



Yoga on the waterfront

Michelle Pugh, owner of Joonbug Yoga, instructs a class Wednesday morning beachside at Alderbrook Resort and Spa. Journal photo by Lloyd Mullen

School starting at home

By Gordon Weeks
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All students in Mason County's seven school districts will begin the school year learning from home.

On Aug. 12, the Grapeview School Board voted to start its school year Sept. 1 with all its students learning remotely. The district will have a "re-evaluation of the pandemic crisis" six weeks later.

On Monday, the Mary M. Knight School Board reversed course and announced its students will also be learning from home, 18 days after passing a hybrid plan of in-class and at-home learning.

Those decisions mean none of Mason County's seven school districts will start the year with students in the classroom.

The Grapeview School Board came to that decision at its regularly scheduled board meeting.

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COMMUNITY PROFILE

Grace & gratitude

Baptist pastor finds her calling in Belfair

By Gordon Weeks
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Jamie McCallum longed to lead a church congregation, but she says her credentials don't show up on job postings for preachers in her native Texas: single, Baptist, female.

"I had a calling, but I didn't know if there was a home for me," said McCallum, who was an associate pastor at First Baptist Church in Waco. "I longed to be in that place."

"I was really discouraged."

That's when a blessing at a retreat that "felt like a promise from God" led her to a man seeking pastors with experience in missionary work for positions in Montana and Washington.

This month, McCallum celebrates her fifth anniversary leading the congregation at Belfair Community Church. Her spiritual outreach includes preaching in the parking lot on Sundays in this time of social distancing due to the pandemic.

Members of her congregation shared their thoughts about their pastor with the *Shelton-Mason County Journal* on the church's social

media site.

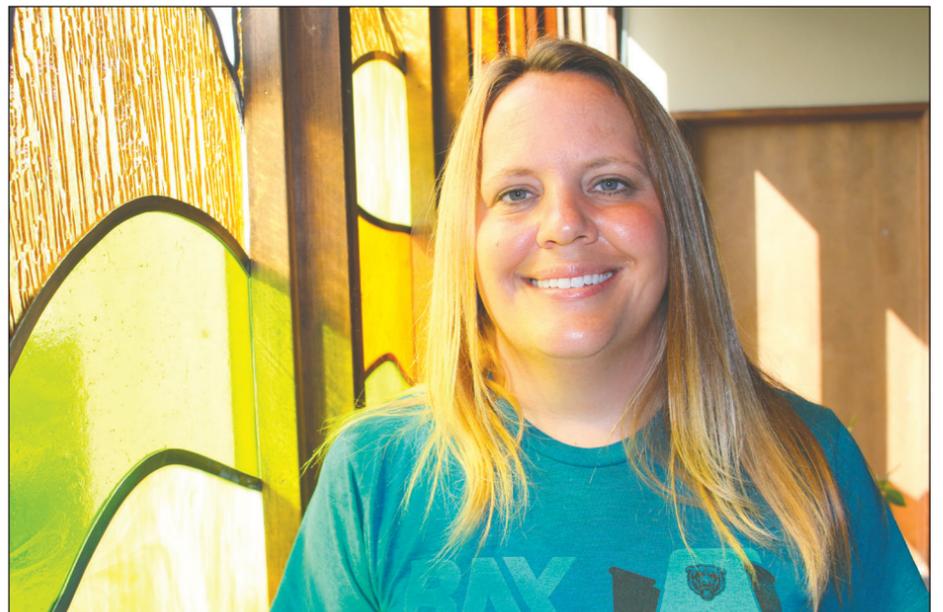
"She brings love," wrote Ellea Rush. "Her heart is always so full for the church and she is truly a great comforter. She is a wonderful teacher and I have looked at the Bible in new ways because of her."

"Her passion for teaching us to be Christ's hands and feet in our community, regardless of whether or not the recipient believes in Christianity, helps heal the division in our society," wrote Terri Michels Drexler. "She is keenly attuned to the suffering of those in our community who don't look like the majority of us. For me, her gender is a welcome difference in a male-dominated profession."

"She has been an amazing inspiration to my faith, especially in the past few months when life has been rough and difficult in so many ways," wrote Anna Darsell Woloschek. "Her morning devotionals on Facebook live have been so helpful!"

"She has true compassion for people and a heart of grace and gratitude," wrote Peggie Newbury-Bartosovsky.

McCallum was born in San Antonio and grew up in the Dallas area.



Texas native Jamie McCallum became the pastor of Belfair Community Church five years ago this month. Journal photo by Gordon Weeks

Her father worked as a probation officer and her mother at a credit union. Her parents divorced, and her stepfather ran a credit union.

McCallum's grandfather was a Baptist preacher. McCallum spent many summers with him. "He became a hero early on," she said.

McCallum was drawn to athletics,

and volleyball was her main sport in junior high and high school. "I loved sports and loved Jesus," she said.

When she was 16, McCallum and other teens crossed the Mexican border to help low income villagers build an orphanage.

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School: Hybrid 'not safe'

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"Again, the health and safety of our students and staff remain our top priorities; however, we are just as committed to providing a quality education," Superintendent Kurt Hilyard and Principal Nick Schulgtek wrote in a letter Aug. 12 to Grapeview residents. "The work that took place this last spring has given our district valuable insight into where we needed to improve, and we are looking forward to partnering with our Grapeview families. Our Continuous Learning 2.0 (the new remote learning platform) will be a significant improvement over what was the past practice. We learned that there needed to be more opportunities for direct instruction by the teacher and that time must be robust, structured and consistent.

"Two-way communication must be intentional and scheduled as well. Grading practices must give students the message that what they are working on matters and are important for them to accomplish at a higher level. In addition, we will be investing our resources and energy into providing support for families and staff members who are participating in our updated remote learning platform."

The district is still formalizing plans on "in-person learning for our most vulnerable populations," including students with special needs.

Under a plan passed July 30 by the Mary M. Knight School Board, the Matlock school's 150 students in kindergarten through the 12th grade would have been divided into two groups. Students in the A Group would attend school in the buildings on Mondays and Thursdays, the students in Group B on Tuesdays and Fridays; on the other days, they would distance learning. All students would have studied at home on Wednesdays.

At that time, the district said the pandemic could alter that plan – and

that's what happened.

In late July, the Mason County Health Department approved the district's hybrid plan.

"In just a few short weeks and with the increase of cases of COVID-19 in the county, it is not safe to reopen in a hybrid model," Superintendent Matt Mallery wrote Monday in a letter to the community.

The school will host parent/teacher conferences Aug. 26-28. The district is investing in Verizon hotspots – including in vans that will deliver food – for families who do not have internet service at home.

"My hope is that after a few additional weeks, the case count in Mason County decreases to the 'moderate' level, it will be safe for us to implement the hybrid A/B schedule," Mallery wrote. He concluded, "We are dedicated to provide the finest teaching possible to your child during this unprecedented time."

In an Aug. 12 letter to the Mason County school superintendents, Dr. Daniel Stein, Mason County health officer, pointed out that "over the past three weeks, the confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our county have almost tripled the total that we had over the previous five months. The age of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our community has also been trending toward younger individuals."

Stein concluded, "In order to safely open, we must start to see a reduction in the community spread of the virus. It is the responsibility of everyone in our community to work on the mitigation strategies that we had previously laid out. I want to again emphasize the importance of maintaining social distancing, masking while in public, staying away from others when you are ill, and getting tested if you are exhibiting any COVID-19 symptoms. This is an unprecedented time. We must all come together to reduce the spread of this virus to protect our children and our community."

Pastor: Church community

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"That was the first time I felt alive ... That week I got to be part of helping people and sharing hope and kindness and joy," she recalled.

As a teen, McCallum also performed missionary work in Brazil. While attending Oklahoma Baptist University, she spent time in a refugee camp for Palestinians in Jordan. After graduating from college in 2006, she travelled to Egypt to learn Arabic in Cairo, and then taught English at a private school in Syria. The teachers "longed for a (native) English speaker to speak with," she said.

In 2008, McCallum returned to Texas to start seminary at Baylor University in Waco.

She received "a strong call from God for the church, preaching and teaching here in America." From 2011 to 2015, she was the associate pastor at First Baptist Church in Waco.

McCallum said Waco is home to about 160 Baptist churches, and she could only name three women who led their congregations. That's when her former professors connected her with a Montana pastor seeking ministers in Montana and Washington. She arrived in Belfair in August 2015.

"This crazy pocket of Mason Coun-

ty, Washington is where I got to be a missionary and a pastor," McCallum said.

She found parishioners seeking to rise above poverty, addiction and abuse. The pastor recalls a few members of the congregation left because they felt it was "too weird" to be led by a young woman. She was an immediate hit with the youths.

"My favorite thing about Pastor Jamie is how she always makes a point to do a children's time," wrote Ivy Beth Greenwood. "She brings the children up to where she stands and talks to them, asks them questions. She makes the word of God easier for the children to understand and when I was younger, I would have loved that."

Connecting with her parishioners during a pandemic has been difficult. People she used to see every week she hadn't seen in five months.

"As a pastor, I'm tired. I haven't had a Sunday off since Christmas," she said.

At 10 a.m. on Sundays, McCallum preaches in the church parking lot to about 50 to 60 people in vehicles, about half the size of the pre-pandemic congregation.

"We've always known the church is not a building ... Church is community," she said.

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'Boys of Summer,' to me, is like the end of the summer, man. That heartbreaking feeling where you have to go back to school, your summer love is coming to an end, and the leaves are changing. That was always such an emotional time for me as a kid, because I loved summer so much.

—Frankie Ballard

