



September 1, 2021
A Note from Pastor April

Dear Friends,

In 2011, I helped launch a six-week summer literacy program called **Freedom School**. With the support and training of the Children's Defense Fund, our small campus church became the home for 100 school age children and 16 staff, creating a place that fostered a love for reading and a constant reminder of the strength inside each child.



I loved what we created. I loved seeing the faces of the children each morning and the joy they discovered when they connected with the stories they were reading. I loved the energy that I felt from the staff, each one of them finding ways to use their gifts to love these children with everything they had. The six years that I spent directly connected with this sacred ministry is still one of the things I will cherish most as a pastor.



I also remember what it felt like when I got the news that the Freedom School was closing. My disappointment and confusion were all mixed up with the treasured memories of real families and the impact we had on their lives. I wondered if we had failed the

families, the children, and the church. Had I done enough to pass on the leadership when I left the church? Had the program been flawed from the start, and I just couldn't see it?

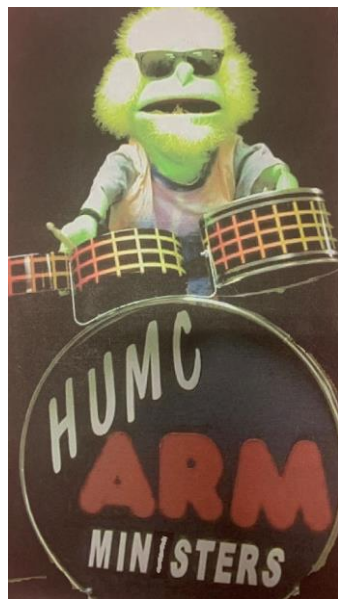
It's hard when things that were so woven into your life come to an end. It took me some time to accept the reality that something can be meaningful, good, and valuable even if it only lasts for a season. The impact that we made in those six summers was real. The growth we saw in the students, the leadership we saw emerging in the staff, and the learning that we did as a congregation... those were the things that lasted far beyond the season of the school itself.

In the wisdom book of Ecclesiastes, there is a beautiful poetic scripture about this very truth.

*"For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die..."*
~Ecclesiastes 3:1-2a (NRSV)

The Byrds brought this scripture into popular conversation in 1965 when they released their song, "Turn, Turn, Turn." I find it interesting that the very first thing named in the scripture itself is the process of birthing and dying. Each has its own time.

We humans have a hard time letting go, even when we know it's time to move on. We tend to stay in jobs or volunteer for things even when they are no longer life-giving to us. We tend to remain in complicated relationships or communities, even when they are hurting us. We tend to avoid the difficult conversations about the things that simply aren't working anymore. It's hard to let things die.



In 1998, Michelle Baker helped birth an amazing, vibrant puppet ministry here at HUMC. The **Arm Ministry** began to meet, rehearse, recruit folks from the church and community, and perform some incredible shows through church and in the surrounding community.

The puppets became so popular that they went on tour (and won awards doing it), sharing the message of God's love in a way that was accessible to children of all ages. Each Christmas Eve, young families looked forward to seeing the puppets help tell the story of the Christ child coming down in love for each of them. The laughter, the songs, and the stories impacted the lives of people all around our community for 20 years.

The legacy of these vibrant years of ministry made it hard to start having conversations about the puppet ministry coming to an end. We were all a bit hesitant. It felt so final. Were we ready to let go of a room filled with such incredible puppets and props and equipment? Was it really time?

It took courage and generosity for the folks who had been so involved in the past to acknowledge that the beautiful season of puppet ministry had ended. I'm grateful especially to Lora Taylor, who understood that God was doing something new and who gave her blessing and leadership to allow the puppet room to be transformed for its next season.



This Sunday in worship at both 9 & 11am, we will honor the faithful work of the HUMC Arm Ministry, and we will celebrate the transformation of the room itself into a second space for our Children's Ministry to utilize on Sunday mornings and beyond for Godly Play. You'll hear more about the new home our puppets have found at a church in Grove City and get a chance to see and help us dedicate the room for its new season.

This Sunday we'll also begin a new season in our Unlearning Together journey, focused on the body. We'll talk about the good gifts of our bodies and the complicated relationships we often have with them. Our hope is that we might be able to let certain stories we have told about our bodies come to an end, and perhaps new, more life-giving stories be born.

The ending of one season is often the beginning of a new one. I am so grateful to be on this journey of learning and unlearning with each one of you.

Many blessings,

Pastor April



Pastor April Blaine
Lead Pastor
ablaine@hilliardumc.org
614.876.2403 (church office)

 **Hilliard**
United Methodist Church
God Loves You  No Matter What
5445 Scioto Darby Road
Hilliard, Ohio 43026 | 614.876.2403
info@hilliardumc.org
www.hilliardumc.org