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Come Away: A Journey into Restoration and Rest

Rev. Joshua Lemons

Over the past months, many of you have heard that I have begun discerning a season of rest and renewal. I want to share more fully what this means, why it matters, and how it connects to my own vocational journey. I also want you to hear clearly that this is not a sudden decision, nor a private one. It has been prayerfully discussed by our leadership, the Bishop, and multiple District Superintendents for nearly two or three years, identified as a key goal, and is now moving toward implementation in 2027.

The details are still being worked out by a dedicated planning team, and I am currently applying for grant funding so that there will be no additional cost to our congregation.

This season of renewal is not about stepping away from ministry. It is about tending to the well that is your pastor's soul.

A Calling That Began Long Before Ordination

Although I was ordained in 2020, my journey in ministry began long before that. I can trace God's hand back to childhood—helping in Vacation Bible School, children's ministry, and youth activities at Center Grove Presbyterian Church in Greenwood.

After high school, I attended Indiana Wesleyan University, where classroom study was paired with internships across Indiana, Colorado, and California. Those years were formative and afterwards, I felt ready to "go and do likewise," trusting that God would lead.

Then came 2008 and the Great Recession. Jobs were scarce. During that discouraging season, Jennifer asked me a question that still echoes in my heart: "Are we limiting God by saying, 'I'll go anywhere—as long as it's Indiana'?" That question shifted everything. It opened the door



to Westwood United Methodist Church in Cincinnati, where I learned what it meant to serve in a truly urban and multicultural context.

Later, another season

of uncertainty led us to Houston, where Jennifer received a faculty appointment and we once again stepped out in faith.

Josh working at a youth event in 2012, at Sarang Love Korean Church in Houston, Texas



In Houston, I experienced both deep challenge and deep renewal. After a season outside paid ministry, worshiping at Houston Vineyard and working at REI

I rediscovered what it meant simply to be part of the church. That season reminded me that pastors, too, need space to sit in the pews and receive.

Eventually, God led me to even more formal theological training at Fuller Theological Seminary. Later, I completed my Master of Divinity at Southern Methodist University, discerning more clearly a call to parish ministry.

Along the way, I was privileged to serve in a Korean

immigrant church, at Westbury United Methodist Church in Houston (a congregation that is half black and half white, among others), and in diverse ministry settings that shaped



my understanding of God's expansive love. Each chapter taught me something new about grace, humility, resilience, and dependence on God.

Ministry, Faithfulness, and the Cost of Service

When I look back, I am amazed by how many places, cultures, and communities God has used to form me. None of this has been accidental. Yet it would be dishonest to say that ministry is easy.

Pastoral work involves joy, creativity, and sacred moments—but also grief, pressure, long hours, emotional labor, and constant availability. National studies consistently show that many clergy experience burnout, chronic stress, depression, and physical health challenges. Too many gifted pastors leave ministry exhausted or discouraged. But you probably already knew that.

Our denomination has long recognized this reality. The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church encourages regular seasons of rest and renewal, including sabbaticals approximately every seven years. This is not a luxury. It is a form of stewardship—of our bodies, minds, spirits, and callings.

"It is about tending to the well that is your pastor's soul."

The Lemons' first Christmas in Lake Jackson, Texas at Chapelwood UMC in 2017



Josh and Jennifer drilling fresh water well in El Salvador in 2012

Just as farmers allow fields to lie fallow so that they may become fertile again, so too clergy are invited to rest so that ministry may remain life-giving rather than life-draining.

Jesus himself modeled this rhythm. Again and again in the Gospels, we see him withdrawing to pray, to rest, to be renewed. At one point, he says to his disciples, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.

A Discernment Shared by Our Leadership

This season of renewal has not emerged in isolation. For the past few years, our Leadership Team has prayerfully named clergy well-being and long-term sustainability as priorities.

Out of that shared discernment came a clear goal: to finalize a plan for clergy renewal and implement it in 2027. A team is now helping shape the details, including worship leadership, pastoral care coverage, communication, and congregational support. I am also applying for grant funding so that this season will not create financial burden for the church.

This is your ministry as much as it is mine. Ultimately, it is Christ’s church. It reflects our shared commitment to health, transparency, and long-term faithfulness.

Why This Matters for Our Church

You might wonder: *Why plan this so far in advance? Why talk about it now?*

Because to build a healthy church requires trust and preparation. Because shared vision builds confidence. And because I want you to know that I am committed to serving here with energy, integrity, and joy for many years to come.

This season of renewal is not about stepping away from you. It is about returning more fully present—to God, to my family, and to this congregation.

During this time, I hope to engage in spiritual direction, extended prayer, theological reflection, study, rest, travel, and family time.

The goal is simple: to come back renewed in spirit, clearer in vision, and more deeply rooted in God.

Running the Race with Perseverance

The writer of Hebrews offers these words: “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight... and run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus... so that you may not grow weary or lose heart” (Hebrews 12:1–3).

That image of a long-distance race has guided much of my thinking. Ministry is not a sprint. It is a lifelong pilgrimage. Runners who never pause to hydrate, stretch, or recover do not finish well.

As I complete my sixth year of ordained ministry and reflect on more than two decades of service in various forms, I am deeply grateful—for God’s call, for Jennifer’s partnership, for our family, and especially for you. Greenwood UMC has been a place of growth, grace, and shared mission. Serving here is a gift I do not take lightly.

Looking Ahead with Hope

Between now and 2027, I remain fully committed to our shared ministry: worship, pastoral care, outreach, discipleship, and community life. This season of renewal is part of strengthening that work, not stepping away from it.

Thank you for journeying with me! Thank you for supporting thoughtful leadership. Thank you for caring about the spiritual health of those who serve and for loving my family!

Please continue to pray—for our Leadership Team, for our volunteers, our staff, for my family, and for me—as we discern next steps together.

May God, who began a good work among us, bring it to completion—renewing our hearts, strengthening our witness, and guiding us faithfully into the years ahead.



Josh's commissioning class in 2018 in Houston, Texas.



Josh at Annual Conference in 2025 with the Senior Pastors of Southport UMC, Grace UMC (Franklin), and Asbury UMC (Columbus)

GUMC Preschool: Little Ones Growing and Learning



It has been wonderful to witness our preschool flourish with the transition to a full-day program. The shift from being a classroom teacher to becoming the Preschool Director has been quite the learning experience, allowing me to observe how each class develops in its unique way. In a way, I'm learning alongside the children! I truly enjoy visiting each classroom and watching how each teacher interacts with their students. The kids have fun with all the teachers and they're excited to come to school every day! Thank you to Greenwood UMC and our community for all the support as we navigate our new preschool model.

~ Ms. Brittany



Our 2s room is full of first experiences, learning emotions, and growing social skills! The children can now count to 20 and beyond, know their ABCs, and are working hard on word pronunciation. Each week we focus on colors, shapes, numbers, and specific letters. During daily lessons we use worksheets, crafts, and hands-on activities to strengthen attention, coordination, and recognition. Sensory bins are a favorite as we explore new tastes, smells, textures, and sounds. We also practice healthy habits like brushing our teeth, washing hands, and cleaning up. Through free play, we continue learning important social skills such as taking turns, sharing, and using gentle hands.



The preschool and church staff make it even more amazing with their daily support and care. The kids look forward to time with Ms. Brittany for stories and recess, and they love before and after care with Miss Margaret. We enjoy visitors and connecting with other classes. As we head into summer camp and the next school year, we hope to see more outdoor-friendly spaces for our littles. The 2s are especially excited about the playground expansion! For winter and bad weather days, we created a "recess room" to release big energy—it's a work in progress, but they love it. We're dreaming of indoor climb-and-slide sets and more!



Friendships are blossoming, and the joy they show when seeing one another is truly a gift. We're also making great progress with potty learning and becoming excellent listeners! ~ Ms. Amy

Pre-K is off to a wonderful start this year, with the classroom full of energy, curiosity, and growing friendships. Students are learning the days of the week, writing their first and last names, and working on counting/identifying numbers 1-18. We've also been practicing important skills like sharing, taking turns, and using kind words. Camping day has so far been the classrooms favorite. We pitched a tent, cooked hot dogs and s'mores, and went on scavenger bear hunt through out the church. Lots of positive changes this year and I'm excited to grow with our new program. ~ Ms. Cassie



Your Giving at Work and It's Impact on Our Community

Heather Rhoda, Bookkeeper

Since joining the GUMC staff, I have been very blessed and amazed to see the journey and growth of GUMC. When joining, the General Fund was operating in the red. Since then, the tide has turned and the General Fund has now climbed back into the black. In other words, whether you have given, as Pastor Josh has mentioned in previous thank you letters, "\$2, \$20, or \$200," because of your generosity the General Fund of GUMC is now self-sustaining. A self-sustaining church can be a giving church, and a giving church is something GUMC has always been.

The preschool remains one of the core ministries at the heart of our church, providing a Christ-filled atmosphere to serve our community. Thanks to funds prayerfully set aside by leadership for such a time as this, the preschool has undergone a major renovation. Updates include rewired internet, added security cameras, three new high-security entry doors, fresh paint, new carpet, additional staff, and new supplies and furniture. We began this semester with a fresh start and renewed energy.



Our missions committee was able to be even more generous to the four Greenwood elementary schools than before. The Holy Cow and Spaghetti dinner fundraiser received just over \$2800 and our missions fund, which has been growing, was able to match that \$2800 and give each elementary school a very generous \$1400 for the year. Each principal expressed amazed and heartfelt gratitude for the donations. Additionally, from a portion of the pastor dunk tank in October combined with another generous discretionary donation, another \$1200 check was given to Isom Elementary School toward playground improvements. The other portion of the pastor dunk tank funds will be used toward improving our own GUMC playground. In addition to the food donations during the October food pantry drive, monetary donations were immediately sent out to support Inter-Church Food Pantry of Johnson County and the Refuge to help those in the community struggling to buy groceries. Generous donations also provided extra support to three families this year in addition to other forms of local assistance.

Other generous donations, both small and large, went toward the music ministry, Kic-It, the Bishop's Fund, the beautification of the Prayer Garden, Shepherd's Table, power washing the sidewalks, a new beautiful robe for Pastor Mandie, staff appreciation, photography for the directory, and more that I probably missed when reviewing the year's financial books for this Spire article.



Perhaps the largest project of the year was the installation of a very much needed flat roof. The original cost of the new flat roof was \$193,400. Between all of the very generous donations



both in the congregation and some outside donations, a generous donation from the Mizo congregation, and all of the donations to pay off the remaining loan principal, the remaining balance of the roof loan is \$24,564. If monthly donations toward paying down the principal continue, loan could be paid off as early as the end of 2027. That's 2.5 years to pay off the 5-year loan!

One other designated area several congregants have been faithfully supporting is our Building and Capital fund. This has all gone toward the \$7300 in plumbing costs, an automatic handicap door opener for the exterior doors next to the chapel, and \$3500 in other fixes of the parsonage. The parsonage is over 50 years old and the copper pipes have now reached their life expectancy. Additionally, the Thompson Fund has been used for installing 4 new furnaces, 1 new water heater, and cleaning the carpets of the church. This year, it is anticipated that we will need to replace at least two more A/C units. We are very grateful for those who have donated toward the Building and Capital fund as well as for the legacy Thompson Fund which has supported GUMC through many difficult times in the past. Donations to the Building and Capital fund to help keep the building healthy are always appreciated.

Your generosity has not gone unnoticed. We are deeply grateful for your support of our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Because of you, we are able to support our new Associate Pastor, Pastor Mandie, and are moving toward sustaining our Special Staff without drawing from savings. Our community is benefiting because of your faithfulness.

Looking Ahead: Our Shared Goals for the Year

Rev. Joshua Lemons

This fall, our church leaders gathered for our annual leadership retreat to pray, reflect, and discern God's direction for our congregation.



Together, we identified several important goals that will guide our work in the months ahead. These goals focus on two key areas: Building and Capital Projects and Ministry and Program Development.

Building and Capital Projects

Caring for our facilities is an important part of stewarding what God has entrusted to us. In the coming year, we hope to repave the parking lot, refurbish the playground, repair the scout house, and update our bathrooms to keep our church safe, welcoming, and accessible for all. Repaving the parking lot is especially important, as it serves not only our worship services and church events, but also community gatherings such as the Greenwood Farmers Market and the city's annual Freedom Festival.



Ministry and Program Development

Alongside these physical improvements, we are also investing in the spiritual life and mission of our church. In the coming year, we will prepare for Pastor Josh's clergy renewal leave, engage in a thoughtful revisioning process, revisit our mission statement, and clarify our guiding values—all while strengthening our focus on outreach and service.

Thank you for your prayers, encouragement, and participation as we move forward together. We look forward to all God will do in and through our congregation in the year ahead.

Sacred Harp and Social Holiness

Margaret Stivers

Last Lent, we were introduced to Sacred Harp singing, and this year we continue that rhythm together. During our service, we will set aside time to use our voices collectively—singing a tune shaped not by instruments, but by one another. No piano. No organ. Just voices: strong, unembellished, and communal.

Sacred Harp is a centuries-old American singing tradition rooted in four-shape note hymnody. Singers typically face one another, each section carrying melody or harmony. There are no performers—only a community lifting its voice together. Yet Sacred Harp is more than a musical style. It carries a spiritual posture.

Lent is a season of holy honesty. We are reminded that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. We examine our hearts. We sit with the cross before we rush toward the resurrection to come. Sacred Harp fits this season because it does not soften the realities of sin and death. Its sound feels grounded—earthy, embodied, unpolished. In Lent, this matters. The harmonies are bold and sometimes stark. The texts name human frailty and divine grace without sentimentality.

“Singing itself becomes a means of grace—not because it is flawless, but because it is shared.”

In the Wesleyan tradition, we believe that grace shapes us in community. John Wesley famously reminded us that there is “no holiness but social holiness.” We are formed through shared practices of worship, prayer, and song—what we call means of grace. Singing itself becomes a means of grace—not because it is flawless, but because it is shared. Sacred Harp embodies this naturally. Every voice matters. No one carries the music alone. The strength of the sound depends on communal participation.

Last year, Sacred Harp slowed us down. It invited us to listen to one another. It required courage to sing boldly, even imperfectly. It reminded us that worship is not something performed for us—it is something we offer together to God.

As we move toward Holy Week, Sacred Harp helps us stay with the story. It does not rush past Good Friday. It allows us to sing the cross before the alleluia. When Easter dawns, resurrection does not feel shallow or sentimental—it feels triumphant because we have walked through the valley together.

If Sacred Harp feels unfamiliar to you, do not be intimidated. You do not need a perfect voice. You only need a willing one. Lent is not about performance; it is about participation. As we gather in song, may we remember that faith is not a solo act. It is a shared song—carried together through repentance, through the cross, and into Easter hope.

CONNECT WITH US

New address?

New phone number?

Interested in Membership or Baptism?

Curious about our Ministries?

Simply scan the QR Code to access our connection card, and we will be in touch with you!



SCAN ME 



CROSSROADS BRASS BAND

Join us on Saturday, April 11, at 7 PM for an exciting musical experience with the Crossroads Brass Band, featuring lively rhythms and vibrant performances.

Holy Week

Schedule

Maundy Thursday

APRIL 2
7:00PM

Good Friday

APRIL 3
7:00PM

Easter Sunday

APRIL 5
SUNRISE- 7:00AM
BREAKFAST- 8:00AM
EGG HUNT- 9:00AM
WORSHIP SERVICE- 10:15AM

SUNDAY SCHEDULE

9:00 am ~ Sunday School for all ages
10:15 am ~ Worship Service
All are welcome here! Please join us!

WEEKDAY SCHEDULE

Monday

6:30 pm ~ Cub Scouts
7:30 pm ~ Boy Scouts

Tuesday

11:00 am ~ The Shepherd's Table

Wednesday

11:30 am ~ Bring It All AA
6:00 pm ~ AA Groups
6:30 pm ~ Bible Study

Thursday

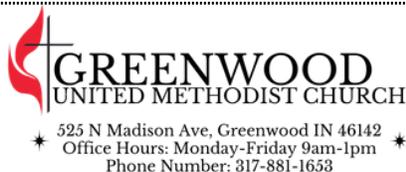
11:30 am ~ AA Group
6:00 pm ~ Girl Scouts
6:00 pm ~ Bell Practice
7:00 pm ~ Choir Practice

Friday

11:30 am ~ GNBB AA Group

Saturday

8:00 am ~ Farmers Market



March

9 ~ Leadership Team Meeting
14 ~ UWF Meeting
15 ~ Missions Soup Luncheon

April

2 ~ Maundy Thursday
3 ~ Good Friday
5 ~ Easter Sunday
11 ~ UWF Meeting
11 ~ Crossroads Brass Band Concert
13 ~ Leadership Team Meeting
25 ~ Farmers Market

May

9 ~ Mother's & Others
10 ~ Mother's Day
11 ~ Leadership Team Meeting
25 ~ Memorial Day – Office Closed

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by Greenwood UMC

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