ONE YEAR AND COUNTING...

Philippians 4:13

Amy and I began collecting small, picture frame Christmas tree ornaments when she found out she was pregnant with Ian. Our Christmas tree now has a small collection of those ornaments on it, each one containing pictures of our family over the last fourteen years. I was looking at those ornaments this past week and began thinking about how quickly those years passed by. While I enjoy reminiscing about those years, I also understand that value can be found in taking time to reflect on past experiences to help one think about both the present and the future. Today marks the anniversary of my first year at the 151st church family and so I want to take a few moments to think about the preceding year as a way of helping us prepare for the coming year.

This past year...

While countless things happened in our church family and in our individual lives this year, I want to remind us of a few things that offer some perspective on our church family:

Our elders and ministers united behind a shared, Jesus-centered vision for the 151st church family.

- Reflecting on the New Testament’s presentation of Jesus’ defining place in the church and in individuals’ lives (cf. Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 1:28), the elders invited the ministers to join them in what ended-up being nearly a year-long conversation about how the 151st church family can be a more Christlike church.
- While the elders continue to work out the details of their Jesus-centered vision for our church family, they have clearly announced Jesus’ place at the center of our church family and everything will, eventually, be drawn into his orbit.
- In support of the elders’ vision, for example, David and I developed a year-long sermon schedule that worked to outline Jesus’ place within our church family and within our individual lives.

Our church family changed.

- Having a Jesus-centered church identity is important because our church family changed during 2019. For example:
  - We added a number of new members.
  - We had a number of baptisms.
  - But we also lost a number of families.
- Despite the changes in our membership, we have maintained a feeling of momentum.
  - Attendance has been gradually increasing.
  - Giving has averaged about twenty percent above budget for the year.
People evidence genuine interest in one another and in the church family.

*Many activities took place over the past year, but we have not defined ourselves by activities.*

- We are an active church and our 2019 church calendar has consequently been filled with many good activities that took place throughout the year.
- Even though we do many good things, a desire exists to be more than an active church; a strong desire exists to be a meaningfully active church (*cf. Revelation 3:1-2*).

*You all have displayed a deep respect for God’s bible, a desire to be like Jesus, and openness about your lives.*

- During every worship and class, I hear countless people turning the pages of their Bibles; I see people taking notes on paper or in their Bibles; I hear people discussing things at the end of worship and class. My observations remind me that you all are dedicated to the Bible and its truths (*cf. Acts 17:11*).
- In addition to your obvious interest in the Bible, you demonstrate your desire to be like Jesus through the ways you talk about him and the conversations you have with me and with others about him.
- Coupled with your interest in the Bible and your focus on Jesus, you have also displayed a genuine openness about your lives.

The coming year...

- We need to begin intentionally, purposefully assessing and organizing all we do underneath our Jesus-centered mission.
- We need to find ways of getting more involved in our community so that we can both serve its needs and create opportunities to share Jesus with people.
- We need to challenge ourselves, both individually and congregationally, to grow in the coming year by finding, or creating, opportunities to take up new responsibilities.
- We need to dream together about what Jesus can do through us when we open ourselves up to him; we need to seriously take up the challenge implicit in the belief that we “can do all things through him who strengthens”*1* us (*Philippians 4:13*).

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*1* All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.