

The Insight

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

Pastor's Pondering, by Rev. Leslie Wood

Before we left for Chichicastenango, Guatemala, our team coordinator at FUMC, Charlie, joked, "On Friday the 13th 21 people from two different churches in two different states are flying from six different airports to connect at one gate in Houston for the same flight to Guatemala. What could go wrong?" As it turned out, nothing.

The outward bound travel to Guatemala went like clockwork. Everyone made it into the country on the same airplane at the same time. If such can be a sign of God's hand on this trip, then you'll find no argument here. The blessedly smooth travel was a precursor to a blessed week in Guatemala.

Even as our team from FUMC and the team from Hilltop UMC in Utah bonded in our down time, at our separate work site our team coalesced into an efficient body of workers. After meeting the Gámez-Loarca family (father Santos, mother Virginia, and adorable sons Domingo and Oliver, ages 5 and 2 years old), our FUMC team got to work on day #1 by transporting upwards of 300, 30-35# cinder blocks up a hill to the site of the new home. This was no small feat, as it required, practically, all hands on deck. Working in two stages, we passed the cinder blocks from person to person until all blocks were neatly stacked and waiting to become walls, and the beginning of a new home, over the next four days.



The aching backs and excessive laughter that first day were the sure indicators that it would be a great week of hard work and relationship building; and, of course, home building as well.

The day #1 experience was even more special as Santos eagerly jumped right in to work alongside us. It was a joy to watch his own joy as he helped construct his own home that will protect and shelter his family for years to come.

Working right alongside us, too, was Lucky, our translator. Lucky (pronounced Looky) is a delightful young woman. She is 26 years old, the youngest of eight children, and still lives in the local area with her family. Last year, she was the first in her family to graduate from college, thanks to the support of Pura Vida. She graduated with a degree in tourism. Today, she works for the organization as a translator, and we were very blessed to have her on our team.

When Lucky isn't working as a translator for Pura Vida, she works on her family farm, tending the vegetables and the animals and supporting her family every day. That young woman is an inspiration!

The first day was so very rewarding and absolutely an indicator of how blessed the rest of the week would be. As Ron Gibbs, one of our team members, explained, "It's a great feeling being around our crew, the family we are assisting and the locals leading the way."

God did, indeed, bless the week. We all were blessed on the work site – finishing in record time, I'm told. Yet it was more than that. It was serving together, making new friends with the Hilltop UMC team, connecting with the Gámez-Loarca family, getting to know both our translators, Lucky and Andrea, reconnecting with Maco, the local site supervisor, visiting the Rosario School (Wow, what an experience!), and worshiping at the local UMC on Sunday evening.

Of course, experiencing the Guatemalan people and their culture was a true blessing. And surviving the very insane traffic in the cities and on the mountain roads was its own unique bonding and growing experience!

One particularly meaningful time happened rather spontaneously, on Ash Wednesday. It occurred to me that morning that I should have brought along some ashes to honor the day. Charlie said, "Hey, I might have some ash left over in my fireplace!" That evening at dinner, he gave me a couple of charred wood pieces in a cup. My husband, Brian, took the cup and a bread knife and, converting them into a mortar and pestle, mashed the thin, charred wood into ash.

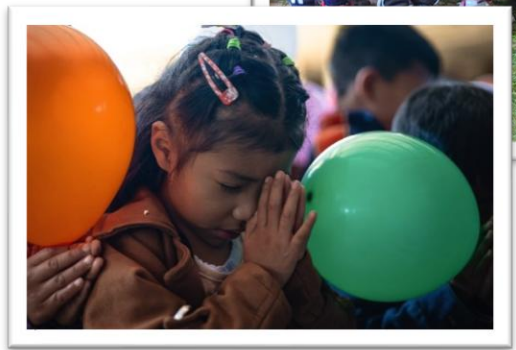
At the combined team meeting that evening, we shared in a simple and sacred imposition of ashes ceremony. We all then went to a much needed rest that night, humbly remembering that all our life journeys – including this one to Chichicastenango – are held in God's hands from beginning to end.

What a deep and lasting blessing it was to meet, serve, learn and grow together with our new – and old – friends in Guatemala. I will always be grateful for the opportunity to go along on this trip. It will remain a cherished memory from my time at FUMC and, hopefully, one day I'll be able to go again.

Shalom, Leslie

P.S. As a nice bookend to the trip, and assurance that God's hand was with us from beginning to end, we learned early in the morning as we left for the airport to fly home that, due to the partial government shutdown, Global Entry and TSA Precheck would be closed when we arrived. We were expecting a zoo of very long lines at customs. When we landed, it felt like we were the only international flight arriving, as there were, literally, no people except a few agents and no lines at all. We breezed through customs with no delays or frustrations. What a blessing, indeed!

See more photos on the next page!



2026 Wednesday Missions Fundraiser Meals!

You can fill out your calendar for the year for FUMC’s Wednesday Missions Fundraiser Meals! Look for the “ticket” sales table in Lobby Court on the two Sundays before each meal. You will also find a link to sign up online in The Window the 2-3 weeks before each meal. Each meal is \$10/adult and \$5/child 10 and under. All money received will be used by the Missions/Social Concerns Committee to respond to immediate needs in the community and beyond, such as wildfire/flood relief in our area, for instance. In 2025, funds were used to help with the Truscott Elementary Community Garden revitalization project.

Dates for the year are March 25, May 20, July 29, and September 23. Come anytime between 5:30 and 6:00 to get your plate. In addition to these fundraiser meals, a Friendsgiving dinner will be served on November 28.

We also need volunteers at every meal to help with set up, serving, and especially clean-up (if you have never soaked yourself by washing dishes in the kitchen, *you are missing out!*). Ideally, a regular team of people that will function as coordinators of these meals would be a big help. This team would be responsible for advertising the meals, recruiting volunteers for the meals, and receiving feedback to help improve the experience when needed. Contact Pastor Lee at lee@fumcloveland.com or (970) 667-0876 or Barry Wehrle at barrywehrle@gmail.com or (732) 754-2235 to volunteer in any of these roles.

Thank You Notes!

The church received two thank-you notes from Food Bank of Larimer County and ChildSafe in gratitude for the Christmas offering money provided to them. You can read them here:

Thank You
from ChildSafe!

Hello Rev. Leslie and First
United Methodist Church,
11/30/2024
Thank you for the wonderful gift
to the Food Bank! Your generosity
will provide 6,870 meals for those
in need... wow! Thanks for making
an enormous impact in our commu-
nity. We truly appreciate you!
Best, Nancy

We appreciate your support of families and children in need! Kathleen

Wow!! This is amazing! So, so appreciated!
~Jana
Thank you so much for your generosity!
~Melissa

Thank you to the amazing members of FUMC for being so kind and generous in your giving!
~Erin

Thank you for caring deeply about the children and families we serve. Your generosity means so much!
-sami Engler

Thank you for your generous support! We're so glad to be in community with you! - Ashley Weber

Thank you for your generosity + support!
Cathy

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.

I (Rev. Lee) want to tell you about an exciting conference designed for laity who are church leaders or who see themselves as playing a role in the health and ministry of the church. It is sponsored by UMC Discipleship Ministries. Even if you have never served on a committee or taken a church leadership role, you still have a calling as a Christian. If you feel God has been calling you into something new, or you just want to learn more, this conference sounds like a fun and meaningful opportunity! Here is the information from the website, and you can go directly to www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/rise-up-together-shaping-the-church-were-becoming to read more. (Note: SCD stands for See, Create, Disciple. The registration page states this conference is “building on the success of the SCD Laity Bootcamp”).

Rise Up: Shaping the Church we're Becoming

Held August 2-5, 2026 in Columbus, OH

Across the church, something is stirring. New communities are emerging. Fresh leaders are stepping forward. God is on the move—often beyond familiar walls, often through courageous experimentation. SCD 2026 is where those movements, questions, and hopes come together.

RISE UP: Love Boldly. Serve Joyfully. Lead Courageously.

For four days in Columbus, Ohio, lay and clergy leaders from across the connection will gather to reimagine the future of the church and prepare to live into it.

Expect more than inspiration. Expect formation, imagination, and activation.

At SCD 2026, you will:

- Be grounded in scripture and Wesleyan theology that speaks to today's realities.
- Learn from practitioners who are planting, revitalizing, and innovating.
- Hear stories of courage, risk, failure, and fruit from the field.
- Worship deeply and rediscover joy in your calling.
- Build relationships that continue long after the conference ends.

Why SCD—and Why This Moment?

Our plenary speaker, Carey Nieuwhof stated, “If you care about the future of the church, this gathering is for you because we're not just talking about what's changing... we're talking about how to lead through it. At SCD, we're going to dig into what it looks like to see where God is already moving, create new pathways for people to meet Jesus, and disciple in ways that actually form lives, not just fill rooms.”

The church is at a crossroads. Familiar models are no longer enough. Communities are shifting. Leaders are tired, but also hopeful. This moment doesn't call for retreat. It calls for holy courage.

For the first-ever SCD Celebration, an evening to celebrate progress, elevate stories of fruitfulness, and ignite faith for what God can do next. Rev. Matt Miofsky will be our keynote speaker who will bring vision and encouragement to help us build momentum—and keep moving forward.

This inaugural gathering will recognize the leaders and churches embracing innovation, disciple-making, and missional impact across the United Methodist Church

Whether you are a pastor, layperson, developer, innovator, or discerner, SCD meets you where you are and helps you take your next faithful step.

SCD 2026 is designed to help you:

- Reclaim clarity around your call and purpose.
- Gain practical tools you can take home and use immediately.
- See how God is already at work across diverse contexts.
- Leave not just encouraged but equipped and sent.

This Is Your Moment to Lead. Bring your team. Bring your desire to reach people who aren't in the room yet.

The future of the church isn't something we wait for. It's something we all rise up to build together with love, joy, and courage.

We can't wait to see you at See. Create. Disciple.

August 2–5 in Columbus. Let's rise up to build the future together.

To register and get more information, including the schedule, cost, and hotel information, [click here](#) or enter this URL: <https://na.eventscloud.com/ereg/index.php?eventid=857313&>.