

January 24, 2023

To the Congregation,

On January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020, I was standing on a convention floor in Atlanta, GA working a Trade Show booth as I discovered that the first Covid case had been announced in the U.S. I still vividly remember the person walking up into our booth, amongst a group of us and stating this as he read the article on his phone. I remember the large group of people in our booth kind of laughing it off, and even as I joined them, something in the back of my mind started wondering how this might play out.

Fast forward to March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020, when Gov Asa Hutchinson closed down restaurants, many other business establishments, and most public places.

I can remember going to the grocery store without a list, because you simply had to shop from what little inventory the stores had. I would return to my vehicle and sit in it with panic...worried for Brenda and me, worried for my parents, my children. Worried for how long my job might last, and then what would I do. I had an incredible fear running through me, yet, day after day, I tried to never let it be seen by Brenda, my family, or my friends. I felt totally helpless in a world that seemed to be crumbling apart, day by day.

When I found out that First Methodist Eureka Springs was looking for a Director of Music, I almost felt like I was being pushed by God to get there as quickly as possible. I knew that regardless of the Church being closed from people attending, in whatever way I could contribute with Blake and help build an online service, it was MY WAY to offer help, to offer hope, to serve and contribute at a time that I otherwise felt so helpless.

There were certainly some weird times. Some Sundays that Blake, Janet and myself actually felt in danger within the building due to politics and the environment around us. There were Sundays that suddenly someone would show up for service, and, well, it was strange and almost uncomfortable.

Later that year, I came up with the idea of using our outdoor space and have a few outdoor events, allowing people to come together, even if masked up, and share music and God's word.

As time moved forward, and Covid became somewhat manageable, we finally opened the doors of the Church and I finally got to meet the choir. We have had some great services together. We've had three wonderful Cantatas, so many wonderful opportunities for Special Music from various people within the group. And it's always been about us helping to lead and enhance the worship experience for all of you.

Now that business is back to normal, I am traveling as much, if not more, than I have in many years. Our company is growing fast, and my responsibilities for all of North America grow by the week. So, this is why it is my time to say goodbye.

I can't thank you enough for allowing me to help lead the worship service on a weekly basis, and also for trusting me to do the same. We each typically spend about an hour per week in Church. And we all need the "feeding" that worship provides us for so many different reasons. Therefore, that hour should be special. It should always be worshipful, prayerful, enthusiastic yet reverent. I hope that I have been able to help make all of the above part of the service each and every week that I have been here.

I can't leave without mentioning a few people. Blake, you have given me a refreshing hope in Church. At a time that I'm convinced that "Christians" are driving most people away from Church, you have helped teach me to read the "red words" in the Bible....to try to love unconditionally, without judgement to others, and to always be there to help feed His sheep, in whatever way we can. You have been amazing to work with. I will miss your sermons, your take on Church and life, and simply all that makes you who you are.

Janet Arnett, your sincerity for all that you do is amazing. I have learned to love you for your faith, your devotion, your commitment to what you do. I know that God has so many things left for you to accomplish in His name.

Melodye, Blake and I kind of dragged you into our service by having you "help us" with your suggestions as to cameras and etc. We baited the hooks, we cast the lines, and I'm certain that God working through Blake and myself, you took the bait. You are an amazing person, with an amazing heart and an amazing talent. Thanks for being there. Thanks for being you.

This Sunday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, will be my last service. I shared with Blake in early December that I almost wished that it would come a big snow storm so people couldn't get to Church on the last Sunday so Blake and I would be the only ones in the sanctuary, worshipping together, and somehow managing to broadcast it to all of you in your homes, just as I started.

Never forget, the Church is NOT inside the 4 walls of the sanctuary, unless you choose to keep it there. The sheep, God's flock is within the community. Keep up your amazing work and missions within Eureka Springs and Carroll County.

Thanks again, from the bottom of my heart, for almost 3 amazing years together.

God Bless You All,

Bren Marshall

