

LOVE, HUGS AND SUPPORT

BY LAURA BRAY



Russ and Judy Weaver have been members of UUMC since 1997. They have been active in the Music Ministry, Administrative Council, Student Choirs, and many other ministry areas. In August 2012, Judy was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's Disease), a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain. Fifty-six people from the Music Ministry recently participated in the Walk for ALS in honor of Judy and raised over \$20,000 (the top team in the city!). Judy now speaks with the help of her iPad. I sat down recently with Russ and Judy to find out what University UMC means to them.

Judy: Home. Family. Love and hugs. Since the diagnosis, we have become better friends with people I knew before.

Russ: We have fellowship time all over town—in Sam's Club and other places. I can't tell you how much the hugs mean. Many people have offered to do practical things, like prepare meals (which we don't yet need). One example is Jane Wilson. She's a retired nurse, and it has been great to be able to talk to her since she knows all about feeding tubes. People have been incredibly uplifting, loving, and kind.

Some people would avoid Judy (in her condition) or be uncomfortable around her. I've not noticed that in anyone in the body of Christ that is University UMC. We cried the night of the diagnosis, and a few times since then. But then we pick up and move on.

Judy: Day to day is all any of us have.

Russ: University also gives us the opportunity to serve Christ, whether it be in the Music Ministry or missions or Student Choirs. It makes you feel good, and I know that God wants us to be happy.

Judy: We enjoyed helping with the Student Choir and getting to know some fabulous teens.

Russ: Intergenerational contact is very important. It helps you stay in touch with not just grumpy old people. It's also good for the kids; they discover that other adults besides their parents care for them. University also gives us a chance to grow. I don't think God is through with me just yet. Being a part of a body of Christ like University lets you "rub up" against others to smooth out some of your rough edges, like a rock polisher.

Judy: We moved around for 29 years [Russ is a retired Air Force officer], and the church helped grow our kids, sometimes at base chapels, sometimes off base. I grew up in really small churches. I never wanted to be part of a big church. We thought we would be lost.

Russ: It's a place of refuge and hope.

PURE MERCY'S IMPACT ON ONE FAMILY

BY LAURA BRAY



Last Christmas, we asked you to donate to our Pure Mercy campaign, to help those in need at Locke Hill Elementary. Your

generosity far exceeded our expectations and enabled us to help over 40 families. Each family received over \$1,000 in gift cards, in addition to food, hygiene items, games, books, and medical exams. We asked one of those families and the school counselor what your generosity meant to them. Norma and Richard Ward are long-time Locke Hill parents; their daughter Clarissa is currently in fifth grade there. Norma Cleveland is the school counselor.

Mr. and Mrs. Ward: When we went to pick up the package, we thought, "Wow, there must be a lot of food in that box." Then we got the white envelope [full of gift cards]. I thought, "All for ME???" I cried when I opened the envelope. It was

an amazing blessing. We were going through a lot at that time. So we prayed, saying, "Lord, you are in control." We were worried our kids wouldn't have Christmas. We knew we should stay strong and walk in faith. God can calm the storm.

The gift cards were from stores where we usually don't shop because we can't afford it. When I went to Marshall's, the clerk told me to apply for a giveaway. Two days later, she called and said I had won a \$50 gift card. When our big family all came in, we had a big turkey to serve them. I thought, "My children are going to have a nice Christmas." This was just amazing. When you bless somebody, God multiplies that blessing ten times.

Mrs. Cleveland: A lot of the families were in tears in my office. They couldn't believe the support they were getting. They were so incredibly grateful. The gift cards allowed and empowered the parents to get their kids what they knew their kids

would like. People don't realize the amount of need we have here at Locke Hill. At the beginning of the school year, families need clothing and school supplies. And especially during the holidays, food can be in short supply.

Their need affects their ability to learn. They're hungry; their shoes are falling apart. It can affect their self-esteem. These gifts allow them to focus on learning.

IT'S NOT
PURE MERCY,
IT'S PURE
BLESSING

TEACHING KIDS TO BECOME SELF-SUSTAINING CHRISTIANS

BY LAURA BRAY

Our new Director of Children's Ministry, Patrick Jackson, arrived in San Antonio at the beginning of November from Tulsa. His family—wife Stephanie, two-year-old Parker, and six-month-old Amelia—will join him after the holidays. He has a Master's of Divinity from Asbury Theological Seminary and is working on his Doctor of Ministry.

Why do you feel called to Children's Ministry?

I don't feel I'm called to Children's Ministry. I feel called to ministry in general. The Lord just keeps putting this in front of me at different churches.

What are your main goals for the Children's Ministry at University UMC?

I've spent a decade in Children's Ministries, so I know what a healthy one looks like. I would like to improve the health of this Children's Ministry—not that it's currently unhealthy, **but** there's always room for change.

Tell me more about "family ministry."

Children's Ministry on its own just does not work anymore. The church of the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s largely separated the generations. We outsourced the spiritual development of children from parents to the church. And the church encouraged it. Pastors stopped teaching theology and Biblical literacy and started

teaching religiosity and moralism. Many parents don't have a clear understanding of the Bible. Kids need someone to teach them how to be self-sustaining Christians. I want to develop children who will become strong, self-sustaining spiritual adults. I'm working on Evergreen Family Ministries, an online resource where families can purchase (for a nominal cost) an intergenerational Bible study. Our hope is to train parents to teach their kids how to read the Bible and teach theology while we're at the same time teaching the parents. We want to increase spiritual conversations between parents and kids.

Where are you in the process of earning your Doctor of Ministry?

I'm "ABD"—all but the dissertation—which will focus on leadership and intergenerational family Bible studies. My goal is to complete the degree by May 2015. Part of my dissertation project is to test my theories surrounding intergenerational Bible studies.

What have been your initial impressions of University UMC?

Whenever you come to a new church, you realize you're meeting great families to replace the great families you left. Everyone has been very nice and welcoming. I'm learning so much about what the church wants and where it wants to go. There's a lot of warmth here.