



Friday, Dec. 18, 2020

Greetings Paragould FUMC,

**THIS SUNDAY** is the Fourth Sunday of Advent! In worship this week we will again focus on Luke chapter 2: the Christmas story. I want to look closely at the angels! **"...an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'"** Angels are central to the Christmas narrative. Everywhere we look, angels! Whereas shepherds are forgotten laborers who work even at night, angels exist almost entirely within the light! Their only responsibility and purpose is sharing and celebrating the Good News of God's love. This Sunday before Christmas we'll give attention to these heavenly messengers who are so central to the story of Christ's birth. Let us worship together this Sunday at 9am & 11am!

**ADVENT DEVOTIONAL | WEDNESDAY STUDY & PRAYER** Continue with your "In Light & Darkness" devotional. Join pastors and other FUMC members for online study and prayer each Wednesday (**6pm ONLY**) during Advent via ZOOM. You'll receive the electronic invitations by email each week.

**COVID-19 & FUMC** On Monday, ARUMC Bishop Gary Mueller met with clergy for an online Zoom webinar regarding the pandemic and recommendations for local congregations. The entirety of the presentation is on the [ARUMC Youtube channel](#). I offer you a brief summary here.

- 1) The Bishop encouraged congregations to be very conservative with in-person ministries at this time. The virus continues to spread rapidly across Arkansas. Hospital capacity is a pressing concern.
- 2) We should no longer think about church activities in terms "Stage 1" or "Stage 2" or whatnot. Ministry and safety decisions should be based on county-level data. The Bishop encouraged us to think of the pandemic as an adaptive challenge. This crisis will not be solved with linear processes. We must constantly monitor and adjust our plans accordingly.
- 3) To that end, the ARUMC developed a dashboard ([arumc.org/covid19/dashboard/](http://arumc.org/covid19/dashboard/)) for churches to receive regular recommendations on in-person ministries based on local cases per 100k and positivity rate. **As of this writing Greene County has 105.3 cases per 100k with a positive test rate of 18.5%. Both of these results mean we are strongly discouraged from hosting in-person ministries at this time.**
- 4) Outdoor services should be drive-in only.
- 5) Churches must continue to require facemasks and social distancing.
- 6) Food pantry-related ministries are encouraged to remain open but only doing so safely.

The Bishop's recommendations were very much in line with the practices and approach at FUMC. Since this began, we have closely monitored the COVID-19 data in Greene County and planned accordingly. If you look across the last 8 months we have tried lots of different things when safe and appropriate. We will continue to do so! But we have also reduced in-person ministries as local case numbers have worsened including right now. On a positive note, the Bishop celebrated our collective response to the

pandemic. Churches across the state have worked hard to be safe while practicing fruitful ministry including Paragould First United Methodist Church.

On a personal note, I would encourage you all to hang in there. This week marks a turning point in the pandemic as vaccines have arrived and already been administered locally! Thank God! The end of this pandemic is on the horizon. Still yet, the very worst of it is still before us. The next 6-10 weeks could be quite challenging. We must be as diligent and careful as ever. Do not lose heart.

Given the Bishop's latest guidance, below are our current ministry plans, though we will adjust when possible or necessary.

- 1) FUMC campus is open for business during the week including social distance & facemasks. Small groups, committees, teams etc. can meet at their discretion. Though we should avoid gatherings where possible.
- 2) The Witt House continues to operate under strict safety guidelines.
- 3) Sunday 9am & 11am services will be streaming only. There will be no in-person worship services at this time. For perspective, our 10am in-person service attendance has been less than 10.
- 4) Wednesdays 4-6pm FUMC Sanctuary is open for prayer and reflection in our sacred place of worship.

**LIVING NATIVITY** Drive by this Sunday, Dec. 20 6-7PM for a celebration of the Christmas Nativity. Kaylee is working with a few students and families and their animals to offer a safe reenactment of the Christmas story. The scene will be on display behind the Welcome Center as ushers guide you at a safe distance!

#### **CHRISTMAS EVE**

**4PM OUTDOOR DRIVE IN SERVICE** We will share in the Christmas story, a brief sermon, favorite songs, and celebrate communion! You will **worship from your car** through FM radio (103.7) or via loudspeakers. Greeters will help you park as they distribute communion elements, candles, and receive offerings. You must wear facemasks when engaging with others. I love snow, but pray for a sunny and mild Christmas Eve!

**12NOON, 7PM, & 11PM ONLINE** The Sanctuary Christmas Eve worship service will be available online. It will be pre-recorded but will play "live" on the church's Facebook page at 12noon, 7pm, & 11pm. You may also access the service at [fumcparagould.org/worship--streaming](http://fumcparagould.org/worship--streaming) on December 24.

**SANCTUARY OPEN HOUSE** The FUMC Sanctuary will be open for visitors on **Christmas Eve 9am-3pm and 6pm-10pm**. Wear your facemask and manage your distance from others. Ushers will manage guests and sanitize throughout the day. Various musicians will offer holiday pieces during the day to better help you center your heart and mind on the joy of Christ's birth.

Though we've had our challenges, I am still thrilled to be celebrating Christmas with you this year! Perhaps we need the joy of Christmas as much as ever! Happy Advent! And Merry Christmas!

Grace & Peace,  
Rev. Dane



**WEEKLY RESOURCES:**

1. 9am Order of Worship
2. 11am Order of Worship
3. [Children's Craft Advent Ornament Week 4 Love](#)