

AUGUST 2020

First Brethren Church of New Paris From The Desk of Pastor Jeff Estep

Just when you think things are going great, God comes in and messes everything up! Ever feel that way? I've been reading in the book of Acts for my devotions, and recently I came to Chapter 8. To catch you up, Stephen, one of the Deacons in Jerusalem, has just been killed, serving as the first Christian martyr. Saul (Paul) had an active hand in his murder. Persecution had been increasing in the church, but it had been directed mostly at the apostles to that point. But Stephen's martyrdom was a turning point. Emboldened by the Jewish leaders' approval of Stephen's death, Saul began going door to door, arresting Christians. The result of this was that, according to verse 1, "all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria."

Is Luke really telling us in that verse that literally every Christian in Jerusalem, except for the apostles, fled? Not likely, but enough of the Christians were scattered that "all" was an acceptable description of the situation. It occurred to me as I read these verses how disruptive this event was for the ongoing ministry of the church. Oh, don't get me wrong, God was DEFINITELY still in charge, and as the book of Acts unfolds, you see how He used the persecution to spread the Gospel message over the entire Roman world. But the book of Acts was written in hindsight. Luke writes the book AFTER seeing the result of the disruption. In the moment, the early Christians had to trust the words of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to direct their steps. They had to trust that God would use this disruption for His (and their) good.

One of the details of this disruption I noticed is how it must have messed up the "numbers" of the church. In the first few chapters we see the "numbers" of the church grow. There were 120 before Pentecost, then the church grew to 3,000 then 5,000. We see descriptions of how "the Lord added daily to their number", and how "the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly." We tend to put a lot of emphasis on numbers. That's not a bad thing, because numbers represent lives, and numbers of those in attendance, in membership, and those baptized are being saved and discipled. But when the great persecution began, the Christian church lost (at least temporarily) its ability to use numbers to judge how things were going

And I have every reason to believe that as future Church historians write about this season, they will describe how the American Church was pruned by it for greater fruitfulness. What that fruitfulness looks like, we do not yet know. But God does, and He will lead us as we press into His Spirit within us.

So take courage, church. We may feel a bit “scattered”, but coronavirus hasn’t thwarted God’s plans. Let’s preach the Gospel, and minister to others, in our new context. And the Lord will add to the number of those being saved, even if it is a little harder for us to measure that number. He will be glorified!

In Christ’s Love,

Pastor Jeff

God is moving in the Global Brethren Church! Over the past year or so the number of our Brethren Churches in the Philippines has grown from 4 to 9! God has used the COVID pandemic to birth a new Brethren church in Paraguay, through the outreach and relief efforts of the church in Asuncion. During the God is also using our new Global Partners in South Africa to give much needed food to the poor. Our Global Partners are adapting to the realities of this pandemic and are finding ways to share the love of Jesus with those in their communities. For more info on what God is doing among our Global Partners, visit the Brethren Global Partners Facebook page, which includes videos of worship services and programs from our Global Partners. You can also download the WMS Mole Report (pdf) from the sermons page of our church website.

Sermon Titles:

8/2- A Family’s Foundation

8/9- A Family’s Blessing

8/16- Struck Down But Not Destroyed

8/23- A Clean Slate

8/30- Be Still My Soul

BUTTERFLY MORNINGS

Jesus said to his disciples: “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.” Pastor Jeff has spent almost every Sunday since his “Sermon on the Mount” series reminding us of this passage. Jesus often provides interesting ways to reaffirm the importance of His teaching. In the three books I have read this summer, the scriptural reference to Matthew 5:13 was used repeatedly. We learn from repetition and by becoming “doers of the word.” I especially appreciated what Jim Wallis wrote in his book titled *Christ in Crisis* about the salt and light illustration :



Therefore, perhaps being “salt” and “light” transcends political ideology; maybe each undergirds the best of both conservative and liberal philosophies—one preserves what we need and one shines a light on what has to be seen and changed. Like salt preserving the food we need to eat, and light ending the darkness and showing us the way forward, we are called to be in the presence of Jesus and his kingdom in the world.

When we demonstrate both perseverance and courage in those roles of salt and light we can help both sustain and transform people’s lives, root our communities in the most important values and keep moving our world toward the kingdom of God—which is both here and yet to come, and which was always intended to change the world that God so loves.

Being salt and light in Jesus’s name is central to what the world always needs and most needs right now. How do we preserve the values and commitments most necessary for a healthy society, and how do we shine a light on what is wrong and needs to be changed? Both will take courage in times like these. But such courage comes

from the hope that is always the best contribution from people of faith. God be with us.



Dear brothers and sisters,

At our Official Board meeting last evening we discussed our church's plan for our fall activities and the governor's statewide Mask Mandate. I wanted to write you briefly to fill you in on decisions we have made.

First, I wanted to give you an update on our church's mask policy. According to the text of Governor Holcomb's Executive Order, churches are specifically exempted from enforcing the mask mandate, because churches are already required to maintain a social distance of 6 ft. between people not of the same family during their worship services. Therefore we are not mandated to require face masks be worn during our church services. However, we understand the various opinions and concerns of those in our church, and want to be sensitive to the needs of others, to keep us safe as well as to keep the unity of our Body.

Therefore, beginning this Sunday, to ensure the safety of those in our church, we are requesting that you wear a mask while you are entering and exiting the church building. Once you have found your seat in the Sanctuary, you may remove your mask if you wish until the conclusion of the service, at which point we request you put it back on until you are in the parking lot.

We have also designated the Overflow seating area as a Mask Only zone. If you sit in the Overflow area during worship, please wear a mask during the entirety of the service. Also, we want to remind everyone of the need to exit the Sanctuary at the conclusion of the worship service, beginning with the Overflow area, then exiting row by row beginning with the back pew. This is so we can maintain safe social distancing before and after the service.

At our meeting, we also discussed our plans for our fall programming. We have decided that for the time being, we will continue to offer a children's sermonette, rather than a Jr. Church program, during the worship service. Our Kids Club and Youth Group midweek programs will begin meeting September 16th, barring any COVID-related developments that would force us to further postpone them. Our Kids Club meetings will run from 6:30-7:30pm on Wednesdays, and will take place in the fellowship hall to allow for greater social distancing. Youth Group will meet in the Youth room from 6-7:30pm on Wednesdays. To keep our children and youth safe, we will ask our youth group to use the Sanctuary door, and our Kids Club kids to use the fellowship hall doors on Wednesday evenings. Regarding other programs like Butterfly Mornings, Adult Bible Study, and Helping Hands, the leadership of those ministries will be able to decide if and when they would like to meet.

Financial Report

Many of you have asked , “Are we meeting our budget?”. The answer is yes. Prior to mid-March a weekly report was given in the bulletin. Then along with all the other disruptions and changes, it was not as easy to bring our tithes and offerings to church. We still continued to generously give, but it was not as steady as before. Checks arrived in the mail, were dropped off at the church, and online giving increased. It was difficult to see the financial picture on a weekly basis. Beginning for July, a monthly report of our tithes and offerings will be in the bulletin. A summary of Jan-June is given below. As you read these reports you will realize that God has blessed our congregation

January – June

Tithes and Offerings	\$ 58,902	(includes a memorial donation)
Required for Budget	54,210	(+ \$ 4,692 over budget)
Camp Scholarships	863	
Brethren Retreat	375	
Cowboys for Christ	85	
Deacon Fund	2,000	
Youth Savings	365	

During the months of January-June we completed the air conditioning system, the final stage of our security system was added, we donated \$2000.00 for summer support for Camp Shipshewana, and sent 4 campers to camp.

July

Tithes and Offerings	\$ 9252	
Required for Budget	9035	(+ \$ 217 over budget)
Camp Scholarships	400	
Brethren Retreat	595	
Deacon Fund	100	
Special Projects	972	

AUGUST 2020 - ANNIVERSARIES AND BIRTHDAYS

Anniversaries:

8/10 Kim and Willie Hostetler (20)

8/23 Dawn and Steven Yoder (56)



Birthdays

8/11 Shannon Wesseler (?)

8/18 Jan Santos (67)

8/21 Nathaniel Estep (14)

8/21 Cheri Mullins (69)

8/23 Eliana Maller (7)

8/27 Sheila Mullins (?)

8/30 Mick Stump (?)



PRAYERS FOR SHUT—INS

Art Baer Sr.

Shawna Brovont

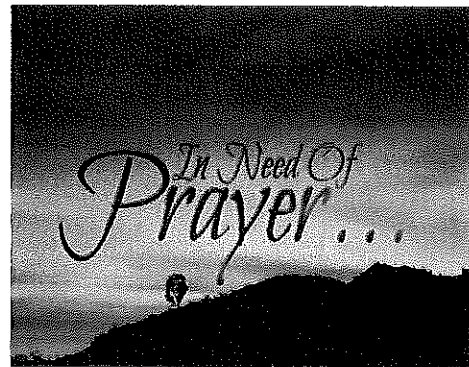
Carol Burridge

Bev. Faubion

Sarah Morris

Bea Puro

Mary Rheinheimer



**I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever: with my mouth
will I make known my faithfulness to all generations.**

PSALM 89: 1