

November 4, 2021

Dear Friends,

I was reading recently that church planning during the pandemic has been occurring at an accelerated rate: churches aren't projecting forward five to ten years anymore, but rather – three to six months! Such is the speed with which things are evolving.

Although this acceleration represents a major change of course for the church world, it is nevertheless proving a blessing. God is reminding the church that we are supposed to be in the business of bringing new things into being now, not ten years from now.

I have also been reading about the ways different types of churches – for example, rural, suburban and neighborhood – are growing their programs and reach, and thus been reminded just how much downtown churches have vital roles to play in their communities.

Downtown areas across the country are being revitalized with new apartment buildings and/or the repurposing of structures that once served as part of the city's industrial core. Michael and I lived in one such building when we were in St. Louis. It had been a dry goods wholesaler. Downtown areas have also seen dramatic growth in the number of restaurants and amenities they offer, including parking, in order to attract customers from outlying neighborhoods and suburbs. Downtown areas are where sports fans increasingly come to cheer on their teams in stadiums or bars paneled with large screen TVs, surrounded by stores, offices and business incubators.

Amid all this development, downtown areas are often the places where a city's unsheltered community and some of its lowest paid workers attempt to eke out a precarious living.

I've been reading that downtown churches generally flourish where they are able to galvanize the resources of their downtown areas in service of the people being left out of the new downtown equation.

So, what do these trends mean for FPCC?

First, we are going to need to learn how to be nimble, to try new things faster than we have in the past – and to stop doing the things that no longer serve our mission fast, as well.

Second, we will need to realize, in a deep way, that our mission field is this neighborhood, Concord's downtown: its businesses, renters, seniors, waiters, baristas, the workers who arrive before dawn to clean its restaurants, as well as its unsheltered community.

Third, the wise and generous stewardship of our resources will in the upcoming year be more important than ever.

I want to encourage you to take a moment to rejoice in all the ways we have served God so far this year. Check out the enclosed "2021 by the Numbers." It will inspire you to give thanks to the Lord for everything God is doing in this place!

I then want to encourage you to pray for our church and for its mission and ministries as we round the bend into 2022. Ask God, what programs should we be initiating at the church – not in ten years, but *now* – to show our neighbors God's love? Ask how you might support that program, financially or otherwise. Ask God, how does God want to use our facility in the upcoming year to teach people that the gospel is not just nice-sounding words, but a vision of how life ought to be? Ask how God might be calling you to support this vision. Don't forget to dream for the church as you pray. Dreams are one of God's most profound languages.

I believe that God is leading FPCC to a path that will enable us to flourish in this new 21st-century context. The waters beside us are not still at the moment – and probably won't be for a while. But God's rod and staff are there, to comfort and protect us. I invite you to join me on the journey by considering the good your time, talents and tithes can do in the world and through this church.

I look forward to worshipping with you either in person or online on November 14th, Giving Sunday.

Pastor Johanna