

PIVOTING AGAIN!

There's a funny scene in an episode of *Friends* where Ross, Rachel, and Chandler are trying to move a huge couch up a narrow stairway. As they try to negotiate a turn, Ross keeps yelling, "Pivot! Pivot! Pivot!" until Chandler, squeezed against the wall, yells back, "Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!" (Check it out on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n67RYI_0sc0)

We have learned to "pivot" in so many ways in the last 18 months--in business, in schools, in health care, and in church. Dealing with the pandemic has taken us down many paths, and we have learned many new things, but like Chandler, we are weary of "pivoting."

We have learned to do worship, classes, and meetings online. We have had half a dozen policies for safety protocols as we have gathered. We have kept the program and mission of the church going in ways we never imagined before 2020. Now we are doing more than just restarting what we once had; we are re-inventing church. We are reconstructing and restoring the Body of Christ at First United Methodist Church in Fort Smith, and doing that is not an easy process.

To re-invent the church, we will be trying new things in new ways. We will have to experiment to see what works in this new context. If a new thing works--great! If it doesn't work, we will try something else. We are going to aggressively pursue our purpose and mission to keep the church as strong as possible for future generations.

In May, when we opened the church back up for three worship services and Sunday small groups, we had to change our schedule to try to balance our in-person activities with our online presence in two worship services. We had a well-thought-out and logical plan that was approved by our church leaders. But it was not as well-received as we had hoped. In August, we did a worship survey, and it indicated the continued importance of all three services and our online worship, yet there was also a desire to move the Connexion back to 11:00. There was also some concern about the length of time between the Chapel service and the start of Sunday small groups.

After consulting with the leaders on the Executive Team, the consensus was reached to return the Connexion to 11:00 and pivot back to the former Sunday morning schedule. However, this change cannot be accomplished immediately, like flipping a switch. It will entail several logistical challenges, since the same technology team cannot be in both the Great Hall and the Sanctuary at the same time and we cannot livestream two services at once. We will need to find another part-time staff person, more volunteers, and a plan for broadcasting the Connexion at a later time. We hope to have all the pieces in place to change our schedule back by the first week of November. Here's what you can do to help.

- **Renew your vows.** Think about those promises you made when you first became a member of FSFUMC--to uphold the church with your prayers,

presence, gifts, service, and witness. As Paul told Timothy, “*I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you.*” (Phil. 1:6) Pray deeply for the revival of the church. Come in person if you can; join us online if you can’t. Continue your good support of the church financially. Find a way to serve. Tell others about the church that means so much to you, in case they might need a church home, too.

- **Volunteer.** We will especially need more volunteers to help with the technology of two services simultaneously. If you don’t know how to do it, we’ll train you for free! Join us **Sunday, October 3, at 3:00 p.m.** for an orientation to this vital ministry. Sign up or ask questions with Trevor Hardcastle (thardcastle@fsfumc.org). Did I mention you get a free T-shirt?
- **Contact and invite.** A new Sunday schedule is not a magic pill for getting everyone back in church. Over the next few months, we are going to have to contact and invite all our church friends we have not seen at church in over a year. (Of course, that means *you* need to come to see if they are there!) The reality is, some will not return, for whatever reason. So we are going to have to invite new people to follow Jesus in our church. That’s part of the process of reconstruction and restoration.

The way forward for First United Methodist Church is not going to be easy. It’s not going to be easy for any church. But let me tell you this: Your pastors and staff are “all in” to do whatever it takes to help this church thrive. I know many of you are all in, too. I believe we are going to emerge from this long, challenging season stronger in discipleship and more dedicated to our mission to make a difference for Christ in this community and the world. Will you join me?

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