



First United Methodist Church 502 N 6th Street, Orange, Texas 77630 (409)886-7466 www.fumcorange.org
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December 14, 2020

Greetings,

We are in the middle of Advent, the season for watching and waiting for Christ's arrival in our midst. We have been waiting most of the year, it seems. But this month our focus is on the Christ Child and the Hope of the season to call us by faith to the reality of God's grace and love in our lives. We are people of faith and hope and love and joy. Even in our current circumstances, of distance and disease. I pray this letter finds you in good health and with a full heart.

As is tradition, I want to let you know about all that has been going on in the life of our church. On November 8, we moved our single in-person worship service to our Sanctuary. It was wonderful to be back in that wonderful space for worship. It is all beautifully decorated for the Advent season, including some wonderful new Christmas ornaments to adorn our tree, handcrafted by Mrs. Pie Bridges. On December 2, I sent out a letter by email to the congregation announcing the decision of the One Board to discontinue in-person worship at this time. Our area hospitals are at capacity and numbers continue to rise. We have shifted our "studio" for recording our online worship service to the sanctuary in order to take advantage of the decorations and a little more space for spreading out when recording. We just added a new smaller digital sound mixing board this past week and what a difference it makes in the quality of the recorded music. Your staff and I have adapted to many new things in the past year. I hope that you have been able to take part in our worship or Bible studies.

Times like these, with a pandemic and hurricanes, require resiliency. And God's people, throughout history have always endured hardships with grace. We do this because we know that we are not alone. God is with us, evidenced by every breath we take. Sometimes we feel like surviving is the only thing we can do. But God calls us beyond survival to the promise of thriving; looking forward beyond our current circumstances to a future with hope. Our church leaders have been doing just that.

There is a buzz of construction underway here at the church. The trustees needed to make some repairs to our lower-level men's restroom in the Fellowship Hall. It also became quite evident that we did not have restrooms on the sanctuary level that had easy access to the elevator and Sanctuary. They brought in an architect, Mr. Rob Clark and reviewed our scope of need. We also had a challenge in our nursery. The tiny restroom was across the hallway, in a stairwell. This often created a difficulty for our nursery worker, who had to take several small children with her, if she had one who was toilet-training. A beautiful and efficient plan was made and approved by the trustees for two new restrooms upstairs, a small one in the nursery with a new sink and counter top and remodeling of the two existing restrooms downstairs near Fellowship Hall. All these new facilities will be able to accommodate walkers and wheelchairs, and will have ample room should a care-giver need to assist their loved one.

The Trustees also made a request of the One Board for the establishment of a new sub-committee that will begin to evaluate our Sanctuary Space and needs for the future. Nominations went to work and created this new sub-committee of the Trustees that will begin its work in the New Year. Our Sanctuary was built in 1921, so this is a big year for our building. What a legacy of service and ministry these walls have nurtured. There is work to be imagined and prepared for the next century of ministry here in Orange, Texas.

Because of our need to have our worship services online through Christmas, we have planned several special offerings, beginning this Sunday, December 20th. We will have drive-through Holy Communion from 1-2 pm. The sacrament will be prepackaged and shared by Randall Bridges or me. Each vehicle will also receive a Candlelight Christmas Eve package to use with our interactive worship service for Christmas Eve. The service will have pause places for you to share the scriptures and the readings with your family or friends. You will receive everything you will need for a special time of Holy Worship. If you ordered Poinsettias for our worship services, they will also be available for pick up that afternoon for your Christmas celebrations. I hope to see many of you on Sunday. If you are unable to come on Sunday, please come by the church on Monday or Tuesday to pick up your Christmas Eve Kit; we will even bring it out to your vehicle. Nothing can stop Christmas from coming. I found this poem by Ann Weems that reminds us of just this truth:

The Christmas Spirit

The Christmas spirit
is that hope
 which tenaciously clings
 to the hearts of the faithful
and announces
 in the face
 of any Herod the world can produce
 and all the inn doors slammed in our faces
 and all the dark nights of our souls
that with God
 all things are still possible,
that even now
 unto us
 a Child is born!

Ann Weems, *Kneeling in Bethlehem*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1980) p.51.

The work of the church continues each and every week and your faithful giving throughout the year makes all our ministry possible. I will have a year-end report for you in the coming weeks with a listing of our new additions to our One Board and the new sub-committee, as well as our financials. If you wish to give a special Christmas offering or finish out your generosity goal for 2020, please make sure it is received in the church office by December 28 for credit this year.

In Christ's service,

Rev. Lani Rousseau
Senior Pastor