

**SOUTHSIDE
BAPTIST
CHURCH**
DECATUR, AL

PASTOR
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SOUTHSIDEBAPTIST.NET



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May 26, 2020

Greetings in the Name of Jesus Christ our Risen Lord!

As this year began, I eagerly introduced you to a vision for a new decade at Southside Baptist Church. What I call our **2020 Focus** is really a *process* for bringing clarity, alignment, movement and focus to *who we are* and *what we do* as a people of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, united in Jesus Christ!

By purposefully balancing our GATHERING (inflow) and GIVING (outflow), we are led to *be* disciples of Jesus. Equally, we pray through this process that God will use us to *make even more* disciples of Jesus — until He returns!

This process requires *faithfulness, determination* and *courage* from each one of us.

Every member of Southside Baptist Church will GATHER with the saints in two ways, *both* in a Large Group Assembly (Sunday Morning Worship) *and* in a Small Group Community (Sunday School, Bible Study, or another Small Group). In doing so, we benefit from the unique accountability and growth opportunities each gathering offers as we walk in faith together.

Also, every member of Southside will GIVE through Ministry (Inward Focus: using spiritual gifts and resources for the building up of the church), and ultimately through Mission (Outward Focus: pulling all efforts, resources and support networks to bear on the intentional work of witnessing, evangelism and reproducing disciples of Jesus).

As your pastor, I am responsible for shepherding each of you individually and collectively as a church through each step of this process so that you might attain maturity in Christ, being

2020 FOCUS



equipped for the work of ministry and experience the joy and fulfillment of being on mission for Jesus in any circumstance at any age!

Undergirding every effort is a whole-hearted dependence upon God in all things (faith), selfless generosity, and an unwavering commitment to God's Word and prayer.

A New Year, A New Decade!

The first sermon we heard together in 2020 was preached from Acts 14:19-23. In what can only be described as the providence of God, that sermon was titled “**Continue in the Faith.**” As I reviewed the summary statement I had written for that sermon, I was confronted with these words:

Tribulations (persecutions) are a necessary part of Gospel advancement. In the face of opposition, God's people are called not to give up, but to persevere and continue in the faith!
- *January 5, 2020*

I did not know when that sermon was preached just how God was preparing a season in the world outside our sanctuary that would require us collectively to **focus** more intensely and persevere more faithfully as a church!

What Had We Accomplished?

In a little under three short months of the new year (and decade), we continued to align our worship, learning and obedience around God's Word, tracing the power (and empowerment) of the Holy Spirit available for God's people in a preaching series through the book of Acts. Furthermore, we began preparations for what was sure to be a special Easter season in the life of our congregation!

At the same time, we embarked together on a series of seminars I called “**Southside Trains...**” On Wednesday nights, we were introduced to Realm and began learning how to use technology to communicate with one another, take attendance, keep track of giving, check in children and organize ministry groups.

The progress we made set in motion the building of an infrastructure for accountability and connectivity, valuable for walking through our vision steps together as a membership. It also has prepared our church administratively for new members to come! We glimpsed the capabilities of leveraging technology to communicate better and minister together more effectively.

We also journeyed through MinistrySafe training, learning what it means to be a church that protects her Gospel witness by caring for the most vulnerable among us (along with the volunteers and workers serving them). We were trained in Sexual Abuse Prevention and Awareness and our eyes were opened to the opportunities around us for constant evaluation and improvement. Employees, workers and volunteers in our Family, Youth and Children's

Ministries spent extra time training to bring all of us up to date in the new policies and procedures that will protect our church and ministries in the decade ahead. That work continues.

Finally, we began church-wide Evangelism Training using The Way of the Master. In a few short sessions, we learned how to cultivate a compassion for the lost and present the message of salvation in Jesus using a biblical method of “*law to the proud, grace to the humble.*” We learned a lost secret of effective evangelism in the use of the Ten Commandments to break the proud heart, expose sin, and silence the mouth in order to offer the healing message of grace to a ready and broken heart. That learning continues.

In all of this, I could go on and on, describing the prayerful work behind the scenes planning, preparing, reading, studying and laboring in the Lord on your behalf, and with you, eagerly anticipating what the Lord will do among us!

Then in mid-March, the COVID-19 *epidemic* became a *pandemic* and wreaked havoc all over the world in terms of lives, healths and economies. Many people became (and are becoming) sick. Many have (and continue) to die from this new virus. Data shows that while this disease can adversely affect anyone of any age, there is one group affected the most — known as *vulnerable individuals*.¹

Since March, a continuous flow of ever-evolving restrictions and guidelines have emerged from leaders and health officials with ideas for limiting the spread of this virus and keeping people (especially those most vulnerable) safe.

In response, Southside Baptist Church did exactly what Christians do — we *continued* to love God and love our neighbors, even while honoring the guidance (and at times, requirements) of authorities that we suspend all-in person gatherings and close the building and work from home.

Put simply, we *adapted* and continued GATHERING and GIVING.

We continued to gather together every week in a new way - Online. Certain Small Groups even found creative ways to meet together on Zoom. We continued to give our time and resources in Ministry to one another through prayer, encouragement, and at times meeting needs (even obligations of our own congregation by sending tithes and offerings in the mail and giving online). We continued to give on Mission by embodying the Great Commandments of Jesus, loving God *and* our neighbor, being witnesses for Jesus to our smaller communities of family, next-door neighbors and even friends online.

¹ *Vulnerable Individuals* are defined as **1.)** Elderly individuals. In many publications, individuals over age 65 are considered vulnerable to COVID-19. **2.)** Individuals with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune system is compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer and other conditions requiring such therapy.

Adapting has been very difficult, trying and even depressing for some. Social distancing at its core limits a fundamental element of Christianity - community. Not all have internet access. Not all are designed by God to go so long without the in-person presence and support of others. So much in our world has changed, is changing, and will change. The uncertainties create new challenges.

In the space remaining, I want to address a few expectations to guide our prayers and actions as we press on into the remainder of this year (and decade), into the vision God has given us!

WHAT HAS NOT CHANGED?

Southside Baptist Church continues to be the Church — at least, one local expression of it! We are not closed. We are not cancelled. Our activities continue in different ways for a season, *but those things that are most important continue uninterrupted.*

I believe adaptability is one of the defining marks of maturity for God's people. Times like this are not new or unique to us. This virus and its aftermath cannot stop Christ's Church — not even the gates of Hell will prevail!

The Realm technology we began to implement has enabled the Church Office to effectively operate remotely, as has been beneficial during this season. Calls are forwarded to mobile phones and answered or returned. Nothing has changed significantly for the administration and operation of Southside's Office, with the exception of in-person visits, which we have intentionally limited. This is a credit to your willingness to adapt and utilize the leading church resource technology available.

The Church Office continues to operate remotely and at times, on-site. This limits the potential spread of the virus among church employees, members and guests. It also keeps Southside's facility clean and sanitized. Until the church begins to gather again in the building, we will keep access to the building limited to essential facility maintenance and office personnel, who will abide by the recommended health protocols, distancing and hygiene practices. This policy enables the church to steward her facility and associated costs efficiently. Any who wish to bring an offering by the church are encouraged to call ahead (256) 353-8814. Pastor Christopher may be reached at (256) 274-1780. Your ministers and staff are accessible, reachable, and continue to work through this season on administrative upgrades, planning, pastoral care and the ministry of God's Word.

On Easter Sunday, we began a new preaching series through the book of Hebrews — online. As a result, we are now better reaching people outside the walls of our building with more online engagement than ever before! Hebrews, just as the first sermon of this year, is challenging us to persevere in faithful obedience to the Lord. It is a timely study that I pray is benefiting you as much as it is me! The point is this — ministry of God's Word and the prayers of God's people remain unchanged. The Church is being reminded that the most important gathering is the one in the home.

There are other factors that have not changed as well. This COVID-19 virus continues to be deadly, *especially* for those who are identified as *vulnerable individuals*. Even as communities begin to slowly re-open, the prevailing caution remains: *those who are vulnerable should stay cautious and stay home*.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SOUTHSIDE?

Southside Baptist Church is a congregation currently made up of *vulnerable individuals* to COVID-19. This creates unique challenges for regathering together sooner rather than later. While our sanctuary is large enough to space out as a congregation, there are many other considerations such as narrow hallways and the questions of how to safely operate the nursery and childcare that factor in.

The amount of precautions recommended for keeping anyone safe (and more so for those who are vulnerable) seem to outweigh the benefits of re-gathering so soon, especially when an online platform is accessible by a large group of our congregation. Most congregations resuming gatherings in our area include provisions for vulnerable individuals to regather *later*. Southside's later regathering is consistent not only with guidelines, but also with what other churches are practicing in our area as well.

WHEN WILL SOUTHSIDE REGATHER IN THE SANCTUARY?

As Alabama begins to reopen, the next several weeks will show how our specific community responds and handles the spread of the virus with people out and about. This response will shape the details, dates and pace of Southside's return.

Let me remind you that as a point of doctrine, the Church is not an organization or building — the Church is a *people*. Practically, God has not called me to shepherd other congregations, but to lead and shepherd you into the grace of God, knowing your concerns and needs. I intend to best lead you in love into what God has in store for you! When looking at timelines of other churches in our area, in most cases Southside's congregation would not be returning for worship gatherings just yet. In this way, Southside is not behind, but keeping pace with the prevailing timelines.

When we return, we will return in phases that follow our **2020 Focus**. First, we will only gather as a Large Group for Sunday morning worship. At an appropriate time, we will then add back Small Groups, then other Ministry and Mission Activities.

For a season, our worship gatherings will look different. Children and families will worship together in what will be a shorter service of worship. The ministry of music will operate differently. Certain provisions will be made to keep safe distancing. Whatever may be asked of you when that time comes, will we all receive that instruction and submit to one another and to our leaders with a heart of love, caring more for others than for ourselves?

Communications will continue through the Realm mobile app (and email notifications), church website (southsidebaptist.net), and social media accounts (Facebook and YouTube).

The website has a tab for COVID-19 Updates and is the easiest place to access up-to date news. Deacons, Sunday School teachers, and all of us are continuing to call and reach out to those we know that do not have access to these forms of communications to keep all active members updated on what is happening.

While certain phases of return will be implemented before others, we should all expect the process for returning to a new “normal” to take awhile. Let us view this as a gift from God — an opportunity together to walk in what the Lord has prepared for us! It is an opportunity to exercise our FAITH!

ENCOURAGEMENT TO PERSEVERE

While many things have changed for a season, the essentials have not. God has not changed! His Church has not changed. His Spirit continues to indwell us and guide us into truth. God’s throne of grace remains accessible. God’s power and authority remain limitless and total. God’s grace remains sufficient for this day as always. Our future in Christ has not changed.

What then should we do? As the Lord is teaching us in Hebrews, let us continue to persevere in FAITH! God has reminded me clearly in recent days that everything we do as a Church must be done in faith. For this reason, I look forward to regathering and sharing with you the ways God is challenging me in faith, and the ways I believe God is challenging us as a people to move forward in faith.

Southside’s history boasts great days in the past, so I am not saying this lightly — but I believe (I am convinced) that Southside’s greatest days are *yet to be!* And those days involve *you*, the *people* God has called together for such a time as this! The faith you demonstrate now will build the foundation for the faith generations walk in tomorrow.

As we press on, I know this — it will be our **faith** that God blesses — faith to do those things that are otherwise impossible, believing God to make a way when there seems to be no way! If you are reading this letter, know that you have a part right now in the journey of faith God is leading us into. Begin now to pray about your faith. The journey ahead will require *faithfulness*, *determination* and *courage* from each one of us!

One final word of encouragement — please do not neglect your financial commitments to Gospel advancement through the giving of tithes and offerings. This is one of the most practical ways of demonstrating faith in God!

Southside began the year with an ambitious Ministry Funding Plan (Budget) that certainly required faith and *all of us* to faithfully give. As we learned in our preaching (remember Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira of Acts 4-5?), that God supplies through the sacrificial generosity and faithfulness of his people who willingly give as God has enabled them to prosper.

So it is at Southside. You have continued to offer to God what first belongs to him, not depending upon any other sources of financial relief as a church, but maintaining a *testimony* and *witness* as a people of God who support the needs of one another as God has provided to each of us individually and collectively during this pandemic.

As your pastor, it is my privilege and responsibility to call all of us to demonstrate even greater faith and obedience in this area of generosity and giving. Our gifts have not taken a significant hit during this pandemic, because you as God's people continue to give unto the Lord. But our giving still falls short of our needs and goals for this year.

I ask everyone reading this letter to examine your heart by looking at your giving, and trust God with your finances. If you have not yet given to support God's work, will you unite in faith with us by doing so today?

You may give online at southsidebaptist.net, by mailing a check to the address at the top of this letter, or by calling the church office to arrange a drop off for your gift.

Already I have heard of some who plan to unite with us in membership when we regather. Others are eager to take next steps in faith. God is moving among us!

Know that you are loved, that the vision continues, and believe with me that you have an essential role in what God is doing at Southside even now!

To God be the glory!

In Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Christopher". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of "Pastor" being a large, prominent capital 'P'.

Christopher Campbell
Pastor, Southside Baptist Church
(256) 274-1780