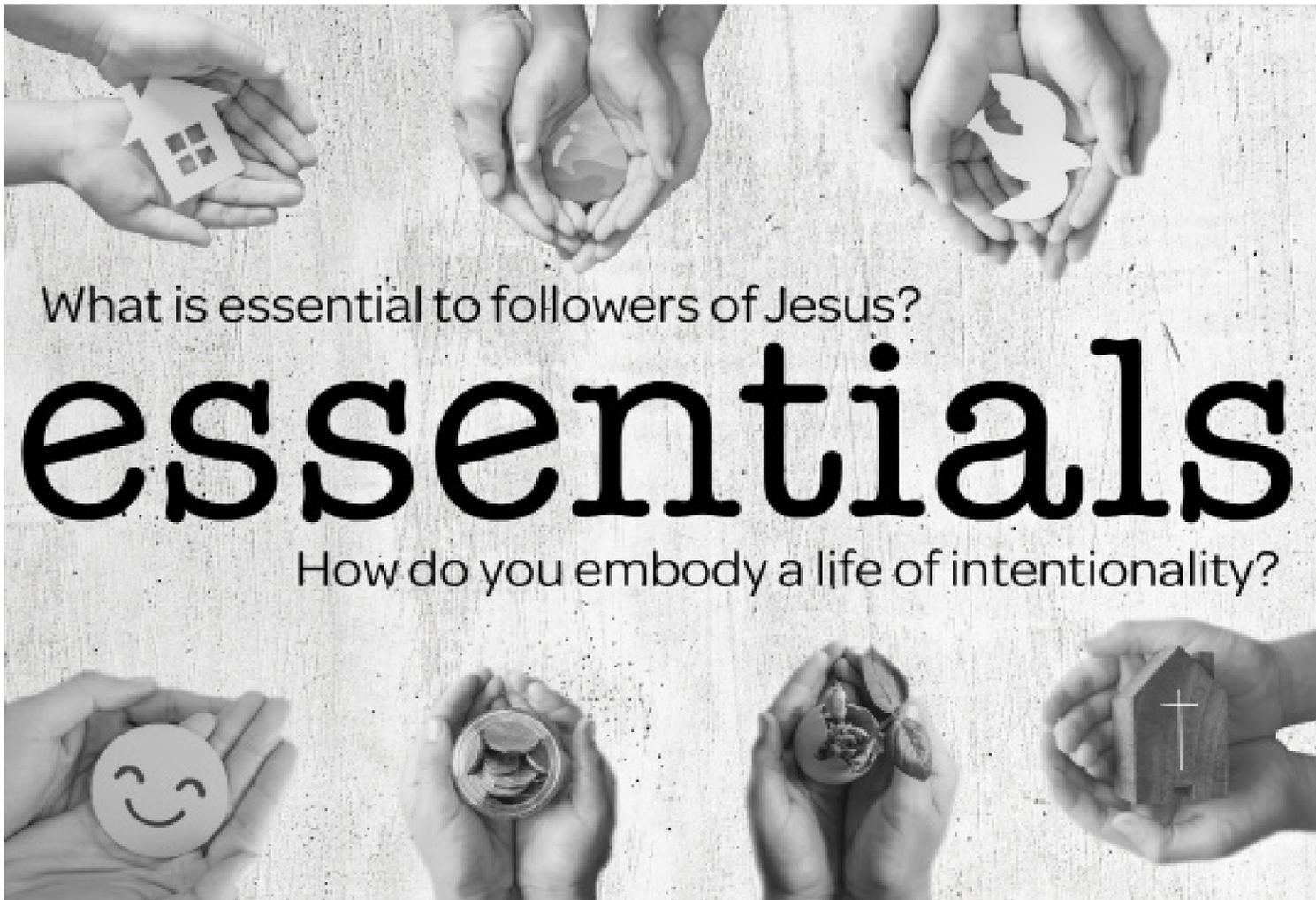


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In the FIRST PLACE

Dear First Church,

I have been praying for you and your families during this Omicron surge. May God surround you with protection, health, healing, and strength. Thank you for your understanding and willingness to shift our worship services to online-only this past Sunday. Circumstances forced us to make those decisions very late in the week, and the process was made easier knowing that our congregation has embraced the fluidity of these times.

The Board of Stewards met Monday night and decided to suspend all in-person activity through the end of January. Our Sunday morning worship services will stream just as they do every week at 9:00 am and 11:00 am. A list of other online opportunities is printed below.

I share in your disappointment and frustration that our progress is not linear, and we have to take a break from our in-person connections. However, projections about the longevity of this surge are shorter than we've experienced in the past. I am very hopeful that we will be back to in-person gatherings after just a few weeks. In the meantime, please pray for all of those contracting COVID, the medical personnel caring for our communities, and those who are most vulnerable. Check on one another and make sure we all remember we are cared for, supported, and loved. God is with you, and God's grace is sufficient.

Gracefully,
David

Online Opportunities for January:

Worship-- Sundays 9 am and 11 am, Church website and Facebook page

Essentials Reflection and Discussion--Wednesdays at 6:30 via zoom. As part of our worship series, we'll have a weekly check-in and discussion about essentials to life and faith. To get the Zoom address, contact Brittany (bwatson@fumclr.org)

Sunday school (adult)--Several classes are meeting through zoom. If your class would like this opportunity, contact Brittany (bwatson@fumclr.org)

Pop Up Lunches--Each Thursday in January at Noon via Zoom. Just because we are apart doesn't mean we have to eat alone. To get the Zoom address, contact Donna (dhankins@fumclr.org)

Children's Activities--video lessons and activities for children will be emailed to parents every Saturday. Links to these videos are also available on the church website.

Youth Activities--Zoom gatherings at 7 pm on Sundays. If you need a link for these meetings, contact Brandon (bbates@fumclr.org)

Tuesday Prayers and Devotionals with the Pastors--Tuesdays at noon. Live-streamed on the church Facebook page.

STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

SENIOR PASTOR

Rev. David Freeman:
dfreeman@fumclr.org,
501-372-2256 Ex. 204

PASTOR OF

CONGREGATIONAL CARE

Rev. Donna Hankins:
dhankins@fumclr.org,
501-372-2256 Ex. 208

PASTOR OF

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Rev. Haley Jones:
hjones@fumclr.org,
501-372-2256 Ex. 219

PASTOR OF NEIGHBORING

Rev. Brittany Watson:
bwatson@fumclr.org,
501-372-2256 Ex. 205

DIRECTOR OF

COMMUNICATIONS

Lesley Andrews:
landrews@fumclr.org,
501-372-2256 Ex. 207

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH

MINISTRIES

Brandon Bates:
bbates@fumclr.org,
501-372-2256 Ex. 206

DIRECTOR OF BUILDING,

GROUNDS & SECURITY

Jerry Carpenter: jccarpenter@
fumclr.org,
501-372-2256 Ex. 227

DIRECTOR OF

MUSIC & WORSHIP ARTS

James Stanley:
jstanley@fumclr.org,
501-372-2256 Ex. 225

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND

ADMINISTRATION

Sonja Taylor Larkowski:
stlarkowski@fumclr.org,
501-372-2256 Ex. 209

Essential Conversations

Over the next few weeks in worship, we will be exploring what it means to claim what is essential in our lives. As each pastor shares their discernment journey, we hope that you will also come to name what you call “essential” in your own life. To help you in this process, Rev. Brittany will be hosting online conversations on Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. on zoom. Just come as you are, ready to discuss and determine what parts of your life God is calling essential. If you would like to join us, here is the zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83672380972?pwd=dHJvTkJSZXB6Q0VhXhYmVcxY0RXZz09>

Afghan Family Update

We officially have a rental house for our Afghan family of 5. There is much to be done to get the house up and running! Please check out our Amazon wish list and help us prepare the house. For a link to the Amazon list, visit: <https://fumclr.org/familyupdate/>

The list will be added to frequently, so always check back if it's empty. The items you purchase will be sent directly to the Church for delivery by a member of the welcome team.

We are looking for small groups to sponsor a “cleaning pack”, “first aid pack”, and “school supplies pack”. These will be starter packs for the families. You can add any items you think fall into that category and package them like a gift! If your group would like to donate a pack, please email Rev. Haley.

The kids are presently being registered for school in the LRSD and are very excited.

You can support the family with your continued prayers as well as monetary donations. If you donate, please mark your donation with “Afghan Family” and it will go to rent, utilities, food, and more as they learn life in the US. Finally, if you have connections with lawn care services or would like to sponsor that monthly, please contact Rev. Haley at hjones@fumclr.org.

Sanctuary Flowers – Reserve yours today!

What better way to honor friends and family members than to donate the Sanctuary Flowers in their name on a Sunday in the next year? The 2022 calendar is open. Our flowers are re-arranged each Monday by the Flower Girls who take them to members in hospitals and homes - a true example of adaptive re-use and sustainability! Your gift of \$75 will cover the cost of the two large arrangements in Sunday services.

Even though we are not meeting in-person during the month of January, we are still taking Sanctuary Flower reservation from February-December. If you reserve in February and there is no in-person worship, you will be able to reserve a different date. You may reserve your date by phoning 372-2256, or emailing Lesley Andrews (landrews@fumclr.org).

Sunday Morning Service Opportunities

Even though we are not in-person right now, we want to be ready for the rest of 2022! We are looking to reignite our Sunday Morning Hospitality Team, which now includes ushers and offering stewards for worship services. We'll send you an email to gauge your interest if you have served before! If you are unsure if your name is already on the list, please email Donna Hankins at dhankins@fumclr.org.

We are also forming a new Audio/Visual Team. We are looking for volunteers to run sound during First Tradition. Don't worry; there will be a quick training session before your first Sunday! It's very easy and fun – plus, it's a great way to serve your church! If you are interested, please email Lesley Andrews at landrews@fumclr.org.

KIDS@FIRST

God-Lessons: You don't have to come to church to learn about God! Each Saturday Rev. Brittany will be emailing out a video lesson for kiddos and their families to be used on Sundays or any time throughout the week. These videos will be a fun and simple way to get your family talking about who God is and how much God loves us! If you are not receiving these Saturday lessons, please contact Rev. Brittany so that she can add you to the list!

FIRST YOUTH

As things have been for the last 2 years, our ability to gather together in person is a fluid situation. Church leadership, in consultation with medical advisors, have decided that there will be no in-person gatherings for the month of January. In the meantime, we will be gathering by Zoom. Email Brandon for Zoom meeting links, bbates@fumclr.org

MUSIC MINISTRY

Yesterday, as my four-year-old son was taking a bath, he started making up a song to entertain himself. This, by itself, is not remarkable; there isn't a kindergartener alive who doesn't sing their own theme music. However, I managed to catch a snippet of his lyrics as I was washing and sanitizing the day's bottles for our infant, and he was repeating the phrase “Newtonian... Newtonian... non-Newtonian fluid...” over and over again as he splashed in the tub.

Now, I'm fairly certain that he has no idea what a non-Newtonian fluid is: he was bathing in plain water, after all, not oobleck or whatever. But he obviously had picked the term up at some point and liked how it rolled across his tongue as he said it. Fair enough; however, when he gets older he and I are going to have a little chat about viscosity and the nature of matter and why you can't just throw the term “non-Newtonian fluid” around in the bathtub.

I wonder about us, though... the church, that is. It's easy enough to forgive a child for singing a silly song and not really knowing what his words mean, but when was the last time you really paid attention to the words in our hymnal? When we get to the line, “Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by thy help I'm come,” do you ever sit and ruminate on exactly what those words mean? All too often we gloss right over them and keep going. It's not just hymns, though; we do the same thing with prayers, creeds, and litanies. It's all passive participation. In this coming year, I challenge you to think critically about the words we use in worship, both spoken and sung. You might find a greater sense of depth. You may discover a few new favorite songs. You may also discover that a hymn you used to love doesn't quite live up to your memory... but let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

James Stanley

FAMILY & FRIENDS



We officially welcomed Ron, Jaimee and Dublin Jensen-McDaniel on Sunday, December 19th. Ron and Jaimee have been an active part of First Church (especially the music ministry) for a while, but they are now officially members of FUMC Little Rock.

We want to thank all the volunteers that helped to make Christmas on the River a success!



Praying for YOU!

Months of separation and isolation have left us all feeling disconnected. To overcome that, we're searching for all kinds of ways to enhance people's sense of connection to one another and the church as a whole. That process begins with prayer. Each week, we'll be listing about 20 names in the newsletter for you to pray for during the week. Praying for someone by name is a powerful way to experience a connection beyond physical distance.

January 2-8: Mike Alex, Ila, Boden, Joan, John, Owen, Elizabeth, Pamela, Bill, Georgann, Lynn, Harold, Olivia, Lee, Michelle, Forrest, Mary, Paul, William, Ginger, Cindy, Russell, Leslee, Stella, William, Lisa

January 9-15: John, Karen, Irma, Murry, Gorden, Linda, Mollie, Sarah, George, John, Jennifer, Kevin, Daina, Brodie, Neil, Don, Dick, Margaret, Sarah, Walter, Ashley, Reiley, Beck, Ginny, Nancy, Daniel, Cory

January 16-22: Charles, Kelli, Meredith, Dana, Jason, Linda, Conrad, Bill, Ginny, Rob, Tori, Sean, Emory, Nicki, Joel, Audrey, Sean, Amelia Margot, Melanie, Sarah, Bob, Thompson, Sharla, Olivia, Bob, Carolyn, Al, Fran

January 23-30: Dayle, Al, Rebecca, Stewart, Mary, Brendan, Amanda, Bob, MaryAnn, Michael, Ginny, Shawn, Jessica, Betsy, Beth, Katherine, Henry, Helen, Alison, Sam, Owen, Carl