

The Insight

Giving *insight* into the life of FUMC Loveland and keeping our mission *in sight*.

Pastor's Pondering, by Rev. Lee Anderson-Harris

In high school, I was on the drill team. It was a significant part of my life, more than just a hobby or afterschool activity. And, a significant life-lesson came from my time on the drill team. To tell the story, I first need to explain the structure of it a little bit. There were three corps: rifle (not real guns, but rifle-shaped wooden things that are twirled and tossed in the air), flag, and dance. All three corps incorporated some ability to dance, but only the dance corps focused on dance, obviously. I was in the flag corps. I loved it, and I was pretty good at it. I was good at doing all the flag things, and not bad at dancing either. There were also the Reserves, the freshman class who were learning the ropes and who would try out to make the official drill team at the end of their freshman year.

As you approached the end of your junior year, you began to think about who would be one of the officers of the drill team. Only the senior class could be officers. Over the whole drill team was the Colonel. Next were two Lieutenant Colonels. Next were the Majors: one for rifles, one for flags, one for each of the two dance companies (Company A and Company B), and one for the Reserves. And then you go onto the Captains for each of these groups as well. The Director made the choice of who would be the officers, but the drill team members had some input.

I wanted to be an officer, but I had no vision of being the Colonel or even Lt. Colonel. I knew that the Director would never have a flag in these roles. I guess the flag and rifle corps were necessary, but only tolerated. It was no secret that she favored the dance corps and even had disdain for the flags and rifles. I had my sights set on Major at best, and just being an officer would have felt like an accomplishment. But then the gossip started. Some of my peers told me they could see me as Colonel. They thought I was talented enough for a higher role. As more support for this idea was rumored, I began to dream. Could this really happen? And then that dream turned into confidence that they must know something I didn't, and I was definitely in the running. So, if I didn't get Colonel, I would at least get Lt. Colonel. I put my eggs in that basket, so to speak.

The momentous occasion came: the next school year's officers were announced. As each position was announced, the new officer had to come forward and stand at the front while the remaining officers were announced. It was announced that I would be Major of Reserves. I was shocked. This was not what I expected, and by this point, not what I wanted because I had shifted my sights to these other possibilities. So I stood, doing my best to smile and look grateful, but inside my heart was breaking (remember, this was high school). And I let out a loud, odd, attention-getting sob before I could pull myself together.

I was crushed. The rest of that weekend was agonizing (Remember how two days felt like a month when you were that age?). The following week, the Director called me to her office to talk about my reaction. She asked if I didn't want to be Major of Reserves, and I told her it wasn't that I didn't want it...and then conveyed to her the whole story. She was not an approachable person, very stern and did not get close to the girls. But this was the closest I had ever felt to her, opening up the way I did. And her response was the softest I had ever

seen her. She said that first of all, she would never put a flag in such a high rank (see, I told you!). But second, the reason she chose me as Major of Reserves is that I was talented in both flags and dance, and this was a skill she wanted the freshmen to start learning. The direction she had in mind for the drill team was to cross-train all of the members. As the Major, I would be doing the most teaching of the new class.

This changed my perspective on the whole thing. It had never occurred to me that the position I was given was a valuable one; I had only seen it as a failure. I felt more empowered after that, and I put my all into that role. And now, as an adult, I understand this moment to be a life lesson: When you focus so much on only what you *want* to happen, and not take in other possibilities, you will be disappointed. It is easy to see anything else as a failure or as a wrong that was done to you. It doesn't have to mean either of those things though. Other outcomes could be just as good or even better than where you had your sights set.

This memory from my life's story came up for me recently, uninvited. It's not a memory I particularly cherish, I would put it in the category of "Can't I just forget about this embarrassing moment?" memories. Maybe there is something more it has to teach me right now. At any rate, I am sharing it because this church is approaching another change, and it is yet unknown what the outcome will be. You might have specific ideas or wishes for the type of person you think the next Senior Pastor should be. But what if that person is not who you expect? Or this person doesn't lead in the ways you want them to lead? It is times like these when life lessons about being open to possibilities are so valuable.

Acceptance allows us to see other possibilities and solutions and not waste energy wishing for or striving for something that just isn't to be. This doesn't mean we shouldn't have a plan or vision; it's just helpful to not cling so tightly to one outcome that you are devastated if that doesn't happen. First, plan or no plan we're not always in control. But more importantly, God might have a better idea that you just don't see yet. I am sure you have your own examples of doors closing only to have others open. Or a direction you never considered going becoming the one that made a wonderful difference in your life!

I like the image of holding onto something loosely, and here is an exercise that can help illustrate what I mean. Hold up your hand, palm face up, and close your fist tightly. Keep it closed tightly as you imagine God trying to put something into the palm of your hand. He can't, can He? Why? Because your hand is closed so tightly. Now, loosen your grip, even let your fingers open slightly, and imagine the same thing. It's much easier to receive the gift this way. Holding something dear to you is never the problem. Holding something so tightly that you can't receive anything else is.

So, dear ones, as we move into this next season together, may we all hold loosely. And may we remember that we are not God, but the gift-receivers. We're not the *owners* of the gifts we receive, but we *are* the stewards, and we have choices in how we use the gifts to the glory of God. May we do just that...understand the gifts this church is given as being for the glory of God. It begins with trusting that God is present, holding and leading you. And then, asking "What gift am I being given that perhaps I don't see?" Thanks be to God for the gifts, and for ability to receive them, see them and use them!

Guatemala Mission Trip, by Mark Elliott

This month, a small contingent from our church will be traveling to Guatemala as part of a mission trip with Pura Vida. This has been an annual pilgrimage for our church since 2016. This year, it will include our own Pastor Leslie and her husband, Brian. Team members from our church will be flying to Houston to meet up with others from around the country, including a group from Hilltop United Methodist in Sandy, Utah, before they all fly out for Guatemala.



As Charlie Bouchard mentioned during the commissioning of the FUMC team last month, they'll be traveling on Friday the 13th, and "What can go wrong?!?" He must have been recalling last year's trip, which was delayed by a couple of days because of the airport closure in Houston due to freezing weather. But last year's trip was in January, and this year's has returned to the traditional February time frame, so smooth sailing ... knock wood.

Pura Vida construction mission trips are aimed at providing a safe and secure home for a deserving family in Guatemala. This year, our team will start on the lower half of a two room, cinder block house for the Gámez Loarca family. Family members are father Santos, mother Virginia, and sons Domingo and Oliver, ages 5 and 2 years old.



As you can see from the pictures, they currently live in a dirt floor, adobe brick home. They live in a small community named Lemoa not far from Chichicastenango where the team will be staying. Their new home will be built on their property adjacent to their existing home. Thanks to donations from our church members covering construction costs for half of the house and those on site laying the blocks, the Gámez Loarca family can look forward to a new home in their future.



Of course, the team will be looking forward to reuniting with the local Pura Vida work crew. Construction foremen Diego (left) and Maco (right) will be making sure our team stays in line (literally) with a tap of the hammer to align blocks to the fishing lines they string. Danilo (center) oversees all of Pura Vida's projects, among many other tasks. He is a former Pura Vida scholarship student who graduated from their program with a Bachelor's degree — a rare achievement in rural Guatemala.

Danilo sent the following message to our team:



"Tell everyone that this upcoming trip will have a profound impact on the lives of everyone they visit, especially the families whose homes they will be building, because they never imagined that angels would bless their lives in this year 2026. Thank you for your love for Guatemala."

Greetings from Union!, by Rev. Bryson Lillie

Time moves fast, and I don't get to connect as often as I'd like, so here's a quick update on what's been happening and what's ahead.

We enjoyed a wonderful holiday season, capped off by our festive Union Holiday Party on December 19th. Around 40 of us came together to celebrate community, faith, and friendship. It was truly a joy to share that time.

As we step into 2026, we're facing some important changes. Our schedule needs to be simplified to reflect the reality that many families are stretched thin. Last year, we saw attendance dip as people juggled other commitments, but there's a sense of hope and fresh energy as we look to address these challenges. We'll also be working with a reduced grant from the Mountain Sky Conference this year. While this won't threaten Union's existence, it will require us to make some adjustments. I'll share more details soon, but your prayers and support are deeply appreciated.

We had a significant Union meeting on January 25th from 2 to 4 pm. We would be grateful for your prayers and, of course, your involvement as we discern the best way forward. It would be great to hear from you too! Though I can't always write newsletter updates, we stay active through email and social media. If you'd like to stay connected or join the conversation, please reach out. I'd love to get you plugged in.

Thank you for being part of Union's journey. Here's to a hopeful and meaningful year ahead.

Pastor Bryson

Greetings from Finance, by Charlie Bouchard

You probably are wondering how this picture ties in with a finance report. Mostly I just like the picture of this Red Tailed Hawk on our bird/squirrel feeder. I have to admit, I was torn about who to root for. The squirrel does a great job of emptying my feeder and he was stuck with no way out. Don't worry, there was a happy ending. The hawk decided he wasn't that hungry and we managed to extricate the furry rodent. Even better news, he hasn't been seen at our feeder since.

So here is the tie in. This time last year, FUMC had passed a budget that called for a 2025 budget deficit of over \$140,000! We in Finance felt a bit like the squirrel, caught in a dilemma with no foreseeable positive outcome. Faith is believing in something you can't see, and it would be a lie to say that the committee was filled with great faith. The financial situation of FUMC was made very public in meetings and letters. I am overjoyed to report that our congregation stepped up and filled our financial gap! We finished the year with a deficit of just over \$5,000!

We are not out of the proverbial bird feeder. For 2026, we still have a substantial "projected" deficit (\$80k+). As a church, and probably as individuals, we will always feel like the hawk is hovering. To me the takeaway is that God is greater than we can imagine. So *for now* let us be grateful that we can celebrate what was good in 2025.

* Loveland Pre-School has moved in and we are experiencing a mutual love affair. Total cost of improvements was about \$40,000 and came from funds specifically designated for capital items.

* We will soon have a new elevator (parts are delayed due to trade uncertainties). These funds came from the 57th Street account specifically designated for capital items and the total cost will be around \$150,000.

* The heating unit in Heart Hub has been replaced and we had the funds to pay for it. Cost of this project was about \$32,000 and came from a bequest.

* Our facility had a major facelift with new flooring, paint, and other much needed upgrades - and we had the funds to pay for it. Funds for this facelift totaled over \$100,000 and came from the FUMC Foundation.

We closed the books on 2025 in a healthy financial situation. We on finance look forward to seeing God's amazing grace in 2026!

Respectfully submitted,
Charlie Bouchard, Finance Chair



Free Market Event at FUMC, by Rev. Lee Anderson-Harris

If you read the Loveland Reporter-Herald, you may have seen a couple of photos in a January 20 article that look mighty familiar! They were taken in FUMC's Heart Hub. The article begins,

Stand Up Loveland, a local action group, has established the Loveland Free Market, where anyone can stop by for a hot meal, shelf stable food, clothing or household goods free of charge.

The market, according to organizers, is an ongoing mutual aid event that aims to bring the community together to help those in need.

"It's about helping your neighbors," said Dawn Morehouse, one of the StandUp Loveland organizers, at the Monday event. "It's about sharing excess that you have that somebody else can use. There's no money exchanged here today, bring whatever you want to get rid of that somebody else needs, take what you need and have a meal."

The first of these free markets was held at FUMC on January 15. It was not organized by the church or a ministry of FUMC, but it is a great example of how the church's building is being used to serve those in need and benefit the community. The event organizer knew of the building space and non-profit rental rates through another event she held at the church, and asked if they could reserve Heart Hub for this event too. I was thrilled when I read the newspaper article and learned more about what they are up to. Their mission is to help people experiencing a tough time financially and strengthen community. Those that came to the market were individuals and families in need as well as people donating items. All are welcome.

Jesus said "Come to me, all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28). I like to think of FUMC's building as a sacred space with open arms, saying, "Come to me, all who are carrying burdens and are in need...of assistance, of acceptance, of community, of spiritual nourishment." This sacred space has a lot to offer!

Reference:

Costello, W. (2026, January 20). Loveland action group hosts first Free Market. *Loveland Reporter-Herald*.

United Methodist Corner

In each issue, you will find a reprinted article or post connecting you to what's going on in the greater UMC. This month's article is a letter from Bishop Kristin Stoneking in response to the recent shootings in Minnesota. The letter was emailed to those on the Mountain Sky Conference distribution list on January 26. In our fast-moving world and news cycle, this may already seem outdated. However, her words remain spiritual guidance for us as we seek to faithfully navigate troubled times.

A Pastoral Message from Bishop Kristin G. Stoneking

"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with their neighbor, for we are members one of another." –Ephesians 4:25

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are in the midst of a crisis of violence and deceitfulness across our nation. In these moments and in all moments, we are called to speak the truth in love and remember that we are one body.

Last week, the cabinet and I met with Colorado Front Range clergy to name the reality, grief, and what hope can arise out of despair in the current moment. We mourned the tragic loss of the life of Renee Nicole Goode, the militarization of our communities, neighbors afraid to leave their houses, the inhumanity of arrests, sweeps, detentions and deportations. We named the reality that ICE is also operating and detaining persons in our area, particularly the Denver metro.

We were reminded that fear of being detained or deported exists in our churches and outside of them. We shared information and plans for response, safety, and acknowledged much more is needed. Now less than a week later, Alex Pretti has been killed as a result of the wanton use of force by federal agents.

Over the weekend, all over our four+ states, our clergy and laity mourned the losses of lives precious to God and affirmed their baptismal vow to "resist evil and injustice in whatever form they present themselves." I am grateful for every single courageous voice.

I recognize that not all in our Mountain Sky area are of one mind about these tactics and policies. A few may feel that somehow this violence is necessary to ensure the nation's safety. But violence always begets more violence. When we trust in the love of God and the sanctity of each member of the body, we have a better path to ensuring safety. Safety is a spiritual issue. As the Psalmist says, "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety."

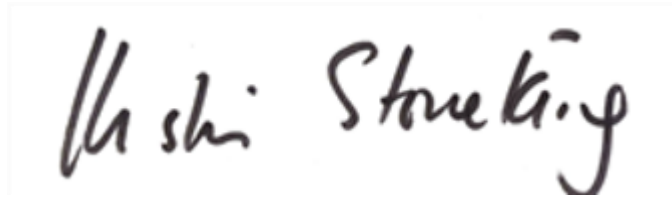
I entreat you to keep the words of scripture foremost: to speak the truth in love, and to remember that when one member of the body suffers physical injustice, it is as if Christ is being crucified once again. Violence is not our way and betrays once again the invitation to new life that Christ has offered us.

The early Methodist movement grew because of the witness of those who struggled to marry their private piety with their actions in public. They hoped to be one with Christ in their hearts and one with Christ in participating in bringing about the redeemed, loving, and just world that he showed us was possible. Showing up and speaking out on behalf of the well-being of others is in our DNA.

The church must speak the truth in love and act for justice always, but especially now. To speak the truth in love is to call each other into community and participation through invitation. Your voice and action are needed in each one of our communities and states to speak to those who represent you, share resources, support each other and stand in solidarity for the well-being of all. We do this in different ways, but we are all needed. Get in where you fit in and know that you are essential to the wholeness of the body.

You are members of one body, and in Mountain Sky, with a backbone the length of the Rockies, stretching through a continent. Be strong and protect one another, especially the least of these. And know that the God of grace and justice, and the Christ who is embodied with us, surround you and will sustain you.

In faith,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Kristin Stoneking". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kristin" written in a slightly larger, more prominent hand than the last name "Stoneking".

Bishop Kristin Stoneking