

# TWO YEARS AND COUNTING...

Colossians 3:15-17

On the first Sunday in December of 2019, I offered reflections on my first full year as part of the 151<sup>st</sup> church family. I included in my comments a number of observations about 2019 and a list of suggestions, things we I proposed we should consider in 2020 to help us build on the momentum and blessings of 2019.

And then COVID...

2020 has been a most unusual year for me as a minister. COVID sidelined many of the church-related patterns I took for granted, patterns that, in many ways, defined ministry. While COVID's disruptions created unease, fear, and frustration, they also revealed a number blessings and created a number of opportunities for us. So, I want to use today – the day of my second anniversary here – to consider some of those things to help us think about the coming year.

## “Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus”<sup>1</sup>

- We have experienced growth during the pandemic.
  - While COVID disrupted many of our plans to grow in 2019, it did lead to an important area of growth – we spent a lot of time talking about our need to focus on Jesus and to respond in Christlike ways to the things going on in our nation.
  - Growth in our focus on Jesus led growth in other areas like generosity.
    - We have not taken a ‘regular’ Sunday collection since the beginning of March, yet you all have continued to give and to give generously. Your generosity has exceeded our weekly budget during a time when many churches have experienced budget difficulties.
    - In addition to our regular collection, you have donated tens of thousands of dollars to the disaster relief fund the elders created this year to address needs created by the pandemic. That fund has been used to help people in our church family, our community, and in the surrounding areas.
  - Growth in our focus on Jesus attracted attention. Despite the lockdown and the COVID restrictions, we have added new families to our church family, and we have experienced an increase in visitors who have expressed interest in our church family.
- We have experienced an increase in our awareness of one another and care for one another even while our nation has experienced increasing division.

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 3:17. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- We recognize that we do not all share the same opinions about COVID, about our government's response to it, or about politics in general, yet we have not fallen into the divisiveness that has characterized our nation this year.
- Rather than focusing on our differences, you have remained focused on Jesus and, because of that focus, have shown love-motivated tolerance and deference towards one another.
- For example:
  - You have graciously complied with the limitations placed on our church activities this year regardless of your opinions about those restrictions.
  - While some have disagreed with decisions and have expressed frustration, they did it respectfully and privately.
  - You have demonstrated concern for one another and a desire to serve one another's needs without judgment or a desire for recognition.
- We have elders who care about you, who care about the Bible, who care about Jesus.
  - Our elders spent months calling every family each a week to check on you all, to encourage you all, to see how they could serve you all, and to answer your questions.
  - Even though the elders are no longer calling everyone each week, they meet together regularly to discuss your hurts and needs and to pray for you all.
  - Most importantly, our elders love Jesus and focus themselves on following his example and his teachings in the Bible.

## Applications

While we have experienced a number of blessings during 2020, this year has uncovered things that need our attention. For example:

- We need to find ways to keep in touch with members who have not returned because of health concerns, we need to find ways to encourage them and offer to them whatever helps they need.
- Additionally, limitations placed on gatherings have divided us into smaller groups for our Sunday worship. We need to consequently find ways of staying connected together as a whole church family.
- We still have a responsibility to represent Jesus in our community but now we have the challenge of finding ways to serve community during our present COVID reality. We need to therefore talk as a church family about the needs in our community, about how we might serve those needs, and what things we can do as a church family to enable us individually to better represent Jesus in our homes, our workplaces, and our neighborhoods.
- We have been blessed with visitors (and new members), but we need to find better ways of following up with them, acquainting them with, and integrating them into, the things we do.
- COVID has significantly impacted our teaching opportunities, raising the need for us to explore how to remain engaged in Bible study when we do not have the same class and worship structures in place on which we previously relied.
- While we certainly did not wish for the pandemic, it has created opportunities for us to rethink what we do and why we do it – a blessing in the midst of a tragedy.

