

Report of the Pastors and Session

Annual Report of the Pastors and Session for 2020

It hardly needs to be said, but 2020 has, of course, been an unusual and unprecedented season in the life of our church.

The year began normally, as the activities of our congregation moved according to their regular rhythms and as we continued to move through a larger season of transition in the life of our church.

In February, training began for our new elder candidates (nominated in the fall of 2019). We also saw some changes to our current leadership. After almost 35 years of serving on our session, Dick Hannula asked to resign from his role as an elder. In light of his many years of dedicated ministry and faithfulness, the session elected him to the status of elder emeritus. At the same time, after nearly 25 years of serving on our deaconate, Ned St. John asked to resign from his active duties as a deacon and was similarly elected to the status of deacon emeritus. As those changes occurred, we also entered the second year of the senior pastor transition.

In early March Pastor Gutierrez led and spoke at our annual marriage retreat. In the week that followed, everything changed. On March 13th, in light of the growing COVID-19 pandemic, the session sent a letter to the congregation informing them that we would be cancelling in-person worship on March 15th and holding worship only over the livestream. With that began a long and difficult season for our congregation, where not only the session but each one of us had to wrestle with the questions of appropriate health precautions, proper submission to civil authorities, and how we are to rightly fulfill God's calling to corporate worship and Christian fellowship, while in the midst of a pandemic. On March 15th we cancelled our evening service and livestreamed a morning service. In the weeks that followed, we livestreamed both morning and evening worship, and held our Wednesday-night prayer meetings over videoconference. Pastors Nicoletti and Gutierrez began leading video morning devotionals 2-3 times a week (which continued into June). From late May through mid-August, we also included a children's message in the Sunday worship service, to help make up for the loss of children's Sunday school.

On June 14th we began outdoor in-person worship in the morning, under a large tent in the parking lot, while observing standard precautions for the pandemic (holding three morning services for a period, in order to accommodate more people). On July 19th we began gathering outdoors for evening worship as well and moved our 8:15 service indoors again for the first time since March. The evening service moved indoors a few weeks later, on August 2nd.

On October 25th we were able to take a few more steps back to "normal", as our 11:00 service (the last service that remained outdoors) moved inside, and (thanks to the dedicated work of several volunteers) we began a form of children's Sunday school again. While everything looked quite different due to COVID precautions, we were relieved to be able to take these steps.

Then, just three weeks later, the governor's office issued new regulations prohibiting congregational singing in worship. Up until this point we had tried to honor the civil authorities as best we could in good

Report of the Pastors and Session

conscience. But at that point, as we weighed the health concerns, questions about the governor's authority to impose such restrictions, and the key role that congregational singing plays in biblical Christian worship, we felt compelled as a session to continue to include congregational singing in our worship. While taking many precautions, we continued to sing in worship through the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

On the denominational level, the General Assembly of the PCA was postponed until 2021. On the presbytery level, the meetings of the Pacific Northwest Presbytery were postponed, modified, and on one occasion held over teleconference.

Needless to say, the past year has included numerous challenges, conflicts, and difficult decisions that we never anticipated.

While much has changed, the preaching of the Word of God has continued. Pastor Nicoletti continued his preaching through the Gospel of John in the morning and the book of Samuel in the evening. In late March through early June, Pastor Nicoletti preached a seven-sermon series in the evening service on living through a pandemic. In the fall we took a break from the Gospel of John for a six-sermon series on the book of Ruth, and at the end of the year we went through a series on "Advent as Warfare". Over the course of the year Pastor Gutierrez continued and concluded his sermon series from the book of James. Our evening worship was also blessed by other guest preachers, as we intentionally sought to bring in gifted ministers from our presbytery and beyond, to minister God's word to our congregation. That included Pastor Rayburn, who preached to us from Habakkuk on September 13th, at the end of his year-long sabbatical that marked the official conclusion of his time on staff at the church.

While the year has been filled with much uncertainty and instability, financial giving has remained stable, which is a significant blessing. We are thankful to God for his generous provision, and to the congregation for their ongoing faithfulness in this area of discipleship.

We are also thankful for the congregation's patience as the elder candidate process has been on hold since the initial shut-down. We look forward to restarting the training process of our nominees in the early months of 2021, and, Lord willing, to having candidates ready to be presented to the congregation for election in the months that follow.

As we come to the beginning of 2021, one lesson we have learned from the year behind us is that we do not know what the Lord will bring our way in the year ahead. Tim Keller has commented that when the pandemic restrictions finally come to a full end, every church is going to need to be "replanted" to some extent. He admitted right away that this was a bit of hyperbole, but he went on to explain that when things returned to normal, the needs of congregations, the needs of communities, and the resources available to churches would all look different than they did before the pandemic. And so, like a church plant, every church will need to step back, consider the needs and resources available to them afresh, and think in new ways about the best way to do the ministry of the Church. They cannot simply move forward as if everything was the way it was before.

Report of the Pastors and Session

We do not yet know exactly what that will look like. But we do know that whatever challenges may come, Christ will be with us. For as we pursue his mission, he assures us of that fact, saying: “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” And so, as we move into 2021, we do it in confidence: not confidence in ourselves, but confidence in our God, who is faithful, who is sovereign, and who is able to carry us through whatever challenges lay ahead.

Warmly in Christ,
The Pastors and Session of Faith Presbyterian Church