families.

Trustees will install a canopy at the First Steps entrance to provide shelter for parents and children being dropped off for preschool.

Thursday Student Lunches will not occur this fall as long as the building is closed. Many of the lunch volunteers are interested in providing to-go meals once we reopen for Stage 1.

The drive-thru Community Meal continues each Wednesday evening, serving on average 160 meals each week. Additional volunteers are most welcome!

Two new, weekly online classes will soon begin: a "History of the Church" class and a study on the importance of humor on the Spiritual Path.

Prayer Class Starting July 27

Mark's recent sermons have been reminding us of the importance of working on our relationship with God. If we are to love others well, we need a strong foundation of loving and feeling loved by God. A spiritual practice and prayer is an important means of strengthening this relationship, and yet, many of us are uncertain about how to pray by ourselves. Pastors and staff will be offering a class teaching many different forms of prayer. We will share some of our favorite methods of prayer and offer you the opportunity to ask questions and try them out. Class will meet on Monday evenings from 7:30-8:30 p.m. via Zoom, starting this week, July 27. If you are unable to join us at that time you can watch the recording under the Virtual Chapel tab on our website.

Who Decides When We Reopen?

The decision about when our congregation will reopen for in-person worship is complicated. The following is an overview of that decision-making process.

Step 1: Our Bishop, Mary Virginia Taylor, ultimately decides when United Methodist churches in our area are allowed to reopen for ministry. Her COVID task force has released a set of guidelines local church leaders must use to create protocols for reopening.

Step 2: Even after churches have an approved protocol, the Bishop reserves the right to close ALL in-person ministry churches in counties where the virus infection rate is spiking. She has decided to use the Harvard Global Epidemic-Key Metrics for COVID Suppression website to make this determination. If a county has more than 10 daily new cases per 100,000 people over a 7-day average, then all in-person ministries, small groups, etc. are suspended for the following two weeks.

Step 3: If a local church has received approval of its protocol (Step 1) and the infection rate in its county is below the Harvard metric threshold (Step 2), then it is up to a congregation's Church Council to decide whether or not it wants to reopen for in-person ministry under their Stage 1 protocol.

Although FUMCOR's protocol has been approved, the infection rate in Anderson County is currently well above the Harvard metric threshold. So, no churches in Anderson County are allowed to open now. Once that infection rate drops, our Church Council decide when we will reopen. We all look forward to that day when we can worship together in person again!

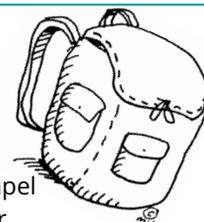
New Online "iStudy Christ" Coming

Rev. Mark Flynn will begin a new online Bible Study class on Wednesday nights from 6:00-7:30 p.m. beginning July 29 through Sept. 9, "iStudy Christ" will explore the topics of Grace, Humility, Sacrificial Love, and Jesus' Passion. This 7-week Bible study with daily readings is open to all; you do not need to have taken previous iStudy classes to participate. The study guide is available under the Virtual Chapel tab on our church website, as is the Zoom meeting link you will need to participate. Be sure to have finished the first week's reading prior to Wed., July 29!

Kids' Return-to-School Blessing this Sunday

Join us VIRTUALLY as we bless the return to school this fall on whatever path you choose for your learning journey. Some of you will return to a school building and others will learn from home, but either way, your church family wants to wish you the best.

You can watch the Traditional or the Contemporary service online this Sunday, July 26, (under the Virtual Chapel tab on our website, fumcor.org). Just tune in at any time on Sunday and enjoy this special event. So grab your backpack, laptop, or whatever back-to-school material you wish and join us. Special Back-to-School blessing tags will be mailed to kids. You can put them on your backpack or hang them in your study space at home. If you do not receive a tag, email Megan Alden (malden@fumcor.org).



Sharing Holy Communion at Home, August 2

Four months ago, few of us believed we would still be worshipping remotely in August. However, because that is the case, our worship planning teams greatly desire for our congregation to share Holy Communion, even if we are physically separated. On Sunday, August 2, those who are able to worship together online, both in our traditional and contemporary services, are invited to participate in a service of Holy Communion. Everyone will be encouraged to have wine/grape juice and some form of bread with them at home. Our worship leaders will share the Communion liturgy and instruct participants. We may not be in the same room, but God's Spirit binds us together as one in Christ wherever we find ourselves.

Congratulations to

Anne, Kent, and Alexandra Campbell in the birth of their daughter and sister, Evelyn (Evie) Theresa Campbell, on July 10.

In Loving Memory Harold (Buzz) Wolfe

who joined FUMC on April 24, 2013 and died on July 17. We extend love and sympathy to his family and friends.

Our Prayers

**Personal information
removed for privacy**

Our Gifts

Offering this Week	\$22,613
2020 Year to Date	\$795,319
2019 Year to Date	\$763,844
Monthly Special Offering	\$1,810

Pastoral Office Hours New Idea

Our first two "Pastoral Office Hours" experiences via Zoom meeting have been wonderful. These will continue each Sunday night from 7:00 - 9:00 pm. This will remain a time for you to check-in with a pastor, share a smile, ask questions, or have a conversation about whatever is on your mind. However, in the future, we plan to suggest a topic for some deeper conversations. This Sunday evening, July 26, the Rev. Jenny Caughman encourages those who find themselves "*spiritually challenged by COVID-19*" to consider participating. The link for this Zoom meeting is available under the Virtual Chapel tab on our website.

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Good News for Finances

FUMCOR continues to be blessed with very faithful members and friends who support its budget and community causes. To date, we have received \$677,257 from those who gave us an estimate of their giving, compared to \$632,423 at this point last year. We have also received \$113,792 from those who did not make an estimate of giving, which compares to \$118,429 at this point last year. In 2020, in addition to the mission giving included in our budget, we have also received \$8,800 for special mission offerings, \$20,600 for our weekly Wednesday Community Meals, and \$18,900 toward our Community Assistance Fund. Although our staff is working during this time, reduced building use has resulted in a 31-49% decrease in our utility bills over the last 4 months. Our total budgeted expenses are 2% under the expected for the year through June. Those reduced expenses include a \$24,000 outlay for necessary HVAC computer upgrades, authorized by our Trustees. Thank you to all of you who continue to faithfully support our church's ministries!

Virtual Sunday School

Many thanks to retired Episcopal priest, Rev. Dr. Craig Kallio, who will lead a virtual Sunday school class for four weeks. He will be exploring Biblical themes we encounter in our faith journey: Presence, Interruptions, Healing/Curing, and Planting Seeds. You can see these interesting lessons each week under the Virtual Chapel tab on our website. The first one was posted on July 19, you can watch it at any time.

Back to Basics Bible Study Continues

This week our class will meet for the third time. Wednesday, July 29, at 8:00 p.m., Chris's Bible study continues with an exploration of what it means to "use scripture to understand scripture." If you haven't participated in the class, don't worry! You can join at any point. There will be a link for the Zoom meeting under the Virtual Chapel tab on the website (fumcor.org). If you have questions, contact Chris Black (cblack@fumcor.org).

Technical Difficulties

Are you struggling with Zoom? YouTube? Accessing online forms? Navigating our website or Virtual Chapel? Do you want to use these applications but do not know where to begin? During this time of physical distancing, most of us have had to learn new skills to continue to communicate, worship together, and simply speak to each other. If you are having any of these issues, please let us know, and we will help you as much as we possibly can. Contact Jeff (jkile@fumcor.org) if you are in need.

Let's Sing Together (Virtually)

One of the most difficult parts of the pandemic for people who enjoy singing together is knowing that, according to experts, singing in a group setting carries a high likelihood of spreading the virus. For now, it seems as though singing together virtually is the closest we can come. You may have seen examples of these virtual singing videos online, and our Contemporary Band has a playlist on the FUMC Oak Ridge YouTube channel. Singers record themselves and then send the recording to someone who edits the videos together to create the final piece with all the voices combined. FUMC singers now have the opportunity to participate in a virtual praise song video. Singers who wish to participate will be asked to record themselves singing a portion of *To Our God* by Bethel Worship. Details about exactly what to sing will be available soon. If you are interested in singing, contact Jeff Kile (jkile@fumcor.org). Let us sing praise to God together!