

The Insight

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

Bold Steps and Ducks...A Farewell Letter, by Rev. Leslie Wood

On my very first Sunday as pastor of my very first church, the Waldo Canyon wildfire was wreaking havoc to the mountains and the Mountain Shadows neighborhoods on the west side of Colorado Springs. After church, Brian and I were driving home down 30th St., next to Garden of the Gods. The top was down in our little 1991 Miata, and we heard a noise behind us. Looking up and back, I saw a helicopter flying low, a large bucket of water was swinging on a cable underneath, liberally splashing water over the sides. The helicopter – and the swinging bucket of water – was passing right over our heads. We ducked, hoping the water would pass over us without getting wet. (It mostly did.)

I remember thinking how metaphorically apropos that moment was to the call to pastoral ministry that had been drawing me forward for 20 years. When a call from God brings us to such an unexpected path, we have two choices, really. Step forward boldly, or duck and hope the call will pass over without harm or expectation.

I remember thinking then...I'm choosing to not duck. I'm choosing the bold step forward. How exciting! How terrifying!

Terrifying is not an exaggerated word. It fittingly describes the feeling of unworthiness and lack of having “what it takes” to be called to serve in pastoral leadership. It describes the feeling deep in my gut, knowing that I was being called to local church ministry at a time of church decline. Had I known that a global pandemic was looming in the future, with the subsequent challenges it wrought and the learning curve it demanded...perhaps I would have ducked!

No. I would not have done that, I know. For being called to serve God through pastoral ministry has been the most humbling and rewarding experience of my life. Even the hard parts have been, in their own way, holy ground.

In truth, when I chose the bold step forward, I've never looked back. I've never regretted saying “yes” ...then, or in the numerous times God has opened unexpected doors since, asking me, “What is your choice, Leslie? Will you trust me and choose, once again, to step boldly forward, or will you choose to duck?”

The most recent time that happened was when I answered the phone five years ago and heard my district superintendent say the most surprising – and unexpected – words, “The Bishop intends to appoint you to First UMC in Loveland...” That was on a Friday, and I asked for the weekend to make a decision. But really, I only needed those couple of days to pray, catch my breath and say “yes” to God first, then to the Bishop and to you.

Once again, I have not regretted one moment of serving here as your pastor. Every minute, even the hard ones (and thankfully, there have been precious few of those) have been sacred minutes. I have been welcomed, challenged, held up and deeply blessed by knowing you and serving alongside of you.

As we worshiped and worked together, my prayer from day one has been that God will lead you precious faithful to know how God desires FUMC to be the church in this complicated new world. That continues to be my prayer and my hope; and I see God answering my prayers...our prayers, every day.

The other day I was walking on the sidewalk outside the church. The parking lot was full. The sound of teachers' voices and children's laughter combined with the sounds of brass and woodwind instruments...all flowing out of the windows. I couldn't help but smile. For me, it sounded like the movement of the Spirit. It sounded like the bubbling up of vitality. It sounded like life; and it was. It is. And, I know, there is more life to come for you and the ministries of FUMC.

It is still exciting. It is no longer terrifying. Just know, I will continue to pray from 100 miles south down I-25 that you will continue to hear God calling you, you will not duck, and you will step boldly forward, even when you're excited and a little terrified by the journey ahead.

And that's about it, friends. Be cheerful. Keep things in good repair. Keep your spirits up. Think in harmony. Be agreeable. Do all that, and the God of love and peace will be with you for sure... The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you. (2 Corinthians 13:11-14, The Message)

Shalom,

Leslie

Matthew's Sending Ceremony

On May 27, folks gathered as Matthew Utley's sending church to celebrate and bless him as he moves toward commissioning as a Provisional Elder, and as a full-time lead pastor. Current and former FUMC youth shared words of gratitude. Pastors and Ann Kessler (his former youth leader and teacher) gave words of inspiration as he enters this new role. He was presented with a gift from FUMC...a stole from Guatemala that he will be able to wear once fully ordained. And of course, we had a great meal and fun together!



Transition Time!, by Rev. Lee Anderson-Harris

You might say we are officially entering the transition time with the pastoral changes that have been announced this year. Just to recap: Pastor Leslie is retiring and her last day at FUMC will be June 7, then she and I go to Billings, MT for Annual Conference the following week. Pastor Don Bird has a renewal leave that he planned with family before knowing he would be moved to FUMC, so he will be joining us beginning Monday, August 10. Matthew Utley will be moving to West Jordan, UT and will start his new appointment as the pastor of Mountain Vista UMC on July 1. And I will begin a new appointment as the pastor of FUMC Fort Lupton on July 1, and will be part-time as Associate Pastor at FUMC Loveland starting that time as well.

On May 21, representatives from Loveland's SPRC and Fort Lupton's leadership council met with me to discuss my schedule. It was a good meeting; I personally felt supported by both teams, and both teams showed care and respect for one another too. My weekday schedule will be as follows: Mondays and Wednesdays I will be at the Fort Lupton church, and Tuesdays and Thursdays I will be at FUMC Loveland. In addition, when there are evening meetings I need to attend or special events at either church, I will be present as best I can outside of "normal" business hours...just as I already am. On Sundays, I will primarily be at Fort Lupton. I will be present in Loveland's worship, likely preaching, about every 5-6 weeks. Based on conversations I have had with many of you, I know that this change is expected. But if it takes you by surprise and you are wondering why I won't be in worship in Loveland more often, please remember that I am the *only* pastor of FUMC Fort Lupton, whereas FUMC Loveland has a lead pastor as well. And I have no doubt, you will be blessed by Pastor Don's preaching and leadership!

With me moving from full-time to part-time, my job responsibilities will shift, obviously. What will those responsibilities be? I don't have an answer yet. But I think this is one of those areas that I will need to live into. During July and early August, when I am the only pastor at FUMC Loveland, I will be doing many things! I am grateful to Pastor Bryson, who has offered to help me with pastoral care, such as hospital visits, if I am in a bind. I am grateful for the many volunteers and leaders of this church who have always kept things humming along. I am not alone nor the only leader. After Pastor Don begins, we'll be able to more definitively sketch out a "job description" for me.

You may have noticed the gap between Leslie's last Sunday and Don's first Sunday. On the Annual Conference Sunday, June 14, Joy Shaw will be preaching. I will preach the last two Sundays of June. July 5-August 9, worship will be led by various lay leaders of FUMC and guest preachers. On August 16, we will welcome Pastor Don in worship together!

Both churches will be adjusting to having a pastor available less often, as Fort Lupton is moving from a $\frac{3}{4}$ time pastor who preached every Sunday and was available during the week more often as well. Please pray for this church, and the people of FUMC Fort Lupton, during this time of change. As we all work to navigate this new territory, I believe that holding loosely to plans and ideas will actually serve us. As I have prayed and spent time in reflection, my approach to this time has changed. I began thinking I needed to get my ducks in a row and have preparations made to turn more things over to volunteers by July 1. I now see value in focusing on inner work as much as outer preparation, and letting some things unfold with time.

One of my favorite books for inspiration and support is *The Way of Transition*, written by William Bridges and published in 2001. I encourage *everyone* to read it. Change is a natural part of life, yet it is something most people

don't do well. In the opening chapter, Bridges delineates between change and transition. He writes, "It's a paradox: To achieve continuity, we have to be willing to change....Here's another paradox: The very things we now wish that we could hold onto and keep safe from change were themselves originally produced by changes. And many of those changes, in their day, looked just as daunting as any in the present do" (Bridges, 2001). He goes on to state that while change is a situational shift, transition "is the process of letting go of the way things used to be and then taking hold of the way they subsequently become" (Bridges, 2001). This time of transition, according to Bridges, is the period in between the end of one thing and the beginning of something else, which is often unclear. The transition is the fertile ground from which new things take root and grow. What we do in the time of transition is crucial. And when I say what we *do*, I mean how we engage with our faith and the choices we make with our energy. Sure, in the midst of any change in life, making preparations as best we can is advisable. But when any life change happens, there is much that remains to be seen. The transition time is when we exercise trust in a higher power and lean on God. It is when we remember, often repeatedly, that we don't know what the future holds, but we know God is already there.

Perhaps it is a God-thing that we say goodbye to one lead pastor, then have an in-between period, then say hello to a new lead pastor. During this in-between, may you listen for God's voice, and think in terms of tilling the earth to make it fertile ground. I look forward to seeing what comes next!

Reference:

Bridges, W. (2001). *The way of transition*. De Capo Press.

My Story, by Rev. Don Bird

I was born in May of 1972, at Mather Air Force Base in Sacramento, California, into a military family where change was simply part of life. Moving was normal. Transition was expected. Looking back, those early experiences formed in me a resilience and adaptability that I would later recognize as gifts for ministry.

The move that shaped me most was to Derby, Kansas, where my father was stationed at McConnell AFB. At that time, I was the middle child—one older sister and one younger brother. Two years later, when we moved to Broomfield, Colorado, our family looked very different. My parents had made the courageous decision to adopt three biological sisters we had met in Kansas. Almost overnight, I became one of six children. Eventually, we became a complex, beautiful, sometimes chaotic family system of four adopted (including one brother and three sisters, three of whom carried significant emotional needs), one biological sister, and me.

It was not easy. The transitions reshaped all of us. And yet, it was in the middle of that complexity that I experienced the steady presence of the Church. If not for my family's faith and the consistent support of our church community, I am not sure we would have navigated those years with the same hope and cohesion. The Church was not perfect—but it was present. It held us when we needed holding.

Youth group became sacred ground for me. Retreats, choir tours, mission trips—those were the spaces where faith moved from something inherited to something personal. I encountered a God who was not distant, but near. A God whose grace held messy families together. A God whose love made room for everyone.

That early formation still shapes how I see ministry today: the Church matters most when it becomes a place of belonging, healing, and honest spiritual growth.

In 1993, during my final semester at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, I was preparing for a different future. I was completing a degree in psychology and planning to pursue a Ph.D. or Psy.D. to counsel troubled youth—a dream I had carried since I was fifteen. At the same time, I was deeply involved in leadership with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, leading an off-campus Bible study and helping shape the spiritual life of the group.

Then, on an ordinary Wednesday night in November, something shifted.

After a guest speaker shared at InterVarsity, I shook his hand to thank him. He looked at me and said, “You’d be great in youth ministry.” He didn’t know me. It was a passing comment. But it wouldn’t leave me alone.

What began as an off-hand remark slowly became a persistent invitation. The words stayed with me through the night and into the next morning. What once felt like my carefully constructed plan began to loosen its grip. And what emerged instead felt less like a disruption and more like coming home.

Within weeks, my passion for graduate psychology programs faded, and a call to ministry took root. When I finally told my parents, bracing for disappointment, my mother responded, “Well, it’s about time.” They had seen something in me long before I was ready to name it.

I began as a youth director at Sunrise UMC in Colorado Springs just days after graduating. I had far more passion than experience—but I knew I was called.

More than three decades later, that call has not diminished. It has deepened.

Over the years, I have served as Youth Director, Associate Pastor, and Lead Pastor. I have walked with congregations through growth, conflict, grief, and renewal. I have wrestled with my own questions and doubts and had seasons of deconstructing my faith and being formed within it again. My faith today is both more spacious and more rooted than it was in my twenties. I love the Scriptures more now—not as a set of easy answers, but as a living story that continually forms us. I love Jesus more now—not as an abstract doctrine, but as the embodied Way that cultivates life, justice, mercy, and courageous love.

Loving like Jesus is not one ministry among many — it is the why behind everything I do. It shapes how I preach, how I lead, how I organize, how I care, and how I engage my community. The love of Jesus is expansive, inclusive, courageous, and restorative. It crosses boundaries. It moves toward those on the margins. It tells the truth with grace. It refuses to reduce people to labels or conditions.

My theology has grown more spacious over the years, as well, but it has also grown more centered. I believe the Church exists not to protect itself, but to embody Christ’s love in tangible ways — in our neighborhoods, in our systems, and in our shared life together. When we love like Jesus, we create belonging before agreement. We cultivate transformation rather than control. We become a community where healing is possible because honesty is welcomed.

As a Lead Pastor, I understand my role to be one that helps shape a healthy, spiritually grounded culture — with staff and with all who consider church their home. Culture is not created by accident. It is formed by what we celebrate, what we tolerate, how we communicate, how we navigate conflict, and how we treat one another when things are hard. I believe the pastor plays a critical role in tending that culture so that it reflects the heart of Christ.

A healthy culture is one where staff are trusted and empowered, where volunteers know their gifts matter, where clarity replaces confusion, and where grace shapes accountability. It is a culture where questions are welcomed, where growth is expected, and where leadership is shared. When a church's internal culture is grounded in love, respect, and spiritual depth, its outward witness becomes credible and compelling.

I am energized by helping others discover their gifts and releasing them into meaningful ministry. I believe the Church flourishes when leadership is shared, when vision is clear, and when we are attentive to where God is already moving in our communities. My calling is not primarily to preserve what has been, but to help discern what is becoming — and to cultivate an environment where people feel safe and inspired enough to step into that future together.

I also want to be transparent about how I understand the pastoral role. I deeply value presence with people who are suffering — sitting at hospital bedsides, praying with families in crisis, visiting those who feel isolated or alone. Those moments matter. They are holy. They are part of what it means to shepherd a community shaped by the love of Jesus.

At the same time, I do not understand pastoral ministry to be primarily defined by chaplaincy. Visitation is an important expression of pastoral care, but it is not the driving center of my calling. My primary vocation is to cultivate a spiritually grounded, outward-facing community — to form disciples, empower leaders, articulate vision, and help the congregation discern where God is moving and how we are being invited to participate.

In my experience, the healthiest churches are not those where the pastor carries all the care, but where the Body truly lives as the Body — where lay leaders are equipped and released to embody Christ's presence in one another's lives. I am committed to being present when my presence is most needed, but I am equally committed to building a culture where care is shared, relational, and woven into the fabric of the congregation.

Spiritual health — my own and the congregation's — is essential to this vision. Sabbath is sacred to me. Time for prayer, reflection, and family is not a luxury but a necessity if I am to lead with clarity and compassion. When I tend to my own soul, I am better able to help cultivate a community that tends to one another's.

At my core, I am compelled by this conviction: God is not finished with the Church. The Spirit is still stirring. The Way of Jesus still brings life. And our task is to pay attention, to remain open, and to courageously align ourselves with that movement.

As I enter this new chapter with First UMC Loveland, I do so with gratitude for the story that has formed me and anticipation for the story we will write together. My prayer is simple — that I remain attentive to God's presence, courageous in leadership, generous in love, and that together we become a community that blesses and serves in ways that are deeply faithful and boldly alive.

News from Trustees, by Joanne Scheihing

You may have already noticed that, while we were ready for our elevator renovation to begin in late April, there have been some delays. Due to a death of the spouse of a TKE worker in Aspen, the crew scheduled to work on our elevator was transferred to that project as they had already started the work. There have been a few delays but our project is now scheduled to begin on June 1. As I said in last month's Insight article, the elevator by the sanctuary will not be available to use for about 4 – 6 weeks, with the repairs taking about 3 weeks while the rest of the time will be spent on inspections. It is very frustrating to be without an elevator but we understand that construction projects often have delays and changes.

We appreciate your understanding and patience as we wait for this project to be complete.

Summer Community Meals

This summer, Union Spiritual Community, Trinity United Methodist Church, and First United Methodist Church are partnering for two special evenings centered around food, fellowship, and connection. Both meals will feature dishes prepared by trained culinary professionals.

On June 30 at 5:30p, Trinity United Methodist Church hosts a potluck meal featuring a main course and salad prepared by Ken Newkirk. Attendees are invited to bring a side, salad, or dessert, especially something meaningful or tied to a favorite memory or tradition. Conversation prompts will help us get to know one another as we share food and stories around the table.

Then on July 29 at 5:30p, First United Methodist Church hosts a traditional Mission Meals dinner prepared by Carl Williams. Tickets will be sold for this meal as usual, with proceeds supporting a joint missions project.

RSVPs for both gatherings can be completed through post worship signups or online through the respective church websites. Join us! Both evenings promise good food, meaningful conversation, and a chance to connect across our communities.

2026 FUMC/TUMC/UNION

SUMMER COMMUNITY MEALS

Three Communities. Two Meals. Two Trained Chefs. One Common Cause.

"We're on a mission from God... to feed you!"

**Chef
Carl Williams**

**Chef
Ken Newkirk**

June 30 - 5:30p
TUMC
Bring Potluck Sides or Desserts

July 29 - 5:30p
FUMC
Mission Fundraiser*

*\$10 per person ticket
All proceeds go to Mission Ministries
Scholarships available