

Pastor Newsletter Article January/February 2021

We all have jobs that we do not enjoy doing, whether that be at home (i.e: cleaning the bathroom or doing the dishes) or at work (i.e: filling out paperwork or meetings). My least favorite job at home is taking out the garbage, which has led to my husband, Laurent, being our families' 'garbage manager!" At work, my least favorite job (and I think those who have served on Team Network will agree with me on this) is writing an "Annual Report".

My lack of passion for writing the "Annual Report", I believe, stems from the fact that I am "by nature" a visionary. My natural state is to look forward, not backward. Over the past few years, I have learned the value of the "Annual Report." As a leader it gives me a chance to look at the goals that I set for myself and the church during the previous year. Writing of the report also provides me with a time to learn and grow, celebrate, and (this year) ... to, also, grieve.

Admittedly, as I sat down to write this year's pastoral report, I was not expecting that it would lead to grief. But that is exactly what happened. (The 2020 Annual Pastor's report will be available via email by February 1) As I reviewed my reports and calendar from this last year, I felt tears well up in my eyes. The life described in the notes I reviewed from last year now seemed like some distant dream. During our "pre-CoVid days of freedom" the weeks were filled with face- to- face meetings, including an unlimited number of people located at all sorts of locations. Best of all, these times of togetherness occurred without masks or fear of the consequences.

National surveys conducted over these last few months reveal that people all around the country are experiencing increased stress and anxiety due to the pandemic; there is even a new phrase to describe the phenomenon: pandemic fatigue. Complicating the emotional impact of the pandemic are the political and socio-cultural concerns our country is facing. Social scientists note there is an increase in the use of alcohol, drugs, domestic violence, and violence across our nation. We are ALL trying to figure out how to cope with the stress of our situation and the uncertainty experienced in not knowing how long this will last.

While I would love to answer the second question, about how much longer all this will last, I cannot. Though the numbers on the calendar have changed from 2020 to 2021, there is no guarantee as to when things will be different. What I can offer is hope and encouragement.

You are not alone. That feeling that you have, of being tired or of wanting to cry, many of us have it. That experience of calling out to God, praying for His help to get through the hour/day/week; that prayer where you ask Him to please make the violence and suffering stop: you are not the only one praying these words.

Knowing that we are not alone, is a helpful step in dealing with the stress and anxiety we are facing. But, for many of us, we will need more help to deal with what is going on both inside and outside of ourselves. Mayo Clinic suggests that we intentionally make changes to take care of our bodies, connect with others, and, finally, take steps to care of our minds.

While opportunities for increasing one's physical health are available through many online services and classes in the community (and through the support of our medical providers), as a congregation we have several great ways to help one another with our needs for connection and increasing the health of our minds and spirits. First, we are still meeting for Fellowship Time on Zoom at 9:30 am on Sunday mornings before worship. We, also, are offering two weekly Sunday school classes, which provide education and fellowship. While these are all great opportunities, I want to invite you to reach out to one another outside of these times as well; and to be honest about how you are doing when you do!

Secondly, FBC is providing opportunities for us to care for our minds. It may surprise you to know that our history as believers, from the time of Abraham to today, has been filled with periods when God's people simply thought they would not be able to make it through. That is one of the reasons that I am teaching on the book of Jeremiah not only on Sunday morning but, also, in a weekly Sunday school class. Jeremiah was written and took place during a period of history in which God's people felt like their world was falling apart. Yet, central to understanding the book is the idea that while it felt like things were out of control, the people would discover God was in the middle of it. It is my hope that through these sermons and discussions, many of us will find peace and comfort in these coming months.

While we do not know what lies ahead, we do know that we will not face it alone. God is still "in the middle of it all." With our Lord and our FBC family at our side we can make it through another year! God bless and keep you.