

# INFORMED & inspired

CONNECTED AT FAYETTEVILLE FIRST UMC

## Church, you surprise me

Rev. Dr. Thomas Martin

Over the past year, we have learned to be surprised. Last year, after moving into our new house and taking a planned vacation, we came home to find a beautiful bloom of hydrangeas in our back yard on a twelve foot tall bush. We knew it was a hydrangea bush, but we had no idea the beauty that awaited us upon our return home. This year, the same blooms are present. The church is a lot like that bush.

It surprises us. Sometimes, things happen that are so beautiful you didn't know to recognize it in the first place. No one could have predicted the time and place we are in now, but the church is there. Someone planted it, others nurtured it, and we get to reap the benefits of its beauty. Take our church's response to COVID-19. Not everyone is in agreement about the church's pausing in-person worship. But everyone loves this church. To me, there is no better expression of the church which does not agree on everything but remains singular in its mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ.



When we disagree, we tell the truth. In a divided world, I don't think there is any better witness that we can give to the world than to show people that you can disagree and still remain united in mission and service. Think about all the disagreements the early church had. If the church got along perfectly, Paul would have never had to write any letters to the communities of faith and over half of the books of the New Testament would not be in existence.

Of course, when we disagree, we have to leave room for error that the decisions we may make as individuals may be wrong. Here's the good news—forgiveness is not a one-time event. Because forgiveness is ongoing, so is our salvation. The beauty of God's natural world surprises us, much like that hydrangea bush. If God can do that with the natural world, imagine what he can do with us as we live with our disagreements, but more importantly, live with God's love.

Church, you surprise me. I am grateful for the ways in which we can be the church and disagree. As Paul says, let us live into the better way--surrounded by God's love. There's a well known story about a monastery where the monks were constantly at each other's throats, bickering and cursing at one another. One night a mysterious visitor knocked at the monastery door and made a brief but solemn announcement. "One of you is Jesus Christ." The atmosphere in the monastery changed over night. Suddenly each monk treated every other monk with awe and wonder, not sure which one was Jesus but knowing Jesus was among them. They had learned what it means to be church – to treat one another as we would treat Jesus, to expect from one another all that Jesus brings, to cherish one another as we cherish Jesus.

# Did you know...?

- You still have time to sign up to donate blood at FFUMC this Sunday, July 19, between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. Go to [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org). An extra bonus: The Red Cross has announced that it is testing donor blood for COVID-19 antibodies. Need help registering? Contact our own FFUMC Blood Drive Team at [ffumcblooddrive@gmail.com](mailto:ffumcblooddrive@gmail.com).
- Your BEST experience for worship services online may be directly through the [link on the Worship Online tab at FayettevilleFirst.com](#). This link goes straight to our YouTube channel video and may offer the most consistent upload and sound. The July 19 service will be available at 11 a.m. and after.
- FFUMC will deliver and serve to-go boxes at SafeHouse Outreach on Thursday, July 30, with minimal volunteers. Contact Randy Riddell with questions at [randyhr8@gmail.com](mailto:randyhr8@gmail.com) or 770-365-6824.

## inspired . . .

### From our church office parking lot to Port Saint Joe

What started out in the FFUMC parking lot as just a bunch of 2x4s became a house last week. More than 80 volunteers from Square Foot Ministry, including eight people from this church, and America's Home Place converged on Port Saint Joe, Florida, July 8-10 to continue building the house. Volunteers raised the walls, added the overhead trusses, and put siding on the house, which is being built in front of the existing home. At the same time, local trades people installed electrical wiring, plumbing, HVAC, and interior drywall. All that remains is for the roofers to place shingles and others to install the flooring, cabinets, and appliances. Once the homeowner moves in, his old house will be demolished because it is unsafe.

This project was a joint effort with the Alabama-West Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), and a local disaster relief group organized specifically to coordinate Hurricane Michael recovery. Hurricane Michael slammed into the Gulf Coast as a Category 5 hurricane on October 10, 2018. During the last two years, the United Methodist Church has had boots on the ground, literally, helping to rebuild in Florida and southwest Georgia. In February 2020, a group from this church worked on projects in the Donalsonville/Bainbridge area in Georgia. More projects will be announced soon.



*FFUMC members in PSJ: (bottom) Chuck Grayson, Wesley Aycock, Faye Livingston, Jacob Hartley (right) Craig Wiley, Doug Higgins, James Hartley (Maggie Clarke, photographer not shown, as usual!)*