

Challenge of 2020

I generally have a year-end report where I give some statistics of the past year followed by a week-by-week summary of the year just ending. I am not going to do that this year. Part of the reason is because I don't want to dwell on the past but the future. *Philippians 3:13-14 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, (14) I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

In meeting with the elders we have some goals that I want to put before the congregation tonight. I think all of us are concerned with our downward trend during the past year which is one of the areas of interest. What can we do to turn that around? Let me suggest that we turn that around by doing what the church is commission to do – which is threefold: (1) evangelism, (2) edification and (3) benevolence. These will serve as a three point outline for tonight's lesson.

EVANGELISM: Blodgett has for a long time been involved in spreading the word of the Lord throughout the world. We plan on continuing that effort in 2020. When we had our building renovation a few years ago, it was decided not to take on any additional work until that debt was paid, but we would continue with most of the ongoing work. So we will continue to be involved with Bear Valley (i.e. Gary Fallis) as they establish preacher schools all around the world. In addition we will continue to support Ralph Williams in his efforts in eastern Africa.

Local evangelism will include continued support to the Arms of Hope children's home in Greenville and Medina along with the Cherokee Home for the Children. In addition we plan to be a partner with the Home of Rehabilitation/Recovery that will begin this week. We are close enough that we can be involved in that work in many ways other than monetarily. We can help with supplies; we can adopt a resident and provide for his special moments like taking him shopping, fishing, work, etc. There are times when volunteers are used to give the staff a few hours break. For some, there will be opportunity to be part of their teaching program.

We have an active group that provides Bible Correspondence Courses. We had 58 lessons completed last year and we plan to continue this effort in 2020. This is an easy way to teach the Bible. We have all the lessons along with grade sheets. All you need to do is mail the lesson and grade it when it is returned and then mail the next lesson. Every person in here can do that. If you are interested, contact Bob Clausen.

Regarding local evangelism, there will be some evangelism classes provided for the congregation to be trained in reaching out to others. This will be taught on a weeknight that will best meet the schedule of the members. We want to improve on personal evangelism. This was the pattern of the New Testament church. *Acts 5:42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*

Acts 8:4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Our ladies will continue their Monday morning devotional/workday which will be placing emphasis on outreach. Part of the ladies outreach is distribution of stuffed bears. In 2019 they distributed over a thousand to various organizations. We received letters from several of the sheriff's expressing their gratitude and what a calming effect the bears were to many of the children.

EDIFICATION: The church is to edify, uplift, and encourage one another. One of the best ways to accomplish this command is by assembling with the saints. *Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider one*

another to provoke unto love and to good works: (25) Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. In talking about the second coming of Jesus, Paul writes *1 Thessalonians 5:11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.*

This thought brings us to our attendance. In 2020, we want to encourage you as a congregation to do what you can do to build up our attendance. This begins by you making a new year's resolution that you are going to be here every service. This is where you need to be.

Secondly, pick out a half-dozen or so people and sorta put them under your wing. When they aren't here, let them know that they were missed and encourage them to be in the next service.

Thirdly, invite, invite, and invite. Now when we have someone visit because of a personal invitation by one of our members, the rest of us need to put forth an effort to meet the visitor and make them feel welcome. This might mean you have to get up out of your pew and walk across the auditorium. This might mean you stop visiting with one another for a few minutes to welcome a visitor. Let us get the reputation of being one of the friendless congregations around.

Regarding the worship service – let me add, be on time, especially if you have an active part of the service. If you have a part in the worship service we need you to be here at least five to ten minutes early. It is really difficult for the men to insure the duties are covered if they have to wait to see if you will be here or not. If you know that you will not be here, then call your alternate listed on the calendar. We are commanded to do things decently and in order and sometimes when you are not here early, it is panic – not order. In the chapter dealing with public worship we read, *1 Corinthians 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.*

In addition to public assembling, we can edify one another by getting together with one another. We do this in things like our monthly covered dish luncheons and/or other congregational gatherings. I have posted a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board for people to volunteer to care for the fellowship building for each month of 2020. The past few years this has been neglected, but this year we want to fill out the list in advance.

Then there can be individual edification. Call up a church member and invite them to meet you at a restaurant for an evening meal; or invite several over to watch a ballgame or play forty-two or maybe there is something else you had rather do. Understand, it's not the activity that's important – it's the being together that matters.

One other thing we want to do in 2020 to edify is pray more. I hope in the near future to have a specified time where those that want to can come together and pray together. This is what the church did when Peter was imprisoned. *Acts 12:5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.* These prayers can be specific or generic in nature; we will pray for individuals as well as the collective body of Christ. I am convinced that a praying church will be a thriving church.

The third area of our discussion is **BENEVOLENCE**. We have in the 2020 budget money set aside for benevolence. The definition of benevolence is (1) showing kindness or goodwill; (2) performing good or charitable acts and not seeking to make a profit. We have three men, Jimmy Jones, Larry Reynolds, and Mike Fields that handle our benevolent needs and this is a difficult job that they do very well. It's hard to make judgment calls on cases in deciding if the need is legitimate or a scam. In years past we have been very willing in helping those that are legitimately in need and 2020 is not expected to be any different. At times we have acted on our own and other times we have worked with other congregations. *Ephesians 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.* Kindness is an aspect of benevolence.

Charitable acts are another dimension of benevolence. Recently there was a need in Mt. Vernon and

several congregations, including Blodgett, responded to that need. A few weeks ago the people that were helped obeyed the gospel. ***Galatians 6:9-10 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. (10) As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*** This is what we do. When part of our family needs something that we can provide – we do it.

In 2020, if we practice personal evangelism and benevolence the church will grow and then edification will keep the church strong.