

Mountain Echoes

Newsletter of First Baptist Church of Gatlinburg
June 1, 2020



FROM OUR PASTOR

With recent world developments having wreaked havoc with our schedule of church activities, almost all our recent communication with church members and friends has been electronic (email, Facebook, fbcgatlinburg.org, telephone). In fact, our last mailing of *Mountain Echoes* (our church newsletter) was dated March 15, 2020. I was looking back at that mailout today and what struck me was how normal things were then. My Pastor's article gave details about special emphases for the next four Sundays: Baptism and the Lord's Supper on March 22, the dedication of our new building on March 29, Palm Sunday on April 5 and Easter on April 12. Also included were announcements about this summer's Centri-Kid Camp and Vacation Bible School.

Looking back today, I was reminded that while we did observe Palm Sunday and Easter, the other scheduled activities did not take place or have been cancelled. What happened? We all know the answer. A Coronavirus pandemic has swept our world, and canceling or rescheduling events is, as we often say, *the least of our worries*. As of this writing the Center for Disease Control reports a total of 6,334,626 confirmed cases with 378,669 deaths world wide. In the U.S., 1,787,680 cases are reported with 104,396 deaths. We have prayed and will continue to pray for all aspects of this world crisis.

But now, let me bring things closer to home for a moment. As a Pastor, I have obviously never had to face a situation like we find ourselves in these days. College and Seminary are a vital part of my training, but there was no class on *Pastoring in a Pandemic*. Therefore I, as other Pastors, have muddled through as best as I can. The questions have been difficult. Should we have church services at all? If so, how? What is best for God's Kingdom? What is safest for worship attenders? How long should we not meet or meet in a non-sanctuary setting? Decisions have sometimes been made week by week as we consulted the rapidly changing COVID 19 statistics. And being a true Baptist congregation, not everyone agreed with all those decisions.

In the end, we have now gone eleven weeks worshipping outside our sanctuary. The first three were online only services which were posted on Youtube and Facebook. The last eight have been Drive-in Services where we broadcast from outside the front doors of our building via FM radio to you who gathered in your cars in our parking lot. The Facebook and Youtube services were continued.

This coming Sunday, June 7, we enter a new faze of worship during the Coronavirus Pandemic as we return to our church sanctuary. Please note that for the time being we will have only one Sunday service. That service will begin at **10:00 a.m.** While we will meet inside, this does not mark a return to *normal*. It is progress, and it will be good to see one another again, but in order to ensure the safety of attenders, some unusual measures will be taken. On the reverse

side of this newsletter you will see a document entitled *Covid 19 Inside Worship Guidelines*. It has been created by your church staff using suggestions from both state government and the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board. The document includes sections on what to do before and after worship. Please read it carefully, and ponder what needs to be done now in preparation for you and your family to attend on Sunday.

Perhaps of some controversy will be the wearing of masks. However, medical doctors and scientists agree that masks are a necessity. When we consider that masks are for the protection of others, wearing a mask becomes the obviously Christian thing to do. Please bring your own mask if you have one. The church will have a supply of masks for those who need them.

For now, we will not be having Sunday School, child care, or Wednesday evening activities. We will be monitoring the virus situation to determine when these and other church gatherings can safely resume.

Finally, I feel compelled to say a word about a new problem in our nation that has all but pushed COVID 19 to the back burner of news coverage. I'm referencing, of course, racism and the resulting demonstrations which have spread across the country.

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, an African-American man, was killed in Minneapolis, Minnesota. While Floyd was handcuffed and lying face down on a city street during an arrest, Derek Chauvin, a white American Minneapolis police officer, kept his knee on the right side of Floyd's neck for almost 9 minutes, almost 3 minutes of that time occurring after Floyd became unresponsive. Three other officers were also involved. Chauvin was subsequently arrested and charged with third-degree murder and manslaughter.

The resulting national protests are complicated. At one extreme are some who seem interested only in the destruction and stealing of property. On the other extreme is a small group of law enforcement individuals who at least appear to be motivated by hatred born from racial prejudice. In-between are two main groups toward whom I have only positive feelings:

1. Citizens who wish to peacefully protest against this most recent example of an apparent pattern of brutality against African Americans.
2. The overwhelming majority of law enforcement personnel who are trying to do their best in the midst of a dangerous situation.

One thing is clear: There is no place for prejudice within true Christianity. The Apostle Paul stated it well in his Biblical sermon to the Athenians in Acts 17: *From one person God made all nations who live on earth...* ~Acts 17:26a (CEV).

Let's pray for resolution. And let's behave according to that powerful statement from our Declaration of Independence: *All men are created equal.*

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**YOUTH MISSIONS
 IN JUNE**

Wednesday evenings,
 4:30—7:00 p.m.

JUNE 3: Fire ministry project.

JUNE 10: Fire ministry project.

JUNE 17: New building landscaping.

JUNE 24: New building landscaping.

COVID 19 INSIDE WORSHIP GUIDELINES

AT HOME GUIDELINES:

1. Please check each family member for signs of **illness**. If issues are noted, we ask the entire household to stay home and join us for worship at 11:30 a.m. on Facebook/Youtube or at 1:30 p.m. on Spectrum Cable Community TV channel 193.
2. If possible, please be sure to bring a **mask** for each member of your family. We will have a limited number of masks on hand at the sanctuary entrance.
3. Please communicate these **guidelines to children** in an age-appropriate manner.
4. Please utilize **home restroom** facilities, as we hope to minimize restroom use in our building.

ENTRY & WORSHIP GUIDELINES:

1. Keep your **household together** at all times.
2. Use provided **hand sanitizer** before entering.
3. Put on a **mask** before entering (Ages 6 and up).
4. Maintain a **6 ft. distance** between your household and others.
5. **Keep children with you** at all times as there is no childcare provided.
6. **Select your seating** remaining 6 ft. from those already seated.
7. **Remain in your seat** unless getting up is absolutely necessary.
8. Ushers will **dismiss** worshippers row by row.
9. **Offering** plates will be placed at the sanctuary doors.

AFTER WORSHIP GUIDELINES:

1. Use provided **hand sanitizer** after exiting exterior doors.
2. After exiting, **speak with other worshippers** only at the safe distance of 6 ft.

May 2020 Deacon Meeting Summary

• Financial Reports for March and April 2020 The deacons recommended the church approve of the Financial Reports presented for March and April 2020 at the next Church Conference. Our fund balance at the end of April was \$290,539.09. Chairman Waters commended the membership for continued financial faithfulness during this time even while we have been unable to continue normal church services due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to our regular sources of income we received a Small Business Administration loan from the federal CARES act in the amount of \$60,800. This loan can be used to pay salaries and utilities. If the conditions of the loan are met, the loan does not have to be repaid. The amount will cover approximately two months of salaries and utilities.

• Staff Reports

○ Rev. Caldwell reported that Vacation Bible School has been postponed and may be held online. Discussions are ongoing. Centri-Kid camps have been cancelled. Deposits have either been refunded or rolled over for next year. Our online Sunday services have been well received with 300-500 views for each week. The children's Bible study online receives approximately 30 views per week and the adult online Bible study receives approximately 40 views per week. There are plans to continue our online presence even after we return to regular church activities.

○ Rev. Fortner noted that this is normally the time for a graduate breakfast and graduate recognition service. He hopes to do that later in the summer. He is exploring ideas for a local summer mission project that might include a camp setting.

○ Rev. Hodges plans to have really good Easter music this year even if it is delayed to this autumn.

○ Rev. Burcham thanked the staff and volunteers who have worked to make services possible during this time. There has been some interest in members furnishing a room in the new building and additional rooms to furnish are still available.

• Maintenance Committee Report—Jay Horner, Committee Chairman All systems in our main building are currently operating. The company doing mowing last year is no longer available and we need to choose a new company for this work. Contact Jay to help fill this need. The final layer of parking lot asphalt has been done. Top soil will be added to the new planting beds. A solution is being worked on for the drainage problem in the new road area.

• New Building Update One vendor has been delayed delivering furniture due to the shutdown. We are still seeking the best option for Wi-Fi connection for the building and integration with our existing Wi-Fi.

• Resuming sanctuary Sunday services After extensive discussion, the deacons voted that if governmental recommendations and our local levels of virus stay the same, we will resume services the first Sunday in June. This allows our staff three weeks to review recommendations from various bodies, prepare the sanctuary, and notify our congregation of how these services will be conducted during this unusual time. We will ask our membership and visitors to cooperate and follow the recommendations so that we can continue services as safely as possible.

John Tarpley, Deacon Secretary

STEWARDSHIP REPORT

(\$10,713.33 needed weekly to meet budget)

May 3, 2020

General Fund	\$8,908.00
Missions Committee	\$100.00
Tools	\$10.00
New Building	\$625.00

May 10, 2020

General Fund	\$5,157.00
SCFM	\$100.00
New Building	\$780.00

May 17, 2020

General Fund	\$7,534.00
Landscaping	\$50.00
New Building	\$645.00

May 24, 2020

General Fund	\$3,065.00
Youth Fund Raising	300.00
Youth Trips	\$50.00
New Building	550.00
New Building Furnishings	\$3,200.00