

# Growing the Family of God

August 2020

Telling the Story

Serving the Community

Nurturing Believers

Coffee with Jim



**Words matter.** I recently received a text which I will share with you in part. The author remains anonymous, and names have been omitted. “I wanted you to know that if I was looking for a church, I would never even consider your church.” The author accuses us of being rude and extremely judgmental. “I just know some comments and holier than thou comments, totally turn me off and I would never consider attending your church.”

As your pastor those words cut deeply. I am called to reflect on my own leadership and teaching. As I reflect, I want to challenge each of us to reflect on what comes out of our mouth. In conflict with the religious leaders of his day Jesus was challenged because his disciples did not practice ritual handwashing. In reply Jesus said, “It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what *comes out of the mouth that defiles*” (Matthew 15:11 *emphasis added*).

Beloved, words matter. Listen to this warning from the letter of James:

***How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.*** (James 3:5b-6, 9-10 *emphasis added*).

As we move through this difficult season, the question uppermost in everyone’s mind is, “When can we get back into the building?” We all want to be back inside where we can be comfortable and greet one another as family. But, as we look forward to that time when we can once again worship in our “family room”, I want to propose a spiritual exercise meant to help us prepare **spiritually** to be together once more.

In 1978, Richard Foster wrote a book titled *Celebration of Discipline*, which examines the inward disciplines of prayer, fasting, meditation, and study in the Christian life, the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service, and the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.

As we anxiously approach returning to worship in the building, I want to encourage us to focus concentrated time on the practice of the inward disciplines of prayer, fasting, meditation, and study.

My suggestion is that each of us commit a specific time each week dedicated to fasting and prayer. As a practical matter I would encourage each of us to set aside lunch time on Mondays and Fridays to fast and pray. It is acceptable to drink water during this fast and, of course, if medical concerns prohibit fasting, please do not risk your health. Rather than fasting from food, you might choose to give up television or internet time. The point is to sacrifice the time and something we enjoy to focus our attention solely on God and God’s direction personally and corporately.

As the community of faith let’s make a commitment to fast and pray for our individual and corporate renewal. I suggest that we begin this practice on Monday, August 3, and continue to exercise these disciplines throughout the month of August. If we follow this practice for three weeks, it will become a staple in our lives. We will experience a deeper relationship with God and our sisters and brothers. As we grow in these practices, we will soon feel comfortable adding another hour to our practice of spiritual discipline.

I want to offer some suggestions as you move into the practice of spiritual disciplines. Let me be clear at the outset that my focus in leading you this way is for the ultimate renewal of our church. Returning

to the building is not a spiritual exercise. While it will be a welcome relief to the vexing issues we have been dealing with, the building is *not* the community of faith. The church is not a building or a place. We are the church – whether actually at church, in public, or on-line. Wherever we are, *we* are the church. *We* are the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

Moving into this practice of spiritual disciplines, I want us to be guided by meditating on four Rs. Reflection. Repentance. Reconciliation. Renewal.

Reflection. As a community of faith, we take great pride in our relationship as family. One of the concerns that has been raised since we have been unable to gather is the loss of fellowship with our sisters and brothers. We want to greet one another with a hug or a handshake.

There have been some disappointing consequences in the absence of that fellowship. We can no longer say that we do family well. We need to reflect on the way we have responded to one another during this time of separation. Have our words spoken and written, represented the Christ we claim to serve? Some of our personal opinions have devolved into ungracious and cutting words which do nothing to build up the body of Christ. I am aware of relationships in this family that have been damaged to the degree that nothing less than the Spirit of God can bring healing.

Therefore, the first act of returning to the building is to reflect on how we conduct ourselves outside the building. I am called to reflect on the way I represent Christ in personal conversation, email, texting, and social media. For Disciples of Christ there is no place where we do not represent Christ. I wonder how Christ would react to my words.

**Words matter.** The spiritual reflection upon which we embark over the course of the next month will lead us to the second R, repentance. It is important to understand that repentance means more than being sorry. Repentance means a change of direction. I reflect on the words that come out of my mouth or my keyboard. I reflect on my words as the words of Christ. When I find that I have failed to meet the standard of Christ, I choose to change direction. I choose to take a step back before I speak. I offer a sentence prayer for patience and understanding. Words matter. I commit to go in the opposite direction, practicing love and com-

passion.

Repentance does not come easy. We are often so entrenched in our opinions that we cannot tolerate another's thoughts. Disagreements can be a healthy part of human interactions. We share ideas, gather new information, gain new understanding and insights into what others are thinking, feeling, and experiencing. What is not acceptable is when those disagreements devolve into personal attacks and insults on one who does not share our beliefs.

Oswald Chambers makes an interesting observation relevant to this point: *"It is perilously possible to make our conceptions of God like molten lead poured into a specially designed mold, and when it is cold and hard we fling it at the heads of the religious people who don't agree with us."*

Sadly, his quote is often too true within the body of Christ. I have a close friend with whom I often disagree on matters of politics and religion. The disagreements have never turned personal. There has never been name calling or attacks on one's personal appearance or intellectual abilities. We love and respect one another too much for that level of pettiness.

Reconciliation. When we reenter the building, we will find ourselves face-to-face with some of the same people with whom we have been in deep conflict. It should be extremely uncomfortable to sit across from, or heaven forbid, shun a member of the family because of ungracious, thoughtless words. **Words matter.**

The reflection that I will engage in over the course of the next month will lead me to a sense of Godly repentance. The need to change direction and attitude, requires that I seek reconciliation with the sister or brother with whom I have been in dispute. This may not be easy and likely will not happen overnight. But, simply sitting in a sanctuary, does not a church make. The act of **being** the church requires work, discipline, sacrifice, and understanding.

Let me suggest that you take time during one of your periods of fasting and prayer to read 1 John 4:7-21. If we honestly sit with those words for a

while, we will quickly come to understand that we cannot be the children of God while holding a grudge against a sister or brother. *The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.* (1 John 4:21 *emphasis added*).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has a great deal to say about interpersonal relationships among his brothers and sisters. *“If you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.”* (Matthew 5:22 *emphasis added*).

He goes on to instruct. *“when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”* (Matthew 5:23-24 *emphasis added*)

Excuses don't count. “She started it!” “He said it first.” This is not a school playground. This is the body of Christ. If we want our community to represent the Christ we love and serve, then we will seek forgiveness and reconciliation with our brothers and sisters. God will not bless division.

Renewal, reflection, repentance, and reconciliation will open the door for God to renew our church. My ongoing petition is that God will pour out the Holy Spirit on us in such a powerful way that merely to walk through the door will bathe one in the presence of the Almighty.

When the Holy Spirit empowered the early church, lives and circumstances were transformed. Luke describes it this way, *Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.* (Acts 2:46-47 *emphasis added*).

What we cannot tolerate, what will, in fact, be the death knell of the church is the criticism leveled against us that we are rude, cutting, and intolerant. When the church is the body of Christ, the community sits up and takes notice. The early church enjoyed the

*goodwill of the people.* Sadly, as the text noted above indicates, we would not enjoy the same affirmation.

I challenge all of us to fast and pray Monday and Friday at noon beginning August 3 and continuing through the month. Let us all honestly, reflect on our relationship with God and our brothers and sisters in Christ. Repent for the words and actions that we may have expressed toward others. Change direction and seek reconciliation where we feel God leading us. Remember, God will not, cannot forgive one, who does not practice forgiveness. Renewal of the church is not about where we worship, but who we worship and how we treat one another.

*Jim*

## Plant a Tree?



As part of the ongoing building and property improvements here at FBC, Peggie and Gary Boldt have been have arranged for the delivery and planting of several fast growing hard sugar maple trees that will grow to provide shade and beauty to our landscaping.

Several people have already expressed interest in purchasing a tree to be planted in memory of a loved one. The trees will arrive as 6 - 7 foot saplings and have a projected growth of 2 feet per year. At maturity the trees will reach a height of 60 - 70 feet. The cost per tree is \$156. If you would like to purchase a tree to honor your loved one, please contact Peggie or Gary Boldt for more information!

## September Newsletter

Any information or articles for inclusion in the September edition of our church newsletter must be submitted to the church office no later than Monday, August 17th. You may submit your items via e-mail: [Rhonda@fbcpontiac.org](mailto:Rhonda@fbcpontiac.org); USPS, or phone (842.4321).

## **\*\*Moving Forward - Schedule Changes\*\***

At its meeting on Thursday evening, July 16, the Board of Ministries voted to continue outdoor worship services through at least Sunday, August 8th. ***This decision will be revisited and reevaluated when the board reconvenes on August 13.***

This decision was not made lightly, but after lengthy discussion and prayer. It was made out of an abundance of concern for the health and well-being of the church family, leadership, and worship team. We rely on your prayerful support as we move through uncharted waters, seeking God's will, and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Please note in case of rain we will make available an on-line version of worship later in the day via our [YouTube channel](#).

### **Through at least August 8th:**

- **The Youth Room will be made available for small group gatherings. This will be the ONLY space available for gatherings during this time.**

\*All requests to use this space ***MUST be made in advance through the church office.***

\*Regularly scheduled activities ( e.g. Women's Circles) ***MUST*** be scheduled in advance to avoid potential conflicts.

\*If you use the room for a small group meeting you ***MUST wipe the entire room down*** (tables, chairs, doorknobs, etc.) with provided sanitizing wipes at the conclusion of your meeting.

\*Social distancing rules are still in place and wearing masks is encouraged. We will have masks available for you if you do not have your own.

- **The church office will be open during the following hours:**

\*The office will remain locked during business hours. We will be open Monday - Wednesday from 8:30 am - 3:30 pm.

- **A drive-in worship opportunity will be offered at 8:30 AM.**

\*You may bring a lawn chair and sit outside on the lawn or you may sit in your car and listen to the service on FM radio.

\*For your safety and the safety of others, proper social distancing should be observed and handshakes and hugging are ***strongly discouraged.*** Face masks will be available.

***\*In the event of inclement weather, outdoor services will be canceled. In that case, the service will be recorded for broadcast on-line later in the day.***

\*There will be no Sunday Morning Connections Meetings

\*There will be no offering plates passed. You may still give your tithe by mailing it to the church office or via our website. Just click on the donation button at the top of the page.

**All of these procedures and schedules will be reevaluated by the Board of Ministries at their August 13th meeting. We ask for your continued prayers and support as we navigate through this very difficult time in our nation's history.**



5 Mike Toon  
6 JoAnn Bockman  
9 Becky Easton  
9 Deb Golliday  
10 Debbie Dowdy  
10 Bob and Debbie Dowdy  
10 Brittany Bohm  
11 Kim Ruther  
11 Solomon Battleson  
12 Joe and Pam Lind  
13 Alex Boase  
15 Judy Judd  
16 Eva Schiff  
16 Carol Stanton  
17 Pam Lind  
17 Hadleih Mitchey  
17 Carol Brill  
24 Joy Henderson  
24 Carol Jones  
24 Jaime Wykes  
24 Michelle Bohm  
26 Christy Stanton  
26 Mike and Carol Toon  
26 Ron E. Watson  
29 Marilyn Gould



Thank you for practicing social distancing!