

We're in this together

November 2, 2020

FBCR Family,

It would be difficult to have imagined a more challenging year than the one we've had. The Corona Virus Pandemic rages on having claimed the lives of over 200,000 people in the US and over a million worldwide. It has altered virtually every facet of life and left us all feeling exhausted and disoriented to say nothing of grieved. The FBCR community has suffered significant loss from and during this pandemic – loss we've yet to fully process and mark as a family of faith. To the anxiety and grief of a pandemic we have added also the struggles before our city and others around the country to deal with deadly racial disparity in criminal justice and other social systems. We are also in the midst of one of the most contentious seasons of political discord in recent history. In short, we are all being asked to reexamine some of the larger questions about the way our society functions and our role in making changes, and we're being asked to do that in a time when our personal capabilities and inner resources are already running low.

How are we going to get through all of this?

Advertisers seized on that question in the early days of the pandemic looking for some feel-good sentiment with which to associate their brand. Laundry detergent, watches, online streaming services, and a host of other products were sold with the message, "We'll get through this *together*." At the time I remember a strange mix of emotions on that sentiment. A bit of an iconoclast, I'm generally wary of any messages that come to me by way of advertising, but I couldn't fully discount the idea that our togetherness would not only carry us through the challenges ahead, but also make the days between much more bearable, even joyous. My only problem with buying what the advertisers were selling then was that I didn't see much togetherness in the world around me. Struggle seems to have been met in every place with contention - in every place except one.

Each time I logged on to be with my faith family at FBCR I sensed your presence with me. Whether it was a book study on "How to Be an Anti-Racist", a phone call, a casual congregational check-in on a Wednesday evening, or digital worship on Sunday morning: finding a way to remain in community made a believer out of me. At FBCR we really are all in this together. An overly rosey picture here will only serve to diminish this point. We're not a perfect church and we never will be, but we're striving to learn and to grow and we're finding that as long as we're working side by side, caring for one another, and worshiping together, then we're cultivating what we need to live into God's calling for us as a community of faith.

We have reached the time of year that requires us to take stock of one particular area of our togetherness that enables all others. Our ability to learn, grow, worship, and serve as a community are supported, of course, by our shared financial stewardship. At FBCR, we are deeply grateful to have a sound enough fiscal foundation to have withstood the budgetary pressures of the pandemic thus far. Our 2021 operating budget, however, will likely face even greater challenges. In order to meet those challenges, we're going to need to be – you guessed it – together. My invitation to you is to begin prayerfully considering how you might be able to contribute financially to this community in 2021 and in the weeks ahead make a generous pledge to do so. While physical pledge cards will be available as usual, we will also offer a digital pledge card this year. You can fill it out and submit it any time by going to www.rochesterfbc.org/together.

One other impact the pandemic has had on FBCR's financial wellbeing has been the necessary sidelining of the *Once And For All* campaign launched in January. The *Once and For All* Fund was established, as you'll recall, as an endowment fund intended to lift the substantial cost of operating a physical campus from FBCR's operating budget. While campaign activities have been suspended until further notice, contributions to the fund are still most welcomed and have a dual impact. Contributions to the *Once and For All* Fund have the immediate impact of supporting the upkeep and operation of the beautiful campus we're all so anxious to get back to, ensuring that it will be a tool for ministry well into the future. The secondary, but perhaps even more important impact of your gifts to the *Once and For All* Fund is to alleviate the cost of operating the building from the annual budget. That leaves room for more ministry, more learning, more serving our community.

You may consider offering a pledge to the operating budget and an additional gift to the *Once and For All* Fund knowing that such an offering would go a long way to support FBCR in 2021 and beyond. For many, however, contributing twice immediately is simply not possible. There are other ways to support the *Once and For All* Fund that may have little or no cost immediately. In fact, some of the options may even be of financial benefit to you *and* to the fund simultaneously. As an American Baptist Church we are blessed to partner with the American Baptist Foundation who holds and oversees the *Once and For All Fund* on our behalf. With their help a number of giving options are available. The enclosed insert names some of the options. For more information on these or other charitable giving opportunities we have both in house resources and experts from the American Baptist Foundation to answer your questions. Should you desire more information you may contact Dale Pensgen, Richard Wien, or me to arrange a meeting at a time and place of your convenience.

The days just behind us have been deeply challenging and the days just ahead of us likely will be also. At FBCR we will not only weather the storm, but will continue to be the presence of God's justice, peace, and love in our wider community. How do I know? Because we're in this together.

Together,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brent Bowden". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Rev. Brent Bowden
Pastor